

Formal and Informal Education in Fair Haven, Placentia Bay, 1911-1958

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DENNIS M. MULCAHY

INTRODUCTION

Education in Newfoundland, whatever its conscious intention, became very largely a process by which economic and social differences were perpetuated, rising talent prepared either for absorption into the dominant minority or export to foreign market-places, and the region's cultural dualism maintained.²

In "Education's Future in Newfoundland" (1975), George Story identified the existence of two very different processes of education in Newfoundland and Labrador. He was quite critical of the formal process, describing it as elitist, exploitative and discriminatory. It was a system that created the denominational colleges in St. John's to serve the well-to-do but left the majority of children to struggle for an education in overcrowded one-room schools with few resources and poorly educated teachers.

The problem with the formal process of schooling was that from the very beginning it had gotten off to a "false start"³ by importing from the "mother country" a model of education⁴ inappropriate to Newfoundland and Labrador. The present situation, i.e. the 1960s and 1970s, was no better, in Story's view:

the latest development of our educational system, similarly imported, has had as its additional aim the supplying of trained manpower for the "resource crunching" engines of industrial enterprise or the purveyors of services to a passive consumer society.⁵

Story contrasted this system of formal schooling with the informal process of education that was to be found in traditional Newfoundland communities. For Story, the aims and organizational features of this informal process could serve as a point of departure for a fresh start to educational development in the province:

From the example of traditional Newfoundland we might, in the first instance, derive two basic inseparable, and concurrent aims which should inspire education from first to last: the development to the maximum of the capacity for understanding and versatility and the provision of the skill to earn a living from our particular environment and developing economy.⁶

In this essay I am going to describe how these two systems of education functioned in the small rural community of Fair Haven, Placentia Bay, from 1911 to 1958, and lay the foundation for future analysis of these phenomena. The formal system of schooling reflected the educational aspirations of the centralized educational authorities situated in St. John's. The informal process of education responded to the hopes and needs of the community. The contrast between the two reflects two distinct educational ideologies. The primary sources for this paper are the recollections of the people of Fair Haven who experienced both forms of education.

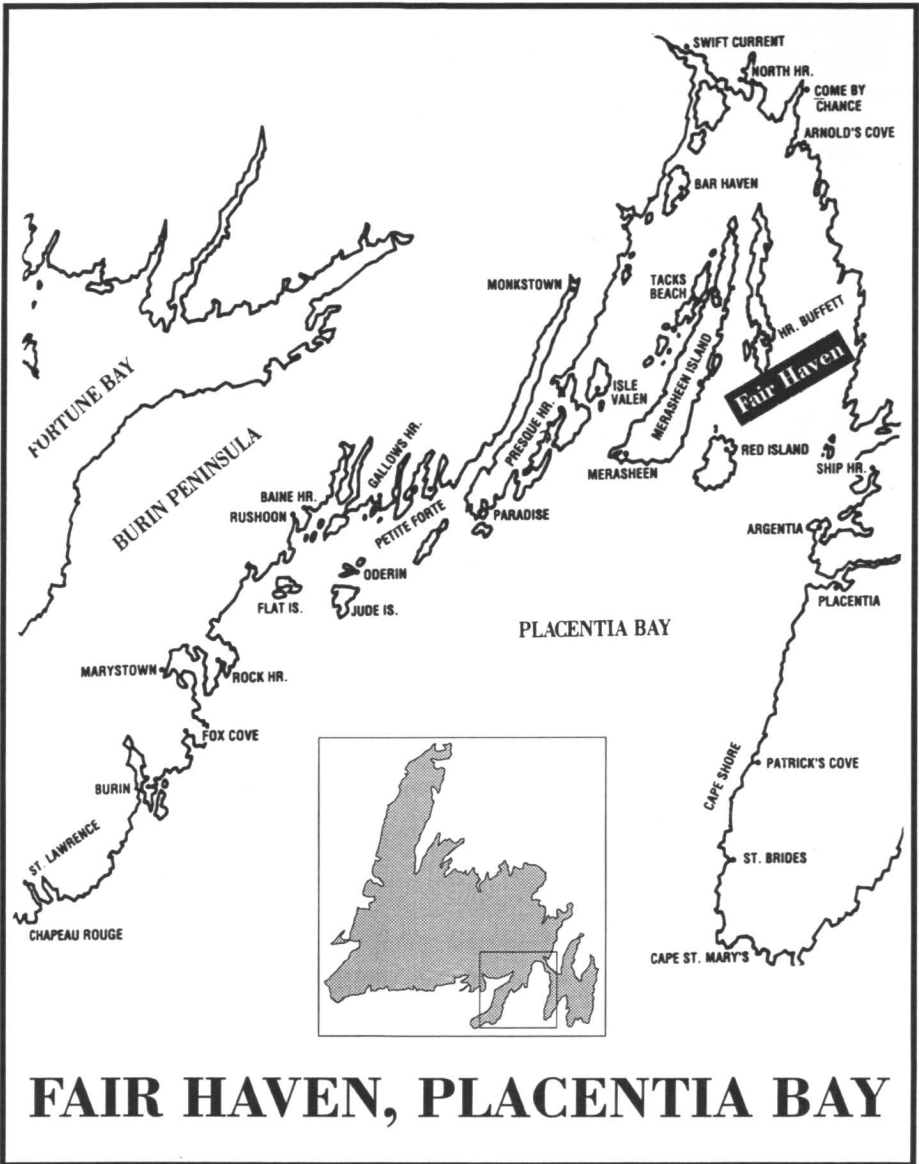
FAIR HAVEN, PLACENTIA BAY

Fair Haven is a small rural community situated in Placentia Bay with a current population of 160. The name of the community has undergone a number of changes over the years. The geographical location of the community was given the name Famishgut by Lane in 1772. In the census of 1836 it appears as Famish Gut and in the census of 1874 as Famish Cove.⁷ By a Proclamation on June 29, 1940, the community was given its present name of Fair Haven.⁸

Some form of semi-permanent settlement in Fair Haven probably began in the early nineteenth century.⁹ These original settlers were from Flat Islands and may have come in the first instance to establish winter houses, returning to the islands to fish in the summer.¹⁰ The Church of England missionary, Archdeacon Edward Wix, reports that he visited Famish Gut in the winter of 1835:

I reached [Famish Gut] by ten A.M. and assembled nine adults, besides children, at the winter house of Thomas Upshore, where I held full service, and baptised two children.¹¹

The *Census* of 1836 lists Trinny Cove,¹² Famish Gut and Pinch Gut together and indicates that there were nine dwelling houses and a combined population of fifty-five.¹³ Twenty-nine of them were children under fourteen years of age. There is no mention of Famish Gut in the censuses of 1845, 1857, or 1869.¹⁴ (Trinny Cove is listed in the census of 1845 combined with Brine's Island.)¹⁵ Famish Gut and Pinch Gut are listed together in the census of 1874. In the two communities there were five families and a total population of twenty-nine including seventeen children under ten years of age. It is not until 1884 that Famish Gut begins to appear as a separate and consistent listing in the *Census*. At this time there were four families and a total of thirty-two inhabitants.¹⁶ There were thirteen children under



ten. By 1901 Famish Gut had thirteen families and a population that had nearly doubled to sixty-one.¹⁷ A small but steady increase is then recorded until 1981 when the population peaked at 181. Since that time the population has been declining.

Fair Haven has always been identified primarily as an inshore-fishing community. However, the fishery there has never been abundant. As a consequence,

for most of its history, especially when fish prices were low, the people have had to seek alternative sources of income. The most common of these alternative sources was the lumber woods. The 1930s were a particularly hard time for the community. Most families had to resort to welfare in order to survive. When the opportunity arose, around 1933, a number of men from the community left the fishery and took work in the mines at Bell Island. The Second World War was the economic salvation of Fair Haven. During the war years, the American Naval Station at Argentia provided employment for practically the entire male population of the community.¹⁸

Fair Haven has always been something of an isolated community. A road link was not established until 1956. When the trains still ran in the province, the closest station, Tickle Harbour, was a five-mile walk over the barrens. Electricity was not available until the early 1960s. Even today the school qualifies for official designation as an isolated school.¹⁹ The thirty full-time fishermen of Fair Haven today are awaiting anxiously the outcome of the cod moratorium. They are very aware that the future of their community very much depends on the fishery reopening.

FORMAL EDUCATION 1911-1958

The First School

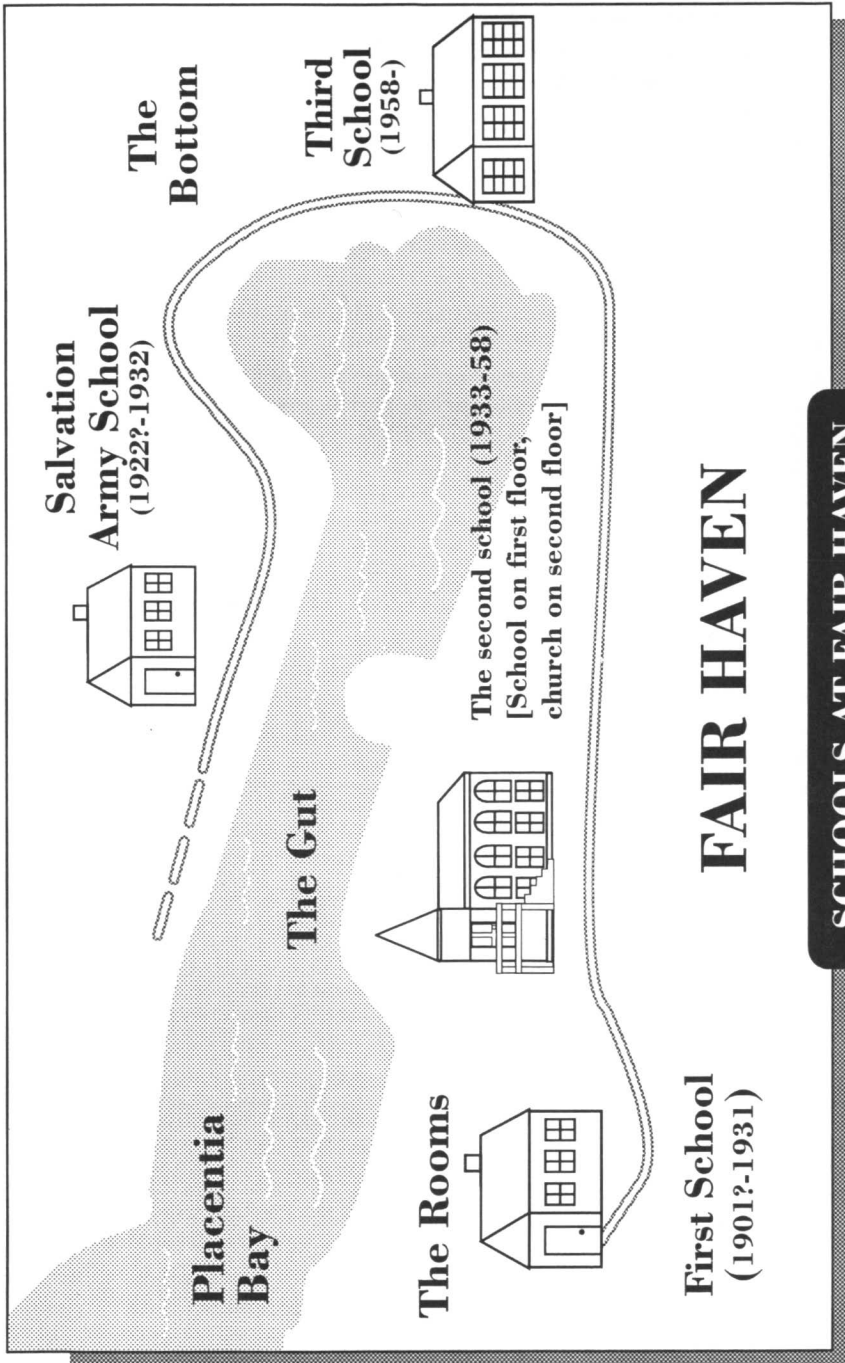
Formal education began in Fair Haven sometime between 1901 and 1911. The first reference to a teacher occurs in the census report for 1911. This report indicates the presence of one female teacher and of sixteen children between the ages of five and fifteen in the school. Only three children within that age range were not attending school. Fair Haven's first school was located in that part of Fair Haven known as the Rooms. This one-room structure served the dual purpose of church and school:

The school was up in the Rooms... where the old cemetery is...the church and school was one...one large space served both purposes.²⁰

The one-room structure had a seating capacity of sixty for church services and forty for schooling. It had a "square roof" and a fairly large entrance porch. It was heated by the standard pot-belly stove. The same benches or pews were used for Sunday services and for education during the week. Each bench accommodated four or five students. A hinged leaf came into play during the week providing a desk top for the students:

You see they had a big leaf on the back of the church seats...they put them up and there'd be four or five seated to them...and then they would be put down.²¹

The first teacher who taught in Fair Haven to be identified by name is Christopher Curtis. Johnson (1925) notes that "After Christopher Curtis had spent many years at Burgeo, he came to Famish and Trinny Coves as teacher and



lay-reader.”²² Curtis began teaching in Fair Haven in September, 1917. In the previous year, 1916, he had been teaching in Trinny Cove. Curtis remained at Fair Haven until 1922 when his place was taken by Cecil Webber.²³

Students from both the Rooms and the Bottom attended this school as well as students from Trinny Cove as of 1917. The students from the Bottom either had to walk the two miles to school or on occasion catch a boat ride across the gut:

We had to walk then from the Bottom if we didn't get across in the boat...you didn't start school as early then as you do now because of the long walk.²⁴

The Census for 1921 shows that there were between twenty-six and thirty-four pupils in attendance, including three from Trinny Cove who had a return journey of six miles each day. Although most students left after five or six years once they had gained some degree of competence in reading, writing and arithmetic, some stayed on to complete at least some level of high school. Mrs. Edna Crann, who still lives in the Rooms, started school at the age of six in 1921. She recalls in her early years of schooling there being present a number of older students who were studying for their exams:

The first time I went to school I was only young and Marion Crann was there then...she was taking exams. She used to study for exams in the school and go to Harbour Buffett to write final exams.²⁵

Mrs. Crann also completed high school at this first school in 1932. She remembers at least one other female student reaching this level as well.

The curriculum remembered by the former students of this first school included “spellings and meanings, grammar, arithmetic, geography, history, hygiene and drawing.” Students were required to assume major responsibility for their own education. The presence of at least thirty students spread over all levels and ages in the one room meant that the students spent a fair portion of their time working independently of the teacher's direct instruction. Small group instruction took place at the teacher's desk at the front of the classroom at least once a day. Each level took its turn reciting lessons for the teacher:

Each group was called up and you recited your lessons. Everybody read so much ...a paragraph or whatever. You had spellings and meanings. The teacher would ask the first one and if he didn't know it, he'd go on to the next one right on down the line. If you missed ...if you were up you'd go down. If you got it right, you'd go to the front of the class.²⁶

After the recitations there might be some instruction at the board for the group and then they would be assigned additional work to be completed at their places. This process would be repeated for all groups of students.

The teachers are remembered favourably, but they are also recalled as being “strict” and rather quick to react to any sound or movement on the part of the students:

Some teachers were rough. Some would have a big alder limbed out and up where they were to and if you stirred they'd flick it down and give you a slash of it...not too

hard...but enough to feel it. Others had straps...they had strappings if you were talking or doing something you shouldn't. They'd put you in the corner, too, see, stick you up in the corner.²⁷

Among the things not permitted in this school was to seek or offer help. The culture of the class demanded that students do their own work as best they could; the only source of assistance was the teacher when and if he became available. To seek help from an older classmate was to risk censure and punishment:

So I was asking her [an older student] how to do something and he come down and put me in the corner...told me I was interrupting her. So he put me in the corner. When he went back to put the seat back in place, I went down through and went home.²⁸

Students had to work not only independently of the teacher but also independently of each other. The ethos of co-operation, sharing and mutuality that generally characterized the wider community contrasted sharply with the classroom norms of interaction.

UNCLE HENRY'S PORCH

In 1931, a decision was made to build a new church-school structure to serve the educational and religious needs of the community. The new structure would be located at the bottom of Bungay's Hill, a location deemed to be equidistant from the Rooms and the Bottom. This was at the insistence of the residents of the Bottom who felt that the children in the Rooms had an unfair advantage living so close to the school. In keeping with a long-standing tradition of recycling scarce and expensive building materials, the old school/church was "taken down" so that at least some of the materials could be used in constructing the new building. This situation required that school be held in some alternative and temporary space while the new school-church was under construction. The solution to the problem was found by holding school in the porch of Henry Reid's house which was situated next to the cemetery:

When they took down the old place, they taught school in the porch of a house there...the house was right by the cemetery. The house belonged to Henry Reid and it had a large porch... school was held in Uncle Henry's Porch.²⁹

The house was a large two-story structure and the porch ran the full length of the back of the house. As Edna Crann recalls, "it was a great big porch," providing about as much space as they had in the school room.³⁰ That year of schooling in "Uncle Henry's Porch" is remembered quite fondly by the students who were there. A door in the porch opened directly into the Reid kitchen. This close proximity of the Reid family carrying on with their normal life created the opportunity for some amusing incidents to occur:

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Ethel, that was Henry's sister, was living in the house. She would come out sometimes, open the door and throw in a bun. She would throw it in to us while a group were up in front of the class reciting with the teacher.³¹

School was held in the Reid house for just one year, with Robert Dawe as the teacher. In 1933 Dawe and his students moved to the new school at the foot of Bungay's Hill.

THE SALVATION ARMY SCHOOL (c.1922-1933)

The 1911 census indicates a significant change in the denominational make-up of Fair Haven. In 1901 the population of the community was sixty-one: nine Church of England and fifty-two Methodist. In 1911 the population was sixty-eight, thirty-three of whom were identified as members of the Salvation Army. This census also indicates the existence of a second church building with a seating capacity of sixty.

Beginning before 1922 and continuing until 1933, this Salvation Army chapel was also used as a schoolroom. For ten years or more, Fair Haven had two small church-schools in operation. It seems that school was taught by the Salvation Army Officer assigned to the community. One of the first officers to teach there was a man named Bowering:

When Cecil Webber was at the school in the Rooms, Bowering was at the Salvation Army School.³²

This school at the Bottom was attended by children of both Salvation Army and Methodist denominations. For some parents, apparently, when it came to choosing schools for their children, proximity carried more weight than religious conviction. Rather than have her walk the two miles up to the Methodist school in the Rooms, Julie Collett's mother sent her to the "Army School" which was next door to where they lived:

I started school when I was six years old in 1928. The school they had was in the same place they used to hold the Army in...it was only one level...my first teacher was Breta Cull...later I had Captain Hallett, Ross Cole and Lieut. Piercey.³³

The physical structure of the Salvation Army church-school was very similar to its Methodist counterpart across the gut in the Rooms. It too had the standard pot-belly stove which required an almost constant supply of wood. The seating arrangements were also quite similar. Again there was some sort of hinged affair on the pews that could be swung into place for schooling and then retracted for Sunday services.

Schooling ceased at the Salvation Army school in 1933. Julie Crann fondly remembers her last teacher:

Lieut. Piercey was my last teacher in the Army. They couldn't afford to keep him...they had to give up...I cried after Piercey...imagine crying after your teacher...he was very nice...they were all nice.³⁴

The students who had been attending the school at the Bottom then transferred up to the new school that had just been built at the foot of Bungay's Hill. Julie Crann attended this school for one year, leaving when she was twelve. Although she wanted to continue with her education, as the oldest girl in her family she was needed to help out at home.

The late 'twenties and 'thirties were very difficult times for the people of Fair Haven as they were for all but a privileged few in Newfoundland and Labrador. The oldest boy or girl in the family often had to leave school to help provide for the younger children:

I didn't really get a chance to go to school...I only went for a few days...I had to stay home and look after the girls for Mom. I wouldn't go every day. I wanted to go to school...I always wanted to go...but I had to stay out, so that's all I could do. I had to stay and look after the others so my parents could pick berries to sell so as to get something to eat...it was that bad....I loved going to school. I often says now I wished I could've went more....After a while...my Dad worked in the mines on Bell Island. But I was too big to go to school then.³⁵

THE NEW SCHOOL: 1933-1958

The second phase of schooling began in Fair Haven with the opening of the new school in 1933. This too was a single structure that housed both church and school. However, this was a two-story building with the school occupying the first floor and the church the second.³⁶ There was no access to the church from the school-room. A large set of steps on the outside of the building led up to the balcony and an entrance porch to the church. The structure had been built by the volunteer labour of the men of the community. In addition to what had been salvaged from the old church-school in the Rooms, materials needed for the new building were procured from the local forests by the community.

The school room was a large rectangular affair (45'x30'). At the far end was a large platform stage (3½' high, 30' wide and 8' deep.) There was a set of curtains that could be opened and closed and a very small room on the right-hand side of the stage that was used as a change and preparation room for the very popular school concerts. At the other end was the entrance door. On either side of the door was a large blackboard. The teacher's desk was to the right as one came into the room. The old church benches with their hinged leaves were replaced with more modern student desks. These were arranged in parallel rows the full length of the classroom. Most of these were double seaters; a few were single. Down the centre of the classroom there was a slightly wider space which divided the class into two halves.

One of the rectangular sides of the school consisted almost entirely of large panels of small square panes of glass. This was the main source of light for the school. The church had regular church windows. The lighting was supplemented late in the day by kerosene lamps which were also used for times and concerts.

On the left-hand side of the room about a quarter of the way down and three feet out from the wall was the ubiquitous and insatiable pot-belly stove. Almost everyone in the community has a memory of an involvement with that stove; students and parents were occupied in one way or another with keeping it supplied with wood.³⁷ Mildred Gilbert, who attended this school from 1934 to 1945, recalls the winter ritual of everyone's taking a turn starting the stove early in the morning:

We all had to take turns carrying a bundle of splits in the morning...I'd have a week...then someone else would have a week. When you were little your Dad would come with you with the splits and light the fire. You'd go a bit earlier that week than the other pupils. If your father couldn't do it then your bigger brother would come with you. Usually, it was my brother that went because Dad was working on Bell Island.³⁸

Although the men of the community would cut wood for the school, when the supply of wood ran low, the older boys would have to go get wood during school time:

All the boys had to go into the woods to get wood for the stove. At recess the boys would go into the woods until about lunch time. Pretty well every day in the woods from recess to lunch cutting trees.³⁹

CONDITIONS OF LEARNING

The school had "two-seaters" built over the brook that ran past the school and into the sea:

We had catalogues for toilet paper...Eaton's and Simpson's. You could read the catalogue while you were there. Before I finished school [1945] we got toilet paper. This change was a big event. It was some comfort.⁴⁰

For the first three years the school was in operation the students of the school were using slates:

First when I started off we used slates. It was a piece of slate in a wooden frame 6" x 9". You had to buy your own slate. You used chalk on it and you'd write down what you had to do...your arithmetic or your letters...it was on both sides...and when you had it finished you had a brush and you cleaned it all off and you'd start again....The problem was you couldn't keep anything.

Then after a year or so we got what they called scribbles...it was a rough kind of paper and it had lines on it and we used a pencil.⁴¹

With the cessation of schooling at the Salvation Army Chapel, all students in Fair Haven now attended this new school. This situation apparently created

overcrowded conditions right from the start. A school built for thirty had to accommodate more than forty. Cramped conditions are remembered by all who attended over its twenty-six years of existence. The only way all students could be accommodated was to have some occupy the stage:

She was full up on both sides and so many more sitting up on the stage.⁴²

The school was crowded....They had a stage, four or five lines of students...some up on the stage...I sat up on the stage.⁴³

To be up on the stage was to be at least forty feet from the blackboard and a long way from the stove. Students remember being cold most of the winter. Theoretically, this one-room school offered all grades from one to eleven. However, in all of its twenty-six years of existence only one or two students progressed beyond grade eight. Former students of the school identify a number of reasons for their early leaving. For most, the root cause lay in the prevailing economic conditions.

For most of its history, Fair Haven might have more aptly retained its original name of Famish Gut. Money was always scarce. One had to work at a variety of jobs and make maximum use of all natural and human resources available. These conditions dictated the nature of childhood and the duration of schooling. The general rule was this:

As soon as you got old enough you had to go to work to help out.⁴⁴

The older boys (eight and up) especially were required to help their fathers at various times in the fishing season. When extra help was needed to take advantage of a particular species, the boys were taken out of school for two- or three-week stretches. Invariably this put them behind in their school work:

I can remember that the boys would be gone for two or three days or a week when the caplin were running or something like that and they'd come back again.⁴⁵

The oldest boy and girl in a family were often needed at home to help with the chores and look after the younger children. Freeman Crann's story is typical of many. As the oldest boy in his family he was responsible for looking after things when his father had to leave the community to find other work:

When fish was scarce my dad would look for other work. He worked at Argentia. We used to burn wood back then. I had to leave school to keep the house going. While my dad was at Argentia I was keeping the house in firewood and doing the chores around the house. I was the oldest boy.⁴⁶

The chores included cutting wood, taking care of the cattle and sheep and the vegetable garden. Picking berries and cutting splits were two activities that generated some cash:

You'd take a 100-pound flour sack and fill that with berries and lug it out...it'd be dark by the time you'd get out. Day after day. You'd get a boat load and carry it over to Harbour Buffett to sell. You'd get 10 cents a gallon.

You'd get billets in the winter...saw them up in stove lengths all that winter...carry them over to Buffett and get twenty-five cents a hundred.⁴⁷

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Freeman left school after he had completed grade six. He was thirteen.

Sometimes gender issues became mixed in with economic conditions. The prevailing belief in the community was that girls didn't need that much education:

Most people didn't believe in a girl getting a lot of education because she was going to get married anyway and didn't need education as far as they were concerned.⁴⁸

Whether you were the oldest or the youngest, once you reached the age of thirteen or fourteen you were expected to start making your own way. Your parents could not afford to keep you at home and pay for your schooling. Many girls from Fair Haven left the community to go into domestic service or take jobs in St. John's.⁴⁹ Some left because of a form of peer pressure:

I left after grade eight. My mother and father wanted me to stay in school, but all my buddies were getting out and I wanted to, too.⁵⁰

Only a very few students stayed on to finish high school. Mildred Gilbert recalls that during the time she was completing grades nine, ten and eleven she was the only student doing those particular grades.⁵¹ She credits her being able to stay in school to a combination of reasons. First, she was the sixth child in a family of nine. Her older siblings had left school and there were enough of them helping out at home. In addition, her older brother who was working in the mines at Bell Island took a special interest in her education and made a special commitment to pay whatever expenses were incurred. She believes that without her brother's help she would not have been able to stay in school.⁵² Mrs. Gilbert's sister was not so fortunate. When she was in grade ten, her father died and the sister had to leave school because there was no one to pay her way. She left Fair Haven and went into domestic service in Corner Brook.⁵³

The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the school had a revolving door as far as its teachers were concerned. The school had twenty-one different teachers in twenty-six years. For the most part they were young, inexperienced, under-educated (if educated at all) and they moved on after one year. They had to teach more than forty students spread over at least eight grades with limited materials and supplies. Even teachers with some professional training were not prepared to handle the demanding conditions of an all-grade one-room school.⁵⁴ These teachers were struggling, with too little training and experience, to provide for too many students in too many grades.

The curricular emphasis in the lower grades was on the basics: reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic. As the students progressed, geography, history and drawing were added. One area of the curriculum that came in for special attention during the 1930s and the 1940s was hygiene or health. The school became the vehicle for the transmission of important knowledge about health matters:

They sent out things from the Red Cross...How to brush your teeth...Everything then out in Fair Haven was new...you know...having a tooth brush was something new. They never had things like that in Fair Haven before. I can remember the teacher,

Evelyn Barbour was her name, telling us to brush our teeth and people would notice it.

I remember they sent this cod liver oil out to the school from the government...sent it out every year and they'd line us up and give us a tablespoon of cod liver oil. A couple of years later they sent out the cod liver oil malt; it was in tins and sweetened up a bit...that was a bit better.⁵⁵

PEDAGOGY

Students sat in rows according to the grades they were in. As they progressed through the grades they moved across the rows. Work was assigned to each grade separately and, as in the past, students were expected to work quite independently. The size of the class and the number of grades and subjects precluded any great amount of teacher contact with individuals or even with grade-groups. Small grade-group instruction took place at the teacher's desk in much the same way as it had in the era of schooling described above:

For example if you had spelling the teacher would always say "now grade ones come up" and you'd go up and stand in a line and the teacher would ask you your spelling and whoever was the best one would go to the head of the class.⁵⁶

They'd pick one class out and you'd go up and stand in front of his desk. He'd ask you all your spelling; you had to remember verses and all that; you had to remember all that. When that was over he'd take another class up. In the meantime he'd give you your arithmetic. You'd go back to your place and do your work. He had it marked on the board what you had to do. He'd come around to your desk and check on you every chance he'd get. The teacher was always on his feet.⁵⁷

You'd stand up in front of his desk and if you had a verse you had to memorize—perhaps the verse was that wide [indicates about five inches]. You'd have to recite all of that. Then you'd have a block of spelling...you'd do all of this standing up. Then he might do something at the board...then the next grade'd come up....If some of the stuff wasn't to his liking or you had too much of it wrong, he'd punish you.⁵⁸

This methodology was not without its entertainment and information value for the students in the classroom. Because of the nature of the school the students sometimes found themselves with long stretches of time with nothing to do. The teacher was busy with the students at his desk and was unavailable. Watching and listening to the constant parade of students was not only a way of passing the time but also a source of additional information:

Sometimes you'd run out of things to do. Watching the other pupils go up as each grade was called, you know, and stand before the teacher was quite entertaining. And you'd remember what you heard.⁵⁹

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When students did return to their places they were expected to work quietly and alone. The rules required students to be quiet and still. If they broke the rules they were punished:

I don't remember helping anyone...the rule was no talking; do your own work.

If you were caught talking to one another or exchanging work, you know, telling each other work, whispering back and forth, you would get put in the corner, facing the wall...there was nothing any worse than that.⁶⁰

You had to do your own work. If you'd try and help one another...like you were sitting in the one seat and if I didn't know something and I whispered and you told me...and the teacher caught you, you were punished for it...and moved.⁶¹

Students were also punished for not knowing their work. It is striking how clearly remembered are the details of the various forms of punishment:

We had a big blackboard across the length of the school...for punishment they'd put you up to the blackboard and draw a straight line on the board...you put your hand out and he'd pile books on it and you'd have to stay there perhaps an hour...keeping your hand up to that line....and they'd have a rule staff for drawing lines on the board...perhaps a six-foot rule staff. They'd give you the rule staff in the other hand...and then the teacher would get up making fun at you, call you a shepherd and all of this stuff. I daresay that pissed me off...I never liked him.

This one liked the leather strap...tapping leather like they used to use for tapping boots...one side was smooth, the other rough...rounded out on one end about two inches wide...when he called you up, he'd try it out on his own hand, you know. "I wonder which side cuts the sweetest." Certainly the smooth side. You'd hold your hand out and he'd go back over his head with that strap...he'd take you up to about there on the wrist [indicates four inches above his palm]...turn your hand right red...stinging for an hour; four or five to each hand.⁶²

Generally, parents supported the teachers and accepted the punishment that they thought was necessary to maintain order in the school. However, occasionally the teacher went too far and there was a reaction:

Another teacher tied the two laces of my boots together right tight and pushed me and tried to make me walk....Sure you know I tripped and fell and landed right on my mouth and cut open my lip...drove my teeth through my tongue....My mother went to him...hey I daresay he heard his prayers that day...he didn't do that again after.⁶³

One other event clearly etched in the memories of former students is the visits from the school inspectors. They would arrive by boat and their visits were much anticipated:

There would be a school inspector come every three months. Everybody would be so quiet....You didn't dare stir or say a word when the inspector was there...desks would be so tidy and the teacher would make everything just so. They used to come in a boat. We'd know what day he was coming and I remember him coming in one time and I was probably eight or nine and he asked each one of us what we wanted to do when we finished school.

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They were very nice....Although the teachers were right on edge because they were coming, wondering if everything was all right. They would go around and look at what work had been done...we had to stand up when they came in...we were dressed in our Sunday best.⁶⁴

The last year for the school at the foot of Bungay's Hill was 1957. During that year the community constructed a new church and a new one-room school. Both church and school were built partly through the volunteer labour of the men of the community. For the first time in Fair Haven's history the school and the church would be separate structures and in different locations. The church remained at the foot of Bungay's Hill. The school was moved down to the Bottom.

The opening date of the new school coincided with the introduction of the Department of Education's Bursary Program. The Bursary Program was designed once and for all to eliminate the historic inequality of opportunity that had existed for students attempting to do high school work in the smaller schools of the province.⁶⁵

Bursaries of up to \$500 were available to any student of a one-room school who had successfully completed grade eight. These would enable such students to travel to a community where there was a larger school (six rooms or more) to attend high school.

Fair Haven was the perfect candidate for the Bursary Program. The program was meant to address the needs of students who did not have ready access to one of the new high schools that had been built and whose parents lacked the financial resources to send them away to school. However, the Bursary Program did not quite work out in Fair Haven in the manner intended by its designers and supporters. In the first place, they failed to take into consideration the cumulative impact of long-term isolation. For some students and their parents the prospect of having to leave their community to live and go to school in another place was too daunting an experience to take on.⁶⁶ There was also the issue of the quality of education available to students in an overcrowded one-room school with untrained teachers struggling with multiple grades and curricular responsibilities. For those prepared to take on the challenge of living away from home, the educational experience they had in the small school proved to be inadequate. In order to qualify for a bursary the students of Fair Haven had to go to Thornlea and write and pass a three-subject exam. No bursary was granted to those who failed.

What was so bad about this was you left a little one-room school and came over to write an exam with several hundred students....A lot of material had not been covered in the school.

It was a very unfair situation...you didn't know anyone except for a few from your community—it was very intimidating.

You didn't have any other choice. Because if you failed the exam and couldn't get a bursary, your parents couldn't afford to pay the money to send you to school.⁶⁷

INFORMAL EDUCATION

As indicated above, formal education began in Fair Haven sometime between 1901 and 1911. However, an informal process of education was operating from the time the original settlers first established winter houses there in the early nineteenth century. I asked Freeman Crann when he started school; he answered, when he was six. When I asked him at what point he started learning how to be a fisherman he said, "that was passed down from the time I was born." From the time they were born, Fair Haven functioned as an informal school for the young people of the community. The woods, the water, the fish store,⁶⁸ the fishing boat, and the kitchen were all *de facto* classrooms. Through this informal process, the next generation acquired the knowledge, skills, and values they needed to sustain and develop their community.

Norman Collett's formal schooling ended at grade eight. His education, however, continued in the fish store and the boat. There he learned the skills he needed for fishing:

You picked it up from your father by working with him in the store and the twine loft. We had two stores as a matter of fact. That's where I learned how to make lobster traps, knit heads...all my experience.

That's where you learned how to repair your gear; you learned from your father and your uncles.

Then when you went fishing you learned your skills of how to fish...out on the water.⁶⁹

The teachers of this informal curriculum were not the young, inexperienced, under-trained transients who struggled to do their best in the school room. These teachers were seasoned professionals, knowledgeable and wise in the ways of the sea and land around Fair Haven. They had lived in this community their whole life and were not planning on leaving at the end of the year. They knew how to make this place work and they also knew it was in the community's interest to teach the next generation to do the same. In the formal school there was one teacher for forty students. What was to be mastered had to be learned from that one person. One could not even ask a friend or relative for assistance. To do so was to risk punishment and humiliation. If the teacher did not know or was too busy to help, the student was often left helpless and alone.

Stan Collett remembers gaining his fishing knowledge "in the boat mostly," although the fish store was also significant. Stan's father had the only lobster canning licence in the community. The canning "factory" was a significant place for him:

They used to can lobsters then...my father had a licence for canning lobsters...the factory was what we used to call it...I learned that from him.⁷⁰

Once they left the formal school, regardless of their age, boys were accepted in the store and the boat as co-workers. The transition from being treated as an

inferior and a child to being accepted as a near-equal and a man was immediate. Hence, "you were there when they were there....," participating in whatever was going on.⁷¹ The fish store was a particularly important place, for it was where the men of the community made, prepared and repaired the tools and equipment of their trade: the nets, lobster pots, trawls, buoys and markers. In addition, engines were serviced and repaired and sometimes boats were planned and built.

The teaching-learning process was one of demonstration, observation, participation, practice and experimentation. The veteran fishermen demonstrated and the boys observed; then they experimented and practised until they got it right. Freeman Crann offered an insight into how this process worked at its best:

I learned a lot from Uncle Bob. I learned how to make twine from him...hours and hours and hours trying to show me....Patience, he had all the patience in the world....I'd get tormented with it and throw it down and say there was no way in the world can it be done...but he had all the patience....I'd cut a hole and he'd give me the needle and I'd try to mend it and I couldn't get it right and I'd start again over and over....finally I picked it up....He was a good teacher...he had patience not only with me but all the children...all the patience in the world.⁷²

When the community functioned as an informal school the teachers outnumbered the students. Knowledge and advice were available from many different sources, within the family in the first instance, but also in the wider community. The idea of being dependent on one person for what you needed to know or not being able to ask your friends and relatives for help was alien. Although the fish store of one's immediate family was the first site for learning, the wider community, other fishermen and other stores were accessed when needed. You were not restricted to your family if you needed to know something:

If there was something I didn't know or Dad didn't know I'd go to someone else. For example, splicing a rope—if your father didn't know you'd have to move to someone else's store to find out.⁷³

When I started fishing on my own I wanted those cod nets and I did not know how to knit one. I never seen one knit...and I went down to the bottom to Uncle George Collett and I said I wanted to knit a cod net or two and I didn't know how to do it....So he told me what kind of twine to get, the size, and how much and he said when you gets it and gets ready I'll come up and show you how to do it.⁷⁴

Sharing and helping each other was the culture of the community and naturally permeated the informal education process:

People were always willing to share their knowledge. That's the way we learned the skills...from one another. The only thing they wouldn't tell you is where the most fish were. They wouldn't share that.⁷⁵

This contrasted sharply with the formal school where the emphasis was on each person doing his/her own work. Talk, in all its conversational and narrative forms, was one of the primary learning media for the young men of the community. Unlike the school where stillness and silence were demanded, the store was a place

of activity, dialogue and story-telling. As the men worked they would talk. Informal and spontaneous conversations would occur. Sometimes, cuffers and stories would be shared. As the men talked and worked, the boys listened and overheard what was said. It was, in fact, not unlike the formal school in which one paused at one's desk to listen to an upper-grade group recite their geography or history lesson or some memorized verses. There was an important difference, however. The geography overheard in the store or the boat told of the land and seascapes in and around Fair Haven. Necessary local knowledge, about submerged rocks and hidden shoals, the best places to fish and put out lobster pots, and points of land that could offer refuge from a storm, was being shared.

The history too was of Fair Haven and Placentia Bay. Its references were to Flat Islands, Trinny Cove, Pinch Gut, and Harbour Buffett. It told the story of the men and women who lived in these places and when they moved and settled in Fair Haven. It told the story of their lives, the hardships endured and the triumphs shared. The cuffers, recitations and songs expanded the narratives to include the legendary exploits, travels and adventures of both actual and fictional individuals from Placentia Bay and beyond. Fact, folklore, and fiction were intertwined and intermingled.

Every one in the community was a potential teacher. The process of learning was continuous and spontaneous. It occurred through observation and participation in the daily and seasonal work and play of the community. Through this informal process, "Products of slowly-fashioned skills and insights...were passed down from one generation to another...wholly outside any system of formal schooling through the family and local community."⁷⁶ This informal process not only made provision for the acquisition of skills, it also functioned to preserve and transmit a distinctive culture, a culture whose "very existence...has always seemed to be an embarrassment to those who concerned themselves with [formal] education...."⁷⁷

CONCLUSION

George Story's purpose in writing "Education's Future in Newfoundland" was to offer an answer to his own question: "What, then, might now be done by way of a new educational enterprise in Newfoundland?"

"The first prerequisite," Story insisted by way of reform, "is to stop the importation and imposition of educational models without regard to their appropriateness to Newfoundland and to look to our selves for our own models and adaptation."⁷⁸ The indigenous model he was advocating for emulation was the kind of informal process of learning and teaching that operated in traditional Newfoundland communities such as Fair Haven. Such communities have "much to teach us about the particular kinds of educational institutions, and their organization, we should be creating."⁷⁹

In the first place schools "should all be part of highly decentralized systems serving," in the first instance, their individual communities and not the "macro-society of manpower planners and administrators...." Story also argued for "the highest possible degree of autonomy for each school, with complete freedom to devise its own curriculum, conduct its own teaching and grant its own leaving certificates." Citing A. N. Whitehead, Story further argued that the starting point for educational reform has to be "the school as a unit, with its approved curriculum based on its own needs, evolved by its own staff."⁸⁰

The informal process of education in Fair Haven was fundamentally community-based and responsive to the needs of the community. What was taught and learned was the "versatility of skills and a quickness of understanding" that the young of the community needed to acquire in order to live and make a living in that small, isolated rural community. The continued existence of the community depended on the success of this educational enterprise. The formal education process, on the other hand, hardly acknowledged the existence of rural communities such as Fair Haven. Its curriculum was not designed to sustain and develop the outposts. For the centralized education authorities the success of education in rural Newfoundland was to be more likely measured by the elimination of communities such as Fair Haven.

The vision of educational change and reform put forth by Story in the 1970s was ignored by those responsible for educational planning in the province. The centralization of educational authority and the closure and consolidation of small community schools have continued to dominate educational reform. The needs of the global economy and the dictates of technology determine the what, the how and even the where of a child's education. Sustaining and developing small rural communities has no place in such an agenda.

In June of this year (1996) formal education in Fair Haven is slated to be reformed out of existence. The educational authorities for the area have determined that it is in the best interests of the students to close the small community school and bus the students to a larger school in Norman's Cove, thirty-five kilometres away. The people of the community do not share this view. They fervently believe it is in the best interests of their children and the community that the school remain open. They are concerned about their children, some still not five, having to get up at 6:30 a.m. in order to catch the bus at 7:30 in the morning and then be away from home and community all day. They are concerned about such young children having to travel over a road that can be quite dangerous during the winter months. They are also concerned that the closing of the school will mean the end of the community.

The continued presence of the school provides the community with a link to the past and a sign of hope for the future. Maurice Tarrant, the deputy mayor of Lawn, in a recent *Evening Telegram* article states,

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In rural areas our schools are the very heart of our community. What happens if the provincial government rips that heart out? As with any living entity, it will most assuredly die.⁸¹

The closure of the school provides one more reason for people to leave. The lack of a school will keep new families from moving into the community. Albert Crann takes great pleasure in bringing his grandchildren to and from school each morning, lunch-time and afternoon. Mildred Gilbert, although she has no children or grandchildren in the school, says that she will miss having children around the community during the day. The idea that there will be no school in the community fills her with a great sense of loss and foreboding. Albert Crann voices the concerns of many when he says,

The way I figures it, if the school is gone, it's all gone.⁸²

INTERVIEWS

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Date of Interview</i>
Mildred Gilbert	October 20, 1995
Robert Crann	October 27, 1995
Marion Loder	November 5, 1995
Edna Crann	November 17, 1995
Mabel Crann	November 17, 1995
Freeman Crann	November 18, 1995
Stan Collett	November 24, 1995
Julie Collett	November 24, 1995
Lorraine Smith	November 24, 1995
Wendy Collett	November 25, 1995
Norman Collett	November 25, 1995
Florrie Dicks	November 25, 1995
Roger Collett	December 2, 1995
Albert Crann	December 15, 1995
Tilda Crann	December 15, 1995

All interviews were conducted at Fair Haven by Dennis Mulcahy.

Notes

¹The primary sources for this essay have been the several generations of people of Fair Haven who have generously shared their experiences of both formal and informal education with me. For the last seven years I have been a frequent visitor to the community and have spent many hours listening to their stories about living and working and going to

school. In the fall of 1995 I began to formalize this process by tape-recording these conversations and focusing on the subject matter of this essay. I wish to thank them very much for their hospitality and their generosity. I would also like to thank my colleagues Amarjit Singh and Phillip McCann for their suggestions and help.

The story of education told here is of one community's experience. There is no intention to suggest that it is, necessarily, representative in any way of rural education in Newfoundland and Labrador. Nor should anyone attempt to generalize about rural education from the details of this essay. Rural communities are often as different from each other as they are from urban areas. This diversity precludes the making of what can only be misleading generalizations.

²G.M. Story, "Education's Future in Newfoundland," *The Book of Newfoundland*, Vol. 5 (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1975), pp. 351-354.

³Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 9. Cited in Joel Spring, *The American School: 1642-1990* (New York: Longman, 1990), p. 6. "Welter found little in colonial education that contributed to a democratic theory of education, and he viewed colonial education as a 'false start from which it was necessary to turn away before education could become a key principle of democratic faith.' According to Welter, colonial education was oriented toward teaching respect for authority and maintaining existing social and religious order."

⁴G.M. Story, "Education's Future in Newfoundland," pp.351-352. Story quotes S.A. Behrs' conception of education to distinguish "good" and "harmful" approaches to formal schooling:

Education, in the sense of knowledge of Nature, men and life, he considers good in so far as it is necessary to enable us to serve our neighbours, but as a manifestation of 'progress' enabling us to enslave our neighbours, education is harmful.

⁵Story, "Education's Future in Newfoundland," p.352.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Censuses of Newfoundland* (1836, 1874).

⁸E.R.Seary, *Place Names of the Avalon Peninsula of the Island of Newfoundland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp.84-5.

⁹H.C. Brown, *The Impact of Modernization on a Traditional Regional System: The Case of Inner Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, 1911-1966* (Memorial University, Unpublished Master's Thesis, 1985), pp.60-72.

¹⁰Interview with Norman Collett, 25 November 1995. Mr. Collett lives in the Bottom close by a small creek which runs into the Barachois. He indicated that his house is located close to where these first settlers are believed to have wintered.

¹¹Edward Wix, *Six Months of a Newfoundland Missionary's Journal* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1836), p.40.

¹²Trinny Cove and Pinch Gut were settled around the same time as Fair Haven. By the mid-1920s both communities had been abandoned. Most if not all of the residents of Trinny Cove had by then moved to Fair Haven (Famish Cove). Some of the people of Pinch Gut came to Fair Haven while others went elsewhere (*Encyclopedia of Newfoundland*, Vols. 3, 5).

¹³*Census of Newfoundland* (1836).

¹⁴*Censuses of Newfoundland* (1845, 1857, 1869).

¹⁵*Census of Newfoundland* (1845). The two communities reportedly had a population of thirty-two Roman Catholics.

¹⁶*Census of Newfoundland* (1884).

¹⁷*Census of Newfoundland* (1901).

¹⁸Marion Loder (interviewed November 5, 1995) was a teacher in Fair Haven for the school year 1941/42. She doesn't recall there being very many (if anyone) engaged in fishing during that year. Most, she reported, were working at Argentia. Although Argentia was a "Godsend" it is also remembered with some bitterness. Newfoundlanders working there were paid substantially less than their Canadian and American counterparts. Robert Crann (Interview October 27, 1995) pointed out that Newfoundlanders were working side by side with Canadians and Americans, doing exactly the same carpentry work as these others, but making much lower wages.

¹⁹*Draft Viability Guidelines* circulated by the Department of Education during the Spring of 1995 categorize a rural school as an *isolated* school if it is at least thirty kilometres from a school that could accommodate its students were the small school to be closed. The Fair Haven school is thirty-six kilometres from the potential receiving school in Norman's Cove.

²⁰Interview with Stan Collett, 24 November 1995. Mr. Collett attended this first school from 1925 to 1932. The old cemetery that he mentions is all that remains to mark the spot where the old church-school stood.

²¹Interview with Edna Crann, 17 November 1995.

²²D.W. Johnson, *History of Methodism in Eastern British America* (Sackville, N.B.: The Tribune Printing Co. Ltd., 1925), p. 271. Johnson is describing events that occurred between 1911 and 1924.

²³The *Report of the Public Schools of Newfoundland under Methodist Boards of Education* for the year ending June 30, 1922, notes that Cecil Webber was teaching at Famish Cove in 1922. The report states his classification was Grade III; he was employed for 11 1/2 months and was paid a total salary of \$432. Florrie Dicks (interviewed 1 December 1995) said that after an absence of two years he returned to teach for one more year in 1925.

²⁴Interview with Stan Collett, 24 November 1995. Interview with Edna Crann, 17 November 1995.

²⁵Edna Crann (Interview November 17, 1995).

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid.* The most startling form of punishment from this era of schooling was referred to as the *skin 'em alive*. Robert Crann (Interview October 27, 1995) took great delight in describing how this worked. The teacher tied a rope around the waist of the offending student and then flung the rope up over the open beams in the school. The student was then hoisted up and held aloft for up to an hour in the middle of the classroom. Uncle Bob claimed this was a punishment he saw carried out only at the school in Trinny Cove and never in Fair Haven. Only male students were punished in this way. This method of discipline appears to have been imported into Newfoundland via the Lancastrian system of education. This system was highly popular in the charity schools on both sides of the Atlantic in the nineteenth century. Joel Spring (1990, p. 57) describes Lancaster's recommended methods of torture:

Lancaster developed a unique system of punishments. Children who talked frequently or were idle were punished by having a wooden log placed around their necks.

Extreme offenders were placed in a sack or basket suspended from the roof of the school in full view of the rest of the pupils.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Interview with Edna Crann, 7 November 1995.

³¹*Ibid.* Edna Crann told this story with great delight and laughter. She said Ethel would do this very furtively so as not to be caught by the teacher, Robert Dawe. The image also suggests that despite the strictness and imposed order, the students were able to create a little anarchy.

³²Interview with Stan Collett, 24 November 1995.

³³Interview with Julie Collett, 24 November 1995.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Although it was a common practice in rural communities to use a chapel or a church as a school, the kind of two-story structure being described here may be unique. I have not been able to find another reference to this kind of church-school combination.

³⁷Interview with Stan Collett, 24 November 1995. Mr. Collett recalls that in the 'thirties when most of the community was on welfare and you had to work for your welfare, the men of the community would often meet this obligation by cutting wood for the school. When the people were on welfare they'd have to work for their order. They'd go and cut wood for the school. When the whack-man would come, they would come out of the woods to get another order. (The welfare officer was called the whack-man—after whack for food.)

³⁸Interview with Mildred Gilbert, 20 October 1995.

³⁹Interview with Norman Collett, 25 November 1995.

⁴⁰Interview with Mildred Gilbert, 20 October 1995.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²Interview with Norman Collett, 25 November 1995. Mr. Collett attended this school from 1938 to 1946.

⁴³Interview with Mabel Crann, 26 November 1995. Mrs. Crann attended school from 1950 to 1958.

⁴⁴Interview with Norman Collett, 25 November 1995.

⁴⁵Interview with Mildred Gilbert, 20 October 1995.

⁴⁶Interview with Freeman Crann, 18 November 1995.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Interview with Mildred Crann, 20 October 1995.

⁴⁹Interview with Mabel Crann, 17 November 1995.

⁵⁰Interview with Norman Collett, 25 November 1995.

⁵¹Interview with Mildred Gilbert, 20 October 1995.

⁵²*Ibid.* Mrs. Gilbert pointed out that it did cost money to go to school and there was very little cash on the go at the time (1934-1945). There were school fees and you had to buy your own school supplies. When you got to high school you had to travel to Clarendville to write your exams and you needed money for clothes, travel and a boarding house. "The money required was not a lot, but at that time there was not a lot of money on the go." Mrs. Gilbert also pointed out that to travel to Clarendville to write exams was in itself a demanding situation for someone from such an isolated outpost: "I was very nervous; I felt like an outsider."

⁵³For a good many of these people, ability had very little to do with their leaving school. One does not have to spend very long in their presence to realize this. As a case in point the woman referred to here went on to complete her education and worked all her adult life in hospital administration on the mainland. She and her husband were chief administrators at large hospitals first in Toronto and later in Montreal.

⁵⁴Marion (Loder) Davis (interviewed November 5, 1995) was the teacher in Fair Haven in 1940-41. She was nineteen at the time and had completed a six-week summer course at the Normal School. She reports that there was no advice or guidance offered to the student teachers regarding how to handle so many students and so many grades. The only thing she had to go on, she said, was her memories of being a student in a one-room school herself on Random Island. On Random, however, there were only fifteen students in the class; in Fair Haven she was responsible for forty.

One possible source of help for these teachers could have been the visits from the school inspector. Mrs. Davis recalled hoping that when the inspector came he would take the class and demonstrate for her how to handle such a difficult situation. However, this never happened. The inspector came but neither demonstrated any strategies nor offered any advice to the young teacher.

Mrs. Davis also recalled that there was a scarcity of school supplies when she taught at this school. She adopted one of the strategies of the community to raise some money: "One day I took the whole school to pick partridgeberries to raise money so I could buy supplies for the school."

⁵⁵Interview with Mildred Gilbert, 20 October 1995.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Interview with Norman Collett, 25 November 1995.

⁵⁸Interview with Freeman Crann, 18 November 1995.

⁵⁹Interview with Mildred Gilbert, 20 October 1995.

⁶⁰*Ibid.* Mrs. Gilbert remembers that you were allowed to help the younger children put on and take off their winter clothes and get ready to go home at the end of the day.

⁶¹Interview with Freeman Crann, 18 November 1995.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³*Ibid.* Despite the various punishments the teachers are remembered favourably for the most part. There is an appreciation of the fact that they had a very difficult situation to deal with. And, as Freeman allows, "there were some students there would do anything to dare the teacher."

⁶⁴Interview with Mildred Gilbert, 20 October 1995.

⁶⁵Frederick W. Rowe, *The Development of Education in Newfoundland* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1964), p.165.

⁶⁶Interview with Wendy Collett, 25 November 1995.

⁶⁷Interview with Lorraine Smith, 24 November 1995.

⁶⁸I would like to acknowledge the research of Barbara Mulcahy on the structure and function of fish stores in the community of Fair Haven. Her work made me aware of the significance of the fish store as an informal site for learning.

⁶⁹Interview with Norman Collett, 25 November 1995.

⁷⁰Interview with Stan Collett, 24 November 1995.

⁷¹Interview with Freeman Crann, 18 November 1995.

⁷²Interview with Freeman Crann, 18 November 1995.

⁷³Interview with Norman Collett, 25 November 1995.

⁷⁴Interview with Freeman Crann, 18 November 1995.

⁷⁵Interview with Norman Collett, 25 November 1995.

⁷⁶G.M. Story, "Education's Future in Newfoundland," pp.351-352.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p.351.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p.352. Story notes that this particular issue has been discussed by David Alexander in "Economic Growth, Development and Higher Education in Newfoundland" (unpublished paper, 1973); by A. Singh in the *Morning Watch*, Vol. 1, no.3; and in "Teacher Training and Curriculum," a brief prepared by the Department of Folklore of Memorial University (1973).

In the *Morning Watch* article, Amarjit Singh notes, "But the fact is, if I may say, that if we have specialized in anything in Newfoundland, it is a specialization in borrowing outmoded educational concepts and theories...."

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p.352.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p.353.

⁸¹Maurice Tarrant, "Towns Die Without Schools," *Evening Telegram* (January 29, 1996), p.5.

⁸²Interview with Albert Crann 15 December 1995.