

Chapter 8

ATTRACTIONS AND MEMORABLE EVENTS

Historic Structures



Elliston United Church

Elliston has been the home of several historic buildings, but sadly some have been torn down or have deteriorated to the point that restoration may no longer be practical. At one time the Town had four Churches namely Anglican, Pentecostal, Salvation Army, and United (formerly Methodist). The former Pentecostal Church is now a private residence, and the former Salvation Army is privately owned. Only two churches remain in operation: St. Mary's Anglican Church and the Elliston United Church. St. Mary's is an official historic site that was constructed about 1872 on the site of Elliston's first Anglican Church.

A Methodist service held on the final day of 1899 was quite eventful as noted by Rev. Lench:¹

Mr. William Gough, 80 years, resided in Bird Island Cove and reviewed the prophets of Methodism, taking us back to the second or third Preacher on the circuit. . . The pastor took them back to the first sermon preached in the settlement by Rev. William Ellis in the year 1814 in the month of April. The first sermon ever preached in the settlement by any clergyman of any denomination When the speech was nearly ended, the cry of fire was heard and it was found that the parsonage was on fire, owing to the explosion of a lamp. Two children, Bert and Rog, narrowly escape death by suffocation. The fire, being extinguished, we returned to church and finished the service. Our hearts were gladdened to find that the poor people had contributed \$60.00 as a thanks offering to God! We returned to church at 11 o'clock for the watch night services and thus, the last day of 1899 ended.

A few years later the construction of a new Methodist Church began to replace the former Church that opened on January 9th, 1864. The 1864 and 1902 Churches both share at least one common component because “John Gough . . . knocked the first nail into the second church. His son, William Gough, at 80 years knocked the same nail into the sill of the third church.”² The construction of this Church was accomplished through donations and labour provided on a voluntary basis. There was a great deal of community spirit regarding its Churches. For instance, in 1898, residents held a tea meeting with entertainment to raise money. Their efforts were quite successful raising \$50.00 for the parsonage.³ This earned the settlement much praise, and this success even found its way into a newspaper of the time.

This Methodist Church was officially dedicated on May 18th, 1902⁴, and remained a Methodist structure until 1925, when Methodism joined with the Presbyterians and a portion of the Congregationalists to form the United Church of Canada. With regard to the Church at Elliston this was simply a change of name because there were no Presbyterians or Congregationalists to merge with the local Methodists.



Salvation Army

St. Mary's
Anglican Church

The first school, in what is present day Elliston, was opened in 1839.⁵ The community went on to be the home of several schools including the two-storey Elliston Memorial School that was built as a monument to the memory of residents who died in the Great War. This school served the area until 1957 when a more modern school was constructed with indoor plumbing. The lower storey of the Memorial School still exists today as the United Church Hall. Elliston's last school was closed in 1986 resulting in all students being transported, by bus, to nearby Bonavista.



Above: The Elliston Memorial School on South Side

Below: Remembrance Day service at the United Church Hall formerly the Elliston Memorial School





Above: Elliston class photograph taken in the early 1930's

Below: North Side School



Other historical structures include the Ryan's Building, Orange Hall or Lodge, and the Tilley House. The Ryan's Building or *Elliston Adventure* was established during the 1890's. While some may consider the name of *Elliston Adventure* unusual; the company that owned the store referred to all branches as *Adventures* until they were well established.⁶ This store still bears the name *James Ryan Ltd.* for whom the business is named and had a strong economic tie to the community. This company was well known on the Bonavista Peninsula with many branches including the one at Elliston. Fish merchants, in general, were not always looked upon with favour by fishermen. Fred Pearce in an interview for *Decks Awash* expressed his view on the topic:⁷

"You'd get your supplies from the merchants on credit in those days," he explains. "You'd spend three or four months fishing and when it was finished you wouldn't have money enough to pay the debt. The merchants called the prices and that was it. We weren't treated fairly. We had no say in things at all. The old days weren't all that good, because we were crucified more then than we are today."

The precise date of the Orange Hall's construction is unknown but it may have been early in the 1900's. This structure was the site of many concerts and activities. One of those activities was as temporary storage of the bodies of those Elliston sealers who perished in the 1914 Newfoundland Sealing Disaster. In 1915, Captain Abram Kean came to the Orange Hall to speak about the disaster but was not well received. It even made the June 10th, 1915 edition of the *Mail and Advocate* saying Kean was uninvited.

Many structures from the nineteenth century still exist in Elliston and several are still in use as private residences. The Tilley House, built in the 1850's, has an interesting history. Is it correct to refer to this structure as the Tilly or Tilley House? Actually both are correct but the latter spelling is more generally accepted. The letter "e" was added about 1923 when Clarence Tilly had a blind made for his shop window with his name on it.

By mistake the name printed on the blind included an “e” but instead of having it replaced Clarence Tilley began to use the new spelling. Soon thereafter others began to follow his lead.⁸

Regardless of the spelling, the house was constructed by the master builders Allan and Robert Ryder who also built other notable structures throughout the area. It is composed of pine and hemlock, and it stands three storeys high. The Tilley House was first used as a business and later was converted into a private residence.⁹ It was later recognized as a heritage structure in 1985, but sadly it has not been maintained since the restoration efforts were completed in 1987.



Top Left:
Tilley House

Top Right:
Orange Hall

Left: Ryan's
Building
undergoing
restoration

Sandy Cove and the Puffin Colony

Elliston has many attractions to offer the visitor, however, one of its best natural features is its beautiful sandy beach. This beach boasts a freshwater brook, a refreshment stand, and nearby camping facilities at the municipal park. Over the years, there has been some debate about the correct way to refer to this location. Some call it Sandy Beach while others refer to it as Sandy Cove. Although the descriptive name of Sandy Beach does fit, the reference of Sandy Cove is much older than many may know. Philip Tocque, in his 1846 book, writes, "Passing along the sea shore I saw the whole margin of the beautiful beach of Sandy Cove. . . ." ¹⁰ This indicates that this designation is the oldest and, in my opinion, the most correct. In any case this is a very popular location for residents and visitors alike. Below is a poem entitled *Sandy Cove* ¹¹ that reflects the view of many people toward this area:

Sandy Cove

Sandy Cove in Elliston Bright
In Summer is a lovely sight
When western winds blow from the land
People frolic there on the sand
Men and women, and children too
Spend many hours out in the blue
They love with feelings of delight
To bathe within its waters bright.

The waves that roll in from the sea
Fall on the sand so gently
That little children love to play
Within its waters all the day
And parents watch their antics there
While lying on the sand so fair
They love to lie there in the sun
After their swimming hours are done.



Sandy Cove Beach during the 2003 Festival

Built by nature but not by man
A wall of stone keeps back the sand
The sand so gentle to the feet
To walk on it is quite a treat
The sea there isn't very deep
The sand won't hurt the tender feet
A swimmer's joy in summer time
The very best place one could find.

The brook that wanders to the sea
Flows through beautiful scenery
With flowering shrubs of every hue
And trees so tall obstruct the view
The people come from near and far
Pedestrians and by motor car
To stay a while and enjoy the fun
With others playing in the sun.

There's many a trail between the trees
Where lovers wander and the breeze
Which blows so soft, perfume the air
With scent of balsam everywhere
People once tried to take the stone
Which nature placed there on her own
This would have been a big disgrace
To ruin such a lovely place.

There are lots of trout that one can hook
Within the waters of the brook
And berries grow profusely there
The dewberry, and the squash so rare
The raspberry and blueberry too
Are sweetened by the morning dew
Nature put forth a willing hand
To build a background for the sand.

When Summer with her breezes mild
Blow o'er the land, both man and child
Love to return to this dear spot
Which none have in the years forgot
What say this place we now rename
For it's become a place of fame?
I hope with me you'll all agree
To christen it Happy Valley.

Elliston was not originally called Bird Island Cove without good reason. It is still home to numerous sea birds including the Atlantic puffin. The puffin colony, located in the area known locally as the Neck, offers one of the closest land views of puffins anywhere. The earliest literary reference to puffins, in the Elliston area, was made by Philip Tocque about what is known as the puffin colony or sanctuary today. He writes, "I saw several puffins (*Fratercula Arctica*) sailing about on the water. A considerable number of these birds breed on the Northern Bird-Island . . . where they form their nest."¹² There are not many places where one can walk within a few feet of puffins and take some photographs. During the spring magnificent icebergs float by and whales grace our waters. Sometimes it is possible to photograph puffins in the foreground with a whale and an iceberg in the background.

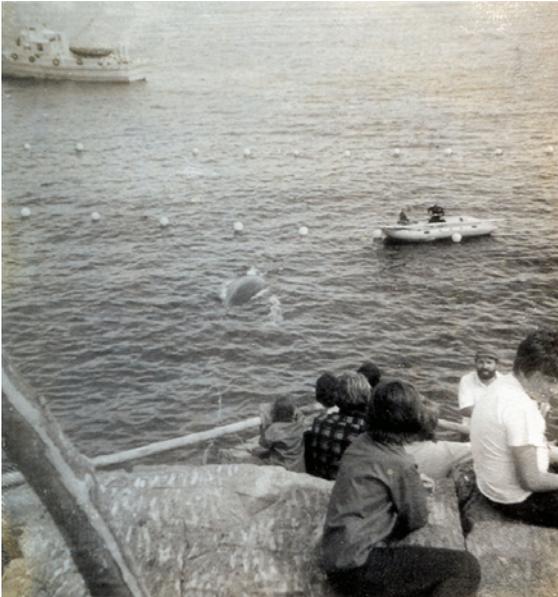


Top Left: Puffins

Top Right: Whale's Tail

Left: Iceberg off Ellison

Memorable Events



Whale at North Side in 1976

Elliston has been the site of several notable events over the years. One such occasion was the month long study of a whale at North Side. A humpback whale, later named Meg, became tangled in a fishing net on July 2nd, 1976. Once the authorities were notified the area of Coles' Gulch was swarmed by scientists and others for the entire month. During the siege of Walter Oldford's fishing premises, a variety of scientific data was collected and behavioural studies conducted. A radio transmitter was also attached to its fin to track the whale upon its release.

This whale was released on the 3rd of August and tracked for a short distance. Surprisingly Meg alerted the scientists to the presence of three American submarines a few miles off Elliston. Despite all of this activity Mr. Oldford was neither compensated for the damage to his net nor the disruption of his fishing activities. This is ironic considering a number of people, excluding the fishermen, were paid for their efforts including the operation of an

existing wench.¹³ Although many whales can still be seen in the area nothing compares to the attention that was created by Meg.

An event of a different nature was on the agenda for 2001. It was a concert featuring, the popular musical group, the Fables. Many groups have performed at Elliston, during recent years, but never an East Coast Music Association Entertainer of the Year winner. The Fables performed at the local municipal park on Saturday, August 18th, treating the community to its first big name concert.



The Fables at Elliston Municipal Park

The community also became involved with a national youth organization known as Katimavik. This national youth program allows participants to become involved in community projects in the areas of construction, literacy, senior care, and communication. Tourism Elliston hosted three rotations from January 10th to August 8th, 2001. With the participants' assistance a winter carnival was held. The most notable aspect of the carnival was the snow sculpture contest that inspired the imaginations of many.



Above: Katimavik's ice fishing adventure

Below: Katimavik's ice sculpture during the 2001 Winter Carnival



Another most unusual event was the visit of a cruise ship at Maberly! Many of the locals had no idea that the ship was scheduled to visit until it was spotted off the coast. Local residents came out by the car load to get an up close view of the ship. The cruise organized by Zegrahm Expeditions visited on May 29th, 2002. The passengers disembarked from the *Le Levant* and came ashore by zodiac. After climbing over the rocky shoreline of Maberly, they made their way to the nearest root cellar and then moved on to visit the nearby puffin colony. Samuel Ryan of Tourism Elliston met with cruise organizer, Mike Messick, welcoming him to the area. Mr. Messick remarked that he had scouted suitable locations for this trip two years prior and was impressed with the beautiful scenery of Maberly and area.



The *Le Levant* off Maberly on May 29th 2002



Mr. Samuel Ryan meeting with Mr. Mike Messick at the Puffin Colony

Shanneyganock
performing at Elliston



Once again a big name concert was held at Elliston Municipal Park. On June 17th, 2005 Shanneyganock treated all in attendance to an entertaining night of music, but not to the scale of the 2001 Fables concert.

Elliston has twice been the focus of CBC television programs. In 2000, *On the Road Again* with Wayne Rostad filmed a segment that concerned our root cellars. Although this coverage was excellent the portion concerning Elliston was quite short and combined with two other stories in a half hour format. This changed in June of 2005 when *Land & Sea* with Pauline Thornhill came to devote an entire episode to Elliston and its root cellars. This superb episode aired on February 27th, 2006 under the very appropriate title of *Root Cellar Pride*.



Land & Sea
filming at
the Elliston
Recreation
Centre

Chapter Eight Notes

1. Notes made by Rev. Charles Lench on 2 Jan. 1900, obtained from Tourism Elliston.
2. N. C. Crewe, "Elliston File," Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador.
3. "Bird Island Cove," The Daily News 24 Oct. 1898.
4. Ray Troke and Associates, The Elliston Adventure (Summer/Fall 2000) 24.
5. Troke 20.
6. Troke 1.
7. "It was all in a day's work," Decks Awash 8.2 (1979): 29-30.
8. Tilley Collection, Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador.
9. Sam Ryan, "Tilley House Restored," The Evening Telegram 26 Oct. 1987.
10. Philip Tocque, Wandering thoughts: or, Solitary hours, (London: Thomas Richardson, 1846.) 273.
11. Aubrey Pearce, Poetry.
12. Tocque 315.
13. Harry A. Cuff, "This Whale Provided Employment for Dozens of People," Newfoundland Quarterly 72.4 (1976): 8-10.