

# Traditional Wooden Fence Styles of Newfoundland and Labrador



Picket and paling fences in Cape Broyle.



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## A look back...

Traditional wooden fences served two primary functions - keeping animals out (or in) and marking property lines. It is difficult to discern the origin of wooden fence types used in Newfoundland and Labrador, but they likely have European origins. The six most common traditional wooden fence types in Newfoundland and Labrador are wattle, wriggle, longer, picket, crosshatch picket, and paling. Each type had a purpose and all are important parts of our built heritage and cultural landscape.



*Garden, Nfld, 1890s*

*St. Anthony, Nfld, 1930s*



*L'Anse au Loup, Labrador, 1926*



*Brookfield, Nfld, 1939*



*Ferryland, Nfld, 1938*



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*St. John's, Nfld, 1939*



*Trinity, Nfld, 1910s*



*Cow pasture, Nfld, 1940s*



*Spotted Islands, Labrador, 1932*



*St. Anthony, Nfld, 1939*



*School in Northwest River, Labrador*

Historic images from [www.therooms.ca/collections-research](http://www.therooms.ca/collections-research)



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## Wattle fences

Wattle fences were a rare Newfoundland and Labrador fence type. But they may have been the inspiration for the much more common wriggle fence. Dating back to the Stone Age, the wattle fence was used to enclose land and livestock. It was also used to construct wattle and daub buildings. Made using a number of round vertical posts with long slender, pliable sticks woven horizontally around them, it is an effective windbreak. It is also a great way to keep animals in or out of a plot of land. No nails are needed to construct a wattle fence and they can last for decades without having to be replaced.



Wattle fence at the Colony of Avalon in Ferryland, 2020.

## Wriggle/Riggle fences

The fence known by many names - including wriggle, wriggling, riggle, riggling, riggle rod, riddle, riddling, roddle, and roddling. Although similar to wattles fences, rather than running sticks horizontally, the use of three horizontal round longers nailed to posts allows for sticks (wriggles) to be woven vertically. Traditionally sticks were usually left untrimmed at the top and pushed tightly together. Like the wattle fence, it provides good protection from the wind and creates a barrier to animals. The only nails needed are for attaching longers to posts. Neatly constructed wriggle fences will last for decades.



Wriggle fence workshop in New Perlican, 2021.



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### *Is a wriggle fence a good windbreak?*

“We're in an area of Trinity where there's pretty much constant wind. We've had very windy days there this year and we have the typical root crops: turnips, carrots, potatoes, and so on. You can go up behind the wriggle fence where we have everything planted and it does provide a great windbreak, so it does definitely serve that purpose as well.”

Wriggle fence maker  
Perry Sullivan



Wriggle fence in Quidi Vidi, 2020.



Wriggle fences made by Perry Sullivan in Trinity, 2020. By Pam-Ashley Sullivan.



Wriggle fence made by Kevin Andrews in New Perlican, 2020.

### *What kind of wood do you use?*

“Either spruce or vir [fir] wood. Whichever bends the best, but both of them are pretty good, so whichever is the most there in the area where you're cutting them. They still last roughly about the same time, probably 15 or 20 years, before they rot out. It is a long-time fence, for sure, and there's very little cost.”

Wriggle fence maker  
Kevin Andrews



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## Longer fences

The longer (lunger) fence was used to keep sheep, cattle, and other large livestock out of gardens or meadows in order to protect crops and hay. In the days when livestock roamed free through communities during the summer months, longer fences were a common sight. One disadvantage of the longer fence was that it was not very effective in keeping smaller animals out of gardens and meadows. Smaller livestock, especially goats, were often fitted with yokes around their necks to prevent them from getting through longer fences. This type of fence was constructed using round vertical posts with horizontal round longer nailed to them. The amount of longer courses often varied, with the most common being three courses of evenly spaced horizontal longer. While the wood used in a longer fence is unrefined, it could be rinded to prevent rotting and make it last longer. The process of rinding was hands-on and could be labour intensive, so some builders chose to leave the rind on.



Longer fence & picket gate, Port Kirwan, 2020. By Evie Brothers.



Longer fence in Cape Broyle, 2020.



Longer fence in Port Kirwan, 2020.



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## Picket fences

A picket fence served to keep both small and large animals out of gardens and away from crops. Versions with extra tall pickets were often constructed around hen houses to keep the hens in and predators out. The picket fence was a more effective animal barrier than the longer fence because the pickets were placed very close together. The fence was made using vertical round posts, horizontal round longers, and vertical sticks known as pickets nailed to longers. The pickets were made from saplings and they were usually about five feet long and two inches across. Pickets were often rinded in order to keep the fence from rotting and thus extending its life. Modern versions are sometimes fancied up by cutting the pickets into oval patterns on top.



Picket fence in Tors Cove, 2020.



Rinding logs in Jackson's Arm, 2008.



Picket fence, Renew's, 2020. By Lisa Brothers Yetman.



Picket fence in Tilting, 2005.



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## Crosshatch picket fences

Crosshatch picket fences were a fancier version of the utilitarian picket fence. They were similarly made using vertical round posts and horizontal round longers, but the pickets were attached diagonally to create a lattice pattern. As with other traditional fences made from unmilled wood the posts, longers, and sticks could be rinded or left with the rind on.



**Traditionally a draw knife was used to remove bark from posts and longers used to make fences.**



Crosshatch picket fence in Cape Broyle, 2020.



Crosshatch picket fence in Twillingate, 2021



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## Paling fences

The paling fence is the most refined of Newfoundland and Labrador's traditional wooden fence types. Often it was used only in front yards. This type of fence was made by using milled square vertical posts, two horizontal planks, and evenly spaced vertical palings (also called laths.) The palings for these fences were usually a standard size of approximately four feet long and three inches wide. To make these fences more attractive the tops of the palings were often rounded or pointed. Some builders were very creative, carving hearts and other shapes on the top of the palings or shaping the entire piece with curved patterns. The entire fence was usually whitewashed with a water and lime mixture or painted white, but other colours were also used.

“Almost every year there was a racket after the garden party. One year they ended up by the house at the top of the lane. This fella walked by and counted the jackets on the laths. There was an odd number of them. He took his off, hung it on the fence, and walked towards the racket saying that he'd make it an even fight. “

Anonymous  
Southern Shore



Paling fence in Cape Onion, 2011.



Paling fence in Quidi Vidi, 2017.



Fancy paling fence in Brigus, 2011.



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