

The Settling of Halls Bay

Halls Bay is a long, deep arm that has formed inward from the Atlantic Ocean for a distance of twenty miles. The entrance being only a mile wide, it acts as a natural barrier to ocean swells. Beyond this opening, the water is usually smooth and calm. The shoreline is fairly straight with high rising hills, coves, and steep cliffs extending down to the water's edge.

On the southeast shore, about eight miles from its entrance, lay the small community of Boot Harbor, which had been named so because of the physical configuration of the shoreline that encamps it. There were no viable records kept on Boot Harbor as to when it was first inhabited. What is known is that the first settlers were of English ancestry and include such surnames as Barnes, Morey, Thistle, Taylor, Wiseman, and Locke.

The first marriage recorded in the Halls Bay area was solemnized at Boot Harbor between Jesse Locke of Little Bay Islands, NL, and Louisa Barnes of Boot Harbor on December 21, 1881 by Rev. J. Lester of Little Bay charge. Shortly after, the community was officially settled, and a school was constructed. This building was used for divine worship and Sunday school, besides it's day school facility until it was destroyed by fire. After this, another school and church was built, with the church being dedicated June 11, 1922. These two buildings served the needs of the community until around 1923-24 when families started moving away. By 1927 only three or four families remained. The last family to move was that of William John Taylor in 1939.

This historic island is situated at the northeast side of Halls Bay at the mouth of Indian River. On this small island (during the years 1877-78) a sawmill was constructed by Nicholas Peters for a Mr. Udle, a ship builder and merchant from Harbor Grace, NL. Mr. Peters moved his family there in 1878 and built a permanent home.

This mill employed a number of men, some working at the plant, and others supplying raw material. The first sawyer to be employed was Joseph Blackler from Twillingate, NL. He moved to nearby Wolf Cove with his family around 1877-78 and built a tilt as a temporary house. He used a rowboat for transportation to and from his work on the island. He has the honor of being the first man to build a home in what is now modern-day Springdale.

The record of other men living on the island and at Wolf Cove, employed at the mill, are John Normore, John Green, Jesse Locke, John Snow, and Adam Saunders. The mill itself was later purchased by the Curtis Brothers (John and Francis), and then continued operation until 1890 when it was destroyed by a fire. John Curtis then returned to his former home of Twillingate, NL, and Francis moved to Pilley's Island, NL. The other families residing on Mill Island moved to Wolf Cove and the settlement of Mill Island was closed.

The scarcity of water at Mill Island necessitated the building of a scow for the purpose of bringing water from Wolf Cove to be used for the steam boiler at the mill. The spring from which the water was obtained was used by all the people at Wolf Cove at that time, and flowed out of the ground near the shoreline a short distance from where the town wharf now stands. After more settlers arrived, the spring was made more suitable for drinking purposes. In 1897 the name of Wolf Cove was changed to Springdale in honor of this historic spring. Today the spring stands as a monument of its past service for the role it played in community development.

Many groups of explorers traveled the early areas of Halls Bay in search of its natural resources. One such group was a party of ten, including Governor Glover and Rev. Moses Harvey that came from Bett's Cove aboard the steamer Hercules and arrived on September 21, 1878.

They toured local copper mines and after a brief visit, proceeded to Little Bay Mines. They then explored Mill Island and the rest of Halls Bay, where they disembarked, their final destination being the West Coast. On their journeys they were delayed three days by inclement weather and were deeply impressed by the hospitality they received.

Special mention of such hospitality was given to the Peters family; Nicholas and wife, Mary Ann. Mrs. Peters was described as a "Newfoundland House Mother". The explorers proceeded in canoes via Indian River and other lakes and rivers to the West Coast. No doubt this was the first trip made by a Governor from east to west Newfoundland, and Glovers Island in Grand Lake was named in honor of this historic trip.

Wolf Cove lies on the northwest side of Halls Bays about half a mile from Mill Island and sixteen miles from the entrance of the bay. As mentioned before, the first settler was Joseph Blackler, followed in the same year by the Brown family with occasional visits by George Clarke (both from Twillingate, NL). Mr. Clarke, a ship builder, came here to procure materials for his trade. He was especially interested in the large pine trees to be used as masts for his ships. He later moved in and became a master builder and built sixteen schooners, the largest a three master named the Ruth Hickman, being 370 tons, built for the firm of Hickman Company at St. John's. Her maiden voyage was made to the West Indies with a load of fish in 1916. On her return voyage, with a load of salt, she was torpedoed and sunk by the Germans.

In 1883, Stephen Huxter towed a house from Bett's Cove to Wolf Cove. In the years that followed, families moved in with such surnames as Anstey, Butt, Butler, Brett, Clarke, Earle, Huxter, Inder, Jenkins, Oxford, Penney, Smith, Whitehorne, and Wells; swelling the population to 243 souls by 1891. Most of them were Twillingate Methodists (171), and others comprised of members of the Church of England (21), and Roman Catholics (51).

In 1904 a forest fire roared down on Springdale, destroying almost everything in its path. The women and children were taken aboard schooners that were then anchored out in Halls Bay, while the men stayed behind to battle the blaze. Seeing that it was impossible to save their homes, they concentrated on saving the mill and lumberyard belonging to Clarke and Brothers so that they would have the materials necessary to begin building the community again.

This same fire destroyed valuable lumber in the Indian River area, burning everything from the river area itself to the eastern section of Springdale, which is now the location of the Senior Citizens Complex. It was only a change in wind that sent the fire inland from there and saved the rest of the town.

Halls Bay was ideal for the lumbering operations, which lured the first settlers to the area. The three rivers of South Brook, West Brook, and Indian River, extend well into the interior, providing relatively easy access to large stands of timber and water transportation for getting logs to the coast and then to the mills.

Other mills were constructed in the Wolf Cove area, although written records of these operations are practically non-existent. The first one was in operation around 1891 by George Clarke and Brothers. Messrs Saunders and Strong operated another. Another third mill, utilizing water power, was built by the Wells Brothers in the east end of Wolf Cove. The diary of the late B.I. Boyles records that he sold the mill to James and Edward Inder on January 1, 1894. This mill worked for a short time and was then destroyed by fire. After, they built another mill, which operated for many years.

These mills produced lumber from spring breakup to late fall. In winter, the logs were cut inland and piled near rivers. When the rivers broke up in the spring, they were floated to the salt water and the mills.

The "Drive", as it was called and celebrated in story and song; required men of skill and courage. Often the logs would pile up against some obstacle in the river and would require difficult and dangerous work to get them free again. Adam Saunders was a renowned logger and spent many accident free years at this work.

Despite the danger, only two accidents were recorded. Frederick Clarke lost his life on May 23, 1890 while attempting to clear a log jam on Indian River Falls. The second incident occurred sometime around 1905, when a pile of logs fell into the river as they were being prepared for the "Drive", causing one man to lose an ear, and another to spend several months in hospital.

The wages a logger earned were small considering the risk involved in their day-to-day work. A cook in the wood's camps earned twenty dollars (\$20.00) a month, meals included. Cash was kept strictly for church and school needs.

Indian River itself was probably named for a Micmac Indian, Andrew Joe, who had a permanent dwelling near its mouth. At the headwaters of this river, there is a short 3/4 mile portage to the waters that flow to the West Coast and Bay of Islands through the mighty Humber River. Rev. Harvey's diary mentions this as being the route his party followed in crossing the island. Undoubtedly, the Indians followed the same route.

In the early years of Springdale's history, the chief industries were logging and lumbering. Very little cod fishing was carried on, but a herring fishery started around 1913 and found ready markets created by W.W.I. Factories sprang up around bay and the population of the area swelled accordingly. Steamers arrived every fall to take fish, which were processed in what was called the "Scotch Pack." Thousands of

barrels were produced annually. The end of W.W.I in 1918 caused a slump in world markets. The local industry began to decline rapidly.

After the great fire in 1904, new homes were constructed and more families moved into the area, especially at the height of the herring boom. The population grew from 317 in 1901 to 740 in 1921. At about this time, another industry sprang up, namely cutting pit props and pulpwood for export to England (at which time Newfoundland was still a colony of). Frank Dove and George Warr Ltd. were the chief businesses involved in this trade. Other recent wood contractors involved in this contracting were Maxwell Goudie and the Hewlett Group Ltd., the latter having discontinued wood cutting to branch out into several different business areas.

Springdale was officially incorporated in 1945 (five years before Newfoundland joined Confederation) and at first included the town of South Brook in order to satisfy the government's requirement of population of at least 1,000 persons. The first mayor of Springdale was Harvey Grant, who held that position for twenty years. Springdale's former Grant Collegiate honors his name and his remarkable achievements. Other mayors were George Warr, George Huxter, and Dr. Evans. The first meeting was held on November 2, 1945 and was comprised of the following: Harvey Grant, R.W. Warr, E.J. Winsor, George Normore, Jonas Noble, Stewart Whitehorne, and William Heath (South Brook). Their first major achievement was a water system, which was completed in 1952. Before this time quite a number of homes in the center of town had to depend on the historic spring from which the town is named, for water used in home consumption. A cottage hospital was built in 1952 and opened in February by two nurses, Alexander and Gosse. Dr. Alexander arrived February 22, and was later assisted by Dr. Ingram. This added greatly to the services offered to the people of the Green Bay area. Springdale progressed over the years and in 1957 diesel power sent the first electricity to people's homes before hydro arrived in 1965. A sewer system was commenced in 1956 and expands with the growth of the town. Today, a vocational training school, a senior citizens complex, and other modern establishments stand to the credit of our energetic citizens.

From the hard working loggers who fought isolation and nature in the latter part of the nineteenth century, to the modern town that stands on the shores of Halls Bay today, Springdale has had a justifiable reputation as being a progressive and enlightened settlement. Her people, past and present, can be proud.

The above article was is an excerpt from the book Grace United Church, Springdale 1880-1980 by Mr. Frank R. Boyles.