

## Carding in the Codroy: The Gale Carding Mill



Heritage NL

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### Introduction

The Gale Carding Mill was constructed around 1940 for and likely by the Gale family to expand their wool carding business, which began in the mid-1890s with the first Gale family carding mill.



**Fig 1. The Gale Carding Mill in 2023 (Heritage NL)**

The Mill is located in Millville in the Codroy Valley, by the site of the original 1890s mill. The Mill is part of the agricultural landscape of the Codroy Valley, which was once home to three of six carding mills in the province (Bennett 1975).

### Building Description

The Gale Carding Mill is a two-storey structure built using local lumber with a painted wooden clapboard exterior. The architects and builders are unknown, but members of the Gale family and local community members likely constructed it.

The interior layout of the mill is an open concept, which is ideal for the working spaces on both the first and second floors. The main floor was used for skirting, picking, and carding fleeces, while the second floor was the loft. The main floor displays 6" x 6" dovetailed beams, which are the floor joists for the upper level. Recent upgrades to the building have included installing some new windows and replacing the wooden exterior shingles with clapboard.



**Fig 2. Exterior photograph of the Gale Carding Mill in 1971. Photograph taken from Margaret Bennett's "The Last Stronghold" from 1989, page 327.**

### Location

Located at 8 Millville Road, the Mill is close to Granddaddys Brook, the site of the first Gale family carding mill. It is also close to E.W. Gale Ltd,

the general store run by the Gale family until its sale in 2022.

### The Codroy Valley

The Codroy Valley is located in the southwest corner of the Island of Newfoundland, bordered by the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Anguille and Long Range Mountains (Smallwood et al. 1991). Several communities are located within the Codroy Valley, including Benoit's Siding, Cape Anguille, Coal Brook, Codroy, Doyles, Great Codroy, Loch Lomond, Millville, O'Regan's, Searston, South Branch, St. Andrews, Tompkins, Upper Ferry, and Woodville.

Early residents of the area included Indigenous groups like the Mi'kmaq and later European settlers such as Acadian, Irish, and Scottish immigrants from Cape Breton. From 1783 to 1904, the Codroy Valley was part of the French Shore, an area reserved for the migratory French fishery which extended from Cape Ray to Cape St. John. By the mid-1800s, the area included several farms and a woollen industry based on local sheep husbandry (Smallwood et al. 1991).



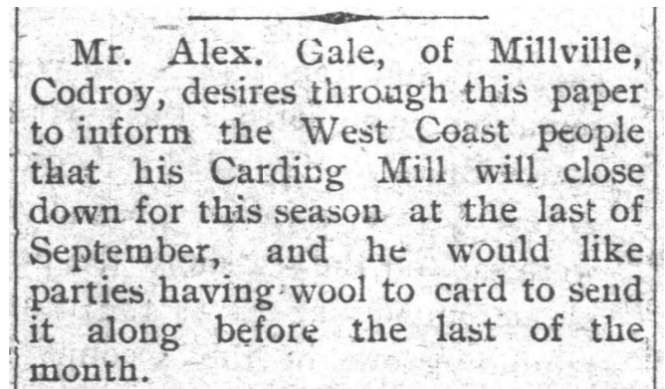
**Fig 3. Photo of Codroy Valley spinning bee, likely taken in 1935 (Photo courtesy of Don Gale).**

### History of the Gale Carding Mill

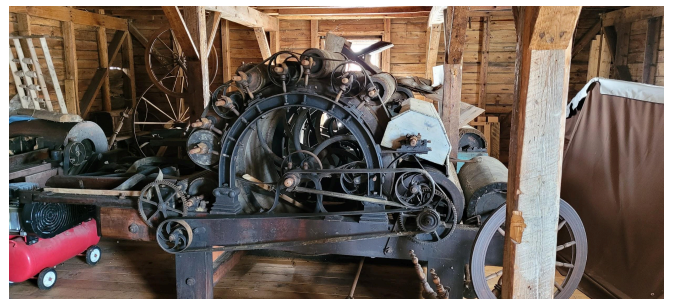
Alexander Gale started the Millville wool carding business in 1897, which would later be known as A. Gale and Sons, close to the site of the current Mill. The original carding mill was operated by power from a water wheel using the nearby brook. Alex Gale built a dam to divert the water to run the water wheel (Bennett 1975). The current Mill was

operated using a diesel generator and later by connection to the power grid. The machinery for the original mill was made in England and purchased by the Gales in Nova Scotia (Bennett 1975).

“My grandfather Gale was the one that, apparently he went to Nova Scotia. And I guess that's where he saw the first mills running. So he bought up all this equipment and brought it back here to Newfoundland. But at that time, there was no engines or anything. But not the mill that's here today but one further down the road, that's where he started this and it was ran by water.” (Alma Gale 2023).



**Fig 4. Notice from the Gale Carding Mill in the Western Star (Western Star 1905).**

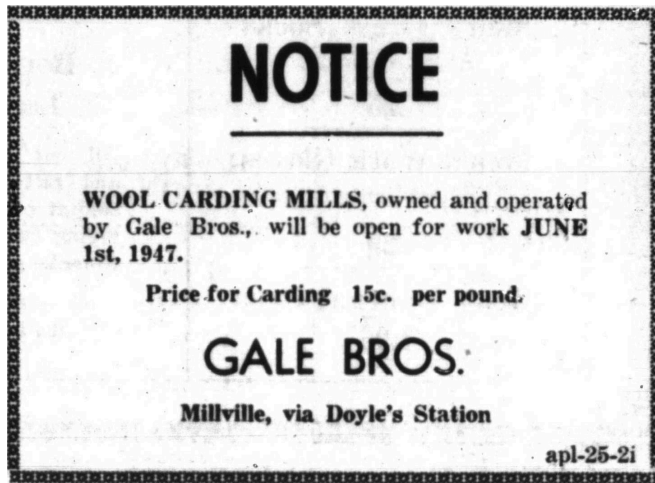


**Fig 5. Photograph of carding equipment in the Gale Carding Mill (Heritage NL 2023).**

In 1938, the Western Star reported a fire at the original carding mill, but the newspaper reports it was spared from being destroyed (Western Star 1938). The existing Mill was constructed near the location of the original carding mill around 1942. By the 1940s, the Mill was operated by two of



Alexander's sons, Edward and George, under the name "Gale Brothers" (Western Star 1939).



**Fig 6. Newspaper advertisement for the Gale Brothers Carding Mill in 1947 (Western Star 1947).**

The Mill's operation was seasonal, typically starting in late spring after the shearing season and running until the fall when all the wool was carded (Bennett 1975; Western Star 1905; Western Star 1939). The Gales offered a truck service for local pickup and delivery, while customers further afield would ship fleeces by train to the railway station in Doyles.

"In the spring, when the sheep would be sheared, you know, they would wash the wool. It had to be washed and it had to be picked. Even though the mill picked it again, it had to be picked. So it had to be cleaned so they would put it into bags. And they would ship it from all over to those mills here because there was more than one mill. And so he would pack the rolls when they came out with the cards, pack them into bags and put the shipping tickets on and the addresses and everything ready to go back to the post office to be shipped back to the people who owned the wool. And you know, it was quite a thing at that time to see the wool being picked, and see how it was carded." (Catherine O'Quinn Gale 2023).

When the Mill was operational in the summer, it employed several people seasonally, including some women from nearby communities. The Mill allowed people to send their wool to be carded by machines instead of by hand, which saved time. Before sending their fleeces to be carded, customers would have to wash and pick their wool.

"They go downstairs and get a bag of wool, or maybe two, and empty it into what we called a picker. And the picker went right fast and tore the wool all apart. And then it was picked up from there and put onto a table, with a belt moving like that. And it would go into a great big machine – a big round machine and a whole lot of little round machines- up rollers. Rollers with teeth on them. And it came out at the other end in long rolls. Rolls about as big around as my thumb. And you picked them up and fold them and put them back in the bag they came in. And then Dad sewed it up, put the person's name on it. Everybody got back their own wool." (Teresita "Terri" Gale Dunphy 2023).

By the 1950s, production was declining, with fewer people raising sheep and sending wool to be carded. In a 1956 article in the Western Star, Edward Gale reported that annual production had declined and that many farmers no longer saw raising sheep as profitable (Western Star 1956). Demand continued to decline throughout the 1960s as fewer people raised sheep, and many preferred to send fleeces away to the Maritimes to be made into finished blankets instead of carded into wool. The Mill later closed circa 1970 (Bennett 1975).

As previously mentioned, the Codroy Valley was once an epicentre for sheep farming and textile production in Newfoundland. Three of the six carding mills in the province were located in the Codroy Valley, Gale Brothers, D.E. Lomond &

O'Quinn, and Paul Doyle's mill (Evening Telegram 1939; Western Star 1944). Sheep were raised for wool and meat, and the wool carded at these mills was turned into yarn, which was dyed and used in various textile products, including knitting, embroidery, and weaving. The resulting products were for home use and for sale (Catherine Gale 2023).

## The Gale Family

The founder of the original Gale carding mill - A. Gale and Sons - was Alexander Gale, born November of 1858 in Millville (Gale and Dunphy 2023). Alexander's parents were Edward Gale (1824-1906) and Ann (Mary) McLean Gale (1831-1859). Alexander Gale was married three times throughout his life and had several children.



**Fig 7. Wedding photograph of Clement Gale and Elizabeth Catherine O'Quinn with extended family in 1924 (Photo courtesy of Don Gale).**

His first wife was Catherine Kennedy, who he married on September 18th 1883 (DuBourdieu et al. 2002). Alexander Gale's second marriage was to Jane Gallop (married October 10, 1892), who likely died shortly after the marriage. On the 21st of November in 1894 Gale married his 3rd wife Susan MacIsaac Gale (October 1872-1956) from Grand River.



**Fig 8. Group photo of the Gale family on the porch of Alexander and Susan Gale's home in Millville on their 50th wedding anniversary. Pictured top row L-R: Clement, Henry, Wilfred, and Afra Gale, middle row L-R: Wallace, George, Edward (Ned), and Frank Gale; front row L-R: Alex, Cassie, Hilda, Margaret (Maggie) and Susan Gale. (Photo courtesy of Don Gale).**

Susan and Alexander had 11 children together; Afra Gordon Gale (February 1896-1976), Wilfred Alexander Gale (Sept 1897-1948), Henry Gale (April 1899-1971), Clement Timothy Gale (December 1900-1965), Hilda Mary Gale Tobin (May 1902-1966), Margaret (Maggie) Alice Gale Doyle (September 1905-2010), Francis "Frank" Joseph Gale (April 1907-1989), Edward "Ned" Gale (September 1909-1967), George Frances Gale (July 1910-1989), Cassia Gale Hingston (July 1911-1978), and Wallace J. Gale (March 1916-1987). His sons Edward and George would later take over the carding mill and Wallace Gale took ownership of Alexander's store in Millville (Gale and Dunphy 2023).

"My grandfather had the store with the carding mill, and my father took over from him, and then in 1980 I took over from my father." (Edwin "Hockey" Gale, September 2023).





**Fig 9. Photo of Alexander and Clement Gale, likely taken in Grand Falls. Date unknown (Photo courtesy of Don Gale).**

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