WITLESS BAY
EXPLORING A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The 2014 Witless Bay Field School
Edited by Gerald L. Pocius

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In the fall of 2013, I started to plan for Memorial University’s 2014 graduate folklore field school. A community on the Southern Shore south of St. John’s was a possibility. I had spent the summer of 1980 working on an architectural project in that region, so I knew its landscape reasonably well. One afternoon that November, I decided to drive up Shore, considering different locations. I drove through Bay Bulls, all the way to Calvert, and back.

As I passed through Witless Bay, however, I noticed that the Presentation Convent—Holy Trinity Convent and Chapel—had been recently restored and renovated. I stopped briefly at the Irish Loop Coffee House on the south side of the harbour and inquired. The owner, Judy Devine, informed me that Colleen Hanrahan had bought the convent and wanted to reuse...
the space for a conference centre, but the work to do so had not been completed. Judy wasn’t sure what was happening with the buildings, but my knowledge of Witless Bay from earlier fieldwork, combined with the potential of the convent as a base, started me thinking about the community as a location for the Department of Folklore’s field school in cultural documentation.

There was another reason that Witless Bay might be an ideal site. A former graduate of the Department of Folklore, Sébastien Després, had been living in Witless Bay for several years, and he recently had become mayor. Sébastien had been to Harlow, England, for my field school, so he was familiar with the documentation of cultural landscapes. He enthusiastically supported the idea, and would engage the Town Council and Town Heritage Committee in our planning.

Before Christmas, I had an initial meeting with Sébastien, Dena Wiseman (Witless Bay Heritage Committee), and Colleen Hanrahan. Several meetings, emails, and discussions later, we had decided that Witless Bay would be an ideal location for our field school. We would use the convent as our base, and students would live there for three weeks. Classes would be held in the chapel. Colleen agreed to upgrade the building before our arrival, and we would work in collaboration with the Witless Bay Town Council and its heritage committee on the project. Without the enthusiasm and support of these individuals, our field school would not have been possible.

The spring and summer of 2014 involved numerous trips to Witless Bay to inventory buildings, meet residents, and introduce our project. We began
to think of our school as focusing partly on the cultural landscape that had been devoted to the traditional ecologies of fishing and farming. Eight students spent three weeks in Witless Bay. The field school students were: Terra Barrett (Newfoundland), Sharna Brzycki (New York), Daisy Hurich (Newfoundland), Andrea McGuire (Newfoundland), Saeedeh Niktab Etaati (Iran), Jacquey Ryan (Newfoundland), Emma Tennier-Stuart (Ontario). Claire McDougall (Ontario) acted as the field school assistant; Claire had worked as a student in the Department of Folklore’s field school in 2012, and was an ideal choice to manage day-to-day life at the convent. John LaDuke and Brittany Roberts, grad students experienced in architectural documentation, helped out with the measuring.

During the course of the three weeks, several guest lecturers worked with the students: Dale Jarvis and Lisa Wilson (Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador), Guha Shankar (American Folklife Center, Library of Congress), Brian Ricks (Professional Photographer, St. John’s), Edward Chappell (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation). Sister Lois Green kindly gave of her time to be interviewed at the school about her experiences of living in the Witless Bay convent, and her life as a nun.

At the end of our time in Witless Bay at the Holy Trinity Convent, the students had learned about daily life in the community through documenting a wide range of buildings, recording interviews about local traditions, and photographing the landscape. Most of all, the students made many new friends. They were all sad to leave their convent home, where—for generations—others in Witless Bay were also educated about the world.
My students, then, were introduced in that short time to life in Witless Bay, through the hospitality and generosity of its community members.

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK the many residents of Witless Bay who helped make this field school possible. First—and most important—Colleen Hanrahan and John Abbott generously offered the use of Holy Trinity Convent as a base for our work. Many groups were generous in their support: the Council and Staff of the Town of Witless Bay: Mayor Sébastien Després; Deputy-Mayor Dena Wiseman; Councilor Ralph Carey; Councilor Kevin Smart; Councilor René Estrada; The Witless Bay Community Enhancement Committee; The O’Connor 50+ Club; The Witless Bay Heritage Committee. Besides these groups, many others provided advice and assistance: The Brunkard family; Jessie Burke; Sheila Carew; Aiden Carey; Jack Foley and Colleen Shea; Sister Lois Green; Bernadette Maddigan; Jacqueline Mahr; Barry Norris; Eddie Ryan; Shelia and Mike Ryan; Tom and Norah Tobin; Maureen Walsh; Vicki Walsh; Joey, Marguerite and James Yard; Thomas Yard; Alun Young.

GERALD L. POCIUS
The shore stretching south from St. John’s to Trepassey was one of the first areas in North America to be exploited regularly by Europeans. Beginning shortly after Cabot’s rediscovery in 1497, Portuguese, Basques, Atlantic French, Bretons and Normans arrived annually to prosecute the cod fishery all along this rugged coast. They were joined after 1575 by fishermen from the English West Country. It was, throughout the 16th century, a seasonal fishery only. In the fall the fleets went home. Few if any men overwintered.

For a variety of reasons too complex to rehearse here, the English had displaced the continental Europeans along this coast by 1630. They also had begun to establish year-round settlements, most notably at Ferryland. A century later West Country shipowners and shipmasters began to recruit servants each spring in southeast Ireland and expanded their fishery. The Irish settled in far greater numbers thereafter than did the English and their descendants dominate the shore to this day. This is the case for Witless Bay.

FRONTIER TOPOONYMY

One of the most distinctive enduring legacies of early exploitation are the names Europeans imposed on the coast. Some, such as Cape Spear and Cape Race, date from the first decade of the 16th century. Capes, headlands, points, offshore islands, arms, bays and large harbours were amongst the first features to be given names that are still recognizable.
Most early place names were Portuguese, or French. The Portuguese pioneered the cod fishery on the shore, particularly to the south, e.g. Ferryland to Trepassey. English translations were more prominent in the north. Petty Hr., Bay Bulls, Mobile. Witless Bay is English, named after a migrant from Dorset called Whittle. It appears on maps from 1664. Toads Cove, Burnt Cove and Caplin Cove are also English. By 1800 Cove had emerged as the most popular place name on the Avalon.

Sites too small to accommodate fishing ships out from England but with adequate anchorage for shallops and other small boats laden with fish were usually called coves. Bear’s Cove and Gallows Cove in Witless Bay are local examples. West Country transfers came to dominate the nomenclature of the coast: head, point, bight, tickle, gut, gulch, hole, beach, river, brook and pond. In Witless Bay, we have Bear Cove, Chapel Head, Long Beach, Dennis Point, Ragged Point, Monahan’s Gulch, Connors’ Gulch, Witless Bay Brook. Most Witless Bay placenames do not appear on published maps; they reside in the memory of local residents. They are also vanishing from collective memory, particularly since the cod moratorium. They are amongst the most dramatic losses of tradition in rural Newfoundland.

THE COD ECONOMY

There were three modes of exploitation by English fishermen at Witless Bay and all along the southern shore. The oldest was the migratory ship fishery. Vessels arrived in spring from SW England from 1600 onwards with their crews. They anchored in the harbours, and deployed the servants in shallops (small boats) inshore. Boat crews ranged from 3 to 5 men, with 2 on average processing the fish ashore. Most ships had several such boats. In the fall they loaded their fish on to the fishing ships, or sack ships, and went home. There were two fishing ships in Witless Bay in 1698 and one sack ship, compared to 12 vessels at Bay Bulls. The latter was a superior harbour. A second strategy, mainly from south Devon, were byeboatkeepers. They did not own fishing ships but travelled on them each spring and operated boats in Newfoundland, alongside the ship fishermen. They too returned home in the fall, after selling their catch to traders and shipowners.

By far the most important fishing operation in Witless Bay from 1750 onwards was the residential or planter fishery. These were men initially out from
England who remained year round, hired young men to fish, and like the byeboatmen sold their fish to traders at the end of the season. Planters were resident boatkeepers with servants. Most planters married, formed families, and settled down. They formed the core of the permanent population and their descendants still dominate places like Witless Bay to this day. Initially planters depended on the fishing ships to bring out male servants each year. In 1675 there were three planters – Mahone, Martin, Smith – in Witless Bay, with three stages, five boats and 26 men servants. These men were likely from south Devon, heartland of the English migrants and emigrants along the southern shore. All three had wives, but only one, Gilbert Martin, had children. In 1677 all three had children. We are witnessing the very beginnings of English settlement. The censuses for small places like Witless Bay are amongst the best for British North America in the late 17th century. They are an important source on the roots of folk culture.

POPULATION AND SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

One of the salient features of Newfoundland’s historical demography (and historiography) was the slow growth of a permanent population. Over much of the 18th century between 2,000-3,000 migrants arrived each spring from England and Ireland to prosecute the fishery from Petty Harbour to Renews. But it was not until the 1780’s that the resident population reached 1,000 along this stretch of shore.

Women composed only a tiny fraction of the transatlantic migration. Most arrived as single young servants; they tended to marry, and remain, but because they were so few in number, the process of family formation was slow. In 1754 only 12% of the population were women (largely wives of the planters), and 18% children. Unattached male servants accounted for over 50%.

Between 1780-1830, the permanent population increased five-fold. More than 6,000 persons were recorded in 1836, spread over 16 coves and harbours (see map). Although there was still a substantial number of unattached male servants, the majority were by now members of local families and natives of the shore. Women and children accounted for over half the population. The demographic transition was marked first by the collapse of the English migratory cod fishery in 1790, and a rapid rise in Irish immigrants, including young women, after 1800. By 1836 this transatlantic
migration was virtually over; natural increase became the major source of population growth. Settlement expanded in three basic ways; through subdivision of ancestral rooms, usually amongst sons; by the occupation of less-favoured fishing sites within old harbours; and outmigration from old harbours to unsettled coves.

In 1720, the ethnoreligious composition of Witless Bay and the Southern Shore was still overwhelmingly Anglican English; by 1760, the Catholic Irish accounted for more than half the population, and for 90% by the end of the century. [Bay Bulls, Witless Bay, Toads Cove, 1753: 391 Irish, 206 English. Total: 597]. A distinction was made between Anglican English and Catholic Irish in the report by Rev. Langman, an Anglican minister at St. John’s. There were “about 124 families in St. John’s [in 1760] 1,100 souls. Great numbers of these Roman Catholics, of Irish descent….in the Harbour of Bay Bulls are 37 families of Irish Papists and 8 Protestants; in all about 230 souls….baptized 4 of the Protestant children; but could by no means persuade the Roman Catholics to have their children baptized, though I strongly urged the necessity of a Christian baptism for them….In Witless Bay are 11 poor families, almost all Roman Catholics….very ignorant, very bigoted.”

From the beginning, Irish migration was closely linked to the Irish provisions trade. Ships from north and south Devon en route to harbours along the Southern Shore called in to Waterford and other ports on the south coast of Ireland to collect salt provisions for the summer fishery. They also recruited servants to work for the planters.

Initially, the Irish tended to work ashore, curing the fish. Increasingly, they overwintered, cutting and hauling out timber for construction and fuel. All were paid wages; some invested their savings in local property and graduated to planter status. This seemed to occur especially in times of war (1757-63, 1776-83, 1793-1815) when the English migratory fishery faltered, then died. Conditions in southeast Ireland also contributed to the migration. The population there increased dramatically between 1780-1830. Most migrants came from rural parishes where access to land and farm work became more and more difficult. Wages in Newfoundland were higher than in Ireland, and property cheaper. Once established as planters, the Irish recruited servants almost exclusively from their homeland. A chain of migration, initiated by the English, and continued by Irish planters, shipowners and merchants, resulted in a pattern of ethnic succession that had few parallels in rural Canada.
In 1836 the government of Newfoundland produced a census of the island’s population and economy exceeding in its geographical coverage anything recorded to that time. More than 400 settlements (outports) were listed. Three-quarters had fewer than 15 houses each. Among the several characteristics recorded for each community was the total population by religious denomination. There were three groups: Protestant Episcopalians (Anglicans), Protestant Dissenters (Methodists), and Roman Catholics. Since the vast majority of Protestants were of English birth or descent, and Catholics almost entirely Irish, a detailed map of Newfoundland’s population by ethnic origin or ethnoreligious composition can be drawn. This has been done (See Historical Atlas of Canada, Vol. II, Plate 8).

In 1836 the Irish accounted for almost half of the island’s population. More than 70% of them lived in St. John’s and its near hinterland from Renews to Carbonear. There were probably more Irish crowded into this relatively restricted stretch of coast than in any comparable Canadian space in 1836. The map shows the distribution of the population for the Southern Shore. All but five percent were Catholic. Witless Bay had a population of 600 (over 90 families); only two inhabitants were Protestant. It was the third most populous place north of Ferryland. There were 800 inhabitants in Bay Bulls, and a surprising 1,100 in Petty Hr. Men were still far more numerous than women (41% men, 23% women, 36% children) in Witless Bay. It was a residue of the old migratory cod fishery where men servants once dominated. A family fishery prevailed. The population continued to increase: 664 (1845), 801 (1857), 928 (1871).

THE PATRIARCHAL EXTENDED FAMILY

The key to population increase and settlement expansion – or intensification – at Witless Bay and elsewhere through the nineteenth century was not immigration from England and Ireland, but natural increase through the subdivision of ancestral properties (fishing rooms) amongst heirs. Inheritance was, overwhelmingly, patrilineal (amongst sons). Daughters married in to neighbouring families and surrendered their surname on doing so. In 1857, nine out of ten Newfoundlanders
were native born. This was true of Witless Bay. Fewer than 10% were immigrants. Much depended on how many sons there were to inherit, and how many actually did. Some surnames proliferated dramatically; others far less so, some hardly at all. And some died out entirely.

There were 20 households of Careys in Witless Bay in Lovell’s Directory of 1871. It is the oldest surname recorded here. Sometimes spelled Carew, it is both an English and an Irish surname. Thomas Carey was recorded in Witless Bay in 1729. He purchased a plantation that year from Peter Philipps. Both men were almost certainly English, likely from south Devon. Thomas Carey would be at least 25 years old to graduate to planter status. In 1751 his ownership was disputed by Arthur Carey, the only surviving son of Peter. He claimed part of the plantation – a boat’s room – for his nephew, Peter Philipps. A witness to the transaction of 1729, Thomas Lacey, also English, was consulted in 1751 and the court in St. John’s ruled that the Admiral of the Harbour, with Lacey’s assistance, determine the boundaries of the property. The outcome is unknown. No maps survive, and neither did Philipps or Lacey. They either returned to England, their names died out, or they moved elsewhere.

Carey’s early history is a lesson in the great themes of cultural continuity and change, on assimilation and acculturation. All Carey marriages and baptisms from 1800 onwards – and likely well before – were Catholic (Basilica Parish Registers). Most spouses were of Irish birth or descent. At least ten marriages are on record prior to 1820. Some have the same first name, e.g. two Benjamin Careys, born before 1800, and likely fourth generation from the founder Thomas.

Pinpointing Carey’s room is a work in progress. It was on the south side, where a Carey house dating from around 1820 was standing until recently. We do not know if all 20 Carey houses were in a single homogeneous cluster, cheek-by-jowl with no non-Carey house present, as we found with the 20 Hobbs and 20 Penney houses in Keels, Bonavista Bay (Folklore Graduate Course, 2012). In a culture where inheritance was partible and patrilineal, large kingroup clusters could evolve over 4-5 generations. It was a product of the fishery where the sea was the field and all that was needed was space for a wharf, store, flakes, room for a house, and some outbuildings. Gardens and
meadows were eventually added to complete the fishing room. The Careys outnumbered all others in Witless Bay. Next were seven Tobins, seven Mullowneys, and seven Norrises. These were Irish. It demonstrates that the patriarchal extended family was uniquely a Newfoundland adaptation, not something exclusive to one ethnic group. It is interesting that the leading surname in Bay Bulls in 1871, Williams, with 20 families, was also an English surname.

YARD’S ROOM

One of the few West Country surnames to survive in Witless Bay, and, with the Careys, one of the oldest families there still resident in their original 18th-century location on the north side were the Yards. Near the modern fish plant by Lower Pond. The surname came from South Devon, noted earlier as the heartland for English migration to St. John’s and the Southern Shore. We believe the Yard family was established in Witless Bay by at least 1750. Originally Anglican, they were all Catholic by 1800. Or at least all marriages and baptisms recorded for the surname came from the Catholic parish registers. Some Yards married immigrants from Ireland. E.g. Stephen m. 1807 Anne Malone, Glenmore Co. Kilkenny; Christopher, m. 1813 Eleanor Mears, Co. Kilkenny; George, m. 1835 Margaret Frisby, Mullinavat, Co. Kilkenny. Others married daughters of Irish immigrants, e.g. Christopher m. 1820 Bridget Delaney. Even when the Yards married women of English ancestry, the marriages or subsequent baptisms of the children were in the Catholic registers. George m. 1812 Elizabeth Whitten of Petty Hr.; and Stephen, m. 1804 a Mary Yard. The witnesses were George, Catherine, and Anne Yard. It suggests four to five generations by 1812.

Despite its deep roots, the Yard surname did not proliferate to the same extent as the Careys. There were six families in 1864, five in 1871, and five in 2000. Their houses were clustered around the present home of Joey Yard, who with his son, James, are the last fishermen in Witless Bay. Their fish stores still stand. In the nineteenth century, the Lash kingroup lived to the east of the Yards and on the west were the Mullowneys and the Cahills.
In the name of God amen, I Laurence Tobin of Witless Bay Planter being infirm in body but of sound and good memory and understanding do make this my last will and testament in manner and form following, viz, First I bequeath my soul to Almighty God and my body to the grave rottenness and worms. I leave and bequeath to my beloved wife Eleanor Tobin during her natural life all my property in Witless Bay comprising of land houses furniture and stock of cattle except a fishing room situate on said property which I will speak of hereafter I bequeath my wife will leave when she is dying the aforesaid property to my two sons Philip and James Tobin Should they or either of them transgress or do anything contrary to the will of my wife so as it can be made appear I leave it invested in her my wife to give their or his part to any of my other sons she consider more deserving of it. I bequeath my wife will during her life keep as a stock five cows and not to let the stock diminish. I bequeath the fishing room and all appertaining to it to my four sons Thomas, William, Philip and James Tobin to have share and share alike. I bequeath to my sons Laurence John and Dennis Tobin five shillings each and my son Nicholas Tobin one shilling I bequeath to my daughters Mary, Eleanor, Beck, Bridget and Catherine five shillings each to be paid to each after my death if required by my executor which I will appoint hereafter. I nominate and appoint my beloved wife Eleanor Tobin my executor. I revoke all former wills whether written or verbal.

Signed and sealed in the presence of the subscribing witnesses this 11th day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty eight first being read to the testator, Laurence his X mark and seal Tobin (LS)

Witnesses, Jeremiah Murphy, Patrick Norris.

Codicil. I bequeath that my wife Eleanor Tobin when dying will give my feather bed to my son Laurence Tobin dated same day & year as above. Laurence his X mark Tobin. Witness, Jeremiah Murphy, Patrick Norris.
PROPERTY INHERITANCE: THE WILL OF LAWRENCE TOBIN, 1852

We do not have a record of his place of birth, but Lawrence Tobin was likely born in Ireland around 1775 and settled in Witless Bay in the 1790s. He married there in 1801 Eleanor Dunn, member of a long-established family of Irish ancestry in Witless Bay. The Tobins settled in Gallow’s Cove in the far southeast section of the Bay. It was a narrow cove, bounded by steep cliffs. Its easterly location was closer to the fishing grounds. It was still back-breaking work. Crews departed Gallow’s Cove for the fishing grounds at dawn. They rowed 2-5 miles beyond Gull Island, and, using handlines, jigged for cod until the boat was full. The journey out and back took 1-2 hours. Specialist headers, splitters, and salters moved the fish along the stage to be carried on hand-barrows by two men to the flakes. Depending on the weather, up to two weeks of turning the fish on the flakes awaited before the cod was stored for shipment to market. With a gradual development of a family fishery, women and children joined the men curing fish.

Lawrence Tobin and Eleanor had eight sons and five daughters born in Gallow’s Cove. The earliest record of baptism for Witless Bay was of their son Lawrence in 1803. Tobin’s Room was on the west side of Gallow’s Cove; the Green family occupied the east side. In 1829, Tobin is recorded as paying rent for his room to William Carter, a planter of English descent. By 1830, Lawrence Jr. was married, and had a son, Michael, born 1832. Records of marriages for at least four other Tobin sons followed in the 1830s. In his will of 1852, Lawrence divided his fishing room equally amongst four of his eight sons. The other four sons were given small sums of money. They had likely already inherited property from their father since they are recorded as fishermen (1864, 1871). It is a classic example of partible, patrilineal inheritance. The five daughters were also given small sums of money – five shillings each. Eleanor was awarded power-of-attorney with power to disinherit a son should he “transgress or do anything contrary to the will of my wife.” She was also bequeathed land, houses, furniture, and cattle (five cows). It was typical of items given widows on the death of their husbands. Women kept house, worked in the gardens, and in the dairy (milk, butter). Like most men in Witless Bay in the mid-nineteenth century, Lawrence Tobin was illiterate. The witnesses were not.

JOHN J. MANNION
The photograph depicts an operation that is one of the oldest and most enduring in Newfoundland, stretching back to the very beginnings of English settlement in the early-seventeenth century. The dry fishery was capital and labour intensive, originally conducted by planters and their men servants, later by the family, fathers and sons. The flakes were made of local spruce and boughs on raised platforms, and took up more space than did the structures on the waterfront. They were placed on elevated dry sites as close as possible to the stage/store complex. Cod, lightly salted, were placed on the flakes, usually turned at mid-day, and piled at night for over ten days of good weather. Once dry, they were taken to the fish store for shipment to markets in southern Europe (Portugal, Spain).

The fish in the photo were landed where Danny Dinn’s Ecotour site is today. They were carried on barrows up the hill on the west side near the modern road. Beyond the flakes are a dozen or so traditional dwelling houses, stables and stores set amidst tiny enclosed gardens. It is a classic Newfoundland outport landscape. Most houses are 1 and ½ stories, peaked or saddle-roof style. Similar to Michael Cahill’s across the harbour. A few 2 to 2 and ½ story structures, next in line in the evolutionary sequence of Newfoundland house types are in evidence. One has a Mansard roof, a style spreading from St. John’s around this time.
Across the beach, up from the fisherman’s neat cottage, are the chapel and convent, surrounded by fenced gardens and meadows. This land was owned by the church, and extended out to the road. In 1839-40, Dean Cleary secured a grant of 38 acres from the Crown, part of which was cleared and preserved for farming. The church and convent stand in striking contrast to the humble vernacular landscape of the fishery. While the flakes have no European precedent, the religious structures represent a distinct cultural transfer from southeast Ireland.

JOHN J. MANNION
A small three-room house of perhaps c.1860-80 appears to have been built with a lobby entrance at one end, and an unheated second room or pair of rooms at the far end. The living spaces and exterior were completely reskinned a decade or two ago, but the ceiling and attic provide evidence for its date and early form. It is located far from the harbor, suggesting it housed farmers as well as or rather than fishermen.

The house is built with what in Newfoundland are called studded walls: studs set side-by-side to form solid walls. Even though studs are tightly fitted, the builders put a material Jerry Pocius calls seaweed as a sealant between them. The studs rise to form the gables, where they are now visible in the attic. The tops of the long walls also extend well above the attic floor and are boxed with horizontal planks, casing their inner face and top.

The attic floor is carried on slight, planed, undecorated transverse joists, left exposed. That floor is hand-planed below and left with circular saw marks in the attic, indicating that the house post-dates c.1855. The attic is unfinished, in addition to having an unplaned floor, though there is a modern window in the left gable.

Evolution of the form is an important question. The house form seems now very simple: a principal living room, 15' 6" by 12' 9" long, entered at the left...
end and opening into two small bedrooms at the right end, 6’ 6” wide. However, there is evidence in the joists, flooring, and roofing that previously the outside doorway opened into a wide, shallow lobby in front of a heating device. Originally, this seems to have been a substantial chimney.

All joists and flooring overhead are replaced in the left 5’ 3” of the large room. Aligned with this, there is a 2” lap joint in the top of the joist at 5’ 3”, 2’ 7” behind the front door. The lap joint corresponds to that at Barry Norris’ house, also in Witless Bay, suggesting there was a lobby about 5’ 3” wide and 2’ 7” deep. There is a later partition ghost, 3” wide, on replaced joists at the left end, suggesting that a lobby of the same size remained after a chimney and associated framing were removed. There is an old patch in the left end of the roof, about 2’ 10” by 2’ 6”, centered just behind the ridge, suggesting there was originally a large chimney and fireplace, just behind the lobby. A smaller and later roof patch, 1’ 6” square, is located 1’ 4” to the right, centered on the ridge, suggests the large chimney was replaced by a small brick chimney serving a wood stove, which presumably was freestanding behind the lobby and set away from the end wall.

The width of the rooms suggests that the present transverse partition is in an original location, and that there was unheated space at the right end. There is no evidence for a chimney serving the smaller rooms. The short longitudinal partition separating it into a roughly square front right room and smaller rear room may be an addition; recent finish obscures all evidence in this area. Fenestration respects the present plan, with one of the front windows lighting the right front room and a sole right end window lighting its rear mate. The present left end window appears to be an addition.

EDWARD CHAPPELL
ALL JOISTS & FLOORING OVERHEAD REPLACED:
5' 6" WIDE
DEPTH OF ORIGINAL CHIMNEY

EARLY ROOF PATCH FOR 4' 8"

ORIGINAL CHIMNEY?

LATER PATCH FOR STOVE CHIMNEY

LATER PARTITION: GHOST 3' WIDE
LAP JOINT IN JOIST, 2' WIDE

JOHN BROWN HOUSE, WITNESS BAY, NEWFOUNDLAND
MEASURED SEPT. 19, 2019 BY EDWARD CHAFFEE & JERRY FOGUSS
FIELD SCHOOL, MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY
Bernadette Maddigan was born in her grandmother’s house in Witless Bay in 1936 and moved into the Maddigan house when she was five years old. She has lived in the house since 1941 when she first came to live there with her parents Martha and Matthew Maddigan and her older siblings Michael (Mickey), Jean Elizabeth and Rita Marie. When we arrived at the house Bernadette was sitting at her table in the roomy kitchen and was quite eager to talk. She broke into stories about ghosts and fairies. Bernadette has a sharp memory and disclosed pertinent information helping us assess the age of the house. She remembers a stone chimney located between the kitchen and the living space. “All the rocks looked the same - big and flat stones”, Bernadette recalled.

There is a curved staircase to the upper floor immediately as you enter the home from the front porch. Bernadette remembers the first time she saw the house she ran through the kitchen up the stairs to see if the bedrooms were the same as her grandmother’s house. There is a master bedroom, two smaller bedrooms, a bathroom and a linen closet on the second floor. The main floor is comprised of a front porch leading into a narrow passage that separates the first floor living space.
The front porch on the southeast side of the home is not currently used although the small deck to the right is occasionally used in the summertime. The kitchen where Bernadette spends the majority of her time is the first room on the left as you enter the front porch. A brick chimney replaces the old stone chimney and Bernadette remembers a small woodstove (Queenie) venting into the chimney from the living room and a coal and wood burning Gurney stove installed in 1953, venting into the same chimney in the kitchen.

Through the kitchen there is a small pantry also serving as a passage to the back porch and the second bathroom. This pantry houses dishes as well as flour, sugar and other dry goods. The back porch is used as the main entry into the home and contains a water pump that brings water from the stone lined well on the property. This well was on the property when the Maddigan’s moved in however the two outbuildings were built by Mickey Maddigan - the root cellar in 1954 and the stable in 1957. The furnace that is now the main heat source is located in the north corner of the back porch. Off the porch is a small bathroom, added in the 1960s when the porch was renovated to accommodate the furnace.

The living and dining rooms, located on the right, show evidence of upgrades including a beam across the ceiling and narrow partial walls on either side of the beam. This beam may have separated two rooms or it may have been an exterior wall, indicating the current dining room and part of the kitchen are additions. The house shows signs of 80s decoration with floral prints in the wallpaper, curtains and furniture fabric.

Bernadette’s recollection of a stone chimney in the centre of the house possibly opening to a hearth in the kitchen and living room, suggests construction was pre 1890. The original stringers for the staircase are still
visible in a closet under the stairs. If indeed the above mentioned beam was at one time a narrow wall that separated two rooms we could safely say this is a double pile Georgian-style lobby entrance home with a three bay facade.

It has been 73 years since Bernadette moved into this home. As the last Maddigan living in Witless Bay, her life bears testament to the many changes the house and property have undergone. From a root cellar over-flowing with vegetables and a stable alive with animals, Bernadette’s memories are all that is left of the times gone by. She currently lives alone with her two cats in the Maddigan home.

TERRA BARRETT and JACQUEY RYAN

Additional Architectural Comments

Although rearranged and re-skinned in the second half of the 20th century, Bernadette Maddigan’s house has always been a lobby-entry house with a central lobby giving access to an enclosed stair and two main-floor rooms. Here the early stair survives, and the central chimney was located behind it.¹

As elsewhere in Witless Bay houses, the lobby is wide and shallow, now 7' 9½" (originally probably 7' 6") by 3' 4". The doorway to the stair, without rebates for a door leaf, is at the left end of the lobby, with three winders in a 2' 6" square space below seven rectangular 2' 6"-wide steps that climb straight up to the right. The lobby was re-skinned c.1950-70 and a closet was added below the stair. Opening the closet door, one sees that the area below the long run was unenclosed, and a stringer rising at about 45 degrees, with 9/16" single bead at the lower edge, facing the lobby. Doors at both ends of the lobby were removed c.1960-70, with the right partition entirely removed, so the lobby is now open into the living room, on the right.

That (right) living room was 11' deep and is now 10' 2" wide to the lobby and 13' 2" to the present chimney. Much of the 4½" thick rear wall of the living room was cut out in the 20th century to enlarge the room by 5' 10".

¹ Bernadette’s parents were married in 1927. Photos of them hang in the living room. She was 25, and he was 31. Michael was her brother. Colleen Hannahan’s mother was Bernadette’s sister. They were afraid to light a fire in the chimney. She remembered the story of the “big rock” chimney being torn out. She is 78. She lived in the house with her brother. BM to EC, September 16, 2014.
To the left of the lobby is the other original room 10’ 3” wide, as it remains, and probably 11’ deep. It, too, has been extended by about 5’ 10”, and then a lobby was created in its left rear corner. In short, the house became two rooms deep, with 5’ 10”-deep rooms at the rear, that were then opened into the front rooms. We see no clear evidence for whether the back rooms were an addition or original, as the whole rectangular block now has a very low gable roof.

The stair rises to an L-shaped upper front passage now giving access to three of the four bedrooms. On the right are two rooms, seemingly of early size, 8’ 1” wide and 7’ deep at the front and 8’ 4” by 9’ 10” at the rear. On the left, the bedrooms are 10’ 1” by 10’ at the front and 10’ 1” by 7’ at the rear, both now having closets apparently made from passage space. The longitudinal partition separating the two left bedrooms is unaltered. It is built of 1”-thick vertical planks, now covered with layers of wallpaper. There is an original door in this partition because the passage does not reach the left rear room.

Here and elsewhere upstairs, all the early doors have Italianate single architraves with 5/8” beads and quirked cyma backbands featuring sloped inner fillets. The door leaves all have four panels, tall ones over short ones, with the same variety of Italianate cymas applied to the outer flat face of panels set into plain rebates and made thin at the edges by using/having relatively rough raised panels on the rear. These are all hung on original 4” cast-iron butt hinges with five knuckles, held with countersunk screws. Doorways to the left front room and its closet are c.1960 work, suggesting that the transverse wall here may have moved when the closets were added to both left rooms.

Bernadette never married, and she lived in the house with her brother until his untimely death 14 years ago. Her furnishings, most c.1940-70, follow a pattern that Jerry Pocius sees elsewhere on the Southern Shore, of personal photographs and colorful pictures downstairs, including a hanging textile celebration marriage of Prince Charles and Diana Spencer, contrasting with up to seven intensely Roman Catholic pictures or cast figures in every space, including the passage. Strangest is a corner shrine shelf with statues of Mary behind glass and pictures facing the bed in the right rear room and at statue of Christ behind glass next to the stair.

EDWARD CHAPPELL
A. Furnace located in North-East corner of the back porch.

B. Water pump located in North-West corner of the back porch.

C. Built-in cupboards/shelf.

D. Counter top in kitchen and pantry.

E. Coal & woodburning stove installed in 1985 located in same location as original stone chimney.

F. May have been dryed wall, an exterior wall or may be evidence of a double pile structure.

G. Original curved chimney wall. A trench rise varies between 3/5 inch & 1 1/8 inch. Drawn for the steps 10 inches for the six upper steps of ranges from 1/8 to 3 inches on lower three steps. There are nine steps in total. Stairs are decorated with lath. Remaining evidence of stonework metal rails attached to front of steps.

H. Wall thickness varies from 3 1/8 to 8 1/2 inches. Walls of original house were likely five inches thick.
Barry Norris’ house is situated at the end of Major’s Path, resting beside the shores of Lower Pond. It’s a quiet place, with riddle fences, sheds, and beautiful greenery on the grounds. The Norris family has lived here for at least 130 years, and the house stands as a testament to the artistry of the family throughout the decades.

The house is thought to have been constructed by Barry’s great-great-uncle, Nicholas Norris, in the 1870’s. However, the ghost scars on the ceiling, discontinued upstairs floorboards, and mounds of stone in the basement indicate that there may have been a larger, stone fireplace in the original structure. If this is the case, the house may have been built prior to 1860, when many Newfoundlanders switched to brick chimneys. At some point a smaller chimney was installed in the house, and the upstairs floorboards were extended to fill the newly opened central space. The intricately carved mantle piece was likely made locally at the time the house was constructed. A stained glass cupboard door (reminiscent of the stained glass within the Witless Bay convent) may have also been installed during this era.

Barry Norris’ grandfather, Peter Norris, moved into the house in 1918. At this
time, he made several structural adjustments. He added the kitchen, sitting room, and porch in the rear of the house, and created diagonal walls to partition the new spaces from the old.

In 1919, the wreck of the Appenine ship (once used for shipping goods along the Southern Shore) washed up on the rocks of Witless Bay. Many residents reused materials from the ship’s remains, including Peter Norris. A constable policed the shores, in an attempt to curb the residents’ salvaging efforts. However, the citizens of Witless Bay couldn’t be stopped. Peter Norris repurposed wood and paneling from the ship’s cabins on the interior walls of his house, creating a beautiful and distinctive aesthetic.

Barry’s grandfather moved out in the 60’s, and briefly offered the house for rent. At this point, Barry’s grandfather separated the parlour into two rooms, and made an indoor bathroom available for his tenant. Previously, the family had relied on an outhouse.

Barry’s uncle, Philip Norris, moved into the house in the 70’s, and installed the carpets, floor canvas, and wallpaper of his generation. Philip also took down the mantelpiece and stained glass cupboard, in an effort to modernize his home.

When Barry took possession of the house in 2010, he restored the house to its original style. He recovered the mantel and stained glass door from the attic, and pulled up all the floor and wall coverings. In doing so, Barry revealed many surprises and architectural clues about the house’s history. He unveiled newspapers from 1918, lining the walls constructed by his grandfather (thereby illuminating the date of the addition). Barry also discovered several pencil markings on his newly exposed wooden
walls. Peter Norris’ signature is indicated on the interior walls of the 1918 renovation, alongside a little pencil sketch of a ship.

The furnishing of Barry Norris’ house is very thoughtful. There are many homemade objects, and numerous original, local paintings. When asked about the house, Barry says he likes “the age, the look of it. The old look, and the feel of it. And the family connection, I suppose. I like the old mouldings.”

SHARNA BRZYCKI and ANDREA MCGUIRE

Additonal Architectural Comments

Barry Norris is interested in historic preservation and so has kept his story-and-a-half, lobby-entrance house relatively unchanged since he bought it, leaving and often uncovering early fabric. It reads very legibly as a two-room plan main block with support space under a rear shed, which Barry says is an additional. Yet it reveals evidence for substantial early changes and retains mysteries about its original form and use.

A surviving small front lobby, 5’ 11” wide and 3’ 8” deep, originally opened into two rooms inside the main block. On the left was a 12’ 1” (now 11’ 5”) by 14’ 3” deep room, now a living room with fancy-cut mantel and c.1900 cupboard fitted with colored glass. On the right, there seems to have been a 9’ by 14’ 3” second room. Like other front lobbies we have seen in Witless Bay, this one projects into the front rooms, consuming 8” to 1’ of width at the inner front corner of both. A small header for the lobby’s rear wall is lapped into the first joist in the left room, as seen at the Broncard House. Now, an old 2’ 7”-wide stair rises between the rooms, straight from the lobby and roughly centered on the front door. It is open, without a doorway at top or bottom, but is fully enclosed by room walls and a stove chimney on the left.

The full-length rear shed, which has no visible finish as old as that in the block, and may be c.1900, provided new rooms 7’ 8” deep. It is now a long single room: kitchen to the right and sitting space to the left. At some date in the 20th century, a long 12’ 4” section of the longitudinal partition (back wall of the main block), was cut 5’ 4” deep into the front rooms, giving them angled inner rear walls, exposing the boxed upper run of the stair and a narrow brick chimney now used by a wood stove in the kitchen and figuratively (but not actually) serving the parlor fireplace.
More recently, the right front room was divided by a longitudinal partition to create a bathroom opening into the front lobby and a bedroom reached from the kitchen.

Climbing the steps from the lobby through a well lined by Eastlake railings, one arrives in a 5' 9"-wide axial passage that expands to the left behind the stove chimney to reach the left bedroom. Here in the passage, one finds evidence of a dramatic remodeling not so easily recognized downstairs. There is a patch in the passage floor, made of cheap 2½" to 2¾" circular- and sash-sawn, unplanned boards, contrasting with 6¼" to 6½"-wide pine flooring, both face-nailed with cut nails. The older, wider flooring is also predominately circular-sawn and only lightly smoothed by a plane or just foot traffic, but it clearly was superior. The patch is 6' 2" wide and 10' deep, extending to the rear wall and encompassing the stove chimney and all of the present stairwell except a small piece at the front.

It is uncertain precisely what this represents for the form of the original house, but the changes involved removing a larger chimney and reorienting or moving the stair. The width of the patch accords well with that of the lobby below. The patch is sufficiently generous, then, to contain a 6' 2"-wide stone chimney providing oversized fireplaces some 2' 6" deep and as much as 5' wide, as well as a stair with winders, probably at the rear, reached from what was the kitchen.

Looking through a ceiling scuttle in the left bedroom, one sees further evidence for a sizable chimney. The roof shows consistently old technology. The rafters are predominately, if not all, hewn on four sides, leaving a modest amount of waney edges and averaging 3" by 4" in section. They are fully lapped and secured with big nails at the ridge. Collars of about the same size and character give them rigidity, support the upper story ceilings, and are lapped on and nailed. The rafter spacing averages 3' on center. A rafter pair above the passage is truncated toward the ridge, indicating a chimney, conceivably as large as roughly 3' by 5', once exited at the ridge. Remedial work was done around this part of the roof, with hewn helpers secured to the sides of the rafters with wrought nails.

From the scuttle, I see hewn studs on roughly 1' 4" to 2' centers in the left gable. Given the nailing patterns on interior sheathing, I assume all the exterior walls were built with comparably spaced studs, not solid studding.

The upper bedrooms have original 4½" to 1'-wide, circular-sawed but
hand-planed horizontal sheathing on the outer walls, underside of the roof and ceiling, secured with rose-head or uneven cut nails. There is Italianate trim around the edges of the ceilings. There are two early doors upstairs, one moved, both with Italianate four-panel leaves and Italianate architraves. These include more complex and thin moldings as well as familiar Italianate quirked cymas with sloped fillets.

On the main floor there is 5¾" to 6" wide flooring, face-nailed with wrought and/or cut nails. Overhead joists are small, as we see elsewhere in Witless Bay, 5" by 2" to 2¼", planed and left undecorated, on 1’ 6” to 1’ 10” centers, carrying upper floorboards that are planed on the bottom. The inner face of outer walls downstairs has original horizontal wall sheathing, 5½" to 1’ 3” wide, straight mill sawn and hand-planed, face-nailed with large cut nails. There are Italianate cymas at the top of the sheathing, as well as Italianate doorframes and four-panel Italianate door leaves.

Looking at the floor in the parlor, we see a continuous butt joint 8" to 9” from the right partition, a seam that aligns with the face of the front lobby, suggesting that the right face of the room may have been moved 8” to 9” to the right (enlarging the room) when the big changes were made at the core of the house.

The oldest finish elements in the rear shed are single architraves around three two-over-two windows, with the backbands removed, and board sills. There is matchboard ceiling and similar finish installed elsewhere in the house c.1900.

In summary, Barry’s house appears to have begun life with two rectangular rooms on both of two floors, flanking a large stone chimney the same width as the surviving front lobby and with main-floor fireplaces as much as 5’ wide. It was framed with spaced studs and rafters, both primarily hewn from small trees. It was finished with horizontal sheathing inside, circular-sawn and roughly planed by hand, and probably outside with clapboards. I assume that the combination of original circular-sawn flooring and sheathing, hand-planing, cut and wrought nails, and Italianate woodwork collectively indicate a c.1855-80 date, or third quarter of the 19th century.¹

EDWARD CHAPPELL

¹ Barry Norris tells us that Steven Carter reported some pit-sawing was still done here in the early 20th century. Carter remembered pit saw “a hole in the ground and some kind of horse [frame], with one man on it and another down in the hole, cutting wood for the house, sawing planks or timbers.” Not sure when, maybe 1910s. Born 1900, d.2001.
The old wooden stable behind Barry Norris’ house isn’t used as a stable anymore, but in the past it was certainly used to stable farm animals. The stable is of uncertain age. It is probably contemporary with the house, the exact date of which is also not certain. Both house and stable are probably over a hundred years old, and may have been built as early as 1870.

The stable floor is a treat for an architectural historian, because the original floor remains intact. In a lot of old buildings the old wooden floors have been pulled up and modernized, but it is not so in Barry’s stable. The wood for the floor was cut in the style called a “longer” floor: the same style is also traditional in fish stages. The way the wood was cut allowed the water from processing fish to drain away, rather than building up in puddle on the floor. There certainly could be advantages in using this type of flooring in a building meant to house farm animals, and it would be beneficial in the winter as well, when people came into the stable with snowy boots.

The front door on the stable was detached at the time we were visiting. Barry had to remove it a couple months prior to our arrival in Witless Bay to replace
some damaged wood in the wall near the doorframe. The door had been temporarily set in place to keep the wind and rain out when we arrived one day. The crash of the door falling inwards instead of swinging outwards provided an excellent exclamation mark to Dr. Pocius’ brief lecture on historic Newfoundland house painting.

The back door on the stable would probably have been used to bring the hay in, and there probably would have been another door to throw the hay out of. The stable originally had a much higher roof, like a Dutch barn, which is unusual for the area. It was removed at some time in the past.

Barry is the most recent in the Norris line to own the house and outbuildings. He doesn’t use the stable to hold animals anymore, and neither did his uncle before him. Barry was considering pulling the stable down at one point, but he decided to use it to store his wood instead, luckily for the folklorists. They built buildings to last in the ‘old days’ and the stable will probably stand for at least a decade longer without any serious alteration.

Barry’s uncle Philip, who owned the house before Barry, used the stable as a carpentry shop for making wooden chairs and the like. Barry thinks his uncle might even have built a couple of small boats in there. Philip had electricity in the stable, but Barry didn’t need it and so he took it out.

In the front right hand corner of the stable, the floorboards were cut so they just sat on a wooden sill, rather than being fastened on. Barry isn’t sure why, but it was certainly handy for studying the rock foundations of the old stable.

DAISY HURICH
4. Barry's uncle, the previous owner, used the stable as a workshop. This was his workbench.

5. The floorboards here rest on the wooden sill visible at the back of the hole. They are not actually fastened down; Barry lifted these up to show us the foundation of the stable.

6. Wooden dividing wall; presumably a former stall.

7. A very thick horizontal beam at the base of the dividing wall.

8. A shelf attached to the dividing wall.

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BARRY NORRIS' STABLE
MURPHY'S LANE, WITNESS BAY, NEWFOUNDLAND
SEPTEMBER 2014, DAISY HURICH

1/4" = 1 Foot
Additonal Architectural Comments

Barry Norris’ stable located 20 feet behind the house looks intended for ponies and a cow, most recently used as a workshop and storehouse. Barry believes his Uncle Nicholas Norris (b.1856) built it c.1875-80. It is 12‘ 9” wide and 18‘ deep, built with spaced studs and weatherboarded inside and out, covered by a very low-pitched roof. There are doors front and rear and a single two-light window above the back door. It is painted white with green trim and yellow doors. Jerry Pocius pronounced this as a tradition derived from using yellow ochre boat paint, as he leaned against the front door that then fell flat, to everyone’s amusement.

It is useful in understanding late 19th-century Newfoundland framing because the system is relatively exposed. The walls are framed with studs that are 3½” skinned saplings hewn only on the outer and inner face, located on 1‘ 5” to 1‘ 6” centers. Builders set two studs at right angles in the corners rather than using larger posts. Joinery is minimal. Plates on the long walls are simply 5” by 1¾” planks nailed to the inner side of the studs. Atop these are small spacers, about 1½” square. The rafters are 4” saplings, skinned but flattened only on the top, and at the ends of the bottoms where they sit on the spacer and are presumably nailed from above. At the low ridge, the rafters again are very slightly flattened to sit on top of (not lap into) two thick reused tongue-and-groove planks. The planks are supported by studs at front and rear ends and midway by a short (about 7” tall) stud on top of a 4½” by 5½”, roughly squared tie beam lapped over the little spacers and their plates.

The studs are not given rigidity braces. Rather, the studs in the long side walls are kept rigid by the nailed-on plate and by a second, straight-mill sawn, 5½” by 2” plank located 2‘ 6” below them, again just nailed to the flat inner face of the studs. In passing, I should note that both large cut nails and rose-head nails are used to secure these planks, in spite of the building presumably dating to the end of the 19th century or early 20th.

Studs in the narrower front and rear walls are similarly secured by saplings (again flattened on two opposite faces) lapped under the plates and sawn planks set above the long lower planks. The long
middle planks act as bearers only for a central tie beam, roughly hewn to 4½" by 5½", lapped flat onto the planks, nailed, and used to separate the front and deep rear spaces.

Barry Norris explained that the stable originally had a steep roof and that his Uncle Phillip said that his father Phillip, Sr. or Barry’s grandfather Peter dropped it to its present pitch.

Sills are roughly hewn to 5" to 6" square, some left round on the inner face, just lapped at the corners, possibly spiked but not pegged. Making the floor, the builders followed a traditional approach, laying, 4" to 5" “longers” side-by-side, right to left, roughly worked but flattened on the top and bottom, resting on the sills, set between or lapped around the studs. In Newfoundland, longers are small trees left in the round, with limbs removed. Stage floors are usually built with longers. Studs are longers that have been chopped/worked. Larger timbers are called logs or saw logs.

EDWARD CHAPPELL
This white and green house belongs to Sheila and Mike Ryan, who moved here in 2009. It is mainly constructed of wood, with some of the parlour and porch walls made of gyproc. It was built in two stages, with further alterations to the interior made later. Since moving in, Sheila and Mike have not made any substantial changes. The body of the house is approximately 22 feet by 25 feet, in addition to two small rooms built onto the side and the back of the house. In total, there are six rooms on the ground floor, and two rooms on the smaller second storey.

Michael and Mary Cahill were the original owners of the house, and probably built it sometime around 1910. It was built as a two-room, lobby-entry house, with the stairs to the second storey accessible directly from the kitchen. According to Mary Ryan, the granddaughter of Michael and Mary, the kitchen was the core of the house as the Cahills and their eight children relied on the wood-burning stove for their heat. The rest of the house would have been extremely cold during the winter, and the family would have to wear several layers of clothing all season. Michael worked as a fisherman, and also worked in the lumber woods in the winter. For this work, he would go “up in the country” for two weeks at a time, along with his sons.
when they were old enough to do the work. His sons also joined him in the fishery. Meanwhile, Mary had plenty of work at home, making clothes, knitting, cooking, and also helping Michael and their sons by making twine which would be made into fishing nets. The whole family raised chickens, sheep, goats for milk, cows for meat and butter, and horses for hauling wood from the forest. They also dried fish to eat.

Of the seven children who survived to adulthood, five married and moved out of the house, building their own homes nearby. Two sons, Gus and George, did not marry, and continued to live in the house. After their father died, around the year 1960, they built a one-storey addition, extending the back of the house by about 16 feet. As well as a porch and an indoor washroom, this included a small room attached to the parlour for their mother to use as her bedroom. When she passed away in 1975, they removed the wall separating her room from the parlour, making that area into one larger living space.

Gus passed away in 1994, and George continued to live in the house on his own until his death in 2007. After this, the house was occupied for one year by Jacqueline Mair, and is now occupied by Sheila and Mike Ryan, who moved to Witless Bay from St. John’s. They were thrilled to move into the house, and while they do use it to entertain their friends, and their children’s families, for the most part they enjoy having the house to themselves. Having started its life as a place for a family of ten to rest after a long day’s work, the house is enjoying a slower pace of life in its old age, operating as a space in which to live and to socialise.
Additonal Architectural Comments

The Cahill-Ryan House illustrates the continued presence of lobby-entrance houses, with the lobby as a relic no longer functioning with a formal intent. Research in the public records, according to owner Sheila Ryan (with her husband Mike) indicates that the house was built between 1880-’90.

It is a small house, containing two main-floor rooms in the main block and a series of three spaces in a rear shed. The shed is conceptually separate, contingent on front spaces and said to be an addition. Virtually no old fabric remains visible (only 6½"-wide, tongue-and-groove, slow-growth pine flooring below the present veneer).

The lobby is long and shallow like most we have seen in Witless Bay. Here it is 6' wide and 3' 10" deep, never giving access to a stair. It now opens directly into a 9' 1" wide by 13' 4" room Sheila calls a “living room,” and through a doorway into the present kitchen, where visitors sit. “Sit down, sit down; it’s more comfortable there,” Sheila says at the kitchen table, handing me a tray of fine dark fruitcake slices, scones or “tea biscuits,” and toutons, Sheila was frying on the stove. The kitchen is 9' 1" wide beside the lobby, extending to 12' 4" toward the rear, beside the stair, and 13' 4" deep.

We accept that the house dates about 1880-90, and it probably was always served by stoves rather than fireplaces. The present stove chimney rises within the room at the front right corner of the stair, centered at the rear. They removed the upper part of the stove chimney five years ago. The Ryans have changed the house very little since they bought it and moved in five years ago. “We like old houses; we’re not changing it. Except the floor, we put in the floor.” Both rooms are lighted by one front and one side window.

There are three 6’ 10"-deep rooms in the rear shed, all three once containing beds. “Eleven people were in here; in Newfoundland, wherever you can put a body,” Sheila says laughing. Part of the back wall in the living room was removed several decades ago, making the left rear room an annex of the living room, and now containing the television.

Sheila leaves the front door open on warm days like today, but everyone enters the house from its side. “Only Jehovah’s Witness and Electrolux salesmen come to the front,” another local resident told us. “You hear that knocking, and you want to hide.” Here there is an
enclosed added extension she calls a “side porch,” where everyone else enters. Straight ahead, the first thing one sees coming into this entry is a bookcase topped by unicorns and filled with souvenirs of the extended family’s travels to Holland, Calgary, Spain, Thailand, and Trinidad. “Mainly Calgary is my thing,” Sheila remarks, “otherwise I just go to the US sometimes. One walks from there into a coat room and then into the brightly-lit kitchen. Circulation is now from the kitchen through the front lobby to the living room. “Little porch I’d call it, a front porch. Nothing to do with them,” she remarks. “I called the husband and said ‘They’re eating all your toutons,'” she jokes. “Mike’s his name, ‘little red leprechaun, they used to call him, shorter than me, and with red hair on him.”

There have always been two bedrooms upstairs, both reached from a central upper lobby and lighted by a gable window. One now reaches the upper lobby from a stair rising from the middle rear bedroom, off the kitchen. Sheila says the stair was previously enclosed and in this location, but rising from the kitchen.

This was the Cahill house, built by the parents of Gus and George, two unmarried brothers who lived here after their parents’ deaths. Mike and Sheila Ryan bought it five years ago. The brothers were fishermen and did cement work. After they retired, the brothers dug a small cellar for the pump under the kitchen floor and lined it with concrete. “I put my husband in there, when he’s bad,” she says.

Sheila took me across the street to talk with Mary Cahill Rind, born 1947. I asked about George and Gus’ parents. Cahill is pronounced “Cal.”

“Michael and Mary were the parents. Mary died in 1975, I’m thinking and Michael, I do believe he died about 15 years older than her (c.1960). Gus died in ’85, and George died in ’98. He (Michael Cahill) was a fisherman all his life. He was always a farmer too, not to sell but just for them [to feed the family]. They were both from here.” “That back part they built on. The living room was there, but not the back part." “That stairs wasn’t where it is now. The stairs was in the kitchen. You come in through your door, and you go over there into the corner, and you went up, bending, inside the stair to the small landing.” “And we call it a closet,” Sheila injects. “When they got a drop of rum, they’d put it up there. They didn’t get a drop much because they were fishermen. But they put it up there when they had it.”

“They [Gus and George] fished most of their life, and Gus went at carpentry.” “Didn’t they do cement?” Sheila asks. “They did all that
cement themselves,” Mary responds. In between times like weekends they worked on concrete. And when they weren’t fishing. They had a place down on the water, stage head, a place where they brought in their fish, and brought in their boat and left the fish out. And they had horses and sheep and their hens. They’d kill the sheep for their food. They kept their horses in the stable and little foals, pigs and cows too. Michael was a fisherman too.” Sheila asks “How many children did they have?” “They had eight children. We had eleven in our family; maybe that’s what he was referring to [in saying there were eleven living in the house]. “They used to have a door into [both of] the rooms, the parlor, they called it, and the kitchen [on right].” Sheila: “We took one of the doors [into the living room] out.” EC: What did they call the back room to the stairs?” “They didn’t have no name for it,” Mary answers. “There was always a chair there, for people who used to come in, they could sit right down.”

EDWARD CHAPPELL
The stable is the largest of the three outbuildings on Sheila and Mike Ryan’s property. It consists of two adjoining rooms, a room accessible only by a separate entry, and a one-room second storey above the two adjoining rooms. Like their house and other outbuildings, the stable was already built when they moved to Witless Bay from St. John’s in 2009. It has a substantial concrete foundation, and has wood beams and siding, and pressboard walls.

While the house itself was built by Michael and Mary Cahill sometime around the beginning of the twentieth century, the stable was a little more recent. Only two of Mary and Michael’s children, Gus and George, never married. While the other five children moved out to form their own families, the two bachelor brothers remained in the house. As well as building an addition on their house, they built a root cellar and the stable. It is difficult to tell when the stable was built as it seems to have been constructed in two stages, but what seems most likely is that Gus and George, who were born in the 1920s, built the stable around the middle of the twentieth century, and that work continued to be done on it between then and today. It is also possible that it was built in the footprint of an earlier building, which would have been built at the same time as the house.

Following in their father’s footsteps, both Gus and George worked as fishermen and in the lumber
woods, as well as in construction. They used the stables for the obvious purpose of keeping horses which were useful when hauling wood from the forest. The stable was also used as storage for the hay they would cut on their property, which was considerably larger than the property on which the building stands now. Because Gus and George were unmarried and had no families to provide for, they worked hard to help their siblings' families, so the work that went on in the stable was really for the benefit of the extended Cahill family.

Now, the building—which Sheila calls the barn, but Mike insists is properly a stable—is used mainly for storage. No alterations have been done to the building since George Cahill passed away in 2007, but Jacqueline Mair, who owned it for a brief period between George’s death and Mike and Sheila’s purchase of the property, started a tradition of writing messages on its walls. This practice already existed in other buildings in the area, but was new to Sheila and Mike when they moved in. They have chosen to continue it, and often invite visitors from away to leave messages on the walls. When Gus and George built the stable, it was to help them with the work that they did on the land. Now, the landscape of Witless Bay is as much a social one as a physical one, and the fact that the stable now houses records of social visits rather than horses and hay reflects this.

EMMA TENNIER-STUART

CAHILL-RYAN STABLE (LEFT TO RIGHT); INTERIOR; EXTERIOR; GRAFFITI.
Lobster pots neatly stacked three deep one on top of the other, edge the roadway leading to Joey Yard’s shed. The pots, worn with age and the harsh climate of the Atlantic Ocean, tell us much about Joey, one of the last two inshore fishermen in Witless Bay.

Joey’s shed is perched on a bank above the beach, constructed to withstand the Northeast wind that often pummels the Southern Shore coastline, standing there for years as testament to its worthy builder. Joey tells me his Dad built this shed forty-five years ago with lumber he cut and planed himself.

The inside of the shed is constructed of irregular sized studs placed at inconsistent intervals and two to four braces on each wall supporting the structure at its corners. There is a splitting table attached half way up the right wall extending across the full right side of the building and the left side of the building is filled with colored plastic assorted fish bins, some laden with fish in salt, varying lengths and thicknesses of nets and rope, anchors and plastic rain barrels. Although one might have called this building a store at one time, Joey refers to it as a shed. The walls are adorned with bright colored floats and fishing tools including hook and line, files, clothing and various other tools associated with the work that takes place in the shed.

There is a front and back entrance to the shed with doors that are often tied open to catch a breeze off the ocean. This also helps with the strong scent of salt fish that often sits in bins on the shed floor curing.
YARD SHED/STAGE: TOP AND BOTTOM LEFT, EXTERIORS; BOTTOM RIGHT: JOEY YARD.
The studs on the inside of the shed are hand sawn and some of the wood still clings to the bark that once protected it from the elements. The outside of the shed is asphalt shingle over two by four boards running horizontally along all four walls. The shingles are black in color on the front and right side of the building and a red ochre color on the left and backside, except for the top two rows where black shingles are used. The left portion of the outside back wall is covered in black shingles. The peaked roof is shingled in the center with brown shingles and trimmed with a border of black asphalt. The trusses on the inside are also hand sawn.

Joey has been using this shed for 45 years, first with his dad, and ever since his dad has passed away. At one time there would have been a stage below the shed where Joey would dock his boat but now he docks at the government wharf. He would have offloaded the fish from his docked boat, carrying it up to his splitting table in the shed, where he would clean and fillet the fish before selling it to the various buyers. If he was salting the fish, there would be flakes lining the landscape in front of the shed, and the filleted fish would be taken and laid on the flakes to dry and undergo the salt curing process. The flakes are no longer standing.

Joey now takes his fish up from the government wharf but still processes it in his shed with his son James, who from time to time fishes with Joey. James recently was successful in obtaining a position offshore, so will fish with Joey when he is available.

Times have changed for Joey since his teenage days when he first went fishing with his dad. Yearly quotas have dropped substantially and the market is no longer available for inshore fishermen, whose total yearly catch doesn’t add up for the larger markets. Joey says “It’s really just enough for ourselves, and maybe the odd person here and there”.

JACQUEY RYAN
A- A Support Block - all boards are between 0½ and 0¾ wide and 3½ inches deep.

B- Studs are 3 inches wide by 3½ inches deep.

C- Running lines between measured to the left side of each stud.

D- Curved beams on right side of shed visible from above are short logs used as fastenings underneath structure.

E- Splitting Table is two widths, E measures 1½ and E measures 2½.
Joey Yard is a local fishermen and one of two inshore fishermen left in Witless Bay. Joey starting fishing with his father Henry Yard when he was fifteen years old and has been fishing for over forty years. Similarly Joey’s son James started fishing with him when he was only thirteen years old and his wife Marguerite fished alongside him for eight years. Joey’s shed is comprised of two parts; the rear part of the shed which is the earlier part built by Joey’s father between the mid 1930s and the mid 1940 and the front part which Joey built in the early 2000s. This “junk” shed is simply used for storage space and unlike his fish store by the water it is not used for storing, cleaning, filleting, or salting fish. This fish store is usually propped open and doubles as a communal gathering place for local and international fishermen who are in port while the junk shed sits with the door closed, too full to be used as a social space.

The shed sits beside the ocean surrounded by meadows which were once cleared to make hay in order to feed the Newfoundland Pony owned by the family. This hay was stored in the shed to dry. There are no traces of the hay in the shed today, instead the building is filled with fishing gear. The building’s location next to the ocean and its close proximity to the wharf where Joey ties his fishing boat allows for easy access to the equipment. The older part of
the shed houses a variety of tools of the trade. The gear ranges from rope to handmade swivels, gill nets to a caplin dipper, a squid roller out of use since the 1980s to a caplin trap last used in 1990.

The roof and wall planks of the rear shed are relatively uniform and are comprised of machine cut wood. The studs and supporting beams vary in size and are mainly composed of hand cut wood chopped by Henry Yard. The exterior walls of this half of the shed are covered in crimson shingles and from both the interior and exterior you can see a clear distinction between the new and old parts of the building.

The front of the shed contains more disused fishing gear but also houses lobster containers for storing lobster, large crates for moving fish and barrels full of diesel fuel for Joey’s boat “No Name”. This part of the shed is more organized and seems to be used more frequently than the rear part. The walls are constructed of pressboard and are braced with three by four inch machine cut studs. The exterior walls are not covered, leaving the pressboard to weather the elements. The roof is composed of machine cut wood planks and the roof covering on both the front and rear part of the building is black shingles. There is a small window on the south side of the front part and the door is on the east side of the building.

With Witless Bay’s (and Newfoundland’s) shifting economy, who knows how much longer this shed will remain in use. The rear side is already piled with disused fishing gear mostly sitting dormant since the cod moratorium in 1992. As one of the last fishermen in Witless Bay, Joey Yard’s shed is a tangible reminder of a tradition - one which isn’t static but varies over time with technological and economic advances.

TERRA BARRETT
A - Doorstep which runs across the front of the shed at 0°.
B - Pressboard walls in new half are 0° thick.
C - Stubs in new half range from 0° to 0° wide and are 0° thick.
D - The walls in the old half are 0° thick.
E - Stubs in old half range from 0° to 0° wide and are roughly 0° thick. These are handcut studs.
F - There are exterior braces which range from 0° to 0°. Several boards are angled and vary in size.
G - Support beams in the center of the shed separating the new and old parts of the building.

Joey Yard's Shed
Witless Bay, NL
Terra Barrett
Claire McDougall
Jacquey Ryan
September 19, 2014
3° 16' = 1 foot
Scale
The Carey root cellar was built by John Carey in the late 50’s. Carey’s son, Eddie Ryan, remembers its construction. Carey dug the cellar hole himself, and lined the ceiling and frame with roughly hewn wood. Large stones protrude from the walls of the cellar, and cement and styrofoam have been used to fill in the frame. Tapering levels of bare earth are exposed on the cellar floor. Most of the cellar space is utilized by four wooden crates, used for sorting vegetables. Tarps are fastened to the cellar’s ceiling to keep the crates and vegetables dry.

Above ground, one can find a highly eclectic shed space. Garden tools, lawnmowers, vegetable seeds and work coats are stored next to string art, ancient editions of The Herald, old election signs, and a My Little Pony lunchbox. Objects are placed upon a work surface and a pink folding table, and within a decorative, canary yellow cupboard. Other items are stored atop a suspended door, and nestled above an old interior car part. At first glance, the space appears chaotic. But if you look hard enough, a certain order becomes evident: rolls of unused wallpaper are positioned alongside one another, old liquor bottles are clustered together, and garden supplies are tossed in a box to the right. Nails are used to great effect as storage hooks.

The root cellar’s appearance hasn’t changed much since John Carey’s death in 2003. However, Eddie Ryan has made some recent alterations. He has attached two
moose antlers he found in the woods to the exterior of the cellar, on either side of the front door. Ryan says that the cellar’s depth is a bit wanting, at six feet, and that nine feet is a more desirable depth for root vegetable preservation. For this reason, Ryan has laid patches of mossy green and pink carpet on the ground floor of the cellar, to act as insulation.

The Carey family used their root cellar for approximately forty years, and mainly stored carrots, turnips and potatoes. John Carey and Eddie Ryan were usually responsible for fetching the family’s vegetables. According to Ryan, the family always had enough vegetables to last throughout the winter. The Carey root cellar is currently used for crop preservation by a neighbour down the road. (Ryan recently constructed a root cellar for his own personal use, in September 2013.)

Ryan remembers, “There was a lot of cellars, years ago, the older people would have them. I guess they needed them, they had to have them, for their vegetables.” When I visited the depths of the root cellar alone, I felt that I was in a very mysterious place. Root cellars seem to straddle a boundary between the world of nature, and the world of human structures. With these thoughts in mind, I asked Ryan what he liked about root cellars. He laughed, and said, “There’s not much to like, they just keep your vegetables from freezing in winter.” I realized that asking Ryan what he likes about root cellars is kind of like asking him what he likes about refrigerators. For Ryan, root cellars continue to serve an eminently practical function.

ANDREA MCGUIRE
NOTES:
A. Worktable positioned at height of 2'6" from floor.
B. 1-1/2" stud; except in corners some corner studs have the same dimensions, but are laid lengthwise; others are 1/4" x 1-4/2"
C. Access via ladder to root cellar below.
D. Wall thickness: 0"
JOHN CAREY'S ROOT CELLAR
WITNESS BAY, NEWFOUNDLAND
SEPTEMBER 23, 2014
ANDREA MCGUIRE
SHARNA BRZYCKI
DAISY HURICH
The Foley fish store sits on the edge of a rocky cove in a small enclave of Witless Bay known as Gallow’s Cove. Situated along the Southern shore and marked by the Eastern Trail that runs along its coast, Gallow’s Cove was once considered a community onto itself. Rolling, green hills slope down to the water’s edge behind the houses along the road. The Foley fish store rests at the bottom of one of these hills, next to a meadow where sheep graze. Wooden beams pressed into the earth serve as steps down, and at the bottom of the slope wooden planks strategically placed over the bog on which the store stands mark a pathway to its entrance. The Foley fish store’s rich red hue stands out amongst the vast greenery and shoreline of Gallow’s cove, representative of the many fishing stores and sheds found along the Witless Bay coast.

Not much is known about the history of the Foley fish store before the mid-20th century. Old maps of Witless Bay show us that a boat slip used for pulling vessels ashore operated from the cove at the end of the property during the early 1900’s. The fishing store would have been used as a working room and storage space for the men who ran the slip. While today the shed rests on the edge of the land, it once stood on wooden posts set over the cove below.
allowing for the flow of tides to come in and out beneath it. Shortly after John Foley’s father purchased the land in the 1960’s, a storm knocked the store off of its posts and into the ocean. John’s father was able to haul the store out of the water and up onto the land, where it continues to stand over thirty years later.

Since fishing has lost much of its prominence in the economy of Witless Bay, fishing stores and sheds are now used for different purposes. This occupational shift has brought with it a change in attitude towards living next to the ocean. No longer considered a work place except by the few left for who this remains to be true, residents relish the open water that defines their community. As Dr. Gerald Pocius describes it, “Nature is now recreation,” and this is true of the recent development in the general mentality of Witless Bay.

This can be seen in the Foley fish store today, as it is now used as a storage space mainly for sea-kayaking equipment. Kayaks line the front of the store as well as the cove down below, while gear such as paddles, ropes of different sizes, life vests, and a few tools such as nails and a large saw are stored inside. A kayaking gear checklist hangs next to the window beside a cluster of recreational fishing hooks. On the other side of the window are various wooden whirly-gigs depicting happy fishermen rowing in brightly colored boats and various seabirds with wings that spin.

The Foley fish store’s architectural style and setting are representative of an earlier, and drastically different, time in history. It serves as a memoir of what was, while continuing to evolve alongside an ever-changing Witless Bay.

SHARNA BRZYCKI

FOLEY STORE (LEFT TO RIGHT): INTERIOR FRAMING; EXTERIOR; CARVED PUFFIN.
FROM TOP LEFT CLOCKWISE: LEARNING ABOUT CAMERAS FROM BRIAN RICKS, WITH GUHA SHANKAR ASSISTING; SISTER LOIS GREEN DESCRIBING HER CONVENT LIFE; OPENING RECEPTION AND DANCE, COMMUNITY CENTRE; SHEILA RYAN SERVES TOUTONS TO HER VISITORS; JOHN LADUKE HELPS SHARNA BRZYCKI WITH HER PLAN; BONNIE JOHNSTONE DISPLAYS ONE OF HER FIBRE ART WORKS; MAYOR SÉBASTIEN DESPRÉ WITH HIS DAUGHTER, AMÉLIE; SHARNA BRZYCKI AND SAEEDH NIKTAB ETAAI AT BINGO NIGHT.