

Robert Slade & Co.

Robert Slade & Co. of Poole (later Slade & Kelson), England, with Newfoundland headquarters at Trinity, was the first to set up business premises in Bird Island Cove. As early as 1813, less than ten years after permanent settlement, Slade's agents expressed an interest in the area. On June 25th of that year Mr. William Kelson, an agent for the company at Trinity, forwarded a letter to Robert Slade in Poole: (Slade Collection , PANL, P7.)

...The greater part of the Bird Island Planters now deal with me instead of going to St. John's or Bonavista and to encourage them I have already sent down 160 hhds. salt with a small assortment of goods and provisions and have no doubt of obtaining the whole of them. I calculate on procuring from thence (if the voyages turn out tolerably) the ACTIVE'S cargo of fish...I wish it were not such a wild place for ships to ride in , but I think it will answer very well if we can only get a store built at Catalina. I am told there is an excellent place in the latter Hbr. for vessels to lay close to wharves and stores which might be constructed and which have been unoccupied for several years past. I think I shall shortly go down there and, if I find it so, will try to spare two or three hands with a small boat to catch and make some fish merely for the sake of taking possession of a spot until we have an opportunity of building a room, or until I have your opinion concerning it. I think this will answer much better than your plan of sending to Goose Cove on the french shore next winter, as there is every prospect of obtaining all the Planters in that direction as well as many from Bonavista. Bonavista and the Bird Islands are allowed to be the best places on the whole coast for fish, and Catalina is said to be with respect to safety for shipping not inferior to Trinity, and it certainly has double or treble the chance that Trinity has of admitting vessels early in the spring ...

Slade followed Kelson's advice and established a business at Catalina. The first manager of the branch was James Lannigan. The following extracts from a letter written by Kelson to Lannigan at Catalina show that some Bird Island Cove settlers dealt with the Catalina branch of the firm: (Slade Collection , PANL, P7.)

April 29, 1819

...Thomas Cole states that he could not get the balance of his account from you in bill last year and writes for it now. Perhaps he had as much bill as you promised him, however, as I learn from Follett that you have a good quantity of pelts from him this spring, I have forwarded to him £27.....

May 4, 1819

...it afforded me much pleasure to learn you had procured all of the Bird Island seals and that your collection exceeded the four or five thousand that you calculated upon in the early part of the season...

In 1822 Lannigan was sentenced to a jail term for larceny, and was deported! He was succeeded at Catalina by Alexander Bremner (1793-1878), a Scotsman from Nairn, who had joined the Slade firm at Trinity in 1811. (The Evening Telegram, Aug 27, 1963.)

Shortly after the establishment of the Catalina store, and prior to 1825, the Bird Island Cove branch store was opened: (The Evening Telegram, Aug 27, 1963.)

ELLISTON:

This place, formerly Bird Island Cove, was my boyhood home from 1905 to 1918. It was permanently settled by the first ancestors there of its present people about 1808-20. Nearby Catalina was my home for six years in early manhood, 1919-25. I am very familiar with the history and traditions of Elliston and, to some extent, with those of Catalina. The name and the firm of Slade were very familiar to the older folk at Elliston during my boyhood...practically all Elliston people purchased their food and other supplies from, and sold their fish to, Slade at Catalina..

...A Slade shop is known on an Elliston land diagram about 1825, which building, successively owned by Slade, Bremner and a Hobbs fishing family, was demolished in 1940. The Slade firm at Catalina no doubt kept a shop in it for years, but perhaps only in the summertime.

The several similar iron firebacks surviving at Elliston from houses built around 1830 were obviously imported through the Catalina Slade branch, and the initials R.S. on them are undoubtedly for Robert Slade; one of these firebacks is now at the Newfoundland Museum, donated about 1959 by Mr. William Trask, descendant of its first owner, Mark Chard, fisherman and teacher.

Two of my ancestors, Thomas Cole and John Gough, mention in their wills, of 1833 and 1858, monies of theirs "now in the hands of Robert Slade, merchant."

N.C. Crewe,

1963.

The following letter from the **Tilley Collection** (The Tilley Collection, PANL, P 6/B/16.) suggests that at least part of the Slade & Kelson business was located in that section of the community later occupied by the Tilley merchants- in the general vicinity of the Tilley Historic House which is undergoing restoration:

Mr. Thomas Clouter

Bought of Slade & Kelson

That fishing room or plantation in Bird Island Cove late occupied by Michael Driscoll for the sum of £10, half of payable this next fall & the other half the next succeeding fall.

By the above instrument Slade & Kelson's interests and property in the room or plantation referred to is sold to Thos Clouter, which interest and property, they, the

said Slade & Kelson derive from Michael Driscoll, the last owner and occupier - done at Bird Island Cove this tenth day of April, 1826.

for Slade & Kelson

Alexander Bremner

And this excerpt from the same reference:

Know all men...that Slade & Kelson of Catalina, Merchants, in consideration of the sum of £10 paid by Thomas Clouter of Bird Island Cove, fisherman...have hereby sold...that fishing room or plantation situated in Bird Island Cove known by the name of Driscoll's Room...

In witness whereof I have hereunto fixed my hand this first day of September one thousand eight hundred and thirty one.

for Slade & Kelson

Alexander Bremner

Attached to this document is a note by N.C. Crewe:

The original bears the certificate of John Stark, Registrar of the Northern District Court.....it is odd that no boundaries are given. It is, I take it, the room on which Clouter fished, lived and died, now owned by his grand nephews, Edward Tilley and his brothers, as I have never heard of his having owned any other room in Bird Island Cove. I have never heard of it having first been called Driscoll's room, nor of Driscoll having lived or fished at either Bird Island Cove, Catalina or Bonavista....

Slade and Kelson monopolized the fishing business of the area for about thirty years. In the early 1850^s, with business on the decline, the Company began vacating some of the property at Bird Island Cove. In the 1850-51 report of **The Colonial Church and School Society**, Rev. T. Dunn stated:⁷

...There was difficulty in finding a room to keep the school, the old building having become quite untenable, but by the kindness of Messrs. Slades, of Poole, we have been accommodated with an excellent store for that purpose...

The last of the Slade property in Bird Island Cove was sold in 1862: (The Daily News, July 4, 1862)

"Sale by Auction"

On Thursday the 10th of July in the Commercial Sale room, all those well known Mercantile Premises occupied by Robert Slade and Co. in Trinity and Catalina, the latter having as an appendage a small store and plot of ground at Bird Island Cove...

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Information Provided by Mr. Doug Cole