

The Resettlement of Pushthrough 2

The Petition

Introduction

Between 1954 and 1970 there were two resettlement programmes in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Department of Public Welfare assumed responsibility for the first, introduced in 1954, and the Department of Fisheries was given responsibility for a second phase that began in 1965. Between 1954 and 1965 some 115 communities, comprising 504 families and 7,500 people were relocated through the province's centralization plan. Between 1965 and 1970, 140 more communities were evacuated, relocating 3,242 households and 20,000 people, making it one of the largest migrations of people in the history of Canada.

The people of Pushthrough were among the latter group.

The Centralization Programme, 1954-1965

The first resettlement programme, known frequently, as the Centralization Programme, had a clear social purpose. Its aim was to move people to places with decent social services, such as schools, medical facilities, and improved transportation networks. The initial cash grants were modest -- \$150 per family -- and they were increased incrementally to \$600 by 1958. They were paid when all of the families -- 100 percent of households -- in a community relocated.

Before 1965, the government had placed no restrictions on where people might move. Some

relocated to communities that were only marginally better in terms of public services than those they had vacated.

The government went to great measures from the launch of its resettlement, or centralization programme to insist that it had left to the people all decisions about vacating their communities. What it did not want was to have to provide public services for even smaller communities. That is why it insisted that only those communities where all people resettled were eligible for government assistance.



(Credit: St. Peter's School,
<http://tinyurl.com/cygr96s>)

New Resettlement Programme, 1965

On 16 July 1965 the Government of Canada and Government of Newfoundland and Labrador formally signed the Newfoundland Fisheries Resettlement Program, a five-year cost-shared agreement to run until 31 March 1970. This was

the first time the Government of Canada became involved in the Newfoundland resettlement programme. The new programme was to be administered by the Household Resettlement Division of the Provincial Department of Fisheries rather than the Department of Public Welfare like the earlier programme. Responsibility for resettlement later passed to the new Department of Community and Social Development.

Procedure to Follow

The Canada-Newfoundland Agreement outlined the procedure for resettlement.



(Credit: St. Peter's School,
<http://tinyurl.com/cygr96s>)

Any settlement, such as Pushthrough, considering relocation had to convene a public meeting to discuss the matter. At that meeting, the features of the resettlement program were to be outlined. If more than 50 percent of the people attending the meeting expressed interest in relocating, a local committee of three, including a chair and a secretary, was to be elected and authorized to negotiate with the Resettlement Division of the Provincial Government. A petition had to be circulated to obtain the signatures of the householders who wished to resettle.

If eighty (80) percent of the householders agreed to relocate, a report of the meeting with the clear intentions of the community had to be sent to the Director of the Resettlement Division.

The 1965 Canada-Newfoundland Agreement provided assistance to those resettling if 80 percent of the community voted to leave. This was an important change from the earlier centralization programme that had required 100 percent of householders to agree to relocate before the government would provide any financial assistance to householders to resettle. The change made it easier for people to receive assistance to relocate.

Those who signed the petition had to complete a "Notification of Intent to Relocate/Request for Employment" and on the basis of this information, the Household Resettlement Committee might approve in principle the resettlement of a community.

However, before any firm commitment was made to individual families that they could avail of the funds available, a Government Committee had to approve the community or communities to which householders wished to move. Once it was determined that proper procedures had been followed and the households were moving to an approved community, each householder was sent via the chair of the Community Committee a "Resettlement Assistance Claim" and s/he was responsible for passing an application to each householder.

The application had to be returned, together with receipts for travel and removal expenses after the move had been completed.

The Petition in Pushthrough

Following the meeting on 7 April 1969 in Pushthrough – to which 15 householders attended—it was agreed that a petition would be circulated to determine the interest in resettling. The petition is dated 25 April 1969, and its intent was clear: “We, the householders of Pushthrough, an isolated community, hereby indicate our desire to move and Petition for assistance under the Fisheries Household Resettlement Act.” Families were asked to sign.



(Pushthrough, 1900. Reproduced by permission of the Archives and Manuscripts Division (Coll. 137 21.07.001), Queen Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University, St. John's, NL.)

The April 7 meeting had elected William Simms as chair, Samuel Kendell, Sr, as secretary, and George Rowsell as member of the local Resettlement Committee. This committee was empowered to circulate the petition and certify the identity of those that signed it.

I do not know how the petition made its way through the community, whether it was left at the Pushthrough Trade, in the post office, or in the Church for people to sign or, more likely, several people were asked to visit, or canvas, each home with the petition. Four names appear in a “Comments” section of the petition – George Rowsell, Maxwell Kendell, and Robert

Roberts, and William Cooper, Jr. – but there is no explanation of why their names are listed. They might have been the individuals who took the petition around the community. I do not know for certain that that was the case.

What do we Know About the Petition?

There are some things which are more certain, however. First, 32 householders signed the petition; the names of 17 of 50 householders do not appear on the petition. An inscription at the end of the petition notes that one householder was away. I suspect this might have been my uncle. Second, each householder was required to provide his/her age. The average age of those who signed was 57.6 years. The youngest householder to sign was 34 and the eldest was 84. Third, four householders signed with an X, which means that they could not write their name. One of those was my grandmother, Eliza Garland. Fourth, four women signed the petition. Of these four, three were related to me: my mother, Minnie Blake, and my two grandmothers, Eliza Garland and Caroline Blake.

Grandmother Blake

Grandmother Blake’s signature is the most distinctive. Her case is interesting: she had recently moved to Pushthrough from Great Jervis and in 1969 had to relocate again. Her file at The Provincial Archives is among the weightiest of those who resettled from Pushthrough. I never asked her about leaving Pushthrough, but I can imagine her reaction when she first encountered the petition. She was extremely proud that she could write her name and read a little. On one of our visits to St. Alban’s after she left Pushthrough I remember her getting out her small tablet and

pen and laboriously writing her name. She was clearly proud of her ability. I don't think she personally completed any of the forms that were required for either of her moves, but she affixed her signature in all of the requisite places. Each signature would have been a slow, calculated movement of her pen across the paper and it left a distinctive signature. I am not sure where she learned to write. What is equally puzzling is that neither of her children, including my father, Ben, could write.

From Pushthrough to Where

Each person had to list the proposed place of resettlement and the date of their leaving. The people of Pushthrough identified several towns to which they might relocate: Milltown, Hermitage, Bay D'Espoir, Gaultois, Fortune, Port aux Basques, Burgeo, St. John's, Grand Bank, St. Alban's, and Grand Falls. Five householders were not sure where they were going and two listed two possibilities. One householder was very clear about his destination and listed St. Luke's Home in St. John's.



(Credit: Maritime History Archives, Memorial University, PF-328.124)

The three members of the local Resettlement Committee all signed of course. Samuel Kendall, Sr. was the first to sign, George Rowsell's is in

the middle of the signatories, and William Simms was the last person to sign.

The 17 Who Did Not Sign

I do not have any information on the 17 householders that did not sign the petition; I suspect they had already left Pushthrough.

The files for Pushthrough that are available at The Rooms, Provincial Archives Division, contain a list of householders who left before the 7 April 1969 meeting to discuss resettling. The list contains 17 names of householders who left Pushthrough between 1967 and April 1969. I believe that these 17 householders would have been included in the 50 households that were identified at the 7 April 1969 meeting. I do not think there were 17 householders that refused to sign the petition.

Forwarding the Petition to St. John's

The petition was forwarded to St. John's by William Simms, the chair of the Pushthrough Resettlement Committee. Under "Comments" for the chair, he typed: "Mr. Evans from Windsor called here last fall and left this petition. At that time most people had not made up their minds what to do[.] Since that, it's much different, as you can see. Few marked for 1970, but it's possible some of them will go in 1969. Trust this will be satisfactory to you." It is signed Wm Simms.

Once the petition was submitted to St. John's, a government official had to review the petition and make a recommendation to the provincial resettlement committee that would either approve or reject the on the request from Pushthrough to resettle.

NEXT: Notification of Intent to Relocate/Request for Employment