

## Burgess Property, Whiteway, NL: Site and Building Survey.



Heritage NL

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notes from Robert and Ian Burgess*

### Introduction

The Burgess Property is a collection of six buildings in Whiteway, NL, dating to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Built and operated by an unbroken line of Burgess family members over six generations, the cluster of closely spaced buildings is part of a single family enterprise. Its continuity helps to imbue a sense of how the property was inhabited and operated for more than 100 years, and the diversity of buildings speaks to the variety of functions and income sources of an outport family premises. Though early Burgess men were recorded simply as fishermen, the family was active in several lines of business. Family histories and records tell us that early Burgesses practiced sail-making, their saw mill produced lumber for barrel staves, house-building, and boat-building in the region, they ran a small scale cooperage, and at least one of the Burgess family women practiced midwifery on the property.

Located along a small riverbank between the ocean and a freshwater pond, the arrangement of the property's remaining fishing stage, root cellar, stable and store, house, and sawmill speaks to typical outport settlement patterns in the late 1800s. The structures are good examples of both residential and working buildings of the period. The Burgess Property was designated a Registered Heritage Structure by HeritageNL in 2020 as a unique and exemplary collection of interrelated vernacular buildings.

### History of Whiteway

Whiteway was originally called Witless Bay, Trinity Bay, and is called Witler's Bay in a few select documents. The misnomer of Witler's Bay may come from a 1774/75 map where an elongated s which resembles an r was used for the first s at the end of Witless (Faden 1778). Problematically, there is another town by the name of Witless Bay on the Eastern shore of the Avalon Peninsula which, as roads and communication lines began to be built in the late 19th century, caused some confusion between the two different Witless Bays. To solve this issue on August 13th, 1912 a proclamation was passed to officially rename the town to Whiteway, after the former Prime Minister William Whiteway, who represented the district of Trinity Bay (Hamilton 1996).

The earliest records of Whiteway are from 1824-1840 when the area was used by James Rowe, Robert Piercey and David Langer to build and launch schooners and brigantines into Witless Bay. Forty years later, in 1862, Whiteway welcomed its first permanent residents when Charles Burgess and his second wife Sarah (b. Butt) arrived with their three children. The town remained a typical small outport fishing settlement, comprising a few families throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

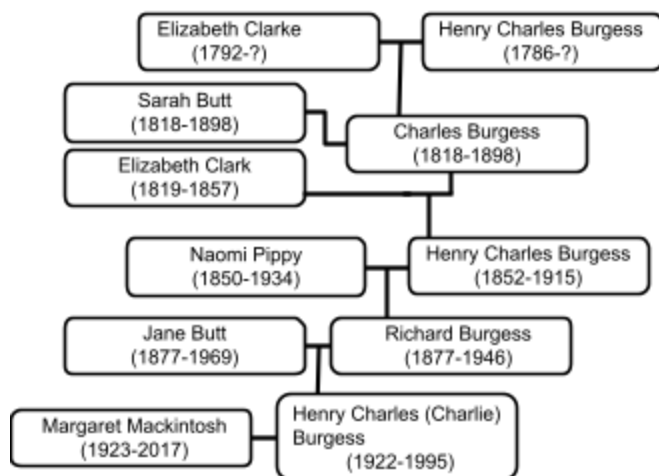
### Burgess Family

The earliest record of the Burgess family in Newfoundland comes from Henry Burgess. Henry is recorded as having originally come from Corfe

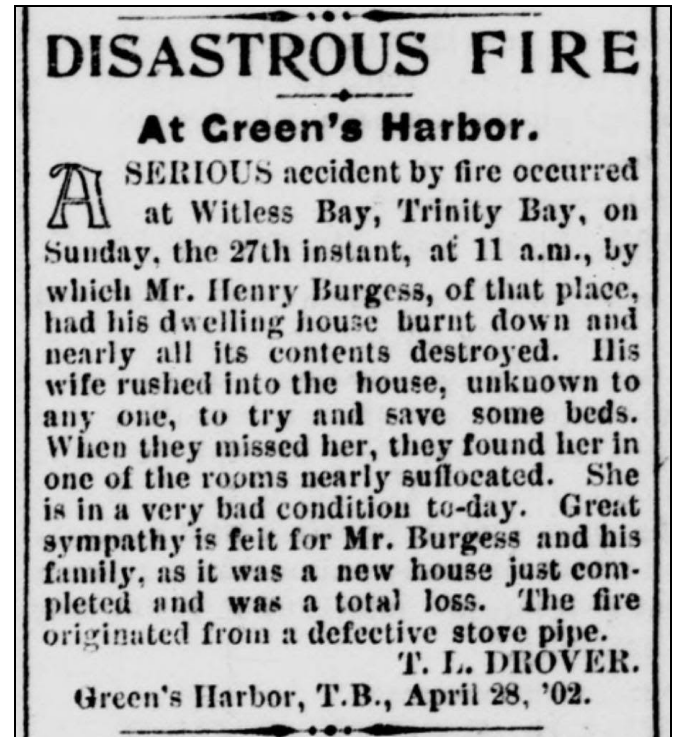
Castle, England, likely some time in the late 18th century as a fisherman before settling in Carbonear, where he married Elizabeth Clarke in 1812. Six years later their son Charles Burgess (1818-1898) was born.

Charles grew up with his parents and lived the earliest part of his adult life in Carbonear, where he married and had three children with his first wife Elizabeth Clark (1819-1857). Elizabeth was only 38 at the time of her death, making Charles a fairly young widower with three children to look after. As a result of this, Charles was re-married to Sarah Butt in 1860. Shortly after they were married, in 1862, Charles and Sarah decided to move their family from Carbonear to Whiteway, where they became the first permanent settlers of the town. Two years later, in 1864, their daughter Ellen became the first resident born in Whiteway (Burgess Properties 2019).

Due to a lack of documentation, the location of the original tilt in which the Burgesses lived when they first arrived is unclear. When exactly the Burgesses built their first permanent home, and what exactly that home looked like, is also unclear. What we do know, thanks to a 1902 news article [Fig. 2], is that the original home burnt down in a fire, but we still cannot confirm whether or not the current Burgess home is built in the same spot as the original home.



**Fig. 1 - Abridged Burgess family tree**



**Fig. 2 - Evening Telegram, 1902-04-30**

While Burgess family knowledge today notes that the Burgess property has not moved since Charles and Sarah's initial arrival in 1862, this is difficult to verify. The first official property records in Whiteway were not obtained until 1891, when Charles received a Queen Victoria Land Grant. The Burgess family has, over six generations of residence in Whiteway, practiced a wide variety of trades reflected in the growth of their property.

Family oral tradition notes that when Charles first moved to Whiteway he was both a sailmaker and a fisherman. This would explain the close relationship his family developed with that of Thomas Pippy, a nearby shipbuilder who operated a dockyard from 1872-1894. Thomas's daughter Naomi eventually married into the Burgess family in the late 19th century when she wed Henry Charles Burgess (1852-1915), eldest son of Charles Burgess (1818-1898) and his first wife Elizabeth Clark (1819-1857) (Burgess Property 2019).



Naomi became a notable figure herself in Whiteway, as a practicing midwife on the Burgess premises. Her success is made even more impressive by the fact that she only had one arm - having lost one to infection after she broke it.

The Burgesses continued to diversify their trades and build on their property well into the 20th century, expanding their collection of stage buildings. Eventually, some time around 1919 (as indicated by a receipt for an engine) the Burgesses also entered the lumber and milling business, and expanded their store to include a small cooperage. Prior to this, the Drover family had maintained a monopoly on local milling to great success, which, as the fishery began to decline, likely inspired members of the Burgess family to begin milling as well.

Today, all of the buildings of the historic Burgess property are still owned by an unbroken line of family members, and the stage was designated a municipal heritage site by the town of Whiteway in 2006.

## Site Overview

There is no record of the exact location and extent of the Burgess property prior to 1891, when the Burgesses obtained a Victoria Land Grant. According to family oral history, there were several reasons which may have prompted Charles to seek an official record of his property at this time. Notably, one important factor included Charles's need to formally subdivide his property between his children after his daughter Henrietta married Archibald Golden and decided to settle in Whiteway (Burgess Property 2019).



**Fig. 3 - Evolution of the Stable/Store**

Regardless, it is likely that the property, initial tilt, and first Burgess were all located nearby. While the house and tilt may have been located on the site of the current Burgess home, we think the house that burned down could have been located either where the highway passes now or in one of the current gardens next to the highway. Either of these locations would be close to the fishing stage which is typical (i.e. house and stage are connected by a short foot path). Further research and site surveying may be able to clarify this.

The 1891 land grant outlines a large area spanning from the edge of the historic road/bridge across to the turning point of the coast line. The property is well-situated for outport life, with Jimmy Rowe's Pond situated just to the East of the property for fresh water, a small river flowing from the pond to the ocean, and significant open, and fairly flat land for subsistence gardening and farming.

Over the 150 years of Burgess occupation the property was divided and reconfigured a number of times to accommodate rail and road construction, both of which cut across Burgess land. In 1915 a rail line to Heart's Content divided the property garden into two portions, the inside and outside (oceanside) gardens, in addition to separating the fishing stage from all other Burgess buildings (Burgess Property 2019).

At this time the rail company was offering some financial compensation to property owners impacted by rail construction, prompting several Burgess family members to claim ownership to properties farther up the shore line. Later, in the 1960s, ongoing construction for Route 80 also altered the original deed twice, and the road currently cuts through the historic property (Burgess Property 2019).

## Buildings

### Stable and Store

The combination stable and store is likely the oldest building on the Burgess property and, as the name implies, is a multipurpose building. During the buildings' recent restoration in 2015 a newspaper clipping was found in the stable wall with a date of September 21st 1897. While today the building's footprint spans 6.6m wide and 9.45m long, it was originally a small, rectangular stable, where this newspaper was found. The building was likely either built or renovated shortly after September 1897, and that all of the buildings' current, complex, additions postdate 1897.

The most probable sequence of construction [see Fig. 3] for the building is as follows: 1) stable, 2) right hand linhay/store, 3) loft extension and first floor stable addition, 4) linhay addition to connect the stable extension and store, 5) the recent deck addition (not pictured). A more detailed architectural analysis, including detailed building measurements, is needed to fully assess this structure. Red ochre was used on the original shingles and is still visible in places.

The stable originally kept a horse, cow, and sled, with space to store hay in the overhead loft. The stable has a few unique and interesting features, including an overhead loft opening from which hay was dropped to feed the horses and cows, and a slot on the right hand side of the building which opened into the haymeadow next door.





**Fig. 4 - Store addition, 1924**

The fishing store addition was potentially added onto the stable after 1915, because it is not mentioned alongside the stable in Henry Charles' will written at that time. This evidence is inconclusive though, because the store may have been implied as included as part of the stable, which is mentioned. A photo from 1924 shows both the store and its extension, meaning that all components of the building predate that year.

Initially built to be used for fish and fishing gear storage, the Burgess family eventually began using the store and stable extension for barrel production. A chimney, which is not pictured in the 1924 photograph, was also attached to the store at some point. Living memory from Burgess family members today places the chimney being in place in 1960 and attributes it to being part of the barrel-making process that took place on site, possibly for the making of hoops.



**Fig. 5 - Root Cellar Exterior, 2020**

## Root Cellar

The property's root cellar is likely the second oldest building on the property after the stable, but no records conclusively date its construction. The cellar is of typical construction, as a small, squat building measuring 3.5m wide by 4.73m long, covering an underground cellar space accessed via ladder. The above ground building is used to store some related items, like a water barrel and some gardening tools.

The below ground portion of the cellar is a small space typical of Newfoundland root cellars, lined with wooden bins in which vegetables are stored over winter. The cellar is concrete; earlier iterations may have been dry stone.

The leftover sawdust from the Burgess and Drover mills were used on the floor as extra insulation to help regulate the cellar's temperature (Burgess Property 2019).

The cellar was consistently used until the 1990s, after which the building fell into disuse. In 2015, as part of property renovations, the building was repaired and has since been regularly used to store root vegetables by the current Burgess property occupants.

## Dwelling House

The current Burgess house is at least the third home to have been occupied by the Burgess family in Whiteway. The first Burgess home was built in 1862 when the first Burgesses arrived, and was only a temporary, small tilt to accommodate the family while they built a proper house to move into. In 1902 this second home, completed shortly after the family's arrival in Whiteway, burned down.

After the second Burgess home burned down Naomi and Henry Charles, who had been living in the first Burgess house until this point, moved into a neighbouring house owned and built by one of their relatives while they waited for the third Burgess family home to be built.

The rebuilt Burgess home was completed by 1903, as evidenced by newspapers from the walls with the date April 8th, 1903. It is, as of 2021, the oldest remaining home on the south side of Whiteway.

The Burgess house, as indicated by its full two storeys and flattened roof, is a typical example of a third generation modified saltbox house (Mills 1975), built on a flat stone foundation [Fig. 7, below]. This style of home was built between approximately 1880-1935, and represents an altered version of earlier, smaller, saltbox homes (Mills 1975). It is likely that this house is substantially different in form from the earlier house.

Over the past 120 years, the Burgess dwelling has undergone a number of renovations and changes to accommodate the changing needs of the Burgess family. The original, typical centre hall with staircase plan was changed with the construction of a later stair in the northwest corner of the house. At the time of its construction the home did not have any internal plumbing, running water, or electricity. Instead, an outhouse for the family was located on the edge of the riverbank in such a way that the river could naturally 'flush' everything away. It was used until about 1972 (Burgess & Burgess 2020).

Water was originally brought to the home from nearby Jimmy Rows Pond in 2 buckets - using a wooden hoop to separate them - and stored in a barrel to the left of the porch door. Electricity installation was initially completed in 1957 and 1958, and plumbing was installed in the house in the early 1970s (Burgess & Burgess 2020).

Plumbing renovations in the 1960s and 70s significantly impacted the layout of the second floor in order to make space for a washroom with a toilet and shower. Similarly, on the first floor changes were made to the kitchen space in order to make room for a sink with running water, including the conversion of the pantry into kitchen space.



**Fig. 6 - Photo of current dwelling exterior**



**Fig. 7 - Dry stone foundation wall.**



**Fig. 8 - Original chimneys, garage addition**



The home was heated entirely by wood until the 1990s when the home was re-wired with baseboard heaters (Burgess 2021). Originally, the 1902 layout of the house featured two chimneys - both for stovepipes - at both gable ends of the house. The ocean side chimney (in the foreground of Fig. 8, next page) serviced the original parlour stove and, on the opposite end of the house, was a Waterloo stove, whose remains are still visible in the ceiling of the second floor (Fig. 9, below).

In 1948 a new oil/wood stove was purchased, and in 1956 this new stove was installed in the center of the building to replace the two original chimneys. This renovation altered the floorplans of both the first and second floors. Today, remains of the original staircase are visible in the ceiling beams of the first floor. The current staircase was installed to replace the one which was removed in what was the Burgess' "breakfast room."

Interestingly, these various changes have made the house seem somewhat larger than it actually is, with a bit of a rambling quality.

Other changes to the fabric of the house include the addition and removal of porches and a garage (see Fig 8). The date of construction for the porches is unclear, and they may have been part of the original construction of the building circa 1902-1903. The back porch was removed between 1948 and 1958. The front porch was removed likely in the early 1960s.



**Fig. 9 - Location of original Waterloo Stove**

The side garage was added to the house in the space between the sawmill and house where sawdust used to be piled in 1948 or 1949, to house Henry Charles (Charlie) Burgess's (1923-1995) car after he returned from service in WWII (Burgess & Burgess 2020). The garage was later removed when Route 80 was altered sometime in the 1970s to pass closer to the Burgess sawmill (Burgess Property 2019).

### Fishing Stage

While fishing buildings would have been constructed soon after the Burgesses first came to Whiteway in 1862, the current two storey fishing stage was a later addition to the Burgess property built by Richard and Charles Burgess around 1900. The lower part of the building was filled with framed pounds used for bulk salting the split cod fish, while the upper part of the building was used to store prepared dried and salted fish. Originally the only access to the lower part of the shed was through a small door facing the water. The double door was added by William Burgess to store his boat and fishing gear in the off-season.

While there is only one stage remaining today, the beach was once home to a variety of other Burgess fishing buildings, in addition to several buildings and wharfs belonging to the Drover and Golden families.



**Fig. 10 - Fishing Stage Exterior, 2020**



A 1948 photo [Fig. 11], taken by Margaret Mackintosh who married into the Burgess family as a war bride, shows seven structures operated by the Burgess family including:

- The current fishing stage
- A second stage
- Two flakes
- A salting shed
- A twine shop/fish store
- A wharf

When exactly the fishing structures came down is unclear. Photos from the 1980s show the stage in a serious state of disrepair alongside the remains of the Burgess flake, with no other buildings.

The decline of the fishing stage began in the early 1960s and late 1950s, with the stage being completely abandoned as a working enterprise by 1969. By the 1950s, in fact, the family's main fishing activities focused on herring and squid, reflecting the overall decline of the Newfoundland cod fishery at the time.

**Fig. 11 - 1948 photo by Margaret Mackintosh**

### **Sawmill**

The sawmill is the newest building on the property. It was not listed in Henry Charles's 1915 will, unlike all the other Burgess buildings. A 1919 receipt for a gas powered, water-cooled stationary engine remains in the family's records (Burgess Property 2019). This places the construction date for the sawmill as likely being sometime between 1916-1918, with the addition for the engine constructed circa 1919.

The sawmill itself is a long and low building on a wood post foundation with one large open room. The mill engine was housed at the very back of the building, in a small extension. Exposed beams along the walls of the building are covered in writing used to record the first date of milling and the amount of milling done annually [Fig. 12, next page]. By 1941 there were three competing sawmills in Whiteway, each processing and selling wood used for making barrels, boat and house building, etc. along the south coast of Trinity Bay.





**Fig. 12 - Notes on sawmill beams**

Family histories note that payment in exchange for milling was, at one time, based on a trading system whereby half of the lumber brought in would be kept by the Burgess' for sale (Burgess Property 2019).

In the winter, blocks of ice were cut from Jimmy Rowe's Pond and buried in sawdust between the sawmill and the dwelling house (Burgess & Burgess 2020). The ice was used to preserve salmon which was sold to the Harnum's in Hearts Delight, Cramm's in Green's Harbour, and the Moores in Carbonear. The saws for cutting the ice remain in the sawmill. Robert Burgess writes:

Once the ponds froze over, the horse and sled would be driven across the pond in the morning, logs would be hauled out before lunch time, lunch was eaten and our uncles would change out of sweat-filled clothes, then head back across the pond to bring out more wood. This continued until the pond ice broke up in the spring.

The death of Jesse Burgess, whose historic home is immediately adjacent to the present Burgess Heritage Property, in 1966 impacted William Burgess's ability to continue to operate the sawmill, which was closed that year. William sold sawmill equipment shortly thereafter, and converted the property into a seasonal residence.

## Gardens and Other Structures

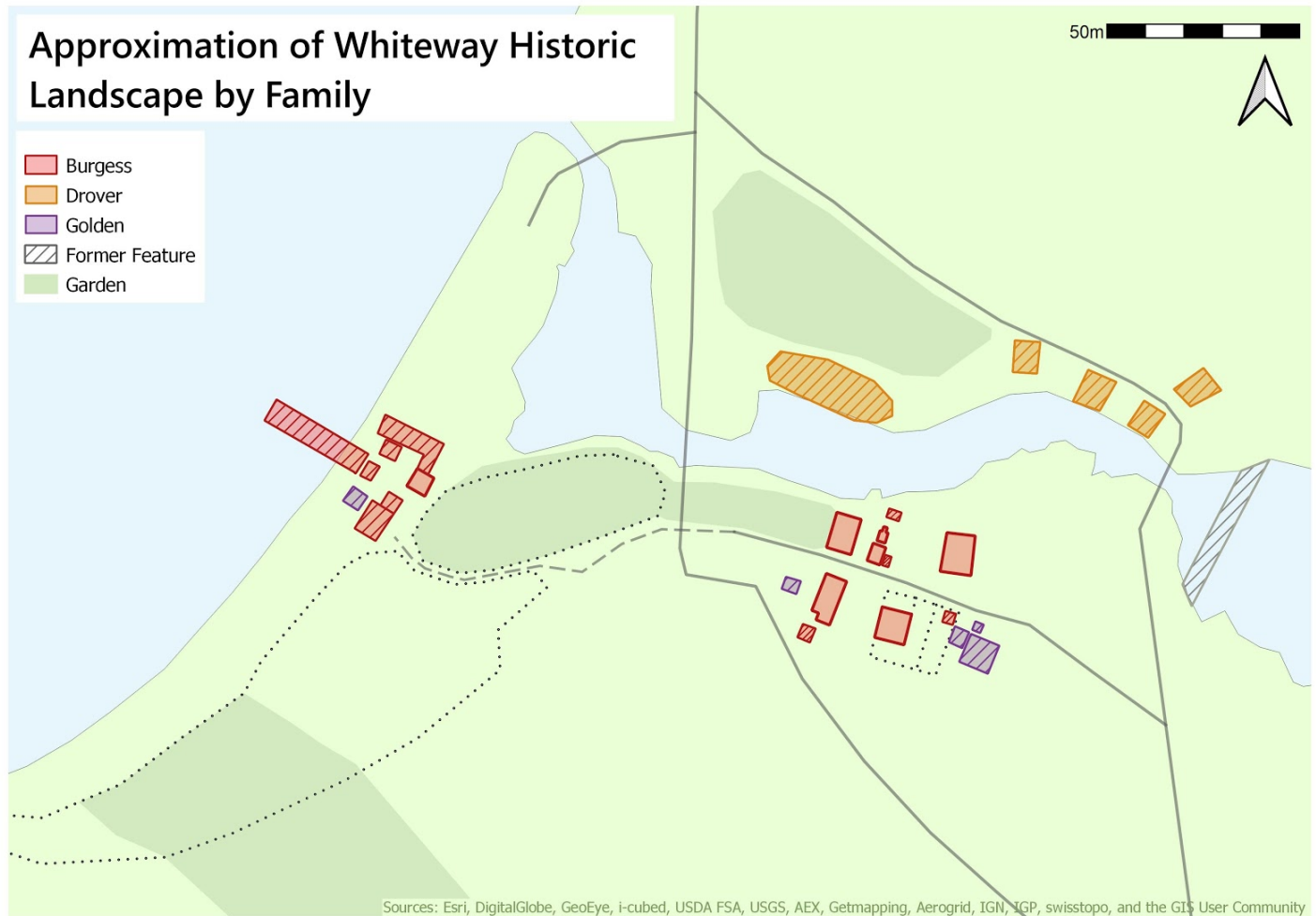
In addition to the extant buildings, the Burgess property also featured two hen houses, an outhouse, and several gardens. The hen houses were there in the 1950s, one by the root cellar and one in the yard by the gate to the Lane. Both have since been torn down.

The Golden family, related to the Burgesses by marriage, also had a henhouse and cellar on the Burgess property which are now gone. The concrete foundation of a third cellar called 'Uncle Jesse's Cellar' is still standing today, but it is excluded from heritage designation and has been converted into a small greenhouse.

Historically, the Burgess family maintained a number of gardens peppered across their property [Fig. 13, next page]. The south-western garden area was primarily used to grow staple vegetables and potatoes. The garden located between the Burgess residential buildings and the fishing buildings was used as a hay meadow, where hay was grown to feed the animals kept in the stable over winter.

Finally, Jesse's Garden (managed by Jesse Burgess) north of Burgess property and just west of Drover property, was used for a period of time in the 20th century to grow hay. A lilac tree in the front dwelling house garden has been there since at least the 1920s, alongside white rose bushes, blackcurrant bushes, and apple trees. There was also a damson tree on the water-facing side of the sawmill building (Burgess Property 2019).

When the Burgess property was split by rail construction it passed through garden space such as the Hay Meadow. From that point on, gardens were referred to as being either 'outside' or 'inside' gardens depending on their relationship to the water and the train track. Today, outside and inside garden spaces are divided by Route 80 and Old Track Road.



### Burgess Archival Materials

In the century and a half that the Burgess family have lived in Whiteway, various family members have collected and passed down an enormous amount of archival materials including artefacts, photos, receipts, letters, and more. Current property owners, Robert and Kim Burgess, maintain antique tools used on the property for fishing, milling, gardening, barrel-making, and more. Artefacts of intrigue include things like in-situ oil lanterns, a grinding stone, and a potato spade. One of the more impressive collections of artefacts includes the family's 'Labrador Box,' which was used in the seasonal fishery in Labrador (Burgess 2019).

In addition to this, the tremendous amount of documentary materials kept and maintained by the Burgesses family forms a uniquely detailed record of a diversified outpost enterprise and the family that operated it. Documents such as the original receipt for the sawmill engine and copies of the original 1891 land grant provide us with

**Fig. 13 - Map of historic Whiteway landscape**

exact dates and details which would otherwise be unknown. Currently, the property owners are organising their collection of hundreds of family letters, cards, and diaries which, collectively, form a detailed record of Burgess family history on the property.

### Into the Present

The period from 1950 to the early '70s brought a great deal of change to the Burgess family properties, including modern plumbing and electricity in all of the buildings on the main premises, which signals an overall change in family dynamics and industry. William Burgess (1905-1999) was the last Burgess to live on the property year round and use it in an industrial capacity, but as he aged he slowly began to limit his work on the property, eventually shutting down the sawmill in 1966. A few years later, William began living in Mount Pearl during the

winter months, limiting his time on the Burgess property to the warmer seasons. Up until his death William continued to play a key role as the primary caretaker of the Burgess family buildings and property, seasonally maintaining and repairing the Burgess property buildings and gardens.

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