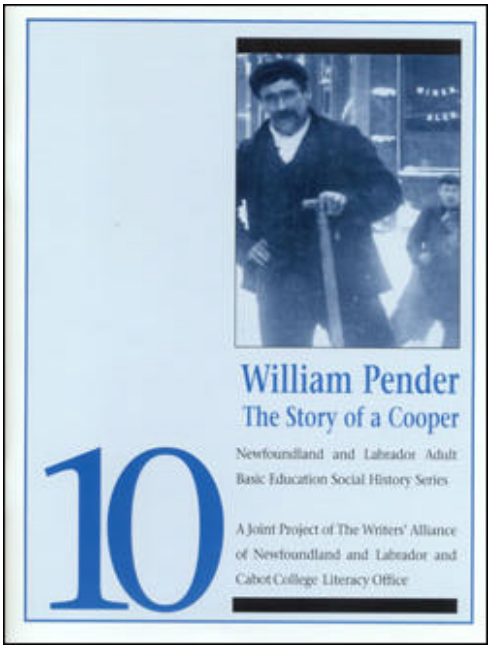

William Pender
The Story of a Cooper

Newfoundland and Labrador Adult
Basic Education Social History Series

A Joint Project of
The Writers' Alliance of
Newfoundland and Labrador
and Cabot College Literacy Office

In This Series...

Book 1 - Timelines of Newfoundland and Labrador
Book 2 - Facing the New Economy
Book 3 - Learning About the Past
Book 4 - Desperate Measures *The Great Depression in Newfoundland and Labrador*
Book 5 - Health and Hard Time
Book 6 - Multicultural History
Book 7 - Surviving in Rural Newfoundland
Book 8 - The Struggle for Work in the Great Depression
Book 9 - How Long do I Have to Wait?
Book 10 - William Pender *The Story of a Cooper*

Book 10: William Pender

Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador
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Contents

Foreword

In 1994, the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador and Cabot College Literacy Office combined to produce a series of Newfoundland books on tape. Under the general title *Increasing Access to Newfoundland Literature*, the tapes and accompanying book *A Woman's Labour*, offered ABE Level 1 students and instructors, as well as the blind and the general public, an accessible and proven set of local literacy materials. The success of that project led to a second collaboration: the *Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Basic Education Social History Series*.

A major difference between the two projects is that while Newfoundland Books on Tape dealt with previously existing material, the essays in the Social History Series have been newly created by five professional writers. The prime objective, however, remains the same: to provide adult learners with meaningful literacy materials drawn from their own vibrant culture.

Topics in the series were chosen for their human and social interest and their importance in shaping who we are today. In addition to historical topics, current social and economic issues such as the closure of fish plants are also examined in an attempt to provide a contemporary perspective.

The five writers employed on the project carried out extensive research in public and university archives and libraries. Some also conducted personal interviews. Many of the essays contain new and fascinating historical research. Often the pieces deal with controversial subject matter: the Great Depression, Commission of Government, workfare, the erosion of social programs, poaching and the future of our rural communities. In an effort to dispel the notion that history is "dry and dull," the approach is fresh and provocative. The object is to inform, entertain and, in conjunction with the accompanying notes and questions, to effectively stimulate lively discussion among literacy students. Consequently, this series will also be of interest and practical use to the general public and, especially, to students.

The intended audience for the *Social History Series* is ABE Level 1 students. Because of the disparate subject matter, however, the essays are written in varying degrees of reading difficulty. In particular, students may need help with some of the quoted source material as this sometimes involves archaic syntax and vocabulary.

Acknowledgements

The essays and accompanying notes and questions in the *Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Basic Education Social History Series* were researched and written by Ed Kavanagh, Carmelita McGrath, Janet McNaughton, Kathryn Welbourn and Kathleen Winter. The series was edited by Marian Frances White.

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The coordinator of the project was Ed Kavanagh. Susan Hoddinott, Literacy Specialist at Cabot College, provided overall coordination.

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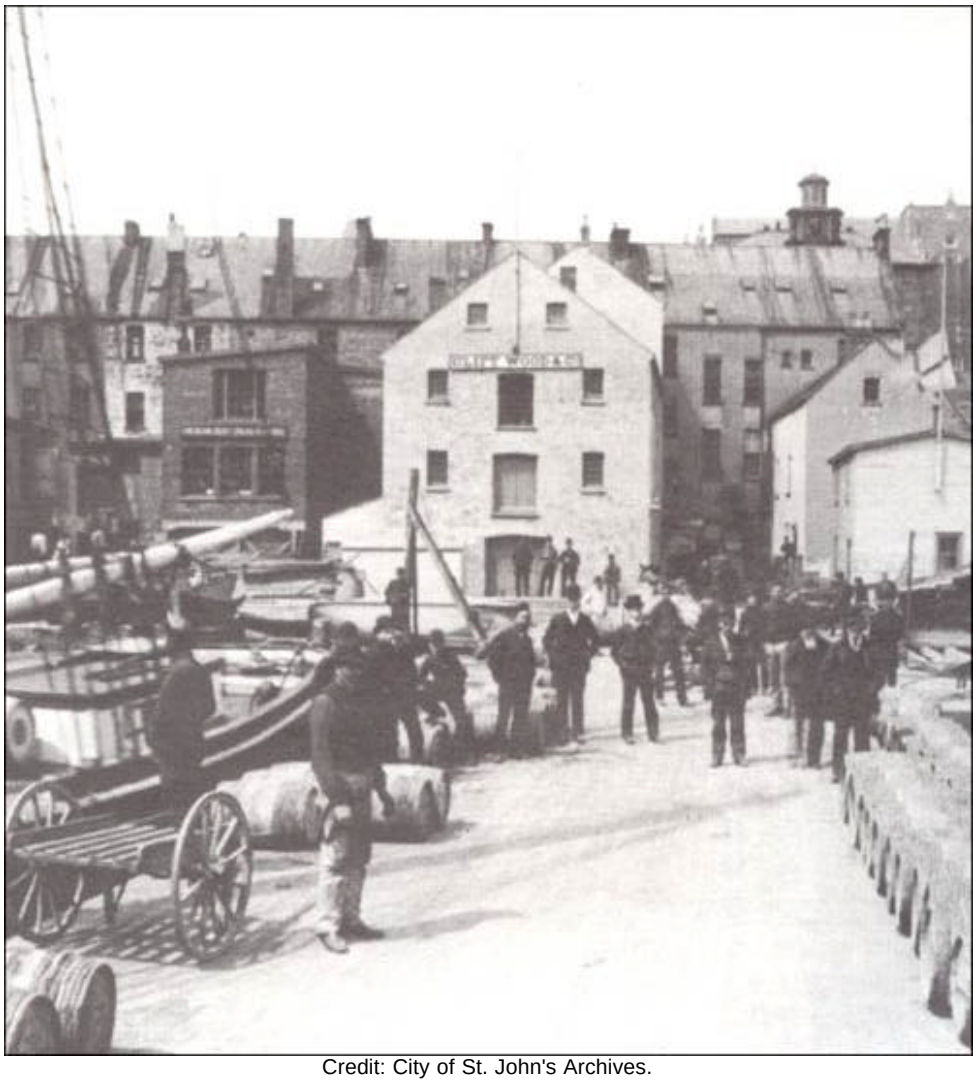
The *Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Basic Education Social History Series* is a joint project of the Cabot College Literacy Office and the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Story of a Cooper

Atmosphere is a great thing. It is the essential element in the understanding of history. To realize past events we must try to breathe the very air of the period.

(Newfoundland historian Daniel Woodley Prowse, 1905.)

Part I: The Golden Dream



Credit: City of St. John's Archives.

Chapter 1
A Lonely Sound

William Pender was a working man living in St. John's in the winter of 1904- 1905. He was a cooper, or barrel maker. Every place you looked in those days, you saw barrels, casks and drums. They stood by shop doors, full of goods from other places, like apples and flour and pork.

Barrels lined wharves on the waterfront too, full of goods Newfoundland sent over the sea. Those barrels had salt fish in them, or pickled herring, or salmon, or seal oil, or cod liver oil.

There were thousands of barrels all over the place. A cooper's sweat and labour had gone into every one of them.

When William was small, he watched his grandfather make barrels. His grandfather looked like a giant. So did his father. And now he was just like both of those men. But they had not seen the trade dying. He was the first one to know the ringing of a cooper's hammer was getting to be a lonely sound.

For five months he had been out of work. Some blamed the strike the coopers had before Christmas. But William knew the strike only went to show what was happening. It never caused the unemployment.

Being out of work gave him time to think. Time to see what was going on. You couldn't see it when you worked hard every day. Then all a cooper thought about was making good barrels.

He saw himself as master of his craft; Why shouldn't he? A cooper started as a lad of ten or eleven. He apprenticed five years. Five years of hard orders and low pay. Then he had a cooper's skills.

So he did come to think of himself as a master. He was master of all the tools hanging on the wall. His hand had worn a mark in the haft of his broad axe. His adze, his shaves and his planes did what he told them. He knew how to coax every wooden stave to bend just right. He knew how to shave the wood, and how to heat it over the little cresset fire in his grate.

He heated and bended and steamed and beat that wood until it fit his dream. The smoke got deep in his skin the same way it got in the staves. He always had the picture of a perfect barrel in his mind. He used his hands to make the raw wood turn into what he had in mind.

Between him and the wood, he was the master. But outside the circle of his own cresset fire, what then? The cooperage owner was master then. And over him was the big master of it all—the merchant who paid for the barrels.

That's what our union forgot when we went on strike, William knew now. We thought we'd win because we made good barrels and the merchants needed them. They needed them to sell their fish to Brazil. They needed them for all the seal oil and cod liver oil.

They needed our barrels too much, William thought now. The working man had too much power. So they hired outport coopers who were not in the union. Now the merchants are banding together. They want all the cooperages under a few big owners. They want new machines to replace the coopers, and new kinds of packing for fish. When they see the end of barrels they'll be happy. I see that now, as plainly as I see all our trades are dying...

These were things William Pender knew in the winter of 1904-1905. He also knew that winter was one of the worst anyone remembered for cold and snow. But there were things he did not know. He did not know he would never find work as a cooper again. He did not know this was to be his last winter.

We know it because newspapers said it. The Roman Catholic Archbishop, Archbishop Howley, gave a speech. The speech was reported in the *Evening Herald* and the *Daily News*. Howley asked people to give more money to the church. He said the new pews had cost $2,928. The new floor cost $6,257. Work on the organ cost $5,000, and the arch needed mending, another $500.

But he had more to say. He spoke out against strikes. Men and women were going on strike all over St. John's. First it was coopers, now it was iron workers, and tailors and tailoresses. Howley warned Roman Catholic workers. If they went on strike, he would cut them off from the sacrament of Holy Communion. He would cut them off from God.

Howley said he had already warned Catholic working people against "disturbing the social order of things." He told workers to fear the Lord, "from whom all social order and authority proceed."

He said murder had been done already over these strikes.

What did he mean by murder? Howley did not spell it out, but *The Evening Telegram* did. It said Howley meant the coopers had murdered one of their own. It said he was talking about William Pender. Howley said the strike forced him out of work. Forced him to wander over the South Side Hill. Forced courage out of his heart, until he lay there and perished.

What did the archbishop mean by the word murder?

Why did he tell working people not to "disturb the social order of things?"

What was the social order of life in St. John's, in the winter of 1904-1905? Would it ever change?

What was St. John's like for a working man or woman in the winter of 1904- 1905? What did William Pender's city feel like? What did it smell like? What did it sound like? What did it look like? And what did it taste like?

And what about William Pender himself? Who was he? What kind of man was he? Did he have courage in his heart or not? What can his life tell us about lives of other working people in St. John's at the turn of the century?

And what really happened to him on the strange day in 1905 when he wandered over the South Side Hills and never came back?

These questions are the heart of this story. Only William Pender knows everything, and his story is hidden in the past.

But real life stories of today are like that. You never find out everything, do you?

There is always a hidden part of the picture. There is always something undiscovered.

Chapter 2
William's World

There was never more life around St. John's harbour than there was the year William Pender died. There was never more industry and hope. No place in the world exported more salt cod fish than Newfoundland. No port in Newfoundland was as busy as St. John's.

Hundreds of small cooperage shops hid in the lanes and alleys. Big shops like Norman Cousens on the South Side hired hundreds of coopers like William Pender. Other crafts people sawed, hammered and caulked for the fishery. Sail makers like Isaac Morris cut and sewed canvas for the sealing fleets. To fit and build the ships, it took riggers, block makers, mast makers, caulkers and shipwrights.

More workers supplied the fishermen and crafts people with goods they needed to live and work. William Pender's children would grow up to shake their heads and say, "There's no industry in this town now." They would go to a shop to buy a bag of nails, or a length of stove pipe. They would find it had been made in Leeside, Ontario. They would tell their children that Newfoundland once made all it needed.

"We had the rope walk for making nets," they'd remember. "We had the nail foundry. We made the best stove in the world-the King Edward. We had shoe factories, clothing factories and tanneries. There were blacksmiths and tinsmiths, the coopers, and butterine factories. We had four or five bakeries."

They would see it all in their minds' eye, and they ended by saying, "It's the people that make the city."

William Pender could not walk out his door without smelling industry. On his own South Side Hill were seal oil and cod liver oil factories. Come spring when the first sealing fleets returned, the thick smell of the fat crept over the garden fences. Women hung their washing out under the stars. They said the night air wasn't as bad.

They were doing a new thing with the cod livers, to get the oil out. William knew men who built the new boilers. Steam rushed into cone shaped vats where the livers churned and rendered their oil in half an hour. It was done over open fires. Smoke and steam and that oily stench billowed over the gardens.

The cod oil boilers were part of the new machinery that smoked and glittered all over the city. They were modern. But below them were old things. Shells and stones lay in the water from hundreds of years back. William had picked up shells. The nicest one was the size of his hand. It had five spirals, then it whirled around like a petal on a big white rose.

The shells and stones were on the shore. Then there were the oil factories. Then rose the South Side Hill. On top lay old things and ancient places. That hill had time prisoned in its stones. You could smell old battles between the French and the English, if you knew where to walk.

William liked to wander over that hill and the stony woods behind it. He'd look down into Freshwater Bay on the other side. He would snare rabbits, and think of the time when this was the real New World.

Settlers from old England and men from New France had hidden in these hills. With swords and muskets, they kept warm near secret fires. William had heard stories of medicine bottles and French coins found near the tall stones.

When he walked there he got away from new things. The smell of ice water under the stones was the same as it was two hundred years before. Then, this land was a dream in the minds of the French and the English. It was a dream of a new life. They had spilled blood over the stones rather than share that new life.

Chapter 3
The Golden Dream

On a Thursday morning in February, 1905, William Pender drew back the kitchen curtain his wife Iris had edged with lace. He looked past the oil factories, past the docks, and beyond Job's Bridge. There lay the city dock and workshops, and all the factories of the west end. There was the planing mill, the biscuit factory, and the gas works. A half mile farther west stood the rope walk. On Job Street above the train station was the boot and shoe factory. Near that was the Imperial Tobacco Company, where hundreds of women and youngsters rolled cigarettes for the local shops.

Hidden among the factories were the little workshops. Tinsmiths made by hand the tins, buckets, lamps and kettles everyone needed. Small furniture workshops hired joiners, upholsterers, polishers, painters and mattress makers.

Other workshops made parlour suites and fancy rockers of mahogany and rosewood. Iris wanted to try and get some upholstering work. She could sew the finest hand of all her friends, William thought. But he worried about Alice Maud, their nine-year-old daughter. She was the only one left at home. She was frail, and she needed her mother.

He looked past the bridge and St. Mary's steeple and the North Side's factory roofs. Beyond all that lay streams, and woods, and farm land. At least the government claimed it was farm land. William laughed into his tea. This was all part of the golden dream, like the factories.

For twenty-five years the government had been saying too many men were in the fishery. It started the railway and sent men on trains to dig buckets of soil. It hired experts from England to look at the soil in summer. The experts said Newfoundland was tropical. You could grow anything here, they said. Corn and mangoes and apricots.

William had seen the government trying to get men out of the fishery. It gave them farming grants and train tickets away from the shores. It hired more experts to figure out what breeds of sheep could live on the farms. There would be wool for all the clothing factories. There was a new government department of farming and industry. The mangoes and corn and apricots and factories were bound up with the sheep's wool in the same golden dream.

Chapter 4
Scarlet Fever

Steam from William's tea fogged the window. He looked into the leaves. He could never see shapes or fortunes in the leaves like his father could. His father saw wedding rings, and big buildings, and tall strangers and far away places in the leaves. These were Oyoywattee tea leaves. William and little Alice Maud had laughed over that name every morning before she got ill.

"Oyoywattee drinkin' there, Papa?" she'd say between spoonfuls of her porridge.

"Oyoywattee talking about, little girl? Anybody can see it is a cup of tea."

"Oyoywattee tea!" The sound made her laugh every time.

He looked at the sky for signs of weather. If it got bad he would have to buy more coal. But he might get work shovelling snow. Iris had been upstairs tending Alice Maud these past five days. This morning more of the child's skin came off in the bed. At first they had not known what was wrong with her. There were so many plagues in the city. But when Lettie next door saw her, she knew it was scarlet fever.

"I'd know that look anywhere," she said. "The skin turns red as a cooked lobster and then peels off."

William knew his child might die. He also knew he could not get her in the hospital. It was full of people who had typhoid and scarlet fever and la grippe. Stretchers were laid out all over the floors with people lying on them. Nurses would steal a stretcher from under one child and slide it under someone worse off.

St. John's had a higher death rate than any town in England. There wasn't a hearse for hire in all the city. You saw one rolling down every hill. Gangs of children gaped at the shiny black carriages and ebony horses. They loved the plumes of black feathers on the horses' heads, and the silver breath streaming from the animals' nostrils. After a hearse passed, the children would play "funeral" on the street all morning.

Iris had hung a sheet dipped in disinfectant in Alice Maud's doorway. Last night she had come down to sit with William near the stove. He thought how tired her eyes were, but he didn't tell her. He gave her a bowl of bread with milk and cod liver oil warmed on the stove. It was for Alice Maud but she wouldn't eat it.

"You have it," he told Iris. "I'll put a spoonful of molasses on it."

She took the bowl, but would not let him give her the molasses. There was a shortage this winter in Barbados. It was expensive. He told her Tom Kelly had promised him a place on the snow clearing gang next time they were called out.

This morning he let her sleep in. He sat down with his tea at the kitchen table. The pine wood showed through the dark red stain where he always rested his elbows as he read the paper. Iris's uncle had made the table. It had a little drawer decorated with a beaded edge. The nails were all hand-forged.

Chapter 5
A Doomed Trade

There had not been much in the papers about the coopers' strike lately. Even when the strike was on, the papers had bigger news. The Bond election had filled the pages. Even when the strike ended not much was said about it. So this headline caught William Pender's eye:

> Passing of the Cooper:
>
> Coopering seems to be a doomed trade in St. John's, and every man who possibly can, is getting out of it. It is being hit from both ends. It will be next to a wonder if it ever survives.

> On the one end is the barrel making machinery cutting into its old area, and on the other is the handy man who, after a little practice, can make "slack" work good enough to pass.
>
> There will always be room for a few coopers here, but four fifths of the usual number cannot now find employment. Some of the craft have, I am told, thrown off their aprons. They have gone to work as ordinary labourers.

William stood up, put his coat on, and stuffed the paper in his pocket. He looked out the window at the merchants' wharves-Morey's, Ayre and Sons, Baine Johnston, and all the rest. Lined with barrels, but none made by him.

"Ordinary labourers," he repeated. For him, that meant working as a longshoreman. He looked down at the docks and tried to picture it. A lot of fellows from the South Side worked at that.

They made a half decent living some of the time. But they were never sure of a job. They had to be down on the docks at the right time. If they were lucky, they got chosen to load and unload the coal and salt boats.

You had to be strong to get chosen. You streamed up from the coal boats after the quitting whistle blew. Your face was covered in black dust. You were beat out unless you were young and strong.

That kind of life was all right if you were used to it. But it wasn't a cooper's life, William knew. Especially if the cooper was forty-six years of age like himself.

He took his canvas bag off its hook and picked up Iris's list off the table. It listed the things she wanted him to get for Alice Maud:

> Vinegar
> Ipecacuanha
> Antimonial wine
> 2 oz. bran
> 6 oz. rice or sago.

He would go to Thomas McMurdo's for the medicines, and Baine's grocery for the bran, rice and vinegar. The streets were bad for walking. They were full of ruts that made the carts lurch. But he would rather go out than stay in all day. At least he would be useful.

The vinegar mixed with water would cool his child's skin. The bran was for a warm poultice on her throat. The ipecacuanha and the wine would make her vomit. Poor little thing. But Lettie told Iris that was what nurses did in hospital. Then when a child got a little better, you gave her a pudding made of the sago or rice.

William put his tinder lighter in his bag with his list and snare wire. He might check his snares on the hill before dark. He left the house and headed up the south side road, to the bridge.

Chapter 6
William and Iris

A gaggle of youngsters caught up to him. Even now, whenever he left his yard a Snow girl or a Whitten lad called, "Mr. Pender, got a hoop for me?" They all wanted their own barrel hoop and a stick to roll it. They'd roll them from the south side to the east end of Water Street and back

again. They'd zig zag. They had a dozen ways of turning a hoop. William told them they had it down pretty fine.

Children liked William. They saw the child-like part of him. They saw the way his hair curled around his hat. They saw how his cheeks were apple-shine red like a little boy's.

When grown-ups saw William and his wife, some wondered how she married him. She was quiet and wise. He joked. She was modest. William seemed happy with himself for no reason anyone could think of. He was sad to have no work. But that did not change his real self. He still snared rabbits on the hill and smiled with both dimples.

People liked Iris. They excused William since they thought so much of her, and she was married to him.

But why had she married him? They did not know. She must have seen something in him, they said. And we all have faults.

People knew that. And they respected Iris. So William Pender had a good name in spite of his foolish smile.

Iris seemed tall, yet she stood only five feet two inches. It was the way she carried herself, and the clothes she wore. She sewed her own clothes. She liked dark greens and reds that glowed like jewels on her. William looked shorter than he was, because of his curls and his red cheeks.

People saw Iris was a smart, lovely woman. They saw her dark red hair curl around her neck. Lettie Duggan was her friend next door. Lettie once said Iris could have married the son of a merchant or a schooner captain. Not the cooper William Pender.

Over time, Lettie got to know Iris and William more as a couple. There was a glass paper weight on Lettie's dresser. The glass was green. It had tiny red blossoms in it. Lettie loved it. She did not know why it touched her heart so. She supposed Iris's love for William was part of the same mystery.

Chapter 7
Spanish Garlands

William flicked a lad's head. "Stay clear of those lassy barrels," he warned them. He knew they sneaked down to the docks where puncheons from Barbados were. They waited until dark. The night-watchman was old and deaf. Small kids licked the corks. But older ones took the corks out. They tipped the barrels to catch the molasses in their mouths.

Molasses barrels, salt fish barrels, cod oil and seal oil barrels. Casks of pickled herring, and drums of pickled Labrador salmon. Barrels coming and barrels going out on schooners to Portugal, Spain, Brazil and the West Indies.

William liked to think of his barrels in those sunny lands. Schooner captains said there was a Newfoundland barrel in the middle of every fish shop in Spain. Customers wanted to see that. It proved the fish came from Newfoundland.

William liked to picture one of his own barrels in one of those Spanish shops. Sun-cured, golden Newfoundland cod all around it. Bright red hot peppers hanging in garlands from the ceiling.

He loved the colours and smells of his own port city. As he walked to Job's Bridge he saw barrels lining both sides of the harbour. Many summers he had dived off a south side dock and swum with a few girls to Fort Amherst light.

The girls wore wool swim suits that got heavy in the water. You could smell lanolin in the wool, mixed with the salt fish smell in the harbour. The fish lay in salt bulk for twenty-one days in June. In July you'd smell them, laid out in a cloak over the harbour. Then it would be steady go. The last of the fish would not go to Brazil until late February.

By March tenth you would not be thinking about fish. You'd be thinking about seals. Already outport lads were in St. John's seeking berths on the sealing fleets.

They filled every boarding house. More bunked out in crowds at the fire hail. William had seen them drinking mugs of tea and reckoning what they'd make on the ice fields. Some nights the fire halls were filled. William saw young men walking downtown all night. Walking to keep warm. Waiting for a berth on the ice.

It wasn't just outport men who hoped for work in St. John's. There were always stowaways. The molasses shortage meant times were hard in Barbados this year. A crowd of black men hid themselves in casks on the brigantine *Grace*. They tumbled onto the south side looking for work. Two weeks later they were sent home on the *Clementine*.

William read in the paper that people were out of work all over the world this winter. In England thousands of unemployed men had marched on the London Parliament. It wasn't only here.

Everyone had the same golden dream. Nobody wanted to wake up from it even though they knew it wasn't true.

He passed St. Mary's Church and stopped on Job's Bridge to watch youngsters playing on ice. The other day five boys had drifted down the harbour on an ice pan. They called for help at the opening of the narrows. Lettie Duggan's son John put off from the south side and rescued them. They promised not to play the game again. William saw two of them down there now.

"Get yourselves home out of it!" he called. The boys used poles to push their ice raft under the bridge. He could hear their muffled laughter under him. He wouldn't mind being down there too. But he crossed the bridge.

Chapter 8
Crafts and Industry

No, Newfoundland was not the only place dreaming the golden dream. Across the bridge excitement trailed from lands across the water. Between 1850 and 1900 Britain, France and America burst with new ideas and exploration and inventions. By 1905 you could feel the thrill in Newfoundland.

The government had planned a big show of home crafts for 1892. It was proud of work done at home by crafts men and women. It wanted to show factory made goods as well. It planned contests for the best product designs. It would show the work of over forty local crafts and trades. It would celebrate tailors, tinsmiths, printers, and workers in leather and metal and wood.

Western countries had been having these shows since the 1850s. People wanted to believe they were in a dream age, when they made whatever they needed.

But St. John's never had its big show. 1892 was the year of one of its great fires. Hundreds of little workshops were burnt down. Many crafts people went away to Boston or Halifax to make a new start. It was easier for big factories to rebuild. Most of them were owned by groups of wealthy merchants.

Still, the fire did not end the golden dream in St. John's. By 1900 the city had been rebuilt. Even a great fire could not destroy the spirit of the age. In 1900 electric streetcars started running in St. John's. In 1901 the Italian Guglielmo Marconi was running around the top of Signal Hill with his kites, trying to catch a wireless signal from across the Atlantic ocean. In 1903 the first two automobiles came to St. John's.

The colonial government wanted Newfoundland to grow. It wanted the colony to export a lot, and import very little. It put tax on imports that could be made locally. It kept taxes low on hemp and flax for making nets, and on supplies coopers needed to make barrels.

By 1904 the local rope walk ensured fishermen no longer had to import twine and nets from Bridport in England's West Country. Local companies advertised that oil clothes and other things made at home were better than imports from America. The newspapers praised anyone who opened a new factory, or invented a new product.

William remembered one man who lived near the tannery on the east side. He had built a new kind of wooden bicycle. The papers called him a great inventor, even though he never made another one.

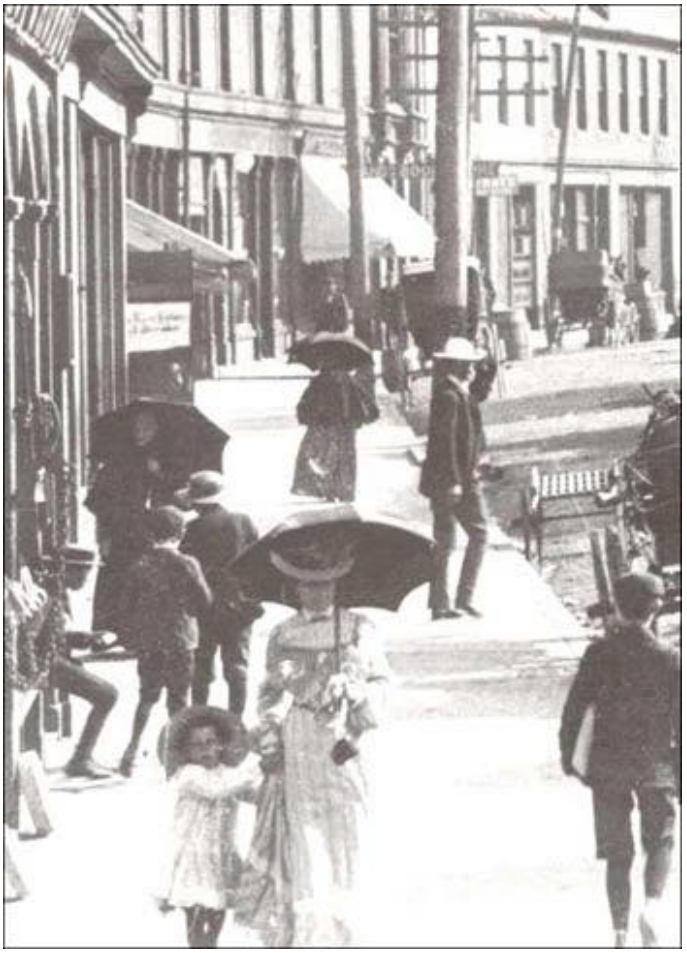
It was all inventors and explorers. The year St. John's got its first two automobiles, the whole world was excited about explorers seeking a north-west passage. By the winter of 1904-1905 the Norwegian Roald Amundsen had found the magnetic north.

As William Pender crossed Job's bridge and looked to the narrows, he thought about the coming spring. Robert Peary planned to stop in St. John's to get supplies for his trip to the North Pole. Like everyone else in town, William wanted a chance to see the great explorer.

Yes, in St. John's in 1905 you could smell the famous Newfoundland cod fish. You could taste sweet black molasses from Barbados. Schooners that came for fish brought tamarinds and dried apricots and fancy dried goods from their lands.

Newfoundland was not an outpost. It was a centre of trade. No schooner left the harbour with an empty hold. There was no such thing as a hollow, empty day on Water Street. You could smell wood smoke from the cresset fire every cooper had in his shop. You could smell delicious things the ships brought in from other countries-cocoa and chocolate, jellies and marmalade, ale, cigars, sole leather and toilet soap.

Part II: Lost Angels



Credit: City of St. John's Archives.

Chapter 9
The Poor House

William sat in a park near Angel Place. He looked in the paper for jobs. He did not want to sit long. The few people in the park were old men and young mothers. Behind bare trees stood the most dismal place in St. John's—the Poor House. It was a gloomy, three-storey building, crowded with beds and lit with oil lamps.

William had heard the place called names. Some called it the Pauper's Rest, or the Pest House. The government built it after the second last great fire—the one that burned St. John's in 1846. People who could not build new homes lived in sheds until it was built. Lettie Duggan had been inside. She worked for a charity that sent people there. She told Iris what it was like. Iris told William one night as they drank cocoa by the fire.

Iris said the place had eighty men and forty women in it. They slept on separate floors. Some slept in beds shoved in closets. The women ate in a dark, damp back room.

You got four kinds of people in there: old people who went there to die, middle-aged people who were down and out, people everyone called demented or idiot, and alcoholics. They had to wear uniforms. They could not leave. The gates were locked.

They did not get many visitors. The rooms were cold. Residents clung to heaters at the ends of the halls. People like Lettie who had been inside called it the saddest place in Newfoundland.

William unrolled his paper. People he knew had been in the news ever since the strike. A drunk cooper was arrested on Poor House Lane. That was just behind the park. Another cooper had found a drowned baby in the sewer. Today he read of another cooper's misery:

"A SAD STORY.
SMALL BOY ALMOST PERISHES"

The boy was eight. His mother and sisters were dead. The grippe, William thought, or scarlet fever. The lad had only his cooper father and two younger brothers. William thought of the poor father. His name was O'Neil. Out of work like him.

The boy had walked from town to Outer Cove. He had an aunt there. He thought she'd look after him. But she turned him out.

It was dark. The boy was tired. He fell into a snowbank and nearly died. Two men found him and looked after him for the night. In the morning they brought him back to town. The east end fire hall kept him until his father went to get him.

William rolled the paper up. It wasn't much comfort. Snow had begun to fall. He might get work shovelling. He slid the paper in his pocket and left the park bench.

On Water Street West a man let his horse drink at the horse fountain. Snow flakes melted on William's boots. He could see the factory where they made the boots, up on Job Street. At one time he would have got Nicholas Wadden's son to make his boots. He measured them, and made warm linings. But everything was factory work now.

William could not agree with it. No machine had the sense of a man. If you looked at the hands of a shoe-maker or a cooper you could see that.

This was what the cooper's strike in 1904 had been about, as far as he could see. Craft and skill.

William cast his mind back to the strike. We never asked for more money, he thought. All we wanted was work...

Chapter 10
The Coopers' Strike

...We made a living when there wasn't too many of us. But merchants don't care about our lives. The want cheap barrels. Outport men make barrels cheaper. Wood for their hoops and staves grows by their doors. Then handy men in town make slack barrels. They aren't trained like union men. We often had to take their work apart and redo it...

He thought how the union had lost its bite. When it started in 1892 it did some good. It raised pay from $1.30 to $1.50 a day. But by 1904 things had changed. It didn't matter what the wage was if there was no work. In his breast pocket he kept a bit of paper.

It was a letter in the *Evening Telegram*. It was signed A COOPER'S SON. Nobody knew who had written it. Each cooper thought it might have been his own son. William was no different. His son John worked in Sydney mines. Driven out of Newfoundland altogether. Maybe John had written the letter. William knew he wasn't the only cooper who had cut it out and saved it. This is what it said:

> Mr. Editor,
>
> The working man is not a slave. All he wants is fair play. Not to be treated like a machine you just wind up.
>
> We are three hundred working men. We aren't afraid of work. We just wanted the right to feed and clothe ourselves and our families.
>
> No matter how hard we worked, we couldn't earn enough to feed and clothe ourselves. Now we don't even have work.
>
> We can not school our children or give them a chance not to be slaves like us. That is what we coopers face today. Modern slavery.
>
> What are we looking for? Work. Not more pay. Just employment.
>
> If you don't think I'm right, listen to this. Today one of the big cooperages made an offer to a merchant who exports a lot of fish. He offered a steady supply of good union barrels at no rise in price. The fish merchant said no. What more proof do you need that union men are acting fair?
>
> Signed, A COOPER'S SON.

William could rhyme off that letter by heart. It said everything so plainly. You would think from reading it that the coopers deserved to win the strike.

But they did not win. The strike lasted two months. It ended on November 11 after a meeting between the coopers and merchants. The paper reported that meeting. William didn't bother to cut out that story. It said this:

THE STRUGGLE OVER-COOPERS AGAIN AT WORK

The Coopers' strike is over. Union members went to work again this morning as usual. This is because of a meeting between coopers and the fish exporters who use the barrels. The meeting took place at the office of Bowring Brothers Ltd., at 5:30 last evening.

Union members at the meeting were president Power, and Messrs. Reid, Linegar and Rorke. The merchants present were the Honourables John Harvey, E. R. Bowring, James Baird, R. K. Bishop, and Messrs. W. C. Job, W. B. Grieve, and A. P. Goodridge. The coopers also had Sir Edward Morris with them.

Sir Edward Morris made a long speech. He said it was too bad the strike happened at the peak of the fish trade season. He said both sides had suffered. The coopers had lost their wages. The merchants were losing money too. They could not export fish without barrels.

The trouble with the coopers was that they did not want to give the outport cooper a chance. The outport coopers had no chance to join the union. They made good barrels. Then there were handy men. They did carpentry work on sunny days. On rainy days they made a few barrels to sell. The union men wanted to shut these people out.

Then Honourable E. R. Bowring made a speech. He showed clearly that the union men were wrong. He said they had made life hard for the merchants. Good men had come to make barrels for them when the strike was on. He wanted the merchants to stand by those men after the strike.

The union men did not argue. They decided to go back to work this morning. They agreed to work side by side with non-union men. It is good that the coopers ended the strike. It means they will avoid a lot of suffering, now that the hard winter is near.

William kept walking. He wiped snow from his moustache with one of the coarse gloves Iris had knit for him. We never asked for a cent higher wages, he thought. We only wanted work.

He remembered another union meeting, before the last one with the merchants. Every union man agreed. We were determined to stand up for our rights. Our president, George Power, gave the noblest kind of a speech.

George is his name, William thought. The papers wouldn't even report his first name because he wasn't an Honourable this or an Honourable that. They treat the working man like a nobody even if he's the union president.

We all said we'd never give in. Now look at us. Working side by side with the non-union men who took the work away from us.

George Power wasn't making his big speeches when he met those merchants. No sir, he wasn't. Docile as you like. That's how we all became. You may as well stuff us in our own barrels and set us adrift. That's all the life of a journeyman cooper is worth these days.

And why did they have to hold that last meeting in the merchants' offices? We should have had it in the union hall. It was the merchants' meeting, not ours. Make no mistake. "Admitted we were wrong." That's a good one. It's a wonder we never said how sorry we were to have troubled them. It's a wonder we never licked their boots.

Chapter 11
The Story of a Barrel

As he walked past the dockyard William saw no one. He missed the other coopers working around him. There was Cantwell, and Linegar, and Mullaly and Brown... There were plenty of small cooperages with just a father and one or two sons. But William was used to his own berth in Cousens' big shop. The men were a team. Each man knew how many casks the firm had promised the merchants. There was always a goal.

The men knew secrets. They knew how many staves it took to make any kind of barrel. They knew how many drops of seal oil a tight barrel would hold. They knew the exact volume of salt fish the longshoremen could press into the slack barrels. They called the barrels by name. There were common drums, half drums, whole drums, long donkeys, short donkeys and butts.

How many bundles of birch hoops had William untied? The hoops came from Topsail and other outports. He knew there were 32 in a bundle. They were not tied with rope. They were tied with soft var or fir branches. Hoop makers walked in swamps to collect the branches. They knew wood that grew in a swamp was soft. William had untied so many bundles he could still smell the var resin on his hands.

William rebuilt old barrels too. Cousens bought old margarine tubs from local factories. William re-beat the tubs and made sure the heads and staves were tight. Then Cousens re-sold the tubs to Bowrings, Job Brothers and Baine Johnston. The merchants put oil in them and sold them to soap factories.

But William's real pride lay in making barrels from start to finish.

He had tried to tell his son John about making barrels over the years. But it wasn't John who cared. It was his daughter, Alice Maud. She'd sit up in bed and listen any time he had a mind to tell her. By now he could listen, and the little girl would tell him how to make a barrel.

"What happens first?" he'd ask her.

She sat against her pillow hugging her stuffed seal. "First you get the staves ready. You make them skinny at the ends and fat in the middle."

"What with?"

"Your special axe."

He told her it was called a broad axe. He told her about smoothing the edges of the staves with a draw knife. He showed her with a knife and a bar of chocolate how he cut the edges on a slant. He told her that was called bevelling the edges.

She ate the chocolate and waited for her favourite part of the story. You had to get the staves inside the hoops. First you stood them on their ends in a circle. You slid a small hoop over them. The small hoop stayed near the top. Then you slid a bigger hoop down to the middle, where the staves were fat. That was called the truss hoop. Now the cask looked like an upside-down cone standing on the floor. Alice Maud liked the upside-down part. That was called raising the cask.

"That sounds hard, Papa," she said. "What if the staves keep tumbling out?"

He laughed and wiped melted chocolate off her chin. He told her his staves never fell out.

The next part was his favourite part. The staves had to be bent. He had to swab the cask with water and set it over his cresset fire. The cresset fire was a special fire only coopers had. It fit in a little iron grate and burned wood shavings.

The fire steamed the damp staves. The staves softened. William went around the barrel with a five pound sledgehammer. He beat more hoops around the cask. First he used big hoops, then smaller ones, until the staves were drawn together into the shape of a barrel.

Then you dried the cask over a flame. The flame shrank the wood fibres and made the bent staves stay in place.

"Then the sun comes out!" Alice Maud always called out about the sun at this part. The sun was the name of the plane he used to trim the top of the cask. It was called that because it was the shape of half a circle. A lot of coopers' tools were round, because barrels were round.

He trimmed the top and cut the groove where the barrel head would fit.

Now came the magic part. You took all the hoops off except the two on the ends, and the barrel stayed together. You needed the hoops off so you could clean and shave the wood.

"It has to be smooth as baby skin," Alice Maud told her father.

"Does it?"

"Yes," she laughed. "Then you drive the real hoops on with a piece of chocolate cake!" When she was six he had told her he drove the hoops on with a wedge shaped like a piece of cake. She never forgot.

The snow was falling thick now. It stung his forehead. He pulled his cap down. He thought of little Alice Maud saying how the sun came out. He wondered if he was the only cooper in St. John's who made barrels out of the sun and chocolate cake.

Chapter 12
Pity

William turned up George Street. He stopped at number 411, where a sign read:

HAY, COAL, SALT, PAINTS, OILS
AND FISHERY SUPPLIES
FOR SALE HERE

He had been sparing coal. But he needed it badly, for Iris and Alice Maud. His son John had sent him a few dollars from Sydney.

His son John mined coal. John was sick of coal. If John could see him buying coal with that money, he would groan. William swung the door open. He went into the dark store.

He asked Harold, the clerk, the price of a bag of coal. He felt the money in his pocket. He knew how much was there. But he counted it again.

He told Harold, "I'm going to Baird's and McMurdo's for cures. Then I'll stop at Cochrane Street. I'll see if there's work with the snow clearing gang. I'll stop here on my way home if I want the coal."

Harold knew how things were. When you sell the basics, like hay and coal, you see things. You see how people are making out. Harold knew William might have money for coal by the end of the day, and he might not. Harold took his pencil from behind his ear. He pointed it at a notice on the wall.

"You might want to see that there," he told William. The notice read: "WANTED-63 steamers and 57 rollers. We have room for a few to learn. Good wages can be made by steady work. Come in and have your name booked. J. D. Goodwin, Manager, Imperial Tobacco Company, Limited."

William was glad of the dim light in the store. He didn't want Harold to see how bad he felt. He was used to making a dollar fifty a day.

Those factories were all the same. Everyone said they created jobs. But if you went into one, like the tobacco factory or the famous rope walk, your heart broke. William knew you did not see skilled men like him there. You saw boys and girls and women. Their faces were thin and pale. All the spirit was sweated out of them. It took a worker seven days to earn what he used to make in one day coopering.

Harold knew that. That was what made it so hard. For Harold to show him that sign meant he saw William was down and out. You felt ashamed when that happened.

William had been a cooper since he was eleven. He knew a cooper was not a king, or a politician, or a lawyer or a judge. But he had a skill. He knew how to work with all his heart and strength.

William knew he should not be too proud to work at something else. But Harold feeling sorry for him twisted in his heart.

"I don't mind working hard," he told Harold. "That's why I'm going to see if there's any snow clearing work. But I'll be damned if I'll work for a miserable dollar fifty a week. Damned if I'll perish like the poor slaves and orphans in those factories."

He smiled. "Besides, they wouldn't take me. I'm too old, and too much of a trouble maker." He left Harold cleaning a lamp at the counter. He went back out into the snow, leaving the smells of hay, twine and oakum behind him.

Near the shop stood a boarded up house. He may not have seen the house, but for a story Lettie told Iris. Now when he passed the house he remembered Lettie's story.

Chapter 13
Lettie's Story

Lettie said she saw the house when she was going around with St. Vincent de Paul's Society. The windows were boarded up. There were three kinds of brown paint on the front, but none reached the roof. It was as if the person could never reach as high as the last time he had tried to paint it. Robins were eating the few dogberries on a bush at the back.

Lettie thought nobody lived there. One morning she saw smoke coming from the chimney.

Some people would have been afraid to knock. Lettie was never afraid. There were two doors. A man opened them slowly. She told him her name, Lettie Duggan. She asked did he mind a visit.

He smiled. He said he could not see her too well. He sat on a chair. There was one more chair. Lettie sat too.

She saw a barrel of water, and bottles of water on a shelf. He did not want to have to go out to get water. He had a little stove, and a good heat. He wore two sweaters and gloves and a wool hat. Lettie could just make things out in the shadows.

He never asked why she came. He had a small voice like a bird's whistle. White hair stuck out under his cap. He had whiskers. Lettie let him talk. She was trying to figure out if St. Vincent de Paul could help him.

He said he had lived there all his life with his mother. She had died seventeen years ago. Lettie pictured him sitting there in the dark with those sweaters on all that time. He told her he never went upstairs now. There was one room off the kitchen. His bed was in it, covered in old quilts.

She asked him, "What do you eat?"

"Soup," he said. "I boil up a bit of soup in that pan on the stove."

He liked talking. He said one thing could make him happy. He wanted concert tickets. He wanted to hear *The Indian Desert Song*. He wanted to hear music from the grand operas. *La Tosca. Carmen. La Traviata.* Songs rich people heard Madame Maria Toulinguet sing at the College Hall. He would learn the words and sing them on George Street. He would make people dance. Lettie wondered how he knew of such things. She saw a book on his table. It was called *Lost Angel of a Ruined Paradise*.

She had just started with St. Vincent de Paul. She did not know they told women not to go to men's houses alone. It did not cross her mind that he might think she was courting him. She did not know old people had young feelings. She was a married women of thirty-five, and he was in his eighties. But he did think that. She had to stop going.

But when she told the Society about Mr. O'Neill, they went to see him. They could see things Lettie had not seen. They did not see him dreaming of *The Indian Desert Song*. They did not see him reading his book in the dark. All they could see was the soup pot.

Lettie never looked in the pot but they did. They said all that was in it was water, and potato peels and gristle he had collected from rubbish heaps on George Street.

They tried to convince him to go to the Poor House. He grabbed his bed post and would not let go. They had to come back three times. The last time they brought the police. They said it should have been done long ago. They said he was starving. They said he had caused his own suffering. He never did agree to go to the Poor House. They forced him.

Chapter 14
Cold Storage

Now no smoke came from Mr. O'Neill's chimney. There was no path in the snow at his door. William turned down Buchanan Street and onto Water Street. As he passed by Clift's Cove he

saw a stack of long boxes outside the merchants Thistle and Company. Each box had a label on it. He looked closer.

The labels said, "FRESH COD FISH—Home orders delivered Wednesdays and Fridays from our cold storage plant."

William saw there was no one behind him. He lifted a box lid. Inside, wrapped in paper, lay a whole fish. He covered the box. Snow fell on the boxes and on him.

Cold storage. Boxes and boxes of fish. Fresh. Taken right to people's doors.

He thought, there is no need for barrel makers like me now. Coopering is on its way out for sure. He looked down the lane to the harbour. Across it he saw his own South Side Hills. He could see the merchants' docks. Bowrings. Goodfellows. Jobs.

You want cheap barrels, he thought. No barrels would be better. You merchants think too much of your money leaks out to coopers and our families. A dollar fifty a day we were paid. A dollar fifty a day leaking out of your life into ours.

He looked past the South Side docks at the seal oil factories. He might get work there once the seals came in. He'd done it before. He was pretty good at it. You had to be. One slip of your knife and the skin was no good.

Skin of old seals for book binding. Whitecoats for clothes. Oil for soap factories. The oil stank worse than cod oil. Come March and April the South Side would reek of rancid seal fat.

Coopers worked at that. They each had two or three big knives. They rolled fat off skin. A man came with a barrow to take the fat and render it to oil. William had skinned seals before to make extra money. There was no extra money now.

They put seal oil in barrels. He would not want to see that. Good tight barrels. The kind he knew how to make better than anyone. The kind that gave him a living wage.

A seal skinner got paid by the skin. William could skin 300 seals in nine hours. That gave him half a cooper's wage if he could get the work. But the skinners' union was not broken like the coopers' union. Half of them were butchers from Adelaide Street. You had a hard time taking work from them.

He looked up the South Side Hill. His house looked secure. He knew it was not. Above it were berry grounds and ponds. Far up was the secret place, where tall stones stood. A place where he went to be alone, to figure things out. Not many knew that place. Even South Siders did not know it. Only those who spent a lot of time out of houses. Like young Roddy Dawe, who had no house.

One morning he had seen Roddy Dawe's feet sticking out from under an old boat on the South Side. The feet had slippers on them. Orange and brown hounds-tooth slippers with a frayed hole in one toe. Roddy Dawe had no mother, and his father was always in a shebeen up on Rocky Road.

William nudged Roddy's foot to make sure he had not frozen to death. He was asleep. He woke up and talked to William. William never forgot what he said.

Chapter 15
What Roddy Dawe Told William

I was fifteen in November. I spent my birthday under this boat. My uncle made the boat. I may as well claim it. Nobody else has. I can use it.

People look at me. Some pity me. I heard a woman near the shoe factory say I've been prowling like a starved cat since I was seven. But it hasn't been that long. I was ten when my mother died of diphtheria. I'm small for my age.

I spend some cold nights in the lock-up. This winter it's hard to get in there. It's full of sealers and homeless kids like me. The fire halls are filled as well. It's a good winter for company. Everyone says this is the worst winter for cold and snow they can remember. I'm lucky I have my boat.

I steal food on the docks at night. I get pork, and bread, and fish, and flour, and molasses. I make a fire and heat a tin of molasses water.

The other day a girl gave me this paper. She wasn't going to. I was so ragged she thought I couldn't read. But I can. My sister Peggy taught me. The woman was giving these green bits of paper out at the bottom of Cochrane Street. She had black hair and a plump throat. I could smell perfume on her. There was a girl with her. You wouldn't notice that one so much. She called the first one Kate, and Kate called her Gertie.

The green paper said, "We will rejoice in thy salvation and in the name of our God we will set up our banners." She gave it to me with white gloves on. I noticed the gloves because they made my hands look so black.

I asked her what kind of banners. I like banners and fireworks. I asked her if there was going to be a parade.

She said no. It just meant people in her church had to tell about Jesus. I asked her what church. She said Methodist. She had a hymn book in her coat. She showed it to me.

She said they were new hymn books. They had to raise a lot of money to buy them. She said there was a tall new preacher. He said they should not spend money on new books. They should spend it on the poor. She looked in my eyes. I could smell her hair. She seemed sorry about her book. So I told her it was nice.

She had to go. She told me she might write in her diary about me. I said will you show me after you write it?

First she said no. She said she never showed anyone her diary. Then she said since I was gentle she'd think on it. She said meet me here tomorrow at noon. I might show you. And she did. So I saw what Kate put in her diary.

Chapter 16
What Kate Put in her Diary

Roddy Dawe broke my heart when he asked me if there would be a parade or fireworks. I love fireworks too. The last time I saw some was on Queen Victoria's birthday.

Anybody was allowed to see them. I wonder if Roddy Dawe did. Maybe I did not see him there. Reverend Hackett says we are blind. Reverend Hackett is so nice looking. Too bad he's a student preacher. I wish he could stay.

I wonder what Frances Ridley Havergal would do if she met Roddy Dawe. I love her books. I want to be humble like her for Jesus. But worldly concerns get in the way.

Sometimes I think I'll never be a real saint. Gertie and I stayed in the church eating oranges. We were waiting for the women's meeting to start in the hall. We talked and laughed so much, we missed the meeting.

But they only talked about what pattern we should choose for new dishes in the church hall. They had a big argument. Some wanted wild roses and some wanted lily of the valley.

I would have voted for wild roses. I found a pretty bush that day we boiled up in the country: Maud and Gertie and I took the children. Father had to hose down the house that day. The street was so dusty.

We went to the river to get away from the heat and dust. The boys ran in the woods and found a nest low down in a tree. The nest looked nice with one little green egg in it. There was thunder and lightning. Then the sun came out again.

Birds sang as the sun set. The moon lit the water. There were little boats. We gathered a basket of ferns. We sang all the way home. We cut through two meadows to see the train pass. It was fun running through hay up to our knees. We got our stockings wet, and we didn't get home until ten.

It's so good to remember that day. Now it's the dead of winter. The council has gangs of men shovelling snow. But there's nowhere for them to put it. It's hard to believe that little green egg was real. I remember Gertie said it felt warm.

Chapter 17
A Little Girl's Toy

From Clift's Cove William saw his house across the water. Above it rose the rocky South Side Hill. That was where he wanted to go when he saw the fresh cod in Clift's lane. Boxes, not barrels. Not salt fish. He recalled fish flakes around the harbour in summer. There were more before the 1892 fire. Soon they would all go. He could not keep up with the changes.

He looked at his house. No, he thought, Roddy Dawe and that O'Neill man don't fit into the golden dream. And I do not.

His house. Iris and Alice Maud. The smell of kippers in a pan on the stove. Alice Maud is in her bed. Iris has folded the quilts to keep her cool. Alice Maud is reading. Her friends come to the door with comics. Torn ones they don't want back. You have to burn things that go in the sick room.

Alice Maud has one thing in her room she loves more than anything. It is the stuffed seal Iris's brother gave her. He caught it last year. Alice Maud keeps it by her. She talks to it. Last night Iris listened on the landing.

"I'm so hot, Peppy. My throat is so sore. Uncle George says they found you on the ice. The ice must have felt cool. I wish I was a seal. I'd float on an ice pan. I wouldn't mind how cold it was. I'd love the cold ice, and the cold wind."

That's what Alice Maud said to her seal. We told her if she kept him in her room we'd have to throw him out when she got better. But she promised to rub disinfectant in his fur and begged us not to burn him.

William turned back onto Water Street. The cold was damp. He wouldn't mind a shot of rum now. But places where you could get one were getting fewer.

Police made criminals out of innocent people. These days if rum didn't ruin the buyer, it ruined the seller. On one hand you had the likes of Roddy Dawe's father, always drunk. His children left to starve. Then you had Tom Kelly's third cousin, Bridgett Gunn. Her children were left to starve as well.

Tom told William all she did was buy one pot of rum. She did it after her husband died. She did not know what else to do. She hid it under the bed. She meant to sell a drink now and then to help feed her twelve children. Tom went to visit her in jail. She told him she never sold the first drink before the police came. She told him some other things, too.

Chapter 18
Bridgett Gunn's Story

My friend Edna says life does things to you that you never thought you could bear. She said you end up doing things you never wanted to do, because life is so hard.

I'd rather have no husband than have her husband, and so would she. The latest thing he did was get run down by the number seven Street car. Even though the driver rang the gong. At least he didn't give his name for them to put in the paper.

My husband was a quiet, good man, and I'm a quiet, good woman. But it's like Edna says, life makes you do things you don't want to do. The older I get, the more I think I'm just as good as the best woman alive, and just as bad as the worst.

Not that I'm old. But with twelve children I feel old. Six work. But they don't bring home enough pay to feed and clothe us. They're right to call that rope walk a sweat shop.

Nine and ten years old and working night and day. With not an hour to go on the swings, nor an extra penny for a chocolate man or a dolly delight or a stick of licorice.

What I did wasn't right. I know that. But it was just one pot of rum. Not a shebeen. At least I wouldn't call it that. But maybe it was one. It sounds bad when someone else does it, and the papers call it wicked.

But to Bridgett Gunn, when it's herself trying to feed Mary and Amy Jo and Tom and Elizabeth Ann and the twins, it doesn't seem bad.

It just seems like a pot of rum under the bed, that I could have turned into bread and meat if the police hadn't come.

Chapter 19
French Violets

William came to Thomas McMurdo's pharmacy. In the window were medicines, perfume, brushes and combs, garden seeds, and toilet soap. A brass bell rang on its chain as he opened the door.

He passed a stack of soap. A flowery smell came through the paper French Violet. He used to buy it for Iris when they were first married. She kept it among clothes in the dresser. When it lost its scent she used it on her skin.

He sniffed a cake of soap. There was no seal oil in it. He had not smelled violets on her skin in a long time. He put it back. He took her list from his sack and gave it to the pharmacist.

The pharmacist read the list. He looked over the top of his glasses at William's face. William tried to stand tall. He did not want the pharmacist to feel sorry for him.

The pharmacist gave him small bottles wrapped in paper. William tucked them in his sack and left the store.

At Baird's grocery, he saw barrels by the door. They held apples from Nova Scotia. They were not tight like his barrels. But they had the same number of staves. Thirty six. One for every year of Iris's life.

In the store were things he could not buy. A tray of dried apricots and raisins made him think of Iris's Christmas cake, and her dress. How sad he felt about that dress.

Chapter 20
Iris's Dress

When she turned thirty-six Iris began making the dress she wanted to be buried in.

"You're not old yet," William said when she told him. It was a beauty. It had two layers. One was pink satin. A layer of wine-red lace went over it. The pink layer shone through. The lace was all snowdrops and stars. It reminded him of the Irish rose and thistle pattern on the glass in their porch door.

Iris bought the cloth with money her mother left her. It was not a lot of money. Iris put half the money aside for Alice Maud when she grew up. Then she made the dress.

"Nobody ever leaves money to girls," Iris said. "Alice Maud can do what she wants with it. Even if it is not much."

William did not question what his wife did with that money. She was a strong woman. She made sure her family was well clothed and fed. She scrubbed the house and the threshold. She kept the yard tidy and grew lilies. Every fall she dug a barrel each of potatoes, carrots and turnips. She packed them in sawdust for the winter.

That was why the new dress astounded him. It was not warm or practical. It was not part of her life. She said firmly that she was making it to be buried in.

But this Christmas she had worn it.

She said her old best dress was worn out. He watched her sit on the daybed cutting it up to make a quilt. It was green with a satin collar. She mended frayed pieces for the quilt. She kept every scrap.

So she had served the Christmas goose, and turr, and pudding, with pink shimmering through the wine lace. All William could think as he ate was how she would look in her coffin.

The dress made him see lines under her eyes and flesh that had gone from her throat. He never told her. If only he had found her a new dress. Something with scrap of satin on it. But he had not.

Chapter 21
Market House Hill

William turned up Market House Hill. He knew men stood at the top by the courthouse. Men looking for work like him. Or not looking. These days the men mostly stood around and talked. If there was work on the snow gangs he would hear of it there.

Iris was on his mind. She was worse off than him in a way. She put faith in him. He could not live up to it. She had more hope than he did. She sat up at night, sewing on the daybed.

She loved sitting under the picture of the house her father built in Topsail. Gladiolas grew taller than the whitewashed fence. She said they were red, yellow and white. She loved the white ones. They were like snow. She said the only colour on them was purple dust in the bloom.

William made the daybed when they were first married. He made it of birch. It was filled with sea grass. Iris picked the grass at Topsail with her sister Annie. William saw them in the dunes. Their hair blew wild. He could hear them laughing. Iris had on a white dress with tiny sky blue flowers all over it. John was a baby. William minded him in his basket on the sand. Now John was in the mines.

Iris insisted she still smelled sea grass in the daybed. She had covered the mattress herself. She used flour sacks, washed and bleached soft. She had sewn two green sea-horses in the corner. She sewed a row of beach flowers along the edge Purple vetch, forget-me-nots, dog roses, and a blue flag iris.

Even in bleak winter Iris would smile. They had this thing they always said to each other when one was worried.

"We have Allie." She'd wait for him to say it too.

"We have Allie."

Then she'd say, "And you have me."

"You have me," he'd say.

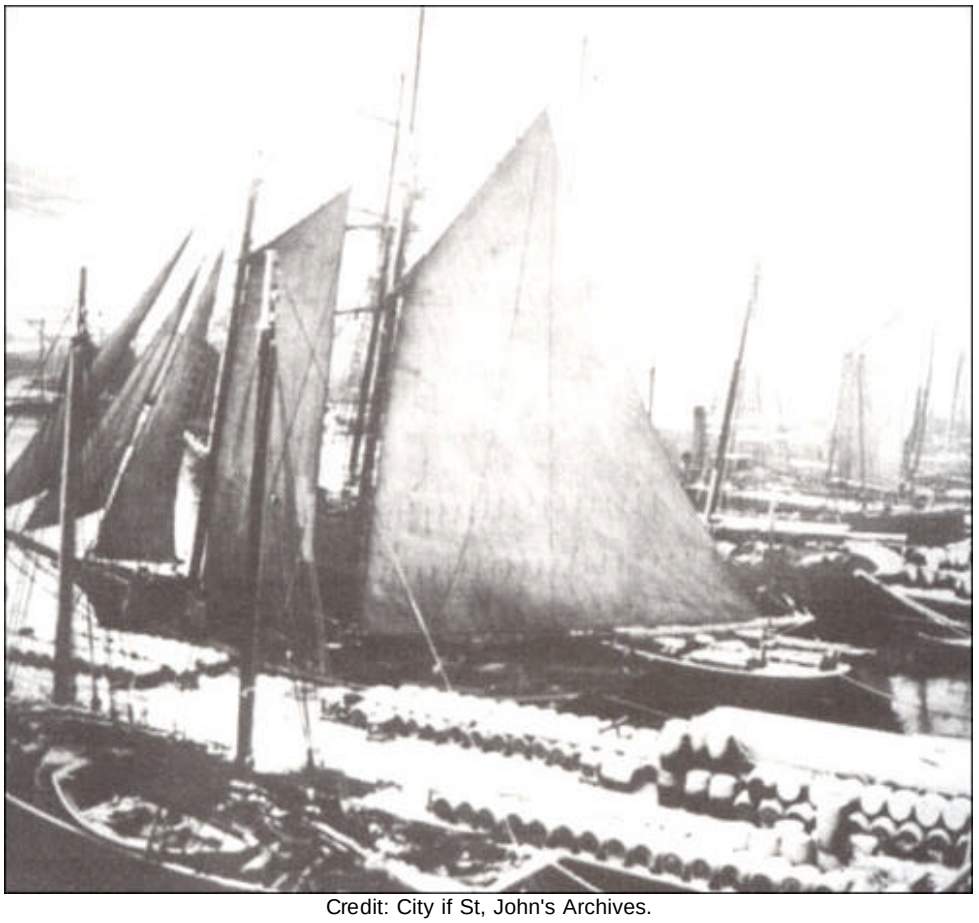
"And I have you." She'd hold him. And she'd always say, "And God is with us." He did not say that part.

At the hilltop a man told him Tom Kelly had gone with four men to shovel Cochrane Street. The streetcar lines were buried in three feet of snow. If he hurried he might get an hour's work.

Tom gave him a shovel. Some men wore gloves. William did not. He laid down his sack. The wooden handle felt warm. The snow was heavy. Feet and carriages had packed it down. The gang worked. Businessmen and boys with snowballs looked at them. Everyone knew they had no other work.

When this was done he'd take the few pennies they gave him. He'd go to his own South Side Hill. Out of this place, to where he belonged.

Part III: Hunger of the Eagle



Credit: City if St, John's Archives.

Chapter 22
The Hill

The South Side Hill looks sullen from the other side of the city. It looks long and tall, with dark patches in the snow. William knew what the darkness was. It was goulds, and berry bushes, and boulders. A South Sider like him knew the hill was not as dark as it looked. Up close, you got to know berry grounds and rabbit paths.

He followed a rabbit path now. He thought, this is how I leave the world. I go to the rabbits' world. Graceful, wild hares. They eat willows and rushes. They make paths and gates. Tidy gates and shelters and hiding places.

He felt the snare wire in his pocket. He could hear Iris's brother Joe now. Joe said there was a special place in hell for people who snare rabbits. William knew why he said that. He had heard how a rabbit screams like a human baby in the snare.

But it was all right for Joe. He had snared a clerk's job with the railway. If he never snared a rabbit he'd still have meat. Pork and beef and no lack of bread and cake.

William had not told Iris he was coming here. She knew him. She did this herself. How often she wore his coat and took her shotgun to Freshwater Bay. She came home with nice ducks. She knew where every one of his snares was. She had more of her own.

She caught white hares with pink eyes. She told him they weren't hares at all. They were human infants eagles had stolen and changed into hares. She would not cook them. He cooked them. She drank the broth but did not eat the meat. She sewed the skins into cradle blankets.

The hilltop was a lonely place. She said an eagle had tried to steal Alice Maud there when she was a baby. Iris had laid her in the partridge berry bushes, all wrapped up. She turned her back to pick berries. But her back prickled.

She looked at her baby. She felt her own mouth water, and she thought, "My, that thing is plump. How white and tasty it looks."

She felt an eagle was near. She could feel the hunger of the eagle. She told herself not to be so foolish. And then, ten feet above little Alice Maud, she saw a great brown bird. She called it an eagle. But it was a falcon.

It hung in the air over the baby. It did not move. Iris swooped on her baby. She folded her in her shawl and fled down the hill.

That night she took the rabbit skin blankets off Alice Maud's cradle. She put a wool one there instead. She rocked the cradle. She sang a song her grandmother had taught her. It was called Marsh Berry Leaves, and this is how it went:

Marsh Berry Leaves

Marsh berry leaves are dark and green
Glossy as the river
I took my baby to a steep hilltop
some berries for to gather

And her I did lay in the leaves so green
and turned my face around
and that was the last thing I should have done
—set my baby down

Stones, stones, cold are the stones
my tears fall down on now
If I'd seen before what I've seen now
I'd not have laid my fair one down

She was so plump, she was so bright
an eagle came and found he
r and with a sweeping wing of night
his talons wrapped around her

She made no cry, she made no moan
but softly rode the air
with the dark-winged bird, to her dark new home
without her mother there

Til my legs were scarred and my feet did bleed
I followed over stones
to a cave where the bird slipped from my view
in a valley of shells and bones

And there an old man I did meet
who took me to a cairn
beneath which lay at my torn feet
my own, my loved, my bairn

I saw her breathe, I felt her warmth
I saw her soft hand move
but her eyes were cold as two blank stones
and for me they held no love

They were the eyes of one who has been
where no human child has gone
and I knew my baby was lost to me
for as long as the world spins on

William came to the top of the hill where Iris had felt the eagle. There were rabbit paths here. He cut four bits of wire with his knife. He put a loop in each end, and circled the wire through the loops. You put snares four fingers above the snow crust.

He liked to hang his snares from a growing twig. His brother Jack laughed at that. Jack cut his own sticks and drove them into the snow and peat. He said William did it the lazy way. William would cut his own sticks if he thought that would make better snares. But he had stopped trying to explain that long ago.

He wanted to go over the hill away from the city. He looked at factory chimneys across the harbour. Below he could see his house, and Norman Healy's, and John Moore's. Coal smoke rose. Lace curtains veiled dim rooms where he knew it was warm.

Iris would have a rabbit or a grouse in the iron pot, with a paste over it. He looked at the heavy sky. Snow had not let up for weeks. He would not get far without his snow-shoes. But he had a trail to the tall stones near the pond.

The tall stones stood over a pool and stream that ran so slow they were smooth as glass. The biggest stone stood six times his height. It had a natural fireplace at its base.

Many summer nights he had curled near his fire of var and tamarack sticks after a supper of roast grouse. Black tea scalded his throat. In summer the earth smelled of peat and needles.

Now the pool glinted. He scraped snow from the fireplace. There was charred wood. He found dry twigs and made a fire. The fragrant smoke took worries away. He broke young var boughs and made a seat in the snow. He began to think on stories he had heard about this place.

Chapter 23
New France

He had heard the stories as a boy, on long winter nights around the stove. He could see his mother bottling goat meat. The jars glinted in the lantern light. His father was the story-teller. His mother half listened, to be sure he got it right. The stories came from her father.

William had not gone far in school. But he knew about the old battles on his own South Side Hill. He knew how the French came to take St. John's from the English just two hundred years ago. His people knew the name of the man who led them. Not out of a history book. But because they belonged to the place where the story happened.

"D'Iberville," his father would begin. He loved to say the full name. "Pierre le Moyne, sieur d'Iberville. It was the winter of 1696 he sailed with his men from Placentia."

William's mother added salt to the meat. "They walked, Jeremiah. D'Iberville made his men walk. The French had tried sailing in that fall. But the English put guns near Chain Rock and chased them back. Who was the first man who led the French?"

"It was de Brouillon," William's father said. "Do you want to tell this story, or will I?" He always said that. He'd spit a gob of tobacco in his bowl. William's mother crumbled home-grown herbs into the jars as he went on with his story.

He told how d'Iberville had a strong face, with creases in his brow and cheeks, and dark eyes. He said you wouldn't think a man with such soft eyes would kill so many men. He told how the English never dreamed men would walk from Placentia.

"What were they fighting for?" William and his brothers and sister would ask. "Land," his father said. He talked as if he could see the land. Crowberry barrens with sea-wind blowing gold grasses. "Land and fish."

He told them the English never meant to stay in Newfoundland. To them it was just a lonely place. Good for fish in summer and nothing else.

"The English just saw money in cod," he told his children. "But the French dreamed of a New France."

When his father said "New France," William felt a thrill. He still felt it now, here among the tall stones. "New France" meant a chance to start fresh. Leave all failures in an old country, and sail to a new-born land. That was what d'Iberville's men had wanted. That was what any man would long for...

Chapter 24
Scalped

William sat among the tall stones. He hardly felt the deep cold that had crept around the bushes. Ice clicked as buds of frozen larches moved in the wind. The firs whispered. Pink bark of the rowan trees glowed in the snow.

These stones and trees hid d'Iberville's French and Indian soldiers two hundred years ago. In a place this stark and stony, time did not pass. It hung in caves and hollows. William had sat here in summer and seen the moon move over the land. He saw there was no time outside things moving.

That's all time is, he thought. Things passing by. I might see one of d'Iberville's Indians. Or a French soldier. Or the English man the Indians scalped.

His father had told him the English hid in these hills, trying to save the valley from the French. But they were fishermen, not soldiers. The French killed most and took the rest prisoner. His father said the one they scalped was called William like him. William Drew.

The moon rose, but William saw only the gold mist it made through the clouds. Shadows of stones moved over the moonlit snow and touched him. His burnt sticks showed the last glow of their skeletons. He did not feel cold.

William rested his back in a hollow in a rock. In shadows beyond the fire was another hollow. It was big enough for another man to sit in.

William still did not feel the deep cold. Half frozen, he imagined the man, William Drew, sat in the other hollow. He imagined the fire was still burning. They shared it. It was their fire.

Why couldn't the two men share fire, moon, rock, hill? Why couldn't he hear William Drew speak to him, if that was what the man wanted?

Chapter 25
The Other William

"It's not so cold now," William Drew said.

"It's the rock," William Pender told him. "It soaks up heat all summer and lets it out slow."

"I never spent much time on this hill," William Drew said. "I work on the north side. Those few houses scattered along the water. You'd hardly call them houses, with your grand city. Your stoneware houses and churches. Even a poor man like you would look on my house as a shack." He laughed.

William Pender saw dying firelight in William Drew's eyes. The man looked like he was thinking of a nice house, not a shack. He was remembering his wife Ada, and their baby May.

"She'll be tucking in her four chicks now," he said gently. The only coal Ada had was a five pound bag by the fire. She used it to save fire from day to day. At night she took four egg-sized pieces. She got them glowing in the fire. Then she scraped them into her iron pot lid.

It put him in mind of a hen tucking its chicks under its wing. She called it saving the fire. He called it tucking in her chicks.

By now Ada would have laid May in her birch cot near the fire pit. Smoke rose through a hole in the roof. The room had flat stones for a floor. It was lit by the fire, and by the glow of a cod oil lamp. The room smelled of smoke, cod oil, and the boughs in the walls.

It was a new house. William Drew had cut the boughs that fall. He cut them from the fir and birch above the harbour's east end. That was where he got his firewood.

The boughs went in the walls between two layers of fir rinds. He put sods on the outside. He figured his walls kept winter out as well as William Pender's did. But coal fires and lace curtains! William Drew did not have these. They were for men like Bill Serjeant, who had boats and servants. Not men like him who came from Cornwall for a fishing season. Two summers and a winter. Came and then stayed.

"Is that a couple of hares?" William Drew moved closer. William Pender had snared two good sized hares where the path turned in to the tall stones. They lay by his sack. He had pulled their legs and arched their backs. That was how he liked to see them. He did not like to see anyone dump hares in a bag in a frozen lump.

He liked to see things done in a neat way. A way that told people you cared how you lived. So his bag was packed neatly. Alice Maud's cures were tucked in a row at the back. At the front things were stacked like goods in Baird's grocery. His tinder lighter. His coil of snare wire. His tin of chewing tobacco. And his flask. The flask had a drink of brandy in it from Christmas.

He lived modestly. But he liked to have a supply of things his family used. Coal, flour and molasses, and a little brandy. They were running out of these things. The brandy and molasses would go first. Then the coal. Then the flour.

He took the cap off his flask and offered William Drew a drink. He took one too. The brandy heated his throat, his chest. He felt William Drew's smile in the dark.

"Brandy cures everything," William Drew said. His smile was too big, William Pender thought. He could not see the smile. But he could feel it gleam.

Heat stole up his legs. It met the heat flowing down from the brandy. It was heat of sleep and brandy, not real heat. He did not worry. He enjoyed it. The smile of William Drew gleamed through veils of sleep. William Pender floated. He watched the smile. He waited for it. It did not speak. But shadows rustled in the bushes.

Chapter 26
The New Found Land

He saw the shadows were men. Clouds passed the moon. He knew by the gold braided hats some were French soldiers. But the gold braid and brass buttons were dull. Their pants were torn. Other men wore skin boots and coats. They whispered words William Pender did not know.

French words. Indian words. D'Iberville's men. One thing shone among them. One thing glittered like new.

"Do you see their swords?" William Drew moved his smile. William Pender saw it was the smile of a dead man. He looked for the swords. The moon came out. He saw two blades flash in the woods.

One sword had a brass leaf at its hilt, and a rope pattern on its handle. Another had an oak handle and a gilt scallop shell hilt that fanned out and flashed the moon.

"You can't see reflections in those swords," William Drew drawled. "But I can."

"What kind?" William Pender asked.

"Black ruins," the dead man said. "The sad mile of shacks in the town, black and smoking. Looted and burned. Ada and baby May murdered. Everyone captured. Or killed. Or driven to the hills. They'll live off hares and grouse. They'll hide until the French move on to attack Conception Bay."

William Pender saw the dead man's gruesome smile in the moonlight. Why was he smiling? What could the dead see? He wanted to know.

"What else do you see in the swords?" he asked.

"Desires," the dead man grinned. "I see the French vision of a new found land. A new France on the wooded hills. With little French children and beautiful French houses."

"Then there is a New Portugal, with women frying little fish like smelt in hot oil on the beaches. Sheep in the valleys and Portuguese music flowing in the cliffs."

"Then there is a New England, where Admirals rule people as they do in Old England. Every stick of firewood spoken for. No hare hunting or partridge shooting on the Lord's lands."

"Then there is a New Ireland, where the fisherman is lord of his scrap of sea. But only until the church or Britain puts some new chains on his freedom."

"Everyone has his own vision for the new found land. There's the nation's vision, the ruler's vision, and the servant's vision."

"I'm a servant. My vision was of a simple life. But England sent me to defend its vision. That happens to us, William Pender. Men like you and me. Our aim for a simple life gets drowned by greed."

William Pender could not answer. He knew the other man was in a different world. He waited.

D'Iberville's men came closer. He knew William Drew was the one they could see. William Drew knew it too. He knew what they wanted. They had Ada and May. They had already burned the shacks around the harbour. They wanted his scalp as a prize for the English fort on the hill. This drama in the moonlit shadows was a dream of things that had already been.

William Drew looked at William Pender. He did not smile. Behind him d'Iberville's men stood. Their swords flashed in the trees. The dead man cried out—

"That which is already has been
and that which is to be already has been..."

William Pender wondered where the words came from. Man had so many words of wisdom. But the words proved life was a puzzle. They did not make it easier. He saw the other William grin as he moved toward the woods. The dead man's teeth and eyes caught the last scrap of firelight.

"This is what you want," William Drew called to d'Iberville's men. He grabbed the sword with the brass leaf. He swung it high. Then he did a thing that horrified William Pender. He sliced his own scalp. He pulled the skin and hair away from his skull bone. He dangled his scalp in the air, grinning.

William Pender saw him sink into the woods. D'Iberville's men closed around him. William saw their shadows cover him. Blue clouds covered the moon.

Chapter 27
The Year of Green Schooners

For the first time since the fire died, William Pender felt cold. Wind from Freshwater Bay curled up the seaward hill. It found all the live things that tried to keep warm.

He knew the wind as a younger person does not know it. A youth thinks the wind sounds kind. A man over forty hears another thing. He knows it searches out things it wants to make cold. It has clever fingers that pry.

It searches out things you want to keep tender and alive. It winds its way into wells and cradles, freezing water and chilling infants.

If you are awake to hear the morning star wind that wanders the most, you can hear that it is alive. You can tell by its voice that it wants to carry souls away on its back.

William got up. He tied his hares to his pack. He wanted to walk down to Freshwater Bay. With the early morning wind blowing he thought of the coming dawn.

From his house he never saw the sun rise. He always saw pink fingers of light on the city. St. John's looked beautiful then, a rose glow on the cathedral, and on the furled sails of the schooners.

He had loved those sails since he was a boy. He and Eddie Coady watched square-rigged schooners sail into the harbour. Gulls flew near them like torn scraps of the sails. When they docked he and Eddie tried to throw their hats on the tops of the masts.

No one chased them. Gulls and youngsters loved to play near sails and wind and salt water, and no one forbade it.

Near dawn William broke out of the scrub firs onto the hill above Freshwater Bay. He saw the moon-coloured sails of a schooner on its way into St. John's. The vessel looked dark in the faint light. But William knew it was green.

This year every captain, big or small, had painted his vessel green, not black. The sea looked like a festival. Vessels were painted all kinds of greens. Fir. Spruce. Limes. Green gages. Iris loved the green schooners.

But William told her they were painted gaily to say farewell. Steamships were coming in. Sails were going out. Sailmakers knew it. They were closing shop.

Sailmaking, like coopering, was a doomed trade. Soon sails and barrels would be a thing of the past.

Soon, soon... he poked the snow with a walking stick he had cut. It'd be better if it were now, not soon. If it was all over, sails, barrels, horses, it would be done. But change happens just slow enough to drain life out of a family like me and Iris and Alice Maud.

Trades people like us are getting fewer and fewer. I suppose it will be worse in a few year's time. A man will wake to find he's the last cooper in the world, and no barrels are needed. Same with the sailmaker, and the tinsmith, and the blacksmith.

But me, I'd as soon be the last one and see the real death of it. Rather than see the life choked out of all the old ways. All the work we know how to do...

Chapter 28
Iris

And it was at sunrise that Iris Pender rose and ran next door to fetch her friend Lettie to mind Alice Maud. She told Lettie William had gone over the hill to look at his snares the night before.

"And he hasn't come back?" Lettie's well had frozen.

"I'm not worried," Iris said. She wrapped a wool shawl around her, and tied the laces on William's old boots. "He'll have a fire at the tall stones. Or he's made a camp at Freshwater Bay."

Lettie was kind. She was not a gossip. She made an effort not to get a thrill out of anyone's bad luck. "How's the child's fever?" she asked.

"William has medicine in his bag," Iris told her. "I need the vinegar to cool her down, and the sago for gruel."

"I have vinegar," Lettie said. "And I've no sago but I have rice. I'll light your stove and simmer it while you're gone. I'll make it into a mush for her."

Iris thanked her friend. She pulled William's old coat over her shawl. It had a lamb's wool lining. It was ripped and sewn at one shoulder. But it warmed your back and ribs in the coldest wind. If he had that on now instead of the wool one she would not worry. She slung a game bag over her shoulder.

The gate creaked. It was whitewashed only on the outside. The inside was like fish scales. Rocks and blueberry scrub stuck out of the snow crust as she climbed. She passed the bleak crop haunted by eagles, and saw new snares William had set. A white partridge lay in one of them.

It was still warm. She took her gloves off to skin it. It was good to skin a warm bird. The body kept your hands warm. The skin slipped off. If she took the partridge now, no hawk would get it.

She left the skin and feathers for the ravens, but tucked the white feet in her pocket for Alice Maud. It was the first partridge Iris had skinned this season. The feet of the first white partridge would bring a child luck.

She found nothing in William's other snares. She saw marks in the snow where he took his hares. At the tall stones she sifted the snow and ashes around the site of his fire. She saw it had been a small fire. Too small to keep a man warm all night.

Against the rock she found his flask. She tipped its last drops to her lips. The flask was a beauty. Green earthenware with a silver top. It was his father's. The only other thing he owned that had belonged to his father was his whetstone in its sealskin case. With it William sharpened the knife he used to cut snare wire and walking sticks. She smelled more snow coming in the air. She headed down to Freshwater Bay.

* * *

The feel of him reminded her of the warm partridge. She looked at the silver sun and knew he had seen it rise.

Once she knew he was dead, she looked in his bag to make sure the things for Alice Maud were there.

She thought of the curly maple bureau in their bedroom. A carved diamond was painted red in the end that showed. There was no diamond in the end against the wall. His wool suit was in the second drawer. It smelled of violets. She unfolded it in her mind, beside his body in the snow.

His hands were like the pair of cups her sister had given her for a wedding present. Chinese porcelain. More watery and transparent than English china. His hands had the look of blue ice with the top just starting to melt. She went over the seams in the suit in her mind, recalling the parts that would need mending. He had a white shirt. There was one moth-hole under the collar. No one would notice it. Shoes. She could buy underpants and socks. But she would have to borrow the shoes. Borrow... she laughed. The snow she knelt on melted through to her knees.

Her own plans flooded in over the space he was leaving. She would take in more mending and sewing. She had had in her mind for some time now to see if Pope's furniture factory needed upholstery done. She knew how to gather grass for filling couches. She knew how to get a fair price for it as well.

She had her garden, and her few hens and Jenny, the milk goat. She and Alice Maud would not want fresh meat as much as William had. There would be nobody to nay-say any plan she chose.

She sniffed the air again, to smell the snow coming. It was miles out to sea now, with sea-wind blowing it around. Iris knew she would mourn later. But here, in the wind from the water, she smelled power and freedom.

Men would come and carry the body out. She took William's bag, and his two frozen hares, and carried them home.

How I Wrote William Pender

Finding the Story

I did not know one thing about William Pender or his world. I went to the library at MUN. Anybody can go there. There is a wonderful room in there where you can hunt for stories that have happened here. It is called the Centre for Newfoundland Studies.

There are people who help you. You tell them what kind of story you are hunting. They go in a big back room where they keep all the stories. There are whole stories and bits of stories. You can use the bits to piece together old stories that no one ever found out before. Or you can make new stories.

I wanted to find a story about a working man around 1900 in St. John's. I found some essays about that. One said there was a man who made barrels. Barrel makers were called coopers. They had a strike in 1904. This one man never found work again. He wandered over the South Side Hill and perished.

That was all it said. It did not say his name. The rest of the essay talked about something else.

If I write something I like it to teach me. I want it to thrill me. I want to feel as if I am hunting treasure. If feels like when we did scavenger hunts as kids.

I decided I wanted to find out who the barrel maker was. I wanted to see his world, and smell it and taste it.

First I needed his name. If he died in a strange way, he would probably be in the newspaper. The same library has newspapers in the basement. They go back in time. I found St. John's papers from 1904.

St. John's had a lot of newspapers in those days. They told different kinds of news. They still had *The Evening Telegram*. They also had the *Daily News*. Then there was a paper that told a lot of working man's news, and another one that told rich people's news.

I looked in them all to find the name of the barrel maker who died. I did not know the date of the strike, so I looked through every day's paper in all of the papers starting in January of 1904. Finally in October, after reading hundreds of papers, I found the strike.

The strike was over in November. That meant the barrel maker could have died a few months later, in the winter of 1905. So I looked through 1905 papers too.

Finally, in June of 1905, I found a speech by the Roman Catholic Archbishop Howley. I found my barrel maker. His last name was Pender. His first name began with the letter W.

That was the only vital statistic I ever found out about him. But something exciting had happened to me along the way.

When you read newspapers from the past, day after day, you catch a thrill from those days. Those days in the winter of 1904 and 1905 were not like ours. The first part of my story tells all about what I found. I called it "The Golden Dream." Golden, because people were caught up in an age of discovery and hope in a new land. Dream, because in the end, that's all the hope really was. A dream that Newfoundland woke up from, to face a grim time.

I looked in old newspapers for a long time. They gave me a lot of details about W. Pender's world. By now I had started to call him William.

But newspapers only gave me certain kinds of information. There were other things I needed to know. Like how coopers made barrels. And details about the scarlet fever and other diseases the papers reported. And the kinds of clothes people wore. And the dishes and furniture they had in their houses. And what they ate. And where William Pender would have lived. What other working people worked at. Details of the strike. The names and plans of the streets he walked. Where the cooperages were, and the tanneries, and the cod oil factories, and the boot making factory.

What did a barrel maker or cooper do when there was no work? What did he feel? Where did he go? Who was around him, and what were they saying?

What were the children playing in the streets? What kind of candy did they eat?

What was a cooper's wife like?

What was going on inside his head?

When I started to ask these questions, two things happened.

First, I started looking in new places for the answers.

Second, when I found the answers, I had to find a way to shape them into a story.

Looking in New Places

Once I got to know more about William's world, 1904 did not seem as long ago as it had. It was less than a hundred years ago. William Pender was not the last cooper that ever was. Maybe there was a cooper who was still alive. Someone who could tell me what it was like. What kind of tools he used. What a cooper's shop smelled like. What a cooper was like when he was a little boy.

The Centre for Newfoundland Studies has a file pile called a vertical file. I asked if they had one about coopers. They did. It was a thin file. It held one article. About a cooper who lived on Leslie Street.

The article was old. The cooper was old. I wondered if he was still alive. I looked him up in the phone book. I phoned him. He said I could come to his house and ask him about his life.

One thing about crafts like barrel making is that they don't change. The barrels Gordon Snow made in the 1920s were the same as those William Pender made before 1904.

Gordon Snow told me many things I could put into my story. He talked about where barrel hoops came from. About games boys and girls used to play with the hoops. About games they played throwing their hats on top of schooner masts. About changing times. About strikes, and working man's wages, and moving away to find work in Ontario. About what a cooper did to make extra money when the barrels were finished for the season. About the times and dates the fish were salted and put in casks. About swimming with girls on the south side of the harbour. Girls in woolen swim suits.

Gordon Snow sat on his couch and held a bit of paper the size of a playing card. He drew small lines on the paper. One for each merchant's premises around St. John's Harbour in 1926. He looked at each mark, and saw the merchant's place. He knew how many barrels that merchant bought from the cooper. He knew how many barrels were made from scratch, and how many were rebuilt from old margarine tubs; He knew the names of the candy the children ate. He knew where cooper lads went with their girls to see a penny theatre show. He knew how coopers felt when coopering was replaced with barrel making machines and cold storage.

Then I visited the Newfoundland Museum on Duckworth Street. They had a replica of a cooper's shop, with his tools and his fire and his barrels. There was a replica of a small grocery store too. A cooper's wife would often run a corner store in her house. Gordon Snow told me his wife had one. I sat and looked in the windows at the cooper's tools, and at his wife's boxes of dried apricots and raisins for sale, until I felt like I was there.

At the museum Colleen Borek helped me. She lent me two videos. One explained more about the display I had just seen. It was all about coopers and other trades people in St. John's around the turn of the century. The second video was about Newfoundland furniture. It helped me see what William Pender's kitchen table would have been like, and his day bed, and his bedroom furniture. The video helped me see inside his house.

I also went to the Provincial Archives in the Colonial Building. I found that place harder to understand, but once I got the hang of it, I found some good things there. They give you boxes and you don't know what's going to be in them until you open them. The best thing I got there was Kate Vey's diary. It was pencilled in a brown scribbler in 1904. You can see in the main story how I used it.

The Newfoundland Studies centre at MUN has an archive too. The people who work in archives can find things for you that you could never find on your own. A woman at this archive told me the lawyer John L. Joy used to study history, and he wrote a thesis all about coopers and the other crafts and trades and factories in St. John's around 1900.

I knew John Joy. I had talked to him. But I never knew he wrote that thesis, and I never found the thesis on any of my hunts because it was listed under his name. I was looking under topics like coopering, factories and trades. I found his thesis and several papers he wrote about coopers. He had done years of work on this topic, and he had put the work together beautifully. He had done a lot more hunting than I had. His work was like a big treasure chest full of doubloons.

I phoned him and asked him if I could use his work. I felt bad because he had done so much of it. I felt like I was stealing it. But he said go ahead, that's what research is for. To help people build on each other's knowledge. He had more things too, like minutes from coopers' union meetings during the strike. I found out more about things from the coopers' point of view. John Joy was very kind, and his work was rich and deep.

Then I remembered that St. John's City Hall has an archive too. That turned out to be my favourite place to find things out, and to think about William Pender. I found out he probably lived on the South Side Hill. I could see the hill out the archives window. The archivist showed me photographs that James Vey took of St. John's in the winter of 1904. She showed me a city insurance map from 1904 that let me picture the streets William Pender walked. She gave me a glass loop that let me see the pictures close up. It let me read the signs on shop windows, and see into the dim stores. I put all those details in the story.

Finally I travelled on foot through the berry bushes to the tall stones on the South Side Hill where William Pender died. I touched the stones and made a fire. Older stories came to me,

from three hundred years ago instead of one hundred. The ghosts of old French battles came out of the rocks. I visited Placentia, and saw old coins and muskets the ghosts had dropped.

By now I was getting used to going back in time. Every night when I closed my eyes I could see William Pender's world. I could see William Pender himself, with his black moustache and his cap, and his T-handled snow shovel, as he shovelled the streets with gangs of other unemployed workmen. Whenever I walked in downtown St. John's, I no longer saw it only in 1996. I saw the present as a dream that hung like a veil over a very real 1904, and a vivid 1698. I saw that what used to be there is just as real as what we see there today.

Shaping the Story

Now I knew a lot about William Pender's world. At first I wove two kinds of story together. I wrote about him, and then I wrote about the things around him. I shaped the personal details around the last day in his life. I had him do things I knew a cooper in his situation would do. You can see what these things are when you read the story. But I kept the factual things about his world separate from his story.

For example, I inserted small essays about the poor house, factory working conditions, and hospital conditions, and Gordon Snow's memories, as separate boxes inside the main story.

After awhile I felt this did not work. The reader kept having to jump out of William Pender's story to get at these "side" stories. That works in some writings, but I did not feel that it worked in this piece. I did not know what to do.

One night I asked this question: How would it be if I melted all the side stores into William's main story? If I put everything inside William's head, or made it apply directly to him, how would it flow?

That is what I did. I gave William Pender Gordon Snow's memories. I gave his wife the recipe for curing scarlet fever. I gave his neighbour knowledge about what went on inside the poor house. I melted all my research into his life.

That was a big step. It raised a lot of questions about how you get at the truth of a story.

And that is the main thing the story of William Pender has done to me. It has got me excited about what history is.

When you read the story of William Pender, you can be sure that it is all true. Every detail comes from real life. It comes from old newspapers and diaries, from old men's memories, from poems and songs, and from things I have seen in my own life. It comes from maps, and loneliness, and faces in old photographs. It comes from the tall stones on the South Side Hill. It comes from life and mystery. And I know now that those are the places that all our history comes from.

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Videos:

(These videos were made available through the Educational Services Unit of the Newfoundland Museum on Duckworth Street, St. John's, by Colleen Shea, Education Officer:)

CL.08 Material Culture: Walter Peddle

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MG435 Patrick Tareham Grocer St. John's record books 1870-1891

MG 701 Diary of Kate Vey

MG 311 Reports and personal papers of Trinity Bay brickmaker

MG 539 Cooperage corporation boxes

City of St. John's Archives, City Hall:

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Museum Exhibits:

Castle Hill Historic Site, Placentia; Dioramas, archeological materials and live performance historical plays shown during the summer and fall of 1995.

Newfoundland Museum, Duckworth Street, St. John's; Partial exhibit of show titled "The Working World of Egbert Warren," including model cooperage and attached grocery shop.

Walks and Day-Trips:

Walks through the old sections of downtown St. John's referred to in the story.

Walks along the portions of the South Side Road where William Pender lived and worked.

Campfire trip with a flask of brandy to the standing stones on the South Side Hill where Pierre le Moyne d'Iberville and his men hid and confronted settlers from the Waterford Valley at the turn of the seventeenth century.

Questions for Discussion

Part I: The Golden Dream

Chapter 1: A Lonely Sound

Think of someone you know who works at a skilled trade like William Pender did. Tell your group about that person. You can include this list of details. Include more of your own.

- The person's hands.
- The tools and materials s/he uses.
- How s/he feels about his/her work.

- What his/her work is used for.
- How the community values his/her work.
- How his/her work is in danger. Is it being replaced or shut out by "progress?"

Listen as each person in your group tells about a tradesperson he or she knows.

Make a class list of feelings and words that tell what you have shared about these people who work with their hands.

Can these feelings and words be used to talk about the fishers and plant workers of Newfoundland's inshore fishery?

What would you add to your list to discuss workers in the fishery?

Chapter 2: William's World

This chapter tells how things change in one place over time. Choose a site in your community that has something new on it. What used to be there? See how many "scenes" you can go back to in time on that one spot. Ask people in the community. If there is a town hall, check old maps and plans of the area. When you have found all you can, make maps or drawings of the area as it was at different times. Label what is there and write the date when it was like that. Label each map with every detail you find out. These can include the following:

- What the site was used for.
- What the building were made of and how big the place. personal memories people have about the place.
- conflicting facts or puzzles about what happened on the site.
- what is still there from the past.
- feelings associated with each "scene" on your chosen site.

Chapter 3: The Golden Dream

Discuss:
The golden dream never dies. What is the golden dream for Newfoundland today? What was the Newfoundland Government's Economic Recovery Commission of the early 1990's all about? How many of its goals were the same as those outlined in Chapter Three from the turn of the century? Why do you think the golden dream never dies?

In 1880, the Newfoundland government wrote a report saying too many men were in the fishery. The report was called the Whiteway Committee Report. This is what it said:

"Our population is growing. We have to think about the future. It's obvious the fishery can't support us all. We have to find something else for people to do." (paraphrased)

Does this sound familiar? Find other things in the news now that were in the news 20, 50, 75, and 100 years ago. Make a class list of these recurring themes in our history.

Chapter 4: Scarlet Fever

Where does our molasses come from today? Find addresses. Ask them to send you a description of where the molasses comes from. How is it shipped? In what kind of containers? What route does it go by? How does it enter Newfoundland?

Here are two addresses:

Happy Home Blackstrap Molasses
Div. of Grain Process Enterprises Ltd.
Scarborough, Ontario, M1P 3A4

Crosby Molasses Co. Ltd.
St. John, N.B.
E2L 3V4

Ask old people in your community to tell you about old style funerals. Get details. Write them down.

- Were there horses with black plumes?
- Where was the body waked?
- What games did children play at the wakes?
- How did people dress the dead?

Chapter 5: A Doomed Trade

Home remedies were widely used in Newfoundland, even for serious illnesses. Often natural things were used. Moldow or old man's beard was boiled and used as an antibiotic salve. Juniper berries were used by women for menstrual and childbearing related medicines. Over-the-counter ointments and "tonics" were widely advertised in old newspapers.

Find some old recipes for cures in Newfoundland. Write them down. Share them and make a class booklet of old-time Newfoundland remedies. Try out a few of these cures on your own minor ills like colds or small cuts. How do they work? Report your findings to your class.

Chapter 6: William and Iris

Chapter six is a character sketch. It gives colour and feeling to William and Iris. It uses these kinds of information:

- How William and children got along.
- What neighbours thought of William and Iris.
- Physical details: height, clothes, colours, hair.
- Unanswered questions: Why did Iris marry William? Why did the red blossoms touch Lettie's heart?

Think of someone who interests you. Write a character sketch about that person. Use information like the four elements listed above. Use other information that you think of yourself.

Chapter 7: Spanish Garlands

Chapter seven is based on three sources:

An interview with an old barrel maker. He told about the following things:

- Swimming to Fort Amherst with girls in woolen swim suits.
- How the fish were cured.
- When the sealing started.

Old newspapers. These told about the following:

- Outport lads filling the boarding houses and fire halls at sealing time.
- The black stowaways.
- The unemployed march in London.

A thesis written by John Joy when he was studying history at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). He told how the Spanish shops had to keep a Newfoundland barrel in the middle of the fish displays.

Choose from these types of sources, and study a certain place and time in the past. When you have enough information to picture a scene from that time in your mind, write it down. You can start with a list, then move the parts of the list around until you like the order it is in. Or share your list with your group and make the scene together. Write it as if it is all happening now. Does it seem to come alive?

Chapter 8: Crafts and Industry

This chapter is about a time when Newfoundland buzzed with trade activity. Read these words by best-selling author James Michener in his book about the Caribbean:

"The wealth of a nation derives from the hard work of its citizens at home, the farmers, the leather workers, the carpenters, the ship builders and the weavers at their looms; they create the usable goods which measures whether a nation is prospering or not."

Part II: Lost Angels

Chapter 9: The Poor House

This chapter describes a place where 1904 society put rejected people: the old, the poor, the mentally ill, the alcoholics.

Where do we put those people today? Choose one of our modern day institutions and find out as much as you can about what goes on inside. Ask people who have lived inside, or visited, or worked there. Visit them yourself. Write what you see.

How is it different from the miserable Poor House of 1904? How is it the same?

Chapter 10: The Coopers' Strike

In this chapter William Pender is angry because the newspapers "treat the working man like a nobody". You can see in this chapter how William lives in a society where rich people are respected more than others. They get called "honourable." Poor people do not.

Look through an old newspaper to find examples of this. Then look through a modern newspaper. How have things changed? How have they stayed the same?

Chapter 11: The Story of a Barrel

It is hard to write down the steps in making something so another person can understand them.

Choose something you know how to make. Write the process step by step, as simply as you can. You might want to make several drafts. You will be surprised how much clearer your writing becomes on the third try.

Chapter 12: Pity

In 1904 children worked hard in factories like the "rope walk" in St. John's.

In 1996 a British newscast reported several thousand twelve-year-old girls were working twelve-hour shifts for low pay in British offices. The report said the girls were punished and humiliated if their work slowed down.

The newscast said there was no law against child labour in Britain.

Is there a law against it in Newfoundland? Check the laws for Newfoundland and Canada to find out if this sort of thing could legally happen here.

Chapter 13: Lettie's Story

This chapter tells a story. Read the story aloud in your group. Try to imagine how each character felt: Lettie, Mr. O'Neill, and the two women from the charity.

As a group rewrite this story as a scene from a play. Imagine and write down dialogue for each character. Then perform the scene in your class.

Discuss: In 1904 charities like St. Vincent de Paul were one of the main sources of "poor relief". In what ways do we still "help" people like Mr. O'Neill today? Do these methods work?

Chapter 14: Cold Storage

In 1905 Newfoundlanders could make money skinning seals. If you go to Newfoundland beaches in spring now, you see seal heads, guts and skins washing up on the beach. Sealers say it's not worth skinning a seal for what you'd get paid for a skin today.

Find out what other parts of Newfoundland's natural resources are discarded or wasted. Make a poster that describes this.

Find out if anyone in Newfoundland is doing anything to try and use these products. Make a poster that describes this.

Invite one of those people to your class to discuss how they are succeeding.

Chapter 15: What Roddy Dawe Told William

In 1905 people like Roddy Dawe could steal a bit of food from crates on the docks. Today's shipping containers are made large and are sealed so no one can steal a crumb. How does a homeless person survive in urban Newfoundland today? Interview one and find out. Interview people from agencies like the Salvation Army and St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Chapter 16: What Kate Put in her Diary

This chapter is adapted from the real 1904 diary of a girl called Kate Vey. The diary was in the Public Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Visit an archive in your area and look at a diary from the past like Kate's. See how someone lived and wrote about themselves 100 years ago.

Chapter 17: A Little Girl's Toy

Old toys can tell us a lot about how people used to live. Interview old people in your area about the toys they had when they were little. Write down what they tell you. Compare notes in class.

Chapter 18: Bridget Gunn's Story

Bridgett Gunn's story is a real story from the newspapers of 1905.

Bridgett Gunn was forced to do something illegal so she could feed her children. In what way do people today feel forced to break laws in order to survive?

Chapter 19: French Violets

At one time people used to make their own soap. They used things like ashes from the stove and bacon grease. Find an old soap recipe, either written down or told to you. Share it with the class.

Chapter 20: Iris's Dress

In 1905 women like Iris Pender knew many ways to stretch the home budget. They grew vegetables, bottled meat, kept chickens and made clothes. We do fewer of these things today. Visit a grocery store and look in people's carts. What are they buying? How have household economies changed in Newfoundland in the past 100 years?

Iris Pender believed "Nobody ever leaves money to girls." Are things the same today? Interview men and women about how possessions are handed down from generation to generation in their families. How do the lists compare?

Chapter 21: Market House Hill

Many daybeds and mattresses made in Newfoundland were stuffed with sea grass. Find a piece of old furniture made in Newfoundland, at the home of a family member or at an antique shop or museum. Get the owner to tell you about its history. Find out where and how it was made. Draw or photograph the piece and write down what you have found out about it. Share these pictures and texts in class.

Part III: Hunger of the Eagle

Chapter 22: The Hill

In old newspapers there are stories of infants being stolen by eagles. Ballads and traditional songs are often written about such events. All traditional songs and ballads are really stories set to music. In most Newfoundland communities there are people who can sing traditional songs or recite traditional stories. Invite someone to your class to sing or recite.

Chapter 23: New France

What was going on in your community 300 years ago? Find out about the history of your community. What started it and who settled it? (*The Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* has short histories on most Newfoundland communities to help you get started.)

Chapters 24, 25 and 26: Scalped, The Other William, and The New Found Land

Here William Pender, cold and tired, imagines an encounter with William Drew, a man who lived 300 years before him. Perhaps William Pender was dreaming. Or perhaps he really did meet spirits from another time. These three chapters are written like a dream. You are not sure whether they happened in real life, or only in William Pender's mind.

Questions for group discussion:

How do you feel about this scene?

Have you ever been with a dying person who "saw" people who had already died?

Before TV, there was a lot of storytelling in Newfoundland, especially "ghost" stories. What ghost stories do you remember hearing in your own family?

Chapter 27: The Year of Green Schooners

1905 was known as a year when all the schooners off Newfoundland were painted green. See if you can find out why they were green.

Chapter 28: Iris

There was one mothhole under the collar of the suit Iris had to bury William Pender in. No one would notice it.

Details like this are what makes a story come alive.

Write down a memory from your own life. Choose a memory with some detail in it like the moth hole. Write it simply. Read it to the class.

Tell each other what feelings these details create in you.