

Municipal Heritage Designation for Harbour Breton
~ Newman & Co. Root Cellar ~



The Newman & Co. root cellar is located near the end of South Side Drive in Harbour Breton as you are entering the fish processing plant. The cellar entrance faces the road and a sign indicates the cellar. (47.48^o N, 55.802^o W)

A root cellar is usually a below-ground excavation for promoting a year-round constant temperature of around 5 – 10 degrees Celsius to preserve such

root crops as potatoes, carrots, cabbage, turnip, and onions. Cellars were used for winter storage of vegetables and preservation of food, in addition to providing a cool summer storage area. The humidity level was constant around 90%, to best preserve crops stored there. Cellars were used in Harbour Breton as a subsistence practice only, that ensured a supply of vegetables over the long winter months. There was however, a Mr. Gordon who was a small-scale, full-time farmer in Harbour Breton during the 1870s.

The English firm of Newman & Co. operated a business in Harbour Breton for a hundred years or more (c.1800-c.1900) and grew crops in several of its gardens to supply its employees during the winter months. A large and impressive root cellar was constructed on its plantation. It was partially dug into the hillside, with four high rock walls, a rock floor, and covered with a steep roof. At the centre of the steep roof was a large vent that allowed air to help regulate temperature from season to season. The rock walls were filled around with earth material on the outside. A low wooden was extended all the way around the rock walls of about five feet in height. The sides were covered with wooden shingles and painted white. The sharp, peak roof was probably tarred wood shingles that allowed water to run off easily. The interior measurement of the cellar was 25' by 38' and a 3' wide door entrance. The rock walls were about 6' high and 16" thick. The rock walls were made of slate and red granite, with slate on the lower part and red granite on the upper part of the walls. Slate is not native to Harbour Breton but red granite is very plentiful. The slate rock was probably obtained from nearby Sagona Island.

As the Newman & Co. grew and its business expanded, there was a demand for more gardens beyond the plantation grounds. In 1849 for example, "*Newman & Co. commenced the cultivation of a large tract of land at the head of Harbour Breton Arm. Hay, potatoes, and wheat were planted.*" Rev. Philip Tocque also noticed during the same year, that some "*tobacco grew in the gardens of Newman & Co.....which was very good.*"

To maintain a constant supply of quality vegetables for the company's needs and to feed the fishermen coming for the annual settling-up time, the Newmans root cellar had to be fairly large. This cellar was shaded until early afternoon when the sun got around the hill, also help to maintain a cool and constant temperature required for preserving crops and food items.

Coady's Ltd. used the cellar for some time after the Newmans, with the wood walls and roof removed and replaced with a sod and earth covering. During the early 1950s, Coady's abandoned the cellar, as most of the potatoes froze during one winter. The cellar is still bit of a tourist attraction and is the only remaining built evidence of Newman & Co.'s existence in Harbour Breton but is in need of excavation work to fully realize its historical significance.

