

VESSEL

stories from the edge of the world

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

From the first instances of human inhabitation on the island of Newfoundland, wooden boats have been crucial facilitators to life on *The Rock*. Those who called this beautifully rugged land home were able to do so as a direct result of hand-built wooden watercraft, fashioned from the land and made for the purpose of existing on the sea. Today, wooden boats have long since given way to the pressures of the industrial age, yet a select few people continue to practice this tradition of boat building for both personal, practical, and heritage preservation reasons. As an object of material culture, wooden boat building is argued to represent an act of placemaking, intertwining the collective identity of communities with the individual identity of boat builders.

Exploratory filmmaking practice and interviews with Newfoundlanders involved in boat building traditions reflect and refract the socio-cultural conditions that characterize the place. A documentary film is made to express the synergetic relationship between wooden boats, the landscape, and the culture surrounding it. Ultimately, the film is a vessel for the ineffable experiences of Newfoundland as a true expression of place.

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This all began with my Dad, who drove me around the island and held the camera for me whenever I couldn't. Thank you for all the Mary Brown's lunches, and thank you for introducing me to this incredible place and starting me on this journey.

I am extremely grateful to my Mom, for patiently fielding all of my questions, concerns, and ramblings. Thank you to my brother Laydon, who was instrumental in capturing the film and photography, and to my brother Eran, for the encouragement and support throughout.

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Her keel slips gently onward and over
The curve of her bow, oh, the swells now she'll look after
Fashioned by hands, that have made more like her
Oh you noble boat, rolling, making for the harbour

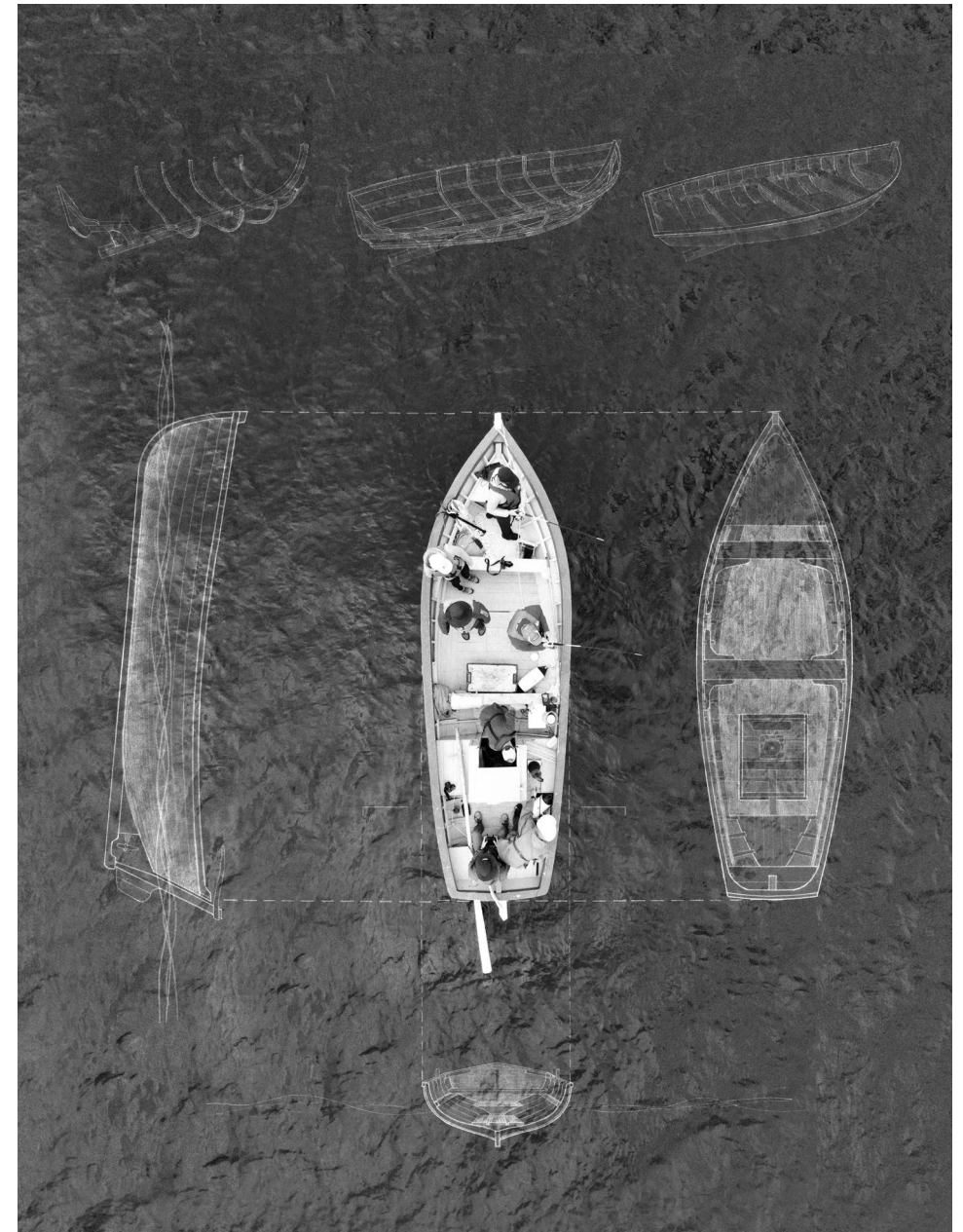
She's made from wood, but she's no ordinary boat sir
Cut in the fall, seasoned til mid winter is over
See her high round bow, and she's all tucked under
And from stem to stern, she's our Newfoundland's wonder

I hear her one lunger pumping, and I look to see her,
Disappear, under the crest of a swell between us
And she rises like a warrior, driving the lops asunder
A legacy to men, who lay down under

We're only men, whose days be numbered
We owe our lives, to the gifts from the water
And for boats that go, come back some never
But for all the boats that go, they are Newfoundland's wonder

For all the boats that go, they are Newfoundland's wonder

Buddy Wasisname & The Other Fellers, *Makin' for the Harbour*



Preface

John Hann Blackmore, commonly known as Captain Blackmore or Skipper Johnny Black, was born on November 27, 1881, on Pinchard's Island, Bonavista Bay, Newfoundland. I was born on the same day, 118 years later. He was my great-great-grandfather. He was a master mariner and boat builder, having designed and constructed three large wooden vessels. Aboard his final ship, *The Newfoundland*, (completed in 1949, the same year Newfoundland joined Canada), Skipper Johnny Black was something of a folk hero to the people of Newfoundland. This thesis project began as a way of recovering a connection to my heritage that had been lost through the years.

When I set out from St. John's in July of 2022, I had a simple research question: *how is the traditional craft of wooden boat building being maintained in the modern era of Newfoundland?* I did not have, however, a program or plan of study. I had only the address of one boat builder named Andy Riggs in a small town on the Burin Peninsula. This was a man without a cellphone or email, and when I spoke with him two months prior on his landline phone, I could hardly understand a word through his thick Newfoundland accent (despite thinking I was well accustomed to the island's vernacular tongue). From what I understood of our conversation we were to meet at his house on a set day in July.

As I turned toward his house across from the Burin Town Hall, I was half expecting him to have forgotten me entirely. Any doubt I had, however, was immediately assuaged as I rolled into his driveway and found him standing on his porch, enthusiastically waving me in with the full length of his arm. I had scarcely stepped

out of the car before I was on his porch being warmed by hot soup, tea and biscuits. Afterwards he took me through every workshop, shed, harbour, and engine garage he worked in and stored his materials. He spoke with an infectious enthusiasm for Newfoundland, wooden boats, the water, and his old way of life. He would be one of many Newfoundlanders I met on that journey who were incredibly eager to take me in and teach me about wooden boat building. Andy told me about a model ship museum in Marystown that he said I ought to see, which solidified my plans for the next day, and from there I continued to be passed hand-by-hand throughout the province between museums and boat-builders in the bountiful tradition of word of mouth.

Day in and day out on this journey I learned about the craft, the traditions, and the strategies of heritage preservation efforts surrounding small wooden watercraft, but most vividly, I learned about the people and the place. Mr. Riggs introduced me to a craft that was both intimately his own and openly his people's. Through him, and through the subsequent members of the tradition I met, I understood wooden boat building to be an act of placemaking as essential as Newfoundland's vernacular architecture in creating the cultural fabric of the island. Wooden boats are both vessels that carry one out to sea, and vessels that impart the essential truths that constitute Newfoundland placemaking.

Liam Bursey

Here the tides flow, and here they ebb.

E.J. Pratt, *Newfoundland*

INTRODUCTION

Positioning

The purpose of this thesis is to provoke and encourage debate about how one situates oneself in an environment through a relationship with the traditions and cultural heritage that exists in a place. In this project, the place in question is the island of Newfoundland. Much has been written on the vernacular architecture in this part of world, and considerable focus has been given to the houses, out-buildings, furniture, fences, and root cellars of Newfoundland. These aspects of material culture have been proven to convey traditional ways of being, reaffirming the methods in which Newfoundlanders situated themselves on this island. Comparatively little, however, has been written on one of the most important cultural artifacts of traditional Newfoundland life: the small wooden fishing boat. What texts do exist are typically categorical in nature, focused on documenting the types of boats and the methods of their manufacture. Very little has been written about the social and cultural functions of wooden boats, and even less on the contemporary context of the wooden boat building tradition and its role as a heritage craft in Newfoundland's modern society.

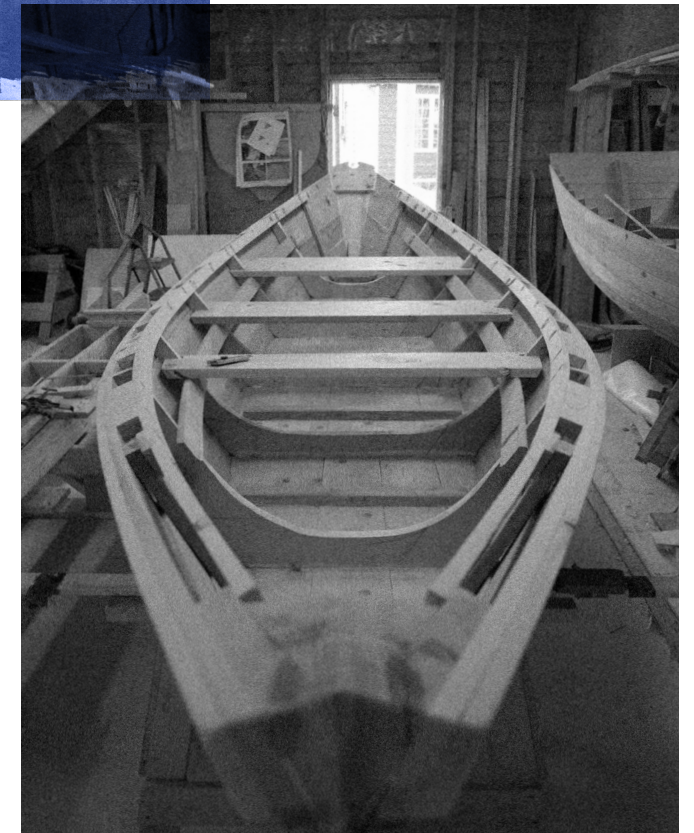
This thesis examines boat building as an extension of the architectural traditions of Newfoundland, and as a material manifestation of the collective identity of communities and the individual identity of boat builders. The history of small wooden fishing boats, from the arrival of Europeans to the present day, is explained within the history of the place. A critical lens is taken to examine the ways in which the craft is being maintained in the present day through various forms of heritage preservation.

1.1 A traditional Newfoundland outbuilding

1.2 Quidi Vidi Harbour

1.5 A dory pulled up on the shore in Dildo Harbour

1.4 A grand banks dory under construction



This thesis begins with an introduction to the cultural history of boat building craft on the island of Newfoundland. Important historical and climatic information on the context of the place is described to orient the reader to the current conditions of the site. *People*, introduces common fishing boat types and their associated uses and examines boat building as a way of being for the people of Newfoundland, demonstrating how the craft is a manifestation of their culture. *Landscape* establishes boat building as a reaction to the forces of the place, and as an extension of the land practices that permit human existence in this part of the world. *Heritage* exhibits the challenges facing wooden craft traditions and the strategies being used by individuals and museums to preserve them and adapt to the future. Finally, *The Film* explains the approach, considerations and desired outcomes of the film project as an interpretation of the poetic truths that were discovered in the thesis research process. Filmmakers, like architects, work with imagery to elevate the experience of a place. Personal narratives and images have the capacity to translate subjective truths and transcend reality to become part of our perceptive existence. As a representation of people, place, and a way of being, the film also strives to be an act of placemaking as a vessel for exploring what it means to build wooden boats in Newfoundland.

1.5 A traditional wooden motor boat on the warf





Wooden boats and material culture

This research strives to examine the sense of identity gained by Newfoundlanders, as individuals and as members of a cultural group, through the design and construction of wooden boats as a product of material culture. The making and unmaking of identity is manifested through social relations enacted and embodied through the material world and spatial practices. Wooden boat building, as an object of this material world, offers a lens into the various socio-cultural conditions that characterize the place. From their first usage as fishing vessels, wooden boats have been intimately tied to the fundamental economic structure of Newfoundland. The following chapters will reveal how the craft of wooden boat building changed as the scope and scale of the economy changed. Wooden boats carry inherent economic value, classifying them as commodities, and as Arjun Appadurai states in *The Social Life of Things*, “commodities, like persons, have social lives.”¹ He explains that such objects as wooden boats do not have an absolute value as a result of the demand for them, but the demand “endows the object with value.”² The changing tides of the fishing industry in Newfoundland over the past generations have permanently altered the demand of wooden boats as a commodity, thus drastically depleting (or altogether removing) their value in society as defined by Appadurai. However, the economy of heritage preservation, tourism, and memory have endowed wooden boats with a new form of demand, one which reflects the current state of Newfoundland society after the collapse of the cod fishery. It is through this study of wooden boats as an object of material culture that various meanings interlaced in the craft will be uncovered. In order to do this, as Appadurai states:

1.6 Grand Banks dory thwart detail

“...we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.”³

The project examines three of the essential aspects of any material culture: design, construction, and use. Primary focus, however, is given to the social and cultural implications of wooden boats and the traditions of people on the island. To this end, the personal testimonies of boat builders and boat builders are prioritized as a methodology to reveal many of the conditions that are central concerns in carving out a life in this place. In Judy Attfield’s *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* the design historian considers “the designers, the maker’s and the user’s perspectives in the context of the same conceptual playing field” to examine material culture and the various ways in which “the interactive role of physical manufactured objects” transform the “modern world into a human place.”⁴ This approach to the study of material culture is a central component of the thesis. To understand the sense of identity gained both as an individual and as a member of a group through “the making, unmaking and remaking of their material worlds,” is to understand how people make sense of the world (create a *place*) through physical objects. This concept, called ‘object relations’ in psychoanalytic theory, can be used to understand wooden boat building as a physical manifestation of culture, and as an objectification of social relations.

As will be further elucidated in the following chapters, wooden boats as a commodity of the fishing industry were originally considered to be everyday objects. Boat building craft was a non-specialist practice executed by fishermen who simply needed a vessel to sustain their livelihood. This is an important distinction to define boat builders as *makers*, akin to the concept of ‘master builder’. To quote Attfield, “considering the maker we turn from the type of professional designer who is mainly involved at the point of the conceptualisation of a product or site, prior to its manufacture or construction, to the type of designer who engages directly with the object of their design through the process of making.”⁵ The following chapters follow this methodology through direct interviews with people involved in boat building. Through stories and memories the craft is understood as intertwined with their place and their own identity.

A boat should be judged only, and I repeat only, in the light of the requirements for which she was built for and the resources of the society which built her. She should never be judged by comparison with other boats built for different purposes of different materials in different circumstances. The basic question is one of fitness of purpose in relation to broad local circumstances. To appreciate a boat one must be aware of the factors that gave rise to her building, the timber available, the general environment, the building traditions of the society which produced her and, above all, the purpose for which she was built.

Basil Greenhill, *Archaeology of the Boat*



1.7 Detail of Christian Hayter's motor boat
1.8 View off the bow of Christian Hayter's motor boat



1.9 Christian Hayter driving his motor boat

Place and placemaking

Throughout this thesis the term *placemaking* is used to explain, in the most general terms, the act of creating a physical and metaphysical place in which humans can inhabit. This is not to imply that *place* only exists through human creation. In fact, the environment we inhabit exists as something that supports us, as an entity independent from our influence on it. This is evidently true in Newfoundland, where life has always been defined by the sea and the land that supported the people on her shores. This new perspective on placemaking has been coined *placekeeping*, defined as “the active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people who live and work there.”⁶ I introduce this idea to render the usage of the term placemaking throughout the text intelligible in its multiple layers of interpretation. Within the scope of this thesis the concept of placemaking is widened to include these values and witness the cultural memories and narratives that are repositories of place-based meaning.

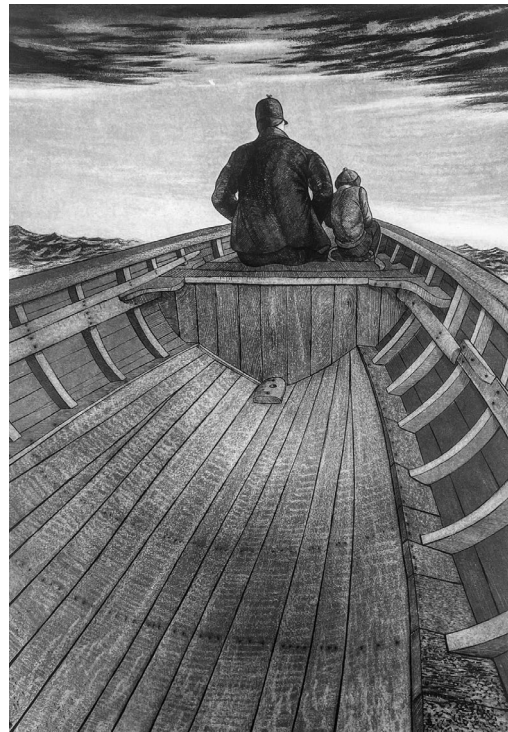
I argue that wooden boats are physical fragments that contain the presence of their place. These objects supply the details and physical textures that give material expression to a cultural connection with the land. This thesis uses the experience of wooden boats (and the documentation of the craft through film) as an anchor to explore the identity of Newfoundlanders in this place. In the same way that the vernacular salt-box homes of Newfoundland are a means on inhabiting the land, these boats are a means of inhabiting the water. As the island and its people change throughout time so too does the nature of placemaking change to adapt to global currents.

Many know Newfoundland for the culture and ‘quaint way of life’ that is made much of in tourist advertisements.⁷ But what is Newfoundland culture? How is Newfoundland *place* created? This thesis is concerned with the form of space and its representations. Henri Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space*, declares the three forms of space: spatial practice, the perceived space we organize through daily routines and activities; representations of space, the conceived space organized by architects and makers; and representational space, the subjective lived space we inhabit that is shaped by personal emotions and symbols, images, cultural forces, and the like.⁸ It will be evidenced in the following chapters that the craft, design, and use of wooden boats relates to each of these manifestations of space.

Of particular note is the changing organization of these forms of space. Newfoundland, like many places commonly known for their quaint, old way of life, has been drastically transformed in recent generations. Today the history and culture of the place is mined in the economic sector of tourism. Newfoundland sociologist James Overton explains this re-organization in *Making a World of Difference*:

“Space is transformed by tourism, but so is the meaning and representation of space. The declining fishing village, the working farm and village are reconstituted in terms of a tourist aesthetic. The purchase, renovation and conversion of old houses, the heritagizing of areas, the use of the shells of old buildings to construct museums and galleries, all this is part of the process by which a way of life is represented for consumption - a process that is variously referred to as objectification, museumization, etc.”⁹

Do original and 'homegrown' instances of Newfoundland culture and space change under this gaze of the tourism industry? What parts of the past are retained and what is left behind? What constitutes a traditional craft as it evolves to meet the demands of modern society? These questions become ever more pressing as new forms of heritage preservation emerge to maintain the craft of wooden boat building in the present day. The heritage preservation strategies exemplified, and the challenges they face, are shared by many efforts to preserve traditional artifacts and cultural practices across the world.



1.10 A fisherman and his son in a traditional Newfoundland punt depicted in David Blackwood's 'Summer on Bragg's Island' (1975)





1.11 Rowing a dory depicted in David Blackwood's 'His Father Dreams' (1983)



The birth of the fishing industry

The Grand Banks of Newfoundland are part of the massive continental shelf demarcating the edge of North America, split from the rest of the world by the earth's primordial tectonic forces 500 million years ago. Over the subsequent eons, these ancient pressures shifted and cracked the earth's crust to create corridors of deeper shelves around the banks that would become critical migratory routes for fish, such as cod.¹⁰ The retreat of the last glacial period some 10,000 years ago revealed a great granite plateau rising out of the ocean.¹¹ This island consisted of over five thousand miles of coastline, bordered by fortress-like cliffs that loomed over the sea, protecting endless bays, capes, and inlets. These glacial processes scraped the rock clean of soil and vegetation and slashed deep fjords into the rock like knife wounds; sheltered sanctuaries in an otherwise rugged territory. The tyranny of ice left the interior raw and barren, "able to support only the most tenacious life."¹² To this day, approximately one-third of the land surface of Newfoundland has almost no soil.¹³ It is unsurprising, then, that the first people to find this remarkable land were people of the sea.

The Grand Banks of Newfoundland

-  Inshore fishing grounds
-  Continental shelf
-  800 - 5000m depth
-  Early migratory routes





1.12 *The untamed coast of Newfoundland*

The Beothuk are the original Indigenous people of the Island of Newfoundland. Descendants of the people of the Little Passage Complex, they migrated from Labrador around 3000 BC.¹⁴ They hunted seals, sea birds, caribou, collected capelin, and fished inshore.¹⁵ They depended on the ocean and existed in harmony with it for thousands of years. For a time, their world remained inhospitable to those of European origin. The first voyagers from across the ocean, the Norse, arrived in the final decades of the tenth century, but later abandoned the island for its limited agricultural capacity.¹⁶ By the fifteenth century interlopers from Europe began feeling their way into the waters of the “New World.”¹⁷ They too were people of the sea, “fishers in pursuit of cod for food, of walrus for ivory, of whales for oil, with little or no interest in the interior.”¹⁸ They came intermittently, upon wooden boats as migratory fishers to exploit the richest waters known to humankind. John

Cabot called the Island *Bacallaos*, a name given by the Portuguese which, translated, means “land of cod.” A record from 1516 claims that “in the sea adjacent [to Newfoundland, Cabot] found so great a quantity... of great fish... called bacallaos... that at times they even stayed the passage of his ships.”¹⁹ By the mid 1500s Portuguese, English, French, and Basques knew the Grand Banks intimately and began settling permanently. This was largely in detriment to the Indigenous populations, and the island would never be the same.

At this point in her history, Newfoundland was teeming with raw, untapped potential for exploitation. Farley Mowat, one of Canada’s preeminent voices, called it a “true sea province” comparing it to the other great sea province, Atlantis. However, whereas Atlantis was lost to the green depths, “Newfoundland seemed to have been blown adrift to fetch up against our shores, there to remain in unwilling exile, always straining back towards the east.”²⁰ It was a rock in the mouth of the St. Lawrence, part of the continent, but held back, part of the sea. Sean Cadigan, professor of history at Memorial University in St. John’s, recounted that since those early days of European inhabitation, “several views have been proposed about how best to support human society in this cold-ocean environment. Since the early nineteenth century, this debate has been a defining element in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador.”²¹ Various fluctuating industries (such as forestry, mining, and more recently oil and gas) have attempted to answer this debate of how best to support human life on the island, but the first and most foundational industry came in the form of wooden boats.

115 Great fjords carved by glaciers in Gros Mourne National Park





1.14 Massive cod flakes in Petty Harbour, c. 1880

1.15 The outpost village of Pushthrough on the south coast of Newfoundland, c. 1900

1.16 Drying salt cod on cod flakes, c. 1890



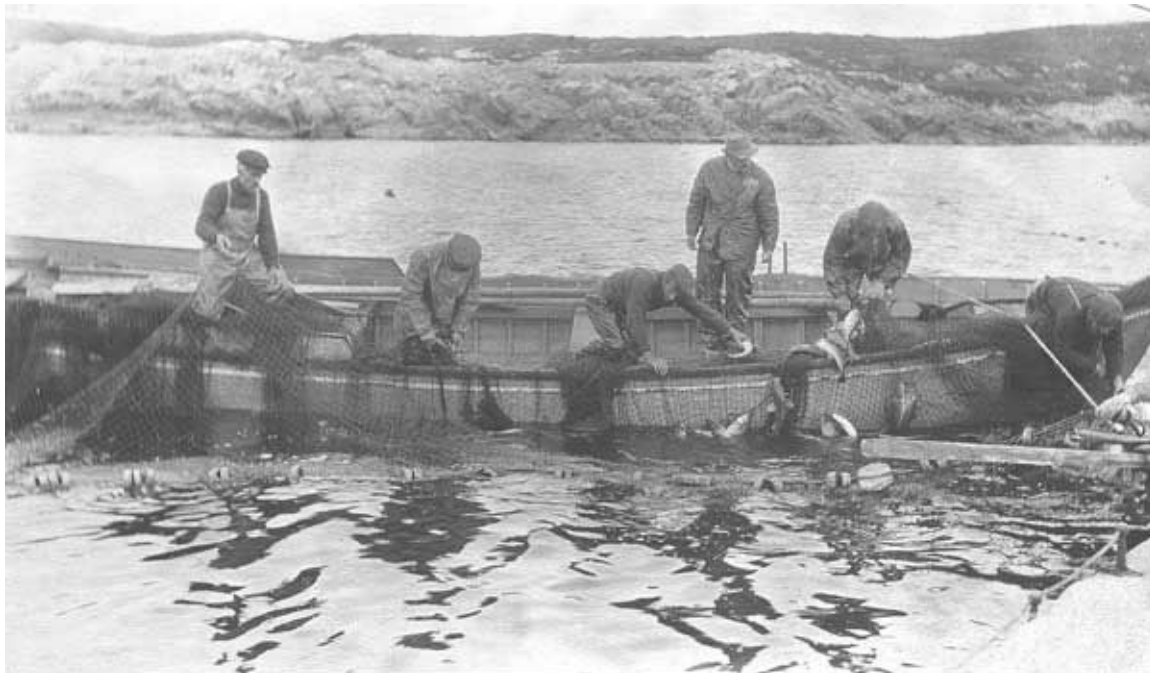
The first settlers “clung, limpet-like, to this rock-walled rim of ocean.”²² They first built summer fishing stations. Later they built small cabins for permanent living anywhere they could find a toehold. Eventually villages were formed as tight clusters of square, two-story frame houses. The outpost was “a little world of its own, living by and on the sea.”²³ Fishermen and women emancipated from their European homelands found refuge on the rock. The nomenclature of each place (such as Port aux Basques, Bay de Verde, and Bonavista), though corrupted through centuries, suggests their origins.²⁴ A fixture in every outpost fishing village would have been a flock of dories, punts, and trap skiffs bobbing beside every wharf and fishing stage like resting seabirds.²⁵ *Fishing stages* were wooden clapboard sheds, built upon spruce poles driven in between the rocks, and *flakes* were the spidery wooden scaffolds on which families (often women and young girls) would split and salt the cod brought in from the catch.²⁶ Salt cod remained as the driving force of the economy of the island for 300 years.

At this time, wooden boats fulfilled a multitude of functions for the people of Newfoundland beyond acting as an economic vessel. Before the inner hinterland was populated, the water was the linkage between communities, and fostered the social life of the outpost world. In *A Whale for the Killing*, Farley Mowat recounts that “these spare encrustations of human life were separated one from the other by many miles of unquiet waters, yet united by the sea which was the peoples’ livelihood, by which was their highway, by the sea which was their mistress and their master, the giver, and the taker-away.”²⁷ Today, life on the island is not quite so one-dimensional, and the reliance on wooden boats and the inshore fishery vanished along with the cod. But before examining these current conditions, we must first describe these small wooden boats that once supported all human life in this place.

We spend our days amid the waves working water, hook and twine
We go for weeks with blistered cheeks waiting for the sun to shine
But as long as the sky hold over us we will not taste the brine
And we'll curse the cod with the fear of God as we haul in every line

Great Big Sea, *England*

- 1.17 A crew in Elliston hauling a cod trap
- 1.18 Many trap skiffs work together to haul a load of cod
- 1.19 (Below) Philip Burse and crew hauling their cod trap





1.20 Petty Harbour, sometime between 1894 and 1904, dotted with wooden fishing boats and fishing stages.

Notes

1 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3.

2 Ibid. 4.

3 Ibid.

4 Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), xiii.

5 Ibid. 60.

6 Peter Soland, "Placekeeping," Council for Canadian Urbanism, May 20, 2020, <https://www.canu.ca/post/placekeeping>.

7 James Overton, *Making a World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland* (St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1996), x.

8 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Wiley, 1992).

9 James Overton, *Making a World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland* (St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1996), 7.

10 Sean Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History* (University of Toronto Press, 2017), 6.

11 Ibid. 9.

12 Farley Mowat, *Bay of Spirits: A Love Story* (McClelland & Stewart, 2009), 4.

13 Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador*, 10.

14 Ibid. 18.

15 Ralph T. Pastore, "The Recent Indians of the Island of Newfoundland," *Heritage Newfoundland & Labrador*, 1998, <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/indigenous/recent-indians.php>.

16 Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador*, 15.

17 Farley Mowat, *Sea of Slaughter* (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1984), 13.

18 Mowat, *Bay of Spirits*, 4-5.

19 Mowat, *Sea of Slaughter*, 167.

20 Farley Mowat, *The New Founde Land* (Doubleday Canada, 1990), 9.

21 Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador*, 15.

22 Farley Mowat, *A Whale for the Killing* (Douglas & McIntyre, 1972), 18.

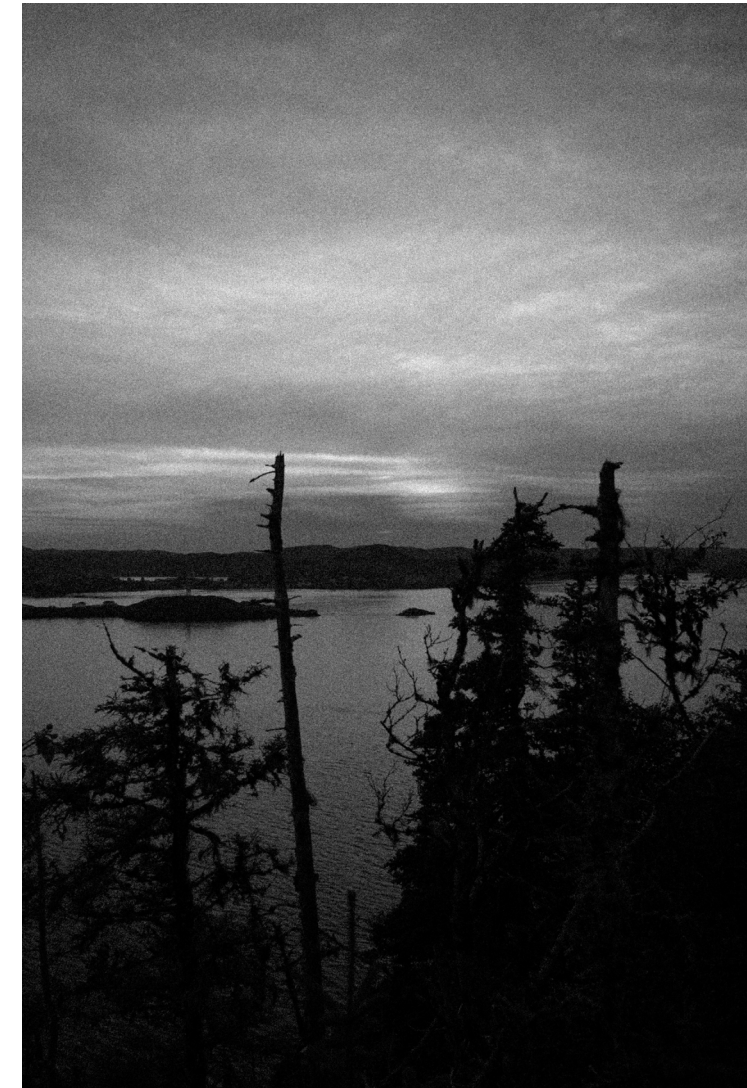
23 Mowat, *Bay of Spirits*, 5.

24 Ibid. 5.

25 Mowat, *A Whale for the Killing*, 18.

26 Ibid. 19.

27 Ibid. 18.



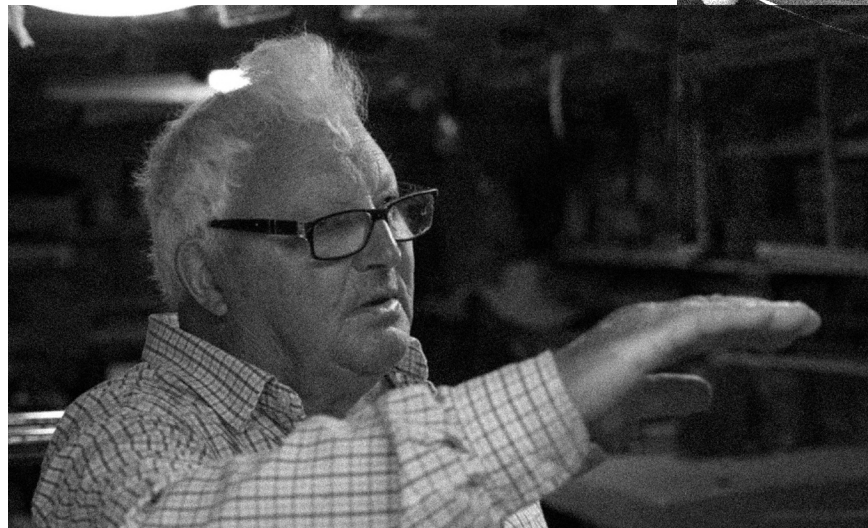
1.21 Trinity Bay at dusk

It's the same as building a house, all you need is a square and a level.

Andy Riggs

WOODEN BOATS

When I first asked Andy Riggs where, or how, he learned to build boats, he seemed slightly uncertain. I realized he may have never been asked that question before. We were standing in his basement workshop. The smell of fresh paint rose from a handmade bench in the middle of the room, the can of bright blue paint still open after this morning's work. Small piles of sawdust and wood shavings huddled in the corners, and every inch of wall was covered in tools or pictures of boats. Shelves were filled with knick-knacks, each carrying its own seafaring story. Under a quietly buzzing fluorescent light he explained to me where he came from, and how he came to boat building.



Liam: *Where did you learn to build these ships?*

Andy: *I didn't learn at all, nothing about those, they just come on me own. You can do that yourself if you want to, you can do built one like that if you want to. Anyone can do that, if they only put their mind to it. I never did work on new ships much. I always worked on repair.*

Liam: *In Marystown [Shipyards]?*

Andy: *Yeah yeah, Marystown. 33 years I worked on that. Winter and summer...*

Liam: *And what were those ships that you were working on?*

Andy: *Oh all kinds, all kinds. Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, you name it, everything... fishing, and coast guard, DOT boats, all types of boats like that, eh? We worked on them all, everything. Whatever come in, we worked on.*

I realized that Andy doesn't build boats to answer the call of preservation. He builds boats because he came from this place. He builds boats because *that is who he is*. In the Marystown Shipyards he was a polymath, learning every facet of modern boat building. Afterwards, to build a wooden boat in the traditional way of his people would seem to be second nature. He was a carpenter, able to build anything just by taking a look at it. Later, he told me that boat building is just like building a house. For boat builders like Andy the same skills and logic applied to boat building were applied to building the vernacular architecture of the island.

(Left to right)

2.1 Andy Riggs in his workshop

2.2 Andy's boat, The Alicia & Andi Mae

2.3 Andy gesturing to the stem of his boat

The first wooden boats

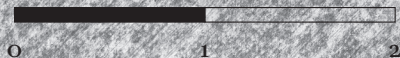
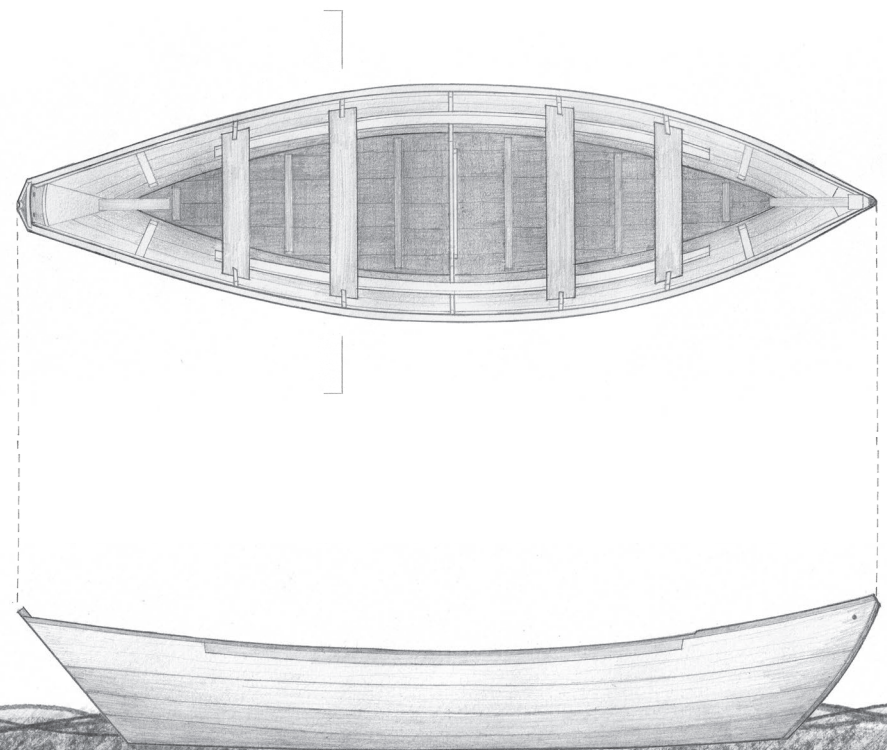
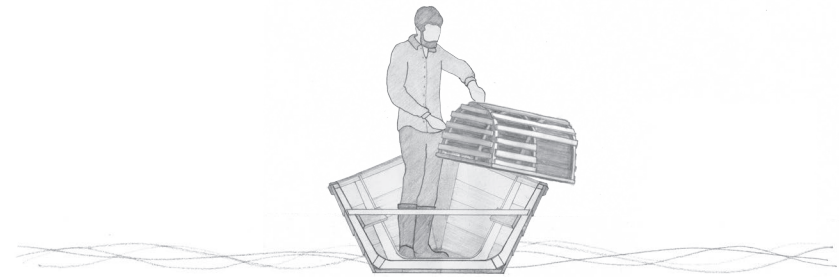
The original small wooden watercraft that enabled the explosion of the fishing industry in Newfoundland can be categorized into two distinct types, both with many variations and sub-categories. The first, known as *dories*, are small, narrow, flat-bottomed boats typically rowed with one or two sets of oars. The second, called *punts*, have deep curved hulls that split the water. This carvel approach to the shape of the boat would be termed *displacement hull*, whereas the flat-bottom dories had a *planing hull* to allow them to glide on the surface of the water. Punts were also rowed with one or two sets of oars but boasted the addition of a sculling oar on the stern.¹ Both boats would occasionally have sail added in the right conditions, either to aid in propulsion or keep the boat oriented perpendicular to oncoming waves.

2.4 A dory pulled up ashore in an outport village
2.5 Winter fishing in a dory

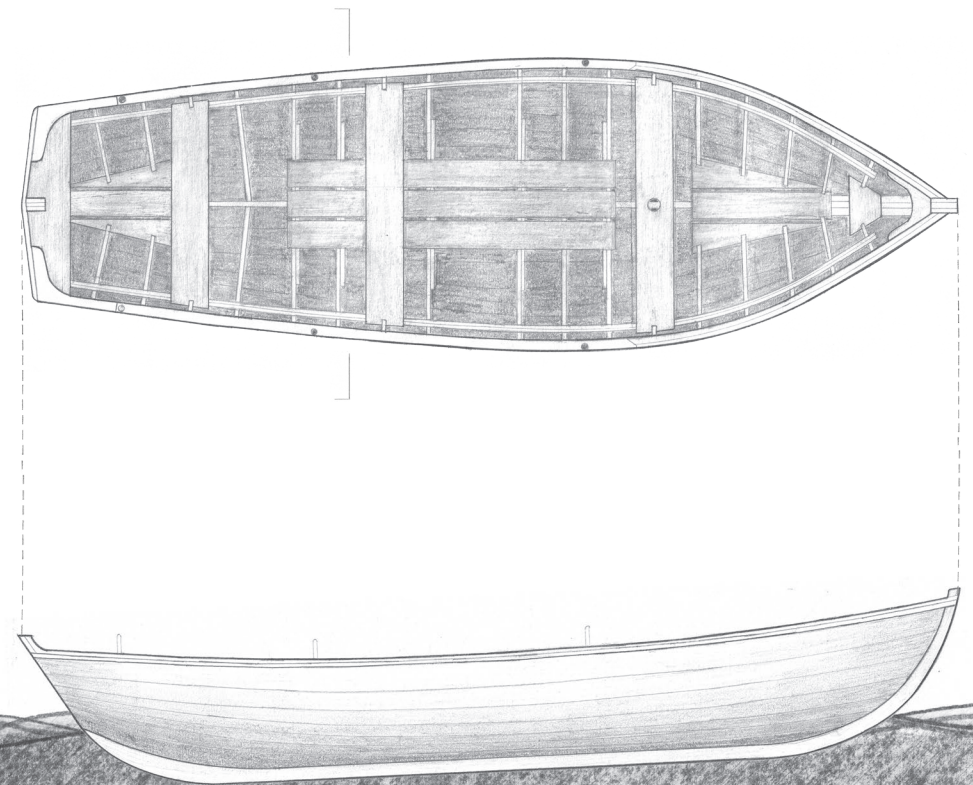
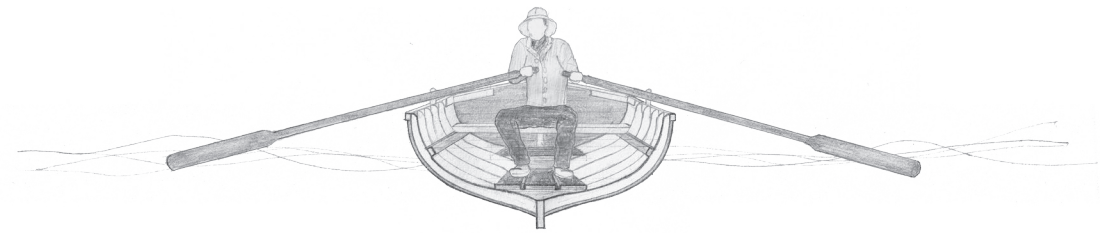


Just like the fishermen, the first dories to arrive in Newfoundland were transplants from elsewhere. They came aboard fishing schooners from the northeastern United States and Nova Scotia, where they were mass-produced for the Atlantic fishing industry.² They were designed with removable seats, which, in conjunction with the flat bottom, allowed them to be stacked on the decks of these huge sailing vessels.³ They would be launched from said schooners for handline cod fishing. Dories were of varying sizes, ranging from 4 to 6 metres (13 - 20ft) long, and were commonly planked with white pine.⁴ Beyond the schooner fishery, they were traded and sold throughout the island for their applicability to multiple types of inshore fishing.

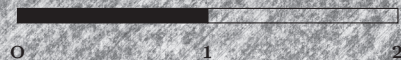
Grand Banks Dory - A small flat-hulled boat of 4.5 to 6.0 metres in length, propelled by one or two set of oars, sometimes with the addition of sail or an inboard motor. Dory designs were often modified in specific localities across the island of Newfoundland for various fishing purposes, such as setting lobster pots.



The genealogy of punts is less straightforward. They likely descended from English fishing boats called shallops and shalloways.⁵ One boat builder in Elliston believed his ancestors brought their moulds with them when they travelled from the old country and used these to design their punts.⁶ Regardless of where they came from, however, punts evolved in Newfoundland. They were anywhere from 5 to 7 metres (16 – 24ft) long but could be larger when outfitted with sail. They were made from many different types of wood, typically spruce for the timbers or ribs and fir for the planking.⁷ At different scales these carvel-hulled vessels could be used for any type of inshore fishery, such as handling for cod or squid, setting cod traps, or hunting seabirds or seals.



Row Punt - A small, round-bottom carvel planked open boat of 4 to 5 metres in length, typically propelled by one or two set of oars for simple inshore fishing purposes. Colloquially called a rodney, bay punt, or gunning punt



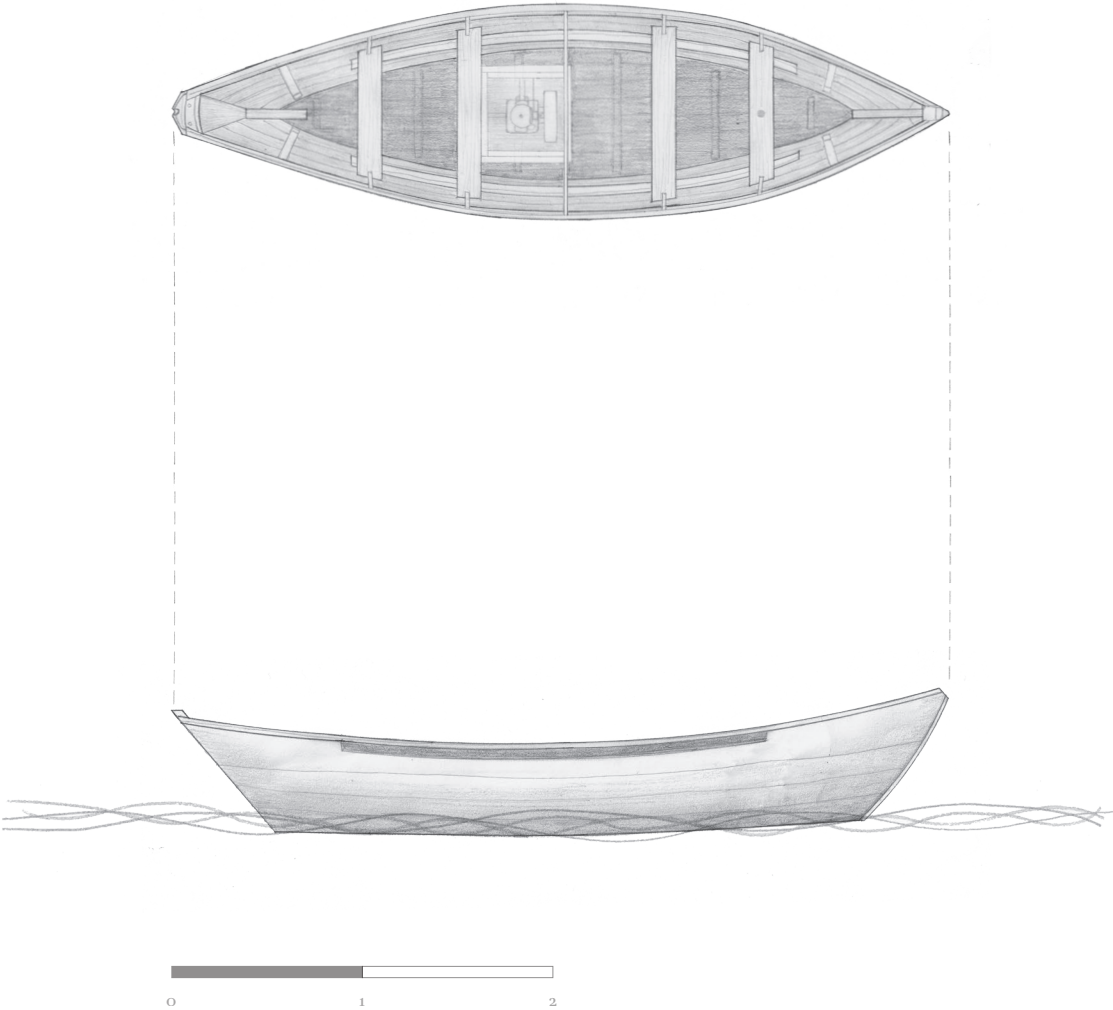


The Island of Newfoundland

Under the umbrella categories of the punt and dory typologies are many boats developed for specific regional requirements or methods of fishing. The following are examples of some of these types, labelled with the place they come from and the builder who constructed the specific boat each drawing was pulled from.

GRAND BANKS DORY

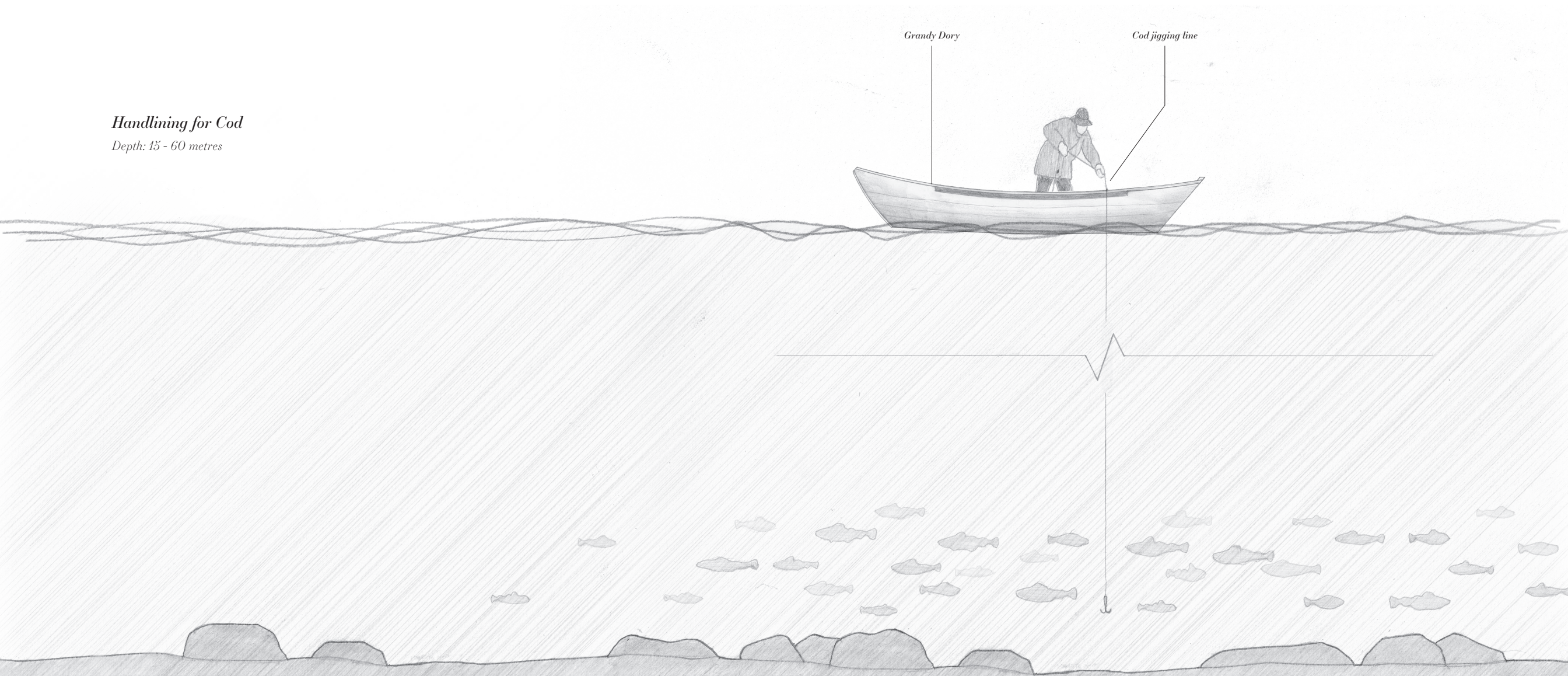
Grand Bank
Built by Stephen Grandy
15' / 4.6m

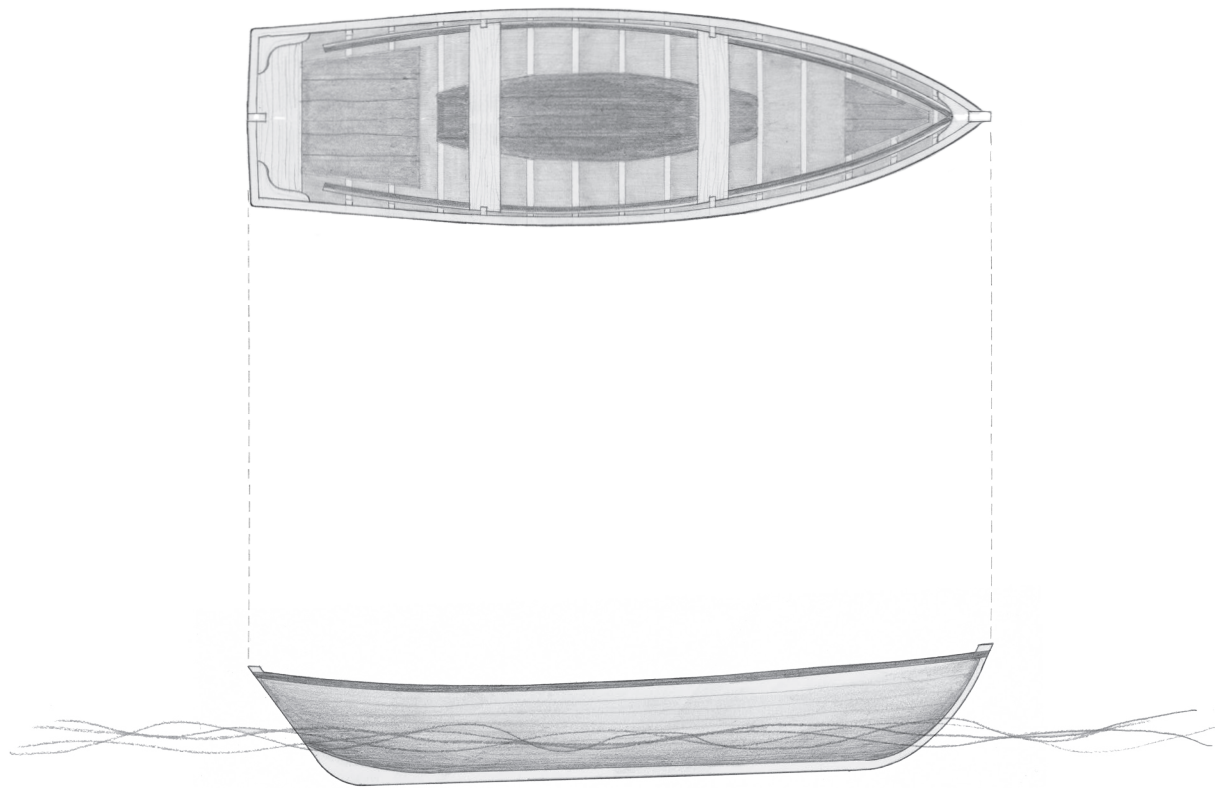


The iconic Grand Bank Dory was developed from the design of dories from Nova Scotia and elsewhere by Stephen Grandy to better suit the Newfoundland fishery. These were 4 to 5 metres (13 – 16ft) long commonly outfitted with inboard, single piston motors and sail. The were often used for inshore fishing of any type, and sometimes were outfitted with ‘gear’ to haul out cod traps.

Handlining for Cod

Depth: 15 - 60 metres

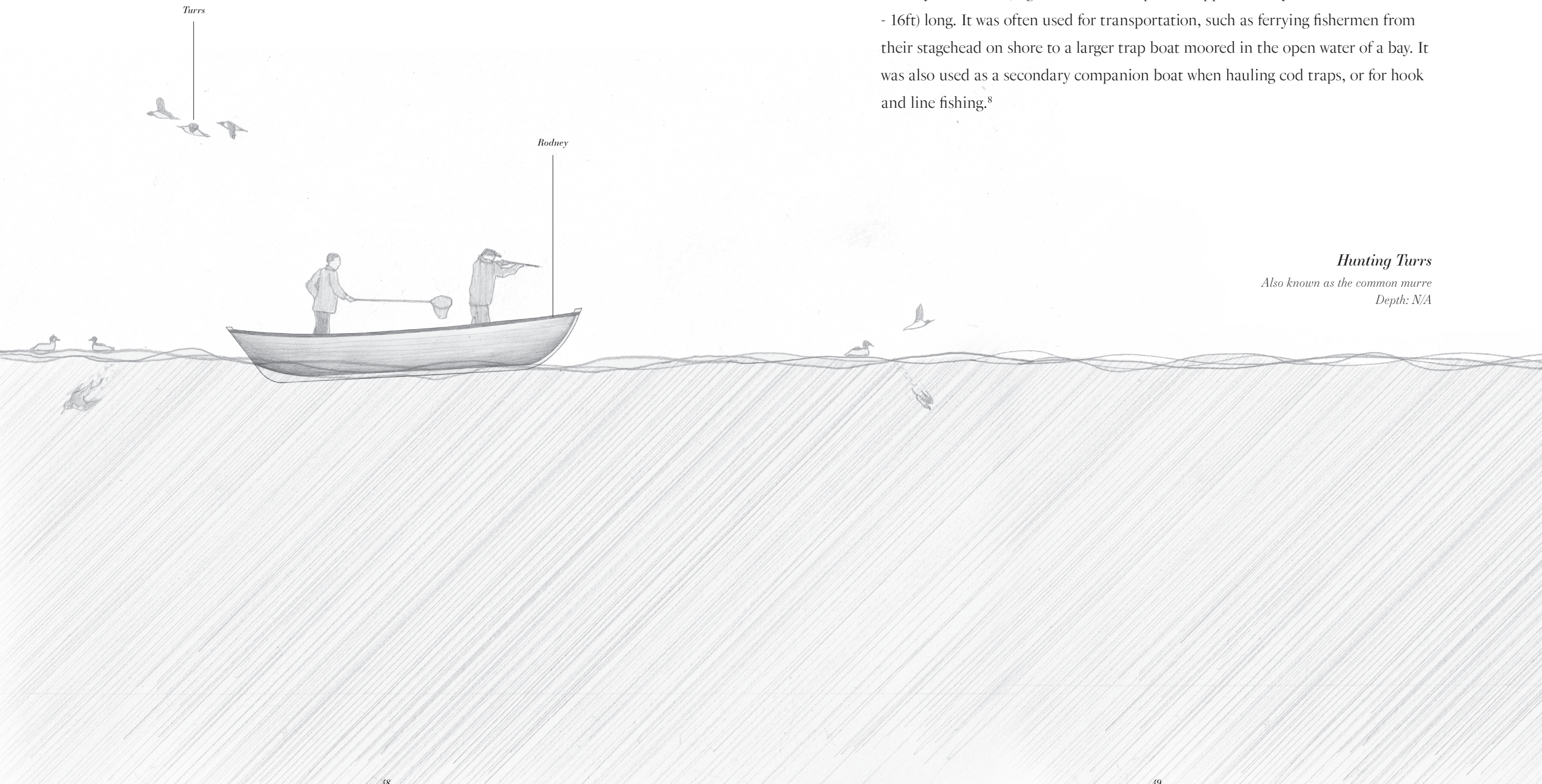




RODNEY

Salvage
Built by Stewart Sturge
14' 6" / 4.4m

The Rodney is a small row-powered punt. The difference between the Rodney and the punt is a cause for some debate, but it is generally accepted that the Rodney is a smaller, lighter version of a punt at approximately 4 to 4.5 metres (14 - 16ft) long. It was often used for transportation, such as ferrying fishermen from their stagehead on shore to a larger trap boat moored in the open water of a bay. It was also used as a secondary companion boat when hauling cod traps, or for hook and line fishing.⁸



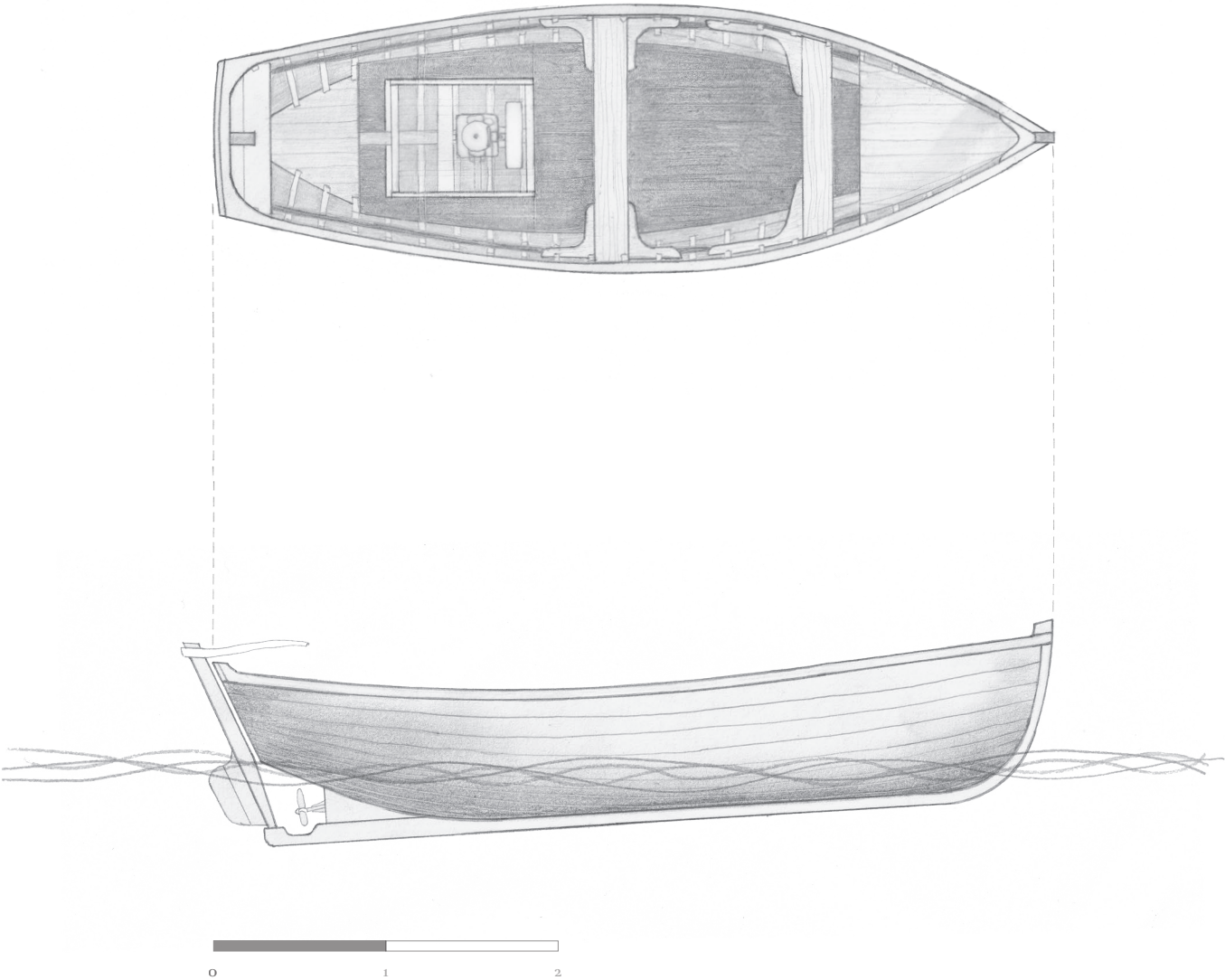
Hunting Turrs

Also known as the common murre

Depth: N/A

MOTOR BOAT

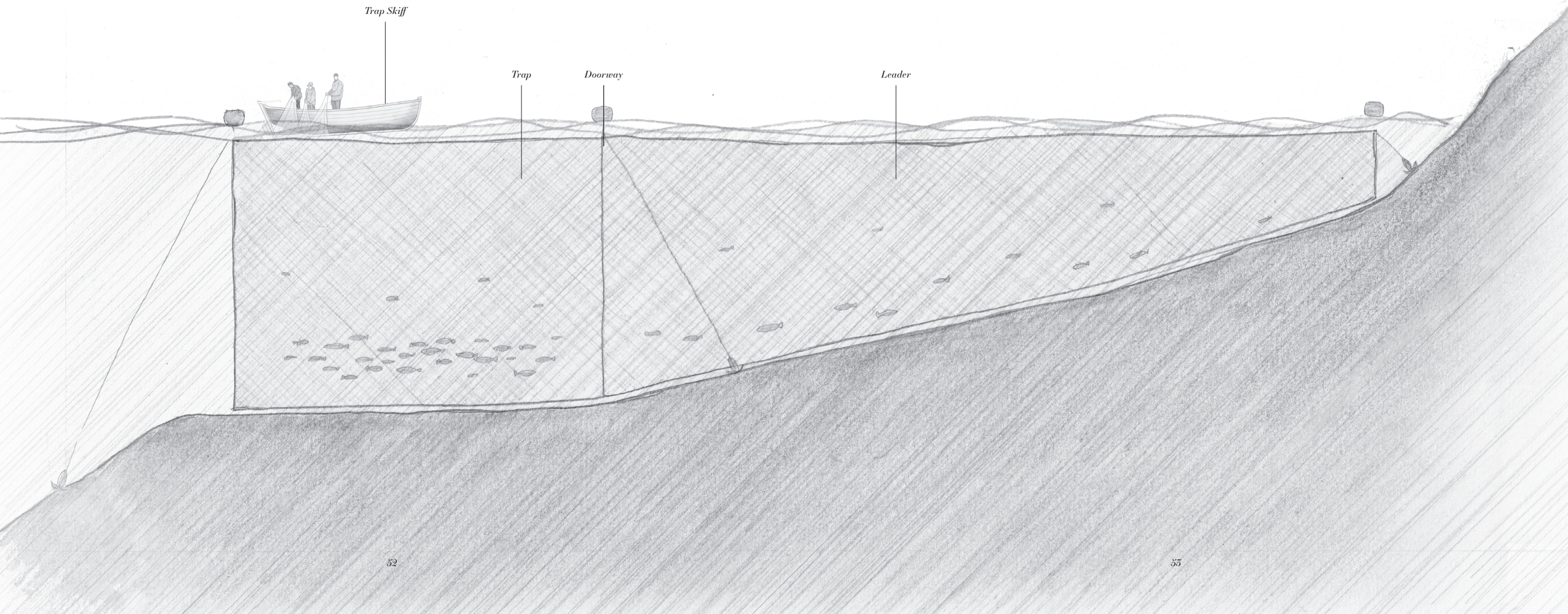
St. Jones Within
Built by Calvin Meadus
18' 5" / 5.6m

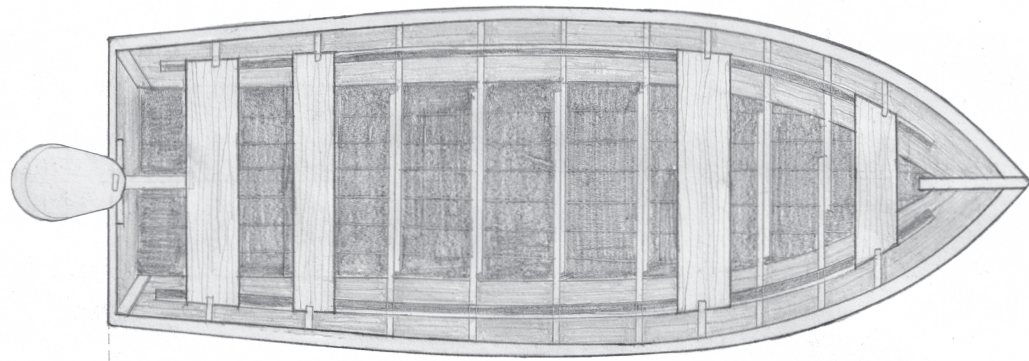


The most consequential change in the development of the punt typology came with the introduction of the single-piston *Make n' Break* engines. Dubbed simply the Motor Boat, these were once the most common of all inshore fishing craft.⁹ They can be 6 to 10 metres (20 – 34ft) long, with carvel planking and an overhanging transom stern.¹⁰ The larger variety of motor boats (above 8m (26ft)) are also called *Trap Skiffs* and were designed to roll out massive cod nets. These were more concave, requiring more volume and stability, permitting fishermen to haul in loads exceeding ten thousand pounds of fish.¹¹ In some parts of the island, variations on the trap skiff boat type may also be called *bully boats*.

Setting Cod Traps

*Depth: 18 - 36 metres
50 - 200 metres from shore*





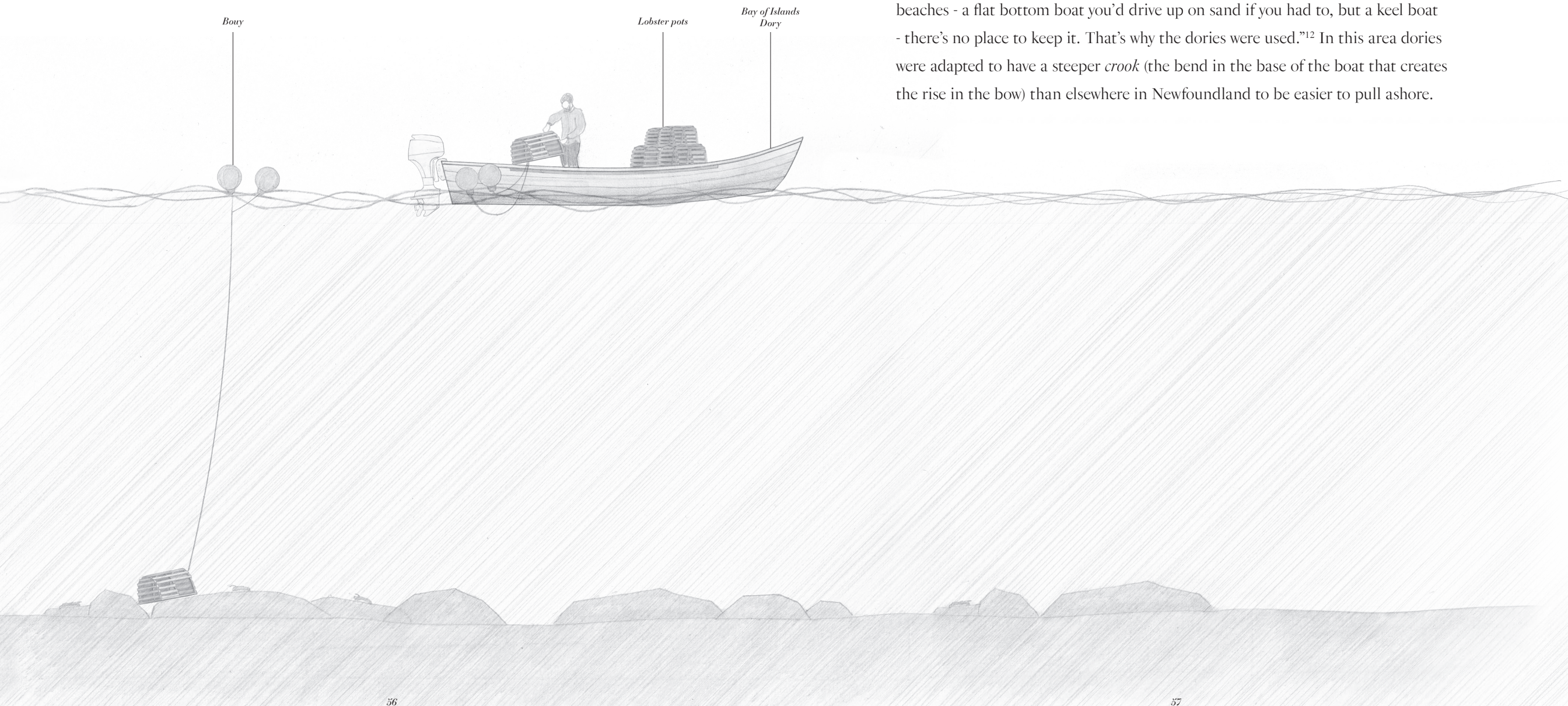
BAY OF ISLANDS DORY

Lark Harbour, Bay of Islands
Built by Sam and Paul Sheppard
18' / 5.5m



Setting Lobster Traps

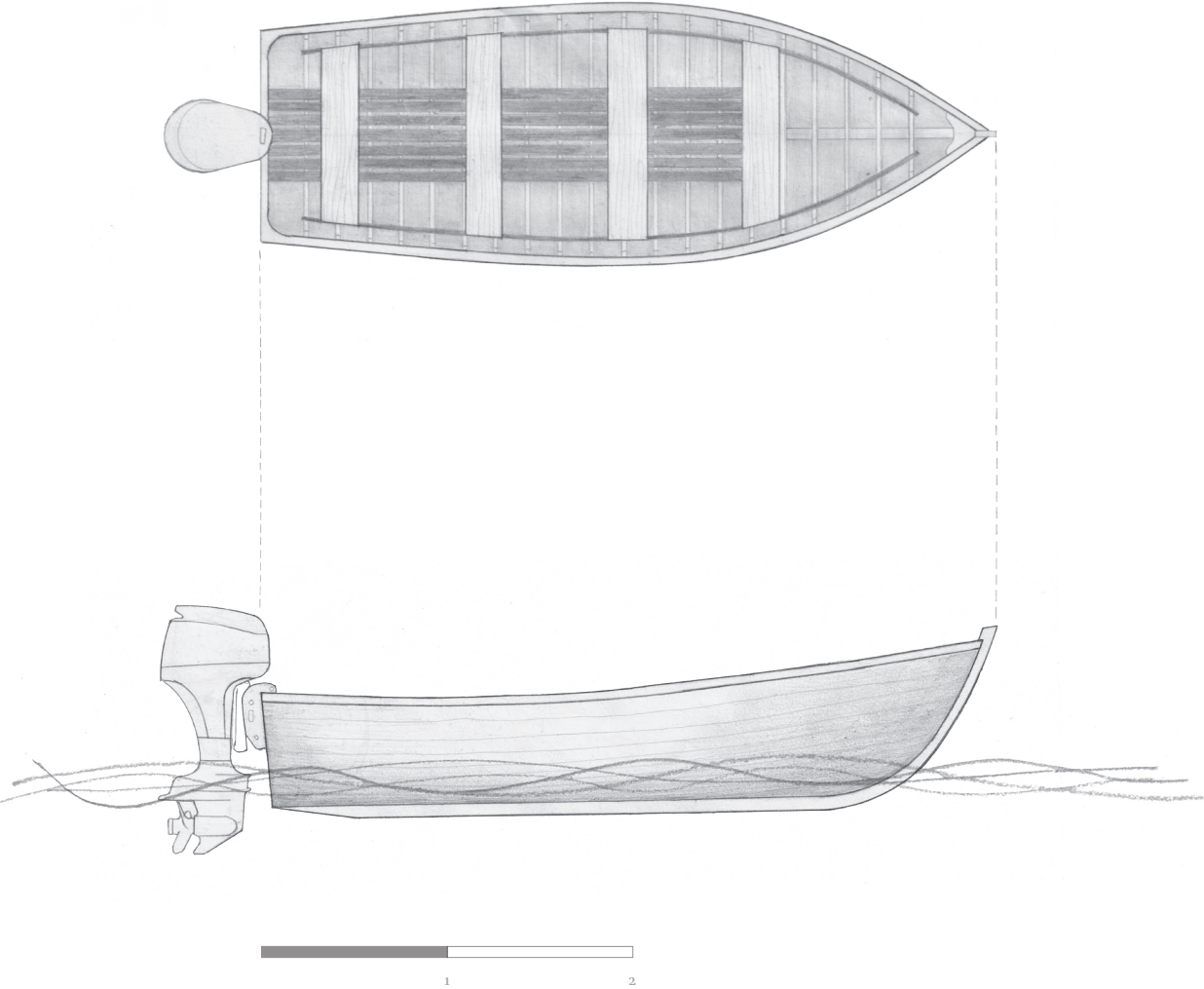
Depth: 5 - 60+ metres



On the west coast, dories were widened with a flat transom for an outboard motor. These became known as the Bay of Islands Dory and were the ideal boat for lobster fishing (5.5 to 6 metres (18 – 20ft) long). To get to lobster grounds fishermen would row their traps out “up the shore” along the coastline. On the west dories were pulled aground as opposed to moored alongside a wharf like a punt. One fisherman from the Bay of Islands testified: “for going ashore on the rough beaches - a flat bottom boat you’d drive up on sand if you had to, but a keel boat - there’s no place to keep it. That’s why the dories were used.”¹² In this area dories were adapted to have a steeper *crook* (the bend in the base of the boat that creates the rise in the bow) than elsewhere in Newfoundland to be easier to pull ashore.

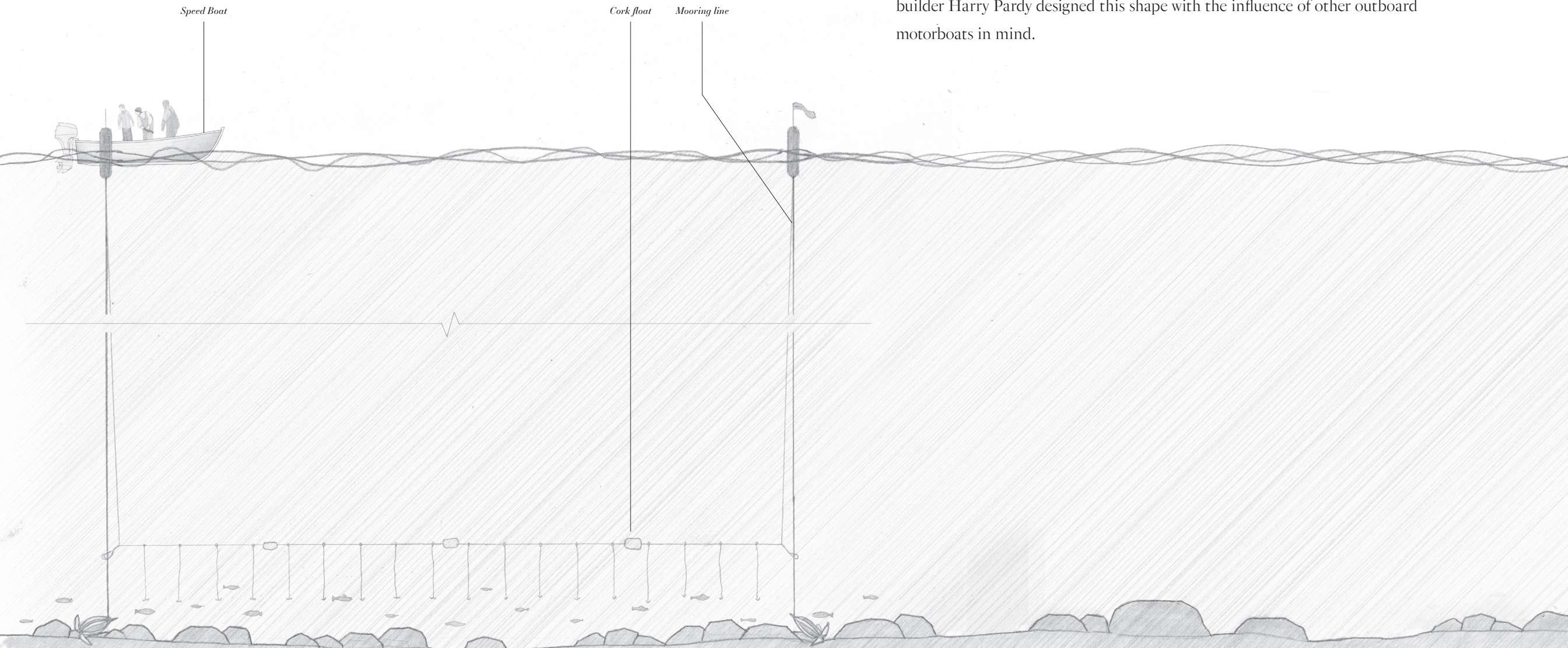
SPEED BOAT

Twillingate
Built by Harry Pardy
15' 4" / 4.6m

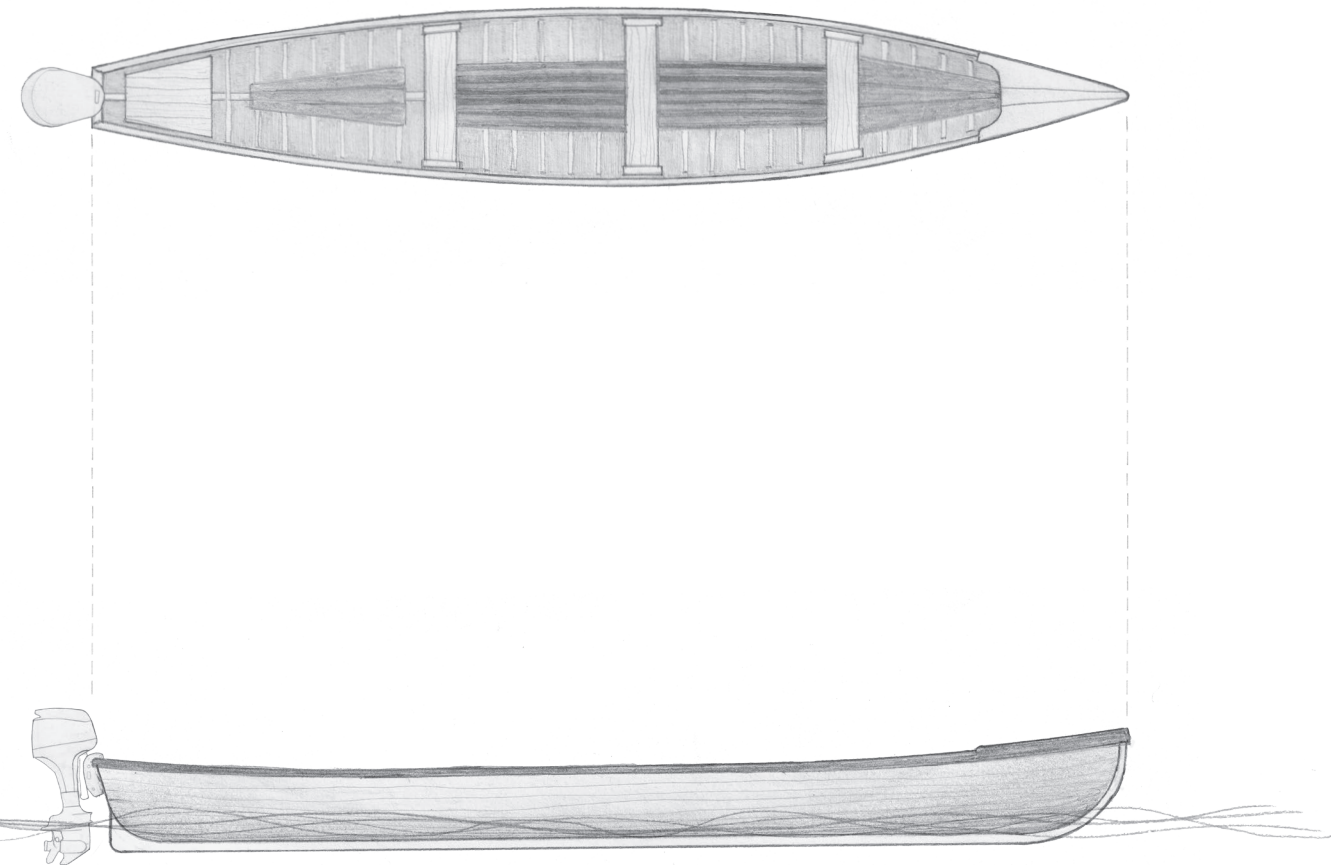


Setting Bottom Trawls

Depth: 4 - 60+ metres



In the 1950s, the invention of the outboard motor generated a new typology; the speed boat (4.5 to 5 metres (15 - 16ft)).¹³ With its relatively flat bottom, straight sides, and a broad square stern, it signified a considerable departure from tradition, greatly resembling the modern open-air steel or fiberglass fishing boats we see today. Whereas regional boats evolved somewhat independently, “as a product of boat builders’ responses to a specific environment and to specific uses,”¹⁴ boat builder Harry Pardy designed this shape with the influence of other outboard motorboats in mind.



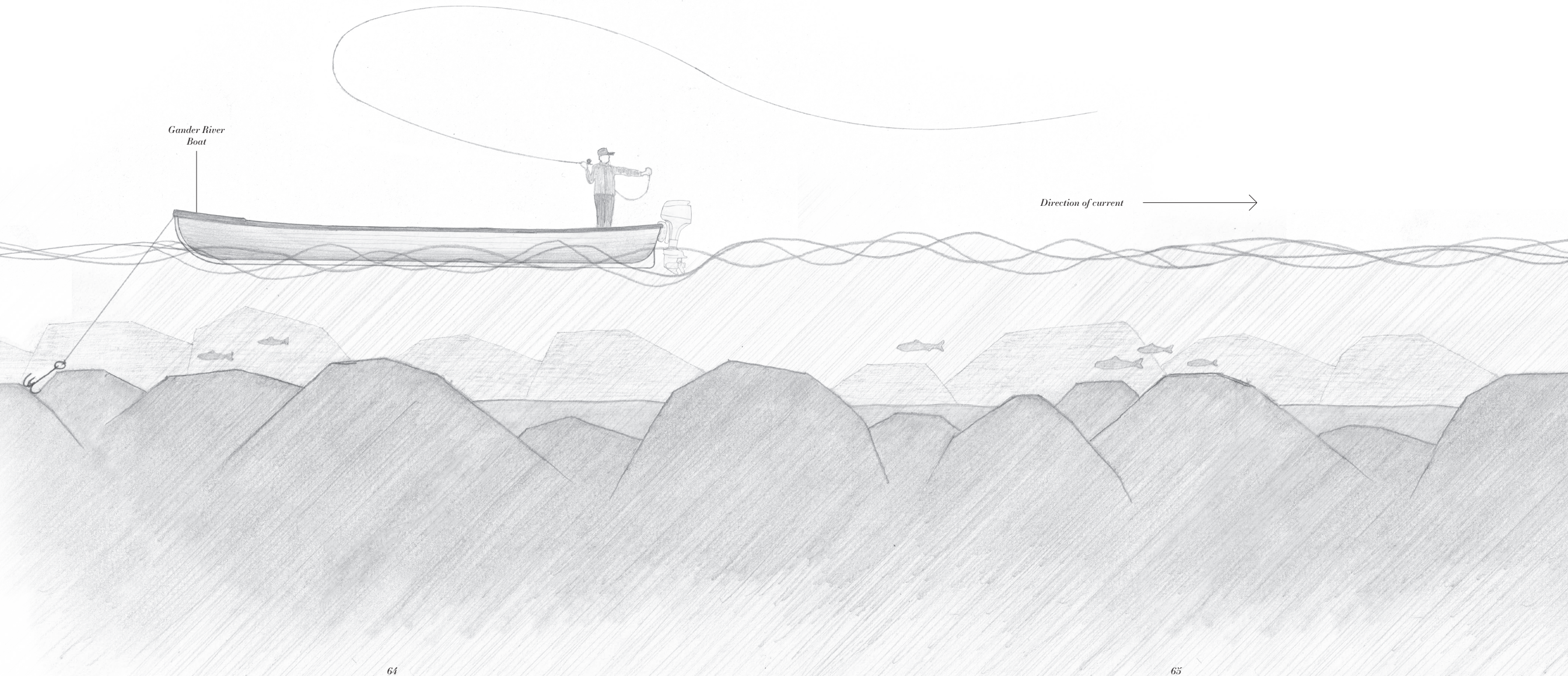
GANDER RIVER BOAT

Gander Bay
Built by Basil Gillingham
24' / 7.3m

Salmon Fly Fishing

Depth: 1 - 10+ metres

The Gander River Boat was modelled on the birch bark canoes traditionally used by Mi'kmaw along the Gander River. At 6 to 7.5 metres (20 – 25ft) long and planked with fir strakes along spruce timbers they were essentially a hybrid between the birch bark canoe and the Rodney. They were originally propelled by a black spruce pole, but were later fitted with outboard motors in the 1940s. They were ideal for navigating the oftentimes rocky, narrow, and shallow Gander River for the salmon fishery.



Regionalism and wooden boats

Small watercraft were effectively the foundation on which life in rural Newfoundland was built. They were used in the inshore fishery to catch cod, squid, lobster, capelin, and for hunting seals and turrs (seabirds).¹⁵ They are still icons of the island, as Jim Miles, of the Marystown Model Ship Gallery said: “When everybody thinks of Newfoundland and the sea, it’s usually dories, first and last.” It is important to note, however, that the title *dory* is essentially a disambiguation, as there are numerous variations and off-shoots that evolved separately in each part of the island to adapt to different climatic conditions, fishing requirements, or even individual taste. Across the Island modifications were made to identify the boat with its place.

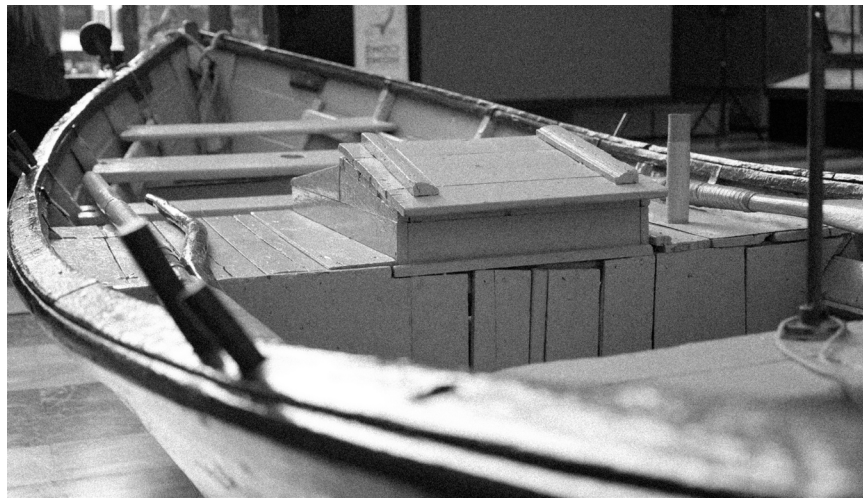
Even the Bay of Islands dory, a unique type in its own right, has slight design differences that can be observed between communities. For example, “builders in Lark Harbour-York Harbour use three boards per side, whereas builders in Benoit’s Cove only use two. Dories built in Cox’s Cove, on the north side of the Humber Arm, can be distinguished by their higher stems and may be painted grey instead of orange, which was commonly done throughout the Bay of Islands in the past.”¹⁶ The design differences are slight, but important. They differentiate each dory according to their home port. Similarly, the motor boats in Elliston had a “gump post” bolted to their stern that identified them with their home port, as in Elliston boats would be moored a short distance offshore “on the collar” and the gump post was used to anchor it in the holding ground.

‘Cause she can punch ahead in any gale
And ride the fishing ground
I often thought how proud I’d be
In a boat like Gideon Brown

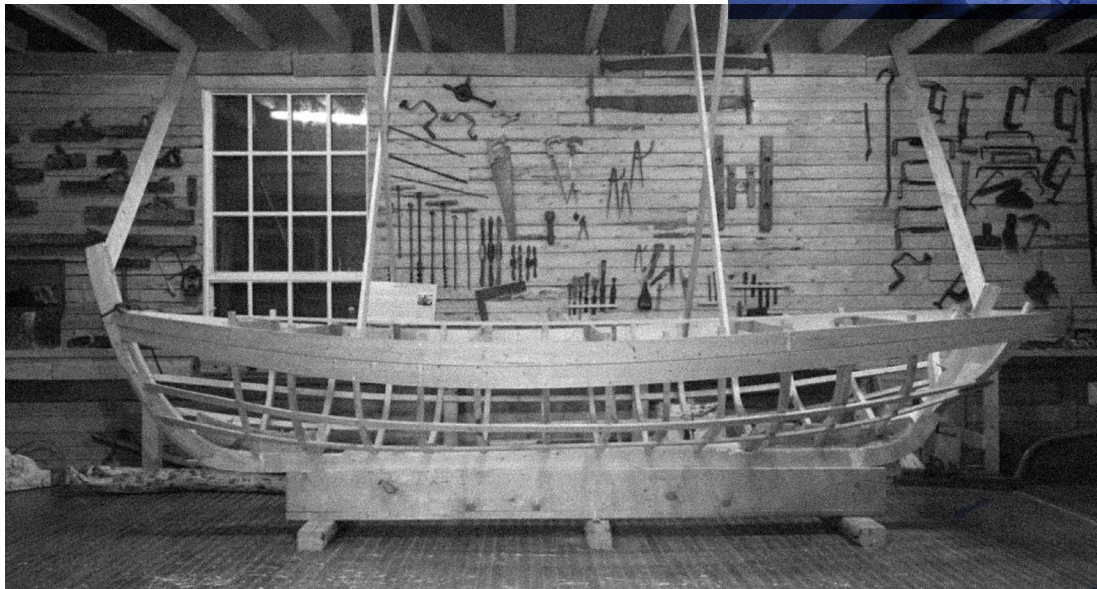
Great Big Sea, *A Boat Like Gideon Brown*

The variations and design history on each type is extensive, and worthy of study, but grows outside of the scope of this thesis. Instead, my inquiry is into the questions that arise through building boats in a specific place, for a specific purpose, over generations. As Jim Dempsey, president of the Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador told me, “*they’re all boats.*” At times, a builder will design his vessel not according to any specific type, prioritizing their own personal expression. This was the case for Andy Riggs’ cabin cruiser boat, which was an integral part of the film produced for this thesis. While it doesn’t fit securely into any one category, it follows the essential recipe of laying a keel, a stem, affixing timbers, and adhering the planking. These are the basic building blocks of a wooden boat, and even these commandments are being challenged by modern techniques, as will be explored in due course.

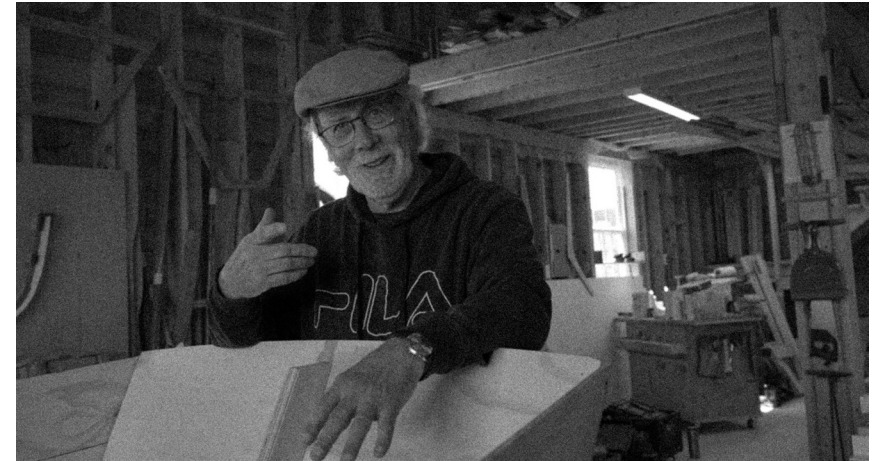
(Top to bottom, left to right)
5.1 A weathered Grandy dory
5.2 Gunwale connection to stern
5.3 Planking connection to stern
5.4 Midship inboard engine box
5.5 Stern knee
5.6 Rudder



In Winterton I met Naval Architect and master boat builder Jerome Canning, from the Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of the distinctions between various types of boats in the province, and he explained to me the distinctions between dory types as he drilled planking on a boat in his workshop.



(Left to right)
 5.7 Unfinished skeleton of a wooden punt
 5.8 Cluttered workshop desk
 5.9 Jerome Canning applying glue to the stem of a punt
 5.10 Jerome Canning working on the stern post of a punt



Liam: *So each region, almost each harbour area, made the modifications based on the type of fishery they had or the terrain?*

Jerome: *Or just to be different sometimes... we generalize and call them the Bay of Islands Dory. But when you're in the Bay of Islands, which is a large bay... If you're there, there's Lark Harbor, they have the Lark Harbor Dory, which is a Bay of Islands Dory, and they have slight difference than Cox's Cove Dory, and the Benoit's Cove Dory. So each one has colours or different planking systems. But essentially the boat has an overall look. It's very, very similar. But just like the Shelburne Dory (the South Coast Dory) the Grandy Dory is more like the Lunenburg Dory.*

He continued to explain how in St. Pierre Miquelon the French took the original dory shape, lengthened it, and inserted an inboard motor. In Placentia Bay, the Monkstown Flats dory came from a similar origin with an inboard motor but was wider and had dropped the crook in the stern. There are an incredible amount of off-shoots and variations each representing a personal act of placemaking.



As an architectural thesis, the terms and technicalities are not as important as are the questions of place and identity which are intimately tied to this craft. The remarkable level of local individualization is unparalleled in the material culture of Newfoundland, nor even in the vernacular architecture. In *Simplicity and Survival: Vernacular Response in Newfoundland Architecture* Shane O’Dea argues that “the architecture of Newfoundland is characterized by a marked simplicity of style and a remarkable persistence of form...”¹⁷ Unique building styles, such as the salt-box style centre-hall house, the Queen Anne revival house, or the mansard-roofed house, are distinct in their origin and classification, but can be seen across the island. Indeed, the architecture of wooden boats was more distinct to place and personal identity than the architecture itself.

Environmental conditions, cultural preference, economic factors, and new forms of technology all exert strong pressures on the evolution of a material culture.¹⁸ Each off-shoot and subcategory in the genealogy of wooden boat design began as the result of unique conditions that fishermen faced in their specific area or their particular method of fishing, but they quickly became identifiers of the *place* the boat came from. Consequently, these changes became part of the identity of the fishermen themselves and were preserved through generations as manifestations of their contribution to the craft of wooden boats. For example, one of the most famous boat builders, Henry Vokey of Trinity Bay, was as masterful a craftsman as they come, having built over 1000 boats in his lifetime.¹⁹ Eventually he adopted his own style, called the *Vokey Boat*, wherein he butted the planking right up

5.11 Wooden speed boat pulled ashore in Grand Bank

against the back of the stern as opposed to flush with its edge.²⁰ This would have no impact on the boat outside of being his own personal flourish or signature.

The case of Henry Vokey illustrates that the craft of wooden boat building is inherently an act of both personal and communal placemaking. These boats embody both physical placemaking, as a symbol of their native outport, bay, or inlet, and metaphysical placemaking as a proclamation by each boat builder to be an active contributor to the identity of their place. Additionally, it must be understood that the importance of placemaking for these boats goes beyond the utilitarian aspects of supporting life on the island. The boats also had a cultural significance.

The practice of fishing in punts and dories was harsh and unforgiving. In his home port of Burgeo, Farley Mowat described men and boys fishing in seventeen-foot dories “in winter weather of such severity that their mittens often froze to the oars.”²¹ In the face of this adversity, the poetics of wooden boats were not lost on the fishermen. Through bringing the fishermen away from the house and back again it became an extension of home. It follows, then, that the design intricacies that identified the boat with their home on the land were consequential. The boat was a lifeline, it was the vessel that permitted one to catch their livelihood, and it could be relied upon to bring them into the tempest and carry them home. It was deliverance from the unforgiving Atlantic waters.

5.12 Rock formations outside of Trinity Bay

5.15 A small trap skiff in the waters outside of Dildo



Notes

1 Crystal Braye, Mitchell Cooper, and Bruce Whitelaw, *Building Boats in Glovertown* (Winterton, NL: Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2018), 11.

2 Jerome Canning, Jeremy Harnum, and Crystal Braye, *Building Dories in the Bay of Islands* (Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2018), 12.

3 Ibid. 13.

4 Crystal Braye, “Grandy Dory,” *Boats & Builders*, February 16, 2016, <https://boatsandbuilders.com/boats/grandy-dory>.

5 Hilda Chaulk Murray, *Of Boats on the Collar: How It Was in One Newfoundland Fishing Community* (Flanker Press, 2007), 43.

6 Ibid. 50.

7 Ibid. 52.

8 Ibid. 46.

9 David A. Taylor, *Boat Building in Winterton, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland* (University of Ottawa Press, 1982), 38

10 Ibid. 38.

11 Ibid. 39.

12 Canning, Harnum, and Braye, *Building Dories in the Bay of Islands*, 24

13 Ibid. 44.

14 Ibid. 61.

15 Ella Reid, interview by Liam Bursey, video recording, July 29, 2022.

16 Canning, Harnum, and Braye, *Building Dories in the Bay of Islands*, 14

17 Shane O’Dea, *Simplicity and Survival: Vernacular Response in Newfoundland Architecture* (Newfoundland Historical Society, 1980), 11.

18 Taylor, *Boat Building in Winterton*, 47.

19 Reid, interview.

20 Ibid.

21 Farley Mowat, *A Whale for the Killing* (Douglas & McIntyre, 1972), 19.

Just to wake up in the morning, to the quiet of the cove
And to hear Aunt Bessie talking to herself.
And to hear poor Uncle John, mumbling wishes to old Nell
It made me feel that everything was fine.

Buddy Wasiname and the Other Fellers, *Saltwater Joys*

PEOPLE



Boat building as a way of being

When describing the experience of entering Newfoundland, it is oft remarked that one feels like they are turning back the clock a decade or more. To quote Mowat; “they were truly people out of time, but it was not that alone which drew me to them. Being a people to whom adversity was natural, they had retained a remarkable capacity for tolerance of other human beings, together with qualities of generosity toward one another and toward strangers in their midst which surpassed anything I had ever known before...”¹ There is an exceptional quality of fellowship here, one which undoubtedly comes from the need to band together against the cold and the hardship, and the changes imposed on the island’s way of life over the years.² In his article entitled “Dependence and Independence: Emergent Nationalism in Newfoundland” Harry Hiller also argues that the source of provincial loyalty in Newfoundlanders is founded on the uniqueness of the place, or the ‘Newfoundland mystique’.³ He believes that the isolation and the weather has created a ‘hardy people’, but first and foremost “it is [the] dependence on the sea that is at the heart of Newfoundland character and identity.”⁴ There is also a strong sense of purpose among the older generation who grew out of this dependence on the sea. As one fisherman explained (in vernacular tongue of bay-talk): “I goes because I got to fish! ‘Tis what I wants to do. ‘Tis out dere, on de sea, dat’s where I wants to be. Dat’s where I knows *what* I is, and *who*, I is... a damn good man, and I ain’t feared to tell it!”⁵

In most cases, boat building knowledge was passed down through generations and family lines. Over the course of their lives, builders would observe the shapes

5.14 Aerial view of Christian Hayter’s motor boat

of boats and understand what was correct for their locality based on judgements by other boat builders.⁶ Teaching was done largely by example, often with little verbal interaction. Herbert Harnum, a boat builder from Winterton, testified:

*Well, my father was building boats and I was there, I was around, holding the plank [for him], [and] getting an idea of what was going on... There was so much you had to do... You know, he'd tell you to do this and show you how to do it and [you'd] pick it up from that.*⁷

This demonstration-focused teaching process was due to the fact that builders were typically not creating unique, original designs. They would craft one of the aforementioned boat types (ie. a rodney, motor boat, dory, etc.) according to the traditions of their region that were passed down to them. It was this body of traditional knowledge that dictated most design decisions, thus boat builders could “stand on the shoulders of their predecessors.”⁸ In the Marystown Model Ship Gallery, Jim Miles explained that along with the visual traditions, sometimes molds and rigs would be passed down to younger generations as well, ensuring the continuation of an individual typology:

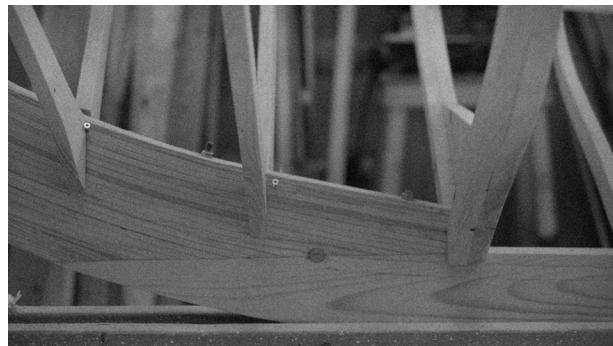
Some people did sketch a rough idea of what they wanted, but it's nothing that an engineer would recognize as a proper blueprint in one sense. It was more like a mental shorthand for the person. And a lot of the time, especially with the wooden craft (dories and swamps and skiffs), you watched your dad do it, he watched his grandfather do it, and he watched his grandfather do it... Some-

*times the jigs remained in use through generations. You'd have your building area and you'd actually have a jig set up to build a 16-foot dory or a 14-foot dory. And of course, that eliminated a lot of the trial and error. As long as you were careful and followed the steps, you wound up with a usable product.*⁹

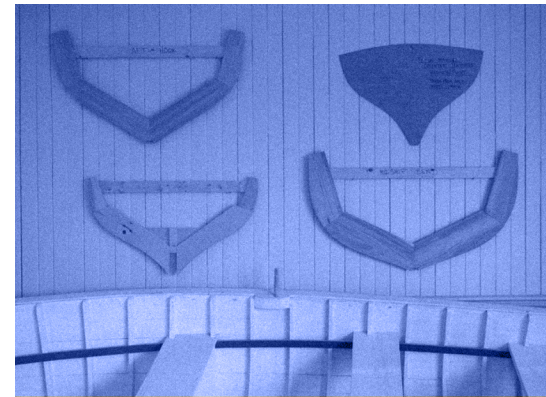
Not all boat builders inherited molds or shared rigs, however, which is a testament to the dedication of individual builders to follow the same design lines. One builder, Fred. P. Hiscock, was uniquely celebrated for forming his timbers by eye:¹⁰

*I started and built one for myself, that's all. I went in the woods, I knows what to cut for timber, what would make a timber, you know, 'cause I was after it before, you know... I marked off gradually, see, what I thought would suit the water, you know, and I made the three frames... I built seven, I think, motor boats, [and] I never had no molds and there wasn't a bit of difference, and I never moulded one from the other.*¹¹

If there is a consistent pattern amongst boat builders, it is their tenacity for the craft. When the boat must be called upon to take one out into the water and bring them back safely, one must fully believe in their own skills. To quote Mowat again, they are “adamantine, indomitable, and profoundly certain of themselves.”¹² But beyond this, the boat builders who continued to use wood and follow traditional designs believed in something else: the old way of life. Perhaps this belief is one of the reasons wooden boats have survived so far into the modern era, even after the drastically changing fishing industry exhausted their economic usefulness.



(Top to bottom, left to right)
 5.15 A builder working on a modern wooden punt in the Isles Wooden Boat Workshop in Twillingate
 5.16 Timber moulds hung on the wall of the workshop
 5.17 Single pane window
 5.18 Laminated curved stern post
 5.19 Sunlight patterns on hardwood floor

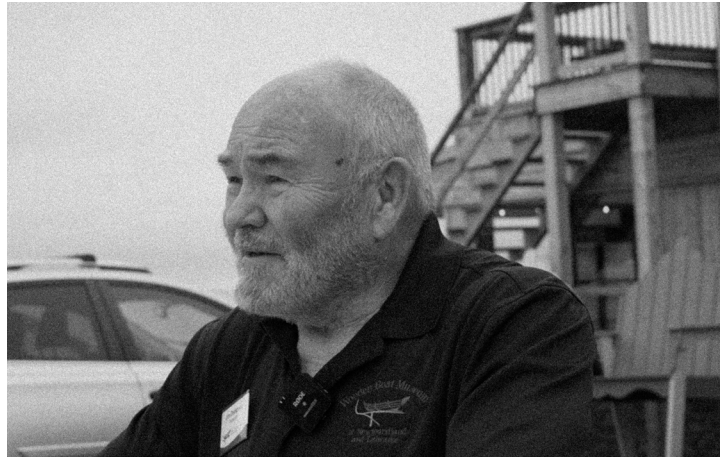


(Top to bottom, left to right)

5.20 Jim Dempsey

5.21 Wooden motor boat on the wharf

*5.22 Wooden motor boat during the Dildo
Make n' Break engine festival*



When I spoke with Jim Dempsey, president of the Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador, he attuned me to the nostalgia interlaced in wooden boats:

Jim: We go to a lot of trade shows, and when we do, we want people to come and visit the museum. We're in the heritage business, but we're in the tourism business as well. But we always bring a boat, and it's always a bit of a magnet. People come over and say, "Oh, look at this." And when we've brought this boat, a lot of people don't realize it's made out of plywood. It takes a little while to get it. So in order to get people to come to our booth, I'll step out into the aisle as people are walking by, and I'll say, "Tell me about the wooden boat in your family." And some people don't have a wooden boat story - A lot of people do. I've been surprised at how often women who are maybe in their 60s or even their 70s will have stories about when they were girls and being out in boats, and they go off for a picnic, or they do something that they thought was a little bit naughty, leaving home and being on their own. It really is a history that people can share, and it's a lot of fun to hear the stories.



Jim reveals something of the personal histories that were merged within wooden boats. He also reveals an important fact of the gender roles in the early Newfoundland fishery, where men fished on the open ocean and women stayed home to salt and split the cod on the flakes. For them, wooden boats could be an exercise in agency, or an act of self-determination. When I mentioned this to Jim, he said "If they didn't take the wooden boats out, they would have stayed home for the rest of their lives."

Confederation and threats to wooden boats

Newfoundland was confederated into Canada in 1949. The movement was spearheaded by Joey Smallwood, who became the new province's premiere. Before joining Canada, the people were independent and harboured an egalitarian way of life, albeit an impoverished one.¹³ Smallwood's vision for a new Newfoundland and Labrador hinged on the creation of new industrial opportunities for the province, and "simultaneously promoted changes to the fisheries that favoured modern technologies and large-scale harvesting and processing methods, moving away from the traditional salt-cod fishery."¹⁴ Consequentially, many people in fishing communities were no longer able to participate in the fisheries as they once had. In order to compete, they had to adapt to new techniques or transition into other industries. This created dramatic changes in the economic structure of Newfoundland's society. What was once a self-sustaining fishing economy was now forced to become part of the rapidly urbanizing world. Hiller states that "whereas 83 per cent of the labor force was engaged in fishing in 1891, only 8 per cent were so engaged by the late 1970s."¹⁵ Simply put, the industrial utopia that Smallwood envisioned for Newfoundland did not involve inshore fishing.

Compounding these tremendous changes to Newfoundland's culture post-confederation were the mass centralization efforts mandated by both the federal and provincial governments. Beginning in the 1960s, these policies forced families out of outports and into 'growth centres' that were designed to be labour hubs for new forms of industry. It was impossible to provide public services to all 1,200 communities scattered across the coastline, and thus the government needed to reduce the number of people reliant on the inshore fishery. By 1975 "28,000

5.23 (Below) Moving a house in Trinity Bay

5.24 (Right) Malcom Rogers bringing a house from Silver Fox Island to shore in Dover



people had been relocated and about 200 settlements disappeared."¹⁶ In these growth centres people could find new forms of employment in a more modernized fishing industry. Fishermen traded their small watercraft to work on offshore draggers and trawlers and industrial fish plants.¹⁷ A natural byproduct to the loss of their self-sustaining way of life was that families would have to become reliant on company wages and government assistance rather than the capabilities of their own fishing boat. Mowat wrote "the day that Smallwood came to power, the continuity and evolution of the Newfoundland way of life was disrupted, probably forever."¹⁸ Smallwood's vision of progress demanded the elimination of outport communities and the transformation of their people into industrial workers. This was executed by first withholding support from the fisheries that would enable them to transition into effective economic enterprises. Later it was done by reducing basic public services. For example, outport schools were often unable to obtain teachers and villages would go months between doctor visits.¹⁹

Resettlement was an experiment in social engineering, and retrospectively it has been documented that it had many destructive effects. As Hiller indicates, “settlements with a vital sense of community were defined by officials as not economically viable and the result was relocation and urbanization without any necessary improvement in economic or social well-being.”²⁰ Families were torn away from

their homes where they had often lived for generations. To make the move, some people had to float their houses on the sea to the new growth centers. Poetically, wooden boats facilitated this move, as houses would be towed by 4-5 trap skiffs in a surreal confluence of home and water.²¹ The boat carried the house from one place to another; a very literal exercise in placemaking.

5.25 A house towed by trap skiff to the town of Dover, c. 1961



Wooden boats and the people of Newfoundland were inextricably linked. Changes that occurred to one are mirrored in the other. The social services that were introduced after Confederation, for example, had both positive and negative outcomes for the people of Newfoundland. One of these services, unemployment compensation, unintentionally placed constraints on boat building traditions. Typically, in the winter months when fishing wasn't an option, fishermen earned money by building boats (both for themselves and to sell to others). After employment compensation, eligible fishermen no longer had the incentive to work during the winter. Compounding this, the Unemployment Insurance Commission had regulations to prohibit recipients "from using their idle time to build boats to sell to others, or even to build boats for their own use."²² To quote David Taylor; "loss of incentive was the main cause, said one man, but as much as he might want to build a boat, he admitted that it would be wiser for him to "sit on his arse" than risk losing his unemployment checks."²³

Fishermen's Assistance Plans were administered by the Fisheries Marine Service of Environment Canada.²⁴ One of these programs was intended to aid commercial fishermen with the purchase of new boats, wherein one would receive subsidies of "up to 35% of the total cost of hulls, engines, deck machinery, and electronic equipment for vessels from 25 to 75 feet in length."²⁵ It would seem that this would be an excellent avenue to encourage wooden boat building traditions. However, in order to comply with the strict regulations of the program a builder would have to go through an arduous process to become a 'specialist', and their boats

had to be built to rigid specifications and inspected by federal officials. The design regulations enforced were often not congruent with local traditions, and were not suited to the specific conditions their boats were required for.²⁶ The program was unsuccessful because it failed to recognize the realities of boat building culture. One of these realities was that boat building was never considered a 'specialist' craft. Especially in the years after Confederation, the craft was, by all accounts, a "very ordinary, unremarkable activity."²⁷ As Winterton boat builder Marcus French stated, "when someone needs a boat, they gets at it and tries to build one."²⁸

In the decades following Confederation it became clear that the traditions and cultural practices that originated in outport Newfoundland (of which wooden boats were eminent), were under threat. Subsequently, a cultural movement began to rise and call for the preservation of these traditional ways. A key journalistic and political figure for Newfoundland, Harold Horwood, fought for cultural nationalism and self-determination in his magazine, *Protocol*. In its first edition he wrote a manifesto calling upon the artistic traditions:

In the forefront of every national movement there must be an artistic movement. The soul of a nation must be born first, and only then is a healthy political body possible. Otherwise the nation is like a wave of the sea, blown about by every wind and tossed; not knowing what is wrong or what it wants, and hence at the mercy of the professional quack or charlatan who promises to bring in the Millennium by act of Parliament. That is why we must have the creative spirit in Newfoundland. Art must not be the hobby of a few over-fed merchants

and lawyers in St. John's - a pass-time to while away leisure hours of people who have nothing better to do. It must be the soul of the people rising up to assert itself as different from the souls of other people. For every people, the Philosopher says, speaks its own language of good and evil. My good is not my neighbour's good, and universal brotherhood must not become international sameness.²⁹



It might be argued that in the post-Confederation years, wooden boat building was a strong contender for hosting the creative spirit that Horwood calls for. With the development of regionally specific typologies, this commodity that began as a utilitarian vessel to support an economic need became an important representation of place and identity. In some ways, their social importance surpassed the home, as one fisherman said; “Afore we joined up to Canada no person spent money on paint for houses. Boats, certainly, but houses would be a waste.”³⁰ After Confederation, despite pressures from the government, those who still relied on wooden boats began to see them as a link to the past, giving them doubly important significance. As time progressed, the ‘mainlanders’ in Canada began to take notice of the romance of Newfoundland living. Farley Mowat and Harold Horwood played an important role in this movement by celebrating the ‘peasant culture,’ attempting to connect with the soul of the province’s “insular people” that Smallwood had forgotten.³¹ They also urged Smallwood’s government to initiate heritage preservation programs: “We can well envision a time when people will not know what a pre-confederation outpost looked like, or even the basic plan upon which an outpost grew up. This, as well as more ancient history, ought to be preserved in as great detail as possible.”³² These were the beginnings of the heritage preservation process that, as will be evidenced later, allowed wooden boats to hold on. Nonetheless, their practical day-to-day usage in Joey Smallwood’s industrial Newfoundland was fading.

5.26 Motor boat wake
5.27 Fishing stage

**In Make n’ Break Harbour the boats are so few
Too many are pulled up and rotten
Most houses stand empty, old nets hung to dry
Are blown away lost and forgotten**

Stan Rogers, *Make n’ Break Harbour*



Boat building as storytelling

Wooden boats, divorced from their original purpose, take on an entirely new function in the face of change. Now, anyone who sits in a wooden boat becomes, by virtue of the history intertwined in the planks of the hull, directly connected to the traditions that once characterized the place. This is exactly how wooden boat building today remains an act of placemaking. Even in contemporary times the hand-crafted boats are reminders of the forces that shaped the life of so many individuals along the coast.

5.28 Modern fishing rods and lures hanging over the side of a traditional wooden boat

Evidently, wooden boats are both a linkage to the past and an instrument of liberation. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, philosopher Michel de Certeau argues for the importance of everyday practices as tactics to subvert the status quo. The practice of building and using wooden boats, and the experience of being on the water, are examples of the quotidian pursuits that Certeau referred to. Certeau argued that “these pursuits unfailingly establish relational tactics (a struggle for life), artistic creations (an aesthetic), and autonomous initiatives (an ethic).”³³ These simple practices are crucial to the essence of life in Newfoundland. In interviewing people on the topic of wooden boats, it became clear storytelling was instrumental in translating the importance of being on the water. The material craft of boat building in itself is abstractly an act of storytelling. It incorporates local history, generational teachings, and personal preference into a physical object, a social commodity. When one knows how to *read* the craft, they can garner the story of a place from the construction of the boats that call it home. Beyond this, wooden boats also tell the story about how people grew into their place. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* Certeau tells us that discourse and practices of storytelling “indicate a social historicity in which systems of representation or processes of fabrication no longer appear only as normative frameworks but also as tools manipulated by users.”³⁴ These systems of representation, processes of fabrication, or otherwise material forms of storytelling found in boats, can be used by those who wield them as “tools” to individualize their culture.

Certeau also argues for storytelling as a spatial practice, stating that stories “carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places.”³⁵ Stories organize the ‘play’ of actions which transform an uninhabited space into a *place*. He continues to declare that “it would be possible to construct a typology of all these stories in terms of identification of places and actualization of spaces.”³⁶ That is to say that stories can be fundamental elements in the act of placemaking. They allow us to inhabit spaces, transforming the unformed and boundless landscape into something we can grasp, a place in the mind of the inhabitant. This can be witnessed in Newfoundland, where the folk stories and songs of the island memorialize and celebrate the landscape, turning it into a place we can grasp. Certeau goes on to state that “reciprocally, where stories are disappearing (or else are being reduced to museographical objects), there is a loss of space: deprived of narrations... the group or the individual regresses toward the disquieting, fatalistic experience of a formless, indistinct, and nocturnal totality.”³⁷ This *formless totality* is exactly the threat that wooden boats currently face. Devoid of practical use they are reduced to museographical objects. There is potential for them to lose their *active* storytelling power, resigned to being *static* representations of the past. When this happens, we lose the value that Certeau argues is necessary to transcend amorphous space and create an inhabitable place.³⁸ As a result of the shifting waters in the utility of wooden boats, their placemaking properties are at put at risk.

**For we still keep our time to the turn of the tide
In this boat that I built with my father
Still lifts to the sky, the “one lunger” and I
Still talk like old friends on the water**

Stan Rogers, *Make n’ Break Harbour*



5.29 Weathered clapboard on Andy Riggs’ boat shed

5.50 Juniper berries



After our conversation in his basement workshop, Andy Riggs took me across Burin, to a small boat shed he built on the shore of Port au Bras. He recounted how he built it from the clapboard of an old friend's house, saying the wood was now over a hundred years old. Inside was a dory on the ground, filled with debris and broken relics of boat accoutrements. A much smaller dory was hanging above it. All around us were moulds for shaping timbers, engine shafts, propellers, barrels and the like. The air inside felt old and heavy; it was the shed of misfit parts, forgotten until a young architecture student from Ontario asked to be taken there.



Liam: *What is your first memory in a Dory?*

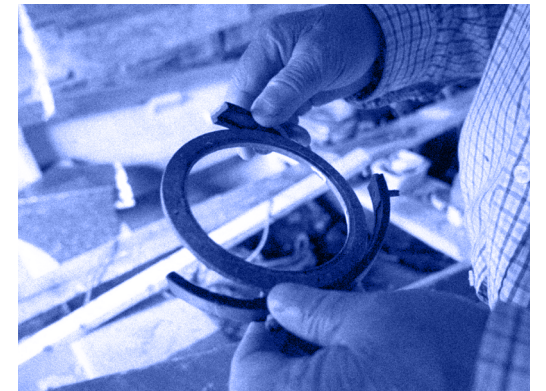
Andy: *Oh, we had a Dory for years and years and years back. We always had a Dory. I had a Dory like that one time I bought with an engine in her. A three Acadia in the middle of her and a keel on her...*

Liam: *So right from when you were a kid, you always had them?*

Andy: *Yeah, we always had them right from there then. We used to play rowing around in them when we'd be young fellers eh? Mm-hmm. We had a small punt too, little punt. A small punt not very big, eh? And me and my sister used to bring rocks in her. When they built the Warf over there, we used to go around, you know, and load her up with rocks. We'd go around the landwash and pick up the rocks, haul her in and load her right full of rocks. Then we'd row over and heave em out in the gump. Buddy used to give us 75 cents a load for it. Ain't that something? That wasn't much, was it? 75 cents 'by.*



(Top to bottom, left to right)
 5.51 Andy telling a story
 5.52 Old dories hung up in storage
 5.53 Andy's boat shed
 5.54 A broken compass found in the dory



Of course, Andy's close connection with wooden boats is congruent with the experience of many growing up in outport Newfoundland. Wooden boats were also objects of play, unlocking the cultural connection to the water at a young age.

5.55 (Following page) Andy Riggs in his boat shed



Notes

- 1 Farley Mowat, *A Whale for the Killing* (Douglas & McIntyre, 1972), 19.
- 2 Hiller, Harry H. "Dependence and Independence: Emergent Nationalism in Newfoundland." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 10, no. 3 (July 1, 1987), 266.
- 3 Ibid. 266.
- 4 Ibid. 266.
- 5 Mowat, *A Whale for the Killing* 33.
- 6 David A. Taylor, *Boat Building in Winterton, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland* (University of Ottawa Press, 1982), 57.
- 7 Herbert Harnum, quoted in Taylor, *Boat Building in Winterton*, 50.
- 8 Taylor, *Boat Building in Winterton*, 50.
- 9 Jim Miles, interview by Liam Burse, video recording, July 27, 2022.
- 10 Taylor, *Boat Building in Winterton*, 54-55.
- 11 Fred P. Hiscock, quoted in Taylor, *Boat Building in Winterton*, 55.
- 12 Farley Mowat, *This Rock Within the Sea: A Heritage Lost* (Little, Brown, 1969), forward.
- 13 Mowat, *A Whale for the Killing*, 30.
- 14 Crystal Braye, Mitchell Cooper, and Bruce Whitelaw, *Building Boats in Glovertown* (Winterton, NL: Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2018), 9.
- 15 Hiller, "Dependence and Independence," 267.
- 16 Ibid. 268.
- 17 Melanie Martin, "Was Resettlement Justified?," *Heritage Newfoundland & Labrador*, 2006, <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/politics/resettlement-analysis.php>.
- 18 Farley Mowat, *The New Founde Land* (Doubleday Canada, 1990), 55.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Hiller, "Dependence and Independence," 268.
- 21 Reid, interview.
- 22 Taylor, *Boat Building in Winterton*, 30.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Horwood, Harold, quoted in James Overton, "Sparking A Cultural Revolution: Joey Smallwood, Farley Mowat, Harold Horwood and Newfoundland's Cultural Renaissance," *Newfoundland & Labrador Studies* 16, no. 2 (October 10, 2000), 183.
- 30 Farley Mowat, *Bay of Spirits: A Love Story* (McClelland & Stewart, 2009), 12.
- 31 Overton, "Sparking A Cultural Revolution," 191.
- 32 Ibid. 178.
- 33 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (London: University of California Press, 1984), 5.
- 34 Ibid. 50.
- 35 Ibid. 171.
- 36 Ibid. 171.
- 37 Ibid. 177.
- 38 Ibid. 177.



3.36 House in Trinity

3.37 Treetops in Trinity

When blinding storm gusts fret thy shore and wild waves lash thy strand
Thro' spindrift swirl and tempest roar we love thee wind-swept land
We love thee, we love thee, we love thee wind-swept land.

Sir Cavendish Boyle, *Ode to Newfoundland*

PLACE

Boat building as a materialization of culture

The study of material culture allows us to understand the sense of identity garnered through an individual's "making, unmaking and remaking of their material worlds."¹ Wooden boats, as previously expressed, were originally made as everyday objects, as a non-specialist practice executed by fishermen who simply needed watercraft to sustain their livelihood. In the days before modern advancements one fisherman in the *Newfoundland Quarterly* in 1958 described it bluntly:

*You are building a boat. You go in and cut the trees, bring them out, hew, work, and shape them over. You get raw material in the woods and work it over with axes, adze, saw, auger, plane, and hammer. All that you will buy is the iron work. But we could make that too, if we had to.*²

It is important to define boat builders as *makers*, akin to the concept of 'master builder'. To quote Judy Attfield, "considering the maker we turn from the type of professional designer who is mainly involved at the point of the conceptualisation of a product or site, prior to its manufacture or construction, to the type of designer who engages directly with the object of their design through the process of making."³

When talking about wooden boats, it's not uncommon to hear a builder reminisce on the qualities of being on the water in a wooden vessel. In her study of material culture Attfield argues that "studies of workers in the craft industries does suggest that one of the main motivating expectations on the part of 'artistic' craftpersons is the direct satisfaction derived from transforming materials, but



(Top to bottom)
4.1 Motor boat docked in Dildo Harbour
4.2 Seagull
4.3 Fishermen participating in the food fishery clean their catch on their warf
4.4 Cleaning cod

maybe even more significantly, from the creative effects of making objects as individual personal statements.⁷⁴ It is an expectation that the maker ‘takes command’ of their work creatively, even when executing a design that has descended from generations and thus isn’t wholly their own. Fulfilment comes through the intimate relationship with their medium and making process. Attfield notes, importantly, that “it is only through a thorough knowledge of their craft that they are able to do so.”⁷⁵

Master boat builder Jerome Canning, of the Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador, describes the embodied knowledge discovered through building a wooden boat, piece by piece, from the ground up:

While you’re building one, the whole sense of what the boat is and where it comes from, actually, what you’re inherit is a lot of tradition. And this is how I look at it, it’s very ancestral, so actually participating in that, you get a feel for that ancestral sort of history. Because when you’re doing something, like why is a certain shape like it is, why is there a certain angle like it is? You realize that this is, you know, in terms of the punts anyway, they were basically perfected before the engine. Like their angle of entry at the waterline, their angle of exit, their angles in terms of dead rise and this kind of stuff.⁷⁶

Jerome describes wooden boats as vernacular crafted objects, deriving their characteristics from regional phenomena. These contingencies, such as climate, materials near at hand, and social and geographical factors, are all deciding

factors in what constitutes place. Attfield observes that the traditional methods of manufacture, those that Jerome is involved in, take on additional significance when they are at risk of dying out due to the industrial age. Crafts that “have also become associated with regional history as representative vernacular forms are valued when they became scarce and therefore precious. The interest in reproducing local crafts is not only for the pleasure in making, nor just for the intrinsic beauty of the object, but in order to keep traditional skills alive as part of the national heritage.”⁷⁷ To understand the underpinnings of heritage in material culture, we must first examine the boat building practices that consecrate the craft as a physical materialization of place.

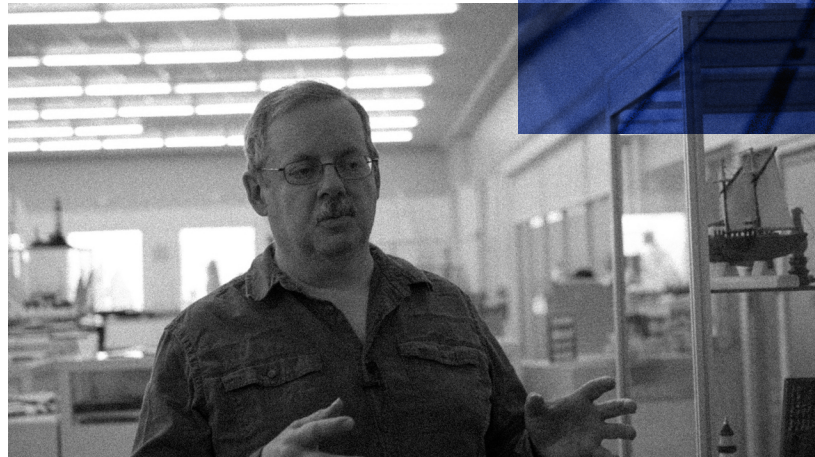


4.5 Petty Harbour

I traveled to the Marystown Model Ship Gallery, and met Jim Miles. His museum was a huge space in the Marystown Mall; a strangely quotidian place for a museum, situated alongside a Scotiabank and No Frills. It was more reminiscent of a department store than a museum with it's bright fluorescent white ceiling panels. It was chock-full of model ships and boats from every era across Newfoundland's history, from dories to deep-sea trawlers. While standing beside a full-sized wooden punt on display, I asked Jim why he believed wooden boat building had managed to hold on despite the pressures inflicted over time to erase the inshore fishing industry.



(Top to bottom, left to right)
4.6 Model dory outfitted with sail
4.6 Trawl tubs in a dory
4.8 Wooden rowboat in Marystown Model Ship Gallery
4.9 Bow of the wooden rowboat
4.10 Jim Miles



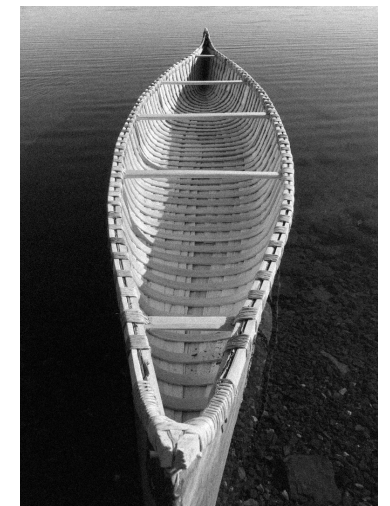
Jim: Well, there's a lot of satisfaction, too, to take a pile of lumber and turn it into a lovely watercraft that you can actually trust to take you out and bring you back and do it with your own hands and your own skills. It's a very satisfying feeling... And if you're putting along close enough that you can sit down and trail your fingers through the water, it's a very different experience. Very different. And of course, there's a family connection. You know, my dad was telling me about doing this with my grandfather. And now I can take my son out with me, you know, pass it along, this sort of business.

Material connections to place

When studying wooden boat building of any type, it is helpful to note the birch bark canoes created by the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island, the original boat builders in this part of the world. Like the boat typologies in Newfoundland, there are many forms of birch bark canoes that are built to suit specific regional conditions across the continent. The Mi'kmaq cultural group, original inhabitants of Canada's coastal provinces and now living throughout Newfoundland, build canoes that derive structural strength from their formal geometry. Richard Kroeker, professor at Dalhousie University's School of Architecture, recounts that in using birch bark, wood, spruce roots and spruce resin, "the resulting overall assembly is a spring-loaded, stressed-skin structure, rather than cladding on a frame, as is the case with most other boats or buildings."⁸ Pliable green wood is bent to create this spring-loaded frame, preserving the continuity and structural integrity naturally created in the wood as it grows out of the ground. Design decisions are made during the construction process depending on the nature of the intended use of the boat. Kroeker explains that "the forces that shaped design in local indigenous cultures were gravity, air movement, materials, connection, conservation of energy, climate, and social patterns."⁹ The resultant watercraft, having literally grown out of the land of the place, and having been designed according to the behaviours of the material to suit the specific conditions of the place, represents an absolute synchronicity of material culture, design, and place.

I mention the birch bark canoe not only because these boat building techniques informed Newfoundland fishing boats like the Gander River Boat, but also

to highlight the essence of wooden boat building as a place-based practice. While the Newfoundland wooden boat building traditions use European construction techniques, similar considerations as to how a boat is born of the land do apply. Mi'kmaq elder Dr. Murdena Marshall states "In our language there are no nouns. There are only verbs." "Everything exists in a dynamic relationship and is understood in the context of relationships."¹⁰ Subsequently, wooden boats cannot be defined by their status as a stand-alone object or commodity, only through their action or potential for action. In terms of Newfoundland wooden boat building, this becomes clear through the original practices of sourcing wood for punts, dories, rodneys, motor boats, and all other small watercraft typologies.



4.11 An Indigenous graduate design studio, taught by David Fortin at the McEwen School of Architecture, sees students build a traditional birch bark canoe

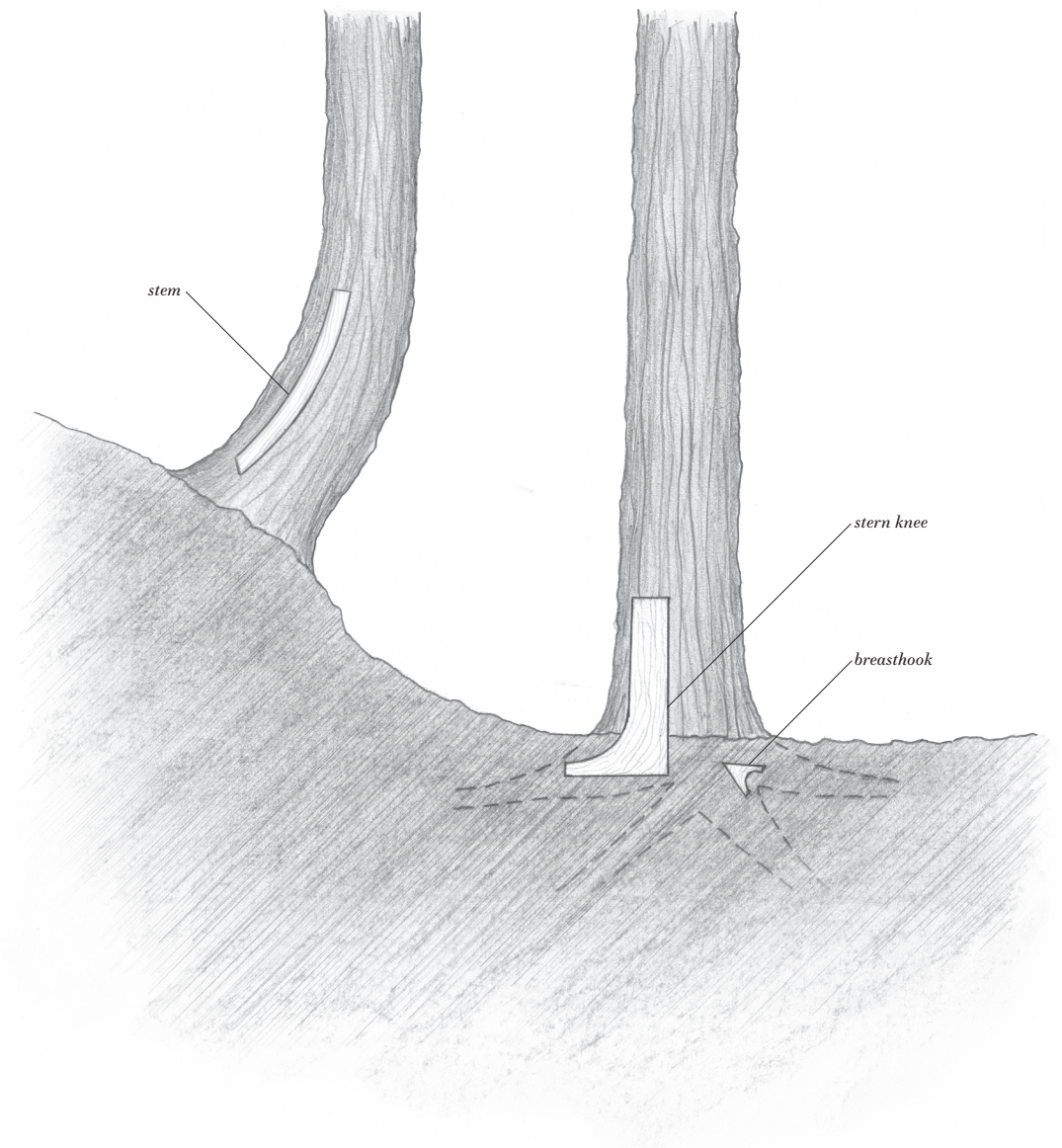
4.12 Under the guidance of Elder Marcel Labelle, the students create the canoe through traditional techniques

4.15 The completed birch bark canoe, named 'Hope'

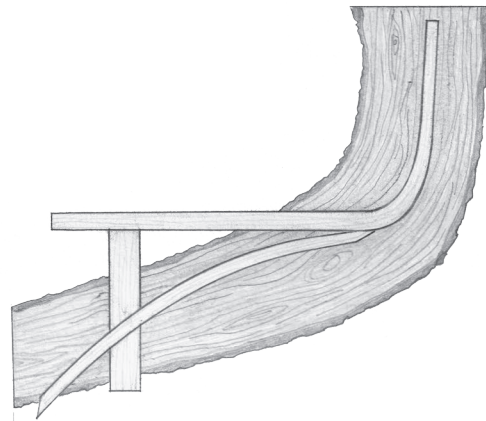
In the beginning, all boat builders would have shaped their timbers from naturally curved pieces of wood found in forests on the island. The gnarled, wind-blown trees around the island were perfectly suited to find curved pieces of lumber to become the timbers of a boat.

That was generally referred to as found timber. Basically, you had an idea of the shapes of knees and ribs, the strength members for your hull. You had an idea of what you needed and then you, as the builder, would go out into the woods and look for a tree that had an appropriate curve where the roots ran into the trunk. That way if you're able to harvest that tree and cut a timber that was 90% the right shape anyway, it was much less work and considerably stronger than if you were trying to make yourself a piece and clobber together... a couple of different pieces of wood to get the same angle. It's a lot stronger if it's all one unified piece... it's all a natural curve with the growth layers in it. I imagine there's a certain amount of almost laminated strength to it.¹¹

This found timber methodology has multiple implications for boat building as a place-based practice. First, it means that boat shapes were, to a degree, influenced by the shapes of the roots growing out of the land of the place. Furthermore, it created a culture among boat builders that involved going out into the forest and reading the trees for specific curved pieces (stems, sternposts, knees, timbers, and deadwoods) needed to create their boat. Up until the point of finding timber in the forest, the design of the boat often only existed in the imagination of the builder. Therefore, this became a sort of collaboration between maker and material, between a fisherman and the place.



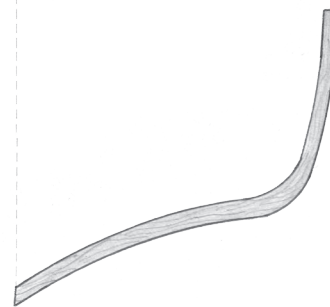
Three-piece mold placed on plank stock



Timber shape traced onto stock



Finished timber



As previously mentioned, templates and shared moulds were often passed down between builders. Another, and potentially even more common conceptual process is what David Taylor called ‘mental templates’: non-physical patterns that exist only in the mind of the designer-builder.¹² In essence, once a builder had decided on the typology of the boat they then had to construct the major structural components of the stem and sternpost (the first ‘broad strokes’). Notably, the stem and stern are less bound by the rigidity of a prescribed shape.¹³ Consequentially, more variability is allowed from boat to boat than in the other component parts. Builders are thus “guided by a general notion of what is correct, what looks right, what will ‘answer’ to the shape of the planned vessel,” which is circumscribed by their cultural conditioning.¹⁴

Thus, traditional wooden boat builds often did not use physical patterns to select boat parts, but were guided by non-physical, mental patterns.¹⁵ Taylor contends that “The mental patterns that boat builders use are contained in their cultural information, that inherited body of knowledge that provides them with the rules, reasons, methods and plans for living within their culture.”¹⁶ The resultant curved timbers of wooden boats are examples of materialized culture. They represent a confluence of metaphysical, cultural place and physical place. For example, Edgar Butt, a builder from Glovertown, knew to go alongside the ponds in his area to find a specific shape in the curved trees that grew there.¹⁷ He also adhered to cutting wood close to the coast, as it was better quality than wood cut further inland:



Taylor: *Were there certain shapes you looked for in trees?*

Piercey: *Oh yes, oh yes. It wasn't only going into the woods and cutting a crooked stick, you know. It had to be right, you know, [it had to] come down with a little bit of hollow, you know.*

Taylor: *How did you know what shape was correct?*

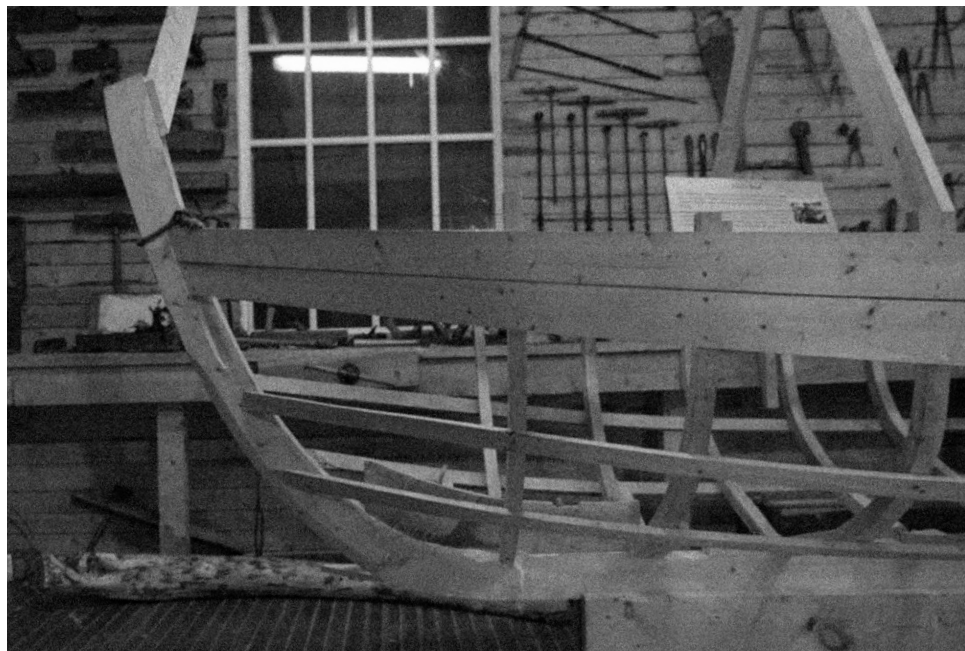
Piercey: *Oh, you could see it. The old fellas, they knew when they looked at it. They could know, I suppose, by the tops of the trees. We was in [the woods] one time, I suppose there was four feet of snow or more. We was boiling a kettle and, ah, I don't know if my father said, or my uncle, one of them, he said "There's a fine knee under that juniper tree". You know, just [by] looking up at it.*

David Taylor and Lionel Piercey on timber harvesting

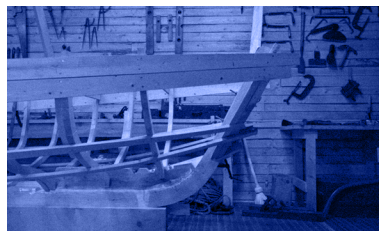
It was a better fiber. (Wood further inland) was more brittle... The plank, for some reason or other, that was cut out the coast was a lot better and more pliable, flexible than what you'd get up by the railway or in the station somewhere. I guess it was grown by the salt water. It was just a different climate, that's all... You could tell by the shavings when you were planing where the wood came from.¹⁸

The builder's relationship to place is what defines the practice of boat building. In order to accurately harvest the timbers of a boat from trees one had to be able to *read* the forest. As Simon Schema, author of *Landscape and Memory* tells us, the landscape we inhabit goes beyond the physical elements that can be seen from the top of a hill. Landscapes are "constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock."¹⁹ As elder Dr. Murdena Marshall noted, it is important understand place as a verb, rather than a noun. This sentiment is echoed in W.J.T. Mitchell's *Landscape and Power*, where he argues that it is important to ask not only what a landscape *is* or what it *means*, but to focus on what it *does*. For Mitchell, landscape is not "an object to be seen or a text to be read, but ... a process by which social and subjective identities are formed."²⁰ In Newfoundland the living as part of the landscape was a cultural practice, it offered the potential to make wooden boats from the land and live off the water. In the original ways in which the boats were crafted there was an interplay between landscape inhabitant and land use.

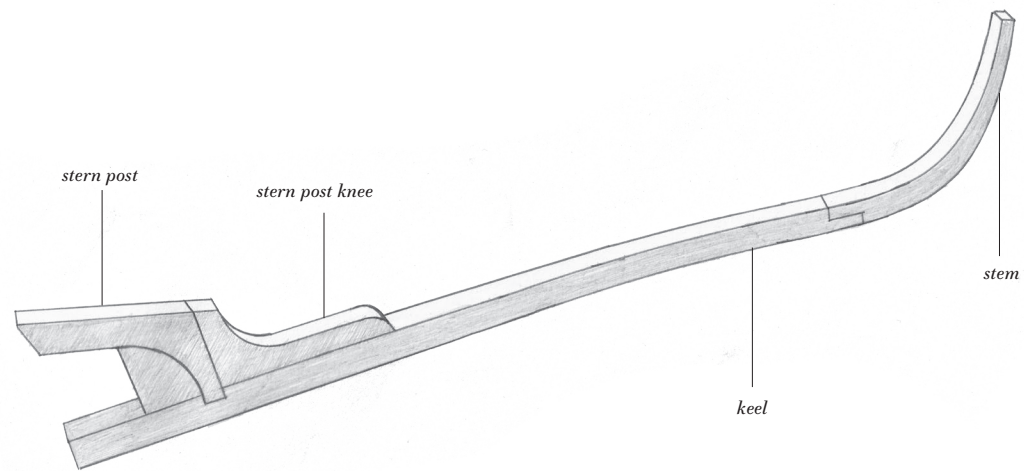
4.14 - 4.15 Windswept trees



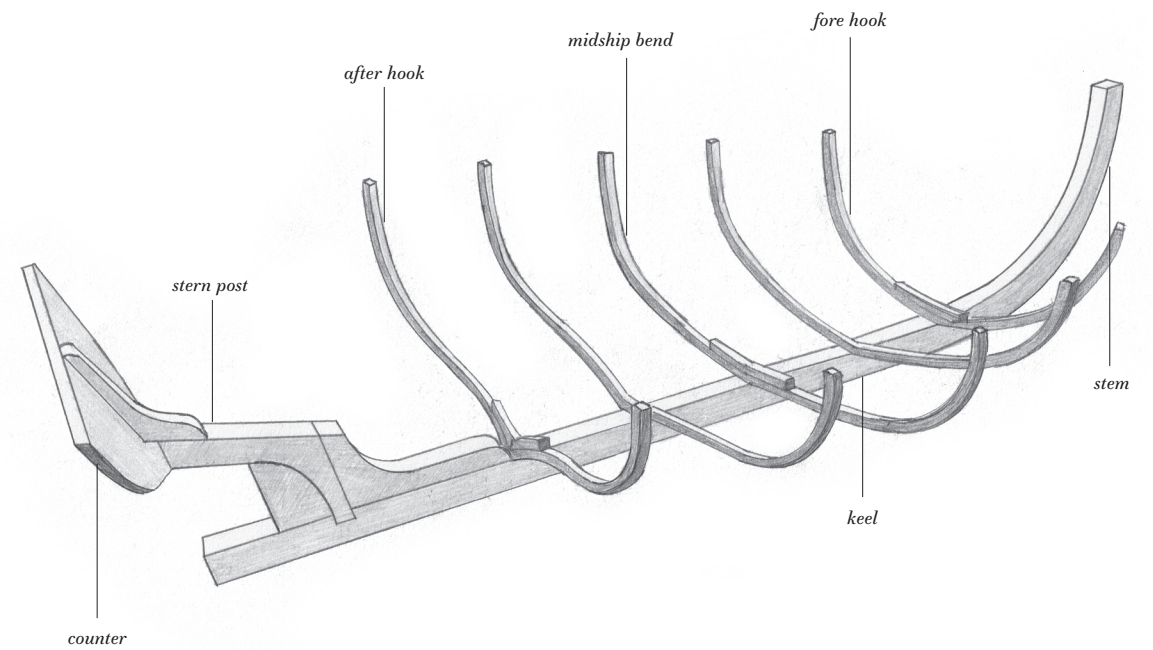
4.16 The crook in a tree that would often be harvested
 4.17 Curved stem that was harvested from a crooked tree
 4.18 Curved stern knee that was harvest from a crooked tree
 4.19 (Opposite) Harvested tree sections stacked in Jerome Canning's workshop



Typological Punt Assembly

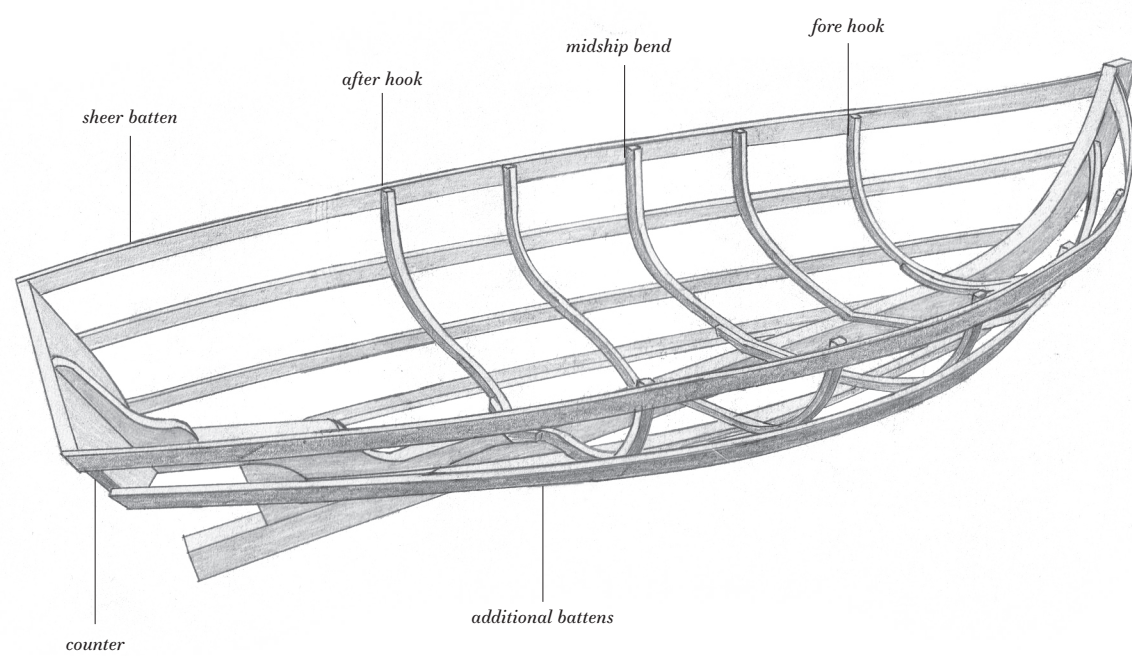


Laying the keel, stern post and stem

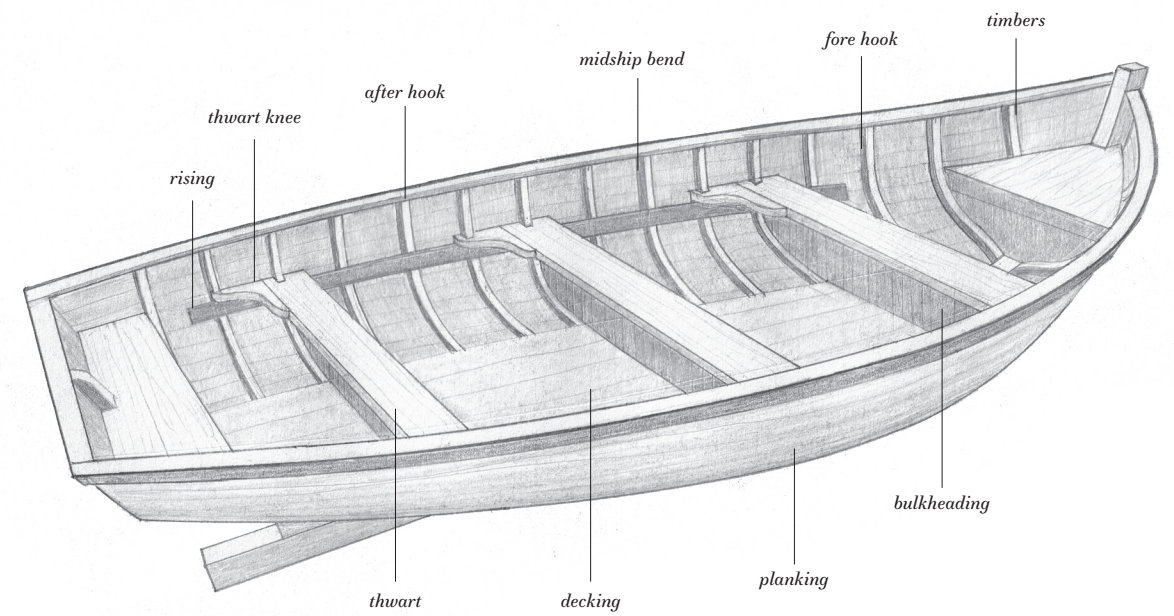


Affixing timbers cut from bent trees

Typological Punt Assembly



Attaching battens for stability



Completed boat with planking and thwarts



4.20 Cod fishing in a traditional wooden motor boat

The changing nature of wooden boat building

In modern times, the profound understanding of place that were once required to shape the timbers and curved members of a wooden boat have been partially reduced. After wooden boats became obsolete in their use as a utility of the fishing industry, and became more rarefied, the practice became less of an ‘everyday’ phenomenon. Today, builders build boats not only for the pleasure in making, nor just for the intrinsic beauty of the boat, but also to maintain a connection to their past and keep their traditional heritage alive.²¹ The advent of modern inventions, machine processes, and new materials began to offer the opportunity to build boats in easier, more comfortable ways, while still allowing for this pursuit of traditional heritage. A compromise was made.

The materials needed to build a boat in the early days of European fishing in and around Newfoundland were the same as those needed up until the mid 20th century. Spruce was used for the timbers or ribs; fir was used for the plank; and birch was used for the keel.²² Today, however, instead of the hardy lifestyle of going out into the forest and felling trees by hand, many builders have started using lumber purchased from their local building supply stores. And why wouldn’t they? A boat builder in the Bay of Islands said, “You can just go to the building supplies and buy 2” x 6” timber and make it out of that.”²³ Rather than use traditionally lapped fir planks, harvested by boat builders themselves, nearly everyone building dories in the Bay of Islands have transitioned to using marine plywood.²⁴ In a way, this evolution is consistent with the natural progression of the dory design, having departed greatly from the traditional Grand Banks dory to adopt a flat transom stern to affix a modern outboard motor decades earlier. The use of plywood plank-

In fifteen years, it’s gonna be no trouble to count them [dories], what’s left... There’ll be nobody fishing on the shore no more. They’ll all be fishing from Little Port. And they’ll be using them little fiberglass boats.

Paul Sheldon, builder in the Bay of Islands

ing, then, can be argued to be just another step in the lineage of adaptation for modern advancement.

The point is not to make an argument for the rejection of modern materials or technologies in favour of handicraft in a Luddite sense. Craftwork of all types has always made use of the tools available at hand, and wooden boat building methodologies have never been rigid or uncompromising. What this does highlight, however, are the ways in which humans manifest their connection to the past, and to heritage, through their material world. To quote Judy Attfield:

Historic time in the context of everyday life might be to do with a sense of identity acquired by adhering to tradition, or conversely by departing from it in a bid for change. The latter depends on a knowing subject who to some extent feels in command of their own life and is more in tune with modern time than past time.²⁵

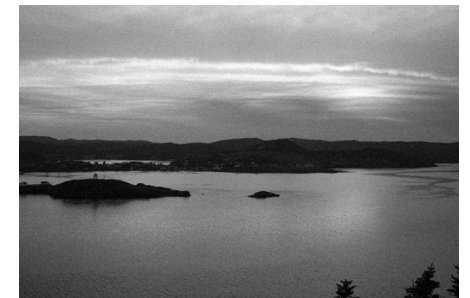
With regard to wooden boat building, we can see this connection to the past through the perpetuation of visual continuity with traditional boat types, but not with the continuity of material practices. Whereas the Mi’kmaq birch bark canoe remains bound to the original practices which tied it so closely to its place, the Newfoundland boats direct connection to the land is now slightly divorced from the origins of its place. Some boat builders, those married to the old way of life

(Andy Riggs included), still harvest their curved timbers from bent trees in the forest, but this practice has progressively faded away. The following chapter will explore these traditional underpinnings in further detail. The compromise that was made in the chronology of wooden boat building traded some of the *traditions* of the craft to facilitate the *continuation* the craft. This decision, over anything else, served to retain the experience of being on the water in a wooden boat.

Notes

- 1 Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), xii
- 2 Ernest Tilly, "Memories of an Old Timer," *Newfoundland Quarterly*, 57, 3 (September 1958): 13
- 3 Attfield, *Wild Things*, 60
- 4 Ibid. 70
- 5 Attfield, *Wild Things*, 70
- 6 Jerome Canning, interview by Liam Bursey, video recording, July 29.
- 7 Attfield, *Wild Things*, 69
- 8 Richard Kroecker, "Learning from Native American Architecture," *DETAIL* 2013, no. 04 (May 2013), 338
- 9 Ibid. 341
- 10 Ibid. 339
- 11 Jim Miles, interview by Liam Bursey, video recording, July 27, 2022.
- 12 David A. Taylor, *Boat Building in Winterton, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland* (University of Ottawa Press, 1982), 56
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.

- 15 Ibid. 57
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Crystal Braye, Mitchell Cooper, and Bruce Whitelaw, *Building Boats in Glovertown* (Winterton, NL: Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2018), 18
- 18 Ibid. 31
- 19 Simon Schama, *Landscape And Memory* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995), 61
- 20 William John Thomas Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1
- 21 Attfield, *Wild Things*, 69
- 22 Hilda Chaulk Murray, *Of Boats on the Collar: How It Was in One Newfoundland Fishing Community* (Flanker Press, 2007), 52
- 23 Jerome Canning, Jeremy Harnum, and Crystal Braye, *Building Dories in the Bay of Islands* (Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2018), 31
- 24 Ibid. 34
- 25 Attfield, *Wild Things*, 240



4.21 Christian Hayter leaving Dildo Harbour in his motor boat

4.22 Landscape at Logy Bay

4.25 Trinity Bay

No change in the weather, no change in me
I don't want to leave, but you can't live for free

Ron Hynes, *No Change In Me*

HERITAGE

The end of a way of life

Before considering the requiem for Newfoundland's old way of life we must acknowledge the proverbial nail in the coffin for the traditional mariner culture. Consequently, I return to Newfoundland's *raison d'être*: cod. Upon European arrival, the Grand Banks were a fisherman's version of the promised land. In 1497 John Cabot famously claimed that the waters were so "swarming with fish [that they] could be taken not only with a net but in baskets let down [and weighted] with a stone."¹ A mere generation later saw over 300 French, Portuguese, and English fishing vessels reaping a rich harvest.² By the 1700s the number of vessels grew to 650, and the fishermen "had nothing to do but to throw in, and take up without interruption."³ By the end of the century some 1600 vessels fished the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.⁴ It was only by the turn of the 1900s that the seemingly infinite quantities of cod began to falter. The cod fishery, however, made no attempt at slowing down. Over the course of the subsequent 60 years, pressure on the remaining cod stocks mounted, enabled by the invention of the floating fish plant in the 1950s. These factory freezer trawlers from European and Asian countries could stay at sea for months at a time, scouring the bed of the ocean and destroying all spawn and bottom-dwelling life.⁵ Thus the great dragger replaced the schooner in the large-scale outshore fishery, while longliners replaced punts and dories in the inshore fishery.⁶

As a result of these new methods of fishing, cod landings increased until 1967. By the early 1960s conservation had become a concern, however officials consistently overestimated the size of cod stocks and the sustainable catch limits.

3.1 Split and salted cod drying in Gready, Labrador, 1927

3.2 Loading dried cod into boats in Battle Harbour, Labrador, 1927

3.5 Women and children working on cod flakes



Despite continuing to decrease catch quotas and the expansion of Canada's jurisdiction to 200 miles beyond their coastline in 1977, cod stocks continued to be overexploited.⁷ In the 1980s international vessels continued to catch well beyond their legal quotas and by 1992 the spawning biomass of northern cod had dropped by 93 percent from 1962 levels.⁸ In 1992 Canada finally imposed a moratorium on the catching of northern cod that ended an industry of consumption that had existed for half a millennium. The biggest layoff in Canadian history put 30,000 Newfoundlanders out of work overnight.⁹

What the cod moratorium completed was a phenomenon that had begun with Newfoundland's Confederation into Canada in 1949: the phenomenon of leaving. We have discussed the centralization efforts post-Confederation wherein rural communities were relocated from their home ports to growth centres that failed to provide adequate work. Mowatt, describing his home port of Burgeo, said:

*"Many of the younger men can find work neither at the plant nor in the fish company's ships and are forced to seek work as far away as western Canada. Burgeo is not a growing community, despite the increase in size resulting from the influx of refugees from other outports; it is a dying community, and it may be that this too is part of the plan, for a people uprooted once can more readily be forced to move again."*¹⁰

Once the growth centres couldn't offer work the people were forced into leaving the island for the mainland, commencing the phenomenon of leaving. But

if centralization and the industrialization of the fishery squeezed out many in the small outport communities, the moratorium sounded like the death knell for an entire culture. With no revenue, and no hope for a future in fishing, thousands of people saw no option but to leave their home.

Indeed the phenomenon of leaving had been going on for years. Even before the moratorium there was a tone shift in Farley Mowat's writings. Contrasting his early celebration the Newfoundland way of life, he began to signal its funerary march with *The Rock Within the Sea: A Heritage Lost*, which contains this description:

*In distantly envisaging these peoples' lives as they had been, we failed to glimpse the heart of darkness beating black within the present hour. Their lives had undergone a sinister sea-change. We had not been long about our task when we began to recognize the change, and began to understand that our account was being transmuted, without our volition, into a requiem. We who had come to chronicle human life in its most admirable guise remained to witness and record the passing of a people.*¹¹

A few years after *The Rock Within the Sea*, Harold Horwood, once the great champion of the artistic movement in Newfoundland, published *Beyond the Road: Portraits & Visions of Newfoundlanders*. Here he described "a people caught in the most painful stage of transition, a people whose roots have been destroyed so recently that they have been able to make no new sustaining growth."¹² He char-

acterizes the Northern Peninsula of the island as “a human backwater, where men stagnate, or emigrate, or struggle against impossible odds to preserve a spirit and a way of life that belongs to the past.”¹³ For Horwood, much of the downward spiral of Newfoundland stemmed from government intervention, and the creation of what he calls ‘the welfare state’:

*Greatest of all was the change in the people. Men whose fathers had toiled every daylight hour in boat or fish shed or field or forest, using their wits as well as their strength in the struggle for mere survival, suddenly found themselves with time to contemplate the harshness of their lot, with worries about the cost of living, the price of gasoline and the weakness of the TV signal.*¹⁴

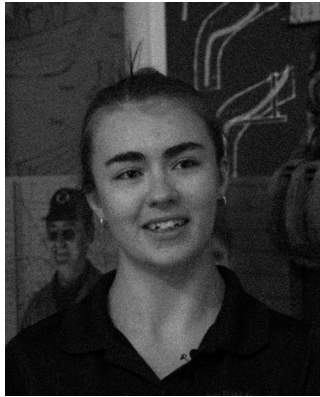
With the inevitable pressures of modernization came the desire for more modern conveniences. The forces of consumption that had been set forth, which determined the inevitable collapse of the cod fishery, and the old way of life with it. Rex Murphy called the moratorium a cataclysm with two extinctions involved, “the destruction of one of the world’s great food resources - the Newfoundland cod fishery - and the dissolution, after 500 years, of one of the most tenacious lifestyles on the continent - the Newfoundland outpost.”¹⁵

**Take me back to my western boat, let me fish off Cape St. Mary’s
Where the hog-down sail and the Fog horns wail
With my friends the Browns and the Clearys**

Otto Kelland, Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary’s



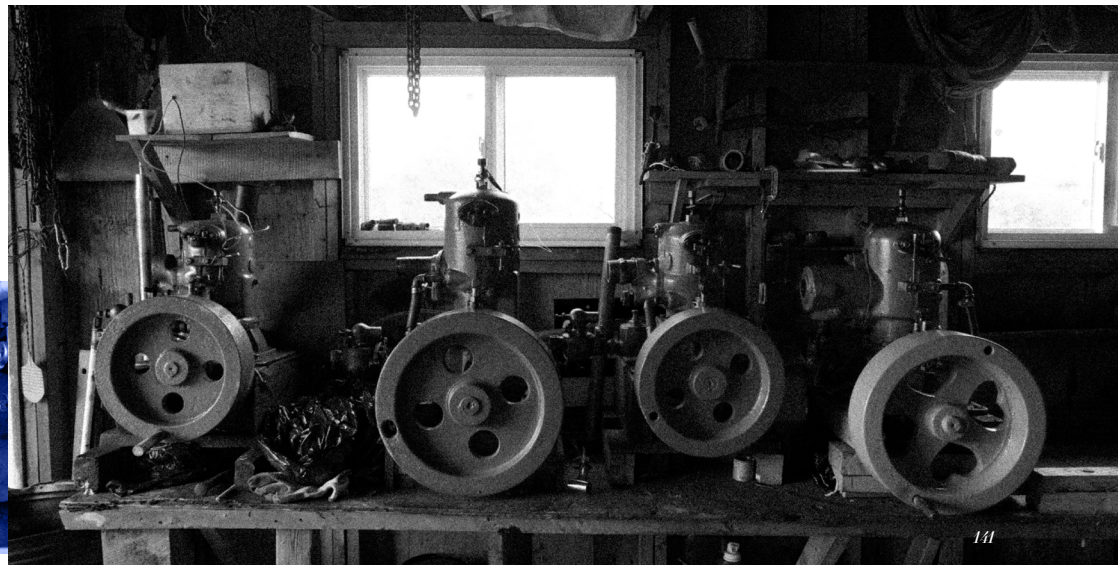
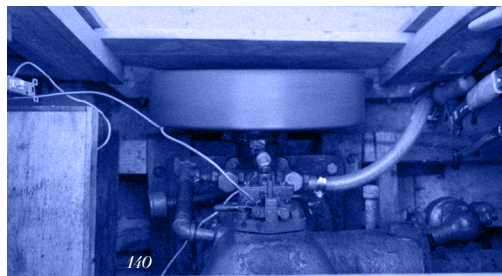
5.4 Saltbox house in Elliston



Before the invention of the outboard motor, single piston engines were outfitted to propel all types of small watercraft. As one gentleman told me, “they were the heart of the Newfoundland fishing industry,” and were affectionately called Start n’ Stops, One Lungers, Putt-Putts, but most often Make n’ Break Engines. Due to the variations in size and make, the identity of each engine became associated with each fisherman:

Ella Reid: When my pop was only a little kid, he could actually tell who was coming into the harbor by the sound of the engines alone... Yeah, the sounds are so distinctive from one another that it was really easy to tell.

I attended the annual Make n’ Break Festival in Dildo, an event that saw 5 traditionally built wooden motor boats with working Make n’ Break Engines parade around the harbour. When I closed my eyes and listened to the sound of the motors floating past me in the fog I could pretend I was standing some 60 years earlier on the same wharf on a typical outport morning. For the end of the festivities a host of modern watercraft, all decorated with flags streaming in the wind, joined the wooden boats and were led out into the sea.



Andy Riggs proudly showed me a lineup of four Make n’ Break engines that he collected from various places around the island and was restoring to their original glory. I was sceptical when he insisted that they were still used around the island. At the time, I saw them simply as old relics of a time long past, but he saw much more in them.



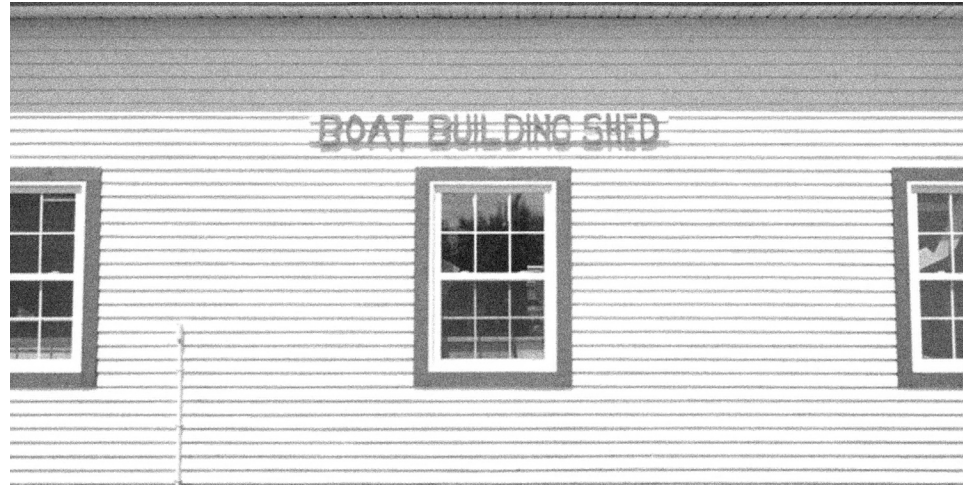
Liam: How come you didn’t let your engines go?

Andy: Nah. I didn’t let it go because, I tell you, I got three boys, eh? Three boys. If I was only here and it’d be meself and me woman, I’d have sold an engine for a lot less. But those engines here, later on, me son might them take them. And he could be here for the next 50 years, eh? And he got a son, perhaps he’ll take them. And that one there, I was going to give that one to me son for down the museum. He got a museum out in St. John’s.

Liam: So the engine is kind of like a heritage piece, you pass it down.

Andy: Oh yes, oh yes. I--no, no, no, no. I wouldn’t sell them. I wouldn’t like them gone. Well, they can do what they like with them, eh? I don’t care what they like with them. But I won’t be around much longer anyway, eh? Well, they can do what they like with them, then, eh? [laughs] Why? They want to do what they like with them.

*(Top to bottom, left to right)
 5.5 Ella Reid
 5.6 Window in Cabot Tower, St. Johns
 5.7 Andy Riggs explaining his Make n’ Break engines
 5.8 Christian Hayter’s Make n’ Break engine
 5.9 Andy Riggs’ Make n’ Break engines under repair in his shed*



The museology of wooden boats

After the moratorium, wooden boats were reduced to little more than a memory, pulled up on shore to rot alongside equally obsolete fishing stages. Amidst the turmoil of the death of the old way of being emerged the cultural revolution to preserve the romantic Newfoundland culture, spearheaded by Mowat and Horwood. One pupil of their writing was, indeed, Joey Smallwood. The oft vilified Premier understood the importance of preserving Newfoundland traditions. Despite being the champion of industrialization and change, the uniqueness of the people and the place were never lost on him. He played a central role in the establishment of The Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1949 from its pre-confederation status as a college. This evolution was spurred by his commitment to “do something to see to it that our distinctively Newfoundland culture and consciousness do not disappear and are preserved and maintained down to many generations in the future.”¹⁶ In many ways, the University achieved this goal. It appealed to the ongoing globalization of Newfoundland and facilitated critical study on the practices and industries of the island. Sandra Gwyn’s recount of Newfoundland’s cultural revival identifies Memorial University’s art gallery “as the ‘crossroads and command post’ for the ‘cultural renaissance’”.¹⁷ The department of folklore at Memorial University is responsible not only for the study and dissemination of the oral and musical traditions of the island, but also of the craft and material cultures. The effect of this focus on preserving traditional heritage is most strongly felt in the museums around the island.

5.10 Jerome Canning’s “Boat Building Shed”

5.11 Rodney built by Jerome Canning in The Rooms museum in St. John’s



Throughout my research around the island I found, in nearly every town or village, a museum dedicated to local history. These typically inhabited historically significant homes or lighthouses but could also be found in strip malls and strikingly contemporary buildings. In the halls of these museums are all types of punts and dories preserved in various stages of weathering. Museum-goers become accustomed to seeing the wooden watercraft divorced from their original way of being. Without the water that dictated their design, construction, and use, the boats are reduced to something more akin to sculpture. In this context they become a static memory of the past, as opposed to an active contributor to the everyday life and culture of Newfoundland. Our consciousness of the past through the preservation of regional craftwork is, as Judy Attfield describes, a feature of post-industrial ‘heritage’ culture.¹⁸ In museums around Newfoundland (and elsewhere), the preservation of utensils, tools, even entire workshops, simulate the spaces and implements that were used to create traditional crafts. This creates a memory of an ‘imagined past’, subject to the gentrification of traditional crafts into middle-class leisure hobbies.¹⁹ Crafts, such as wooden boats, move away from the everyday and into aestheticized memory.

5.12 Cabot Tower, St. John's

Newfoundland has recently become a tourism hotspot, occupying its own niche in a world where ‘heritage’ has become one of the most potent symbols of our time. As James Overton declares through his essays on Newfoundland tourism, “We are told that Newfoundland has history a-plenty, that it is steeped in heritage. But heritage, if it is to be the basis for tourism, has to be manufactured and marketed just like any other commodity.”²⁰ Recalling Arjun Appadurai’s definition that demand “endows the object with value,”²¹ we see that wooden boats, long divorced from their demand in the fishing economy, have now become a commodity of the heritage economy. They contribute to the touristic image of the ‘real’ Newfoundland – a vision of outpost life with “fishermen knitting their nets, caulking their boats, or building a wiggly garden rod fence.”²² It is a place that conforms to the touristic gaze, it is idealized and romanticized. It is rooted in history, but a history that filters out the hardship and uncomfortable truths of mass unemployment, poverty, and forced out-migration. Wooden boats straddle the real and the romantic. In fact, the film produced in this thesis reveals that they remain a living part of life and identity on the island. Of course, there is validity to this romantic idea of the ‘real’ Newfoundland, the creation of it “does not simply create an illusion.”²³ As Overton tells us, “Myths and ideology are real; they are a material force, not merely empty fancy. They guide action.”²⁴ Once the idea of the ‘real’ Newfoundland exists in the collective consciousness, “it is fed back onto the landscape and the pattern of people’s lives.”²⁵ Communities and governments take action to make reality conform to this image: historic events and sites are marked; buildings and entire areas of cities are ‘heritaged’; and crafts are deemed traditional and are taught to others.

How we situate ourselves within this interplay of real and imaginary place is not necessarily a straightforward task. In terms of material culture, our sense of being can be understood in relation to what existed before our arrival, and what may happen after we've left. Material objects, such as wooden boats, act as symbol (or gauge) for how one situates oneself temporally in a place. They bear "the cultural representations and narratives that work their part in giving people a sense of identity – of living in their own time."²⁶ How does this sense of identity change when wooden boats are so often displayed alongside other retired ornaments of the fishing industry, sealed in the mass memory of the island as ancient history? When heritage is preserved through a museum alone it can only contribute to a sense of identity, or a sense of place, that is sealed in an aestheticized ideal.



5.15 Trinity East landscape

5.14 Sailboat leaving The Narrows of St. John's

Active museum strategies

There are efforts being made to overcome the museumification of wooden boats while actively continuing the boat building tradition. The Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador in Winterton, and its sister The Isles Wooden Boat Museum in Twillingate, are discernible exceptions to the typical museology of wooden boats. Both contain boat building workshops integrated into the museum with full-time craftspeople building wooden punts and dories around the clock. In both cases, the workshop areas are open to the public to observe and talk with the builders about their craft. Additionally, in Winterton, courses are offered at the museum and through partnerships with Memorial University that take participants through every step of building a regionally specific watercraft. After the participants have gained the knowledge and skills to build a Marcus French Rodney, for example, many have gone on to build their own boats with their newfound abilities.²⁷ Unfortunately, however, the courses are difficult to run and require several workarounds to provide participants with the necessary experiences in a condensed time frame. As Jim Dempsey, president of the museum in Winterton, explains:

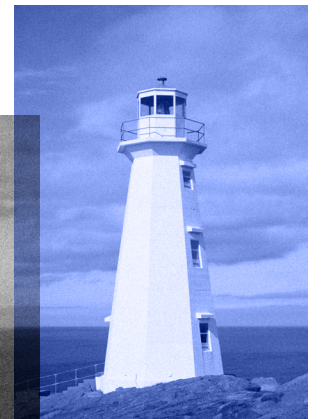
We live in the 21st century and we take advantage of larger machines: planers and table saws and band saws and that sort of thing. And also fasteners: stainless steel screws (don't use boat nails anymore), marine adhesives, and we use a lot of two part epoxy for laminating wood. So we're living in a different lifestyle from the old fellas who would go out in the wood and get their own timber. They'd be looking for the right shapes for their knees and frames and stems. We take care of that through lamination now. So it's the same boat, just slightly different materials, and we're not living that lifestyle where we're out cutting wood every day.²⁸

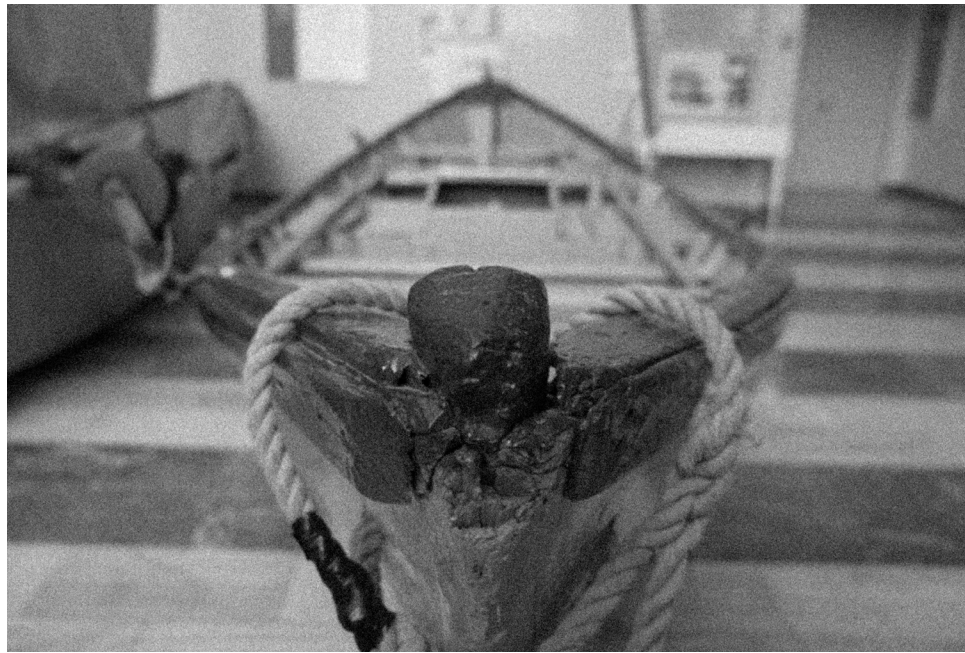


5.15 Original lighthouse at Cape Spear

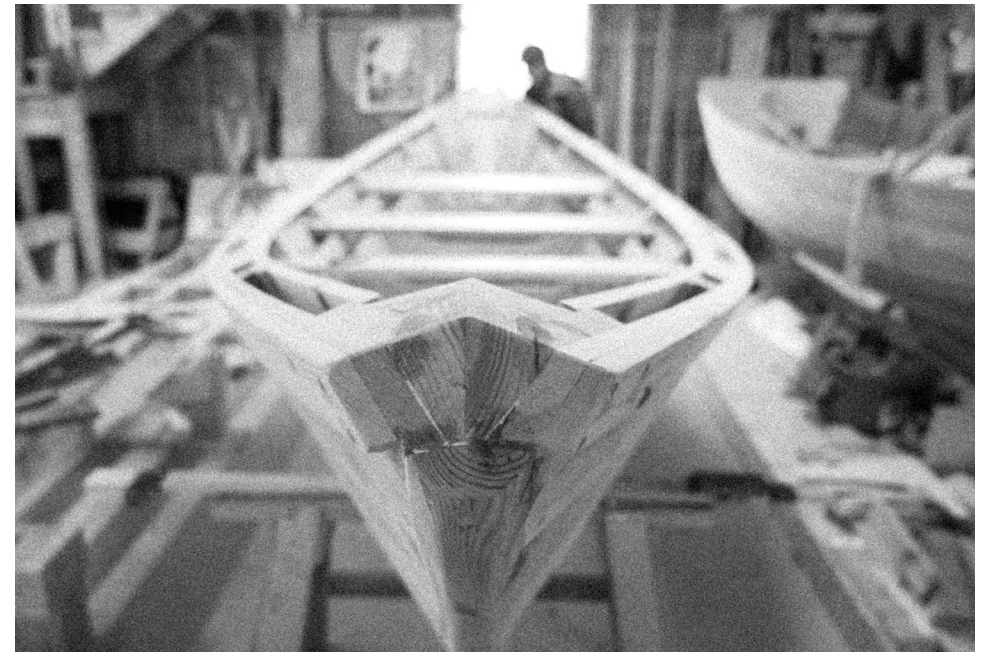
5.14 - 5.15 Current lighthouse at Cape Spear

As discussed in the previous chapter, the original traditions of boat building are no longer necessary in the contemporary craft and have been replaced by modern techniques in order to maintain the act of wooden boat building as a feasible practice in the modern era. The current methodology is a hybrid of traditional typologies with contemporary techniques. Interestingly, however, the people involved in the boat building at these museums are often descendants of those who were original boat builders. In the boat building workshop in the Isles Wooden Boat Museum I met Andrew Parry while he drilled moulds together for a new wooden punt. Andrew was the grandson of Hedley Parry, himself the son of Harry Parry, a very influential boat builder in the Trillingate area. As far back as family lines go, the Parry's were fishermen who built boats, as Hedley testified, "everybody built boats out of necessity... You were fishing, you couldn't afford to buy a boat, you had to build it."²⁹ Just like Ella Reid in Winterton, Andrew was, as they say, born with boat building 'in his blood'.





5.16 Nose of weathered Grand Banks dory



5.17 Nose of new construction Grand Banks dory



Adapting to the future

With the loss of Newfoundland's original mariner culture, the distance between the desire to have a wooden boat and the skills required to make one has only grown continually further apart. For those in the business of preserving this heritage, then, disseminating the skills and processes involved in building wooden boats has been a primary concern. Unfortunately for Jim Dempsey and Jerome Canning, however, the boat courses they offer still require a considerable devotion of time and a basic level of woodworking skills. These two barriers to entry make it difficult to adapt wooden boat building to the modern age at a large scale. In 2022 the Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador embarked on a new project that sought to address this problem and adapt the traditional craft of wooden boat building to the future of wood construction.

The "Kit Boat" or "Boat-in-a-box" project resembles a traditional Newfoundland row-punt or rodney but calls upon drastically new techniques. Each individual boat member is designed to be entirely pre-cut by CNC router on ½" marine plywood and assembled via stitch-and-glue construction by novice builders. I met with Jim Dempsey in the town of Dildo, where his prototype Kit Boat was on display to introduce the project to other wooden boat enthusiasts at the annual Make n' Break engine festival.

This year we're taking a step into a slightly new direction to allow people to build their own boat at home, probably in their basement or their garage. And they'll come up with a traditional looking Newfoundland plant, but it's built with very modern techniques. We call this the Kit Boat and on our poster there we've called it the Boat in a Box. It's not a new technique, it's called stitch-and-glue construction, and the features of stitch-and-glue are all the parts are prefabricated or pre-cut and all the builder does is glue them together.

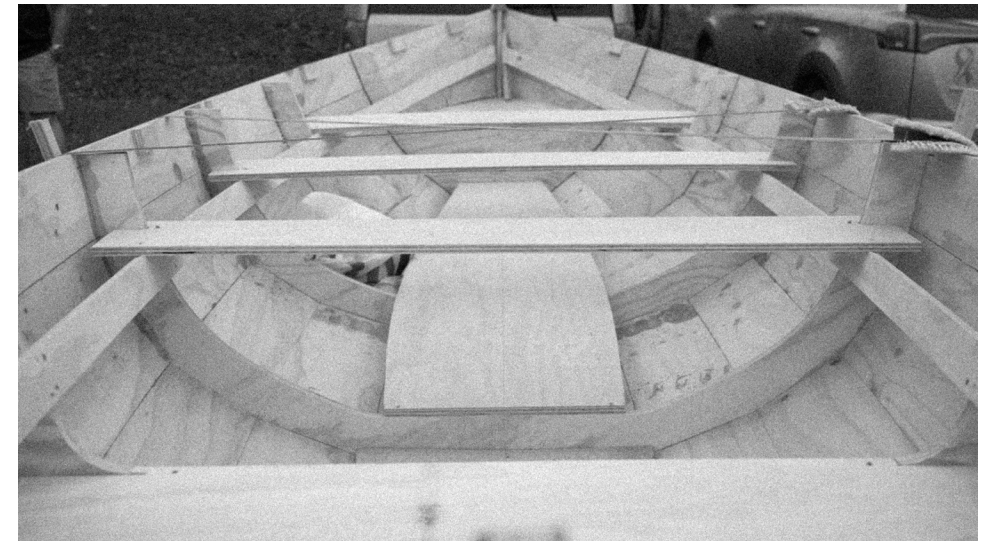
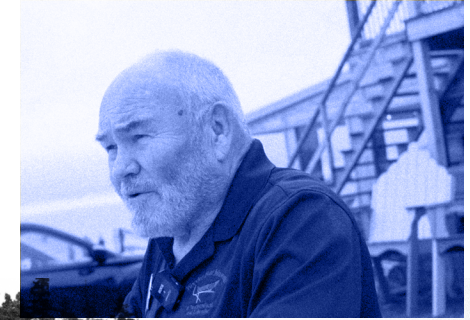
So, this is the shape of a Newfoundland punt. It's an original design. It's taken from all of our experience, all those documentation programs, our lofted Marcus French Rodney, and we've made it into more of a recreational boat. It's a little shorter. It's a little beamier. It's made for recreation. You could have up to five people in this boat or you could row it yourself.

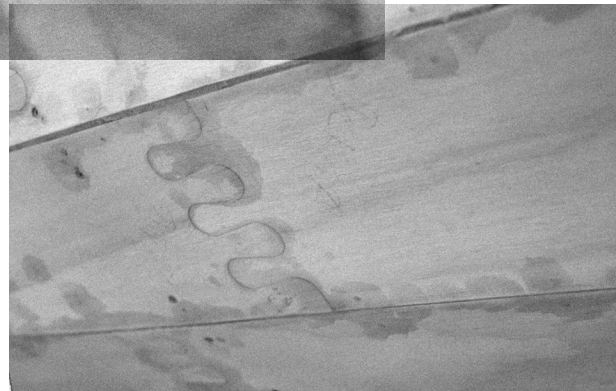
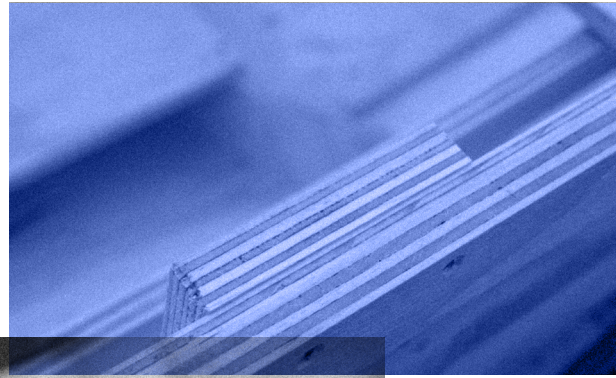
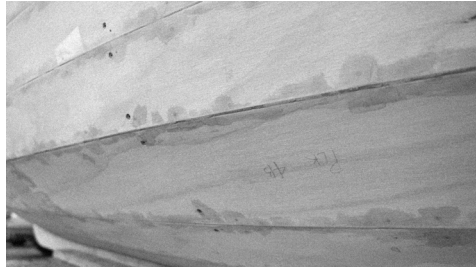
We're in the middle of our development process, we're lucky to have a prototype. This is the first boat that was actually designed completely digitally and cut using a CNC router machine. So, it really is a computer boat. And our boat builder Jerome Canning, he just went back to his model aircraft days and he glued it together.³⁰

3.19 Jim Dempsey explaining the Kit Boat

3.20 The Kit Boat on display at the Make n' Break engine festival

3.21 Interior hull of the Kit Boat





The purpose of the Kit Boat project is removing the barrier to entry into the heritage lineage of traditional wooden boat building. While it breaks from convention in very fundamental ways, it retains the shape and look of a Newfoundland row-punt. The essential goal is for boat building to be made *accessible*.

For me, more accessible means being able to go on the water. I grew up in a boat like this. I had my own boat like this when I was eight years old. And the times we had with that, we'd go to islands and camp and stuff like that, it was tremendous. So, we had a real opportunity to be on the water. And I've been on the water ever since. In my career and now with the wooden boat museum. So, accessibility is important.³¹

I'm constantly looking over my shoulder for being a wooden boat heretic (laughs). And it started off in building our traditional punts and dories where we create our curved shapes through lamination on a curve jig. Obviously it's very carefully designed, but nevertheless, we're gluing pieces of wood together so they create that shape... It's still the same boat, okay? We don't have that lifestyle of going into the woods. I prefer to call this building a heritage boat in the 21st century. And this is a heritage boat, and although the design objectives are completely different, it's still a heritage boat. We're using the tools that are available to us to create something that is near and dear to us. I'm too old to get bossed around by the old guys.³²

5.22 Planking on the Kit boat

5.25 Plywood gunwale detail

5.26 Plywood timbers

5.27 Puzzle joint interior view

5.28 Puzzle join exterior view

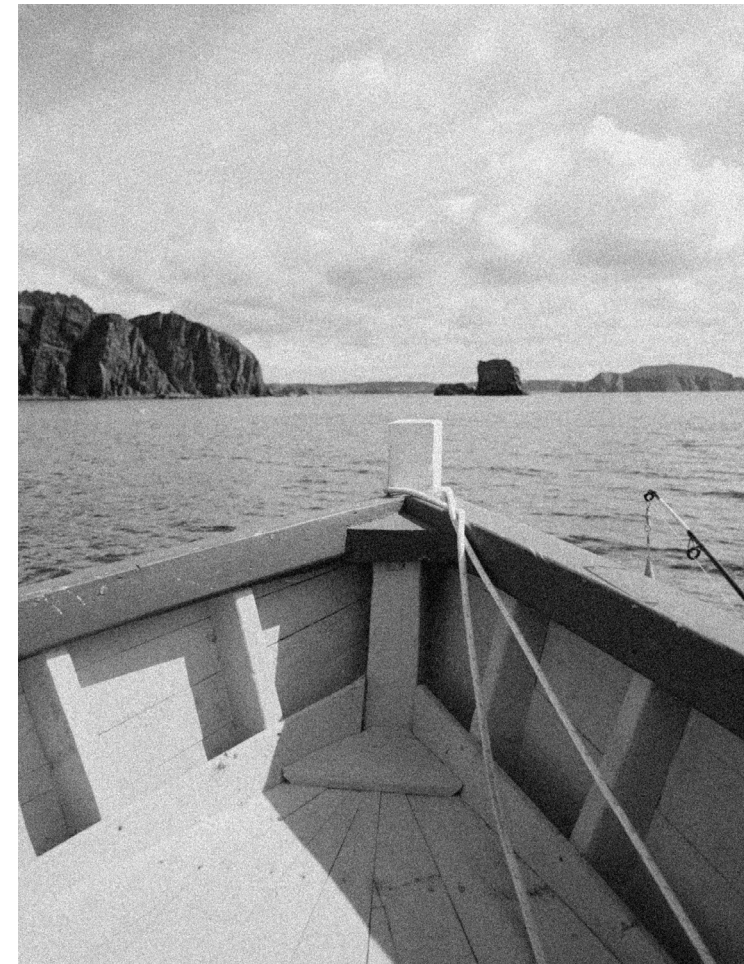
The Boat in a Box project brings into focus many of critical questions surrounding what qualifies an act of heritage preservation. The compromise to drop tradition to the wayside in favour of preserving the spatial quality of being on the water in a wooden boat is a sensible one when faced with the realities of modern life. But at what point does the new technology eclipse the phenomenology, craft practices, and cultural values that were inherent in the traditions? What constitutes an authentic traditional Newfoundland wooden boat?

The concept of authenticity relies on established principles or “fundamental and unchallengeable ‘truths’”³³ that depend on belief systems which are supposedly unchanging. In theory, an authoritative knowledge should be able to distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic, yet in reality this authority cannot exist because belief systems and cultural values are constantly changing. For at least a generation wooden boats have abandoned the found timber methodology in favour of mass-produced store-bought lumber, already distancing the craft from its roots. Is the shift to plywood, then, too great a leap forward? Does digital design remove too much of the genealogy imbued into the original moulds? Do edges cut by a CNC machine lose the personal touch once inherent to a family’s wooden punt?

Authenticity is also associated with a state of originality. Judy Attfield describes originality as “the uniqueness that comes into being at the moment of conception when a particular unreproducible concatenation of materials and conditions come together to produce a sui generis creation.”³⁴ She believes that, when considering material culture in our modern world, originality is highly valued

Where it's wave over wave sea over bow
I'm as happy a man as the sea will allow
There's no other life for a sailor like me
But to sail the salt sea boys, to sail the sea

Great Big Sea, *Wave Over Wave*



3.29 View over the bow of a wooden punt

because “technology enables the effortless production of an infinite number of clones to be reproduced from the prototype.”³⁵ The ability to endlessly reproduce an object necessitates the exaltation of the original object. She goes on to explain that those who offer originality – “the authors, artists and designers who are able to dream up new ideas particularly in the face of the constantly increasing number of new creations”³⁶ are extremely important in our society. What implications does this have for the act of assembling a wooden boat that was designed by another’s hand? Today, the attribution of authorship, especially to objects that are replicated, gives more value to the author of the *idea* rather than the maker. Where would the authorship of a CNC-cut wooden boat lie? Prior to the industrialization of production this dilemma wouldn’t exist, as the conceiver of a boat would be the maker, and they had complete autonomy over the process of creation. Or, perhaps they didn’t? After all, design decisions were often dictated by tradition, and the regional typologies were adhered to by builders both for logistical fishing reasons and to identify themselves as part of a collective community. Perhaps the Boat in a Box project tangentially follows heritage lines by proposing a specific boat style, executed in a specific way, for the purpose of existing on the waters around Newfoundland. For Jim, preserving the placemaking of boat building is the highest priority:

*The sense of place, that’s important. And nowhere that I know of has more sense of place than Newfoundland, and so I think this is important... what do you take forward and what do you leave behind? Technology alone allows us to leave other things behind, so I don’t feel too bad about that. It’s a compromise that I can live with.*³⁷

Notes

- 1 Farley Mowat, *Sea of Slaughter* (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1984), 166.
- 2 Ibid. 167.
- 3 Ibid. 168.
- 4 Ibid. 170.
- 5 Jenny Higgins, “Cod Moratorium in Newfoundland and Labrador,” Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage, accessed April 18, 2022, <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/economy/moratorium.php>.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Farley Mowat, *The New Founde Land* (Doubleday Canada, 1990), 56.
- 11 Farley Mowat, *This Rock Within the Sea: A Heritage Lost* (Little, Brown, 1969), forward.
- 12 Stephen Taylor and Harold Horwood, *Beyond the Road: Portraits & Visions of Newfoundlanders* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976), 7.
- 13 Ibid. 27.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Rex Murphy on the Cod Moratorium in 1994, CBC’s The National, 1994, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1769469338>.
- 16 James Overton, “Sparking A Cultural Revolution: Joey Smallwood, Farley Mowat, Harold Horwood and Newfoundland’s Cultural Renaissance,” Newfoundland & Labrador Studies 16, no. 2 (October 10, 2000), 197-198.
- 17 Ibid. 167.
- 18 Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), 71.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 James Overton, *Making a World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland* (St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1996), 39.
- 21 Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4.
- 22 Overton, *Making a World of Difference*, 106.
- 23 Ibid. 177.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid. 118.
- 26 Attfield, *Wild Things*, 216.
- 27 Jim Dempsey, interview by Liam Bursey, video recording, July 30, 2022.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Hedley Parly, “Interview Excerpt,” Twillingate Isles Wooden Boat Museum, n.d.
- 30 Dempsey, interview.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Attfield, *Wild Things*, 78.
- 34 Ibid. 79.
- 35 Ibid. 80.
- 36 Ibid. 80.
- 37 Dempsey, interview.

In a word, the image is not a certain meaning expressed by the director, but an entire world reflected as in a drop of water.

Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*

THE FILM

Imagery, truth, and expressions of place

The film, at its core, is intended to be a vessel for the stories and experiences of the people who are continuing the tradition of wooden boat building today. It seeks to translate the feeling of being in wooden boats in conjunction with the feeling of the landscape of Newfoundland. In this way, it is an expression of *being* in this place. The filmmaking methodology placed an emphasis on exploration and discovery. Long, free flowing interviews took place wherein those involved in wooden boat building shared their unique experiences surrounding the craft. The informality of these interviews allowed the conversation to organically flow from boats to landscape, to memory, to ancestry, and everything in between. Afterward, the summation of these individual perspectives contributed to a collective understanding of boat building craft and its history, its present conditions, and its future prospects.

In between these interviews, I travelled across Newfoundland over the course of a month visiting every museum, workshop, and heritage event I could find, filming and photographing each one in an attempt to absorb as much of my own experience with boats as possible. I also explored the landscape on foot at an intimate level, through hiking and camping in the wilderness. The findings were documented at every scale possible, from the rich textures of the rock to the broad sweeping landscapes captured with drone photography. The resulting assemblage takes these three pathways: the interviews; the experience of the environment; and the craft-based research; to create an essence of the place. These pathways are reflected in the chapters: *People*, *Place*, and *Heritage*, that also organize the written thesis according to these realms of study.

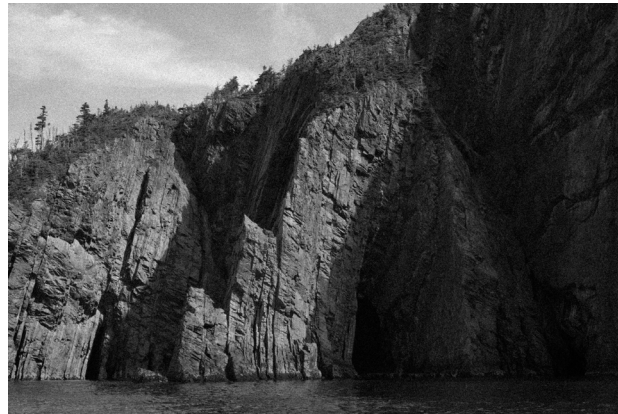
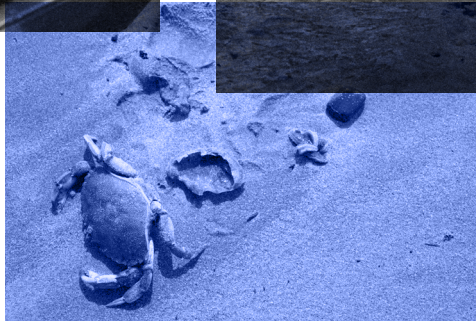
6.1 Cod fishing in Trinity Bay

6.2 Fishing over the edge of a wooden motor boat

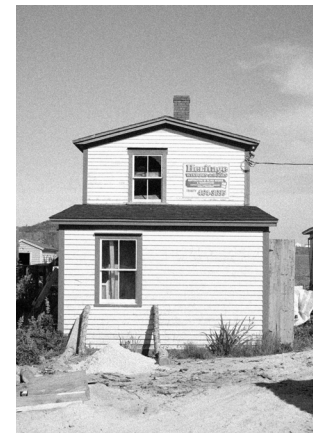
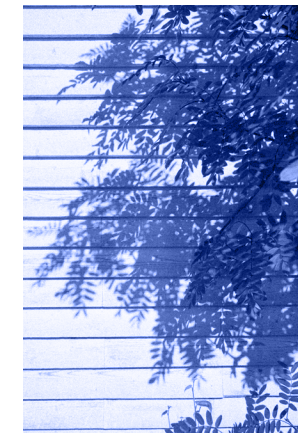
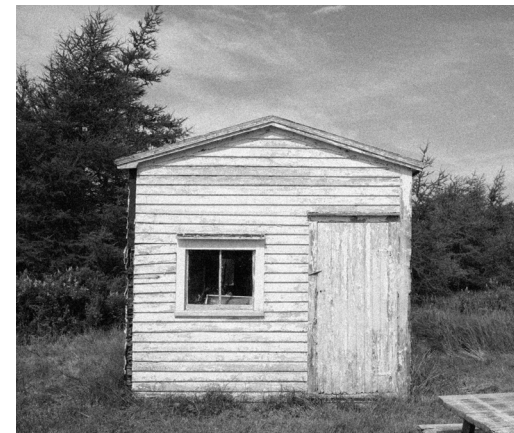
6.5 Avalon Peninsula landscape



- 6.4 Fresh cod
- 6.6 Rising Tide Theatre
- 6.7 Crab and shells on the beach
- 6.8 Jagged shore around Trinity Bay
- 6.9 Jagged shore around Trinity Bay



The film inevitably grows out of individual perspectives. Many layers of subjectivity, from each of the interview subjects, are filtered through my own point-of-view as a filmmaker and as an outsider. This inherent bias is ingrained in the imagery. To balance the subjectivity of the film the written thesis imparts the scholarly knowledge, history, and context involved in wooden boat building. It constitutes *fact*. In contrast, the film presents *truth*. This is not an objective (or *verité*) truth, but a personal, subjective truth. In Werner Herzog's *Minnesota Declaration* he states that "There are deeper strata of truth in cinema, and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylisation."¹ This poetic, ecstatic truth manifests itself through the voices of people met during this research and the



- 6.10 The Bursey's shed in Catalina
- 6.11 Shadow play on white clapboard
- 6.12 Sawmill in Trinity

images and textures of my own lived experience in Newfoundland. The film supplements the text by providing another form of language to chronicle wooden boats, a form of communication by means of emotions and images. The desired outcome, to use the words of Andrei Tarkovsky, is that this communication through film “might give it that aesthetic intensity of feeling which would transform the idea of the story into a truth endorsed by life.”²²

Juhani Pallasmaa, in his book *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery* in Architecture discusses the concept of embodied imagery, and the various ways in which it can be created both in architecture and in other forms of media. He argues that “our multifaceted image of the world is a product of our own imagination... Yet, the most deeply existentially and experientially rooted architectural experiences impact our minds through images which are condensations of distinct architectural essences.”²³ Certain scenes from the film are devoted to evoking these architectural essences, such as the shots looking through lighthouse windows, the dark interior of Andy’s boat, and the shadows cast by a tree branch on weathered clapboard siding. Architecture, Pallasmaa believes, “has always fictionalized reality and culture through turning human settings into images and metaphors of idealised order and life, into fictional architectural narratives.”²⁴ However, in the contemporary world filled with commercialized images, fictitious simulacra, and virtuality, the task of the architect becomes to create and defend the real. This parallels the task of the documentary filmmaker, who manufactures a space defined by the four-sided frame of cinema.

(Top to bottom, left to right)
 6.15 Treeline
 6.14 Root cellar in Elliston
 6.15 Window in Elliston
 6.16 Barnacles
 6.17 Burin Peninsula landscape



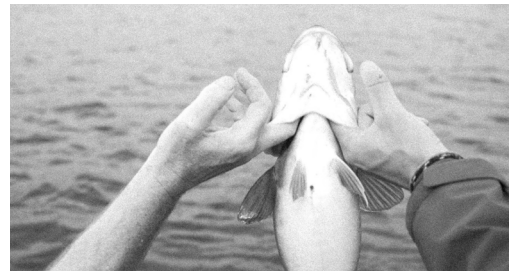
Imagery can be used to dictate, manipulate, and condition, or it can be used to emancipate, empower, and inspire.⁵ The film makes an effort to achieve, or at least contribute to, this touchstone for truth. Through our imaginative projection we naturally create a world, or a place, around images. Pallasmaa defines this as “an evocative, affective and meaningful sensory experience that is layered, associative and dynamic, and in constant interaction with memory and desire... Poetic images are mental frames that direct our associations, emotions, reactions and thoughts.”⁶ Images, atmospheres, imagined experiences, etc., all translate our personal truths to others.

Capturing the truths of wooden boats through film allows for the opportunity to ask the question “how do we situate ourselves in a place,” and seeks to answer through the logic of cinema. Theoretical writing cannot always impart the same poetic links, themes, and visual metaphors that can be expressed in *montage* and the moving image. The spatial qualities of Newfoundland fishing villages, for example, contain a symphony of rich spatial experiences: waves beating against the wharf, footsteps bouncing along fishing stages, seagull chatter, perhaps a foghorn in the distance. These can be intercut with personal anecdotes, such as Andy Riggs proudly showing off his lineup of Make n’ Break engines and insisting that he will pass them down to his children, or Ella Reid’s first memories of being in a boat with her father and seeing a pod of porpoises jumping along the side of the boat. These moments bleed into each other and interact with images of the Newfoundland landscape, extending their experiential affect to the audience.

In *The Open Work* Umberto Eco tells us that works in movement are “characterized by the invitation to make the work together with the author and that on a wider level... there exist works which, though organically completed, are “open” to a continuous generation of internal relations which the addressee must uncover and select in his act of perceiving the totality of incoming stimuli.”⁷ A film is an exchange between author, subject and audience. In this case the subject was wooden boats on one level, but also the *place* of Newfoundland, including its people, landscape, crafts, sounds, textures, sights, and feelings. To this point, Tarkovsky says:

*I am firmly convinced of one thing... that is an author is moved by the landscape chosen, if it brings back memories to him and suggests associations, even subjective ones, then this will in turn affect the audience with particular excitement.*⁸

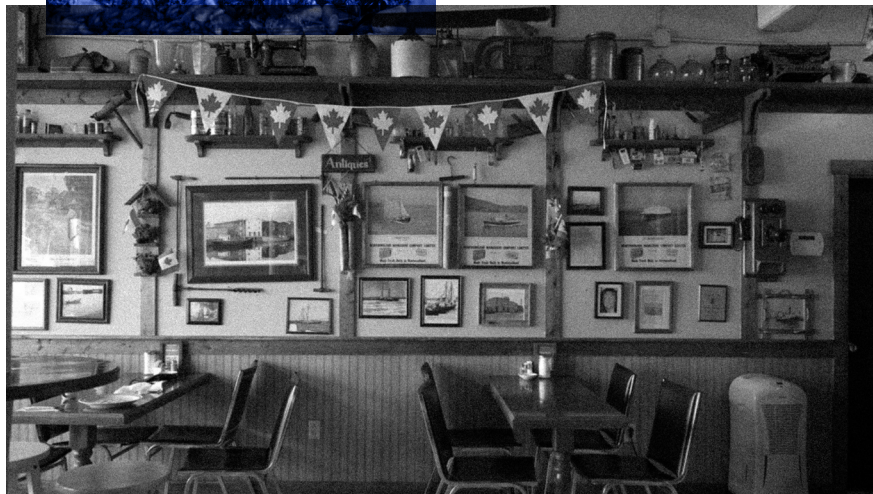
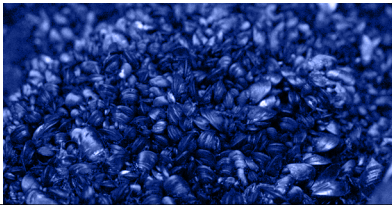
Herein lies the essential ambition of the film, to pass on my memories, associations, and excitement of Newfoundland to the audience, carrying with it a true experience of place.



(Top to bottom, left to right)
6.18 Christian Hayter's wooden motor boat
6.19 Motor boat docked at the wharf
6.20 Handline jigging for cod

6.21 Handshake
6.22 Logy Bay landscape
6.23 'Reeling in' cod with a handline

6.24 Trinity lighthouse with Make n' Break engine exhaust in foreground
6.25 Catching cod in a wooden boat



Notes

- 1 Werner Herzog, *Minnesota Declaration: Truth and Fact in Documentary Cinema* (Walker Art Center, 1999), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkJiasC3cRI>.
- 2 Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 16.
- 3 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 10-11.
- 4 Ibid. 19.
- 5 Ibid. 21.
- 6 Ibid. 41.
- 7 Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 55.
- 8 Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 28.

6.26 *Window in Trinity*

6.27 *Mussels*

6.28 *Grass at Cape Spear*

6.29 *Tea shop interior in Grand Bank*

The truth about stories is that's all we are.

Thomas King

REFLECTIONS

Conclusion

The material world stores memories, giving a sense of continuity to our physical and temporal place on this earth. Wooden boats, both as an act of placemaking and as a vessel for stories of identity, embody this continuity, and reflect the culture of Newfoundland in its craft. This thesis is a testament to the manifold ways in which placemaking happens. If we consider architecture to be the act of placemaking, and we consider placemaking to be the care and maintenance of an environment and its social fabric,¹ then building a wooden boat undoubtedly falls into this classification. These boats are physical fragments that contain the presence of their place. They are repositories for cultural memories, and they are a lens through which we can understand the socio-cultural condition of Newfoundland as a *place*.

Newfoundland is a place where change seems to happen slowly, until it happens all at once. This thesis examines the history of the craft of wooden boat building to see what it can tell us about the ability of people who live here to hold on amidst adversity and the forces of change. Newfoundlanders adapt in their own unique way. As the island and its people change throughout time the nature of placemaking in this part of the world naturally changes with them. Wooden boats, as a commodity of the fishing and tourism industries, and as object of material culture, retain elusive and ephemeral reverberations of placemaking and traditional heritage even while the function and nature of their craft has drastically changed.

The methodology of this thesis, balancing film and architecture, resulted in an interesting condition for research. The exploration process in Newfoundland preceded much of the scholarly research, such that the act of filmmaking was one of discovery without pre-conceived conclusions or desired outcomes. Consequently, the editing of the film and writing of the thesis afterwards was a crystallization of the threads that began in the unrestrained exploration phase. This allowed for a remarkable level of expressive freedom. Joined with this, however, was the important acknowledgement of my own presence as a researcher trusted with the stories and experiences of my interviewees.

As a filmmaker and researcher, it is important to remember that I “*come from away*.” I am a mainlander in Newfoundland. In the end, it is not my position to decide what is and what isn’t a traditional wooden punt, nor shall I attempt to make an argument regarding which direction the craft should take in the future. The intention of this thesis is to provoke and encourage debate on the nature of this material culture that is held so dear to many Newfoundlanders and use it to examine how one situates themselves in this place. As a student of architecture, I’m trained to ask such questions to delve into the fundamentals of why we, as a society, build the things we build. Why do we hold on to things from our past? Why does tradition and heritage matter to us? How do we preserve these ephemera?

Andy Riggs, and the other active builders around the island, preserve their heritage for personal reasons, as part of their identity. The museums preserve heritage through cataloging and freezing an image of the past that helps us understand where we are today. The instructional boat building courses and Boat in a Box project are preserving heritage through active, progressive, and forward-looking strategies in the hopes of passing along this knowledge to future generations. These are three essential ways in which heritage efforts preserve traditional ways of being, and each bear their own challenges and advantages.



7.1-7.5 Andy's boat 'The Alicia and Andi Mae' docked in Ship Cove, Burin

The people of the Iroquois Confederacy hold the philosophy of the *Seventh Generation Principle*. This outlook on decision making considers the near and the distant future as well as our ancestors. In architecture, we are constantly situating ourselves in a physical and temporal place. Our work has a relationship to the generations who came before us and will last for many generations after we're gone. We have the privilege of deciding what aspects of our past we choose to amplify and what we choose to leave behind.



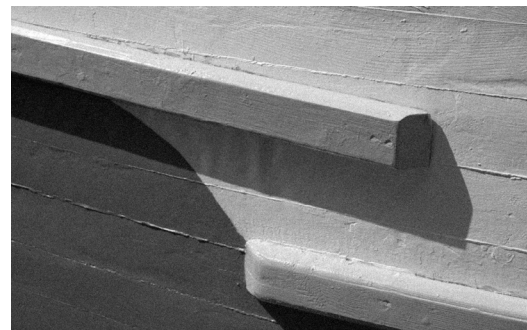
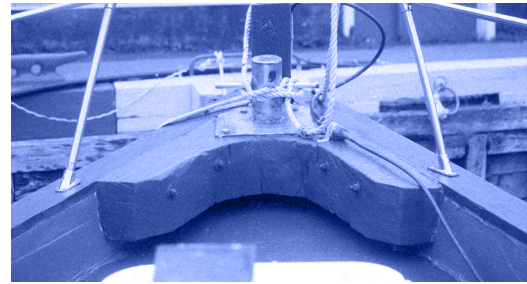
(Top to bottom, left to right)

7.4 Alicia and Andi Mae bow detail

7.5 Alicia and Andi Mae docked

7.6-7.8 Alicia and Andi Mae details

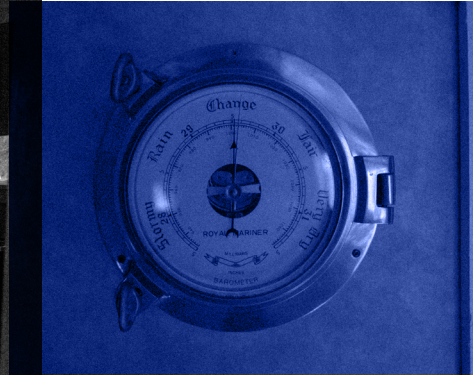
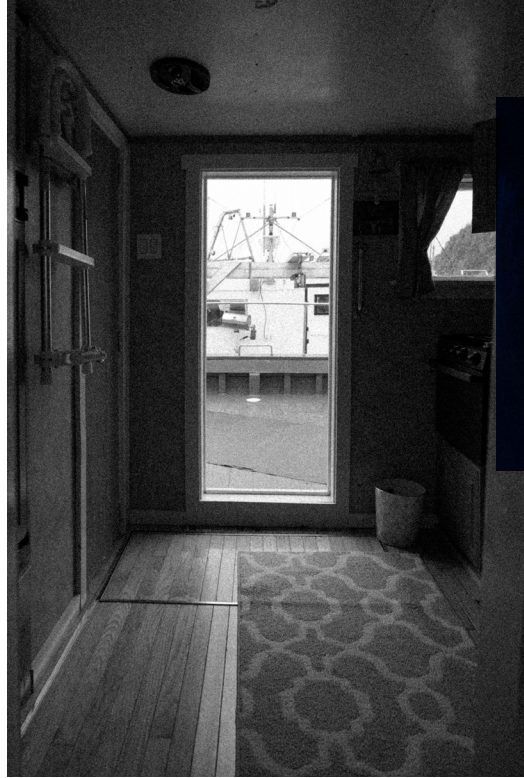
7.9 Andy turning the radio on in the cockpit



Andy's Boat

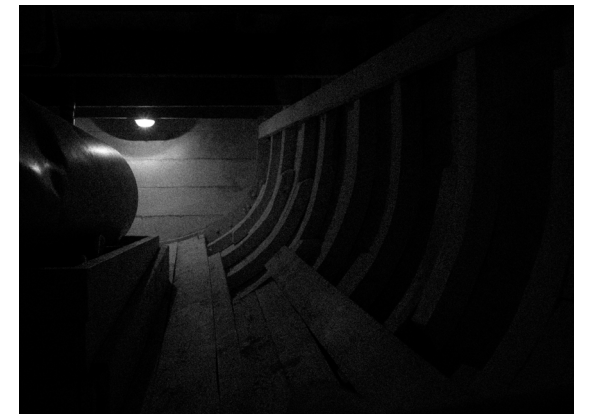
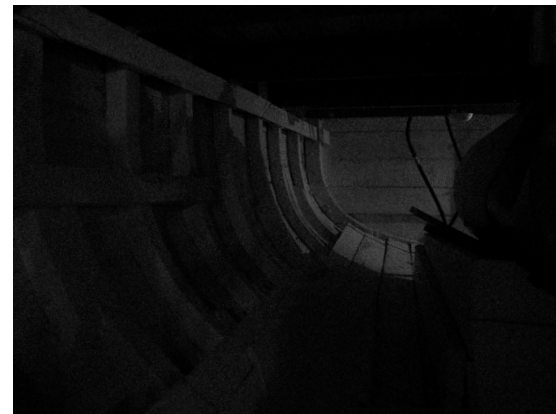
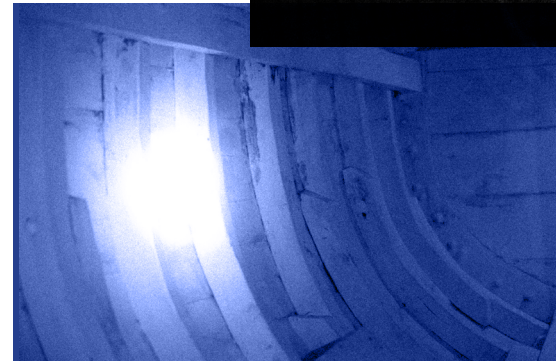
I am reminded of the day when Andy, with quiet pride, guided me through his boat, named the *Alicia and Andi-Mae*, after his great-granddaughters. This broad cabin cruiser was a hybrid of tradition and innovation. The central volume contained a small but fully outfitted kitchen and bathroom as well as a dining table and cockpit. Descending further, past the threshold of the forward hull I encountered snug bunks, enough to squeeze up to five people. The boat was painted in bright primary colours, standing in stark contrast to the muted palette of the sea and shore around us. Andy proudly informed me that these were inspired by the boats he saw in St. John's. After taking me through each part of the boat above deck we descended into its dark underbelly. Here, while we crouched in the hull's embrace, Andy recounted how often he checked on the boat in the middle of the night.





She don't leak too much now. Don't leak much now, she's pretty good now. I used to come out here last winter, at four or five o'clock in the night, right here in the morning, and check on the boat. I'd check on the water in her eh? We'd come out here at six o'clock. Me and Dean we came out here one night at three o'clock, when Dean was home, and checked on it. Cause you got to check on her eh? She stays in the water, all winter... Nothing ever happened, no, no, no, nothing ever happened, but I'd like to get a check on her.²

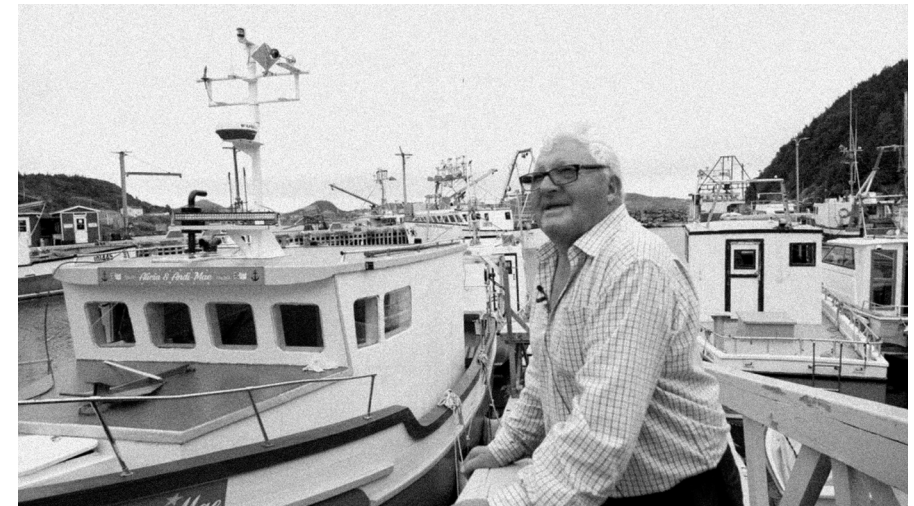
(Top to bottom, left to right)
 7.10 View through the front foer of Andy's boat
 7.11 Andy's barometer
 7.12 Andy in the underbelly of his boat
 7.15-7.15 Timbers harvested from curved trees lining the hull of the boat



In these moments the boat ceased to be only a floating vessel, it became a vessel of his very being. As we sat in the darkness his flashlight danced along the ribs of the boat surrounding us. All were robust juniper timbers that he had painstakingly harvested from curved trees and shaped by hand. I asked if he remembered where any of them came from. He replied “If I were to tell you where I got them you’d have some walking to do ‘by. I cut two or three of them everywhere! All over the place!”³ In the embrace of the boat I found myself tracing the trajectories of the juniper trees across the island, imagining where each timber might have grown in the bend of the roots, mapping their journey from sapling to tree and then through Andy’s craft to the water where they now supported us in this subterranean world.

Both the Kit Boat project and Andy’s boat fulfill the essential experience of being on the water, a testament to history and adapting to place. Both may be built by someone with a close personal relationship to you and may be a vessel for stories and connections. The contrast emerges, however, in their materiality. There is undoubtedly a difference between the feeling of being surrounded by pieces of plywood and pieces of hand-cut juniper. The hope for the Kit Boat and similar active preservation strategies is to keep the memory of craft and boat building alive in the collective consciousness of Newfoundlanders. This is done by creating a product that adapts to the modern age while still being woven out of the memory

of the past. The challenge lies in the choices: what do we hold on to, and what do we leave behind? With such choices there always lies the danger of losing the ineffable essences of tradition. In Andy’s boat, the juniper-framed hull resonated with the sound of what it means to be from a place, to live on the water, and be bound back to its land like waves upon a shore.



Notes

1 Peter Soland, “Placekeeping,” Council for Canadian Urbanism, May 20, 2020, <https://www.canu.ca/post/placekeeping>.

2 Andrew Riggs, interview by Liam Bursey, video recording, July 26, 2022.

3 Ibid.

7.16 Andy proudly standing in front of the Alicia and Andi Mae

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Appendix: Supplementary Material

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Description

A documentary film created as a supplement to the thesis. The film represents the design component of the thesis, exhibiting the setting, exploration, and resultant findings of the research.

