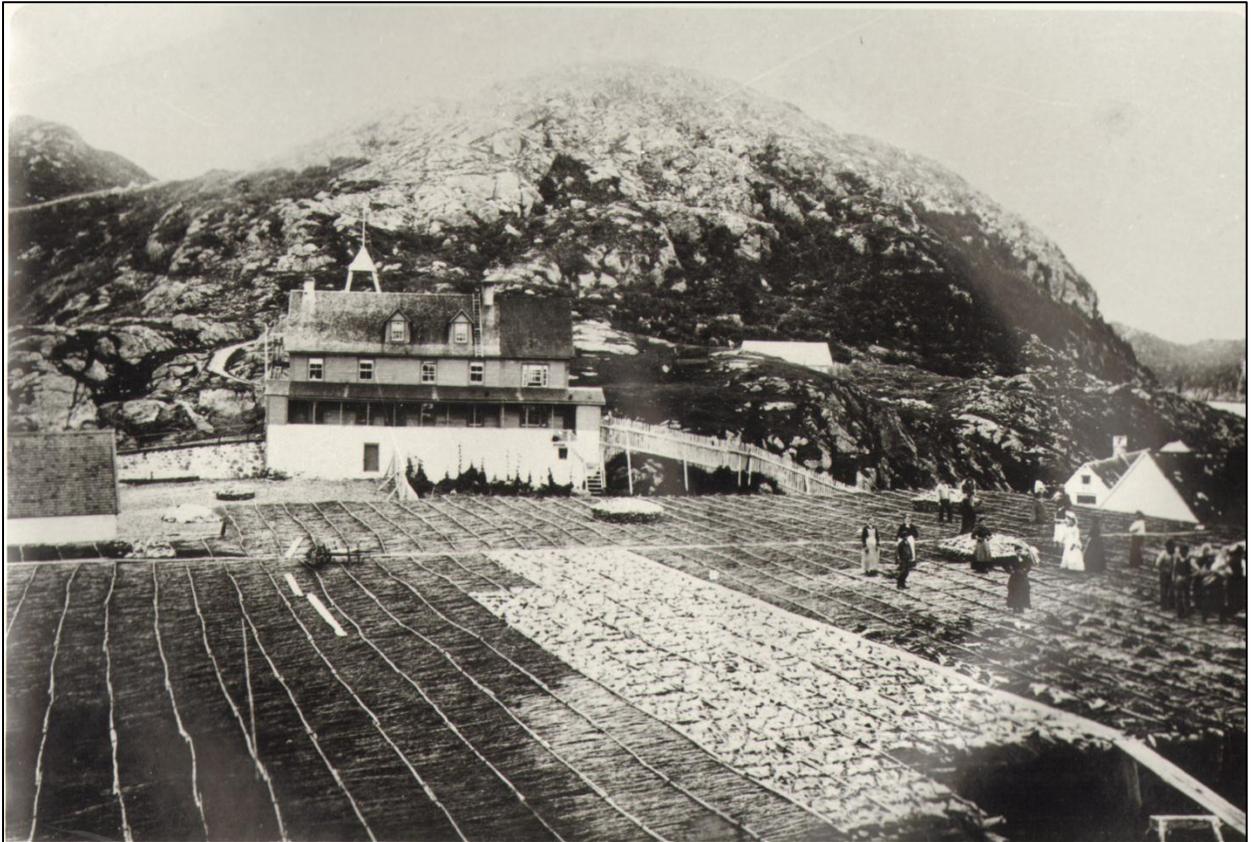


**19<sup>th</sup> century Newfoundland outport merchants**



*The Jersey Room, Burin, c. 1885, S.H. Parsons photo (GPA collection).*

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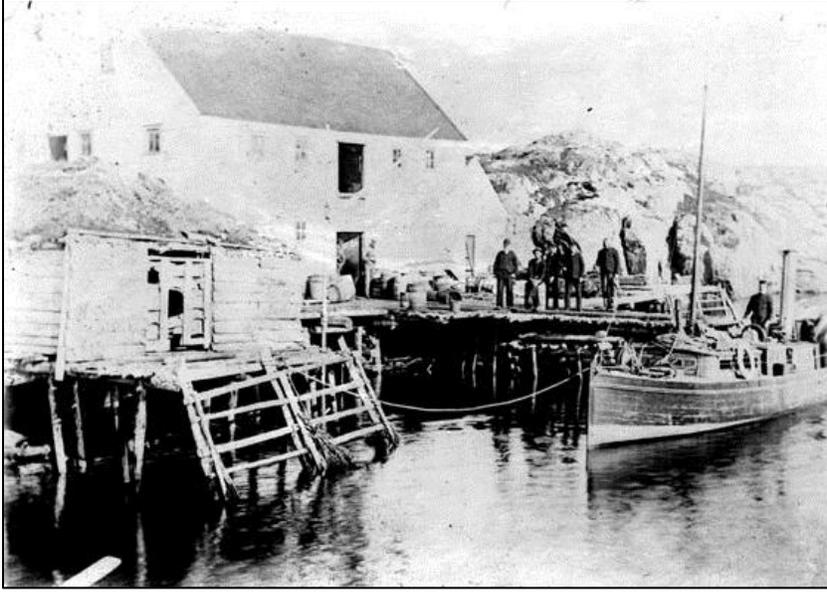
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## **Executive Summary**

In their impact on Newfoundland and Labrador's economic development, patterns of settlement, and community life, 19<sup>th</sup> century outport merchants made a significant historic contribution. Their secondary impact, on the Province's political and cultural development, may be less obvious but was nonetheless vital. Each merchant had a demonstrable impact beyond his home community, in that each supplied nearby communities. Although a merchant's commercial home sphere was typically in the headquarters bay or region, the majority of the outport merchants were also involved in both fishing and in supplying planters/ fishers in migratory or vessel-based fisheries elsewhere: the Labrador and French Shore fisheries; the seal hunt; and the western boat and Bank fisheries of the south coast.

For the purposes of this review it was found helpful to draw a distinction between "resident outport merchants" who lived the full range of their adult lives in rural Newfoundland and the "merchant gentry" whose outport residency was an episode in their business and family life which was otherwise substantially spent in the Old Country or in St. John's. The resident group may be more worthy of consideration for the Province's commemoration program. Existing commemorations tend to favour the merchant gentry.

The period of activity meets the criteria for the Provincial Historic Commemorations Program (10 years after the group ceased to be active). Indeed, some were active prior to 1800. The period of activity of the group may be said to have ended in 1938.



*Duff's Labrador room, at Merchantman's Harbour (The Rooms/Provincial Archive, VA 91-3-2).*

### **Economic and Cultural Impact**

Historian Keith Matthews has described the fish merchant as “the creator and sustainer of all activity in Newfoundland.” The typical outport merchant outfitted inshore fishermen from his own community and those nearby. He owned his own vessel, even a fleet, in order to export fish to world markets and to import fishery supplies, foodstuffs, and household items for the retail trade. Many merchants sent ships and men to the Labrador fishery, Bank fishery, or seal hunt, but would also back ambitious or reliable planters to build and outfit their own vessels. Some of these in turn became dealers or agents of the merchant house. Many dealers eventually developed substantial trade “on their own account” and entered the merchant class. Ancillary industries developed by merchants included shipyards, cooperages and sawmills and many also built up substantial farms, as befitted gentlemen. Later in the century several outport merchants attempted to develop mines, or invested in small industry, with mixed success. As Lawton and Devine (1944:63) wrote of King's Cove firm of Munn & Carroll (which became insolvent in 1869), “[t]heir business had probably been neglected for other enterprises. That [Michael Carroll] was enterprising admits of no question.”

In order to assess the significance of 19<sup>th</sup> century outport merchants it was found useful to look at a number of people, representative of differing aspects of the salt fish industry, as well as

different national origins, and a variety of regions of the Island.<sup>1</sup> Historical geographer Gordon Hancock has investigated the career of one outport merchant in detail. He concluded that James Burden, of Salvage

... was a person of vision, energy, enterprise and, for his time, considerable personal achievement. He became a wealthy businessman in Salvage, Bonavista Bay. On that account he was probably not much liked because the general perception was that fish merchants were grasping and deceptive, even dishonest, in their dealings with fishermen, paying too little for fish and charging excessively for supplies and basic necessities. And James Burden was one of those fish merchants whose financial success perceptively was based upon taking unfair advantage of poor families. He was certainly the most prominent and powerful public figure, perhaps the most revered and feared, in Salvage during the second half of the nineteenth century. Burden was not only a successful merchant and general dealer, he was distinctive also as a community leader, an entrepreneur and, to some, a philanthropist. When he died his eulogist, a Salvage school teacher, referred to him as “one of those master minds who have helped to make the history of the out harbors.” In Salvage where he was born and grew up, but especially in the case of Eastport (formerly Salvage Bay), this endorsement was not without merit for he and his family played an influential role during the formative years of both these rural communities. For these reasons, and purely as a person, his life and times are interesting and worth the telling (Hancock 2011, quoted by permission of the author).

As for the “general perception... that fish merchants were grasping and deceptive, even dishonest, in their dealings with fishermen,” undoubtedly, there were Newfoundland merchants who fit this image, just as there were uncaring factory owners in Victorian England and “robber barons” in the American Gilded Age. However, neither the Industrial Revolution, trans-continental railways nor the salt fish industry could have existed and expanded through the 19<sup>th</sup> century without the business-owners who provided the considerable capital and profit-driven vision to prosecute both domestic development and international trade. While the stereotype of the grasping merchant has some basis in both anecdote and the documentary record, there is also ample evidence of 19<sup>th</sup> century outport merchants as community leaders, providers of employment and philanthropists.

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<sup>1</sup> Capsule biographies of 12 representative merchants are presented in Appendix 2. In the further interest of making some reasoned generalizations about the type, origins, career-path and contributions of 19<sup>th</sup> century outport merchants, it was decided to investigate 38 other merchants, to bring the sample total up to 50 individuals, as listed in Appendix 3.

If there is no true homogeneity in the careers of our sample of 50 outport merchants, this is reflective of their lifetimes, which span from the Seven Years War to World War II. Henry Butler, born in Salisbury, England in 1769, came to Placentia Bay as an apprentice in 1780 and died at a ripe old age at Lamaline, two years before “Gambo Jack” Murphy was born, at Catalina, in 1849. Murphy also passed threescore years and ten with all flags flying. He lived until 1938 and is chiefly remembered for his pioneering management role in establishing electrical and telephone services, business opportunities unfathomable to Butler.<sup>2</sup>

*Transatlantic and local merchant gentry.*<sup>3</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century was one of considerable change in the character of the “general business of the country” – the trade in salt fish and general supplies. In 1800 merchant houses based in England, Ireland or Jersey had substantial premises representing considerable trade in outport Newfoundland and in particular at the “fishing capitals”—ship harbours such as Bonavista, Burin, Burgeo, Carbonear, Fogo, Harbour Grace, Placentia, Trinity and Twillingate— which were centres of trade for the surrounding area. The “18<sup>th</sup> century type” of transatlantic fishery/supply firm persisted into the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and is represented by John Bingley Garland (Trinity).<sup>4</sup>

Typically, 18<sup>th</sup> century outport merchants had been associated with trading firms headquartered in the English West Country ports (less frequently, Ireland or the Channel Islands), with the Newfoundland side of the trade being managed by a junior partner who may have spent years or decades crossing the Atlantic before ‘graduating’ to the parent house in the old country.

... until the 19<sup>th</sup> century the merchants had their own reasons for wishing to remain in their places of birth... The more successful soon bought landed estates and moved on equal terms with the gentry, whilst the greatest of all sat in Parliament and obtained knighthoods. No one would lightly exchange this for the rude life of a Newfoundland planter, and until

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<sup>2</sup> It may be of interest to note that both Butler and Murphy began their careers as clerks, became managers of outport branches of large firms (Spurrier’s and Ridley’s respectively) and began in business on their own account after purchasing the premises in which they had been employed, during liquidation proceedings.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase “merchant gentry” is a suggestion from Gordon Handcock, who read an early draft of this paper. While the present version owes much to Dr. Handcock’s insight and experience, its conclusions, errors and omissions are mine.

<sup>4</sup> Others in the sample who either were involved in the transatlantic fishery of the 18<sup>th</sup> century or spend a portion of their career with a transatlantic merchant house include Clement Benning (Burin); Henry Butler (Burin); James MacBraire (Kings Cove); William Phippard (St. Mary’s); Christopher Spurrier (Oderin); Stephen Rendell (Hants Harbour) and Roger Sweetman (Placentia). MacBraire and Spurrier might also be considered representative of the 18<sup>th</sup> century type.

1800, the ambition of most of the latter was to make some money and retire “home” to England (Matthews 1984).

Merchant after merchant came, made fortunes out of fish, seals and oil, converted it all into gold, and took it away out of the country for 200 years. The merchants themselves went away to enjoy their wealth, far away from a country that was good enough to make money in, but not good enough to spend it in (Devine 1990:55-56 – written in 1915).



*Rural Retreat (also known as Peach’s Farm), Carbonear, built by local merchant Robert Pack in the 1830s, a registered heritage structure (Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador).*

In addition to the transatlantic merchants, the merchant gentry of the 19<sup>th</sup> century included the managers (whether agents or principle partners) of the major mercantile establishments in the fishing capitals. These men “wielded immense power and influence over these places and their dependencies... if they were so inclined.”<sup>5</sup> While earlier in the century the gentry tended to return to the Old Country, in latter part of the century some moved to St. John’s later in their careers, while other returned to England after they had retired from active business. Stephen Rendell, Thomas Ridley and James Ryan number among the “local merchant gentry.”<sup>6</sup>

*Resident outport merchants.* These men might be classified as the “true outport merchants.” As a group they were generally either Newfoundland-born or resident from a very young age. They were committed to developing the fishery and economic diversity in their region and also to the cultural, religious, educational and social lives of their home communities. They were also generally important contributors to the social and economic lives of what might be called their

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<sup>5</sup> Hancock (2014).

<sup>6</sup> Others from the sample whose status might be considered that of “local merchant gentry” include John Munn (Harbour Grace), Robert Munn (Harbour Grace) and John Murphy (Gambo).

“trading circle,” including nearby communities which were supplied through a branch or local “dealer” and the communities which grew up around their fishing rooms on the coast of Labrador.

Roger Sweetman’s local influence and his firm’s Old Country origins certainly suggest that he could be classed among the gentry. However, he also demonstrated residential commitment to Placentia and area. Similarly, John Peyton and William Duff may have been born in England and Scotland, but their business interests and families were in Newfoundland from young adulthood. William Kelson (Trinity), Robert Pack (Bay Roberts), and James Rolls (Barr’d Islands) are also good examples English-born merchants who added much to outport life and to Newfoundland. James Burden, John Lake and James Norris are examples of Newfoundland-born resident outport merchants.

William Kelson... could be titled Trinity’s principal 19th century citizen. ... From 1808 he spent upwards of 60 years as a resident and made significant contributions to the growth, management and civic improvement of the town, apart from his mercantile duties which on Robert Slade’s behalf he performed very successfully. He headed a committee to rebuild the fort 1812-14, and raised and commanded a local voluntary force to defend Trinity. Appointed magistrate in 1822 he served several decades. He helped build a new court house, school, church and parsonage; served on committees related to poor relief and road improvements. He supported both the Church of England and the Wesleyan/Methodist Church. ...In retirement he wrote letters to government officials on needed reforms in the fishery (Handcock 2014).

*Demographics.* The Newfoundland census of 1884 tallied nearly 1000 men who were classified as “merchants or traders” from a total population of just under 200,000. Of our total sample of 50 outport merchants, two of the earliest became principals of multi-generational family firms founded in Poole, England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Garland and Christopher Spurrier). Seven “came out” to Newfoundland as young men apprenticed as clerks as established outport trading firms.<sup>7</sup> Six others became involved in business working alongside their fathers, who were of the planter/mariner/small dealer class in Newfoundland outports. Ten were fishermen/mariners who became vessel owners and later established themselves “in the general business of the country” through the coasting trade, Labrador fishery or bank fishery.<sup>8</sup>

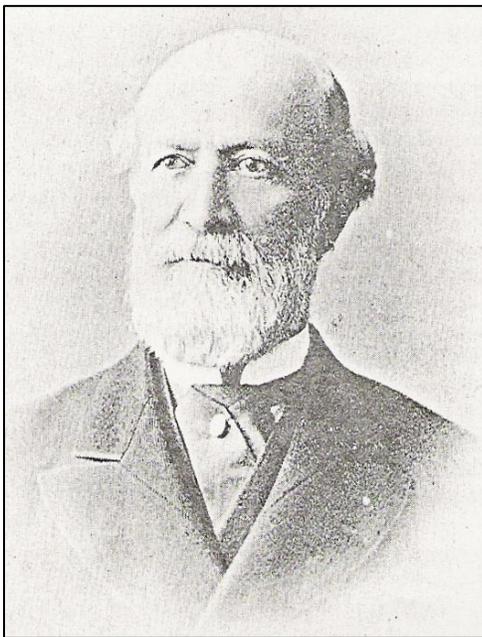
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<sup>7</sup> Clement Benning (Burin), Butler, Duff, John Munn, Robert Munn, Ridley and Rendell.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Barbour (Newtown), Burden, Charles Dawe (Bay Roberts), Samuel Harris (Grand Bank), Thomas Knight (Moretons Harbour), Azariah Munden (Brigus), Penny, Norris and Peter Winser (Aquaforte). Kelson came

By birth 36% of the sample were English, while 18% were born in another “old country” – whether Scotland, Ireland, Jersey or (as with Celestine Giovannini, St. Lawrence), Italy. One was born in the Massachusetts (Small), one in New Brunswick (James Furlong, Oderin), and there are two others whose birthplace is uncertain, but who were probably English-born (Richard Rice and Ridley). Approximately 40% of the sample were Newfoundland-born.

Although a little more than half were born elsewhere, very few 19<sup>th</sup> century outport merchants lived elsewhere after commencing their business careers in Newfoundland. For the most part these few exceptions were merchants early in the century and more closely resembled the 18<sup>th</sup> century cultural type: Garland (who lived here less than five years), James MacBraire (who left in 1817) and Spurrier (who seems never to have visited Newfoundland at all, at least as an adult). Otherwise, the only merchants who went back “home” in their later years were Ridley (whose firm became insolvent under the direction of his son and retired “in reduced circumstances” to England), William Pinsent (Port de Grave) and Rendell. The latter two returned to England as older men in poor health, leaving their adult children behind.<sup>9</sup>



*Stephen Rendell (from Mott's Newfoundland Men).*

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to Labrador as a young fisherman, then was a clerk with the Slade firm on the Labrador before becoming a Slade agent at Trinity.

<sup>9</sup> In Pinsent's case, after his return to Devon in 1828 his Newfoundland-born wife, Amy (nee Richards), managed the Port de Grave business in partnership with a nephew until 1840 (Andrews 1997:56-58).

Although Stephen Rendell retired to England for health reasons (a severe asthmatic, he had also recently lost his oldest son), he retained a strong connection to the English side of the fishery supply business and also to St. John's, where remaining sons and daughters raised their families. Rendell is also an anomaly in that his outport business career was primarily as a local representative of an English/St. John's firm, although he was also a vessel-owner and small trader on his own account. Rendell's impact on the community of Hants Harbour and the fishery and seal hunt of Trinity Bay 1840-60 was substantial, followed by two decades of his being immersed in the business and political life of St. John's as managing partner of Job Brothers – where one of his duties was to wind-up the Hants Harbour operation, in 1864.

Outport merchants played a very significant role in 19<sup>th</sup> century elective politics in Newfoundland. Of the sample, more than half were active in 19<sup>th</sup> century elective politics. In three other cases, a merchant's public political activity came in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> A few became major political figures. John Bemister (New Perlican), Charles Dawe, William Donnelley (Spaniards Bay), Augustus Goodridge (Renews), Thomas Glen (Bay Bulls) and Rendell all served in cabinet during politically significant times, although in each case this service came later in their business careers, after they had moved to St. John's.<sup>11</sup> Garland and Robert Pack played key roles in political reform and the introduction of representative government in 1832.<sup>12</sup> Ridley and John Munn had considerable political influence in Conception

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<sup>10</sup> Henry Earle (Fogo), Liberal backbencher during the Bond government; Murphy (MHA and then MLC, 1908-1934) and Ryan, who was appointed to the Legislative Council in 1913. Cape Broyle merchant Michael P. Cashin was first elected MHA in 1893. The meat of his political career (including a brief term as Prime Minister) came in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, after he moved to St. John's.

<sup>11</sup> John Bemister (1815-1892), a New Perlican merchant first elected MHA in 1852, served in several senior cabinet portfolios 1861-69, but appears to have left management of the business in the hands of his brother after entering politics and moving to St. John's. He and Donnelly are the only ones in our sample to have left the fishery/supply business for politics in mid-career and both received a government appointment afterwards. Goodridge served briefly as Prime Minister in 1894, while Dawe was (also briefly) Leader of the Opposition in 1908.

<sup>12</sup> Eight of the 15 members elected to the first House of Assembly may be classed as outport merchants: Peter Brown (of Harbour Grace, elected for Conception Bay), William Brown (King's Cove/Bonavista Bay), Charles Cozens (Brigus/Conception Bay), Garland (Trinity/Trinity Bay), William Hooper (Mortier/Burin), James Power (Carbonear/Conception Bay), Pack (Bay Roberts/Conception Bay) and Sweetman (Placentia/Placentia and St. Marys).

Bay for many decades, although their final joint initiative (support for Confederation with Canada in 1869) did not bear fruit.<sup>13</sup>

Some outport merchants became quite wealthy by the standards of 19<sup>th</sup> century Newfoundland, although probably only MacBraire, John Munn, Robert Munn, Ridley and Ryan ever numbered among the ranks of the wealthiest, who tended to reside at St. John's.<sup>14</sup> Ryan's estate was probated at more than \$600,000. He was likely the most financially successful apart from Garland, whose fortune was primarily amassed in the English end of the fish trade and was in any case substantially inherited. Others who died with substantial estates include Burden, Dawe, Furlong, John Rorke (Carbonear), Pack, Penny and Rendell. In Burden's case much of his capital was lost shortly after his death, in the Bank Crash of 1894, which event also came very close to bankrupting Goodridge.<sup>15</sup> The Bank Crash led to the collapse of the Munn firm, and contributed directly to the death of Robert Munn. Munn's insolvency and the insolvencies among some of the largest St. John's firms<sup>16</sup> in the 1890s adversely affected many outport agents and dealers. Ryan, his capital intact, purchased vessels and fishing rooms from several bankruptcy proceedings in the 1890s. Three others<sup>17</sup> suffered the insolvency of the family firm during their careers, while four<sup>18</sup> were appointed district magistrates in their 40s and took a much less active part in business thereafter.

Our study period has been characterised by historians as a century of competition between St. John's firms and outport firms. This competition was progressively won by St. John's for many

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<sup>13</sup> Based on a sample of MHAs in four 19<sup>th</sup> century elections (1836; 1855; 1869; and 1885), overall approximately 33% of members were outport merchants and 14% were St. John's-based fish merchants. The mercantile influence in politics waned in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (based on returns from 1900; 1913; 1928 and the 1946 election to the National Convention). Based on this sample 22% of members were outport merchants and only 5% were St. John's-based fish merchants. In part this change can be traced to the political activities of the Fishermen's Protective Union after 1908. It should also be noted that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century St. John's-based lawyers won the majority of seats in the capital, and often were elected to outport seats as well. Although very few seats were held by lawyers in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, most governments 1855-1934 were led by lawyers.

<sup>14</sup> As did MacBraire and Ryan later in their careers. Murphy also amassed an apparently substantial fortune in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but from business activities unrelated to the fishery, by which time he too had moved to St. John's.

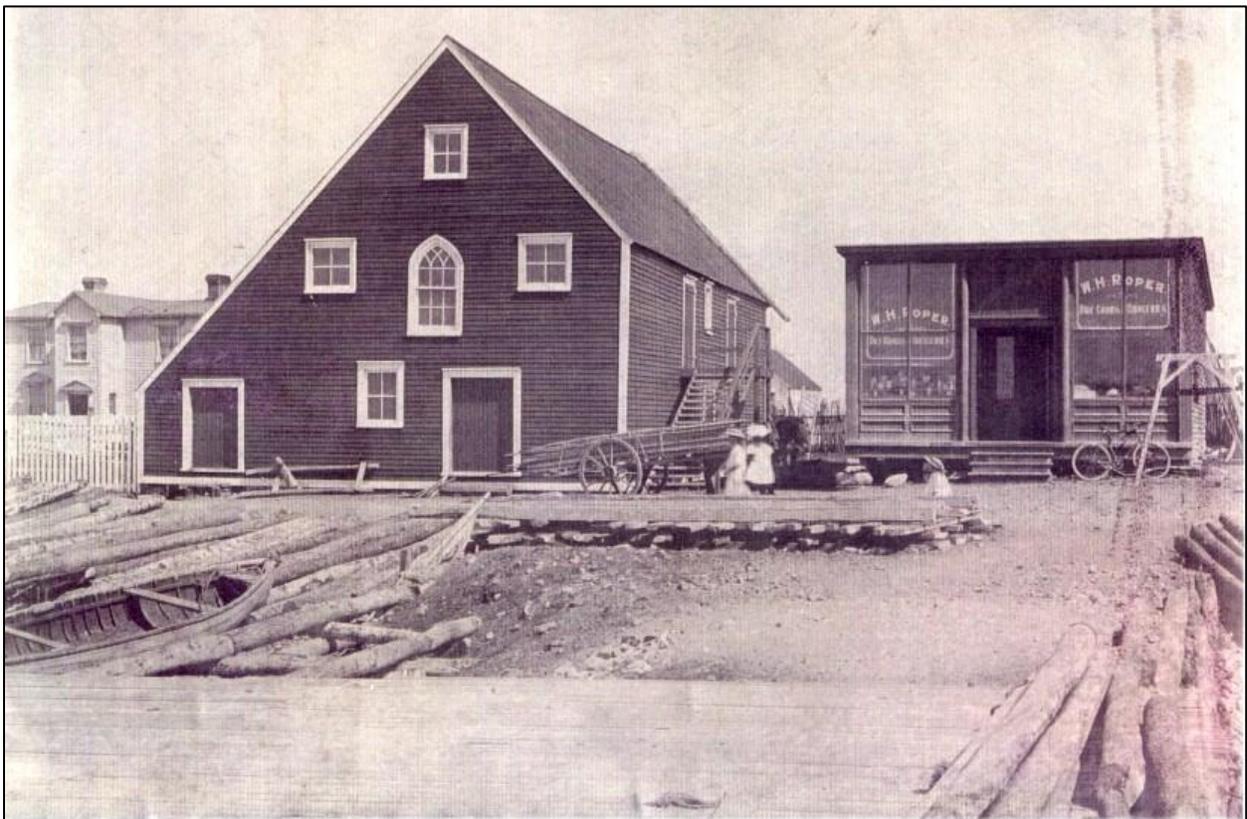
<sup>15</sup> Both Goodridge and Donnelly were prosecuted for conspiracy to defraud in their capacity as bank directors (neither was convicted).

<sup>16</sup> P. & L. Tessier and J. & W. Stewart both collapsed in 1893, while Thorburn & Tessier and Edwin Duder & Co. failed in the aftermath of the Bank Crash.

<sup>17</sup> Ridley, Spurrier and Sweetman.

<sup>18</sup> Peyton, Thomas O'Reilly (Placentia), Rice and Small.

reasons, not the least being the investment required to purchase steam-powered vessels after 1863 and the consequent change in the structure of the seal hunt, eliminating a major potential profit centre for the owners of smaller vessels (see Ryan 1986). A 19<sup>th</sup> century outpost merchant relied not only on the local fishery and retail trade, but the ownership of fishing vessels, and the expansion of the fishery into new areas (the Bank, French Shore and Labrador fisheries). Concentration of sealing profits in a few St. John's firms, a general decline in the fish stock through over fishing, reaching the limits of northern expansion, and a developing problem with the cure and marketing in the Labrador fishery, ensured a general reorganization of the outpost fishery/supply business, so that the old-style outpost merchant house – independent and integrated – could not as a rule survive into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The collapse of the once-mighty Munn firm of Harbour Grace after the Bank Crash of 1894 symbolizes the end of an era respecting the outpost merchant.



*Ropers fish store and shop, Mockbeggar, Bonavista, 1900. Bradley House is glimpsed at far left (Mockbeggar Plantation Provincial Historic Site).*

## Existing Commemorations

The homes or business premises of many 19<sup>th</sup> century outpost merchants have been preserved and restored, occasionally as the focus of formal commemoration. The Ryan Premises National Historic Site in Bonavista, the best surviving example of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Newfoundland merchant's premises, includes the dwelling of James Ryan, a manager's residence, fish store, salt store and retail shop. (Ryan's branch store at Elliston is also a registered heritage structure.) The former Slade/Baine Johnston premises at Battle Harbour represents a surviving example of a merchant's "big room," on the Labrador, its restoration and preservation overseen by the Battle Harbour Historic Trust.

Hawthorn Cottage National Historic Site in Brigus, built in 1830 by local merchant John Leamon, was selected for recognition primarily for its association with 20<sup>th</sup> century explorer Robert Bartlett, but also "as typifying the refined lifestyle<sup>19</sup> of Newfoundland outpost merchants of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century."

All of the above are to a significant extent commemorations of the transatlantic fish business and the merchant gentry.

In Bonavista, the Mockbeggar Plantation Provincial Historic Site includes a 19<sup>th</sup> century merchant's residence (Bradley House), fish store and shop. The Barbour Living Heritage Village at Newtown, Bonavista Bay includes a complex of dwellings and premises, some of which date to 1875. The Rorke Stores and Stone Jug (retail shop and residence) at Carbonear are registered heritage structures. A smaller complex of merchant's premises includes significant 19<sup>th</sup> century components is the John Quinton premises at Red Cliff, Bonavista Bay. There are several 19<sup>th</sup> century merchant's homes which are registered heritage structures, some of which (such as Fogo's Bleak House and Belleoram's Cluett House) are community museums. In fact, most of

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<sup>19</sup> Rev, Charles Lench wrote of Bonavista merchant Giles Hosier that he "lived in lordly home in good English style. He was well educated, a man of refined tastes and superior attainments, which qualities were transmitted to a large family of interesting sons and daughters" (cited in Whiffen 1993:73-74). Bartlett House in Brigus, a private home, is also a registered heritage structure.

Newfoundland's "fishing capitals" are monuments to the 19<sup>th</sup> century fishery in layout, character and in historic preservation, including Bonavista, Brigus, Carbonear, Harbour Grace and Trinity.

In addition to the Rorke Stores, and Robert Pack's Rural Retreat, Carbonear has several surviving 19<sup>th</sup> century merchant's houses, including that of William Duff (presently Sophia's Heritage Inn). The Harbour Grace waterfront also has much built heritage from its 19<sup>th</sup> century mercantile heyday, including merchants' homes, St. Paul's Anglican Church, the former Customs House (now the Conception Bay Museum), the Court House, and the stone Ridley Offices at Point of Beach. Another historic town with significant built heritage from the 19<sup>th</sup> century is Trinity, including the reconstructed Lester-Garland House, which houses a museum, archive, and education centre "to rekindle, promote and celebrate the strong historical and cultural links between Newfoundland and the west of England."

## **Appendix 1: Nomination Criteria, Exceptional People from the Past**

Nominated subjects in this category-either individuals or groups of people-must have been active in Newfoundland and Labrador, or their work must have had a significant and demonstrable impact on the province, our way of life, or how we view ourselves.

Submissions must demonstrate that the nominated subject(s) had an impact on the province as a whole - that is, their influence went beyond the local community - and that they had a direct and tangible link with events, ideas, cultural traditions, or beliefs of provincial significance.

The Provincial Historic Commemorations Program will consider designating only those persons or groups of people who lived or worked in the province, and **only if 10 or more years have passed** since their death (in the case of an individual) or the end of their period of activity (in the case of a group of people).

## Appendix 2: Biographies

**John Bingley Garland** (1791-1875). Born Poole, England the son of George Garland, a Poole-Trinity merchant, he served a commercial apprenticeship in London with Hart and Robinson, a firm long-established in the West Country-Newfoundland fishery. Garland spent two years overseeing the family establishment at Trinity 1819-21, then returned to the management of the English end of the trade at Poole, where he was elected mayor in 1824. After becoming principal partner in 1830, Garland returned to Trinity 1832-34 and was elected to the first Newfoundland House of Assembly, serving as Speaker. He returned to Poole in 1834.

**John Peyton, Jr** (1793-1879). Born Wimbourne, England. After some commercial experience in England, Peyton came to Newfoundland in 1812 to help oversee a salmon fishery in the Bay of Exploits and cod fishery at Exploits Burnt Islands which had been established by his father and which he helped develop as a general business. He is primarily remembered for his accounts of experiences with two Beothuk women, Mary March and Shawnaudithit. Peyton moved to Back Harbour, Twillingate in 1836 after having been appointed district magistrate, and gradually withdrew from business.

**Roger F. Sweetman** (1795-1862). Born Ireland, the son of Pierce Sweetman, a partner in the Waterford, Ireland/Poole/Placentia fishery supply firm Saunders & Sweetman. Roger Sweetman was sent to Placentia to oversee the firm's trade in 1813 and under his direction the firm played an important role in the expansion of settlement in Placentia Bay and along the Cape Shore. He was elected member for Placentia and St. Mary's in the first House of Assembly, in 1832. The firm became insolvent in 1859.

**Thomas Ridley** (1799-1879). Born England or Ireland. Ridley came to Newfoundland as a young man and by 1824 was partner in a small firm trading at Adams Cove, on the north shore of Conception Bay. He established a branch at Harbour Grace (with Carbonear the main supply base of the north shore fishery), through purchasing assets of an insolvent Bristol-based merchant, Hugh Danson. Ridley was sometimes a controversial figure, as in 1832 when his recalcitrance in the face of a sealers strike led to one of his vessels being sabotaged. In 1836 Ridley was forced to withdraw as a candidate for the House of Assembly and in 1840 was injured by being struck in the head while attempting to keep order during a by-election campaign. Trading as Ridley and Harrison from 1838 and Ridley and Sons from 1849, the firm further expanded during the 1850s and 1860s, including the sending vessels to the Labrador fishery, seal hunt and the Bank fishery (out of branches at Catalina, and Rose Blanche). The firm became overextended and began to experience financial difficulties in 1870 and went out of business in 1873, an insolvency that was felt all over Newfoundland. The firm "of whom it is said that they once paid half of the custom dues that were collected in the country" (according to Joseph Small) collapsed owing £250,000.

**James Burden** (1817-1894). Born Salvage. Beginning his working life as an inshore fisherman, Burden was co-owner of a schooner trading from Salvage in the late 1840s, where he was the principal merchant from the 1850s to the 1890s. He supplied the inshore fishery out of communities from Happy Adventure to St. Brendan's and fitted out schooners for the Labrador

floater fishery. He is also considered one of the founders of Eastport, where he established a farm in the 1860s.

**Stephen Rendell** (1819-1893). Born Coffinswell, England. Rendell came to Newfoundland in 1835 as an apprentice with the Liverpool-St. John's firm Job Brothers and by 1840 was managing Jobs' principal outpost branch at Hants Harbour. From 1859 Rendell was a partner and manager of the St. John's branch. He was MHA for Trinity Bay 1859-73 and then a Member of the Legislative Council from 1874. Besides the trade in fish and fishery supplies, Rendell was a great booster of Newfoundland's agricultural potential and an investor in several manufacturing concerns in St. John's in the 1860s and 1870s. His son, John Rendell (1845-1881) was also briefly MHA for Trinity and died at Twillingate in 1881, while en route to Round Harbour, where he had a general business. The next year Stephen Rendell returned to England, but his adult children remained in St. John's, including Dr. Herbert Rendell and mining promoter Robert G. Rendell.

**John Penny** (1832-1903). Born Somerset, England. Penney came to Great Jervis, Hermitage Bay, as a young shipwright in the employ of Newman & Co. He built a vessel on his own account and began trading throughout Hermitage Bay and along the southwest coast, supplying bait to and participating in the Bank fishery. By 1870 Penny had moved his residence and business headquarters to Halifax. His sons established John Penny & Sons as the largest firm in Ramea, a firm which became one of Newfoundland's largest fresh-frozen fish processors after World War II.

**James M. Ryan** (1841-1917). Born Bonavista. Ryan began in the fishery supply business with his father, as a dealer of the Scottish/Newfoundland firm Baine Johnston & Co. By 1869 he was operating on his own account and had purchased a piece of prime waterfront property in Bonavista. He directed the building of the substantial premises which are now the Ryan Premises National Historic Site. Operating as James Ryan & Co., the firm became one of the largest fishery supply firms on the northeast coast. The firm expanded to Kings Cove in 1880 and Trinity by 1902 (as Ryan Brothers), branches which were operated by James Ryan's brothers Daniel and Edmund. The firm continued until 1978 under Ryan's descendants, who by this time had been normally resident in England for many years. James Ryan had his primary residence in St. John's after 1908 and was appointed a Member of Legislative Council in 1913.

**William Duff** (1842-1913). Born Stirlingshire, Scotland. Duff came to Newfoundland as a young clerk with the Harbour Grace/Scottish firm Paterson and Foster and became a partner in a Carbonear-based firm, Balmer & Duff, in 1866. As William Duff & Sons (after 1884) his concern was one of the largest suppliers to the Carbonear/Labrador fishery, out of Merchantman's Harbour. Duff was MHA for Carbonear 1889-1900, generally supporting Sir William V. Whiteway.

**Joseph H. Small** (1845-1933). Born Massachusetts. Small's father (also Joseph Small) began trading in salmon and herring along the southwest coast in 1856. In 1860 he and a partner purchased a failing general business at Burgeo and Small Sr moved his family to the community, where he traded under the name of Bowley and Small until 1864, after which his son joined him in the business as J. Small & Co. The younger Joseph Small was appointed a Justice of the Peace

in 1877 and district magistrate in 1890, which was also the year that his father died. J. Small & Co. carried on in business “with indifferent success” until 1896. After retiring from the bench in 1915 he began to compile material on the history of the southwest coast, later published, which includes useful accounts of the various business houses operating in the area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**John E. Lake** (1845-1920). Born Fortune. A third-generation member of one of the pioneer families of Fortune, Lake became a skipper and involved in the supplying vessels to the Bank fishery out of that community. He later attempted to diversify his interests, and the local economy, including a salmon and lobster cannery in Fortune Bay, sawmills in Bay d’Espoir, a furniture-making enterprise and a boot and shoe factory in Fortune, all established in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He served a term as MHA for Burin 1897-1900.

**James Norris** (1851-1924). Born St. John’s. By 1871 Norris had established himself in business at Three Arms, in western Notre Dame Bay, building a schooner with which he traded with other communities in the Green Bay area and along the French Shore (his wife being a Dower from Conche). Norris built a thriving village at Three Arms, where he was involved in shipbuilding and sawmilling and also had a small Roman Catholic chapel built. He later supplied crews from nearby communities to the Labrador fishery and the French Shore fishery, establishing branches at Conche and Coachman's Cove.

### **Appendix 3: the Sample**

Benjamin Barbour (1809-1891) – Pinchards Island/Newtown.  
Clement Benning (1785-1865) – Burin.  
Alexander Bremner (1798-1885) – Trinity/Catalina.  
James Burden (1817-1894) – Salvage.  
Henry Butler (1769-1847) – Burin.  
Richard Cashin (1813-1897) – Cape Broyle.  
Charles Dawe (1845-1908) - Bay Roberts.  
William J.S. Donnelly (1844-1914) - Spaniards Bay.  
William Duff (1842-1913) – Carbonear.  
Henry Earle (1841-1934) – Twillingate/Fogo.  
Edward Evans (1819-1898) – Grand Bank.  
James Furlong (1808-1856) – Oderin.  
John B. Garland (1791-1875) – Trinity.  
William Genge (1793-1865) – Anchor Point.  
Thomas Glen (1796-1887) – Bay Bulls.  
Celestine Giovannini (1839-1902) – St. Lawrence.  
Augustus Goodridge (1839-1920) – Renewals/St. John’s.  
Samuel Harris (1850-1926) – Grand Bank.  
George Hoskins (1811-1905) – St. Albans.  
William Kean (1810-1887) – Flowers Island/Pools Island.  
William Kelson (1782-1866) – Trinity.  
Thomas Knight (1801-1882) – Moretons Harbour.  
John E. Lake (1845-1920) – Fortune.  
John Leamon (1800-1866) – Brigus.  
Stephen March (1810-1884) – Old Perlican.  
Philip Messervey (1769-1837) – Sandy Point.  
James MacBraire (1757-1832) – Harbour Grace/Kings Cove.  
Azariah Munden (1813-1889) – Brigus.  
John Munn (1807-1879) – Harbour Grace.  
Robert Munn (1829-1894) – Harbour Grace.  
John Murphy (1849-1938) – Greenspond/Gambo.  
James Norris (1851-1924) – Three Arms.  
Thomas O’Reilly (1839-1897) – Placentia.  
Robert Pack (1786-1860) – Bay Roberts/Carbonear.  
John Penny (1832-1903) – Hermitage Bay.  
John Peyton (1793-1879) – Exploits.  
William Phippard (1771-1830) – St. Marys.  
William Pinsent (1757-1835) – Port de Grave.  
Richard Rice (1824-1905) – Twillingate.  
Thomas Ridley (1799-1879) – Harbour Grace.  
Stephen Rendell (1819-1893) – Hants Harbour/St. John’s.  
James Rolls (1807-1896) – Barr’d Islands.  
John Rorke (1807-1896) – Carbonear.  
James Ryan (1841-1917) – Bonavista.  
James Saint (1800?-1873) – Bonavista.  
Joseph Small (1845-1933) – Burgeo/Channel.  
Christopher Spurrier (1783-1876) – Oderin/Isle Valen/Burin.  
Roger Sweetman (1795-1862) – Placentia.  
James Watson (1845-1908) – Hants Harbour/L’anse au Loup.  
Peter Winser (1781-1864) – Aquaforte.

#### Appendix 4: The Outharbour Planter, by Maurice Devine (c. 1900)

"The times bain't what they used to be, 'bout fifty ye'rs or so ago,"  
And he hooked a coal from the bar-room stove, and set his T.D. pipe aglow.  
"The b'ys be changed, the men be changed, their place supplied by fraud and ranter,  
But the deadest of all the burr'ed past is the dead and gon' outharbour planter.

"He's gon' with gansey and corduroy pants; with Hamburg boots and ne'er collar;  
He's gon' wid cook-room, pork and duff; gon' wid the good, old pillar dollar;  
Gon' wid his chare at Christmas time; gone wid his rum in the red decanter;  
He's chareful v'ice and breezy song are burr'ed 'low wid the outport planter.

"Tis true he was bluff and somewhat rude, and hadn't a stock of college manners;  
His gurls warn't trained in boardin' schools, and didn't thump on grand pianers.  
But they'd gut a fish, or make a shirt, and at dawn rise at a call instanter;  
They were truthful, honest, kind and good, the simple gurls of the outport planter.

"His place supplied by a class o' dude (I've seed the word in the Yankee papers),  
With standin' collars and shinin' boots; wid cheap segars and sickenin' capers,  
Wid shop-made clothes and silvern rings, and larnin' enough to fool and banter;  
You'd drown 'em all with your nipper's spray those pale face sons of the outport planter.

"Ye'r in, ye'r out, he done his work, as best he knew in his position;  
The winter seed him mend his nets, the summer seed him go a-fishin'.  
The priest and parson he always paid (the regular men, but not the ranter),  
For the latter class no favor found with the orthodox outharbour planter.

"His house the village meetin' place, tho' it not always was a mansion,  
Its carpet was a sanded floor, with sometimes sawdust on the planchin',  
Here song and merry dance went round, the tune supplied by cookroom chanter;  
The reel, cotillion (not the waltz) was the dance enjoyed by the outport planter.

"I knew one quite well he had his faults, and made men work both night and marnin';  
But, then, he didn't spare himself, a more than three hours rest a scarnin'.  
And he cussed and he swore when the fish was scarce, and drank too deep from the red decanter;  
And bad molasses and rotten flour, was sometimes sold by the outport planter.

"But when 'counts he squar'd at the final day, and into the ledger the Lord is sarchin',  
He'll say, 'I find you cussed a sight, and once in a while you stuck the marchin';  
But you clode the naked, the hungry fed; so go up fust with the harps and chanters,  
The place reserved for all good men, and honest, square, outharbour planters.'"

## Sources

The only extended contemporary first-hand account of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Newfoundland outport merchant house and household is a memoir fragment by Philip Henry Gosse, a clerk with the Carbonear firm of Slade, Elson & Co. 1827-35 (see Rompkey 1990). Gosse's account is a wonderful source concerning Slade, Elson's operations and structure. Some 19<sup>th</sup> century travel accounts also include brief portraits of the outport merchants who typically played host to travellers. J.B. Jukes' *Excursions in and about Newfoundland* (1842) includes some material on individual merchants that he met (including an extended journey to the Exploits River with Twillingate merchant John Slade and Peyton, who was by this time a magistrate) and some observations on their roles in outport Newfoundland. The first 26 years of Nicholas Smith's *Fifty-Two Years at the Labrador Fishery* (1936) is rich in detail concerning the business and personal relationships of Conception Bay (and, particularly, Brigus) merchants, dealers, planters and fishing families on the Labrador in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Maurice Devine's poem "The Outharbour Planter" (c. 1900) is also essential to understanding not only the 19<sup>th</sup> century fish business, but our nostalgia for its Golden Age.

Many community histories contain a chapter concerning the various merchants who operated in a particular community. There are useful sections in recent books by Andrews (published 1997/on Port de Grave), Cranford and Janes (1995/Hants Harbour), and Whiffen (1993/Bonavista). Earlier authors who wrote at length about the commercial history of their community in the *Newfoundland Quarterly* include Small (Burgeo) and W.A. Munn (Harbour Grace).<sup>20</sup> The richest source for the 19<sup>th</sup> century commercial history of an outport is J.T. Lawton and P.K. Devine's *Old King's Cove* (1944).

In fiction, R.T.S. Lowell's 19<sup>th</sup> century novel *New Priest in Conception Bay* features two outport merchant/magistrate characters: the Hon. Mr. Bride of "Bay-Harbour" (Harbour Grace) and Mr. Worner (of Messrs. Worner, Grose & Co. of "Peterport"/Bay Roberts) – although neither is a developed character. A much fuller and more complex character is Thomas Hutchings of Cape Random in Bernice Morgan's novel *Random Passage* (1992). Hutchings is better described as

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<sup>20</sup> W.A. Munn's 20-part "Harbour Grace History" appear in the *Quarterly* in installments 1934-39. Two articles by Small appeared posthumously in the *Quarterly* in 1940 and 1941, a fuller version being published in the *Newfoundland Ancestor* in installments in 1997 (as "Diary of Burgeo").

an agent of St. John's merchant Caleb Gosse (a shadowy, generally malevolent figure) than someone who is trading on his own account. The novel is set in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (c. 1820-40). Hutchings' portrayal by well-known Irish actor Colm Meaney in the 2001 mini-series *Random Passage* is one of the strongest features of the production. Meanwhile, John Peyton is one of the principle characters of Michael Crummey's novel *River Thieves* (2002). Here, the fictional John Peyton is depicted c. 1810-20, rather than as the merchant he later became.

Several collections of 19<sup>th</sup> century mercantile records are held at the Maritime History Archive of Memorial University, the largest being the papers of James Ryan/Ryan Brothers. Other mercantile collections at MHA include: the Alan Goodridge and Sons fonds; the Robert Dawe collection (C&A Dawe of Bay Roberts, Charles Dawe's firm); the Job Family fonds; the John Munn and Co. fonds and the John Rorke and Sons fonds. Memorial's Centre for Newfoundland and Labrador Studies Archive houses the Peyton Family Collection. There is also a significant collection of surviving records pertaining to the mercantile history of Trinity held by the Trinity Historical Society archives, including records of Grieve and Bremner, Ryan Brothers, the Lester-Garland Family fonds and the Slade fonds (which includes mercantile or occurrence diaries 1809-1852 kept by William Kelson).

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