

Trinity Involvement in Modern Newfoundland and Labrador Shore-Station Whaling

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Introduction

MODERN SHORE-STATION WHALING IN NEWFOUNDLAND and Labrador began in 1898 and reached its peak in 1904. It finally ended in 1972 (Fig. 1). The industry expanded from one catcher, *Cabot*, and station, Snook's Arm, which processed 91 whales in 1898, to 10 catchers hunting from 14 factories in 1904. The 1275 whales caught yielded 1,492,456 gallons of oil, 2,903 tons of whalebone (baleen) and 3,511 tons of guano (fertilizer). The rapid growth and high profits of the industry to 1904 encouraged continued expansion which could not be sustained by local stocks. A rapid decline in catches from 1905 led to the closing of stations, resulting in the temporary cessation of the whaling industry after the 1916 season.¹

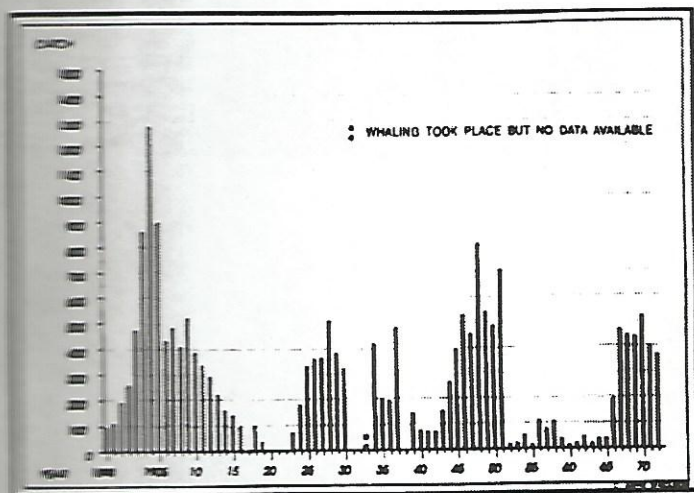


Figure 1: Whale catches, 1898 - 1972.

The Trinity Whaling Station

The whaling station at Trinity (Figs. 2 and 3) was opened during the illfated secondary rush to share in the huge profits earned by those who had initially developed the industry. The factory was built at Maggoty Cove in 1904 by Job Brothers and Co. Ltd. of St. John's.² At the same time Daniel and James Ryan, of Trinity, were important investors in another station being developed at Hawke Harbour, Labrador.³ This factory became the most successful of the 21 that operated periodically in Newfoundland and Labrador between 1898 and 1972 (fig.4).

As principal shareholders in the Atlantic Whaling and Manufacturing Co. Ltd., Job Brothers constructed factories at Trinity (Maggoty Cove) and Safe Harbour, Bonavista Bay. Two new catchers, *Hump*⁴ and *Fin*⁵, were built in Christiana (Oslo), Norway. Both had Norwegian crews. *Fin* (Capt. Nils Neilssen) began hunting from Trinity on 19 July 1904, taking a fin whale on her first voyage and subsequently killing the first sperm whale captured during this modern phase of Newfoundland whaling⁶. During the 1904 season the Trinity station processed 68 whales (59 fin, 5 hump, 3 blue, 1 sperm) for 115,416 gallons of oil, 294 tons of guano and 126 tons of whalebone.⁷ This comprised 5.5% of the total Newfoundland and Labrador catch for that season.

Unfortunately, local stocks could not sustain this level of exploitation and trends evident prior to 1904 were accelerated. As with other companies and stations, the 1905 season at Trinity was disastrous⁸. Whales were now scarce, and *Fin* ran aground "while fast to a whale off Catalina" necessitating her drydocking for examination in St. John's⁹. Only 23 fin and 10 humpback whales were captured¹⁰. Job Brothers' three other whaling stations (L'anse au Loup, Dublin Cove and Safe Harbour) were even less successful.¹¹ It was thus decided not to open the Trinity factory in 1906.

This season was equally disastrous¹² and Job Brothers down-sized even further by incorporating a new company, the Phoenix Whaling and Manufacturing Co. Ltd.¹³ *Fin* was sold in Japan at the end of the 1906 operation¹⁴ and plans were made to use only *Hump*, first from Dublin Cove in early 1907 and then at Trinity when the whales had migrated north in late summer and fall.

Fin (Fig.5) and another catcher, *Avalon*, owned by the St. Mary's Whaling and Trading Co., Ltd., with its factory at Riverhead,¹⁵ sailed from St. John's for Japan on 9 January 1907.¹⁶ They reached the Azores on the 17th and Algiers 10 days later. Sailing from Port Said on 5 February, *Fin* passed safely through the Suez Canal but went ashore at Jeddah in the Red Sea for a total loss. Four of the crew got away in a boat, but were never found.¹⁷

Hump hunted from both Dublin Cove and Trinity between 1907-14. Whales had become so scarce by 1913, however, that the Phoenix Whaling and Manufacturing

Co. Ltd. attempted to sell their carcass and blubber plants in Maggoty Cove, Dublin Cove, Lance au Loup along with the whaler *Hump*.¹⁸ Unable to find a buyer, Job Brothers again fitted out *Hump* in 1914, but at the end of the season only 15 whales had been processed, 6 at Dublin Cove and 9 at Trinity.¹⁹ They therefore closed all three factories²⁰ and sold *Hump* to Crosbie and Co. Ltd.,²¹ thus

ending their involvement in Newfoundland whaling. The Trinity factory had operated for 10 seasons and processed 472 whales. *Hump* was subsequently used in coastal mail and fishery protection services²² until at 03 00 hrs on 24 August 1916 she collided with the coastal steamer *Argyle* and sank within ten minutes, all crew saved.²³



Figure 2: Trinity (Maggoty Cove) Whaling Station, c. 1905.

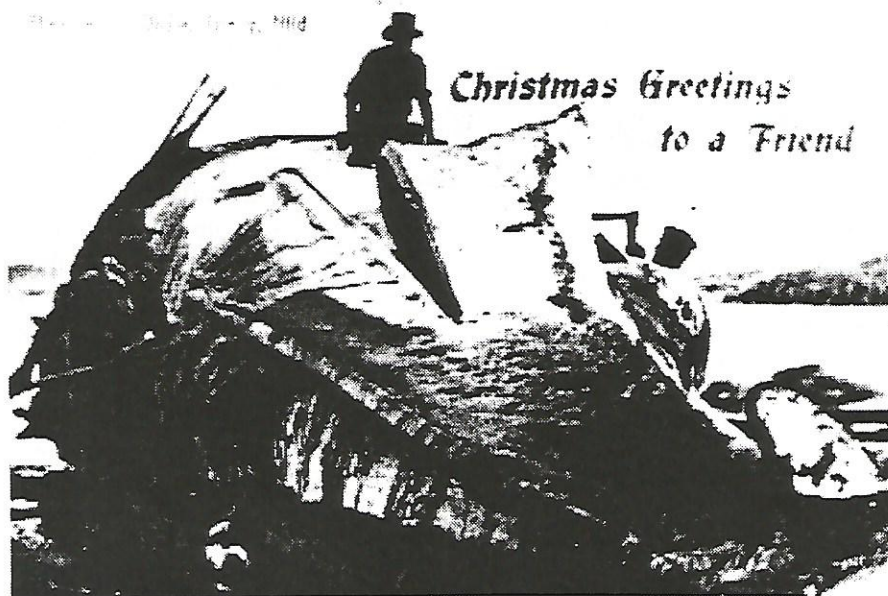


Figure 3: "Post card" - Partially flensed whale, Trinity Factory, c. 1905



Figure 4: Newfoundland and Labrador Whaling Stations
1898 - 1972

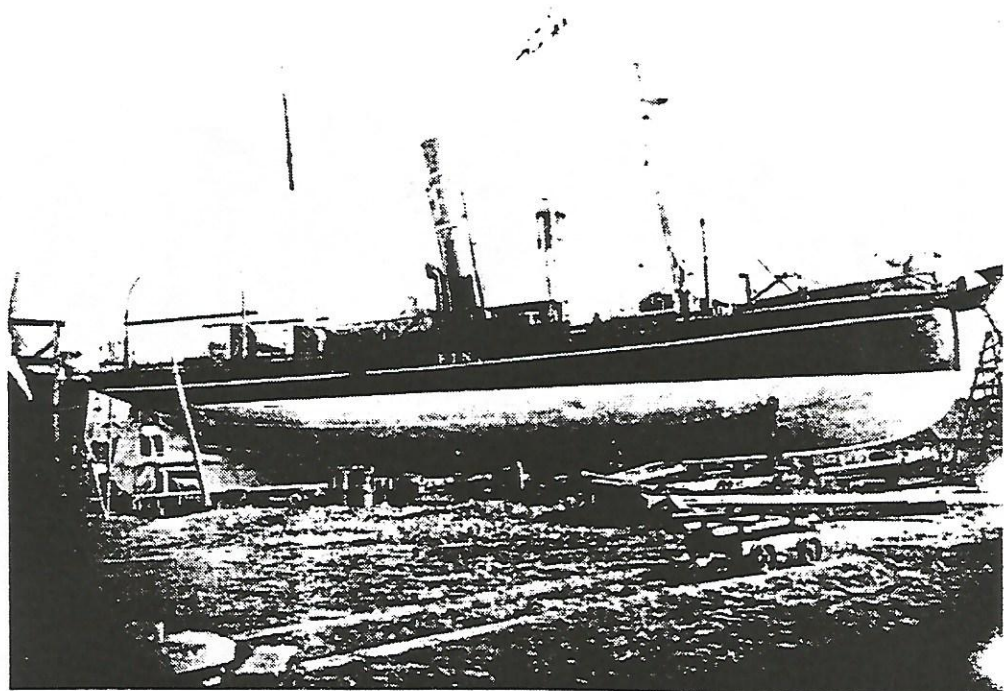


Figure 5: Fin under construction, Oslo, Norway, 1905

Cultural, Social and Economic Impact

Although coastal residents of Newfoundland generally welcomed the employment opportunities offered by a new whaling factory, pollution and perceived disruption of the shore fishery often caused negative comment. In 1904, for example, Charles Way, Inspector of Whale Factories, noted that he had successfully responded to a complaint from the residents of Peace Cove near Trinity who “were

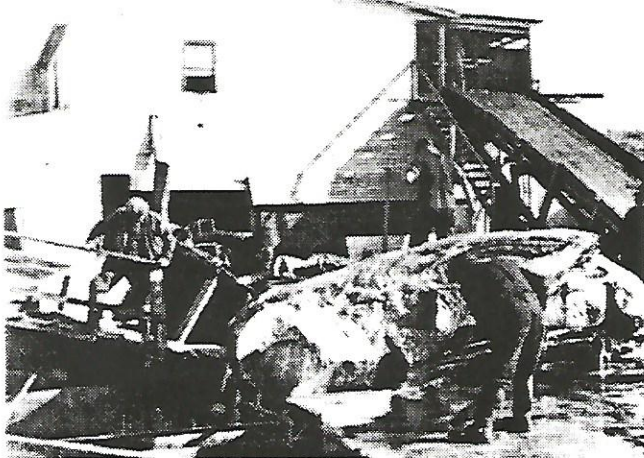


Figure 6: Flensing Crew, Hawke Harbour Factory, Labrador, c. 1938.

Source: George Lilly, St. John's, Newfoundland.

much inconvenienced by the offensive odour from the guano plant during westerly winds”.²⁴ There were also complaints concerning the fact that the highest paying jobs on the catchers were reserved for Norwegians while locals only worked at less skilled jobs for substantially lower salaries. As an example, M.E. Davidsen, master of *Hump* in 1910, was paid \$2,260 for seven months work while each Norwegian crewman earned \$300.²⁵ Newfoundland factory workers, however, received less than \$25 a month.²⁶ This practice, as a letter to the Editor of a St. John's newspaper indicated, was highly resented: “Whaling seems to be about the only fishery that Newfoundlanders cannot master; but many argue that they would become just as proficient as the Norwegians if they were given the chance. It seems strange that Norwegians must be brought here every year when Islanders are such adapts at other fisheries”.²⁷ Not surprisingly, such complaints began to increase as economic benefits from the industry declined. In 1913, for instance, the Colonial Secretary presented a petition “from the residents of Trinity... that the whale factory... be discontinued.”²⁸ Over the years most complaints from outport residents revolved around water pollution, offensive smell, and the fear that reduced whale stocks were responsible for caplin not coming ashore.²⁹

Although Job Brothers' factory at Maggoty Cove had the most immediate and beneficial impact on Trinity, the

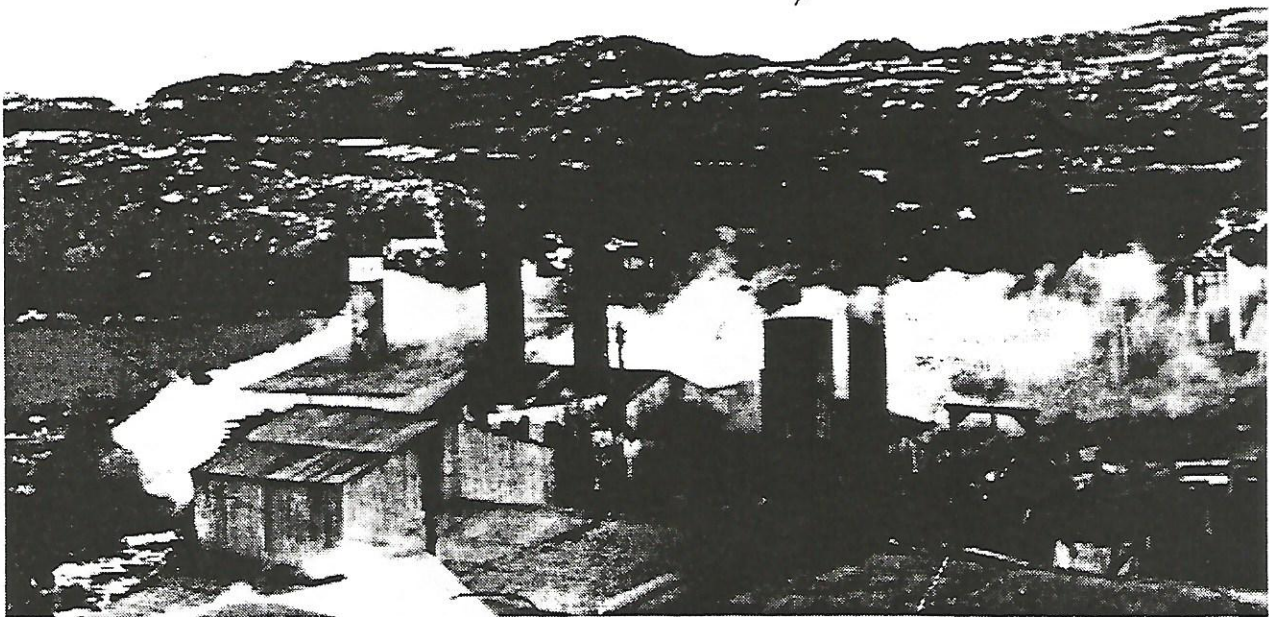


Figure 7: Hawke Harbour Whaling Station, c. 1950

Source: Courtesy of the family of the late Thomas E. Hennessey, Harbour Grace.

Labrador Whaling and Manufacturing Co. Ltd. (Ryan Brothers) also had a significant influence.³⁰ Many Trinity area residents were employed at Hawke Harbour (Figs. 6 and 7) between 1905 and 1920 when Daniel Ryan, "owing to Fishing Regulations and Combines", sold the Hawke Harbour factory and all of his other "business places on the Labrador".³¹ In 1906, for example, the Labrador Whaling and Manufacturing Co. Ltd. catcher *Cachelot* (1) carried factory workers to Hawke Harbour from Trinity, Catalina and King's Cove,³² and in 1912 the St. John's *Evening Herald* reported that "she will call at Trinity for men."³³ Further, the company catchers *Cachelot* (1 and 2) were usually laid up for the winter at Trinity.

Despite complaints about the conduct of the industry and differential wages, relationships between Norwegian whalers and local residents were usually amiable often leading to romantic liaisons and marriages. Examples included the marriages of Albert Eriksen, engineer on *Hump*, to Fanny Pittman in 1909,³⁴ and Capt. M.E. Davidson to "Miss Florence DeGish[DeGrish?] of Trinity" at St. Thomas' Church, St. John's, on 28 November 1911.³⁵

Conclusion

Trinity played an important role in the early development of modern shore station whaling in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Maggoty Cove station offered local employment for ten years between 1904-14, while the Hawke Harbour factory also employed Trinity area residents and paid substantial dividends to local investors. The Ryan Brothers' decision to divest themselves of shares in the Labrador venture in 1920 brought Trinity's sixteen year involvement in Newfoundland and Labrador whaling to a close.

Endnotes

For greater details on modern shore-station whaling in Newfoundland and Labrador see Sanger, C.W. and Dickinson, A.B., "Renewal of Newfoundland and Labrador Shore-Station Whaling, 1918-1936", *International Journal of Maritime History*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1995, pp. 83-103; "Commercial Whaling in Newfoundland and Labrador, Vol. 5 St. John's, Nfld: Harry Cuff Publications", 1994 pp. 546-551; "The Origin and Development of North American Shore Station Whaling: Newfoundland and the Norwegians, 1896-1916", Basberg, B.L., Ringstad, J.E. and Wexelsen, E. (eds), *Whaling and History: Perspectives on the Evolution of the Industry* (Sandefjord, Norway: Kommandor Chr. Christensens Hvalfangsmuseum) 1993a, pp. 91-100; "Modern Shore Station Whaling in Newfoundland and Labrador: The Peak Season, 1904", *International Journal of Maritime History*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1993b, pp. 127-154; "Newfoundland Involvement in 20th Century Shore-Station Whaling in British Columbia", *Newfoundland Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1991a, pp. 97-122; "A Newfoundland Floating Factory Whaling Expedition", *Polar Record*, Vol. 27, No. 161, 1991b, pp. 125-128; "Expansion of Regulated Modern Shore-Station Whaling in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1902-1903", *The Northern Mariner*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1991c, pp. 1-22; "Modern Shore-Based Whaling in Newfoundland and Labrador: The Cabot Steam Whaling Co. Ltd, 1896-98", *International Journal of Maritime History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1989, pp. 129-157. See also Baker, M., Dickinson, A.B. and Sanger, C.W., "Adolph Nielsen: Norwegian Influence on Newfoundland Fisheries in the Late 19th - Early 20th Century", *Newfoundland Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1992, pp. 25-35.

Incorporated 29 September 1903, principal shareholders in the Mic-Mac Whaling Co. Ltd. were: William C. Job (215 shares), Robert B. Job (100), Marmaduke C. Winter (100), Kenneth R. Prowse (100), Colin Campbell (75), Alexander McDougall (50), and John James S. Pitts. Newfoundland, Registry of Companies, Drawer 1, No. 7. In the same year Job Bros., with 200 shares @ \$100, were major investors in the Atlantic

Whaling and Manufacturing Co. Ltd. Newfoundland Registry of Companies, Drawer 2, No. 90. This company subsequently amalgamated with the Mic-Mac Whaling Co. Ltd. Construction of the new whale factory at Trinity was "under the direction of Captain Cross" *Evening Herald*, 15 July 1904.

3. Major initial shareholders in the Labrador Whaling and Manufacturing Co. Ltd., incorporated 7 July 1904: W.D. Reid (150), Daniel A. Ryan (90), James Ryan (50), and Charles Dawe (50). Newfoundland, Registry of Companies, Drawer 2, No. 89.

4. "The new whaler *Hump*, Larsen Master, 9 days from Galway where she called for coal on the way from Christiana, reached port yesterday", *Evening Herald*, 16 July 1904.

5. "The new whaler *Fin* Nils Neilssen, 11 days from Christiana, arrived this morning having made a very good passage, notwithstanding head winds. She is another fine craft for this industry, is 103 tons gross, 21 net, 52 horsepower, triple expansion engines and capable of high speed." *Ibid.*, 11 July 1904.

6. For full details of the *Fin*'s first whaling season at Trinity, see, for example, *Ibid.*, 1, 14 and 25 June; 11, 15, 22 and 25 July; 6 August; 9 and 26 September; 7 and 28 November; and 28 and 30 December 1904.

7. Newfoundland, Annual Report of Department of Fisheries (1904), p. 72.

8. Only 892 whales were captured, "being a falling off compared with the year 1904 of 383 fish. Considering that there were five more steamers working in 1905 this is a very large deficiency, and demonstrates the great scarcity during the past year". Newfoundland, Annual Report of Department of Fisheries (1905), p. 150. Towards the end of the season a report in the *Evening Herald* (15 August 1906) noted that "the prospects for the whale factories is not promising this season and just now parties interested are talking of closing down next year, otherwise they fear the fishery may soon become extinct."

9. *Evening Herald*, 1 and 2 May 1905.

10. Newfoundland, Annual Report of Department of Fisheries (1905), p. 150.

11. The season was so poor that a special meeting was called to determine if shareholders would be willing "to pay up" a debt of "some \$30,000 on its two years' work" *Evening Herald*, 14 November 1905.

12. The generally poor state of the industry as a whole, and the 1906 season in particular, is reflected in a newspaper report in June when the catchers should have had their greatest success: "The past week is regarded as the best week of the year for whaling, and that it is an utter failure shows better than any thing else the collapse of the industry." *Evening Herald*, 18 June 1906.

13. See, for example, *Ibid.*, 28 August and 8 November 1906.

14. *Ibid.*, 4 January 1907.

15. Sanger and Dickinson, op. cit. (1933b), pp. 150-151.

16. *Evening Herald*, 10 January 1907.

17. For full details, see *Ibid.*, 19 and 21 February and 13 March 1907.

18. *Ibid.*, 6 January 1914.

19. For full details, see *Ibid.*, 7 and 27 March; 1, 25 and 28 April; 1, 4 and 21 May; 1, 6, 16, 23 June; 13 and 23 July; 29 September; and 4 October 1914.

20. Despite advertisements which ended with, "All the above will be Sold cheap", Job Bros. were unable to find a buyer for their "whaling stations and all the machinery." *Ibid.*, 1 April 1915.

21. *Ibid.*, 12 April 1916.

22. See, for example, *Ibid.*, 12, 13, and 14 May; 22 July; and 8 November 1915.

23. *Ibid.*, 24 August 1916.

24. Newfoundland, Annual Report of Department of Fisheries (1904), p. 69.

25. *Evening Herald*, 1 December 1910.

26. *Ibid.*, 21 November 1906. See also, "Correspondence: C.B. Rankin to Anders Ellefsen", 5 December 1906. *Ellefsen Papers*.

27. *Evening Herald*, 1 December 1910.

28. *Ibid.*, 15 April 1913.

29. See, for example, Sanger and Dickinson, op. cit., (1990), pp. 109-115; and op. cit., (1989), pp. 141, 152 et passim. For a full account of a lengthy debate in the House of Assembly concerning the possible influence of whale stocks on annual caplin runs, see *Evening Herald*, 30 May 1914.

30. In 1909, for example, with the industry in decline, the Labrador Whaling and Manufacturing Co. Ltd. declared a dividend of 17.5 per cent "and \$3000 was added to the reserve fund." *Evening Herald*, 30 January 1909. The Hawke Harbour factory remained profitable. The *Cachelot*, lost when she went aground on Bell Isle in 1910, was replaced the following year with a new catcher built in Norway, *Cachelot*(2), and in 1912 at the annual meeting of the shareholders "a dividend of 6 percent was declared." *Ibid.*, 23 January 1912. By 1914 the Ryan Brothers' operation at Hawke Harbour was "the only whaling Co. left the others having shut down because of poor business", *Ibid.*, 23 January 1914.

31. *Ibid.*, 2 March 1920.

32. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1906.

33. *Ibid.*, 20 May 1912.

34. Ms. Ada Nemic (Green) and Mr. Adrian McGrath, Trinity. *Personal Communication*, 1993.

35. *Evening Herald*, 28 November 1911.