



# Wooden Boat News

Our Post Conference Edition

Issue 3 – November 2008

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## The Research

It was part of our mandate that we would hold a Wooden Boat Builder Conference this year. It was very important that it would take place, as we all felt that this is a very critical time in the century's old tradition of wooden boat building in Newfoundland and Labrador.

To do this, it would be imperative that we identify as many of the wooden boat builders, model builders and enthusiasts as possible. We wanted to find out where they lived, their age grouping, were they still active, and were the boats they were building still being used in some aspect of the fishery.

Our Research Assistant, Howard Cooper, took on this task with great enthusiasm. He made over 550 contacts by telephone and email to people residing in more than 275 towns in Newfoundland and Labrador. From those contacts, we learned that there were 160 active wooden boat builders and 133 inactive builders. Additionally, there were 38 active model builders identified.



Howard Cooper  
Photo by Dennis Flynn

## The Conference

From this base of information the Conference was planned and subsequently held during the weekend of October 31 to November 2, 2008 at the Society of United Fishermen (S.U.F.) Lodge in Winterton. There were 73 registered for the Conference and there were 92 people attending the Conference Dinner. It exceeded our every expectation. Comments from those attending confirmed similar feelings, especially with the demonstrations of the use of the “three piece mold” by Melvin Green, the “half model” and “lofting” by Leonard Pecore and Bruce Whitelaw, and the part these different molds played in building wooden boats.

Several interesting comments were introduced from the audience regarding the builders who did not use molds at all, but simply relied on their unique ability to shape their boats just with the “naked eye”.

We were very pleased to have Dr. David Taylor provide the Conference Opening Address on the topic “Building Wooden Boats in Newfoundland and Labrador: Key Elements of the Tradition” as well as being Facilitator for the two afternoon sessions entitled “What are we trying to save?” and “What do we need to do?”. Dr. Taylor has published a book “Boat Building in Winterton” which was based on his thesis which was submitted for a Masters of Art in Folklore from Memorial University of Newfoundland, August 1980. He is presently head of research and programs at the American Folklife Centre at the Library of Congress, in Washington, D.C. These afternoon sessions were very interactive and drew considerable audience participation.



*Frank French, Conference Chair*



*Melvin Green, 3 piece Mold Demonstration*



*Leonard Pecore & Bruce Whitelaw, Lofting Demonstration  
Photo by Dennis Flynn*

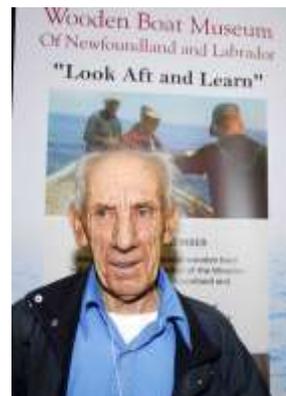


*Dr. David Taylor, Facilitator  
Photo by Dennis Flynn*

## Where we Came From

It was very interesting to reflect on the Members who made the effort to attend the Conference and AGM. We had 6 attend from St. Lewis, Mary's Harbour and the Port Hope Simpson region in Labrador, 6 from Twillingate and 5 from Joe Batts Arm. The oldest boat builder we had attending was 82 year old Paul Poole from St. Lewis. We had 15 active boat builders with us, for a total of 73 Members from 22 different communities.

The entire program for the day's events was guided by the capable hands of Frank French, a member of the Winterton Heritage Advisory Board and Chair of the Heritage Board's Steering Committee.



*Paul Poole  
Photo by Dennis Flynn*

## Dinner, a Special Member, and a Time to Let Down Your Hair

The Conference Dinner Chair was Jennifer Green Sheppard, a member of the Winterton Heritage Advisory Board and a member of the Board's Steering Committee. The highlight for this event was a tribute to Henry Vokey of Trinity, TB, in recognition of his lifetime devotion to building wooden boats and his being recipient of the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador. Greetings were also extended to Henry through correspondence from Premier Danny Williams. On behalf of the Members of the Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador, Jennifer presented Henry Vokey with an Honorary Life Membership.



*Photos by Dennis Flynn*

The evening's program included a traditional "Kitchen Party" which was under the baton of "Music Director" Melvin Green. There were lots of participants holding forth with their guitars and accordions as well as several renditions from the "Ugly Stick". Those of us not so musically talented took a few skuffs around the dance floor. A great time was had by all.



*Left to Right: Melvin Green; Andy Jones; Evelyn George and Henry Vokey; Aidan Penton, Otto Young, and Francis Reardon; Joe & Shelia Vokey; Alex Garland, Evelyn George, and Wayne Vokey; Otto Young and Aidan Penton; Howard Cooper; Paul Hindy and Lee Broaders*

### Seafood Donations

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the following companies who donated seafood for our Meet and Greet on Friday night:

Greens Seafood – Mussells  
QuinSea Fisheries – Shrimp

P.Janes & Sons – Crab Claws  
Quinlan Brothers Ltd. - Shrimp

## Our Volunteers

We were very fortunate in having a number of volunteers help make the Conference such a success. Our Admin Assistant, Beverley King, recruited Brenda French, Rosanne Pinhorn, Christine Cooper and Eileen Green. Many comments were received concerning the great work that was done in providing the food and other help at the “Meet and Greet” evening, as well as their help with the Registration Desk and in providing the treats during the Conference “Breaks”. They deserve a heartfelt and well deserved “Thank You”.

## The Annual General Meeting

Sunday morning brought the Members together again for the Conference Breakfast and our first Annual General Meeting and Election of Directors and Officers. The normal business of the AGM was facilitated by Hal Barrett, and included the adoption of reports from the incorporating Directors, the interim Financial Report, adoption of the By-Laws, approval of the Annual Fees, appointment of the Auditor and the Nominating Committee Report. The Nominating Report was unanimously accepted and the follow persons elected:

<b>Chair/President</b>	<b>Bruce Whitelaw</b>
<b>Vice Chair /Vice President</b>	<b>Frank French</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Beverley King</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Wallace Pinhorn</b>
<b>Directors</b>	<b>Anthony Cobb</b>
	<b>Melvin Green</b>
	<b>Chris Osmond</b>
	<b>Jennifer Green</b>
	<b>Sheppard</b>
	<b>Wayne Vokey</b>



*Back: Wayne, Chris, Melvin, Tony, Jennifer  
Front: Bev, Frank, Bruce, Wallace*

## A Message from the Chair *Bruce Whitelaw*

**Imagine** a Newfoundland and Labrador without access to the sea.

**Imagine** your Bay without boats of wood.

**Imagine** a language without midship bends and breast hooks, rodneys and punts.

**Imagine** your children without connection to the past.

Inspired by the work of David Taylor, and fuelled by passion for boats and family heritage, a small group founded the Winterton Boat Building Museum in 1997, a community effort to stave off the possibility that traditional boatbuilding might fade into obscurity, remembered by none.

They envisioned a living tribute to the past: Boats in the making, Boats on the water, People in boats on the water, People practicing skills borne from our heritage – rowing, sculling, sailing.

We have been invited to share their vision and begin a new Provincial **Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador** resting on the foundation they have so ably constructed.

The new mission? **Operate as professional archivist, conservator and exhibitor of this province's knowledge and history of wooden boats, their economic use and contribution to community life.**

*What a challenge we have accepted!*

To get things going and gauge the provincial appetite for such a mission, we hosted our first conference, some 70 people brought together under a common cause. Crowded into the historic SUF Hall in the town of Winterton we were challenged by David Taylor to ponder the future of traditional wooden boats and the preservation of our maritime heritage. People came from the far reaches of the province: from Corner Brook and St. John's, from Mary's Harbour and Marystown. People represented boat building and model building, folklore and heritage, education and business and enthusiasm. The group filled the hall with infectious energy and ideas and optimism. Everyone had things to share and it would go unchallenged to boast that no one escaped the weekend without learning something new. It was an exciting event.

*So, where to from here?*

There is some urgency. We must move quickly before some opportunities are lost as time overtakes those with the experience, skill and knowledge which we treasure so deeply. We must move quickly before the last of our natural resources falls prey to the appetites of housing and paper mills and wood burners. On Fogo, traditional boatbuilding is only eight funerals away from extinction.

Already, since the conference, we have taken first steps in three directions in the effort to preserve, safeguard and exhibit the design, construction and use of wooden boats. We have committed to:

1. Documenting the boatbuilding life of Mr. Henry Vokey.
2. Action as an Advocacy Group for the preservation of our forest resource and rights of bona fide boat builders to harvest boatbuilding timber.
3. Preserving the secrets locked up in the aging boats strewn across the province by creating an army of helpers through a Field Documentation Course specifically addressing the challenges of traditional wooden boats.

A handful of enthusiasts from one small town has shown what can be done in a short time.

The success of our newly minted Provincial Museum will grow only through the efforts of its members so we look forward to harnessing the deep reserve of enthusiasm so nakedly displayed at the conference.

*Imagine* what can be done by a hand full of talented people and their friends from across Newfoundland and Labrador!

## A Membership Event

We are pleased to have a booth at the Fish and Workboat Show at Mile One Centre in St. John's on Friday, November 21 and Saturday, November 22, featuring a Vokey punt. We would like to see you there. Tell your friends, or bring them with you. We will be actively soliciting new Members and would appreciate the help of all our Members in signing up new ones. Our future will be dependent on a strong and diverse membership base, and this will be very important in preserving the wooden boat culture of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We started a "**Member Get a Member**" campaign at the conference and **ALL** members are asked to join in. There are a couple of prizes to reward the first Member to sign up 5 new members, and a Free Mariner Membership for the Member who signs up the most new Members by December 31, 2008.

## Conference Feedback

An evaluation sheet was distributed to the Members attending and we are pleased to pass along a number of the comments that were expressed:

-  *"I find everything first rate – Congratulations to All"*
-  *Well organized, great start or kick off for the organization*
-  *Made it even more compelling to save this tradition and these skills – need for this part of Newfoundland Culture*
-  *A terrific experience!*
-  *Already you've done amazing work with getting the message out – but don't stop there*
-  *Keep working to keep your staff fulltime*
-  *Get your MP, MHA, other related Government Departments and Officials engaged*
-  *Something this important needs continuity and that can only come from permanent staff (like the ones who arranged this)*
-  *I think all was outstanding! You made a tremendous start toward the goal of preserving, cataloguing and maintaining the art of wooden boat building*
-  *This was an outstanding and well organized weekend – I enjoyed the whole event*
-  *All excellent presentations and demonstrations*
-  *Many thanks go to the organizers for this event – the content was top notch and was portrayed in a very positive environment*
-  *Looking forward to attending another Conference*

## Other Matters

The Museum in Winterton has now closed for the season and will re-open in April 2009.

Two of our staff positions will terminate this month. We will greatly miss having Beverley King, our Administrative Assistant, and Howard Cooper, our Research Assistant. They performed their daily tasks with dedication, enthusiasm and professionalism and we were all rewarded by the results obtained. Unfortunately, our funding allocations would not accommodate continued employment at this time, but as both of these positions are so imperative to the success and continuity of the program, we look forward to having the positions filled again following future agreements with our primary Funding Partners.

The New Board of Directors and the Project Consultant will begin assessing the results of our current project during the next number of months and reviewing project priorities. This will result in a plan for the continuation of the vision and mandate to preserve the culture and heritage of wooden boat building in Newfoundland and Labrador. Consultations will be ongoing with Government Departments and Agencies, seeking their continued support and working with them to develop the framework and obtain a commitment for funding for the next stage of our program.

## Of Growing Concern

Several Members at the Conference expressed concerns about the diminishing source of timber required for boatbuilding. Most of the forested areas of the province are under permit and in a lot of cases, boat builders cannot get access. It was suggested that one of the things that could be undertaken by WBMNL would be in acting as an advocacy group for the boat builders. WBMNL's first demonstration in this role would be to lobby government for the traditional rights of bona fide builders to harvest boatbuilding timber and to protect the natural resource from exploitation by other groups (pulp and paper, firewood, construction, etc.). What do you think of this idea? Do you think that this would be a necessary step to take? Are you finding this to be an issue? Do you support this initiative? Are you prepared to help? It is important that we know where you stand – so give us a call or drop a line.

## IMPORTANT

We would like to hear from you. Anything you have to say about the Conference? For those that did not make it, what do you see as where we go from here? Have you anything to tell us about wooden boat building, any photos, anything of interest to the Museum. It's important to stay in touch.

## Contact Information

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