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## Chapter 7

# BIRD ISLAND PUFFIN FESTIVAL

### Annual Festivities



Crowd at the 2005 Bird Island Puffin Festival

The creation of the Bird Island Puffin Festival was one of the original aims of Tourism Elliston and, by far, the most successful. If one were asked to sum up this phenomenon in a single word, it would be volunteerism. The level of organization and commitment needed to hold a successful week long event is staggering. This extends from the executive of Tourism Elliston down to the people who put in a shift at the park. At all levels volunteer support is extremely important, from those who cook meals to those who run the various booths, everyone makes a valuable contribution. Likewise the sixty hours of live entertainment at the Festival would not be possible if it was not donated by talented persons. This annual event draws thousands of people each year to the area. It is the largest cultural event in the entire region and is held during the third week of July. The Festival also boasts the Province's largest Root Cellar Jiggs Dinner, utilizing vegetables taken from the local cellars.

The first Festival was held in 1998 and it has grown every year thereafter. The 1999 Festival saw a large reunion of friends, relatives, and acquaintances at the first Come Home Year celebrations. The 2000 Millennium Festival was also a great success for all involved. Each year the municipal park, which is the focal point of the festivities, has undergone several improvements including new construction. Initially a temporary stage and tents sufficed but that arrangement could not cope with the success that followed. Since that time several buildings have been constructed to enhance the experience for all. A permanent stage has been built and again expanded; a kitchen built and equipped with electrical appliances as well as a large multipurpose building that is used for serving beverages and various exhibitions. Permanent game and craft booths have also been added making it much more convenient for all users.

The Festival now encompasses many different activities and new ideas/events are still being developed. It runs for an entire week and can be divided into two main divisions: pre-Festival activities and the live entertainment extended weekend. The pre-Festival activities have included the Flowers Cove hike and boil up, which is held about twenty minutes inland from Maberly, a community night held at the recreation center, and a breakfast at the municipal park. The Festival's opening ceremonies is held on a Thursday but the motorcade is the event that really announces the beginning of the festivities as it travels through the neighboring communities. Live entertainment takes place at the park each day/night thereafter.

Recent years have seen the establishment of several memorial events, held in the name of deceased Elliston residents and those with a connection to the community. These specialized events have contributed to the significance of the whole week and have added even more prizes to an already impressive line up. Currently, there are four memorial challenges: The Ray Durdle Memorial Dart Challenge, The Uriel Moulard Memorial Bowling Challenge, The Peter Tucker Memorial Shooting Challenge, and The Norman Pearce Memorial Horseshoe Challenge. In addition

to the prizes, the winners of these events have their names added to memorial plaques that are on permanent display at the Elliston recreation centre.

The Festival has continued to expand, and at the moment the largest event is the Peninsula Idol contest. In front of huge crowds and a panel of judges, contestants from all over the Bonavista Peninsula compete for hundreds of dollars in prize money. To date Idols have hailed from Bonavista, Catalina, and Hickman's Harbour.

### **Newsletter Excerpts**

Tourism Elliston began publishing/distributing a series of *Updates* to keep the public informed of the committee's activities and progress surrounding the Bird Island Puffin Festival. Here are excerpts from selected newsletters concerning that event. The first update from August of 1998 refers to the very first Festival:<sup>1</sup>

Dear Friends:

The Bird Island Puffin Festival has set a new standard for festivals on the Bonavista Peninsula, particularly in organization and community involvement. Our Committee has received congratulations from every segment of our society. The support for our group was never stronger than it was during the preparation of the Park for the Festival and during the Festival itself. To each and every person who contributed in any way to the success of this Festival, a sincere thank you. Our group took the Festival to the top of the hill; but you, the volunteers, took us down the other side to a triumphant finish.

Financially, the Festival was an enormous success. Tourism Elliston had accumulated more than \$10,000 in expenses prior to and during the Festival. Our gross revenues exceeded \$15,000, which enabled us to make a profit of \$5,000. The Recreation Committee received all the profits from the beer tent and the Bingo, and did equally as well as we did or better, and already one can see the improvements. . . .

A newsletter from September of 1999 highlights the success of the Come Home Year celebrations and the plans for the Millennium Festival:<sup>2</sup>

An incredible Bird Island Festival and what a wonderful welcome for all the people who came home! We did our community proud. Enough said! Let's get ready for the Millennium Bird Island Puffin Festival celebrations scheduled for the week for July 17-23, 2000. . . Get ready for the biggest turnout of people as we will lead all communities on the Bonavista Peninsula in not only welcoming in the new Millennium but also in providing seven (7) days of the best program and entertainment on the Discovery Trail.

A newsletter from 2000 provides details on the Price is Right Household Showcase:<sup>3</sup>

In the next few weeks we will be starting to purchase items for our "Price is Right" new "Household Showcase" for the upcoming Festival in 2001. The showcase will contain no less than \$1000 and no more than \$2000 worth of "household" items. For just a toonie you could win this showcase. A trip to the stage, place your bid once the showcase is revealed, and if your price is the closest without going over, you walk away with the complete showcase. There is nothing to it!! Ask Debbie Stone who this summer walked away with the entire media showcase! Get ready for a great showcase!

A newsletter from September of 2001, reiterates the success of that year's Festival:<sup>4</sup>

The summer is gradually coming to a close and what an exciting summer it was for residents and visitors alike. The Bird Island Puffin Festival again exceeded all expectations drawing record crowds during the festival period. Great food, great music, and great game prizes all created a special atmosphere at this year's festival. The highlight of the week no doubt was Saturday night with more than 6600 people in attendance and being

entertained by the best local entertainment that can be found in our province. A special thanks to the scores of entertainers who came forward and the hundreds of volunteers who made this festival such a huge success. Financially, the festival turned in a profit of more than \$10,000 for Tourism Elliston, Inc.; and from all reports, the Recreation Committee also did quite well. The festival is the main source of revenue for both organizations and provides both committees with much needed finances in order to reinvest into community projects. Again this year, it was a pleasure to work with the Recreation Committee and the Town of Elliston in putting off one of the top folk festivals in our province. It is always an exciting challenge for us to make each new festival bigger and better than the one the year before.

A newsletter from February of 2002 outlines the progress at the municipal park, and the selection process for the Lucky Entertainer of the Year draw:<sup>5</sup>

Exactly what is happening here at Elliston? Definitely the biggest thing right now is the improvements to the Bird Island Puffin Festival infrastructure at the Municipal Park. Tourism Elliston partnered with the Town of Elliston and the Recreation Committee have submitted a proposal to ACOA to build and improve existing infrastructure at the Park. Tourism Elliston redirected \$25,000 from its Heritage Development account to jumpstart the project. Approximately one-quarter of a million dollars will be invested in this new infrastructure from all partners. ACOA and HRDC are the major financial partners. A multi-purpose building and shelter 40 x 60 feet, which will house the beer tent during the Festival, is no doubt the biggest addition to the infrastructure. The work crew at the Park has this building pretty well constructed and is currently working on a 20' extension to the kitchen-picnic shelter area. The fencing around the Park is nearly completed and compliments the existing infrastructure. A new stage is also proposed with the existing stage being used for a dressing room and prop storage preparation area. . . .

Tourism Elliston is pleased to announce that on Presentation /Showcase Sunday at our Festival on July 21, we will be conducting a drawing for "The Lucky Entertainer of the Year." Each entertainer who performs in at least one slot at our Festival will have his/her name or the group name entered for a special draw on Sunday night. The Lucky Entertainer of the Year will receive a check for \$500 from Tourism Elliston in appreciation not only for performing at our Puffin Festival but also their contribution to the many benefit concerts and other functions where they so freely give of their time. This will now become an annual presentation at the Bird Island Puffin Festival.

The first newsletter of 2003 profiles the plans for the sixth annual Festival, and it also announces the beginning of the popular Peninsula Idol contest:<sup>6</sup>

Tourism Elliston will add two new special attractions to this year's festival. This year we will present the first ever exclusive kids' showcase - our version of the Price is Right - on Sunday, July 20, 2003. This showcase will be specially designed for kids from the age of 5 - 12. . . The value of the showcase will be between \$500 - \$1000. . . .

Tourism Elliston is searching for the "Peninsula Idol." This contest is open to all residents on the Bonavista Peninsula, male and female, ages 13 - 21 as of July 20, 2003. The contest is open to all residents from Clarenville to Bonavista and includes all the communities that branch off from the Cabot Highway. Interested participants must have vocal talents.

A 2004 newsletter addresses the concern for professional security at the ever growing Festival:<sup>7</sup>

Tourism Elliston, the town, the Recreation Committee, and the RCMP have been meeting on a regular basis to put in place a safe and secure festival. With each year we have seen a dramatic rise in attendance, and as a result we now have to address the security issues. . . Tourism Elliston and the Recreation Committee have enlisted the services of Clarke's

Security, a new local company to work with us to provide a safe family environment for our Festival.

The second newsletter of 2005 refers to the continuing success of the Festival:<sup>8</sup>

We are currently one of the few remaining non-commercialized Festivals in Newfoundland and Labrador. Honorable Paul Shelly, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, in his address at our Festival in 2004, listed our Festival as one of the top 10 events in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2006 newsletter discusses the community's bicentennial, events of the Second Come Home Year, and the excitement concerning that largest prize ever to be given away at Elliston:<sup>9</sup>

No doubt the highlights of this Come Home Year and Puffin Festival will be midnight on Sunday when we will draw the winning ticket on our 2006 Chevrolet Cobalt. . . The car will be displayed in Bonavista during the month of June and here in Elliston during July month up to the draw. Imagine yourself driving away in a brand new Cobalt. . . .

Tourism Elliston members are getting excited about this Come Home Year and the Ninth Bird Island Puffin Festival. We hope you are too. We are looking forward to the biggest party in the history of our community. Be a part of this year in history. Celebrate the 200th Anniversary of our town! Celebrate the Come Home Year and celebrate the Puffin Festival at the same time!

Excited as can be!  
Calv Hayley  
Public Relations Chair  
Tourism Elliston, Inc.

## Pictorial Retrospective

There have been a total of eight enormously successful Bird Island Puffin Festivals with the ninth on the immediate horizon. The task of compiling a handful of pictures to represent this phenomena is momentous. Despite the fact that photographs from the 1998 and 2000 Festivals are not available for use in this publication and the number of pictures from 1999 being quite limited, a great deal of images do exist. Since the 2001 Festival, Tourism Elliston has made their digital camera available resulting in an abundance of digital images. In 2003, I began to make extensive use of my own digital camera, and since then my collection of hundreds of digital photographs have increased to several thousand.

Each year attendance at the annual Bird Island Puffin Festival grows as well as its notoriety. The following pages contain a selection of assorted photographs surrounding past events and activities. There are several crowd pictures so look closely and you might just see someone you know.



Crowd scene at the 2003 Kid's Showcase



**Above:** The beach, park, and traffic during the 2004 Festival

**Below:** 2004 Peninsula Idol Shevonne Donovan and other contestants





**Above:** A 2003 crowd enjoying some live entertainment

**Below:** Tug of war game at Sandy Cove Beach (2005)





**Above:** People enjoying some entertainment in 2002

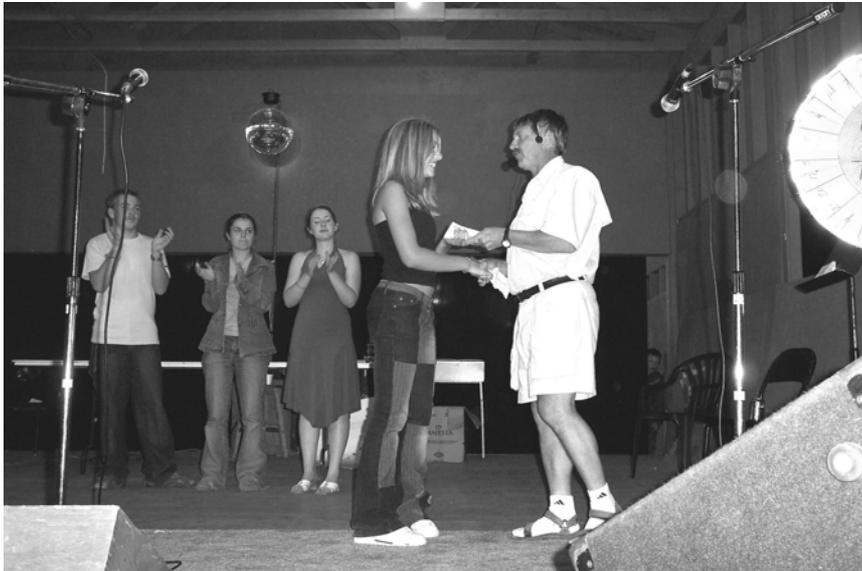
**Below:** Crowd scene at the 2005 Festival





**Above:** Root Cellar Jiggs Dinner at the 2004 Festival

**Below:** Calvin Hayley presenting 2003 Peninsula Idol winner Bobbi Bartlett with a \$500.00 cash prize





**Above:** Contestants taking aim with .22 rifles at the 2005 Peter Tucker Memorial Shooting Challenge

**Below:** The 2001 Uriel Mouland Memorial Bowling Challenge





**Above:** A 2005 photograph of the Norman Pearce Memorial Horseshoe Challenge

**Below:** The 2003 Ray Durdle Memorial Dart Challenge





**Above:** Crowd scene at the 2003 Festival

**Below:** The 2003 Community Night at the Recreation Centre





**Above:** Crowd at the Flowers Cove Boil Up in 2004

**Below:** Federal Member Scott Simms serving hot dogs at the 2004 Festival





**Above:** Body Bingo Game in 2001

**Below:** 2005 Peninsula Idol contestants selling tickets on stuffed toys





**Above:** Flowers Cove Hike in 2002

**Below:** Flowers Cove Boil Up in 2002





**Above:** Crowd scene at 2001 Festival

**Below:** Volunteers prepare meals at the 2001 Festival





**Above:** 2004 Kid's Showcase winner Daniel Tucker with his winnings

**Below:** The "Man with the Magic Touch" Carlton Trask performs a magic show for local children at the Recreation Centre in 2003





**Above:** Elliston Sport Shoot during the 1999 Festival

**Below:** Nighttime crowd scene taken during the 2003 Bird Island Puffin Festival





**Above:** 2005 Peninsula Idol winner Aaron Vardy with Sarah Fennell (2<sup>nd</sup>) and Kathryn Wheeler (3<sup>rd</sup>)

**Below:** 2005 Bird Island Puffin Festival Motorcade





**Above:** MHA Roger Fitzgerald, Tourism Elliston Chairperson Marilyn Coles-Hayley, Tourism Minister Paul Shelley & Tourism Elliston P. R. Chair Calvin Hayley enjoying Jiggs Dinners in 2004

**Below:** Nighttime crowd scene taken during the 2005 Festival



**Chapter Seven Notes**

1. Calvin Hayley, "Update," Tourism Elliston Newsletters 7 Aug. 1998.
2. Calvin Hayley, "Update," Tourism Elliston Newsletters 1 Sep. 1999.
3. Calvin Hayley, "Update," Tourism Elliston Newsletters 29 Sep. 2000.
4. Calvin Hayley, "Update," Tourism Elliston Newsletters 10 Sep. 2001.
5. Calvin Hayley, "Update," Tourism Elliston Newsletters 18 Feb. 2002.
6. Calvin Hayley, "Update," Tourism Elliston Newsletters 30 Apr. 2003.
7. Calvin Hayley, "Update," Tourism Elliston Newsletters 21 Jun. 2004.
8. Calvin Hayley, "Update," Tourism Elliston Newsletters 15 Jun. 2005.
9. Calvin Hayley, "Update," Tourism Elliston Newsletters 15 Feb. 2006.