

The following excerpt is from a story that I recorded for a Newfoundland Folklore course at the Memorial University in 1978. I conducted an interview with Dad about his many voyages. This was his recollections of his first voyage.

William Green's: First Voyage to Labrador

By Lester Green

It was around the middle of April, 1935 that I made my first trip to Labrador. We loaded the schooner with birch junks, wooden stakes, splits, barrel hoops, lumber and a few barrels of herring we caught the first part of the winter. We shipped this to St. John's to sell for grub for Mom and them 'cause they couldn't get any when we was gone to Labrador.

“Father, me, Wallace, and I think it was George, went to St. John's and the rest of the crew stayed to get the gear ready.

“When we get to St. John's, we sell the stuff and buy grub for Mom and them. Father get credit for gas, tar for barking the trap, about 160 hoghead of salt and grub for the boat. We loaded the boat with freight like flour, cans of food, things for stores and items people asked us to get them like a stove, chairs, and other stuff. When we returned, these things were dropped off at Little Heart's Ease, Southport, Gooseberry Cove and St. Jones Without.”

“In early June we loaded the gear aboard the *R.A. Squires* for the voyage to Labrador. The gear was a trap skiff, two punts, three codtraps, seven to ten lines of trawl, and a salmon net to catch a few salmon to eat. The skiff was 28 feet long and had a five Acadia in her.”



The *R.A. Squires* under full sail leaving St. Jones Without for the Labrador Fishery. Note the supplies on deck and punt in tow.

“We left home on Thursday, 18th of June with Dad, me and Wallace aboard. We stopped off Gooseberry Cove to pick up John Robert Spurrell, Uncle Dickie Seward, Edward Spurrell, and George Smith. Off Trinity it was some foggy and someone yelled “sure we got no tea!!” We pulled the jib down and hauled up the skiff, Uncle Dickie and Wallace jumped aboard and went ashore in Trinity to get the tea. We had to keep blowing the horn so they could fix a course to come towards us.”

‘When they got aboard, we hoisted the jib and set the course for Catalina. The fog lightened and we saw a schooner of the bow. Dad said “Sure that’s Uncle Moses Martin from Little Heart’s Ease and we should follow him into the run and go across Bonavista Bay.”



Uncle Moses Martin's schooner *Eldon John Russell*.

“We got down to St. Anthony just before dark and we anchored in the harbour for the night. We spent a few days in St. Anthony. Dad met his old buddy, Uncle Stevey White, from New Perlican. Dad said we’ll go down to Labrador with Uncle Stevey and fish near him.”

“The next day we left and off Quirpon, there was some mess of schooners. I’d say thirty or forty from Conception Bay, Trinity Bay, Bonavista Bay and some from around the Cape. We went across the straits and schooners raced pass each other and other passed them. The schooners all split up on the coast of Labrador. Some landed Planters and their gear. Others found a place for trap births.”

“We stopped at different places like Hawke Harbour, Huntingdon Shore and finally we anchored at Snack Cove. We took out the traps and found out about the births from settlers and Uncle Stevey. About a week after there was some storm from the Northeast. After the storm, we went over and helped Uncle Stevey get his trap off the bottom. We tore the bottom of the trap to get it free from the rocks.”

“The collector boat came down and told us there was lots of fish in Packs Harbour. So we got the traps aboard and took the 260 quintals and headed for Packs Harbour. There was two schooners at Packs Harbour, when we got the traps in the water. Uncle Stevey fixed his trap and put it out. There was no fish the first couple of days. The two schooners that was there left. After that boy was there ever fish!!”

“We’d haul the trap, load the skiff, and put the rest in a codbag. We bring the load to the schooner and get something to eat, while the cook would prong up the fish. After we have a quick lunch, we go up on deck and clear away the fish. Dad was a splitter, Wallace was the header, and I was a cut-throat, John Roberts was the salter, Edward and George was the rousers. They would dip the fish out of the tub and throw it down in the hole, to the salter. We didn’t have a cook but Uncle Dickie did the most of the cooking.”

‘Sure sometimes it be dark by the time you was finished, so we’d put the kerosine lamp over the splitting table. Sometimes we rig a torch and by the time you was finished, your face would be black as ink. We finish the load around 12:00 or 1:00 in the morning and grab a quick nap, cause we go out around 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning to haul the trap again.’

“Coming back from Labrador, she be a strake clear of the water’s hedge. We’d have about 700 quintals of salt fish, and about 6 cast of codliver oil aboard. We dropped the boys off at Gooseberry Cove and headed home. It was around middle of August. The boys would come up later to help us take the gear of the schooner. Around September, we get ready to dry the fish. The schooner would get half the voyage and the crew the other half. Dad, Wallace and my share was included in the crew share. Our share was left at St. Jones and the crews share was given to them to dry. If it spoiled their share they got nothing. The boat share was given to people from Gooseberry Cove, Butter Cove, Southport and Little Heart’s Ease to dry. We’d give the people so much a quintal but most of the time they wouldn’t take money but wanted to get something in St. John’s perhaps a jacket, pair of pants, or pair of rubber boots.”

“Around October, Dad would go down to people who had the fish to dry. If the fish was to his liking, we’d come down and with the rest of the crew we’d collect the dry fish and put it in the hole. When we’d get it all aboard, the schooner headed to St. John’s.”

“We would beat in the narrows and go tie up at Baine Johnson wharf. The next morning Wallace went up to the office and he came down, we’d start culling the fish. The weigh-master would keep track of the weight but we keep count of the barrows and each barrow would have a draft, about two quintals of fish. We paid Baine Johnson a payment on the boat and for the supplies that we had there the spring. What was left was shared among Dad, me, and Wallace.”



Men culling fish on the wharf at St. John's, NL

We'd go shopping then with Mom and Melita to buy food and clothes for the winter. The stores we'd go to was the Big Six, Harris & Hiscocks, London, and Ayre's and others, I can't remember the names. When we were ready to go, we'd take the freight down to the wharf and load it aboard. It was hard to get out of St. John's in the fall but when we got our chance, we were gone."



The Arcade, Water Street



Bowering Brothers, Water Street



Interior of Bowering Brothers

Some of the many stores that lined Water Street and Duckworth Street in St. John's between 1930s and 1950s.

“When we get back home, we carry the freight to the people that sent out by us. Then we’d come back and moor the schooner up in Ferry’s Cove under full force for the winter by carrying two anchors ashore and having two more on the bow. We carry two more span lines ashore in the cove. This kept the schooner from swinging in the winds. After she was moored, we take down the riggings and build up a place in the hole for the canvas. Then she was left for the winter.”



[*Earl John Millar* at anchorage for the winter in the same location where the *R.A. Squires* would have been anchored.]