

Winter 2010

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The Newfoundland Historical Society  
1905-2010



Newsletter

**Robert Parsons, NHS Grand Bank Regional Representative**

When the Canadian Coast Guard (Alumnus), Newfoundland and Labrador division, called me in November 2009 to ask if they could present me with their "Polaris" award on December 17, 2009, I was honored by their gesture. Not an annual award, it had been given out only two previous times in the years of the Alumnus' existence. The citation reads: "In Recognition of the Outstanding Contribution to the Preservation and Public Awareness of the Marine Heritage and History in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador" and was presented in the Coast Guard building on St. John's South Side.

In my twenty-three years of research and writing of North Atlantic ships and sailors, survivors and victims, especially those of Newfoundland and Labrador, this is the first public recognition I've received for writing about the sea and shipwrecks.

Meanwhile research and writing continues unabated from my keyboard here in Grand Bank. In the fall of 2009, *Courting Disaster: True Crime and Mischief on Land and Sea* became my twenty-second book. *Wrecked and Ruined: Curious Sea Tales from the Eastern Edge* by Pottersfield Press, Nova Scotia, is currently in press and slated for appearance in March/April of this year.

For ten years I published a monthly newsletter online, but because of technical difficulties it and the website folded. I'm delighted to announce a new website which, among other items, has a newsletter and button bar listing over 1200 persons lost at sea at <http://www.atlanticwrecks.com>.

I have recently become a member of Newfoundland Historical Society and I've often been asked how I became interested in marine history.

My father, Charles, was a seaman all his life (1915-1950s), and was shipwrecked once, on the *Mary D. Young*, at the entrance to St. Pierre harbour, in November 1918. In later years he was a cook on foreign-going schooners, banking vessels and druggers. I remember that, in my teenage years, he could rhyme off all the vessels that were "lost with crew" in Grand Bank (there were twenty-five in a one-hundred year span).

Because of my family background and the fact that Grand Bank was a great fishing community, some say the third largest after Gloucester and Lunenburg, I suppose the feeling for wooden, sailing ships was instilled in me. I didn't realize this until about the mid-1980s. The catalyst for my initial research was a list of all schooners once owned in Grand Bank. The list was comprised of about 300 ships giving the name, owner and a brief history. I thought at the time that it was a shame that all these ships were lost and lives gone with them, and that not much had been recorded.

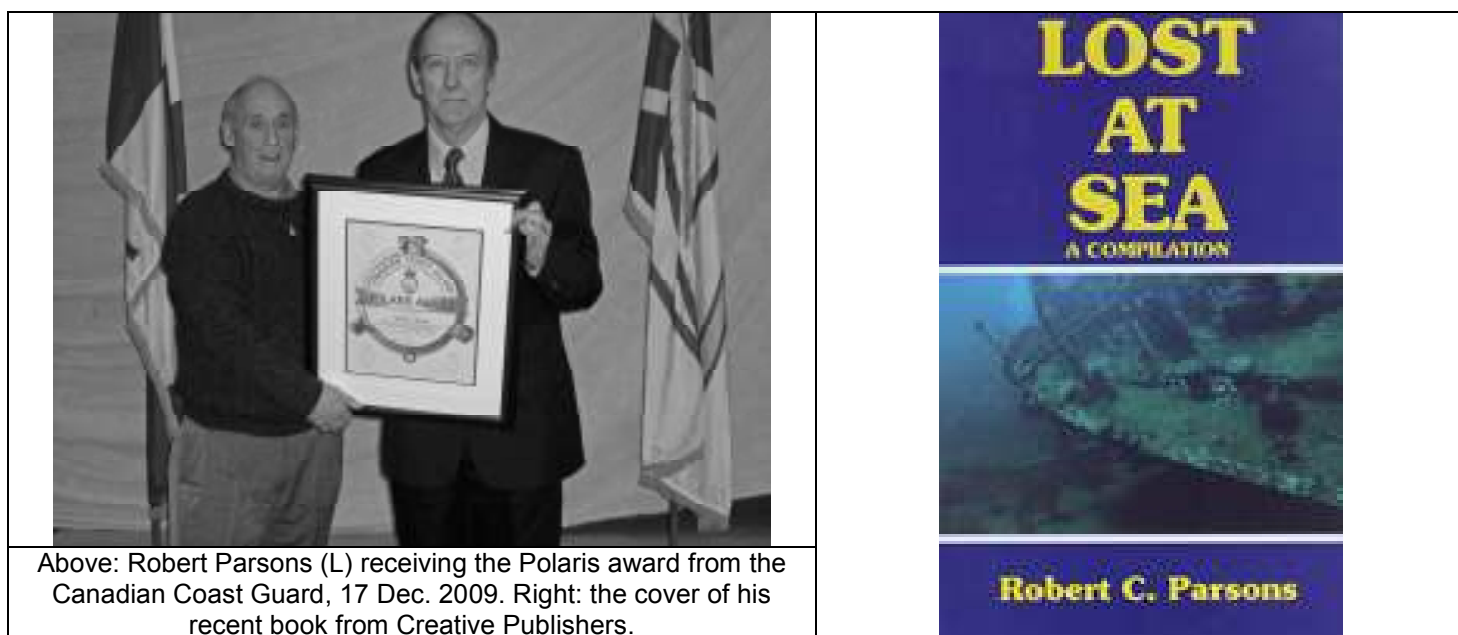
As a hobby, I began to search out what had happened to the rest: some burned or sank, others were beached, wrecked, abandoned in mid-ocean. I put this information on file index cards at first, then in exercise books. Some stories were brief, others much longer.

In 1988-89, I connected all stories chronologically with lead-in information between stories or chapters, e.g. World War One, the advent of three-masted schooners and later engines, prohibition/rum running, the decline of the salt fish trade and so on.

I sent a draft of my work to a friend and asked him if he thought it had the potential to be a book. His answer was, "No, not one book, but two." And so it was. I was wisely led to Creative Publishers and Don Morgan who produced *Lost at Sea, Volume One* in 1991 and *Lost at Sea, Volume Two* in 1992. Both of these were mainly centered around Grand Bank, with some stories from other places: Burin, Fortune, Garnish, Belleoram, Ramea, and Burgeo.

There have been five reprints of the book, the last one entitled *Lost At Sea: A Compilation*. And that was how it all came about.

Robert Parsons



Above: Robert Parsons (L) receiving the Polaris award from the Canadian Coast Guard, 17 Dec. 2009. Right: the cover of his recent book from Creative Publishers.

### 2009-2010 Lecture Series: Winter 2010

- 28 January:** Garfield Fizzard: *The MacDermotts of Fortune Bay: Their Three Missions, 1904-1934.*
- 25 February:** Jessie Chisholm: *The Response of the FPU to the Sealing Disasters of 1914 – an Illustrated Presentation.*
- 25 March:** Susan Newhook: *The Grandchildren of Fogo: the Ripples of the Fogo Island Films of 1968.*
- 29 April:** Sandra Clarke: *Tracing our Linguistic Roots: Mapping Regional Diversity in Newfoundland and Labrador English* [George Story Lecture].

Lectures will be in Hampton Hall at the Marine Institute on Ridge Road at 8.00 p.m.

**WEATHER CANCELLATIONS:** *If the weather is bad, please consult the Storm Centre at [cbc.ca/nl](http://cbc.ca/nl). Cancellations will be announced there.*

## Cupids Symposium

In 2010 we celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Guy's arrival in Cupers Cove, now Cupids. The Newfoundland Historical Society and the Cupids Historical Society will co-host a symposium in St. John's and Cupids to commemorate the founding of the first permanent English community in Canada. Funding has been approved by CUPIDS 400 Inc, the organization overseeing provincial activities, and the symposium is scheduled for September 24-25.

A preliminary programme is taking shape and a list of speakers and topics should be available in our next newsletter. Organizers have identified a range of items of historical interest: the London and Bristol Company charter of 1610, European-Beothuk interactions in the early settlement period, letters and correspondence, Atlantic activities and living standards in the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century, historical geography and regional settlement patterns, Shelia NaGeira, community defence and piracy, continuing history of Cupids, 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 1910 and archaeological activities in recent years. The new Legacy Centre under construction in Cupids will provide a range of interpretive materials, and other exhibits are under consideration.

The symposium is open to the general public and no admission is charged. Transportation to/from St. John's and lunch/banquet events will be on a cost-recovery basis. The Society encourages members to mark these dates in their calendars. The Cupids Historical Society anticipates a high level of interest at the community and regional level.

*Larry Coady  
Chair, Programme Committee*

NOTE: Discoveries relating to Cupids continue to gather news coverage. Susan Snelgrove, an Ontario genealogist, recently found the will of "Master James Hill inhabitant of Cupits Cove", dated 1674, on the British National Archives website. It provides more information on the early inhabitants of the settlement. And Bill Gilbert's team has recently unearthed a 17<sup>th</sup>-century structure, possible a defensive wall, at the site. See <http://www.baccalieudigs.ca/discoveries.asp> for details.

## Photos of recent speakers



Heather O'Brien, our September speaker



Allan Byrne, our October speaker



Derek Wilton (L), our Gilbert Higgins lecturer, with Melanie Martin, and Peter Latta of MANL (co-sponsor with ANLA)

## Planned Giving

Are you interested in supporting the work of the Newfoundland Historical Society yet not in a position to make a donation at present? Have you considered the option of planned giving, i.e. including in your will a legacy to allow the province's oldest heritage society, founded in 1905, to continue its mandate of bringing quality history to the general population? In so doing, you may be able to reduce the tax burden on your estate at the same time. If this option is of interest to you, please contact the office by phone, email or regular mail (details on p. 1) to receive further information.

*If you have much, give of your wealth; if you have little, give of your heart. Arab proverb.*



22.07.001, Schooners in harbour, Venison Tickle, Labrador, pre-1903.  
From the Geography Collection, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University

Reminder: if you need to visit our office, we are now in room 904 of the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of the TD Building at the corner of Duckworth and Prescott Streets. However, our postal address, phone number and email remain the same. Please be advised that due to space issues in our new location our Archives and Reading Room are closed to researchers until further notice.

### MEMBERSHIP FORM

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**Membership Fees:** Regular \$28 / Life \$400 / Institutional \$24 / Student (no Quarterly) \$15 / Joint NHS-Heritage Canada Foundation \$50  
**Donations are always welcome!**

Fee \_\_\_\_\_ Donation \_\_\_\_\_ Total \_\_\_\_\_

Visa Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_

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***Payment may be made by VISA, cheque or money order to the Newfoundland Historical Society. Please send this form with your payment to the address on the front page. US subscribers please pay in US funds to cover postage. International subscribers please pay 18 pounds sterling or Canadian equivalent.***

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