Figure 1: Locations mentioned in the essays of this special issue on book culture in Newfoundland and Labrador. Map produced by the Map Room, Queen Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland, using ArcMap 9.3. June 2010.

Introduction: Book Culture in Newfoundland and Labrador

Nancy Earle*

When I was a graduate student at Simon Fraser University working as a research assistant on the *History of the Book in Canada* project, I became more and more interested in the role of print in our everyday lives. Returning to St John's for a visit, I asked my Newfoundland-born parents about their early experiences with reading and writing. Some of my father's stories on this subject, of course, were already familiar, as he carries with him a permanent sense of wonderment at the changes in communication technologies he has witnessed in his lifetime. (Born on the northeastern island of Fogo in 1921, he went to school at the age of six equipped with a slate and now experiences the Internet.) My mother, however, recalled details about her childhood in Kelligrews (Conception Bay) and Deer Lake (in western Newfoundland) in the 1940s that I had never heard about before. In Kelligrews, her family did not subscribe to a newspaper, I learned, because a neighbour came to the house every evening with his paper, which my grandmother read aloud to him after supper was cleared away. In Deer Lake there was no public or school library, but my mother, always a keen student, made good use of her textbooks. She remembers carrying home a large stack of them one day when she met the town doctor, who looked at the books with a sympathetic smile and said, "Isn't it a shame they're in your arms instead of in your head?" It was a great pleasure for us to recover these memories, which seem to me to have value beyond family lore as glimpses into the values and social relations of the larger communities.

To explore the book culture of Newfoundland and Labrador is to some extent to ask a new question in relation to the culture of this province. Fortunately Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are

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used to viewing and re-viewing their history through new lenses: In 2009, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador marked the 60th anniversary of Confederation with Canada. This year, “Canada’s youngest province” observes another milestone: 400 years since the founding of a plantation at Cupids by Bristol merchant John Guy. Cupers Cove, as it was then known, was the first chartered English settlement in what is now Canada, and Guy was Newfoundland’s first proprietary governor. Both anniversaries have invited new examinations of the province’s history, society, and culture, of which this special issue on “Book Culture in Newfoundland and Labrador” is one. Today, the provincial population totals just over half a million people, whose numbers include Inuit, Innu, Mi’kmaq, and Metis groups, a majority settler population largely of English and Irish (and to a lesser extent Scottish and French) origins, as well as other linguistic and cultural groups.¹ As the maps created to accompany this issue of *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada / Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada* show, this initial exploration of the print culture of Newfoundland and Labrador spotlights just a few dozen locations (Figures 1 and 2); understanding how these and many other communities have experienced print will enhance our understanding of the heritage and the contemporary environment of this vast territory.²

What can a study of book culture tell us about Newfoundland and Labrador? What can a study of Newfoundland and Labrador contribute to the history of the book? The four articles and six brief notes included in this issue examine the life of print in and of this province. They illuminate the connections between local (as well as international) print traditions and the making of identity; they document the roles of institutions, groups, and individual

1 Statistics Canada, “Population by selected ethnic origins, by province and territory (2006 Census) (Newfoundland and Labrador),” <http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/demo26b-eng.htm>, accessed 30 June 2010.

2 While the history of the book in Newfoundland and Labrador is largely an English-language story, there are some exceptions to this rule, most notably the long history of printing in Inuktitut which is carried on today by the Labrador Inuit. Hans Rollmann is currently compiling a bibliography of works published in Inuktitut by the Moravians (in Saxony, Germany, and later in Nain, Labrador) from 1790. There is also a history of French-language titles relating to Newfoundland, though the majority of these were published elsewhere. The province’s one French-language newspaper, *Le Gaboteur* (est. 1984) has a readership across the province with concentrations on the Port au Port Peninsula on the island’s west coast, in St John’s, and in Labrador City.

Figure 2: Locations mentioned in the essays of this special issue for the Avalon Peninsula, Newfoundland and Labrador. Map produced by the Map Room, Queen Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland, using ArcMap 9.3. June 2010.

men and women from numerous walks of life in the creation of culture; and they add to our knowledge of the history of education, religion, medicine, and the arts, among many other areas. For book historians, Newfoundland and Labrador represents a generative site of inquiry: a region that came late to printing and publishing (the printing press arrived in 1807; book publishing did not begin in earnest until the 1970s), for much of its history Newfoundland and Labrador may be seen as a place where, according to William Barker in his essay included here, “the book ... was not at the centre of much of the cultural life but at the margin.” Far from being a disappointing assessment for those interested in print culture, this observation opens up many questions about the particular ways in which print has been accessed, produced, and given meaning by local populations that have for centuries existed far from the major centres of publishing. Many of the province’s communities have been, until recent decades, relatively isolated, and their interactions with print are largely unexplored. Orality remains a significant characteristic of

the culture, and further work needs to be done on the functions of print in relation to the maintenance (or erosion) of oral traditions and the distinctive linguistic dialects of the province.³ As in many other regions, there has been a remarkable growth in local publishing in Newfoundland and Labrador in recent decades, a situation that prompts questions about the roles and markets of regional presses in the electronic, globalized age. These issues, which have clear relevance beyond the local situation, are among those that are examined, directly or indirectly, by the contributors to this volume.

For a lively and engaging introduction to the specific “facts and problems” of Newfoundland and Labrador book history, I direct readers to the first article in this issue, William Barker’s “Three Steps towards a History of the Book in Newfoundland.” Defining three periods in the history of the province – the first, that of European exploration and early settlement, from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth century; the second, beginning at the time of the first known printing (1807) and continuing until the moment of Confederation (1949); and the third, from Confederation to the present day – Barker proposes that these “transformations of the public sphere,” though broadly construed, may be seen as a useful framework upon which to build a history of the book in Newfoundland, and outlines the research and resources available for each period. Noting the scarcity of information relating to the earlier periods, Barker helpfully identifies areas yet to be explored – notably that of the serial press. While there are few publishers’ and booksellers’ records and little surviving information on the importation of books, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century newspapers and other publications offer advertisements, reviews, and original writing that have yet to be examined by book history scholars. A lack of extensive research on such subjects is identified as another obstacle, though Barker notes that there have been numerous attempts,

3 On the interrelations of orality and print in the history of folklore studies, and on the development of Memorial University’s Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA), see Herbert Halpert, “Folklore and Newfoundland: An Informal Introduction to the Materials and Methods of Folklore,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* 8 (1969): 10–22. Newfoundland and Labrador’s oral traditions have been a rich area for researchers, many of whom have been associated with Memorial University’s Folklore Department; for a sampling of the scholarship, see Memorial University, Department of Folklore, “Publications from MUNFLA Research,” <http://www.mun.ca/folklore/munfla/biblior.php>, accessed 30 June 2010.

taking place over more than a century, to document and preserve the print history of Newfoundland and Labrador. These endeavours include the intellectual pursuits of individual book collectors (W.G. Gosling and J.R. Smallwood, to take two notable examples), whose libraries would become major components of public collections, as well as the mandates of governments and of Memorial University of Newfoundland (founded as a college in 1925 and granted university status upon Confederation), which formally established the Centre for Newfoundland Studies (CNS) in 1965 and helped to support major research projects including the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* and the *Bibliography of Newfoundland*, among other projects. By documenting the repeated impulses over time to collect and interpret print materials relating to an entity known as Newfoundland, Barker establishes a background for the concerted effort in recent years to “define [Newfoundland] culture in its own terms, to preserve and write the history, to publish works oriented to local culture and politics.” Although this contemporary activity has parallels in other Canadian provinces (as well as elsewhere in the world), Barker insists that “a Canadian history ... cannot ... tell the local history for any region in the country.” By beginning with a local history of the book, Barker seeks to establish the specificities of Newfoundland and Labrador print culture into order to understand it “in its own terms” and with a view to fostering global comparisons.

William Barker’s contention that book history must be written from the local perspective may be seen to be supported by Kristina Fagan’s study of Lydia Campbell and the Labrador Metis⁴ literary tradition, which examines a community whose history is unique in Newfoundland and Labrador and for whom even that geo-political category has a limited use as context. Fagan’s focal point is Lydia Campbell’s *Sketches of Labrador Life by a Labrador Woman*, the first published autobiography written by a woman of Inuit and English descent, which appeared in serial form in the St John’s *Evening Herald* in 1894–95 and was rediscovered nearly 90 years later by a wider audience in a new edition by Labrador publisher Them Days. Drawing on her own oral history research in Labrador, Fagan contextualizes Campbell’s achievements within the culture of the Labrador Metis – a community in which literacy has long been “valued and widespread,”

4 In 2010, the Labrador Metis Nation adopted the name Nunatukavut (“our ancient land”), a name with close links to Nunatsiavut (“our beautiful land”), the Labrador Inuit territory self-governed since 2005.

due in part to the legacy of the Moravian missionaries in northern Labrador and to the literate Hudson's Bay Company traders in central Labrador who taught their Inuit wives to read, a skill that would be passed down through the generations. In exploring the factors that led Campbell to write her life story, as well as the impact of Campbell's writing on her descendents, Fagan examines the ways in which the Labrador Metis "made writing their own," and, in doing so, challenges critical assumptions that have posited Aboriginal writing as "primarily defined by a tension between the 'white' and 'Aboriginal' worlds, or between colonialism and resistance." For Fagan, the uncritical adoption of this "oppositional framework" may actually obscure the ways that writing has been become part of an indigenous tradition within this Metis community.

Another writer with strong associations with Labrador and northern Newfoundland is the English-born doctor Sir Wilfred Grenfell (1865–1940). J.T.H. Connor's article, "Putting the 'Grenfell Effect' in its Place: Medical Tales and Autobiographical Narratives in Twentieth-Century Newfoundland and Labrador," examines the fiction and non-fiction print tradition centring on the life of Grenfell and its influence – termed the "Grenfell effect" – on the medical autobiographies that have emerged from the Atlantic region over the last century. Connor shows how this tradition is inflected by and at the same time constructs place, in this case, Newfoundland and Labrador as the inhospitable (though often redemptive and therapeutic) North, and examines the "intellectual and economic ecosystem" of social gospel, muscular Christianity, and antimodernism that both propelled and was promulgated by the market for books on and by Grenfell. In exploring the widespread popularity – and eventual fall from fashion – of tales of missionary medicine in the remote North, Connor's discussion sheds light not only on the sensibilities of early twentieth-century readerships but on the new markets of the contemporary regional book trade, in which medical narratives continue to feature prominently. Connor concludes with a case study of the life cycle of the memoirs of Dr Robert Ecke (1909–2001), an American physician who practised in Twillingate in the 1930s and who was among the many to experience Grenfell's influence on medical and literary culture. Ecke's journey into print illustrates some of the shifts in the genre of medical memoir and its import for different writers and readers over the course of the century.

Connor's exploration of the interrelations of print and place are threads which are also picked up in my contribution to this

volume, entitled “*Death on the Ice* and the Newfoundland Imaginary: Print Culture on the Periphery.” My study examines the writing, publication, and reception of the Newfoundland bestseller *Death on the Ice: The Great Newfoundland Sealing Disaster of 1914* (1972), written by Cassie Brown with Harold Horwood. One central concern of the essay is to describe the literary climate that gave rise to this book by focusing on the early career of Brown as a study of female “regional” authorship in the 1950s and 1960s. A writer who always sought a popular Newfoundland audience, Brown began her career in broadcasting and journalism and wrote *Death on the Ice*, her first book, at a time when there were no book publishers operating in the province. Her decision to send the work to Doubleday Canada led to the involvement of another author, Harold Horwood, whose collaboration was invited at the suggestion of the publisher with the aim of creating a novelistic popular history that would be marketable to a North American audience. A sympathetic account of a tragic event in the history of Newfoundland sealing, *Death on the Ice* appeared at a time when the international controversy over the Canadian seal hunt was intensifying, and in part because of this, issues of representation were on the minds of many Newfoundland readers and critics. Arguing that *Death on the Ice* remains a key text in the Newfoundland imaginary, I situate the reception of the book within the larger construction of Newfoundland and Labrador culture in the mid- to late-twentieth century, with a particular focus on the work’s impact on the new generation of literary authors.

Looking toward future explorations in the history of the book in Newfoundland, William Barker expresses a hope and a warning: a hope that serendipitous finds will enrich our knowledge of the nineteenth century, and warning that book history research threatens to become too St John’s-centric. It is fortunate that a number of the short essays in the “Notes” section seem to speak directly to these points. Illuminating various time periods, and a number of geographical areas of the province, some of the notes included here describe ongoing research projects, while others are personal essays by local cultural producers. Taken as a group, they provide an indication of the breadth of current activity in the world of print from the perspectives of writers, publishers, artists, and scholars in a range of fields including literature, history, and women’s studies.

Mary Dalton’s “Michael Coady, John Murphy, A Notebook” describes the appearance and content of a notebook dating from the mid-nineteenth century found in Brigus, Conception Bay. Amid the

pages of surveying notes, records of legal transactions, and assorted “lists and lore,” this notebook contains a two-page list entitled “1848 Catalogue of Books,” possibly an estate list or simply a record of a library. The titles include works of classical literature, scripture and devotional works, texts for study and reference, and popular novels. The list raises many possibly unanswerable questions – To whom did the books belong? When and through what channels were they obtained? To what extent did they circulate among community members? – and thereby offers an entry point for a study of reading cultures in rural Newfoundland of the nineteenth century.

The literary culture of another rural Newfoundland community is the focus of Vicki S. Hallett, who examines the writing life of poet Phebe Florence Miller (1889–1979) of the town of Topsail, Conception Bay. Beyond re-evaluating the place of Miller’s poetry, which appeared both locally and nationally, in the history of Newfoundland literature, Hallett is primarily concerned with examining concepts of identity and place in Miller’s life writing, which consists of an extensive collection of unpublished poetry, diaries, and correspondence. Of particular importance for understanding the context for Miller’s writing is the local community of fellow writers and literary enthusiasts which the poet helped to foster by hosting a literary salon in Topsail through the 1920s and 1930s. The philosophy and practice of this salon are key areas of inquiry for Hallett as she explores the archive of Miller’s writing life.

While Phebe Florence Miller was creating a space in which to discuss literature and the arts in Topsail, another Newfoundlander, newly retired sailor William Morris Barnes (1850–1934), was making his first contact with New York publishing circles in a New York park. As Meaghan Walker explains, due to a chance meeting with a woman named Hilda Renbold Wortman, Barnes became both the model for a cartoon character in the *New York World-Telegram* newspaper and the author of an autobiography published in New York and London in 1930 and 1931, respectively. By using modern technology (Dictaphone) to capture his dialect and storytelling style, Hilda Wortman laboured to vividly convey Barnes’s oral narratives on the printed page. Although little is known about Barnes’s reception in his native Newfoundland, Walker’s discussion touches on points raised by J.T.H. Connor on the conjunction of Newfoundland with the genre of the adventure tale in the imagination of international readerships in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The next two notes are written by contemporary publishers about the roles their presses have played in the cultural and intellectual life of the province and beyond. In “Reflections on ISER Books,” Robert Paine and Lawrence Felt outline the administrative history and the publication record of what is today the longest standing book publisher in the province: ISER Books, the publication arm of the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) of Memorial University. Originally founded to support and promote research on Newfoundland issues, ISER quickly expanded beyond its original fields of interest – sociology, anthropology/archaeology, economics, and political science – to the areas of folklore, history, and linguistics, and soon adopted an even more expansive purview, publishing studies employing “multidisciplinary and comparative lenses” on subjects within and beyond provincial borders. While other book publishers – Breakwater, DRC, and more recently Boulder – have published a number of academic studies on topics of local interest, ISER Books, now in its 45th year, remains the only dedicated scholarly book publisher in the province and has published close to 100 titles.

In “Scop: A Retrospective (2002–2008),” Stephanie McKenzie examines the history of Scop, her Corner Brook-based publishing house and production company. As McKenzie explains, Scop had particularly strong ties to Ireland’s Waterford Institute of Technology, a relationship fostered by the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the governments of Ireland and Newfoundland and Labrador in 1996, and exemplified by co-edited and co-published collections, a travelling art exhibition, and an international conference. Like ISER Books (scholarly), Scop (literary) sought out and depended on an array of funding sources. Beyond pointing out the difficulties of the young press in securing anything beyond ad hoc financial support, what McKenzie’s discussion makes very clear is that Scop’s survival and success depended on a kind of synergism within the larger environment – the local and international communities of scholars, artists, writers, readers, and supporters of the arts whose individual and collective efforts reveal publishing to be a truly collaborative endeavour.

The final contribution to this special issue also originates from the west coast of Newfoundland, though it also brings us back to Conception Bay on the east coast. Corner Brook artist Shirley Greer’s “Yours Affectionately: Artists’ Books Inspired by Correspondence” describes an exhibition of artists’ books created by Greer that are based on a series of letters written by the Reverend W.H. Dotchon

of Brigus to Greer's grandparents in Bay Roberts in the 1930s. Greer's experimentation with the material form of the book in these works (some of which include both visual and audio components) may be seen to explore the practice, experience, and significations of correspondence through the artist's imagining of the situated acts of writing and reading letters within the larger day-to-day cultures of these communities. It is interesting that Greer's discussion shares some points of connection with that of Vicki Hallett: not only does it recover an all but forgotten writer (Dotchon was a published poet of religious verse), it also highlights the issue of gender (in Greer's case, the roles of women as custodians of family documents) in relation to the creation and maintenance of culture.

Shirley Greer concludes her discussion by acknowledging the richness of the documents on which she based her work and commenting, "I think I may have only begun this journey." This statement is, I feel, a fitting final word for this special issue. The print culture of Newfoundland and Labrador is a fresh and exciting area of inquiry; I hope that the essays here will inspire further studies into the meanings of print for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I would like to thank the editor of *PBSC/CSBC*, Jennifer Connor, for her support and guidance during the editing of this issue, as well as the authors and peer reviewers, the publications committee of the BSC/SBC, editorial assistant Elizabeth Ross, and the faculty and staff of the Centre of Newfoundland Studies, the Division of Archives and Special Collections, and the Map Room of Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II Library for their interest in this subject and their many insights and contributions.

I would like to dedicate this special issue, with respect and gratitude, to the memory of anthropologist and publisher Dr Robert Paine (1926–2010).

SOMMAIRE

Cette livraison spéciale des *Papers/Cahiers* s'articule autour de la culture du livre à Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. Cette publication coïncide avec la commémoration de deux importants anniversaires. Il y a en effet soixante ans en 2009 que la province de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador faisait son entrée dans la Confédération canadienne. À cela

s'ajoute le quatrième centenaire, célébré en 2010, de la fondation de Cupers Cove (aujourd'hui Cupids), la première colonie d'expression anglaise dans le pays qui deviendra le Canada. Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador adopta sur le tard l'imprimerie (1807) qui occupa dans un passé encore récent une place où, selon l'avis de William Barker, « le livre ... ne figurait pas au centre de la vie culturelle mais en marge de celle-ci. » La culture de l'imprimé à Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador ne fut donc que très peu abordée. Vu l'éloignement des communautés locales des grands centres de publication, l'imprimé put être accessible et produit en empruntant des voies inhabituelles, sujet qui mérite d'être examiné en vue de faciliter une compréhension approfondie de la conjoncture locale et d'amener des comparaisons fondées. Grâce aux articles et aux notes de ce cahier spécial, nous parviendrons à une meilleure connaissance de l'histoire culturelle et sociale de cette province ainsi que diverses études en histoire du livre internationale. Débutant par l'introduction de Barker, laquelle énumère les questions et les défis qui témoignent pour une histoire du livre à Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador, les articles et notes qu'on lira ici explorent un éventail de thèmes tels que le rôle joué par l'imprimé dans l'établissement de l'identité d'une collectivité, les connexions entre les traditions orales et l'imprimée, l'apparition des éditeurs locaux et leur influence dans le milieu et l'importance de la lecture et de l'écriture dans la vie de tous les jours.