"To the disgust of the whole of the northern districts": The Placentia Railway Question and Regionalism in Newfoundland, 1884–1889

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1. INTRODUCTION

After a long hiatus, historians recently have begun to re-examine the history of policy and development in Newfoundland.[1] Given the importance of railways to such policies in the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that much discussion has focused on attitudes towards this technology. Yet, despite its importance, the historiography of Newfoundland's railway remains remarkably thin; since the 1960s, only a handful of publications have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the railway's history.

Such works can be divided into two camps. Historians who first analyzed the railway's history had narrowly political and economic concerns. Among other things, they sought to understand how the government of Newfoundland became so invested in the railway project and its fiscal and economic impact on the country. Frank Cramm was the first, perhaps, to revisit the history of the railway in Newfoundland. An MA student at Memorial University, his 1961 thesis argues that when considering the viability of building a railway across the island, Newfoundland's politicians were informed more by potential than by reason: "There is little doubt that the Newfoundland politicians who enacted the railway legislation were sincere in their belief in a prosperous future for the Island. They were, however, carried away by an optimistic feeling that resembled a vision. There was no realistic analysis of the potential of the island."[2] Still, Cramm's conclusions regarding the success of the railway

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR STUDIES, 28, 1 (2013)
1719-1726

are somewhat indecisive; he notes that despite the debt created as a result of its construction, the railway offered immediate economic benefits to Newfoundland's residents in the form of employment. Thus, he continues, "it is very difficult to weigh these [long-term economic] disadvantages against the direct beneficial results of the railway project, and come to a definite conclusion."[3]

In the 1980s, James Hiller produced similar findings, though his works more confidently assert that Newfoundland's railway project was a failure. Hiller observes that Newfoundland's political elites stressed that the railway would bring economic diversification to the country; the fishery was failing to support the island's population, and the railway was a response to this crisis. Its purpose, he remarks, was to "open the country, stimulate mining, agriculture, and lumbering, and free Newfoundland from its retarding dependence on one unpredictable staple."[4] The railway's construction, however, did not accomplish this goal. Instead, Hiller concludes, it devastated Newfoundland's economy, and did little to accelerate resource extraction outside of the fisheries: "large interior developments occurred when the colony's timber lands came into demand, and not before; and capital came because there were trees, not because there was a railway." He admits that the railway made forestry operations easier, but holds that the railway was ultimately a loss in both economic and accounting terms.[5]

A second camp of newer literature has focused on the relationship between class and the railway. Writing in 2008, Kurt Korneski has emphasized the importance of working-class Newfoundlanders to political debates about railways and railway-building. One such instance, he notes, came in 1885. Railway construction had halted just one year prior, and Sir Robert Thorburn — who had been a spirited opponent of the railway project — became the new Premier of Newfoundland. While this was an ideal opportunity for Thorburn to end the project he viewed as an economic vice to the island, his administration instead reinitiated railway construction. Unconvinced that this was either a political manoeuvre aimed at gaining support from members of the Liberal Party or Thorburn's preferred answer to providing jobs to the unemployed, Korneski posits that such a shift in policy was primarily a response to working-class pressure. Historians incorrectly presume, he remarks, "that the form and viability of government policy is determined primarily by elites themselves. While elites were central in formulating and executing policies in the colony, they also did not work in isolation from and could not ignore the colony's working people. . . ."[6] This is an important insight, as it shifts the focus of the railway's history away from elites.

Still, the existing literature tends to under-appreciate the diverse and shifting views about railway development in the colony at the time.[7] Indeed, Newfoundlanders rarely spoke in political unison, as they were divided markedly in many ways: class and religious cleavages are the most prominent examples. In other instances, however, Newfoundlanders identified with their particular localities, and frequently spoke out in their name. While the most obvious example of this is "St. John's vs. the rest of the island" or "urban vs. rural," this regional cleavage could take other forms in unique situations. Thus, in an attempt to argue that geographic location within the colony shaped the ways that people thought about and responded to railway policy, this article employs a case study of the Placentia Railway Question.

This event is unique for two reasons. First, the interests of various regions were overtly at odds with each other, and Newfoundlanders frequently spoke in the name of their communities. Second, because of the political scandal involved, the Placentia Railway Question was given a substantial amount of coverage in Newfoundland's numerous newspapers. Furthermore, as Maudie Whelan explains in her Ph.D. thesis, the debates concerning the railway in Newfoundland took front stage among Newfoundland's press; "the sole purpose for launching the *Evening Mercury* was to promote the building of a railway," and alternatively, the *Evening Telegram* "stood firmly opposed" to such a project.[8] In the outports as well, papers were highly partisan, as both the *Weekly Record* and the *Twillingate Sun* "were used and supported as political instruments by . . . William Whiteway."[9] While allegiances sometimes changed, the intense political debate regarding the merits of the railway created the necessary foundation for the circulation of daily newspapers in St. John's and weekly newspapers in the outports; there is, thus, much that we can glean from these papers.[10]

Accordingly, this article relies heavily on evidence found in such newspapers — foremost, the *Twillingate Sun*, *Weekly Record*, *Evening Telegram*, and *Evening Mercury*. The editors of these papers were undoubtedly members of an elite bourgeois class, and their opinions are not representative of the entirety of their hometowns. But to dismiss these opinions as simply elitist would be incorrect. Indeed, in the first secret ballot election in Newfoundland, constituents of Twillingate and Trinity elected the primary editors of their respective papers to the House of Assembly in the 1889 General Election.[11] There was, therefore, a high degree of support for the opinions portrayed in these newspapers among more than just the bourgeois class.

2. CONTEXT

If the nineteenth century was the "century of steam," the quintessential symbol of the age was the locomotive. Europeans and North Americans built extensive systems of rail, particularly in the second half of the century. In the United States, for example, between 1850 and 1890, the railroad network expanded from 9,021 miles of track to a remarkable 129,774 miles.[12] Such expansion had profound economic, social, and cultural impacts. Railways spanned countless acres of land, and traversing it opened the land for market-oriented cultivation. Furthermore, time systems became centred on railway schedules. Towns typically standardized their time in accordance with the arrivals and departures of trains. Accordingly, prior to 1870, the United States alone possessed between 200 and 300 different "railroad times." Perhaps in response to this lack of uniformity, the Prime Meridian Conference in Washington (1883) divided the world into 24 administrative "time zones," each apart by one hour.[13]

Railways undoubtedly fostered a sense of liberty. In 1849, the well-known Canadian civil engineer, Thomas Keefer, wrote an impressive pamphlet, *Philosophy of Railroads*.[14] Keefer explained how railways freed people from the confines of things such as weather, distance, landscape, and fatigue. Further, he claimed that railways fostered civility: "the civilizing tendency of the locomotive is one of the modern anomalies, which however inexplicable it may appear to some, is yet so fortunately patent to all."[15]

Like Keefer, when policy-makers, engineers, intellectuals, and others began to speak of building a railway in Newfoundland towards the end of the nineteenth century, they embraced the technology as a harbinger of progress. On 9 February 1875, for example, an Irish Catholic clergyman, Father Michael Morris, stood in front of a crowd in the New Temperance Hall in St. John's (Map 1) and delivered a lecture on the potential benefits of having a railway in Newfoundland. He remarked:

> [N]o one, who has not travelled in countries that participate in the benefits of the Railway system can have any adequate idea of how great an engine of commerce and civilization we are still deprived of in Newfoundland . . . the Railway project cannot afford to be delayed or postponed. Either now or never for Newfoundland is the motto of the day.[16]

Morris's argument drew on the idea of civility; as it stood, Newfoundland was too primitive to advance on the world stage. A railway, he argued, would bring

with it the modern technology of civilized nations, make trade easier, and attract capital from outside investors.

Despite his Irish Catholic heritage, Morris was part of a group of elite colonial nationalists; indeed, his brother, Edward Patrick Morris, was a wealthy lawyer, became Newfoundland's Prime Minister in 1909, and was eventually appointed to the British House of Lords in 1918.[17] Proud of the colony's ties with Britain, colonial nationalists wished for Newfoundland to be an exemplary model of the "British race." This belief was typical of residents of British colonies of settlement. In these locales, a range of people envisioned themselves as part of the "British World," a world "held together by a sense of belonging to a shared British culture, not simply by ties of commerce and trade."[18] In many cases, colonies settled by the British wished to transcend the standards of life established at home. As Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis remarked, "it was 'Better Britains' — not simply neo-Britains — that they sought to create."[19] It was painfully obvious, however, that the quality of life in Newfoundland failed to live up to British ideals.[20] Thus, before Newfoundlanders could conceptualize their colony as a Better Britain, they necessarily had to transform their way of life to more closely mimic their "mother country." To people like Morris, a railway running across the island would serve this end. It would be a tangible symbol of Newfoundland's civility and it would help foster a quality of life that was generally more in line with prevailing ideas of Britishness. Through the construction of a railway, Newfoundland would earn respect within the British World; it was a tool through which a civilized Newfoundland nation could be realized.

In a more concrete fashion, from the middle of the nineteenth-century, railway promoters accentuated the fact that the construction of a railway would allow access to the island's reportedly rich supply of interior resources. Joseph Hatton and Moses Harvey summed up this long-held view in their co-authored *Newfoundland: The Oldest British Colony* (1883). A railway, they remarked, "would open up for settlement the most fertile agricultural and the best timber lands in the island . . . it would place the mining region in connection with the capital . . . and it would also traverse and open up a large extent of mineral lands."[21]

Such views of the interior had not always existed. In fact, for most of Newfoundland's post-contact history, men and women were oriented to the sea and they viewed the interior as a wasteland. W.E. Cormack, the first European to attempt to traverse Newfoundland, exemplified this tendency. He began his trek in 1822, departing Trinity Bay, and only a few months later Cormack and his crew landed in St. George's Bay, near present-day Stephenville on the island's

west coast. In his *Narrative of a Journey Across the Island of Newfoundland*, he noted some of the obvious geological characteristics of the landscape. In St. John's, a mix of largely unusable sandstone, quartz, and slate rocks were ubiquitous; in Conception Bay, "some small shrubs and small fruit" were to be found; and in Bonaventure, residents were able to "cultivate only a few potatoes and some other vegetables . . . amongst the scanty patches of soil."[22] As he made his way further into the depths of the island, he observed that the forests were "composed almost entirely of trees of the pine tribe" and tended to enclose and hide the marshes and lakes of the interior.[23] The overall picture that he painted was bleak, and left much to be desired for Newfoundland's economic future in the interior.

Only a few years later, J.B. Jukes — a geological surveyor rather than a hobbyist explorer — undertook a similar venture. Between 1839 and 1840, he conducted an extensive geological survey of Newfoundland. Jukes yielded similar conclusions to those of Cormack:

> The general character of the island of Newfoundland is that of a rugged, and, for the most part, a barren country. . . . Great boulders, or loose rocks scattered over the country, increase the general roughness of its appearance and character. . . . Most of the wood is of small and stunted growth . . . [and] commonly grow[s] so closely together, that their twigs and branches interlace from top to bottom, and lying indiscriminately amongst them, there are innumerable old and rotten stumps and branches, or newly fallen trees, which, with the young shoots and brush-wood, form a tangled and often impenetrable thicket.[24]

Jukes further noted that the resource potential of Newfoundland was limited, with the exception of some slate suitable for roofing purposes, and some coal and gypsum located in isolated parts of the island.[25]

A few decades later, however, a different vision of Newfoundland's interior had emerged. In 1864, Alexander Murray began his own trek across the island. His results seemed far more promising. Suddenly, coal appeared in Bay St. George and Grand Lake, and Murray suspected that it was likely to be found in other parts of the island as well. Gold deposits were identified in Brigus and Conception Bay, and the west coast was full of highly cultivable land.[26] Notably, the results of the 1875 survey financed by Sandford Fleming — an experienced Canadian railway engineer (and the originator of the concept of 24 global standard time zones) — generated different results; one surveyor, Thomas Ramsay,

noted that the character and placement of the rock made the proposed choice of a railway route a poor one: "it will be hard to work, without being good for building purposes."[27]

Yet, amid a lively railway debate, the enthusiasm of Murray's survey was most often referenced. The economic forecast of the time had disposed people to accept Murray's findings. Newfoundland's foremost industry, the shore fishery, had declined significantly in the late nineteenth century. With the colony's population steadily increasing, more fishers were constantly entering the trade.[28] Indeed, between 1845 and 1884, harvesting capacity in the northern cod fishery doubled. Despite the increase in fishing effort, however, total catches of northern cod actually decreased by 30 per cent over the same period.[29] Accordingly, individual catches dropped appreciably — by 1880, the average annual catch per fisher had declined to approximately one-third of its value in 1800.[30] The poor potential returns for fishers and merchants alike and the desire for a better tomorrow left many asserting the veracity of Murray's findings.

Of course, what had changed was not the land but the way people envisioned it. In a different context, historian D.W. Moodie notes that "a region is a mental construct, an idea in the minds of men." "[O]ur pictures of the world," he explains, "are highly selected versions of reality that are influenced, not so much by the quality of our vision, but the vision we have in mind."[31] Thus, when Newfoundlanders used Murray's findings as an argument in favour of the railway, they were perhaps accepting his vision rather than his findings.

This vision was one of economic diversification. The construction of a railway, as Hatton and Harvey had argued, would open the island's interior for the exploitation of its resources. This would take pressure off the fishery, thus removing the colony's dependence on a single resource. Cultivable agricultural lands throughout the island, proponents argued, might entice families to move away from the capital, creating a number of strong, self-reliant localities apart from St. John's.[32] Alexander Murray had envisioned an extensive system of townships throughout the colony, which would create a market for industrial products manufactured in the capital.[33]

More than providing a financial boost through the advent of exploitable natural resources, politicians and some intellectuals thought the railway could actually transform Newfoundland's economic structure. Anthropologist John Kennedy describes the merchant truck system of the time as a "cashless exchange" whereby, in the spring of each year, merchants gave fishers appropriate fishing gear and other commodities (such as tea and molasses) as a loan. The fishers repaid the loan in the fall with salt fish. Cash never found its way into

the hands of the fishers, and in years where the fishing yielded poor returns, many people were unable to repay the loans. Furthermore, when international fish prices dropped, merchants occasionally went bankrupt.[34] Still, the opportunity existed for merchants to reap large profits while fishers struggled to subsist. Proponents of the railway argued that the project might transform Newfoundland's economy from this restrictive truck system to a more liberal cash-based, wage-labour economy.

Some merchants, then, stood to lose money if a railway were built, and thus, most tended to oppose the project. The reason for this became clear to many; in 1881, the *Public Ledger*, for example, declared that "the merchants, or the majority of them, object to the railway." "Shopkeepers and middlemen," however, were "in favor of the railway . . . because fish and oil would no longer be king, a class of middlemen would arise, and the whole wealth of the community would not find its way into half-a-dozen merchants' offices."[35] These observations were generally correct. While some supporters of the railway were merchants — notably A.W. Harvey and Moses Monroe — most supporters were wealthy lawyers, financiers, and other professionals, such as William Whiteway and Robert Kent. It was fish merchants who became politicians, such as Robert Thorburn and A.F. Goodridge, who tended to oppose the railway.[36]

Sir William Whiteway was Newfoundland's foremost advocate for a railway. Born in Devon, England, Whiteway was sent to St. John's at age 15, first becoming a merchant and later a lawyer. Running under the patronage of one of his wealthiest clients, the merchant and eventual Newfoundland Premier (1870-74), Charles Fox Bennett, Whiteway first got into politics in 1859, becoming an MHA for the Twillingate and Fogo district. This region included the island's first copper mine at Tilt Cove (located on the eastern side of the Baie Verte Peninsula — Map 1), which was financed by Bennett. Whiteway quickly became convinced of the island's mineral and agricultural promise, and he was committed to politically helping Newfoundland realize this potential.[37] In 1878, Whiteway, leading the Conservative Party of the day, centred his election campaign on the issue of the railway, pledging to begin construction if elected Premier. Up against a disorganized opposition, after the resignation of Charles Fox Bennett, Whiteway handily won the premiership as his Conservatives earned a majority of seats in the House of Assembly.[38]

While there was much optimism surrounding Whiteway's election, the *Evening Telegram* was largely critical of his development policies. Editors argued vociferously that the railway would bring financial disaster to the colony.[39] In November 1880, the newspaper began to print a series of articles entitled "Our

Agricultural Lands," which attempted to dispel the geological findings of Alexander Murray and his team of surveyors. The author, under the pseudonym "Observer," was adamant that trying to diversify Newfoundland's economy by means of a railway would not only be economically damaging to the colony, but also might be asking too much of its resources. "[Newfoundland's] physical features are all right," he noted, but "it is folly . . . to try and *make out* more of this or that. Let us know it well; accept of it as it is, and try to make the best of it."[40] As evidence for these remarks, Observer referenced Cormack and his findings. He argued that Cormack's findings were more trustworthy than those of Murray because Cormack had no agenda pertaining to the island's physical characteristics — he had simply been looking to find the Beothuks:[41]

> I am penetrated with admiration of the noble spirit, now departed, which conceived and consummated that bold enterprize [*sic*] without promise of reward, and solely as a free-will contribution to the increase of knowledge . . . the faithful record of this journey we accept with gratitude.[42]

Although Murray's vision of the interior as a hinterland was prevalent throughout much of Newfoundland, some residents still subscribed to Cormack's vision of an interior wasteland. One's attitude towards the railway project likely dictated which of these visions was accepted; for some, the reverse may have been true.

While there was vocal opposition, the arguments in favour of a railway in Newfoundland carried the day and construction began in 1881. Unfortunately, the reality that came to pass was quite different from the one imagined by railway supporters. Railway construction proved difficult and the cost of the line soon exceeded expectations. The debt burden was not offset by economic growth. Rather, when the trans-insular line was completed in 1898, Newfoundland's public debt had reached $17 million, of which almost 60 per cent ($9.5 million) was directly attributable to the railway project.[43] Further, between 1875 and 1934, the railway is estimated to have cost Newfoundland over $40 million.[44] While the railway project was promising in theory, the finished product never lived up to the surrounding hype. Although there were other factors at work — namely, an economic depression spanning most of the later nineteenth century, the implementation of the Newfoundland Regiment in 1914, and the Great Depression[45] — the construction of Newfoundland's trans-insular railway line represents a major causal factor of both the 1894 bank crash and Newfoundland's loss of responsible government in 1934.[46]

3. EARLY DAYS OF THE RAILWAY: INSOLVENCY AND IMPOVERISHMENT

While some works have provided compelling accounts of central aspects of the history of the railway, most have focused primarily on St. John's and the St. John's press. Regardless, these historical accounts have accurately represented these newspapers. The *Newfoundlander* and the *Evening Mercury* were among the most vocal advocates of the railway. The *Newfoundlander*, for example, frequently noted that it believed that "the manifold benefits involved in the Railway [would] abundantly pay the purchase."[47]

At times, the attitudes that existed in St. John's were also present in other centres. Twillingate residents, for example, thought that a railway could serve a number of ends. First, as the *Twillingate Sun* noted in 1881, it would help to diversify Newfoundland's economy: "if by the introduction of a Railway mineral deposits can be reached, the agricultural tracts cultivated and the timber wastes utilized, a very great object will have been accomplished . . . we hope that the expectations of the most sanguine in this respect may be realized in due time."[48] The railway, however, would also be able to remedy Twillingate's local ills. The mail service was sporadic due to the town's isolation from the capital. Although the implementation of telegraph lines had improved communications with St. John's, residents believed that "the advantages of a regular weekly mail service would unquestionably be a great boon to [their] district."[49]

Twillingate locals were not alone in this regard. In 1881, a number of towns, including St. John's, Harbour Grace, Brigus, Carbonear, Harbour Main, Trinity, and Bay Roberts, produced petitions urging for railway construction to hasten for the overall well-being of the island.[50] These petitions reflect the popularity of the railway at the time. Many people experiencing harsh economic times looked to the railway as a potential economic saviour. Even Alexander Murray's survey, remarked the *Newfoundlander*, was a sign of things to come: it "has already given employment . . . to numbers of our people who might be penniless to-day without it."[51] They hoped that the initiation of a railway project would drive them out of destitution.

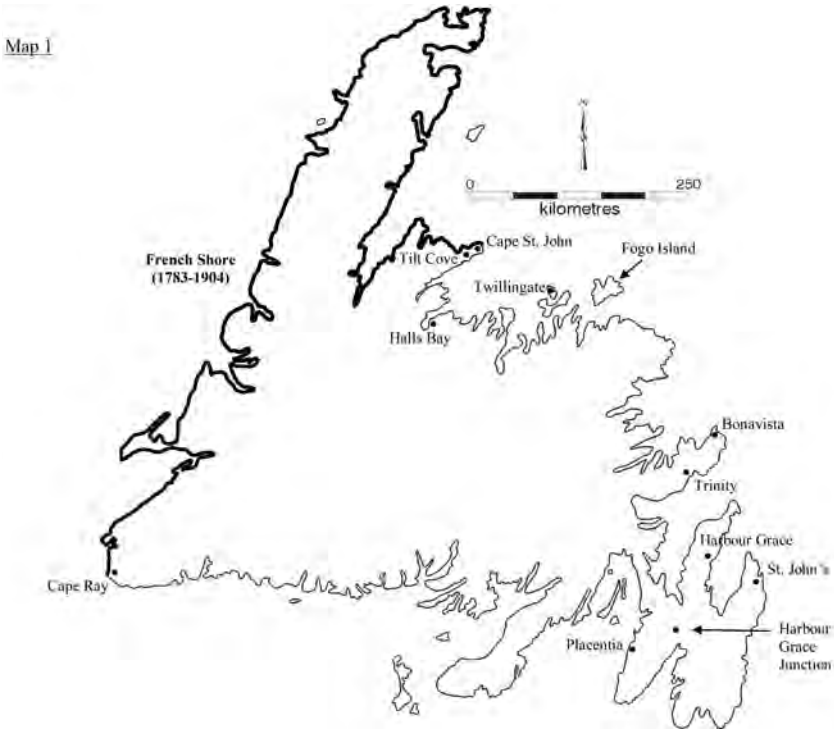
Aside from the economic benefits, some newspapers portrayed the railway as a tool to thrust Newfoundland into the modern age.[52] The *Terra Nova Advocate*, for example, drew attention to the similar impact that simple roads had made:

> Remember that pauperism is the most burdensome taxation on a country because the expenditure on poor relief is non-productive; it

> is worse than non-productive, it is demoralizing. . . . Roads in all ages have been the great civilizers, and railroads, be it always remembered, are only *improved roads*.[53]

Railway advocates, thus, thought of the railway as an honourable project. It would civilize the country by removing people from poor relief, teaching them that fair pay could be exchanged for a fair day's work — something that the fishery did not offer.

Unfortunately for opponents of the railways, their efforts were ultimately ineffective. In early 1881, the government of Newfoundland granted a contract to the Newfoundland Railway Company (NRC), a syndicate headed by New York lawyer A.L. Blackman, to build a narrow-gauge railway from St. John's to Halls Bay.[54] The agreement stated that within five years the NRC was to build a railway to Halls Bay and a branch line from Harbour Grace Junction (later Whitbourne) to Harbour Grace (Map 1). In return the NRC received an annual government subsidy valued at $180,000 for 35 years; a 5,000-acre land



grant for every mile of rail constructed; duty-free import of building materials; and $90,000 in government funding to help pay for the right of way over the land.[55]

Halls Bay, located on the western portion of Notre Dame Bay on the island's northeast coast, was strategically chosen as the western terminus. It was in this area that the French Shore began. With the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, the British ceded fishing rights to the French between Cape Ray — located on the southern tip of the island's west coast — and Cape St. John — located on the northeastern point of the Baie Verte Peninsula, near Halls Bay.[56] The years thereafter were witness to complex yet hostile political fights between the French, the British, and Newfoundlanders over whether French fishing rights on the shore were exclusive or held concurrently with the British. While Newfoundland's political elite pressured the British government to press the French for concurrent fishing rights, they were frustrated, as the imperial government proved unwilling; the British had a valuable trading partner in France, and worried that such a move might complicate that relationship. Still, there was more at stake in the French Shore than fishing rights. If Alexander Murray's geological survey was to be believed, there was much fertile land on the west coast, and jurisdiction over the lands adjacent to the French Shore would have been an economic boon to Newfoundland's government. A terminus at Halls Bay would hopefully encourage additional British settlement in areas near and along the French Shore, strengthening the capital's claim to jurisdiction over the land's resources.[57]

By July, evidence surfaced indicating that the NRC was not the economic force it had claimed during contract negotiations. The contract Blackman signed required that he pay a security deposit of $100,000 into a bank in St. John's within three months of the date of the signature. On 21 July 1881, however, the *Evening Telegram* proclaimed that "the money was payable yesterday; and although mendacious rumours were industriously circulated by the Blackman crowd … the money has *not been paid*." Blackman, they suggested, had defaulted on the contract.[58]

Despite this rocky start, construction was underway by August. The company, however, proceeded sluggishly.[59] By the end of 1882, only 45 miles of track had been laid and the line from St. John's to Harbour Grace Junction was still incomplete.[60] Unfortunately for Whiteway, the slow progress on the railway led to party infighting, as some members held Whiteway directly responsible for the railway's difficulties. In particular, James J. Rogerson (Receiver General, MHA for Burin, and a member of Whiteway's party) and Walter B. Grieve (a

wealthy St. John's merchant) contended that another four years of Whiteway would mean financial ruin for Newfoundland. Together they formed a political faction called the "New Party." The New Party promised increased attention on public works, reduced taxation, and, eventually, further construction on the railway. Newfoundlanders voted in the country's fourteenth general election on 6 November 1882. The campaign fought between the Whitewayites and the New Party was extremely bitter. The New Party, however, was able to elect only five members to the House of Assembly out of a possible 33 seats; two ran unopposed. Whiteway's party resumed office with a strong majority, and continued with the railway's construction.[61]

By February 1884, the Blackman syndicate, which had struggled financially from the outset, appeared to be in serious trouble. At that time, news broke that the company owed large sums of money to many of its employees, and members of the New Party accused the government of misappropriating the security deposit for the purposes of paying the railway workers. As a result, the St. John's press became quite critical of Whiteway.[62] By late 1884, with the NRC bankrupt and its bondholders continuing construction, the railway finally reached Harbour Grace.[63]

The bankruptcy of the NRC intensified arguments regarding further railway construction. The *Evening Mercury* thought it best that Blackman's company was now removed from the railway's construction. The government, it argued, should take over the project and continue the line to Halls Bay.[64] In fact, the paper demanded that Whiteway fulfill a promise he had made to "*the people*" when he assumed office; a promise of "profitable work and plenty of it for the next five years . . . HE MUST DO IT!"[65] The line to Harbour Grace began operating in the fall of 1884, and it proved to be useful, running through the most densely populated part of the colony.[66] There was no further progress during Whiteway's tenure, however, as railway construction ceased for the time being.

In 1885 the Harbour Grace Affray forced Whiteway out of politics. On 26 December 1883, a procession of Orangemen from the Courage's Beach area of Harbour Grace clashed violently with a group of Irish Catholics from the Riverhead area who were staked out at the boundary of their community. At least five men died, one an Irish Catholic from the community of Riverhead. In total, 34 men were arrested, 27 of whom were Irish Catholics.[67] Two trials were held between May 1884 and January 1885. Whiteway himself conducted the prosecution of the Catholics, and when no convictions were made hard-line Protestants blamed Whiteway, stating that the Irish Catholics were responsible for the

fracas. The situation became even more complicated in early 1885 when an Orangeman, MHA, and supporter of Whiteway, Alfred Penney, put forth a motion stating that the Catholic acquittals had been unjust. As Carolyn Lambert notes, by supporting or opposing the motion, Whiteway was sure to alienate a portion of his base of support: Catholics if he supported the measure, Protestants if he opposed. When Whiteway proposed amendments to the motion, making the language much more temperate, Catholic supporters of Whiteway such as Ambrose Shea still interpreted it as anti-Catholic and left Whiteway's party, forming an independent "Liberal" party in the House of Assembly. Other supporters, such W.J.S. Donnelly, the Receiver General, and Robert J. Kent, the Speaker, resigned. With his party falling apart at the seams, Whiteway was forced to resign as party leader and did not run for a seat in the legislature in the next election.[68]

Notably, Whiteway's Protestant supporters formed a coalition with the Protestant members of the reorganized New Party (now the "Reform Party").[69] The Reform Party's campaign for the 31 October 1885 general election was intensely sectarian, as Thorburn promised that there would be no coalition with the Roman Catholic Liberals. Under the leadership of Robert Thorburn, the Reform Party gathered a slim majority of seats in the House of Assembly, as the vote essentially followed the sectarian divide.[70] The party made a commitment to implement a strong system of public works, and the Speech from the Throne contained no mention of the railway; their election, claimed Reformers, was a statement against the development policies of Whiteway.[71] Instead, they encouraged the advent of agriculture through an extensive network of roads, rather than through a railway. To this end, Reformers devoted government money for road construction and defeated resolutions put forth by Ambrose Shea for the resumption of railway construction.[72]

In the years ahead, fish prices began to decline. In 1886, prices were the lowest they had been since 1871,[73] and inconsistencies with curing created problems in the marketing of Newfoundland's salt fish.[74] The press became quite critical of the government, noting lack of effort in job creation. The *Evening Telegram* persistently called for Thorburn to initiate a more rigorous, fair system of public works. The Board of Works, it claimed, was "a huge fraud on the taxpayers," as the friends and acquaintances of those directly in control of the project tended to receive work quicker and for longer periods of time than those who had no relationship with these men.[75] If nothing was done, claimed the *Telegram*, mass starvation and death would follow: "the time has now arrived when the problem of productive employment for the people . . . *must* be grappled

with. . . . Up to the present, it has *not* been taken hold of with the earnestness and zeal its importance merits."[76]

Outside of the Avalon Peninsula, the northern districts and the Trinity region agreed that Newfoundland's system of poor-relief needed restructuring. In early 1886, a correspondent from Little Bay noted the locality's disappointment with the government's existing system of poor relief and public works, and suggested an alternative:

> Daily, yea, hourly we can see men and women (walking skeletons, for nothing better can we call them) wending their way to the Magistrates, begging relief to keep themselves and families from actual starvation. They say they don't want pauper *relief*; we want employment and are able and willing to work for our bread, but his worship informs them that he can do nothing at present for able bodied poor. . . . I would suggest to the electors of the district of Twillingate, that unless the representatives cause an act to be passed which will compel sportsmen to pay a license, and further, that they be compelled to employ men to bring the meat, venison, &c, to the nearest settlement . . . that their stewardship may no longer be *required*.[77]

The idea that Newfoundland's sportsmen should be forced to pay a fee for a licence — for the purposes of poor relief — and should be required to provide employment to the poor to aid them in transporting meat represented only one possibility. The *Twillingate Sun* argued that pauper relief was demoralizing and that, where possible, roads should be built in an effort to "enable everyone to give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay."[78] Accordingly, the people of Twillingate forwarded a petition to the government, "praying" that it take steps to provide employment for the people.[79]

Other communities shared this view. The *Weekly Record* in Trinity argued that Newfoundland's "sole reliance on one precarious industry, which has now been a failure for three consecutive years . . . calls for instant action on the part of the Government." It argued further that "the inaugurating of works of public utility . . . would be profitable to those employed as well as beneficial to the country generally."[80] The railway, they suggested, was the best means to this end. To Trinity, as with other communities, the railway was a public work; while it would later be utilized to transport people and goods, its immediate and foremost purpose was to provide employment to the people.

These pressures sometimes transformed into organized protest. In February

1886, for example, between 300 and 400 fishers and other labourers surrounded the courthouse in Harbour Grace to demand "Bread or Death." More protests of a similar nature ensued in March, including a 1,000-person protest outside of the Colonial Building — the seat of the Newfoundland legislature in St. John's — on 3 March 1886. Such momentary hostility could also take on a more organized political form. In late March, for example, a large number of men stormed the Colonial Building, rushed the Speaker's chair, and waved a white flag with the word "Railway" imprinted on it. These protests, as Korneski has noted, attest to the popularity of the railway among many Newfoundlanders and to how important they perceived it to be for their well-being. For all the troubles that it had caused the colony, many thought that the railway was the answer to Newfoundland's economic crisis. Railway workers were paid in cash, and were thus given more independence in where they spent their money and what they could purchase. This independence had been snatched from the hands of the people as railway construction ceased with the NRC's bankruptcy. They demanded that work on the railway resume.[81]

4. THE PLACENTIA LINE: REGIONAL EXPERIENCES

Pressure, then, was on Thorburn to resume work on railway construction — from the Liberals, from Newfoundland's labourers, and from the press.[82] Thorburn, however, was limited in how he could initiate railway extension. Sir Francis Evans was receiver of the Newfoundland Railway Company when it went bankrupt, and the company maintained control over the line to Harbour Grace. When Thorburn approached Evans with the idea of continuing the line to Halls Bay, Evans responded swiftly: "the Company are not in a position to continue work under the present contract, and bond-holders do not contemplate undertaking to do so. . . . The Company are similarly not in a position to enter into any fresh contract." Instead, he suggested that the company could build a branch line to Carbonear (only a few miles north of Harbour Grace), and eventually another branch to Placentia, a community located on the southwest coast of the Avalon Peninsula (Map 1).[83]

Unfortunately, the NRC would not be able to easily achieve this plan. As the receiver of a bankrupt company, if Evans were to diverge even slightly from the original contract, he would have been forced to consult with England's Court of Chancery. In a letter to J.S. Winter, Newfoundland's Attorney General, Evans remarked that "it is a cumbersome machinery to use, for the

consent of the Court must be asked to every deviation, even when the general consent is determined."[84] To bypass this, Evans thought that the Court might order a sale of the company and its property to the government for a sum that would cover the majority of the £468,000 it still owed its bondholders. Evans suggested that £420,000 would probably please the Court, and this could be in the form of cash, or in government bonds.[85]

The government, however, appeared dissatisfied with the suggested price. Instead of purchasing the NRC, it severed communications with Evans and refused to pay the company the subsidies laid out by the contact, claiming that it was not required to do so as the company had breached the contract by failing to complete the line to Halls Bay by 1886. Subsequently, the government engaged in a long legal battle with Evans and the NRC.[86]

Thorburn still wished to resume railway construction, but expanding to the north presented an issue. The government did not own or operate the line from St. John's to Harbour Grace, and the Reform Party's show of animosity towards Evans and the NRC left the relationship between the two strained. If the government continued construction on the main line towards Halls Bay, co-operation between the government and Evans was unlikely. The best way to proceed with railway construction, he surmised, was to build a branch line from Harbour Grace Junction to Placentia, and only later to extend the main-line beyond the Avalon Peninsula and into the northern districts. This course of action would have been beneficial in numerous ways: it would have provided jobs for large numbers of Newfoundland's unemployed; it would have pleased the Liberal Catholics; and it would have allowed the government time to work towards purchasing the NRC and its property, as the two sides had been unable to agree on the worth of the company's assets.[87]

Thorburn proceeded to implement this plan; he did so, however, without consulting the House of Assembly. Early in 1887, labourers began constructing a road between Harbour Grace Junction and Placentia Bay. In March, some members of the Legislative Council began questioning the purpose of the road.[88] They thought that it generally took on the characteristics of a railroad; however, the government insisted that it was merely an "agricultural road," meant to open up farm lands in the interior and to provide access to the main line.[89] The opposition, however, quickly dismissed these remarks, as the scope of the construction combined with the funding required for the project became evident; "only a railroad would require the extensive kind of operations . . . being carried out."[90] Thorburn's motive in undertaking the Placentia branch in this manner remains unclear.

As this news became known, however, views concerning the desirability of the railway changed. The Reform Party introduced a bill in the House of Assembly proposing that the government raise $800,000 to build the branch line to Placentia. Trinity was one of the first communities to speak out against this measure. On 5 March 1887, the *Weekly Record* in Trinity proclaimed that it was unreasonable for the government to tax Trinity's residents for something that was of no direct use to them: "it is palpably unjust for the Government to enter upon the construction of a line of railway, which can only benefit a portion of the country, though entailing expense on all."[91] A railway to Halls Bay had been promised to the country and for various reasons this had not yet been provided. The Placentia line, the paper argued, would not open agricultural lands. Instead, it would increase Newfoundland's public debt and would damage the chance of a line being built to Halls Bay.[92] People in Bonavista had also grown discontent, and had begun to form a "monster petition."[93]

Twillingate residents expressed similar sentiments. Although they had paid their share of taxes towards it, the main line from St. John's to Harbour Grace benefited their town very little. Though fundamentally pro-railway, the *Twillingate Sun* disagreed with the construction of the Placentia line:

> Now it is generally understood that the original route is to be deviated from, and a branch line to Placentia constructed instead. But this will not serve the Northern districts. Of all the public expenditures that have ever been made, they have received comparatively nothing, as nearly everything is centred in the metropolis and the surrounding localities. A Railway to Halls Bay would put within the reach of many of our people facilities for procuring a livelihood now unknown to them and be the means of employment in various directions.[94]

The Twillingate paper further placed pressure on Newfoundland's northern representatives to oppose railway projects other than the line to Halls Bay; if they ignored the claims of the northern districts, those representatives could scarcely expect to be re-elected.[95] The people of Little Bay, they pointed out, were of the same mind: the town's residents "feel aggrieved when any move is made in the way of frustrating the object desired, namely the completion of the Railway to Halls Bay."[96]

These feelings of animosity were strengthened by the fact that Placentia's local fishery had remained more productive than most, escaping much of the

economic distress that the rest of the island had endured in the years prior to 1887.[97] In the eyes of the destitute, public works as a means of pauper relief should be the government's priority. While the railway could be used for this purpose, the line to Placentia represented only a frivolous expenditure the colony could not afford, and that, while supplementing the incomes of those in a comparatively prosperous area, would leave many without employment. John Syme, a member of the Legislative Council, felt that the government could not reasonably ask other communities to help fund such a project:

> Why should the people of all the extern [*sic*] districts of the Island be called on to pay for such immense privileges for a particular locality where the fisheries have been most successful for years past, where no poverty exists, while many other parts of the island, where destitution is rife are entirely ignored? . . . It would have been more properly the duty of the Government, instead of making lavish expenditure on a district that did not need, to have initiated some public works on places in Bonavista Bay and elsewhere where the people have had to cry out for the necessaries of life.[98]

Another member of the Legislative Council, A.W. Harvey, also spoke out against the Placentia line. He doubted that the government was truly worried about public relief, and called into question the integrity of the policy: the line, he noted, was "a form of pauper relief disguised under a false visage."[99]

Furthermore, Placentia's location within the Avalon likely fostered much animosity from other communities within the same region. Placentia was in close proximity to a deep, ice-free port at Long Harbour, which provided easy, affordable shipping to the area.[100] Without such benefits, and without the same prosperous bank fishery, the northeast coast of the Avalon would have had feelings of envy towards Placentia residents. The addition of a railway line to the area perhaps awakened these feelings; why should the government fund a relief project to a community that was already economically stable?

Not everyone, however, opposed the Placentia line. The *Harbour Grace Standard*, for example, thought the line would yield the largest benefit to the whole country: "the true way to utilize the present road, and to make it most useful to the largest number, and at the smallest cost to the colony is to connect it with Placentia."[101] At a small cost ($260,000, the paper calculated), the line would "give travelling and freighting facilities to a large population on the northwest coast."[102] Many people in St. John's also supported the line. Com-

munications between Newfoundland and Canada, argued the *Evening Mercury*, would be improved. Once the "continental system of railways" reached a port in Nova Scotia — either Louisbourg or Sydney, it was inferred — steamers could be run from there to Placentia, forming a quicker, more efficient mail route for the bulk of the island. This would be "[a] means of saving many thousand dollars a year to the Colony . . . possibly more than will pay the interest on the expenditure in the construction of the line."[103] This was, perhaps, a slightly altered version of Sandford Fleming's vision of a railway system in Newfoundland. Fleming saw St. John's as a logical terminus for steamers coming from Ireland. A railway running from St. John's to St. George's Bay would connect with ferries running to Shippigan, New Brunswick, which would ultimately save passengers four days on a trip from London to New York.[104]

Such supporters of the Placentia line also condemned the view that it would only benefit Placentia and the surrounding area; these proclamations, claimed the *Evening Mercury*, were part of "an unworthy attempt to awaken the jealousy of the northern districts."[105] As it stood, however, the main line had been completed as far as Harbour Grace Junction, with a branch line to Harbour Grace; the advent of a branch line to Placentia would have served to bring traffic to both St. John's and Harbour Grace, and thus the response from these two areas is hardly surprising. Further, the *Evening Mercury* was pro-railway, and at this point the main organ of the Reform Party. Thus, it was less susceptible than other newspapers to questioning Thorburn's policies.[106]

Predictably, residents of Placentia also tended to be in favour of the line. They felt that they had the same rights to a railway line as any other locality in the colony. The simple fact that their fishery had been successful in years past should not have entered the equation; rather, railway construction should have proceeded in a way that best served the island as a whole. In response to comments made by Syme in the legislature, one Placentia native expressed these opinions in a letter to the editor of the *Evening Telegram*:

> [Mr. Syme] asks, why should people in the extern districts pay for such immense privileges for a locality where the fisheries have been successful for years and where no poverty exists?. . . Why should our prosperity be made the platform of such comments? I fail to see where the immense privilege comes in. Do our people debar those of the northward from obtaining employment thereon? And should the country at large . . . be called upon to relinquish such a laudable

> enterprise as railway extension, to the building of breakwaters to the northward?[107]

The "Placentia Observer" continued, noting that Newfoundlanders should be proud to have Placentia as a railway terminus, as its beauty was breathtaking and its soils were highly productive, awaiting development.

Politicians and the press raised further questions. Why had the railway line to Placentia been hidden under the guise of an access road? Why had Robert Thorburn, who had so vehemently combated the railway's inception, himself initiated a project of railway construction?

In April 1887, the press reported that the Placentia line was part of a political transaction between Thorburn's Reform Party and Ambrose Shea's newly formed Liberal Party. In exchange for support from the Liberals, Thorburn offered the Liberals "three men in the Executive with portfolios . . . a Municipal Board; a Railway to Placentia, and several other valuable considerations."[108] In the 1885 general election, the Reform Party had won 21 seats, and the Liberals had won 14. Notably, the parties were divided markedly along religious lines. Indeed, all elected Reform Party members were Protestant, and all Liberal Party elected members were Catholic. Although Thorburn had promised that there would be no amalgamation with the Liberals,[109] the vigorous opposition of the Liberals, suggested the *Evening Telegram*, caused the Reform Party to enter negotiations.[110] While the Liberals' ability to thwart Thorburn's ability to govern is perhaps questionable, support from the Liberals certainly would have made the process of creating legislation more expedient.

Regardless, the construction of the Placentia line worked to the detriment of Thorburn. Localities that had elected members of the Reform Party felt as though their MHAs had failed to represent the interests of their respective constituencies. On 22 April 1887, for example, a man from Bonavista wrote the following to Abraham Kean and Frederick White, two of the three Bonavista MHAs:

> While Placentia can boast of a carriage road, all the time, and is now to have a railroad, not one yard of road is being made towards the northern districts. Or even less than that, you can't erect a light house in your own district, so long in contemplation, because it will cost a few hundred dollars. But you can allow this enormous expenditure. And why is it so? Is it because the party you belong to chose to enter into a private contract, to the disgust of the whole of the northern districts, and you don't dare oppose your party?. . . Remember, there are only

> two years more. You may be asking again for our support; and if you improve in the future we *may* support you. But if you don't cause something to be done as an equivalent for this Placentia affair . . . your chances will be few and far between.[111]

The *Evening Telegram* concurred with the man from Bonavista, who signed his name *Vox Populi*, or "voice of the people": these men from Bonavista, the *Telegram* charged, "actually SOLD THE INTERESTS OF THEIR CONSTITUTENTS. . . . No wonder Responsible Government is becoming a by-word and reproach in such lands."[112]

The reason for such hostility towards these men was that they did not actively oppose the bill entitled "An Act to Make Provision for the Construction of a Line of Railway from the Harbour Grace Junction of the Newfoundland Railway to Placentia and for Other Purposes." The bill called for the colony to raise a sum of $800,000 for the purposes of constructing the Placentia line. On 7 May 1887, the House of Assembly passed the bill; only two people voted against it — one from St. John's East (Thomas Murphy) and one from Bonavista (Alfred Morine).[113] Robert Bond, representative of Fortune Bay, also adamantly opposed the bill, though he did not vote against it. These members of the House of Assembly were praised by the press: the *Weekly Record* printed an excerpt of Bond's speech opposing the bill;[114] the *Twillingate Sun*, after noting that Bond, Morine, and Murphy were the only members who opposed the bill, condemned the rest of the House of Assembly, crying that "whether they were in favour of the measure or not 'political expediency' was the outcome of the Placentia railway inauguration," and the interests of the northern districts were ignored.[115]

In the early debates concerning the branch line, the Thorburn government had argued that the railway to Placentia was necessary to provide immediate employment to the impoverished; the line would satisfy this need as well as improve the country's overall infrastructure and provide a profitable return:

> We have had, as every preceding Government, to adopt our conduct to the varying emergencies of the moment, and have sometimes been compelled, in order to save the country from loss and calamity, to exceed our powers and do unauthorized acts in order to save the whole concern from a disastrous collapse and the country from the loss which would have ensued.[116]

The three men who did oppose the line, however, produced convincing counter-arguments. Morine, in particular, was quite vocal. He noted that the government's lawsuit against the Newfoundland Railway Company left the government in a precarious position. It would have to ask for permission from the NRC to connect trains from St. John's with the new branch line. "The Company," he continued, "being irritated with the Government, and having all the cards in their hands, will be in a position to demand seven eighths or more of the rates charged."[117] Further, argued Morine, the company could potentially boycott the new branch line; it could refuse to allow the Placentia line to connect with theirs, and it could further refuse to allow traffic from Placentia to be transported on their lines. "Thus [the] branch line to Placentia will become a laughingstock to everybody," Morine asserted; "a line which will carry neither passengers, nor freight."[118]

Bond, too, was critical of the Thorburn administration. He was adamant that in its political deal with the Liberals, the government had intentionally abandoned the interests of the northern districts of Newfoundland. He fought this point by referring to a government speech that noted the intention to financially help regions outside of the Avalon, as "a large proportion of the population of the eastern and northern coasts of the island failed to secure the means of subsistence for the coming winter."[119] Though the government had made large expenditures on relief works, noted Bond, these districts — the ones that needed it most — "[had] not been the recipients of the large expenditure." He continued: "What about the Placentia Railway?… There is not a word about it because the northern districts were promised that this railway should not be built before the northern line was complete. Yet we know . . . that this railway has been commenced."[120]

Acting on these objections, Morine proposed an amendment to the Placentia Railway Bill, which proposed "the continuation of the main line and not of the Placentia branch."[121] The amendment, however, was easily defeated — Murphy had seconded the motion, but there was no further support — and the bill eventually passed on 7 May 1887.[122] A week later, the Legislative Council passed the bill without amendments.[123]

Contrary to the interests of large portions of the colony, workers resumed construction on the Placentia line. A few months later, however, the project began to encounter problems. On 9 May 1887, government engineer H.G. Burchell wrote that work on the line "was each day becoming more expensive, and the hardships of labourers were daily being added to."[124] Indeed, the workers did have it rough; they were paid a mere 75 cents per day and had to build their

own lodgings from rough materials.[125] "Further than this," continued Burchell, the localities from which the line could be used as a relief work became "more and more restricted as operations are pushed away from Hr. Grace Junction, owing to the increasing distance from the base of supplies."[126]

By early 1888, the project was nearly complete. By the time of its completion, however, the government's expenditure on the line was double the original estimate, and had cost the colony $500,000.[127] Northward expansion of the railway had scarcely been discussed in the House of Assembly; around the same time, Morine moved that construction on the line to Halls Bay be reinitiated, but the motion was promptly defeated.[128] The debacle captured the attention of Newfoundland's former Premier, William Whiteway, who had retired from politics prior to the 1885 election. Indicating his intention to re-enter the political arena, in October 1887 he published a "manifesto" entitled "To the People of Newfoundland." Within the text, he noted the "broken promises" of the Reform Party:

> With a great flourish of trumpets the Reform Party had made many promises to the people, and I was willing to give them an opportunity to attempt to carry them out. . . . Chief among these promises may be mentioned . . . "Railway extension *upon honest principles*" . . . Railway extension "upon honest principles" there has been none; but an extension to Placentia has begun at the price of a most dishonest political bargain. . . . Looking at the financial condition of the colony, the mismanagement of public affairs, and the lamentable exodus of our people, I feel it my duty to respond to the earnest solicitations of numerous friends, and to again unfurl the banner of progress. . . . The time is not far distant when you will have an opportunity to revive a policy which will develop the material prosperity and promote the general well-being of the people of Newfoundland.[129]

Of course, many constituencies had grown discontent with Thorburn and the Reform Party, and received Whiteway's declaration positively. The *Weekly Record* noted that there was a country-wide "clamouring for the patriotic and progressive Sir William," and that the Reform Party would "not go unpunished when the day of reckoning arrives."[130]

Residents of Twillingate were of a similar opinion. The *Twillingate Sun* wrote that "no statesman [is] more qualified or competent to guide the helm of public affairs than the ex-Premier." It did suggest to Whiteway, however, that

the paper would support whichever party proposed the continuation of the northern line:

> We know that the fisheries the past two years have been bad, still there would be no cause for so many of our people leaving, if the country were opened up and avenues of employment were provided, instead of so many having to depend solely on the fisheries and eking out a miserable existence. . . . What is wanted to bring about a new era of things is the extension of the railway through the country to Hall's Bay, and we are prepared to support the party that will hold out this inducement to the people.[131]

The *Twillingate Sun* was adamant that the line be extended to Halls Bay — the party that delivered it was secondary, though certainly the paper seemed partial to Whiteway.

Opinions in St. John's were generally split. The *Evening Telegram* supported Whiteway's return, primarily because of the failure of Thorburn's government: upon the retirement of Whiteway in 1885, the Reform Party "assumed control of our public affairs, and a nice 'kettle-of-fish' they have made of them. Such a reckless, blundering, profligate combination called a government the colony has never before been afflicted with."[132] Though the *Telegram* had originally supported the Reform Party, it now had shifted loyalties, supporting the Liberals under Whiteway; "[a]way with such contemptible poltroons," the paper cried, "and let us have a whole Government of honest men!"[133] The *Evening Mercury*, however, dissented. It maintained that Thorburn was actually "a noble character," and criticized Whiteway's manifesto, asserting that he unfairly accredited Newfoundland's financial problems to the government actions, rather than to "naturally occurring" problems that hindered the fisheries:

> Will Sir William tell us what the Government have had to do with the failure of the Labrador and shore fishery in the northern bays, for three years in succession . . . with the great storm on Labrador in 1885 which impoverished thousands? How does he hold the Government responsible for the fall in the price of cod and seal oil to one half their former prices. . . ? These are the causes that have impoverished so many of our people . . . and rendered employment scarce; but to put them down to Government is sheer absurdity.[134]

The *Evening Mercury* also criticized the *Evening Telegram* for its inconsistency in supporting Whiteway. Indeed, on 28 September 1887, the *Mercury* published an article exposing some of the absurd accusations made by the *Telegram* in 1885; one charged that Whiteway imported his own groceries "duty free," and another of stealing $8,000 from fishermen. The *Evening Telegram*'s newfound support for Whiteway, the *Mercury* asserted, was enough to bring Whiteway's reputation "into suspicion, distrust and ultimate ruin."[135]

The impending 1889 election gave Newfoundland's communities a chance to actively demonstrate their opinions. Certainly there were other issues afoot at the time of the election, but for some localities the railway project was the primary concern. Most notably, Trinity residents were assured by Whiteway that "every attention [would] be given to those local matters which are of the greatest importance to them"[136] and Twillingate residents were reminded by their paper that it was Whiteway who had set out to build a railway line to Halls Bay, and thus, it was Whiteway who would be best suited to finish such a project.[137]

Thorburn attempted to win over some of these Whiteway supporters in the months immediately prior to the election. In June 1889 the House of Assembly passed "An Act to Make Provision for the Construction of a Line of Railway to Halls Bay, and for Other Purposes," which allowed for the Receiver General to raise a loan of $4,250,000 for the purposes of continuing construction on the line to Halls Bay.[138] The action, however, was not enough to help Thorburn. Out of 36 total seats, the Reform Party managed to obtain only five. None were elected in St. John's, Trinity, or Twillingate. In fact, Thorburn — running out of Trinity — failed to retain his seat, receiving only 698 votes, the fewest of all six candidates in his district; Whiteway, leading the Liberal Party formed by Ambrose Shea, received the most with 2,094 votes.[139]

Upon returning to power, Whiteway's Speech from the Throne indicated that he fully intended to rekindle railway policies from his previous tenure. By 1890, his administration had signed a contract with George H. Middleton and Robert G. Reid to build a railway from Whitbourne to Halls Bay for $15,600 per mile. Middleton and Reid further agreed to operate the Placentia Railway during the period of the contract, taking the line out of government hands. By 1892, Middleton had pulled out of the contract, and thus Reid's chapter in Newfoundland's railway history was beginning to emerge; it was yet another period marred with political controversy.[140]

5. CONCLUSION

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, Newfoundland's economy puzzled the country's politicians and intellectuals. As the colony's population increased throughout the century and the shore fishery faltered, Newfoundland's dependence on the cod fishery became problematic. With less than 15 per cent of its inhabitants employed in an area outside of the fishery,[141] Newfoundland was, according to Shannon Ryan, "dependent on the cod fishery to an extent unmatched by any other major producer."[142] As a result, politicians attempted to deal with limitations and declining prospects in the fishery by making terrestrial resources more central to the island's commerce. By the last decades of the century, many people — namely, the wealthy employed outside of the fishery, and fishers themselves — became fixated on the idea that a railway would be the best means to this end. There was, however, no consensus on whether Newfoundland was prepared to enter the railway age. In fact, the question of whether the colony ought to build a railway was one of the most contentious political issues of the period.

In his 1973 article "Regional Politics and the Politics of Regionalism," political scientist Peter Gourevitch asked: "Are regional differences capable of breaking through present alignments, which tie people together by class or religion across sub-national geographic boundaries, to create new political alignments, linking up the residents of one area against the residents of another?"[143] This is an apt question when considering Newfoundland's railway and development history. Newfoundland residents were indeed tied together in terms of both class and religion. As Korneski has observed, a positive opinion of the railway was so entrenched in the consciousness of the working class that, shortly after the NRC and its bondholders terminated railway construction in 1884, the government was met with a number of worker-organized protests; the relationship is irrefutable.[144] As well, as the politics of the 1880s — including the Harbour Grace Affray — indicate, the religious cleavage between Newfoundland's Protestants and Catholics was still a strong factor as the two battled for political power. Whiteway himself was forced from the premiership as a result of this sectarian strife. Although Newfoundlanders did identify — wittingly and unwittingly — with class and religion, quite evidently they also identified with another variable: region.

We must assess, then, where we can, the role of the region in the formulation of railway opinions. Here, there is a notable trend: people's opinions on the railway were significantly influenced by whether or not they perceived the

project to be of any direct benefit to their particular community. The expectation was that a railway was to be built across Newfoundland from St. John's to Halls Bay (as stipulated by the contract of 1881), bringing benefits to all districts of the island. The majority of people, it would appear, supported this policy. Residents, however, had no intentions of supporting a railway that did not come within reach of their hometown; if people were being taxed for the purposes of railway construction, they fully expected to be able to obtain work on the line's construction and for the line to benefit their locality. Thus, when construction on the line to Halls Bay ceased in 1884 and construction on the line to Placentia began shortly thereafter, communities beyond the Avalon Peninsula were upset. Though they were helping to fund the railway, it was being built away from them, rather than towards them. Alternatively, towns within the Avalon tended to support the line to Placentia, or at the very least, opinions were split, as other variables came into play. Placentia's comparatively flourishing economy at the time — which was in no small part due to its bank fishery and access to an ice-free port at Long Harbour — made other communities envious. If the railway project was primarily a relief work, then building a line to a prosperous community hardly made sense.

More than this, however, communities outside of the Avalon were able to exert a high degree of political influence. Thorburn's decision to resume construction on the railway was affected by the pressures exerted by localities throughout Newfoundland. When the government revealed its intention to build a railway line to Placentia, the papers of those communities not on the Avalon Peninsula were extremely critical of Thorburn. From their perspective, by failing to first complete the line to Halls Bay before commencing work on branch lines, the government, though continuing to collect their taxes, was failing to properly represent their interests. Realizing that his re-election was severely threatened by the discontent of these localities, Thorburn reacted by reinitiating work on the line to Halls Bay in 1889, just before the general election. This action, however, came too late. Whiteway's return to the political arena offered a viable alternative to Thorburn, who had betrayed the trust of these communities. Promising continued work on the railway to Halls Bay and to cater to the needs of individual localities, Whiteway easily won the 1889 election.

The Placentia Railway Question represents but one small episode in Newfoundland's greater history of railway construction and colonial development. If the opinions of Newfoundland's populace were affected by where they resided, and the collective views of communities could help to shape railway policy, then we can scarcely forget to consider region in the debates concerning railway policy

in Newfoundland. We would be well advised to revisit the bulk of Newfoundland's railway and development history while bearing in mind the role of region.

NOTES

1 I would like to thank Kurt Korneski and Sean Cadigan of Memorial University's History Department, the journal's anonymous reviewers, and the journal's editor, James Feehan, for reading drafts of this paper and offering their consistently thoughtful feedback. I would also like to thank Charles Conway of Memorial's Department of Geography who helped to generate this paper's map.

2 Frank Cramm, "The Construction of the Newfoundland Railway" (M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1961), 157.

3 Ibid., 159.

4 James K. Hiller, "The Railway and Local Politics in Newfoundland, 1870-1901," in James K. Hiller and Peter Neary, eds., *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Essays in Interpretation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 123.

5 Ibid., 141.

6 Kurt Korneski, "Race, Gender, Class, and Colonial Nationalism: Railway Development in Newfoundland, 1881–1898," *Labour/Le Travail* 62 (Fall 2008): 96.

7 Other scholars of the time focused on Reid's involvement with the Newfoundland Railway. See, for example, James K. Hiller, *The Newfoundland Railway, 1881-1949* (St. John's: Newfoundland Historical Society Pamphlet no. 6, 1981). S.J.R. Noel devoted a chapter of his 1971 book, *Politics in Newfoundland*, describing the 1898 contract signed by R.G. Reid. Within it, he condemns the members of Newfoundland government for being too concerned with themselves, rather than with their constituents; he specifically mentions Alfred Morine, who while serving as Newfoundland's Minister of Finance was also a solicitor for Reid, being paid at a rate of $5,000 annually. See S.J.R. Noel, *Politics in Newfoundland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 26-35. There have also been a few quasi-popular histories of the Newfoundland Railway. All of these, however, are meant only as surveys, and suffer from a lack of appropriate citations. See A.R. Penney and Fabian Kennedy, *A History of the Newfoundland Railway* (St. John's: Harry Cuff, 1988); Les Harding, *The Newfoundland Railway, 1898-1969: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008).

8 Maudie Whelan, "The Newspaper Press in Nineteenth-Century Newfoundland: Politics, Religion, and Personal Journalism" (Ph.D. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland 2002), 277-78.

9 Ibid., 39.

10 Ibid., 277.

11 The *Twillingate Sun* editor, Jabez P. Thompson, received 1,140 votes, and the *Weekly Record* editor, David C. Webber, received 1,750 votes. See Robert D.W. Pitt and Joseph

R. Smallwood, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 1 (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1981), 697.

12 Chauncey M. Depew, ed., *1795-1895: One Hundred Years of American Commerce, Consisting of One Hundred Original Articles on Commercial Topics Describing the Practical Development of the Various Branches of Trade in the United States Within the Past Century and Showing the Present Magnitude of our Financial and Commercial Institutions* (New York: D.O. Haynes & Co., 1895), 111.

13 Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 12.

14 Thomas Keefer, *Philosophy of Railroads* (Montreal: Armour and Ramsay, 1850).

15 A.A. den Otter, *The Philosophy of Railways: The Transcontinental Railway Idea in British North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 33-34; Keefer, *Philosophy*, 9.

16 Father Michael Morris, *The Proposed Railway Across Newfoundland: A Lecture Delivered in the New Temperance Hall, February 9th, 1875* (St. John's: Public Ledger Office, 1875), 4-5, 46.

17 When Newfoundland was granted responsible government in 1855, the First Minister of the House of Assembly was known as the Premier. In 1907, however, when Newfoundland was granted Dominion status, the First Minister formally became known as the Prime Minister; this title changed again in 1934 when Newfoundland lost responsible government and was headed by the Commission of Government. It was not until 1949 when Newfoundland joined Canadian Confederation that the First Minister once again became known as the Premier. For information on the Morris brothers, see Robert D.W. Pitt and Joseph R. Smallwood, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 3 (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1981), 622-25.

18 Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, "Introduction," in Phillip Buckner, ed., *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 14.

19 Ibid., 15.

20 Korneski describes an idealized "British colony," as envisioned by colonial nationalists, as a "prosperous, liberal-capitalist society that consisted of sober patriarchs who dealt with the trials and tribulations of a capitalist economy and liberal polity, and cultured, nurturing women who centred their lives on a 'private sphere' of home, family, and emotion." A railway upheld these ideals in that it promoted both wage labour of a capitalist society — an escape from the despised merchant truck system that failed to live up to standards of "Britishness" — and proper gender roles, as ideally, the wages offered to men employed in railway industries would be sufficient to support a wife whose new domain became the household. For a full discussion on British colonial nationalism and standards of "Britishness," see Korneski, "Race, Gender, Class, and Colonial Nationalism," 86-88.

21 Rev. Moses Harvey and Joseph Hatton, *Newfoundland, the Oldest British Colony: Its History, Its Present Condition, and Its Prospects in the Future* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1883), 251-52.

22 W.E. Cormack, *A Narrative of a Journey Across the Island of Newfoundland* (St. John's: Morning Chronicle Press, 1873), 8-9, 11-12.

23 Ibid., 16-17.

24 J.B. Jukes, *Excursions in and about Newfoundland: During the Years 1839 and 1840*, vol. 2 (London: J. Murray, 1842), 211-12.

25 Ibid., 342-54

26 Alexander Murray and James P. Howley, *Geological Survey of Newfoundland* (London: Edward Stanford, 1881), 62-70, 532-36; James Hiller, "A History of Newfoundland, 1874-1901," (Ph.D. thesis Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1971), 66.

27 Sandford Fleming, *Newfoundland Railway: Report of Preliminary Survey and Explorations of 1875* (St. John's: House of Assembly, 1876), 134.

28 David Alexander, "Newfoundland's Traditional Economy and Development to 1934," *Acadiensis* 5, 2 (1976): 19, 22.

29 Sean T. Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons: Ecology and Equity in the Newfoundland Cod Fishery, 1815-1855," *Labour/Le Travail* 43 (1999): 23.

30 Shannon Ryan, *Fish Out of Water: The Newfoundland Saltfish Trade, 1814-1914* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1986), 258-62; George A. Rose, *Cod: The Ecological History of the North Atlantic Fisheries* (St. John's: Breakwater, 2007), 286.

31 Here, Moodie is referring to British visions of Rupert's Land in the eighteenth century. See D.W. Moodie, "Early British Images of Rupert's Land," in Richard Allen, *Man and Nature on the Prairies* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1976), 1.

32 Hiller, "The Railway and Local Politics," 123.

33 Michael Staveley, "Saskatchewan by the Sea: The Topographical Work of Alexander Murray in Newfoundland," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 77, 2 and 3 (1981): 31-41.

34 John C. Kennedy, "At the Crossroads: Newfoundland and Labrador Communities in a Changing International Context," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 34, 3 (1997): 302-03.

35 *Public Ledger*, 4 Mar. 1881.

36 Korneski, "Race, Gender, Class, and Colonial Nationalism," 84-85, 93.

37 James K. Hiller, "Whiteway, Sir William Vallance," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13 (Toronto and Quebec City: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1994). At: <www.biographi.ca/en/bio/whiteway_william_vallance_13E.html>.

38 Ibid.; Pitt and Smallwood, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 1, 692.

39 Though it had been critical of Whiteway in the early 1880s, in 1887 the *Evening Telegram* switched political allegiances. It became critical of the Reform Party (under Thorburn) and supported the Liberal Party (under Whiteway).

40 *Evening Telegram*, 3 Dec. 1880 (italics in original).

41 Beothuks were the Aboriginal group inhabiting the island of Newfoundland until their extinction in 1829. Little was known about the Beothuk at that time, and Cormack had hoped to make contact with them for the general purpose of gathering information. See Pitt and Smallwood, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 1, 536. For more information on the Beothuk, see Ralph Pastore, "The Collapse of the Beothuk World," *Acadiensis* 19, 1 (1989): 52-71.

42 *Evening Telegram*, 29 Nov. 1880.
43 Cramm, "Construction of the Newfoundland Railway," 158; Hiller, *The Newfoundland Railway*, 14-20; Korneski, "Race, Gender, Class, and Colonial Nationalism," 105.
44 Hiller, *The Newfoundland Railway*, 28.
45 Mike O'Brien has shown that the by the end of World War I, the establishment of the Newfoundland Regiment had cost the country over $16 million in funds; he, among others, identifies this as "the leading factor in Newfoundland's loss of self-government." See O'Brien, "Out of a Clear Sky: The Mobilization of the Newfoundland Regiment, 1914-1915," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 22, 2 (2007): 420. Numerous authors have emphasized the importance of the Great Depression on the establishment of the Commission of Government in Newfoundland in 1934. See, for example, Noel, *Politics in Newfoundland*; Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1988); James Overton, "Economic Crisis and the End of Democracy: Politics in Newfoundland during the Great Depression," *Labour/Le Travail* 26 (Fall 1990).
46 The Newfoundland Royal Commission (1933) noted that the burden of Newfoundland's public debt was "wholly beyond the country's capacity." It also noted that the railway had cost Newfoundland "from first to last . . . nearly $50,000,000, a sum equivalent to approximately half the [country's] public debt." See Great Britain, *Newfoundland Royal Commission Report 1933: Presented by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Parliament by command of His Majesty, November, 1933* (London: HMSO, 1933), 206. 223.
47 *Newfoundlander*, 1 Apr. 1881.
48 *Twillingate Sun*, 21 Apr. 1881.
49 Ibid., 16 June 1881.
50 *Newfoundlander*, 18 Mar. 1881.
51 Ibid., 19 Oct. 1875.
52 Den Otter, *The Philosophy of Railways*, 222.
53 *Terra Nova Advocate*, 13 Dec. 1879 (italics in original).
54 *Public Ledger*, 25 Mar. 1881.
55 Hiller, "The Railway and Local Politics," 130.
56 Frederic F. Thompson, *The French Shore Problem in Newfoundland: An Imperial Study* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 10-16.
57 Sean Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 89-90, 108, 126.
58 *Evening Telegram*, 21 July 1881 (italics in original).
59 *Twillingate Sun*, 16 Aug. 1881; *Newfoundlander* 16 Aug. 1881.
60 Hiller, "The Railway and Local Politics," 132.
61 Pitt and Smallwood, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 1, 693.
62 *Evening Telegram*, 17 Oct. 1883, 22, 23 Feb. 1884; *Evening Mercury*, 22 Feb. 1884.
63 Hiller, "The Railway and Local Politics," 132-33.
64 *Evening Mercury*, 12 Sept. 1884.
65 Ibid., 17 Sept. 1884 (italics and capitals in original).

66 Hiller, "The Railway and Local Politics," 133; Hiller, *The Newfoundland Railway*, 11.

67 Willeen G. Keough, "Contested Terrains: Ethnic and Gendered Spaces in the Harbour Grace Affray," *Canadian Historical Review* 90, 1 (2009): 38-48; Willeen G. Keough, "Ethnicity as Intercultural Dialogue: Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Newfoundland," *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 31, 2 (2005): 23-24.

68 Carolyn Lambert, "Far From the Homes of Their Fathers: Irish Catholics in St. John's, Newfoundland, 1840-86," (Ph.D. Thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2010), 297-98; Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador*, 143.

69 Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador*, 143.

70 James K. Hiller, "Thorburn, Sir Robert," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13, at: <www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thorburn_robert_13E.html>.

71 Pitt and Smallwood, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 1, 694-95.

72 Korneski, "Race, Gender, Class, and Colonial Nationalism," 93-94.

73 Ryan, *Fish Out of Water*, 262-63.

74 For a description of the problems encountered in curing salt fish, see ibid., 42-46; Hiller, "Railway and Local Politics," 134-35.

75 *Evening Telegram*, 5 Feb. 1886.

76 Ibid., 22 Feb. 1886 (italics in original).

77 *Twillingate Sun*, 24 Jan. 1886; *Evening Telegram*, 28 Jan. 1886 (italics in original).

78 *Twillingate Sun*, 10 Sept. 1886.

79 Ibid., 17 Sept. 1886.

80 *Weekly Record*, 29 Sept. 1886.

81 Korneski, "Race, Gender, Class, and Colonial Nationalism," 98-100.

82 Ibid., 95-100; Hiller, "History of Newfoundland," 131.

83 Newfoundland, *Journal of the House of Assembly: Sessional Papers* (St. John's: House of Assembly, 1887), 837, 840-43. Henceforth, *JHA*.

84 *JHA: Sessional Papers*, 1887, 846; Cramm, "Construction of the Newfoundland Railway," 88-89.

85 *JHA: Sessional Papers*, 1887, 844, 846-47.

86 Cramm, "Construction of the Newfoundland Railway," 90, 94-96.

87 Ibid., 104.

88 In 1855, Newfoundland was granted a bicameral, responsible government. This consisted of an elected chamber — the House of Assembly — and a chamber appointed by the Governor — the Legislative Council. While the Governor still appointed the Executive Council (i.e., the government), in order to govern it had to maintain support from a majority of members in the elected House of Assembly. Still, the Legislative Council had the ability to "defeat" or "amend" legislation passed by the House of Assembly.

89 *Evening Telegram*, 10 Mar. 1887; D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland* (Portugal Cove, NL: Boulder Publications, 2002), 514-15; Newfoundland, *Journal of the Legislative Council* (St. John's: Legislative Council, 1887). Henceforth, *JLC*.

90 *Evening Telegram*, 10 Mar. 1887.

91 *Weekly Record*, 5 Mar. 1887.

92 Ibid., 21 May 1887.
93 Ibid., 5 Mar. 1887.
94 *Twillingate Sun*, 2 Apr. 1887.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., 9 Apr. 1887.
97 *Evening Telegram*, 10 Mar. 1887; *Weekly Record*, 21 May 1887.
98 *Evening Telegram*, 10 Mar. 1887.
99 Ibid., 14 Mar. 1887.
100 Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador*, 253.
101 *Harbour Grace Standard*, 30 Apr. 1887.
102 Ibid., 7 May 1887.
103 *Evening Mercury*, 15 Apr. 1887.
104 Hiller, "The Railway and Local Politics," 124.
105 *Evening Mercury*, 25 Feb. 1887.
106 Korneski, "Race, Gender, Class, and Colonial Nationalism," 94-95.
107 *Evening Telegram*, 7 Apr. 1887.
108 Ibid., 14 Apr. 1887; *Weekly Record*, 14 May 1887.
109 Pitt and Smallwood, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 1, 694-96.
110 *Evening Telegram*, 14 Apr. 1887.
111 Ibid., 22 Apr. 1887.
112 Ibid. (capitals in original).
113 *JHA*, 1887, 208-09.
114 *Weekly Record*, 21 May 1887
115 *Twillingate Sun*, 4 June 1887.
116 *Evening Mercury*, 7 Mar. 1887. For further discussion, see Cramm, "Construction of the Newfoundland Railway," 94.
117 *Evening Mercury*, 5 Mar. 1887.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid., 24 Feb. 1887.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., 6 Mar. 1887.
122 Again, Morine and Murphy were the only ones to vote against the bill; 16 MHAs were in favour. For some unapparent reason, Bond decided to abstain from voting. See *JHA*, 7 May 1887, 204-07.
123 *JLC*, 1887, 140.
124 *JHA: Sessional Papers*, 1887, 834-36.
125 Hiller, *The Newfoundland Railway*, 11.
126 Ibid., 836.
127 Hiller, "The Railway and Local Politics," 135.
128 Cramm, "Construction of the Newfoundland Railway," 101-03.
129 *Evening Telegram*, 21 Sept. 1887; *Twillingate Sun*, 1 Oct. 1887; *Weekly Record*, 8 Oct. 1887.
130 *Weekly Record*, 8 Oct. 1887.

131 *Twillingate Sun*, 1 Oct. 1887.
132 *Evening Telegram*, 21 Sept. 1887.
133 Ibid., 23 Sept. 1887.
134 *Evening Mercury*, 22 Sept. 1887.
135 Ibid., 28 Sept. 1887.
136 *Weekly Record*, 19 Aug. 1889.
137 *Twillingate Sun*, 7 Sept. 1889.
138 Newfoundland, *Statutes of Newfoundland, 1889* (St. John's: Queen's Printer, 1889), 44-50.
139 Pitt and Smallwood, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 1, 697.
140 For a history of the 1898 contract and the surrounding political scandal, see Noel, *Politics in Newfoundland*, 26-35.
141 Cadigan, "Moral Economy of the Commons," 18.
142 Ryan, *Fish Out of Water*, 38.
143 Peter Gourevitch, "Regional Politics and the Politics of Regionalism," *Policy Studies Journal* 1, 3 (1973): 172-76.
144 Korneski, "Race, Gender, Class, and Colonial Nationalism," 98-100.