

**Chapter 1**  
**Beginnings**

**Bird Island Cove and Muddy Brook**

The Town of Elliston is located on the east coast of Newfoundland in Trinity Bay. Specifically, it is on the northeastern tip of the historic Bonavista Peninsula and, by car, is only minutes away from Bonavista. It is nearly a three hundred-kilometer drive from the capital city of St. John's.

This settlement was originally known by the somewhat commonplace name of Bird Island Cove. This particular designation and variations of the same, were quite familiar to the seventeenth century migratory fishermen who frequented our fishing grounds. The name was quite appropriate due to the presence of two small islands, North and South Bird Island, which lie just off its coast and the thousands of seabirds that inhabit them. There is also a third island known as McCarthy's or Carty's Island, which is little more than baron rock. The community retained this descriptive name until the early twentieth century. Rev. Charles Lench campaigned to rename it Elliston, to honour Methodist Minister William Ellis. In April of 1814, Rev. Ellis held the settlement's first Methodist sermon at the residence of George Crewe.<sup>1</sup> Details surrounding his life include:<sup>2</sup>

Missionary. Perhaps the most memorable, certainly the most indefatigable, of all the early Methodist missionaries to Newfoundland, Ellis, like many others of his calling in those days, was an Irishman, born in County Down. There as a youth he witnessed some of the battles of the uprisings of 1797-98, on one occasion barely escaping with his life when his family in hiding was discovered by the enemy. The timely arrival of friendly troops saved his life, a circumstance that Ellis ascribed to the intervention of Divine Providence, which, he believed, had saved him for a purpose. Shortly thereafter he offered himself as a Methodist Class

Leader and Local Preacher. The date of his ordination is uncertain, but in 1808 as an ordained minister he was sent to Newfoundland, where he was to spend his entire ministry of twenty-nine years and become the first British Methodist missionary to die and be buried on the Island. He also had the distinction of being in 1816-17 the first Chairman of the newly-created Methodist District of Newfoundland (under the British Methodist Conference). His circuits in Newfoundland included most of the major ones in the District: Bonavista (during three separate terms, in 1812-15, 1820-21, and 1832-35), Blackhead, Brigus-Cupids, Port de Grave (which then also included Bay Roberts and Clark's Beach), and Harbour Grace. His posting in 1816 to Trinity, Trinity Bay, where several earlier attempts to establish a mission had failed, met with no greater success, though at a later time a substantial Methodist circuit was constituted at Trinity. He was, however, instrumental in laying the groundwork for at least two new missions that soon grew into substantial circuits: at Catalina, and at Bird Island Cove, where he is believed to have preached the first sermon to its Protestant residents and which some eighty years later was renamed Elliston in his memory. He died and was buried at Harbour Grace in 1837.

The residents of Bird Island Cove, under Rev. Lench's leadership, petitioned the government to change the name of their community to Elliston on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1902, and approval was given a few weeks later.<sup>3</sup> While it is generally believed that the residents wholeheartedly supported this initiative, this was not the case. An unidentified resident wrote a letter to the editor expressing dissatisfaction. This dissenting voice asserts:<sup>4</sup>

. . . a number of our people were very much opposed to the name being altered. . . . It is true that a petition was got up and signed, but I don't think many knew just what it was about, and I believe that if another petition had been taken around at the same time praying that no alteration be made in the good old name of Bird Island Cove, it would have been more largely signed.

Even in the twenty-first century, various parts of the municipality are known by distinct names. On the northern section of Town, one can find places such as Norder Cove (Northern Cove), North Side, and Coles' Gulch. On the southern region of the community there are locations such as Crawler's Hill, South Side, Porter's Point, Sandy Cove, and the Neck.

Just southeast of Elliston is the tiny settlement originally known by the name of Muddy Brook. This picturesque community was renamed through the efforts of Anglican Rev. Augustus George Bayly, from Bonavista. A letter written by N. C. Crewe (deceased) to Rev. Gordon Elliott May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1966, states "I imagine Canon Bayly was disturbed at the change, [renaming of Bird Island Cove] . . . but that did not prevent him about 1905 from getting the name of Muddy Brook . . . changed to Maberley [sic]."<sup>5</sup> Why Rev. Bayly, who became a Canon in 1919, chose that name is uncertain, but it has been suggested it was renamed for a girl he had once known.<sup>6</sup> The following was written as a tribute to Canon Bayly by life long Maberly resident Aubrey Pearce<sup>7</sup> (deceased).



Canon Bayly at Maberly during the 1920's

**In Memory of Canon Bayly**

This little place called Maberly  
Was named by Canon Bayly,  
A holy man, who ministered here  
To everyone with loving care.  
He preached and visited the sick  
In every home, in every creek,  
A noble man who loved mankind,  
A man of God, a man divine.

How often when I was a boy  
I'd watch to see him riding by.  
With horse and sleigh he'd laughing go;  
His noble horse, he called it Clo.  
Seven miles in winter's sleet and now  
From Bonavista he did go  
To preach and visit all his flock;  
A shepherd true, staunch as a rock.

I see him now, though years have gone,  
A-lifting up his voice in song.  
I loved to hear his wondrous voice;  
His singing made one's heart rejoice.  
And when he preached the Word divine  
It seemed to me a light did shine  
Above his forehead, a halo there  
Did glorify his features fair.

What hardships this good man endured  
While working for his Blessed Lord.  
He only had his horse and sleigh  
To help him on his lonely way.  
But God was always by his side,  
He knew no fear with Him as guide.  
He ventured forth in winter's storm,  
For God would keep him safe from harm.

Though many years are past and gone,  
His voice I hear in memory's song.  
His features, too, I can descry;  
His lovely smile and twinkling eye.  
He had a joke for everyone,  
With beaming smile, his face it shone.

His charity was good to all;  
He loved to give at every call.

His memory ne'er will pass away.  
His godliness did all us sway.  
As boys we learned from him of God,  
He tried to lead us where he trod.  
He now has gone to his reward  
For preaching God's own precious Word.  
This loving tribute here I pen  
To one of Nature's noblemen.

Today, Maberly and the previously mentioned locations are generally grouped under the umbrella designation of Elliston for administrative purposes. This little community is quite unique, and residents can even pick berries that grow in or near their backyards. Information concerning this hamlet is neatly summarized in a second narrative poem by Aubrey Pearce appropriately entitled *Maberly*<sup>8</sup>. This particular poem is displayed on one of the many interpretive signs placed throughout the area.

### **Maberly**

We hear this spoken by some folk  
Maberly soon will be  
A ghost town with its industry  
The Salt Cod Fishery.

No stages, boats nor fishing gear  
Are seen along the shore  
The old folks that once caught the cod  
Are gone for evermore.

A lovely spot is Maberly  
This hamlet by the sea  
In summer when the tourist come  
They love its scenery.

The marshes and the barrens too  
Abound with berries wild  
A source of income for the folks



Maberly 1930's

And every boy and child.

People come from near and far  
Those berries for to pick  
With bakeapples in the early fall  
They fill their buckets quick.

The partridgeberry industry  
Alike for rich and poor  
Is better here than anywhere  
Along the Eastern shore.

The blueberry is scarce in quantity  
Is still a source of wealth  
And makes sweet wine for Christmas time  
It's good too for one's health.

The folks grow all the crops they need  
The land is fertile here  
Potatoes are as good as seen  
At any country fair.

Two miles of road connect this place  
To the Town of Elliston  
Its upkeep by the government  
Is very small when done.

The school bus no doubt cost a bit  
Of dough to make it go  
And then there is the snow plow  
That clears the road of snow.

The electric lights along the road  
And in our homes likewise  
Are paid when due, we never fink  
Though some say people try.

The facts that's stated here are true  
We never will agree  
To end our days away from home  
In some locality.

We have good water near at hand  
The best that can be found

And grazing land is plentiful  
For cattle all around.

There's tons of hay that could be cut  
For grass is plenty here  
Enough to feed a thousand sheep  
The people do declare.

Nature has provided us  
With codfish in galore  
And berries that are plentiful  
No distance from our door.

Some of the folks that once lived here  
Have settled now in town  
They thought electric lights  
Would never get around.

Now when they come to visit here  
And see the old homestead  
They view with envy those who stayed  
Although they were in need.

Centralization may be best  
When things are handled right  
But dumping people everywhere  
Is sure an awful sight.

What good is it to leave a place  
Where plenty can be found  
And live one's days in poverty  
Within some busy town?

To move the houses from this place  
Much money would be spent  
Enough to buy an airplane  
And cross the continent.

They say this twentieth century  
Will see the end of time  
If this is so we then will be  
Within some other clime.

So when you look at it this way

And others stated here  
Let us enjoy our heritage  
The place we love so dear.

If Joey and his government  
Would lend a helping hand  
We'd make this place a paradise  
The best in Newfoundland.

Canon Bayly named this place  
From Bonavista Town  
A Godly man who loved to preach  
To people all around.

We love it more because of him  
And all of us agree  
There is no better place to live  
Than here in Maberly.

The preceding poem makes a passing reference to resettlement. Some people at Maberly and the Neck chose to move to the larger site of Elliston, which had the availability of electricity thirty-four years before Maberly. Many of us may be familiar with the images of homes being floated to their destinations. However, the relocation of Clarence Goodland's house from the Neck to Elliston was captured on film by Samuel Ryan.



## Continuous Settlement

It is generally believed that Elliston was first permanently settled in the year 1806. However, this statement is not entirely accurate. The first attempt at permanent settlement was by a group of Irish Catholics, who were driven off by order of the then Governor of Newfoundland, Molyneux Shuldham. To say the Government or at least the Governor had a somewhat negative view of Bird Island Cove is quite an understatement. In 1774, he made his view on the subject crystal clear with a reference to:<sup>9</sup>

. . . the Nuisance occasioned by sundry Idle and worthless Papists, contrary to Law fixing themselves in a certain concealed place called by the name of Bird Island Cove where every evil person may find an asylum when they fly from justice, where stolen goods have been conveyed and which is become a nest of such people who in general are a pest to society and therefore request I will give an order for removing and suppressing this Growing Evil. . . .

Instead of affirming that first permanent settlement began in 1806, it would be more correct to suggest continuous settlement has occurred since 1806, although a degree of uncertainty has existed about the precise year. Initially, three possibilities for settlement stood out and they were 1805, 1806, or 1808. In correspondence between N. C. Crewe and others, reference is made to a petition concerning the improvement of roads. Unfortunately, this petition was not dated, although it declares that “. . . forty-eight years have passed away since the first person came to this settlement to reside.” A 1962 letter places it at 1856, suggesting the date of settlement would be 1808, but I dismiss that possibility in light of information contained in a 1966 letter. It makes reference to an undated draft of a cover letter, written by Robert Tilly, which was intended to accompany the petition. Presumably, about the same time, Mr. Tilly wrote to Rev. James England, a Methodist, who was at Bonavista during the period

of 1851-1854. Since Mr. Tilly came to the community in the spring of 1853, this petition would have been sent between his arrival, and the departure of Rev. England, suggesting the date of settlement could be either 1805 or 1806.<sup>10</sup> While the petition was not dated, the date of its consideration by Government was recorded, on page 136, in the Journal of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland, as Monday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1854.<sup>11</sup> Considering the available evidence, if we go back forty-eight years from 1854, the date of 1806 must indeed be the actual date continuous settlement began in the community.

This small settlement was also the site of literary inspiration during the mid nineteenth century. Rev. Lench notes that “It was in this quiet village that Philip Tocque, Esq., merchant afterwards the Rev. Philip Tocque, M.A., D.D., partly raised his family and began his literary career.”<sup>12</sup> His book, published in 1846, was the first book written in the community. It was titled *Wandering Thoughts or Solitary Hours* and covered a variety of topics with multiple references to Bird Island Cove.

According to Slade and Company records, the founding families of Bird Island Cove included Baker, Burt, Chant, Chard, Chaulk, Clouter, Cole, Coles, Crewe, Flinn, Gough, Hill, Hobbs, Hollahan, Martin, Minchiner, Miles, Minty, Murphy, Oldford, Pearce, Porter, Randell, Sanger, Stead, Trask, Tucker, and Way.<sup>13</sup> While the vast majority of the settlers were basically law abiding, there were some exceptions. There is some speculation that a few of these early settlers may have had something less than exemplary backgrounds:<sup>14</sup>

First settlers at Bird Island Cove were Michael Meaney or maybe (Maheney) and Peter Hackett.

“Meaney” settled in the North Side of Northern Cove Brook about where the House of John Hicks now stands.

Hackett settled on the South Side of the Brook below or near the Brook by the piece of land now owned by Joseph Crewe . . . owned previously by the Chaulk family.

Then came William Chaulk who also settled at Northern Cove but Hackett and Meaney made it so uncomfortable for Chaulk that he moved to Muddy Brook. Shortly after this both Hackett and Meaney disappeared. Meaney going to some part of Bonavista Bay, probably Stock Cove where some of descendants now reside.

It was generally reported that both Hackett & Meaney had escaped from the old country as convicts. Nothing seems to have been known of Hackett's movements after that. . . .

Even though continuous settlement began in 1806, seasonal residency probably occurred much earlier. The majority of these settlers traveled to this new found land in search of a better life and opportunities that were not readily available in their homelands. They not only brought hope with them but also their skills, knowledge, and determination.



**Top:** North Side of Elliston as viewed from Crawler's Hill

**Middle:** South Side of Elliston as viewed from the United Church



**Bottom:** Maberly as viewed from the sea

Chapter One Notes

1. N. C. Crewe, "Elliston File," Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador.
2. J. R. Smallwood, "Elliston," Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1967 ed.
3. Ray Troke and Associates, The Elliston Adventure (Summer/Fall 2000) 24.
4. "From Elliston," The Daily News 28 May. 1902.
5. Crewe.
6. Ella Pearce, Conversations.
7. Aubrey Pearce, Poetry.
8. Pearce.
9. Crewe.
10. Crewe.
11. Journal of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland: Second Session of the Fifth General Assembly, Petition from Robert Tilley and others, of Bird Island Cove (St. John's: Newfoundland, 1 May. 1854) 136.
12. Charles Lench, The Story of Methodism in Bonavista and of the Settlements Visited by the Early Preachers, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (St. John's: Robinson and Company. 1919.) 145.
13. Troke 19.
14. Crewe.