Heritage Structures
THE HISTORIC METROPOLIS
OF CONCEPTION BAY

When you come to historic Harbour Grace, you are following in the footsteps of many fascinating visitors for the last 450 years.

Over the centuries, Harbour Grace has been visited by pirates, buccaneers, soldiers, adventurers, and explorers. The French were here as early as 1505, and named it, 'Havre de Grace'.

Among the notable people who have come our way, have been the infamous pirates, Peter Easton and Henry Mainwaring; famous American 'Quinnuat', later a friend of the Pilgrim Fathers; Robert Hayman, Newfoundland's first poet; Sir Richard Whithorne, the father of Newfoundland literature; William E. Cormack, the first white man to cross Newfoundland; the Reverend Lawrence Coughlan, the first evangelical Methodist in Newfoundland and the founder of Methodism in British North America; Amelia Earhart, the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic; and many others!

And now, you have joined this illustrious group!

Welcome to Harbour Grace, a town rich in history and pride.

Town of Harbour Grace

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH
Cochrane Street

The first Church of England was built in Harbour Grace in 1764 with the establishment of a mission to the community. Ten years later the clergyman in charge, Rev. J. Balfour, opened a school which was taught by W. Lampen. Rev. Balfour gave the population of the place in 1778 as 5768 including 4462 Protestants, many of them Methodists. Rev. John Clinch, who was the first person in the New World to use the smallpox vaccine discovered in England by his friend Dr. Jenner, was a Church of England clergyman in Harbour Grace for a short period. He was followed in 1798 by Rev. George Jenner, a nephew of the noted doctor, who returned to England to help his uncle popularize his discovery. Jenner's successor was the noted historian Rev. Lewis Amadeus Ansprech whose "History of Newfoundland" is today a classic work. The church of 1764 was destroyed by a fire, believed to have been incendiary in origin, 29 August 1816. The new church was burned in another fire which devastated the town, 18 August 1832. The cornerstone of the present St. Paul's Church was laid by Governor Prescott 28 August 1835 on the same site as the 1764 church. The place was consecrated by Bishop Spencer 4 July 1840. Of interest is the fact that the music for the services from 1835 to 1877 was provided by clarinet, violins and a bass viol. In 1877 a pipe organ was installed. During 1977-78 a massive restoration of the exterior stone work was carried out.
This building, which now houses the Conception Bay Museum, was built in 1870. The first recorded structure on the site was the pirate fort of Peter Easton which was constructed in 1610.

The earliest customs house in Harbour Grace is reported to have been located in the vicinity of the Two Sisters rock formation. The Water St. location, however, served as the site of the customs house at least from the turn of the century. Reports indicate the present building replaced a wooden, cottage-roofed building on the site in 1800 which also served as customs house. The following letter which appeared in the Harbour Grace Standard on 29 July 1867 would indicate that by the late 1860's replacement of that building was a matter of some urgency.

Dear Sir:

I see by the "Supply" Act of 1867 that the Legislature granted the sum of $6,000 for the erection of a Customs House in Harbour Grace. It is high time that the said building be commenced—when supposing a piece of land for the site thereof had to be purchased, the above handsome grant would be quite sufficient therefor, and for the erection of the building. If this not be done, we may well fear that the present contracted old crumbling apology for a Customs House will, before long, fall down.

Yours,
Bet

The place was presumably built by George Tapp who was sent to Harbour Grace in the 1860's for the purpose of constructing such a building. The first inhabitants of the slate roofed brick structure seem to have been the Gordon family who were reported to be living upstairs in the building immediately after its completion.

On the grounds there is a monument to the role of Harbour Grace in the history of transatlantic flight. In the summer months when the museum is open the flags of prominent 19th century Harbour Grace merchant firms as well as the solid black pirate flag of Peter Easton are flown from the poles next to the building. The skull and crossbones flag was adopted by later pirates.

This century old house located on Water St. East is actually two houses. The contract for the building of the front house was let in September 1878. An agreement drawn up at the time between Thomas R. Bennett and Edward Comer, master carpenter, specified that Bennett would supply materials and that Comer was to be paid 85 pounds in three instalments for the labour. The work was completed in 1879.

The back of the house was a pre-existing structure which craftsmanship indicates may predate the 1879 house by forty or fifty years. There is a possibility that it was moved a short distance to the present site to be joined to the newer house.

Thomas R. Bennett was elected to the legislature about 1870 as a member from Hermitage and subsequently served as Speaker of the House of Assembly. He was appointed to the bench in January 1874 and held the post of Judge of the Northern District Court at the time he built the house in Harbour Grace.

In 1902, Bennett’s widow sold the unit to James Cron, a prominent merchant of Harbour Grace, and he occupied the place until his death in 1935. It is still owned by members of his family. Details in the contract drawn up between Bennett and Comer provide evidence that the interior of the house is essentially unchanged from what it was like at the time of construction.
STEVENSON HOUSE
Just west of Terra Nova Shoes on Water Street

There seems to be little or no documentation on this place. It is necessary, therefore, to depend on the Stevenson family history to piece together the story of the house.

It is said to be the structure erected to house the first Atlantic Cable which landed in Bay Bulls Arm (now Sunnyside), Trinity Bay, in August 1859. It served as a cable telegraph office but the cable soon failed and the building was abandoned. It was later purchased by Captain William Stevenson who had it shipped to Harbour Grace on his schooner "Rose". It is thought to have been rebuilt in Harbour Grace in basically the original manner but over the years a porch and bay windows in the front, a sloped roof, and an addition to the rear have changed the building. The house has been insulated with birch rind.

COURT HOUSE AND JAIL
Junction of Harvey and Cathedral Streets
East End

This is one of the oldest institutional buildings in the province having been in continuous use as a Court House from the time of its construction in 1830. Only in recent years has the use of the prisoner's cells in the jail portion been discontinued.

The first Court House in Harbour Grace was built in 1808 and was situated where Gordon Lodge later stood. The present structure was financed on the pledge of every firm doing business in Conception Bay of one pound each (cash) for every 1000 quintals of fish shipped annually. The Carbonar firm of George and James Kemp, for example, sent a cheque in the amount of 45 pounds to represent 45,000 quintals of fish shipped.

Tenders were called for construction of the new court house by David Buchan, High Sheriff, on 11 May 1830. The foundation stone was laid amid colourful and elaborate ceremonies on July 26th of that year. Taking part in the Monday ceremonies were Thomas Danson, Esq., Chief Magistrate of the Northern District who laid the stone, Patrick Kough, architect and builder, who deposited in the cornerstone "the various coins of the realm, corn, wine, and oil with a bottle containing the latest publications of the Island, and a scroll of parchment having an inscription descriptive of the event..."as well as"...the Clergymen of the Town, Magistrates, Merchants, and other respectable inhabitants, the members of the Benevolent Irish Society of Conception Bay, and of the Association of Fishermen and Shoremens, (and) the children of the public schools, to the number of about 350..."

The Newfoundlander of Thursday, July 29, 1830 which carried the record of the event noted in conclusion that "...the parties retired to their respective homes, much pleased and gratified with the very novel and interesting proceedings of the day. The excellent arrangements and regularity observed on the occasion-the large respectable attendance of the inhabitants of Harbour Grace and its vicinity- the neat cleanly appearance and orderly deportment of the children-had a most imposing and exhilarating effect, and was altogether such a creditable exhibition as much wealthier and larger towns might have very justly been proud of."
HAMPshire COTTAGE
(Now Garrison House Inn)
Across from museum, Water St.

WEST END MERCANTILE ESTABLISHMENT
Water Street at foot of Noad Street

Harbour Grace folk history places the date of construction of the cottage as 1811. It has been impossible, however, to document this date. It is also believed that it housed British officers during the War of 1812 and the long windows at the rear of the house enabled the officers to keep watch on the enlisted men who lived in the barracks on a hill behind the house.

The first official recorded date for the building seems to be 1845 when the cottage appears on Joseph Noad's map of Harbour Grace for that year. At that time it was occupied by a Mr. Bailey. According to Frederick Rowden Page's map it was occupied in 1857 by a Mr. E. E. Brow who was an MHA for Harbour Grace.

Exactly when the house came into the possession of the Godden family is not known since there are no records at the Registry of Deeds indicating when the purchase was made. There is record of Thomas Godden purchasing a house from Thomas Ash in March 1858 but it is not known if this was Hampshire Cottage.

Newspaper advertisements, however, indicate the Godden family tried to sell the house in 1859, 1872, 1873, and 1891. Since there is no record of Bailey or Brow selling land to the Goddans it is possible that the earliest known occupants of the house were tenants of Godden, or perhaps Ash, if he was indeed a former owner.

Harbour Grace Town Council has set the construction date of these buildings as 1856, but recent research indicates them may be older.

An advertisement in the Harbour Grace Weekly Herald and Conception Bay General Advertiser for Wednesday, 5 January 1853 reads as follows: "To be let: Those well known Waterside premises in the West End near Noad Street, measuring about 130 feet frontage bounded by Water St. on the North. The same being admirably adopted for an extensive mercantile business combining great depth of water with perfect security against fire. For further particulars apply to W. C. St. John, Harbour Grace."

Two factors support the argument that the buildings at 111 Water St. are those mentioned in the 1853 advertisement. Records show that the land was owned before 1850 by a Charles St. John, possibly the W. C. St. John referred to in the advert., and the buildings, which were all brick lined, enjoyed a reputation in Harbour Grace for being greatly fire resistant.

The buildings were apparently built by a Mr. Clement Noel, a fish merchant, and records indicate that the Hennessey and Andrews families lived there as well as a merchant named Eli Frost.
The Mayor and councillors, on behalf of all the citizens of Harbour Grace, sincerely thank you for your visit to our historic town and hope you have enjoyed your stay with us.

Please visit again, real soon.

For further information, please contact...
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Concept, Research & Text
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