

*A View of a Stage & also of the manner of Fishing for, Curing & Drying Cod at NEW FOUND LAND*  
*A The Habit of the Fishermen B The Line C The manner of Fishing D The Draffers of the Fish E The Trough into which they throw the Cod when Draffed F Salt Boxes G The manner of Carrying the Cod H The Cleansing of Cod I A Press to extract the Oyl from the Cod's Livers K Casks to receive the Water & Blood that comes from the Livers L Another Cask to receive the Oyl M The manner of Drying the Cod*



*From Moll's map, about 1710.—B.M. K., 118-25.*

2.72

## TOPIC 2.7

# Changing Lifestyles

What might life have been like for migratory fishers while working in Newfoundland and Labrador?

What is similar and different for migratory workers today?

## Introduction

Until the late eighteenth century, settlements were very different from those which developed later. They were essentially seasonal fishing stations (or work camps) occupied mainly by young, single men who were there only for the summer (although some overwintered with planters). The few planters who did live here

tended to maintain links with their families in England or Ireland. In many respects the English and French areas were similar in their demographic patterns, except that after 1713 the French were permitted to reside only in St. Pierre.



## Fishing Servants

Little is known about the life of visiting fishing servants, although it is likely that it was laborious. The fishing season was short and intense, and the best use had to be made of it. Servants were forced to work long hours with little time to sleep or rest. Those who worked for merchants often lived in barracks (called cookrooms) on their employers' premises. They were paid a small wage and given their keep. Those who worked for planters and byeboat-keepers usually boarded with their employers, sleeping in the lofts of stages or outbuildings.

When they were at Newfoundland and Labrador, the migratory fishers' lives revolved around their occupation. Workers spent most of their waking hours catching and curing fish, which left them with little leisure time. Immediately after arriving in the spring or early summer, workers had to first spend much time and energy cutting timber and building the infrastructure of the fishery – stages, flakes, cookrooms, and the like. After the construction phase, fishing servants spent the remainder of the season catching cod and processing it

for sale. Workers rowed to fishing grounds in small open boats early each morning and returned to shore when their vessels were filled with cod. Once fishers unloaded their catch onto the stage, members of the shore crew processed it. Headers removed the cod's head and guts, splitters cut out the backbone, and salters covered the fish with salt for curing – a process that could take weeks.

## New Opportunities

As settlement expanded, settlers found opportunities for new economic activities. In the 1670s some settlers in Bonavista were involved in fur trapping during the winter, and in the early 1700s reports indicate the development of commercial fisheries on rivers flowing into Bonavista and Notre Dame Bays. As settlers moved northward, they discovered they could harvest seals from herds that migrated southward each winter. Sealing was a very important support to year-round settlement on the northeast coast and in Labrador. Although soils were rather poor, subsistence farming was an important activity.

### Questions:

1. Summarize the tasks of the fishing servants. Would you like this lifestyle? Why might people have become fishing servants?
2. What new industries developed in the late seventeenth century? How did the growth of these industries affect settlement?

**2.73 Lester-Garland fishing premises** and the banking establishment on the eastern side of Trinity Harbour, then called The Northside. This oil painting was originally owned by the Lester-Garland family. Artist and date are unknown.

