



## Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada

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TO HIS HONOUR THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR IN COUNCIL

The Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada was appointed under Order in Council OC2002-187, dated April 19, 2002. We are pleased to advise that the Commission has completed its work and is now submitting its Report.

In the past fourteen months, it has been our privilege to meet with almost three thousand Newfoundlanders and Labradorians throughout this province and in expatriate communities. We have received valuable insights from these meetings, from written submissions and from our research program. We now present for your consideration a recommended Pathway to Renewal built on the foundation of a collaborative partnership between the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Government of Canada.

It has been an honour to have served on this Commission. It is our hope that the work we have done will play a part in renewing and strengthening our province's place in Canada.

Respectfully submitted,

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# OUR PLACE IN CANADA

ROYAL COMMISSION ON  
RENEWING AND STRENGTHENING OUR PLACE IN CANADA

MAIN REPORT



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# “What Is This Place That Holds Fast Our Hearts?”<sup>1</sup>

We love thee, smiling land...  
We love thee, frozen land...  
We love thee, windswept land...  
God guard thee, Newfoundland.  
– Sir Cavendish Boyle

These words from the “Ode to Newfoundland,” still sung by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians long after Confederation with Canada, reflect the strong bonds between this place and the people who call it home. The bond is powerful; it remains no matter how far away we go, or how long we stay.

Relentless seas, barren landscapes, fertile valleys, stark mountains and rugged, ragged coastlines – these mark the geography of this place at the mouth of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the northeast corner of North America. An island of 111,390 km<sup>2</sup>, a coastal mainland region of 291,330 km<sup>2</sup> and an offshore of 1,820,000 km<sup>2</sup> define the geography of a province with a population of approximately 512,000 people. The Newfoundland and Labrador expatriate community is estimated at 220,000,<sup>2</sup> with most living in other parts of Canada and tens of thousands in the United States and elsewhere. Labrador is the easternmost part of the Canadian Shield and has some of the oldest rocks on Earth, while the island of Newfoundland consists of three areas of the prehistoric world melded by continental drift. The coastline is only about 12 per cent of the Canadian total, but this represents more than one-third of the Canadian coastline that is ice-free for at least six months of the year. The south-flowing, cold Labrador Current, the northwest-flowing, warm Gulf Stream, dramatic storms, fog, variable winds and flowing pack ice and icebergs add to the unique character of this place shaped by the sea.

Our history reflects the importance of the sea and its riches; it was this that first brought our ancestral peoples<sup>3</sup> to these shores. The Palaeo-Indians, likely our first settlers, came to Labrador about 9,000 years ago. They developed the Maritime Archaic culture, which emerged in Labrador about 7,500 years ago, and on the Island about 5,000 years ago. A thousand years later the Palaeo-Eskimos reached Labrador, and about 3,000 years ago came to the Island. The Intermediate Indian culture is visible about 3,500 years ago in Labrador. Later, the Recent Indian culture developed and may have been the foundation of the Innu in Labrador and the Beothuk on the Island. The ancestors of the Labrador Inuit are the Thule, who came from the Canadian Arctic about 800 years ago. For reasons not entirely clear but certainly related to the coming of the Europeans, the Beothuk culture became extinct in the early nineteenth century. Loss of access to the vital resources of the sea, unknown and deadly illnesses such as smallpox, violence and competition with the settlers for hunting all contributed to their demise. The last known Beothuk was Shanawdithit, who died in 1829, having left the only written records of Beothuk life. Oral tradition suggests that the Mi'kmaq were living in Newfoundland long before the arrival of Europeans; however, archaeological evidence for prehistoric occupation is scarce, and we are not exactly certain when the Mi'kmaq first came to the Island. We do know that by the 1600s the Mi'kmaq frequented the Island from Bay St. George to Placentia Bay, and, during the 1760s, many moved to Newfoundland from Nova Scotia as a result of English conquests there.



So, you see, ups and downs has been my life all through, and now I am what I am.

Lydia Campbell  
"To See Things and to Understand"

## What Is This Place That Holds Fast Our Hearts?

The Norse arrived circa 1000 AD, but left soon after. The next wave of Europeans came in the sixteenth century, not for furs or gold as in other parts of North America, but for the vast resources of the sea. The Basques were primarily interested in whale oil; the other Europeans came mainly for cod.

The first official settlements began in the early 1600s, but extensive settlement did not occur until the later 1700s and early 1800s, really the last time this place has seen considerable immigration. Gradually, small fishing communities appeared all along the coastline, often isolated from each other. At first, the governance of this emerging colony was in the hands of fishing admirals, governors and English merchants. Representative government, a way to make this power base more responsive, was established when an elected Assembly was granted by the British Crown in 1832. Initially, only resident men on the Island voted. Women would not be given the right to vote until 1925, and Labradorians would first vote in 1946. The colony became self-governing in 1855 with responsible government. Although some believed that Newfoundland would become part of the Canadian Confederation in 1867 (indeed, Newfoundland delegates attended both the Charlottetown Conference in July 1864 and the Québec Conference in October 1864), union with Canada would not occur until more than eight decades later. The Dominion of Newfoundland would have its own coinage and bank notes, flag, stamps and ode. On the Island and in southern Labrador it had, and still maintains today, its own distinctive mid-Atlantic time-zone, which is one half hour earlier than the closest North American zone.

Newfoundland and Labrador began the twentieth century with great promise. The opening of the Bell Island mines in the 1890s, and the later establishment of pulp and paper mills in Grand Falls, Bishop's Falls and Corner Brook, led to a much more diversified economy. The railroad, necessary for land-based economic development, was finally completed – although at great cost to the public treasury. The Island, given its geographic location, became key to the development of transatlantic flights. The Balfour Declaration (1926) and the Statute of Westminster (1931) confirmed Newfoundland's status as a Dominion. In 1927, the Privy Council ruled in Newfoundland's favour in the dispute with Canada over Labrador's boundaries.

In the two world wars, Newfoundland and Labrador distinguished itself both by commitment to the cause and by the bravery of its people. Names such as Tommy Ricketts, John Shiwak, Frances Cluett, John Ford and Margot Davies remain in our memories of those wars. The Newfoundland Regiment fought bravely in World War I, first at Gallipoli and later at the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel, where more than 90 per cent of its soldiers were killed or wounded – a tragedy we remember and mourn every July 1. The Dominion was represented in the Imperial War Cabinet and at the Versailles peace talks. In World War II, men and women from Newfoundland and Labrador served with distinction in the British and Canadian Forces, as well as in the Newfoundland-based Escort Force, which protected convoys of supply ships crossing the Atlantic. The Dominion also provided land for American bases at Goose Bay, Stephenville, St. John's and Argentia. The people of St. Lawrence and Lawn showed their bravery and generosity in the rescue of the



*Natuashish  
Makkovik  
Aniapskwof  
L'Anse au Clair  
Bristol's Hope  
Ireland's Eye  
Loch Lomond  
Conception Harbour  
Isle aux Morts  
Bay D'Espoir  
Heart's Delight  
Fox Harbour  
Swift Current  
Come-By-Chance  
St. John's*

sailors and soldiers from the American destroyer USS *Truxton* and the supply ship *Pollux*, which went aground and were wrecked during a heavy storm.

The optimism of the earlier part of the century came to an end with the Great Depression of the 1930s. The devastation it caused, coupled with the heavy debts incurred by the war effort and the railway, made the finances of the Dominion untenable. As a result, Newfoundland's legislature voluntarily gave up self-government in 1934 and was replaced by a Commission of Government appointed by Britain. Its task was to administer Newfoundland until it become self-supporting again. In 1948, by referendum, the people chose union with Canada as an alternative to a return to responsible government or the continuation of the Commission. In 1949, the Dominion of Newfoundland became the tenth province of Canada. In 2001, the name of the province was changed to Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the 54 years since Confederation, Newfoundland and Labrador has become a modern place with characteristics common to any Western society. The people of the province enjoy the benefits of a social system with publicly funded health care and education. Manufacturing industries, mines and oil wells use the most advanced technologies. One of the fastest growing industries is information technology. Strong unions, a dynamic voluntary sector and a growing business sector have strengthened our social fabric. Sophisticated telecommunications, modern forms of entertainment and urban fashions mirror lifestyles found elsewhere in Canada. Today, in addition to the descendants of the Innu, Inuit, Mi'kmaq, French, English, Irish and Scottish, there are small numbers of immigrants from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, who live mainly in urban centres. More than 95 per cent of the communities in which 90 per cent of the people live, from St. John's to Corner Brook to Forteau to Nain, are situated on coastal waters.

Our challenging geography and our history of hardship and struggle have created a people who have enormous pride in this place. We are confident in the gift we have brought to Canada. We celebrate the women and men who have built this home for us: the countless explorers, reformers, religious leaders, politicians, Aboriginal people, health care providers, musicians, artists and everyday Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have contributed to the making of this place. People such as Gudrid, Shanawdithit, John Cabot, Lord and Lady Kirke, William Carson, Armine Gosling, William Coaker, Bishop Michael Howley, Bishop Edward Feild, Emma Dawson, Philip Little, Robert Bond, Helena Strong Squires, Joseph R. Smallwood, John Joe Drew, Catherine Joe, Maniane Ashini, Lawrence Benoit, Mary Frances Webb, Martin Martin, Lydia Campbell, Elizabeth Goudie, Amos Voisey, Margaret Duley, Cassie Brown, Percy Janes, E.J. Pratt,

Ted Russell, Tommy Sexton, Minnie White, Emile Benoit, Rufus Guinchar, Joan Morrissey, Harry Hibbs, Robert Bartlett, Mose Morgan, Myra Bennett, George Story and hundreds more have imprinted their spirits on this place. The men, women and children who carved the face of this land have left us a legacy of hard work, hope in difficult times, strength in working together, creativity in facing overwhelming odds and joy in celebrating our uniqueness.

Religion has always played a significant role in the lives of the people in this place. Aboriginal traditions often exhibit a deep spirituality intimately connected to the land. Submerged for many years, these traditions are today finding a new place in the lives and dreams of the Innu, Inuit, Labrador Métis and Mi'kmaq. Christianity has had a profound influence on the history, politics and culture of the communities settled by the Europeans. Christian organizations played key roles in the development of the education, health and social systems in the province. Today, our religious traditions are constantly being expanded with the arrival of immigrants who bring the richness of other world religions and spiritual beliefs to our culture.

Unlike other parts of North America, the Newfoundland and Labrador community did not rely on specialized artisans and artists to create its culture; rather, much was made by ordinary people. "Newfoundland art is vernacular art; it speaks directly to the condition of ordinary Newfoundlanders; most of it is about their everyday lives."<sup>4</sup> Newfoundlanders and Labradorians built their own houses, boats and furniture; they knit clothing, stitched quilts and baked bread. In many cases, what is unique to Newfoundland and Labrador furniture, hooked mats, house decorations, fences, mitts and so many other things is that they were made through a combination of ideas from the individual, the community and the outside world.

The artists here have always expressed themselves through storytelling, recitations, songs and ballads, traditional dance and the music of the accordion and the fiddle. Themes from Newfoundland and Labrador folklore and folklife have furnished much of the subject matter for our plays and other theatrical performances. Novels, short stories and other literary forms often deal with the values and characteristics associated with outport life. We celebrate our unique heritage in old songs such as "Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's," "I's the B'y," "Squid Jiggin' Ground" and "Star of Logy Bay." But we also celebrate it in newer compositions like "Sonny's Dream," "Woman of the Island," "Saltwater Joys" and "Sea of No Cares." Think of the names of some of our most famous musical groups: Figgy Duff, the Wonderful Grand Band and Great Big Sea. Look to the paintings of visual artists such as David Blackwood, Christopher Pratt, Helen Parsons Shepherd and Gerald Squires. And, of course,



literary works such as Bernice Morgan's *Random Passage* or E. J. Pratt's *Newfoundland* triumphantly explore our vibrant culture and history.

In the first two decades of Confederation, Newfoundland and Labrador faced the subtle but very real threat of assimilation into the Canadian culture. During that same period, there was a strong American influence on those living near the American bases. But in the 1970s, a nationalistic revival led to a cultural "renaissance,"<sup>5</sup> which has evolved today into internationally renowned music, art and literature. In the words of Newfoundland-born, London-based independent journalist, Gwynne Dyer:

... the intellectual and artistic capital of the province has been growing at a faster rate than almost anywhere else in Canada ... writers, painters, musicians and films are making Newfoundland's special history and character known on the national and international stage as never before, and creating an attraction that brings artists here from all over the world ...<sup>6</sup>

The diversity of our ancestry and the melding of struggle and hope in our relationship with the land and seas are often reflected in our unusual place names. The Innu (Sheshatshiu, Utshimassit, Natuashish), the Inuit (Makkovik, Okak, Nutak), the Mi'kmaq (Miawpukek, Aniapskwoj, Pekwatapaq), the French (Port aux Basques, Port au Choix, L'Anse au Clair), the English (English Harbour West, Bristol's Hope, Windsor), the Irish (Ireland's Eye, Waterford Valley) and the Scottish (the Highlands, Loch Lomond) have imprinted their identities on this place. The strong influence of religion is seen in community names such as St. John's, St. Brendan's, St. Mary's, Mount Carmel, Conception Harbour, Angel's Cove and St. Lawrence. Our emotional response to the struggle and hope inherent in settling here is reflected in names such as Isle aux Morts, Port de Grave, Misery Point, Famish Gut, Bay D'Espoir, Heart's Content, Heart's Delight, Heart's Desire, Hopedale, Little Heart's Ease, Paradise and Harbour Grace. Our bond with nature is evident in names such as Fox Harbour, Gander, Deer Lake, Rose Blanche, Swift Current, Swan Island, Muskrat Brook, Corner Brook and Grand Falls. Our imagination and artistic bent have found expression in names like Come-By-Chance, Broom Point, Ladle Cove, Cape Onion, Bumble Bee Bight, Blow Me Down and Random Island. Above all, the sea permeates our imagery, as almost every community is named as Harbour, Bay, Cape, Tickle, Cove, Arm, Port, or Island.

Our provincial emblems reflect our ancestors' humour and resilience in facing the challenges of living in this place. We have the Atlantic puffin, which makes its home on the ocean and in the rugged cliffs; the pitcher plant, which lives in boggy marshes and is nourished by the insects it traps; Labradorite, or firestone, which combines an iridescent glow with the durability of ancient rock; the black spruce, which is a hardy and durable coniferous tree flourishing in a short growing season; and the endangered Newfoundland pony, possibly the oldest breed of domesticated livestock in North America. Our flag, designed by Christopher Pratt and adopted in 1980, captures the colours of snow and ice (white), the sea (blue), human effort (red) and confidence in ourselves (gold). As it seeks to link our past heritage with our present reality and future promise, the flag has visible links to the Innu and Beothuk cultures, our Commonwealth heritage, the Christian tradition and the Canadian maple leaf.

Despite life in the postmodern age, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have retained an important sense of identity, a sense of place, that links the past with the present. We have a deep sense of belonging. We care about community and value a lifestyle that balances work and time with family and friends. We have a passionate appreciation of our cultural and artistic heritage, and enjoy a strong sense of connection to the land and the sea. Our sense of attachment to this place remains remarkably strong. This was evident when the Commission visited with young people. A predominant message, in both urban and rural communities, was the crucial importance of their sense of identity and their attachment to Newfoundland and Labrador as home. We know our culture is special and even unique. And other Canadians know it, too. In a Commission poll, 72 per cent of Canadians viewed Newfoundland and Labrador as culturally distinct from Canada.<sup>7</sup>

One event in the recent past that serves as an example of our character and sense of humanity was the province's response to the tragedies of September 11, 2001. By hosting thousands of airline passengers from around the world and providing them with a "home," we did instinctively what we thought should be done. "There is a tendency on the part of some of us not to recognize the event for what it was – singular and revelatory. This gentle openness of heart is a manifestation of the Newfoundland and Labrador spirit nurtured over time and insinuated into our character, and we often forget it is that spirit which fires our sense of belonging."<sup>8</sup>

Our identity and sense of place are, and perhaps have always been, vulnerable. The impact of the loss of responsible government on the young generation of the time has never been fully examined, but it's not difficult to conclude that it must have left a changed self-image, a fear of failure and a loss of confidence. Some argue that we experienced another significant loss in 1949. One expatriate told the Commission, "We have not found that identity in Canada, because our belonging began with a loss of who we were in the moment of Confederation. We are still, I believe, stuck in that moment ... the threat of losing ourselves altogether is very real."

Others see in the closure of the cod fishery, with which our identity is so involved, a terrible impact on the attitude and spirit of our people. We blame others, and we blame ourselves. Have we accepted what has occurred in many of our rural communities? Are we in denial? Consider the following two statements received by the Commission:

Our sense of belonging to this place and a way of life have been shaken to its roots and somebody has to be held responsible. Principally it has been governments, federal and provincial, heads of organizations, business leaders.<sup>9</sup>

... Laying blame at the feet of governments, big business, or other impersonal forces creates a milieu of victimization and erodes local agency and responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

This loss of confidence, the feeling of powerlessness, may suggest that a less enduring sense of place threatens to emerge unless we all work together to fight it.

"We must ... [allow] people to learn that the story of their past, despite its perceived shortcomings, is largely one of resilience, survival and even success over the centuries."<sup>11</sup> The need to maintain and revitalize our sense of self and sense of place is fundamental to renewing and strengthening our place in Canada. As one person told the Commission, "We haven't figured out how to use our culture and identity to our social and economic advantage, to transform us from being proud of who we are to being confident in who we are."

There is a wonderful Newfoundland and Labrador image: the dory. When you row a dory, you do not look in the direction in which you are going; but, in looking at the wharf or beach you have left, you are able to guide your way to the new place. "Renewing our sense of place ... is not to go back; it is to launch out anew. We must reclaim the independent spirit which sustained us over our first 400 years."<sup>12</sup>

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are very much part of today's world. In our lifestyles, our ways of work, our music, our art, our connections around the world and our interests, we are a modern people enjoying the same experiences and facing the same challenges as Canadians everywhere. We name ourselves Canadians, proudly celebrating the values that make this country great. We have no desire to live in the past or to go back, but we have a deep conviction that the spirit which our ancestors brought here was special and lives on in each one of us. That spirit, that sense of identity, is the source of our belief



that we can make a better future for ourselves and all who will follow us. And that spirit is the unique gift we bring to the Canadian federation.

When Newfoundland and Labrador joined Canada, our nation finally became complete from sea to sea. It remains to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians at home and abroad to ensure that all Canadians know our rich history, rejoice in our uniqueness and understand our challenges. Only in this way will we feel that Canada is made complete by our presence, and that in Canada we have truly found a place of respect and dignity.

Ode to Labrador

Dear land of mountains, woods and snow  
 Our Labrador  
 God's noble gifts to us we know  
 Our Labrador  
 Thy proud resources waiting still  
 Their splendid task will soon fulfil  
 Obedient to thy Maker's will  
 Our Labrador

E minasshkuat shash tshakat tshé utnakant  
 (Thy stately forests soon shall ring)  
 Ninan Napatau (Our Labrador)  
 Tshé tshemekeishkanut  
 (Responsive to the woodman's swing)  
 Ninan Napatau (Our Labrador)  
 And might floods that long remained  
 Their raging fury unrestrained  
 Shall serve the purpose God ordained  
 Our Labrador

Kakrangit Pisugianga  
 (We love to climb the mountains steep)  
 Labradorvut (Our Labrador)  
 Uvalu imakkuluta  
 (Or paddle on the waters deep)  
 Labradorvut (Our Labrador)  
 Our snowshoes scar the trackless plains  
 We seek no city streets, nor lanes  
 We are thy sons while life remains  
 Our Labrador

Labradorvut

Ninan Napatau

*Dr. H.L. Paddon wrote the lyrics for this song to the well known tune of "O Tannenbaum". Shirley Montague composed an original melody in 1988, incorporating the Inuktitut translation by Margaret Metcalfe and the Innu-aimun translation by Ann Rich (Nuna)*

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