

Chapter 5 Lifestyles in the Nineteenth Century

Lifestyles in the 19th century focuses on diet, transportation, communication and entertainment. The church played a major role in the community by establishing and operating schools, sponsoring social events and providing spiritual guidance.

Family Life

Housing: homes reflected how people earned a living. The type of occupation reflected the size and style of home. Housing types varied greatly within the province.

- Tilt: made from logs and chinked (insulated) with moss between the joints where the logs rested on each other.
- Saltbox: a simple peaked-roof house design
- Square roof: common in out port Newfoundland
- Mansard roof: featured a curved slope pointing outward at the bottom.

Food and Diet: Aboriginals' diet consisted of seal, caribou, salmon, berries etc. European settlers ate game and fish, especially cod (fresh and salted). Once their land was cleared they planted vegetable gardens. Some kept hens, sheep and cows to provide eggs, dairy products and meat. They also imported some essentials like flour, molasses, tea, salt beef and pork. Wealthier families were able to import expensive items like spices and dried fruit. By 1924 Newfoundlanders were manufacturing foodstuffs with the help of transportation via the railway.

Entertainment and Recreation:

Social Activities: most people's waking hours were spent working. However, there were times when people took a break, particularly special occasions like Christmas. Story telling, song/music, dance, religious festivals, card playing and copying pans were part of social interactions.

Christmas celebration was a time for preparing of special foods and exchanging gifts. Burning of a Yule log (back jack) was a common activity. This was done on Christmas Eve by placing a log on the hearth at sunset and then at midnight an ember from the log was thrown over the home. It was believed that it would protect the home

from fire for the upcoming year. Another popular Christmas activity was Mummering or jannying. This was where group of people dressed in disguise would visit homes and perform a traditional song or dance. Nalujuit: people disguised in caribou or seal would visit the community reminding children to be good for the remainder of the year (done on old Christmas day, Jan 6)

Sports: 1800's was not a time for regular sporting events; there were a number of organized clubs and teams.

Games: although recreation was important, children were expected to devote much of their time to work. They tended to play most of their games outdoors skimming rocks, playing piddly, ring games or catching tom cods. In Labrador many of the skills essential for survival were practiced in the games they played. The games focused on strength, agility, endurance and patience.

Community Life

Role of the Church

Church buildings were the most prominent in the community. The church was the center for religious, social and educational life. Volunteer women's groups were usually in charge of church social activities and held fund-raisers and did charitable work. Church's importance is evident by the annual holidays and celebrations set by the church. The churches' role in education began to wane towards the middle of the 19th century because the government began to take a greater role.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell: came to Labrador in 1892 on a hospital ship and decided to stay because he found such poverty and medical need. He wanted medical reform and help raise money to build hospitals, nursing stations and schools. He will be remembered as a pioneer who brought medical care to northern Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mary Southcott: a nurse from St. John's who received her nurse's training in England. She founded Newfoundland's first school of nursing. She was also involved in Child Welfare Association, the Girl Guides and the League of Women Voters.

Health Care: in the 1800's the basis for health care was the community. Knowledge of plants and other home remedies was passed down from generation to the next. Generally one or two women inherited that knowledge. Only larger communities such as St. John's had fulltime doctors, while small communities generally had traveling doctors with few trained nurses. Traveling conditions were dangerous and most surgical procedures were done in the home because hospitals were seen as a place to protect the public more than treating the patients. Many diseases were spread in the hospital because very little was known about germs and harmful microscopic organisms.

Connecting People and Community:

In the 1800's people did not have the modern-day communications we enjoy today. People led relatively isolated lives where communication and transportation was limited. There was a postal service, but delivery was slow.

- **Communication**: the only contact some communities had with the outside would be from fishing schooners, trading vessels and visiting clergy and school inspectors. In Labrador because the communities were so small and there were such vast areas to cover, contact with the outside reduced and time between mail deliveries lengthened. The invention of the telegraph greatly improved communication because people could communicate with a system called Morse code. After cables were installed from Europe to North America messages could be sent across the Atlantic Ocean. In 1901 Guglielmo Marconi enhanced communication when he received the first **wireless** communication across the Atlantic greatly improving long-distance communication.
- **Transportation**: in the 1800's most communities in Newfoundland and Labrador were quite isolated. By the 1870's government subsidized (helped pay for) coastal steamers to link communities on the island and Labrador. The arrival of a ship was a great occasion and many people would gather to observe. This also greatly improved the postal service because ships were visiting the communities on a regular basis. The building of the railway also greatly improved travel because freight and passengers could move from place to place year-round. Also by the end of the 19th century was a regular crossing between Newfoundland and North Sydney as well as to England.