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[See table of contents](#)

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William Eppes Cormack (1796–1868): A Biographical Account of the Early Years

Ingeborg Marshall and Alan G. Macpherson¹

Introduction

William Eppes² Cormack is celebrated for his walk across the interior of the island of Newfoundland in 1822, and for his involvement with the Beothuk: his collection of information about Beothuk history and culture and his attempts to rescue the Beothuk from extinction. Several reports of his interior explorations have been published,³ and the information he obtained from the Beothuk woman Shanawdithit, the last known member of her people, comprises an important part of what is known about Beothuk history and culture.⁴ A central figure in Newfoundland's history, surprisingly little is known about Cormack's early life, his birth in St. John's, and his family's relatively strong ties to Newfoundland and to Prince Edward Island. This paper intends to close this biographical gap as far as the available documentation will allow. It focuses on Cormack's early years, beginning with the records of his father, Alexander Cormack, in Newfoundland, describes the family's documented business interests and the family's return to Scotland after Alexander Cormack's death, and finishes with what is known of William Eppes Cormack's life up to 1821, when he returned to Newfoundland. It also touches on some of the economic, social, and civic responsibilities that individuals like Alexander Cormack were typically responsible for at that time.

Though this study focuses on the family history of the Cormacks and Rennies in St. John's and their Scottish connections, it also fills in

a substantial gap in our knowledge of the business and economic life of St. John's at the end of the eighteenth century and during the early nineteenth century.

Alexander Cormack in Newfoundland

Alexander Cormack (c. 1762–1803), a Protestant Scot and the father of William Eppes Cormack, arrived in St. John's in 1782 at the age of 19 or 20. The 1794–95 census for St. John's described him as a “merchant in the colony for 12 years.”⁵ He may have been sent to this outpost as an employee of one of the established Scottish firms in St. John's. Newfoundland was one of Britain's oldest North American possessions and St. John's, a town with about 3,000 inhabitants,⁶ was the main port of call for the Grand Banks fishery and the third point in a triangular trade that included Europe and the West Indies.

No records were found disclosing details of Alexander Cormack's life before his arrival, though there is a good record of his life in St. John's.⁷ It reveals a reliable young man who was, to use the Scottish term, “canny,” or capable of making smart decisions in a challenging business environment. By 1791 Cormack had become a well-established member of the town's elite and one of the “Principal Merchants of St. John's” who signed petitions and lobbied governors.⁸ He was also a member of the Grand Jury where he was listed alongside members of the town's largest merchant houses.⁹ Cormack's numerous appearances in court as litigant, suing or being sued in cases concerning trade, reflect some of his business interests. He is listed as the owner of three vessels: the *Nancy*, the *Rose*, and the *Two Sisters*, and as sharing ownership of the 55-ton sloop *Betsey* with the St. John's firm Hart, Eppes and Co.¹⁰ His trade transactions extended to Dartmouth, Quebec City, Prince Edward Island, South America (for molasses), and Grenada Island and Suriname in the West Indies. Cormack seems to have become independent of larger firms although there is speculation that he may, for a time, have been a junior partner with Hart, Eppes and Co.¹¹

It appears that Alexander Cormack and William Isham Eppes

had become friends as well as business associates. Eppes had come to Newfoundland from England, but began life in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1760.¹² His father had died young, leaving his mother, Abigail, with five children to raise. Her second husband, Dr. Silvester Gardiner, was a prosperous Boston surgeon. In 1776, his vocal opposition to American Independence made him a target of the revolutionaries and the Gardiners were forced to flee Boston. They finally settled in Poole, England, where they became associated with the Lesters.¹³ Benjamin Lester and his brother Isaac owned some of the largest fishing stations in Placentia and Trinity bays, as well as dozens of ships, many built in Newfoundland.¹⁴ William Eppes's sister, Love, married Benjamin Lester's son, John,¹⁵ and it was through Lester's influence that Eppes secured the position of purser in the garrison in St. John's.¹⁶ He also became Lester's agent in Newfoundland.¹⁷ Another brother-in-law of Eppes, Richard Routh, was married to his sister, Abigail. Routh secured his job as Chief Collector of Customs in St. John's in 1782 as a result of Lester's recommendation; he later became Chief Justice.¹⁸

In 1790, William Eppes was promoted to Commissary of Provisions, which made him responsible for providing food and other necessities to the hundreds of soldiers stationed in St. John's.¹⁹ This new position gave the company he had founded with Marmaduke Hart, in 1789, a ready market for his imports.²⁰ Eppes also acquired fishing premises in the "Quiddy Viddy Division" of St. John's, where he employed three servants²¹ and kept livestock on land behind the hospital used by the Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencibles, a volunteer militia he had helped to create.²² Eppes and his future wife, Elizabeth Randolph, were part of Benjamin Lester's social circle in Poole. Following their 1792 marriage, Eppes brought her to St. John's, where the couple raised two sons and two daughters.²³

A year earlier, in 1791, Alexander Cormack had also married, to 17-year-old Janet McAuslan (1774–1821). Her father, Robert McAuslan,²⁴ had come to St. John's from Glasgow with his wife Grizel (née Wright) and their three children in 1776.²⁵ The possibility of bankruptcy had driven him [McAuslan] from Scotland, where his debts were such

that he was threatened with imprisonment.²⁶ It is believed one of Robert McAuslan's brothers sold property in North Carolina to pay off Robert's Scottish debts.²⁷ In Newfoundland, he appears to have been involved in the fishery until another claim from his Glasgow days finally forced him into bankruptcy.²⁸ In 1778, he was appointed Deputy Postmaster of Newfoundland.²⁹

Alexander and Janet settled in a rented house in the "Third Division," the part of town between Nobles Cove and the Engine House. Janet's parents lived nearby in the "Fourth Division." At this time St. John's was divided into six "Divisions" running from "River Head" (west) to "Chain Rock" (east). The main roads through town were the "Lower Path" (now Water Street), which followed parallel to the harbour's northern shoreline, and the "Upper Path" (today's Duckworth Street). According to the census of St. John's, in 1794–95 the Cormacks had one son (Alexander) and a daughter whose name and age are not known.³⁰ At that time they had five servants — one female and four males — one of whom may have been Sandy (Alexander) McAuslan, Janet's nephew, who was Alexander Cormack's clerk.³¹

On 5 May 1796, Janet Cormack gave birth to another boy. The couple called him William Eppes Cormack in honour of their friend and business associate. Three months later the Cormack's older son, Alexander, died.³² Unsanitary conditions prevailed in St. John's and the family was living in the most crowded division of town, a factor that may have contributed to the child's death. The Cormacks subsequently moved to a residence on the western end of the "Second Division," just west of today's Waldegrave Street. The number of their servants was reduced to one female and two males.³³

In July 1797, Alexander received a grant of a little more than 11 acres of land "about a mile from the [Waterford] river on the north side near to and lying to the Westward of Webber or Fortune's plantation . . . to take and keep [without] being interrupted in the quiet and peaceful enjoyment thereof, so long as he shall continue to occupy the same for the purpose of carrying on the Fishery."³⁴ Though Cormack's land grant had nothing to do with the fishing trade, the wording of the

grant had to conform to British legislation meant to discourage permanent settlement by people who did not work in the fishery. Cormack had asked for the grant because he wanted to raise cattle for personal consumption and to sell as beef. He also leased Fir Hill Farm in Outer Cove, which was accessible by boat.³⁵ This area was known to have good soil and Alexander would have hired servants to do the cultivation and harvesting. He thereby followed the trend among merchants and garrison officers who purchased or leased land in the immediate vicinity of St. John's for agricultural purposes.³⁶ Governor William Waldegrave (1797–1800) promoted farming in order to alleviate ongoing food shortages in Newfoundland. He also encouraged merchants to set up a market and a slaughterhouse.³⁷

Food shortages were a major concern at the end of the eighteenth century, the result of trade sanctions that England and the United States imposed on each other after the American Revolution.³⁸ The shortage of food also affected the military garrison, and with it the reputation of William Eppes, who was Commissary of Provisions. In December 1797, Eppes reported that a large quantity of spoiled food in storage at the garrison had been dumped into the harbour and that there might not be sufficient supplies for the soldiers for the winter.³⁹ Eppes then went to England to be with his wife and children, intending to bring them back to St. John's from their sojourn there.⁴⁰ In his absence Alexander Cormack was appointed Acting Commissary.⁴¹ This placed him in a difficult position; by January 1798, all available food in St. John's had been bought or requisitioned, with only 10 weeks' supply left in the stores.⁴² Cormack subsequently spent more than 3,000 pounds sterling to purchase pork, flour, butter, pease, fish, and potatoes from local merchants for the garrison. Governor Waldegrave questioned this expense but an investigation showed that the receipts were entirely in order.⁴³

Alexander Cormack appears to have come through the debacle unscathed. He may have redeemed the impression that he was extravagant with public funds by volunteering for the Committee for the Relief of the Poor and the committee that raised funds for a new

Church of England,⁴⁴ as the old one was so dilapidated that the congregation had to meet in the courthouse.⁴⁵ Alexander had also been able to purchase a moiety (half-share) in Roope's Plantation on the harbour front in the "Second Division."⁴⁶ The deed describes it as a substantial property "consisting of a Dwelling House, Store, Wharf, Cook Room, Flake and Fish House." Most likely the Cormack family moved to the plantation.

In 1795, Janet Cormack's brother, Peter McAuslan, had bought 1,500 acres (Lot 32) in Prince Edward Island for 23 pounds sterling.⁴⁷ Peter had done well, farming and trading in real estate, and was later going to add to his farming enterprise by leasing the western part of Rustico Island.⁴⁸ Sometimes during 1799 or 1800, Janet and Peter's parents, Robert and Grizel McAuslan, joined Peter in Prince Edward Island. In St. John's, the McAuslans had lived in a house owned by Edith Brookes but had found the premises untenable. The matter was settled in court in McAuslan's favour,⁴⁹ but this would have been a discouraging experience and might have confirmed their decision to leave Newfoundland for good. As it turned out, Robert McAuslan was able to purchase town Lot 498 in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and secure a land grant for Lot 549 "for no money."⁵⁰

From March to December 1800, Rear Admiral Charles Morice Pole replaced William Waldegrave as governor.⁵¹ He was not as willing as Waldegrave had been to bend the land occupancy rules to support local food production and ordered Cormack, who had set up the slaughterhouse with Waldegrave's permission, to remove it because it was "erected on a vacant fishing room." Cormack was given just four days to bring his cattle to market, which may have caused financial losses.⁵² In his continuing capacity as an active member of the St. John's community, he also had to sort out problems with a new grammar school that had opened for the town's Protestant elite. Louis Amadeus Anspach, a Swiss-born clergyman and educator, had been recruited from England on a three-year contract to run the school. But as soon as it opened there were insufficient funds, and discord arose among the subscribers about fees.⁵³ The affair became so rancorous

that Cormack, as treasurer, had to take subscribers to court to be able to pay the schoolmaster and his staff.⁵⁴

By 1800, Alexander and Janet Cormack were celebrating the birth of another daughter.⁵⁵ She was called Janet Grace Cormack, her second name honouring her grandmother, Grizel, which is Scots Gaelic for Grace.⁵⁶ In the following year, they welcomed a baby boy into their lives. They called him John Bell Cormack after another one of Alexander's merchant friends who was a partner in the company of "Cunningham and Bell."⁵⁷

Alexander seems to have cut back on his jury work that year, although in December he and John Bell were among nine merchants who posted a bond for one Thomas Parsons who had been in jail all summer awaiting trial, which could not be held until Chief Justice Richard Routh returned. However, the ship that had taken Routh to England, in December 1801, was lost at sea.⁵⁸ Benjamin Lester, Eppes's and Routh's benefactor, died shortly afterwards, in January 1802.⁵⁹

Around 1802 the Cormacks lost their eldest daughter. She is listed in the 1794–95 and 1796–97 censuses of St. John's but was not among the Cormack children who survived into adulthood.⁶⁰ The Church of England burial registry for that year lists an unprecedented number of mostly unnamed children who died of unstated causes.⁶¹ Fifty-nine children were buried in 1802, whereas only six children were buried in 1801, and in 1803, when burial records were kept for only six months, there were no entries of children.

There is no record of Alexander doing jury work again until September, 1802, when he was part of a merchants' committee appointed by Routh's replacement, Chief Justice Thomas Coote.⁶² He also served on the Grand Jury with John Bell and another prominent Scots merchant, David Rennie, who was jury foreman.⁶³ Surrogate Court records show that Cormack launched more than 20 court actions between December 1800 and June 1803 to recover debts amounting altogether to 800 pounds sterling. As he was unsuccessful in recovering his money in several of the lawsuits, these debts not only reflect uncertain economic times but also the nature of Cormack's business partners, who were

vulnerable to insolvencies.⁶⁴ This was in contrast to merchant David Rennie, whose name does not appear in these records, and the very few writs issued by his merchant company, Stuart & Rennie.⁶⁵ However, in the case against James Rakestraw, who owed Cormack and other creditors money and whose ship *Hannah* was seized by the sheriff, Cormack took the opportunity to purchase the vessel⁶⁶ and wasted no time dispatching it to fish on the Grand Banks. His brigantine *Hawk* was already trading in the West Indies.⁶⁷

Alexander Cormack made his last appearance at the St. John's courthouse on 28 June 1803, on a minor debt matter. Less than a month later he was no longer alive.⁶⁸ He would have been 41 years old. His death must have been sudden because he died intestate, that is, without a will.

Janet Cormack: The Relict Years, 1803–05

On 15 August 1803, Janet Cormack made what could have been her first visit to the St. John's courthouse to ask for permission to settle her husband's estate. She was now 29 years old and must have paid attention to her husband's business during their marriage, or she would not have considered administering the estate. It was certainly not typical in this era for a woman to be the sole executrix of a merchant's estate. Several other individuals listed in the probate records could only sign their names with the mark of an x.⁶⁹ Janet also wanted to ensure that her husband's possessions were given to her as his rightful heir. Luckily for her, it had become customary for widows in Newfoundland to inherit their husband's property when there was no will.⁷⁰

At the court hearing Chief Justice Thomas Coote presided. Janet Cormack had to swear that her husband had “died Intestate and without a Will, having whilst living and owning at the time of his Death divers Goods, Chattels, Credits and Effects in the said island of Newfoundland.”⁷¹ She was granted the all important “Letters of Administration” and made executrix of Alexander's estate on condition she return to court within a year to provide “a true and perfect inventory

of all the said goods, chattels and credits of the deceased which already have, or hereafter shall, come into [her] hands.”⁷² She was also required to post a surety set at 5,000 pounds sterling, equal to the estimated value of Alexander’s estate, which would be forfeited if she did not follow the court’s orders.

Two prominent Scottish merchants, Richard Reed and David Rennie, who had accompanied her to court, declared their willingness to guarantee the surety “of good and lawful money . . . made and levied on their Goods and Chattels.”⁷³ Both men were respected members of the merchant elite and had served on juries and committees with Alexander for almost a decade.⁷⁴ Rennie may have been recommended by John Bell as he was one of Bell’s trusted business associates and had already settled a number of estates with no will.⁷⁵ Janet’s brother, Peter McAuslan, who came back from Prince Edward Island during the fall, also helped Janet in settling the estate.⁷⁶ There is no evidence that William Eppes came forward to assist.

Janet Cormack returned to court in August 1804 with the required information. The will and probate record reveals that her husband of 12 years had left her well off, but not wealthy: the estate was valued at more than 8,000 pounds sterling.⁷⁷ The brig *Hawk* had sold its cargo for 750 pounds sterling and was then sold for 718 pounds sterling. The *Hannah* had made 220 pounds on its cargo and was sold to Janet’s brother, Peter McAuslan, for 132 pounds. Seal skins and oil, bread, furniture and shop goods, the latter sold by McAuslan, netted 2,630 pounds. The half-share of Roope’s Plantation was valued at 500 pounds and the grant of land at River Head at 50 pounds. Shop goods valued at 1,500 pounds were still left at the store, and household furniture, farming utensils, and stock on the farms were considered to be worth 663 pounds sterling. Disbursements, including money spent for funeral expenses, mourning apparel, and house and farm expenses and repairs amounted to 554 pounds. There were also “bad debts.”⁷⁸

With cash in hand, Janet offered George Elliot 560 pounds sterling for his half-share in Roope’s Plantation, including “all the houses, stores, stages, flakes, gardens, wharfs, ways, privileges, refits, rents,

issues, advantages, hereditaments, and appurtenances thereto,”⁷⁹ which he accepted. The sales document states that the property was sold jointly to Janet, widow of the late Alexander Cormack of St. John’s, and to the children of her and her late husband. As executrix, Janet also filed nine writs in court to collect on debts, all of which were paid.⁸⁰

On New Year’s Eve, 1804, Janet Cormack purchased from Robert Bollard “a certain field or enclosed meadows containing one acre and one Rood of land” near Fort William, including “tenement or premises with all its appurtenances, privileges and advantages together with all the rents, issues, profits, and improvements thereto.”⁸¹ She also leased 3¼ acres of Crown land for 21 years at a cost of 1 pound 4 pence a year.⁸² At the time, Governor Erasmus Gower (1804–06) was taking measures to alleviate the housing shortage in St. John’s and hired Thomas George Eastaff to carry out a survey, draw up a town plan, and mark out a new road, which became today’s Gower Street.⁸³ Janet’s land near Fort William would have been suitable for building lots, but the Crown land was located on the outskirts of town, south of Circular Road, and could only have been rented out for gardens or for keeping cattle. By 1849 this land had reverted to the Crown and become “Government House Domain.”⁸⁴

Though it was Richard Reed and David Rennie who supported Janet in her court appearances, Janet’s brother, Peter McAuslan, assisted her in the long-term task of winding down Alexander’s business affairs. With almost 1,500 pounds worth of shop goods still in store, he continued offering Alexander’s stock for sale from an establishment in St. John’s.⁸⁵ He also issued “penny tokens” inscribed with his name and “sells all sorts of shop & store goods.”⁸⁶ In 1805 Peter sent haberdashery, furniture, and shop goods, along with the usual salt, rum, molasses, and fish, to Prince Edward Island.⁸⁷ To recover money owed to his brother-in-law’s family,⁸⁸ he filed more than 20 writs between 1804 and 1807.⁸⁹

In the fall of 1805 the young William Eppes Cormack acquired a stepfather. Janet Cormack travelled with her three children to Edinburgh where she married David Rennie, who had moved there in the

spring. He maintained his partnership with Stuart and Rennie by working in the company's office in Greenock.

David Rennie's origins, like Alexander Cormack's, remain something of a mystery.⁹⁰ What is known is that he joined James Stuart of Scotland in 1790 to form a company called Stuart & Rennie, the third Scottish firm to establish a permanent trade between Scotland and Newfoundland; it later grew into one of the largest Scottish trading companies.⁹¹ David Rennie became the firm's St. John's agent.⁹² There is evidence that he was previously married to Jean Crawford and had a son, Joseph, born 14 January 1797.⁹³ Jean's sister Margaret⁹⁴ was married to Robert Orr; the couple named their eldest child David Ranie⁹⁵ and Robert Orr called David Rennie his brother.⁹⁶ David Rennie is not listed in the St. John's censuses for 1794–95 and 1796–97, which suggests that he lived at that time in Scotland.⁹⁷ However, the Glasgow register does not list David Rennie as merchant but as cloth lapper, an occupation also attached to a name listed above David Rennie. Most likely, this was an error. David Rennie was 41 years old when he married the 32-year-old widow, Janet Cormack.⁹⁸

Sailing from St. John's to Scotland, in optimal weather conditions, typically took three weeks, but could last four or five. It would have been the first time that nine-year-old William had a taste of ocean travel onboard one of the larger sailing vessels of the day, an experience he repeated many times during his roving life. Once they disembarked in Greenock the family would have had to travel to their destination of Edinburgh by coach. They stayed with John Wright, a relative on Janet's mother's side, who had a shop in the "Old City."⁹⁹ Before the wedding could take place Janet had to prove that she had "resided upwards of six weeks in Edinburgh."¹⁰⁰

David and Janet's marriage ceremony took place on 23 April 1806 and was entered in St. Cuthbert's Parish register as: "David Rennie, Merchant, St. Andrews Church Parish, and Janet MacAuslan or Cormack, St. Cuthbert's Parish, relict¹⁰¹ of Alexander Cormack."¹⁰²

William Eppes Cormack's Years in Newfoundland and Scotland, 1805–18

By the fall of 1806 David Rennie took his family back to St. John's, where they may have moved into a property later known as "Castle Rennie." David had purchased it in 1801 for 500 pounds sterling, presumably as an investment to be rented out.¹⁰³ It faced Signal Hill Road and included a dwelling house and outbuildings, "trees, woods, gardens, and waterways." David continued to be the Newfoundland agent for Stuart & Rennie¹⁰⁴ and acquired for the company a plantation on the "French Shore and in Labrador" from John Widdicombe, for 737 pounds sterling.¹⁰⁵ Stuart & Rennie also bought land at Outer Cove with direct access to the sea at a cost of 521 pounds.¹⁰⁶ The site comprised Fir Hill Farm, which had previously been leased by the late Alexander Cormack. Owning land in the vicinity of St. John's seems to have been considered a good investment. On his own account, Rennie purchased a plantation at Maggoty Cove Hill, on the east end of St. John's harbour, though he sold it a couple of years later.¹⁰⁷ Rennie once again served on the Grand Jury.¹⁰⁸

In 1807 Janet gave birth to a son who was named after her husband, David Stuart Rennie. A second son, born in 1809, called James, received the middle name "Gower" in honour of Governor Erasmus Gower.¹⁰⁹

With two more sons added to the family the problems of good health services and educational opportunities may have become acute. Deteriorating social services and living conditions in St. John's may have led to the decision to return to Scotland. The town had "no system of education . . . or hospitals, sanitation, organized road systems, or fire services."¹¹⁰ The population was growing, mainly through settlers from Ireland, which strained the few social services that existed.¹¹¹ By 1810, Janet was expecting another child and this may have been the catalyst for the couple to leave Newfoundland since David Rennie could conduct business on either side of the Atlantic. On his departure for Scotland, Peter McAuslan took over as interim agent for Stuart &

Rennie until James Stuart arrived in the fall of 1810,¹¹² at which time McAuslan returned to Prince Edward Island.

Prince Edward Island became another focus of business for the Rennie-Cormack family, possibly inspired by Peter McAuslan's experiences. In 1810, David Rennie purchased Lot 23 northwest of Charlottetown. The land fronted the Gulf of St. Lawrence and included the area where New Glasgow was later established.¹¹³ The island had opened large areas for development, which were often purchased by absentee landlords who, in turn, attracted settlers willing to clear the forest and cultivate the land.¹¹⁴ Peter McAuslan, who was already living in PEI, was the obvious choice for administrator of this new property, and in 1811 David Rennie gave him power of attorney "to Renew Leases, Collect Rent etc." on Lot 23.¹¹⁵

Rennie left "Castle Rennie" in the hands of the agent Geo. Burton, who had sold him the property in 1801. In 1810, Burton was hoping to use the dwelling house for a school and let it be known that he intended to teach 20 to 75 children reading, writing, and arithmetic.¹¹⁶ Several years later, he advertised "Castle Rennie" for rent, describing the property as large enough for two tenements or dwellings, and fruit trees, a poultry yard, stabling for six horses, a frost-proof cellar, and a never-failing well.¹¹⁷ "Castle Rennie" became a St. John's landmark well beyond Rennie's time in Newfoundland.¹¹⁸ It changed hands a couple of times and the current St. Joseph's Convent on Signal Hill Road is believed to have been built on the precincts of "Castle Rennie."¹¹⁹

Janet kept the properties she had acquired as a legacy for Alexander's children, William Eppes, Janet Grace, and John Bell Cormack. She would have rented out Roope's Plantation, and most likely also the fenced meadow near Fort William¹²⁰ as well as the land granted to her in 1805. She probably left the administration of her rental properties in the hands of Stuart and Rennie — at least James Stuart is on record for paying a fee on her behalf for the grant in 1814.¹²¹

On their arrival in Scotland, the Rennie family settled in Glasgow, though David probably maintained an office in Greenock.¹²² In September 1810, Janet gave birth to a baby girl. She was christened on 14

September as Janet Emma Rennie.¹²³ In the following years, the Rennies welcomed two more sons into their family: William Frederick Rennie, born in February 1812,¹²⁴ and Robert Rennie, born in April 1814.¹²⁵

According to his obituary, William Eppes Cormack “delighted to recount his boyish rambles amidst the pleasing and classic scenery of Southern Scotland.”¹²⁶ During one of his holiday excursions he visited Robert Burns’s widow, Bonnie Jean, in Dumfries, “which formed a green spot in his memory which often blossomed into facetious pleasantry at congenial gatherings.”¹²⁷ There is a possibility that Robert Burns was related to David Rennie and that William’s visit with Bonnie Jean came about as a result of this connection.¹²⁸

The Rennie family made use of the fine educational opportunities offered in Glasgow and Edinburgh. William Eppes Cormack, aged 15 in May 1811, attended Glasgow University in 1811–12 and 1812–13 to study Greek, a language required for a classical education. In 1813–14 he was listed for a class in “Logica.”¹²⁹ Edinburgh University records only list him as a student in 1825. But he must have attended classes in natural sciences, particularly geology and mineralogy, under the well-known scholar Professor Robert Jameson earlier.¹³⁰ He certainly showed himself to be knowledgeable in these subjects by the time he crossed Newfoundland in 1822, and it was Professor Jameson who assisted him in identifying the rocks he had collected on the way.¹³¹ According to his obituary, “he was fortunate enough to secure the personal friendship of Professor Jameson.”¹³² His brother, John Bell Cormack, joined William at Glasgow University in 1812 for a “humanity class.”¹³³ William’s half-brothers David Stuart, William Frederick, and Robert Rennie were attending Glasgow University as well.¹³⁴ Between 1820 and 1828 David took courses in Latin, Greek, and Logic, William Frederick in Latin, Greek, Ethics, and Physics, and Robert in Greek. With the exception of Robert and James Gower, the Cormack and Rennie brothers also matriculated at Edinburgh University, attending classes in Literature, John and David also in Law,¹³⁵ and William in Chemistry, a class also attended by Charles Darwin.¹³⁶

William Eppes Cormack and the Business Years, 1818–21

In 1818, when William Eppes Cormack was 22 years old, his stepfather, David Rennie, considered him ready to take over part of his business. Cormack was to go to PEI to make preparations on Lot 23 before the arrival of the Scottish settlers. He set off in 1818¹³⁷ to ready the land for occupancy. This would have involved a division into parcels of between 90 and 150 acres. He may also have organized the harvest of pine and hardwood for export.¹³⁸ Realizing the potential value of landownership, Cormack bought, for five pounds, five acres of land at the south side of Rustico Bay, which included part of township No. 33.¹³⁹ In January 1818, David Rennie entered into another business arrangement on the Island, paying Peter McAuslan 1,000 pounds for a mortgage on the “Peter’s Island Farm” in Rustico Bay. McAuslan was left in full possession of the property under the obligation to pay back the principal sum with interest to regain full title.¹⁴⁰ McAuslan had leased the western part of Rustico Island (also known as Peter’s Island) in 1802 from James Montgomery, Baronet in Scotland, and James Douglas, Comptroller in PEI “for 1000 years.”¹⁴¹ The farming venture, however, was not a success, and a few years later McAuslan advertised his farm “to be let or sold, in whole or in part.”¹⁴²

By April 1819, W.E. Cormack was back in Glasgow, where David Rennie gave him power of attorney¹⁴³ with the indication to return to PEI. Cormack was thereby authorized to “sell and dispose of such parts there as are un-occupied . . . for such rents as he may see most fit for my Interest.” These had been his Uncle Peter McAuslan’s duties under the agreements of 1811, which presumably had not been fully carried out. There were also “certain disputes which have arisen between me [David Rennie] and several of my Tenants . . . respecting their right of occupancy and arrears of rent due,” which Cormack was to settle amicably.¹⁴⁴ Recognizing Cormack’s inexperience in these matters, Rennie included the proviso that he was to “take the Advice and Council of William Johnston Esquire, His Majesty’s Attorney General.”

The first Scottish settlers, numbering about 200, arrived on the

Morning Field on 2 September 1819.¹⁴⁵ Another 85 settlers followed in May 1820 on the *Alexander* of Greenock, a 169-ton brig owned by David Rennie.¹⁴⁶ The *Alexander* returned to Greenock with a cargo of 100 tons of pine and three tons of hardwood.¹⁴⁷ The settlers may have landed at Charlottetown, from where they would have had to trek overland on poor or non-existent roads. Proper roads were not built until years later — one of them is called “Rennies Road” to this day.¹⁴⁸

The settlers were initially tenants of parcels of land, though some of them were later able to purchase their lots. John MacGregor, one-time member of the House of Assembly in PEI and High Sheriff, described these settlements in his *Observations on Emigration to British America* as very successful.¹⁴⁹ In a letter to MacGregor, William Cormack stated: “to secure a foundation to that Settlement, I . . . supplied their wants so far as to enable them to labour on the land without working for others [to earn cash], and, by this measure to make them feel attached to it as their own.”¹⁵⁰ The settlers were not expected to repay the supplies that were advanced but ultimately paid in rent increases as the land became more valuable through the improvements. In a retrospective about the early years, Dickieson, one of the early pioneers, recalled that the settlers were not only clearing the land for cultivating crops; they also made money by selling lumber and building ships. Robert Orr, David Rennie’s brother-in-law, and his sons became well-known sailors and builders of schooners and square-rigged vessels.¹⁵¹

Even before the arrival of the first group of settlers, Cormack was in Charlottetown to serve on a 12-man jury.¹⁵² Recognized as one of the players in the development of PEI, in 1820 he was named to “a new Commission of the Peace.”¹⁵³ In October 1820, he was reappointed as a magistrate and listed in the *PEI Gazette* with “Township No. 23” attached to his name.¹⁵⁴ Following the death of George III in 1820, Cormack was one of the signatories on the Island’s Oath of Allegiance to His Majesty George IV as one of the “Magistrates, Public Officers, Gentlemen and respectable inhabitants.”¹⁵⁵ As a male between 16 and 60 years of age, Cormack was also under obligation to bear arms and attend military musters and exercises in the Volunteer Militia. In

December 1820 he was assigned to the Queens County Regiment as Captain of the Grenadier Company at Rustico in the 1st Battalion.¹⁵⁶

The settlement of Lot 23 seems to have gone well, and in time this lot became one of the most populated sections in the province.¹⁵⁷ Cormack was able to resolve outstanding disputes about occupancy and arrears of rent, though in some cases he had to take a tenant to court to collect debts.¹⁵⁸ He also purchased parcels of land on his own account. In 1820 Peter McAuslan sold him Lots 470, 549, and 556 in the Royalty of Charlottetown,¹⁵⁹ and in 1821 Cormack purchased a further six pasture lots totalling 72 acres.¹⁶⁰ He also acquired half of town Lot 8 and half of Lot 9 in Charlottetown.¹⁶¹ Cormack was successfully integrated into the business and civic life of the Island, but in 1821 another journey began.

Conclusion

In June 1821, Cormack learned of his beloved mother's death the month before of anemia.¹⁶² She was 46 years old, and outlived by eight of her 10 children. Cormack left PEI sometime in the winter of 1821–22 to return to St. John's, the place of his nativity and where he had spent his early childhood years. He was now 25 years old, a man of proven ability, and ready to attend to business interests in connection with his mother's properties in St. John's, which she had placed into a trust disposition for the three Cormack children: William Eppes, Janet Grace, and John Bell.¹⁶³ Within a few months of his return, William Eppes Cormack was inspired to trek across Newfoundland's interior to explore its natural conditions and geography. On the way, he also hoped to meet the Aboriginal inhabitants of the island, whom he called the Red Indians.¹⁶⁴ Seven years later, after another trek inland in search of the Beothuk¹⁶⁵ and the founding of the Boeothick Institution, Cormack left Newfoundland never to return.¹⁶⁶ However, four of his step-siblings later moved to St. John's. In 1832, James Gower and William Frederick Rennie founded Rennie's Mill,¹⁶⁷ and David Stuart¹⁶⁸ and Janet Emma¹⁶⁹ married members of the Hoyles family in St. John's.

Notes

- 1 Much appreciation is due to Michael Rennie of California, a descendant of the Rennie family who has done his own research on the Rennie family and generously shared many important documents with us.
- 2 His middle name has also appeared as “Epps” or “Epes.”
- 3 For three examples, among others: William E. Cormack, “Account of a journey across the Island of Newfoundland, Esq. In a letter addressed to the Right Hon. Earl Bathurst, Secretary of State for the Colonies, && — with a map of Mr Cormack’s journey across the Island of Newfoundland,” *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal* 10, 19 (1824): 156–62; “Mr Cormack’s journey in search of the Red Indians in Newfoundland. Read before the Boeothick Institution at St. John’s, Newfoundland,” *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal* 20, 6 (1829): 318–29; *Narrative of a Journey across the Island of Newfoundland, the Only Ever Performed by a European* (St. John’s: Morning Post and Commercial Journal, 1856).
- 4 J.P. Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915); I. Marshall, *A History and Ethnography of the Beothuk* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996).
- 5 The Rooms Public Archives Division (hereafter TRPAD), GN 2/39/A, Census of St. John’s for 1794–95.
- 6 Ibid. By 1794–95 c. 3,250 inhabitants were listed. The figure of about 3,000 for 1782 is an estimate.
- 7 Many references to an Alexander Cormack or some variation of that name were examined in Scottish, New England, and Quebec holdings without success.
- 8 TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 13–15, 1797–1800, box 5, Colonial Office Outgoing Correspondence, vol. 13, f. 369–70, 16 Oct. 1797, Principal Merchants of St. John’s to Governor William Waldegrave, regarding the location of a market.
- 9 TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 11–12, box 4, 1786–1797, vol. 12, f. 296–97, 29 Oct. 1794, Cormack listed as member of the Grand Jury.
- 10 National Archives, UK, HO 46/76, formerly HO 76/1, Aug. 1793, gives Cormack as owner of the *Nancy*; Public Archives Record Office (hereafter PARO), PEI, Acc.4063, United Empire Loyalist collection.

- Reel 1: St. John's Island (PEI), Collector of Customs Letter Book 1784–99, Shipping Inwards entry books (4 vols.) 1790–1822, 27 May 1799, lists Cormack as owner of the *Two Sisters*; K. Matthews, Memorial University of Newfoundland (Memorial University hereafter), Maritime History Archives (MHA hereafter), Name File “Alexander Cormack,” GN 5/2/A/1, Box 24, Supreme Court Records (1798–1802), f. 37, 11 Dec. 1798, Cormack was sued as his brig *Rose* had struck William Pendergast's wharf; National Archives, UK, BT 6/190, Returns of Shipping, Quebec, 1787–94, shows W.I. Eppes and A. Cormack as owners of the *Betsey*. These references also describe ships' cargoes and ports of call.
- 11 Jeffrey A. Orr, “Scottish Merchants in St. John's 1780–1835,” in Alan G. Macpherson, ed., *Four Centuries and the City: Perspectives of the Historical Geography of St. John's* (St. John's, Dept. of Geography, Memorial University, 2005), 38. Memorial University, MHA, Matthews Name File “Alexander Cormack,” C-229 C: 19-793 bt. 6/190A and 1794 HO 76/1A.
 - 12 Essex Institute Historical Collections, vol. 64, no. 1:32, Immigrants to New England, “Epes, William Esq. Of Salem Mass. From Chesterfield, Virginia before 1750; m. Abigail Pickman, April 5, 1750. Children: Abigail, William, Judith, William Isham” (microfilms at Memorial University, QEII Library).
 - 13 Dr. Silvester Gardiner, Geni website, <http://www.geni.com/people/Dr-Silvester-Gardiner/6000000018108655489>; in 1754 Gardiner had purchased a large tract of land and helped to settle what is today the city of Gardiner, Maine; J.H. Stark, *The Loyalists of Massachusetts and the Other Side of the American Revolution* (Boston, W.B. Clarke, 1972 [1910]), 314.
 - 14 D.F. Beamish, “Lester, Benjamin,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (hereafter *DCB*), vol. 5 (1983), 490–97; University of Toronto/Université Laval, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lester_benjamin_5E.html.
 - 15 Ibid.
 - 16 Benjamin Lester Diaries (1761–1802), 27 Dec. 1783, Lester writes that his good friend, British MP Joseph Gulson, “got [Eppes] made a purser. Wrote Mr. Eppes to acquaint him of it.” From MHA, Garland-Lester Family Fonds on microfilm. Available online on the Digital Archives Initiative (hereafter *DAI*) Memorial University Libraries, <http://collections.mun.ca>.

- 17 Ibid. 17 Jan.–15 July 1795, several entries where Lester notes Hart and Eppes were acting in his interest.
- 18 K. Matthews, “Routh, Richard,” *DCB*, vol. 5 (1983), 725–27; University of Toronto/Université Laval, at http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/routh_richard_5E.html.
- 19 TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 13–15, box 5, 1797–1800, Colonial Secretary’s Office Outgoing Correspondence, vol. 14, f. 182, 10 Mar. 1798, Instructions to William Isham Eppes Esq., Commissary of Stores and Provisions at Newfoundland.
- 20 K. Matthews, “Marmaduke Hart,” *DCB*, vol. 6 (1987), 311–12. University of Toronto/Université Laval, at http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/routh_richard_5E.html.
- 21 TRPAD, GN 2/39/A, Census of St. John’s, 1794–95, entry #40 in the Quiddy Viddy Division, describes W.I. Eppes as the occupier of the premises. Entry #325 in the Fourth Division is given as the residence of W.I. Eppes, Commissary; his household included a wife and a son and four servants.
- 22 TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 13–15, 1797–1800, box 5, Colonial Secretary’s Office Outgoing Correspondence, vol. 15, ff. 139–40, 28 Jan. 1799, Eppes to Waldegrave describing his history with the regiment.
- 23 Benjamin Lester Diaries (1761–1802), 6 July 1792: “Mr. and Mrs. Eppes and Mr. Rouths Son went of wth Capt. J. Andrews to St. John’s.” From MHA, Garland-Lester Family Fonds, on microfilm. Available online on the DAI Memorial University Libraries, <http://collections.mun.ca>; http://www.ancestry.ca/genealogy/records/william-isham-eppes_12895842.
- 24 TRPAD, CO 194/39, 1780–84, f. 276–77, 16 Dec. 1784, Petition to Lieutenant Governor Ilford with the signature of “Robert McAuslan.” His name has also been spelled McAusland, McAuslin, McAuslane, or Mcaslan.
- 25 TRPAD, GN 2/39/A, Census of St. John’s, 1794–95, “Robert McAuslan, 19 years in the country, married, 1 male, 1 female, both Protestants”; *Mormon’s International Genealogical Index (MIG)*, Janet Mcaslan born Mar. 1774 in Glasgow to Robert Mcaslan (merchant) and Grizzel (Wright); an older brother, Peter, was born in 1772, and a younger sister (not named) was born 15 Oct. 1776. The sister is not listed in the 1794–95 census of St. John’s.
- 26 National Records of Scotland, CS231/MC1/1, Books of Council and

- Session, Glasgow, 20 Aug. 1772, unextracted processes, Petition of Peter and Robert McAuslan.
- 27 Ibid., 22 Sept. 1772: "At the time their affairs fell in disorder there remained a considerable Sum unsettled in Carolina with the Pet[itione]rs Brother at the risk of his health undertook to recover, and accordingly went to Carolina for that purpose, where having settled the affair and procured sufficient bills for the money, he delivered up the same for the benefit of all Concerned."
- 28 National Records of Scotland, Acts and Decrees of the Court of Session, Glasgow, CS18/515/2, 21 July 1784, case against "Robert MacAuslin and Company in absence" by Messrs. Allen, Stewart & Company re premiums and insurance for different vessels for 1782.
- 29 TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 11-12, 1786-97, box 4, vol. 11, Colonial Secretary's Office, Outgoing Correspondence, p. 419, 17 Oct. 1778, Governor John Elliot to Joseph Peers, recommending Robert McAuslan as Deputy Postmaster.
- 30 TRPAD, GN 2/39/A, Census of St. John's, 1794-95, entry #262.
- 31 TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/1, box 24 (1802-1805), f. 54, Pleas in the Supreme Court, 25 Oct. 1802, Cormack vs. Sawyer. Sandy McAuslan, the son of Janet's uncle, John McAuslan, is mentioned as being Alexander Cormack's clerk.
- 32 TRPAD, Cathedral of St. John the Baptist Church of England burials, 1796-1803, box 1, 14 Aug. 1796, Alexander Cormack.
- 33 TRPAD, GN 2/39/A, Census of St. John's, 1796-97, entry #1 for the Second Division, the house was owned by Robert Bollard.
- 34 TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 13-15, 1797-1800, box 5, Colonial Secretary's Office, Outgoing Correspondence, vol. 13, pp. 333-34, 13 Oct. 1797, Waldegrave to Cormack granting land at River Head.
- 35 TRPAD, GN 169, vol. 4, Miscellaneous Deeds and Wills, ff. 180-82, 8 Feb. 1808. David Rennie purchased land from Robert Bulley's estate in Outer Cove that included Fir Hill Farm, which had "formerly been leased by Alexander Cormack."
- 36 Robert MacKinnon, "Farming the Rock: The Evolution of Commercial Agriculture in Newfoundland to 1945," *Acadiensis* 20, 2 (1991): 36-38.
- 37 TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 13-15, box 5, 1797-1800, Colonial Secretary's Office Outgoing Correspondence, vol. 13, f. 35, 9 Aug. 1797, Governor

- Waldegrave to Magistrates of St. John's, recommendation for a market; vol. 13 ff. 369–70, 16 Oct. 1797, merchants to Waldegrave describing the site for the market and the intent to construct a slaughterhouse.
- 38 C.G. Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 209–14.
- 39 TRPAD, CO 194/39, 1796–97, f. 286, 17 Dec. 1797, Waldegrave sent Eppes's report on the spoiled provisions to the Duke of Portland, Colonial Secretary. Ibid. f. 288, Eppes to Waldegrave, sent from Poole, 13 Dec. 1797, warning of impending food scarcity.
- 40 TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 13–15, 1797–1800, vol. 14, ff. 392–93, 15 Oct. 1798, Waldegrave to Eppes, granting permission for Eppes to go to England providing he return with the spring convoy.
- 41 Eppes to Lord Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury, transmitting vouchers of purchases of provision made by Cormack, acting Commissary of Provisions. Great Britain, D'Alberti Papers (correspondence, incoming and outgoing, between the Colonial Office and the Governor's Office in Newfoundland), vol. 9, 20 May 1795, p. 270. London, Colonial Office, paper held in the Centre for Newfoundland Studies (hereafter CNS), Memorial University Libraries. Online on the DAI, http://collections.mun.ca/PDFs/cns_colonia/A51_V09.pdf.
- 42 P. O'Neill, *The Oldest City: The Story of St. John's, Newfoundland* (Portugal Cove-St. Philip's: Boulder Publications, 2003), 65. To make matters worse, a fire broke out at Fort William in March, destroying medical supplies, bedding, utensils, and stores of food.
- 43 Eppes to Lord Commissioners submitting vouchers for provisions made by Cormack "for the use of His Majesty's Troops" that was "in conformity to an order by Colonel Thomas Skinner, Commandant." Great Britain, D'Alberti Papers. vol. 9, 20 May 1798, London, Colonial Office. Paper text held in the CNS, Memorial University Libraries. Available online on the DAI, http://collections.mun.ca/PDFs/cns_colonia/A51_V09.pdf. In January 1799, there was another substantial loss of food at the garrison due to improper shipment and storage, and Waldegrave called for Eppes's dismissal. Yet, Eppes continued to serve as Commissary for another four years though he had to resign from his position as an officer in the Fencibles. TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 13–15, 1797–1800, vol. 15, ff. 137–38, 22 Jan. 1799, Waldegrave to the Duke of Portland; TRPAD, CO 194/43 f. 41, 20 Apr.

- 1802, J. Gambier to Lord Hobart, refers to W.I. Eppes as Commissary in Newfoundland. The *London Gazette*, 13 July 1799, announced Eppes's resignation from the Fencibles.
- 44 Waldegrave to the Charitable Fund Committee, Great Britain. D'Alberti Papers, vol. 9, p. 190, 23 Oct. 1798; Church of England Fundraising Committee to Governor Waldegrave, *ibid.* vol. 7, p. 310, 24 Oct. 1797.
- 45 D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland* (1895; reprint, Belleville, Ont.: Mika, 1972), 373.
- 46 TRPAD, GN 169, Miscellaneous Deeds & Wills, Index 1744–1869, vol. 2, 1798–1804, p. 117, “Memorandum of the original Bill of Sale from the assigns of R.H. Roope.” The property was located near “Upper Pie Corner,” or “Brookes’s Plantation.” Originally half the property was sold to Marmaduke Hart, W.I. Eppes, and Alexander Cormack but on 20 November 1799 Hart and Eppes sold their share to Cormack so that he owned a moiety, the other half being owned by George Elliot.
- 47 PARO, Land Registry Records, Conveyances, Liber 8(2) f. 66–67, 24 Aug. 1795. Peter McAuslan bought the land from Thomas Rhodes Haszard of Charlottetown.
- 48 PARO, RG 16, Land Conveyances, Liber 16, f. 305–09, 15 May 1802, lease of the western part of Rustico Island for 1,000 years from James Montgomery, Baronet in Scotland, and James Douglas, PEI.
- 49 TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/1, Supreme Court Central, Minutes, 1798–1803, box 24, f. 78, 13 Dec. 1799, Hart & Eppes, attorneys for Edith Brookes, sued James Keating for not keeping up the premises of Robert McAuslin.
- 50 PARO, RG 8, vol. 770–72, 13 June 1803, “to Robert McAusland from Edmund Fanning, Town Lot #98 in the 4th hundred” and “Robert McAusland of Ch’tn, gentleman, granted from L. Gov. also Lot #549.” The land was granted by the Colonial Governor, Edmund Fanning, for no money.
- 51 “Charles Morice Pole,” *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 4 (St. John’s: Harry Cuff, 1993), 352.
- 52 Great Britain. D’Alberti Papers, vol. 11, 18 Oct. 1800, p. 182. Paper held in the CNS, Memorial University Libraries. Online on the DAI: http://collections.mun.ca/PDFs/cns_colonial/A51V11.pdf. However, at p. 188, it is indicated that Sam Rickards granted Cormack an extension until 20 December 1800. Memorial University, MHA, Matthews, Name File “Alexander Cormack,” 16 Oct. 1800.

- 53 Fred W. Rowe, *The History of Education in Newfoundland* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1952), 31, 55.
- 54 TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/1, Supreme Court Central, Minutes, box 24, 1798–1803 and 1802–1805, f. 117, 15 Dec. 1800, Alexander Cormack vs. John Rennels, 18 Dec. 1800, Alex Cormack, treasurer of the School Committee vs. Peter McKie.
- 55 There is no birth record for Janet Grace Cormack but her death, under her married surname “Scott,” is recorded in the Mormon International Genealogical Index, Census Return 1861 for Kensal Manor House, Willesden, UK. Registration District of Hendon 135/3, f. 135; RG 9/785;3 (Willessden): “Janette Grace [Scott] age 61, [born] Nfld. 1799/1800.”
- 56 Personal communication, Dr. Alan G. Macpherson: Grizel derives from an older Scots Gaelic name: “Greasesail.”
- 57 Matthews, 1980. “Newfoundland Merchants,” Part 1, unpublished manuscript, Memorial University, MHA, entry on John Cunningham.
- 58 “Richard Routh,” *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 4, 645.
- 59 Ibid. “Benjamin Lester,” 1991, vol. 3, 280–82.
- 60 National Records of Scotland, RD 5/268, pp. 518–31, Marriage contract and last Will and Testament made on 22 May 1824, between Janette Grace Cormack and William Scott. The document only refers to two siblings, William Eppes and John Bell, with whom she shared property in Newfoundland. The older daughter is not referred to after the census of 1796–97 and could have died any time after that date.
- 61 TRPAD, Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Church of England burials, 1796–1803, box 1.
- 62 TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/1, Supreme Court Central, Minutes, Records Supreme Court, Oct. 1798–Oct. 1802, box 24, p. 127, 28 Sept. 1802: the committee included David Rennie and John Bell.
- 63 Ibid., p. 129.
- 64 TRPAD, GN 5/1/A/4, Surrogate Court, Central Circuit, Writs, box 3, 1800–07, different dates between December 1800 and June 1803, listed on ff. 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27.
- 65 Memorial University, MHA, Matthews Name File has the spelling “Stewart” though in some contexts also Stuart, presumably following spelling in original documents. Since David Rennie later called his son David Stuart Rennie, we have adopted the spelling Stuart.

- 66 TRPAD, GN 5/1/A/4, Surrogate Court, Central Circuit, Writs, box 3, 1800–07, 8 Apr. 1803, Alex Cormack vs. James Rakestraw.
- 67 TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/9, box 101, Probate Court Records, ff. 63–65, 16 Aug., 1804, lists both these vessels and their proceeds from the 1803–04 trade and fishery among the goods in Cormack’s estate inventory.
- 68 TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/9, Supreme Court Central Estate Matters, box 101, Administrations and Probates, 1803–07, pp. 17–22, 15 Aug. 1803.
- 69 TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/9, Supreme Court Central Estate Matters., box 101, Administrations and Probates, 1803–07, contain a number of wills signed with an x or another mark, ff. 29, 38, 42.
- 70 Trudy Jane Johnson, “Matrimonial Property Law in Newfoundland to the End of the 19th Century,” thesis submitted to the Department of History, Memorial University, 1998, 48.
- 71 TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/9, Supreme Court Administrations and Probates, box 101, 1803–07, ff. 17–22, 15th Aug. 1803.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, f. 296, 29 Oct. 1794, Chief Justice D’Ewes Coke to Governor Wallace. David Rennie, Richard Reed, and Alexander Cormack with 20 others were on the Grand Jury for the trial concerning the murder of Lieutenant Lawry.
- 75 Two examples: TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/9, Supreme Court Administrations and Probates, box 101, 1803–07, ff. 115–16, 15 May 1801: David Rennie helped to administer the estate of Bollard’s son, who had died at sea. He also settled the estate of the merchant Peter Ougier: TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/9, box 101, 1803–07, ff. 23–24, 5 Oct. 1803. “Peter Ougier,” *DCB*, 1983, vol. 5, 640–41.
- 76 He came to St. John’s sometime between mid-August and December 1803 and paid court costs on behalf of the estate in December 1803: TRPAD, GN 5/1/A/9, box 101, 1803–07, List of Writs issued from the Surrogate and Supreme Court, 14 Dec. 1803.
- 77 G. Handcock, *Soe Longe as there comes noe women: English Migration and Settlement in Newfoundland* (St. John’s, Breakwater, 1989), 279. The value of several wealthy fish merchants’ estates at their death, listed in 1793, was between 20,000 and 130,000 pounds sterling.
- 78 TRPAD, GN 5/2/A/9, box 101, Supreme Court Administrations and Probates, 1803–07, ff. 63–65, 16 Aug. 1804.

- 79 TRPAD, GN 169, vol. 9, Miscellaneous Deeds and Wills (1815–16), sale of Elliot's moiety of Roope's Plantation to Janet Cormack, 1804. Although this document was created in 1804 it was included in vol. 9.
- 80 TRPAD, GN 5/1/A/4, Supreme Court, Central Circuit, Writs, box 3, 1800–07, f. 42, granted on 3 Dec. 1804.
- 81 TRPAD, GN 169, vol. 3, Miscellaneous Deeds and Wills, 1744–1858, p. 40, 31 Dec. 1804.
- 82 TRPAD, GN 58/3/A, Crown Lands registry, Index and Register, 1803–1923, #82, Janet Cormack, 20 Oct. 1805.
- 83 TRPAD, MG 907, Eastaff, Plan of St. John's, 1807.
- 84 TRPAD, MG 93, William R. Noad collection, Plan of St. John's, 1853. This plan does not extend far enough east to include Janet's land; it ends slightly east of "The Road to the King's Bridge."
- 85 O'Neill, *The Oldest City*, 684: Peter McAuslan received permission to "build a fireplace in his counting house."
- 86 These coins are now rare: *The Telegram*, St. John's, 7 Sept. 2013: one coin sold for \$41,250; CBC newscast, 5 June 2015: one coin sold for more than \$50,000; O'Neill, *The Oldest City*, 684: illustration of a coin.
- 87 PARO PEI, Acc4063, United Empire Loyalist collection, Reel 1: St. John's island (PEI), Collector of Customs Letter Book, Shipping Inwards entry books (4 vols.) 1790–1822, 16 Dec. 1805.
- 88 TRPAD, GN 5/1/A/1, Supreme Court records, Book D, 27 Apr. 1804, McAuslan vs. William Andrews for 193 pounds "balance of account due him and the late Alexander Cormack in partnership."
- 89 Peter McAuslan also concluded a number of business transactions on his own account, several of which turned out to be poor investments and lost him money. TRPAD, GN 5/1/A/4, Surrogate Court, Central Circuit, Writs, box 3, 1800–07, 2 July 1804, 6 May, 11 Nov. 1806, 16 Nov. 1807, 18 June 1808 — for a total of 502 pounds sterling.
- 90 The name is variously spelled as: Ranny, Rinnie, Rannie, Rainie, Renny, Rennies, and Rennie.
- 91 J.F. O'Mara, "Rennie's Mill," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 92, 2 (1998): 17.
- 92 Memorial University, MHA, Matthews Name File, "Stewart": David Rennie was St. John's agent for the firm, 1790–1804 and 1807–10.
- 93 Glasgow Parish Register, OPR, Births, 644/01 0190 0314, 14 Jan. 1797, birth of Joseph to David Rennie and Jean Crawford. <http://www.familysearch.org>.

- 94 Ibid. "Hugh Crawford and Janet Russel of Greenock baptize a daughter Jean in 1770 and Margaret, 2 October 1771."
- 95 PARO, Master Name Index, list of cemetery tombstone transcriptions for Orr family, "Orr, lot 67, no.2, in memory of David Ranie Orr, died 10. Jan. 1881 aged 81."
- 96 *Ross's Weekly*, Charlottetown, PEI, 26 Dec. 1861, death notice of Robert Orr Sr., age 87 years, came to "this Colony with his family in 1819 and settled on the Township owned by his brother, the late David Rennie Esq. Glasgow, Scotland." According to *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), vol. I, 283/1132, brothers-in-law could formerly refer to themselves as "brothers." Brothers were either "in blood" or "in law."
- 97 TRPAD, GN 2/39/A, Censuses of St. John's, 1794-95 and 1796-97.
- 98 Glasgow Old Parish Register, OPR 644.1/52, 7 Jan. 1823: David Rennie died of a "bloodburst," age 58.
- 99 Scottish Record Society, Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild Brethren, 1761-1841, "8 Dec. 1791, John Wright . . . apprentice to James Carfrae," also online.
- 100 National Records of Scotland, St. Cuthbert's Parish's "blotter" register MR 4-52, 23 Apr. 1806: "that she has resided upwards of six weeks in Edinburgh is certified by Mr. John Wright, merchant, Edinburgh."
- 101 "Relict" is an archaic form of the term "widow."
- 102 National Records of Scotland, St. Cuthbert Parish "blotter" register, MR 4-52, 23 Apr. 1806.
- 103 TRPAD, GN 169, vol. 2, Miscellaneous Deeds and Wills, pp. 90-91, 10 Oct. 1801: David Rennie bought a house from Geo. Burton "adjoining the house of Mr. Burton's mother."
- 104 Matthews, "Newfoundland Merchants," Part 2, unpublished typescript: "Stewart" under "Stewarts and Rennie/Resident Agents and Partners in Newfoundland," Memorial University, MHA.
- 105 TRPAD, GN 169, vol. 4, Miscellaneous Deeds and Wills, pp. 51-53, 10 Oct. 1807. It included "boats and their crafts, nettes, seines . . . provisions and other articles belonging to the fishery . . . as well as the schooner *Margaret* with all her masts, anchors, cables, tackle, and the brig *Polly*."
- 106 Ibid. vol. 4, pp. 180-83, 8 Feb. 1808, purchase from Robert Bulley's estate.
- 107 TRPAD, GN 169, vol. 3, Miscellaneous Deeds and Wills, 1804-07, ff. 405-

- 408, 3 Jan. 1807: John Barnes sold the property to David Rennie for 275 pounds sterling; Ibid. vol. 4, ff. 415–17, 29 Oct. 1808: David Rennie sold the property to John Dunscombe for 315 pounds sterling.
- 108 TRPAD, CO 194/45, ff. 119–20, 20 Oct. 1806, David Rennie to Governor Erasmus Gower.
- 109 There are no Church of England birth records for this period in St. John's, but both David Jr. and James Gower are listed in later family records.
- 110 Matthews, "Newfoundland Merchants," Part 2, unpublished manuscript, Memorial University, MHA: "James MacBraire."
- 111 Shannon Ryan, "Fishery to Colony: A Newfoundland Watershed, 1793–1815," *Acadiensis* 12, 2 (1983): 34–52: between 1805 and 1815 the population doubled.
- 112 Matthews, "Newfoundland Merchants," Part 2, "Stewart"; James Stuart remained until 1819.
- 113 A.H. Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), 44 (map), 265. Rennie purchased Lot 23 in 1810 from William Winter.
- 114 S. Holland, "Prince Edward Island, 1765," 1765, reprinted in *Prince Edward Island Magazine* 3, 4: 121–26. <http://137.149.200.109:8080/fedora/get/demo:75/OBJ>.
- 115 PARO, RG 16, Land Conveyances 1769–1872, Liber 20, f. 140, registered 27 Sept. 1811.
- 116 *The Royal Gazette and Newfoundland Advertiser*, 20, 27 Dec. 1810, 3 Jan. 1811. The paper also included advertisements from Mr. P. Phillips offering "Private tuition" and willing to go to the houses of the students.
- 117 Ibid. 17 Sept. 1816, p. 2, col. 3; Newfoundland and Labrador Registry of Deeds, Service NL Commercial Registration, St. John's, vol. 9, p. 525, 15 June 1845: Dunscombe sold the property to Walter Grieve.
- 118 Statutes of Newfoundland 1875–78, Acts of the General Assembly, 1876, p. 14: \$180 authorized for road repairs "from Castle Rennie to Playhouse Hill." Online DAI, <http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cns/id/152766>.
- 119 Katherine Bellamy, *Weavers of the Tapestry* (St. John's, Flanker Press, 2006), 430.
- 120 *Royal Gazette and Newfoundland Advertiser*, 14 June 1810, advertised "two small meadows well fenced behind Fort William from which a

- great crop of grass may be expected.” This could be the meadow owned by Janet.
- 121 TRPAD, GN 2/1/A, vol. 25, p. 366, Accounting of ground rents paid to Governor Duckworth, 15 Oct. 1814.
- 122 PARO, RG 16, Land Conveyances, 1767–1872, Liber 20, f. 140, 27 Sept. 1811, David Rennie is listed as “merchant from Greenock, Scotland.”
- 123 National Records of Scotland, Glasgow (Lanark), OPR 644, vol. 20, f. 515, “David Rennie Mercht & Janet McAslan, a L[awful] daur. Janet Emma, baptized September 14, 1810, Wit[nesse]s Hay Wright & William Stewart.”
- 124 Ibid. OPR 644, vol. 21, f. 33, “David Rennie Mercht & Janet McAslan a L[awful] son William Frederick, baptized 14 Feb. 1812. Wit[nesse]s William Mills & William Cormack.”
- 125 Ibid. OPR 644, vol. 22, f. 4, “David Rennie Mercht & Jane McAsland in Tradeston, son Robert Rennie, born 26 April 1814, baptized [date illegible].” Tradeston was part of Glasgow.
- 126 Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians*, 234: Cormack’s obituary, originally published in the *British Columbian*, 9 May 1868.
- 127 James Mackay, *A Biography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, Mainstream Publishing, 1992), 680: Bonnie Jean was the widow of the well-known poet Robert Burns, who, after her husband’s death, “played hostess to a never-ending stream of poets, writers, literati, celebrities and devotees of her husband’s poetry.”
- 128 Rev. J. C. Higgins, *The Book of Robert Burns*, vol. 3, (Edinburgh, Grampian Club, 1891), 60, states that Janet Brown (born in Kirkoswald near Maybole), a sister of Robert Burns’s mother, married a Rennie, and that they had two children, David and Agnes. Higgins believed both died unmarried. William Eppes Cormack’s stepfather, David Rennie, had a sister Agnes and both were born in Maybole. It is quite possible that they were the David and Agnes referred to by Higgins.
- 129 Glasgow University Archives, Class Catalogues (Catalogus togatorum in Academia Glasguensi), 1794–1838 [R9/1/1]. Also Innes Addison, *The Matriculate Albums of the University of Glasgow from 1728–1858* (Glasgow: J. MacLhose & Sons, 1913), lists: “8281 1811 Gulielmus Cormack f.N. max (1st son of) Alexandri Mercatoris, Newfoundland, brother of 8685 (f.n.) for the Greek class, which was the second year.” Also: 1813–14 in Classe

- Logica, (282) Gulielmus Cormack and in the same class, under (284) Campbell, Dom. De Glenorchy.
- 130 Sir Alexander Grant, *The Story of the University of Edinburgh during its first three hundred years*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1884), 433.
- 131 Cormack, “Account of a journey,” 158 n.
- 132 Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians*, 235.
- 133 Addison, *The Matriculate Albums*, “8685 1812 Cormack Joannes f. 2dus Alex Quondam Merc. Glas. (onetime Merchant in Glasgow) otherwise John Bell Cormack W.S. 1827 (W.S. writer to the Signet, a lawyer) died in 1870, brother of 8281 entered for a humanity class which was a first year class.” Neither of the brothers graduated at Glasgow. Innes Addison, *The Role of Graduates of the University of Glasgow* (Glasgow: J. MacIhose & Sons, 1898), has neither of the Cormack sons listed. However, extremely few students in the arts did graduate, and they often used the class-certificates of their professors as their university certificates.
- 134 Addison, *The Matriculate Albums*, “David Rennie 10834 [1821] fil. N. max. Davidis Merc. Newfoundland.” “Frederick Rennie 12260 [1828] filius natu 4tus Davidis Mercatoris in com. de Lanark.” “Robert Rennie 12309 [1828] filius natu quintus Davidis Mercatoris in com. de Lanark.”
- 135 Edinburgh University, Matriculation Roll: Arts, Law, Divinity III: 1811–29.
- 136 Edinburgh University, Matriculation Roll: General and Medical, vol. 21, 1825–26, Literary Students, Classes.
- 137 John MacGregor, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Maritime Colonies of British America* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1828), 9–10, asterisked footnote p. 10; *British Columbian*, 9 May 1868, Cormack’s obituary; reprinted in Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians*, 235.
- 138 *Prince Edward Island Gazette*, 9 June 1819: the *Alexander* cleared for Greenock on 7 July 1819 with a cargo of timber. Also PARO RG9, Collector of Customs, Shipping outward, 7 July 1819.
- 139 PARO RG 16, Land Conveyance, Liber 25, ff. 335–36: Cormack purchased this land from Angus McLure, 6 Oct. 1818, and the document was registered 20. Jan. 1819. The witness was Peter MacAuslan.
- 140 PARO RG 16, Land Conveyances, Liber 25, f. 265–67, registered on 29 Sept. 1818.

- 141 PARO RG 16, Land Conveyances, Liber 16, folio 305–9, 15 May 1802.
- 142 *Newfoundland Mercantile Journal*, St. John's, 30 Sept. 1824, p. 3, col. 1.
- 143 PARO, Land Registry Records, Liber 26, Folio 1, PoA from David Rennie to William Eppes Cormack, dated 6 Apr. 1819, registered 30 July 1819.
- 144 Ibid.
- 145 Orlo Jones and Douglas Fraser, *The Island Magazine*, no. 16 (1984): 36–41: *Prince Edward Island Gazette*, 3 Sept. 1819.
- 146 Ibid.
- 147 *Prince Edward Island Gazette*, 22 May, 26 June 1820.
- 148 One of the authors noticed the sign “Rennies Road” on a visit to PEI in 2004.
- 149 John MacGregor, *Observations on Emigration to British America* (London: Longmans, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1829), reprinted in the *Prince Edward Island Register* (Charlottetown), 22 June 1830, 4, col. 1–2, a reference to Cormack's successful settlement.
- 150 MacGregor, *Observations*, 61: note G, letter from W.E. Cormack to John MacGregor, 14 Feb. 1829.
- 151 *The Daily Patriot* (Charlottetown), 14 Feb. 1906, 8: son John was a particularly skilled sailor and travelled from California to Manila and Hong Kong.
- 152 PARO RD 6.1 Series 14, 9 July 1819.
- 153 *Prince Edward Island Gazette*, 17, 29 Feb. 1820.
- 154 Ibid., 7, 25 Nov. 1820, 20 Jan. 1821.
- 155 Ibid., 26 Apr. 1820, 4, col. 3.
- 156 PARO ACC3035/2, Militia general orders issued by Adjutant General Office, Charlotte Town, 20 Jan. 1820.
- 157 Charles Dickieson, “New Glasgow as it was 100 years ago,” *The Island Register* (1920), <http://www.islandregister.com/newglasgow.html>. John W. Chalmers, *Laird of the West* (Calgary: Detselig, 1981), 3–4.
- 158 PARO, RG 6, Supreme Court Case Papers, 1820 W.E.C. against D. & J. Kennedy, and 1821 against A. McGregor.
- 159 PARO, RG 16, Land Conveyances, Liber 28, f. 74–76, 24 Feb. 1820, *ibid.* f. 76–78, 15 June 1820.
- 160 PARO, RG 16, Land Conveyances, Liber 28, ff. 341–45, lots 200, 241, 250, 256, 266, 277, 10 Nov. 1821, registered 8 May 1822.
- 161 *Prince Edward Island Register* (Charlottetown), 15. Sept. 1829, vol. 6.

- 162 High Church Glasgow, burial register, OPR 644/52 15/05/1821, p. 195,
“Janet S. McAslan, aka Renn. buried 15 May 1821, age 46, wife of D.
Rennie, cause of death: anemia.”
- 163 The disposition is referred to in a contract between Janette Grace
Cormack and William Scott and was registered at the same time as
their marriage contract, 24 May 1824. National Records of Scotland, RD
5/268, 517–31 (14.A3). The document was written and signed by John Bell
Cormack, at the time apprentice to James Arnott W.S.
- 164 Cormack, *Narrative of a Journey*, Introduction.
- 165 Cormack, “Mr Cormack’s journey,” 318–29.
- 166 Cormack to Bishop of Nova Scotia, 10 Jan. 1829, Private Papers file
57/84; also Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians*, 210.
- 167 “Rennie, William Frederick,” *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and
Labrador*, vol. 4, 577; O’Mara, “Rennie’s Mill,” 17–20.
- 168 *Newfoundlander*, 16 Mar. 1843.
- 169 *The Public Ledger*, vol. 23, no. 2250, 10 Oct. 1845: “On Tuesday last, that is
the 7th of October 1845.”