
Chapter 10

CHANGING FACE OF ELLISTON

Community Progress

Elliston has seen progress during the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries despite some previously noted setbacks. In the 1940's and 1950's there were very few automobiles in the community and only gravel roads. There was also one car made out of wood! It was used by Roy Tucker to learn how to drive, and he later went on to become a taxi driver. Surprisingly, Elliston had several taxis operated by Mahlon Baker, Uriah Hobbs, Peter Tucker, and Cyril White. Most of these taxis only carried people short distances, while Cyril White and later Peter Tucker regularly transported passengers to Clarendville. The community once had a total of three gas stations: two located on South Side and one on North Side.

The same period saw the introduction of telephones, however, "A few residents . . . have been wanting phones since the last dial phones were installed . . . some two or three years ago . . . owners are very pleased . . . especially taxi men. . . ."¹ Once the number of telephones increased, privacy became an issue because several families would be on what was called the same "line," line being the actual connection from the telephone company. There were different "rings" that would signal who was actually being called. For instance, your ring could be what would have been identified by two short rings, and another could be a short and a long ring. Each different user was responsible for identifying their own ring and not listening in on other peoples' telephone conversations. Even in the late 1970's and early 1980's several people were still on party lines, although the number of households was down to two for each line. It was well into the 1980's before everyone had their own private telephone connection.



Peter Tucker with
his Taxi (1954
Ford) and his Aunt
Bessie



Aunt Bessie,
Peter Tucker, Betty
Tucker
(Maidment), and
unknown.

The first use of ATVs (All Terrain Vehicles) at Elliston, in 1982/83, changed the way people went into the woods or countryside. These small vehicles, called trikes by many locals, made it possible to gain access to remote areas. Previously, people would have to walk this great distance, which would be physically taxing, before engaging in various activities. For instance, if you were cutting wood, an ATV gave you the ability to go much further into the forest, arrive there somewhat rested, and then proceed to cut your wood. Afterwards you could use your ATV to transport the wood home. This also opened up distant ponds for fishing, better known as trouting, and berry picking.



1986 Honda
Big Red ATV
(250cc) and
Sport

The task of berry picking was important for many reasons. For some it was private use in cooking or the brewing of wine. Others picked berries to sell and supplement the family income. ATVs enabled ease of access for picking bakeapples, berries located on distant marshes that would not be easily assessable by foot. Anyone who has engaged in this activity would know how tiresome it is to individually pick enough berries to fill a gallon bucket. Blueberries and partridge berries were also harvested by many to supplement their income. Some locals constructed wooden *berry pickers* that consisted of a handle attached to a wooden box that is open at one end. The open section was

equipped with several metal prongs carefully spaced not to allow berries to slip through. This may sound like a small advancement, but it was most certainly a significant one to many berry pickers.



Example of an adult picker (left) child's picker (right)

One item that negatively impacts on tourism in Elliston and, for that matter, the whole Bonavista Peninsula is the poor road conditions. Elliston received pavement in 1973 but it had only been patched since that time and thirty-two years of use takes its toll. However, North Side received some good news in 2005 with an announcement that \$80,000 would be spent to resurface Route 238-10, North Side road in Elliston.² Much more road work is needed, but, at least, it is a start.



North Side being resurfaced on August 26th 2005

A Measure of Success

Elliston has achieved considerable success in recent years. The community has gone from virtual obscurity to the focus of national media attention because of its recent accomplishments. Since 1997, the municipality has enjoyed several achievements beginning with the formation of Tourism Elliston, one of the top volunteer committees in the Province. Some of the more notable successes include the annual Bird Island Puffin Festival, the restoration of many root cellars, the revitalization of the municipal park, the erection of interpretive heritage signs, the establishment of a shooting range, the restoration of several structures, various beautification efforts, and the numerous projects that add to the enjoyment of the community at large, not to mention the employment opportunities for local residents. All these endeavors serve to further enhancing Elliston's attractiveness to visitors. By any measure, the promotion of the annual Festival has earned widespread recognition and is arguably the community's single greatest achievement of recent times.

The publicity concerning the root cellars has been quite beneficial and has helped to spread the Town's reputation of being the Root Cellar Capital of the World. This aspect has drawn interest from all over Newfoundland and far beyond. It even made national television when CBC's *On the Road Again* filmed a segment about our cellars in 2000, and once again on CBC's *Land & Sea* in 2005. Tourism Elliston's website www.rootcellars.com has drawn international attention and has been instrumental in spreading information on the community's undertakings. The number of inquiries for information on different aspects of the Town through email alone has revealed that the level of interest continues to rise.

Thanks to the heritage sign initiative, visitors can treat themselves to a self-guided journey of exploration around the area while viewing the many interpretive signs that neatly highlight various aspects of the community in scenic locations. Tourists can explore the story of early Newfoundland subsistence and our many

root cellars while enjoying a leisurely walk about Town. Nature enthusiasts can take advantage of Elliston's easily accessible puffin colony, whale watching, and, in the spring, magnificent icebergs. At the lookout near Maberly, you can view South Bird Island through a mounted telescope. Although there are many similar telescopes located throughout Newfoundland this one is available to the public at no cost.

A telescope and flowers at the Maberly lookout



The municipality also boasts the best sandy beach in the region. Those interested in a challenging hike can partake of several marked trails of various lengths and difficulty. The Maberly to Little Catalina Trail is, in my opinion, the most breathtaking and challenging trail in the whole area. Despite all of these attractions, the best time to visit is during the annual Bird Island Puffin Festival that occurs during the third week of July. With its many events and varied activities, there is something to offer everyone.

Early 2004 contained a development that reenforced the success of the community's tourism efforts. It was the presentation of the 2003 Doug Wheeler Tourism Award, the highest tourism award in the Province. On February 6th, 2004, then Minister of Tourism, Culture, and Recreation Mr. Paul Shelley publically acknowledged Tourism Elliston's contribution to the provincial tourism industry. The following appeared in the local newspaper on Monday, February 16th, 2004.³

The Department of Tourism obviously believes in the value of volunteers. In his preamble to announcing the winner, Minister Shelley said the winners demonstrate what can be achieved by an enterprising and energetic group of volunteers working as a team, with community participation and co-operative partnerships with other groups and levels of government.

“This group of dedicated people [Tourism Elliston] has successfully rejuvenated the economy of a former fishing town by developing and promoting tourism attractions and activities based on their natural and cultural assets.”

A measure of success neatly sums up the Elliston of recent years. While the community still has a long way to go before it can be considered a total success story, it has made considerable progress and continues to do so. When you consider the size of the Town and its population, it is even more impressive that it is able to consistently attract thousands to the area especially during the Bird Island Puffin Festival.

What does the future hold for this small Newfoundland community? On the immediate horizon it appears Elliston may become home to windmills or rather wind powered turbines. Although it is not certain Elliston Ridge may soon become the site of a wind farm with several windmills that will generate electric power. If this development does come to pass it will provide an uncommon view for visitors and residents alike.

At the time of writing, Elliston is preparing to celebrate its bicentennial with many events planned including the grand prize of a brand new vehicle, 2006 Chevrolet Cobalt. Since the first edition of this book was published the level of cooperation and volunteerism has remained high. The future is unknown but one can only hope that this community will continue to lead the Province in tourism matters for many years to come. In any case, this small hamlet by the sea will always be the place I call home.

Chapter Ten Notes

1. “Phones for Elliston; Coal in Good Supply in Bonavista Area,” Newfoundland Journal of Commerce 24.12 (1957): 25.
2. Government of Newfoundland and Labrador News Release, Department of Transportation and Works, Road improvements announced for Bonavista South (St. John’s: Newfoundland, 21 Jun. 2005)
3. Anne Barker, “And the Winner is! Tourism Elliston receives major Award,” The Packet 16 Feb. 2004.