

## Rapports de recherche

### Decorative Cast-Iron Fences in St. John's, Newfoundland

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A discussion of ornamental cast ironwork in Canada often begins and ends with the cities of Montréal and Québec.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as Eric Arthur and Thomas Ritchie demonstrate in their survey of cast and wrought iron in Canada, there are fine examples to be found outside the province of Quebec. In describing the cast-iron gates to Halifax's Public Gardens, for example, they write: "The Golden Gates are astonishing, magnificent, and have their equal nowhere in North America."<sup>2</sup> Less assuming than some of the spectacular public examples, but arguably as important in shaping the face of older urban landscapes are the decorative domestic ironwork gates and fences that contribute detail and character to some of the country's late-nineteenth-century neighbourhoods. This research report documents the decorative cast ironwork found on or near Monkstown Road, a Victorian residential area of St. John's, Newfoundland. Although the approximately twenty-five fences in this part of the city are easily overlooked or forgotten, as elsewhere, they not only reflect aspects of the industrial and aesthetic past, but continue to influence the contemporary appearance of street fronts.

The use of architectural ironwork reached its height of popularity during the 1870s and 1880s, combining the latest technology with Victorian aesthetics. While layers of paint on some of the fences in St. John's probably cover other manufacturer's marks, five are still discernible. One fence is locally made, but the remaining four come from British foundries; one from Hopkins, Gauser, and ——— of Birmingham, England, another from Walter MacFarlane and Foundry, Glasgow, Scotland; and two from George Smith and Co. Sun Foundry, also of Glasgow.

The only fence known to be of Newfoundland origin was manufactured by the Avalon Iron Foundry in 1883. This foundry was established by Hugh Doherty on Theatre

Hill in 1880 on what John Joy in his thesis on early manufacturing in the city describes as "a very ambitious scale."<sup>3</sup> Despite any lofty aspirations, however, Doherty's foundry was short lived and by 1890 it had closed. The Avalon Iron Foundry was one of several small foundries in the city during the middle to late 1800s: Charles Fox Bennett built a foundry in 1847 and Alex Leask's Vulcan Foundry appeared in 1871. The St. John's Iron Foundry and Co. (1857), known after 1886 as Newfoundland Consolidated Foundry Ltd., grew to be one of the largest foundries and its product line included "stoves, windlasses, winches, hawser-pipes, caulks, ship's cabooses and railings."<sup>4</sup> Joy notes that this manufactory originally included a rolling mill which had to be abandoned after a few years because of the high cost of importing raw material and coal. In addition, the small market made it impossible for the company to compete with British producers. These factors were presumably among those that led to the failure of many of the small foundries, for in 1932 a city directory lists only two: United Nail Foundry and Trask Foundry.<sup>5</sup> Today just the Nail company remains and while it once produced railing, it has not done so for many years. Newspaper ads listing items other than fences suggest the product was never a major one for any of the Newfoundland foundries.

Of the British foundries represented, no information turned up concerning the Birmingham firm. The *Griffith's Guide to the Iron Trade of Great Britain* (1873) makes no mention of Hopkins, Gauser, and ——— but describes Hopkins, Gilkes and Co. Ltd. of Middleborough as a substantial operation with a hundred puddling furnaces, five mills and forges and three new blast furnaces in the process of construction.<sup>6</sup> In the early 1870s Hopkins, Gilkes and Co. were leaders in new technology, being the first to incorporate the

Danks furnace in Britain.<sup>7</sup> The fact that this foundry of a similar name and location established cross-Atlantic lines of communication and engaged in large-scale production suggests that the St. John's fence may come from Hopkins, Gilkes and Co. operated under an earlier or later name.

The registration mark on the fence produced by the MacFarlane foundry is dated 12 February 1870. Established in 1850 in Glasgow, the MacFarlane foundry is credited with introducing the concept of architectural iron castings.<sup>8</sup> A 1911 company catalogue illustrates a wide range of ornamental and architectural ironwork including building and shop fronts; outdoor pavilions; cast ironwork for bridges; parapets; cornices; lampposts; inscription plates; stairs and stair balustrading; bandstands; shelters; summer structures; conservatories; railway-station ironwork; cupolas; interior ironwork; canopies, porches; verandas; "architectural ironwork for exterior decoration of public and domestic buildings"; gates and railing; clock towers; architectural figures; and "sanitary conveniences."<sup>9</sup>

The final two discernible marks belong to George Smith and Co. Sun Foundry. In an 1876 industrial survey of Glasgow, St. John V. Day writes:

At the Sun Foundry, Glasgow, Messrs. George Smith and Co. carry on the manufacture of sanitary apparatus very extensively, and with it they combine, we believe, the making of architectural castings on a still more extensive scale. . . . the manufacture of these two kinds of castings has become quite a feature of the iron industries of Glasgow within the last quarter of a century or thereby.<sup>10</sup>

Certainly Glasgow trade directories from 1870 indicate the city was a principal producer of architectural ironwork prior to First World War. The MacFarlane foundry was so successful Day states, "Now 'MacFarlane's castings' are favorably known in every civilized nation in the world."<sup>11</sup> By 1890 seventeen Glasgow foundries are listed as specializing in the manufacture of iron fences.<sup>12</sup>

Although no other manufacturer's marks are visible, it is likely many more fences are of British origin. At the time the railings were constructed, Newfoundland surpassed both Canada and the United States in its importation of iron products from Britain. For example, by 1906–1907 the value of iron imported from Great Britain to Newfoundland was £53,924, well above Canada's £7,139 or the United States's £3,712.<sup>13</sup> While this substantial importation of iron is not reflected in

local advertisements specifically mentioning imported cast-iron fences, the ads clearly indicate items such as British cast-iron fireplace grates were readily available. That many of the fence designs in St. John's correspond with illustrations of ironwork found in Australia—one of the largest importers of MacFarlane products—further suggests a British, and more specifically a Scottish, origin.<sup>14</sup>

Dona Meilach's observation that "throughout European history, grillwork echoed the styles and tastes of the countries and times and emulated work in other media: stone carving, painting, graphics, furniture, and even clothing styles"<sup>15</sup> is demonstrated in the decorative motifs used in the Newfoundland examples. They reflect High Victorian Gothic tastes, presenting an eclectic blend of Greek, Roman and Early Gothic styles. The ironwork clearly demonstrates the Victorian tendency to use natural, rather than geometric, forms as a source of ornamental design. Flowers, leaves and stylized plant structures abound. Daffodils as well as sunflowers and more frequently lilies, the symbol of the aesthetic movement, are plentiful. Fleur-de-lis—the symbol of France, the enlightenment and the Trinity—appear in a variety of forms, sizes and degrees of stylization. An assortment of leaves, most in a three-lobed form, are also present. Stylized acanthus leaves bear three distinct points and oak leaves appear with three lobes on three leaves. These three-lobed leaves and flowers probably draw at least some of their inspiration from the trefoil, which in medieval times was not only linked with the Trinity but also connoted the three-fold aspect of life: birth, growth, and death, or birth, death, and rebirth. The most common vegetable form is a stylized ear of wheat which the *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* links with faithfulness, rejuvenation, or the vital urge.<sup>16</sup> The plant form was so highly valued that inanimate objects such as diamonds or crosses appear placed between two leaves as if growing like a flower.

The quatrefoil, a common medieval motif in stained glass windows and prints of the late 1800s, also appears in St. John's fences. Like the trefoil, it can have religious connotations, symbolizing the four evangelists. On the other hand, the rosette, the emblem of the English Tudors and referred to as the star of the wheel of the universe, is one Victorian design revived from the Middle Ages that never gained wide usage in St. John's. Only one stylized version of a rosette could be identified. Likewise, people or animals, considered suitable subjects for

ironwork in other places, are not treated in the St. John's examples.

The columns or end posts of the fences are indicative of the Victorians' interest in reviving classical Greek and Roman forms. Urns are common in end posts even though they were originally associated with death. Columns are eclectic mixes of Roman, Greek, and other architectural styles. Because the fences were shipped in sections and end posts sold separately, strange combinations of designs arise. The only fence of a geometrical design consists of alternating round and square rods with a zig zag pattern that is carried through to the end post and the supporting brackets to produce an internally consistent fence. When the geometrically moulded brackets are found a second time, however, they support a piece of fencing cast in the shape of lilies where no correspondence exists between the various parts. In addition, end posts may be of a different style than the rest of the fence, or wrought iron might be married to cast railing or posts. When residents have fencing on more than one side of their property, often two styles are used. The geometrically moulded fence mentioned above is joined to a piece of fencing with a

floral motif. Used in ways designers never imagined, the mass-produced cast-iron fences that draw properties together and produce an overall effect of visual unity ironically also add individuality and personality to the houses they enclose.

Although not on the scale celebrated in larger population areas throughout Europe and North America, the variety and prevalence of domestic architectural ironwork in St. John's demonstrates that even in smaller Canadian cities the rising Victorian middle class had access to and made use of ironwork, either produced locally or imported from larger British foundries. Today ornamental iron continues to shape the built landscape of the cities it graces, helping us to recall a period when the availability of factory-made, ready-to-install architectural elements represented an exciting new use of both material and technology. Fences that line neighbourhood streets like Monkstown Road in St. John's are a material testament to the late Victorian burst of industrial energy that helped not only to build individual residential districts but also to fashion entire cities.

#### NOTES

*This research report is based on an earlier paper submitted to Dr. Gerald Pocius as part of the requirements for Memorial University of Newfoundland's Folklore 6500. I would like to thank Dr. Pocius for his encouragement and editorial assistance.*

1. For example, see E. Graeme Robertson and Joan Robertson, *Cast Iron Decoration: A World Survey* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977) p. 77. The only reference the authors make to ironwork outside Montréal and Québec cities is the fence around Osgoode Hall, now the Law Courts of Upper Canada, Toronto.
2. Eric Arthur and Thomas Ritchie, *Iron* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 61. Arthur and Ritchie introduce some confusion here, for although an illustrative photograph clearly shows they are describing the gates to Halifax's Public Gardens, the term "Golden Gates" usually refers to the gates of the city's Point Pleasant Park. For a discussion of ironwork in both Halifax parks, see Stephen Archibald, "Civic Ornaments: Ironwork in Halifax Parks," *Material History Bulletin* 5 (Spring 1978): 1-11.
3. John Joy, "The Growth Development of Trades and Manufacturing in St. John's, 1870-1914" (MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977), p. 161.
4. Joy, "Growth Development of Traders," p. 164.
5. *St. John's Classified Business and City Directory 1932* (St. John's: Manning and Rabbits, 1932), p. 243.
6. W.K.V. Gale, *Griffith's Guide to the Iron Trade of Great Britain* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968; Samuel Griffith, first ed. 1873), p. 272.
7. J.C. Carr and W. Taplin, *History of the British Steel Industry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 56, describe how the Hopkins, Gilkes and Co. Middleborough works installed a revolving puddling furnace designed by Samuel Danks of Cincinnati and thereafter quickly established a forge of twelve revolving furnaces. While it later became clear that the Danks furnace suffered mechanical defects, Hopkins, Gilkes and Co.'s initial success with the new technology encouraged the furnace's widespread adoption and by the close of 1872 there were 72 Danks furnaces being built in England (see p. 57).
8. St. John V. Day et al., *Notices of Some of the Principal Manufactures of the West of Scotland* (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1876), p. 68.
9. Walter MacFarlane and Co. Architectural Sanitary and general iron founders, Saracen Foundry, Possilpark, Glasgow. *Illustrative Examples of MacFarlane's Architectural Ironwork Catalogue* (Glasgow, c. 1911).
10. St. John V. Day et al., *Principal Manufactures*, p. 68.
11. *Ibid.*

12. *Glasgow Directory for 1890-1891* (Glasgow: William MacKenzie, 1890), 1163-64.
13. Henry William LeMessurier, "Report on the Foreign Trade and Commerce of Newfoundland 1906-1909" (London: Great Britain Board of Trade, 1909).
14. Robertson and Robertson, *Cast Iron Decoration*, p. 24, indicate finding MacFarlane trademarks as far away as India and Australia. Some of the ironwork in St. John's bears a definite similarity to examples found in Halifax, N.S., where much ironwork is thought to have originated at the MacFarlane foundry.
15. Dona Meilach, *Decorative and Sculptural Ironwork* (New York: Crown, 1976), p. 8.
16. Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* (New York: Scarecrow, 1962), p. 1675.

## **Eighteenth-Century Immigrants to Nova Scotia: The Yorkshire Settlers**

**PETER LATTA**

The goal of this report is to begin to identify some of the artifacts of everyday life for one group of eighteenth-century immigrants to Nova Scotia, those from Yorkshire, England, and to gain insight as to the way these artifacts were used, the economy in which they existed and the social organization of a newly settled place. This is a necessary first step in a longer project to compare similar elements of ordinary people who were first-generation immigrants belonging to identifiable immigrant groups. This research report is limited in several ways. First, it tries to reconstruct the property of the group and its usage using only one type of document. Second, it is limited to the households of those people identified as first-generation immigrants. Third, it deals only with the members of a single group who settled in one geographic area and does not account for those other group members who went elsewhere or returned home. Nevertheless, certain conclusions may be drawn which challenge some popular historical assumptions about "pioneer life." The evidence here also suggests another series of questions which this research report can only note in passing, but which point the way to further work.

John Mannion in his exceptional study of eastern Canada's Irish settlements and John Demos in his work on Plymouth Colony adopt the use of a wide number of sources for their work. These included architecture, land and farm systems and the local official records such as deeds, marriage and death records and probate files.<sup>1</sup> Because these studies are based on records previously little used or overlooked by historians and other scholars, new knowledge and ways of thinking about those

particular groups have emerged. While this report cannot be so extensive in the examination of all the records available, it does hope to establish a foothold upon which to advance.

To do this, the probate court records were examined. The files vary in content, but a complete file contains the last will and testament, an order by the judge of probate or Justice of the Peace to certain people to produce a true and accurate account of the real and personal property of the deceased, lists of accounts owed to and owed by the deceased's estate, receipts for charges against the estate and documents supporting any questions or disputes. The most important of these for understanding the material history of a group are the wills and the inventories of the contents of the estates, and it is on these that this report relies. Use of probate records alone can give a misleading impression, but by recognizing from the first the restrictions inherent in these documents, conclusions can still be reached and new directions for research identified.

The method used to locate these documents was, first, to survey the probate records for Cumberland County, Nova Scotia, and Westmorland County, New Brunswick, the latter having once been part of the former, and an area where the study group of Yorkshire settlers concentrated. By using existing passenger lists as a guide to the court indexes, those files of people with Yorkshire surnames were extracted. Because the sample of documents written in the eighteenth century seemed small (fifteen documents), the records of Yorkshire settlers who died up to 1810 were included on the basis that cultural, political and economic activities remained essentially stable for those further eleven years. This