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Volume 13, Number 2, Fall 1997

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds13_2art04

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Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-1430 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Broderick, M. A. (1997). Economic and Religious Restrictions on the Timing of Marriages in Trinity Bay Newfoundland, 1890-1939. *Newfoundland Studies*, 13(2), 178–197.

Economic and Religious Restrictions on the Timing of Marriages in Trinity Bay Newfoundland, 1890-1939

MICHELLE A. BRODERICK

MARRIAGE¹ is a social event that in most cultures unites not only two individuals, but also their families or larger kin groups. Since marriage often reflects elements of the social context in which it takes place, it is not surprising to find that religious and economic restrictions have had a pervasive effect on its seasonal distribution. Two Christian periods in particular have restricted the timing of marriage: Lent (affecting spring marriages) and Advent (affecting late fall and early winter marriages). The strength of these religious restrictions has been found to vary depending on the denomination and the ethnic identity of the population in question. The type of subsistence limits the extent to which economic activities can influence the timing of marriage. When economic activity is seasonal, the frequency of marriage declines during labour intensive periods and increases during slack periods of work.² Research on the seasonality of marriage is generally restricted to historic populations whose economy was based on agriculture and/or pastoralism; few studies have focused on fishing populations.³ This oversight can be attributed to the relative scarcity of fishing populations, both spatially and temporally. The study of historic populations in the island of Newfoundland is particularly suited to addressing this issue.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Newfoundland served primarily as a seasonal fishing base for English, Portuguese, Basque and French fishermen. The settlers from whom the current population is descended arrived primarily during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and subsisted on the inshore cod fishery, supplemented in some regions with the seal fishery. The Newfoundland cod fishery, from the early 19th century up until W.W. II, has been characterized as a family fishery, since the family provided the bulk of the labour.⁴ During this period

fish-crew formation was based on patrilineal kinship which resulted in patrilocal post-marital residence and a modified form of partible inheritance.⁵ Therefore, fathers, sons, and brothers fished together, while other family members contributed their labour as members of land crews processing the fish. Men were also involved in the construction of boats and houses, collected firewood, and supplemented their families' diets with the hunting of small birds and mammals. Women and children helped process the fish and formed the bulk of the labour force used in subsistence farming⁶ and the care of livestock. Women were also responsible for cooking all meals and, until relatively recently, made most of their families' clothing and tended to their health.⁷

Marriages recorded between 1890 and 1939 in the Trinity Bay area (see Figure 1) were used to determine the existence and effects of religious and economic restrictions on the timing of marriage in Newfoundland. The data included in this analysis consists of 8824 marriages which were either recorded in the Trinity Bay District or recorded outside of Trinity Bay, but involved a Trinity Bay resident.⁸ Analysis was limited to the 1890-1939 time period for two reasons. Firstly, prior to the mid 1880s the groom's occupation was rarely recorded, and secondly, social patterns were disrupted in Newfoundland after the mid 1930s, with increased male migration spurred by labour needs in the construction of military bases in Newfoundland, the loss of men who went overseas to fight in W.W.II, and with a shift from the family to the factory fishery after W.W.II.⁹

Prior to the 1880s the population of Trinity Bay, like those elsewhere in Newfoundland, was primarily distributed among three religious groups: the Church of England, the United Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. After the 1880s membership in other Protestant religions increased, most notably that of the Salvation Army (see Table 1 for a distribution of Trinity Bay's population by denominational affiliation and occupation).¹⁰ Although the frequency of inter-denominational unions was low in Trinity Bay, denominational affiliation was assigned on the basis of the church where the marriage was solemnized.¹¹ In cases where the marriage was solemnized in the home, religious affiliation was based on that of the officiating clergy. Using an ecclesiastical calendar, the exact dates of Advent and Lent were calculated for each year from 1890 to 1939. Unions were classified as either having occurred during Lent, Advent, or a non-religious period. The occupational profile of Trinity Bay was relatively homogeneous, consisting primarily of men engaged in the fishery (70 % of known cases).¹² Of the remainder, the majority listed their occupation as either labourer (28%), lumberman (9%), carpenter (6%), or sailor (5%). A variety of other occupations existed, but each accounted for less than 4% of men involved in non-fishing occupations.¹³ Due to the small number of cases associated with specific non-fishing occupations, these were combined under the category of non-fisherman.

A monthly index of marriage was calculated in order to minimize the differences in sample sizes and to control for the varying days within each month.¹⁴ This

index was used for graphic purposes only. A value of 100 indicates a lack of seasonality, while a value above or below 100 indicates a preference for or against marriages during a specific month. Chi-square was used to test for statistical significance in the seasonal distribution of marriages.¹⁵ A distinct seasonal pattern can be seen in the monthly distribution of marriages in Trinity Bay (see Figure 2 and Table 2). The frequency of marriage declined sharply between January and March, increased slightly in April to peak in May, declined between May and August, and increased from September onwards, to peak in December. Marriages occurring between September and January accounted for 64% of the total number of marriages.

The two most pervasive religious restrictions on the timing of marriage were Lent and Advent. Lent is a moveable feast in preparation for Easter. It lasts for forty days, beginning on Ash Wednesday and terminating on Easter Sunday. During the study period, Lent began as early as February 5th and as late as March 8th, and ended as early as March 23rd and as late as April 23rd. The monthly distribution of marriage was significantly affected by denominational affiliation (see Figure 3).¹⁶ Considerable variation between religious groups was observed in the distribution of marriage between March and April and between November and January, while little variation was observed between May and October. The differences between denominational groups can be attributed to variation in the adherence to religious restrictions (see Figure 4).¹⁷ Adherence to the Advent ban on marriages was the most variable: the percentage of marriages recorded during Advent ranged from 2.8% among Catholics to 21.2% among Anglicans. Adherence to the Lenten ban was less variable with the frequency of marriage ranging from 1.6% among Catholics to 8.6% among members of the Salvation Army. Of these religious groups, the Catholics avoided marriages during both Lent and Advent (4.4%), the Anglicans avoided marriages during Lent (3.2%) but not Advent (21.2%), and members of both the United Church and Salvation Army were the least affected by religious or customary restrictions. Marriage during Lent ranged from 6.9% among members of the United Church to 8.6% among members of the Salvation Army; during Advent the frequency of marriage ranged from 20% to 14.9%, respectively. The marked avoidance of marriages during Advent among Catholics explains their relatively lower frequency of marriage in December and higher frequency both before and after Advent (November and January).

Traditionally the two most labour intensive periods in Newfoundland were associated with the cod and the seal fisheries. The inshore cod fishery was the primary economic pursuit in Newfoundland until well into this century. Although variation in the scheduling of the cod fishery existed depending on geographic location, the fishery was generally active from June to the end of September or the beginning of October.¹⁸ The Labrador cod fishery was also an important activity and necessitated a summer seasonal migration to the shores of Labrador, and lasted roughly from June to September.¹⁹ The seal fishery was second only to the cod

fishery in terms of labour requirements. The landsman hunt could run from the end of December in Coastal Labrador through to May in the more southerly districts in Newfoundland. Scheduling of the vessel-based hunt also varied. Before the introduction of steam vessels, sailing vessels were active in the seal hunt from February to May. With the introduction of steam vessels this period was limited to March and April, although men working as sealers would still be absent from their communities from February to May, since most were required to meet up with their vessel in St. John's by the end of February, and had to return home on their own after their vessel docked again in St. John's.²⁰

A statistically significant difference in the seasonal pattern of marriage was observed between occupational groups (see Figure 5).²¹ Among non-fishermen, marriages between June and September accounted for 28.9%, compared to 13.7% among fishermen. Since the avoidance of marriage during March was consistent regardless of occupation, the seal fishery alone cannot explain this pattern.²² Other possibilities include a religious restriction, as previously mentioned, coupled with inclement weather²³ which would have affected fishermen and non-fishermen alike. Since fishermen tended to avoid marriages during their most intensive work period, i.e. the summer months, marriages were more frequent prior to and after this summer period. Avoidance of summer marriages among non-fishermen was not as marked, therefore marriages before and after the summer period were not as frequent as those observed among fishermen. Although a preference for fall-winter marriage is also noted among non-fishermen, they may have simply followed the established pattern in fishing communities, or may have married during this time to accommodate extended family members who were engaged in the fishery.

It is important to note that economic restrictions affecting the seasonal timing of marriages were not only related to increased work load, but also to economic hardship. Life in typical Newfoundland outports was, at times, difficult.²⁴ During the summer fishery, fishermen and their families worked hard to secure enough credit to sustain them through the coming winter and, if necessary, to pay off debts accrued in previous years.²⁵ It was only after the summer fishery, when accounts were settled with the merchants, that goods such as flour and molasses were purchased, vegetable gardens harvested, and local fruits collected and preserved. These stores lasted well into the winter, but by March most stores of food were running low again.²⁶ Since there was no system of welfare or relief for able-bodied persons in Newfoundland until after 1930,²⁷ many fisher families may have suffered harsh winters and lean summers. This lack of food resources may have contributed to the lower frequency of marriages observed in both the winter and summer months, as families could not have afforded to host the wedding celebrations.²⁸

Comparison of the seasonal marriage pattern in Trinity Bay to other fishing populations was limited.²⁹ Only Knipe's study of Gamrie provided a monthly distribution of marriages (see Table 3 and Figure 6). The marriage index was lower in Gamrie in all months except December. In Gamrie 65% of marriages occurred

between December and January, compared to 36% in Trinity Bay. Differences in marital seasonality between Gamrie and Trinity Bay may be attributed to their distinct fishing economies. While Trinity Bay fishermen focused primarily on cod (June to October), in Gamrie they engaged in the herring fishery (May to September). In Trinity Bay, the inshore fishery did not require prolonged sea voyages, therefore the men returned home each evening. In Gamrie the fishermen were separated from their families during the week. As a result, marriages were generally limited to Saturdays during the fishing season, hence the lower frequency of marriage during this period and the greater frequency of marriage between December and January, when they could be solemnized during the week as well.³⁰ Baillie, who examined fishing communities in northeastern Scotland, stated that between 75% to 90% of marriages involving fishermen occurred between September and December. This compares to 54% in Trinity Bay. This variation in the timing of marriage may also be attributed to the different methods used to conduct the two fisheries. In Whitehills and Gardenstown Scotland, the herring fishery required a lengthy separation between the fishermen and their families. Byron, who studied Shetland communities in Scotland where the fishery was active year round, did not provide specific numbers or percentages. However he notes that marriages were more common in April, a four week period which marked the end of the haddock fishery and the beginning of the herring fishery. September, which marked the end of the herring season, was also a common month for marriages. Unfortunately, the effects of religious restrictions on the timing of marriage were not addressed in any of these comparison populations.

Although comparisons are limited, it appears that a great deal of variation existed in the seasonal pattern of marriage among fishing populations. This observation was not unexpected, since the same holds true for agrarian populations and reflects variation in the scheduling of economic activities. However, the fact that economic activity patterns did have a significant effect on the timing of marriage argues that it could be an equally important factor affecting other demographic parameters, such as fertility, mortality, and migration. Therefore, the seasonal pattern of marriage can be used to indirectly determine the extent to which economic and religious restrictions affect a population. In Trinity Bay, economic patterns were an important and pervasive factor affecting demographic behaviour, while the effects of denominational affiliation were more variable.

Table 1
Percentage Distribution of Trinity Bay's Population by
Denominational Affiliation and Groom's Occupation, 1890-1939

Variable	Percentage
Denominational Affiliation	
Church of England	44.9
United Church	43.4
Roman Catholic	7.3
Salvation Army	4.4
N of Cases	8768
Groom's Occupation	
Fisherman	70.1
Non-fisherman	29.9
N of Cases	8554

Table 2
Monthly Marriage Index in Trinity Bay Newfoundland, 1890-1939

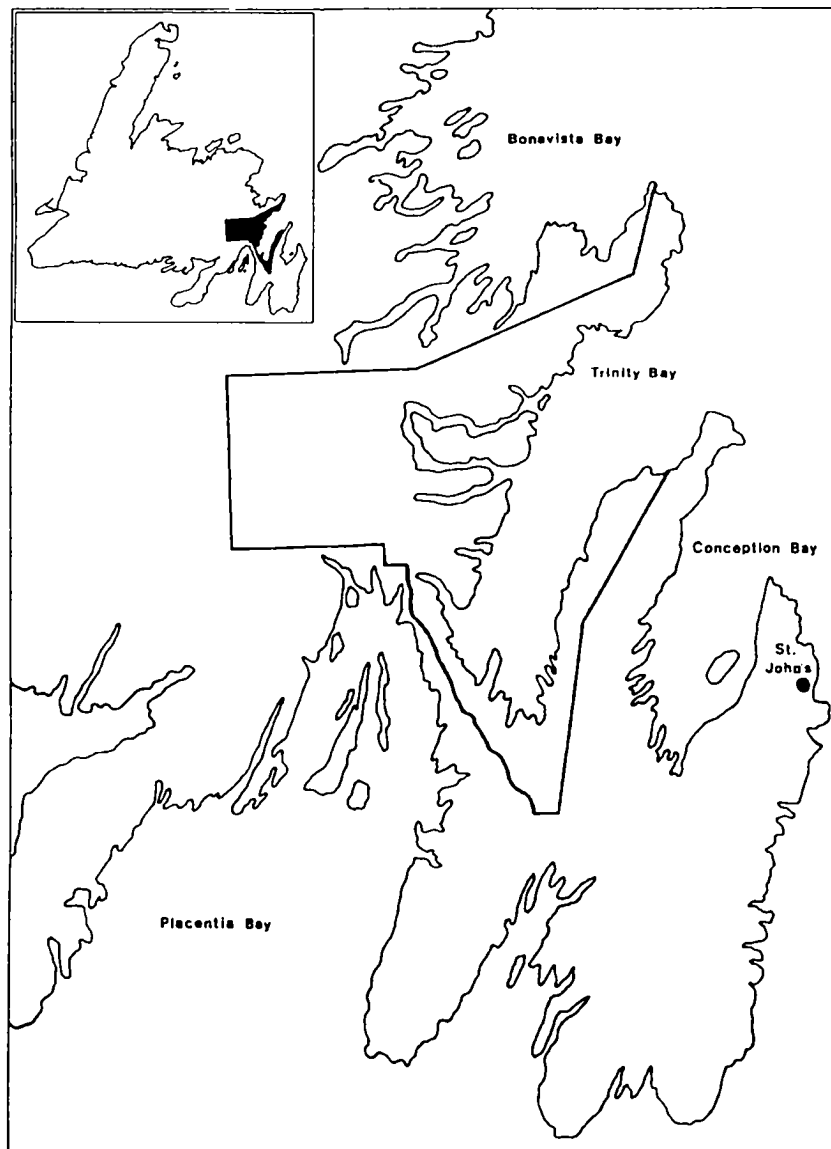
Month	Total	Denominational Affiliation				Occupation	
		Church of England	United Church	Roman Catholic	Salvation Army	Fishermen	Non- fishermen
January	148	142	140	249	120	155	123
February	60	61	55	96	51	59	62
March	40	24	55	20	80	38	45
April	78	82	75	57	108	76	82
May	95	88	102	98	89	105	70
June	75	83	63	93	86	68	90
July	48	43	50	53	49	29	87
August	40	44	38	37	37	25	74
September	59	53	65	53	73	42	95
October	83	74	94	75	92	79	95
November	200	200	180	323	207	212	171
December	271	305	280	50	206	308	204
N of Cases	8824	3940	3805	640	383	5994	2560

Table 3
Monthly Marriage Index in Comparison Populations

Month	Gamrie Scotland
	1900-1939
January	126
February	16
March	52
April	77
May	52
June	31
July	15
August	15
September	100
October	22
November	46
December	637
N of Cases	159

Note: The marriage index was calculated based on the frequency distribution provided by Knipe.

Figure 1: Trinity Bay, Newfoundland



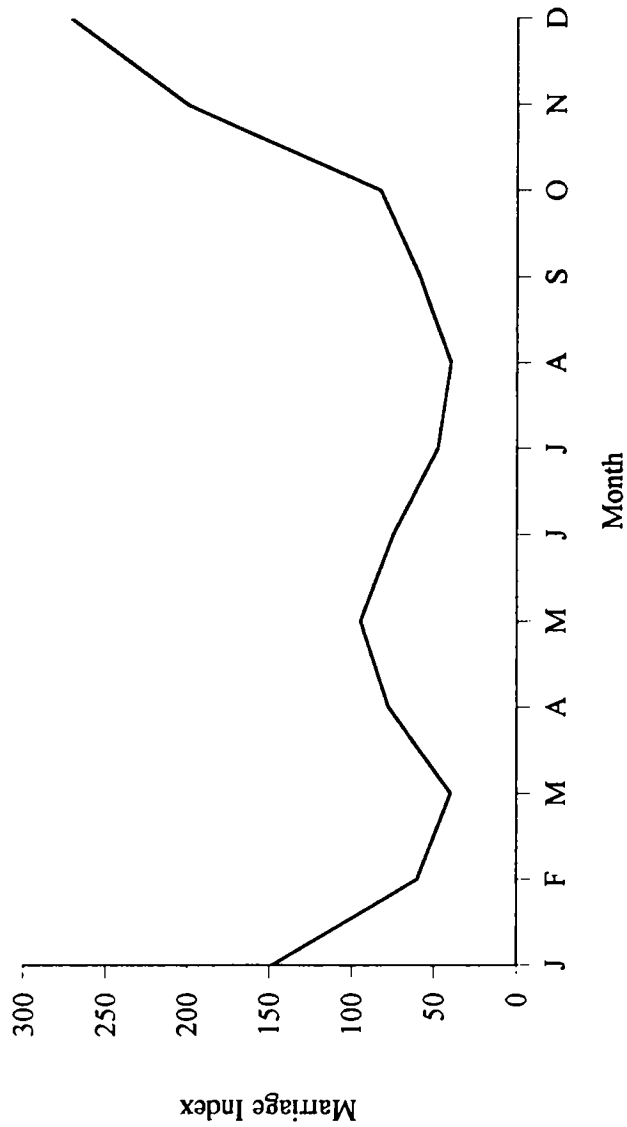


Figure 2: Seasonal Distribution of Marriages in Trinity Bay, Newfoundland 1890-1939

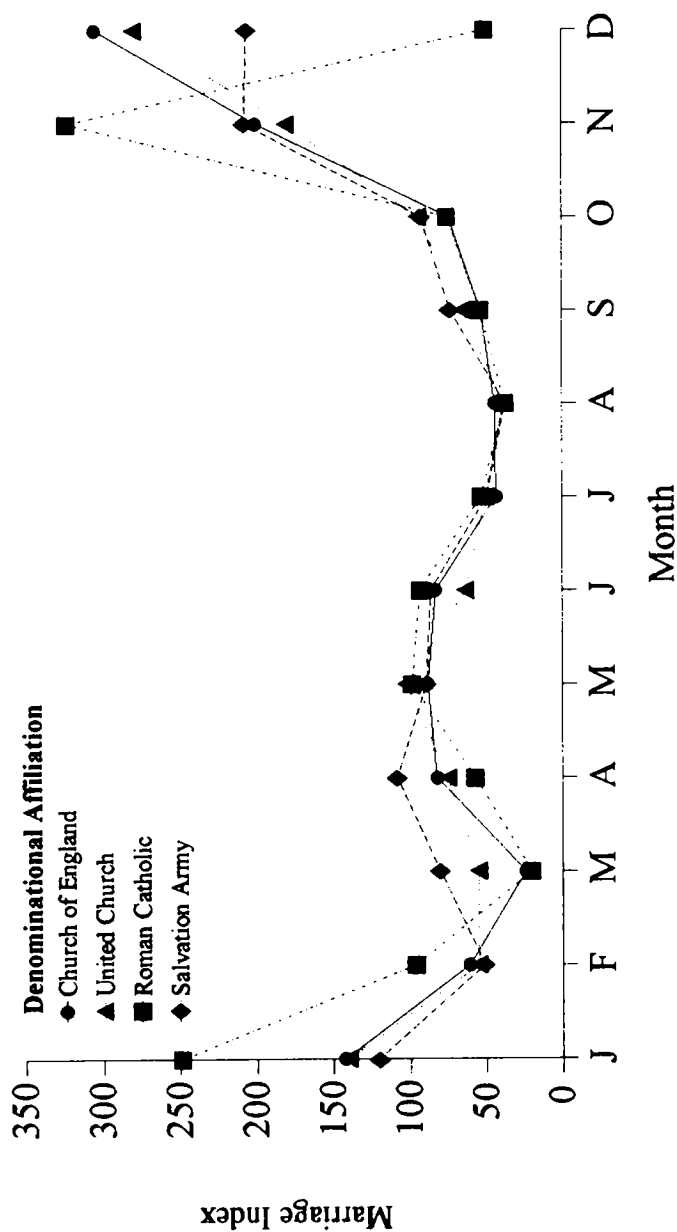


Figure 3: Seasonal Distribution of Marriages by Denominational Affiliation, Trinity Bay Newfoundland 1890-1939

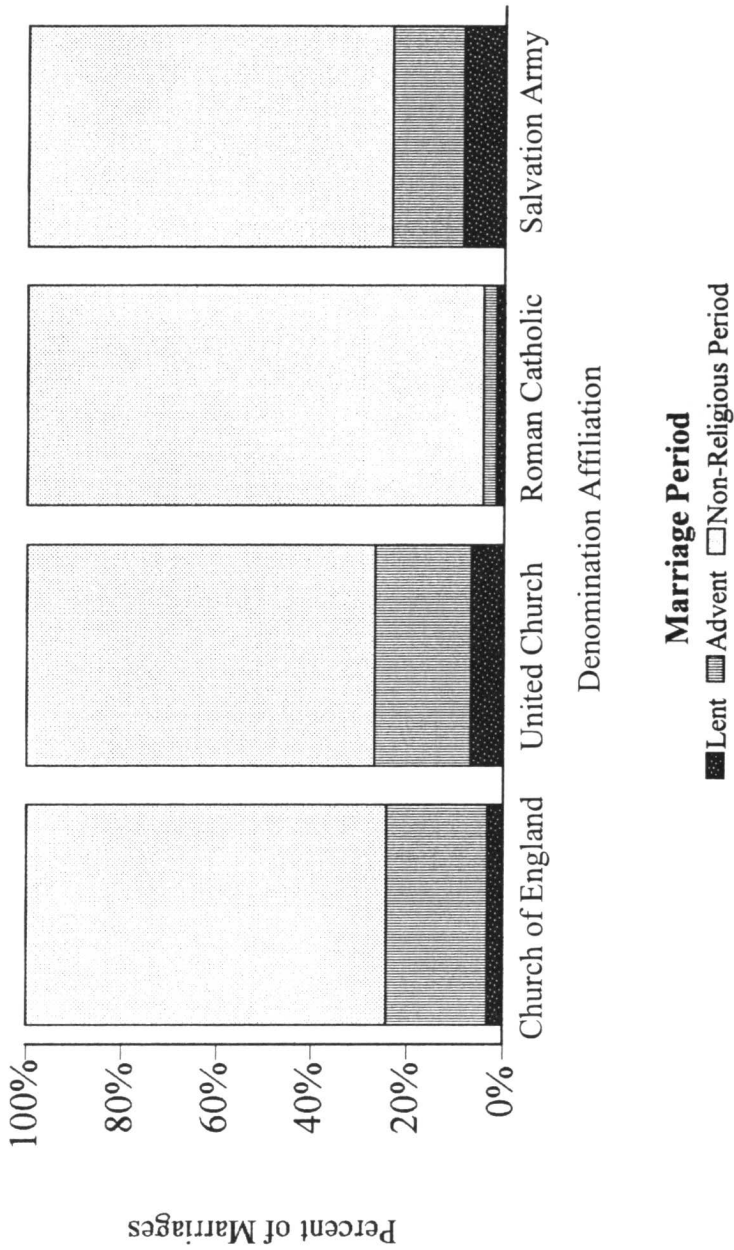


Figure 4: Adherence to Religious Restrictions on the Timing of Marriage, Trinity Bay Newfoundland, 1890-1939

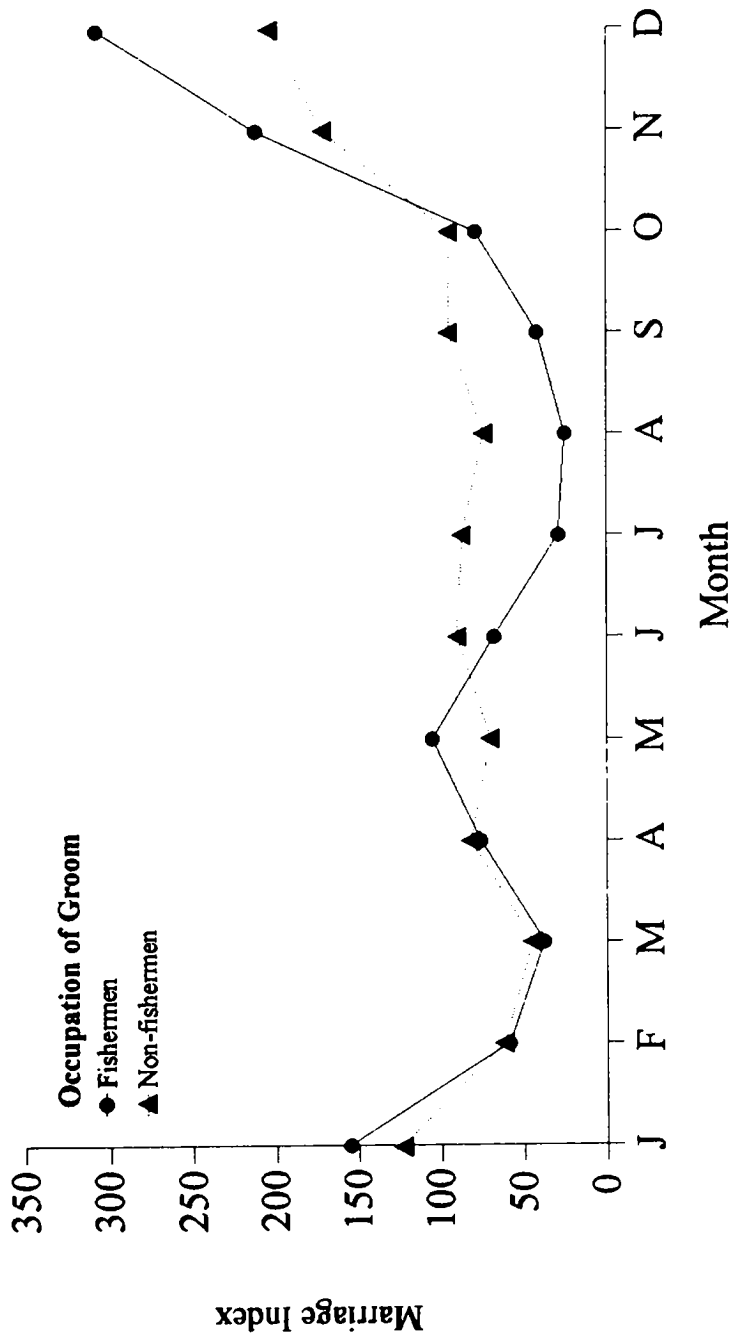


Figure 5: Seasonal Distribution of Marriages by Male Occupation, Trinity Bay Newfoundland 1890-1939

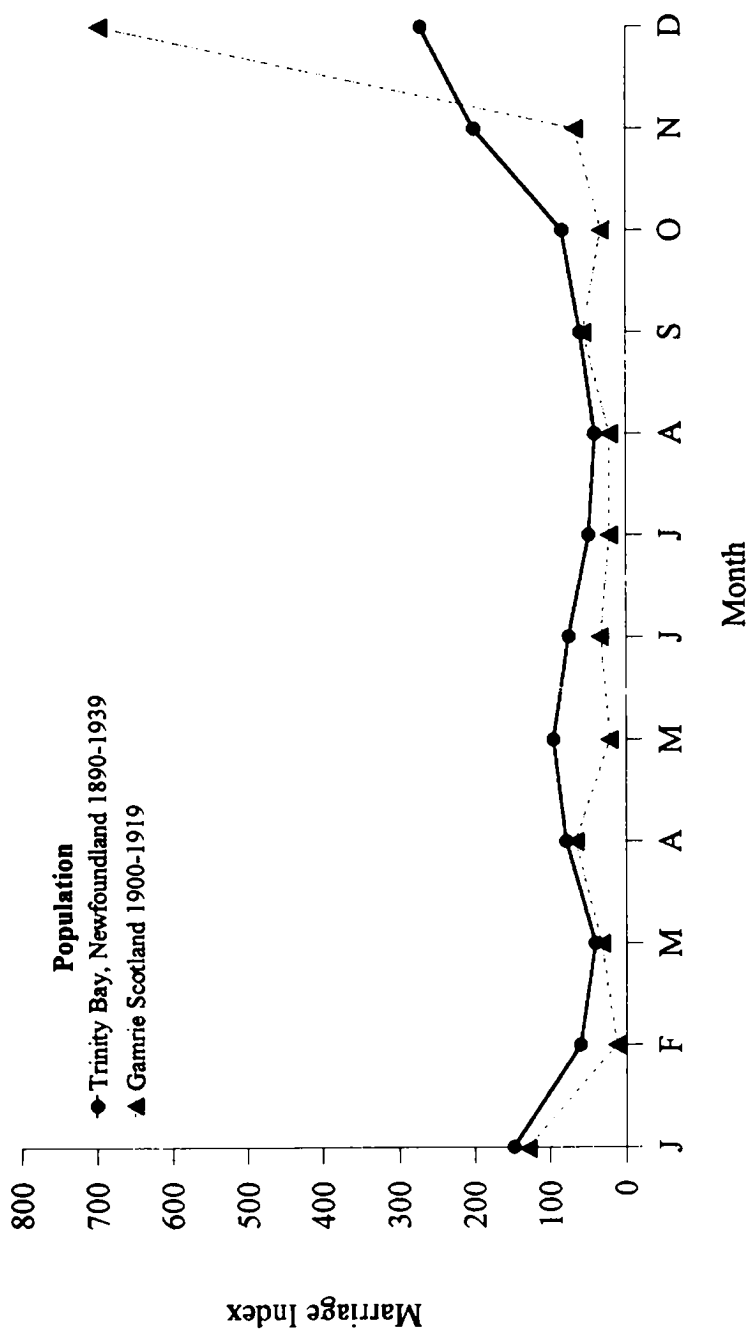


Figure 6: Comparison of Marriage Seasonality Between Fishing Populations

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Notes

¹In this analysis "marriage" refers to the solemnization of a marital union, which is conducted by a member of the clergy. In Newfoundland most marriages occurred within a church, but on some occasions marriages occurred in private dwellings (usually the home of the bride or groom's family). The term "wedding" refers to the celebrations after the marriage (Faris 1966, 1968). Since information on wedding celebrations or receptions is not recorded on marriage records, and since the focus of this analysis is marriage, weddings will only be briefly mentioned later in the text.

²Examples of quantitative research linking the seasonality of marriage to economic activity patterns and religious restrictions include the following: Cressy; Edwards; Kuss-maul; Ogden; Wells; and Wrigley and Schofield.

³In addition to those studies previously mentioned, the following also deal specifically with agrarian populations: Gunn; Houdaille; and Palli. Few published works are available concerning the seasonal pattern of marriage in fishing populations. See for instance Baillie; Byron; and Knipe. Several Newfoundland ethnographies, such as Faris (1966) and Murray, make note of a seasonal pattern in the timing of marriage similar to that observed in this study, however these observations are not quantified.

⁴See Sider for a discussion on temporal phases within the cod fishery based on different forms of labour.

⁵Modified partible inheritance in Newfoundland consisted of the male heirs inheriting property associated with the fishery (land, boats, nets, etc.), while female children inherited only household implements. For more information on inheritance in Newfoundland see Faris (1966); Firestone; Nemec (1972); Stiles; and Szwed.

⁶In Newfoundland subsistence farming was also referred to as gardening and small farming (Murray; Nemec 1973; Newfoundland Colonial Secretary's Office; Seary *et al.*; Sparkes, and Wicks).

⁷For discussions on various aspects of the activity cycle in traditional Newfoundland outports, see Antler; Britan; Dyke; Faris (1966); Handcock; Martin; Porter (1993); Sider; Story; and Wadel.

⁸Marriages were transcribed from the Government of Newfoundland Vital Statistics Registry of Marriages, located in St. John's Newfoundland. This registry began recording vital statistics in 1890. Prior to then, marriages were only recorded in ecclesiastical registries.

⁹The family fishery was replaced by the factory or commercial fishery towards the end of the 1940s. This shift resulted in numerous social changes, such as the development of a migratory wage-labour pool and the depopulation of outport settlements. For more details see Alexander; Antler and Faris; Britan; Brox; Davis; Dyke; Iverson and Matthews; Matthews; and Sider.

¹⁰A small number of cases were excluded from analysis involving denominational affiliation. These included 48 marriages involving a variety of Protestant groups, such as Presbyterian and Pentecostal. Membership in each of these groups was too small to permit

an accurate determination of the seasonal marriage pattern. An additional fourteen cases were also excluded since denominational affiliation was unknown.

¹¹Denominational endogamy was high in Trinity Bay, ranging from 80% in Protestants to 88% in Catholics. See Broderick for a discussion on this topic.

¹²This figure does not include 270 cases in which the groom's occupation was not listed.

¹³Occupations outside the fishery included merchant, tinsmith, teacher, cooper, mechanic, and telegraph operator, to name but a few.

¹⁴The monthly marriage index was calculated according to Gunn, where the index = [(the monthly frequency of marriages within a cohort / the total frequency of marriages within the same cohort) / (the total number of days in the month / 365.25 days)] x 100.

¹⁵Chi-square was used instead of the popular Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test since this was shown to be inaccurate when using data aggregated from several years (Gunn; and Reijneveld). An equally valid criticism of the KS test is that the determination of significance depends on the order of the months used to calculate the cumulative percentages (McCullough; and O'Brien and Holbert).

¹⁶Using Chi-square, significant differences in the monthly distribution of marriages were found among the four religious groups ($X^2 = 315.35$; $df = 33$; $P = .000$). An examination of residuals indicates that the Catholics contributed the most to these results, i.e. were the most distinct. Marriages involving members of the Church of England and the United Church differed substantially in September, and also contributed to the significance of the results. It is important to note that significant results are obtained even when the Catholics are omitted from the sample ($X^2 = 100.32$; $df = 22$; $P = .000$).

¹⁷Significant differences were found among religious groups in regards to the adherence to religious restrictions ($X^2 = 217.23$; $df = 6$; $P = .000$). The distinctive pattern observed in the Catholics is related to their stronger adherence to both the Lenten and Advent bans on marriage. When the Catholics are removed from the sample results remain significant, and can be attributed to the fact that members of the Church of England adhere more to the Lenten ban on marriages than do members of either the United Church or Salvation Army.

¹⁸It is important to note that inshore fishermen in Trinity Bay returned home each night, unlike fishermen in Scotland who were often separated from their families for a period ranging from several days to months at a time (Baillie; and Knipe).

¹⁹Women were not excluded from the Labrador fishery as evidenced by the fact that several marriages involving Trinity Bay residents were solemnized in Labrador during the summer. Except for one groom, none of those individuals involved were listed as residing in Labrador; in all cases the men were fishermen.

²⁰For an excellent in-depth discussion of both the cod and seal fisheries, see the following 19th century sources: Prowse; and Wilson. For more recent examinations of the history of the cod and seal fisheries see Candow; Ryan (1986, 1994); and Sanger.

²¹Chi-square results comparing the monthly distribution of marriage between occupational groups indicate that significant differences in the seasonal pattern existed ($X^2 = 386.01$; $df = 11$; $P = .000$). Residuals support the contention that the cod fishery imposed restrictions on marital timing, with the most distinct patterns occurring between May to September.

²²This assumes that non-fishermen did not participate in the seal fishery in any substantial numbers.

²³Winter storms may have been a factor limiting marriage during March by restricting travel of kin and clerics; some settlements had no resident clergy. However, this is difficult to quantify, especially when examining marriages occurring over a large geographic area.

²⁴Mowat.

²⁵For a discussion of the truck or credit system which existed between fishermen and the merchants who supplied them, see Firestone; Innis; Macdonald; Ommer; Szwed; and Wadel.

²⁶Although accurate historic information on the daily life of people living in outports is not well documented (Porter 1985; Smith; and Wicks), some information can be obtained from research based on the recollections of older informants (for example Davis; Kendall and Kendall; Mowat; Murray; and Porter 1991). Another source, though somewhat eclectic in nature, are recently published memoirs (such as Butler; Houlihan; and Sparkes) which contain descriptions of various aspects of life in Newfoundland.

²⁷Pope.

²⁸Most of the food eaten during wedding celebrations was provided and prepared by a large segment of the community in which the marriage took place. Since weddings often involved an entire community, as well as kin and friends from nearby communities, these receptions represented a significant consumption of local resources, which would be difficult to accomplish during months of economic hardship (Carter; Faris 1966; Mifflin; and Murray).

²⁹As previously noted, there were only a few sources which provided data on marriage seasonality in fishing populations. These included Baillie; Byron; and Knipe.

³⁰Marriages in Trinity Bay involving fishermen were evenly distributed throughout the week, regardless of the season. During the summer fishery, 71% of marriages occurred between Monday and Friday; this figure increased to 78% in the periods both prior to and after the summer fishery (this figure excludes those marriages solemnized either during Lent or Advent).