THERE WAS NO PAVEMENT THEN

Memories of Growing Up in Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove

Edited by Terra Barrett
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Growing up in St. John’s any chance I had to escape the city was an opportunity I jumped at and looked forward to. Whether it was going “around the bay” to visit my Nan and Pop or heading to “the harbour” during the summertime, I’ve always enjoyed the opportunity to head outside St. John’s. Although I didn’t grow up in Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove I have fond memories of visiting my aunt, uncle, and cousins out on the point. I remember catching jellyfish at the mouth of the river, climbing the rocky hills, and watching fishermen split freshly caught fish.

Many of the stories in this collection recall similar events. From children’s games such as rounders, and piddly to activities such as skating, berry picking, trouting, and cutting cod’s tongues, the stories highlight the close-knit families and friends in the community. Describing the Petty Harbour of her youth Mary Heffernan noted, “I have to say I have so many wonderful memories of growing up in Petty Harbour and we were all like one family.”

While there are many stories of the wonderful times had at card games, garden parties, and community concerts there are also recollections of the hard-working people of the community. As Jimmy Kieley stated when describing his childhood, “Never played hockey in me life, never knew how to skate, never learned how to swim. All we done when we were young was work.” The people of the community
worked hard to make a living and several interview excerpts highlight this difficult work.

Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove is a unique and picturesque town. Located less than twenty minutes south of St. John’s the town was settled as a fishing village approximately 200 years ago and remains one today. From the steep hills for climbing and exploring, to the river frequented by fairies, the geographic features have shaped the settlement in the community. Although the dirt roads have been paved, and mummers might not darken the doors as frequently as they once did, the community continues to change and grow while preserving traditions such as community concerts, card games, and garden parties and adding new traditions like the annual Arts and Heritage Festival.
Working as a Heritage Intern with the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador during the summer of 2014 provided me with the opportunity to meet and interview a number of residents in the town of Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove. This book reflects just a sample of the stories I heard. The people of the community welcomed me into their homes, fed me lobster and cookies, tea and slush. I would like to thank all the residents who I talked to this summer and who made this book a possibility. A special thanks goes to Graham Blair, Pam Chafe, Robert Chafe, William Chafe, Betty Cheeseman, Karen Cimer, Yvonne Collinson, Helen Creighton Foundation, Gordy Doyle, Jimmy Doyle, Ron Doyle, Mike Hearn, Mary Heffernan, Dale Jarvis, Gussie Kieley, Jimmy Kieley, Mary Kieley, Annie Lee, Richard Murphy, Ann Payne, Kimberly Orren, Stephanie Stack, Gertrude Walsh, Jack Walsh, Marguerite Weir, Phyllis Weir, and Cyril Whitten.
There wasn’t a big lot around. Hardly any cars when I was young we used to see a car and we would run to look at it. Especially a dump truck.

— JIMMY DOYLE

I never can remember being hungry, but I always can remember being cold. You would get up in the morning and everything would be froze up you know you would be froze to death. But we never did have running water or anything like that, I always tell about that. You know you had a bucket for your water and you had a bucket as your washroom as well. What they would do is they would buy a new enamel bucket and first going off they would use that for the water cause it is fairly new and when it would get old they would use it for the other bucket, right.

But I always recall one time and I tell about getting up one night and wanting to go to the washroom, but there was a new bucket up there where the old bucket usually was and anyway I didn’t want to use it. I said that can’t be the one for the washroom because it looks too new right? So, I sang out through the grate – we used to have a grate in the floor where the heat would come up through the floor and when you were singing out to someone downstairs, talking to them, you would talk to the grate, right? And I recall singing out to
my mom, “Mom, can I piss in that new bucket?” she said, “Yes honey, indeed you can!”.

– RON DOYLE

“ That was the time then you would have to get in your food for the winter. So many sacks of flour, a barrel of beef, a couple of boxes of butter, have it all in the house because there wasn’t much transportation back and forth to St. John’s then and it used to be hard winters. The roads used to get blocked they didn’t have the equipment that they got now and the road was narrow as well.

– CYRIL WHITTEN

“ I remember in the community when there were no TVs or very little TV and TVs started to come on, right? Like I said it was only people that had a few dollars that could afford it. I remember one guy who owned the bus service here in the community Mr. Lee, he had a TV. We used to go down and stand on a rock that was outside of his window and look in his window all night at the TV. I’m still amazed, I say, “Did we really do that?” and he really let us do it. Imagine someone standing outside your window all night looking in through your window at the TV, right. That was entertainment growing up here – I tell you there wasn’t a lot. You made your own.

– RON DOYLE

“ Murray Lee, we used to knock around with Murray, and they got a television. One of the first in Petty Harbour I think, I don’t know who was the first, but every Friday night because
we weren’t allowed to go down during school nights. But every Friday night Murray used to ask myself and another one or two of his friends down to watch the late show with him. So, we were down there one night watching the Cat Man of Paris and the guy used to drop down from the tree. He would get up in the tree and he would drop down from the tree, this was over in England, on somebody’s back and he would make the big squeal like a cat and that’s when you used to find people dead. So, we were watching this on TV one night and walking home after I was coming along over there where Uncle George and them got their stage. There was flakes there and so that nobody would go out there they had fences along by it and the flakes were about a foot off the ground and I was coming up there probably twelve thirty one o’clock. I don’t know how old I was, I must’ve been thirteen or fourteen, probably younger than that, right? All of a sudden two cats start fighting underneath the flake. You know something? They’ve got pavement over there on that road now, but I still think there is a dip in the road from where I started running, I dug up that much sand trying to get going
and I never stopped. I ran up through the harbour which was still a nice little distance and almost went in through our front door.

— WILLIAM CHAFE

“There was so many of us in a family that you know, I guess your mother knew that you were out and about and that everyone there in Petty Harbour was your mother because you couldn’t do anything out of the way or anything because another parent would chastise you and say I’m telling your mother and everybody knew everybody, see.

— BETTY CHEESEMAN

“So, that’s my life from the humble beginnings in Petty Harbour – and when I say humble yeah when I was growing up in the fifties we were poor but we had everything. I never
had a day where there was no food available that I wanted. I never wanted for anything really. Anything that I got I was really – and I’m saying me, but I’m saying this is the way it was in Petty Harbour at the time you were appreciative.

– GUSSIE KIELEY

“... I have to say I have so many wonderful memories of growing up in Petty Harbour and we were all like one family. You know there was a group of us in, we called it, in the circle. You know there was four or five families in a circle we were all very close, we helped each other.

– MARY HEFFERNAN
“We used to play a game called rounders. Rounders was a game something like baseball or softball. You had three bases and instead of batting the ball, the person had to run and you had to throw the ball and hit them and if you hit them with the ball they were out.

– JACK WALSH

“...”

“We would have sword fights. The fish flakes had all longers we called them, all small sticks about as big as a Pepsi can right? And then the end of them was long and pointy so we’d crack off one of them nail a little piece on the cross. It’s a wonder we all didn’t lose our eyes.

– MIKE HEARN

...”

“I can remember if we went out in the night time or anything like this and we were always told – I was anyway that when I see the light coming on over the pole I had to come home. That’s the way it was.

– PAM CHAFE

...”
There was no pavement then, it was all dirt road and we would play in the schoolyard, hopscotch. We would draw out the hopscotch with our sticks in the sand and we had lots of time and lots of fun.

– BETTY CHEESEMAN

My sister and I used to have concerts. We had an old shed on the side of our house and we used to have concerts. We would probably sing and dance and do recitals. The other kids used to come and we used to charge them a cent to get in and we were tickled to death if we made five or ten cents that was big money back then.

– MARY KIELEY

Back to the skating bit I remember going to the ponds and I mean everyday you did it and probably you would go to put your boots on and your feet are frostbitten, the boots are
probably filled up with snow trying to come home, right, and you would come home and you’d cry your feet would be that cold from being up on the pond, but you would turn around and go do it again the next day. We spend hours up there.

– PAM CHAFE

“On Piddly*: We used to have two rocks and you would put a small stick across the rocks, right? A longer stick and then you used to put it there and flick the smaller stick at the other team. If they caught it you were out, if they didn’t they’d have to take the stick and throw it back. You would put the long stick across the rocks and they had to try to knock it off. Like I said it was our own game, we had our own rules.

– JIMMY DOYLE

“We’d play shop and my dad used to have the wood horses and when he would be sawing up the wood and we would
gather old tin cans and what have you and we’d pile them up and my little friend probably or I would do it. We’d go and we’d ask for something, you know in groceries and we’d use little stones for our money. So that was a lot of fun.

– MARY HEFFERNAN

“Everything was so much fun then like we were always outside. Always. Always. We would go out in the morning, right? We’d leave and the men, we would wait for the men to come out. But when we were younger and we weren’t involved with the fishery because we were too small to have down around the stage we would leave at nine o’clock in the morning go up in the hills, up in first pond, the graveyard and all that place, you know, and we were catching frogs and we were doing this and then we’d wander down and we’d pick blueberries in a can.

– GUSSIE KIELEY

*Piddly is a name commonly used in Petty Harbour to refer to a game known in some communities, such as Carbonear, as tiddly.
“Piddly sticks, alleys – we were never into sports, right? Never. A bit of baseball that’s all, right? Never played hockey in me life, never knew how to skate, never learned how to swim. All we done when we were young was work. I was out fishing when I was eight years old. We always fished with me father.

– JIMMY KIELEY

“When we were young fellas we used to catch codfish, well not cod, tomcods we called them about oh six to eight, ten inches long. Especially in October, November you would get them a foot long. They would be in the harbour after the old offal.

– MIKE HEARN

“People say, “Oh how come they only washed on Monday?” and I said, “Well you didn’t because you had to take water.” Mom used to have to drag water from the river for the washing and heat it up and that meant you had to put in the stove. By put in I mean light it and boil water to wash clothes. So, you’re not going to do that every day of the week are you?

– ANN PAYNE
We used to cut out tongues too. We done that a lot. When people come in from fishing we would go down and we would tend the tables for them. Tend the table that means you would throw the fish up on up on the table where they were curing, where they were doing the fish and when they had the fish they would throw the head down there and we would be sat down on a box with a knife and a bucket cutting out tongues. We used to sell them.

— JIMMY DOYLE

The delivering of the groceries was always fun because on Saturdays people would come and maybe they would tell one of the employees what they wanted, sort of their grocery list for the week. So, they would leave that on Saturday morning and then during Saturday evening sometime Dad would deliver them and we, my sisters, would go with him in the truck, you
know, to deliver the groceries. So, of course Dad would have some things in a small box so that we would have boxes to bring in too and it used to be great fun because we would just go to a door and dad would say, “Just kick the door because we got boxes in our arms and shout out, “Groceries!”.”

– PHYLLIS WEIR

“ That’s all I’ve ever done. Fished. I’m fishing over fifty years myself now. I loved it from the beginning and nothing has changed, right? I still have just as much passion for fishing now as I ever did in my life. I’m the kind that goes on the water very early in the morning, probably two, three o’clock that kind of thing but when I get out I don’t be the first to come home. I just like to be out there, right? Sometimes I say to myself, “How lucky am I to be in a job for over fifty years and loved it and still do”.

– MIKE HEARN
‘You went to anyone’s house then you would get cake and syrup.’  
 – GERTRUDE WALSH

‘We kept the full twelve days of Christmas and the tree didn’t come down until the twelfth day and usually that was a busy time. People were in playing cards, you know it was fun. Every night they went out and played cards.’  
 – YVONNE COLLINSON

‘Mummering, dressing up in funny clothes, you know, wearing something over your face so that they wouldn’t know you.’  
 – MARGUERITE WEIR

‘At Christmas time the whole twelve days there would be visiting and the main thing was mummering. They used to go mummering for thirteen nights. The old thirteenth we used to call it. Put in the thirteen nights mummering. Going from one house to the other. Yeah we used to get a great charge out of that.’  
 – CYRIL WHITTEN
“But I remember the boxing day tradition was definitely you would be going – well not so much we would be going, the men would go from house to house and have a drink in you know each other’s house and Dad always was part of that. I think sometimes they would even repeat because I can remember lots of relatives and friends being there with Dad. So, they would come and they would get him and he would go with them and join in and then they would go around and then maybe they would come back.

– PHYLLIS WEIR

(LEFT TO RIGHT) YVONNE COLLINSON IN HER LIVING ROOM, 2014; COVER OF A PRINTED VARIETY CONCERT AND PLAY, WHICH WERE COMMON DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON AND AROUND ST. PATRICK’S DAY (COURTESY OF RICHARD MURPHY); MARGUERITE AND PHYLLIS WEIR (COURTESY OF PHYLLIS WEIR).
One of the biggest things of all was the garden parties. You would have a garden party this year – say the 20th of July. Well, as soon as that was over you were preparing for the next year.

– JACK WALSH

For the garden party it was basically making cookies, baking turkeys and then we all went to the garden party. You had to spend so much money. You didn’t come home with money. If you won it you had to spend it. There were prizes and we had little ten cent packages we called “grabs”.

– YVONNE COLLINSON

We started to go on the concerts ourselves then – myself and my brothers Len, Tom, and Jim and all of us. Then eventually we formed a group from that that went on All Around the Circle on the very first show in 1964. That is fifty years ago as well since we were on with John White and All Around the Circle. So, that came out of the concerts, there was a lot of fun that came out of the concerts, you know. Even the band that we formed came out of the concerts.

– RON DOYLE
We used to go the dances up to the RC Hall up here on this side of the harbour and we always talk about that because the floor used to go up and down about six to eight inches, right? And they said they better tear that building down.

– WILLIAM CHAFE
I'll tell you a big pastime for this generation of people were cards.

Every Monday night we used to go to a card game.

But Dad and them used to play for a quarter of a cow. They played for your meat for the winter. They were gambling like Las Vegas. But Dad and them used to play for a quarter of a cow all the time, didn’t they?

A half a cow.

A half a cow? So, I mean that was big!

— ANN PAYNE and ANNIE LEE
“At one point there were twelve of us but we dwindled away to six. We held that for a long, long time. Cards – auction, 120s once a week. Say if they came to my house this week they would go to your house the following week until the twelve ladies had their turn and it repeated. Play cards and have tea and sandwiches and cookies.

– MARGUERITE WEIR

“It seemed like there were always people in the house visiting. Aunts and they weren’t really true aunts but they were aunts. Like all of grandmother’s friends were all our aunts. Nan’s sister-in-law and her sisters.

– PHYLLIS WEIR
That’s where we got the name Petty Harbour Dogs. The name “harbour dog” is because we had to go so far for our wood so we always had dog teams in the wintertime and when coal came around you didn’t need the dogs so you had to feed the dogs, but when the coal came around you had to feed the dogs, but you didn’t have to feed them to work so that’s a totally different thing altogether. You would just give them a couple of scraps, right? So, there was always packs of dogs roaming around and for the few families that were living in the Goulds, there wasn’t many, but there was a few families, they would have sheep and stuff, right, cattle and the dogs would go in and kill them and eat them, packs of wild dogs, right, from Petty Harbour so that’s where the nickname Petty Harbour Dogs came from.

– GORDY DOYLE

But it was a thing that you got up Sunday morning and you went to church – Sundays was your special day, you know? You didn’t do anything, you didn’t work on Sundays, well you worked all week. You worked all week, Sunday was supposed to be your day of rest, a holy day and that was lovely because Sundays had a special feel to it, you know. Everybody got up, everybody went to church, church was full, you know. And men would stand before mass would begin – the men would gather, they still do outside the church and have a little yarn before they went into the church. They went in and said their prayers and did whatever they had to do in there and came out and everybody went home to a cooked Sunday dinner. Salt meat and your cabbage and your chicken or whatever you had roast beef or something and then after dinner of course we had your game of cards and then for your supper we would have a cold plate. That was the tradition, every Sunday.

– BETTY CHEESEMAN
“The boards, the pound boards that you have right? To cover up your fish, to put your fish in pounds according to the size of the boat. You would never have them up right? You would have them painted and the opposite side would be painted a different colour. You would never have them turned over in the boat. You just don’t do that. I’m not superstitious at all, but it’s just something that I don’t do and I if I see it turned over, I’ll say, “No b’ys turn the gang board back over”.

– GORDY DOYLE

“One night my uncle, who is dead now, he, well let’s say my parents lived here and the river was here so he was going to cut down across the river from his house there to see his sister’s son who was sick. His mother said, “Don’t cross the river Ted because if you do you know what’s going to happen”. “Ah don’t be so foolish”. He was a young man then he wasn’t any child.

His mother said to him, “Ted you shouldn’t cross the river my son in the night time”. So, anyway he swears, if he was here he would swear now, up and down on the bible that the fairies knocked him down, broke his leg and held him. He was in the river for four hours screaming and yelling and nobody heard him.

– ANN PAYNE AND ANNIE LEE
They used to say if a bird pecked at a window it was someone was going to die, right? And three knocks on the window. I definitely had them when my brother died. It was – what do you call it? July the first and we were down on the wharf and we came up here, I got in bed and my husband Jack was out here and it was on my window, three knocks and I said to him “There is a knock on the window”. I called out to him and he says, “There is no knock on the window they can’t reach that window anyway”. He went out and looked around and not a soul around or anything and the next morning they phoned me and said my brother had died. I firmly believe that – definitely.

– GERTRUDE WALSH

I can remember one time this man, and myself, and his son we used to knock around together. So, we were going out to the cod trap this evening in the boat. Two of us were sat down and we were only young, you know. Not old enough to go fishing or anything, but just going for a run with the men and we were sat down in the boat and we were going along. It was a make and break motor then they called it and I don’t remember which one of us started to whistle and
we knew nothing until down came the big stick and hit the boards between the two of us and he shouted, “Don’t dare whistle in this boat!” he said, “Whistle up a storm.”

- JACK WALSH

“In discussing another fisherman’s beliefs: If he had a small fish, a tomcod, one got left in the boat and all the fish is out of her. He got up the next morning to go fishing and saw one of them there it would be a job to get him to go out. That was a jinker. They called leaving a fish in the boat like that a jinker. Bad, bad thing to do.

- MIKE HEARN

“We used docky leaves for stings, for sting nettles. We’d go out and get those. Corn starch was used a lot for babies to take the red out and you could use Carnation Milk for sunburns because of the calcium in it and the sweet it would dry and take the heat out of it. Put Carnation Milk in the refrigerator and let it get cold and it was very, very good.

- YVONNE COLLINSON
“General stores, they were one of the centre points for the community, you know. Where news got exchanged, and it wasn’t only groceries were bought, tales were told.

– PHYLLIS WEIR

“For us it was just a place you went, you saved up your money, you bought a May West and a bottle of – a can of Mountain Dew and you went up there and had a picnic. It was called, we used to call it Injun Rock, but it was Indian Rock.

– ANN PAYNE

“The stand is an area right kind of at the cross roads of three roads in the middle of Petty Harbour where the main road
comes on and splits to the North and South Side right by the Anglican church. This was a place where the older men of the community would come and commune, they would kind of come there and talk.

– ROBERT CHAFE

There were two stands. There was one on the North side just over here on the – going up the Cribbie’s Road and there was another one over by the Anglican Church. I don’t know if you know this community, but the river runs through this community and 99% of the Anglicans are on the South Side, and the Irish decent, the Catholics are on the North Side and both of them had a stand and most of the time it was the fishermen they would come in in the evenings put away their catch and go up – especially Sundays and after church and stuff like that. They would walk back and forth and talk to each other steady, and you can see the road is actually beat down where they would walk because they were constantly there walking. That is where they would meet. They knew that if you go to the stand there was guaranteed to be someone there to have a yarn with.

– RON DOYLE

(LEFT TO RIGHT) INTERIOR OF HERBIE’S OLDE SHOPPE (FORMERLY WEIR’S STORE) IN PETTY HARBOUR, 2014; WILLIAM CHAFE AND ROBERT CHAFE (COURTESY OF ROBERT CHAFE); LOCATION OF THE STAND, PETTY HARBOUR, 2014; GUSSIE KIELEY IN THE PETTY HARBOUR-MADDOX COVE COMMUNITY CENTRE, 2014.
“The men used to have gathering places – only men, right? There was a rock over here we used to call it the big rock, right, by the big rock. The men used to gather there and they’d lean against the rock and they’d talk and that gathering place changed from time to time over the years, right? Then they used to meet in front of Eddie Chafe’s house here, okay? They used to walk back and forth and they had the path worn out walking back and forth and talking about the fishing and talking about the things that happened in town. A lot of times that’s how we got the news.

– GUSSIE KIELEY

The men would be back and forth, back and forth and smoking their pipes and there wasn’t much cigarettes on the go – well they used to make their own, roll their own. They would be probably five or six or seven from down the harbour, and two or three from the North side and the men around would come down from up the road that way and they would all stand around on the stand. Some would leave and go home after a half an hour and a few more would come and replace them. There was always a few men there chatting away.

– MARGUERITE WEIR

The big thing in the community were the churches. The churches were the things you looked at, they were your government, they were, whatever you needed you went to the churches. There was no police force and if there was it was only in St. John’s. If you had a land dispute you went to the churches, you know? Yeah, so the churches were a major thing that stood out.

– ANN PAYNE
I like moving forward. I don’t like staying in one spot so I like the idea of trying to keep some of the old ways because you can’t forget them because you need a direction for where you’re going. So, you need to know where you came from in order to know where you’re going, right. But I feel that, you know, I would put more importance on where I was going as to where I came from. So, for me it is always, always about moving forward and I think they’ve done well here in the harbour too – with the Harbour Authorities, and with the Museum. I think we’re keeping some of the memories of the old ways alive, right, by the museum. Probably we could do more, right? But I would like to go forward, I like the general direction that the community is going in, people are getting bigger, it’s getting more diversified and like I don’t want it to stay the same, right? That would be stale. So, I do like things changing. Not too fast but I do like things changing.

– GORDY DOYLE
About the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador

The Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador is a non-profit organization which was established in 1984 to stimulate an understanding of and an appreciation for the architectural heritage of the province. The Foundation, an invaluable source of information for historic restoration, supports and contributes to the preservation and restoration of buildings of architectural or historical significance.

The Heritage Foundation also has an educational role and undertakes or sponsors events, publications and other projects designed to promote the value of our built heritage.

The Heritage Foundation is also involved in work designed to safeguard and sustain the intangible cultural heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador for present and future generations everywhere, as a vital part of the identities of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and as a valuable collection of unique knowledge and customs. This is achieved through policies that celebrate, record, disseminate, and promote our living heritage.