

The Resettlement of Pushthrough 4

Pushthrough is approved for Resettlement

Introduction

Mr. Shirley, an official from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, came to Pushthrough in September 1967 to discuss resettlement with the Reverend Reuben Hatcher, the Anglican Parish priest. It was not the resettlement of Pushthrough that he wanted to discuss but certain communities in Reverend Hatcher's parish that extended west from Pushthrough to Francois. Reverend Hatcher was away. Mr. Shirley reportedly talked with a few men who told him said there was little interest in resettlement in Pushthrough. In fact, two families had recently moved there under the Resettlement Programme. Mr. Shirley also reported that some people he saw felt "that Pushthrough would phase out slowly within the next few years." They suggested that many would move to Bay d'Espoir if employment opportunities existed there.

Snapshot of Pushthrough

C.A. Evans, Mr. Shirley's colleague, visited a year later. He reported that much had changed in Pushthrough: "A great many have already moved." He left a petition form "which they requested to have circulated among the householders." He reported that several more families were moving to Milltown in the spring.

Mr. Evans completed a two-page snapshot of Pushthrough, prepared following his discussions with community leaders. He noted that Pushthrough, settled in the early 1800s, was accessible only by water. It had a C.N.T. telephone and a doctor visited weekly. Gaultois was identified as the nearest service centre, and

fishing was the major economic influence. The population had declined dramatically from 204 in 1966 to 165 in 1968. Of those 70 were over the age of 21. The community had 35 privately-owned homes, mostly two storey and several newer bungalows. There was a two-room school, enrolment 33 pupils from Grade 1 to Grade 11. There were 3 general stores. Under community organization he noted the Society of United Fishermen and the Anglican Church, adding the names of William Rowsell and Mrs. George Courtney after each. He identified two individuals in the power structure of



(Credit: St. Peter's School <http://tinyurl.com/cvgr96s>)

Pushthrough: William Simms, storekeeper, and Samuel Kendell, junior light keeper. The labour force consisted of 35 dragger fishermen (all of whom were employed outside the community), 10 labourers, and 6 carpenters. He did not identify any inshore fishers.

Petition and Applications Assessed

This information was available to the Resettlement Committee in St. John's when they sat down to review Pushthrough. They had the petition dated 25 April 1969 and signed by

32 householders, and the Notification of Intent to Relocate/Request for Employment from those who had signed the petition. They also had the names of the 17 householders that had left before 7 April 1969. All of those presumably qualified for the resettlement allowance.

Problems Identified

Yet, the applications from Pushthrough were not immediately approved as two problems had been identified. The delay was caused by the receiving communities. First, there was a problem in Milltown, Bay d'Espoir. The Town Council had been trying to secure government-owned land to create a new subdivision to provide building lots for residents of Pushthrough and other resettled communities. Land had been approved by several provincial agencies but the Crown Lands Division of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador turned down the site that had been selected. The Member of the House of Assembly for Hermitage District which included Pushthrough and Milltown, Aiden Wornell, was asked to intervene. He immediately contacted the Honourable William (Bill) Rowe, Minister of Community and Social Development responsible for resettlement. The lack of suitable land in receiving communities was a major problem for those leaving Pushthrough and other resettled communities.

The second problem was with Hermitage. Several householders were relocating there and had made this clear on their Notification of Intent to Relocate. My family was one of them. In fact, my mother reported she would not consider any other location. However, it was another Pushthrough family who had a long-history in the carrying-trade and shipping that he had operated with his brother and father that discovered the problem with moving to

Hermitage. He had submitted his Notification in early April 1969, and was informed by William Rowe on 28 April 1969 that his application could not be approved: Hermitage was not a recognized community to which people could relocate. The Minister suggested that he reconsider his choice and recommended Harbour Breton, Gaultois, or St. Alban's. One can only imagine the reaction of the resident to such news.

Confronting the Government

As was common in communities such as Pushthrough and, indeed, throughout Newfoundland, there were a limited number of people in the community to which residents could turn when they required help in dealing with the state. Government was a distant and foreign entity and people often sought the assistance of a merchant, teacher or, more likely, the clergyman. The applicant who wanted to relocate to Hermitage followed the usual route.

The result was a stinging, abrasive and censorious letter to Minister Rowe. It began: "I can probably understand moving to Hr. Breton; Gaultois appears to be saturated already and continues to be isolated; St. Alban's, as far as I can learn is mainly a welfare community and certainly offers no employment and at St. Alban's, as well as other parts of Bay D'Espoir, land is frozen and no one can get permission to build a house there."

"Rejection of [name removed] application to move to Hermitage," the letter continued, "confirms my belief that this total resettlement program is being done blindly." He added that he had written an earlier letter to Premier Smallwood complaining about the lack of availability of land in Bay D'Espoir and other

aspects of the resettlement programme. The Premier had not bothered to reply or even acknowledge the letter.

Hermitage as Receiving Town

Then the letter made a case for Hermitage as a receiving settlement: "I understand locally that people are being encouraged to move to Hermitage and that land is being prepared there for new building lots. Hermitage shows as much growth as any other centre in this part of the



(Credit: Maritime History Archives, PF-328.123)

South Coast." The letter then pointed out that many of the people from the resettled communities of Richard's Harbour and Muddy Hole had moved to Hermitage as did a number of families from Piccaraire.

The letter called for an investigation.

While maintaining that he was not disagreeing with centralization and the programme of resettlement, the letter condemned the process involved. "It is now late in the game as far as the resettlement of Pushthrough and some other places are concerned," he wrote. "In many cases people are moving, ignorant of the scheme and knowing only some of the answers."

The next sentence oozed with contempt: "One of your officials came by for a short time last

Fall and spent this [his] time in the local store [shop]." This undoubtedly refers to the visit of C.A. Evans that William Simms, who was the chair of the Pushthrough Resettlement Committee and managed the Pushthrough Trade, referred to in his various correspondence with the government about resettlement. How widespread these feelings were, I do not know. That is why we need more information from the people who lived in Pushthrough about what they recall of the visits from government officials and the whole resettlement process.

Minister Rowe acknowledged receipt of the letter on 20 May 1969, promising to write again once he had considered the issues raised in the letter. In the meantime, he passed it along to K.M. Harnum, the Director of the Resettlement Division, who replied on 1 July 1969. He addressed some of the concerns raised in the letter, but I am sure his explanations must have been considered unsatisfactory when the letter arrived in Pushthrough. Mr. Harnum included pamphlets outlining the details of the resettlement programme.

Investigation into Pushthrough Resettlement Plans

In mid-June 1969, C.A. Evans, the field worker with the Department of Community and Social Development in Grand Falls who had earlier visited Pushthrough, was despatched to investigate some of the problems that had delayed the approval of the Pushthrough petition for resettlement.

On Tuesday, 10 June he met with the Milltown Town Council and examined two sites in Morrisville that residents from Pushthrough had acquired. They were approved by Urban and Rural Planning. No details are provided of the Milltown meeting but apparently the issue was

resolved and building lots were made available. Mr. Evans then travelled to St. Alban's and was likewise assured by the mayor and town clerk that land was available for all that might wish to relocate there. Grandmother Blake moved to St. Alban's and built a small home but encountered considerable problems with water and sewage connections. One other family also moved to St. Alban's. Both were Roman Catholic.

Then, To Pushthrough

Mr. Evans then travelled to Pushthrough by CNR boat, arriving at 3:45 in the afternoon. As he reported to Mr. Harnum: "I worked until twelve midnight interviewing people at Mr. Wm [William] Simms house. I also did Field Workers reports on all householders that are now living at Pushthrough. I find that one hundred percent of the people are planning to move not later than November 1, 1969. All the people are dismantling their houses and are moving to reception centres." He noted that people were moving to Hermitage, Milltown (10 or 11 families), Port aux Basque, St. Alban's, Morrisville, Fortune, St. John's, Grand Falls, Harbour Breton, and Burgeo. He completed his report for Pushthrough on Thursday before noon and hired the Riggs boat from McCallum to take him to Hermitage. One can only imagine what the letter writer I mentioned above felt about Mr. Evans working on the resettlement files in the home of Mr. Simms.

Then, To Hermitage

At Hermitage, Mr. Evans met Mayor Everett Rose and talked by telephone to Reverend Cannon Watkins who was in Stone Valley. They discussed the availability of building sites for people wishing to move to Hermitage. He reported that the council had constructed a new road and had made 12 building lots

available, with room for expansion. He recommended Hermitage be made a reception centre, adding that it was a "viable community," with good schools, a doctor and "a progressive town council." It had a year-round fishery and daily collection from the fish plant at Gaultois.

His investigation done, and with the CNR boat not due for another two days, Mr. Riggs took him back to St. Alban's. The boat hire cost \$50. He arrived back to Grand Falls slightly before midnight on 12 June 1969. He filed his report to Mr. Harnum in St. John's on 20 June 1969.

Decision Made: Approval Granted

William Simms, the chair of the Pushthrough Resettlement Committee, received a letter dated 9 July 1969 from Mr. Harnum that the Pushthrough petition had been approved. The issues regarding building lots at Milltown had been resolved, and Hermitage had been granted the status of a receiving community. The resettlement of Pushthrough could proceed. The letter to Mr. Simms included applications for the Resettlement Assistance Claim. He was to pass one to each householder in Pushthrough. The application was to be returned, together with receipts for travel and removal expenses, only after the move had been completed. "We hope that the move of each householder will be a success," Mr. Harnum wrote in conclusion.

A telegram was also sent two days later to the Anglican priest, the Reverend William Noel advising him that the letters of approval for the householders of Pushthrough was in the mail.

The rest of the people Pushthrough could prepare to depart.

Next: Resettlement and Reimbursement