

Chapter 3
Making a Living in the 19th
Century

19th Century Employment:

- Cod and seal fisheries were the staple industries of the 1800's
- Merchants owned stores and exchanged supplies and food for cod and seals.
- Shipbuilding grew (all sizes of boats) with the active cod and seal fishery and a growing population.

Consumer versus Subsistence Economy

- Today we live in a consumer economy. This means that we use money to buy things (i.e. If you need new sneakers, you go to the mall and buy them with cash, credit card, or debit).

- Newfoundlanders lived mainly in a subsistence economy. Thus, they produced most of what they needed for their own consumption. They were self-efficient and more independent. (i.e. The aboriginal and native peoples obtained food, clothing and shelter by hunting and gathering)

Comparing a Subsistence Economy to a Consumer Economy

NEEDS	19TH CENTURY Subsistence Economy	TODAY'S CONSUMER ECONOMY
Home Heating	Cut firewood; burn blubber	Pay hydro bill or burn oil
Housing	Build houses out of snow; make tents out of skins	Buy house or rent Apartment
Clothing	Sew or knit clothing	Purchase pre-made clothing
Home Entertainment	Play musical instruments	T.V and movies, computer, video games
Food(milk, meat, vegetables, berries)	Milk a cow, grow a garden, fish, gather, hunt	Buy at supermarket

The Three branches of the cod fishery:

- The chief occupation in the nineteenth was cod fishing. The three types of cod fishing were and referred to the place where the fish were caught

A. Inshore fishery

B. Labrador Fishery

C. Bank Fishery

Inshore Fishery

- Took place near the shores of Newfoundland and Labrador where fisherman operated small boats
- Started at dawn and continued throughout the day.
- Cod was caught on baited hooks that were lowered into the ocean on weighted lines called handlines. Hooks were baited with capelin, herring, squid or shellfish.
- Fish was washed and laid out on wooden planks called fish flakes to dry in the sun's heat. If rainy, the fish was taken inside.

Labrador Fishery

- This fishery occurred along the Labrador coast
- It was a migratory fishery conducted by non-residents of Labrador. Many Newfoundland fisherman and their families spent from early summer to early fall "down on the Labrador".
- There were few medical services, limited supplies of food and equipment, and, harsh weather to deal with.

There were two types of fisherman in Labrador –

The Stationers and the Floaters.

- Stationers worked from shore and salted/dried the fish on their own premises.
- Floaters stayed on their boats and moved around to various fishing grounds. Their fish had to be salted heavily to preserve it. They did not dry their fish until they were back in Newfoundland.

The Bank Fishery

- Large vessels called schooners carried crews and dories to the banks. Fish was plentiful in areas like the Grand Banks, Rose Blanche bank, and St. Pierre Bank.
- Dories left the schooner each day to fish on the banks and returned often to unload their catch. They used trawl lines.

- This was a dangerous job. There was heavy gales, fog, danger of being capsized, harsh living conditions, little water for washing, and intruders.

- The Bank Fishery had major economic impacts due to it extending its season. Fisherman worked longer days/months and had less time to cut wood for fuel and woman had less time for gardening. Thus, these items had to be purchased by the merchant (costly).
- **Read the song "Banks of Newfoundland" on page 55 and answer the two questions.**

Responsibilities in the fishery

MEN	WOMAN	CHILDREN
Fishing Offshore (3-4 trips per day)	Gutting and splitting fish	Help woman with their fish chores
Move fish from boat to flakes	Cure and salt the fish. Lay it on the flakes, turn it and stack it.	Cook for the men and woman and bring tea.
Cutting, scooping, and scraping the cod fish	Take care of children	Small children will fetch and carry, take care of babies,
Mend nets, fix flakes, repair fishing gear and during the fall and winter	Care for vegetable gardens, animals, and wash cloths in the tub or river by hand.	Shoo goats away from the fish and use boughs to shoo away the flies.

Stages of the Cod Fishery

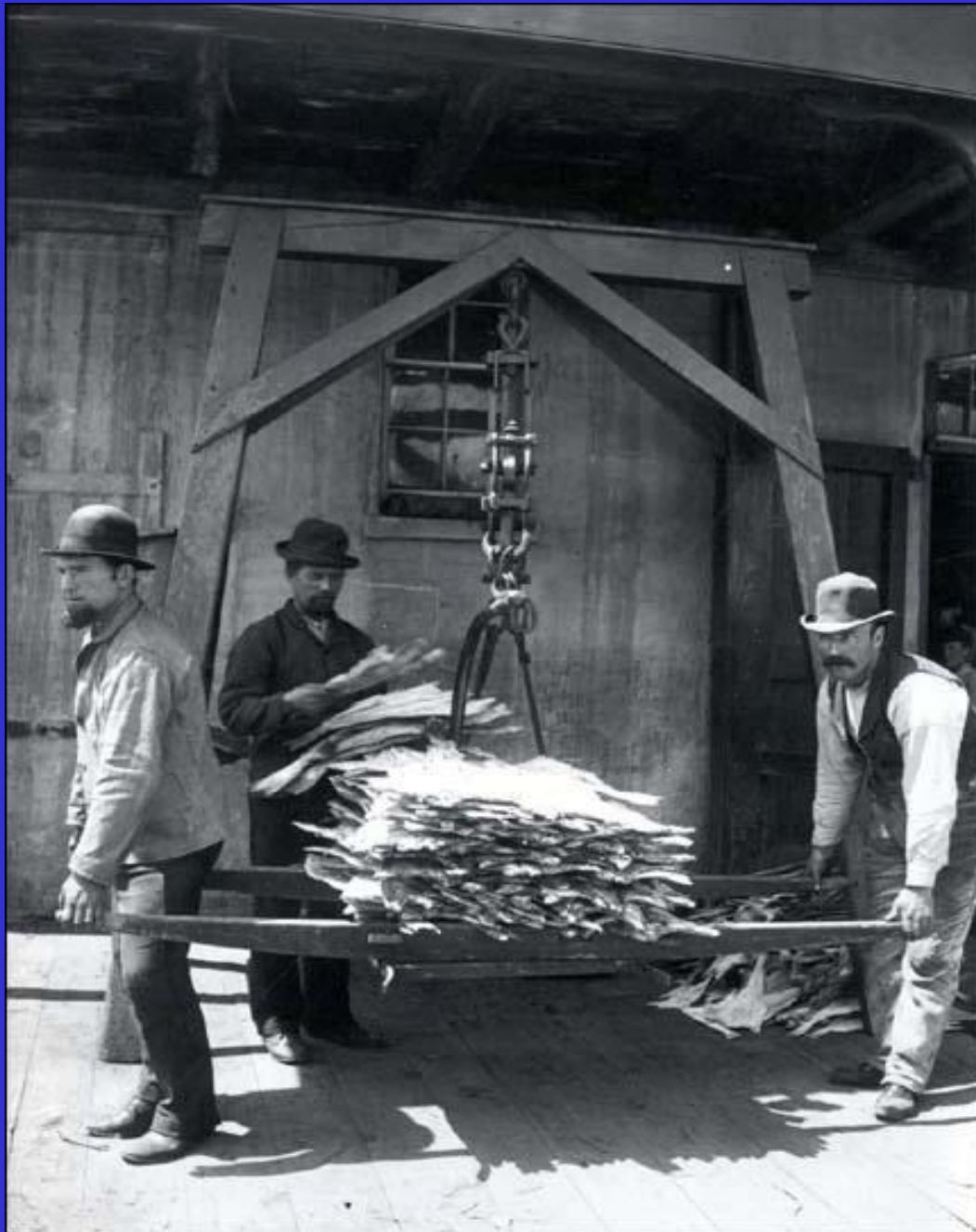
A. Hauling a cod trap: This was very demanding as men would haul on meters of line by hand (first used in the 1860's).

B. Splitting Fish: Cutting the throat, removing the head, taking out the guts, removing the sound bone and washing the fish.

C. Drying the fish: After they were cleaned, the fish was salted and laid out to dry. If there was too little salt the fish could spoil; if there was too much salt, the fish could break easily in the drying stage.



D . Weighing Fish: Once fish was cured, it was sold to the merchants. A hand- barrow of fish was laid on a weigh scale. The hand-barrow could carry up to two quintals of fish (1 quintal being equal to 51 kilograms or 112 pounds).



Weighing saltfish at St. John's harbour:

Newfoundland and Labrador's outport economy depended not on cash, but on merchant credit for much of the nineteenth century. Fishers traded their annual harvest of salt-cod to local merchants for clothes, food, fishing gear, and other supplies.

Fish Merchants

- They often determined the standard of living of the fisherman. Some were known as villains who became rich due to the fisherman.
- Some merchants lost money in the fishery and became bankrupt.

The method of trade that existed between merchants and fisherman was called the **TRUCK SYSTEM**

- A cashless system whereby, in exchange for their season's catch, fisherman and their families received credit at the merchant's store. They could buy fishing supplies, food, and clothing.

- Fish was sold to the merchant by the quintal. It was the culler that graded the fish for the merchant. The highest grade received the highest prices.
- The price paid for the fish changed frequently as it ultimately depended on the demand in international markets.

- The truck system allowed merchants to set the price for fish as well as the prices of the goods available in their stores. In many out-ports there was only one merchant so negotiating prices was impossible. Often families went into debt to the merchant

- It was widely known that some merchants overcharged for goods, paid unfair prices for fish, and often refused credit. Others, however, were very supportive of the fishermen, supported their communities, and had the respect of the people.

- They faced financial risks because of fluctuations in the price of fish and sometimes were unable to recover debts owed to them.

Seal Fishery

- Sealing began as a personal activity for aboriginals and immigrants until the 19th century
- Today it is very small compared to what was once major industry

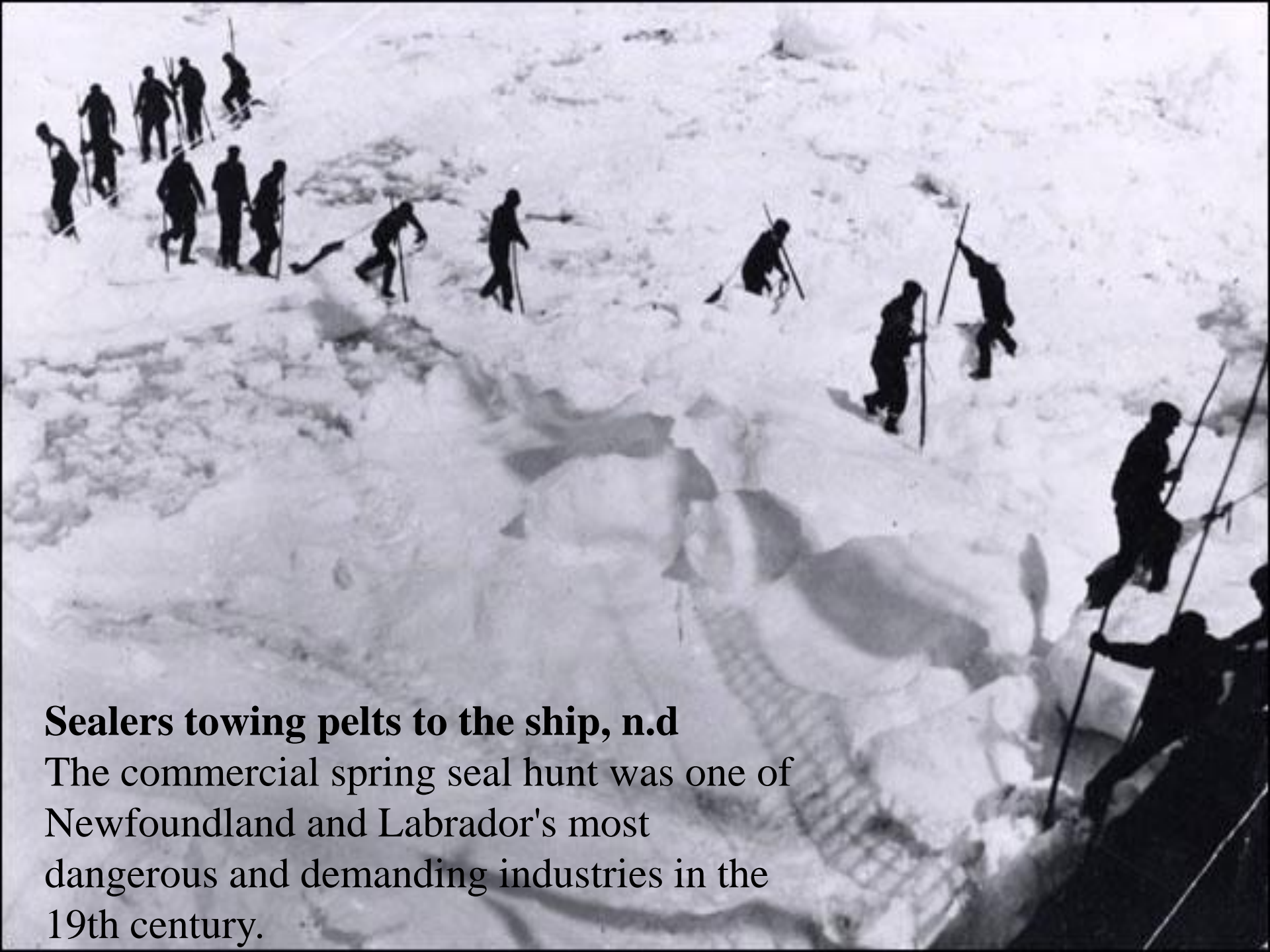
Two branches of the seal fishery

- **Landsman's Hunt:** Caught near the shore if the ice packed in
- **Offshore Hunt:** From ships off the coasts of Northeastern NL. And Labrador and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.



Sealers on the ice by their ship, n.d.

- Seals were hunted for food, clothing, and oil. The best usage was oil, which was used for lamps, lubricants, softening textiles, and as an ingredient in paint, explosives and margarine.
- Page 59: Read article and do question #1.



Sealers towing pelts to the ship, n.d

The commercial spring seal hunt was one of Newfoundland and Labrador's most dangerous and demanding industries in the 19th century.

Southern Cross Disaster of 1914

- A wooden steam ship lost at sea in the Gulf during the seal fishery (had been sailing for thirteen years)
- On the way back (with a large catch of seals), a severe blizzard took "The Cross" and 173 crew members (March 31, 1913)



SS Southern Cross, n.d.

In late March or early April 1914, the *SS Southern Cross* sank while returning to Newfoundland from the Gulf of St. Lawrence, taking with it 174 men.

Stages of the Seal Fishery

- A. Preparing for the voyage (large vessels and many men)
- B. Sculping Seals: removing the pelt with a thick layer of fat attached
- C. Towing: Seals were towed back to the ship in 2 or 4 pelts depending on the size of the seals and weather conditions.
- D. Skinning Seals: Seal skimmers at port removed the fat from the skin. Skimmers could remove or "de fat" about 450 young harp seals in a ten hour shift.



Sealers hauling pelts with gaffs and tow ropes, n.d.

Sealing equipment in the 19th century consisted of a gaff for killing the seals, a knife for skinning the carcasses, and a tow rope for hauling the pelts to the ship. The gaff was a two-metre long wooden pole with an iron hook and spike attached to one end.

Trapping

- Trapping was a lonely lifestyle with many months away from the family.
- It started as a way for Immigrants and Aboriginals to receive their basic necessities (food, clothing).
- Eventually, trading for goods became more important leading to over hunting and extinction of many species.
- In the 1930's, the Hudson Bay Company moved into Labrador putting small traders out of business.

What was the Moravion Mission Stations?

- Moravians operated a system similar to the fish merchant truck system.
- Trapped items were exchanged for supplies, food and clothing. However, the Moravions also offered education and health services as well for pelts.
- Moravions believed that merchants were bad, cheated fisherman, and sold harmful substances like alcohol.



Moravian Station at Ramah, ca. 1900

Shipbuilders

- At the beginning men built their own boats and schooners so they settled where there was easy access to lumber.
- As populations grew with the cod and seal fishery so did the need for more boats. Shipbuilding became an industry.
- It is estimated that between 1820 and 1920 almost 10,000 vessels of 30 tons or more were built in Newfoundland communities.

Michael Kearney (1811-1885)

- One of Newfoundland's greatest Shipbuilder.
- From a family of sea captains (2 brothers)
- Was a Master Shipwright, sail maker and sailor who learned his trade in Ireland.
- His ships were noted for their strength, speed, and beauty.
- Three very well known famous ships that he built were the *Ida*, *Gauntlet*, and *Shamrock*. They were built on the Waterstreet and South Side areas of St. John's.

Other Occupations in Newfoundland

- By the beginning of the 20th century, the fishery no longer dominated the Newfoundland Economy.
- Working in the fishery remained high, however, other industries provided jobs for the growing population.
- Some jobs included Mining (Baie-Verte), Forestry, Railway (CN), Factory Workers, Lumberers, Farmers, Clergymen, Teachers, Lawyers, Doctors, Government officials, Mechanics (manual laborers), and clerk/shop assistants.