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**“(Im)Migration and Community Building: Newfoundlanders in Cambridge,
Ontario”**
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On June 30, 1966, the iron ore mine of Bell Island, Newfoundland, ceased operations. That day miner 585 penned these words: “But now the game is over; They’re not playing any more. We must wander like the Nomads, Off to Galt and Labrador.”¹ Thirty-five years earlier, a Newfoundlander living in Hespeler wrote Newfoundland’s Prime Minister for assistance in relocating his family back to the island, describing the area as full of odd customs and few employment opportunities.² He believed the Western Newfoundland mill town of Corner Brook a far better bet for a job than what he called the “strange” country of Southern Ontario. Contrast this with a Bell Island politician’s 2002 description of Cambridge as “Bell Island’s largest community.”³

By the 1970s, between 12,000 and 15,000 Newfoundlanders lived in Cambridge, and in 1976, one decade after the closure of the mine, there were more Bell Islanders in Cambridge than on Bell Island.⁴ These numbers represent one of Newfoundland’s largest communities today! Despite the existence of a significant Newfoundland community in Cambridge, Newfoundland history has neglected this area. Although mobility has long been a prominent part of Newfoundland life - and at times a cultural obsession - most studies of “out-migration” from Newfoundland focus on movement to places like Cape Breton and the New England states where Newfoundlanders have traditional cultural and occupational ties, or, if in Ontario, to large population centres like Toronto and Hamilton.⁵ In recent years the growing petroleum centre of Fort McMurray, Alberta, home to an estimated 18,000

¹ Miner 585, Alison O’Brien. “The Brighter Side”. 30 June 1966. The city of Galt, a vibrant manufacturing centre of 33,000 in 1966, is located in south-western Ontario, and along with the nearby communities of Preston and Hespeler, formed the city of Cambridge after amalgamation in 1973.

² “Personal Requests”, Squires Papers, Prime Ministerial Papers, GN8, Box 15, File 156. Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador.

³ June 20, 2002 House of Assembly Proceedings Vol.XLIV No.29.

⁴ Kenneth McLaughlin. *Cambridge: The Making of a Canadian City*. (Burlington: Windsor Publications Ltd., 1987). p.125.

⁵ For example see Ron Crawley “Off to Sydney: Newfoundlanders Emigrate to Industrial Cape Breton, 1890-1914” *Acadiensis* 17:2 (1988) pp.27-51; W.G. Reeves “Newfoundlanders in the “Boston States”: A Study in Early Twentieth Century Community and Counterpoint” *Newfoundland Studies* 6:1 (1990) pp.34-55; Thelma McCormack *Maritime Migrants to Toronto: Selected Cases* (Canadian Centre for Community Studies: Ottawa, March 1968); Anne Martin *Up-Along: Newfoundland Families in Hamilton* (MA Thesis, McMaster University, 1974).

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Newfoundlanders, has become the focus of studies on Newfoundland out-migration.⁶ The history of Newfoundland migration to Cambridge remains neglected.

This paper examines why by 1966 Galt, a small Ontario city, was the prime destination for unemployed Bell Island miners and their families, and how the Cambridge area changed from a “strange country” to the home of a highly visible community of expatriate Newfoundlanders. The creation of the Newfoundland community in Cambridge was the result of three successive, overlapping and interdependent waves of immigration and migration. The first wave, characterized by small-scale sporadic immigration, lasted from the late nineteenth-century to the beginning of the Second World War. Then, during the Second World War men and women from Newfoundland were formally recruited to work in essential war industries in both Galt and Hespeler. Following confederation with Canada in 1949, Newfoundland families began to migrate to the Cambridge area in large numbers, attracted by employment opportunities and connections with friends and family already living in the area. This third period of chain migration, exemplified by the mass exodus of Bell Islanders in the 1960s, continues to the present day. Studies of Newfoundlanders in Hamilton, Toronto and Fort McMurray generally conclude that true Newfoundland communities do not exist in those cities.⁷ Yet since 1970 Cambridge’s Newfoundland population has formed a distinct community within the city that actively contributes to the larger Cambridge community, while maintaining extensive ties with Newfoundland.

⁶ Stephanie Porter, “It’s not a ‘Little Newfoundland’” *The Sunday Independent* 20 February 2005. For studies on Newfoundlanders in Fort McMurray see H.H. Hiller and T.M. Franz “New ties, old ties and lost ties: the use of the internet in diaspora” *New Media and Society* 6:6 (2004) pp.731-752; Newfoundland and Labrador, Rural Secretariat, Cormack-Grenfell Steering Committee. *Expatriate Newfoundlanders and Labradorians speak out: Rural Secretariat strategic social plan, an initiative.* (2004) and Keith Story, Mark Shrimpton and Calvin Thistle. “CBFA’s attitude toward return migration of Newfoundlanders living in Fort McMurray” in *In Search of Work: A Working Conference on Speculative Migration and Community Impact.* ISER Conference Papers No. 1, 1986.

⁷ Martin, *Up-Along: Newfoundland Families in Hamilton*, p.194. McCormack, *Maritime Migrants to Toronto*, p.13 and p.24. Porter, “It’s not a ‘Little Newfoundland’”. However, studies of Newfoundlanders in New England and Cape Breton argue that Newfoundlanders formed “distinctive communities” in these areas. (see Reeves “Newfoundlanders in the ‘Boston States’” p.34 and Crawley “Off to Sydney” p.28).

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The immigration of Newfoundlanders to Ontario prior to the Second World War represented only a trickle of the total Newfoundland immigration to Canada during this period. The industrial towns of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia were the main destination for Newfoundlanders, attracting over 50% of Newfoundland immigrants to Canada, while Ontario was the destination for only 5%.⁸ Many of the immigrants to Cape Breton were in search of short-term seasonal employment, but the distance and expense of travel to Ontario suggests long-term or permanent settlement.⁹ The movement of Newfoundlanders to the Cambridge area in this period reflected the overall pattern of Newfoundland migration to Ontario. According to the 1911 Census there was only one Newfoundland-born resident in the area, and just over two thousand Newfoundlanders in all of Ontario.¹⁰ Two decades later there were 47 Newfoundland-born residents in Galt and over 6,000 Newfoundlanders in Ontario.¹¹

I will now discuss a couple examples to illustrate the informal, sporadic and chance nature of this first wave of Newfoundland migration to the Cambridge area. In 1919 Benjamin Harvey, who worked in a limestone quarry in Boswarlos, on the west coast of Newfoundland, came across a pamphlet entitled “Come to Hespeler”, advertising the opportunities for employment in the vast woollen mill in Hespeler. Hespeler was a booming manufacturing town of nearly 3000 people, 750 of which were employed at Dominion Woollens and Worsteds, the largest woollen mill in Canada.¹² The mill advertised that “employees here are practically guaranteed work year in and year out” and encouraged families to write to the company, for “the ever-increasing business of this Company enables it to frequently engage entire families”, including young people of both sexes, in

⁸ Crawley, “Off to Sydney” p.28. Peter Neary, “Canadian Immigration Policy and the Newfoundlanders, 1912-1939” *Acadiensis* 11:2 (1982) p.69.

⁹ Crawley, p.33.

¹⁰ 1911 Census of Canada, Reel T-20407, Waterloo South District 131, Galt Subdistrict 17, p.23. “Obituary Mrs. Philipina Keachie” *Galt Reporter* 11 April 1931, p.6. 1921 Census of Canada, volume I.

¹¹ 1931 Census of Canada, volumes I & II.

¹² *Hustling Hespeler: The Town with a Future, A Good Town to Live In.* (1922) p.5.

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employment.¹³ Benjamin Harvey contacted the mill and relocated his family to Hespeler, hoping to provide better employment and education opportunities for his children. The Harvey family settled in the town, finding employment for two generations at the Dominion Woollens and Worsteds mill.¹⁴ In 1920, Darius Miles moved his family from the isolated mining community of Tilt Cove, on the north coast of Newfoundland, to the city of Galt to live with his sister-in-law.¹⁵ Darius Miles had worked in the copper mine at Tilt Cove, until it closed in 1917, and was unable to support his family in Newfoundland, due to his failing eyesight.¹⁶ In Galt, his wife found employment house cleaning, and the family settled there.¹⁷ Galt had a population of over 13,000, and had earned the nickname “Little Manchester” reflecting its importance as a manufacturing centre.¹⁸ Both the Harvey and Miles families decided to emigrate from Newfoundland to the Cambridge area because of limited employment opportunities in Newfoundland and the availability of employment in the Cambridge area, especially in manufacturing. This first wave of Newfoundland migration to the Cambridge area was small-scale and sporadic. During the Second World War, the demand for labour in the essential war industries in the Cambridge area fundamentally altered the character of Newfoundland migration.

The Second World War had profound effects on the manufacturing centres of Galt and Hespeler. In both communities several industries won important contracts from the Department of Munitions and Supply, and were designated essential war industries. However, the same industries were faced with serious labour shortages as local men volunteered for military service. The great woollen mill of Hespeler lost 225 employees to

¹³ *Hustling Hespeler*, p.11 and p.19.

¹⁴ Survey 16, 1 March 2006.

¹⁵ *Galt Reporter*, 22 Feb. 1953.

¹⁶ Wendy Martin, *Once Upon a Mine: Story of Pre-Confederation Mines on the Island of Newfoundland*. (Montreal: The Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, 1983) p.12.

¹⁷ *Galt Reporter*, 4 Oct. 1953.

¹⁸ 1931 Census of Canada, volume I. Robert L. Perry, *Galt, U.S.A: The ‘American’ Presence in a Canadian City* (Toronto: Maclean-Hunter Limited, 1971) p.6.

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military service over the course of the war.¹⁹ To meet its labour demands, Dominion Woollens and Worsted began recruiting female workers from areas outside Southern Ontario. In November 1944 47 female workers arrived in Hespeler from Newfoundland, recruited to work in what had become the largest woollen mill in the British Empire.²⁰

The construction of Canadian and American military bases in Newfoundland during the early 1940s had brought full employment to Newfoundland, but the Newfoundland government was concerned about the return of unemployment once the base boom ended.²¹ The Canadian government was also interested in transferring this “surplus labour” from Newfoundland to essential war industries in Canada.²² In the spring of 1943, Newfoundland’s government and Ottawa’s National Selective Service and Department of External Affairs made arrangements for the formal recruitment of Newfoundlanders to work in Canada.²³ Between 1944 and 1949 Dominion Woollens of Hespeler recruited over 200 women from Newfoundland, many of whom married and settled permanently in the area.²⁴ Shurly-Dietrich-Atkins, manufacturers of armour plating in Galt, recruited 135 men from Newfoundland during the war, and despite the official view of the Canadian government, the company was “not averse to families following, once arrangements had been made in Galt”.²⁵ Within half a decade, the Cambridge Newfoundland population quintupled by way of formal employment recruitment. By 1949, Cambridge was no longer a “strange” country

¹⁹ Kenneth McLaughlin, *Cambridge: The Making of a Canadian City*. p.98.

²⁰ Kenneth McLaughlin and Kristel Fleuren. *Hespeler: A Portrait of an Ontario Town*. (Hespeler: The Company of Neighbours, 2000). p.29. *D.W. & W. News*, Vol. IV, No.5, Nov. 1944.

²¹ Steven High, “Working for Uncle Sam: The “Comings” and “Goings” of Newfoundland Base Construction Labour, 1940-1945” *Acadiensis* 32:2 (2003) p.84.

²² Peter Neary, “Canada and the Newfoundland Labour Market, 1939-49” *Canadian Historical Review* 62:4 (1981) pp.476-477.

²³ Neary, “Canada and the Newfoundland Labour Market” pp.476-481.

²⁴ Letter from J.S. Macdonald, High Commissioner for Canada, 31 Oct. 1944. RG76, Volume 595, File 851889 pt.3. National Archives of Canada; McLaughlin, *Hespeler*, p.37; Neary, “Canada and the Newfoundland Labour Market”, p.493; *D.W. & W. News*, Vol.VIII, No.10, April 1949. For marriages between Newfoundland “mill-girls” and locals see *D.W. & W. News*, Vol.V. No.2 Aug. 1945 and Vol.V no.1. Sept. 1945.

²⁵ Neary, “Canada and the Newfoundland Labour Market” p.487; Letter from A.L.Jolliffe, Director of Immigration Commission Government Newfoundland to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs in Ottawa. 31 May 1944. RG76, Volume 595, File 851889 pt.3. National Archives of Canada.

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for many Newfoundlanders, but the expatriate population was still not particularly significant.

With formal recruitment news spread back to Newfoundland concerning the considerable employment opportunities in the area. With mining operations temporarily curtailed on Bell Island, there were several instances of unemployed miners applying for immigration to Canada in 1943 and 1944. In March 1943 four miners from Bell Island were stopped at the port of North Sydney “destined [for] Galt, Ontario [to] seek employment [in the] war industries”.²⁶ By October 1944 the manager of the mining operation in Bell Island complained to the Labour Relations Office in Newfoundland concerning Bell Island miners eager to apply for work in Canada who had heard that “Newfoundland workmen [have] gone to Galt, Ontario, recently and have found employment in garages, restaurants, etc.”²⁷ During the war, Galt had a growing reputation on Bell Island as a destination for Newfoundlanders seeking work in Canada. Following Newfoundland’s Confederation with Canada in 1949, Ontario, not the Maritimes, became the most popular destination for island migrants.²⁸

Confederation with Canada erased all immigration restrictions between Newfoundland and Canada. Many Newfoundlanders immediately exercised this new freedom and moved their families to Ontario to take advantage of the abundant good paying manufacturing and service-sector jobs.²⁹ Throughout the 1950s Newfoundlanders migrated to the Cambridge area, drawn by employment opportunities and increasingly by news from family and friends who had already settled in the area. Strong connections between Newfoundlanders living in Cambridge and Bell Island are evident from the frequent Galt news items in the *Submarine Miner*, the monthly newsletter produced for mine employees.³⁰

²⁶ Telegram 29 March 1943. RG76, Volume 595, File 851889 pt.2. National Archives of Canada.

²⁷ Letter from S.H. Parsons, Labour Relations Officer to J.S. Macdonald, High Commissioner for Canada, 23 Oct. 1944. RG76, Volume 595, File 851889 pt.3.

²⁸ Neary, “Canadian Immigration Policy and the Newfoundlanders”, p.83.

²⁹ “Newfoundland’s 50th Anniversary” *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 31 March 1999. p.A06

³⁰ *Submarine Miner* August 1954, March 1955, November 1956, December 1957 and September 1958.

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Cecil Blackmore, a former resident of Bell Island who immigrated to Galt during the Second World War along with his sister Jessie, wrote to the *Submarine Miner* in 1955: “Cecil tells us that he receives copies of our Plant Magazine from his brother Hector on Bell Island and enjoys reading them very much...He has shown copies of the magazine to several other former Bell Island residents now residing in Galt.”³¹ The Blackmore family is one of many examples of the growing connections between the Newfoundland community in Cambridge and Newfoundlanders on Bell Island. It is also an early example of the third period of chain migration. Cecil and Jessie Blackmore were joined by their brother Hector in the early 1960s.³² By that time there were almost 500 Newfoundlanders living in Galt, nearly 70 in Preston and approximately 300 Newfoundlanders in Hespeler.³³ Cambridge had become the destination of choice for many Newfoundlanders moving to Southern Ontario.

The fortunes of the iron ore mine on Bell Island began to drastically decline during this period. The Bell Island ore was increasingly less competitive in the global markets. One thousand men were laid off in 1959.³⁴ By 1961 Bell Island’s population peaked at 12,281, 95% of whom were directly dependent on the mine, but continuing layoffs and rumours of an impending mine closure led many Bell Islanders to make the trek to Galt.³⁵ On April 20 1966 the company announced that the mine would close in June.³⁶ The *Wabana Urban Renewal Study*, published in April 1966, had arrived at a devastating conclusion, that since “no alternate functions can replace mining” on Bell Island “it would be better to resettle the whole population and wipe out the urban settlement”.³⁷ Thus began what one local historian

³¹ *Submarine Miner* July 1955; “Family Reunion After Two Decades Apart” *Galt Daily Reporter* 13 Aug. 1963, p.9.

³² “Family Reunion After Two Decades Apart” *Galt Daily Reporter* 13 Aug. 1963, p.9.

³³ 1961 Census of Canada, volume I.

³⁴ Gail Weir, *The Miners of Wabana: The Story of the Iron Ore Miners of Bell Island*. (St. John’s: Breakwater Books, 1989) p.126; Kay Coxworthy, *The Cross on the Rib: One Hundred Years of History of Bell Island, Newfoundland* (1996) p.103; “A Deep Fear Reaches the Surface” *Globe and Mail* 15 June 1963, p.8.

³⁵ Weir, *The Miners of Wabana*, p.132.

³⁶ “Dosco Industries plans to close Wabana Mine” *Globe and Mail* 20 April 1966, p.82.

³⁷ *Wabana Urban Renewal Study: First Interim Report* (April 1966) p.12.

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has called “the single greatest mass exodus of people in the history of Newfoundland”.³⁸

With little assistance from the government, unemployed miners from Bell Island resettled themselves en masse in the Cambridge area and secured employment in the city’s numerous factories. Miners’ families followed shortly thereafter to what was quickly becoming “Little Bell Isle”.³⁹ Cambridge, once a “strange country” and home to only a handful of Newfoundland families during the first wave of Newfoundland immigration, rapidly became a destination for Newfoundlanders following the formal recruitment of Newfoundland workers during the Second World War. This second wave of migration established familial ties and employment opportunities leading to the third wave of chain migration. Finally, the catalyst of the devastating mine closure on Bell Island led to the mass exodus of Bell Islanders to Cambridge.

The sheer number of Newfoundlanders living in the Cambridge area, representing nearly one quarter of the city’s population by the mid-1970s, still does not account for such a highly visible and distinct community. While other Ontario cities experienced the migration of large numbers of Newfoundlanders in the postwar period, those cities do not have similar cohesive Newfoundland communities. Dick Stoyles, affectionately known as the “the unofficial mayor of Newfoundlanders in Cambridge”, is an example of the chain migration of Bell Islanders in the 1960s, and represents “a pillar of [the Newfoundland] community.”⁴⁰ Stoyles, whose family still operates a meat market and department store on Bell Island, moved to the Cambridge area in 1959 following his brothers, but quickly returned to Bell Island.⁴¹ With the closure of the Bell Island mines, Stoyles returned to Galt in 1966, and

³⁸ Coxworthy, *The Cross on the Rib*, p.36.

³⁹ “Grants to be made without delay to relocate displaced workers” *Globe and Mail* 22 April 1966, p.4; *Wabana Urban Renewal Study*, p.9; Peter Neary, “‘Traditional’ and ‘Modern’ Elements in the Social and Economic History of Bell Island and Conception Bay” *The Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1973) p.122.

⁴⁰ Steve Neary, “Book features successful Newfoundlanders”, *Cambridge Reporter* 3 June 1994, p.5; *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 8 Jan. 1992, p.B3.

⁴¹ The Bell Island Lancers, *Memories of an Island* (1985) p.26; *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 25 May 1996, p.A1; *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 8 Jan. 1992, p.B3.

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opened a Newfoundland food store.⁴² With a sizeable existing consumer base Stoyles' market was a success. It also became a focal point for the Newfoundland community in Cambridge, and in the early 1970s Stoyles spearheaded the formation of a Newfoundland Club to provide "a home away from home" for Newfoundlanders and "a place...to keep tradition alive".⁴³ The Newfoundland Club was instrumental in keeping the Newfoundland community of Cambridge "closely bound".⁴⁴ It held annual Newfoundland Reunion weekends, hosted performances by Newfoundland artists like Bell Island native Harry Hibbs, talks by the father of Newfoundland Confederation Joey Smallwood and Newfoundland Premier Clyde Wells, and other well-attended social events.⁴⁵ The Newfoundland Club also regularly contributes to the greater Cambridge community through extensive fundraising activities, donating over \$1.5 million to various community initiatives since its founding.⁴⁶ The Newfoundland Club in particular, and the Cambridge Newfoundland community in general, maintain extensive ties to communities back in Newfoundland, especially on Bell Island. The mayor of Bell Island seldom fails to attend the annual Newfoundland Reunion in Cambridge, and the Newfoundland community in Cambridge is quick to aid Newfoundland communities in need: building a Second World War memorial on Bell Island; raising money for boys and girls clubs; assisting the flooded town of Badger in 2003 and lending their voices to Newfoundland's protest to the 1987 Canada-France fishing agreement.⁴⁷ Bell Islanders continue to settle in Cambridge, frequently return "home" for visits, and increasingly settle on Bell Island again after retirement.⁴⁸ Today it is impossible to avoid

⁴² *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 25 May 1996, p.A1; *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 8 Jan. 1992, p.B3.

⁴³ *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 24 Feb. 1993, p.B3; *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 25 May 1996, p.A1.

⁴⁴ *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 24 Feb. 1993, p.B3.

⁴⁵ *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 24 Feb. 1993, p.B3.

⁴⁶ *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 25 May 1996, p.A1; McLaughlin, *Cambridge*, p.125.

⁴⁷ *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 3 July 2001, p.B03; Steve Neary, "Donations sought for Nfld. memorial" *Cambridge Reporter* 10 May 1994, p.5; *Cambridge Reporter* 7 March 2003, p.A8; "Badger Flood" Hansard no.71, 2003-03-17; "Canada-France Fishing Agreement" Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 1987-02-9; McLaughlin, *Cambridge* p.125.

⁴⁸ *Cambridge Reporter* 12 Aug. 2000, p.A3; *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 24 Feb. 1993, p.B3.

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Newfoundland provincial flags and other references to the highly visible community of Newfoundlanders in Cambridge.

Cambridge-Newfoundlanders represent a significant and distinct cultural group that has contributed to the greater Cambridge community and maintains extensive ties to Newfoundland. Starting with a handful of families who chanced to journey to Southern Ontario in the early twentieth century, the Newfoundland community grew through formal recruitment for work in war industries, and chain migration exemplified most dramatically by the mass exodus of Bell Islanders in the 1960s. Although out-migration “has long been a prominent feature of Newfoundland life”, the history of the movement of Newfoundlanders to Cambridge and to Canada in general has been neglected in Newfoundland studies.⁴⁹ Though writers normally recognize Newfoundlanders as a distinct cultural group, they “are invisible in Canadian literature on ethnicity and multiculturalism.”⁵⁰ In a country that prides itself on its immigrant multiculturalism, Canadian history neglects Newfoundland immigration and community building in Canada. This brief study demonstrates that Newfoundlanders came to Canada not merely as seasonal fishers or temporary industrial workers. In Cambridge, Newfoundlanders created a visible and distinct expatriate community.

⁴⁹ Neary, “Canadian Immigration Policy and the Newfoundlanders” p.69. Neary, “Canada and the Newfoundland Labour Market, 1939-49” p.470.

⁵⁰ Leslie Bella, *Newfoundlanders: Home and Away* (St. John’s: Greetings from Newfoundland Ltd., 2002) p.v. According to Dick Stoyles “Some people think Newfoundlanders aren’t an ethnic group. But we are. We have our own language, our own food, our own music.” *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* 8 Jan. 1992. p.B3.