

## (Re-)telling Newfoundland Sealing Masculinity: Narrative and Counter-narrative

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### Résumé de l'article

Tout au long de la controverse concernant la chasse aux phoques à Terre-Neuve à la fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les mouvements de protestation contre la chasse comme les contre-protestations, les politiques gouvernementales, les médias ainsi que l'opinion publique internationale sont devenus des lieux de discussion concernant la masculinité des chasseurs terre-neuviens. Lorsque que ces chasseurs ont tenté de définir leur masculinité, ils sont entrés en discussion avec les différents discours portant sur ce sujet. L'article qui suit, basé sur des entrevues récentes réalisées avec des chasseurs, démontre la complexité de ce processus identitaire. Si les chasseurs ont bien évidemment contesté les images négatives disséminées par les critiques environnementalistes, ils se sont néanmoins généralement positionnés en opposition à l'image des chasseurs enjoués ou des héros intrépides des glaces. Cet article explore la différence entre l'image traditionnelle plus romantique et statique de la masculinité de ces chasseurs et celle plus terre-à-terre et nuancée développée par ces mêmes chasseurs et leurs communautés au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

# **(Re-)telling Newfoundland Sealing Masculinity: Narrative and Counter-narrative**

**WILLEEN KEOUGH**

## ***Abstract***

*Throughout the controversy over Newfoundland sealing in the latter twentieth century, anti-sealing protest and counter-protest movements, government policy, the media, and the broader arena of international opinion all became sites for the creation of knowledge about Newfoundland sealing masculinity. Sealers engaged with these various discourses as they negotiated their own masculine identities. Recent interviews with sealers of the period reveal the complexity of this process. Not surprisingly, they challenged negative portrayals by their environmentalist critics. More intriguingly, they often positioned themselves outside a Newfoundland cultural narrative of “jolly ice-hunters” and undaunted heroes of the ice-floes. This article explores the disconnect between a romanticized, static cultural understanding of sealing masculinity and the more grounded, nuanced masculinity articulated by sealers and their local communities.*

## ***Résumé***

*Tout au long de la controverse concernant la chasse aux phoques à Terre-Neuve à la fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les mouvements de protestation contre la chasse comme les contre-protestations, les politiques gouvernementales, les médias ainsi que l'opinion publique internationale sont devenus des lieux de discussion concernant la masculinité des chasseurs terre-neuviens. Lorsque que ces chasseurs ont tenté de définir leur masculinité, ils sont entrés en discussion avec les différents discours portant sur ce sujet. L'article qui suit, basé sur des entrevues récentes réalisées avec des chasseurs, démontre la complexité de ce processus identitaire. Si les chasseurs ont bien évidemment contesté les images négatives disséminées par les critiques environnementalistes, ils se sont néanmoins généralement positionnés en opposition à l'image des chasseurs enjoués ou des héros intrépides des glaces. Cet article explore la différence entre l'image traditionnelle plus romantique et statique de la masculinité de ces chasseurs et celle plus terre-à-terre et nuancée développée par ces mêmes chasseurs et leurs communautés au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.*

The Newfoundland seal hunt was a site of intense controversy in the second half of the twentieth century, and tensions between animal rights activists and sealing communities received extensive coverage in the international media. The conflict revealed two very different interpretations of masculinity: the seal saviour/sea shepherd versus the skilled hunter/family provider/local hero. In the court of world opinion, each situated itself on moral high ground and undermined the other's claims to respectable manhood.<sup>1</sup>

Yet while these two discursive threads presented themselves very distinctly in the period, the seeming clarity of difference becomes muddled with deeper reading. Male activists, for example, did position themselves in direct contrast to Newfoundland sealers, whom they saw as savage and cruel. Theirs was a gentler, more ethical masculinity — an eco-masculinity that understood male environmentalists as nurturers of all species and caretakers of the planet. But while they disassociated themselves from the hyper-masculinity of the hunter and warrior, they sometimes borrowed from that same image-bank to represent themselves. Dressed in camouflage suits, these “eco-warriors” raced to a “front” that had become a “battleground” for the “seal wars.”<sup>2</sup> So there was a tension in their self-identity as they also defined themselves in terms of older, more combative images of masculinity.

There was also some disjuncture in understandings of sealing masculinity within Newfoundland, even within the large pro-sealing community in the province. This paper will investigate an intriguing tension between the highly romanticized versions of sealing that permeated popular culture *vis-à-vis* the much more pragmatic ways that sealers of the latter twentieth century and their local communities articulated sealing masculinity in 32 interviews that I recently conducted in Newfoundland.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, it will provide a new perspective on the ways that Euro-North American hunting masculinities have been understood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The current historiography focuses on sport hunting — a return to the primitive in response to the over-civilizing effects of industrializing society, as men's work moved away from forests and fields into offices and factories.<sup>4</sup> Newfoundland sealing masculinity, by contrast, developed in a proto-industrial context, where seal hunting (in combination with the cod fishery) was linked to economic survival. The current literature observes that bourgeois sport hunters actually forged a separate identity for themselves from “less respectable” hunters who killed for subsistence or commercial gain. They followed a “sportsman's creed”: that only the adult male animals should be killed in as “clean” a manner as possible.<sup>5</sup> The slaughter of whitecoats in Newfoundland with gaffs (long poles with barbed hooks at one end) and, later, hakapiks and guns — although adjudged humane by the scientific community — flew in the face of this bourgeois code of hunting masculinity. In Newfoundland, however, sealing represented a form of working-class manliness that was not only

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acceptable to local bourgeois culture but, with a very few exceptions, also celebrated by it.

Yet, I will argue, this very celebration of sealing manhood has, in many ways, been suffocating and oppressive for Newfoundland sealers. It has left little space for their own renderings of day-to-day experiences, leaving them in a limbo between discourses of heroic masculinity and their own sense of identity. It can be difficult, even risky, for sealers to articulate memories of the hunt that do not conform with public versions of the past, even when — or perhaps especially when — those broader discourses extol and glorify.<sup>6</sup> Yet as sealers of the late twentieth century tried to bring coherence to their own understandings of sealing in our interviews, they not only countered criticisms from environmentalists but also challenged some local cultural understandings of their masculine identities. This paper will explore the tension between these discursive threads — the narrative and the counter-narrative, if you will, in the telling and retelling of sealing masculinity in Newfoundland.



The Newfoundland seal hunt has not always been an exclusively male enterprise. Hunting seals near shore and processing carcasses and pelts was a family affair in the days of early European settlement and vital to the survival of the white settler society on the northeast coast. However, when a spring vessel hunt developed in the late 1700s and became increasingly commercialized as it fed the demands of world industrial markets for oil, the main hunt became a masculine activity in both its harvesting and processing sectors. Large sealing vessels now brought all-male crews offshore to the whelping ice, and while a smaller “landsman” hunt that involved whole families continued, a cultural linkage between sealing and masculinity was forged.<sup>7</sup>

Since the middle decades of the nineteenth century, then, the dominant cultural understanding of the seal fishery has been of an exclusively masculine space — where men and boys tested themselves in a harsh, frozen landscape; where cruel sealing masters drove their crews to exhaustion while greedy merchants urged on their fleets with the toast “Bloody decks and a bumper crop”; where countless ships were crushed in the ice and thousands of men lost their lives. Still, men, young and old, fought for a berth, because “going to the ice” was a rite of manhood, and sealers were hailed as “men of the Viking breed” for their skill and their ability to endure hardship and danger at the “front.” This metanarrative was saturated with images of heroic masculinity, and it constructed sealing manhood by deploying all the classical elements of conflict: man against man; man against nature; man against himself.

Yet this discursive rendering of Newfoundland sealing masculinity was highly romanticized, urban, and bourgeois. Indeed, it fit very nicely within a broader, imperial literature on the adventure hero that was evolving in the same

period and both reflected and contributed to a major shift in dominant understandings of masculinity in the British world. Bourgeois masculinity was increasingly chafing at the constraints of domesticated manliness, whereby responsible husbands and fathers worked hard in the world of business, industry, and/or politics to maintain and defend the private, domestic world of marriage and family. Amidst growing concerns about the softening of manhood in the offices and boardrooms of the industrializing age, the hegemonic ideal was reworked to recover and re-incorporate the body and physical hardiness into what had become a rather genteel, cerebral masculinity. Adventure fiction — such as *Treasure Island* (1883), *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), and *Captains Courageous* (1897) — helped forge a close relationship between heroic masculinity, nation, and empire. And soon, the reports of far-flung, real-life adventures — of men thrusting through polar seas, penetrating darkest Africa, mounting the world's highest peaks (and, yes, the sexualized imagery has meaning here, because nature was gendered feminine and needed to be tamed) — helped all men participate in a process of reclaiming a more physical, adventurous masculinity, especially as these stories became more accessible in a period of intensifying mass popular culture.<sup>8</sup> Like polar explorers, Newfoundland sealers were scripted in the role of heroic masculinity. Theirs was primarily a working-class masculinity, but it was still highly respectable and emblematic of the superiority of Western manhood and the British “race.” Within these narratives, sealing vessel owners and captains were raised into the echelons of the empire's finest: “brave, strong, and daring ... in the truest sense of the words they were ‘Captains Courageous,’ and of such a type as placed them in the foremost ranks of our ninetee[n]th century Empire builders.”<sup>9</sup>

This assertion is not to imply that sealing masculinity was uniformly valorized in Newfoundland before the arrival of animal rights activists at the front. Philip Toque of Carbonear, who went to the ice on his father's vessel in 1834, described the seal fishery as not only a physically dangerous activity, but also “a nursery for moral and spiritual evils” and “a sink of iniquity, where almost every principle of morality is laid prostrate, and the heart shriveled up to the narrow dimensions of pounds, shillings, and pence.”<sup>10</sup> In the late 1880s, Lady Edith Blake, wife of Newfoundland's Governor Henry Blake, decried the “cruelties and unnecessary barbarities” of the hunt and the “wholesale brutalization of large numbers of ordinary unthinking human beings,” who had been “allowed to retrograde from the humanizing benefits supposed to be reaped from civilization.”<sup>11</sup> The industry was turning working men into mere brutes — something less than human and definitely less than manly — and she was left to wonder at the fond reception that sealers received after returning from the hunt:

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Groups of filthy and foul-smelling men, their clothes clotted with blubber and gore, loiter about the grogships, or stand staring and spitting *ab libitum*. But their dirt and other drawbacks only seem to increase the heroic attributes of the 'soilers' in the eyes of the population. The town cadgers gaze on them with undisguised admiration, and they may be seen walking with respectable-looking women evidently proud of the escort of their greasy cavaliers.<sup>12</sup>

Such critiques were drowned out by more sympathetic and increasingly awe-inspired renderings of the dangers of the hunt and the "skill and fortitude" with which the sealers dealt with the perils of their trade. "Big-boned, broad-chested fellows are our sealers," boasted Rev. John A. Harvey, "as fine seamen as any in the world. To see them jumping ashore after a successful voyage ... is a sight worth remembering."<sup>13</sup>

Earlier writings about the seal fishery, while occasionally mentioning hardships, had generally been more detached and scientific in tone.<sup>14</sup> By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a sense of romance had pervaded descriptions of the hunt as observers described high adventure, excitement, and imminent danger in a world far removed from the safety and comforts of the domestic hearth.<sup>15</sup> In the midst of the narrative were the "fearless" and "hardy fishermen" who ventured into "crushing ice-masses ... where other mariners would shrink away in terror."<sup>16</sup> Published in Britain and across North America, these accounts were often accompanied by illustrations of sealing vessels dwarfed by looming icebergs in dark, menacing seas, of sealers leaping from pan to pan, wielding gaffs, or cutting channels through the ice to free jammed vessels.<sup>17</sup> These men were the epitome of respectable working-class manhood — "men of iron"<sup>18</sup> "men of endurance without limit,"<sup>19</sup> who were "[b]orn and bred to the ice ... [and willing to] go through a prodigious amount of hardship and hard work without a murmur."<sup>20</sup>

Nowhere was the bravery of the sealers hailed with greater admiration and respect than in narratives and songs of sealing disasters — and there were certainly many tragedies in the industry to provide backdrops.<sup>21</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, for example, Arthur P. Silver paraphrased (with some poetic license, I suspect) an interview with J.A. Farquhar, survivor of the *Greenland* tragedy of 1898, in which some 50 men died or went missing during a violent winter storm at the front:

[Finding ourselves adrift on an ice-floe, cut off from our ship], there suddenly burst over us a cruel, blinding snow-storm, darkening the air and seeming to bring on us in a moment the terrifying gloom of night. And suddenly, with incredible rapidity, dark masses of clouds piled themselves in the eastern sky, and out from their ranks there burst a tempest of awful fury. The sea now became churned into an angry, seething maelstrom, which caused our floating island of ice to heave up and down in a sickening manner. The temperature fell

lower and lower, until the savage cold went through and through our sealskin clothing, cutting like a knife. The salt spray, freezing as it fell far from the edge of the ice-field, encased all whom it reached with a covering of ice like a coat of glistening armour .... What was to be done? Absolutely nothing, apparently, save to face our hopeless misery and die, perhaps even inch by inch, as became brave men, without a murmur of complaint, sharing the fate which at various times had befallen so many of our countrymen before us.<sup>22</sup>

In these tellings, nature was a cruel conqueror; yet sealers still maintained a manly dignity in succumbing to its power. Sealing masculinity was thus framed in terms of not only a man's capacity to face the worst that nature could hurl at him, but also his ability to die with honour and courage.

Such renditions of sealing masculinity persisted right into the mid-twentieth century, even though by then the large vessel hunt had gone into serious decline, with only a handful of sealing ships bringing mere tens of men to the ice in an industry that had once employed hundreds of ships and thousands of men.<sup>23</sup> Still, popular cultural representations evoked the "high adventure, romance, great hardship and tragedy" of the seal hunt — a "tradition that is hallowed by more than two centuries."<sup>24</sup> Going to the ice was much more than a livelihood; it was almost a compulsion to those men who heard "the sealer's call":

I must go up to the ice again  
And mix with a crew of men,  
Fearless and bold on the ice floe,  
Willing and zealous and keen,  
Men who can leap from pan to pan,  
While the surging ice-fields roll,  
Men undaunted and unafraid  
Of the blizzards from Arctic Pole.<sup>25</sup>

This poem (owing much to John Mansfield's "Sea Fever") reflected a broader cultural assumption that sealers of true Viking spirit could not resist the lure of the ice each spring. Despite the shrinking fleet, said *Bowring's Magazine*, the seal fishery still enticed the "hardy and adventurous," for it was one of the "few commercial enterprises in the civilised world where man can pit his wits and endurance against the forces of nature." Although markets were shrinking, the hunt still stirred the souls of Newfoundland working men:

It is a saga of the sea, of hardship and adventure, courageous deeds and comradeship. It is more than a tale of colourful business undertaking, for who can measure a day's pay in terms of danger, hunger, freezing cold and frequent encounters with death? Many men have given their lives in search for the seal and hundreds of ships have been lost, but in Newfoundland a berth to the ice has always been considered a coveted honour.<sup>26</sup>

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Thus, when animal rights activists began to arrive in the province in the 1960s and 1970s, the broader Newfoundland culture countered protestors' discourse of a cruel and barbaric sealing masculinity with a firm understanding of a courageous, skilled provider who was very much cast in the character of the adventure hero. This image was resoundingly articulated in publications such as Cassie Brown's *Death on the Ice* (1972), which combined elements of both pathos and conflict in a mind-searing narrative of the *Newfoundland* sealing disaster of 1914, when 132 men were stranded on the ice for two days and nights during a vicious blizzard. In the book's foreword, Harold Horwood wrote:

Every spring for more than a century Newfoundland men and boys went out in ships to the most dangerous and brutal adventure that has ever been called an industry — the seal hunt. More than a thousand of them died when their ships sank, crushed like eggshells by colliding ice-fields, or exploded, or failed to pick them up from drifting floes, when boats were driven away in blizzards, or when those on foot were caught by storms. Survivors often lost fingers or toes, or sometimes feet or legs from freezing or other injuries.

He went on to denounce “the greed of the shipowners,” who refused to provide proper food, clothing, and safety equipment for the sealers. He described gruesome conditions on board sealing vessels, where sealers drank water that was “polluted with blood and seal fat until it stank” and slept in ships' holds on top of the pelts and fat “in utter filth.”<sup>27</sup> And yet, Brown herself insisted, the sealers were always anxious to get a berth:

The eager seal hunters knew what they were heading for — a terrible voyage, living and working like dogs, their arms constantly caked with blood up to the shoulder, short of sleep, and with little time to do more than snatch a bite to eat, and working, constantly cold, on heaving, cracking sheets of ice that could give way under them or break off and float away with them into the icy darkness — they knew all this, but they cheerfully flocked into St. John's to volunteer, in fact to compete, for tickets to berths on the ships going “to the ice.”<sup>28</sup>

Published the following year, Farley Mowat's *Wake of the Great Sealers* was filled with the language of heroic struggle and evocative visual images by artist David Blackwood of vessels jammed in the ice or shattered by fiery explosions, sealers staggering off the edges of shifting icefields or frozen together on the pans, their heads and hands turned upward in mute supplication to final visions of home and loved ones.<sup>29</sup> These representations of brave, determined ice-hunters, willing to stare into the face of hell to earn a livelihood, were reinforced in numerous Newfoundland media reports during a period of intensive confrontations with animal rights activists in the 1970s through the 1990s.<sup>30</sup>



Yet these narrative tropes of epic struggle, pathos, and spectacle were largely absent from recently collected oral histories of sealers who were active in the industry in that period and the members of their families and communities.<sup>31</sup> In this dissonance between sealers' narratives and the romanticized cultural understanding of the hunt can be heard a deliberate assertion by sealers of the right to articulate their own version of masculinity. The animal rights activists do not have it right, according to sealing communities, but the broader Newfoundland culture does not always have it quite right either. Essentially, their counter-narratives engage and challenge both.<sup>32</sup>

Granted, sealers' understandings share some common ground with the larger Newfoundland narrative. They do have a strong sense of being family providers, for example. In the latter twentieth century, sealing brought in roughly one-third of the cash income earned by a sealing family — a significant amount in many small coastal communities, and often essential in financing the upcoming fishing season. When the sealers had a good year, local economies also benefitted from the extra cash flow, and even the churches would find that their collection plates in the aftermath of the hunt were "filled with \$20 bills."<sup>33</sup> In addition, most sealers establish their sealing lineage back to a great-grandfather's or great-great-grandfather's day, situating themselves within a patriline of swilers dating back to the early 1800s. Like the larger cultural narrative, they claim that sealing is "in the blood" or "part of our nature," and that they learned how to kill and skin seals from fathers, uncles, and brothers. It might be easily assumed, then, that the industry has created a homosocial space, where men can escape their womenfolk and enjoy the male comradery of the hunt. But sealing was and is not like sport hunting, sealers are quick to point out; the men are out there to make a livelihood. They work hard in uncomfortable and dangerous conditions over long hours and have little energy for fraternizing at the end of the day.

There was some excitement in going to the ice, a sense of adventure to the extent that they were setting off to earn significant income and try out their skills at "swatching" (shooting older seals in the water) and "copying" (jumping from one ice pan to another). But, primarily, as one retired sealer told me, they "were looking for seals, not adventure." It was gruesome, dangerous work and sealers felt that they were "lucky to get back alive."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, several wives of sealers told me that the first thing they did when their husbands got home was to wash the stink off them and then check them over carefully to make sure that all the most important parts were still there.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, there was a great deal of danger involved, whether in the small-boat landsman hunt or the large-vessel hunt offshore, and almost all of my narrators related personal experiences of being trapped in shifting ice, drifting off course in winter storms, or falling through the ice.

While the broader culture hailed them for their bravery, neither sealers themselves nor people in their local communities spoke of them as being heroic

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for facing these dangers. The hazards were acknowledged; one wife told me that she felt every spring as if her husband were going off to war and did not know if she would ever see him again.<sup>36</sup> But the “greasy cavaliers”<sup>37</sup> and “jolly ice-hunters”<sup>38</sup> of the nineteenth century had lost their swagger by the latter decades of the twentieth. Sealing had become just something that you did as part of “the rhythm of the seasons.”<sup>39</sup> Those men who chose not to go sealing, either because they could not bring themselves to kill the animals or because they felt it was too dangerous, were not looked down upon by the rest of community. Granted, sealing offered an opportunity in the winter and early spring to earn some cash or provide fresh meat for families and work dogs, but pursuing the hunt was not a requirement of responsible masculinity along the northeast coast. Some men, for example, worked in the lumber-woods instead as a means of contributing to family incomes. Virtually all of them were involved in other fisheries. Sealing was “always a good start to our spring,” explained one, but it was just part of a year-long fishing enterprise that “never stopped.”<sup>40</sup>

All sealers told me that there was no thrill in the actual killing of the animals. Every sealer remembered his first kill as being really difficult, especially if it involved a whitecoat. “A whitecoat looks up at you with them eyes,” one recalled, and then “you had to beat him over the head. It wasn’t easy.”<sup>41</sup> Another told me, “Every time I went out, I swore I would never go again, that I was throwing away my knife. But the next year, I’d be back at it again [out of economic necessity].”<sup>42</sup> None remembers his first kill as a significant moment when he passed from boyhood to manhood. One sealer told me that after killing the first 20 or so, you stop feeling guilty; another estimated the number at 100. None of them indicated to me that he enjoyed the hunt. “There was really no joy in the killing,” said one retired sealer. “But, I guess, you appreciate that your hunt was successful. As far as the joy in killing, no, there was really no joy in killing a seal .... These seals were available, and you went and got them in season.”<sup>43</sup> A former resident of the northeast coast, whose own family had been involved in sealing for generations, observed:

I never, ever thought of these people killing animals out of like blood thirst, you know, blood lust. There was no enjoyment in killing. It was just the same as, you know, firing at vegetables .... And seals were like fish, were no more than cod, you know. It was there for the taking, and it was what God gave you.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, there is a strong element of religiosity in the intensity of their belief that by harvesting seals, they are simply following God’s plan. One older sealer quoted a verse from Genesis (1:28–31) to justify the hunt, arguing that “man was given dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the animals of the field.”<sup>45</sup> Another explained:

To me, in some ways, it's almost a spiritual thing, in that people believe that this is the way God ... designed the whole system. That's what [the seals are] there for .... These are just one of God's creatures; we're all God's creatures. And the reason that that animal is there is for us [to harvest responsibly].<sup>46</sup>

Sealers and other community members all differentiated between sport hunting for trophies and hunting for survival. In fact, many referred to the industry as a fishery rather than a hunt, because they have always seen sealing as part of a coastal experience that took them through the year — fishing for capelin, cod, salmon, flounder, herring, and seals as the species came within range of the coast. As one explained:

I don't think that we can connect the seal fishery as [being] a seal hunt .... It's a part of a cycle in your life, as a mariner, that goes from one season of your life to another season, and it's all brought on by nature itself .... So I don't want the seal fishery to be seen as just a hunt .... My feeling as a professional fisherman, a professional sealer, is it's part of our overall fishing enterprise .... The same boats that we use to catch groundfish, we use to catch seals, and it's just a cycle.<sup>47</sup>

Sealers were “honest people, making an honest living,” another told me.<sup>48</sup> The seals appeared at a certain time of year and the coastal populations harvested them, like any other resource that was available. They were simply doing what had to be done to survive. While some also hunted large land animals, such as moose and caribou, they contrasted themselves to sportsmen who hunt similar game: “They want the antlers,” one explained. “We want the hind quarters.”<sup>49</sup> Ironically, sealers have been far less likely than male animal rights activists to present their masculinity in terms of hyper-masculine images such as the hunter or the warrior. They criticize bourgeois sport hunters as wasteful and often (if unconsciously) inhumane because so many are amateurs and not competent with their weapons.

Sealers are troubled by accusations of barbarism and cruelty in the seal hunt, which, they think, emanate from the disconnect between urban sensibilities and a rural understanding of what is necessary to put meat on the table:

It was just nature. You know, animals bleed, and there's blood, and the thing is dead, and so what? The only difference between that and a turnip is that a turnip doesn't bleed .... It was never an issue of being bloodthirsty or cruel; it was just what you did, as simple as that. Same as ... farmers .... [T]hey raise animals to kill animals. It's all in a day's work ... and no more and no less.<sup>50</sup>

They dissociate themselves from hyper-masculinity and point to the relatively few confrontations that sealers have provoked through the years. Although they feel that they have been harassed almost beyond endurance, both on the ice and

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off, they speak of their ability to walk away from potential physical altercations. One sealer who had worked at the front remembered how frustrating it was to be dogged by protestors shouting “murderers” and “killers,” and how dangerous it was to have helicopters stirring up wind and snow on the ice as the men tried to carry out their work. Some sealers gesticulated angrily at the protestors, he told me, but, “You’re tired, you’re hungry, you have a big knife. It could have been a lot worse.”<sup>51</sup> Many spoke of an incident in St. Anthony during the early days of animal rights protests in Newfoundland. In 1977, Brian Davies and activists from the International Fund for Animal Welfare arrived in the community with the intention of taking a helicopter to the icefields. Some 75 international reporters also descended upon the small town. Sealers and their supporters decided to mount a peaceful protest by lying on the snowy ground between Davies’ accommodations at the Viking Motel and his helicopter, daring him to walk over them. Davies declined, and the sealers were arrested for denying him access to the helicopter. Ultimately, however, the superintendent of the RCMP in Newfoundland wrote to the town of St. Anthony to commend residents for their restraint, and sealers and their families remember this as an example of the ability of sealers to maintain their dignity and composure under pressure.<sup>52</sup>

They also take pride in their ability to carry out the hunt proficiently, while causing minimal pain to the animals. “I got compassion for all animals,” said one sealer. “I can kill a seal [to make a living], but I do want a clean kill.”<sup>53</sup> Many feel that the gaff was the most effective and humane method, while some preferred the hakapik or the rifle. Almost all were happy to change to using rifles in the landsman hunt, however, as they were confident in their shooting skills and realized that their use of rifles was less disturbing to the public. Indeed, it was less troubling to many sealers as well, for it put some distance between them and the animal. Regardless, sealers insist that they have always made every effort to dispatch the animal with the first blow or shot and estimate their success rates in percentages in the high 90s. As for the method, they shrug their shoulders in terms of the outcome for the animal and say, “Dead is dead.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, when the Department of Fisheries and Oceans introduced regulations that required the sealers to strike each seal on the head three times with a club, the locals observed: “One to kill the animal, one for DFO, and one for Greenpeace.”<sup>55</sup> One older sealer admitted that he has seen thousands harvested by various methods but “you still can’t make it look good.”<sup>56</sup> Still, he pointed out, while the presence of blood may offend urban sensibilities, it is part of slaughtering animals; the killing itself is efficient and humane<sup>57</sup> — a point of view that was shared by all my narrators.

There has certainly never been any ritualistic celebrating of the kill in the Newfoundland seal hunt. Although there was some storytelling — usually about the loss of boats and lives — when men and boys gathered in the

“store,”<sup>58</sup> there was no boasting or fond recollections of glory days because, in their eyes, the hunt was simply not very pleasant. So while we can find many songs and chronicles that celebrated bumper crops and elevated high-liner captains—the old jowlers like Abram Kean, “the greatest seal killer of them all” — to the status of legends, most of these were, again, for broader consumption.<sup>59</sup> They have not become a corpus of lore that sealers bring out as they sit by the fire. As for those old jowlers, narrators spoke with much more respect for those captains who put the safety of their men above the outcome of the hunt and who looked after the people of the community — people such as Captain John Blackmore and Captain Morrissey Johnson. Abram Kean was no hero to late twentieth-century sealers; he was the devil incarnate for his cavalier neglect of ordinary sealers — an attitude that they feel was manifested in his prioritizing seal pelts over sealers in the *Newfoundland* disaster of 1914.

The sealers of the late twentieth century separate their working ethos from the greed and hunger for profit that drove the large commercial hunt from the mid-nineteenth century into the early twentieth, and goaded captains such as Kean to fill their below-decks with pelts and fat in a race to earn the title of high-liner of the fleet each year. They acknowledge that this type of hunt was destructive to the environment and could not be sustained. One retired sealer spoke of the immorality of capitalism and urbanization, which “separates us from the sea and the topsoil that feeds us.” He felt that sealers had been increasingly caught up in these forces in the past, because “they got to pay for their dinner; they got to make money.” As a result, they were “forced to do things to satisfy the market, and that’s very destructive to the food that’s feeding us.”<sup>60</sup> Sealers say that they have learned from the past and know that they can no longer pursue the seal fishery in the way that their forefathers had hunted in the height of the commercial hunt. Indeed, those families that have been involved primarily in the landsmen hunt argue that they have always been good stewards of the environment. “Our forefathers ... had more insight and were more conservation-minded than [even] the protesters are now, because they only took what they needed,” whether that was 20 seals or 50, to provide for their families and other community members.<sup>61</sup>

Challenging representations of sealers as interlopers in the natural world, sealers and sealing communities present themselves as conservationists who are keenly attuned to the needs of the environment. Fishers and sealers have always known that you have to maintain a balance in nature, one told me, long before government scientists and activists came on the scene. “They probably couldn’t see the scientific of it,” he said, “but they could see the realities.”<sup>62</sup> Another argued that they are “a lot better managers” than the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. “We’re on the ocean,” he told me. “We see what’s going on .... We know what the environment is. We know what to look for.”<sup>63</sup> Sealers

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see themselves as very much part of the ecosystem — just one of the species that is part of maintaining a balance. “Life depends on life,” one told me. “There’s no way out. Fish eat smaller fish, and smaller fish depend on an insect ... If I’m going to live, an animal must die.”<sup>64</sup> Another compared himself to the polar bear. “We [are] all predators,” he observed; yet predators have their place in the system as well.<sup>65</sup>

They worry that, in protecting larger fish-eating mammals, such as whales and seals, we are forgetting to care for their prey — the cod, herring, capelin, and other smaller species that are part of the food chain. “Nature is crying out,” one told me. “The resources of the sea are no longer in balance.”<sup>66</sup> Another argued that sealers have always “respected the role of the seal in the environment,” but that the privileging of this species will ultimately require a seal cull if groundfish in Newfoundland waters are to be saved. A cull would be the most wasteful form of hunting, in his opinion, as carcasses would be dumped with no utilization of the animals whatsoever.<sup>67</sup> Sealers feel that they are far more connected to nature than “urbanites,” who are too removed from the realities living in a coastal environment: “[Y]ou were always taught as young people, to have respect, to make sure that whatever you are doing, when it comes to harvesting the resources ... of the ocean, you should use it wisely, and if you use it wisely, it will always be there.”<sup>68</sup> While this desire to remain in balance with nature seems commonsensical to them, various media accounts and my own interviews suggest that articulating sealing masculinity in terms of conservationism has been a more recent rhetorical strategy from the 1970s onwards. This is not to say that sealers have only recently become aware of a need to balance resources, but rather that they have self-consciously begun to think and speak of themselves as environmentalists; and there can be little doubt that this was in response to the protest movement.

Another facet of sealing masculinity that has developed more recently is a greater sense of professionalism. Granted, pride in skill — the knack of understanding ice conditions and the movements of tides and winds, for example, or the ability to dispatch a seal and pelt it properly — has always been part of sealing masculinity. But in recent decades, there has been a greater effort to set standards in the industry and ensure that they are being met by all practitioners. There has thus been an open engagement with creating the qualified sealing specialist: ensuring that killing methods are humane, moving to a more sustainable landsman hunt, training in new technologies on board boats, obtaining sealing licenses, and forming a Canadian Sealers’ Association to oversee the industry and lobby on its behalf. Sealers are no longer willing to follow the old ways unreflectively and see themselves as modernizing and improving the industry. One of my narrators partially credited this transition to encounters with protestors in the late twentieth century:

[W]hat I have found, with all of this protest and the various groups, is I've learned a few things. Maybe, yes, I did some things wrong and I admitted that, but from all of this I have learned, and not only me, but hundreds of our sealers, have learned to be more professional through the debates that have taken place over the years. So if there's any credit I could give to some of these groups it's that, yes, there was some people who went out and who probably didn't respect animals the way they should, but we've educated ourselves and we've learned a lot of things, and if there was people who done things in a cruel way, you know, we have decided that if you're going to go out, you're going to do your job right, and ... do [your] work in a professional manner.<sup>69</sup>

Those very few who have made no effort to meet these standards are described as "amateurs" and "yahoos."<sup>70</sup> They are not included in the ranks of "proper sealers."

Similarly, there has been a growing sense of entrepreneurship among sealers in recent decades. For those remaining in the industry, it has become imperative to find new markets (primarily in the east), develop new products, and market themselves as responsible businessmen who are utilizing the entire animal. On the Baie Verte Peninsula, for example, a cluster of seal plants share the same catches: one, processing the pelts; another, canning seal meat; a third, making seal oil capsules. Sealers are much less willing to be battered by the winds of circumstance or to rely on government or big business to fix the industry. Sealers have become entrepreneurs in their own right and are taking the initiative in re-inventing themselves. No longer at the mercy of cruel masters and greedy shipowners, they have incorporated concepts of freedom and independence into their masculine identities. This freedom comes with responsibility. As one sealer, who makes 40 percent of his income from sealing, explained:

I put a lot of sweat into [this enterprise], I'll tell you that ... Everything I got around here I owns, but it never come easy, right? ... You're your own boss; ... you set rules for yourself; ... you are independent, but you got to work at it.<sup>71</sup>

In the cauldron of environmental politics of the late twentieth century, anti-sealing protest and counter-protest movements, government policy, the media, and the broader arena of international opinion all became sites for creating knowledge about Newfoundland sealing masculinity. Sealers engaged with all these discourses as they negotiated an identity that was far less static and more complex than "traditional" sealing masculinity. In doing so, they not only challenged negative representations by animal rights activists and other critics, which I had expected, but also adopted some of the environmental movement's rhetorical strategies. As this paper has specifically noted, they also articulated a more grounded sealing masculinity that challenged the tyranny of a broader

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cultural narrative about “men undaunted and unafraid.” Sealers did not present themselves as heroic, claiming that they “had nothing to prove”<sup>72</sup> and were simply doing what was needed “to make ends meet.” They were not in conflict with the environment, as traditional accounts portrayed them, but worked in harmony with nature — taking only as much as they needed and helping to maintain a balance among all the creatures of the sea. Their (counter-)narratives were not filled with bravado, but sometimes fear, sorrow, and loss. Yet they also told of pride in being skilled fishers and hunters, responsible family men and community members, good Christians, independent professionals, and entrepreneurs — all markers of respectable masculinity in the province.

In articulating a more nuanced sealing masculinity, sealers at the turn of the twenty-first century put to rest the ghosts of “jolly ice-hunters” and “swoilers fearless, bold.”<sup>73</sup> Harking back to “The Sealer’s Call” of the mid-twentieth century, we can observe a profound disconnect between the narratives of these modern sealers and the final stanza of the poem:

I must go up to the ice again,  
The call comes strong to me,  
The call of the north is in my blood  
I yearn for the frozen sea.  
Then when I’m nearing journey’s end  
And death doth round me prowl  
I trust it will be on a stormy day  
When the northern tempests howl.<sup>74</sup>

This glorified, bourgeois notion of sealing has little to do with sealers’ perceptions of themselves. No Newfoundland sealer wants to die in a howling gale on the ice with a stiff northeasterly wind blowing in his face. Most would rather be at home with their loved ones and with all their important parts intact.

\* \* \*

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**Endnotes:**

- 1 The larger research project that informs this paper examines this juxtaposition of eco-masculinity and Newfoundland sealing masculinity in local, national, and international conversations about manhood and its relationship to the environment. I gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in carrying out this research.
- 2 For example, see Michael Brown and John May, *The Greenpeace Story* (Scarborough, Ont.: DK Publishing, 1989); Brian Davis, *Savage Luxury: The Slaughter of the Baby Seals* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970); Stephen Dale, *McLuhan's Children: The Greenpeace Message and the Media* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990); Robert Hunter, *Warriors of the Rainbow: A Chronicle of the Greenpeace Movement* (New York: Henry Holt, 1979); Rik Scarce, *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement* (Chicago: Noble, 1990); Karl and Donna Sturmanis, *The Greenpeace Book* (Vancouver: Orca Sound, 1978); Mark Warford, ed., *Greenpeace: Witness Twenty-Five Years on the Environmental Front Line* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1996); Paul Watson, *Seal Wars: Twenty-Five Years on the Front Lines with the Harp Seals* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2002); and Paul Watson, with Warren Rogers, *Sea Shepherd: My Fight for Whales and Seals*, ed. Joseph Newman (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).
- 3 My oral history fieldwork included interviews conducted with 32 sealers, former sealers, family and community members, and cultural producers in 14 communities along the Great Northern Peninsula, the northeast coast, and St. John's during the months of July and August of 2009.
- 4 For example, see Lisa M. Fine, "Rights of Men, Rites of Passage: Hunting and Masculinity at Reo Motors of Lansing, Michigan, 1945–1975," *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 805–23; Tina Loo, "Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880–1939," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 296–319; Sylvia D. Hoffert, ed., *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2003); Simon J. Bronner, "'This Is Why We Hunt': Social-Psychological Meanings of the Traditions and Rituals of Deer Camp," *Western Folklore* 63, no. 1/2 (Winter/Spring 2004): 11–50; and Andrew Gow and Julie Rak, eds., *Mountain Masculinity: The Life and Writing of Nello "Tex" Vernon-Wood in the Canadian Rockies, 1906–1938* (Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2008).
- 5 Nancy B. Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank, "'Sportsmen and Pothunters': Environment, Conservation, and Class in the Fishery of Hamilton Harbour, 1858–1914," *Sport History Review* 28, no. 1 (1997): 1–18; Andrea L. Smalley, "'I just like to kill things': Women, Men and the Gender of Sport Hunting in the United States, 1940–1973," *Gender & History* 17, no. 1 (April 2005): 183–209; and Loo, "Of Moose and Men."
- 6 Alistair Thomson notes this phenomenon in "Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia," *Oral History* 18, no. 2 (1990): 25–31.
- 7 Although this commercial vessel hunt was masculinized, a landsmen hunt continued in more northern bays and harbours; and when seals came towards land in large numbers, women also joined in the harvest. Shannon Ryan discusses local newspaper reports of women's landing large numbers of seals in 1824, 1839, 1843, 1862, and 1872. Shannon Ryan, *A History of Newfoundland Sealing to 1914* (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater, 1994), 265–6. *Harper's Weekly* reported in 1881 that "women, too, who seem in this Northern latitude to be in complete sympathy with the toils of the husbands and brothers, shared in the general craze. It was not uncommon even for wind and sun browned damsels, daughters of the hardy fishermen, to gird on the seal-hunter's armor, and enter the lists with their brothers in competition for the treasures of the oil fields." See "Catching Seals," *Harper's Weekly* 25, no. 1268 (16 April 1881): 254–5. In 1987, the Department of Fisheries prohibited the use of vessels longer than 65 feet

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- in the seal hunt and banned outright the harvesting of whitecoats (young harp seals) and blue-backs (young hood seals). Since then, the hunt off Newfoundland has been carried out by landmen primarily in longliners and small boats.
- 8 For discussions of these processes, see John Tosh, "What Should Historians do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," *History Workshop Journal* 38 (Autumn 1994): 179–202; John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (London: Longman, 2005); Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991); Jen Hill, *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (New York: SUNY, 2007); Loo, "Of Moose and Men"; and Martin Francis, "The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (2002): 637–52.
  - 9 I.C. Morris, "The Seal Fishery," *The Newfoundland Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (April 1916): 15–6.
  - 10 Philip Toque, "The Seal Fishery of Newfoundland," *Littell's Living Age* 27 (1850): 186–7.
  - 11 Lady Edith Blake, "Of Seals and Savages," *The Nineteenth Century* 25, no. 146 (April 1889): 524.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, 526.
  - 13 Rev. John A. Harvey, "Newfoundland. Hunting the Seal — Its Excitements and Perils," *New Dominion Monthly* (January 1871): 335–8. Even Harvey admitted, however, that it "is just as well to keep to windward of them until they get changed and washed," 338.
  - 14 For example, see "Seal Fishery," *Saturday Magazine*, no. 249 (21 May 1836): 198; and "Hunting Seals on Ice Floes," *Frank Leslie's Chimney Corner* (24 March 1866): 268.
  - 15 For example, see "March in Newfoundland," *The King's College Record* 9, no. 38 (March 1882): 301–4; and Rev. John A. Manning, "A Sealing Adventure on the Coast of Newfoundland," *The Canadian Methodist Magazine* (November 1888): 439–42.
  - 16 "Seal-Hunting on the Coast of Labrador," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* 24 (December 1887): 699–704.
  - 17 For example, see "Cutting a Channel in the Ice," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (10 April 1880): 89; "The Newfoundland Fisheries," *Canadian Illustrated News* 21 (1 May 1880): 276; "Seal Fishing off the Newfoundland Coast," *Canadian Illustrated News* 23 (14 May 1881): 317; and "Sealing Steamers in the Ice. Harbour Grace, Nfld.," *Dominion Illustrated* 2 (16 March 1889): 173.
  - 18 Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL), Varick Frissel Collection, MG 416, "Vikings of the Screen," *New York Herald Tribune*, ([18?] March 1931).
  - 19 J.H. Mallet, "Seal Hunting on the Newfoundland Coast," *Colonial Commerce* 27, no. 2 (31 January 1918): 17–22.
  - 20 John Harvey, "With the Ice Hunters," *The Newfoundland Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (March 1907): 3–7. In the early decades of the twentieth century, various periodicals regularly provided special spring coverage of the Newfoundland seal hunt and commented on the bravery and skill of the sealers. For example, see *The Newfoundland Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (March 1902): 9–10; *ibid.*, 6, no. 4 (March 1907): 8; *ibid.*, 9, no. 1 (July 1909): 19–20; *ibid.*, 13, no. 1 (July 1913): 30, 32; *ibid.*, 13, no. 4 (Spring 1914): 23; *ibid.*, 13, no. 4 (Spring 1914): 34, 36, 38, 40; *ibid.*, 14, no. 4 (Spring 1915): 6–9; *ibid.*, 15, no. 4 (April 1916): 15–6; and see various spring issues of *Shortis* for the period in the Centre for Newfoundland Archives (CNS), Memorial University, vertical files "Whaling and Sealing" and "Sealing."
  - 21 See Gerald S. Doyle, *The Old Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland* (St. John's, Nfld.: Manning & Rabbits, 1927); and Shannon Ryan and Larry Small, coll. and eds., *Haulin' Rope and Gaff: Songs and Poetry in the History of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery* (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater, 1978). In addition, Newfoundland periodicals and newspapers carried accounts and poetry relating to sealing disasters in the wake of the tragedies and revisited these incidents frequently over time.

- 22 Arthur P. Silver, "What the Sealers Endured on the Ice," *The Wide World Magazine* 4 (1899/1900): 193–8.
- 23 See the numerous press clippings in a scrapbook for the period 1954–1967, kept by Bruce Humphries, shipping manager of Bowring Brothers Ltd., St. John's, in PANL, Bruce Humphries Collection, MG 303, Box 31.
- 24 J.G. Taylor, "Iron Men in Wooden Ships," *The Newfoundland Quarterly* (Spring 1965): 6–8.
- 25 Solomon Samson, "The Sealer's Call," in *Haulin' Rope and Gaff*, eds. Ryan and Small, 14; reprint from Solomon Samson, *A Glimpse of Newfoundland in Poetry and Pictures*, ed. Roberts Saunders (Poole, Eng.: J. Looker Ltd., printers, 1959), 37.
- 26 "The Seal Hunt," *The Bowring Magazine* 10, no.2 (summer 1961): 191–2. Similar articulations of heroic manhood appeared in other periodicals of the period. For example, see Taylor, "Iron Men in Wooden Ships," 6–8; *C-I-L Oval* 2 (1955): 14.
- 27 Harold Horwood, in Cassie Brown, *Death on the Ice: The Great Newfoundland Sealing Disaster of 1914* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1972; reprint 1988), "Foreword."
- 28 Brown, *Death on the Ice*, 13.
- 29 Farley Mowat, *Wake of the Great Sealers* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973), with prints and drawings by David Blackwood.
- 30 See numerous clippings from *The Evening Telegram*, *The Daily News*, *Atlantic Insight*, *The Newfoundland Herald*, *Decks Awash*, and *The Newfoundland Quarterly* for the 1970s and early 1980s, available at CNS, vertical files on sealing.
- 31 Unless otherwise specified, the following discussion is based on the 32 interviews described in Note 3. Direct quotations are acknowledged by footnotes.
- 32 Indeed, the language of high adventure is missing from extant diaries and logs of sealers and officers of earlier periods as well. These journals are filled with ordinary descriptions of weather, ice conditions, vessel progress, and seal sightings. See Darius Green (cook), "The Diary of Darius Green, Aboard the *S.S. Iceland*, 1898," *The Greenspond Letter* 13, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 6–16; PANL, Coll. 115, File no. 9.01.029, Isaac Mercer, "Chief Officer's Log Book of the *S.S. Greenland*," 10–14 March 1898; *ibid.*, Capt. Robert Bartlett Collection, MG 405, Box 4, Robert Jane, Chief Officer of the *S.S. Algerine*, "1904 — Log"; and *ibid.*, *S.S. Fagota* Collection, MG 941, "Diary of a sealing voyage, March 9–April 17, 1914." Two exceptions appear in Darius Green's 1898 diary: references to anxiety and "fearful excitement" on board the *Iceland* on 21 March 1898, as the crew attempted to collect some 150 men who had gone missing on the ice in the height of a snow storm, and the relief when all returned safely; and the rescue and recovery efforts on 23 March of men who had gone missing from the *Greenland* during the same storm. "Our Captain & crew purely broke up," Green reported, as they recovered dead bodies and iced them down on the *Greenland's* deck. Ultimately, 27 bodies were recovered and 23 men were never found. Yet, the very next day, the tone of the diary returns to "business as usual."
- 33 Jack Troake, Twillingate, interview by author, 1 August 2009.
- 34 Allan Richards, St. Anthony, interview by author, 25 July 2009.
- 35 This observation was made during a group discussion with Myrtle White, Effie Sweetland, Myrtle Mason, C. Milly Johnson, Olive Cullimore, Cornelia Sweetland, and Josephine Mason, Port Union, interview by author, 8 August 2009. All these women were daughters, sisters, and/or wives of sealers during the study period.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 Blake, "Of Seals and Savages," 526.
- 38 Anonymous, "Come All Ye Jolly Ice-Hunters," in *Haulin' Rope and Gaff*, eds. Ryan and Small, 17.
- 39 Raymond Elliott, St. Anthony, interview by author, 23 July 2009.
- 40 Harold Stagg, Wesleyville, interview by author, 4 August 2009.
- 41 *Ibid.*

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- 42 Keith Johnson, Catalina, interview by author, 8 August 2009.
- 43 Elliott, interview by author, 23 July 2009.
- 44 Jim Wellman, St. John's, interview by author, 20 July 2009. Wellman grew up on the northeast coast. He has maintained strong contacts with fishing and sealing communities as a journalist and host for CBC Radio's "The Fisheries Broadcast," and, more recently, as managing editor of *The Navigator*, a monthly magazine that publishes news, topical articles, and commentaries on fishing and marine industries in Atlantic Canada and the eastern United States.
- 45 Allan Richards, St. Anthony, interview by author, 25 July 2009.
- 46 Wellman, interview by author, 20 July 2009.
- 47 Mark Small, Wild Cove, interview by author, 27 July 2009.
- 48 Richards, interview by author, 25 July 2009.
- 49 Wellman, interview by author, 20 July 2009.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Jacob Dalton, Catalina, interview by author, 7 August 2009.
- 52 Many sealers now have mixed feelings about this action. They are pleased that they remained peaceful throughout, but they realize that they were completely outgunned in the media attention that followed. The moment was reported widely in the international media and hate letters poured into St. Anthony from North America and Europe. It was the moment when they lost the seal wars, they say, because it was from this time onward that increasing media attention shut down their fur markets. A local sealer and historian, Francis Patey, kept a large scrapbook of material about the protest, including the hate mail received in St. Anthony from around the world. He kindly allowed me to read the scrapbook when I interviewed him in his home in St. Anthony on 24 July 2009. He also wrote an account of this episode. See Francis Patey, *A Battle Lost: An Unsuccessful Attempt to Save the Seal Hunt* (St. Anthony, Nfld.: Robinson-Blackmore, 1991).
- 53 John Gillett, Durrell, interview by author, 3 August 2009.
- 54 Jack Troake, Twillingate, interview by author, 1 August 2009.
- 55 Earle McCurdy, St. John's, interview by author, 20 July 2009. McCurdy is the president of Newfoundland and Labrador's Fish, Food, and Allied Workers Union. His work brings him constantly into contact with fishers and sealers in the province.
- 56 Troake, interview by author, 1 August 2009.
- 57 Most interviewees made this point.
- 58 The store is an outbuilding close to the water, where fishing supplies and gear are stored and equipment repaired; in the traditional cod fishery, the store also held salt fish awaiting shipment.
- 59 For example, see "Captain Arthur Jackman Died: His Name a Household Word — A Famous Seal-Killer," *Evening Telegram* (13 January 1907); "Newfoundland's Most Successful Seal-Killer," *The Newfoundland Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (July 1913): 30, 33.
- 60 Elliott, interview by author, 23 July 2009.
- 61 Boyd Noel, St. Anthony, interview by author, 25 July 2009.
- 62 Elliott, interview by author, 23 July 2009.
- 63 Gillett, interview by author, 3 August 2009.
- 64 Richards, interview by author, 25 July 2009.
- 65 Elliott, interview by author, 23 July 2009.
- 66 Richards, interview by author, 25 July 2009.
- 67 John Blackmore, Port Union, interview by author, 6 August 2009.
- 68 Small, interview by author, 27 July 2009.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 These terms should not be conflated with the traditional term of "bedlamer boy," which referred to a novice sealer (a "bedlamer" being a young seal), who was on his first trip to the ice but was considered to be in training. According to my informants, more experienced sealers took time with these novices to ensure that they learned the skills of the industry well.

71 Gillett, interview by author, 3 August 2009.

72 Ibid.

73 James Murphy (attrib.), "Hunting Seals," in *Haulin' Rope and Gaff*, eds. Ryan and Small, 133.

74 Samson, "The Sealer's Call," in *Haulin' Rope and Gaff*, eds. Ryan and Small, 14.