

## Mercantile Memories: The Ashbourne Premises, Twillingate, NL



Heritage NL

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### Introduction

Located on the eastern side of Twillingate Harbour, the Ashbourne Premises have been a fixture on the community's cultural landscape for several generations (fig. 1). The three remaining buildings - the Longhouse, Office, and Shop – are only part of a much larger mercantile premises that once included large warehouses, various fish and seal stores, a lumber yard, and wharves (fig. 2). Constructed in the early 1800s, the Longhouse is one of the oldest private residences in Twillingate - and possibly in the province. The Office and the Shop were both built some time prior to 1883, before the property belonged to the Ashbournes.



**Fig 1. Ashbourne Premises, 2021.**

**Source: Heritage NL.**

The three buildings are designated Registered Heritage Structures by Heritage NL as they form a valuable collection which reflects the scale of an outport merchant's operations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since 1800, a series of owners were influential in the economic and political evolution of the province.



**Fig 2. Ashbourne Premises, pre 1911.**

**Source: Facebook, Twillingate and the Isles History Group.**

### History of the Premises

The Ashbourne properties are physical reminders of Twillingate's history as a vibrant and prosperous outport driven by fishing, sealing, and shipping. Merchants were at the heart of these industries, and were central figures in social, economic, and political life.



**Fig 3. Edwin Duder Sr.**



**Fig 4. Edwin Duder Jr.**

**Source: Facebook, Twillingate and the Isles History Group**

William Menchinton, owner of the property from 1800-1852, operated a large mercantile establishment in Twillingate. Edwin Duder Sr., the owner of a St. John's-based mercantile firm, purchased Menchinton's premises in Twillingate in 1852 (fig. 3). His son Edwin Jr. took over the firm upon his father's death in 1881 (fig. 4). Duder's company was very successful and his presence in Twillingate speaks to the community's significant role in the fishing industry of the time.



**Fig 5. Ashbourne brothers Arthur and William.**  
Source: Facebook, Old Twillingate Snaps Group.

William Ashbourne bought the property in 1897, after Duder's firm was brought to ruin by the Bank Crash of 1894. William Ashbourne (fig. 5) outfitted schooners for the Labrador fishery and the seal hunt, along with exporting fish and seal products. William's son Thomas inherited the property following his father's death in 1922 (fig. 6). Thomas Ashbourne was active in Newfoundland politics, beginning as an M.H.A. in

the 1920s and eventually travelling with Joey Smallwood to Ottawa as a delegate for the National Convention in 1947. Following Confederation with Canada, he went on to represent the then federal riding of Grand Falls-White Bay in the House of Commons. Thomas Ashbourne died in 1984. The property remains under the ownership of Ashbourne descendants.



**Fig 6. Thomas Ashbourne.**  
Source: Facebook, Twillingate and the Isles History Group.

## The Ashbourne Longhouse

Located at the rear of the Ashbourne property, the Ashbourne Longhouse was designated a Registered Heritage Structure in 1991. The two-storey structure with a mid pitch roof, is



**Fig 7. Longhouse with veranda, date unknown.**  
Source: Heritage NL files.



thought to have been built in the early 1800s, which would make it one of the oldest private residences in Twillingate, and possibly in the province. Its Georgian-inspired “longhouse” style is rare locally. Its scale was achieved through additions to a much smaller residence some time before 1897; evidence of a previous roof uncovered during restoration in the 1990s suggests that the original house was much smaller. An elaborately-trimmed veranda, which ran the length of the front facade, was added later, likely in the early 1880s (fig. 7). The French doors on the front of the building would have accessed this veranda, while French doors on the south wall led to an enclosed conservatory. Neither the veranda nor the conservatory remain on the existing structure.



**Fig 8. Ashbourne Longhouse, 2021.**

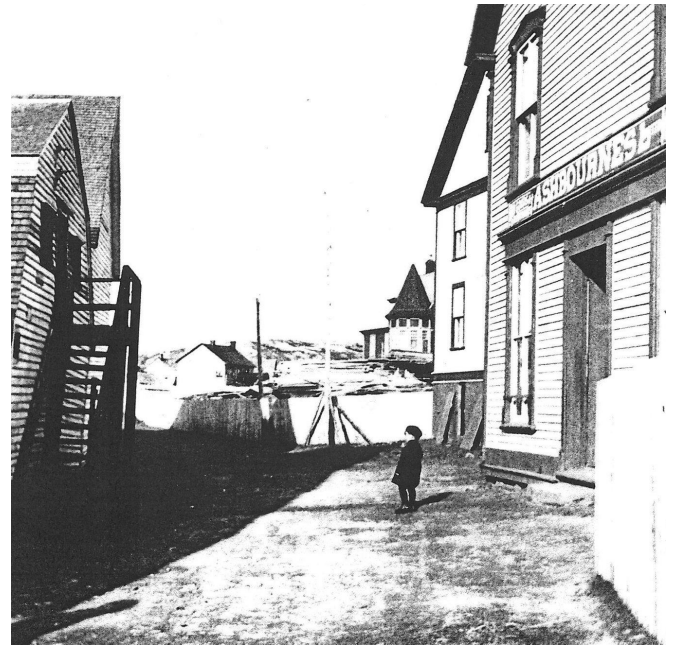
**Source: Heritage NL.**

In its current configuration (fig. 8), the house is 20.02 metres long with a depth of 9.29 metres (roughly 65 feet by 30 feet). The physical grandness of the house is tempered by the symmetrical, unornamented facade. Wooden roof shingles, 6/6 windows, and plain trims add to the building’s Georgian sense of order and simplicity. The interior features several fireplace mantels of imported marble, which speak not only to the status of the various merchant families residing in this building, but to Twillingate’s connections with international trade networks and cultural trends.

## The Ashbourne Office

Located along a road skirting the harbour, the Ashbourne Office was built prior to 1883, before the property belonged to the Ashbournes. Built with a mid-pitched gable roof, the two-and-a-half

storey wooden building strongly resembles the neighbouring Ashbourne Shop in style, but with a smaller footprint (fig. 9). The Office has a footprint of roughly 83 square metres (893



**Fig 9. Side facade of the Office and front facade of the Shop, date unknown .**

**Source: Heritage NL files.**

square feet). The large window openings, narrow wooden clapboard, plain trim work, and slightly returned eaves are consistent with the plain, unornamented commercial style of the building (fig. 10). The placement of five windows on the



**Fig 10. Ashbourne Office, 2021.**

**Source: Heritage NL.**

harbour-facing side of the Office echoes a similar placement on the neighbouring Shop building, creating a sense of unity between the two

buildings. Unlike the street-facing Shop, the Office was accessed by a laneway between it and the Shop. Both buildings were likely built around the same time, and were once connected by a voice tube for ease of communication.

## The Ashbourne Shop

The Ashbourne Shop is a mid-1800s wooden mercantile building with a mid-pitched gable roof and a rear extension. It is the larger of the two remaining mercantile buildings, with a footprint of roughly 245 square metres (2637 square feet). The large windows flanking the front entrance and the sign band on the front facade are characteristic of 19th century shops (fig. 11). Pedimented window mouldings and the arched



**Fig 11. Front facade of Ashbourne shop, date unknown.**

**Source: Facebook, Old Twillingate Snaps Group.**

window on the front facade add decorative detailing to an otherwise utilitarian mercantile building (fig. 12). The hipped roof extension on the back of the building is possibly a later addition, constructed pre-1897. The Office and the Shop

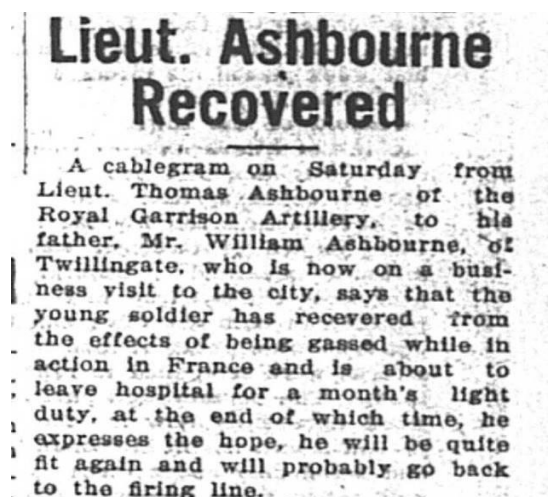
were designated Registered Heritage Structures in 2007.



**Fig 12. Ashbourne Shop, 2021.**  
**Source: Heritage NL.**

## Ashbourne Premises Memories

During a People, Places and Culture workshop hosted by Heritage NL in Twillingate in May 2021, participants ranked the Ashbourne Premises as one of the community's top cultural assets (see <https://heritagefoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2021-Twillingate-People-Places-Culture-Report.pdf>).



**Fig 13. Thomas Ashbourne in WWI.**  
**Source: Evening Herald, November 26, 1917.**



Considering historical themes alone, previous owner Thomas Ashbourne was witness to many events that shaped Newfoundland and Labrador's development. In his youth, he joined the British Army and saw action in WWI (fig. 13). He was a member of the House of Assembly before the introduction of Commission of Government. In 1946 he was elected to the National Convention - a group formed to "examine the condition of the country [of Newfoundland] and to make recommendations to [the British] Government as to the possible future forms of government to be put before the people at a national referendum." (Hiller, 1997) As a member of the National



**Fig 14. Thomas Ashbourne second from left.**  
Source: *The Rooms Archives*.

Convention he travelled to Ottawa to discuss terms of possible confederation with Canada (fig. 14). Following union with Canada, Ashbourne was elected to the House of Commons. A quick archival search found many sources pertaining to Thomas Ashbourne's time in politics and many mentions of the Ashbourne business (fig. 15).

While historic events hold a certain value, the memories and stories associated with the Ashbourne Premises provide a deeper, richer understanding of the role the properties played in the community. Participants at the People, Places and Culture workshop commented on the smell that would permeate from the wharf when seals were being cleaned there. They also noted that

***In Stock***

Rose's Lime Juice, Fruit Syrup, Instant Coffee,  
Fruit Juices, Chocolate and White Cake Mix,  
Ginger Bread Mix, Jiffy Pie Crust, Assorted Jams,  
Orange Marmalade, Lemon Pie Filling,  
Sandwich Spread, Salad Dressing.

**TINNED** Peaches, Pears, Plums, Apricots, Pineapple.  
Fruit Cocktail, Grapefruit, Strawberries, Tomatoes,  
Asparagus Cuttings, Spinach, Green Peas,  
Green Beans, Golden Corn, Diced Beets,  
Diced Carrots, Spork, Speef, Beef Stew, Veal Stew,  
Roast Beef, Ready Dinner, Meat Balls & Gravy.

Gent's Suits,  
Plastic Clothes Lines,  
Shelf Oil Cloth,  
Small "Union Jacks",  
Pocket Watches,  
Ladies' Wrist Watches.

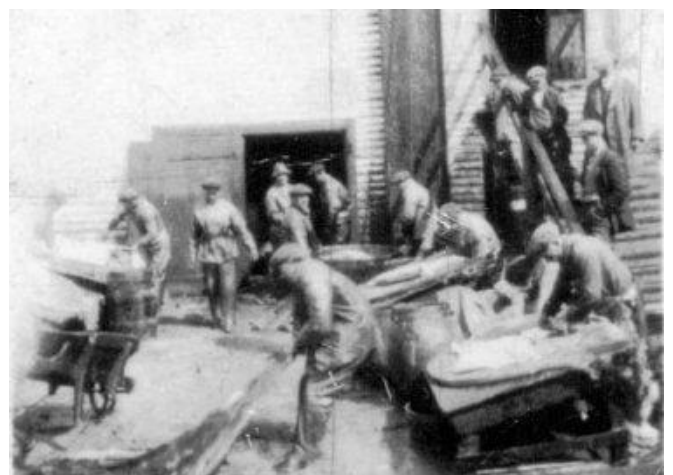
Ham, Bacon, Bologna, Cheese, Apples,  
Oranges, Lemons.

**Ashbournes Ltd.**

**Fig 15. Ashbournes Limited ad.**  
Source: *The Twillingate Sun*, August 4, 1951.

the Ashbournes had one of the few seal plants where oil was rendered and pelts prepared for export (fig. 16). And the presence of a general store at the location is a surety of stories.

The People, Places and Culture report recommends that oral histories associated with the Ashbourne Premises be collected. A quick review of Twillingate related social media shows



**Fig 16. Ashbourne seal plant.**  
Source: *Facebook, Old Twillingate Snaps Group*.

how mentions and pictures of the premises can quickly elicit memories and stories (figs. 17 & 18). Ashbournes Limited was involved in so many mercantile ventures - from selling candy to international shipping. The posts found on social media are surely just the tip of a Twillingate iceberg when it comes to Ashbourne related memories and stories.



**Fig 17. Cashier's Station, Ashbourne Shop.**  
Source: Facebook, Twillingate and the Isles History Group.

*"This was the cashier's 'station'. I remember Eric Legge manning this station."* -James Troke

*"Gordon Ashbourne's desk was where the phone is."*  
-Ross Ashbourne

*"And before Gordon, it was Rol Churchill's desk... whomever was Manager of the shop."* -Christine Caskey

*"What about the good part- Olive Cooper at the candy counter. It took ages to decide which candy you wanted."* -Kathleen Boyd

*"I remember being taken upstairs where the barrels of candy were kept & told to help myself..."* -Kay Jenkins Von Riesen



**Fig 18. Shelves lining the walls, Ashbourne Shop.**  
Source: Facebook, Twillingate and the Isles History Group.

*"Through the open door on the extreme right-hand side, you can see what used to be the 'meat room' & where the big 'wheels' of cheese were kept."* -James Troke

*"I remember this shop so well, was there almost every day."* -Ross Ashbourne

*"I bought a pair of brown ribbed stockings, the kind all little girls wore just before the store closed. They are one of my treasures at Christmas time. An apple, orange in the toe of that stocking was a treat indeed."* -Sandra Luscombe

*"It was a real treat to walk in that store..it looked so big in our eyes in those days!"* -Doreen Roberts

*"Both my mother and sister worked there..and my graduation dress was bought there..Black chiffon swing tail and Silver bodice...Wonder whatever my mother did with that? LOL"* -Doreen Troake Scott

*"My mother worked there for many years -as a young woman and again later in 1960 to 1964."*  
-Norma Hamlyn



*"...the store seemed so very big to us...and I just loved going up stairs...I remember Patsy Jenkins working there...." -Rose Troke Saunders*

*"I remember Mrs Olive Cooper worked there at what we called the candy counter, and for a nickel you got a paper bag full lol." -Ruth Smith Sharpe*

*"I went there many times with my great grandfather George Stuckless from Moreton's Harbour." - Ruby Burke*

Ashbourne descendants are also an invaluable source of information to map the history of the buildings. A brief correspondence with Thomas Ashbourne's daughter provided details on the layout of the upper floor of the Longhouse, even detailing who slept in which of the nine bedrooms.

## To Be Continued...

I first visited the Ashbourne Premises in 2004, when Thomas's son Gordon allowed me a quick peek inside the Longhouse (figs 19 & 20). I've been fascinated by this property ever since. While fishing, sealing, and shipping shaped so much of our history, existing collections of mercantile architecture are rare. It is hoped that this preliminary report is the beginning of a more indepth look at this wonderful collection of buildings and the stories they have to tell.



**Fig 19. Helen and Gordon Ashbourne, circa 1950.**  
Source: Heritage NL files.



**Fig 20. Gordon Ashbourne, 2004.**  
Source: Heritage NL.

## References

Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador property file "Twillingate – Ashbourne Longhouse – FPT 1314"

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