

Farming Traditions of Pouch Cove

Agriculture in Pouch Cove has a long history, stretching back for centuries. For those who first settled here, farming in small gardens for domestic consumption provided essential food for survival, supplementing income earned in the fishery. The establishment of gardens often involved back-breaking labour, clearing forest, digging up rocks, and making acidic soils more fertile.

Settlers also raised livestock and kept common lands on which animals grazed. Some families in later generations established small commercial farms, expanding the scope of agriculture in Pouch Cove beyond the household unit.

The 1836 census records a population of 581 people living in Flat Rock, Pouch Cove and Biscayne Cove. They occupied 89 homes, were served by two schools and owned and operated 107 fishing boats. They also had 75 acres under cultivation, producing 5650 barrels of potatoes, 53 tons of hay, and they kept 14 horses, 19 head of cattle, 25 pigs and 11 sheep. Since Biscayne Cove never had more than 15 families and Flat Rock probably accounted for about 40 homes, the bulk of the settlers were in Pouch Cove.

From later census records we know that by the late 1800s the traditional crops were potatoes, oats, turnip and cabbage. They were able to harvest about 80 barrels of potatoes per acre.

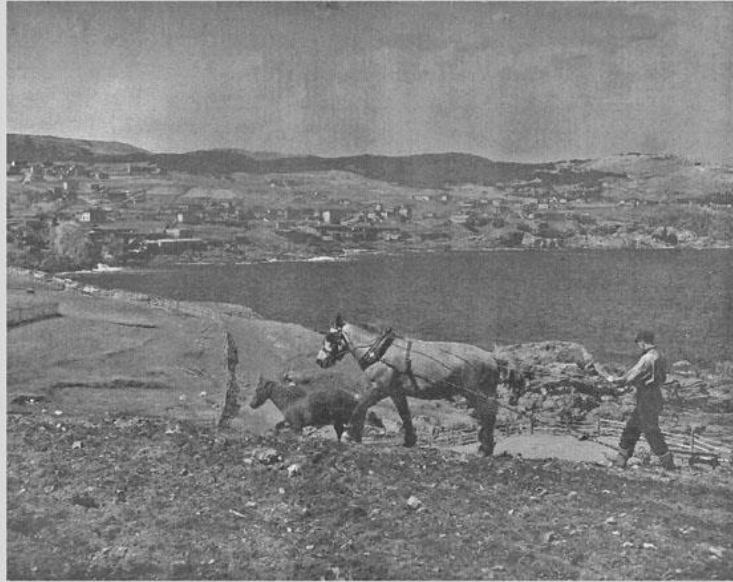
Typically, crops were rotated (changed, from year to year) so that the fertility of the soil would not be depleted. Crops were fertilized with stable manure, supplemented by capelin (during the capelin scull) and fish waste, during the summer fishery. Kelp was not used in Pouch Cove, as the shoreline was too rugged for it to be gathered.

Most families would have had at least one cow, one or two pigs and some goats. Animals would be slaughtered in winter, after the frost, and then hung in chill houses, the only available means of refrigeration. Sheep were sheared, as well as eaten, and the wool was spun and knitted or woven into clothing.

Chickens were kept for eggs and meat. In addition some tame geese and ducks were kept. Milk was provided by cows or goats. Butter was made from the milk.

Lloyd Noseworthy remembers that his family kept a milk cow; his mother milked daily and made butter every Saturday. She used the "buttermilk" left over for biscuits. She would scald the milk on the stove in a pan set in a big brass pot full of water. The scalded milk produced sweet, thick clotted cream, and the scalded milk would be whipped in a bowl with a spoon to make the butter. She shaped the pats of butter by hand to be used all week.

From 1857 onward, census records show that substantial amounts of butter were produced, and some was likely sold to merchants, locally or in St. John's.



Historical Photographs, "Duty in Newfoundland", U.S. Army 1945,
Fisheries and Oceans, Canada

Tom O'Keefe operated a dairy farm here in Pouch Cove until 2002; he was among the officers of the Cattlemen's Association. He kept 30 head of cattle (of his herd of 50) on the pasture in the early 1980s. He was the major user of the community-operated rangeland at the time.

Lloyd Noseworthy grew up in a house behind Gruchy's Store in Pouch Cove. He remembers his father (whose name was also Lloyd) and his father's brother Max kept a flock of several hundred sheep when he was growing up in the forties and fifties. They ranged their sheep in the community, which was possible because a local law prohibited dogs in the community of Pouch Cove. They overwintered their sheep in barns near their home and out along the Bauline Road.

Their breeding flock of about 50 ewes was bred with Cheviot rams so that, over the years, their flock was mainly Cheviot. During the summers the flock was pastured out at Cape St. Francis. Lloyd and his father would walk out there regularly to keep an eye on them. In the fall they sold their lambs to Campbell's Meats in St. John's. The older sheep would be sold from time to time, and were converted into meat to be sold to the Portuguese White Fleet as mutton.

There were others in Pouch Cove who also kept sheep. The Department of Agriculture held an annual Sheep Fair in Pouch Cove, and other communities, to encourage the farmers. There were competitions for the best rams and ewes, with cash prizes awarded.



Later in his life, when he was in his fifties, Lloyd Sr. was offered 300 acres of land along the Bauline Road, if he was interested in expanding his flock. In an area near the present Marine Park that was called the Burnt Hummocks, there was a lot of open grassland because of the big fire that had burned all the way out to the Cape. The Department wanted to see sheep farming expand so they offered him the land, and support to build a large barn. He did not accept the offer because he felt he was too old to take this on.

It was probably just as well, because within a year or two, by the end of the 1950s, freezer ships began bringing in New Zealand lamb, and the price paid to the farmers dropped from 55 cents per pound to 35 cents, or less. Raising sheep was no longer economically viable.

During the years after the Second World War most families in Pouch Cove kept a cow, while some kept goats and sheep. Many families kept chickens and would sell surplus eggs to neighbours or to people in St. John's, which gave them money for special food supplies and other needs.

Everyone grew potatoes. Hundreds of pounds of potatoes were raised for sale. Other crops were harvested and some were sold. To keep the breeding flock of sheep over the winter, hay was raised and harvested.

Lloyd Noseworthy remembers only one time that his father ever purchased hay, which was 400 pounds of hay from Sammy Hudson, a neighbour who had grown it, but didn't need it. The rest he always grew himself.

Lloyd's dad and his brother Max were called the "turnips" because they grew the biggest and best of these in the town. His mother also raised Jerusalem artichokes. They were unusual at the time, and he doesn't know anyone else who grew these. Lloyd's mother's great grandfather had brought them from England to Spaniard's Bay, where she grew up. Jerusalem artichokes are a type of sunflower that produces an edible tuber attached to its roots. Native to North America, they were brought to England, where for a time they rivaled potatoes in importance as a staple food.



Bill and Annie Jordan

Another important harvest in Pouch Cove was berries. They were picked by the people here, packed into barrels by the local store owners, and then shipped into St. John's to be made into jam, by Purity and other companies.

Photographs courtesy of Sharon Wall and Nancy Bradbury Hawkins.



"Papa Dick" Connors, c. 1965