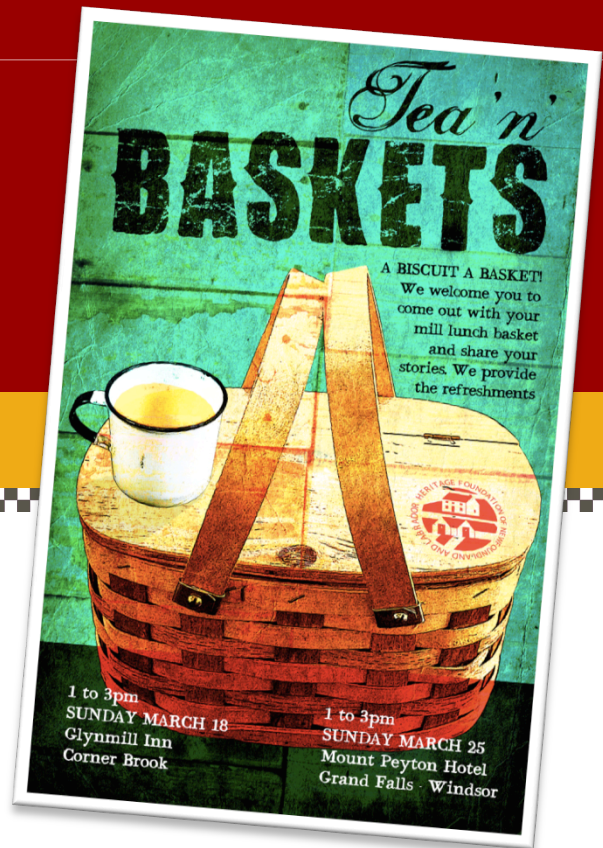


Intangible Cultural Heritage Update

News and notes on Newfoundland and Labrador's Intangible Cultural Heritage Program

February 2012
ISSN 1918-7408

ich@heritagefoundation.ca
Heritage Foundation of NL



In this issue

- | | |
|--------|------------------------|
| Page 1 | Tea and Baskets |
| Page 2 | A look at mill baskets |
| Page 4 | Inuksuit Nomination |

Tea and Baskets

The ICH office is always interested in the ways in which Newfoundlanders and Labradorians create the world they live in through crafts, skills, and traditional arts. This year, we've been taking a close look at baskets and basket makers across Newfoundland and Labrador. We are interested in all kinds of baskets, from trout creels to potato baskets, but one style of basket that has really generated a lot of discussion is the two-handled, splint style lunch basket most commonly associated with the various wood and paper mills across the province.

This coming March we're coordinating "Tea n' Baskets", an event to bring together those who have a mill lunch basket of their own. Whether you worked in the mill yourself or the basket was handed down from a family member, we welcome you to come out, show your basket and share your stories. We will photograph as many of them as we can, and would love to hear your tales.

Join us on Sunday, March 18th from 1-3pm at the Glynmill Inn in Corner Brook and on Sunday, March 25th from 1-3pm at the Mount Peyton Hotel in Grand Falls-Windsor.

We provide the tea and biscuits!

On Saturday, March 17th, at Grenfell College in Corner Brook, we will also be hosting a special talk and presentation on Mi'kmaq and Acadian spruce root and ash baskets, with visiting experts. Check out the ICH blog or next month's newsletter for more details as they unfold.

A Look at the Mill Lunch Basket

By Nicole Penney

The wonderful thing about the mill lunch basket is that in some way or another it involved all the members of a family. A folk group constitutes a number of people that share things in common, like customs and traditions, which makes them distinctive and attributes to their identity. Folk groups can be based on ethnicity, religion, region, occupation, age and gender. The family folk group, much like any other, shares customs individual to the group. The mill lunch basket is a part of the shared folklore of many families in Newfoundland, bonding them together and setting them apart from others.

The exact origin of this two-handled, splint style lunch basket design is unknown but one thing known for sure is that there were Newfoundlanders who eventually began making the baskets themselves.

One of the most prolific and well-known mill lunch basket makers in Newfoundland was Angus Gunn Sr. of Grand Falls-Windsor. He began making baskets in the early 1950s and is said to have made hundreds of lunch baskets for local mill workers.

In the Newfoundland tradition of making items from found or recycled materials, Gunn made his first baskets from broken off hockey sticks. When the manufacturers began laminating the sticks and they were no longer suitable, he switched to birch strips, a very pliable and plentiful material found in the area. According to Kevin Gunn, Angus Gunn's youngest son, his father would:

...saw the birch slabs into strips, those wooden strips were then soaked in water, usually overnight, and then used to weave the basket. The top and bottom of each basket were made from plywood. The handles were made from several heavier strips of birch that he used to laminate to give them strength. After the handles were laminated and bent into shape, they were kept in a wooden mold that he had made, and left overnight to dry. He then sanded them before attaching them to the baskets. When the basket was finished, he would give it a coat of orange shellac, which gave it a distinctive color. He even made the hinges for the covers and the metal fittings for the handles.



The use of the mill lunch basket was not just restricted to those who worked in the pulp and paper mills. Men who worked in many other professions used this style of lunch basket as well. Sherry Jones of Corner Brook remembers her dad carrying his lunch basket to work as a painter and plasterer. Patricia Devine of Grand Falls-Windsor also has a mill lunch basket that belonged to her father, who worked first as a blacksmith and then went on to work for the Department of Highways. Devine's grandfather, who worked as a fireman in the Grand Falls-Windsor pulp and paper mill, upon his retirement, gave her father the lunch basket to use when he went to work.

It was very common for mill workers to hand down their lunch baskets to a younger member of the family. Be they sons, daughters or grandchildren, some continued to use the lunch basket, even if they did not work in the mill.

While there are no examples of women using this basket, women nonetheless played a very important role when it came to the mill lunch basket. During a recent interview with Don Taylor, who grew up in Grand Falls-Windsor, he was asked who packed the lunch basket and resoundingly responded that it was his mother. When asked if his father got a say in the contents of his lunch, Taylor laughed and said, "No! Not (with) my mother. He just said he wanted a lunch and took whatever he got!"



Female members of the family, usually the wife and/or mother, would pack the mill lunch basket. These women did not skimp on food as they knew full well their meals would be observed and maybe even scrutinized by the other mill workers. Jane Burns notes the anxiety many women would feel about packing the lunch basket “the right way,” and the “right way” meant a lot of food. Women would usually set a plate aside from the large meal they cooked that day, which could be anything from baked beans to macaroni and cheese to jigs dinner or roast with all the trimmings.

As Andy Barker describes in the article “Lunch Baskets, Newsprint and Dreams,” “the hot meal was put in bowls with a small plate used as a cover, and was often wrapped firmly with a piece of sample (newsprint from mill)”. The lunch would also not be complete without biscuits, cream

crackers, several slices of homemade bread, tea and maybe even a bottle of milk.

The children in the family also played their part with the mill basket. They were often responsible for getting a lunch basket to the mill, possibly bringing it to their father, uncle or older brother, while the meal was still hot. Boys and girls alike would look forward to this task, often getting to take a peek into the “front porch” of the mill, a large, mysterious place.

One individual from Grand Falls-Windsor remembers being one of the boys who would carry the lunch basket to his father. As he recalls, “sometimes they would be there to pick them up and other time we’d leave them on a long bench provided for the purpose”.

Others remember the excitement of checking the basket for treats when it came back home after a shift. Shirley Hynes of Corner Brook describes running to meet her grandfather after his shift as “there was always some treat, generally just a slice of homemade bread with butter.” She goes on to say, “I never knew if Nan packed extra so there was always a treat or if Pop just always saved some of his lunch, knowing how much we looked forward to it.”

Gord Gosse of Corner Brook also remembers the surprises that would come out of the basket, “as a kid I remember the basket sitting in the kitchen corner and I would sometimes check it at the end of his shift for a piece of left over bread or cheese or fruit.” But he warns, “You would never touch it after mom packed it before his shift.”

To all those involved with the mill lunch basket, be it mother packing all the food, the children carrying it to the mill or father using it to carry his lunches, this basket was a lasting symbol of financial security, hard work and a coming together of the domestic and social spheres in Newfoundland.

Today the mill lunch baskets are treasured pieces of Newfoundland family folklore, filled to the brim with fond memories.



Inukshuk Commemorations Nomination

By Nicole Penney

The Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (HFNL), in cooperation with the Torngâsok Cultural Centre's archaeology office, recently submitted a nomination form for the Provincial Historic Commemorations Program, nominating Labrador Inuksuit as "a distinctive tradition or practice" which is an outstanding example of an enduring theme and pattern in the history and heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Nominated subjects in this category include any traditional cultural practice, skill, knowledge, custom, or expression that portrays the unique identities of the people of this province. The "distinctive cultural traditions and practices" category particularly includes items of intangible cultural heritage that are in danger of being lost. These may include skills connected to traditional craftsmanship, performing arts, knowledge and practices that concern nature and the universe and oral traditions and expressions.

During a recent heritage forum, many of the elders of Nunatsiavut voiced their concerns that inuksuit were not being constructed in the way they traditionally have. The elders used the inukshuk to point to good hunting grounds, while others warned of unsafe places, such as thin ice.

However, many youth present at the forum indicated that they were not aware that inuksuit were used for communication, nor did they know the cultural meanings behind them. It is with this in mind that HFNL and the Torngâsok Cultural Centre's archaeology office choose to commemorate this important, and at-risk, part of Newfoundland and Labrador heritage.

The Provincial Historic Commemorations Program is a citizen-driven program that welcomes individuals or groups to nominate people, places, events and traditions they feel are provincially significant and worthy of official commemoration. The Provincial Historic Commemorations Board (PHCB) consists of six members and is appointed by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Its representatives are drawn from a range of citizens who have far-reaching experience in the fields of culture and heritage.

In 2011 the Intangible Cultural heritage Development Office nominated Mummering as a "distinctive cultural traditions and practices and was successful in having it included in the Historic Commemorations Program.

