

James Murray and the 1882 Newfoundland General Election

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James Murray (1843–1900) was a St. John’s businessman, born in Newfoundland of Scottish parents. He began a commission and importing business, later expanding into fisheries supply, and seems to have done well until the crash of the local banks late in 1894, which drove the firm into bankruptcy. An obituary stated that at one time his business was “amongst the most extensive, and his wealth was very great.”¹ He was also politically involved, a firm anti-confederate, and held strong opinions about public affairs. But he was not conventionally ambitious, and did not ally himself with any political party or faction, the usual route to place and preferment. Murray was fundamentally a political loner.

He had severe doubts about the viability of the railway project, begun by the government of Sir William Whiteway² in 1881, thinking that the cost would be excessive, and in 1882 he quixotically decided to contest the south coast district of Burgeo-La Poile in the general election held that year. Though he ran as an independent, calling himself “the Fishermen’s friend,” he was obviously opposed to the Whiteway government, though not a member of the New Party that had emerged to contest the Whiteway program.³ The details behind his decision are unclear. He had never been to the district, but had

been asked to run by a number of local residents. This was known as a “requisition,” to which he replied positively in April 1882.⁴ Why he was requisitioned — normal and accepted practice at the time — and by whom, is not known. He seems to have accepted out of a sense of public duty and curiosity.⁵ The election over, Murray wrote a series of over 30 articles for the St. John’s *Evening Telegram* (the colony’s first daily newspaper) between 21 November 1882 and 1 March 1883 describing his experiences during the campaign. Murray was closely associated with the *Telegram*, which had started business in 1879 and was at that time an opposition newspaper.⁶ These articles, couched as letters to the editor, are the reason for this note. They are wordy, and larded with unnecessary quotation and exclamation marks, but they provide a unique account of electoral campaigning in a remote district before the introduction of the secret ballot in 1887.⁷

The single-member district of Burgeo-La Poile had been created in 1855. It extended from Mosquito (Hermitage Bay) in the east to Cape Ray in the west, the terminus of the French Treaty Shore. Its population according to the 1884 Census was 6,544, mainly Newfoundland-born, living in 65 communities of which only 18 had over 100 residents. It was a Protestant district; about 80 per cent were Anglicans, though Wesleyan Methodists were on the advance. There were very few Roman Catholics. Fishing was the main occupation. The largest settlements were Burgeo (681) and Channel (966), with Rose Blanche (495) not too far behind. Only about a third of the population could read and write.⁸

Mercantile influence was an important factor in elections, especially before the introduction of the secret ballot. The firm of Newman and Company, based at Harbour Breton in Fortune Bay, had considerable influence in the eastern part of the district.⁹ But further west the dominant company was De Grouchy, Renouf, Clement and Company, a Jersey firm with establishments at Burgeo, Isle aux Morts, Burnt Islands, Petites, and La Poile.¹⁰ At Channel, the main merchant was John Steer, listed in 1877 as agent for H. Garland.¹¹ There were a number of other important supply merchants, several of them in Rose Blanche, Channel,

and Burgeo. Most supported the incumbent member, Alexander M. Mackay,¹² who had taken the district by acclamation in 1878. Indeed, this was the first time the district had been contested. A Nova Scotian, Mackay was the local superintendent and manager of the Anglo-American Telegraph Company, which owned the international telegraphs landing on and crossing the colony; he also ran the government's telegraph system. He was a man of importance, and in 1882 he supported the Whiteway government. Like Murray, he was a Presbyterian.

The election was governed by the 1877 Elections Act. Candidates had to be adult males, resident in the colony for two years, with a net annual income of at least \$480 or property valued at a minimum of \$2,400. Voters — male British subjects — had to have occupied a dwelling, as owner or tenant, for two years. Those who had received poor relief during the 12 months before the election were disqualified. A voter had to enter a polling booth, declare his name, and record his vote; but if he lived more than 15 miles from a polling booth, he could “give his vote by a written notice made and subscribed in the form [provided in] this Act.” These were known as “proxy votes,” the cause of great competition between candidates.¹³

Murray set off from St. John's on 9 October 1882. Election day was Monday, 6 November, a little less than a month ahead. He travelled on board the steamer *Curlew* with Alexander Mackay and others, “all, like myself, on political business bent.” They parted company at Harbour Breton, since Murray had decided to start his canvass in Channel and work eastwards. He went on to Gaultois in Hermitage Bay¹⁴ and points west, and soon learned that he could not expect any support from the Newman firm: “Messrs. Newman & Co. ‘own’ Gaultois and all the inhabitants thereof . . . We were cordially received and hospitably entertained by Mr. Galop, the residential ‘agent’, but I was sorry to ascertain at a later stage of my political progress that Messrs. Newman’s were ‘opposed’ to me, and had promised their ‘support’ to the other side!”

The *Curlew* later called at Burgeo.¹⁵ It was late, nearly midnight when the boat arrived, but Murray's supporters mounted a

demonstration, complete with the firing of guns, and “then we all proceeded in great good humor to the public hall. Here we amused ourselves, our audience, and one another by making impromptu political speeches, the ‘election’ fever being very prevalent just then and very ‘catching’. After this we Western passengers proceeded on board the steamer again and Burgeo went to sleep.” At Rose Blanche¹⁶ the next morning he spoke to “Mr. Rolls, the local Supplying Merchant,” and learned that he was also supporting Mackay.¹⁷ Murray arrived at “Channel¹⁸ via Port-au-Basque [*sic*]” the next day and found “three-fourths of the Channel people in organized ‘support’ of the Fisherman’s candidate, a ‘support’ that was amply sustained throughout my canvass and fully confirmed and harvested on polling day.”¹⁹

Murray now began serious campaigning. As he writes:

[I took] stock of the political situation, and fully made up my mind as to the course of conduct it was my duty to pursue in relation to it. . . . As far as Channel was concerned, and, as I afterwards discovered, throughout the entire district, I found myself opposed by all the authorities — clerical, mercantile, government and telegraph! Every man, in short, who was paid directly or indirectly from the public funds, or who had a stake in the Government . . . was lifted against me. Every man who held his head higher than that of a “common fisherman” — as they were called — was opposed to “the Fisherman’s candidate!” . . . Verily, the hosts of Anak²⁰ were marshalled against us! . . . In addition to the personal influence and efforts of my political opponent — and these were backed by six years political experience and hold on the district — I had to encounter the active opposition of:— 1st — Every Government official . . . 2nd. — Every Supplying Merchant on the Western Shore,²¹ and most of the itinerant traders along its coast. 3rd — Every Telegraph official from North Bay to Cape Ray. 4th — every political clergyman in the district.²²

While in Channel, Murray also called on Dr. Alexander McKenzie, the Returning Officer for the district, and saw the list of registered voters.²³

In spite of the opposition, Murray persisted. Voters who supported him were, he said, threatened with “a Winter’s starvation and a perpetual deprivation of Road Moneys, poor relief and every other public participation.” Attempts had been made to change their minds with “strong drink (principally porter and rum),” which was freely available. In contrast, Murray made it very clear that he would not purchase votes with drink.²⁴

The only “refreshment” of a liquid kind given by me at public meetings was that afforded by Mr. Gaden’s unrivalled beverages Ginger Ale, Nectar and Lemonade. These drinks were pungent but popular. . . . Crackers and cheese supplied us with the most substantial part of our repasts, with plenty of apples for the women and children (who much appreciated but rarely procured that fruit) and a little tobacco for the men. We all enjoyed ourselves, and did each other mutual good.²⁵

There was also some excitement about a contested election. Murray found “great enthusiasm” throughout the district: “The people had never been to the polls, and they anticipated beneficial results of many kinds.” They were right. One benefit apparently was the distribution by the government of a schooner-load of coal among the poor. Indeed, “[i]n the course of my canvass . . . many amusing instances of its long-continued political neglect came to my observation. One old gentleman — an old Englishman — said to me . . . ‘Well, Mr. Murray, I have been fifty-three years in Newfoundland, and I never received a visit from a Member before!’”²⁶

Murray canvassed Channel and nearby places, including Cape Ray,²⁷ “after a stiff bit of rowing.” He thought he had confirmed about a hundred votes, and then went “down the shore” in a schooner, the *Mayfly*, owned and commanded by “Captain Micky Gillam [who is] one of

the best-known and most popular schooner-holders on the Western Shore.” On 18 October he visited settlements as far as Burnt Islands,²⁸ where he held a meeting, and was promised 85 votes. “At Lower Isle-aux-Mort, they had a procession organized and awaiting our arrival. Experience by this time taught me how important a part ‘flags’, ‘guns’ and ‘processions’ play in Outport election campaigns. . . . We had a fine midday meeting at Isle-aux-Mort, the people being all on ‘our side’.”²⁹

The next day he went in a small boat to Rose Blanche, calling at several places on the way. “Here are a fine ‘fishing room’ and pretentious tower built by the late mercantile firm of Messrs. Ridley & Sons, in their flourishing days.”³⁰ The local supplier, Rolls, was an active opponent, but the visit went ahead nevertheless.³¹ Murray found that:

Such was the obduracy of our powerful enemies, that no place to hold our meeting could be secured except the upper loft of a crazy old fish-barn or loft, the lower “pedal extremities” of which were fixed in the landwash. This upper story . . . opened from the public — well — street; but it was built (or rather propped up) on very long poles that came up from the beach, some thirty or forty feet below. . . . However, there was no help for it! There was no time now to make any alteration. . . . The only thing we could do was to put in a few extra “supports” — strengthen what were in before — and then go home to our “teas”.

When Murray arrived at seven o’clock, he found “at least two hundred men” there and began to speak — though disturbed by the sounds of a pig that “Our ‘diabolical’ enemies had actually anchored . . . down-stairs in the landwash, and these were the ‘notes of discord’ it sent up to disturb our meeting, every time its tail was pinched . . .” Murray spoke for two hours, and “when we ‘called the roll’ of the evening’s proceedings we had the names of sixty of the finest fishermen on our side that ever broke bread! . . . Fifty-seven of these men (three had meanwhile left in a schooner for Boston) came up on polling day and ‘voted for Murray!’”

The next stop was Petites, but Murray visited Seal Islands³² on the way, where there was a short midday meeting.³³ There was a gathering that evening in Petites.³⁴ “We usually found at least two open enemies at each of our meetings, and these two were always different, and always the same. For the latter reason we came to expect them, and gave them a name of our own, calling them ‘the Ten-per-cent Man!’ This name arose from the circumstance that the two men were generally always the Chairman of the Road Board and the Poor Commissioner for each locality, who get ten per cent on the gross amount of money they disburse, as remuneration for themselves.” Those at Petites were inevitably critical, but the evening ended cordially enough.³⁵

On to La Poile Bay, where Murray arrived on 21 October.³⁶ He visited La Poile and nearby places, but understood that this was “the head-quarters of our most powerful political enemies in the district,” and he had little hope of making a serious impression.

Nevertheless we . . . resolved to do the best we could under the circumstances. We had received some mysterious hints “through the day” that we might expect an extra and special degree of opposition at our meeting that night. . . . Eight o’clock came, and so did our audience. The regular assortment of refreshments was “prepared”, the barrel of apples upheaved, and every preliminary cough had subsided into silence. As by this time “the people” were getting impatient and “the rebel chiefs” had not arrived, I began my address.

The Jersey house representatives soon arrived, though, and Murray invited them to the front. A “Mr. Le Sailleur spoke first, a jolly gentlemanly man, who had once commanded a schooner out of the ‘Jersey house’, and is now its chief residential agent. His speech had evidently been ‘cut and dried’ The whole effort was so palpably spiritless and artificial . . . that I thought the task of replying to Mr. Le Sailleur would be a very easy one.” But then another “ten-per-cent man,” a Mr.

Stone, wanted to know what might be done about the extent of poverty, to which Murray replied that the question was an old one, and that what was needed were just laws, change, and competition. Whereupon Stone raised the issue of confederation with Canada, which he supported. Murray responded in the following manner:

1st, — I do not believe that Confederation would confer any benefit on us in Newfoundland that we cannot equally enjoy without it. 2nd, — The Confederation of Newfoundland with Canada would lose us our political independence for ever. 3rd, — If we were in Confederation to-day, we would be paying ten per cent more taxes all round by being under the present Canadian tariff instead of our own. 4th, — It is certain that Canada would not pay into the Newfoundland “pocket” one penny more than she got out of it. How, then, will union with Canada benefit us?

At this point, sensing that a tense altercation was brewing, Murray closed the meeting.³⁷

The schooner went on to Grand Bruit³⁸ (Murray called it Grand Brett), where the party spent a quiet Sunday (22 October). After a meeting the next morning, and with a storm coming on, the party made for Connaigre,³⁹ spent the night there, and then went on to Burgeo.⁴⁰ This was politically difficult territory:

The town of Burgeo — including Upper Burgeo and Hunt’s Islands — contains somewhere about 130 “votes” or families, and from a politician’s point of view, they are as promising a lot of people as our fine Colony can boast. There is a resident Ten-Per-Cent Man, a Magistrate, a “Jerseyhouse,” a Schoolmaster, several schooner-holders, and a family by the name of Dicks. In the event of a general election, the dignitaries named, of course, are all on the side of “the powers that be.” As for the Schooner-holders

... these gentlemen generally “keep their eye to the windward” so effectively as to be always on “the winning side”, while the family by the name of Dicks ... take the precaution to “scatter themselves” on both sides.

Two of the Dicks brothers sided with Murray, but Edward Dicks, who looked after the lighthouse, was “actively employed in canvassing and collecting proxy votes for the other side. . . . And not only he, but every public official in Burgeo was similarly engaged.”

Murray now encountered Alexander Mackay for the first and only time. There was a large audience at the meeting that evening in the public hall. Murray had his say,⁴¹ and then Mackay arrived. He “spoke strongly in favor of the present Government and its general policy . . . [and] said he respected [those] who were politically opposed to him and had not met with anything but respect from them. [He] spoke in a manly way and spoke well.” After Mackay finished speaking, Murray responded:

in a few good-humoured sentences, and then the audience . . . gave “Three Cheers” for both. Thus ended the first and only public encounter of the two candidates. . . . After all the speaking was over we called our roll, as usual, when only thirty out of the hundred electors of Burgeo responded to the call. Evidently advantage had been taken of the six months interval which had transpired between the two “calls”⁴² to “patch up” the political grievances of the district. Rectification of the abuses connected with the administration of the Road Board and of the Poor Relief had been promised, and substantial tokens that they were still appreciated by “the powers that be” had been given to the leading “Schooner-owners” of the place.⁴³

Murray was stormbound the next day, but decided to hold a meeting on Hunt’s Islands (near Burgeo) in the evening, in a deserted schoolhouse. This was done as quietly as possible so as not to alert the

opposition. But soon after the meeting began, “the closed door was stealthily pushed open, and three ‘muffled Dromios’ glid in”⁴⁴ Undaunted, Murray spoke for an hour. When he called a break, “one of the Burgeo men — a smart little man with an impediment in one of his legs, named Matthews — came out also. Beckoning to two of the Hunt’s men inside, who came out and joined him, he said, ‘Now, boys, give three cheers for Mister Mackay!’ This the boys did ‘to the best of their knowledge and ability’, whereupon the little man, satisfied he had done his ‘terrorising best’, hopped away.” Murray then closed down an attempt by the Burgeo schoolteacher to address the crowd, and everyone dispersed.

The schooner remained stormbound the next day and Murray was frustrated. “There were still no less than twenty different ‘settlements’ to be visited in the East part of the district. There were still 180 Fishermen to be ‘interviewed’ before our task was done! And here was Thursday, the 26th day of October, and Monday next [30 October] would be ‘proxy day,’ while the succeeding Saturday [4 November] would ‘wind up’ the game altogether!” Friday the 27th was a fine day, though, and the *Mayfly* tacked out of the harbour “preceded by four or five similar schooners and skiffs all dispatched by ‘the other side’ to gather in ‘proxy votes’ along the Eastern shore of the district on the coming Monday.”⁴⁵

Murray decided to bypass Ramea and went on to “three islands off the mainland, named RED island, DEER or BEAR islands, and FOX island.⁴⁶ These various rocky ‘punctuations’ of the sea are all more or less inhabited. . . . I have seen so many such curious eyries on ‘the Western Shore.’” He was welcomed on Red Island “with the usual demonstrations of welcome, the firing of guns and the waving of flags, as soon as our own, the ‘Fishermen’s friend’s’ flag was ‘shown at the mizzen.’” He was assured of seven votes there (out of 12). At Deer Island, Murray found that all the votes had been given for Mackay:

“They told us that Mr. Murray had gone home and given up the Election”, was the reply.

“But you see now such is *not* the case. Do you consider yourselves bound by a promise given under false representations?”

“Well, Sir, *we give'd our words, and we don't like to break them!*”

On Fox Island, “We were received with open arms . . . and soon found that we were the political owners of the whole settlement. Twelve good men and true enrolled themselves under the banner of ‘the Fishermen’s friend’ at our meeting that evening — Friday, Oct. the 27th. We had a glorious time — a time of refreshing — a time of mutual congratulation!”⁴⁷

The *Mayfly* then went on to Cape La Hune,⁴⁸ where Murray reported that he was well received and held a meeting. He then decided to make for the easternmost point of the district and work back westward. There was fear of a prevailing easterly wind, and since electioneering supplies were running low, he hoped to intercept the steamer. But the *Mayfly*’s captain did not know that part of the coast, and the schooner had to seek directions from the people of Muddy or Little Hole.⁴⁹ “The little cluster of Fishermen’s huts that comprised it was built under a projecting cliff within the shelter of a small ‘bight’ on the straight shore between Facheux Bay and Bonne Bay. . . . The fishing village itself was barely distinguishable to the passing navigator, and except that one of the homes was painted red, we might have run past without observing it.”⁵⁰ Its patriarch was one George Simms, who came on board with six other men:

“Be you Mr. Merry, sir?”

“That is my name.”

“Well, now! I’ll never forgive that Mister Parsons for deceiving me [so].”

“How did he deceive you?”

“Oh, he told us you were the Fishermen’s ‘Member’ and that we all ought to vote for you.”

“Well, my friend, there wasn’t much deception about that.”

“But another man came along afterwards and told us if we voted for you we should all be turned out of the church.”

“Did he say why?”

“Yes, he said our parson had taken down all our names for Mister Mackay, and if we giv’d them for you we’d be all turned out of the church.”

“Did your clergyman take down your names?”

“Yes.”

“Did he tell you what for?”

“No.”

“O, he took down your names on a piece of paper and did not tell you what for?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Afterwards another man came along and had the list of your names with him just as your clergyman had taken them down, and *he* told you that *your clergyman had taken down all your names, and that if you didn’t ‘vote’ for Mr. Mackay you would be turned out of the church?*”

“That is right, sir.”

“How often do you see your clergyman?”

“We seed him twice the last two years, sir, when he came to collect his fees.”

“What are his fees?”

“Ten shillings for single men, and twenty shillings for married men, just according as we can give it to him.”

“The time he ‘took down your names’ was a special visit, then? What else did the second man tell you?”

“That if we voted for you, we would never get any road money.”

“Have you ever got any road money?”

“No, sir, not a penny!”

“Have you ever seen your Member?”

“No, sir.”

“And you really believe that if you vote for ‘Mr. Merry’ you will NEVER get any road money, and you will be ‘turned out of the church?’”

“So they told us, Sir.”

“And in consequence of what ‘they’ told you, and of what all of them said and did, you are *afraid* to vote for me?”

“We wouldn’t like to, now.”⁵¹

The *Mayfly* then visited Mosquito,⁵² where Murray found seven voters, three of them committed to Mackay. “The other four gentlemen . . . voted for the ‘Fishermen’s friend’ . . . I visited all the families during the day.”

Monday, 30 October, was nomination day and the *Mayfly* took off early. Proxy votes were now vital,⁵³ and there was a real sense of urgency. Murray arranged for another schooner to take up such votes in Mosquito and Muddy Hole, and then:

to follow us up the Shore until we were overtaken. Knowing that “the other side” had a Schooner in each of the “proxy” ports, ready to gobble up all the votes the moment the clock struck two on Monday afternoon, it was of first importance that we should try to over-haul as many of said ports as possible *before* that time. We knew, of course, that we could only realize partial success at the best. . . . Herein behold the fraudulency of this “proxy” system of voting! There were some ten of these “proxy” ports altogether, comprehending some one hundred votes. There was no reason on earth why those places should not have been furnished with “polling booths” as well as similar places to the Westward.⁵⁴

The *Mayfly* went into East Cul de Sac,⁵⁵ “where there are five voters, and all for ‘Mr. Merry’! The pronunciation of the name is Cue-de-Sac — the l in Cul being silent — and the meaning of the French

is, I am told, the ‘mouth of a bag,’ or a blind alley or passage — the allusion being to the shape of its harbor.” Murray was then storm-bound in Richard’s Harbour with other proxy-seeking vessels.⁵⁶ There were 13 votes there, of which Mackay got 12, but John Simms, a local resident, provided an account of how government forces had managed the election, which Murray thought typical:

I — First, Mr. Galop — Messrs. Newman & Co.’s agent at Gaultois — “sent up word” to the thirteen voters of Richard’s Harbor, all of whom “dealt” with the aforesaid firm that “*they would have to vote for Mr. Mackay!*”

II — Secondly — the respected Clergyman of that part of “the Western Shore” — quietly intimated to the thirteen voters of Richard’s, through one of their leading men, that “*they would be expected to vote for Mr. Mackay!*”

III — Thirdly. The Government suddenly discovered *after Mr. Murray had started for the Westward* that the citizens of Richard’s wanted a short piece of road in their “settlement” — a road that would employ each and every one of the thirteen voters for three days per man, at a dollar per day, and entitle the “voters” to exactly three dollars a head, *payable on “proxy day!”*

IV. Fourthly. Capt. Ansen’s⁵⁷ schooner, laden with coal, left Burgeo for “Richard’s” so as to arrive at the latter place just in time for “proxy” day. As handling coal is rather *dry* work, and as it was election time, anyhow, she carried one of those *gallon jars of rum*, which sometimes prove such effective instruments in political warfare. And it is rather a remarkable circumstance that, according to orders, the seals on the rum-jars were not to be “started” until *the “proxy votes” were all ready to sign!*

V. Fifthly and last. The thirteen “free and independent” voters of Richard’s were kindly invited into one of the houses “towards” two o’clock on Monday afternoon — having all that day been “gaoled and guarded” with a jealous eye. Then were the playful “proxies” brought out, *all*

ready to sign. Then was the three dollars a head per man on the table *all ready to pay!* Then was the gallon jar of rum unsealed ALL READY TO DRINK!

The weather was so bad that it was not until 2 November that the *Mayfly* could get away to Ramea.⁵⁸ Most of the party went across to Burgeo,⁵⁹ where they arrived early on the Friday morning (3 November). “After a hurried breakfast the ‘Fishermen’s Friend’ availed himself of the ‘institution’ over which Mr. Mackay particularly presides — the Electric Telegraph.” Murray sent and received messages from various parts of the district,⁶⁰ and then had an altercation with the local magistrate about the removal of four Fox Island voters from the roll because they had allegedly received poor relief.⁶¹

He then returned to “the Ramea Islands. The sun was setting in ‘the golden West’ as we tacked along past Bear Islands, where Mr. Edward Dicks resides in that fine Lighthouse of Burgeo.” Murray continues:

As the writer paced the “Mayfly’s” deck, he could not refrain from thinking of the many scenes and incidents he had passed through since, *on that day three weeks ago*, he had first set foot in the district of Burgeo and La Poile! How much had I seen of Outport life in my native land during that short period! And now, on to-morrow, the whole campaign would be over, and my duty done. . . . Truly, there was a little sentiment even about that “last time” — associated as it has been with much hardship of various kinds, a good deal of monotony and confinement and not a little unfair treatment at the hands of men from whom I might have expected better things. But the warm attachments of my Fishermen friends, and the manifestations of them, made amends for all. . . .

Shortly before eight o’clock, we arrived across in Ramea. . . . It was election eve, and “the enemy” had gathered all the “voters” they could “lay their claws on” into a large store belonging to Mr. Penny, where, under the tutelage of

young King — the schoolteacher of Burgeo — they were having “a high old time of it!” This was done, of course, to keep them out of earshot of the “Fishermen’s friend”, and to prevent us from getting even a *chance* of their votes. “The time was short” . . . and so it was deemed proper that . . . all the “free and independent” voters of Ramea [should be] *locked up in a Fish store!*

Nonetheless, Murray held a small meeting in Ramea:

At the close of my speech I told them that the present was my *last* political meeting “on the Western Shore” as a candidate for their district, and that I would *end* my campaign as I had *begun* it, by saying that, whatever the result may be, *I have faithfully done my duty from first to last!* I have visited every settlement in your district but three. I have personally asked for the “vote” of every Fisherman to whom I could obtain access. I have gone through the district from East to West before election day, and that *without any steamer*. With the *result* of this Election I have nothing to do . . . I feel that my work is done *here and now*, and my labors terminate *to-night!* Accept my thanks yourselves . . . and now “Good Night, Farewell, and Good-bye all!” This wound up my campaign on “the Western Shore” *for that time.*⁶²

The canvass over, Murray made his way to Channel, where the official result would be pronounced by the Returning Officer, Dr. Alexander McKenzie. On his way he stopped in La Poile Bay, where he found that some voters were “very indignant at the extreme measures resorted to by ‘the Jersey house’ to ‘carry the day’.” “Why, Sir,” — said they — “they even brought the very COOK out of the COOK-HOUSE to vote for Mr. Mackay!” Did you let him vote? asked Murray. “Be gannies, no!” they shouted — “*We basted him!*” Murray got 44 votes there, against 60 for the “other side.”⁶³ The *Mayfly* then went on to

Petites and Rose Blanche. Murray had been concerned about the solidity of his backing in that area, given that his main supporters were neither economically independent nor dependable. Moreover, the local merchants — Rolls and Rideout — were hostile and among “a lot of prowling, plotting wolves . . . hovering over our poor little political flock.” Nevertheless, Murray got 57 votes against 45.⁶⁴ The *Mayfly* arrived in Channel early on the Sunday morning, 5 November.⁶⁵

Election day was 6 November. Dr. McKenzie “opened the packets” from the polling stations, “called out the votes,” and declared Mackay elected.⁶⁶ By this time Murray had moved his effects on shore and squared up with Captain Gillam,⁶⁷ but he was indignant about the government’s establishment of a polling booth at Cape Ray by telegraph instruction on nomination day. This, Murray held, was unfair and illegal, blaming the Canadian Rennie family, which operated the lighthouse, managed road labour, and also ran the polling booth.⁶⁸ Murray lodged a formal complaint with the Returning Officer, adding other instances of improper behaviour.⁶⁹ He received 346 of the 819 votes cast, about 42 per cent, giving Mackay a majority of 127. The election as a whole was easily won by the Whiteway government.⁷⁰ Murray had made a respectable showing, though, and after 1885 (when there was a largely fixed general election that gave an uncontested district to Mackay) Burgeo-La Poile was always fought over. Murray won the district in 1889, the first general election to use the secret ballot, and again in 1893, but he was unseated in 1894, part of a slippery Tory attempt to oust Whiteway’s Liberals⁷¹ that drew in Murray, who was seen as vulnerable. Because disqualified, Murray could not contest the subsequent by-election in September 1894,⁷² but he canvassed on behalf of the Liberal candidate, who lost. This did not end Murray’s status as an independent candidate. He was defeated (as an independent) in the 1897 election, and that marked the end of his political career.

Murray’s articles in 1882–83 contained some general comments on the “Western Shore” that are worth mentioning. Generally familiar with conditions on the Avalon Peninsula, he was struck by the very different environment of the southwest coast. It was scantily settled

with “no roads of any kind from place to place, except local roads or rather paths. Locomotion has thus to be accomplished by means of boats . . . ; and, of course, ‘times and tides’ have to be observed in trying to get about.”⁷³ The landscape — the geography — was of particular note to Murray: “The first thing that struck me . . . was the almost entire absence of soil of every kind. The ribs of that Western shoulder of ‘our island home’ are of granite rock . . . covered only with a light snuffy kind of turf or bog. . . . Of this material it is quite impossible to make roads — in the ordinary acceptation of the term — and, of course, little or no culture of the soil takes place, for the very simple reason that there is no soil to cultivate. A few potatoes — and poor ones at that — and cabbages are about the only ‘agricultural produce’ that Dame Nature will yield.”

There were no farms or gardens, no larger animals, and therefore “that great portion of a Newfoundland fisherman’s annual bill-of-fare which he derives from the small patch of cleared land around his homestead, is denied to the Western fisherman.” As a result, his position was “a particularly hard one, and if it were not for some degree of counterbalancing advantage, in the shape of the Winter’s fishery, existence there would be entirely impossible. As it is, the case is bad enough. The average condition of the Fishermen living on the Western Shore is no credit to the Merchants who have been dealing with them, or to any of the ‘authorities’ or ‘influences’ which so zealously guard their political destinies.”

Murray lambasted the supply merchants, alleging that they kept up “the exorbitant old prices of a hundred years ago, when the Fisheries were flourishing on that coast, and those who had to be sustained by these Fisheries were much fewer in number than at present” He then added:

[T]he prices charged by [the merchants] against the Fishermen, and allowed to the Fishermen for their produce, are such, I think, as not to afford a “living profit” to the latter. Forty-five to Fifty-five shillings for a barrel of superfine

flour! Thirty-six to Thirty-eight shillings for a hundred-weight of biscuit! Three-and-nine to Four shillings a gallon for Molasses! Three-and-six for a pound of “dealer’s” tea, and the same for a pound of tobacco! Then if the dealer is bold enough to ask for any Cash he is charged ten per cent for his temerity. For his green fish he is kindly allowed 14s., 15s., or 16s. per 308 lbs., according to the time of year, but denied (even for proffered cash) salt to “make” the same, in case he should take away that modicum of the supplying Merchant’s profit.⁷⁴

Though a merchant himself, Murray maintained a strong sympathy for the underdog at a time when the inshore cod fishery on the south coast was contracting, and he saw himself as a fair and principled merchant and supplier. The extent of his support in the 1882 election suggests that many in Burgeo-La Poile district agreed, and his articles provide an unusual insight into how elections in that period were conducted, and into the condition of the district itself. Murray was an unusual, maverick candidate, earning the patronizing comment from D.W. Prowse that he had provided “the one and only comic element” in the 1893 general election.⁷⁵ Independent candidates were unusual, and in due course Murray was defeated by a political system that emphasized party affiliation and party loyalty. Political loners, then as now, were marginal figures.

Notes

- 1 *Daily News*, 17 Jan. 1900.
- 2 J.K. Hiller, “Whiteway, Sir William Vallance,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* [DCB], vol. 13; *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* [ENL], 5: 564–66.
- 3 On the general background, see James Hiller, “The Railway and Local Politics in Newfoundland, 1870–1901,” in Hiller and Peter Neary, eds., *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Essays in Interpretation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 130–33;

- Kurt Korneski, *Conflicted Colony. Critical Episodes in Nineteenth-Century Newfoundland and Labrador* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 80–90.
- 4 *Evening Telegram* [*Telegram*], 23 Nov. 1882.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 1 Dec. 1882.
- 6 See Maudie Whelan, “The Newspaper Press in Nineteenth-Century Newfoundland: Politics, Religion, and Personal Journalism” (Ph.D. thesis, Memorial University, 2002), 284–86, 330.
- 7 The legislation establishing the secret ballot was passed in 1887 and was used in the St. John's municipal election in 1888. The first general election to use the secret ballot was in 1889.
- 8 *Abstract Census and Returns of the Population of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1884* (St. John's, 1886), 168 ff.
- 9 David A. Macdonald, “‘They Cannot Pay Us in Money’: Newman and Company and the Supplying System in the Newfoundland Fishery, 1850–1884,” *Acadiensis* 19, 1 (1989): 142–56.
- 10 The last of the Jersey houses, this firm closed in 1886 because of the failure of a Jersey bank.
- 11 John A. Rochford, *Business and General Directory of Newfoundland, 1877 . . .* (Montreal, 1877), 28.
- 12 Melvin Baker, “Mackay, Alexander McLellan,” *DCB*, vol. 13; *ENL*, 3: 413.
- 13 “An Act respecting the Election of Members of the General Assembly,” 1877. 40 Vic. Cap. 11, *Acts of the Legislature 1875–1878*, 62–93.
- 14 *ENL*, 2: 489–91. The frequency of French or French-derived place names reflects the use of the south coast by French fishermen before 1713. Not all of the places and people mentioned by Murray are included in the *ENL*.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 1: 287–88.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 4: 634–37.
- 17 Rolls had another establishment at Burnt Islands.
- 18 *ENL*, 1: 400–04.
- 19 *Telegram*, 22 Nov. 1882.
- 20 The “sons of Anak” opposed the movement of the Israelites under Moses into Canaan.
- 21 Throughout his account, Murray used the term “Western Shore,” which was usual at the time.

- 22 *Telegram*, 23 Nov. 1882.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 13 Dec. 1882.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 *Ibid.*, 21 Nov. 1882.
- 27 *ENL*, 1: 334.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 298.
- 29 *Telegram*, 28 Nov. 1882.
- 30 Ridley's was a Harbour Grace firm that entered the winter fishery at Rose Blanche. It was declared insolvent in 1873. *ENL*, 4: 597–98.
- 31 *Telegram*, 29 Nov. 1882.
- 32 *ENL*, 5: 117.
- 33 *Telegram*, 30 Nov. 1882.
- 34 *ENL*, 4: 264–65. Seal Island and Petites are now abandoned.
- 35 *Telegram*, 2 Dec. 1882.
- 36 *ENL*, 3: 197–98. Little Bay is part of La Poile.
- 37 *Telegram*, 2 Dec. 1882.
- 38 *ENL*, 2: 684–86. The place was abandoned in 2010. J. Angela Baker, *"The Forgotten Coast": Landscapes and Memories of Southwestern Newfoundland* (rev. ed., 2015; no pagination).
- 39 *ENL*, 1: 504–05. Now abandoned.
- 40 *Telegram*, 5 Dec. 1882.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1882.
- 42 This refers to Murray having replied positively to his "requisitionists" in April 1882, which gave the government notice that the seat would be contested.
- 43 *Telegram*, 8 Dec. 1882.
- 44 The Dromios are comical characters in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*. *Telegram*, 11 Dec. 1882.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 13 Dec. 1882.
- 46 All these places have been abandoned. *ENL*, 1: 607–08; 2: 358–59; 4: 543–44.
- 47 *Telegram*, 14 Dec. 1882.
- 48 Abandoned in 1963. *ENL*, 1: 332. Baker, *"Forgotten Coast"*.
- 49 Abandoned in 1965. Baker, *"Forgotten Coast"*.
- 50 *Telegram*, 18 Dec. 1882.

- 51 Ibid., 16 Dec. 1882. The first visitor Murray identified as his advance man; the second as “Mr. Edward Dicks, the Burgeo Lighthouse keeper.”
- 52 Now abandoned. *ENL*, 3: 629.
- 53 The 1877 Act did not state when proxy votes could be collected. That it was on nomination day and after must have been the result of a later regulation.
- 54 *Telegram*, 19 Dec. 1882. There were no polling booths east of Burgeo.
- 55 Now abandoned. *ENL*, 1: 569.
- 56 *Telegram*, 19 Dec. 1882. *ENL*, 4: 593–94. Now abandoned.
- 57 Possibly “Anderson’s”.
- 58 *Telegram*, 5 Jan. 1883; *ENL*, 4: 518–20.
- 59 Ibid., 8 Jan. 1883.
- 60 Ibid., 9 Jan. 1883.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid., 12 Jan. 1883.
- 63 Ibid., 16 Jan. 1883.
- 64 Ibid., 22 Jan. 1883.
- 65 Ibid., 25, 29 Jan. 1883.
- 66 Ibid., 1 Mar. 1883.
- 67 Ibid., 1 Feb. 1883.
- 68 Ibid., 16 Feb. 1883.
- 69 Ibid., 1 Mar. 1883.
- 70 *ENL*, 1: 693–94.
- 71 The prosecution case against Murray concentrated on how road work had been given out in Channel and Burgeo. *Daily News*, 28–29 Mar., 17, 19 Apr. 1894.
- 72 The September 1894 by-election was between Henry Mott (Tory) and Charles Emerson (Liberal), who lost by 78 votes. Murray published a vitriolic address to the electors after the vote (22 September 1894), pledging that he would return. *ENL*, 1: 699, 775; *Telegram*, 1, 10, 12 14 Sept. 1894; *Daily News*, 11, 14 Sept. 1894.
- 73 *Telegram*, 21 Nov. 1882.
- 74 Ibid., 25 Nov. 1882.
- 75 D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland* (London: Macmillan, 1895), 531. Prowse, who was a good and faithful Liberal, may have been amused by Murray’s “Fishermen’s friend” persona.