

**The following is a speech given by Mayor E. P. Reddy to the Kinsmen Club of Marystown on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1978, on the occasion of Heritage Week.**

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, I would like to thank the Kinsmen for the generosity to our Community; especially for the Arena, Swimming Pool and the children's playgrounds, etc.

This is Heritage Week in Newfoundland. We have a proud heritage. I have been asked to speak to you tonight on our manner of living in Marystown in the distant past. As far as can be ascertained, the first English speaking settler to arrive at Mortier Bay was Joseph Cleal, who settled on Tiny Birchy Island in 1800. Thomas Mallay from Ireland set up residence at Mooring Cove; George Murley from England settled at the mouth of Tides Brook in the South West Arm; Patrick Devereaux built his home in Spanish Room; Thomas Dober and other Dober Families settled at Beau Bois and Little Bay, while a family of Browns and Dodges settled at Rock Harbour. It was at Beau Bois and Rock Harbour in the early 1800's that the first settlers gathered in any number. These places were selected because of their proximity to the fishing grounds. They were of English, Irish and French origin. Some of the first names were Dober, Kelly, Fitzpatrick, Mallay, Devereaux, Brown and Dodge. Beau Bois soon became a flourishing village. The new settlers built several large boats, wharves, flakes, dories and engaged in the Fishery. The first wedding took place in Rock Harbour between Mr. A. Dodge and Miss Honey in 1800. The first Post Office for Mortier Bay was set up at Beau Bois and was operated by the Dober family. The mail was sorted at Beau Bois and distributed to certain small Post Offices in Mortier Bay. Beau Bois was the only port of call in Mortier Bay for the Mail Boat, The S. S. Alert, as late as 1900. Several years previous to this, however, many families began to settle along the shores of Mortier Bay, which some people claim derived its name from General Mortier or Admiral Mortier, a high-ranking Official in the British War Office who is supposed to have chartered certain waters in this part of Placentia Bay for the British Navy. Houses were built, patches of land cleared and people in general made preparations for the fishery. The first census was taken in Mortier Bay in 1836.

In early 1896, my father, Hugh Reddy, came from Burin and set up business in Marystown South. The next year, Michael T. Flynn, also from Burin, formerly from Conche, started business at Marystown South; and thirdly, Joseph Baker of Mortier Bay set up business at Marystown North at Baker's Cove. These three businessmen began the deep sea fishery at Mortier Bay. They built their own large fishing schooners, boats and dories and completely fitted these schooners for the Bank Fishery as well as supplying many private fishermen with a complete means to prosecute the fishery. This was the dawn of a new era for Mortier Bay, as previous to this the fishermen of Mortier Bay, wanting to secure an opportunity to go fishing, had to walk to Burin, Fortune or Grand Bank partly through the woods as there were no roads to secure berths in the banking schooners from the above places. This was no longer necessary now, as they could obtain berths in the schooners sailing from Mortier Bay.

The prevailing approximate earnings for an individual fisherman for a voyage which lasted from the middle of March until October 31 at that period was \$300.00 to \$400.00 respectively. This very meager income clearly demonstrated that other avenues had to be availed of to secure a livelihood for their families during the long winter. Every family then possessed a cow or two, some sheep, a pig, a horse to obtain firewood and a fair patch of land to enable them to grow potatoes, turnips, carrots, cabbage, together with an abundance of codfish, herring, mackerel, haddock and trout to supplement their earnings from the fishery.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the herring is the most nutritious fish of all. Every vitamin beneficial to the human body is contained in the lowly herrings. In the early days of Newfoundland, the Americans in their big white sail schooners came to Placentia Bay and other Bays in Newfoundland buying herring and paid for same in Gold. That's one reason why there was a fairly large quantity of gold in many of the outports in Newfoundland. Quite a number of our fishermen would go down to Placentia Bay in their little boats and catch herring for the Americans; thereby, supplementing their earnings substantially. The Bond Blaine Treaty enacted by our Legislature about this time, as a result of pressure by the Canadian Government through the British Government, forbid the Americans from taking herring and other bait fish in Newfoundland waters, thereby depriving our fishermen of a substantial income so desperately needed in those lean years.

On representation to the Government, from the three local merchants, Messieurs Reddy, Flynn and Baker, the first Telegraph Office was erected in Marystown in 1908. Miss Elizabeth Mahoney from Burin was the first Morse Code Operator. This was Mortier Bay's first communication with the outside world.

The first school was erected in Marystown North in 1895. On representation to the Parish Priest at Burin by Hugh Reddy, the first school was erected at Marystown South in 1902. About this time a ferry service was instituted which linked Marystown North to Marystown South. This ferry system was in charge of one man and he was paid salary by the government of the day. As the population grew, two men were engaged by the government to run the ferry system. The first steamer owned by the Reid Newfoundland Co. to arrive in Marystown was the S.S. Argyle in December 1902, followed shortly afterwards by the S.S. Glencoe. This meant that the business people could receive their supplies from St. John's as well as the mail for the general public every two or three weeks. All due, Ladies and Gentlemen, through the community mindness of the three local businessmen.

As students wishing to further their education and graduating from the lower grade school at Marystown South, they had to cross the harbour in the ferry to attend the higher grade school at Marystown North. Many students, including myself, did this for several years. We experienced some stormy and hazardous trips across the harbour in an open boat, especially during the winter months. On many occasions the salt-water spray froze as icicles on our clothing. The ferrymen, mostly old retired fishermen, were very kind and helpful and the boys gladly helped them in rowing the boat. Certain days, the ferrymen had a sail on the boat and the boys loved to see the sail up. One day, however, I was alone with the ferrymen and fanned by a strong breeze which caused the ferryboat to

croon and buckle. Nearing the Southside, a stronger than usual gust of wind struck us, turning the boat bottom up. The ferrymen and myself went over the rail to our necks in water. My books went floating away in the tide. We scrambled ashore none the worse but wet and cold from the chilly water. The ferrymen got suspended by the government for two weeks and I got spanked for two weeks for losing my books. No more turning over the ferry for us.

In 1908 – our population was getting fairly large, our spiritual needs were still being ministered to by the Parish Priest of Burin. My father made a representation to Archbishop Howley to have a Parish Priest established at Mortier Bay. In 1909, Father E. J. Wilson, who was curate at Burin, was transferred to Mortier Bay as Parish Priest. Father Wilson changed the name of Mortier Bay to Marystown.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this Hall you are in tonight was erected by Father Wilson. He assembled every man in this parish on the Garnish Pond Road early in the morning, week after week, until all the sticks and timber were out, sawed and brought to this location necessary for the erection of this Hall, which began in 1910. It was then considered one of the largest halls in all Newfoundland.

In 1912, two large firms came here from Grand Bank to set up business. They were G & A Buffett Ltd. and The Marystown Trading Co. owned by G. C. Harris. These firms went into the fishery in a very big way.

In 1914, as the First World War broke out, codfish soared to unprecedented prices, which brought prosperity in abundance to our people. The above firms built several large three-masted schooners on Stapleton's Beach here and loaded them with dried codfish, manned, captained and navigated by our own young local fishermen who sailed them to many foreign parts of the world, such as Greece, Portugal, Spain, France and Naples. With many people employed in shipbuilding and many of our men working with the fish firms, Marystown was a very prosperous community. Marystown then possessed some of the best shipbuilders in all Newfoundland.

After the war ended in 1918, the price of codfish fell to practically nothing. European countries crippled financially from the expense of a four-year war had no money. This combined with the drastic Coaker regulations dried salted codfish bought in Marystown for fifteen dollars per quintal and shipped across the ocean was thrown overboard in Portugal Harbour. There were no buyers. Many of the fish firms on the whole Southwest Coast lost so much money they went bankrupt. The great Marystown Trading Co. was one of them. Hard times came again and you could not sell fish at all. Hundreds and hundreds of young fishermen unable to make a living emigrated to the United States. Those who remained left the fishery and sought employment away from home, either at Sydney, Halifax, NS or in the lumber woods.

Marystown experienced two very serious sea tragedies. One several years previous to this, the schooner Orion in November 1908, after the season voyage loaded with heavy salted codfish, left a port on the Labrador for Marystown via Grand Bank. She was lost

with all on board; eight married men from Marystown; three men from Grand Bank; one from Fortune; one from Brunette, leaving many widows and orphans.

Then again, the August Gale of 1936, when a tornado blew in from the sea, striking the headlands of Cape St. Mary's where a large number of our little fishing boats were fishing at the time. The storm came so unexpected and the winds were of such velocity, it took our fishermen unaware as it smashed their boats to pieces against the jagged rocks of that rugged coast. There was no escape. Some twenty-five men, again from Marystown South, lost their lives. I was the wireless operator and for days I did nothing but copy telegrams conveying the tragic news. These tragedies are felt to this very day. These two tragedies combined with the exodus of our young men to the US reminds me of a quotation from a famous poet, "A bold peasantry, its country's pride, once destroyed can never be supplied".

Ladies and Gentlemen, the trials and tribulations of early settlers in other countries have been recorded. Should we not have something to remember them by? As a tribute, let us go back to the beginning and the men who prosecuted the bank fishery, Iron Men, in wooden boats. These men were in a special class to themselves, and they deserve to be remembered. Never again in the course of human endeavor will mortal man be required to garner such super human strength, to meet such formidable struggles. The old rugged mariners are fast fading away and before complete extinction envelopes all, we felt they also deserve some kind of memorial, especially those who paid the supreme sacrifice to the sea.

Our little Tourist Chalet, with its small collection of artifacts of the deep sea fishery, and the Fishermens Memorial at Grand Bank, is our small but sincere tribute to the great race of men.

The largest of all fishing schooners ever built on the Atlantic Sea Board was built by Thomas J. Hodder at Creston North, in the year 1950. She weighed 234 tons and was christened the Alberta Wareham. Most of her timber knees, stanchions and some plank were cut in the North West Woods and in the area of Garnish Pond. This provided much badly needed employment.

On November 18, 1929, about 7 p.m., an earthquake and tidal wave struck Marystown as well as the whole Burin Peninsula. I was Postmaster and Assistant Wireless Operator at the time. I was sitting at the wireless desk when the earthquake struck. The whole office building shivered and stuttered like a frightened steed. The wireless set went dead immediately and we were isolated from the outside world for four days. I left the office immediately for my home in my own little rowboat across the harbour. I could barely pull with all my might against the rushing tide, which I could not understand, as I never experienced such tide before. I just reached the South Side, however, when the water began to come back. A wall of water about ten feet high came rushing in, sweeping wharves, flakes and stores all before it until it spent itself across the Garnish Road into the Southwest Marshes.

In the late 1930's, as the world depression had engulfed us, times were more than difficult for our people. With codfish, our main and only industry, practically unstable,

rendering our only source of income in complete disarray, there was no other recourse for our people to return to, to sustain life and limb, but to seek government assistance in large numbers.

The commission of Government, in 1938, considered Marystown a depressed area and initiated a scheme to try and alleviate our serious economic ills. It was called the Marystown Co-operative Enterprise, which constituted the development of three land settlements to try and encourage people to go back to the land. The settlements were Maryland, Markland and Winterland, a shipbuilding yard and a general store. This gave considerable employment and brought back a measure of prosperity to us. In 1939, shortly after the shipyard began, World War II broke out. The ships under construction were hurriedly finished and sent over to England and used as Mine Sweepers in the North Sea. The whole enterprise folded up immediately.

Then the Americans came to Argentia to build a Naval and Air Base and spent millions and millions, thereby giving much needed employment to our people and prosperity came to us again.

After World War II, times became very depressed again as the price of fish, which had been very high during the war, had now declined to a low level, making it uneconomical to catch. Agitation grew among the people to ask England to recall Commission of Government. A referendum was called and a National Convention was elected. I was elected to the district of Burin East, which included Marystown, on June 21, 1946. At that time, Marystown North was isolated, you could not get to the South side except by boat. Shortly after my being elected, I arranged a meeting with the Deputy Minister of Public Works. I obtained five thousand dollars, built a bridge across the North West Arm and half a mile of road to connect same. Now the people of Marystown North could motor to the hospital at Burin or any other place on the Burin Peninsula. However, the whole Burin Peninsula was still isolated and our only way of getting off the peninsula was by coastal boat. The S. S. Argyle or the S. S. Glencoe every two weeks to Argentia, thence by train to St. John's.

In the late fall of 1946, while a member of the National Convention, I organized and headed a delegation of South Coast Business Men and others to meet Commissioner McNeil of Public Works and informed him of the terrible isolation of the Burin Peninsula. After a very long meeting, we impressed on Commissioner McNeil the need for a road from Terrenceville to Marystown to break this desperate isolation. We finally obtained a commitment from the Commissioner and one million dollars was allocated to build fifty miles of road from Marystown to Terrenceville. Work began in the spring of 1947. The road was completed in a very rough manner before the first government under confederation took over the government of the province.

In 1951, we elected our first Town Council. Our population was then 1440 people. We held our first meeting in a house owned by Mrs. Cecilia Pike. Our first job was to widen our narrow and winding roads and get rid of picket fences. We were thirty years agitating for a bridge across the harbour. With letters and delegations, we finally obtained the bridge. As Mayor at the time, I felt the official opening of this bridge, September 1959,

was the most beneficial and historic day in our Town's history. The bridge is more than a combination of steel and concrete. It is more than a linking of the North and South of this town. It was the palpable, fulfillment of even lively hopes, long deferred.

Year 1958 – still no electricity, although the rest of the towns on the peninsula had electricity twenty-five years now. In the winter of 1958, as Mayor, on behalf of Council, I went to St. John's and appeared before the Commissioner of Utilities at a Public Hearing, and with the aid of a very able lawyer, R. C. Furlong Q. C., now attorney general, made a very strong plea for electricity for Marystown. As a result of our strong presentation, the United Towns Electric was instructed by the Commissioner to bring electricity to Marystown. I assisted in erecting the first electric light pole in November, 1958.

News had come to Council that Federal Government was contemplating the building of a shipyard, somewhere on the south coast, to assist the fishery. I assisted in writing a brief for our Council, expounding the potential of Marystown for such a development. I was instructed to proceed to Ottawa and presented the brief to the Hon. W. J. Browne, Attorney General for Canada, in the Diefenbaker government, and explained the feasibility of Marystown for such a development. Mr. Browne informed me that St. John's, Clarenville, Burin, Fortune, and now Marystown, were all trying to get this shipyard. Several months passed and finally a group of engineers were sent to Newfoundland to survey the different sites suggested. Marystown was finally selected and work on the shipyard began in the spring of 1966. Just about the same time, the erection of a modern fish plant at Mooring Cove began. We now had over 600 men employed, with everything hustling and bustling. Marystown was on the march. The resettlement program was availed of and strongly encouraged by our Council. They came from the islands, they came from the harbours, they came from the cities and from across the sea. Our population is now over the six thousand mark and steadily increasing. With electricity, modern telephone system, water and sewerage in certain sections, paved roads and a High School second to none in the Province, we are fast becoming a fair size town. All in the space of eleven years.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am optimistic for the future of Marystown. The two hundred mile limit pertaining to our fishery has greatly enhanced the belief in future developments of our fishery. Our shipyard will not only continue as a great asset to Marystown, but to the whole of the Burin Peninsula. Its great success is assured as our fishery develops. I humbly ask your pardon if I have kept you too long, but being involved in this community for a lifetime, in bad times and good, it is difficult to be concise.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Marystown.

Thank you.

E. P. Reddy  
February 25, 1978