

CLUBS & ORGANIZATIONS

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Dildo settled in early 1800s

The Compass "Offbeat" column of Dec. 2 made reference to the communities of Dildo and Spread Eagle. Although the names may imply a humorous meaning, their names have stuck throughout the centuries and I can find no evidence of where the settlers ever wanted the names changed.

Dildo was first settled in the early 1800s by Reids, Prettys, Smiths and Newhooks. And in the 1980s, these were still the predominant names among the inhabitants.

Dildo is close to good fishing grounds and the cod fishery has always been the primary basis of the economy, supplemented until the 1950s by subsistence farming.

In the 1750s, herring fishing began and some years later, a sawmill and then a butter factory opened. These did not last and in the latter part of the 19th century, Dildo was well-known for its squid, and Americans and Canadians came regularly to purchase bait.

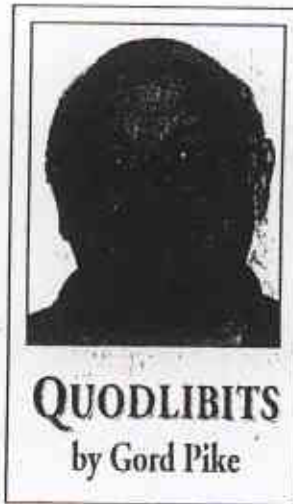
In 1889, a permanent fisheries commission was set up for the colony and a fish hatchery was established on Dildo Island under the direction of A. Neilson, superintendent of the fisheries. The hatchery, one of the most modern and largest of its type in the world, was designed to hatch between two and three

million cod in a season. A spawning pond was added in 1891 and a 5.5 metre (18 feet) high windmill provided the power to pump sea water into the pond. In 1891, 39,550,000 cod and 541,195,000 lobster were hatched. Two years later, 201,435,000 cod and 517,353,000 lobster were propagated.

Twenty people were employed in the hatchery in the summer but despite its seeming success the hatchery was discontinued; perhaps because of the financial crisis of the colony in the 1890s. During the same period a lobster-packaging factory had been set up, but it too was abandoned by the turn of the century.

In the 20th century, Dildo was a flourishing whaling centre but a ban on whaling in the early 1970s brought this industry to a close. It also aided the demise of mink ranches in the area which depended on whale meat (from pothead whales) as a cheap source of food.

In 1955, an entire mink farm had been transported from Lester Island, near Vancouver to Dildo, but in the late 1960s, rising feed prices forced it and other ranches to close. The Newfoundland Fur Farmer Co-op, incorporated in 1951, although the post Confederation period the inshore fishery diminished in 1950, a fresh-fish plant was established



in South Dildo.

Dildo can boast the only sealing plant in Newfoundland, operated by the Norwegian firm Carino. Three small sawmills operate in the area as well as one shipbuilding concern, a commercial farm, two longliners and eight trap-skiffs. Although neither Dildo nor South Dildo has a town council, they have good municipal services.

SPREAD EAGLE

This community is located in the western bight at the head of Spread Eagle Bay, which was noted for its fine beaches.

There was a Church of England family living at Spread Eagle from 1869 to 1874 - probably either the Reids or the Hellyers (Hilliers), who were

fishing there in 1889.

Salmon and herring were taken in addition to cod and the family kept a few cattle and swine. The population had reached 30 in 1891. By 1901, a school had been built for the children of the Reid, Hillier and Smith families.

Logging supplemented the shore fishery and by the 1930s, there were two sawmills providing local employment. Pothead whaling took place in the area, though concentrated mainly at Dildo and Old Shop. Spread Eagle also enjoyed a reputation as a fine trout fishing area.

With a population which never exceeded 80 people, Spread Eagle was resettled in 1967, when three families moved to Blaketown, four to South Dildo and two to New Harbour. The two remaining families resettled to Old Shop by 1968.

Since Spread Eagle remained accessible by road from Old Shop, many families continued to keep summer homes there.

I visited Spread Eagle last summer, and was amazed at the number of fine cottages there. I have fond memories of the place. I was last there in the mid-1960s, when my father, Art Parsons and me found some great salmon and trout fishing holes there. It then had a population of about 50.