“Houses Still Standing”: Modernity, Myth and Memory on Nova Scotia’s Devil’s Island

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Abstract

Once known as the "singing island" by folklorist Helen Creighton, Nova Scotia's Devil's Island has been sorely neglected by academics. By uncovering its history, mapping the community, and exploring Creighton's role in perpetuating the island's folk identity, this paper will examine the influence of the island on Creighton's later archival work. In exploring the island's shifting identity, from the epitome of true folk to an abandoned ghost village, this paper will also show how both identities promoted by Creighton contribute to her manufactured idea of the folk, which was later exploited by the tourism sector. This study also examines the effects of the relocation during WWII on former residents, exploring their inability to move back to the island after the war. With the recent passing of many former residents, "an intimate fund of memory" has disappeared and Devil's Island has become what Pierre Nora refers to as a *lieu de mémoire*. Using interviews from former residents and their descendants collected in 1998 and 2021, my paper will examine the disparity between second-hand memory and the childhood nostalgia for a lost place. This paper examines collected memories to highlight how the physical loss of the island contributed to the intense nostalgia and collective longing for a place no longer in existence. Applying both Pierre Nora's theory on the interconnectedness of history and memory and Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory, I will analyze the shared memory and community experienced by former residents even after their displacement.

April 9, 2021

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Introduction

Canada's land of leisure, Nova Scotia's provincial identity relies heavily on its reimagined past. Carefully reconstructed for the tourism industry, the fisherfolk, a hardier people, living and working along the windswept coast are an enduring image. The preservation of folk ballads from fishing communities across Nova Scotia by folklorist Helen Creighton would catapult the "folk" into the provincial consciousness. Excluding any descriptions of the dangerous and impoverished realities experienced by fisherfolk, Creighton promoted the myth of the simple folk. Content with their humble homes, this version of the folk glosses over high mortality rates, inconsistent wages, and the financial necessity of backbreaking physical labour well into old age. Creighton's time on Devil's Island in 1929 came to define her role as a collector of folk culture. The twenty-seven-acre island located in Halifax harbour was once home to over seventy-five people in a vibrant and tight-knit community of fishing families.[1] In the years since Creighton's visit, Devil's Island has slowly shifted from being an isolated, self-sufficient fishing settlement to being an abandoned "ghost" village. Creighton played an important role in promoting both identities by suggesting strong links between the fisherfolk and the supernatural. Despite what the name "Devil's Island" may suggest, the recollections of former residents are not centered around the mysterious, with residents arguing the opposite. Instead, memories of community strength during difficult times, home-cooked meals, and kitchen parties persevere. Displaced in the 1940s and 1950s, many former residents felt like they had lost a way of life. Sister Sadie Henneberry, a beloved former resident known for her kindness, wrote in her personal essay, "Devil's Island - Happy Memories," that "it was a kind of life that may never happen again."[2] In many ways, she was right. Most community members

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[1] Langan, Kate. "Devil's Island." *The Beaver: Exploring Canada's History* 78, no. 4 (1998): 34.
[2] Brown, Joe. *The View from Here: An Oral History of Eastern Passage, 1864-1945,* 22.

relocated to nearby Eastern Passage, bound together by family and their collective memory of the island they had loved. After having an opportunity to hear the stories of several former residents, the fond memories blended to create a clear picture of a happy childhood home not without its struggles.[3] However, it was the sense of community that prevailed and ultimately, came to define life on the small fishing island.

Immortalized in Creighton's collections, the creation of the dying folk had taken shape on that very land, island folk singers responsible for over half of the ballads in her first publication, *Songs and Ballads from Nova Scotia*. Despite its cultural importance, Devil's Island has been sorely neglected by academics. By applying Maurice Halbwachs theory of collective memory and Pierre Nora's idea of a *lieux de mémoire* to recollections of former residents and their children, I explore the history of the island in order to process the displacement of a longstanding community. Bringing the numerous sources together, my thesis aims to help process the root of Nova Scotia's folk identity through an unlikely origin and place the island's residents within a complicated past.

In attempting to map the Mi'kmaq use of Devil's Island, nothing can be verified. Hartlen Point in Eastern Passage was used as a summer camping location and tools dating back at least 500 years have been found on what is now a golf course.[4] During the 1760s, Mi'kmaq populations in Dartmouth were forcibly relocated onto McNab's Island maintaining "a presence on the island until the middle of the nineteenth century."[5] Despite both Hartlen Point and

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[3] Interviews were conducted by the author in 2021 after the successful completion of the SMU Research Ethics Board application.
[4] Chapman, Harry, and Dartmouth Historical Association. *A Journey to the past: Condensed Histories of Dartmouth, Preston, Cole Harbour & Eastern Passag*e. Dartmouth, N.S.: Dartmouth Historical Association, 2009, 38; CMM Environmental Services. (2010). *Mi'kmaq Ecological Knowledge Study: Highway 107 Sackville to Porters Lake*, 28.
[5] Fisher, Victor John. "Conservation, Recreation, Access, and Elitism, McNab's Island as a Case Study." Saint Mary's Institutional Repository, 1996, 67.

McNab's Island being in close proximity to Devil's Island, known to the Mi'kmaq as Kjikujikutk, archaeological evidence of a Mi'kmaq settlement has yet to be found on the small island.[6] Perhaps, it was too dangerous and exposed to the elements with little benefit. The Mi'kmaq Ecological Knowledge Study, a project undertaken to identify historical and current Mi'kmaq land use through engagement with Indigenous communities, was particularly helpful in determining whether or not Devil's Island was used by the Mi'kmaq. The document, which was part of a larger study looking at different districts across the province, was completed in 2010 and knowledge holders in several Mi'kmaq communities were consulted. Although the Mi'kmaq did have a name for the small island, there was no indication that the island was used as other islands in the area were. For promoters of the folk, this works heavily in their favour. McKay argues that many European folklorists define the folk as being the "original fundamental characteristics" of a particular "country's founding peoples."[7] For Nova Scotia, this complicates matters. Despite the recognition of Indigenous groups as being the founding peoples, they are never considered to be folk. The absence of the Mi'kmaq on Devil's Island tidies the history for folklorists. Although the island is unceded Indigenous territory, the lack of settlement on Devil's Island keeps the historical narrative away from the discomfort of colonialism.

Few complete histories have been written on Devil's Island by contemporary writers, however, John Boileau's *Historic Eastern Passage: Including Imperoyal, Shearwater, South East Passage, Cow Bay, McNab's Island, Lawlor's Island, and Devil's Island* published by Nimbus in 2007, is widely considered to be the best. Boileau draws on the work of other historians, creating one definitive history. He begins with the earliest records of the island,

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[6] CMM Environmental Services. (2010). *Mi'kmaq Ecological Knowledge Study: Highway 107 Sackville to Porters Lake*, 37.

[7] McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994, 10.

exploring the original land grants and the multiple name changes. Since 1711, the island has been formally known as Isle Verte, Wood Island, and Rouse's Island. On an island that thrives off stories, it comes as no surprise that there are many local legends explaining the "Devil" in Devil's Island. In one tale, several hunters, hoping for a day of leisure, became trapped on the island for days due to poor weather. After returning, they proclaimed they had been on "the Devil's Island", traumatized by their ordeal.[8] Another tale involves several men arriving on the island during the night and terrorizing a family of shepherds by shooting down their stone chimney. Terrified, the shepherds fled the island, abandoning their sheep for the night. When asked what had happened, they claimed "the Devil was on the island."[9] Although the dramatic stories of how the island obtained its name are more entertaining, it is unlikely that they hold any truth. Boileau explains that the name "Devil's Island" is most likely a corruption of the surname of a former, unknown, French owner whose last name was possibly "Deval, Devol, or even DeVille."[10] In 1752, Captain John Rouse was given a 450-acre land grant that included the island and much of Eastern Passage. Eventually, his son-in-law Richard Bulkley, obtained the grant to the island and in 1802, began leasing the land to Jacob Horn for sheep pasturage. Horn's sons would later claim the island was purchased from Bulkley in 1802.[11] Whether or not this is true, is now impossible to determine as there is no official documentation. It is important to note that nearly every publication containing details on the history of Eastern Passage and Devil's Island cites one source, a series of articles written by H.W. Hewitt for the newspaper, the *Dartmouth Patriot*, in 1901. H.W. Hewitt worked as a teacher in Eastern Passage, gathering most of his

[8] Langan, Kate. "Devil's Island." 34.
[9] Boileau, John. *Historic Eastern Passage: Including Imperoyal, Shearwater, South East Passage, Cow Bay, McNab's Island, Lawlor's Island, and Devil's Island.* Halifax, N.S.: Nimbus Pub., 2007, 98
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

information through oral history. Hewitt interviewed residents, attempting to put together a cohesive history of the area based on the testimonies of families who had lived there for generations.[12] As for the first settler on the island, Hewitt writes that an old stone house was built some time prior to Horn's arrival by an unknown inhabitant. Years later, residents told Hewitt that a Black man may have lived on the island sometime in the late eighteenth century.[13] Unfortunately, his story will likely never be uncovered.

In 1830, Horn's sons began leasing a portion of the land to the first permanent settlers of the island, Andrew Henneberry and his family.[14] This would mark the beginning of a feud between the Horns and the Henneberrys that would last nearly a century, with the latter claiming they had rightfully purchased it from the Horns and the former vehemently denying this. Jacob Horn was the maternal grandfather of Andrew Henneberry, making this conflict very much a family feud.[15] In 1845, five years after the untimely drowning of Andrew Henneberry, two of his sons, who had since established their own households on the island, applied for a land grant. They disputed the claim that Jacob Horn had leased their father the land, arguing that he had instead purchased nearly half of the island from Horn. They also felt they had a right to the land they had been actively improving. Neither family's claims were substantiated, and grants were never received.[16] However, the Henneberrys continued to live there, clearing the land of thick brush, and making several agricultural improvements. Sometime during this period, the island was cleared of nearly all its trees, most likely by burning. Whether this was done intentionally or

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[12] Martin, John Patrick, and Raddall, Thomas Head. *The Story of Dartmouth*. Dartmouth, N. S.: J. Martin, 1957, 366.

[13] Hewitt, H.W. "HISTORY OF DEVIL'S ISLAND: His Satanic Majesty Never Resided There --- Origin of the Name" *Dartmouth Patriot*. July 6, 1901.

[14] Boileau, John. *Historic Eastern Passage: Including Imperoyal, Shearwater, South East Passage, Cow Bay, McNab's Island, Lawlor's Island, and Devil's Island*, 2007, 98.

[15] Stevens, Robert Kim. *Eastern Shore Families: Genealogical notes on Eastern Passage & Cole Harbour*. Lake Charlotte, N.S.: Maritime Imprints, 2002, 141.

[16] Langan, Kate. "Devil's Island." *The Beaver: Exploring Canada's History* 78, no. 4 (1998): 35.

not, is debated in several sources.[17] In 1841, Thomas Edwards, originally from Pope's Harbour, married Andrew Henneberry's daughter, Margaret.[18] Another house was then constructed on the island and the population steadily rose.[19] During the mid to late nineteenth century, a number of schoolhouses were built, each replacing an older version to accommodate the growing community. Initially an island of farmers, residents had "easy access to Halifax markets" by boat and in the winter, by sleigh, as the harbour would freeze over.[20] Over time, fishing slowly became the main source of livelihood for islanders, a community shaped by the sea.

Due to the treacherous nature of the coast, many ships were wrecked near Devil's Island after nightfall (when the day beacon, constructed in 1837, was no longer visible). After the *Southampton*, a brig carrying wheat, was wrecked in 1851, a formal petition requesting the construction of a lighthouse was approved.[21] In 1852, the first lighthouse on Devil's Island was built and a lightkeeper, Edward Bowen, was hired. Since the living quarters in the lighthouse amounted to a single room, his wife and children had to stay in Eastern Passage. In 1859, a separate residence was finally built allowing lightkeepers to bring their families to the island.[22] Prior to the establishment of the lifeboat station, the fisherman of Devil's Island made several successful rescues of shipwrecked sailors.[23] An 1872 account details the rescue of eleven crew members of the *Breamish* and includes a recommendation from the Minister of Marine and Fisheries for compensation for the brave men. The account, written by a resident of Eastern

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[17] Boileau, John. *Historic Eastern Passage: Including Imperoyal, Shearwater, South East Passage, Cow Bay, McNab's Island, Lawlor's Island, and Devil's Island*, 2007, 99.
[18] Stevens, Robert Kim. *Eastern Shore Families: Genealogical notes on Eastern Passage & Cole Harbour*, 2002, 93.
[19] Boileau, John. *Historic Eastern Passage: Including Imperoyal, Shearwater, South East Passage, Cow Bay, McNab's Island, Lawlor's Island, and Devil's Island*, 2007, 99.
[20] Chapman, Harry, and Dartmouth Historical Association. *A Journey to the past: Condensed Histories of Dartmouth, Preston, Cole Harbour & Eastern Passag*e, 39.
[21] Irwin, E. H. Rip. *Lighthouses & Lights of Nova Scotia: A Complete Guide*. Halifax, NS: Nimbus Pub., 2003, 79.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Brown, Joe. *The View from Here: An Oral History of Eastern Passage, 1864-1945* 18.

Passage, details who was involved, how the rescue was performed and the hesitation of the community to intervene. Charles Hutt, a farmer from Eastern Passage, and his neighbour Albert Osborne, could see the wreck from the mainland and rowed to Devil's Island in an attempt to recruit community members for a rescue mission.[24] Upon landing, nearly fifteen residents were simply watching from the shore, horrified by the pleading screams of the sailors who had tied themselves to the railing on the side of the ship. Hutt demanded action be taken, but residents claimed there was little to be done, citing the nearly fifteen-foot waves. Unlike Hutt, the residents were well acquainted with the dangers of the ocean through their trade; drowning was a common occurrence on the island. In 1877, a second lighthouse was built to help passing ships better navigate the "Thrum Cap shoals" and the lighthouse keeper received a pay increase to care for both.[25] This source provides a valuable glimpse into the realities of island life, demonstrating how the proximity to the open sea forced the community to witness horrific wrecks and make hard choices. Without the assurance of a monetary reward, the risk of losing the family member responsible for the entire household's livelihood was too great. Families on Devil's Island were large, with some households having over ten children.[26] The loss of a father was financially devastating. While a handful of men volunteered to help in this particular instance, there were many wrecks for which nothing could be done. Once the lifeboat station guaranteed money per sailor rescued, men were eager to sign up, showing how any extra income went a long way for impoverished families. Storms would continue to pose a serious threat to both passing ships and islanders themselves.

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[24] Reward to [Charles] Hutt, B. Fulker and 4 others who rescued the Crew of the Barque BREAMISH near Devils Island, 1872, RG2, series A-1-a, volume 296, Reel C-3300 Access Code 90, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada 6.

[25] Irwin, E. H. Rip. *Lighthouses & Lights of Nova Scotia: A Complete Guide*, 2003, 80.

[26] Stevens, Robert Kim. *Eastern Shore Families: Genealogical notes on Eastern Passage & Cole Harbour*. Lake Charlotte, N.S.: Maritime Imprints, 2002, 8.

Established in the 1880s, the lifeboat station was an important part of island life for over fifty years, the lifesaving service ending around 1940. Exact dates are not certain, as there are a number of conflicting sources.[27] The lifeboat crews were under the direction of the coxswain, an appointed member from the community who received a yearly salary of $75. The longest serving coxswain was Benjamin Henneberry, renowned folk singer, who served for forty-two years. Upon hearing the signal, crew members were to drop what they were doing and perform paid drills for upwards of five hours.[28] Former residents would describe the signal in the late 1930s, as being a shrill siren easily heard from anywhere on the island.[29] The men would make several rescues over the years, with Devil's Island and nearby Big Thrum Cap off of McNab's Island, being particularly hard for ships to navigate around during bad weather.

Breakwaters were constructed along the shoreline of Devil's Island in 1892. The construction of the breakwaters is important, as it demonstrates government recognition of the community.[30] According to former residents, storm surges would occasionally be so high, seafoam could be found in the middle of the island. One resident described finding "suds" all over the island the day after a particularly bad storm.[31] As Devil's Island was only eleven feet above sea level, the government-commissioned breakwaters represent a care for the wellbeing of its citizens.[32] A symbol of community safety, the breakwaters formed a harbour for the fishing boats and many wharves, sheltering the island from hazardous storms. In many ways, the community would begin and end with the breakwaters, the island's geography and proximity to

[27] Brown, Joe. *The View from Here: An Oral History of Eastern Passage, 1864-1945*, 17; Parker, Mike. *Ghost Islands of Nova Scotia*. East Lawrencetown, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 2012, 42.
[28] Parker, Mike. *Ghost Islands of Nova Scotia*, 42.
[29] Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1 2021.
[30] Devils Island Nova Scotia Breakwater - acceptance tender of Hugh MacDonald and C. W. Moffatt for construction, 1892, RG2, series A-1-a, volume 595, Reel C-3423 Access Code 90, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
[31] Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1 2021.
[32] Creighton, Helen. "Ballads from Devil's Island." 503.

the open sea creating a necessity. The breakwaters would be maintained every few years until the 1940s, when the government advised all residents to leave the island for their own safety. By the 1950s, the breakwaters had all worn down, the government deciding there were not enough residents to justify the expense of the breakwaters' upkeep.[33] This decision to abandon the island to the sea was one of the biggest reasons remaining residents were forced to leave, the displacement of their community a difficult point in their lives.

Despite many improvements over the years, the community never received electricity, indoor plumbing or running water, relying on the several wells across the island.[34] In 1906, a five-party line from Dartmouth arrived on the island and was installed in the lifeboat station for emergencies. The other locations included the Lawlor's Island Quarantine Station, St. Peter's Church, Quigley's Corner general store and a fish plant, all located in Eastern Passage.[35] In 1913, Devil's Island received a post office after previously petitioning the government, John Henneberry serving as the first postmaster.[36] According to islanders, postmasters rowed into the South East Passage twice a week to collect and send mail for residents. They received a government boat and ran the post office out of their home.[37] Notably, two out of the five postmasters who served between 1913 and 1952 when the post office closed, were women. Mrs. Jane Henneberry was postmistress from 1926 until her resignation in 1930 and Mrs. Alice Henneberry took over after her husband's death in May 1937.[38] She worked for two months, despite being a new widow with six children to care for. In reality, it may have been much

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[33] Langan, Kate. "Devil's Island." 34.
[34] Brown, Joe. *The View from Here: An Oral History of Eastern Passage, 1864-1945*, 20.
[35] Chapman, Harry, and Dartmouth Historical Association. *A Journey to the past: Condensed Histories of Dartmouth, Preston, Cole Harbour & Eastern Passag*e 43.
[36] Devils Island: Post Offices and Postmasters, 1913, RG3-D-3, Item ID Number: 25728, Source PSFDS03-(19579), Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
[37] Parker, Mike. *Ghost Islands of Nova Scotia*. East Lawrencetown, 2012, 40.
[38] Devils Island: Post Offices and Postmasters, 1913, RG3-D-3, Item ID Number: 25728, Source PSFDS03-(19579), Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

longer. Despite the information being absent from the postmaster records, according to his death certificate, Edward F. Henneberry died in the hospital of sepsis complications after two operations and a four month stay. His death certificate also noted fishing as his prime occupation, which he had not done since December of 1936.[39] It is possible his wife, Alice Henneberry, took care of his postmaster duties during this time as well, despite the risk. Her son Earl would perish two years later rowing to the mainland. Another former resident recalled lighting the eastern lighthouse in the 1940s for her father's friend, lightkeeper Ken Faulkner, when he was late coming home from selling fish in the city.[40] Sources describing her father helping Faulkner wrote her out of the process, prompting the need for more research into women's roles on the island.

Harry Chapman's *A Journey to the past: Condensed Histories of Dartmouth, Preston, Cole Harbour & Eastern Passag*e, is a valuable source when approaching the history of the surrounding area. The community of Eastern Passage is heavily linked to Devil's Island, as most men married women from the mainland.[41] Many children of the island often settled in Eastern Passage as adults seeking opportunities for economic growth not possible not on Devil's Island. Chapman's source tracks the population of Eastern Passage throughout the nineteenth century showing the striking differences in settlement growth rates. In 1827, there were only 157 people living in Eastern Passage, with none listing fishing as their primary source of income.[42] By 1881, the population had grown to nearly 700, of which only one third were involved in the fishing

[39] Edward Henneberry, Nova Scotia death record, Book 169, Page 348 (1937); digital image, "Nova Scotia Historical Vital Statistics."
[40] Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1 2021.
[41] Creighton, Helen. "Ballads from Devil's Island." 504.
[42] Chapman, Harry, and Dartmouth Historical Association. *A Journey to the past: Condensed Histories of Dartmouth, Preston, Cole Harbour & Eastern Passag*e 39.

industry.[43] This demonstrates a major difference in the developing job markets. Brickyard production, glue factories, a lobster cannery and a cod liver oil production plant were only a few of the changing industries brought to Eastern Passage through the province's industrialization.[44] Notably, the Acadia Sugar Refinery, which opened in 1884, and Imperial Oil both located in Woodside were large employers of Eastern Passage men.[45] Factory employment may have appealed to fathers of large families, as it was less hazardous than fishing and provided stability through consistent wages. Ironically, despite moving away from resource-based employment throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the illusion now supports the community through tourism. Fisherman's Cove still operates as a base for Eastern Passage fisherman, but the area is better known for its brightly coloured fishing sheds turned tourist shops.[46] This image of Nova Scotia presents an idealized version of the past, exploiting the real fisherfolk whose lives were defined by poverty.

[43] Ibid 40.
[44] Ibid 41.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid 46.

Chapter One: Helen Creighton and the Folk Identity

As Ian McKay writes in his groundbreaking work, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, Helen Creighton's search for folk authenticity was not out of the ordinary, but rather, it was part of a "general cultural pattern."[1] Many felt that modernization was killing the rural folk traditions of storytelling and craftwork and went in search of the "rural ways."[2] In the early 1920s, Beatrice Hay Shaw's publication in *The Dalhousie Review* demonstrates attitudes towards widespread folk preservation in Nova Scotia. Hay Shaw promotes the idea of a dying folk, directly citing "modernity and progress" as the culprits.[3] Indeed, this also appears to be a running theme in Helen Creighton's work, the old folk ballads slowly slipping from the collective memory of rural communities. Hay Shaw's article acts as a call for preservationists to protect the culturally diverse communities around the province. She believed Canada's population, and specifically Nova Scotians, have a distinct voice due to the Indigenous population. Hay Shaw praises the province's cultural variety, citing Indigenous and Black areas as being of particular interest.[4] Hay Shaw argues that folklorists in the Atlantic region focus on the wrong type of folk, neglecting the "more interesting field of traditional tales and songs."[5] Offering her opinion, Hay Shaw ranks the various forms of folk content from most to least important. McKay argues that this elitist attitude was not uncommon among middle-class academics of the time.[6] Attempting to apply worth to the cultural output of an entire demographic of people, Hay Shaw disregards the value of the functional role of various

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[1] McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994, 8.
[2] Ibid 9.
[3] Hay Shaw, Beatrice M. "The Vanishing Folklore of Nova Scotia." *Dalhousie Review* 3, no. 3 (1923): 343.
[4] Ibid 348.
[5] Ibid 342.
[6] McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*, 22.

folk customs in their communities. Alternatively, Hay Shaw's article also explores the origins of specific myths known to Nova Scotia, comparing them to their European counterparts. Interestingly, there is not always a direct correlation between those telling the stories and the European country. For example, she compares Acadian "feu follet," which are blue flames seen in marshlands, to English will o'wisps.[7] Her comparison, although centered around a natural phenomenon, suggests there is an aspect of universality among supernatural folklore.

Answering similar calls to action as Hay Shaw's article, Clara Dennis would begin her journey around Nova Scotia in the 1930s, eventually writing several travel books containing many stories told to her by locals. In the 1940s, Mary E. Black began her work with the handcraft and weaving revival in the province, publishing her bestselling craft book, *The Key to Weaving*, in 1945.[8] Far from the only folk collector, Creighton's role as an advisor with the National Museum would elevate her work, giving her an automatic authority on folklore in the province.[9] However, in the late 1920s, Creighton was struggling to find her vocation in life. Having had some success as a writer and teacher, Creighton received advice from a colleague to explore folk collection.[10] After finding success with several families in Eastern Passage, the Hartlen family in the South East Passage urged her to visit Devil's Island. Many in the area knew Ben Henneberry personally, aware of his impressive repertoire of folk ballads. Eager to visit the island everyone was recommending, Helen Creighton's career in folklore would begin shortly after visiting the island. Creighton found herself drawn by the sinister name, setting herself up for an otherworldly experience. A minor discrepancy between the year Creighton ventured to the island makes it hard to pinpoint the actual date. While Creighton herself claims it was 1928,

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[7] Hay Shaw, Beatrice M. "The Vanishing Folklore of Nova Scotia," 344.
[8] McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*, 334.
[9] Ibid 81.
[10] Croft, Clary. *Helen Creighton: Canada's First Lady of Folklore*. Halifax, N.S.: Nimbus, 1999, 32.

McKay suggests it was actually 1929.[11] Creighton's autobiography, *A life in Folklore*, carefully describes the adventurous afternoon as her own origin myth, the birth of her calling. Creighton details the immediate way the islanders embraced her, recognizing her voice as "Aunt Helen," the woman who read their children bedtime stories over the radio a few years earlier.[12] Her descriptions of William Faulkner, eagerly giving her a tour of the lighthouses he kept, and Ben Henneberry, who sang folk ballads while the entire village listened intently, are so exaggerated one often forgets these characters are real people. Creighton's book reads more like fiction and she writes about "stepping into a different world," despite the island's close proximity to the mainland.[13] Creighton's descriptions of the island and her repeated visits help corroborate the claim of her personal connection to Devil's Island, solidifying its importance in her professional life. The events recalled by Creighton, who wrote the autobiography in the mid-1970s, are affected by the unreliability of nostalgia. Creighton's reconstruction of the island fifty years later supports her perception of all folk villages and it is important to remember that the individuals she writes about were no longer around to confirm the authenticity of her accounts. Clary Croft, the official biographer of Helen Creighton, illustrates this in his description of her first visit. He describes "Mrs. Ken Faulkner, wife of the lightkeeper," greeting Creighton on the wharf as she disembarked from the fishing boat.[14] However, Ken Faulkner's father, William Faulkner, remained the island lightkeeper until his death in 1936.[15] A teenager at the time of Creighton's visit, Faulkner did not marry Nora Smith, a teacher from East Chezzetcook, until 1940.[16] Croft's

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[11] McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*, 6.
[12] Creighton, Helen. *Helen Creighton: A Life in Folklore*. Toronto; New York: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975, 56.
[13] Ibid 58.
[14] Croft, Clary. *Helen Creighton: Canada's First Lady of Folklore*, 38.
[15] William J. Faulkner, Nova Scotia death record, Book 164, Page 876 (1936); digital image, "Nova Scotia Historical Vital Statistics."
[16] Nora Elizabeth Smith and Kenneth Anthony Faulkner, Nova Scotia marriage register, Book 100, Page 434 (1940); digital image, "Nova Scotia Historical Vital Statistics."

incorrect references to Mrs. Kenneth Faulkner throughout the biography erases a real woman's contributions to Creighton's success. Not only is her identity mistaken, her first name is seemingly of no consequence, absorbed by her husband. In reality, Jane "Jennie" Faulkner, née Chisholm, was a mother of seven children, an excellent cook and a kind hostess to schoolteachers who boarded with the family.[17] While Creighton's autobiography does not confuse Jennie and Nora Faulkner, Croft's text is thrown into question. The accuracy of Croft's descriptions of the nameless faces in other folk communities, the real people for whom the "folk" was much more than collectible artifacts, can be challenged. Additionally, the lack of correction further cements the idea that events are only being told by one side, making the stories of former residents all the more important. Beyond Creighton's first day on the island, other important details of the island's history appear one-sided. Supernatural tales later claimed by Creighton to have been heard on Devil's Island are now unable to be verified by the storytellers, historical records offering a much different view.

Creighton's *Bluenose Ghosts* is a collection of hundreds of personal ghost stories from across Nova Scotia. Creighton claims these tales were told to her during her time collecting folk ballads, furthering the image of the naturally superstitious folk household. Several of these stories originated on Devil's Island and were relayed to Creighton by residents. One memorable story involves the demise of a young family. Staring out her window towards the sea, Catherine Henneberry clutched her newborn baby as she watched her husband fall out of his boat and drown while fishing. The empty boat slowly made its way back to shore as though guided by unseen oars. Following this traumatic event, Catherine became chronically ill and lived only a

[17] Brown, Joe. *The View from Here: An Oral History of Eastern Passage, 1864-1945.* Shearwater Development Corporation, 1998, 19; Stevens, Robert Kim. *Eastern Shore Families: Genealogical notes on Eastern Passage & Cole Harbour*. Lake Charlotte, N.S: Maritime Imprints, 2002, 102.

few more years. After the funeral, her infant daughter Henrietta was found sitting upright in her highchair deceased with no discernible cause of death.[18] Upon further research, this is far from the truth. According to Nova Scotia's Historical Vital Statistics, in 1914, Henry Henneberry accidently drowned while fishing.[19] Two years later, his 19 month-old daughter, Henrietta Henneberry contracted meningitis and died after five days of fighting the illness, her mother passing away a day later.[20] Far from supernatural, this sad story outlines the unforgiving nature of a fisherman's life and little access to medical care, highlighting poverty and isolation on the island. At the time of Creighton's visit, these events had transpired less than fifteen years earlier and the older children of the Henneberry family still resided on the island with their grandparents.[21] Surely, the horrific memory of losing both parents and a younger sibling in the span of two years was not peddled as a ghost story to visitors. Another tale involves unnatural fires with no heat appearing all over one particular home on the island.[22] This story aligns more closely with mainland preconceptions about the island, rather than with the islanders themselves. Eastern Passage residents would often report seeing flames coming from the lighthouse and residences, an illusion caused by the reflection of the sun on windows.[23] One islander recalled one night during the 1940s when the eastern lighthouse was accidentally given too much power. Due to the powerful magnifying glass, the entire island looked like it was on fire. He

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[18] Creighton, Helen. *Bluenose Ghosts*. Halifax, N.S.: Nimbus, 1994, 260.
[19] Henry Henneberry, Nova Scotia death record 2765 Book 9, Page 461 (1914); digital image, "Nova Scotia Historical Vital Statistics," novascotiageneaology.com: Accessed 3 December 2020.
[20] Catherine Henneberry, Nova Scotia death record 641 Book 34, Page 194 (1916); digital image, "Nova Scotia Historical Vital Statistics," novascotiageneaology.com: Accessed 3 December 2020; Henrietta Henneberry, Nova Scotia death record 639 Book 34, Page 194 (1916); digital image, "Nova Scotia Historical Vital Statistics," novascotiageneaology.com: Accessed 3 December 2020.
[21] David Henneberry household, 1921 census Canada, Nova Scotia, Halifax County, Devil's Island, district 57, division 34, p. 21, line 5; RG31 5692461, Statistics Canada.
[22] Creighton, Helen. *Bluenose Ghosts*, 259.
[23] Gray-Leblanc, Linda. *Haulin' in the Family Net*. Halifax, N.S.: Linda Gray-Leblanc; 1994, 10.

remembered watching his father and a few other men rush to the lighthouse to help.[24] When given the chance to discuss their home, islanders scoffed at the myth surrounding the island, claiming it was "not the spooky place you read or hear about."[25] One of the few exceptions, told with pride, is the story of "Caspar" Henneberry. Holding a party on the island many years ago, Henneberry decided to step outside for some fresh air. Bursting back inside after a few minutes, Henneberry told his friends "he'd seen the Devil in the form of a halibut."[26] The next morning he was found dead in his fishing boat, his head hanging over the side, bobbing in the water. Creighton also records a version of this story told to her by Enos Hartlen, a resident of the South East Passage, in *Bluenose Ghosts*. In Hartlen's story, he recalls that there is a discrepancy regarding the ending. In some versions, Henneberry's friends from the previous night find hoofprints on the beach and evidence of a scuffle, as though the devil himself had physically murdered Henneberry.[27] This story is presumably based on Gasper Henneberry, Andrew Henneberry's eldest son, though whether this story originated from a real experience or was simply told to scare children in unknown.[28] Proud of being the first permanent settlers on the island, this story may have been more about the Henneberry family immortalizing their connection to the island. Spun to tourists every summer by the Halifax Ghost Walk, the oldest ghost walk in North America, this tale falls firmly into the realm of legend. Encouraged by the displacement and the name, Devil's Island has moved away from the folk and into the supernatural, a representation of Nova Scotia's constructed provincial identity.

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[24] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 16, 2021.
[25] Brown, Joe. *The View from Here: An Oral History of Eastern Passage, 1864-1945*, 22.
[26] Langan, Kate. "Devil's Island,", 34.
[27] Creighton, Helen. *Bluenose Ghosts*, 111.
[28] Stevens, Robert Kim. *Eastern Shore Families: Genealogical notes on Eastern Passage & Cole Harbour*, 141.

McKay's book, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*, critiques both Helen Creighton and Mary Black's role in the creation of provincial identity. In one example, McKay addresses Creighton's idealized folk in a description of her alleged visit to Sable Island. Writing an evocative piece on the violent waves and an inherently Nova Scotian way of life, Creighton convinced *Maclean's* readers in 1931 that she had visited the island located 180 miles east of Halifax.[29] Creighton argued the population was free "from all personal care and worry," invigorated by the sea and the blowing sand.[30] McKay claims that Creighton had assumed the island's isolation meant a "purer" folk and had used her imagination to fill the gaps "official government sources" had left.[31] In reality, lighthouse keepers and scientists were the only inhabitants, many only staying a few years before returning to the mainland.[32] Fresh from her visit to Devil's Island, Creighton projects it onto the desolate Sable Island, feeding into her readers' preconcenptions. Creighton's creation of the folk had begun, her journey to find more examples of idealized folk communities well underway.

After the publication of *Songs and Ballads from Nova Scotia* in 1932, Creighton set out to collect more folk ballads in other communities across the province. In 1938, Creighton travelled to a small community near Antigonish where she met and stayed with John and Hattie MacNeill. They quickly introduced her to Angus MacDonald, a bagpiper with a large repertoire of Gaelic songs.[33] Creighton regarded her time in the community and other areas in Antigonish county as "depressing" and hopeless.[34] Despite the welcoming nature of residents, Creighton was

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[29] McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*, 78.
[30] Ibid 74.
[31] Ibid 74.
[32] McKay, Ian. "He Is More Picturesque in His Oilskins: Helen Creighton (collector of Nova Scotian Folk Music) and the Art of Being Nova Scotian." *New Maritimes* 12, no. 1 (1993): 17.
[33] Croft, Clary. *Helen Creighton: Canada's First Lady of Folklore*, 65.
[34] Creighton, Helen. *Helen Creighton: A Life in Folklore*, 116.

caught off guard when many singers wished to share their "opinions on political and social issues."[35] In her diary, Creighton writes that she was put off by the extreme poverty and felt troubled by the kind families who were barely making ends meet. During their visits, John MacNeill warned her that one family he knew used tomato soup cans to hold tea, as they had no cups in the house.[36] Throughout her autobiography, Creighton frames herself as a woman constantly concerned with her finances and finding a career to support her dependent sister, Lillian, and herself. Being exposed to real poverty was shocking and uncomfortable. Rather than engaging with community members on issues that directly impacted their lives, Creighton wrote very little on the community in her autobiography. Instead, she mentioned a wedding that occurred where MacDonald played the bagpipes and "the mood was festive."[37] This was not the first time Creighton had actively ignored the poverty, focusing instead on the romanticism of the folk.

Ian McKay's article, "He Is More Picturesque in His Oilskins: Helen Creighton (Collector of Nova Scotian Folk Music) and the Art of Being Nova Scotian," explores Helen Creighton's role in the erasure of individual identity. McKay examines Creighton's personal letters highlighting an unchecked middle-class privilege, having never experienced the poverty of many rural families. Creighton believed in an unspoken cooperation between the classes, calling those who striked for better wages and working conditions "selfish" and "lacking in public spirit."[38] For Creighton, modernity, even if it lifted financial burden from impoverished families, was not welcome. In one exchange, she describes her dismay at the possibility of "an extensive air force development" in Shearwater that she admits may bring "a new prosperity" to

[35] Croft, Clary. *Helen Creighton: Canada's First Lady of Folklore*, 65.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Creighton, Helen. *Helen Creighton: A Life in Folklore*, 117.
[38] McKay, Ian. "He Is More Picturesque in His Oilskins," 21.

Eastern Passage residents.[39] To Creighton, prosperity meant modernity, which was, in her eyes, the main cause of folk destruction. Using the possessive term, “my singers,” Creighton displays a feeling of ownership over their cultural output, centering herself as the heroine of a fading Nova Scotia.[40] Keeping the fisherfolk impoverished furthered her agenda, profiting off “copyrighted pieces of personal property.”[41] McKay also explores Creighton’s propensity to censor singers without their knowledge or consent, including her admittance that she “would quietly erase” songs that made any references to class.[42] Sticking to the Child ballads, Creighton found little value in community creations, opting to “dismiss” them “with little comment.”[43] Creighton actively refused to collect aspects of the lives of rural Nova Scotians that did not fit her prefabricated mold. Although Helen Creighton is hailed as a preservationist, McKay works to expose the other side of Creighton’s work, in which she actively silenced the voices of the “folk,” while simultaneously profiting off of their songs.

In his article, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux De Mémoire*,” Pierre Nora states that modern memory “depends entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image,” as such the role of the archivist becomes essential.[44] Plagued by the constant fear of a “final and rapid disappearance” of culture, we opt now to archive everything.[45] Holding onto the guilt of past destruction, archiving is shaped by “a responsibility for tomorrow.”[46] We keep things not for ourselves, but for our future selves,

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[39] Ibid 19.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid 17.
[42] Ibid 13.
[43] Ibid 20.
[44] Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux De Mémoire*.” *Représentations* 26, no. 26 (1989): 13.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Schmetterling, Astrid. “Archival Obsessions: Arnold Dreyblatt's Memory Work.” *Art Journal* (New York. 1960) 66, no. 4 (2007): 80.

beholden to an "unknowable future."[47] Nora argues that when everything is kept, "it becomes impossible to predict what should be remembered."[48] However, archival material acts as a placeholder for memory, a bookmark for the mind. As a society, we often rely on aids, recorded songs, speeches, and literature providing a base for our recollections. Archival collection actively works to remove "the responsibility of remembering" from individuals.[49] This poses two important questions: What is actually being remembered and if archival collecting becomes selective, who should be responsible for deciding what is kept? Nora argues that the most mundane testimonies may be the most important for finding an average representation of a population. While interviewing past residents of Devil's Island, it was these memories that were hardest to collect, as many doubt the significance of their own experiences. However, it is these memories that challenge what has already been collected, offering a different perspective of the lives of those spoken over. The decision to preserve certain material and disregard others can have a massive impact on the collective memory of an entire province, as demonstrated by many folk collectors in the first half of the twentieth century. Nova Scotia is left with the content folk, living in humble, but undeniably happy circumstances. The erasure of labour songs and political discontent leaves future listeners with a distorted and idealized view of the past.

In Annapolis county, rural Victoria Beach became another area of interest to Creighton in 1947. Her article, "Folklore of Victoria Beach, Nova Scotia," describes the history of the community, provides details on community members, and includes select ballads. Creighton's desire for the folk to be an all-encompassing lifestyle comes across strongly in this article when she claims

[47] Ibid.
[48] Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux De Mémoire*," 14.
[49] Ibid 13.

"the sea provides all the fun" a rural child could desire.[50] While many former residents of Devil's Island remember learning to fish from a very young age, the children of the island were not entertained by the sea alone. One former resident spoke of the year her cousin received roller skates for Christmas. As the island had no paved roads, the girls would skate on the breakwater, each with one foot in a skate, holding each other to keep from falling.[51] In the winter, her sister recalled how they would ride the sleigh their father had built down "two big slate rock hills" and across the frozen pond over and over.[52] While the ocean certainly shaped their childhoods, it is inaccurate to suggest they were consumed by an innate longing for it.

Despite her version of the folk living and breathing the waves of Nova Scotia, Creighton is vague when discussing the dangers of the sea. In 1931, a particularly dangerous storm trapped islanders for two days, as the waves threatened to destroy homes and wash residents out to sea. An article in the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, "Fear for 150 Lives Diminishes in East as Storm Subsides," describes the previous two days of chaos as several ships and the Devil's Island residents were nearly drowned. Using the crank telephone located in the lighthouse, Mrs. Johanna Henneberry spoke to members of the press, reporting that the island's breakwater had protected the seventy-five inhabitants.[53] Creighton also mentions this storm in her article, "Ballads from Devil's Island." She writes that Ben Henneberry, her most prolific folk singer, had nearly lost his life saving his fishing boat.[54] While admitting the danger of the storm, Creighton does not comment on the desperation felt by Henneberry who was willing to risk his life for the

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[50] Creighton, Helen. "Folklore of Victoria Beach, Nova Scotia." *The Journal of American Folklore* 63, no. 248 (1950): 131.
[51] Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1, 2021.
[52] Brown, Joe. *The View from Here: An Oral History of Eastern Passage, 1864-1945*, 21.
[53] "Fear for 150 Lives Diminishes in East as Storm Subsides: Passenger Ship Loses Propeller, but Refuses Assistance Islanders are Safe Threatening Tide Recedes and Breakwater Holds Firm." *The Globe (1844-1936),* Mar 06, 1931.
[54] Creighton, Helen. "Ballads from Devil's Island." *Dalhousie Review* 12, no. 4 (1933): 503.

boat that allowed him to feed his family. In her article, "Ballads from Devil's Island," Creighton acknowledges that the fisherfolk of the island frequently rowed into town to sell their fish. However, she also writes that they did not "linger long in town," arguing that it was this distance from modernity which kept the folk alive.[55] In fact, former residents remember accompanying their parents into town fairly often. One woman, a granddaughter of Ben Henneberry, recalled receiving her allowance of twenty-five cents every Saturday. As a child, she would spend a portion of her money at the Orpheus movie theatre in Halifax, where westerns were always playing. This left ten cents for dinner and five cents for candy to take home.[56] Although aspects of their lives may have left islanders isolated, they were actually in close proximity to the city, making several trips a week.

Discussing Victoria Beach, Creighton mourns the community, as she writes she is "much too late in collecting old songs, for the best have long since been forgotten."[57] Caught between a lost folk and an untouched, rural paradise, Creighton's narrative is often contradictory. Again, Creighton's autobiography, *A Life in Folklore*, becomes relevant as she details her experiences in other communities. These can be directly compared to her time on Devil's Island, furthering the notion that she used Devil's Island as a model for her collection efforts in various communities across Nova Scotia. In 1944, Creighton visited Big Tancook Island, a large community in Mahone Bay that is much more isolated from the mainland. Creighton may have been hoping for Devil's Island on a larger scale. However, despite three days of socializing and enjoying the hospitality of a local family, she found only one man with an interest in folklore.[58] Although she

[55] Ibid 504.
[56] Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1 2021.
[57] Creighton, Helen. "Folklore of Victoria Beach, Nova Scotia," 140.
[58] Creighton, Helen. *Helen Creighton: A Life in Folklore* 150.

did eventually collect many more tales and songs from other areas in Nova Scotia, the sheer quantity of folk output on Devil's Island was never replicated.

A *Globe and Mail* article published in 1974 summarized the life of Helen Creighton in the year before her popular autobiography was published. "Thanks for the Memories: Helen Creighton has Devoted her Life to Keeping Maritime Folklore Alive," uncovers a particular story told by Creighton concerning a CBC broadcast in Toronto in 1956. Creighton claims that her nerves were calmed just before her performance by a supernatural event. The ghost of former Devil's Island resident, Ben Henneberry, had reached out from the beyond to comfort and encourage her.[59] Despite his death in 1951, Creighton continued throughout her career to speak through him, using his image to justify and promote her own work. Henneberry serves as a supporting character in Creighton's story, his voice, and the voices of other fisherfolk used to claim widespread folk approval. My research attempts to reach out to those who lived on Devil's Island, gathering a crucial perspective on life during a time of great upheaval and change. Creighton's collection is undeniably important for both the province as a whole and for individuals. Creighton's work allows descendants to connect with a history that may have otherwise been lost, but the stories of those still able to tell them should not be overlooked in favour of archival collections. After eighty years, the houses are still standing, and the memories of the island are still there; we just have to find them.

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[59] "Thanks for the Memories: Helen Creighton has Devoted her Life to Keeping Maritime Folklore Alive." *The Globe and Mail (1936-2016),* Sep 28, 1974.

Chapter Two: Community, Loss & Life on Devil's Island

Much of the scholarly work that has been done on Devil's Island revolves around the talents of Ben Henneberry, a fisherman and folk singer. Diane Tye's article, "Retrospective Repertoire Analysis: The Case Study of Ben Henneberry, Ballad Singer of Devil's Island, Nova Scotia," is one of very few academic sources that makes an effort to understand the lives of those who inhabited Devil's Island. Tye attempts to piece together Ben Henneberry's life through records on other island members, assuming his education and possible work experience in the lumber industry. Creighton, however, never explored the lives of the folk singers she recorded. Rather than treat them as individuals, Creighton's folk are a group, their personal stories unimportant. Otherwise, as Ian McKay argues, Ben Henneberry would be as widely known as Creighton herself.[1] The details of how and where Henneberry learned his varied ballads were never of interest to Creighton. Tye argues that Henneberry may have brought ballads down from Newfoundland, learning them from other Atlantic fishermen.[2] Despite the role he played in Creighton's work, Henneberry's life story is known only to those who remember him. Halbwachs argues that the key to remembering relies on informally assigned positions within a set group. Social interactions between the group members are key to understanding how and what one remembers.[3] Henneberry's position in the community was defined and respected. His repertoire of folk ballads well over 100, Henneberry acted as the community's storyteller and local historian.[4] Creighton recalls that during her visits to the island, other residents would not

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[1] McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*. 139.
[2] Tye, Diane. "Retrospective Repertoire Analysis: The Case Study of Ben Henneberry, Ballad Singer of Devil's Island, Nova Scotia." *MUSICultures* 16 (1988) 4.
[3] Russell, Nicolas. "Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs." *The French Review* 79, no. 4 (2006): 796.
[4] Tye, Diane. "Retrospective Repertoire Analysis: The Case Study of Ben Henneberry, Ballad Singer of Devil's Island, Nova Scotia," 9.

sing if Henneberry was present, as he had taught them their ballads; they belonged to him.[5] He had a "desire to pass on the story of the island," his surname and age granting him authority over the island's history and events in the surrounding area.[6] Walter Benjamin's theory of "The Storyteller" applies to Ben Henneberry, though leans toward the classification of the rural storyteller, a keeper of local history.[7] Former resident Donald Purdy remembers Henneberry entertaining the young children with tall tales from his days travelling down to the Caribbean on fishing schooners:

> They were partying the night before and this big local guy was supposed to be the best swimmer around and Ben Henneberry, drinking, was bragging how good of a swimmer he was. He could outswim anybody in the world and all that kind of stuff. They agreed that Ben and him would go swimming the next day. They would leave the beach and swim out to a buoy that was way outside, touch the buoy and then swim back again and the one that did that and got back to shore, half a mile away or so, first would be the winner. So the next morning, the guy went down there with a whole gang of people waiting on the beach for Ben Henneberry to show up and then finally decided he wasn't going to show up. But he did. After a while he came down there with a big coil of rope and an anchor on his back. A good-sized anchor. This is his story, he told it himself. And they said, what the hell are you going to do? And he had a tin full of some biscuits with him. He said I'm going to swim out as far as the buoy, touch the buoy, anchor myself, have a little lunch while I'm waiting for you to come out, then I'm going to swim back to

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[5] Creighton, Helen. *Helen Creighton: A Life in Folklore* 59.

[6] Tye, Diane. "Retrospective Repertoire Analysis: The Case Study of Ben Henneberry, Ballad Singer of Devil's Island, Nova Scotia," 9.

[7] Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. London: HMH, 1968, 95.

> shore. And he claims the other fellow, once he realized that Ben was that strong, it scared the other fellow so bad, he wouldn't race.[8]

For Purdy as a young child in the late 1930s, the Caribbean was a dream place, an exotic paradise that lived only in his imagination. Although Henneberry's stories were not always believed, they were memorable, part of something larger than Devil's Island. Richard White's article, "Walter Benjamin: 'The Storyteller' and the Possibility of Wisdom," expands on Benjamin's theory of the storyteller. White writes that "there is no final separation between the storyteller and the listener," as everyone is a "potential storyteller."[9] They, in turn, hand down their own version and the cycle continues. Nearly eighty years have passed since this story was first told and yet, it continues to be told anew. Carrying his own stories from the island, Donald Purdy has become one of the island's new storytellers. With so few left, those who can remember are eager to share the "fullness of the past."[10] However, many do not have a platform and are simply waiting for someone to ask. Ben Henneberry's stories live on through family members and neighbours, but it was his son Edmund, who made an effort to learn all of his father's ballads. Asked to sing on recordings, Edmund often filled in for his father, as Henneberry's facial deformity made it "difficult for him to articulate clearly."[11] Edmund's daughter, Ina York, reflected on how her grandfather obtained his injury: "One time when he was out fishing, he got a hook caught in his face and he fished all day. Just cut the string and fished all day with that hook in his face, until he came home and then he took a knife and cut it

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[8] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 16, 2021.
[9] White, Richard. "Walter Benjamin: "The Storyteller" and the Possibility of Wisdom." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 51, no. 1 (2017): 3.
[10] Ibid 13.
[11] Tye, Diane. "Retrospective Repertoire Analysis: The Case Study of Ben Henneberry, Ballad Singer of Devil's Island, Nova Scotia" 10.

to get the hook out. His face was kind of pulled to one side."[12] Henneberry had mangled a facial nerve in an attempt to get the fish hook out himself and his face was never the same. Despite this and other hardships in his life, Henneberry persevered, proudly remaining the coxswain of the lifeboat station for over forty years.[13] He was good-natured, and Donald remembers how he used to tease the children.

> The guys would have barrels where they kept all the fish livers and things and that would rot and so on. They'd have sticks in the liver, two sticks, and they'd twist the liver around the sticks and use it for hauling their boats up, for making the skids slippery. But there was oil in the bottom and eventually, they'd sell that oil in Halifax. Ben Henneberry sometimes, just for the hell of it, to show off in front of us kids, would grab them sticks and take a big lick of the oil. The flies were there with maggots and stuff all summer long. Us kids would be talking about that for weeks afterwards.[14]

Henneberry's death in 1951 was a devastating blow to his family and friends, the community storyteller leaving behind thirty-two grandchildren and sixty-two great grandchildren.[15] Walter Benjamin writes on the inheritance of memory, claiming that no one "dies so poor that he does not leave something behind" and Henneberry had left much.[16] Although Edmund was the clear successor to his father's wealth of knowledge, he was not the only one who had gained something. Donald Purdy recalled learning Henneberry's songs from his childhood friend, John Henneberry: "As a boy I used to chum around with his grandson, one of them, and he would sing

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[13] Parker, Mike. *Ghost Islands of Nova Scotia*, 43.
[14] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 16, 2021.
[15] Tye, Diane. "Retrospective Repertoire Analysis: The Case Study of Ben Henneberry, Ballad Singer of Devil's Island, Nova Scotia," 5.
[16] Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, 102.

a lot of them. So, I got to know a lot of them. I forget them mostly."[17] Donald was rarely able to go to the Henneberry parties on the island, as his parents were more strict about how late their children were permitted to stay up. However, Johnny would often attend, teaching Donald the many songs his grandfather had sung the night before. Years later, the pair would sing the old shanties in Halifax during pub nights with friends. Music, games and dancing were certainly part of everyday life on the island, but this does not mean it was easy.

Bound together through an unshakable drive to survive, former residents recalled the many dangers of island life, and the endless ways they supported one another. Life on Devil's Island was exceedingly hazardous, especially for the fishermen. The water around the island was subject to extreme changeability, and death was a hard reality for all islanders. From a very young age, Donald Purdy understood the danger his father faced on the rough coastline daily. He recalled walking by the houses he knew were occupied by children who had lost their fathers.

> When I was a boy, there were three or four houses on that island with women raising the family and the women were alone. They were widows and their stories...each time they lost their husbands. Well, their husbands were out there on boats around that island trying to make a living. It wasn't like losing your husband gone away at sea somewhere, he's just in the small boat out there fishing around Devil's Island, the way I was brought up.[18]

Donald went on to describe how vulnerable groups, such as widows, small children and family pets, were taken care of by everyone. This contributed to a sense of island identity, each household belonging to the larger collective group. The mutual understanding of their everyday difficulties united them, despite their differences. While every other family was Roman Catholic

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[17] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 16, 2021.
[18] Ibid.

and would travel to the mainland for church on Sunday, the Purdys were not religious. Donald's mother, Verna Himmelman, was brought up Protestant on the mainland, his father Fred Purdy, Roman Catholic. Due to the problems this had caused in their families, the couple made the decision not to raise their children in a specific faith. While this could have created conflict between the Purdys and the other islanders, Fred Purdy was known for his incredible work ethic as a fisherman, overriding any potential disagreements. Donald explained: "He was so respected as a hardworking man...you just couldn't hate [him]. I don't remember, as a boy, even realizing that I wasn't Catholic."[19] The islanders as a group formed their collective identity around their occupations, which was inherently tied to their home. While signs of the past were evident in the tree stumps and the old collapsed barns used for farming, fishing was how the men supported their families.[20] The group's identity was not linked to Catholicism, despite church being an important weekly event. Instead, the islanders were linked through their mutual understanding of the physical dangers and financial struggles of their occupation. Looking back, the word all residents used to describe their former community was 'family'. Ina York recalled how the people were welcomed in every home: "It was just like one big happy family. You didn't knock, you just opened the door and walked in."[21]Another former resident recalled how exciting holidays were, especially within such a close-knit community: "At Easter time they used to have what they called an Easter table that you had your Easter candy on. And everybody did it, so you'd sort of go around the island and visit and see what their Easter table looked like. You knew everybody."[22] This cohesive bond was put to the test during times of particular difficulty, the community strengthened by an innate care inhabitants had for each other. An event former

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 23, 2021.
[21] Ina York, Interview by the author, Eastern Passage, February 1, 2021.
[22] Shirley Farrell, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, January 12, 2021.

residents have never forgotten was the hailstorm of September 1939. Residents described hail balls larger than golf balls pouring down from a black sky, smashing western-facing windows in every home.[23] Donald's uncle, Bob Purdy, hid several children in his fishing shed who had been playing nearby. When the hail balls began bouncing into the shed, he held the doors closed from the inside, his exposed fingers taking the brunt of the damage.[24] Former residents also saw themselves as protectors of the many ships that passed through the treacherous waters, their lighthouses serving as guiding beacons in the night; taking care of each other came naturally.

The beginning of the Second World War brought tremendous uncertainty to the island, creating a distinct generation of children. Sometimes, lying in bed at night, Donald recalled hearing the humming of torpedoes ripping through ships in the open water just past the island. At ten years old, he often wondered how he would protect his family if the Germans landed on the island. That fear was not confined to the children. Schoolteachers would leave the island to visit family never to return, frightened by the active signs of the war perceptible from the island.[25] Often, mothers were left to homeschool their children, in addition to the endless list of tasks required to run their households. This absence of schooling created a wilder generation of children, left to explore the island's geographical features for entertainment. Diane Tye's article, "When Mary Went through the Hole: Constructing and Contesting Individual and Family Identity through Narrative," investigates a particular memory retold by two of the individuals involved as children. Siblings Bill and Mary grew up in northern Nova Scotia during the 1930s and 40s, creating many similarities between their childhoods and those of the islanders. As adults

[23] Brown, Joe. *The View from Here: An Oral History of Eastern Passage, 1864-1945.* Shearwater Development Corporation, 1998, 27.
[24] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 23, 2021.
[25] Ibid.

were often busy with housework, "children largely fended for themselves."[26] The same can be said for the children of Devil's Island. For the Purdy children, especially Donald, this freedom occasionally led to dangerous situations. Being the eldest of four and the only boy, Donald was warned from a young age never to let anything happen to his sisters, especially Anita. "She's one year and one week younger than me and I always was told to look after my sister, look after your sister. Don't let nothing happen."[27] Tye argues that personal narratives, especially childhood memories, are the "building blocks of family identity."[28] Repeated stories from one's "inner library" work to "express personal values," and define the storyteller's role within the family unit.[29] Donald Purdy's many stories show him as the mischievous but protective older brother, his sisters taking a more passive role with the exception of one story. A harrowing experience involving one of the wells on the island remains fixed in his memory as the time seven-year-old Anita saved his life. The children had been walking home when they decided to stop at a nearby well. Playing around, the rope from the bucket fell into the shallow well and Donald decided to climb down to retrieve it.

> I'd seen my Uncle Stanley, when they were cleaning wells one time, climb down the well for cleaning them. So, I could climb down this well. I climbed down all right. I slipped and then, the next thing I knew I was in the well. Nita, when I bounced upwards, she got me by the hair on my head and she was screaming, and I was probably screaming and

[26] Tye, Diane. "When Mary Went through the Hole: Constructing and Contesting Individual and Family Identity through Narrative." *The Journal of American Folklore*, 130, no. 518 (2017): 423.
[27] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 23, 2021.
[28] Tye, Diane. "When Mary Went through the Hole: Constructing and Contesting Individual and Family Identity through Narrative," 420.
[29] Tye, Diane. "When Mary Went through the Hole: Constructing and Contesting Individual and Family Identity through Narrative," 419, 420.

> yelling too when my head wasn't underwater. But I couldn't sink because she was bent over there, and she had a hold of the hair on my head...Nita actually saved my life.[30]

Two women who were walking towards the wharves heard the screaming and quickly pulled him out of the water. Donald also shared his recollection of nearly falling to his death off his tar-paper roof. After his parents went to town, Donald noticed a ladder leaning against his house and impulsively decided to climb up on the roof. "I was so small I had to stand on the part that touches the roof, you know, past the rungs? And when I had a hold on the eaves, I managed to shimmy up over onto the roof. And there I was up there, walking on the roof."[31] Noticed almost immediately, the children on the ground convinced him to come down. Waist and legs dangling over a two-story drop, Donald lost track of where the ladder was. "I was so scared. They were hollering at me down below, "A little more that way, a little more that way!" And I managed to shimmy over enough and finally I felt it with my toes."[32] Stories like these demonstrate the core values of the community. If the adults were busy, the children of Devil's Island took care of each other.

Ina York's memories illustrate the love she had for her parents and siblings. Ina described a night in July 1938 when she and her father became trapped on the mainland during a trip to town after an unexpected storm. Many other islanders had come over on their own boats and decided to stay in Eastern Passage with family, rather than risk going back through turbulent waters. However, Ina's mother was still on the island and due to give birth any time. Ina's father, Edmund Henneberry, would not risk being separated from his wife for days, as storms were unpredictable.

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[30] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 23, 2021.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

> Dad wanted me to stay, and I said, "No! If you're going, I'm going." So, I got in the boat and I wouldn't get out, so he had to take me. So, on the way, I pumped the whole way while Dad steered and looked after the engine, but the waves would come and break right up over the bow. It just kept me busy with both hands pumping water out of the boat. But we made it home.[33]

Tye argues that recollections based on "episodic childhood memories" can "articulate family dynamics and culture."[34] While semantic memory relays the facts of an event and can be told from different perspectives, episodic memory has a layer of subjectivity applied by the storyteller. Memories often expose one's sense of self that "persists through time," a unique identity expressed through the remembering.[35] At thirteen years old, Ina's role as a productive and valued member of her family was apparent. Despite the immediate danger, her father trusted her abilities. It is quite possible her refusal to stay on the mainland was the only reason her father made it home.

During the early 1940s, the government warned residents the island was no longer safe and advised them to relocate to the mainland. German U-boats were known to lurk in the waters just outside of Halifax harbour and the island's exposed location beyond the harbour nets left it vulnerable to the very real threat of German occupation. Ina York remembers when government workers called her grandfather, Ben Henneberry, from the telephone in the lifeboat station: "They telephoned him and told him that the people had to get off of the island, move on their own, or the government would move them."[36] In the end, the government's threats were

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[33] Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1, 2021.
[34] Tye, Diane. "When Mary Went through the Hole: Constructing and Contesting Individual and Family Identity through Narrative," 420.
[35] Russell, Nicolas. "Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs." 800.
[36] Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1, 2021.

unfounded, it was easier to do nothing. The government's refusal to maintain the breakwaters and to employ a schoolteacher for the children eventually led to the community's demise. Although some families did manage to wait out the war, the government denied the renewal of necessary maintenance, and the fishing village was left to the elements.[37]

Childhood is a physical experience. The loss of the rock formations that looked like ships and engine rooms and the coastline where sailors' caps frequently washed to shore, deeply impacted former residents as children. Liliane Weissberg explores Pierre Nora's writings on cultural memory in her book, *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*. Environment is a powerful tool for remembering, houses and hills acting as bookmarks for memory.[38] Residents can never return to what once was, reminders of a different era lingering only in their minds. Even photographs of the community were restricted, as images of the ocean were not allowed during the war. As such, photos of their homes do not exist. Afraid of being reported for having a camera, the only photos of the island during this time are closeups of each other. Even some possessions were abandoned during relocation. One former resident, Shirley Farrell, remembers begging her father to bring her baby doll and carriage to their new home, a request she narrowly won.[39]

Despite differing personal memories, this overwhelming feeling of community contributed deeply to the collective memory of the group. Svetlana Boym's, "The Future of Nostalgia," describes how reflective nostalgia focuses on the "reconstruction of the lost home."[40] After displacement, many islanders settled in nearby Eastern Passage. Although living among

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[37] Langan, Kate. "Devil's Island." *The Beaver: Exploring Canada's History* 78, no. 4 (1998): 34.
[38] Ben-Amos, Dan, and Weissberg, Liliane. *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999, 11.
[39] Shirley Farrell, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, January 12, 2021.
[40] Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia* New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001, xviii.

family, and familiarity, former residents experienced a profound change in feelings of safety. While physically safer on the mainland, the distinct sense of security and care created by the community was lost. According to Lorna Martens' work, *The Promise of Memory: Childhood Recollection and its Objects in Literary Modernism*, in societies where childhood is shaped by upheaval, there is a desperation to recreate and romanticize what once was, holding onto "the places that ha[ve] disappeared."[41] The inability to return to the physical space of the island prompted the creation of an imaginary place, kept alive through the sharing of memories. Diane Tye's article, "'A Poor Man's Meal': Molasses in Atlantic Canada," explores family recipes and "food's powerful connections to memory."[42] While specifically focusing on the use of molasses in impoverished Atlantic Canadian households, the article explores how "tastes and smells" from the past can come back to us in a moment's notice.[43] In her personal essay, "Devil's Island - Happy Memories," Sister Sadie Henneberry describes a favourite treat her mother used to make. Dough, or doughboys as they were called on the island, was fried in lard and eaten for breakfast. Donald Purdy recalled his father bringing home large kegs of lard that had washed ashore, and both he and Sister Sadie claimed, "there never seemed to be an end to the doughboys."[44] Donald's sister, Anita also remembered enjoying fried dough for breakfast: "Well, it's just ordinary when you're making bread. After it has risen once, if you happen to have a little bit extra and most people would, and some of them did it for quick bread. You just fry it in the frying pan and it's great with molasses."[45] When asked about family recipes, many former residents and descendants could not recall anything specific they had inherited. The best recipes

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[41] Martens, Lorna. *The Promise of Memory: Childhood Recollection and Its Objects in Literary Modernism* 190.
[42] Tye, Diane. "'A Poor Man's Meal': Molasses in Atlantic Canada." *Food, Culture, & Society* 11, no. 3 (2008): 336.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Brown, Joe. *The View from Here: An Oral History of Eastern Passage, 1864-1945,* 22.
[45] Anita Crowell, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, January 16, 2021.

existed only in the mind of the cook, making the act of passing them on more difficult than simply handing a loved one a piece of paper. Cooking was an experience, a way for mothers to work with what they had, even when families did not have a lot. For many, it was the warm memories of a family around the table, and the remembrance of when "life was more sociable."[46]

After leaving the island, adjusting to life on the mainland was harder for some than it was for others. However, for those who were left behind, bitterness over the dismantlement of a beloved community soured the memory of the island. In many ways, departing earlier left residents with happier memories. Those who stayed until the collapse became bitter about the government's lack of community acknowledgement.[47] Kate Langan's 1998 article, "Devil's Island," explores those who were left behind and refused to leave until the mid-1950s. Ben Henneberry, a grandson of the renowned folk singer, shared his experience of being the last of the Devil's Island residents to leave. After lightkeeper Kenneth Faulkner moved off the island in 1949, Henneberry took over and served for four years. By 1953, the breakwaters had worn down, leaving "no place to keep the boats safe from the southerly storms."[48] Despite this major inconvenience, Henneberry credits the refusal to send a schoolteacher for his children as the biggest reason his family left the island. Traditionally, schoolteachers boarded with the lightkeeper's family. However, Henneberry had nine young children and the teacher struggled to plan her lessons in the lively home. After the government refused to let the schoolteacher live in one of the unoccupied homes, she left and never returned, truly marking the end of an era.[49]

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[46] Tye, Diane. "'A Poor Man's Meal': Molasses in Atlantic Canada," 345.
[47] Langan, Kate. "Devil's Island," 34.
[48] Ibid 38.
[49] Ibid.

For Pierre Nora, memory is a living, breathing thing, susceptible to manipulation. It can be forgotten, "long dormant and periodically revived."[50] In the article, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux De Mémoire*," he examines the relationship between history and memory, arguing that they are in direct opposition. Nora believes that history belongs to both everyone and no one. Memory can belong to individuals or groups, a shared experience binding them together. Nora's considerable work on sites of memory and historical monuments is useful for understanding how societies remember and what they deem important enough not to forget. Studying French historical monuments, Nora describes a *lieu de mémoire* as being a cold, solemn place. Nora argues that these sites are not visited, they are dutifully attended. Often, war monuments are created as a way to encourage a "fear of repeating the past."[51] As those who were involved are no longer around to tell their stories, the monuments serve to echo the voices of the past. Built in 1877, the Devil's Island lighthouse remains the obvious choice for a monument, but can this building represent almost 150 years of life and loss? A lone light in the darkness, the story of Devil's Island has been told by those who did not experience the island for years. A consequence of the recent passing of nearly all former residents of Devil's Island, an "immense and intimate fund of memory" has disappeared.[52] No longer remembered without effort, the identity of the island shifts and its placement as a *lieu de mémoire* becomes clearer. Those who remain feel a personal responsibility to remember and with remembrance comes the inevitable feeling of loss.

After speaking with former resident Anita Crowell, the importance of her childhood home became clear. Anita and her family had lived beside the schoolhouse in the middle of the

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[50] Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." *Représentations* 26, no. 26 (1989): 8.
[51] Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995) 133.
[52] Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." 12.

island. When asked about her experiences at the school, she offered to find a class photo she had for more details. Within minutes, she had produced the photograph from 1943 and began listing off the names of old friends and family members, captured forever as smiling children. After young Ben Henneberry and his family left Devil's Island in the mid-1950s, Anita never returned. "There's nothing there to go back for now," she said, matter-of-factly.[53] For Anita, the island is just that, an empty island, all traces of her former home long since disappeared. Nora argues that "memory implies a sense of mourning," and for many former residents, the pain of community displacement remains tucked away, but always just within arm's reach.[54]

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[53] Anita Crowell, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, January 16, 2021.
[54] Ben-Amos, Dan, and Weissberg, Liliane. *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, 10.

Chapter Three: Descendants of the Island and the Shifting Collective Memory

After the difficulty of relocation, the many childhood memories of the island stayed fresh in the minds of those forced to leave. But were these stories passed on and did they play a role among descendants in establishing the island's current identity? Jan Assmann's article, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," examines the ways in which Halbwachs' theory of collective memory contributes to cultural identity, and how the oral history that is successfully passed on is a direct reflection of how a society structures itself. Assmann states that collective memory works to reconstruct the past, arguing that memories are constantly changing based on the society recalling them. According to Halbwachs, the influence of a common past only lasts "eighty to (at the very most) one hundred years".[1] While collecting stories from the island, I wanted to challenge this theory, hypothesizing that despite the distance of nearly eighty years, the family connections and closeness of the community would promote memory sharing. What I found, however, was far different.

In Diane Tye's article, "When Mary Went through the Hole: Constructing and Contesting Individual and Family Identity through Narrative," Tye interviews a family that grew up in northern Nova Scotia during the 30s and 40s. One family member "recalled that during his childhood, the worlds of adults and children were separate."[2] Many former residents of Devil's Island confirmed this sentiment, arguing that "adults did not speak to children of what they thought were adult issues."[3] In the investigation of whether memories of the island were passed on or forgotten, the societal difference in family communication was the key factor. Dorothy York looked puzzled when I asked her if her mother ever told her stories of the island growing

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[1] Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." 127.
[2] Tye, Diane. "When Mary Went through the Hole: Constructing and Contesting Individual and Family Identity through Narrative." 423.
[3] Ibid.

up. She replied: "Adults talk to adults, not really to kids."[4] Among the descendants, Dorothy was far from alone. Many former residents simply did not share their stories with their children. While neither a descendant, nor a former resident, Jack Waller inherited his memories of the island from his late wife, Margaret. Interested in genealogy, Jack retains an impressive collection on her family history. He also admitted Margaret was fond of the island and had many stories. However, due to the time that has passed, many have sadly been forgotten.[5] In order to become a part of the "family folklore," childhood narratives must be told and retold repeatedly.[6] These "small stories in ordinary interaction" are often responsible for maintaining personal values and identity.[7] Unfortunately, family stories are told until they aren't, and many fall through the gaps of time. One descendant revealed that her grandfather had not often spoken about the island, due to his dislike for it.[8] While this negative view is in the minority, it is important to note that not everyone had the same experiences or love for such a hard life. Another descendant described how her Papa was able to secure better employment once off the island. Patrick Henneberry worked at the oil refinery in Woodside for a time, as well as at Oceanview Manor as a maintenance man. Additionally, Oceanview Manor was where Henneberry met his beloved wife, Queenie.[9]

Another familiar sentiment among a few descendants was the regret of not pursuing family stories from elderly relatives while they still could. Jim Crowell, the son of a former resident, discussed missed opportunities for a sharing of heritage, remarking: "I talk to people a

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[4] Dorothy York, Interview by the author, Eastern Passage, February 1, 2021.
[5] Jack Waller, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, January 8, 2021.
[6] Tye, Diane. "When Mary Went through the Hole: Constructing and Contesting Individual and Family Identity through Narrative." 420.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Tracy McDonald, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, January 6, 2021.
[9] Tanya Smith, Interview by author, Dartmouth, January 6, 2021.

lot more now. When you lose something and you realize you lost something that can't be returned, you can't go back."[10] This loss was not confined to descendants. Some former residents also felt that they had not asked their parents and grandparents enough questions. Donald Purdy reflected on not exploring his family history with his grandparents years ago. "We never talked. You know, it's a shame. I don't know the history of my family as much as I'd like to because I never spent time talking to my grandfather Purdy."[11] James Purdy passed away in the early 1950s when Donald was only 20 years old and the stories he now associates with his grandfather are all secondhand from his aunts. While former residents do rely on both inherited memory and personal experience, the descendants hold onto something else entirely.

Nicholas Russell analyzes Halbwachs' theories in his article, "Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs," arguing that a "group's identity and existence" depend on the collective memory of lived experiences.[12] Despite the lack of inherited memories, descendants do identify as being connected to the island. Due to the exceptionally large families, there are now hundreds of descendants, many of whom have never met and inevitably, some of whom are unaware of their connection to the island. Proud of their heritage, descendants who are aware of their family connection are eager to share photos in online groups on social media platforms. There was, however, one name that descendants were eager to bring up, Helen Creighton. Nearly all the descendants who reached out to share their stories, quoted from her influential book. In 1957, Helen Creighton released what would become her most popular publication, *Bluenose Ghosts*. A collection of paranormal tales from across the province, the book was an immediate success and since then, *Bluenose Ghosts* has gone through several publications. Her stories from Devil's

[10] Jim Crowell, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, January 15, 2021.
[11] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 23, 2021.
[12] Russell, Nicolas. "Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs." *The French Review* 79, no. 4 (2006): 797.

Island continue to resonate deeply with the descendants of former residents. *Bluenose Ghosts* is tangible, offering a history for those who carry pride for a heritage some were not given the chance to understand. Creighton uses real names of former residents, all of whom are no longer with us. Smothering the oral history and recollections of past inhabitants, the island as a community was lost, and the island as a legend began. Assmann argues that "no memory can preserve the past," suggesting that Creighton's role in shifting the island's identity laid the groundwork for the island's future identity.[13] Every "era reconstruct[s] within its contemporary frame of reference."[14] For descendants, this frame of reference was Creighton's *Bluenose Ghosts*, the book quickly surpassing her folk collection work in sales.

While collecting stories from the children and grandchildren of those who inhabited the island, discrepancies between the two distinct groups began to emerge. Overall, descendants have a great respect for Creighton's work, viewing her collection methods and lack of singer compensation as ultimately necessary for the survival of folk culture. However, there is another side to Creighton's work on the island, as highlighted by some former residents. Ina York remembers her father, Edmund Henneberry, being paid "about $2 for each show," while Creighton claims it was closer to $10.[15] Regardless of the discrepancy, Creighton argues the "money wasn't half as important as" the performances, unaware of the insensitivity of her comment.[16] Citing Henneberry's nervousness, Creighton described in her biography how she did not inform him the first time he was to sing on the radio. Arriving at the Nova Scotian Hotel "in his fisherman's togs," Henneberry perfectly fit the image of the folk so familiar to urban

[13] Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." 130.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Creighton, Helen. *Helen Creighton: A Life in Folklore*, 111; Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1, 2021.
[16] Creighton, Helen. *Helen Creighton: A Life in Folklore*, 111.

residents.[17] This would not be the last time Creighton used clothing to create a more authentic folk, occasionally requesting to photograph rural residents in more traditional clothing.[18] When remembering the many songs her grandfather had contributed to Creighton's song books, Ina remarked: "They never got paid for any of the songs they gave her...they made a fortune for her."[19] As a principle, Creighton did not pay her informants, "suggesting that it was an honour for [them] to contribute to her collection."[20] Ina's family contributed hundreds of songs to Creighton's collection, and received little for it. The families on Devil's Island were crucial to Creighton's success and provided her an opportunity to earn an income through folklore collection. For descendants, it is Nova Scotia that should be grateful, as Creighton preserved and maintained the province's cultural image. Pierre Nora writes that "history is a representation of the past," and to many, Creighton's version of Devil's Island has become history.[21] Even those who were there carry a version of history, as memories are fallible and subject to manipulation or romanticization.

But what happens when there is memory inherited between the generations? *Haulin' in the Family Net* by Linda Gray-Leblanc is a collection of news articles and stories written about Eastern Passage and Devil's Island over the years. One article addresses the disregard for island legends through an interview with a past resident and his son, the former being Howard Henneberry Sr. who lost his mother and baby sister to meningitis in 1916.[22] Although Henneberry no longer lived on the island at the time of the interview, he remembered it fondly. Despite the island being abandoned, Howard Sr. felt compelled to return to the island frequently

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Croft, Clary. *Helen Creighton: Canada's First Lady of Folklore*, 70.
[19] Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1, 2021.
[20] Croft, Clary. *Helen Creighton: Canada's First Lady of Folklore*, 90.
[21] Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." 8.
[22] Gray-Leblanc, Linda. *Haulin' in the Family Net*, 10.

until his health no longer permitted it. His son, Howard Henneberry Jr, never lived on Devil's Island, but instead sees it through his father's eyes, likewise dismissing the superstitions. Howard Jr. described the "ghosts on the island" as living only in the "imagination" of those from the mainland.[23] This suggests that when memories from the island are inherited, the island's supernatural identity, as promoted by Creighton, falls away. *Bluenose Ghosts* did not resonate with Howard Jr., as his father had already shared his experiences of growing up on the island. What makes this revelation more telling is the family connection to three of the more popular ghosts of the island, Henry, Catherine and Henrietta Henneberry, Howard Sr.'s parents and baby sister. Their story was incorrectly recalled in Creighton's *Bluenose Ghosts*, and was not supported by members of the immediate family. Unfortunately, with the time that has passed, it is impossible to establish who originally told Creighton the story or whether it originated with Creighton.

After the displacement, many residents settled in Eastern Passage with extended family. Assmann's article also describes how groups unite through individual memories. Former Devil's Island residents remained a distinct group, united through their memories of the island, but also through the denial of the island's apparent supernatural aura. Assmann argues that "fixed points," defined as crucial events in history, are often maintained in memory "through cultural formation".[24] Possible cultural formations include monuments or written pieces, of which Devil's Island has several. However, examining where Devil's Island appears in print is key to understanding its changing identity. Helen Creighton's *Bluenose Ghosts* and other haunted histories of Nova Scotia worked to solidify the paranormal image of Devil's Island. Russell claims that the "particular nature of a group's experience creates a shared memory and

[23] Ibid.
[24] Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." 129.

identity".[25] Perhaps the reason former residents are consistently mentioning how their home was not a spooky place to live is due to the assumptions of those who never lived there. In *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, Weissberg writes that history "sets in when the collective memory disappears," offering a possible explanation for its current association with the supernatural.[26] Ina York had this to say on the validity of Creighton's supernatural stories: "There's no such thing as ghosts. They may have told them out there, but they didn't believe them."[27] Donald Purdy recalled being teased by the older children about the nature of a particular path on the island:

> There was a little swampy bit up the road that goes for a shortcut to go up to my place from down where the fishing village was, and they say...if you're going up there don't ever look over your right shoulder or you'll see the devil. I actually believed that, so I was scared to look over my shoulder. All us kids were...at night, going through there.[28]

Shirley Farrell, another former resident, remembered what her mother had to say on the matter. "I remember Mum saying she used to go out at midnight to see if there were any ghosts. She said she's never seen anything. I mean I don't know if they're true or not, but I'm just going by what my mother told me."[29] Clearly, the stories were known among residents, but taken with a grain of salt. Only one woman's name seemed to come up frequently in regard to anything paranormal, Alice Henneberry. Daughter of the renowned folk singer, Ben Henneberry, Alice was born in 1902 and lived on the island for the first half of her life until relocation. Alice witnessed

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[25] Russell, Nicolas. "Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs." 796.
[26] Ben-Amos, Dan, and Weissberg, Liliane. *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, 9.
[27] Ina York, Interview by the author, Eastern Passage, February 1, 2021.
[28] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 16, 2021.
[29] Shirley Farrell, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, January 12, 2021.

unexplained footprints across freshly mopped floors, phantom fires on her tar paper roof and even a forerunner that would predict the death of her teenage son Earl in the late 1930s.[30]

In December 1939, Earl's younger brother Ben, had rowed to the mainland to spend time with friends. Alice became worried that he had not yet arrived as it was late and the water was getting rougher. Acting on his own initiative, Earl borrowed postman Clarence Henneberry's boat to row across to pick up his brother.

> Alice was supposed to have looked out her doorway or her window facing the path going up to her house and saw her son Ben walking up the path towards her house. 'Oh, Ben's home.' Earl must be around somewhere. She wasn't worried about him, he didn't go to Eastern Passage that she knew. She saw Ben coming up and she waited for Ben to come in the house. She went and done something and she come back and Ben didn't come in the house. She opened the door and looked around, 'Where's Ben?' I think she may have even hollered for him. No Ben. What happened is she saw a ghost, apparently, because Earl went across there, but Earl got caught in the breakers, upset his boat, sunk it, and he drowned. Ben was coming down from Shore Road and he heard someone holler, 'help' out there and he went and found the boat on the shore.[31]

Thinking one of Clarence's older sons must have drowned, Ben quickly rowed home to tell everyone the news. "It was an hour or so more when she had already seen him walking up the road. She didn't see her son who died walking up the road, she saw her son who was still alive walking up the path towards her house. So, that is a ghost story in a way."[32] In Creighton's version, Earl had seen the forerunner of his brother, prompting his need to retrieve his brother

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[30] Creighton, Helen. *Bluenose Ghosts*, 259.
[31] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 16, 2021.
[32] Ibid.

from the mainland.[33] This significant change writes Alice Henneberry out of her own story and reinforces the alleged importance of superstition to the folk. Memories from the island serve to remind us that before the ghost stories, there were real people.

> His name was Earl Henneberry. I really liked him. He was older, a teenager, he was older than me of course. But he gave me a cookie one day and I never forgot it to this day. I was out roaming around by myself outside of his house where his mother, a widow, and his brother and them lived, sisters. And Earl was going down to shore or something and he asked me if I wanted a cookie. 'Do you like cookies?' I said, 'yeah.' And his mother must have just baked a batch of cookies. He goes back, he said, 'wait here' and he goes back in the house and he comes out with a big ginger snap or something, fresh baked. And he gave me that and to this day, I can't forget that.[34]

Although no longer around to tell her tales, former residents who knew Alice Henneberry remain adamant that she was of good moral character, and not prone to make up stories. Interestingly, they believe her, but still actively disregard the strange stories, so important to descendants. So, how did one woman's experiences come to define an entire community? Picked up by Helen Creighton, Alice's stories survive predominantly in *Bluenose Ghosts*, one of very few publications on the island's history, descendants eager to claim her as an ancestor. There is a gap for them, an empty space filled by Creighton's collections. Their nostalgia is different, warped by time and tall tales, the stories children might cling to; they long for a place that has never existed.[35]

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[33] Creighton, Helen. *Bluenose Ghosts*, 214.
[34] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 16, 2021.
[35] Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia* New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001, xiii.

Looking back, there is another generation of stories that will never be collected, that of the adults who lost their homes and their community. During turbulent times, children are often adaptable, the stress of caring for a large family falling squarely onto the shoulders of parents. The full extent of how it felt to be informed that their family no longer had a home will never be known. Creighton's folk collection was certainly important, but what of the stories of regular people? While we are indebted to Creighton's collection work and the preservation of folk songs that otherwise would have been lost, especially in African Nova Scotia communities, there is the loss of what could have been. Would an unbiased snapshot of the so-called "disappearing cultural treasure," not have been better?[36] Instead, we are left without hundreds of stories of the mundane and our understanding of a displaced community remains impoverished. As Pierre Nora writes, "the less extraordinary the testimony, the more aptly it seems to illustrate the average mentality," reminding us of the value in everyday stories.[37] If anything, this demonstrates the need to keep collecting, keep seeking out memories, before it is too late. Over the following few decades, the island's appointed folk identity would shift into a supernatural one, the abandoned island finally living up to its name. Although both displaced former residents and their descendants are deeply nostalgic for a lost home, both distinct groups cling to a different symbol of remembrance. While Creighton's *Bluenose Ghosts* would become a symbol of nostalgia for descendants, displaced residents held onto the eastern lighthouse, the island's last remaining structure. The opposing symbols help explain the crucial difference in each group's version of nostalgic loss. For former residents, they remember the lighthouse, a crumbling

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[36] McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia*, 133.

[37] Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire," 14.

reminder of the physical loss of their childhood home and a community centered not around the paranormal, but around taking care of each other.

Conclusion

For those who called Devil's Island home, confronting the island as it is now remains bittersweet. Chris Mills' periodical, *The Lightkeeper*, discusses the current state of the island and sends out a plea for the now dilapidated lighthouse. Built in 1877, it is the last remnant of habitation on the island, the lightkeeper's home having blown over in a storm in 2012.[1] Even the planks that once held the other houses together are gone. In the early 2000s, a Norwegian artist lived on the island and, according to former resident, Ina York, he used much of the remaining wood from the collapsed houses for firewood. When asked if it bothered her, she said that "it didn't matter," her daughter remarking that "at least somebody had use of it."[2] As for the lighthouse, descendants were overwhelmingly in favour of preservation, however, the opinions of former residents were mixed. Although many support the idea, some residents feel indifferent towards preservation. Shirley Farrell discussed her role in the efforts of a small group of Eastern Passage residents in 2009 and was disappointed by the inaction of the provincial government. Despite many meetings, and growing public interest, the government refused to intervene. "The government won't have anything to do with any of the lighthouses. They just let them fall down."[3] This remains the most recent attempt, and many fear the eastern lighthouse will be lost in the next few years. Dorothy York shared a similar sentiment: "It'll go like the rest of the houses and fall down."[4] Her mother, Ina York believes the time for preservation has passed, remarking sadly, "It's too late now."[5] Pierre Nora argues that monuments are built only after memories of an event or location "no longer occur[s] naturally".[6] As the literature suggests,

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[1] Mills, Chris. "Devils Island" *The Lightkeeper* 19, no. 4 (2013): 4.
[2] Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1, 2021.
[3] Shirley Farrell, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, January 12, 2021.
[4] Ina York, Interview by author, Eastern Passage, February 1, 2021.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." 12.

Devil's Island was once a treasure trove of the Nova Scotia folk. They were a people defined by their songs and yet, the individuals who remembered these treasures remain outside of the provincial consciousness. Although work has been done regarding the fisherfolk of Devil's Island, it is only after scholars peel back the carefully painted layers of romanticization and listen to those who remain, that the truth of who the "folk" were as a people, can come to light.

Herb Wyile's book, *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature,* focuses on the shifting approaches used by Atlantic Canadian authors in presenting the area as a complex, multifaceted region rather than the tourist industry's quaint land of leisure. Wyile's work breaks down the economic and political realities of Atlantic Canada in contrast to its associated stereotypes. Wyile writes on the irony of tourism promoting an abundance of dying resource industries such as fishing and farming, while the region increasingly depends on modern occupations. He argues that tourism has become a necessary supplementary income promoting the longevity of the very resources it is replacing.[7] The continuation of the image of the folk has given life to the tourism industry, however, it also spreads misinformation on Nova Scotia's economic state. Exploiting past folk villages such as the community on Devil's Island, and minimizing their experiences, is what fuels the tourist industry today. Therefore, works like Chris Mills' *Lighthouse Legacies: Stories of Nova Scotia's Lightkeeping Families* are desperately needed. Making connections, collecting memories and examining a dying lifestyle, Mills describes how Nova Scotia is "at a critical point in lighthouse history," citing the recent passing of many former lightkeepers and their immediate families.[8] Realizing the impossibility of lighthouse preservation, Mills dedicates his time to "sav[ing] the

[7] Wyile, Herb. *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature*. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011, 4.
[8] Mills, Chris. *Lighthouse Legacies*. Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2006, vi.

memories of the people who lived the lighthouse life."[9] Unfortunately, fifteen years have passed since Mills' publication and more memories have been lost. Thus, this paper covers only the opinions of those who remain. Those who held different views can no longer tell us their stories, stories that are so essential in attempting to understand moments from a lifetime ago. The recollections gathered in this paper are just the beginning and more work to preserve the memory of the island as it was, is severely needed.

Collecting memories from Devil's Island from former residents, the physical loss of the island during a wartime childhood filled with uncertainty, created a longing to go back for some. Donald Purdy admitted his own desire to return to the desolate island: "If that island still had those wharves, and breakwaters the way it used to, I would move on there to spend my last days. I would be gone, I'd be there now."[10] Donald sighed, his sense of longing truly profound. But what he's searching for can't ever be returned to him. The island as a home no longer exists. All that remains are the memories, and for Donald and the other former residents, the eastern lighthouse, the symbol of their nostalgia that will one day crumble and be lost to the ghosts of the island.

[9] Ibid.
[10] Donald Purdy, Interview by author, Three Fathom Harbour, January 16, 2021.

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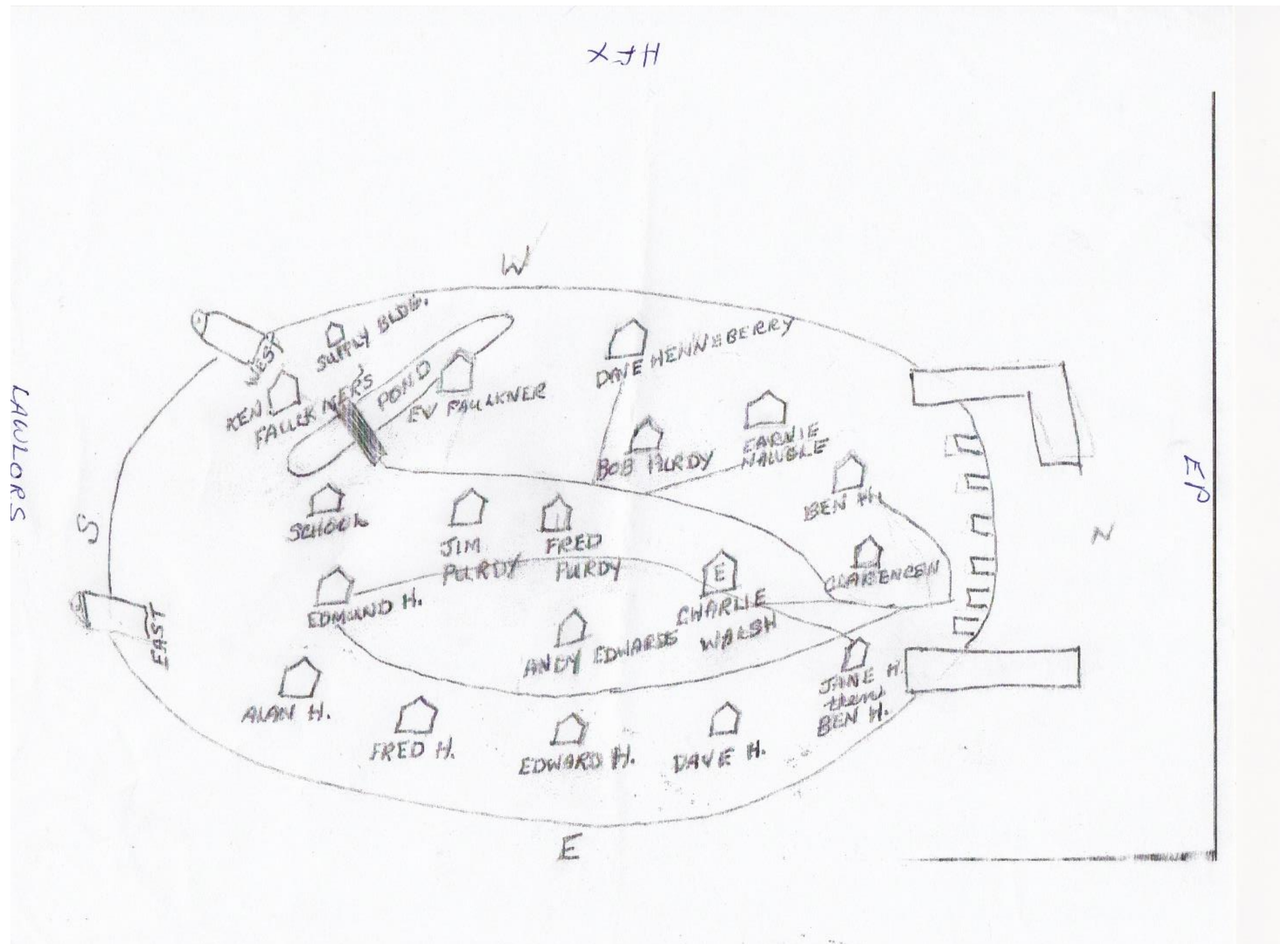
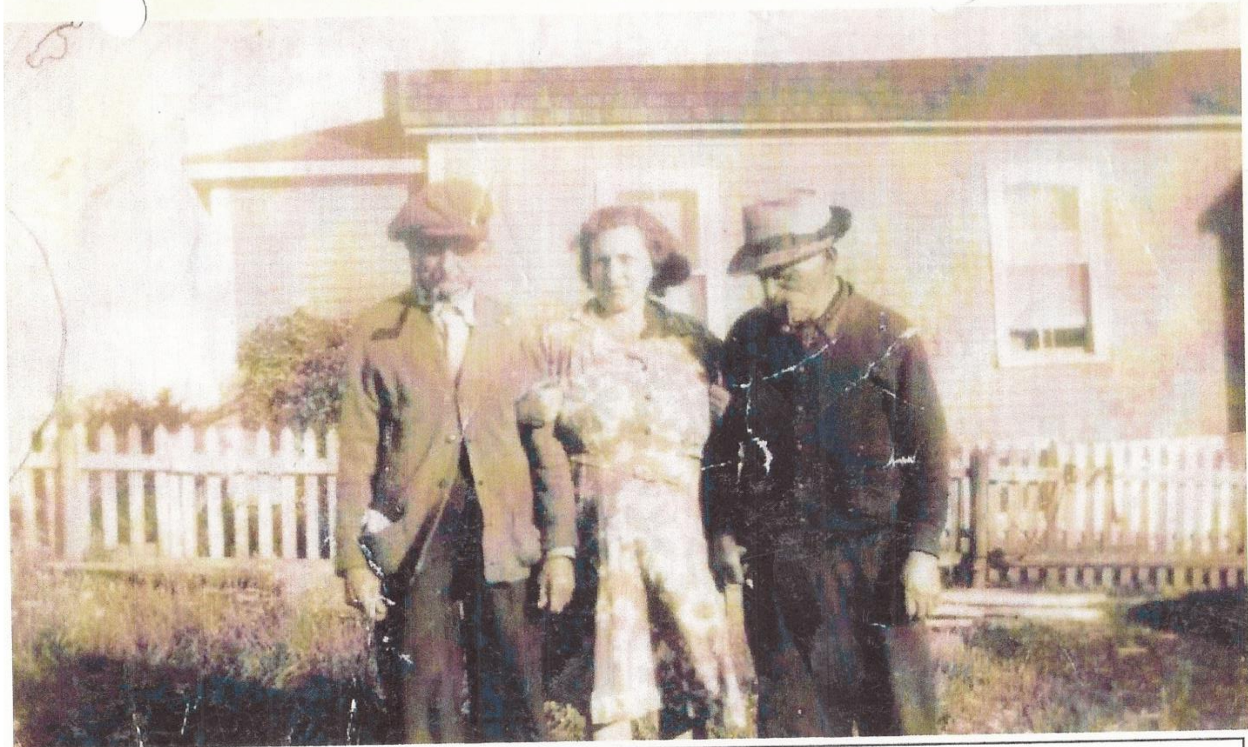
Appendix A: Photographs

Ina York and her sister, Joan Oakey (Née Henneberry)
(Courtesy of Ina and Dorothy York)



Hand Drawn Layout of the Buildings on Devil's Island
(Courtesy of Ina and Dorothy York)

Eastern and Western Lighthouses
(Courtesy of Ina and Dorothy York)



George WILLIAMS, Elizabeth Agnes WILLIAMS Henneberry, Benjamin HENNEBERRY

(Courtesy of Ina and Dorothy York)

Elizabeth Agnes WILLIAMS Henneberry and Edmund Clair HENNEBERRY
This is presumed to be a wedding day photograph.

(Courtesy of Ina and Dorothy York)

View from the Eastern Lighthouse
(Courtesy of Ina and Dorothy York)