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## A Material History of the Early Eighteenth-Century Cod Fishery in Canso, Nova Scotia

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### Cover Page Footnote

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## A Material History of the Early Eighteenth-Century Cod Fishery in Canso, Nova Scotia

Adrian L. K. Morrison

*In the early 18th century, Canso, Nova Scotia, hosted an influential Anglo-American fishing and trading community with far-reaching connections across Europe and the Americas. The islands were inhabited by a small permanent population joined each year by hundreds of migratory workers who established seasonal operations along the shores. Despite high hopes for long-term development, success would be short lived. Canso was a volatile space: the islands were contested territory and existed within a tense and turbulent frontier. The settlement was attacked multiple times and was destroyed in 1744. This article draws upon new research and previous archaeological studies to discuss the social history and material life of the early 18th-century Canso fishery; in particular, it focuses on the consumption patterns and living conditions of those who lived within this frontier community.*

*Au début du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle, Canso, en Nouvelle-Écosse, accueillait une influente communauté anglo-américaine de pêche et de commerce ayant des relations étendues à travers l'Europe et les Amériques. Les îles étaient habitées par une petite population permanente rejointe chaque année par des centaines de travailleurs migrants qui établissaient des opérations saisonnières le long des côtes. Malgré de grands espoirs de développement à long terme, le succès sera de courte durée. Canso était un espace instable : les îles étaient des territoires contestés et existaient à l'intérieur d'une frontière tendue et turbulente. La colonie a été attaquée à plusieurs reprises et a été détruite en 1744. Cet article s'appuie sur de nouvelles recherches et des études archéologiques antérieures pour discuter de l'histoire sociale et de la vie matérielle de la pêcherie de Canso au début du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle. En particulier, il se concentre sur les modes de consommation et les conditions de vie de ceux qui vivaient au sein de cette communauté frontalière.*

### Introduction

In the 1720s the Canso Islands in eastern Nova Scotia became a primary staging ground for the New England cod fishery. At a time when cod was king and the fishing industry was among the most profitable businesses in the Northeast, more vessels were employed off the coast of Canso than in virtually any port in New England itself (Flemming 1977; Grenier 2008). The islands maintained a small but dedicated group of permanent residents, accompanied year-round by a military garrison and seasonally by shore men, as well as hundreds of migratory fishermen and shore hands who caught and cured the fish (Flemming 1977; Tulloch 1997; Vickers 1994). Each summer, sack ships from England, New England, and the Iberian Peninsula transported Canso's product to markets in Europe and the West Indies (Flemming 1977; Tulloch 1997).

The outpost was a socially fluid space situated at the epicenter of Nova Scotia's early 18th-century frontier. The majority of occupants were transient, and their time was spent

primarily aboard ships, within fishing stations, or inside makeshift cabins and taverns. Their immediate company consisted of young men and boys from across New England, and together they lived a communal life with few comforts and little semblance of domesticity or privacy. What is more, Canso was contested territory; it was claimed by Mi'kmaq, French, and New England interests alike (Chard 1976; Flemming 1977; Rawlyk 1973; Robison 2000; Wickens 1994).

Indigenous residents had been inhabiting the islands for well over 1,000 years and bitterly opposed British claims to their territory (Parks Canada 2009). Similarly, French fishermen resented the expansion of New England operations into the harbors and fishing grounds that they had considered their own for more than a century (Brebner 1927; Chard 1976; Flemming 1977; Rawlyk 1973, 1994; Robison 2000; Wickens 1993). Both groups threatened the success of Canso as a nascent settlement, and they attacked the port multiple times (Grenier 2008; Robison 2000).

The ongoing threat of invasion shaped daily life for the islands' occupants and was a reoccurring theme within English correspondence (see Armstrong [1735] and Waterhouse [1731]). When King George's War broke out in 1744, the settlers' fears were realized. A French army from Louisbourg quickly and efficiently destroyed the settlement (Chard 1976; Choyce 2002; Plank 2001), and the English presence all but disappeared. Though its success was short lived, Canso flourished as an important component of the Massachusetts economy. The small Nova Scotian outpost helped feed the families of New England fishermen and line the coffers of colonial merchants. For a short period Canso was also a community, though a precarious one.

Renowned scholar Peter Pope (1988: 30) has stated that "[f]isheries sites are consumer as well as producer sites." Understanding the consumption patterns of those who occupied communities like Canso provides a more nuanced appreciation of the colonial fishing industry; crucially, it can also illuminate the social structures that governed those who worked within the industry. Little is known, however, about the living conditions or consumer trends of Canso's settlers, the dynamics of their relationships, or the rhythms of their daily lives. This is particularly applicable to those directly employed within the fishery.

With this in mind, I have spent the past seven years researching the social and material history of early 18th-century Canso, drawing on decades of previous archaeological research carried out by Parks Canada, as well as leading new excavations at the site of a small cabin located within Robinson's Room—one of Canso's dozens of early 18th-century fishing stations. My focus is on uncovering information about material life and the ways in which it mediated social interactions around this early 18th-century frontier settlement. This article will discuss concepts of comfort and community as they pertain to the Canso fishery—particularly how these notions were constructed and construed within the remote, liminal, and socially fluid outpost.

## Background History

The Canso Islands National Historic Site (FIG. 1) is recognized for its rich and lengthy

history. A Mi'kmaq presence on the islands has been traced to at least 1,500 years before present (Parks Canada 2009), and in the 16th and 17th centuries Canso was a popular destination for Basque and French migratory fishers (Flemming 1977; Innis 1978). The area reached the height of its occupation during the early 18th century with the establishment of New England operations (Bedwell 1972; Flemming 1977; Moody 2004; Tulloch 1987, 1997).

New England's primary interest in Canso developed following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. This date is significant, as it coincides with a period of dramatic expansion in the offshore banks fishery (Flemming 1977; Vickers 1994; Wickens 1993). The American colonies' involvement in the Nova Scotia fishing industry, however, began almost 100 years earlier (Brebner 1927; Rawlyk 1973). Working in the region since the 1620s (Brebner 1927; Plank 2004: 69), the number of New England fishers increased throughout the 17th century (Rawlyk 1973: 6). These efforts—brought on in part by a decline of local cod stocks in Massachusetts (Bolster 2012: 67)—continued, and by 1670 they had a virtual monopoly on the fisheries (Rawlyk 1973: 34). By the end of the century they had already shown an interest in Canso, and a small group of New Englanders was working the islands alongside the French (Flemming 1977; Rawlyk 1973).

As New England interests expanded, the Mi'kmaq grew more concerned about the effects this encroachment had upon their subsistence, sovereignty, and traditional ways of life (Wickens 1994: 264–265). The influx of American crews put a strain on fish stocks and other marine resources and prevented access to fishing and hunting grounds (Wickens 1994: 264–265). Recognizing this threat, during the early 18th century the Mi'kmaq initiated an active campaign of resistance to discourage the influx of fishing vessels and, above all else, the establishment of permanent communities like Canso (Chard 1976; Flemming 1977; Rawlyk 1973; Robison 2000; Wickens 1994).

Throughout the late 1710s and the early 1720s, the region was engulfed in conflict. In 1720 the Mi'kmaq and their French allies attacked Canso and nearby vessels (Rawlyk 1973, 1994; Robison 2000), and war broke out soon after (Rawlyk 1973, 1994; Robison 2000).



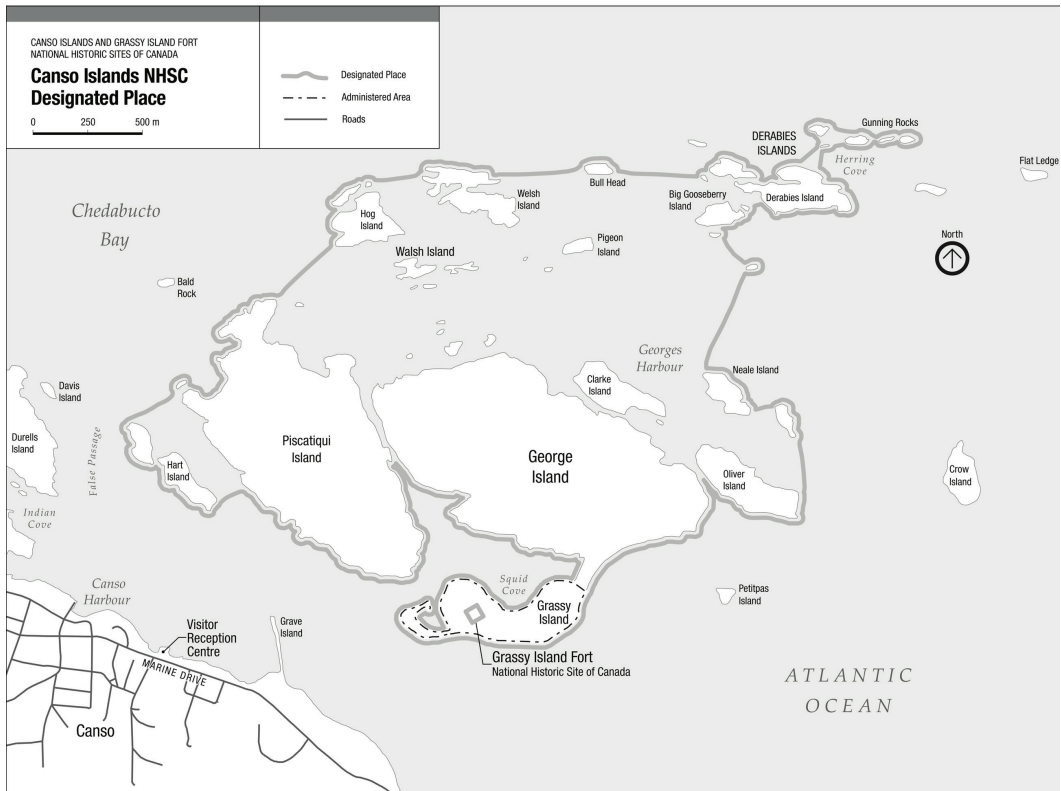


Figure 1. Now an uninhabited wilderness, in the early 18th century the Canso Islands were a primary staging ground for the New England cod fishery. (Map courtesy of Parks Canada, 2009.)

During the first half of the 1720s, skirmishes between New Englanders and the Mi'kmaq occurred both in Canso and elsewhere in the region (Brebner 1927; Chard 1976; Flemming 1977; Rawlyk 1973, 1994; Robison 2000; Wickens 1993). The Massachusetts government subsequently declared war on the Mi'kmaq, and Nova Scotia was drawn further into a bitter frontier conflict (Rawlyk 1973, 1994; Robison 2000).

A deepening sense of unease permeated daily life for those permanent and seasonal English fishers at Canso, but repeated calls for help were met with little response. Residents began preparing to abandon the settlement if adequate protection was not provided (Flemming 1977: 16–20). Despite England's reluctance to militarize the islands, the 1720 attack forced their hand, and fishermen and merchants successfully encouraged government officials to construct defenses and enlist

a garrison (Flemming 1977; Plank 2001). Over the next several years, Canso would host a series of shabby fortifications occupied by a poorly trained and undersupplied garrison (Flemming 1977: 17–24). Still, the military presence eased tensions, and fears were further reduced when New England signed a peace treaty with the Mi'kmaq in 1726 (Robison 2000: 8). Though this treaty would usher in almost two decades of peace for the Canso Islands, the sense of unease lingered.

In addition to serving as a land base for the fisheries, Canso was a prominent trading center. Sack ships from England purchased the highest grades of mercantile cod for markets in the Iberian Peninsula, whereas poor-quality refuse fish was transported to the West Indies, where it was used to feed enslaved plantation workers (Flemming 1977; Tulloch 1987, 1997). Perhaps most significantly, Canso's proximity to Louisbourg made it a convenient place from

which to carry out extensive commerce—both legal and illicit—with French traders (Bedwell 1972; Tulloch 1997).

On Grassy Island there emerged a small year-round community established primarily as a spinoff of the migratory fishery and the island's mercantile trade. With a makeshift fort situated on a central hilltop, a series of homes, businesses, warehouses, finger wharves, military structures, and other shacks and shelters were constructed along the island's shores (Bastide 1742; Flemming 1977; Tulloch 1997). Grassy Island's resident population included merchants and their households, officers, and soldiers, as well as inhabitants whose living was made through supportive roles within the fishing industry (Flemming 1977; Tulloch 1997; West 1739). The latter spent summers curing fish, watched over fishing stations during winter months, and eked out a living through the various opportunities the islands presented (Waterhouse 1938; West 1739).

Canso's successes were short lived. After roughly a decade and a half of prosperity, by the late 1730s Canso's fishery and its associated settlement fell into a state of decline (Flemming 1977; Tulloch 1997). This deterioration can be attributed to a series of interrelated factors, notable among which were constraints caused by poor-quality fish and increased market competition (Tulloch 1987, 1997; Robinson 2000). The worst of Canso's refuse fish had typically been shipped to the West Indies, while the best grades of cod were kept for Southern Europe. Nevertheless, quantities of low-quality product had slipped by fish inspectors, thus making their way into European markets (Tulloch 1997: 70). This diminished the reputation of Canso's product and, by the second half of the 1730s, few buyers were willing to trade with the islands' merchants (Robinson 2000; Tulloch 1987, 1997). The fisheries based out of Massachusetts's ports such as Marblehead and Salem had also witnessed a revival, and fish proprietors in these ports were ever too happy to capitalize on Canso's poor reputation (Rawlyk 1973; Tulloch 1987, 1997). These factors ultimately

led to the virtual destruction of Canso's fishery by the late 1730s (Robinson 2000; Tulloch 1987, 1997).

By the early 1740s, tensions between France and England had once again risen to dangerous levels. Canso's already shabby fortifications had fallen into disrepair, and with the lack of a proper garrison and the increased threat of a French attack, many of the island's remaining fishermen and inhabitants began abandoning the settlement (Rawlyk 1994: 115). When King George's War broke out in 1744, a French force from Louisbourg destroyed what remained of the outpost (Chard 1976; Flemming 1977; Robinson 2000). The damage was left in disrepair, and the community remained largely uninhabited.

### **Previous Archaeological Research: Grassy Island**

The Canso Islands have long provoked academic curiosity. Notable archaeological research began on Grassy Island in 1975 with salvage operations at the sites of a former cemetery and the residence of military commander Captain Patrick Heron (Snow 1975). Two years later, Parks Canada acquired Grassy Island and resumed work there in 1978 under the direction of Robert Ferguson (Ferguson 1980; Ferguson et al. 1981). For over three decades Ferguson and his crews returned intermittently to the Canso Islands conducting ground and aerial reconnaissance, as well as targeted proton-magnetometer surveys, auger testing, and archaeological excavations (Ferguson 1980; Ferguson et al. 1981). Much of the focus was on Grassy Island, and excavations revealed several sites: Captain Heron's residence, a merchant premises, a tavern, fish flakes, a fishing shed, drains, wells, gardens, outbuildings, and a cobble road, among other features (Ferguson 1980; Ferguson et al. 1981). Combined, their findings offered a glimpse into the material lives and social history of Grassy Island—particularly as they apply to the island's wealthiest residents. It became apparent that within this coarse frontier community, station owners and operators had the financial means to import material elements of 18th-century polite

society and enjoy many of the associated comforts.

During the 18th century, the social and material lives of middling and wealthy North American colonists underwent a period of steady transformation. European perspectives regarding order and discipline, gentility and politeness, taste and style, and privacy and individuality progressively challenged elements of traditional ideology. All the while, growing international trade introduced myriad new goods and commodities into the lives of common settlers. As historian Kevin Sweeney (1994) observes: "[I]n eighteenth-century America possessions became tools for actively cultivating a distinctive genteel style of life that set off 'polite society' from the 'meaner sort.'" Objects ranging from buildings to buttons were increasingly specialized to reflect current concepts of "taste," while consumer goods were transformed into codified mediums through which to express individual refinement (Goodwin 1999; Pendery 1992). This process was linked to the performance of politeness; for example, fine imported table settings facilitated the ritualistic customs of a formal tea service, lavish luncheon, or extravagant dinner (Sweeney 1994). Within well-mannered social circles, combining "correct" etiquette with appropriate commodities demonstrated an individual's participation in genteel society (Goodwin 1999; Hodge 2014).

Excavations on Grassy Island reveal the degree to which the customs and commodities of "polite society" were transplanted into Canso's remote frontier community. This was particularly evident at a premises belonging to the How family. Edward and Deborah How were merchants and fishing-station owners whose material lives illustrate the degree of wealth enjoyed by some of those employed within Canso's fish trade (Campbell 1985; Hansen 1986; Moody 2004). Over several years they established a small empire that encompassed their two fishing operations, military facilities, and a property complete with a home, warehouses, a finger wharf, gardens, and livestock (Flemming 1977). The family's premises is the most extensively excavated site in Canso to date, and interpretations were aided by historical records, including a document detailing architectural losses that the

Hows sustained during the French attack of 1744 (Flemming 1977). Combined, the historical and archaeological evidence provides a glimpse into the family's social capital, economic wealth, and consumption patterns.

The Hows had a two-story home with a lean-to on the east side and two wings to the south (Ferguson et al. 1981; Flemming 1977). The house was of a three-bay, single-pile, hall-and-parlor plan, with a total of four hearths, a brewing copper, and a coal-storage shed, and was adorned with plastered walls, wainscoting, and imported Dutch tiles (Ferguson et al. 1981; Flemming 1977; Parks Canada 1980-1989). Their property contained three warehouses—two of which were used to store provisions for the garrison—as well as a stone-and-timber wharf, a palisade fence, a well, cobble paving, a cow house, a hog sty, a dove-cote, and gardens (Ferguson et al. 1981; Flemming 1977). Some features are known only through historical documentation, though many were uncovered during the course of excavations.

Amongst these architectural features archaeologists unearthed a wealth of high-status materials (Campbell 1985; Hansen 1986; Moody 2004). The How's artifact collection includes ornate buttons, buckles, and cuff-links, wig curlers, clock pieces, elegant glassware, and other lavish belongings (FIG. 2) (Campbell 1985, 1989; Moody 2004). The excavated assemblage also contained a rich and diverse collection of imported ceramics used for the consumption of fashionable beverages, such as coffee, punch, and tea (Hansen 1986). Particularly prevalent were Chinese porcelain tea wares, which, aside from utilitarian coarse earthenware, were the most prevalent ceramic type found on Grassy Island (Hansen 1986: 3). Few porcelain fragments were recovered from nonresidential contexts, including the tavern, highlighting the private and restrictive character of early 18th-century "polite society." Reportedly, few European goods were sent from Canso to New England (Tulloch 1987: 5-6), and it is safe to presume that the majority of goods used and consumed within Canso were imported directly from the North American colonies. However, archaeological evidence indicates that some of Canso's residents did take

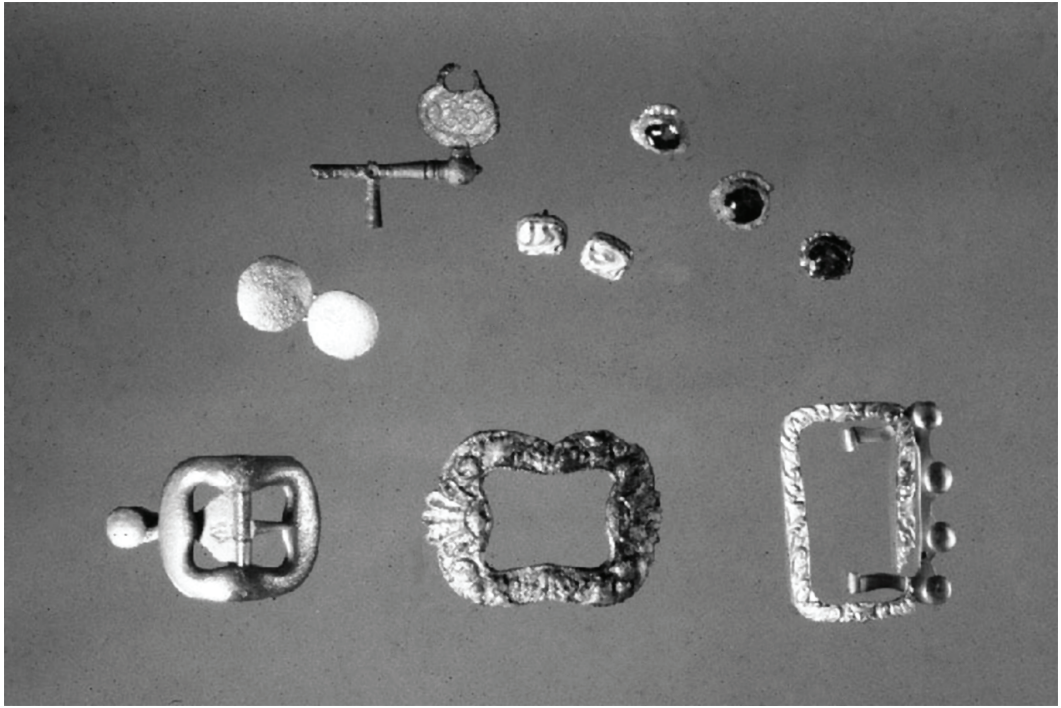


Figure 2. Parks Canada's excavations at the How property on Grassy Island unearthed a wealth of high-status artifacts associated with this merchant household. (Image courtesy of Parks Canada, 1985.)

personal advantage of their trading relationships (Hansen 1986).

Archaeological remains uncovered on Grassy Island provide important insight into the social history and consumption patterns of Canso's residents, though this work has focused on the year-round community and is limited in its ability to speak to the experiences of those fishermen, processors, and shore men who lived and worked within Canso's many operations. A 1735 report on Canso's affairs states that

[t]he inhabitants who stay the winter have all of them houses on the hill of Canso, where no fish is made, the flakes etc. being all round the waterside upon the other parts of the harbor, where the fishermen, shoarmen, and their owners etc. have houses amongst their flakes, for themselves and shore hands who cure the fish. (Cotterell 1735)

It is the houses among the flakes that have most captivated my interest, and it is these which offer information related to the experiences of migratory residents. However, barring a short underwater survey conducted in

1985 (Ringer 1985) and two days of testing in 2001 (Ferguson 2001), the remaining islands had received little archaeological attention. In an effort to gather information regarding Canso's migratory populations and their consumption patterns, fieldwork was planned at the site of an early 18th-century fishing station on Clarke Island in the hope of uncovering architectural remains and associated domestic deposits left by the island's inhabitants.

### **Robinson's Room and the Archaeology of Clarke Island**

Clarke Island is a 14 ac. granite outcrop covered by thin veneers of soil, open expanses of gooseberry and cranberry bushes, and thick stands of stunted and windswept spruce. On the eastern side it faces George Island; together they form Watering Cove—a small body of water with a freshwater stream. In the 1720s the island reportedly had a fishing station and blockhouse owned by Captain Andrew Robinson of Cape Ann, Massachusetts (Flemming 1977: 111). Fishing stations were commonly referred to as "rooms" and con-



tained all the facilities necessary to conduct the fishery (Pope 2009: 41). These industrial landscapes typically included wharves, stages for processing fish, cobble terraces and/or wooden flakes for drying catches, as well as cookhouses, dwelling houses, and other industrial and domestic features. Rarely, though, would an individual fishing station contain defenses as substantial as a blockhouse. Robinson was actively involved in skirmishes in Nova Scotia and elsewhere in the Northeast, and the inclusion of this feature within his fishing operation likely speaks to the frontier nature of the Canso Islands as well as the activities in which Robinson and his men participated.

Among his many exploits, Captain Andrew Robinson was a farmer, shipbuilder, and fishing captain who has been regarded historically as both a pioneer shipbuilder and an active frontiersman. When discussing Cape Ann's fishing industry, historian Daniel Vickers states:

Cutting timber, building boats, fishing along the coast, and traveling to and from Boston and Salem in vessels they manned themselves, men like Andrew Robinson ... assembled small fleets of twenty-to-forty-ton sloops and schooners that they employed on voyages to Canso and beyond. (Vickers 1994: 195)

Robinson is often referred to as the inventor of the schooner (Babson 1860; Hawes 1923; Pringle 1892: 252–253), though this claim has been widely debated (Story 1995: 10). He has also been the subject of wildly romanticized stories in which he is portrayed as heroically confronting and defeating aggressors, i.e., Babson (1860), Pringle (1892), and Hawes (1923). Robinson did participate in multiple attacks against indigenous and French people, but the nature of these encounters has undoubtedly been misrepresented to reflect colonial perspectives and settler interests.

The exact year of Robinson's arrival is unclear, though in 1722 he led his men in pursuit of a group of Mi'kmaq and French fighters who had raided the Canso Islands and captured New England vessels (Babson 1860; Pringle 1892). Robinson and his crew are reported to have retaken two vessels and killed several men. In 1724 he was one of fifteen individuals selected to "draw up and enforce regulations" within the community

(Flemming 1977: 100–101), and in 1725 Clarke Island was listed as housing his fishing station and blockhouse. Following 1725 there is little or no reference of Robinson in Canso; however, there is also no evidence to suggest an end to his operations.

Aside from the blockhouse, nothing was known about the other buildings within Robinson's Room. In an attempt to discern additional information regarding the social history of this fishing station and its domestic components, I carried out archaeological fieldwork on Clarke Island between 2014 and 2016 with the assistance of graduate students and other volunteers—including Robert Ferguson. We focused our efforts on a single building identified through a shovel test in 2014. The structure was located on a small hill on the northwest side of Clarke Island approximately 40–50 m from Watering Cove. A 1735 map of the Canso Islands (FIG. 3) shows three buildings in this general location and a 1742 map shows two, including the blockhouse (Bastide 1742). A total of 19 m<sup>2</sup> were archaeologically excavated, unearthing architectural remains and thousands of associated artifacts (FIG. 4). These findings offer important insight into the site's social history and the consumption patterns of the islands' migratory residents.

### Architectural Remains

There are few known descriptions of European migratory fishermen's camps; however, a glimpse into Nova Scotia's 17th-century fishery-related domestic architecture can be gleaned from the 1672 writings of Nicholas Denys (Denys 1908: 278–282). The Acadian explorer and entrepreneur depicts fishermen's dwellings as simple halls that were quickly constructed using pickets interlaced with fir boughs and covered with a ship's mainsail. The crew's bed platforms were made of woven rope and topped with a mattress of dry grass. Their few belongings were kept within a personal chest that was located near their bed. A separate captain's quarter was constructed in a similar fashion, but with a table, bed, and locked partition for storage of provisions. A third building was used as a cookhouse. Remarkably, these

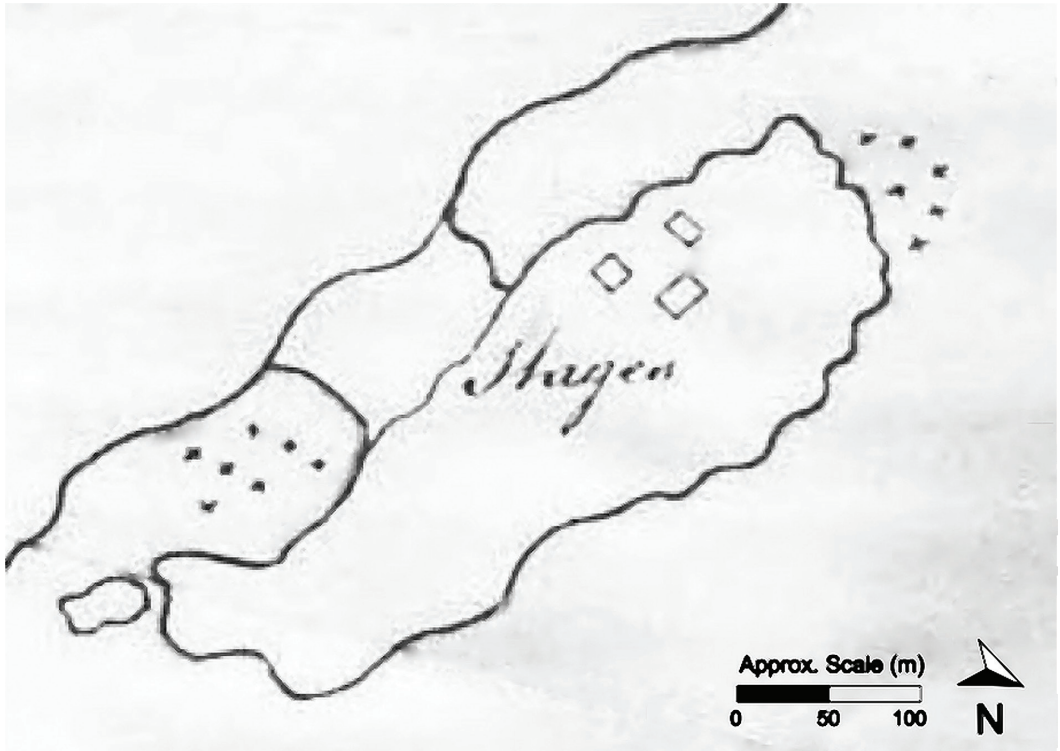


Figure 3. A 1735 map of Clarke Island depicts three buildings believed to have been situated within Robinson's Room. (Flemming 1977: 205.)



Figure 4. The 2015 excavations at Robinson's Room. (Photo by Adrian K. Morrison, 2015.)

accommodations were all completed by the crew themselves within two or three days (Denys 1908: 278–282).

Some variation certainly existed, but the degree of rudimentary impermanence seen in 17th- and 18th-century fisheries architecture has been discovered archaeologically at multiple sites within Newfoundland and elsewhere in the region (Clausnitzer 2018; Livingston and Losier, this issue; Pope 2013). This can be attributed, in part, to annual changes in ownership and usage rights. Each year, the first master to arrive in a particular harbor was awarded the position of Admiral and was granted the right to issue room locations for the given season (Clausnitzer 2018; Denys 1908). As there were no guarantees that one could return to the same location the following year, masters and company owners were unwilling to invest in more substantial architecture. Many rooms were intentionally torn down at the end of a season to prevent competing fishing crews from using the infrastructure in subsequent years (Pocius 1990: 65). If any crewmen stayed the winter, they routinely tore down stages and flakes for use as firewood (Pocius 1990: 65).

Canso's early 18th-century fishing rooms maintained many of the same features found within earlier establishments, though rooms were granted on a long-term basis "by the Governor or Commander in Chief of the Province, with the advice of H.M. Council," and rent was charged annually (Cotterell 1735). The understanding that one could occupy the same stretch of shoreline year after year must have provided the assurance necessary for additional architectural investments, a heightened degree of architectural permanence, and the confidence necessary to build more substantial structures, such as warehouses and wharves (Bastide 1742; Flemming 1977). Notably, references to Canso fishing operations contain few if any mentions of cookhouses or distinct captain's cabins and fishermen's halls. Within his 1749 report of losses, Edward How listed two stations in a 1749 account: one was reported as a "Dwelling house fram'd boarded Shingled and floor'd a Stone Chimney Cabbins & Conveincys for lodging" and the second was described as a "Dwelling house fram'd boarded Shingled

Thirty two feet long and twenty feet wide with two Chimneys" (Fleming 1977:131). Both properties were equipped with wharves, store-houses, and flake yards, consistent with the structures depicted on period maps (Bastide 1742; Flemming 1977). Edward How's are the best-known descriptions of domestic architecture directly associated with fishing rooms in Canso and provide a rare glimpse into the buildings' construction methods and structural details. Perhaps, most notably, they suggest a level of investment and permanence generally unseen within earlier migratory camps.

The architectural remains uncovered at Robinson's Room included a stone footing, a stone hearth and collapsed chimney, a drain, nails, spikes, clay daub, window glass, bricks, and a few pieces of structural hardware (FIG. 5). These findings are indicative of a small timber-framed cabin that was constructed fairly quickly, using a combination of local and imported materials. The foundation was composed of cobblestones laid directly on and against an exposed bedrock outcrop, and the building site was leveled off with a deposit of soil, sand, and gravel. To date, only three sides of the building (as evidenced by the stone footings) have been located, though the building is believed to have measured roughly 16–20 ft. long and between 14 and 16 ft. wide. It presumably had a single room—or two at most—and the hearth was a dominant feature on the eastern wall. The hearth, like the main superstructure, was rudimentary, made of roughly laid stones and built directly upon the exposed bedrock. Though intact elements of the hearth appear to be dry laid, fragments of mortar and pockets of sand were found amongst the chimney collapse, and a deposit of clay was discovered in a dense concentration below one section of the collapse, suggesting some use of bonding agents. The feature lacked any hearthstones or other structural or ornamental components, and while brick fragments were discovered amongst the collapsed chimney, there was no evidence of them being intentionally laid. Directly in front of the hearth was a stone-lined channel approximately 30–50 cm wide dug into the earthen floor and capped with small stones.



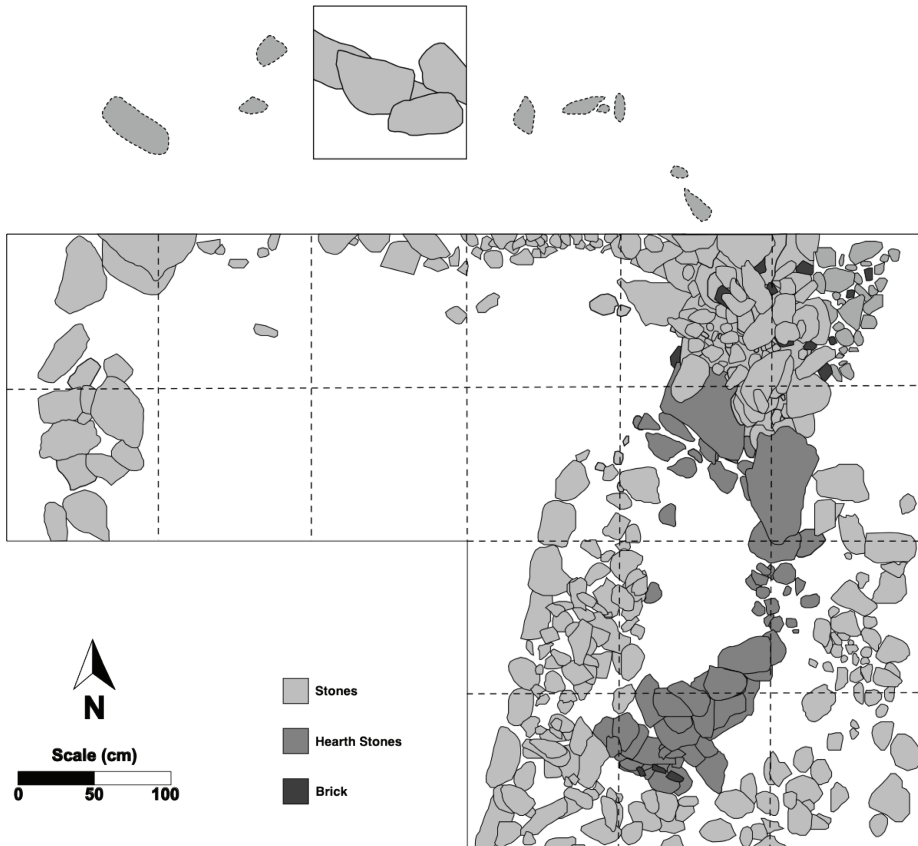


Figure 5. Between 2014 and 2016, 19 m<sup>2</sup> were excavated on Clarke Island, unearthing a sizeable portion of an early 18th-century dwelling house. (Map by Adrian K. Morrison, 2016.)

Though not fully explored, this feature was presumably a drain constructed to direct water away from the hearth and toward the exterior of the building. On the west side, facing the cove and opposite the hearth, was a small gap in the footing that may be the location of a former door. This interpretation is supported by the presence of door hardware as well as faunal remains and other domestic refuse found in close proximity.

Though the building was rudimentary and likely never intended to be particularly long lasting, the architectural artifacts discovered amongst its ruins suggest that it was framed, boarded, and potentially finished with glazed windows. These types of construction techniques do indicate some investment in time and material and a degree of intended longevity. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is more reminiscent of the fisheries architecture

described by Edward How than Nicholas Denys. However, its construction methods and the materials used pale in comparison to those discovered within Grassy Island contexts. Instead, they are reminiscent of a 17th-century planter's house discovered by Stephen Mills in Renews, Newfoundland, that also used local materials, measured approximately 14 × 20 ft. in size, and contained a large hearth and a centrally placed drain (Mills 2000).

### Additional Material Culture

The artifacts recovered from Clarke Island allow for a reasonable interpretation of the building's use and support the assumption that this structure was domestic rather than industrial in function. Most notable is the absence of objects directly connected to the fishery. Two hooks and a rolled lead sinker are

the only tangible links to the industry that brought inhabitants to Robinson's Room. The associated artifact collection is composed of over 10,000 pieces, but the overwhelming majority is associated with the consumption of food, alcohol, and tobacco, alongside smaller quantities of personal items and firearms-related material. Fishing rooms were industrial landscapes that placed labor over leisure and afforded little consideration for basic amenities. Within such spaces, simple pleasures like food, tobacco, and alcohol were among the few comforts available (Pope 1988; Vickers 1981; Wickens 1994).

Food-related artifacts consist primarily of ceramic wares and a few fragments of an iron pot. Unfortunately, many of the ceramics are too fragmented to assign to a specific type or vessel form but a small selection of English, Anglo-American, and French coarse-earthenware pots, pans, and jars were identified. These were discovered across the site, but were mainly concentrated around the hearth. Several pieces exhibit charring and scratch marks consistent with a dish used for cooking over an open fire (Griffiths 1978). The iron-pot fragments were found in close proximity and likely served the same or similar function. Also recovered were the remains of at least one Anglo-American storage pot, though the number of such vessels presumably present in the structure is believed to be higher. Except for a small assortment of tin-glazed earthenware, the site produced little in the way of serving dishes. This may be an indication of the communal nature of fishing-station life, where meals were prepared, cooked, and served from a single, shared pot (Champagne and Losier, this issue). It could also be a simple sign of the coarseness of camp life.

Migratory residents, like year-round inhabitants, had provisions imported directly into Canso. Bread, flour, pork, and beef were carried aboard overseas sack ships, whereas items, such as livestock, sugar, molasses, olives, oil, and lemons, were shipped from America (Tulloch 1987: 3). Fishermen further supplemented their diets by hunting for game, most notably seabirds (Noël 2010; Wickens 1994). The archaeological record uncovered at Robinson's Room includes a significant number of faunal remains from both

domesticated and wild animals. They were analyzed by Dierdre Elliott at Memorial University, who was able to identify several species, including pig, cattle, sheep (or goat), eider duck, heron, cod, and mussels (Elliott 2016). Included were calcined bones as well as large fragments, some of which exhibited butcher marks or other cuts and breaks. Though the remains do not allow for a recreation of the recipes cooked within this space, they are suggestive of a varied diet that must have been welcomed after a trip to the banks, where salted pork, hard bread, and stale water were characteristic of an offshore fishermen's diet (Vickers 1981: 202–203).

Alcohol was another distinctive dietary component for early 18th-century fishermen and shore hands. As Vickers has noted, fishermen's alcohol consumption increased throughout the 18th century, likely triggered by the adoption of offshore-banks fishing practices, which saw vessels remain at sea for 10 days to a month at a time (Vickers 1981: 196). The heightened demands of this labor coincided with increases in alcohol consumption, and the two were likely connected. During the 18th century the average Massachusetts vessel carried both rum and cider (Wickens 1994: 267–268), which included communal barrels as well as private stock (Vickers 1981: 203). Wine, rum, port, and cider were also imported directly into Canso (Tulloch 1987: 4), and drinking was noted as a common pastime for the islands' fish makers (Cotterell 1735; Tulloch 1987). The penchant to imbibe is demonstrated in the archaeological record. Among the artifacts recovered from Robinson's Room are the remnants of several drinking vessels, including jugs, mugs, and tankards (FIG. 6). Most were salt-glazed stoneware of English and German origin, with smaller quantities of coarse earthenware. The majority of drinking vessels are durable utilitarian ceramics, but the collection also includes fine glass stemware, wine and case bottle fragments, as well as barrel hoops and part of a brass barrel spigot.

Like alcohol, smoking was pervasive; clay tobacco pipes are by far the most prevalent artifact type within the entire collection (FIG. 7). Over 6,000 fragments were recovered, representing a minimum of more than 150 individual pipes—though the actual number is



Figure 6. An early 18th-century Westerwald stoneware mug recovered from in and around the hearth. (Photo by Adrian K. Morrison, 2015.)



Figure 7. A sample of the many pipe bowls recovered from Clarke Island. (Photo by Adrian K. Morrison, 2017.)

likely much higher. Multiple shapes, sizes, and manufacturers are represented, but several examples were produced by the same few makers and are of similar shapes and styles, suggesting the pipes may have been distributed within Canso and, potentially, Robinson's Room or even the building itself. Notably, however, most do exhibit signs of having been smoked, indicating that they had been used and were not new stock. Pipe fragments were discovered across the site in virtually every context, with the highest concentrations found in and around the hearth.

The recovered artifact collection also contains an assortment of personal objects connected to those who lived and worked within Robinson's Room. Included are five shoe-buckle fragments, 19 buttons, two glass beads, two small pieces of textile, as well as a thimble and a British half penny minted in 1724. By the early 18th century, the offshore fishery was considered socially acceptable as short-term work for all but those from the highest socioeconomic backgrounds (Vickers 1981: 221). Most of the personal items found at Robinson's Room exhibit little or no ornamentation, though the collection does contain a gold sleeve button (FIG. 8) and textile fragments sewn from silver-wrapped thread, which are the types of luxury objects associated with an affluent merchant or captain (perhaps Robinson himself).

Excavations also uncovered a variety of firearms-related artifacts, such as birdshot, musket balls, pistol shot, gunflints, a possible piece of gun hardware, and evidence of lead-shot production (FIG. 9). Given the common practice of hunting for seabirds, the presence of some firearms material is not surprising—particularly the birdshot. The quantity and diversity of objects, however, is notable and may be connected to the frontier tensions of early 18th-century Canso and the exploits of Robinson and his men. The cabin is also believed to have been in close proximity to the operation's blockhouse, and it is conceivable that ammunition for use in the blockhouse was manufactured in/around the cabin's hearth.

Collectively, the material record indicates that the structure found on Clarke Island was a place where food, alcohol, and tobacco were consumed, and the building has been

interpreted as a dwelling, likely occupied by Robinson or a shore man acting on his behalf. Luxury objects—most notably the gold sleeve button and textile fragments with silver-wrapped thread—were associated with someone of considerable wealth. Their presence implies this small space may have housed an individual of elevated social influence and economic status. Even the discovery of glass stemware and tin-glazed earthenware dishes exceeds the expectations of a worker's dwelling. Still, the sheer quantity of clay pipes alone suggests the place was used for social congregation and potentially for the distribution of alcohol and tobacco. Though commonplace consumables, these goods were valuable commodities within the historical fishery, as they were among the few luxuries available to all crew members (Pope 1989). Reports from Canso note that shore workers were given tobacco, alcohol, and other provisions as compensation for their work (Tulloch 1987: 3); in turn, fishermen who were paid in shares purchased such consumables from their employers (Tulloch 1987: 2–3). The Robinson's Room dwelling house may have been a venue for the acquisition of such goods.

Given the grueling nature of the banks fishery and the limitations of an offshore diet, trips back to port must have been welcomed opportunities for feasting, festivities, and socialization. Taverns and tipling houses were standard features in migratory-fishing rooms (Pope 1988: 23–25), and within Canso there were as many as 11 taverns operating simultaneously (Waterhous 1731). All seem to have been located on Grassy Island, and this likely created a demand for informal drinking establishments on the outer islands. It is possible the Clarke Island cabin acted as a type of tipling house where fishermen, shore men, and others could spend their limited free time eating, drinking, and smoking around a warm hearth.

## Conclusion

An examination of consumption patterns and material life within early 18th-century Canso provides rare insights into the settlement's social history and the means by which comfort and community were constructed within this remote, liminal, and





Figure 8. This small, early 18th-century, gold sleeve button was likely made in Massachusetts and lost by a fishing captain, merchant, or other individual of notable wealth. (Photo by Adrian K. Morrison, 2017.)



Figure 9. While these gun flints and lead shot may have been used for hunting, they are also a tangible link to the frontier wars of the 1720s. (Photo by Adrian K. Morrison, 2014.)

socially fluid outpost. Countless questions remain, though the few archaeological sites that have been excavated are crucial in illuminating small but relevant details about life on the islands. They highlight the diversity of living conditions and social interactions experienced by those who worked and dwelt within this outpost community. When discussing the findings from the How premises, historian Barry Moody (2004: 152) observed that “the rich archaeological evidence provides important insights into life in Canso during this period, suggesting a more sophisticated and varied existence, and greater comfort, than the transient nature of a rough fishing station might suggest.” Excavations on Clarke Island provide a different perspective. There, the coarseness of the migratory fishery was distinctively present, with little priority afforded to creature comforts.

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