

History and Culture

Why do you think people are interested in their heritage?

What past events stand out in your family's history?

Introduction

"A man cannot free himself from the past more easily than he can from his own body." — André Maurois, writer

"What you need to know about the past is that no matter what has happened, it has all worked together to bring you to this very moment. And this is the moment you can choose to make everything new." — Unknown

Which of the two quotes above do you feel is more accurate? Does the past totally dominate us today? Or can we really make "everything" new? Could the truth lie somewhere between these two positions? Regardless of how you answer these questions, the fact remains that much of our way of life is deeply rooted in the past.

When we talk about the past, there are two words that frequently come up: history and **heritage**. Although they have different meanings, both are useful when examining culture.

History is the record or narrative of past events. Since the entirety of the past can never be fully recounted, it makes sense that we focus on those parts that are important for us today. That's why historians tend to be guided by the idea of **significance**. They generally explore those more important experiences that have had deep consequences for many people over a long period of time. Think about where you live, the language(s) you speak, and your nationality. It is likely that significant events from the past played a strong role in determining these parts of your culture.

Heritage, on the other hand, is a familiar word that is surprisingly difficult to explain. In general terms, it refers to that which is preserved and passed on from one generation to the next. Think about what has been passed on to you from your family ancestry. What objects have been preserved for you? What practices have you learned? What important values and ideas have been stressed to you and are now part of your culture?

1.42 Used and altered with permission from the Bank of Canada



DIMENSIONS OF THINKING

SIGNIFICANCE

To help guide their inquiry into the past, social scientists use the concept of significance. An event, idea, or trend is said to be significant if it meets the following criteria: it has deep consequences for many people over a long period of time; or it is revealing and provides insight.

For instance, it is often helpful to study a particular example, not because the example itself is important, but rather that it helps us understand a larger experience. Therefore, the stories a grandparent may tell you about growing up 50 years ago may provide you with both revealing information about your personal history and a

deeper understanding of the experience of people living in those times.

Sometimes assessing significance can be difficult. Significance can vary based on time, perspective, and purpose.

1.43



Question:

Compare the significance of offshore oil and the fishery to our province. Which is most significant today? What

was most significant in the 1800s? What about 100 years from now?

By examining our history and heritage, we can gain better insight into how they have helped shape our lifestyles today. This is often very challenging, as our knowledge of the past is limited to the information that has survived to the present. When we think about historic information, it can be assessed in terms of both *quantity* and *quality*. The greater the quantity of information we have, the easier it is to create a comprehensive picture of an experience. Likewise, having quality information that is reliable and accurate is also important.

Often when we talk of historical sources, we think of tangibles such as documents, images, and artifacts. These types of information from primary and/or secondary sources tend to be considered “facts.” However, it must be remembered that historical sources are products of human actions. When an individual creates a record, he or she tends to do so with a purpose that is relevant to his or her present time. Seldom does the author of a document think that his or her creation will be used as a historical source at some point in the future. Therefore, the records that do survive and are used as historical sources are often “incomplete” or “biased” records of the past.

One other point worth making is that individuals and their memories are also valid historical sources. While oral histories have limitations, they can be excellent sources to help gain a deeper insight into a particular experience from the past – especially for those aspects that are not always documented in writing. For instance, if you wanted to know what life was like for the average person in your community 50 years ago, your best bet might be to interview an older person who lived during that time.

Oral history is based on the idea that powerful insights can be derived from people talking about their experiences. It ... assumes that everyone's memory is valuable and of potential historical interest. ... the voice of the past ... is that of the humble, of working men and women, who ... have rich experiences ... that offer a distinct historical perspective.”

– Dr. Ludmilla Jordanova, historian

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**“Those who cannot
remember the past are
condemned to repeat it.”**

— George Santayana, philosopher, poet, and cultural critic

Questions:

1. What information can you get from an oral interview that you cannot obtain from other sources?
2. Create a list of objects, practices, and values that you have inherited. What is the most significant? Why?

This is called presentism.

THINKING ABOUT THE PAST

Our lives today are different than those of our great-great grandparents. Not only are there differences in the technologies we have, such as cell phones and microwave ovens, but also differences in the way we look at the world around us. Our expectations of what we are able to do in areas such as transportation, communication, and medicine are radically different from the expectations of people a century ago.

As we think about the past, it is important that we refrain from interpreting past experiences based on present-day values and ideas. Rather, when examining the past, we should do so in the context of the values and norms of that time period. For example, when considering lifestyles in Newfoundland and Labrador in the eighteenth century, we realize that there were virtually no government-sponsored services such as health care or education. This does not mean that the society at that time was “primitive” or “backward.” Quite simply, there was no expectation during that period that government should provide those services.

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CASE STUDY

Using Information as Evidence

Primary sources are the “raw materials” historians use to answer questions, make inferences, and draw conclusions.

FOR A HISTORIAN OR OTHER SOCIAL SCIENTIST, INFORMATION becomes evidence when it is used to answer a question or support a point of view. Examine the following information to see what you can learn about trends in population distribution and changes in the past.

→ The 1836 data was not in the original source, but was added by the authors.

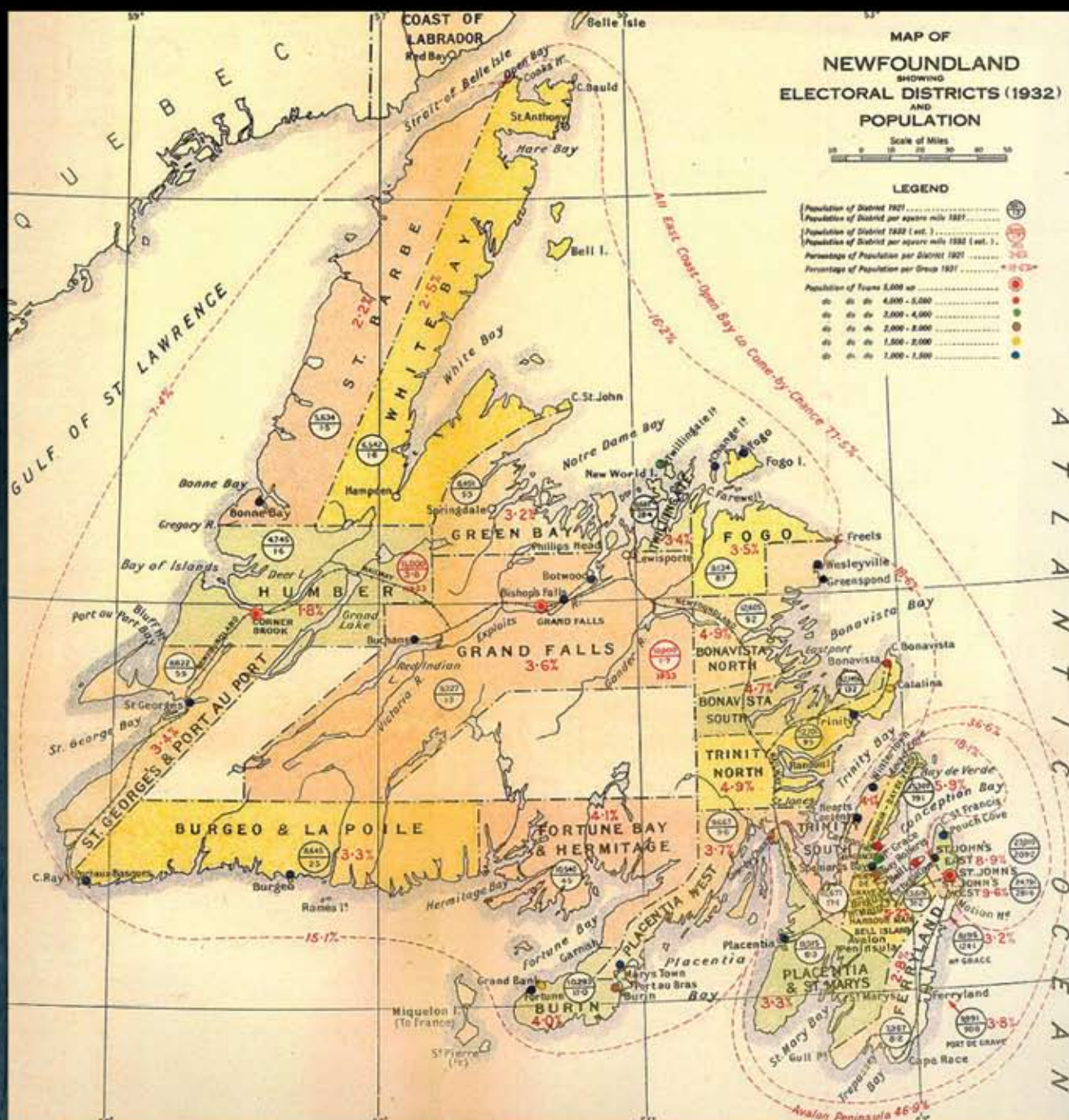
POPULATION BY DISTRICTS

1.46

Source: Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933

The following table gives the population of the various districts by the 1921 Census, and also the figures for each district for former years:

Districts	1836	1857	1874	1884	1891	1901	1911	1921
Twillingate	---	9,717	15,135	14,058	16,780	19,453	22,705	26,320
Fogo	4,886	---	---	6,264	6,700	7,570	8,257	9,134
Bonavista	5,183	8,850	13,008	16,486	17,849	20,557	22,894	24,754
Trinity	6,803	10,736	15,677	19,005	18,872	20,695	21,788	24,754
Bay-de-Verde	---	6,221	7,434	8,403	9,708	9,827	10,213	23,422
Carbonear	---	5,233	5,488	6,206	5,765	5,024	5,114	4,830
Harbour Grace	23,215	10,067	13,055	14,727	13,881	12,671	11,925	11,453
Port-de-Grave	---	6,489	7,919	8,698	7,986	7,445	6,986	6,545
Harbour Main	---	5,386	7,174	8,935	9,189	9,500	9,471	9,262
St. John's West	18,926	13,124	12,763	15,962	15,251	18,483	20,550	23,739
St. John's East	---	17,352	17,811	22,183	20,776	21,512	25,135	28,419
Ferryland	5,111	5,228	6,419	6,472	5,853	5,697	5,793	6,015
Placentia and								
St. Mary's	4,701	8,334	9,857	11,789	12,801	15,194	16,099	16,472
Burin	3,140	5,529	7,678	8,502	9,059	10,402	11,616	12,579
Fortune	3,129	3,493	5,788	6,917	7,671	8,762	9,989	11,272
Burgeo and								
La Poile	---	3,545	5,098	6,544	6,471	7,011	7,793	8,645
St. George	---	3,334	8,654	5,473	6,632	9,100	11,861	13,556
St. Barbe	---	---	---	6,500	6,690	8,134	10,481	12,176
Total	75,094	122,638	158,958	193,124	197,934	217,037	238,670	259,259
Labrador		1,650	2,416	4,211	4,106	3,947	3,949	3,774
Grand Total	75,094	124,288	161,374	197,335	202,040	220,984	242,619	263,033



1.47 Source: Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933

1.48 POPULATION BY CHIEF TOWNS

Source: Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933

	1901	1911	1921		1901	1911	1921
Twillingate	3,542	3,348	3,217	Brigus	1,162	1,034	935
Grand Falls	---	---	3,769	Harbour Main	798	762	745
Fogo	1,118	1,152	1,216	Conception Harbour	932	988	892
Change Islands	1,067	1,087	1,075	Ferryland	535	478	562
Greenspond	1,358	1,304	1,211	Placentia	1,315	1,327	1,383
Bonavista	3,696	3,911	4,052	Burin	2,719	2,783	2,763
Trinity	1,197	1,332	1,356	Grand Bank	1,427	1,605	1,869
Heart's Content	1,079	1,017	1,229	Harbour Breton	763	654	725
Western Bay	695	966	869	Channel	1,280	877	994
Carbonear	3,703	3,540	3,320	St. George's Harbour	1,409	867	1,024
Harbour Grace	5,184	4,279	3,825	Bay of Islands	1,184	1,048	1,349
Bay Roberts	2,266	2,187	2,168				

Note: Corner Brook, which now* has a population of about 5,000, was only a small village at the time of the 1921 census and owes its present proportions to the establishment of a paper mill there in 1923.

**This note is from the original 1933 document.*

The degree to which a question can be answered or a position supported by evidence is a function of the quantity and quality of the information available.

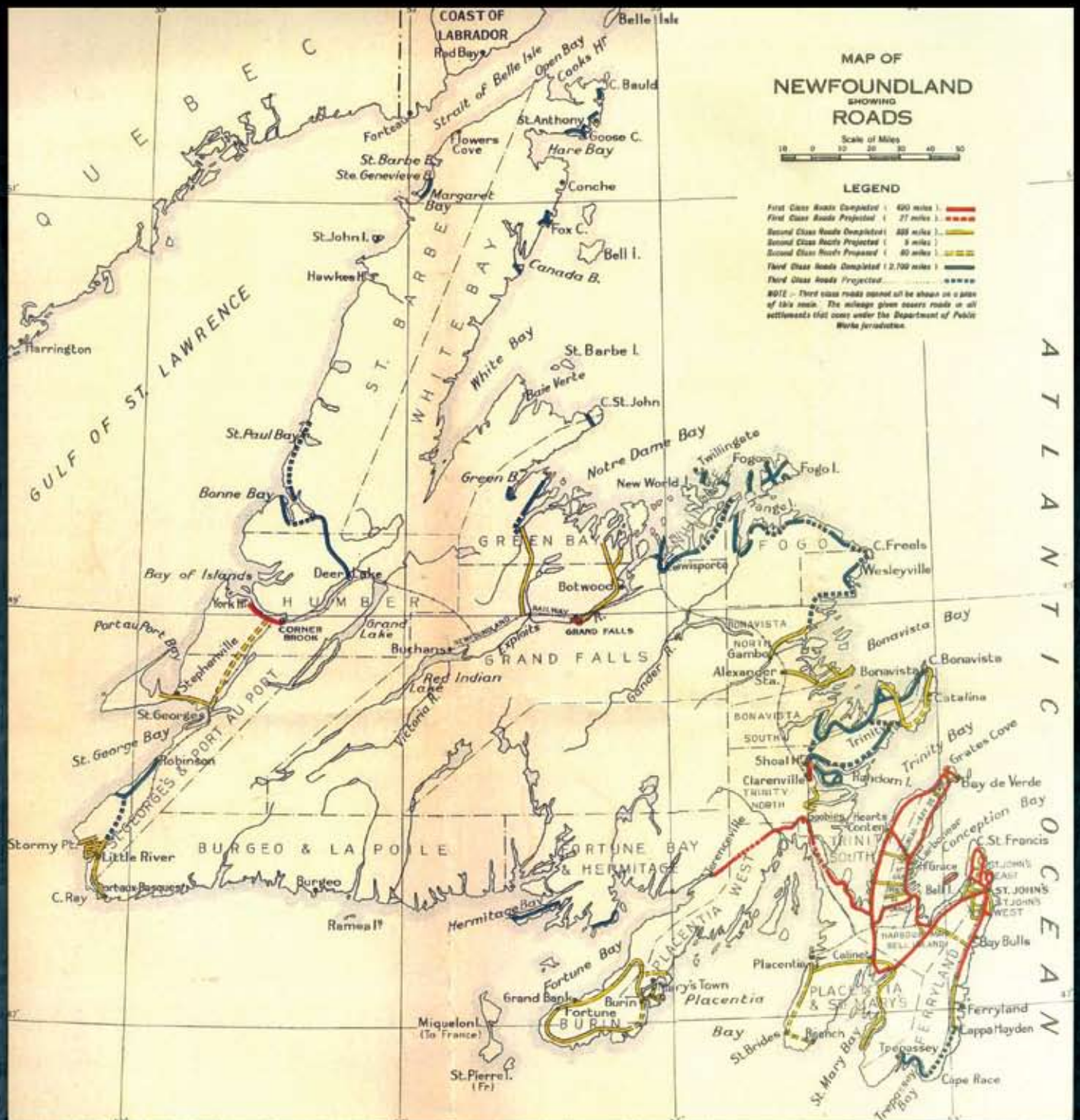
1.49 OCCUPATIONS

Source: Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933

	1857	1869	1874	1884	1891	1901	1911	1921
1.	---	---	---	---	---	---	1	1
2.	---	2	4	3	3	4	3	3
3.	77	97	120	185	183	239	245	301
4.	---	---	---	---	606	789	1,395	1,622
5.	Lawyers and Doctors	Lawyers 24	Lawyers 30	Lawyers 41	Lawyers 43	Lawyers 55	Lawyers 46	Lawyers 47
	71	Doctors 42	Doctors 41	Doctors 56	Doctors 62	Doctors 83	Doctors 119	Doctors 92
6.	689	591	589	895	771	1,040	1,326	1,098
7.	---	---	---	1,613	1,952	2,353	4,641	5,186
8.	---	---	---	---	614	739	1,468	1,712
9.	1,552	1,784	1,004	1,685	1,547	2,475	2,915	3,227
10.	---	---	---	---	36,303	40,438	40,880	34,979
11.	1,970	2,019	2,171	3,628	2,682	3,111	5,376	4,862
12.	Males and Females	Males and Females	Males and Females	Males and Females	Males and Females	Males and Females	Males and Females	Males and Females
	38,578	37,259	45,845	60,419	18,081	21,443	23,245	24,937
13.	334	391	453	1,507	625	1,408	2,821	2,619
14.	---	462	29	404	1,258	1,576	2,260	1,137
15.	---	---	---	---	1,058	626	1,204	1,833
16.	---	2,353	3,023	3,360	8,686	11,639	14,811	16,121

1. Archbishops 2. Bishops 3. Clergymen 4. Teachers 5. Lawyers and Doctors 6. Merchants and Traders 7. Engaged in Office or Shop 8. Government Service 9. Farmers 10. Fishermen and others who cultivate land 11. Mechanics 12. Catching and Curing Fish (Males and Females) 13. Lumbering 14. Mining 15. Engaged in Factories 16. Otherwise employed.

In earlier times mechanics referred to trades persons or skilled trades persons, including coopers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, lumbermen, and loggers.



1.50 Source: Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933

Questions:

1. Based on the information provided in this case study, what inferences can you draw about the way of life in your area of the province in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? What conclusions can you make about the colony as a whole? What parts of this lifestyle still exist today?
2. What are some other questions that could be raised about this time period that are NOT answered by this data? Where might you go to obtain answers to these questions?