

Irish Merchants Abroad: The Newfoundland Experience, 1750-1850

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JOHN MANNION

SO LITTLE HAS BEEN written on the nature of Irish mercantile settlement overseas that students of the Irish past might conclude with some justification that such a phenomenon rarely occurred and, when it did, was ephemeral and peripheral. The literature on Irish migration and settlement abroad understandably focuses on the poor and disadvantaged. Certainly many emigrants were poor; but not all. Some were artisans with varying degrees of skill, others strong and middling farmers or, more frequently, their surplus sons. These people brought with them expertise, and sometimes capital, to continue careers in new settings. By contrast, only a tiny fraction of the migrating Irish were merchants and traders or advanced to that status overseas. But that fraction had a considerable influence on the management of Irish commerce abroad, as the pioneering work of scholars such as Louis Cullen is beginning to reveal.¹ Waterford, the smaller port of New Ross, and the hinterlands of these towns emerged early as important sources of Irish Catholic merchants in the great seaports of France and Iberia. Drawing on a long tradition of intensive commercial farming in the physically favored pockets of the southeast, particularly in the fertile basins of the Barrow, the Nore and the Suir rivers, merchants in this region specialized throughout the 18th century in the export of salt provisions to the continent and in the importation of wines, brandy, fruit, and salt. Much of this trade was handled abroad by non-Irish merchants. Irish mercantile participation was substantial, however, and probably increased as the century progressed.

While merchants from Waterford and other ports were engaged in

southern Europe, a distinctive trade also with strong southeast Irish connections was emerging across the Atlantic, in distant Newfoundland. This commerce was similar in several ways to that practised by Irish merchants on the continent, but it also involved the migration of labour, seasonal at first, then permanent, to prosecute the cod fishery. These migrations were organized by merchants and their agents, many of whom belonged to the southeast. This paper attempts to open up for discussion neglected aspects of Irish migrations and the character of Irish mercantile settlement overseas, by probing the contribution of a single merchant house in Newfoundland with deep roots in southeastern Ireland.

The firm, founded by Richard Welsh of New Ross in Placentia, Newfoundland, continued by his son-in-law William Saunders of Bideford, Devon, and later by Welsh's own likely descendants, the Sweetmans of Newbawn, Co. Wexford, lasted for more than a century. From modest beginnings, the firm became a giant in the Newfoundland trade. At its peak this house owned a dozen ocean-going vessels, employed or supplied several hundred men and shipped as much as £25,000 worth of dried cod in a single season to markets around the North Atlantic. After 1800 the company was responsible for the settlement of scores of Irish immigrants throughout its trading territory in Placentia Bay. These settlers came mainly from the southeast of Ireland; and their descendants dominate parts of the bay to this day.

Richard Welsh was born in New Ross in 1718 and moved to Placentia in 1734 at the age of sixteen.² Little is known of his social origins except that he came from a relatively modest background.³ He probably began as an apprentice clerk or an assistant storekeeper to an English trader in Great Placentia harbour. Placentia was at that time the centre of a thriving migratory ship fishery based in north Devon. A cluster of ports in Bideford Bay were involved: Barnstaple on the river Torridge, Bideford on the Taw, and their outports, Northam and Appledore. Each spring the fishing ships would set sail from these small ports with fishermen and supplies for Placentia and other harbours in the southern half of the Avalon peninsula. Here they would anchor for the summer while crews were deployed in shallops to fish inshore for cod. When dried, the cod was shipped to the major markets in southern Europe or the West Indies, and in the fall these Devon fishermen returned home. Twenty such fishing ships docked at Placentia and nearby harbours in 1734, the year of Welsh's arrival, with some 600 fishermen who operated 100 shallops and caught over 30,000 quintals of cod.⁴ There was at this time also a small fishery conducted by

some fifty planters who lived at Placentia and nearby harbours year-round. These residents were mainly from the English West Country; some were married with families. The planters hired servants or "passengers" who were brought out annually on the fishing ships to work for a summer or more on contract before returning home. Fewer than fifty such passengers arrived at Placentia in the spring of 1734 and the resident fishery accounted for less than one fifth of the season's catch.

From their inception, the Irish migrations to Placentia were an integral part of the transient ship fishery and the resident operation that it spawned. Late in the 17th century some of the fishing ships departing Devon for Newfoundland in the spring began calling in regularly en route to the port or harbour of Waterford to collect provisions for the summer cod fishery. In March, 1697, for example, the merchants of Bideford and Barnstaple requested a convoy for the fishing ships bound for Newfoundland "to stop with ye said ships in ye River of Waterford forty-eight hours only for taking on board their bread and provisions that are ready to be shipt."⁵ Early in the 18th century the fishing ships also began taking on passengers annually from the southeast to work as servants in the fishery. Following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and the cession of Plaisance (Placentia), the regional capital of France's extensive fishery on Newfoundland's south coast, this splendid harbour became the focus of a fishery from north Devon and consequently an important centre for early Irish migrations and indeed settlement. "There are not above ten French residents in St. Peters, St. Lawrence and Placentia who conform to the treaty of peace and are supplied with craft and servants from England," wrote a British naval commodore in 1720, "but here are brought over every year by the Bristol, Bideford and Barnstaple ships great numbers of Irish Roman Catholic servants, who all settle to the southward in our plantations."⁶ The governor reported that the "vast increase" in the amount of fish cured at Placentia was "in part owing to the great quantity of Irish papists and nonjurors. . . . who yearly come out and settle here."⁷ The English authorities complained that several unlicensed Irish fishing ships were actually operating from Little Placentia and from other harbours across the bay formerly occupied by the French: "They bring with them a number of Irish servants, some of whom they leave in the winter and by that means stake out the very best of the ancient fishing rooms." The threat of an independent Irish fishery, of unemployed, overwintering Irish servants, and of Irish Catholic disloyalty worried the English officials on this remote fishing frontier. Should war resume with France, they "would join with the enemy," a commodore warned, and be "a direct

means of losing the country." A large group of Irish servants rioted in St. Mary's harbour in 1724, after the British man-of-war had left in the fall. Although uncertain about the legality of an independent Irish fishery and Irish settlement in Placentia, the authorities moved to suppress them to "make room for His Majesty's subjects, duly qualified."

It is against this complex web of economic, ethnic, religious and political tensions that the role of a cultural broker like Richard Welsh must be examined. The English controlled the fishery as it expanded, but depended increasingly on Irish servants to catch and especially to cure the fish. Welsh helped regulate Irish labour in Placentia, placing young servants with English planters and supervising the several specialized tasks undertaken by the Irish ashore. Each fall on the expiry of their contracts, servants had to be paid and provision made for their passages home. In 1753, for example, five servants sued a Bideford captain for the "cruel treatment they had received on their passage to Ireland."⁸ Apparently they had managed to get aboard without their passage money being paid. Welsh and another Bideford captain testified that "passage money is always by custom paid by the planters," and the court ordered Welsh to see to it that this be done.

Placentia was by now the centre of a flourishing fishery. The number of fishing ships and fishermen had almost doubled since Welsh's arrival but more striking was the growth in the resident fishery and associated Irish passenger trade. Between 600 and 900 servants arrived annually, there were 170 planters in the district, and the residents' catch accounted for 45% of the total. The passengers were predominantly and, a decade later, overwhelmingly southeastern Irish. With the outbreak of war between Britain and France in 1756 the migratory ship fishery from north Devon collapsed, never to recover. During the war Placentia depended largely on a resident fishery conducted inshore. Poole in Dorset replaced the north Devon ports as the organizational centre of the ship fishery, and the importance of Waterford and its hinterland as a source of labour and provisions increased. It was under these changing conditions that Richard Welsh, twenty years a resident of Placentia, finally entered trade on his own account.

Few data survive on the details of Welsh's early trade, but in 1753 he rented some ground on the Great Beach of Placentia from a long-established English planter and built premises there. Over the next few years he acquired at least five more properties from nearby English planters.⁹ These properties formed the core of Welsh's trading domain and continued as headquarters for more than a century.

Although overshadowed by Waterford, Ireland's third busiest port, New

Ross was the pivot of Wexford's links with Newfoundland and the base for a small but independent trade from there in passengers and provisions through the 18th century. It was managed by a closely-knit Protestant merchant community at Ross—notably the Elmeses, Nappers, Allens, Koughs, Glasscotts, Goffs and Lamphiers—and was directed primarily to the port of St. John's. This commerce had begun by the time Welsh moved to Newfoundland, but there is no evidence that the Ross merchants were involved in trade with Placentia during his long stint as agent there. In the spring of 1759, however, "Richard Welsh, late of this town, now of Placentia, merchant," was given the status of freeman of Ross for the purpose of trading.¹⁰ Among the signatures on the town council were three of the leading merchants in the Newfoundland trade: James Napper, Highate Allen, and Thomas Kough. Three other "Papists" were admitted with Welsh. One, William Furlong, recorded as a mariner with a house on Mary Street in 1750 and as a shopkeeper in 1759, was a relative.¹¹ The others, Dominick Farrell and Thomas Knowles, were established merchants and freemen of Waterford and already engaged in colonial commerce. These admissions almost certainly represent an attempt by Welsh to cultivate his home place as a source of labour and supplies for the fishery at Placentia, now that the north Devon ports had declined.

Welsh quickly emerged as the leading merchant in the harbour of Placentia, where the Irish outnumbered the English two to one. Indeed the district of Placentia was the most Irish part of the island, accounting for one third of the total Irish population in the summer of 1759 and over 40% of all Irish women and children. Welsh took advantage of his connections to build up an ethnic trade but also maintained commercial links with the local English planters. His drive to capture the commerce of the district was contested by the merchants of Poole, and a bitter struggle ensued. In 1759 a new Poole house established in Little Placentia sent out one of its sea captains, with a letter of recommendation to Welsh, to act as their agent through the summer. Welsh "pretended a great friendship" and promised the new firm supplies on reasonable terms if it ran short. This promise he failed to fulfill; and he was accused by the agent of the iniquitous and unreasonable practice of supplying the Poole company's planters and servants at low prices in exchange for fish, despite written contracts and the customs of trade.¹² Welsh did sell supplies to the company in winter, but at exorbitant prices, and appropriated their fish in exchange. "In this condition we unfortunately labour'd from year to year," the agent reported, causing "the ruin of three gentlemen in England who have spent their fortunes here and become bankrupt. . . . If some speedy remedy don't take place it will be impossible

for any English merchant to carry on any employ or trade here as Mr. Welsh will throw every impediment and imposition in his way." Six planters, two of them English, the others Irish, protested that the Poole merchants never had adequate supplies and that without Welsh they could not have continued their fishery.

Of the merchant families from Poole attempting to establish a branch at Little Placentia during the Seven Years' War, only the Quaker house of Neaves and Company, drawing on Quaker merchants in Waterford for passengers and provisions, succeeded and in fact became the main rivals to Welsh and his successors. Welsh dominated trade at Great Placentia but did not monopolize it. He apparently focused on local traffic, issuing supplies to planters and servants and collecting their fish. There is little evidence that Welsh was an important shipowner with a network of correspondents overseas. In 1760 he purchased a fifty ton brig from Boston, likely for coastal trading, and evidently chartered a vessel that spring which sailed from Appledore to Placentia and took a cargo of cod to Bilbao.¹³ This venture, under the management of Richard Kavanagh, a Wexford sea captain, ended when the vessel sank returning to Placentia with salt from Cadiz.

Welsh depended largely on other traders for supplies from overseas in exchange for fish.¹⁴ He depended also on the honesty of planters and servants, to whom he advanced provisions in the spring on the promise of fish in the fall. In 1762 a group of planters and servants supplied by him fled to Halifax with cod, oil and shallops. Five Irishmen hired to build boats through the winter also deserted. He urged the governor to compel all winter servants to carry shipping papers, in order to prevent their absconding in spring and taking up work in other harbours.¹⁵ Like most merchants, Welsh was harsh in his treatment of planters and servants alike, appropriating their properties and possessions when they were unable to pay their debts and withholding wages and supplies.

Trade at Placentia peaked after the Seven Years' War, as settlement expanded and the harbour continued to dominate the fishery of the bay. It was during this period that Welsh laid the foundations for a merchant firm that was transatlantic in scope with respectable international connections. He hired William Saunders of Bideford as his principal agent and revived links with old shipowning families such as the Hoggs and Salmons of north Devon and Placentia, long engaged in the trade. More importantly, he forged closer ties with Waterford and Wexford, and with Iberia.¹⁶ These commercial connections were facilitated and consolidated by the marriages of his three daughters prior to his demise. In 1767 his daughter Bridget, with a

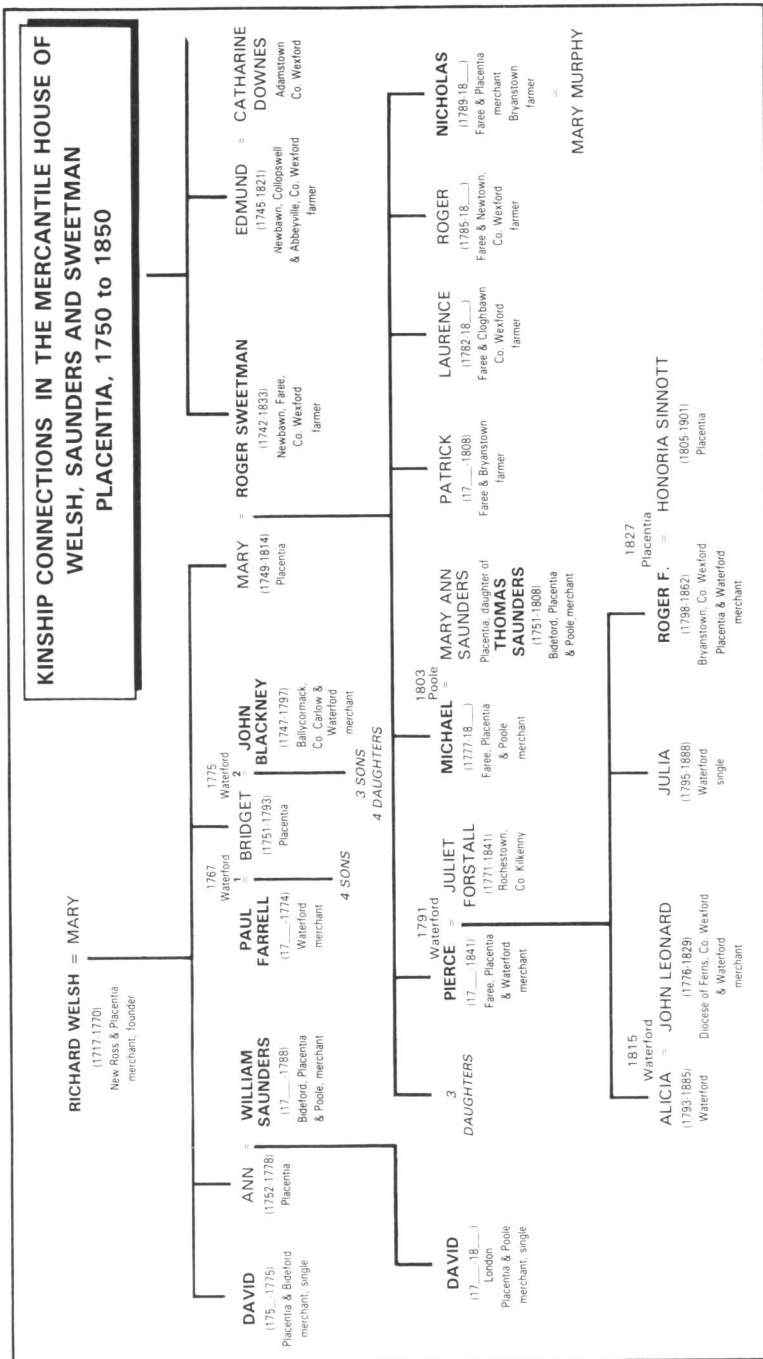


Figure 1

dowry of £10,000—dazzling, by the standards of the time—married Paul Farrell, son of Dominick, one of the leading Waterford merchants in the Irish-Newfoundland trade (Fig. 1).¹⁷ Dominick Farrell was engaged in a ship fishery at Trinity harbour, north of Placentia, but Paul apparently linked up with his father-in-law to carry on a triangular trade among the ports of Waterford, Placentia and Cadiz, where the Farrell dynasty operated a major branch house. Paul was admitted freeman of Waterford shortly after his marriage and owned or had shares in the 100 ton brig *Bridget*, built in Newfoundland, probably by Welsh.¹⁸ Another daughter, Ann, married William Saunders and, although the evidence remains circumstantial, the third, Mary, probably married Roger Sweetman, son of Michael of Newbawn, a parish close to Richard Welsh's native place in Co. Wexford.

Richard Welsh died at Placentia in the fall of 1770, still relatively young but one of Wexford's most successful overseas merchants (Pls. 1A, 1B). More than twenty years after his death, he was selected by Aaron Graham as a prime example of a man from a modest background who made a fortune in the cod trade.¹⁹ Welsh bequeathed over £15,000 and properties in



Pl. 1A: Anglican church (1787), cemetery and the courthouse at Placentia. The church and cemetery are on the same site as the French church, established by the Recollects in 1689, and used by the English after 1713.



Pl. 1B: Located in the Anglican cemetery in Placentia, this headstone to Richard Welsh, carved in Ireland, is one of the oldest in Newfoundland. It contains the details of the Crucifixion, typical of Irish Catholic headstones of that time, and reads: "Here lyeth the body of Mr. Richard Welsh who carryd on the most extensive trade ever heard of in this Harbour and Bay for thirty six years with the greatest credit. He died on the 7th of October, 1770 in the 53rd year of his age. Lovingly lamented by his Planters, Dealers, etc. and deservedly regretted by all who knew him. May he rest in Peace."

Placentia to his immediate family and kin. His wife, Mary, likely a Furlong from Ross, was awarded £100 a year from Welsh's "capital stock of £5,000 in the New South Seas annuity." He gave £2,000 to his three daughters, £1,000 to two Farrell grandsons in Waterford, and £200 "to Mary Furlong, daughter of William Furlong of Ross." Although long a resident in Newfoundland, more than one third of the money bequeathed by Welsh was interest from investments in Ireland, mainly in New Ross. This pattern of investment was typical of a colonial merchant in the 18th century fishery. One of his principal heirs was Paul Welsh Wibault, probably a nephew, who received £3,000; should he die, this sum was to be transferred to the six sons of David Wibault. Deborah Wibault was given £1,300, with two dwelling houses and a store at Placentia. Little is known of this family in Newfoundland, but James Wibault was a chief engineer and colonel with the garrison at St. John's in 1741 and subsequently served with the garrison at Placentia.²⁰ Welsh's main heir was his son David, to whom he bequeathed his wife's annuity after her death, £2,500 "in the hands of Charles Tottenham, Esquire," a leading landowner in New Ross, plus "plantations, stock-in-trade . . . all household goods, plate, china and furniture for the purpose of carrying on in Great Placentia or elsewhere in Newfoundland the business . . . I now follow." He appointed his son-in-law William Saunders as his agent in Placentia, for "as long as my said trustees shall think proper and he appearing to be faithful." Saunders's salary was not to exceed £150 a year, "sufficient maintenance for himself and his present wife, Ann Welsh, and for whatsoever children he might have by his said wife." Welsh also directed his trustees, Thomas Hogg of Appledore, Edward Smith of Bideford, and Joshua Bowden of Northam, merchants, to make "a true and just inventory" of all his "goods, wares and merchandize that shall be in the store at Great Placentia" or elsewhere in Newfoundland six months after his death and again when his son reached the age of twenty-one. He showed the caution of a mature merchant when recommending that Saunders drop one third of the house's planters in the event of war with France or Spain.

THE WELSH SUCCESSION

Welsh's death did not alter significantly the firm's pattern of trade. William Saunders settled down with his family at Placentia, directing the business from there. He was assisted by his brother, Thomas, who alternated residence between his native Bideford and Placentia, and by David Welsh. Like their fathers, David Welsh and Paul Farrell were admitted

together as freeman of Ross, but there is no evidence that they traded from there.²¹ Farrell's Waterford and Spanish connections, however, were of strategic importance. Ships engaged in the firm's freights usually departed Bristol, Bideford or Waterford in the spring with supplies and passengers for Placentia, proceeded to Iberia, principally Alicante and Cadiz, with cod, and returned to ports in southern England, and particularly Waterford, with salt, wine and fruit.²² Paul Farrell built what was described as "the best salt works in Ireland" on Catherine's Pill near his main premises in the east end of Waterford. He was a leading importer of Iberian and Newfoundland products. In 1772-3 he exported £5,000 worth of salt provisions mainly to Newfoundland, with smaller shipments to Poole, Bristol and Bideford, for the cod fishery. Little is known of his trading arrangements with David Welsh and the Saunders brothers, but Farrell did not engage exclusively in the Newfoundland trade and he probably operated on his own account. Close to half his exports went to Liverpool, Campveer (Holland), Bordeaux (where his older brother resided), Port Mahon (Minorca), and especially to London and Cadiz.

Paul Farrell died suddenly in 1774 and David Welsh shortly thereafter.²³ This essentially ended the Farrell family's links with the Placentia cod trade. As a trustee to Paul's marriage in 1767 and executor of his will, Dominick Farrell was involved in the administration of the Welsh estate.²⁴ He received a bond of £6,000 from Bridget Farrell for the benefit of his four grandsons—who were also the grandsons of Richard Welsh—and in 1776 requested, jointly with Hogg, Bowden and Smith of Appledore, that all debtors and creditors of the late Richard Welsh submit their accounts. Bridget remarried in 1775, her new husband being John Blackney, member of a long-established, landed Catholic family in Carlow who had moved to Waterford and was engaged in the wine trade there.²⁵ Her dowry of £15,000, most of it her father's fortune, was rarely surpassed in merchant marriage settlements in 18th century Ireland. William Saunders of Placentia and Roger Sweetman of Faree, Co. Wexford, were appointed trustees and most of the money was reserved for the development of the Placentia cod fishery.

John Blackney acquired one of the Farrells' premises and replaced Paul Farrell as Waterford agent in this trade. He had close family ties with members of the Catholic sub-gentry in the southeast, including the Archbolds, the St. Legers, the Wyses and the Anthonys of Waterford. Like others in this group, Blackney focused more on the local land market than on commerce overseas. In contrast to the Farrells, who were shipowners

with a network of correspondents on the continent, Blackney did not invest in shipping and did not attempt to integrate the cod trade in Iberia with his Waterford trade as the Farrells had done. Indeed, there is no evidence that he ever established a formal partnership with his brother-in-law William Saunders in the Placentia fishery. Like the majority of Waterford merchants, he worked for a commission, assembling provisions on Saunders's request, recruiting labourers for the season, arranging their passages, paying these servants on their return to Waterford in the fall and taking cod and cod oil from Placentia for sale locally.²⁶

The enterprise expanded during the American War of Independence. New England's substantial supply trade to Placentia Bay was disrupted and the Poole merchants turned to ports in the British Isles, particularly Waterford and the southeast, for extra provisions. William Saunders finally moved his English base from his native Bideford down to Poole during the war. He had depended largely on north Devon shipowners and sea captains for freight to Placentia, as Richard Welsh had done. Saunders now purchased some of these vessels but also began building ships at Placentia during the winters. By 1780 the firm had seven or eight ocean-going vessels engaged in the trade, and was one of the leading shipowners in the fishery. This fleet sailed from Poole and other ports on England's south coast and increasingly from Waterford.

Encouraged by a growing fishery in the 1770s, William Saunders consolidated and expanded the properties and trade bequeathed by Richard Welsh. Despite the intensification and spread of settlement, seasonal and permanent, along the southern coast, the harbour of Great Placentia maintained its monopoly over trade in the region.²⁷ "If Placentia were to fall," an official reported in 1772, "it would destroy the fishery of twenty harbours." In a petition a decade later from seven Poole firms asking for better fortifications at Placentia, the town was described as "the repository for all the coast between Cape Pine and Cape Ray" with cod exports amounting to nearly one third of the island's total.²⁸ Like his father-in-law, Saunders was the principal merchant in this fishery and headed the only major house in the harbour. Early in the 1770s he conducted this trade "for the trust of the late Richard Welsh," but following the death of David Welsh he assumed control of the firm. He established close links with the military, particularly during the war, securing contracts to carry supplies from St. John's and elsewhere to the garrison at Placentia.²⁹ Saunders also secured material from the military to defend the firm's premises in the outharbours, at Point Verde and at Marticott (see Fig. 2). Following the death of his wife in

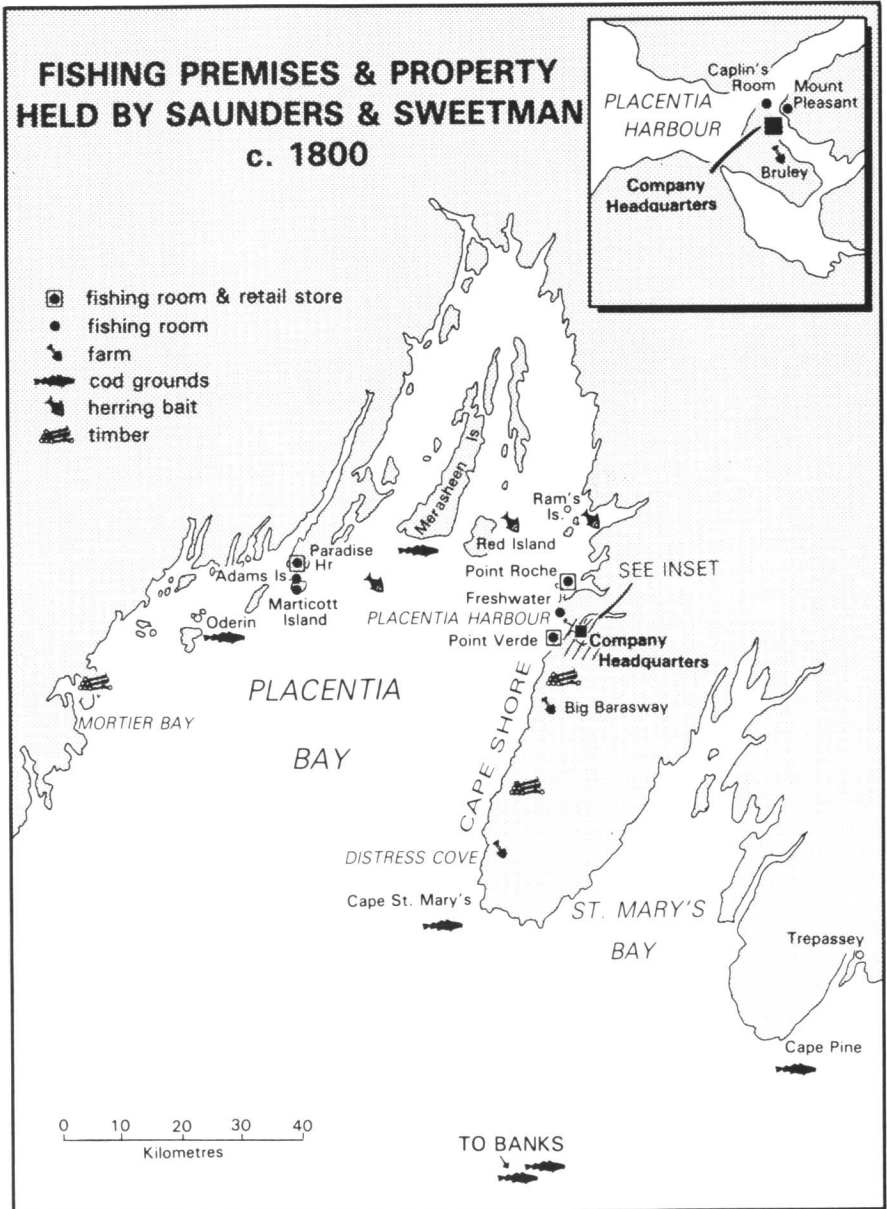


Figure 2

Placentia in 1778, Saunders moved to Poole, rotating residences on both sides of the Atlantic with his younger brother Thomas, now a partner in the trade. By 1783 the Saunders firm was one of the leading houses in Poole, a position it maintained until the end of the century. The firm had opened up trade on company account in a dozen ports in southern Europe, employed over fifty mariners and sea captains, carried hundreds of men annually to and from the fishery and supplied even more customers in Placentia Bay.

THE SWEETMAN CONNECTION

The Sweetmans of Newbawn entered this fishery as it neared its peak. An Anglo-Norman family dislodged from their towerhouse and deprived of their lands during the Cromwellian conquest, they managed to survive the upheavals of the 17th century to emerge as big farmers with considerable wealth. Family tradition holds that they cleared land in Newbawn, part of an extensive forest, following the Cromwellian confiscations. Pierce Sweetman is recorded there in 1700 with his wife, Elizabeth Downes, member of another important farming family in nearby Adamstown. He was likely responsible for the construction of the commodious two-story farmhouse with five bays which still survives in Newbawn (Pl. 2). Such communities provided the classic background for entry into 18th century mercantile trade or a career in the upper echelons of the re-emerging Irish Catholic church. Pierce Sweetman's son, Patrick, born in Newbawn in 1705, moved to Cadiz in 1730 as an agent and then merchant in the wine trade.³⁰ He married a Wexford woman there and travelled extensively through southern Europe and to England in pursuit of commerce. Nicholas Sweetman (1696-1786), probably an older brother, was sent to the Irish college at Salamanca, returned to Wexford after ordination and in 1745 became Bishop of Ferns, an office he held longer than anyone else. In 1752 Michael Sweetman (1711-76), possibly Pierce's youngest son, worked 347 Irish acres at Newbawn, leased from the Leighs of Rosegareland.³¹ This was by far the largest farm in the area, its boundaries virtually coterminous with those of the townland. A pre-reformation church (in ruins) and a cemetery, the historic core of the old civil parish (also called Newbawn), were located within the farm. These large townland farms, bearing the same name as the parish, were characteristic locations for privileged families such as the Sweetmans in the Norman southeast.

Michael Sweetman divided the farm and other land he had acquired amongst his sons, initiating a gradual dispersal of Sweetmans across the south Wexford landscape (Fig. 3, Table 1, and Pls. 3-6). One son, Edmund,



Pl. 2: Newbawn, original home of the Sweetman family.



Pl. 3: Abbeyville, home of Edmund Sweetman on site of monastic grange of Kilbraney.

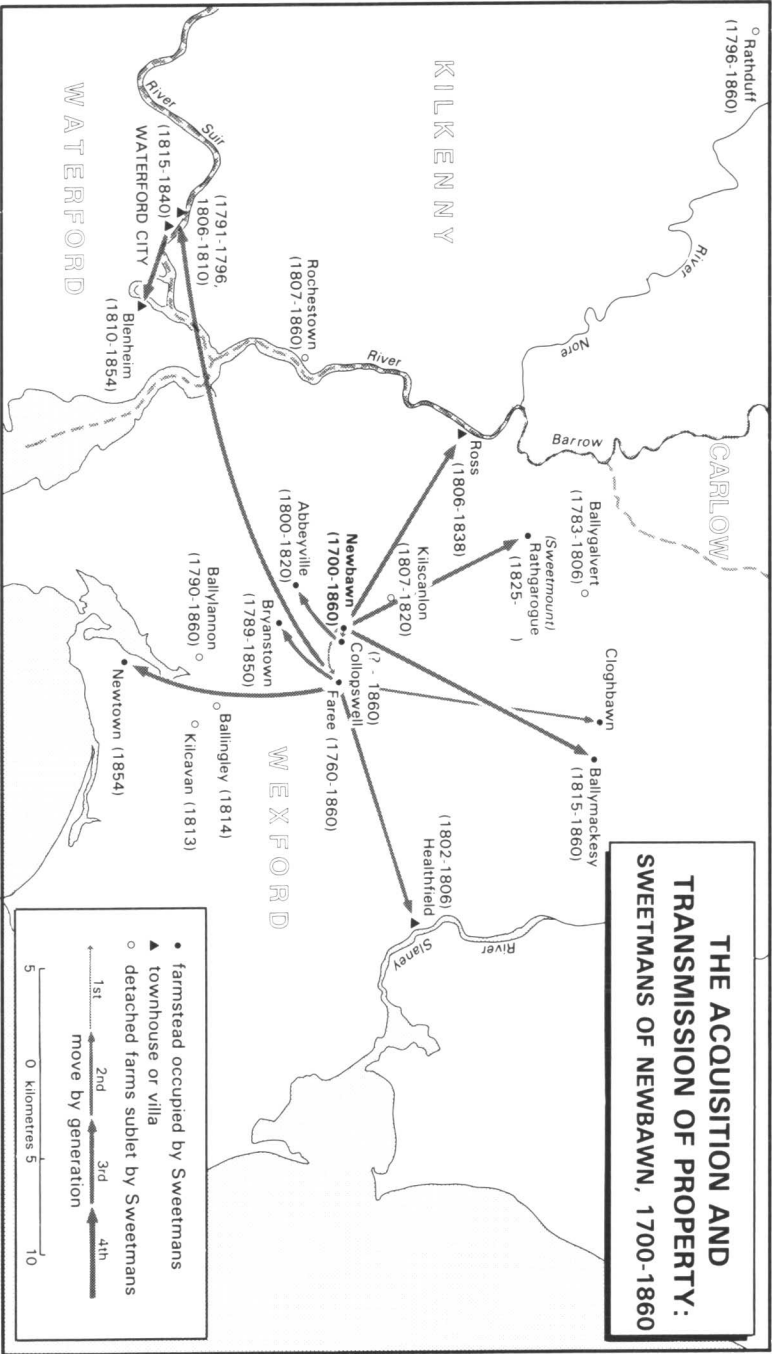


Figure 3



Pl. 4: Faree, Ballyclemock, home of Roger Sweetman.



Pl. 5: Bryanstown, home of Pierce Sweetman, then of his brothers Patrick and Nicholas. Both house and tower house were taller.

- Farmstead Occupied by Sweetmans
- [X] Townhouse or Villa
- 0 Detached Farms Sublet by Sweetmans

Property	Years	Acres	Generations				
			1	2	3	4	5
• Newbawn	1700-1860	347	Pierce	Michael	Nicholas & Michael Edmund	Peter F.	Cadigans Roger F. Edward O'Farrell
• Collopswell	? -1860	240	?	Michael	Edmund		
• Faree	1760-1860	224		Michael	Roger	Roger Catherine Harriette (Farrell) Pierce Patrick Nicholas Mary (Ryan)	Edward O'Farrell
• Bryanstown	1789-1850	178			Roger		
• Abbeyville	1800-1820				Edmund Lawrence		
• Cloghbawn	1810-?						
• Newtown	? -1854					Roger	

• Ballymack- essey	1815-1860	160			Lawrence	Lawrence
• Rathgaroge (Sweetmount)	1825- ?	225			Edmund Farrell	Edmund Farrell
☒ Healthfield	1802-1806	80			Pierce	Pierce
☒ Waterford City	1791-1796, 1806-1810				Pierce	Pierce
☒ Waterford City	1815-1850					Alicia Roger F. Roger F.
☒ Blenheim	1810-1854	52			Pierce	Pierce
☒ Ross	1806-1838				Nicholas	Nicholas
0 Ballygalvert	1783-1806	80				
0 Ballylannon	1790-1860	200		Nicholas		
0 Ballingley	? -1814	84		Roger		
0 Kilcavan	1813	100		Edmund		
0 Tinnacarrick	1819	107		Roger		
0 Kilsacanlon	1807-1820	101				
0 Rochestown	1791-1860	95			Pierce	Roger F. Juliet
0 Rathduff	1791-1860	350			Pierce	Juliet

Table 1: The Acquisition and Transmission of Property: Sweetmans of Newbawn, 1700-1860.

was bequeathed Collopswell where, according to tradition, he built a house similar to that at Newbawn. This house was burned in 1798 and Edmund moved to nearby Abbeyville (Pl. 3).³² Another son, Nicholas, rented a farm in Ballygalvert, well north of the Sweetman country, from the Byrnes and the Blackneys. It was one of several land transactions between Blackneys and Sweetmans after 1775, reflecting marriage and mercantile ties. Nicholas later returned to Newbawn to share the home farm with his brother Michael (1747-1833), the youngest son. The eldest son, Roger, was given a large farm in Faree, east of Newbawn, by his father, where he built a substantial dwelling house in the typical Georgian style (Pl. 4). Although he was admitted a freeman of Ross in 1786 and was recorded as a merchant there two years later, there is no evidence that Roger Sweetman was ever engaged directly in overseas trade.³³ He was, all his life, a big farmer. The precise details of his marriage settlement are not known, but Richard Welsh left £500 to Mary Welsh in his will, or, should she die, to her children, plus an equal share of the business at Placentia. Most likely in keeping with these agreements, Pierce Sweetman, eldest son of Roger, was sent to William Saunders, at Poole, and to Placentia to learn the trade. Pierce Sweetman's early travels typify the considerable mobility of an apprentice merchant in the cod fishery. He was first recorded at Placentia in the fall of 1785; since he was there in the summer of 1786, he had likely overwintered. In the fall of 1787 he witnessed the will of William Saunders at Poole, sailed for Placentia the following summer for a year and thence to Cadiz, journeying overland through Iberia and France to Poole to prepare for another transatlantic passage.³⁴

The death of William Saunders in 1788 had important long-term implications for the Sweetmans' position within the company. David Welsh Saunders, only son of William, inherited the trade, but he was still a minor and was apparently in poor health. William's brother Thomas was given £2,000, an annual salary of £100 and a third of David's share in the profits to manage the business "whilst there is a prospect of it turning out advantageous." Although apparently he had only one quarter the amount of capital accumulated by Richard Welsh to bestow, William Saunders gave small sums to a number of relatives and friends, including his brother in Massachusetts, who was nominated heir with Thomas should David die, James, "born in adultery to my wife in Placentia," and "my sister [in-law] Mary Sweetman of Wexford."

The death of William Saunders left space for the Sweetmans to assume a more active role in this fishery. In replying to a letter written by Roger

Sweetman of Wexford in spring, 1788, Thomas Saunders acknowledged that his brother's death "brings a large share of the burden of business" on him, but assures Roger that he will "pay strict attention to the trade, hoping to carry it on in an amicable way and profitable for the benefit of all parties." Saunders goes on to comment on prospects for the fishery, expresses the hope that Pierce Sweetman will arrive soon in Placentia, sends regards to Roger's family and signs himself "assured friend and honorable servant." It is clear from this and subsequent correspondence that Sweetmans were major shareholders in the firm and formal partners by the fall of 1789, when the company's name was changed from Saunders and Company to Saunders and Sweetman.

THE COD FISHERY AT PLACENTIA, 1788-1793

In 1788 the company had a dozen deep-sea vessels at its disposal and considerable data survive on their voyages. Eight of these vessels arrived at Placentia from ports in Europe between mid-April and mid-June: four directly from Poole, one each from Poole, Bristol, Alicante-Cadiz via Waterford, and one with salt from France. Two of these ships made a second voyage to Placentia from Poole and France later in the summer. Saunders and Company were sole owners of all but one of these vessels, a brig chartered from Bird and Company of Poole. This firm was engaged in the fishery at Fortune Bay, west of Placentia. Its head was executor of William Saunders's will and agent at Poole for the company while David Welsh Saunders was in his minority. Every month between May and November one or more of the fleet departed Placentia for south European ports with dried cod. Three of the early vessels returned with salt in time to take on a second cargo and in the late fall most ships arriving at Iberian markets proceeded with salt to Poole. One of the vessels arriving Placentia early in spring was dispatched to the Grand Banks and fished there through the summer; another was sent to Quebec for supplies; and the firm reserved one brig for a shuttle trade with St. John's. Construction was completed on two vessels during the year. One was sent to Iberia with cod, the other to Waterford in November with cod oil and passengers, and thence to Poole. Finally, a vessel sailed directly from Placentia home to Poole to complete the season's shipping.

This pattern of voyages, linking three disparate regions in the north Atlantic in a primarily triangular network of trade, typified the cod economy and persisted into the 19th century. Figure 4 reveals the pattern at its peak. Departures from Poole and Waterford for Placentia outnumbered

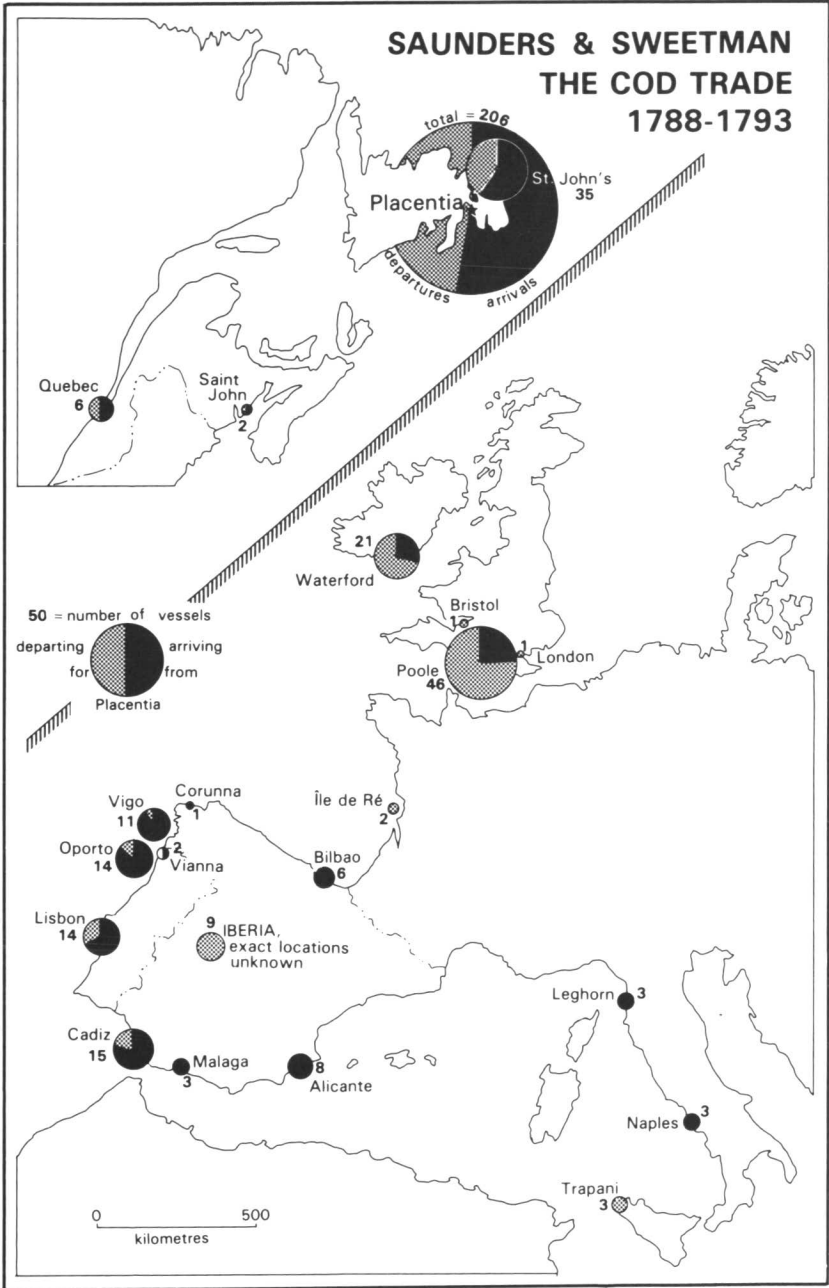


Figure 4

direct arrivals from there three to one. By contrast, only a small proportion of the ships arriving at Iberia with cod sailed back directly to Placentia. Poole was the pivot of this trading network, the port where the vessels were owned and registered and where the final decisions on their deployment were usually made. Poole and its hinterland provided much of the technology and some provisions for this fishery. Early each spring the firm assembled a bewildering variety of commodities, many produced specially for this distinctive trade in the towns and villages of Dorset. Other goods were re-exported through Poole. Breadstuffs, dried peas, teas, beer, brandy, condiments, cooking oil, cooking utensils, kitchenware, tobacco and pipes, fishermen's footwear and clothing, bedding, fishing tackle, construction material and tools, hunting and trapping gear, even agricultural implements and garden seeds, were stored in the Saunders' warehouse in Poole harbour and crammed into the vessels bound for Placentia. Probably the most valuable commodity loaded at Poole was salt, carried northwards from the Iberian ports in the cod ships through the winter and warehoused in Poole until the ships were ready to sail.

Food and drink were the most expensive commodities in the fishery and accounted for over 60% of the company's extensive supply trade. Waterford was an important source of food. "I have drawn on Mr. Blackney for the servants' wages," wrote Thomas Saunders at Placentia in 1789, "but a great deal of this will return to us again for [their] provisions." Each fall Saunders and Sweetman sent their orders to John Blackney for Waterford pork, which was highly regarded, butter, and other supplies, including porter casks for Dorset beer to be shipped from Poole in the spring.³⁵ Sometimes the provisions were put on the passenger vessel returning from Placentia and stored at Poole through the winter; more often they were warehoused in Waterford and shipped out directly in the spring. Despite his kinship with the company, Blackney did not have a monopoly on the Irish traffic to Placentia, even in salt provisions. St. John's had emerged by this time as an important source of supplies throughout the island. Saunders and Sweetman dealt extensively there (Fig. 4), procuring a wide range of goods, including Irish provisions, from their agents, the Poole house of Hart and Eppes. Prices for provisions were much higher than at Waterford, but brokers like Hart and Eppes were willing to accept low quality fish for the West Indies market in exchange.³⁶ Blackney did not provide breadstuffs, and the firm depended on a number of sources for this critical commodity, including their Poole and Placentia neighbors, Neaves, who specialized in the bread trade, and St. John's houses. During the War of Independence

Quebec replaced America as an important source for bread and flour and William Saunders opened up direct trade there. In January, 1788, for example, he placed an order in Poole through his London agents for £1,500 worth of breadstuffs from Quebec, and his brother sent on one of their ships from Placentia that summer.³⁷

Waterford's main contribution to the prosecution of this fishery was the provision of manpower. Three of the firm's fleet arrived in Waterford in March, 1788, to take on passengers and provisions. Precise details on the numbers of servants boarding these vessels for Placentia, their places of origin or mode of recruitment do not survive. John Harries, an Anglican minister who came out to Placentia in 1788 with Pierce Sweetman and lodged at the company residence, made the exaggerated claim that the firm brought out 700 Irish servants each season.³⁸ Whatever the numbers, it is certain that they came from southwest Wexford, south Kilkenny, southeast Tipperary and Waterford. John Blackney's principal task was the arrangement of labour contracts. Some servants were hired for a season only, others for two summers and a winter, still others for a longer spell. Details of their wages and terms of employment were confirmed and clothing suitable to the conditions of the fishery advanced, sometimes with food and accommodation while waiting to sail. Nothing is known of Blackney's network of contracts through the migration basin, but it probably included Roger Sweetman of Faree, one of whose former servants was recorded in 1788 at Placentia. Nothing is known either of the role of the firm's sea captains, still all English, in the recruiting process. They could hire men independently at the Passage of Waterford, where the vessels usually anchored prior to departure and the servants boarded. Alternatively, and more likely, they could liaise with Blackney in Waterford city, regulating labour contracts and organizing the shipping of provisions. The stopover at Waterford extended from four to six weeks between 1788 and 1793, but some ships cleared port more quickly, particularly if not taking on supplies. Vessels with passengers usually departed during the first two weeks of April, arriving at Placentia in late April and early May after thirty to thirty-five days passage.

Timing was crucial to the successful prosecution of a seasonal fishery 2,000 miles from home. Labour was divided between fishermen and shoremen. The former were required early, to get the boats to sea. "Since your crew are all fishermen," wrote Thomas Saunders to one of his captains bound for Italy in the fall of 1788, "come back in March and reach here by April for the start of the season." Each spring the agents chafed over late

arrivals. "If the passengers had arrived earlier," noted Pierce Sweetman the following summer, "we would have had one of the best spring voyages since my coming to the country." James Downes complained bitterly over a passenger vessel arriving from Ireland on June 10 "for a spring fishery." Delays were usually blamed on adverse weather conditions during the Atlantic crossing. "The vessels in general had a long passage this spring," Saunders reported, following the arrival of two of the fleet after "disagreeable" voyages of thirty-five to forty-one days against westerly winds. Pierce Sweetman's journey from Poole in the summer of 1789 took fifty-two days, "a long, tedious passage." Even after reaching the roadstead in Placentia, vessels were sometimes hindered entering the harbour because of ice or southeasterly gales. One vessel from Waterford, loaded with passengers, listed off Gibraltar rock near the entrance to the harbour and was saved only when the passengers crowded into the forecastle and righted her.³⁹

Close to one thousand men arrived in Placentia and neighbouring harbours in the spring of 1788, a peak not surpassed subsequently. More than three quarters of these were Irish, the remainder from Dorset and Jersey. Most Saunders and Co. servants, fishermen or shoremen, were dispatched on arrival to company planters, and the firm was reimbursed for their passages in fish through the summer. All of the shoremen were Irish but some of the fishermen, particularly those belonging to the fishing ships, came from Dorset and fished for the company on the Banks. The preference for Irish labour, however, was clearly expressed by Thomas Saunders in a letter to his brother in Poole: "I would advise you never to send out more English youngsters than will just clear the vessels. They run away in winter, they never stick to a place, [never] have any attachment to it. And for hard labour one Irish youngster is worth a dozen of them."

The fishery at Placentia commenced in April with a search for herring, the main spring bait. Herring migrations were unpredictable and the bait often difficult to procure, but it was essential for a successful spring fishery. Both Saunders and Sweetman believed a northeasterly wind kept the herring out; they waited anxiously each season for a southwesterly "brush" to blow the fish deep into the bay. Here they were trapped in chosen grounds by fishermen using skiffs and deep nets. Once sufficient bait was secured, crews of three to five men were deployed in shallops and jacks to jig the cod. Pierce Sweetman reported in 1789 that the company had nineteen shallops at sea by May 1 under the management of captain Salmon, who had brought passengers from Waterford that spring. By the end of May

they had caught an average of fifty quintals a boat. The fishery peaked in June with the arrival of millions of tiny caplin, which drew the cod inshore. By late June the boats had averaged 220 quintals, with "the fish now coming in very fast." Sweetman looked forward to a final haul of 350 quintals or £250 a boat, an excellent catch.

Hand in hand with this company fishery was the resident planter operation. Sweetman ordered Salmon at the beginning of June to "back" twenty-five planters once the caplin struck ashore. These were the company's principal dealers, either the most productive and reliable among the planter community or bound to the firm through debts. Some had ties with the house back in the days of Richard Welsh, others were quite recent arrivals. Over one half were Irish, the remainder from England and Jersey or their offspring. Almost all had two to three boats and were concentrated in the four leading harbours of the district: Great and Little Placentia, Point Verde and Paradise, the locations also of the company's rooms (Fig. 2). These planters had been supplied by the firm with provisions and servants early in spring, and had agreed to deal with Sweetman through the summer and deliver their fish and cod oil to him in the fall.

Following a successful spring venture in 1789 by company and planters alike, conditions deteriorated early in July, illustrating the fickle nature of this fishery. Poor weather and a shortage of servants ashore hampered the curing process, but Sweetman could still report a good voyage in mid-August. Then the weather worsened, destroying the fall fishery. An unprecedented amount of fish lay uncured on the planters' rooms by October, delaying the settling of accounts and requiring extra overwintering servants to help with the cure in the spring. The subsequent spring fishery also failed, owing to lack of bait. By late May, 1790, Thomas Saunders, who had replaced Pierce Sweetman as manager in Placentia, reported that the company's boats had not averaged five quintals each, compared to fifty quintals the previous season. Herring was scarce and the caplin were late, but when they did strike in, the cod fishery zoomed to "fantastic" proportions. In September, Pierce Sweetman went to St. John's to charter an extra vessel to freight this unexpected catch to market.

Management of an enterprise notorious for its unpredictability, with sudden bursts of activity followed by languid spells, with fluctuating seasonal yields and rapid price shifts for fish and for supplies in widely separated geographical areas, required a high degree of mercantile skill. Through the 1780s the fishery in Placentia grew considerably, attracting new planters, new boats, new merchants and interloping traders. Saunders and Sweet-

man's central objective was to protect their trading territory and planter clientele in the face of increased competition. The difficulties of doing so were made clear in the copious correspondence of James Downes, likely a Wexford kinsman of Pierce Sweetman, who first appeared in Placentia in 1785 and was managing agent there in 1792. The 1792 season did not begin auspiciously. Herring were plentiful but the company did not have adequate nets to catch them. The second passenger vessel from Waterford did not arrive until June 10, keeping ten company shallops ashore and forcing Downes to recruit some expert shoremen from the more expensive St. John's labour market. He estimated that the company boats lost an average of 100 quintals in the spring fishery alone. A poor caplin season followed. By late July Downes was reporting "the worst fishery in a decade." If Saunders and Sweetman did not send out adequate nets and other supplies next season, he warned, their boats "will be the laughing stock of the bay."

The inshore fishery was overcrowded. Downes's claim that a thousand "northern" boats had entered the bay was hyperbole; but an unprecedented number had arrived, probably deflected from a rapidly declining banks fishery. By August the company's boats were dispersed from Placentia to Cape St. Mary's, east to Cape Pine and all along the western shore of Placentia Bay in search of fish (Fig. 2). The company's difficulties were compounded by intense competition amongst traders for cod. An increasing number from St. John's, the West Indies, and even Quebec were calling in at Placentia, attracted by the inflated numbers of fishermen inshore. They were willing to sell supplies at prices lower than those set by the company, in exchange for fish. "Don't let those peddling Jews make their fortunes at our noses," James Downes howled in July; but Placentia continued to be "stocked with peddlers" through the summer and fall. All through the season Saunders and Sweetman were short of supplies. Downes was forced to purchase goods from neighbouring firms, including Pennels of Trepassey, Spurriers of Oderin and a Jersey house in Placentia, but this did not prevent the loss of custom. The company's chief rival in 1792 was Fitzhenry, Doyle, Power and Company, a Bristol-based firm with Waterford and Wexford connections that had established a branch at Placentia a few years previously and were making serious inroads into Saunders and Sweetman's Irish trade. John Power took up residence in Placentia and his firm sent out vessels from Bristol and Waterford with passengers and provisions. He dispatched two vessels to America for breadstuffs and lumber in the summer of 1792 and another was loaded early for the market. In the fall three vessels arrived from Bristol with supplies. "This business will never be

as it was," lamented James Downes; but his rivals expanded too quickly and were forced to withdraw from Placentia a few years later.

Downes's complaints reveal, in part, an experienced firm refusing to be lured into supplying a surfeit of fishermen. He himself cautioned that their own dealers would fall into debt. They had taken on too much supplies and were paying extravagant wages for labour. In the fall a few attempted to "smuggle" fish and oil to interloping traders, forcing Downes to consider confiscating their possessions to pay servants' wages and recover credits extended by the company in the form of supplies that spring. He advised headquarters that the planter fishery was no longer viable and that the firm should focus in future on a merchant fishery. While the number of boats run by the company evidently did expand to thirty-two in 1793, this fishery accounted for only a small proportion of the cod shipped. The planter operation remained the backbone of the enterprise at Placentia.

Whether they worked directly for the company or for the planters, most of the servants' contracts expired in October and many went home. "Our vessel going to Ireland will be thronged," Thomas Saunders informed a fellow merchant in September, 1788, "as I intend sending a great number of men out of the country. The vessel I go to Poole in will be packed also." Early in November he instructed one of the company captains to proceed to the Passage of Waterford, land the passengers there, and send their sea chests up to the quay in lighters, together with cooking equipment and water casks. The latter items were to be stored in Blackney's warehouse until the first spring voyage. Unless there were orders from Poole to the contrary, the captain was directed to proceed to this port on the first fair wind, discharge the crew there and go to headquarters for further instructions. In a separate letter to John Blackney at Waterford, Saunders enclosed a list of bills drawn on him for the servants' wages, which he was to honour. Blackney in turn drew on the company's London bankers for these amounts. No records survive of the number of servants paid, but 162 printed company bills were sent from Placentia, and others were written by hand. More than 200 bills were cashed by Pierce Sweetman in Waterford in 1793.

Shipping dried cod to Iberia and Italy was the core of this fishery. Commercial success hinged on the quality of the cargoes to Europe. Considerable time and expertise were invested in ensuring that fish was properly culled and sorted to suit regional tastes abroad. Most vessels were loaded at company headquarters in Placentia under the supervision of Saunders, Sweetman, Downes and other trusted agents or by experienced company

TABLE 2: THE SEASONAL FLOW OF COD FROM PLACENTIA, 1788-93

VESSELS DEPARTING PLACENTIA:						TOTAL
May	9: Oporto 4	Lisbon 2	Bilbao 1	Cadiz 1	Alicante 1	St. John's 1 10
June	5: Oporto 1	Lisbon 1	Vigo 1	Corunna 1	Cadiz 1	St. John's 5 10
July	0:					St. John's 5 5
August	6: Oporto 3	Vianna 1	Bilbao 1	Malaga 1		St. John's 0 6
September	15: Cadiz 4	Alicante 3	Bilbao 3	Lisbon 2	Vigo 1	St. John's 3 18
October	14: Cadiz 5	Alicante 3	Leghorn 2	Naples 1	Lisbon 1	St. John's 1 15
November	14: Vigo 5	Oporto 2	Lisbon 2	Bilbao 1	Cadiz 1	St. John's 0 14
December	3: Vigo 2	Lisbon 1				St. John's 0 3
						82

Table 2

captains and masters of the voyage. "Sweetman has seen the whole of it shipped so it must be good," Thomas Saunders commented on a cargo to Alicante in 1789. Vessels arriving early in spring from England and Ireland were usually loaded directly with old fish. They departed Placentia through May and early June, mainly for the Portuguese market (Table 2). By June 6, 1791, for example, more than £10,000 worth of cod had been shipped by the firm to Iberia. A lull followed this transatlantic spring traffic while poorer quality fish, "the sweepings of the rooms," was collected and shipped to Hart and Eppes in St. John's for the West Indies. By late August the first of the new fish was ready for Europe. Company vessels lying idle through the summer or engaged in local fishing or trade were now pressed into service in the scramble to get to markets. Saunders and Sweetman sent prime merchantable cod to thirteen or more merchant houses in a dozen ports virtually encircling Iberia and east to Italy (Fig. 4). Each captain was issued written instructions to proceed to a particular port and deliver to the firm's agents there a bill of lading, notes on the quality of cargo, news from the fishery and the firm's expectations in the markets. The European agents usually received additional instructions on marketing strategies from Poole and sold the cod on company account, either in their home port or elsewhere, depending on prices. They were also entrusted with securing a cargo of salt or other freight for the subsequent outward voyage and remitted the balance from these transactions to the company's bank in London with a statement of account to headquarters in Poole.

The company's south European correspondents comprised an interesting mixture of English, Irish, and continental merchants. Some were known personally to the firm, some were recommended by Poole firms and other houses in the trade. Saunders and Sweetman sent the bulk of their shipments to agents with whom they had personal ties and could trust, notably the Harrisons of Poole at Lisbon, the Staffords in Oporto and the Stranges in Cadiz. More than 40% of all cod was shipped to two houses and a further 22% to two others (Table 3). The long commercial and cultural links between southeast Ireland and Iberia facilitated the Sweetmans' relationship with members of the substantial Irish Catholic merchant community. They were on friendly terms with Stafford of Oporto, the firm's most active agent, who may have had Wexford connections. He sent them luxury items, including choice port to Roger Sweetman in Wexford, through Blackney, and Portuguese table linen to Pierce. But the Sweetmans' main contacts were the Stranges of Cadiz. Originally from Waterford, a branch of the Strange family settled in Aylwardstown in southeast Kilkenny late in

TABLE 3: Saunders & Sweetman agents in Iberia & Italy, 1788-1793, with cod sold

	Quintals	Agents	Ports	Years	Percent
1	33,909	Harris, Stafford & Co.	Oporto & Vigo	1788-89, 1791-93	22.5%
2	27,246	Strange Bros., Doudall & Co.	Cadiz	1788-93	18
3	19,597	Hudson, Harrison & Gonne	Lisbon	1788-93	13
4	13,637	Douat, Labat & Plante	Bilbao	1788-93	9
5	10,466	George Moore	Alicante	1790-93	7
6	10,190	Pennell, Smith & Co.	Oporto & Vianna	1788, 1790, 1792-93	6.8
7	8,219	Valine & Warrington	Naples & Trapani	1790-93	5.5
8	6,875	Greveney & Co.	Malaga	1790-92	4.6
9	6,621	Robert Porter	Leghorn	1788, 1790	4.4
10	6,026	Peter Arabet	Alicante	1788	4
11	3,061	Rodd & Comyn	Alicante	1789	2
12	2,945	Earle, Hodgson & Drake	Leghorn	1792	2
13	1,849	Patrick Morrough	Corunna	1788	1.2
14	0	De Lamard	Barcelona		0
15	0	McDonald & Co.	Cartagena		0
	150,641				

Table 3

the 17th century and in Cadiz before Patrick Sweetman of Newbawn established trade there.⁴⁰ They were one of a number of families from the big farmer class in this corner of Kilkenny who settled in southern Spain to prosecute the wine trade. Later in the 18th century the Stranges established a partnership with the Farrells of Waterford and became one of the leading merchant houses in Cadiz. Their main imports included salt provisions from Waterford and Newfoundland cod. In the 1780s the house was headed by Laurence Strange, who had moved to Cadiz in 1758, assisted by his kinsmen John and Peter, who settled later, and by Patrick. They were the leading agents for Saunders and Sweetman's extensive trade in southern Spain. Pierce Sweetman visited the family in Cadiz and later offered to act as their correspondent in Waterford. The Stranges kept the firm informed on local prices, sold their cod in Cadiz or dispatched the company's vessels through the Strait of Gibraltar to more profitable markets in the Mediterranean, procuring salt and other goods for the return voyage.

Saunders and Sweetman were now among the giants of the Newfoundland trade. In 1788, the peak of the 18th century Newfoundland fishery, they shipped close to 38,000 quintals of cod from Placentia, 4% of the island's total. Few firms ever exceeded this amount. It required roughly 140 shallows, 500 fishermen and perhaps half that number of shoremen. Over the next two seasons the company's volume of exports dropped dramatically, consistent with the general Newfoundland pattern. But in 1792, James Downes's criticisms notwithstanding, the firm equalled the quantity exported in 1788, an impressive 7% of the island's total catch. Despite operating a fleet equal to those of the leading shipowners, Saunders and Sweetman sometimes had to charter an extra vessel or two to transport surplus fish in the fall. Some of their vessels carried 4,000 quintals of cod, worth £3,000. In the absence of a ledger it is impossible to estimate the value of their imports or the number of men they supplied. Another perplexing question is the extent to which Saunders and Sweetman could capture the trade of independent planters. James Downes despaired of any success in this sector because interloping traders and competing resident merchants offered better prices, but such traders were transient and unreliable. Unless they were approaching bankruptcy, independent planters normally preferred a more stable trading arrangement with an established and expensive house. Although Saunders and Sweetman increased the volume of their trade as the fishery grew, they did not expand noticeably beyond the territory they had fished and traded in since the days of Richard Welsh. Firms from Poole continued to dominate St. Mary's Bay, Little Placentia, Oderin,

Mortier and Burin. Although there was competition and, on occasion, deceitful dealing, Saunders and Sweetman's relations with neighbouring Poole houses were generally harmonious and cooperative. They met annually in Poole or Placentia to fix the prices for provisions and fish, carried each other's agents and passengers if space allowed, occasionally shared freight, and exchanged trade information and delivered letters and messages for each other. There is little evidence of anything like the alleged rapacity of Richard Welsh in the firm's dealings in the 1780s. Much of the company's ire was reserved for their upstart rivals in Placentia harbour and for coasting hawkers.

Over 400 men remained in the harbours of Great and Little Placentia in the winter of 1788-9. Fewer than 20% of these were planters, the remainder servants. Winter was spent cutting timber and hauling it from the woods. Early each December Saunders and Sweetman dispatched crews of around a dozen men in shallops and schooners across the bay to Mortier (Fig. 3) or to the densely forested river system in Bay D'Espoir, 200 kilometers to the west. Some of these crews were employed by the company, others worked on contract on their own account but were usually given winter provisions by the firm. "Our crews are all in the woods," Pierce Sweetman recounted in December, 1788; adding, "I hope they make good returns for the vast quantity of provisions they consume." In May he could report that these winter crews had done great work, one group procuring over 600 fine ships' timbers. These timbers were hauled over frozen rivers and streams, then shipped to Placentia and other company rooms in the spring. Almost all of this timber was used for ship and boat construction. It included fine plank and board for sheathing, spars, keels, knees and top timber. A massive amount of timber was required for the construction of houses, stores and fishing installations onshore. This timber was usually cut locally in the arms east of Placentia harbour and along the Cape Shore.

The local Newfoundland forest could not, however, provide sufficient timber for vessel construction. Like neighbouring firms, Saunders and Sweetman purchased special ships' timber, notably oak, from St. John's—where it was imported—Saint John, N.B., Quebec and America. Deep-sea vessels were built beside the company's main premises on the Great Beach at Placentia. While almost all the men working in the woods were Irish, the small group of specialized craftsmen engaged in ship-building, including the master shipwright, carpenters, the blacksmith, caulker and sailmaker, came from England. Poole provided most of the materials not available locally to finish and furnish the vessels: nails, an-

chors, cordage, canvas, tackle and cooking equipment. Once completed, the vessels were taken by their captains to St. John's and registered, then readied for a transatlantic voyage. Two such ships were built in the winter of 1788, one with a carrying capacity of 2,500, the other 4,000 quintals.

Winter work implied year-round residence and encouraged the growth of permanent settlement. Between 1786 and 1788 close to 60% of the men engaged in the summer fishery in the bay had stayed the previous winters and, subsequently, this proportion grew steadily. Thomas Saunders noted "a great number of unshipped men" staying on in the fall of 1789 and "a vast number" the following fall. Official statistics record 67% and 74% of the summer population of Placentia and adjoining harbours overwintering in these two years. Winter men found extra employment building or repairing wharves, stores and dwellings, mending nets and making wooden casks for shipping the staples of the trade. In the absence of contracts, some Irish worked just for food and shelter. Gradually these "dieters" and shipped servants acquired or built cabins of their own, cleared small parcels of land for potatoes, married, and started families. In 1790 the Irish accounted for over 60% of the winter population of Placentia. This population was greatly augmented over the next half-century, primarily under the direction of the Sweetman dynasty which finally came to dominate the fishery in eastern Placentia Bay.

THE SWEETMAN SUCCESSION AND THE NAPOLEONIC WARS

In 1791 Pierce Sweetman married Juliet Forstall, daughter of a well-to-do Catholic farmer, middleman and occasional merchant from Rochestown, Co. Kilkenny (Fig. 2). The Forstalls, of Anglo-Norman stock, had been more successful than the Sweetmans in retaining part of their medieval patrimony in the upheavals of the 17th century. Several branches of this once influential family continued to operate substantial holdings beside ancestral castles in the southeastern corner of the country. Like the Sweetmans, the Forstalls also engaged in trade. Nicholas Forstall, for example, moved to Nantes early in the 18th century and thence to Martinique, where he married the daughter of an Irish merchant. Their son settled in New Orleans and became governor of Louisiana. Another member of the sept was a sea captain, trading out of New Ross and Waterford with southern Europe. Juliet Forstall's father was also involved in trade at Waterford but focused mainly on the management of his large farm at Rochestown and the properties sublet to tenants along the Barrow.⁴¹ He allowed his daughter a dowry of £2,000, the standard sum for offspring of her class. The Sweet-

mans agreed to pay £3,000 and an annuity of £200, should Pierce predecease her. An elaborate marriage settlement involved Forstall properties in Rochestown and Rathduff, Edmund Sweetman's farm in Collopswell, and Blackney's interests in Traceystown in the parish of Taghmon.⁴² Blackney was appointed one of the trustees. Some of these lands passed eventually to Pierce Sweetman and his offspring (Fig. 3, Table 1). The marriage did not recruit a Forstall to the Placentia partnership; even if this were desirable there was no son to spare. It did, however, connect the Sweetmans with some important families, including the firm of Wyse and Quans, a major merchant house in Waterford.

Pierce Sweetman replaced John Blackney as director of the company's operations in Waterford in 1792 and began his long career as a resident Irish merchant. Blackney's wife, Bridget, had died, leaving a large family, none of whom was involved subsequently in the Placentia trade. Blackney then married a wealthy Waterford widow, but apart from financial and property transactions related to Pierce Sweetman's marriage settlement for which he was executor, those of his own two marriages for which Roger Sweetman was executor, and the management of the Welsh fortune, Blackney had no further dealings with the Sweetman family or with the Newfoundland fishery. Roger Sweetman's second son, Michael, now entered the trade. He was sent to Poole as an apprentice and then to Placentia, where he was joined by his youngest brother, Nicholas of Faree.⁴³

The Napoleonic Wars imposed new strains on the management of a transatlantic merchant fishery. Traditional provisions were increasingly redirected by the parent company to feed the garrisons at home and abroad. Some company vessels were transferred from the fishery to serve in this trade. Traditional cod markets were vulnerable under the fluctuating geopolitical conditions of war, established lanes of commerce were severely disrupted on the Atlantic, and vessels were under continual threat from enemy shipping, their flexibility further hampered by tardy convoys. Finally, both fishermen and mariners were the targets of roving press gangs. Passengers returning home from Placentia in the fall attempted to avoid the press by landing in safer havens west of Waterford or Poole, sometimes with the collusion of company captains or agents, sometimes not. "Get rid of the passengers before you reach Poole," James Downes advised a captain at the outset of the war. In the following fall Thomas Saunders wrote Pierce Sweetman at Waterford: "I have given [Captain] Shephard orders should [the passengers] force him into any port in southwestern Ireland not to go to Waterford with their chests. If the winds are favourable he should try to

make land at the east of the cape [Cape Clear] and frustrate their scheme."⁴⁴ Arrivals from Placentia at Dingle, Crookhaven, Baltimore, Kinsale, Cork and Youghal during the war attest to the disruption of company shipping. Some of these vessels did, however, call in at Waterford en route to Poole, and the port was a focus for outbound traffic early in the war. At least six shipments of supplies were dispatched from Waterford to Placentia in 1794, and there were four arrivals, making this the busiest year on record for the firm's operations there in the 18th century. Pierce Sweetman was made freeman of the city in 1794, but his Newfoundland trade soon weakened. The flow of passengers to Placentia was reduced to a trickle, and there were difficulties finding local mariners to man the company ships. "Our crew are Swades and Danes, [except for] one who was with us last voyage," King Elmes, mate on a company vessel anchored at Portsmouth, informed his father in Old Ross.⁴⁵ Elmes feared impressment, claiming that his status as mate did not exempt him from service in the navy during war.

Pierce Sweetman moved from Waterford to Wexford in 1796, returning to the port only periodically over the next decade. The trade there was entrusted to Thomas Quan, husband of Juliet (Forstall) Sweetman's sister, and a leading merchant in the house of Wyse and Quans. The Sweetmans took up residence in Bryanstown (Fig. 3, Pl. 5), a large farm leased by Roger Sweetman in 1789 for £150 a year. Whether Pierce's departure from Waterford was due less to the slump in company business than to a desire to return to his home place, kin and, presumably, inheritance at a time when the big farm economy was expanding, is difficult to say. Few merchants made such a move so early in their careers, and Sweetman was back to active trading in 1798, going to Poole and then to Placentia. Over the next several years he was the epitome of the mobile merchant, journeying between Waterford, Poole and Placentia to coordinate the company's trade, and to Wexford to care for his farm and growing family.⁴⁶ Some hint of the Sweetmans' enhanced social status among Wexford's middle class is suggested in the family's move in 1802 to Healthfield, Killurin (Pl. 6), a fashionable demesne pleasantly situated on the western bank of the Slaney. Although the property contained only fifty-two acres, some of it wood and parkland, it cost £130 a year.

The slump in Saunders and Sweetman's fortunes during the early stages of the war was evident in all their trading areas. The firm still had nine vessels registered at Poole in 1794, but only five by 1800.⁴⁷ During this short period, moreover, the value of the company's trade there was halved. Their Irish trade faced new pressures. Britain's burgeoning population, with its



Pl. 6: Healthfield, home of Pierce Sweetman.

appetite for fresh food, stimulated the export of grains and bacon before the war, and of livestock by the end of the century. The traditional Irish salt meat trade was being rapidly dislodged, and the growing demands of the British army and navy for provisions drove up the price of food in the fishery. Waterford's merchants sought victualling contracts with the military, causing problems in Newfoundland's supply. Pierce Sweetman advised Thomas Saunders in Poole to write Cork and Limerick as well as Waterford for pork prices, "since our Waterford friends will up the price if they think we're dependent on them."⁴⁸ He also advised against purchasing all company supplies in the spring. With three of their vessels in England, they could afford to delay some transactions until mid-summer when demand dropped off and prices were lower. Problems with Poole and Waterford sources forced the firm to look increasingly to the more costly St. John's supply market and to ports on the North American mainland. For the first time in company history Pierce Sweetman sent a vessel to Boston for pork in 1803, and the firm secured special licenses to import food from there in 1806 and 1807. But British ports remained the principal sources of supply through the war. Michael Sweetman reported that English bread was better than Boston bread and that pork was hard to find there. Apart from one or two seasons, imports from the mainland were modest. America closed its ports to Newfoundland traffic in 1807 and farming in the Maritimes was still relatively undeveloped. Almost all the pork and butter entering Placentia during the war was Irish. England supplied the bulk of the breadstuffs and other comestibles. Even West Indies produce such as rum,

sugar, and tobacco was shipped mainly through English ports, as was much of the company's Iberian salt.⁴⁹ Halifax controlled the trade in molasses. Small amounts of Canadian pork, butter, bread, flour, beer, soap, candles and coal were imported with timber, the mainstay of this trade. Despite disruptions, Poole and Waterford maintained their dominance over company supplies, but new ports, notably Liverpool and Halifax, entered the trade after 1800.

The fishery in Placentia became almost totally sedentary during the war. Apart from Saunders and Sweetman in Great Placentia and Neaves and Company at Little Placentia, no other firm was involved in the transatlantic passenger trade to this part of the bay. Over 300 passengers had arrived in 1793, the first year of the war; a mere twenty-one were recorded two years later and none at all in 1797. There was a brief revival in passenger traffic with the temporary cessation of hostilities in 1802, but the numbers arriving thereafter were trifling until the final years of the war. Interruptions in the regular flow of servants from Ireland caused problems in the fishery. A company vessel with passengers from Waterford was captured in 1804, leaving Michael Sweetman with a severe shortage of shoremen "to split, salt and cure" the company catch and the catches of their dependent planters. "Half the crewmen," he concluded, "will have to work ashore."⁵⁰

The slump in Irish passengers directly to Placentia was partly relieved by recruiting in St. John's. This port was now the destination for the vast majority of spring servants from Ireland. It was also the centre for unshipped, overwintering men, who flocked there from the outharbours in the hope of getting casual work or some government relief. Michael Sweetman went to St. John's in spring 1804, for example, and shipped fifteen fishermen for the company boats. This fishery was much reduced. In 1790 the firm had thirty-two boats at sea; there were only nineteen in 1803, employing around 100 fishermen and shoremen. Only fourteen company boats were put to sea the subsequent season and Michael Sweetman planned to sell three or four in St. John's the following spring. Both Pierce and Michael Sweetman were relatively satisfied, however, with the company catch: "A few of our boats have done well . . . they kill as much fish as most shallops . . . better than our neighbours . . . the best in the bay."⁵¹ There is no record of the magnitude of their planter fishery, but it was in difficulty. Planters' debts mounted and insolvencies increased during the war. Auspicious seasons in the late 1780s had boosted some Irish servants to substantial planter status, but they lacked the capital and expertise to ride out hard times. John Farrell, for example, was an ordinary servant in the summer fishery of 1788. That winter he was appointed master of one of Saunders and Sweetman's

timber crews, graduated to boatkeeper status the subsequent spring and was supplied by the company. By 1794 Farrell operated six shallops in Freshwater, four supplied by Saunders and Sweetman, two by another merchant. His debts to Saunders and Sweetman were close to £600 at the end of the season. James Downes agreed, informally, to accept repayments in fish and oil at £100 a year, but Farrell died unexpectedly after one payment, leaving the firm to fight it out with competing creditors for possession of the insolvent estate.⁵² Another of Saunders and Sweetman's Irish planters departed with a debt of £740. The company's most reliable and productive planters were mainly members of long-established British families, by now a small minority in an overwhelmingly Irish area. They included the Collinses, Martins, Millers and Viguers' of English stock, the Blanche and St. Croix families of Jersey, and the Greens, a Quaker family of American loyalist background centered in Point Verde.

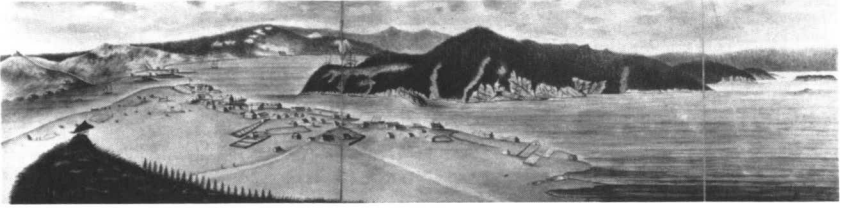
The most precise measure of the company's fortunes during the war is the export of cod. This ranged from 10,000 to 12,000 quintals annually, one third the volume exported in 1788. Over 80% of this cod was shipped to Iberia in the early years of the war. Spain closed its ports to Newfoundland traffic in 1796 and Portugal emerged as the principal market. Saunders and Sweetman focused on Lisbon, cultivating their connections with the Harrisons of Poole and the Cork Murroghs, formerly of Corunna. Murrogh and Co. was joined in 1806 by George Walsh and later by two partners from Poole to form a major cod importing house, which became the focus of Sweetmans' south European trade until 1850. Oporto ranked next to Lisbon in the firm's foreign trade. Here the Dartmouth house of Hunt and Newman was foremost. It was part of an impressive network of family firms established in St. John's, Ferryland, Renew's, St. Lawrence and Waterford. Pierce Sweetman was artful enough to refer to Robert Hunt, head of the branch in Waterford, when sending instructions with a cargo of cod to Hunt and Newman of Oporto. "Get the best freight you can, preferably for Waterford or Liverpool. If for Waterford, I ask that you ship a ton of best port to my friend Mr. Hunt."⁵³ Personal and family ties were more important than ever in the fragile market situation during the war, and the Sweetmans at Placentia made every effort to cultivate connections in southern Europe. "My brother Nicholas, goes passenger on the Boadicea to your care," Pierce Sweetman informed John Bushel of Dorset, correspondent for the company at Alicante. He added: "I commit him in full belief that you will be a Parent and Friend to him. If you can't make room for him at Alicante, or McDonnell can't take him, place him in some good situation to learn Spanish and give him whatever money is necessary.

Charge it to our house, or better still, to me.”⁵⁴

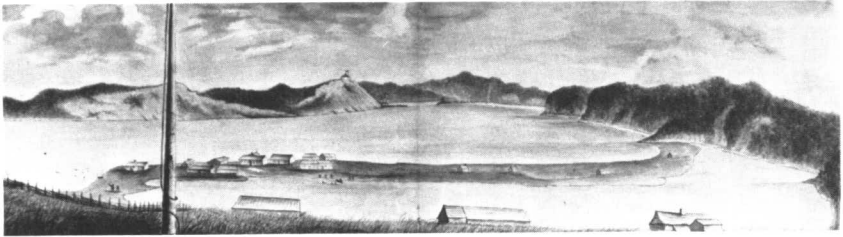
Disruptions in the south European markets resulted in a greater concentration of company shipping in the home ports. Waterford and particularly Poole were the traditional centres for the sale of cod oil, shipped with returning passengers each fall. In 1796, for example, the company sold £1,700 worth of cod and seal oil in Poole. Fish was also shipped to home ports through the war, particularly in difficult years. When Portugal closed her ports in 1808, for example, over 80% of the cod at Placentia was sent to Britain. Pierce Sweetman moved permanently to Waterford around this time, causing a shift in company trade as Saunders’s control at Poole weakened. All the cod, cod oil, fur and timber exported by the company in fall, 1809, went to Waterford.⁵⁵ Some of the fish was re-exported to Iberia, but most of it was sold locally as cheap protein for the expanding Irish poor in Waterford, New Ross and their hinterlands.

Sweetmans gained sole control of the Placentia fishery during the war. Thomas Saunders returned permanently to Poole after a brief spell in Placentia in 1793 and none of the family was subsequently in Placentia. In poor health, he made his will in 1797, leaving almost all his property to his illegitimate daughter, Mary Anne Ryan.⁵⁶ She married Michael Sweetman in Poole in 1803, reinforcing the ties between the two families and strengthening the Sweetmans’ position within the company. Although he became a formal partner in 1805, William Saunders’s son, David, remained in London and was not active in company trade. Michael Sweetman took up permanent residence in Poole, assisting his father-in-law in managing a diminishing trade. Although the company depended on a succession of agents, English and Irish, to direct the business in Placentia through most of the war, the temporary presence of Pierce Sweetman and his brothers there, and at Poole, was important in securing the Sweetman succession.

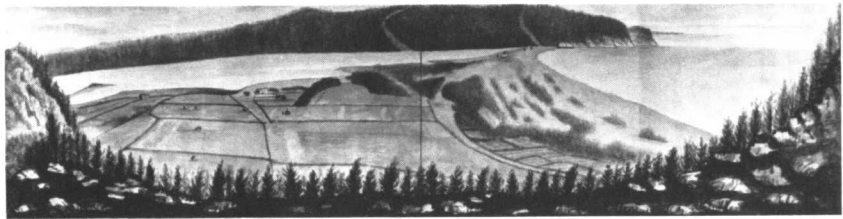
Following the death of Thomas Saunders in 1808, the company was finally dissolved and their “extensive and desirable” premises at Placentia advertised for sale. Despite the decline in the firm’s fortunes, the property accumulated represented one of the most substantial and specialized mercantile cod establishments recorded at this time. It comprised: (1) a capital dwelling house with two extensive stores in front; an excellent kitchen garden; a new fish store and sail loft in front of the garden; a long fish store at the back; and a beach (for drying fish) in front and at the rear of the house; (2) a plantation adjoining with an extensive fish store, loft, a pork store, wine cellar, bread loft, an iron store, a forge, a carpenter’s shop, a cooper’s shop, and two cook rooms (Pl. 7); (3) a plantation and beach beside lot 2; (4) two extensive stores, a wharf, the lower salt house and



Pl. 7: Placentia, 1786. Logbook, HMS *Pegasus*, PANL.



Pl. 8: Fishing rooms at Point Verde, 1786. Logbook.



Pl. 9: Bruley farm, Placentia, 1786. Part of this property was originally cleared by the French in the 17th century and acquired by Richard Welsh in 1756. Logbook.

wharf, all at Mount Pleasant; (5) a very good fishing room with an extensive store, two smaller stores, stages, a wharf and appendages, called Le Caplin's room; (6) an excellent fishing room at Point Verde, comprising a house, two stages with all utensils, a good fish store, a salt house, an oil house, two good cook rooms, and John Lambe's room (Pl. 8); (7) Bruley farm, well fenced (Pl. 9), with a dwelling house, cow house and fowl house; (8) the Point Roche room at Little Placentia, now vacant; (9) a house, stage, beach and garden leased to Philip Power in Little Placentia; (10) the island of Marticott, with houses, stores, stages, flakes and a farm; and (11) John Lambe's room and Long Tom's room, at Paradise. There were, in addition, thirteen houses in Great Placentia, most with gardens, leased to Irish ser-

vants for between £1 and £12 a year.⁵⁷

Some of these properties had been acquired by Richard Welsh, others by William Saunders. No record of their precise value survives, but Pierce Sweetman suggested in 1803 that the company headquarters alone was worth several thousand pounds. Part of the property in Point Verde had been sold that year for £700, and Bruley was valued at £500. Pierce Sweetman bought out Saunders's interest in the Placentia estate and became sole proprietor. He moved in 1810 from his town house in Waterford to Blenheim lodge (Pl. 10), a substantial villa on thirty acres on the south bank of the Suir.⁵⁸ Just a few miles downstream from the quay of Waterford, with a commanding view of the river and its traffic, Blenheim was an ideal location for a merchant shipowner. It remained the chief residence of the Sweetmans until 1850.



Pl. 10: Blenheim, Ballymacloode, Co. Waterford, home of Pierce and Roger F. Sweetman.

MERCANTILE INFLUENCES AND THE EXPANSION OF PERMANENT IRISH SETTLEMENT

Despite the substantial Irish migration through the eighteenth century, most families in Placentia are descended from immigrants arriving after 1800 and many attribute their origins in the area to Sweetmans' transatlan-

tic fishery. Seasonal migration was replaced by emigration from the southeast during the war. "So few of our servants speak of going home," Pierce Sweetman noted in 1802, "I'm not inclined to send our ship to Waterford. . . . If we get sixty passengers, which I doubt, I'll let her touch at either Cork or Waterford. If not, direct to Poole. She will make a very fine vessel for Irish passengers in the spring."⁵⁹ Close to 600 passengers were recorded as arriving directly from Ireland at the harbour of Great Placentia between 1811 and 1827.⁶⁰ The vast majority of these young men were recruited by Pierce Sweetman and transported on his vessels to serve out their terms of contract in a transatlantic merchant fishery. By this time, however, passengers from Ireland to Placentia accounted for no more than 5% of the manpower engaged there in a season. Whether they worked for the company or for planters, most servants were now residents and living mainly in Placentia.

Details on the recruitment of labour locally are sparse for the decade following the war, but some data survive from 1825. That fall Roger Sweetman, who was sent to Placentia by his father, Pierce, in 1813, when he was only fifteen, to help revitalize a languishing trade, hired servants in Placentia and in St. John's.⁶¹ Labour was still specialized in the fishery, and expertise was reflected in the spread of wages. Foreshipmen were paid £21, able midshipmen £23 and a boatmaster £24 to man the shallops. A youngster, hired to work as a general labourer ashore from May to October, agreed to do so for £14. But skilled shoremen were as well or better paid than fellow servants at sea. Able splitters were given £22, and three carpenters, two of whom could double as a splitter and a boatmaster, were allowed £26 each for the season. One man was hired as master of a winter crew, master of a bait boat in the spring, and as an able splitter of cod fish through the summer, for £30. The highest seasonal wage was £32 for the supervisor or master of the voyage. Almost all wage contracts were for the summer season only, but some of these men were taken on as winter dieters and were given clothes, provisions and accommodation, but no wages. All were Irish and only a few could sign their names.

This pool of labour was augmented from Waterford in the spring. Between March 2 and 14, 1826, Sweetmans hired "captains" and youngsters⁶² at £8 and £6, respectively, for the season. Each servant signed a standard contract designed for the trade: "I have this day hired with R. F. Sweetman to proceed on board the brig Concord, James Wagg, master, and there to serve R. F. Sweetman, his agents or assigns, in the capacity of an able captain or other employment for the good of the voyage, until November 1.

The balance of wages to be paid in cash." A shallop captain was below a foreshipman, but the substantially lower contract wages for both captains and youngsters at Waterford probably reflected the costs of passage and supplies. The captains and even some of the youngsters had been to Newfoundland before; one captain had spent three summers there and his wages were raised to £10. Martin Walsh of Fethard, on the other hand, agreed to work as a youngster "if unable to function as a captain." Each servant had a guarantor from his home place who pledged to reimburse Sweetmans should the servant abscond.

This archaic mode of labour recruitment and indentured migration persisted to mid-century. Roger Sweetman shipped forty-four servants in Placentia in November, 1839, twenty-five for the boats, the remainder to work ashore. In addition to the specialized occupations listed in the fragmentary account of 1825, they included several headers, a salter, a cooper and a cook. Apart from the carpenter, who earned £36, wages had hardly changed in fifteen years. Unskilled shoremen were paid as little as £9 for the season, with a promise of £2 extra if proven satisfactory. A substantial number of these servants were born in Placentia, the sons of Irish immigrants; but others were recruited from Ireland.

One of the interesting unanswered questions on a migration managed by merchants is: to what extent did entrepreneurs use family, kin and traditional neighbourhood links to fetch labour from home places? The Sweetmans maintained close ties with their native Newbawn through the management of lands inherited there, and with their farming kin scattered across southwest Wexford (Fig. 3). Although there were plenty of Wexfordmen on Sweetmans' vessels, there is no convincing evidence of a specifically Newbawn or indeed Wexford bias in the origins of Irish settlers in Placentia. Pierce Sweetman's residence at Blenheim, the chapel at nearby Ballygunner, the outport of Passage and particularly the family's premises in Waterford were more at the hub of their social or trading territory. The quay of Waterford was a magnet for labour migrations from at least three counties, Waterford, Kilkenny and Tipperary. Immigrants settling in Sweetman's trading territory in Placentia (Fig. 2) came from these places as well as from Wexford. We do not know how actively the Sweetmans were engaged directly in recruiting labourers in Ireland for their fishery or to what extent it was delegated to captains and clerks. Writing from Placentia in the fall of 1802, Pierce Sweetman noted that the captain of their passenger vessel, Dan Carroll, was "very capable of shipping the servants" at Waterford in the spring "in the case of my absence." On the other hand,

William Doyle of Ballyruane, a nephew of Father Hearn of Placentia, came out through the Sweetman connection and worked at Placentia prior to establishing a business in St. John's. There are several other specific examples of direct recruiting.

Homeland, county and local loyalties were evident in many spheres of Irish life in Placentia. In 1845, for example, Patrick Hogan, Sweetmans' principal agent there, became embroiled in a conflict with the other leading resident power, the popular Father Walsh of Mooncoin, Co. Kilkenny. A fight between Hogan, some of his staff, and the priest's workmen quickly spread to involve the servants and some local families and their servants. The civil authorities supported Hogan's men, arresting fifteen rivals. Despite opposition from the bench, all were acquitted by a local jury. Angered by both sides, Bishop M. A. Fleming, a native of Carrick-on-Suir, decided to transfer Father Walsh to Merasheen Island. This sparked a riot. Ten of the leading heads of households refused to be enrolled as special constables and government troops were requested from St. John's. "All the county Wexford men are to be driven out," Hogan wrote despairingly to Sweetman in Waterford; "the gang on the street [are] publicly singing 'out now the Y. Bellys . . . ' Father Nowlan's influence here is nothing. . . . They call him a good for nothing old Yellow Belly. . . . I dare not stay. A storm has been raised against me. My life is sought in open day."⁶³ Hogan changed his mind, however, and two weeks later wrote Sweetman from St. John's for passengers and provisions: "Send out 8 youngsters, County Wexford men. No Carrick men or County Kilkenny men. . . . The Wexford men . . . from the same neighbourhood, if possible. This is more important than you may think for the preservation of order Your presence will be indispensable at Placentia the ensuing spring. Those whom you shipped there can only be brought to their senses by yourself"

Pierce Sweetman's attitude to this thicket of conflict is not known, but it was generally acknowledged that his presence in Placentia would have prevented such turbulence. The family was clearly respected by members of the community. A nostalgic letter to the St. John's *Patriot* of 1846 from a Placentia man, for example, noted that the people of Placentia, poor and struggling in recent years, had derived "considerable advantage in past times from the establishment of the House of Sweetman, a house established here probably more than a century." He went on to describe their patronage and benevolence in "ministering to God's poor. . . . At Christmastime all the people of the Shore, as far as Distress, were in the habit of coming to Placentia. In those days the cookroom was always open

and abundant with excellent food and comfortable lodgings freely granted to all comers, there being accommodation for 40 persons there. On Christmas Eve several prime head of cattle were killed and cut up for Christmas presents for the poor . . . decanters of spirits would be filled . . . tea, molasses, flour, etc. . . . distributed. In the days of the Sweetmans never was it thought of that application should be made to the government to relieve the poor. It is only under [their] representatives that the system is adopted of looking abroad for that which had always been dispensed at home. . . . Their love for Mr. Sweetman gave him an influence over them that made his word law."

Not everybody would agree with this rather romantic view of an outharbour merchant, but an oral tradition persists pertaining to the role of the Sweetmans in transporting Irish immigrants from the homeland and fostering settlement in Placentia. Between 1800 and 1840, partly under their auspices, settlements were established or expanded along the northeast and southeast arms of Placentia, on some of the less favoured coves on the islands to the west, and particularly along the Cape Shore. In the 18th century these places had been used by the Sweetmans and others to procure timber in winter for vessel and other construction at Placentia, and for herring and caplin in the spring.

The Irish who came to occupy these places permanently focused on farming; their settlements and material folk culture are described in some detail elsewhere.⁶⁴ Sweetmans promoted farming to feed their servants, particularly during the disruptions in the Irish provisions trade in wartime. John Lambe, a company planter at Point Verde, began farming in Big Barrasway (Fig. 2) with his family as early as 1782. By 1800 he worked fifteen acres of intervale, probably the oldest farm on this shore.⁶⁵ It was subsequently acquired by Sweetmans, who used their winter crews to extend the clearings. They placed one of their servants, Patrick Keefe, there as manager, sometimes with as many as ten young labourers. Fresh vegetables, particularly potatoes, and butter were sent in shallops to company headquarters and fatstock driven along the pathway to Placentia each fall. Keefes eventually acquired the farm. John Skerry of Mooncoin first came to Placentia in 1768 as a migratory fisherman. He spent thirty-four years with Welsh, Saunders and Sweetman before he petitioned, successfully, to settle at Ship Cove with his family, recently transported from Kilkenny. Like his neighbour John Lambe, Skerry established a farm and was later joined by two other Mooncoin men, servants of the Sweetmans, who married Skerry's daughters. By 1802 the Conways had established two stock

farms further south in Distress Cove, under Sweetman auspices.

Over the next three decades, some fifty Irish families established farms along the Cape Shore, the vast majority of them immigrants transported on Sweetmans' vessels from Waterford, or their descendants. Several served for a period as shoremen in Placentia prior to taking up land and retained close commercial ties with company headquarters. Like planters in the fishery, they were supplied by Sweetmans, on the promise of agricultural produce in the fall. A few farms were managed initially by Sweetman servants—at Bruley, Point Verde, Barrasway, Point Lance, and Marticott—but most were owned from inception by their occupiers. Others were purchased later as the Sweetman dynasty declined. This system was in striking contrast to the pervasive tenant farms of the homeland. Despite the differences inherent on the frontier, however, society and settlement in Placentia came to resemble to some extent the Sweetmans' native Newbawn. Although far more numerous, the young male servants in the company cookrooms at Placentia, Point Verde and Marticott were the equivalent of the labourers who slept in farmstead lofts at Faree, Newbawn and Bryanstown. Servant families living in houses, some with small potato gardens, leased from Sweetmans on the beach at Placentia, were similar to the cottier settlements around the edges of the big Wexford farms. And although they did not normally have to pay an annual rent for their properties, the planters and farmers scattered around Placentia Bay resembled the small tenant farmers at Newbawn. Some of them were Sweetman tenants on both sides of the Atlantic.

AN IRISH COD FISHERY, 1810-1850

These settlements at Placentia were spawned by a merchant cod fishery that endured to mid-century. Sweetmans continued to rely on sources overseas for food, despite the growth of local agriculture, and for technology on land and sea. With the demise of Thomas Saunders, Poole was replaced by Waterford as the organizational hub of the fishery and virtually vanished as a source of supplies. Twice as many company vessels entered Placentia from Waterford between 1811 and 1846 as from all other ports combined, excepting St. John's. Almost all the food, drink, clothing, soap, candles and a range of lesser goods needed for this fishery were now produced in Waterford, New Ross and their hinterlands. Moreover, manufactured items were collected by Sweetmans' vessels in Bristol and particularly Liverpool and were shipped mainly through Waterford with salt from Lisbon and Cadiz. When distant Hamburg emerged after 1827 as

an alternative source of food for Newfoundland, the company vessels went there, sometimes shipping the salt provisions and breadstuffs directly to Placentia. Halifax emerged briefly during the conflict with America and the final stages of the Napoleonic Wars as an important source of supplies. The Irish community in this port had strong cultural ties with Placentia and the southern Avalon. Sweetmans linked up with two Irish cod merchants in Halifax, William Power and Hugh Cleary. In 1810 and 1811 Power and Cleary brought 43% of the bread and flour, 17% of the pork, some soap and candles and all the beer, rum, molasses, tobacco, pitch, tar and timber imported by the company from overseas.⁶⁶ These supplies were exchanged for fish. Apart from two shipments of salt from Iberia, all other goods from overseas in these two years came from Waterford.

The value of goods imported is difficult to determine, but it was considerable. Pierce Sweetman's shipments of pork, butter and bread alone from Waterford amounted to almost £8,000 in 1810-11. He was no giant, however, in the ranks of Waterford's extensive trading community. Smith credits him with only £1,300 worth of exports of salt provisions and breadstuffs in the year 1813-14, placing him seventy-first out of eighty-three exporting merchants.⁶⁷ Smith's lists, however, ignore several specialized commodities characteristic of the Newfoundland trade. Moreover, Sweetmans sent their ships to other places to collect produce for sale in Placentia and, in contrast to the majority of Waterford merchants, they traded on their own account. The firm sold close to £13,000 worth of supplies in Placentia in 1816; this would place them in the middle ranks of the Waterford merchant community.

Some exporting merchants integrated the processing and packaging of provisions at Waterford into their general trade. Sweetmans did not. They relied instead on local processors and established exporting houses for Newfoundland produce: Wyse and Quans, Fogartys, Nevins, Penroses and Ridgways for pork and butter; Cherrys, and Strangman and Davis, for porter and beer; Hunts for bread and flour; the cordwainer John Farrell for boots and shoes; Grahams for iron; Whites for cordage and other ship material; and Gatchells for Waterford glass. Half of these firms were Quaker and all of them long engaged in the Newfoundland trade. Sweetmans also shipped goods on the account of artisan producers like the Fennellys, butchers in Waterford, to small traders and even to planters; and they transported passengers and provisions to their Poole neighbours in Little Placentia.

Although the fishery in Newfoundland grew during the latter stages of

the Napoleonic Wars, the quantity of cod produced or exported from Placentia did not. Governor Erasmus Gower commented in 1805 on how much the once considerable trade of this harbour had declined. Only one merchant house continued there, and no more than six to eight vessels arrived each season. Between 1810 and 1827 an average of only four to five vessels arrived at Great Placentia from Europe for cod. Across the bay, by contrast, Burin was booming.⁶⁸ Fewer than 200 fishermen and shoremen were based in the harbour of Placentia and coves nearby, producing 10-12,000 quintals of fish in a good season. Most of this fish, once cured, was delivered by the planters to Sweetmans' premises, the Beach Stores at company headquarters beside Blenheim, the family residence in Placentia (Pl. 11), or the Jersey Stores at the north end of the harbour.



Pl. 11: Blenheim, Placentia, home of Roger F. Sweetman.

Although there was as always competition from local and visiting traders, Sweetmans apparently still dominated the export of cod from Great Placentia. In 1810 and 1811, for example, 21,000 quintals of cod, worth around £15,000, were shipped overseas from there, 80% by the company. The remainder was taken to Halifax by three traders, almost certainly operating through Sweetmans. Over 54% of the fish exported in these two seasons went to Waterford, 27% to Lisbon and 19% to Halifax. Waterford endured as possibly the principal market until the demise of the company's transatlantic trade after 1850. Each year, two to four cargoes of cod, and some

herring, arrived at Sweetmans' premises on Quay Lane, or later at their warehouse in the west end of the city. Cod and seal oil, seal pelts, a small amount of furs, hides for tanning, and timber were also imported. In 1846 close to 8,000 quintals of cod arrived at Waterford in four shipments and were sold for £4,700. Sweetmans also transported cod for neighbouring merchants such as the Koughs of New Ross and Merasheen, and Nicholas Hayes of Waterford and Little Placentia.

Little is known of the distribution of Newfoundland cod in the growing Waterford market. Sweetmans were one of a score of firms engaged in this trade. They advertised cod for sale from their "Newfoundland Fish Store" on George's Street and also delivered fish directly to traders on the quay. The widow Margaret Brownrigg, whose family had leased warehouses on Quay Lane to Pierce Sweetman in 1815, handled a cargo of 2,530 quintals of cod arriving from Placentia in October, 1833, and a number of shipments subsequently. She supplied fresh food and other necessities to the ship's crew, paid whatever expenses were incurred unloading the cargo and settled sailors' accounts with wives and kin after the vessel departed. Through the winter the fish was sold in small amounts to local dealers, mainly women. Upon completion of sales, Brownrigg sent a statement of account to Roger Sweetman at Placentia with comments on the Waterford market, charged a commission and remitted a balance of £1,300 to his father.

The emergence of Waterford as an important market for company cod in the 19th century reflected the spread of poverty there and the concomitant demand for cheap protein. Unlike the majority of Irish merchants now engaged in this trade, however, Sweetmans maintained their links with Iberia and it continued as a cornerstone for company traffic. Roger Sweetman visited there during the depression that followed the war to bolster sales, and he was the only Irish merchant attending a meeting in London two decades later to discuss high duties on Newfoundland cod in south European markets.⁶⁹ According to official statistics, 70% of all cod shipped from Great Placentia overseas between 1810 and 1827 went to Iberia. Cod was sometimes shipped through Waterford, and although the Sweetmans traded with a geographically diffuse range of ports, from Bilbao and Corunna to Madeira and Alicante, their principal markets were Lisbon and Cadiz. Roger Sweetman had close personal ties with the firm's main Iberian agents, Morrogh and Walsh of Lisbon, acting as an occasional agent for them both in Waterford and in Newfoundland, where they were anxious to develop trade.

Sweetmans remained overwhelmingly committed to the cod fishery but did engage in some ancillary trading after the war. Vessels arriving at Placentia from Waterford in the spring were sent on to Quebec, sometimes in ballast, sometimes with fish and other produce, to take timber back to Waterford. Quebec pine and other lumber were advertised for sale off their vessels at anchor in Waterford quay.⁷⁰ Sweetmans also sent their ships from Waterford to English ports, notably to Bristol and Liverpool, with grain, flour and other commodities and brought back manufactured goods for the local market. They shipped provisions from Waterford and Cork to St. John's and took fish from there on freight or on their own account, working through old agents like Hart and Robinson or Hunters and Company. The intensive shuttling of ships between Waterford and Newfoundland, with side voyages to England and Canada, was a popular pattern amongst Irish merchants engaged in the cod trade in the 19th century.

As the Newfoundland economy emerged from its post-war slump, Sweetmans rebuilt their fleet. In 1815 they owned a mere three vessels, but by 1835 they had twelve, most of them ocean-going. No more than half a dozen Irish merchants in the trade operated a fleet of this magnitude. Almost all of these vessels were built at company headquarters in Placentia, or in Cape Breton under the direction of a company shipwright. Sydney and Bras d'Or also became Sweetmans' main source of timber for local construction, coal, and occasionally livestock. With an expanded fleet, Sweetmans entered the seal fishery. In 1828 Pierce Sweetman sent detailed instructions from Waterford to one of his Irish captains to sail for the ice fields and follow the example of experienced sealers. Despite the disadvantage of being headquartered on the south coast, each winter thereafter the company sent two or more vessels with fifty to sixty local men to the seal fishery off Newfoundland's northeast coast. The sealers were signed on at Placentia in March; they were then given supplies and charged 10/- each for a berth. Work on the ice was arduous but the season relatively brief. By mid-April Sweetmans' crews were home. The seal pelts were usually sold in St. John's and the men rewarded with a share of the catch.

Pierce Sweetman died at Blenheim, Waterford, in 1841, having prosecuted the cod trade for over half a century. "No man better sustained, in distant countries or at home, the character of a British merchant," stated an obituary; "he was a deservedly adored husband, parent, friend, and a finished gentleman."⁷¹ His only surviving son, Roger, moved with his family from Placentia to Waterford and assumed sole management of the firm. No other Irish merchant could claim such deep roots in the Newfoundland

trade. Roger Sweetman, born in Co. Wexford at the end of the 18th century, was likely the great-grandson of a Placentia merchant and he himself had spent close to thirty years managing the fishery by the time his father died. Sweetman maintained the traditional triangular pattern of cod trading through the 1840s, the only Waterford-based merchant to do so. He continued to send passengers and provisions to the fishery and to build vessels at Placentia; a 222 ton brig was launched there in 1843. Imports of cod to Waterford increased during the famine, but so did company debts across the Atlantic. The economic and demographic impact of the famine, moreover, virtually ended the residual cod trade with Irish ports. The Sweetmans left Waterford permanently for Placentia in 1850. By now an economic backwater, Placentia had little traffic overseas. The firm's extensive premises were still intact, however, and Roger Sweetman endeavoured to preserve a diminished trade. He survived a bankruptcy in 1854, although he did not register any vessels subsequently. In 1860, after a wretched fishery, Sweetman had to let some of his servants go. Debts owed him exceeded £12,600, only £1,000 less than in 1847. But he ordered supplies from two of the family's agents in St. John's in the following spring and wrote enthusiastically about the prospects for the fishery at Placentia that July. He requested a vessel of around 1,400 quintals capacity from Tobins of Halifax, together with a comprehensive cargo of provisions. A year later he was dead and a family business that extended back over a century finally closed.

CULTURE AND CLASS: THE MERCHANT SOCIETY

The background and behaviour of the dozen or so merchants engaged with the house established by Richard Welsh raise several important issues regarding the nature of Irish mercantile society in the century after 1750. The firm's founder came from a small but active port with a venerable trading tradition and served a long apprenticeship overseas before attaining mercantile status. This route was probably characteristic of many successful merchants from modest backgrounds in 18th century Ireland. Much work, of course, has yet to be done on the social origins of Irish merchants before the typicalness of Welsh's career can be assessed. Scholars suggest that the nascent Irish merchant needed £400 to £500 capital and connections to established houses (Wall; Dickson; Cullen, "The Irish Merchant Communities"). Welsh probably accumulated the requisite capital on his own, but it is likely that most beginners were bequeathed some cash to launch mercantile careers. Fernand Braudel's suggestion that "the best way to make a fortune was to have some money to begin with" generally holds

true. All of Welsh's successors were middle class. Four were the sons of merchants, four the sons of big farmers, and John Blackney was subgentry. All these men had access to credit, whether it came from Irish land, Waterford commerce or the profits of the Placentia cod fishery.

The importance of daughters in the absence of male heirs, and the centrality of marriage and affinal kin in the perpetuation and, to some extent, vertical integration of a mercantile house, are demonstrated in the Welsh succession. His three daughters married in their teens, two of them departing the rudimentary society of a maritime frontier for the relative social sophistication of the homeland. Apart from recruiting men from four strategic families to protect and continue the trade, these marriages gave the firm better access to critical source areas for labour, provisions and capital and, to a lesser extent, access to markets or market information. Successful trading depended to a considerable degree on trust, and this was best ensured through ties of kin.

In contrast to the trade in some colonial staples like sugar and tobacco, the cod fishery did not spawn elaborate formal mercantile partnerships. Apart from its high-water mark in the 1780s, the Placentia firm was never much more than a loose association of two or three families operating under the direction of a single head, Braudel's "campagnia." There is no evidence that affinal relatives such as William Furlong, Roger Sweetman, Paul Farrell or John Blackney were ever active formal partners. When the Sweetmans began to gain control, Pierce's two brothers were recruited, but they did not play a major role. Three other brothers remained on their Wexford farms, and none of Pierce's brothers-in-law, nor his Wexford son-in-law, a Waterford merchant, was involved. After 1810 the enterprise was managed by Pierce Sweetman and his son, and then by the son alone. The profits from the cod trade could be considerable, as Richard Welsh vividly revealed, but this fishery did not require an extensive investment of capital to mount a venture. A large group of individual firms, small in scale and centered on the nuclear family, dominated cod commerce for four centuries. Saunders and Sweetman in the 1780s were more the exception than the rule. The individualism pervading entrepreneurship in the cod fishery stands in contrast to the large extended family partnerships or syndicates that typified the business organization of, for example, the tobacco lords of the Clyde (Devine).

Despite the importance of daughters and their dowries in the formation of mercantile partnerships and the continuity of a firm, merchant society was strongly patriarchal. Women were rarely involved directly in trade.

There is no record of wives or daughters engaged in clerical work in the counting houses of Welsh, Saunders and Sweetman. Indeed, they are seldom mentioned outside marriage settlements, wills and associated property transactions. Richard Welsh's headstone inscription reflects the male ambience of the merchant's world in a colonial setting. In the socially more mature homeland, however, women had a more important role. The relatively commodious villas or town houses were the foci of merchant socializing, and wives sometimes travelled with their husbands on business. The *Waterford Chronicle* of 1776 reported, for example, the arrival of "John Blackney, Esq. and his lady" from Bristol on the Tyrone yacht, a vessel owned by Blackney's brother-in-law, John Wyse.⁷² Pierce Sweetman's entourage for England in 1793 included his lady, his two sisters, his two sisters-in-law, some servants, attendants and their chaplain, Reverend Deane. At Blenheim in Waterford they employed four servants, two labourers and a family in the gate lodge. Pierce's daughters were educated by the French Benedictine nuns at Winchester. When she "entered society," his eldest daughter was reportedly fluent in French and "one of Ireland's leading harpists." After their mother's death, Pierce's two surviving daughters entered the Ursuline convent in Waterford and became reverend mothers, typical of middle class Catholics in the nineteenth century.

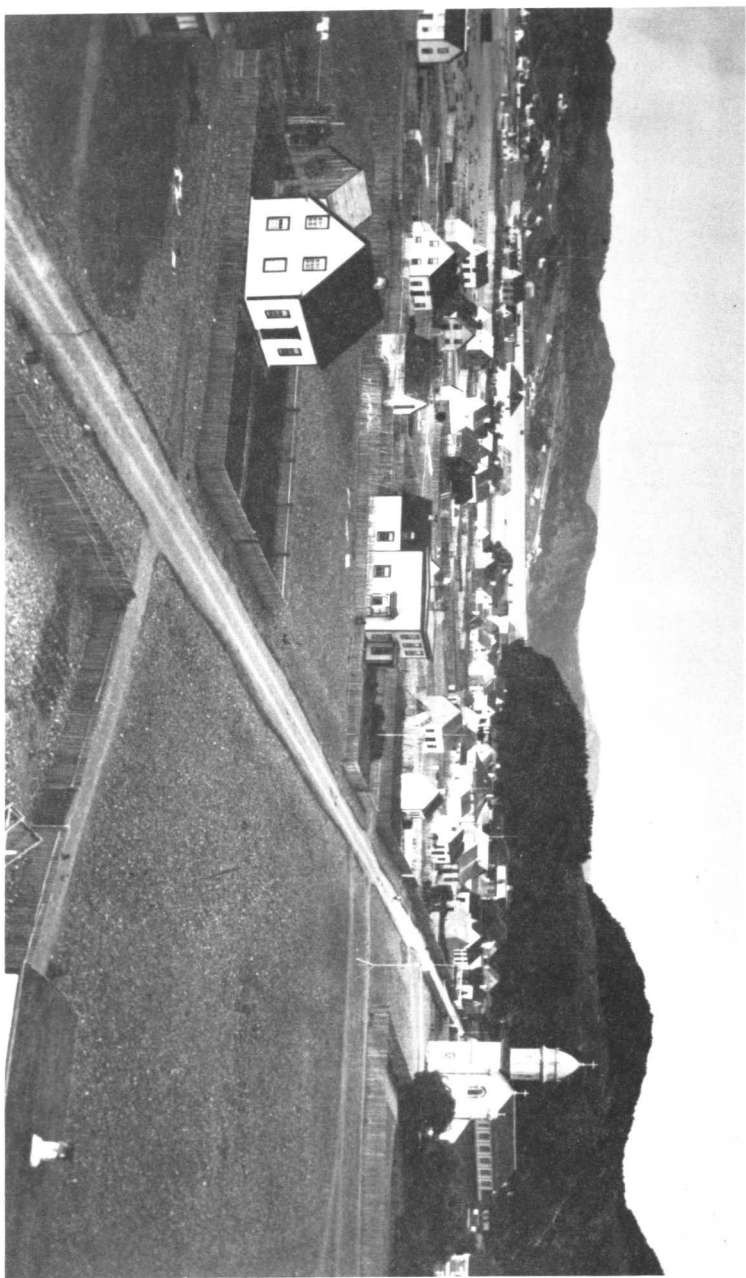
Marriages involving spouses from another country or even denomination were relatively rare in merchant society in the homeland. Less is known of Irish merchants abroad, but the opportunity for mixed marriages was greater. The presence of Protestant English spouses like Wibault and Saunders in the Welsh and Sweetman marriage field reflects the social and economic conditions of a fishing frontier. Marriageable women, especially English ones, were scarce in places like Placentia. Management of the fishery there required the close cooperation of a tiny trading class, composed of English and Irish. Inter-ethnic partnerships sometimes resulted and could be accompanied by a marriage, as in the case of William Saunders and Ann Welsh. Such unions were rare but understandable in a frontier society where the church was indifferent and the middle class were few. Something of the indiscipline of 18th century mercantile society in Placentia may be revealed in the birth to Anne Saunders of a son in adultery. Thomas Saunders, moreover, did not marry his Irish mistress, but bequeathed his property to one of their children, whom Michael Sweetman married in the Anglican church in Poole.

Both Saunders and Sweetman welcomed the establishment of a resident Catholic clergy in Placentia. It was probably the best guarantee of law and

order among the servant class. They provided a house and land near company headquarters for Father Burke in 1785 and collected £20 from their servants to help build a chapel.⁷³ When Burke's jurisdiction was challenged by Father Lonergan, an unlicensed priest popular among the Irish servants, William Saunders used his influence with the governor in St. John's to have him banished. Pierce Sweetman was the third most generous donor, after Prince William Henry, the future monarch, and Thomas Saunders, to the fund to build an Anglican church (Pl. 1) in 1786. On the insistence of the prince, he also took the oath of allegiance, something his kinsman Bishop Sweetman in Wexford would not have approved. Pierce Sweetman was a close friend of the Anglican ministers in Placentia. In order to attract a replacement in 1803, for example, he offered half an acre of company ground near the church, and money to build a parsonage.⁷⁴ The amicable relationship was maintained by Roger Sweetman. In a speech to the Catholic Association of Waterford attended by Daniel O'Connell, the St. John's merchant Patrick Morris instanced the role of the Sweetmans in the maintenance of religious harmony in Newfoundland. When the Anglican church had deteriorated there and was threatened with closure, Roger Sweetman and Father Cleary of Bannow organized the Irish congregation to help the small Protestant community have it repaired.⁷⁵ Placentia avoided much of the sectarian tension that split society in larger centres like St. John's after 1830.

Sweetmans were among the mainstays of the Catholic church in Placentia from its inception. Most of the priests were from Wexford, and Sweetman vessels were available to transport goods and materials for them. Bishop Fleming stayed at Blenheim on his tour of southern Newfoundland, and Bishop J. Doyle visited Pierce Sweetman at Blenheim in Waterford. Sweetmans' long association and kinship with Wexford bishops conferred social status at home and abroad. Relics of Bishop Nicholas Sweetman are still in the family's possession in Newbawn and, like most big farmers, the Sweetmans were a significant source of support for the local parish church as it emerged from the seclusion of the 18th century. There are few closer analogues in the evolution of society and settlement on both sides of the Atlantic than the Irish Catholic church with its middle class nurture, exemplified here by the Sweetmans of Newbawn and Placentia (Pl. 12).

Despite their status as leading residents in a small colonial community, neither Richard Welsh, Pierce Sweetman nor his brothers was ever appointed to administrative positions in Placentia. Catholics were not allowed to hold office, and all surrogates, magistrates, justices of the peace, con-



Pl. 12: Placentia, c. 1900, showing the modern Catholic church, built 1878 near the site of the first Irish chapel, 1786. The tower of the Anglican church is visible in the centre of the photograph and Blenheim is to the left. In the foreground are some houses typical of Irish fishermen and artisans in the 19th century.

stables, jurors, customs officers and other officials were drawn from the Protestant class. Richard Welsh's only recorded public duty was to collect taxes from planters and servants for the upkeep of the Anglican cemetery, the courthouse and the jail, and to provide for those in distress. This responsibility, traditionally assigned to the leading merchant in a harbour, was assumed by his successors. Fear of Irish Catholic disloyalty in Placentia continued among the authorities to 1750, but there is little reference to it thereafter. Certainly the Catholic merchants were loyal, as they were almost everywhere in the empire. Welsh and the Sweetmans enjoyed the full confidence of the colonial authorities, to their mutual benefit. They cooperated closely to maintain social order and ensure economic control. In this they were usually supported by the church. When Michael Sweetman insulted the local court, the Anglican minister intervened on his behalf and the governor advised a light sentence since his presence at Placentia was essential for a successful fishery. This is not to say that mercantile loyalty and economic power meant total dominion over planters and servants. Richard Welsh was fined by the local court for assault and mistreatment of servants, and on several occasions was ordered to pay them their wages or reimburse planters. So were his successors.

The military at Placentia, the strong arm of colonial authority, bolstered mercantile control and ensured total loyalty. It not only protected a merchant fishery but was a source of lucrative contracts to merchant houses, particularly in wartime. Richard Welsh established healthy relations with the military through the Wibaults, and the company was active thereafter in the local garrison trade. James Downes took advantage of his position as chief company agent to organize a local force of some ninety men for the protection of the harbour early in the Napoleonic campaign. He had problems, however, procuring funds from St. John's. And Pierce Sweetman had more than pure loyalism on his mind when he informed Colonel Skinner in a communication on the parlous state of the town's fortifications that he was always willing to aid the work of His Majesty. Sweetman had taken the oath, perhaps under pressure from the virulently anti-Catholic Prince William Henry; but he was willing to serve on a committee over forty years later to pledge loyalty to William as king. His behaviour in 1798 illustrates the primacy of profits in the merchants' world. While his uncle plotted rebellion in Newbawn, Pierce Sweetman left his family at Bryanstown for Poole to organize the season's shipping and then proceeded to Placentia.⁷⁶

A gradual liberalization of laws proscribing Catholics from holding office allowed merchants to participate more in political life, first in Ireland,

then in Newfoundland. Following the Catholic declaration of loyalty, signed by over 200 men in Waterford in 1793, two of the three Catholic merchants elected to the Grand Jury, John Blackney and Thomas Quan, had close company connections. Pierce Sweetman's social status was also enhanced when he was appointed justice of the peace for Wexford in 1806. Like most Catholic merchants, he was a supporter of the Waterford Liberal Protestant M.P. Sir John Newport and was active in the struggle for Catholic emancipation.⁷⁷ While in Waterford, Sweetman did not run for any political or administrative office. He focused instead on humanitarian causes, particularly the alleviation of local distress. His son belonged to a much more political generation of Irish-Newfoundland merchants, emboldened by the success of their idol, O'Connell. As the leading resident in Placentia, Roger Sweetman played an important part in the effort to improve local conditions through political representation in the 1830s, a critical decade in Newfoundland's evolution. He was elected foreman of the Grand Jury in 1830, justice of the peace shortly thereafter, and represented Placentia in Newfoundland's first House of Assembly between 1833 and 1836. Sweetman served on several committees in the House, using his expert knowledge of the fishery, trade and agriculture to stimulate development in his district and to introduce social and institutional reform. On his return to Waterford he followed the example of other merchants formerly resident in Newfoundland, notably Patrick Morris, James Kent, Thomas Fogarty and Thomas Meagher, a relative by marriage, all of whom entered local politics. Sweetman was a member of Waterford Town Council from 1842 to 1850. He was active in the movement for Repeal and visited O'Connell in Richmond jail. During the famine he was treasurer of the local relief committee. His final years as a public servant were spent in Placentia, beseeching the government in St. John's for funds to ameliorate the growing poverty in the bay.

Perhaps the most notable feature of the firm established by Richard Welsh was its longevity. Continuity was not a characteristic of merchant society. Most family firms lasted only a generation, few more than two. In the century after 1750, over 100 Irish firms entered the Newfoundland trade and although some, such as the Elmeses and Koughs of New Ross, were remarkably enduring, none matched Welsh and his successors. Indeed, few English merchant houses in Newfoundland survived for more than a century. The durability at Placentia appears more striking when one considers that over the four generations of merchants active in the company only Pierce Sweetman produced a lasting male heir. But studies of durable mer-

chant houses have revealed the importance of matrilineal descent in patterns of succession. S. M. Socolow, for example, found that over 40% of the merchants of Buenos Aires had no male heirs and brought in daughters to perpetuate family firms.

The Sweetmans came from a traditional middle class Catholic society in Wexford, with a strong sense of a distinguished past. Pierce Sweetman's father and grandfather lie buried with other members of their families beside Bishop Sweetman in Clongeen. They are commemorated in impressive tombstones similar to that for Richard Welsh in Placentia. They had survived the calamitous 17th century and with renewed vigour subsequently branched out from their heartland in Newbawn. The Sweetman family crest decorated the company's bills of exchange issued in Waterford and Placentia. Their tenacity in the volatile cod trade was mirrored in their retention of lands inherited or purchased in southeast Ireland (Fig. 3, Table 1) and in Newfoundland. Richard Welsh established a pattern by investing some of the profits from Placentia in the New Ross land market through the Tottenhams. Roger Sweetman continued to collect rents from tenants on the ancestral farm at Collopswell up to the 1840s when it was passed on to his cousins, the Farrells of Fary. Sweetmans relied on their farming kin in Wexford to administer this and other holdings in their absence from the county. Although they departed Wexford for good in 1806, Pierce and his family are still remembered there in family tradition. They may not have had the cohesiveness of a Scottish clan, but they maintained their links with their native place, even when overseas. Cod from Placentia was sent to the farm at Ballymackesey, for example, as late as the 1840s. Although permanently resident in Placentia by 1853, Roger Sweetman still had a farm of seventy acres in Faree let to an undertenant, and he still retained the family interests in Blenheim. Lists of tenants, details of leases and maps of farms from Wexford and Kilkenny survive in Placentia. Roger's sister Juliet leased ninety-five acres to six tenants in Rochestown and 350 acres to seven tenants in Rathduff. At least part of the latter property was still in her hands in 1868. Roger Sweetman died in 1862, leaving a widow and one child, a daughter, who was married to an English mining engineer. Although they inherited the premises and lived in Placentia, they did not continue the business into a fifth generation. Placentia's long tradition of overseas trading was over. But the property in Placentia, procured by Richard Welsh in the 1750s, remains in the family's possession to this day.

Notes

¹This paper is drawn from research begun in 1973 and is part of a larger project on the Irish migrations to Newfoundland. For research assistance, my thanks to Howard Brown and Edward Tompkins of the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANI), and to Maura Mannion. I am grateful to the Institute for Social and Economic Research, Memorial University, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Ottawa, for research funds, and to Randall Verran and the Careens of Placentia, the Cadigans of Newbawn, the Sweetmans of Ballymackesey, the Cullens of Adamstown and Dan Dowling of Glenmore for assistance in the field. Special thanks to Gary McManus, Memorial University of Newfoundland Cartography Laboratory (MUNCL), Department of Geography, Memorial University, St. John's, for the maps and genealogy, and to Dr. Gordon Handcock, Department of Geography, Memorial University, for background information on the English fishery.

There are now several studies of Irish merchants at home and their trade overseas, but few scholars have yet examined Irish merchants abroad. See, however, William D. Griffen, "The Irish on the Continent in the Eighteenth Century," L. M. Cullen, "Merchant Communities Overseas, the Navigation Acts and Irish and Scottish Responses," "The Irish Merchant Communities of Bordeaux, La Rochelle and Cognac in the Eighteenth Century," and *The Emergence of Modern Ireland, 1600-1900*; E. R. R. Green, "The Irish in American Business and Professions," John Mannion, "The Waterford Merchants and the Irish-Newfoundland provisions trade 1770-1820," "Nevins, Archibald," and "Patrick Morris and Newfoundland Irish Immigration," David N. Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen and Revolutionary America, 1760-1820*; and Augustin G. Ravina, *Burguesia Extranjera y Comercio Atlantico: La Empresa Commercial Irlandesa en Canarias (1703-1771)*.

²Minutes, New Ross Corporation, April 16, 1759, Tholsel, New Ross; Headstone Inscription, Anglican Cemetery, Placentia.

³Great Britain, House of Commons, 10 (1785-1801), *Report from the Committee on the State of the Newfoundland Trade* (1793), Testimony of Aaron Graham, 433-63.

⁴Colonial Office (CO) records, Public Record Office (PRO), Kew, series 194, vol. 9, ff. 261-63.

⁵CO 194/1/107.

⁶CO 194/7/48.

⁷CO 194/8/52; /9/212.

⁸GN2/1/A/2/80 (Petition of John Bryan, William Bryan, Daniel Kennedy, Edward King and Michael Sullivan of Little Placentia, servants, against Captain Alexander Ley, Placentia, September 14, 1753); the GN and GB series of MSS are in PANI; CO 194/13/113-4.

⁹PANI Placentia Court Records (PCR) Sept. 15, 1757; Sept. 2, 1758; May 6, 1762; Oct. 16, 1764.

¹⁰Minutes, New Ross Corporation, April 16, 1759.

¹¹Registry of Deeds (RD), Henrietta St., Dublin, 187540 (1750); Will of Richard Welsh, Placentia, Sept. 27, 1770. PRO London, Chancery Court of Canterbury, 137, March 6, 1771. I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Gordon Handcock for this latter document and for the wills of William and Thomas Saunders.

¹²PCR Oct. 6, 1767. In 1763 the court of Placentia had placed Welsh under a bond of £500 not to supply these planters and servants but he was granted permission to do so when the Poole house ran short of provisions.

¹³CO 194/15/14; *Lloyd's List of Voyages* (LV) Aug. 24, 1760; Admiralty (ADM), Class 7 Misc./90 (1760); Register, Mediterranean Passes (MP) Admiralty, May 23, 1765. Data on shipping are located in the Maritime History Archive (MHA), Memorial University of Newfoundland.

¹⁴PCR Sept. 20, 1763.

¹⁵PCR Sept. 13, 15, 1757; Aug. 29, 1758; March 3, July 28, 1762; Oct. 3, 1763; July 14, Sept. 24, 1764; Oct. 7, 14, 1765; Oct. 3, 1768; Sept. 28, 1770; GN2/1/A/3/232-3.

¹⁶ADM7/91 (1765)/92 (1766)/94 (1769); LV Jan. 12, 20, April 25, 26, Nov. 19, Dec. 26, 1768; Nov. 3, 15, 1769; Jan. 29, March 22, 1770.

¹⁷*Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, Sept. 8, 1767, National Library of Ireland, Dublin (NLI); Man-nion, "Waterford Merchants" 198.

¹⁸LV Aug. 23, 1767; MP Sept. 4, 1767; Dec. 2, 1768; List of Freeman, Waterford, Jan. 26, 1768, NLI; PCR Sept. 6, 21, Oct. 1, 1768; Sept. 6, 1769; Oct. 1, 1770.

¹⁹*Report from the Committee on the State of the Newfoundland Trade*, 433-63. Welsh's obituary is published in *Finn's Leinster Journal* (FLJ), 1771: "Died, some time ago, Richard Welsh, Esq. Placentia, a gentleman universally and deservedly lamented by all degrees and ranks of people. Reported he died worth £100,000. Some time ago, married, at the same place, William Saunders to Miss Welsh, daughter of Richard, with an immense fortune" (NLI).

²⁰G. W. L. Nicholson, *The Fighting Newfoundlander* 5; Jean-Pierre Proulx, *Placentia: 1713-1811* 137; CO194/12/33-6; GN2/1/A/2/83. A Paul Wibault was recorded at Placentia in 1753, and Paul Welsh Wibault may be his son. The latter was nominated co-heir with Welsh's three daughters should David Welsh die. Paul Welsh Wibault, Gent., was recorded living at Mount Prospect, a villa on the north bank of the Suir, outside Waterford, between 1778 and 1787. He is not mentioned in any subsequent administration of the Welsh fortune. See FLJ Dec. 26, 1778; RD 390298 (1787).

²¹Minutes, Ross Corporation, Oct. 2, 1771. Records of shipping from New Ross were usually subsumed under Waterford in the 18th century.

²²FLJ Nov. 18, 1768; LV Jan. 29, Mar. 15, 1770; Jan. 1, Feb. 10, Apr. 6, 29, Aug. 3, 30, Dec. 9, 10, 29, 1771; Jan. 3, 27, Mar. 3, Apr. 13, Nov. 27, Dec. 3, 1772; Jan. 18, Apr. 23, May 2, 23, July 13, 1773; Feb. 12, 26, Mar. 13, Apr. 7, July 4, Aug. 8, Oct. 17, Nov. 6, 23, 1774; Apr. 4, Oct. 16, Nov. 16, 1775; ADM May 2, 1772; July, 1773; FLJ Feb. 15, Sept. 8, Nov. 25, Dec. 5, 1772; Jan. 27, Apr. 17, May 19, Dec. 24, 1773; Mar. 1, 23, 1774; Mar. 1, 1775; *Waterford Chronicle* (WC) Jan. 16, 1771 NLI.

²³FLJ March 18, 1775.

²⁴FLJ April 15, Dec. 13, 1775; Jan. 31, 1776; LV Dec. 22, 1775.

²⁵Roman Catholic Marriage Register, Cathedral Parish, Waterford, Apr. 11, 1775, NLI; FLJ Feb. 27, 1773; Jan. 19, May 28, 1774; Apr. 15, 1775; Feb. 4, May 31, Sept. 20, 1775; Minutes, Waterford Corporation, Sept. 26, 1772, NLI.

²⁶FLJ Sept. 20, 1775; Feb. 7, Oct. 16, 1776; Oct. 3, Dec. 19, 1777; Mar. 14, 1780; Dec., 1783; WC July 23, 1776.

²⁷CO 194/30/120. The town had attained "the superiority of a capital over so many small harbours and coves in the extensive bay . . . and of others situated further to the westward."

²⁸CO 194/35/139-42.

²⁹GN2/1/A/5/97; 8/12; GB2/1 Sept. 14, 25, 1775; Sept. 26, Oct. 6, 1776; Correspondence, Royal Engineers, St. John's.

³⁰My thanks to Julian Walton for this reference and the details on the Strange family from the notarial records in Cadiz. See footnote 40 below.

³¹Leigh Estate Papers, private mss, Rosegareland House, Wexford. The lease was renewed in 1767 at £153 a year. My thanks to the Leigh family for allowing me to inspect these documents and an excellent 18th century map of the farms of Newbawn.

³²Will of Edmund Sweetman, Abbeyville, 1821, Sweetman Papers, now at PANL. My thanks to the late Randall Verran of Placentia for access to these papers. RD 207262 (1760), 350184 (1782), 44246 (1791), 488154 (1794), 579573 (1806), 2215 (1839).

³³Minutes, Ross Corporation, Oct. 7, 1786, Admission of Roger Sweetman, Papist, Gentleman; Richard Lucas, *A General Directory of the Kingdom of Ireland* (Dublin: R. P.

Dugdale, 1788).

³⁴PCR Oct. 29, 1785; Aug. 22, 24, 1786; Will of William Saunders, Poole, Nov. 8, 1787, PRO, Calvert MS 210, 1788; Letter Book of Saunders and Sweetman (LBK), 1788-1803, June 24, Sept. 18, 25, 26, 1788; May 20, 26, Oct. 26, 1789; June 15, Aug. 13, 1790, PANI P7/A/22; Diary of Benjamin Lester, merchant, Poole, Dec. 8, 1789, Feb. 9, Mar. 21, 1790, PANI P3/B/4.

³⁵LBK June 24, 1788.

³⁶LBK Nov. 4, 1788; Nov. 3, Dec. 6, 1789; June 1, Oct. 27, 1793. Tom Saunders, Placentia, to John Blackney, Nov. 1, 1790: "If you have 50 barrels of good pork made up when [Captain] Warn arrives put it on board as we will need it at Poole for the fitting out of our ships in the spring."

³⁷LBK June 11, Aug. 11, Sept. 6, 1788; June 2, Sept. 22, Nov. 3, 1789; May 20, Sept. 13, Nov. 15, 1791; Sept. 21, 1792; Apr. 1, July 23, 1793. Saunders complained that a poor harvest in Quebec in 1788 forced bread prices upwards in Newfoundland.

³⁸Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to Foreign Parts, Oct. 28, 1788; Box 1A/17 Series C, PANI.

³⁹LBK May 6, 11, 16, June 3, Sept. 26, Oct. 20, 1788; May 29, June 3, 26, 1789; May 7, 1790; June 1, July 23, 1793.

⁴⁰Julian Walton, "Census Records of the Irish in Eighteenth Century Cadiz," 748-56. Pedro Doudall, in Cadiz since 1733, lived beside Lorenzo Strange who settled there ten years later, in 1743. Both were merchants and unmarried. Two of the Shiels family from Glenmore, one a cashier, one a clerk, apparently lived with Strange.

⁴¹Waterford Corporation, Admissions of Freeman Nov. 26, 1740; Jan. 5, 1778; ADM7/86 (1750) 1672; RD 188584 (1741), 330552 (1766); WC Dec. 12, 1771; Roman Catholic Register, Marriages, St. Patrick's Parish, Waterford, April 8, 1791, NLI.

⁴²RD 44246 (1791), 465580 (1793), 492226 (1796), 497381 (1796), 512112 (1797), 586211 (1806).

⁴³RD 389129 (1785); Diary of Benjamin Lester, Poole, Sept. 6, 1791; Saunders and Sweetman Ledger, Placentia, 1799; Newman Ledger, June 1, 1799, PANI; PCR Aug. 18, Nov. 2, Nov. 7, 1800; Sept. 2, 1802; LBK, Oct. 2, Oct. 21, 1802; Sept. 20, 1803.

⁴⁴LBK Dec. 7, 1792; Oct. 7, 27, Nov. 4, 1793; Dec. 24, 1803.

⁴⁵Elmes Papers, June 19, 1794, NLI. Elmes had been a crewman on one of the Thomas Kough and Co. vessels in the New Ross - St. John's trade and, though offered a captaincy, moved to Sweetmans in 1791.

⁴⁶CO 194/40/179; Lester Diary, Poole, July 6, 1798; Saunders and Sweetman Ledger, 1799; *Waterford Mirror* (WM), Sept. 24, Dec. 21, 1801; June 24, 1807, NLI; RD 460330 (1789), 574129 (1802), 689287 (1804), 576181 (1805), 583105 (1806); LBK Sept. 29, Oct. 6, 7, 9, 21, 1802; March 6, April 17, July 8, Aug. 20, Sept. 14, 20, Oct. 6, 1803.

⁴⁷Name files, Saunders, MHA.

⁴⁸LBK Oct. 6, 21, 1802; Aug. 20, Oct. 6, 7, 1803; May 22, June 15, July 4, Aug. 20, 1804; GN2/1/A/19/61, 169-170.

⁴⁹Imports to Placentia, GN2/1/A/19/434-5;/20/60-61, 100-1;/24/91-2;/25/105-6;/26/89-90.

⁵⁰LBK June 15, 1804. Only seven passengers are recorded from Ireland this spring, compared to 147 the previous season.

⁵¹LBK Oct. 6, 1802; Aug. 20, 1803; July 4, 1804.

⁵²PCR Sept. 3, Oct. 21, 1799; Duckworth Papers, 3/9 (1811), PANI PY5; Pleas, Supreme Court, St. John's, Nov. 6, 1798; Dec. 11, 1799, PANI.

⁵³LBK Aug. 20, Sept. 5, 20, 1803.

⁵⁴LBK Sept. 29, Oct. 6, 1802.

⁵⁵Exports from Placentia, GN2/1/A/18/432-3; 20/58-9, 98-9; 24/93-4; 25/107-8; 26/91-2; Duckworth Papers, Oct. 1809 - Sept. 1811, passim.

⁵⁶June 2, 1797, Will of Thomas Saunders, Poole; Collingwood 215/1810, Dorset Archives, Dorchester. Her brother, Francis Ryan, was given £500 but is not mentioned subsequently in connection with the firm. PCR Nov. 7, 1805; GN2/1/A/19/169-70; name files, Saunders, MHA.

⁵⁷Data on the acquisition of property in Placentia Bay by the company are extensive and extend back to the 1750s. This list comes from L BK Feb. 13, March 6, 1803; the Sweetman Papers, 1810; and the *Royal Gazette* (St. John's), Aug. 30, 1810, PANI. It was noted in the last source that most of the properties were originally granted in the reign of Louis XIV of France.

⁵⁸RD 665552 (1810), 735231 (1818). The property of Blenheim was leased in 1791 by the Marquis of Waterford to Samuel Roberts, a Waterford architect and banker. He improved and sublet the demesne to Robert Porter in 1805 for £184 a year. Porter sold his interest to Sweetman for £1000 five years later.

⁵⁹L BK, Oct. 6, 9, 1802.

⁶⁰GN2/1/A, 1811-1827, passim. Passengers are rarely mentioned in newspaper reports of vessels arriving at Waterford from Placentia during this period.

⁶¹Sweetman Papers, Indentures, 1825-6.

⁶²A "youngster" was an inexperienced boy or man; a "captain" in this context was a youngster who served as cook in the fishing boat. For definitions of words used in Newfoundland, see G. M. Story, W. Kirwin, J. D. A. Widdowson, *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*.

⁶³GN2/2/53/585-7; *The Patriot* (St. John's), Nov. 12, Dec. 24, 1845; Jan. 7, 1846, PANI; Sweetman Papers, Jan. 2, 5, 16, 1846. Rev. Pelagius Nowlan (1784-1871) came from Kilrush, Co. Wexford, and was priest at Little Placentia.

⁶⁴John Mannion, *Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada and Point Lance in Transition*.

⁶⁵PCR Aug. 11, 1800; Sept. 24, Dec. 16, 1802; Feb. 16, 1803; Sweetman Papers, July 9, 1825.

⁶⁶Duckworth Papers, 1810-11, passim. Later the Tobins, Halifax's leading Irish-Newfoundland firm, with branches in St. John's and Cork, were important Sweetman agents. See GN2/1/A, 1811-27, passim, Imports, Placentia.

⁶⁷Smith's Annual List of Exports from Waterford, May 1, 1813 - 30 April, 1814, MS 13370/10 (1814), NLI.

⁶⁸GN2/1/A/18 (1805) Nov. 28.

⁶⁹Sweetman Papers, Mar. 14, 1817; *Public Ledger* (St. John's), Mar. 27, 1838, PANI.

⁷⁰V Aug. 20, 1816; Aug. 12, 1817; WC Aug. 4, 9, 14, 1819; July 21, 1821; WM July 11, 1828; Aug. 11, Dec. 21, 1830; July 9, Dec. 9, 1831.

⁷¹*Waterford Mail*, April 21, 1841, NLI.

⁷²WC July 23, 1776; *Waterford Herald*, June 22, 1793, NLI.

⁷³PCR Sept. 10, Oct. 27, 29, 1785; July 20, Aug. 1, 22, 24, Sept. 4, 1786; GN2/1/A/10/197.

⁷⁴L BK Oct. 6, 1802; Sept. 14, 1803.

⁷⁵WM Jan. 15, 1829; *The Newfoundlanders* (St. John's), April 9, 1840, PANI.

⁷⁶GN2/1/A/12/263, 351-2; L BK July 8, 1803.

⁷⁷*Waterford Herald*, April 25, 1793; GN2/1/A/12/263, 351-2; L BK, July 8, 1803; Sweetman Papers, July 9, Aug. 9, 1806; WM May 26, 1807; April 26, 1829; WC Jan. 13, 1819.

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