

# History and Structures of the John Quinton Limited Premises, Red Cliffe, NL



Heritage NL

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*This report was drafted in August 2019 and  
expanded in January and February 2021.*

## Introduction

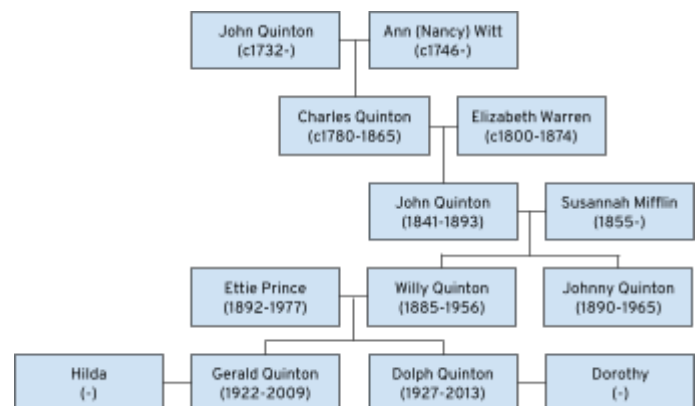
The five buildings comprising the John Quinton Limited Premises (the “Premises”) were designated provincial Registered Heritage Structures by Heritage NL (Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador) in 1994. The structures are noteworthy as a cohesive collection of buildings making up a 19th - 20th century outport merchant premises. It has been well-maintained by the Quinton family throughout its use and much of its historic fabric survives today. The Premises comprise a large residence, shop (former residence), post office, salt store, and fish store. The property also includes the remains of a herring store and several period fences.

With the Quinton family's endorsement Heritage NL staff visited the site on August 1st and 2nd, 2019. Michael Philpott and Patrick Handrigan, undertook preliminary documentary and investigative work including photos of existing conditions and measurements of exteriors and interiors of the structures where accessible.

## History of the Premises

The history of the John Quinton Limited Premises predates its namesake enterprise by at least a generation. In 1806 John Quinton and his brothers were recorded as having fishing rooms at Red Cliffe Island just offshore of the present Premises. These were said to be built by their father, an emigree of the Channel Islands. The earliest surviving structures – the original house (now part of the Shop) and the Salt Store – are believed to have been built by Charles Quinton (c1780-1865), son of John, circa 1820.

John Quinton Limited was established by John Quinton, son of Charles, in 1872 and run following his death in 1893 by Susannah Quinton, his widow (figure 1). The current Residence was built in 1892 at which time the old house was expanded to become the retail Shop. The Post Office is believed to have been constructed sometime prior and served as interim shop during this transition.



**Fig. 1. Abridged Quinton family tree.**

In 1925 John and Susannah's sons John "Johnny" Quinton and William "Willy" Quinton assumed control of the business. Johnny quickly fell into the role of office man or bookkeeper while Willy was known as the "outside man" or supervisor of the movement, packing, and grading of goods. In this period the Quinton enterprise rivalled the established firm of James Ryan in the region, and in the 1930s, when Ryan's King's Cove operations shuttered, the Quintons became the principal buyer and retailer for approximately 20 area communities.

In addition to their dealings in salt cod and salmon, the Quintons were known to be innovative businesspeople who branched out into several other commodities and operations. In 1926 Willy established a fox farm which operated for 10 years (Long 1998, 33-34). In the 1930s the firm did well in the dried squid trade using a process picked up by relative Joliffe Quinton in British Columbia. Highly sought-after by Chinese buyers, an order of 10,000 barrels of dried squid was recorded in 1934. The same year Johnny purchased the three-masted, 130-ton schooner from Baird and Company known as the *Tishy* for the purpose of prosecuting the Labrador fishery (figure 2). The ship travelled north for nine summers and was used to move fish, coal, and other products besides. Their swift and varied business led the Quinton firm to be commended as the "most energetic" on the peninsula in 1952 (Cuff 1993).



**Fig. 2. The *Tishy* was built by Thomas Palfrey of Placentia in 1920 and sank in 1950. Photo ca. 1938.**

Around the time of Willy's death in 1956 business responsibilities began to fall to his sons Gerald and Adolphus ("Dolph"). Following Johnny's death in 1965 Gerald took on the role of general manager. The brothers continued to buy salmon, lobster, and cod from the Premises and opened a supermarket nearby in 1969. John Quinton Limited operated until 1990, leading local historian E. James Long to write that "of all the endeavors that flourished and waned in Tickle Cove, Red Cliff, and Open Hall, the Quinton firm alone can claim to have lasted nigh the entire 20th century" (Long 1998, 35-36).

## Life at the Quinton Premises

As the major dealer in fish and dry goods in the region the Premises was a hub of activity both commercial and social. The Quintons orchestrated a near-constant cycle between salmon season in the spring, cod in the summer, and squid in the fall with herring and mackerel falling in between. Following the cod season cullers stayed at the Residence while grading the year's catch. Afterwards the Quintons hired men from as far as Bonavista to pack fish and hosted them for meals. The Residence, normally home to six family members, sometimes welcomed up to 12 additional guests.

While the men were the faces of the Quinton enterprise the Quinton women played equally important roles both at work and home. Hilda and Dorothy each worked as clerks in the shop, selling dry goods as well as groceries like cheese cut to order and wrapped with paper and twine. Outside the shop women made hay from grass, plucked turrs, spun wool into yarn, knit and sewed clothes, and tended the vegetable garden. Earlier Quinton women likely operated the Post Office which was closed around the 1940s.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to their business dealings the Quinton family were also important community members. Colin Quigley, researching rural folk dance around 1980, found Gerald Quinton in particular enjoyed

<sup>1</sup> Hilda and Dorothy Quinton, interviews by Maryssa Barras, February 23, March 22, and April 7, 2021.

a "special status" in the community and became "somewhat of a mediator between the local people and the outside world" by dint of his role as local merchant (Quigley 1981, 61). Hilda too enjoyed this status and it was through both their efforts that a significant number of residents assembled to film the *Land and Sea* episode "[A Time in Red Cliff](#)" in December of 1976. Produced by Dave Quinton, the program recreated a traditional community dance or "time" once common in the area and formerly held in the Salt Store. Gerald could play the accordion and mouth organ and was an accomplished step dancer, the latter skills being featured in the video.

## Structures and Other Features



### Residence

The "big Quinton house" was built in 1892 to replace a smaller saltbox house just to the north (now part of the Shop). The house is believed to have been built by carpenter Caleb Marshall (c1834-1900) of nearby Brooklyn, Bonavista Bay. Marshall and his father David (1807-1868) were builders responsible for several fine houses and churches in the area including St. Andrew's Anglican Church Registered Heritage Structure in Brooklyn and St. James Anglican Church in King's Cove. The floor area of the house is approximately 178.5m<sup>2</sup> (1,920ft<sup>2</sup>) on three storeys, with eight bedrooms ranging from 9.0m<sup>2</sup> (97ft<sup>2</sup>) to 13.9m<sup>2</sup> (150ft<sup>2</sup>).

The house is built in the Second Empire style as characterized by its mansard roof and bonneted dormers. It exhibits a symmetrical, centre hall

plan typical of local residential construction throughout the 19th and well into the 20th centuries. While the house is simply trimmed, several decorative details elevate it above more common houses in the area. The eaves are adorned by bargeboard and running trim, window trim exhibits a chamfered edge around the opening, and the front door is accentuated by a heavy rain cap, brackets, and pilasters. There are currently metal storm doors on the front and rear.

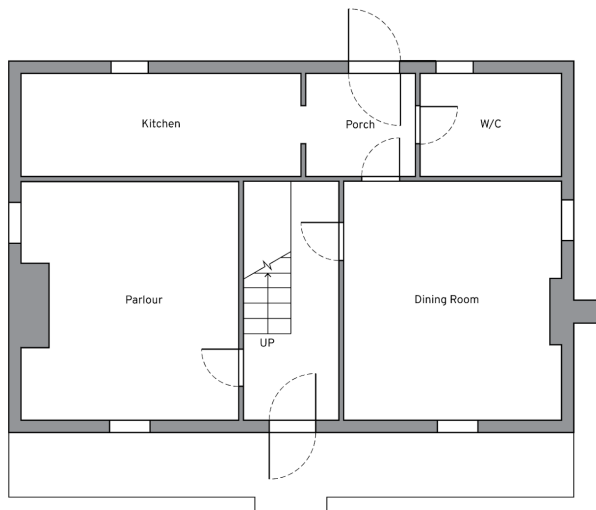


**Elevation of the Residence. Note the symmetry, window sizes, and roof decoration.**

The house is easy to "read" in that exterior details correspond to interior function. The windows of the ground floor parlour and dining area are larger than all others and are symmetrically located on the façade indicating the importance of these spaces. The rear ground-floor windows of the kitchen and washroom are the smallest, and the rear door is asymmetrically located indicating the working nature of these rooms. Moving up the house the size and number of windows decreases, indicating increasingly private, less formal space.

This arrangement of space is emphasized in plan with the ground-floor parlour/dining areas taking up two-thirds of the house's depth and the kitchen/washroom one-third. The house has four bedrooms on each of the second and third storeys which each occupy approximately half the house's depth. Ceiling height decreases as you ascend the house from 2.4m (8') on the first floor, to 2.1m

(6'9") on the second, and 1.9m (6'4") on the third. The third floor is made smaller by the slanted walls of the mansard roof.



**Ground floor plan of the Residence.**

The hierarchy of rooms described above is lastly denoted by trim and other decorative details. The back-of-house kitchen and washroom have little trim to speak of. The dining area – the main living space of the house – is elevated slightly by decorative brackets on either side of the stove. The hall and parlour is grander again with wood crown moulding resembling fine plaster, wood paneling under the stairs and windows, faux-wood-grained doors, stair parts, and built-in furniture, a marbleized wood mantel, and stenciled ceiling decorations forming a perimeter and medallion in the parlour. The faux-graining continues to the doors, trim, and window panels of the second floor, while on the third floor doors are plain white with narrower trim and the crown reduces to a simple chamfered board.

While the crawlspace was not accessed the foundation appears to be mortared stone built in part of the red rock from which Red Cliffe takes its name.



**Post Office**

This structure is believed to have served as a post office in the 19th century and as a temporary shop during the expansion of the old house. In later years it was also used as a workshop and for general storage. It is a gable-roofed structure of essentially one storey with a small loft accessible through an opening in the ceiling. There was once a small stair to access the loft.



**Western elevation and plan of the Post Office.**

The structure's exterior trim is plain except for a bead routed into most cornerboards, friezes, and watertables.<sup>2</sup> A single window on the west side is currently boarded over. There is evidence of a mail slot at the northeast corner which would have dropped into the office side of the structure. The interior is divided into two spaces, a 4.3m<sup>2</sup> (45ft<sup>2</sup>) office side and a 13.5m<sup>2</sup> (145ft<sup>2</sup>) public side, by a thin plank wall. There is no opening between the spaces but a built-in counter likely would have had a window above it when in operation. The office is accessible through a panel door on the east side and the public side through a larger, bi-fold plank door on the west.

<sup>2</sup> Horizontal trim, sometimes with a drip cap, running above the foundation.





### Shop

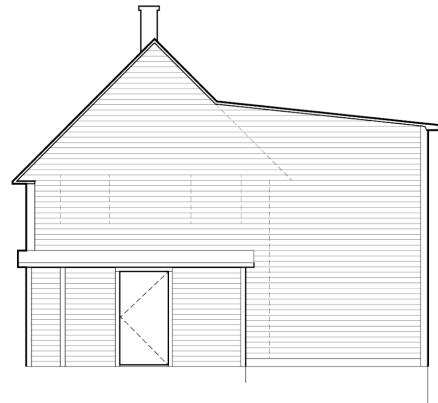
Part of the structure known as the Shop was an early home for the Quinton family. Family history tells us the original house – a first-generation saltbox – was built by Chales Quinton following his marriage (to Elizabeth Warren) circa 1821-22. This was Charles's second marriage however and it is possible it was built somewhat earlier following his first marriage. Around 1892, after construction of the adjacent Residence, a two-storey, shed-roofed addition was added to create a retail shop. The Shop subsequently served as such for nearly 100 years.



***Façade of the Shop with the generator room to the left.***

Evidence of the early house includes the steep-roofed rear section of the structure, seams in the clapboard indicating the original size of the house and the locations of several windows, and two remaining 3/6 wood windows on the south and east sides. The house's west elevation was completely removed and most features of the

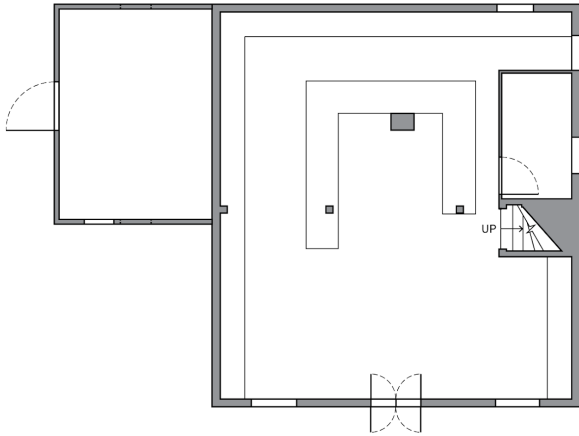
other three have since been covered by clapboard on the exterior and paper on the interior. The house would have measured approximately  $57.2\text{m}^2$  (620ft<sup>2</sup>) (less with interior divisions) in one-and-a-half storeys. A seam in the clapboard on the rear of the Shop may indicate the former location of a linny, the size of which has not been determined.



***North elevation of the Shop. Seams in the clapboard (dashed lines) indicate the form of the house and the location of early windows.***

With the Shop addition the structure measures approximately  $47.0\text{m}^2$  (505ft<sup>2</sup>) on each floor or  $94.1\text{m}^2$  (1,010ft<sup>2</sup>) total. A single-storey addition on the north elevation measures an additional  $11.1\text{m}^2$  (120ft<sup>2</sup>). This addition is not connected structurally or spatially to the main structure and housed a generator once used to power the Shop. The space is vented on the east and west by louvered openings and accessible only by a door on the north.

The Shop sits above the ground due to the steep slope of the site with stair access on the west (road) side. The façade features two large windows to either side of a double door. An interesting feature is a long raincap which spans both the doors and windows of the first storey.



**First floor plan of the shop. Note the U-shaped counter and built-in shelving on the perimeter.**

The interior of the Shop is open on both the main and upper floors. The perimeter walls of the lower floor are lined with floor-to-ceiling shelving. A U-shaped counter is located at the center of the space with several metal stools mounted to the floor inside. A spiral staircase provides access to the second storey on the south wall. Next to the staircase is a small office. The second floor plan is completely open.



**Salt Store**

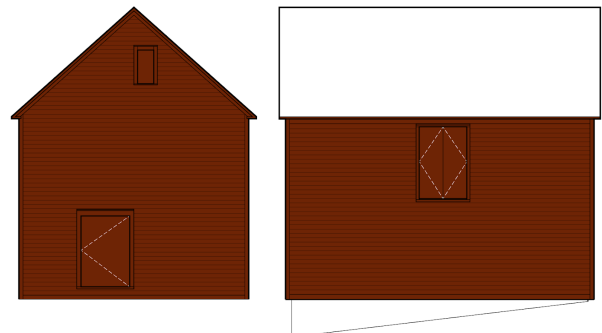
The Salt Store is a two-and-a-half-storey gable-roofed structure on the water's edge once used to store salt for processing of cod. It was believed by Gerald Quinton to be the oldest building on the property. The structure is purely utilitarian with a single ground-level door, one small window on the west (water) side, a loading door on the second storey, and one small window on the east (land) side of the loft. The second-storey door is a double door once

accessible from a tall flake abutting the structure (figure 3). Other openings have been removed over time including windows on each side of the second-storey door.



**Fig. 3. The Salt Store and adjacent flake are visible in the background.**

The Salt Store has plain, narrow trim and no decorative detail to speak of. Based on exterior measurements and window locations the floor area of the Salt Store is estimated at 93m<sup>2</sup> (1,000ft<sup>2</sup>) on three levels. The structure is painted with red ochre paint. The foundation comprises a system of substantial wood posts. The roof is tar and felt with several types of patches.



**Eastern and southern elevations of the Salt Store.**



**Fish Store**

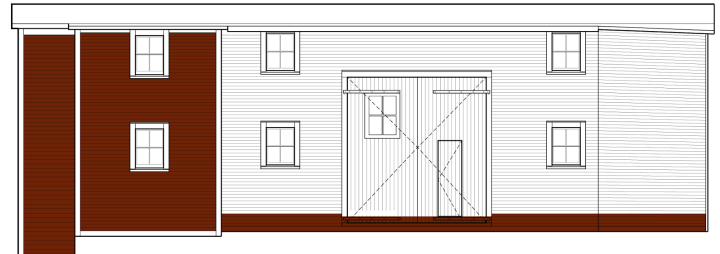
The Fish Store is the Premises' largest and most complex structure. It was likely built around the turn of the 20th century as a simple rectangular store roughly half its current size. A late 19th or early 20th century date is inferred from its low-slope roof, a form that became popular once rolls of felt and tar became readily available.



**Fig. 4. Raising the roof of the Fish Store, mid-20th century.**

Several expansions to the original structure are either apparent or have been documented by photos and oral histories. A third storey was added to the store in the mid-1900s. During this operation the original roof was retained and raised using packing boxes to hold it aloft as walls and posts were inserted underneath (figure 4). Some time later the south end of the store was lengthened by approximately 4.0m (13'). This change is indicated by a seam in the clapboard of the water side running from the eave to the watertable, as well as a change in foundation type from pier-and-post to board-formed concrete at this point. The two-storey façade on the road side

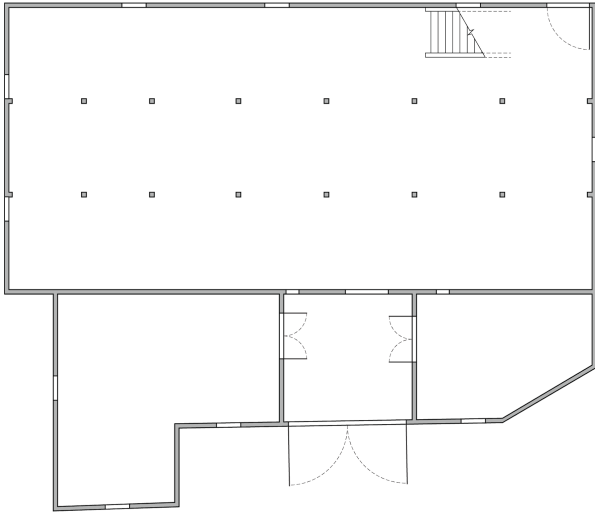
of the structure is the most recent addition and was likely added in stages. The lower level of the Fish Store is known to the family as the “understore” and the upper levels referred to as the “store loft.”



**Elevation of the road side of the Fish Store.**

The store loft is accessed through a small plank door set into a large double door opposite the Residence. The double door is an unusual feature which takes up an entire wall of the room it enters into. It is supported by iron strap hinges and includes a fixed, four-light window. Inside is a one-and-a-half-height space with the feel of an interior courtyard. This “room” has doors to the west, north, and south leading into separate spaces, a window in the west wall, and hatches above each of the north and south doors. The west wall is clad with the original exterior clapboard of the once-smaller store. An L-shaped room to the south of the entryway is used for storage and display of goods. An irregular room to the north, with a diagonal wall following the road, is used for ground storage and is the least “done-up” of the rooms. Early ochre paint remains on the west, once-exterior wall and wood framing is unpainted. The west door of the entryway leads to the main part of the structure, an 16.1m (50') by 7.7m (25') room with an open plan punctuated only by posts and a stairway in the northwest corner. This level has an exterior door behind the stair. The upper level of the store loft is similar save for a vaulted ceiling. There is no access from the store loft to the understore which is instead entered through exterior double doors on the north side. As above this level has an open plan though with more substantial, built-up posts supporting the structure above. There are two plank doors on the west side. Most of the interior of the Fish Store is whitewashed with some gaps where goods and supplies were stored.





***Plan of the store loft, the middle of three levels.  
Note the courtyard/vestibule inside large doors on  
the road side.***

Today the Fish Store stands approximately 9m (30') at its highest point and contains approximately 464.9m<sup>2</sup> (5,000ft<sup>2</sup>) on three levels - 124.5m<sup>2</sup> (1,340ft<sup>2</sup>) on the lower level, 176.2m<sup>2</sup> (1,900ft<sup>2</sup>) on the main, and 164.2m<sup>2</sup> (1,770ft<sup>2</sup>) on the upper. Floor heights range from 2.2m (7'3") on the main level, to 2.4m (7'10") below, to 2.3m (7'6") rising to 3.1m (10'3") at the peak of the upper level.

The Fish Store features a number of built-in tools and unique hardware which speak to its use and construction. The large double doors, as mentioned, are hung with substantial iron strap hinges while the doors are held in either their opened or closed positions by long, forged hook-and-eye latches. A built-in screw press was reportedly used to package dried squid and likely also for salt cod.

## Other buildings and landscape features



### Fences

White paling fences define a series of gardens around the Residence. At the rear of the Residence and Shop a pointed-paling fence borders a tended lawn and garden area. This fence once extended to the road to the south and along the road to the front of the Residence before a driveway was added. Today the fence breaks at the driveway but continues around the Post Office to enclose it and a side yard. A gate just to the northeast of the Residence presumably once led to additional gardens.





### Francis Quinton Twine Store

The Francis Quinton Twine Store is located just to the south of the Premises. It does not belong to the main collection of structures but forms part of a supporting cultural landscape. The Francis Quinton Twine Store was restored with assistance from Heritage NL's former Fisheries Heritage Preservation Program in 2012.



### Herring Store

The Herring Store is located on the water side of the Fish Store and is only partly visible from the road. It was a one-and-a-half storey, gable-roofed structure though today it is partly collapsed and not safe to enter. Measurements were taken of its north and east walls and approximate elevations drafted based on photos.

## Summary

The John Quinton Limited Premises is a remarkably intact collection of structures related to Newfoundland and Labrador's fishery and

several adjacent industries. It has great family significance as the home and source of livelihood for generations of Quintons, it has community and regional significance as the area's longest-lasting commercial enterprise, and it has provincial significance in the story it tells of a locally grown business which, in its heyday, competed with and outlasted several international mercantile firms.

What distinguishes the Premises is not simply the fact that most early structures remain in their original forms, but that they largely retain their original details and materials. The craft and character of its builders and owners and its evolution over time are all evident in the fabric of the structures. To explore the Premises is, as David Quinton writes, "to walk back in time." Work on the structures should therefore continue to be undertaken with great care.

## Citations

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