

*Diane M. Coffey: A Clash of Ideologies:
Fishermen/Loggers in the Logging Industry*

The history of Newfoundland and its traditional economy has been defined by the seasonality of the fishery. Early Europeans settled along coastal regions in bays and inlets that provided them with access to the sea's resources. For the fishing families, which formed the nucleus of these outport communities, dependence on the sea meant that economic survival was precarious at best. Consequently, the economy of the fisher families was pluralistic: developed in response to the uncertain nature of the fishery, it evolved into a complex interplay of internal and external socio-cultural and economic dimensions. The family functioned as an economic unit, within a typical patriarchal and paternalistic framework. This framework defined the social and economic position of the fishermen both in and outside the community. When fishermen sought external sources of short-term waged labour to supplement their income during poor fishing seasons, it was generally in the logging industry. Pulp and paper companies took advantage of seasonally available loggers from fishing communities as a reserve labour pool of less skilled, much more poorly paid workers. In return for seasonal work in the camps, fishermen had to give up control of their time and space to the logging companies.

There was extensive use of primary documentation in this paper, especially two Enquiries carried out during 1924-25 and 1934 that illustrate the methods employed by government and companies to control and use the fishermen loggers' labour. Fishermen crossed industries with mixed results. The literature suggests the social complexity in the relationship meant that loggers—including fishermen/loggers—were not a well-defined cohesive group. The primary aim of the pulp and paper companies was to develop a workforce that was conducive to high levels of production for minimal wages. The government viewed the industry as a means to diversify the economy, to encourage growth and development beyond the fishery. The fishermen, however, typically viewed logging as a secondary source of income. The competing agendas—a struggle for survival versus attempts to maintain and develop industrial prosperity—are evident in an examination of the living and working conditions of the fishermen.

The historiography of Newfoundland was typically the discourse of politics and economic development from the Euro-centric perspective. Settlement of the island

and exploitation of the resources had been for the economic benefit of Britain. It is worth noting that while the fishery has frequently been part of—more often the centre of—intensive studies, the logging industry in which many fishermen sought financial refuge has not received much attention. This trend has been gradually changing in recent years as historians such as Sean Cadigan, John Dufferin Sutherland and Mark McLaughlin have delved into the logging industry. Their research has helped open the history of the marginalised and forgotten people who helped shape and were shaped by the geo-political and cultural circumstances of Newfoundland. Fishermen and loggers, as some of the lowest on the socio-economic ladder were typical of individuals subsumed into larger histories; ironically, they were essentially the backbone of Newfoundland's primary industries.

Because historians are now looking beyond the traditional precepts, they can shed light on the actions and reactions of ordinary people to their social, economic and political environment. In his MA thesis, John Dufferin Sutherland explored the development of the logging industry in Newfoundland. He placed the 1959 International Woodworkers of America strike and the logging industry in a broader political and socio-economic historical context (Sutherland 1, 10). Sutherland argued that merchant and industrial capitalist exploitation of resources and labour led to an uneven distribution of development of the island and had a detrimental affect on the people, economy and resources (Sutherland, 1988 11). The influence of Sutherland's work is evident in James Candow's book, *Lomond: The Life and Death of a Newfoundland Woods Town*. Candow "reconstructed" the company town of Lomond, revealing how logging companies shaped the geographical distribution of communities (66-67). Further to this he showed the inherent problems of company towns dependent on a single industry for survival. As Candow articulated in his book, this form of industrial development cannot easily survive and the resulting social and cultural ramifications for the people of these communities are profound. Resettlement with its disruption of familial and communal ties tends to be the hallmark of these dying towns and outport communities. Lomond was eventually absorbed into the Gros Morne National Park in 1973 (54-57).

Much of the historical discourse (and folklore) of Newfoundland suggest that fisher people were dependent on their kinship and communal networks. In *Fisherman, Logger, Merchant, Miner: Social Change and Industrialism in Three Newfoundland Communities*, Tom Philbrook noted that social norms and expectations were based on "reciprocal and mutual obligations, binding between individuals and groups" (3). Typically, fathers and sons, occasionally aided by hired help, caught the fish; mothers and daughters played a key role as well in

the curing process. Beyond the traditional duties to household and children, women further contributed to the familial/economic unit through their vegetable gardens. In *History of Logging*, Andrew Barker interviewed a logger and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler of Tizzard's Cove, and illustrated that the role of women was extended when men were away from the community. Providing firewood to maintain the house—for heat and food preparation—usually fell to the males, but is one example of a task that was added to the daily routine of women when men were away. Mrs. Wheeler explained that, on at least one occasion when she had difficulty finding adequate firewood, she had to resort to splitting her mat frame for kindling (36).

The Colonial Secretary's Department files from 1911 to 1939 provide further insight into communal life and the interaction between fishermen and the logging industries. The role of the Church and its clergy was to tend to the spiritual needs of community members, but was often extended to that of social and welfare aid during poor fishing seasons. Acting on behalf of fisher families, clergy would appeal to the government for relief, which often involved work cutting pit-props or pulpwood (Colonial File 399). In "*The Commission of Government and the Loggers: The 1937 Strike at Robert's Arm, Newfoundland*", Sutherland examined the power of men in their public and private spheres. He explained that the fishermen/merchant relationship, on the local level, dominated the lives of the fisher families, however, "men possessed substantial power in these patriarchal households through their ownership of family property and of the means of production for fishing and logging".

Emphasis on communal values rather than individual accumulation of wealth continues to shape many outport communities as seen in the division of labour. Rosemary Ommer explains the "moral economy in practices such as the kind of job-sharing that lets someone work long enough to get his or her 'EI' (employment insurance) stamps, and then (unofficially, of course) hand on the job to someone else. This custom is, to local people, common sense." (Ommer 20). Customs such as this have developed over time as people learned to adapt to harsh living conditions, creating a tradition of interdependence out of necessity (Sutherland, 1988 12). Sean Cadigan has researched the social and economic constructions of outport communities in the context of the moral economy. He has demonstrated that fishermen were pragmatic in their exploitation of natural resources. Exploitation of the fishery was determined by need, including the attempts at preservation of such resources for future generations (Cadigan, 38). Conservation efforts extended to the forests, as exemplified in Twillingate in 1926.

The government of the day allowed the cutting of pit-props in an area—on Crown land—that had been ravaged by a forest fire several years prior. Fishermen from surrounding communities united and petitioned the government to re-enact a ban on cutting in the area (Colonial File 321). Fishermen decried the government's actions as detrimental to the future needs of the community as well as the fishery. Continuity in temporal dimensions is obvious in the fisher people's perception of the land, as past traditions are woven into their present and the future. The past informs the present; therefore, understanding the social expectations and assumptions that have evolved over the centuries of settlement in outpost Newfoundland could help define a solution for future economic improvements and viability.

A reference must be made here to Rosemary Ommer's conceptual model, developed to generalise from a number of historical studies, the ideal outpost community. It helps to draw attention to the realities of an often-romanticised communal life. Although Ommer's work is contributory to the historiography of this paper, it also helps provide a general image of how outports were constructed. Her fictitious community, Rosie's Cove, is a compilation of the values, struggles, physical structures and peoples that were inherent in individual communities to varying degrees. From the explanatory analysis of the physical and ideological structure of the community, Ommer illustrated the socio-cultural dimensions of communal life. For instance, the practice of passing land and fishing rights to the oldest son who then employed his brothers as crew indicate the familial nature of the fishing industry. Lines of kinship were vital to establishing economic order and security. As the population grew and access to the sea became scarce, this practice evolved into a "system of drawing lots annually for prime berths," which gave all families access to the "benefits of the fishery" (Ommer 20). Through her ideal model, Ommer produced an image of the social and economic norms that in essence created a localised "social safety net". These communities functioned on a social and cultural ideology that was fundamentally rooted in the need to survive.

Within their communities, fishermen constructed the spaces in which they dominated, lived and worked. Houses, flakes, stages, wharves and churches were all part of what formed the daily spaces the fishermen occupied. Access to the woods was assumed and later ensured by the government; fisher families took what they needed from the forests to provide the basics of life (Cadigan 38). Fisher people deliberately ordered spatial dimensions to maintain the social, cultural, spiritual and daily needs of the people. The community was structured to serve and maintain the individual and the collective (Ommer 24).

The temporal boundaries that guided the fishermen's work in the fishery were at the base of the cultural and social evolution of the community. Life was centred on executing or preparing for the fishing season. Fishermen controlled their hours and means of production, in contrast to their experiences in the logging camps. When not directly involved in fishing, they were able to continue producing economically or socially within the community. In the camps, however, factors such as poor weather meant lost time, which translated into lost wages. Obviously, men in the camps also lost valuable time maintaining their interests at home outside the fishery, such as breaking land, cutting and preparing hay, cutting wood for use in the household or extending farming grounds (Colonial File 62/34A). Logging companies controlled every aspect of the loggers and the fishermen/logger's living, working and social conditions when they were in the camps. This was owed in part to geography—the proximity of the camps in relation to local communities prevented loggers from any real interaction outside the camps during working periods. A natural outcome was that companies further tightened their grip on fishermen/loggers' time.

The control exercised by the fishing merchants and the logging companies differed greatly in how it affected the fishermen. Leaving the community for waged labour, however, was not a new phenomenon that emerged with the logging industry. As historians have previously demonstrated, fishermen and their families were well accustomed to going where work was available; this applied to both men and women. In *The Ice Hunters: A History of Newfoundland Sealing to 1914*, Newfoundland historian Shannon Ryan has provided an in-depth look at the mobility of fishermen in seeking waged labour. Year-round viability of the island had been achieved with the development of the sealing industry, which was entirely dependent on a transient labour force. Throughout the history of the fishing and sealing industries, it is also evident that fishermen were not simply passive victims of the mercantilist system. They periodically engaged in collective action to improve their living and working conditions (Little 6).

In 1908, William Coaker formed the Fishermen's Protective Union. Coaker's advancement of the fishermen's cause further demonstrates the spatial barriers that kept people of the outports subjugated and trapped in a cycle of poverty (Macdonald 20). For instance, education and adequate health care were available in St. John's, at least to those who could afford them, but for the people living in the outports they were luxuries rarely accessed (Macdonald 20). The demands of the fishing industry excluded these people by the sheer physical distances involved. In order to overcome the obvious problems posed by the geographical separations of

fishermen, Coaker established *The Fishermen's Advocate* as a means of uniting and educating them. His ultimate goal was better working conditions for the fishermen as well as improved products for international markets (Macdonald 27). Loggers, however, did not have a union that organised their work, supported their causes or established a legitimate system to effect changes until 1935 (Gillespie 58).

Attempts to improve working conditions for the loggers were difficult and made all the more labour intensive for organisers because they had to finance, find a mode of travel and secure access to the camps. In 1935, Joseph Thompson undertook such an effort by organising the Newfoundland Lumberman's Association. He met with resistance from the companies and the government. Thompson was not permitted to go into the camps to speak with loggers without the companies' permission. As the company controlled both the working and living spaces of the loggers, it was impossible to reach the men without their approval. In a letter from Sir Richard Squires, Thompson was advised to meet with the men outside the camps (Thompson 5). However, the long hours of work—often daylight till dusk—left the men little free time and the distance between the camps and the communities meant the isolation of the loggers in their poverty was difficult to break (Colonial File 627/34A). Thompson did eventually gain access to the camps and the men were able to unite and begin the process of addressing their working conditions. The fact that the loggers were not a cohesive group with a collective identity or shared demands became a defining and dividing element in the attempts to unite them in collective bargaining. The fishermen/loggers were transient labourers in the logging industry, a situation that often created tensions between them and the "all-time" loggers; this division was acutely evident in the 1939 strike in Indian Bay. As reported in *The Newfoundland Lumberman*, in July 1939, efforts to unite the Fishermen's Protective Union with the Loggers' Association met with resistance from the "all-time" loggers. The newspaper articles also revealed that loggers equated their full time commitment to the industry with a higher status of experienced and competent workers that distinguished them as real "loggers as the word [was] generally understood". The notion of time held connotations of prestige and position that excluded the fishermen/loggers and relegated them to a lower rung of the industrial ladder.

In the initiatives taken by the government and the industry, loggers remained the critical factor in production, but they were also the least valued and poorest group. This is clear in the discourse on logging and the primary documentation left by the colonies' government. Conditions in the lumber camps, as described in the commissions of enquiry, demonstrate the companies' view toward their labourers.

The 1924 Commission of Enquiry was established to investigate the “system of logging in the country” (Colonial File 435). Contracting and subcontracting of labour versus waged labour had become a major concern for loggers (Sutherland 1997, 103). Testimony given to Commissioner William Warren sheds light on a number of factors that shaped the assumptions and conditions of loggers’ experiences. Lewis Murphy of Elliston, Trinity Bay, a 24-year-old full time logger, had worked under both systems and expressed a preference for subcontracting, as his earning potential was greatly increased (Colonial File 435). Murphy was an experienced logger and his testimony helps explain the competing agendas between the full-time and part-time labourers. Logging required skill gained through practice that fishermen did not have the time or the desire to pursue; their aim was to supplement their household economy. Consequently, as income was dependent on skill, the fishermen were vulnerable. Salaries varied annually—ranging from \$23 per month to \$75 per month—depending on the availability of labour. In years when “men were scarce” wages were obviously higher, peaking at \$75 per month once between 1913 and 1924 (Colonial File 435). Murphy’s testimony show to two crucial points: first, the demand for increased production and profit, which the fishermen/loggers felt most acutely, and second, a growing division between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled loggers as each tried to achieve the highest possible wages. These divisive and individualised ideals differed significantly from the communal sentiment and were more reflective of a capitalist economy.

Many of the men who testified at the Warren Commission were not average cutters or axe men; they were contractors, superintendents and foremen. Warren noted the apparent lack of interest or support of the commission by the loggers in his letter to the government regarding his investigation (Colonial File 435). He was not, however, accounting for the demands on the loggers that prevented them from testifying. The average logger would have had to leave the camps, travel to where the commission was, testify and then travel back to his camp; resulting in lost time and wages. In the grand scheme of the political and economic spheres, the fishermen had little power to effect major changes.

In 1934, the Commission of Government appointed Gordon Bradley to conduct an enquiry into the conditions of the camps in the Forest Operations in Newfoundland. Bradley found that the camps were inadequate and deplorable, consisting primarily of two buildings, a bunkhouse and a cookhouse. The bunkhouses were overcrowded, lacked proper sanitary facilities; sweat pads and tackle gear were dried in the same area the men lived (Colonial File 627/34A). Bradley summarised the company attitude: “the workmen [was] a mere beast of

burden in which animal life must be maintained that he may labour" (Colonial 627/34A). Bradley's report described the dehumanising and repressive affects of the logging industry on the labourers. He debunked commonly held myths about labour in logging, such as the notion that any man of sound physical well-being who was able and willing to work could earn a decent living in the camps. He also suggested that the fishermen in particular were ill equipped for the work. Further, they lacked the experience and skill necessary to produce enough wood to accumulate a decent living wage for themselves and their families. Bradley's report was not made public; government feared it would set off "strike action in the woods" and outrage the pulp and paper companies (Neary 60-61). The country was economically strapped and dependent on the industries to provide relief and employment. Instead the government responded by using the report to make a deal with the pulp and paper companies that increased the loggers' wages, but only to about half of what Bradley had recommended as a sustainable wage (Gillespie 58).

Timber merchant Harry Crowe, in developing the logging industry in Newfoundland, promoted railway development and construction of what was basically a company town at Hampden. In 1912, Crowe, as president of the Pine and Pulp Company, approached the Newfoundland government with a proposal for, and was granted permission to build, a railway from Bishop's Falls to Bay d'Espoir. He planned to develop Chrome Iron Mines and Pulp and Lumber industries in these regions (Colonial File 196 A 1). His proposal to the government suggested that a great deal of economic growth could be stimulated by such a project. He stated that building a railway would attract foreign investors to exploit the natural resources of the island, thereby increasing the potential for economic growth. Ironically, the railway development as a stimulus for economic diversification led the Newfoundland government to greater debt than profit by 1933. The railway reduced the time and effort required to move about the island and this increased access to and availability of waged labour, but it did not always translate into financial gain for the fishermen in regards to the logging industry (Sutherland 1997, 92-95). The labour strikes at the Labrador Development company and the subsequent Bradley Commission of inquiry into logging in 1934 demonstrate the frustrations and demands of loggers regarding the cost incurred and the effect it had on potential earnings. During the 1934 strike negotiations, workers demanded, "1) that the rate of pay per day be \$2.00 per cord (for rough unpeeled wood) with free board and free transportation, or 2) that the rate be \$2.70 for a cord of rough at the stump, or 3) that the rate be \$2.00 per day and found." In this case, the company offered \$3.50 for cut and peeled wood and \$2.30 for

unpeeled or to provide transportation for loggers wishing to leave. Of the five camps involved, only two accepted the terms of the company and reopened. Loggers in the other three quit and returned home (Sutherland 1997, 95). The railway did not mean greater control or gain for the fishermen. In fact, it sometimes meant less control, as more of their time could be consumed by the industry at a decreased rate of return. The role of the railway in determining the labour force for the logging industry is clearly tied to the wages. Fishermen had to be able to afford to travel to the camps and make enough to return home and, most of all, provide the supplementary income for their families. Neither the government nor the companies were prepared to compensate the fishermen for their travel expenses (Sutherland 1997, 92-95).

Conditions for loggers—full-time—had also changed with the advent of company towns; this, again, did not reflect back to benefits for the fishermen/loggers. The settlement patterns of Newfoundland were typically determined by accessibility to natural resources and the railroads had provided this access to the interior regions. The logging industry followed this trend in the traditional sense, individuals and groups attempting to develop a full-scale industry on the island established “company towns”. Crowe was one example of a prominent and influential timber merchant; he was also an enigma in industrial development. He clearly exhibited all the characteristics of an aggressive businessman. His method of constructing and maintaining his industry and labour force was progressive in that he used every means available to accommodate and create a loyal workforce. In 1911, he signed an agreement with the Fishermen’s Protective Union to improve conditions for loggers (Macdonald 26). By building a company town he provided homes, medical and educational facilities for the men and their families who were employed by him. He also made special efforts to keep married men in close proximity to their families. Single men were the ones employed in the camps (Macdonald 49).

Crowe argued the Hampden area had the potential to become a major centre for employment (Colonial File 196 A 1). Working from this premise and recognising the value of a contented labour force, he “built” a communal structure that tied the labour force to each other and to his company. Rooted in the patriarchal ideals of the day Crowe’s strategy was to recognise the importance of the male’s presence in the household by keeping married men close to their homes, enabling them to care for their families. In many ways, using familial ties to ensure a productive workforce was a replication of the merchant fishermen relationship in an industrial setting. Single men were employed in the camps where the social conditions were

most restrictive and the draw of familial ties less likely to cause them to leave. As Crowe further explained in correspondence with the government:

Earning more money than they can at the Humber or Grand Falls operations, a visit to Hampden would convince you of this. They would tell you that it would be a calamity if Hampden shut down as they do not want to return to their former way of living and have "cut their bridge behind them". (Colonial File 196 A1)

With stable working conditions and improved wages, Crowe had set the stage to maintain a productive workforce. Unfortunately, the fishermen/loggers remained on the periphery. As labourers in the logging industry, they continued to work in the camps separated from familiar settings and stripped of their social and cultural positions of power in their traditional family/economic unit. They had no ties to company towns and were not moving their families to these areas. Ultimately, they were relegated to a lower stratum, enabling companies to be more exploitive of their circumstances.

The Newfoundland Government encouraged the establishment of the logging industry on the island in order to stimulate economic development and growth. The logging industry helped relieve some of the financial pressures faced by the government from fishermen seeking relief from impoverishment. In make-work schemes to provide employment, the government instituted pit-prop cutting programs, extended cutting licenses for the cutting of pulp wood and guaranteed purchasing prices (Colonial File 399). Companies were given tax breaks, waivers on imported equipment and contracts that bound them to expand the industry through the development of infrastructure for the cutting and processing of lumber and pulp and paper on the island (Candow 14). Both the government and the companies worked together for mutual benefit, which was often to the detriment of the labourers and the economic development of the island. At times, their haphazard approach negated the possibility of stimulating further industrial developments from their burgeoning industry. In one respect the government succeeded in attracting outside capital, in another they failed to ensure a diverse and growing economy.

The clash between the moral economy and the political and industrial demands for diversification and development emphasised the uncertainty and lack of control the fishing families faced in their daily struggles to survive. It is also apparent that the companies and fishermen had very different ideas of how and why to use the natural resources. While each viewed the resources as a means to an end, their goals were non-complimentary. For the companies it was exploitation for profit

making, for the fishermen it was exploitation for basic need. The socio-economic and cultural characteristics of communal life challenged the companies as they attempted to create industrial development based on a capitalist system. Equally challenging for the fishermen was their struggle to find a balance between their traditions and the demands of the logging industry where they periodically sought relief from poverty.

Within the camps, fishermen who were used to a degree of autonomy within the mercantilist system were subjected to a rigorous shifting of spatial dimensions that reordered their temporal dimensions. As loggers, these men were controlled by economic conditions that made them a transient and vulnerable labour pool. They were not in a strong position to bargain for higher wages or improved working conditions. Whereas the full-time loggers achieved a relative degree of security and stability in the logging industry, the fishermen/loggers continued to exist in a state of flux. As a reserve labour pool, unskilled and lacking a unified identity with a common purpose, they were easily exploited for cheap labour by the pulp and paper companies.

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