

Memories of Outport Girls and Women in Domestic Service



Heritage NL

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Introduction

In conjunction with Heritage NL's designation of Outport Girls and Women in Domestic Service as Exceptional People from the Past, we asked people to share their memories and stories of women in their lives who worked as domestic servants. Here are the remembrances we received as written by those who submitted them.

Francis "Fanny" Quinlan Gushue - Holyrood

Early 1900s



"The Maid of Industry"

Source: Newfoundland Railway Museum

Francis "Fanny" Quinlan from Holyrood, was a domestic for sculptor/stone mason, Charlie Henderson. He sculpted the Lady of Industry statue at the Railroad Station in St. John's and Fanny modeled for the statue. Fanny later married John Gushue of Whitbourne.

Submitted by Nora Phillips

Lydia Taylor Harris - Grole

1900s

Lydia Harris (née Taylor) is our beloved maternal Grandmother. Her five grandchildren called her "Nannie". Her friends called her "Lil" and her two daughters and husband called her "Mum". One Montreal expat Newfoundland friend called her "Ma".

Lydia was born in Grole, Hermitage Bay in 1887. Her mother was Elizabeth Ann Langdon (1866 -1898), and her father was Thomas Taylor (1863 -1897). Elizabeth and Thomas had at least seven children and Lydia was the oldest surviving girl.

Thomas, a fisherman, drowned when Lydia was 10 years old. A year later her mother "died of a broken heart" and their children [were left] orphaned. Dying of a broken heart could mean many things: depression,

tuberculosis, or a long list of other possibilities.

Following this double loss, the children of Thomas and Elizabeth were “farmed out” to relatives. Lydia was sent to a maternal uncle’s farm. She remembered that between the rocks, they would plant seed potatoes in rotted seaweed. They also raised cows. Because she didn’t have shoes, she would warm her cold feet in fresh cow manure. After the snow melted, they would pick the first green shoots of dandelions to supplement their diet. She also talked about working in a lobster canning factory and having to stand on a box to reach the work tables.

When Lydia was about 14 years old, the Salvation Army, known for its social welfare initiatives, came to Grole seeking children who wanted to leave and go into service in St. John’s. Outpost farm and factory work was not the way forward for Lydia, so she didn’t hesitate and put her hand up. “Take me, please!” She was placed in a doctor’s home as his wife was bedridden. Lydia’s role was the nannie who cared for two little boys.

In St. John’s, Lydia probably helped out in the doctor’s surgery by cleaning instruments, along with other housework duties. Overall, she was happy and was able to save money. She often recounted her purchase of a stylish “hobble skirt” that made her feel glamorous as a young woman in the city. Lydia also learned how to prepare meals from an Irish cook. In married life, she was recognised as a good cook and meticulous homemaker. Her kitchen pantry was well-stocked, and she was generous when caring for others. She cooked in the British tradition with lamb and mint sauce at Easter, poached salmon with white sauce, and pies.

When Lydia met a seaman, they planned to marry and leave Newfoundland to seek more opportunities. It was to be Boston or Montreal. Sadly, her fiancé drowned at sea. Lydia decided to go to Montreal on her own

with the help of Newfoundland contacts. She took a boat down the St. Lawrence River and immediately found employment with another doctor in Montreal. This time she worked in a doctor’s surgery. Years later, when Lydia would prepare the Christmas turkey for her family, she used a big darning needle threaded with butcher’s string. She would secure the dressing into the turkey’s cavity and skillfully suture the opening closed. Then she would say: “This is how you sew up a person’s wound” and she was right.



Lydia (née Taylor, 1887-1981) and George Harris, Greenfield Park, Quebec, 1942.

Source: Harris family

For 60 years, Lydia enjoyed her beautiful home in peaceful Greenfield Park, suburb of Montreal. In 1967, encouraged by the

province's "Come Home, Newfoundlander" campaign, Lydia visited St. John's and Grole. She was able to reconnect with the boys, now grown and successful men, and many more relatives. The families remembered Lydia's parcels of clothing that had been sent to them during hard times. Many Taylors now live in Harbour Breton or other centres in Hermitage Bay.

Today, Lydia's grandchildren are grateful to have known a brave and enterprising individual who left her Newfoundland outport for the economic and social advantages of urban service. She was an intelligent, independent girl and woman who considered her life options and made thoughtful, prudent, decisions. As a mature adult she prioritized women's education, independence, family planning, and self-determination. She was warm, kind, fun-loving, outgoing and supportive. In 1969, when watching the first manned moon landing, she commented that she had experienced seal-oil lamps and now space-age achievements. She had a life well-lived that began in a Newfoundland outport.

Submitted by Norma-Jean Nielsen for Lydia Taylor Harris. Written by Lydia's four grandchildren: Doreen Rae, Ross MacCulloch, Ruth MacCulloch and Norma-Jean Nielsen.

Ellen Oldford Walker - Salvage

1910s

My paternal grandmother was Ellen Oldford from Salvage in Bonavista Bay, and she came to St. John's in the late 1910s to go "into service" as they called it. She would have been about 15 or 16 years of age at the time. She came to the city alone as her family remained in Salvage. I can't imagine the courage it took to leave home at such a

young age and come to a new place where she knew no one.



*Ellen Oldford Walker in St. John's, circa 1910s.
Source: Janet Costigan.*



*The house where Ellen worked in St. John's, circa 1910s.
Source: Janet Costigan.*

I don't know the name of the family she worked for. In fact I'm doing some research now trying to find out. I do have pictures of her in uniform and also a picture of the house where she worked (trying to figure out where that house is as it might lead me to identify the family she worked for).



Possibly Ellen's employer in St. John's, circa 1910s.
Source: Janet Costigan.

It's quite possible the pictures were taken by the family and copies given to my grandmother. Actually one of the pictures is of an older woman sitting on the steps of the house and I'm thinking it may be the lady of the house, but have no way of knowing.

My grandmother stayed in St. John's and married my grandfather, Edgar Walker, in the late 1920's. She would have left service then. My grandfather was a streetcar conductor and they resided on McFarlane Street raising

their five children. From family stories I've been told, theirs was the home that family and friends stayed at whenever they came to town.



Ellen and unknown maid in St. John's, circa 1910s.
Source: Janet Costigan.

I have very fond memories of my grandmother as I was growing up. She came to live with us after my grandfather died.

Submitted by Janet Costigan

Mary Antle Cooke - Julie's Harbour

1920s

Both my grandmothers came to St. John's to work in the 1920s. My maternal grandmother Mary Antle worked for the Crosbie and Ayres families. She was originally from Julie's Harbour, which no longer exists. She told my mom that Lady Crosbie in particular was a lovely woman. My grandmother's father passed away when she was in St. John's and Lady Crosbie gave her the rest of the day off when Nan got the letter. She married my grandfather Patrick Cooke in the early 1930s and they settled in Bishops Falls.

Submitted by Laurie Roche Lawrence

Edith Randell Roche - Champney's Arm

1920s

My paternal grandmother Edith Randell was from Champney's Arm. Her mother passed away when she was quite young. Her father married again and that woman also passed away not long after they married. He didn't marry a third time. She came in and worked at Liddy's in Torbay - I'm not sure if it was for the family or the bar. Either way that's where she met my grandfather Thomas Roche. They married in 1926 in Outer Cove. Nan Roche converted to Catholicism to marry my grandfather and her father never spoke to her again.

Submitted by Laurie Roche Lawrence

Janet Hoffe Downer - Change Islands

1920s



Janet Hoffe Downer holding Diane Crosbie in St. John's, 1934.

Source: Ruby Legge.

My mother came to St John's from Change Islands when she was just 14 years old (born 1911), to work at Queen's College on Forest Road. Her older sister, by 2 years, was already working at Queen's College.



Janet's two sisters standing in the centre.

Source: Ruby Legge.

After about 6 years with Queen's College my mother went to work for George Graham Crosbie and his wife Audrey, on Rennie's Mill Road. At that time Mr. Crosbie was president of The Newfoundland Butter Factory on LeMarchant Road.

At some point my mother's younger sister, by 2 years, came from Change Islands to work with the Crosbies while my mother was there.

My mother stayed with the Crosbies, as housekeeper/cook, until she married in 1937.

The picture I have attached is my mother holding the Crosbie's oldest daughter Diane. This would have been in 1934. My mother was not the children's nanny. Diane Crosbie Craft sent me this picture about 20 years ago. Up to then I had not seen a picture of my mother while she was working.

I have also attached a wedding picture which shows the two aunts who were also working here in St John's. The lady to the far right was a friend of my mother's.

My mom's name was Janet Gertrude Hoffe then Downer when she married.

My father was from Fogo but they hadn't met until they both were working in St John's.

Submitted by Ruby Legge

Rosella Lundrigan Adams

1930s

My mother, Rosella Lundrigan Adams, was in service in 1931 at 14 Kenna's Hill in St. John's. She was born in Upper Island Cove, Conception Bay to parents John and Flora Lundrigan on October 30, 1912. At age 18 years she was in service as a housekeeper for Maurice Job Taylor, director of Job Brothers Ltd. He was one of the famous fish merchants of Water Street. Growing up I heard his name and about that house on Kenna's Hill many times. She loved to cook and bake and when asked where she learned those skills, it was always "at Maurice Job Taylor's on Kenna's Hill."

I regret now not asking questions about her life and time there. I remember how she took pride in setting the table properly, also instructing me "how to iron a man's shirt and pants properly." I feel working in the city exposed her to the art of embroidery which came from the early English settlers. My mother's hands were always busy making quilts, hooking mats, knitting, sewing and crocheting. I have many good memories of my mother. She loved music, to sing and dance, had a great sense of humour and loved to laugh.

There's one story about the house on Kenna's Hill that stands out, one very interesting proposal of marriage. First, I must tell you that my father was Captain Esau Adams of Bishop's Cove, a small community adjoining Upper Island Cove. On May 29, 1931, his

young wife of 13 years died. He was left with an 11 year old son, a 2 year old adopted daughter and an elderly mother with no one to care for them. He was a foreign-going sea Captain going to Europe and the Caribbean, and also had many business operations to manage. Within 2 months of his wife's death he came knocking at the door of 14 Kenna's Hill looking for Rosella Lundrigan. First he asked her if she would come out to be his live-in housekeeper to care for his family and help in his store. She said, "No Sir, I can't do that, people will talk." Keep in mind she was 18 years old and he was 41. He was taken aback by her answer. He thought for a minute then said, "Well, I'll marry you!"



Rosella Lundrigan Adams holding her son Clyde, 1934.

Source: Flora Bishop.

But it wasn't that easy. Her parents objected, considering he was more than twice her age

and the responsibility of an instant family. He went to her father who said "Esau, you're a good man and a friend but I think you're crazy to want to marry a young girl just 18. Why don't you marry Lizzie?" This was his oldest daughter who was 21.



Rosella at her daughter Flora's wedding, 1971.
Source: Flora Bishop.

On August 15, 1931, less than 3 months after losing his first wife, Captain Esau Adams married my mother, Rosella Lundrigan in St. Peter's Church in Upper Island Cove. She gave him 9 children, 1 died, but raised 10 children including her step-children. I am their youngest daughter, now 75 years old. Many years I have been curious about the house on Kenna's Hill. Last year I discovered and visited it. To my amazement, it still

stands. It is Retreat Cottage built circa 1834. It's been designated a Registered Heritage Structure.

Submitted by Flora Adams Bishop

Bride Dalton MacLean - Cape Broyle

1940s

My mother was Bridget "Bride" (Dalton) MacLean. Born November 1926 in Cape Broyle, she was the third daughter of John and Hannah Dalton. She had two sisters and five brothers.

Probably in the mid 1940s, Bride went to work as housekeeper/nanny for Dr. O'Regan in St. John's. While working in St. John's she learned about opportunities in Goose Bay on the US Air Base. Off she went to Goose and remained there until 1976.



Bride Dalton MacLean, circa early 2000s.
Source: Joe MacLean.

Bride had a son Joseph in 1953. He was raised by Bride's parents and her brothers and sisters in Cape Broyle. Bride married Al MacLean in 1963 and moved to Nova Scotia in

1976 and back to Cape Broyle around 1995/96. Bride passed away in 2009.

Submitted by Joe MacLean

Margaret Trahey Cahill - Conception Harbour

1940s

My grandmother Margaret Trahey Cahill (July 15, 1921 - April 23, 1959) moved to St. John's as a general girl from a fishing family in Conception Harbour.



Gertie, Jack, and Margaret Trahey 1944 in Conception Harbour, 1944.

Source: Jessie Cahill-Bouzane.

She worked for the Stirling family likely in her late teens or early twenties. Edgar Stirling,

the family's patriarch, owned the popular Stirling's Restaurant on Water Street. We have photographs of her in St. John's in the early 1940's.



Margaret Trahey Cahill, St. John's, 1944.

Source: Jessie Cahill-Bouzane.

She became fast friends with the family, and was even a bridesmaid at the 1947 wedding of Geoff Stirling (media pioneer) and Jean Carter Stirling. She loved fashion and would send back the latest styles in men's clothes to her little brother Jack (Judge John Patrick Trahey, February 27th 1927- April 14th 2016). She made sure he was the best dressed at the dances in Conception Harbour!

Margaret married Augustus Cahill from St. John's (June 6th 1912- September 18th 1980) in November 1950 at St. Teresa's Parish in St. John's. They had five children: Brenda Ann Cahill, David Augustus Cahill, Emily Marian Cahill, Glenda Marie Cahill, and Edward John Cahill. Margaret died of breast cancer on April 23rd 1959. She was 39 years old.



Augustus and Margaret Cahill, circa 1950s.

Source: Jessie Cahill-Bouzane.

Margaret now has five grandchildren, four great-grandchildren with one being named Lillith Margaret Cahill-Bouzane after her, and two more great-grandchildren due in 2022! Her family's home in Conception Harbour was designated a Registered Heritage Structure on March 27th, 2003 by the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Submitted by Jessie Cahill-Bouzane

Loretta Cassell Head - Locksport

1940s

My mom's maiden name is Loretta Cassell. She grew up in Locksport. This community was later resettled to Glovers Harbour. My mom left home in 1949. She was 14 at the time. She said her mom received a letter from

a woman in Bishop's Falls looking for a young girl to help with the children. My mom had lost her dad when she was 2 months old. Her mom had remarried and at 14, my mom wanted to leave home. She said she only finished grade 5 as her mom didn't believe girls should be in school as they would just be married anyway. Lol.

My mom went to work for a couple named Arthur and Annie Simmons. They had 4 kids when my mom arrived and two more were born during the 18 months she worked for them. My mom was told she would have to care for the kids but said after she arrived, she learned she was responsible for all the housework and baking bread. She didn't have to cook meals. My mom said she didn't mind as she had been doing similar work at home. She was paid \$10 a month and had no days off. She said she had two evenings off a week where she could go out. She would have to be home by 11 and sometimes have to take some of the children with her. She slept in a room with the kids.

My mom didn't have anything bad to say about her time with the family. She said it was hard work but she was used to it. She didn't know any other young girls in her situation. My mom worked there for 18 months before her brother got her a job working at the staff house in Buchans. She met my father there and remained in Buchans until 1980. She now lives in New Brunswick and is a healthy 86!

Submitted by Gail Head

St. John's

Late 1960s

I worked at VOXM in the late sixties. Girls worked in homes in the city and went home by bus or taxi on the weekends. Most homes did not have phones, and if they did long distance fees were charged outside the city.

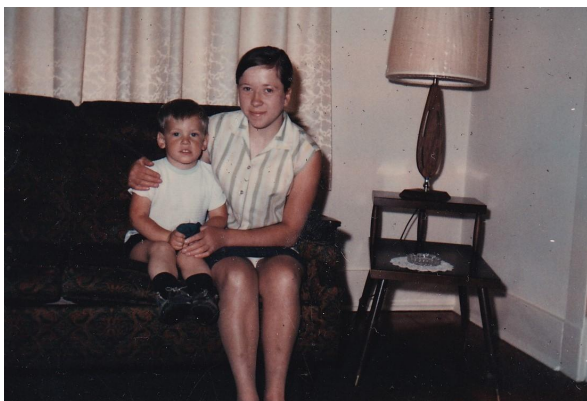
So they called the radio station to let their families know they would be home or had arrived back safely in the city. This method was also used to pass along other messages...like if someone had their baby, had surgery, etc.

Submitted by Anne Marie (Dalton) O'Brien

Corner Brook

Late 1960s-early 1970s

When I was three years old, in 1969, my mother experienced great distress in caring for her children. My older sister was born with physical, cognitive and developmental disabilities, and was sent from our home in Corner Brook to St. John's to an institution for children with disabilities, now called Wiseman Centre.



Charles Veitch and Ivy, 1969.

Source: Charles Veitch.

When I was born, a series of nannies were hired to care for me and my older brother. I can recall that one of them came from Stephenville and one from Rocky Harbour. One was named Ivy [and another Sharon].

I loved these caregivers very much. Later in life, I learned the extent of the reasons why my mother required a nanny to help raise her children. There are photos of me with at least two of these nannies and the smile on my

face shows happiness. The memories I have can only be called love and admiration. These nannies helped heal me from a traumatic experience of surviving a car crash at age 3. They provided the loving touch, hugs, and care my mother was incapable of providing by herself at that time.



Veitch children and Sharon, 1969.

Source: Charles Veitch.

With gratitude for those young women who cared for me, taught me trust and humour and play, I have happy memories surrounding those important early experiences and know those hired nannies helped me in many ways. I will never forget them.

As an adult, I have no idea if I will ever get a chance to thank them for taking monumental risks, leaving their families in small towns, and working in jobs with great responsibilities, caring for two young boys in Corner Brook.

My mother died over ten years ago and has no issue with me sharing this wonderful story about how I learned to live in the world.

Thank you for valuing the history of young women.

Submitted by Charles Veitch



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