

CONCEPTION BAY SOUTH T'RAILWAY.



the town of
Conception
Bay South

Topsail.

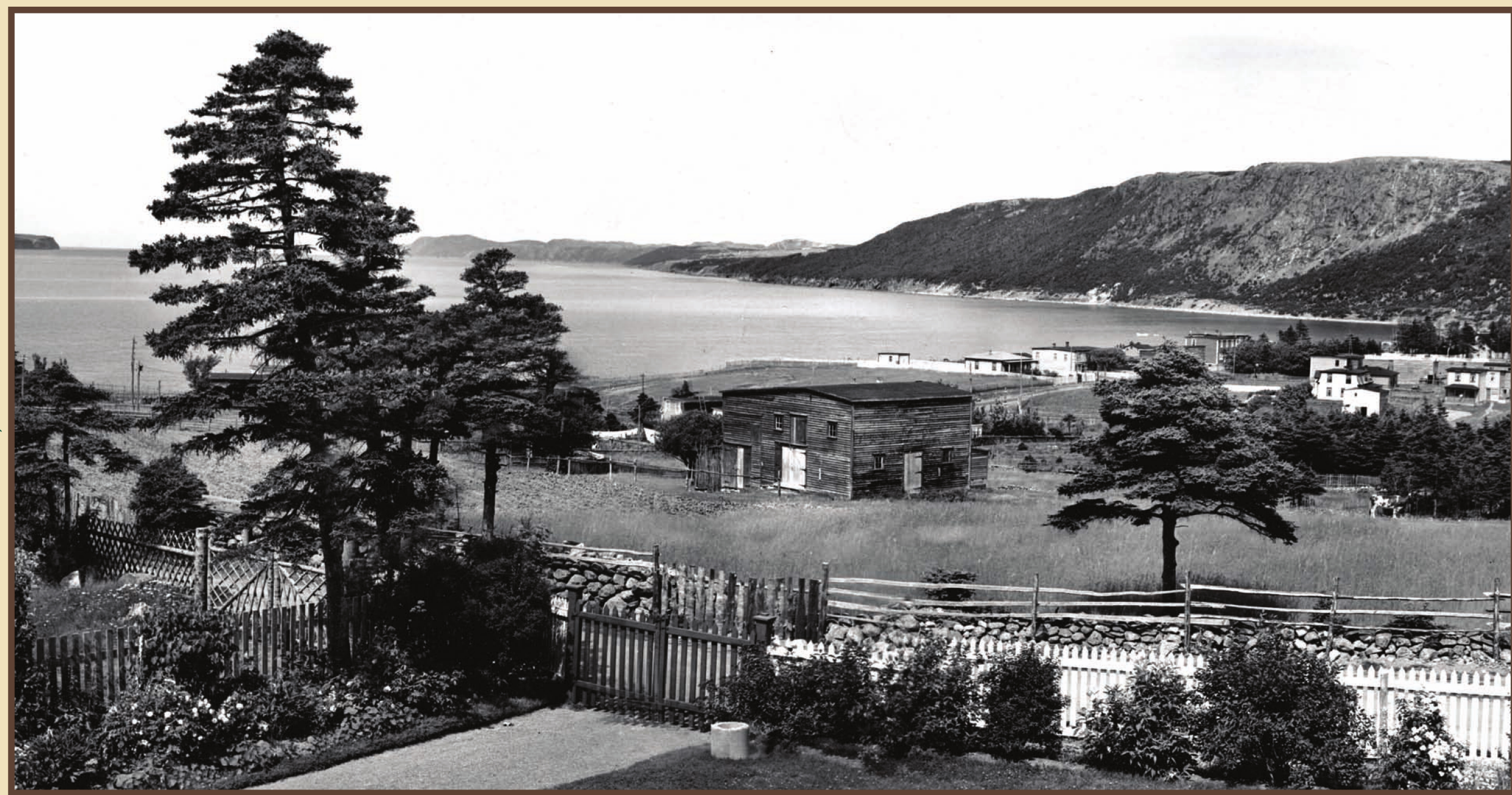
Early Settlers.

The general belief is that the name comes from the high bluffs above the beach, which resemble the “topsails” of a schooner, and are prominent with vessels entering the Bay. Settlement in Topsail dates from about 1820 when the Churchill, Miller, and Allen families moved from nearby Portugal Cove to fish in the less populated area off Topsail Beach. Settlers also took up farming the fertile land to supplement the

fishery. Some eventually became full-time farmers. The opening of a road to St. John's in 1857 enabled the ability of farmers to market fresh produce in St. John's 25 km / 15 mi away. After 1882, they could move by rail. Other early settler families were O'Brien, Geehan, and Neville. In 1845, Topsail had 118 residents; 385 in 1891; and just under 900 when Topsail was amalgamated in 1973.



A view of Topsail Beach taken sometime between 1875 and 1917 by renowned Newfoundland photographer, Robert E. Holloway. In 1987 the beach area was designated a provincial park. Since 1997, the Topsail Beach Rotary Park has been managed and developed by the Town and Rotary Club of Avalon Northeast.



Formal gardens in a summer cottage along a laneway in Topsail, in contrast to nearby farm fields, lined with stones picked from the fields.

Topsail Beach.



The “Topsail Regatta” was a very popular summer event in the 1880s. Large crowds gathered for the dory racing. Kelly's Island (left) and Little Bell Island (right) can be seen in the background.

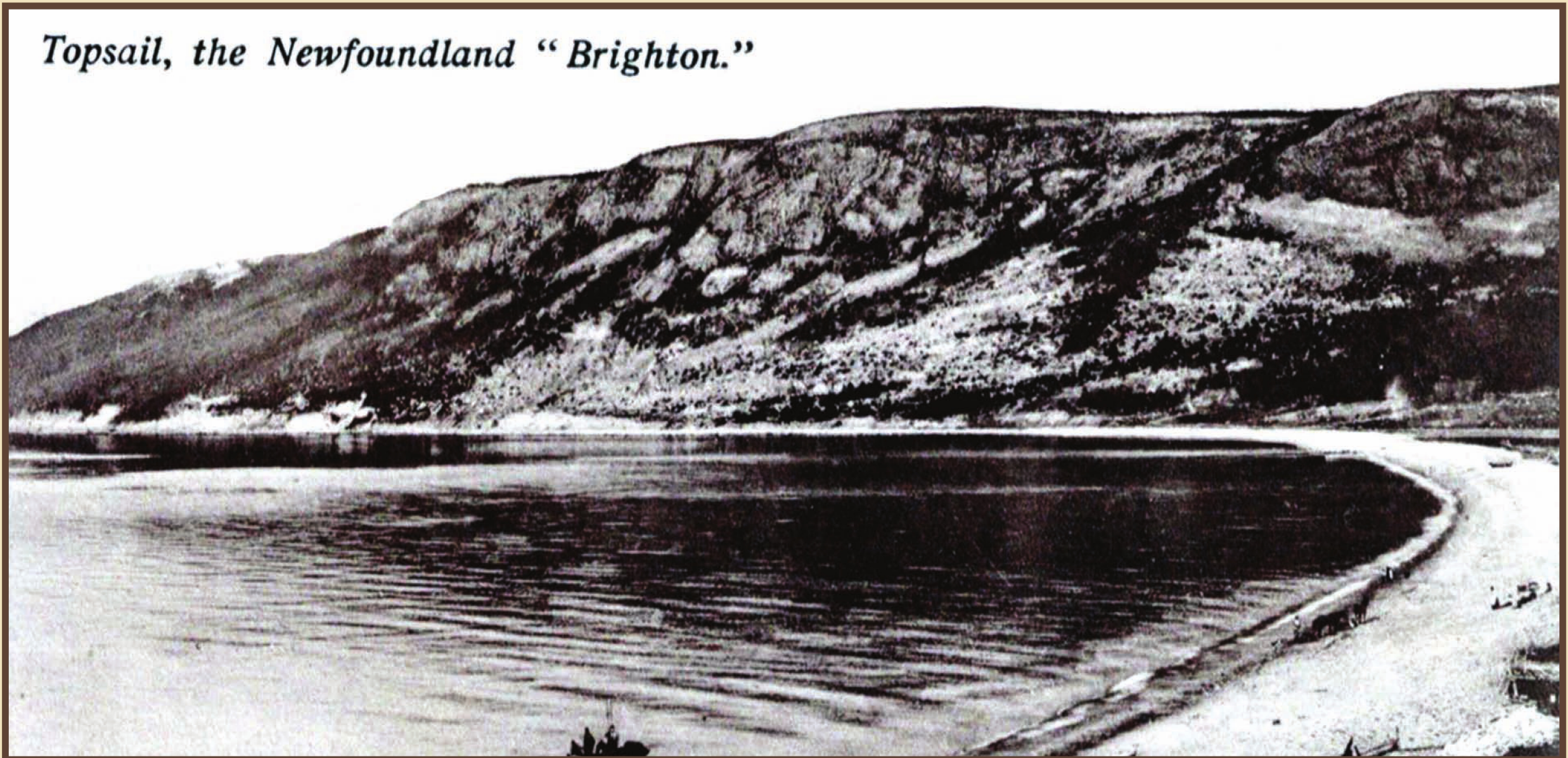
Topsail – The “Brighton of Newfoundland”.

Styled the “Brighton of Newfoundland” for its warmer climate and one-time sandy beach, by 1900 Topsail was “a fashionable summer resort, and wherever, there was a spare room, people flocked from the city” (Florence Miller).

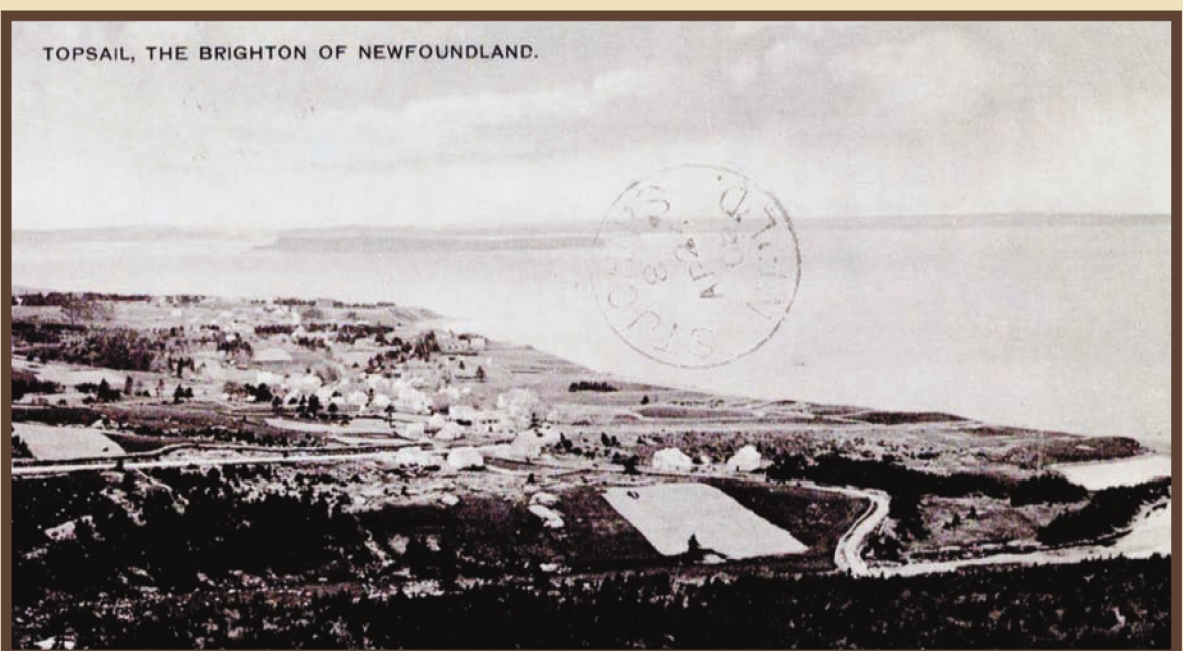
Private homes were opened for boarders and new establishments were created, to host the booming, summer vacationers. In the 1920s and 1930s, establishments that catered to tourism included Bergville (proprietor Mrs. George Berg) advertised in 1928 that she provided meals at all hours, had a table license and telephone connection; J. Geehan Teas & Board (proprietor Mrs. Mary Geehan) provided dinners, teas, lunches, dancing, bathing, etc.; Oxley's Pavilion (proprietor Harold Oxley); the Popinn Tea Rooms (proprietor Mrs. Vatcher); and the Seaview Hotel (proprietor Frederick S. Hollands). The Road House, built about 1871, accepted guests in the early 1900s and Robert Miller, grandfather of poet Florence Miller, is believed to have operated the first inn in Conception Bay.



Advertisement for the Topsail Regatta, 1884.



An early post card proclaims Topsail Beach as Newfoundland's “Brighton”.



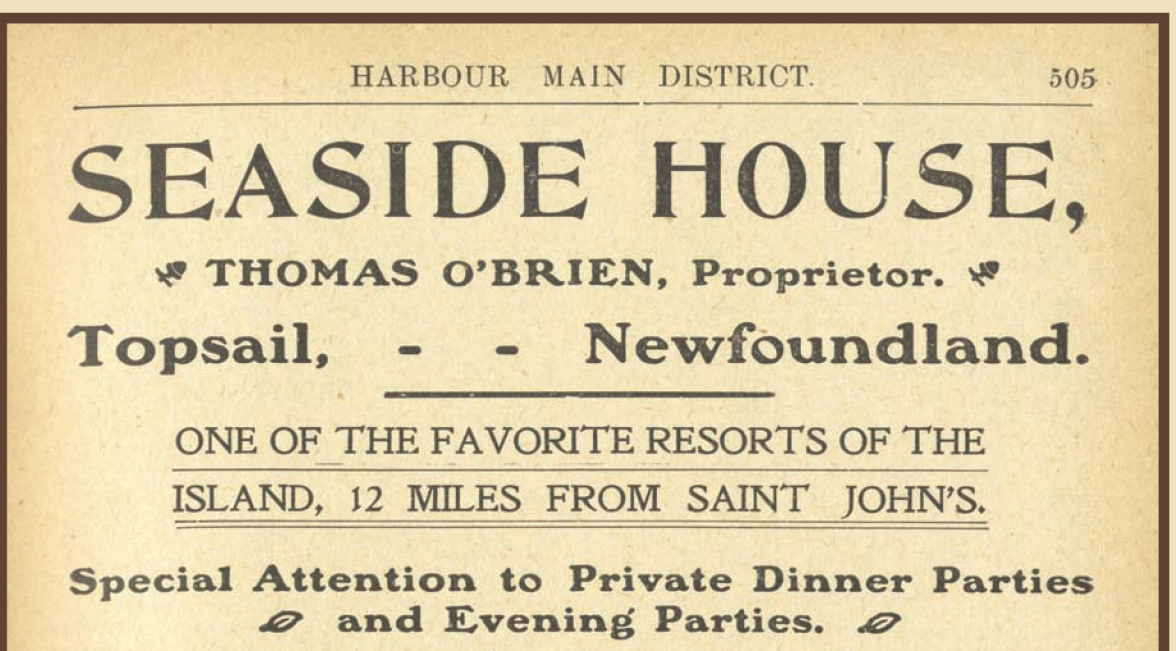
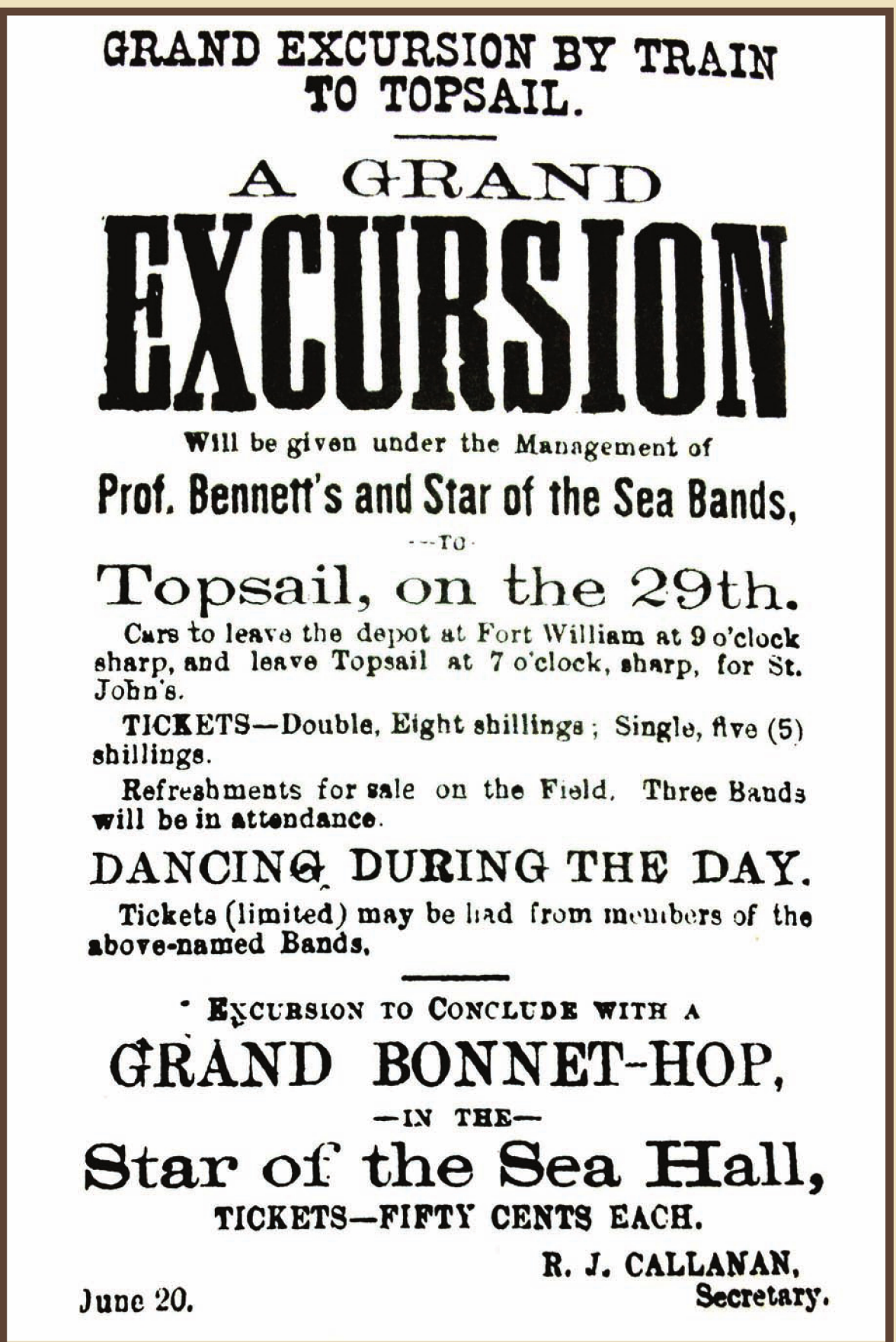
Another post card that labels Topsail as "Brighton of Newfoundland".



Halley Farm in Topsail. These bridges are also visible in the oval image at left.



Summertime fun at Topsail Beach, 1935.

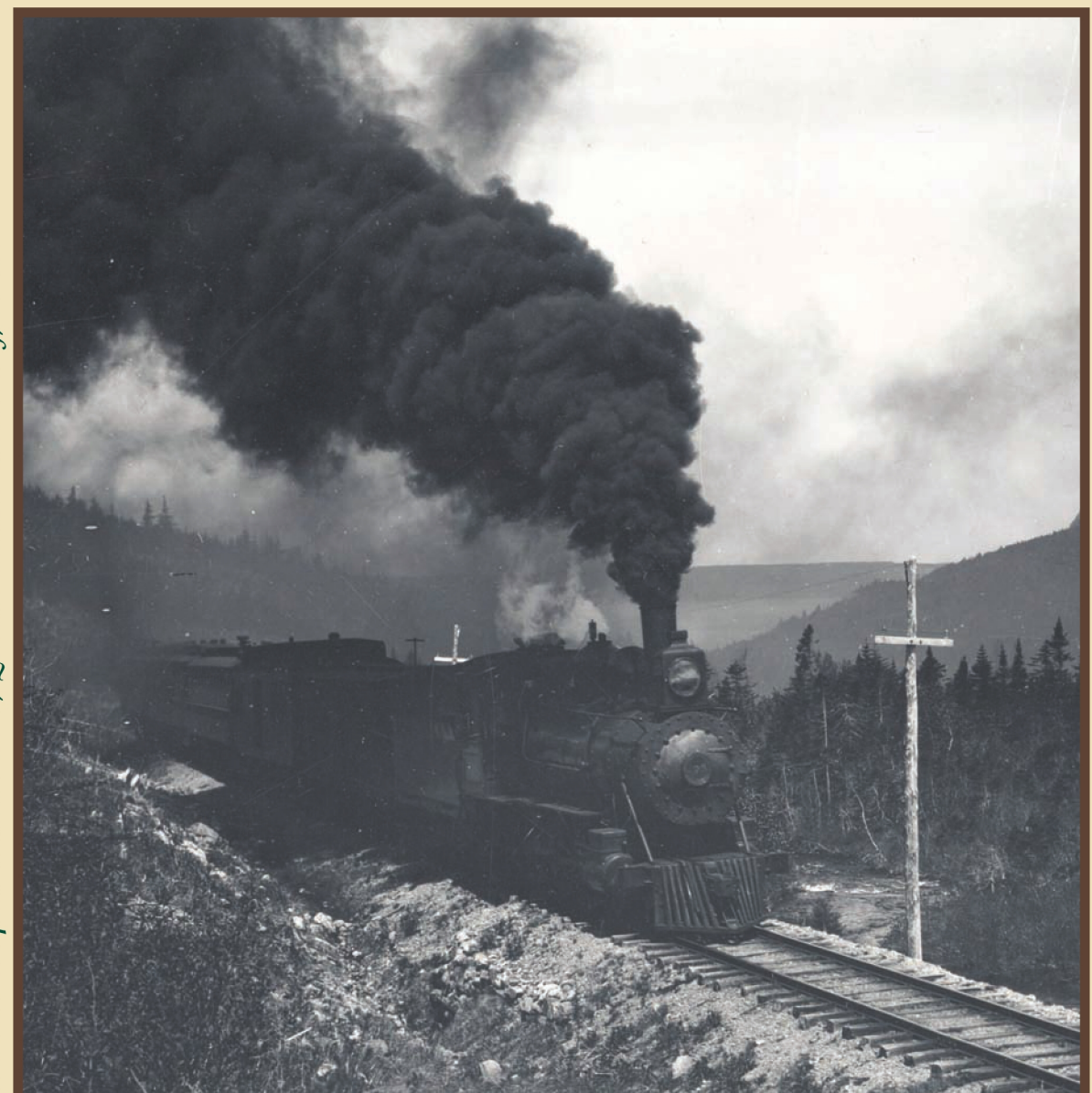


Advertisement from a 1904 directory.

Conception Bay.

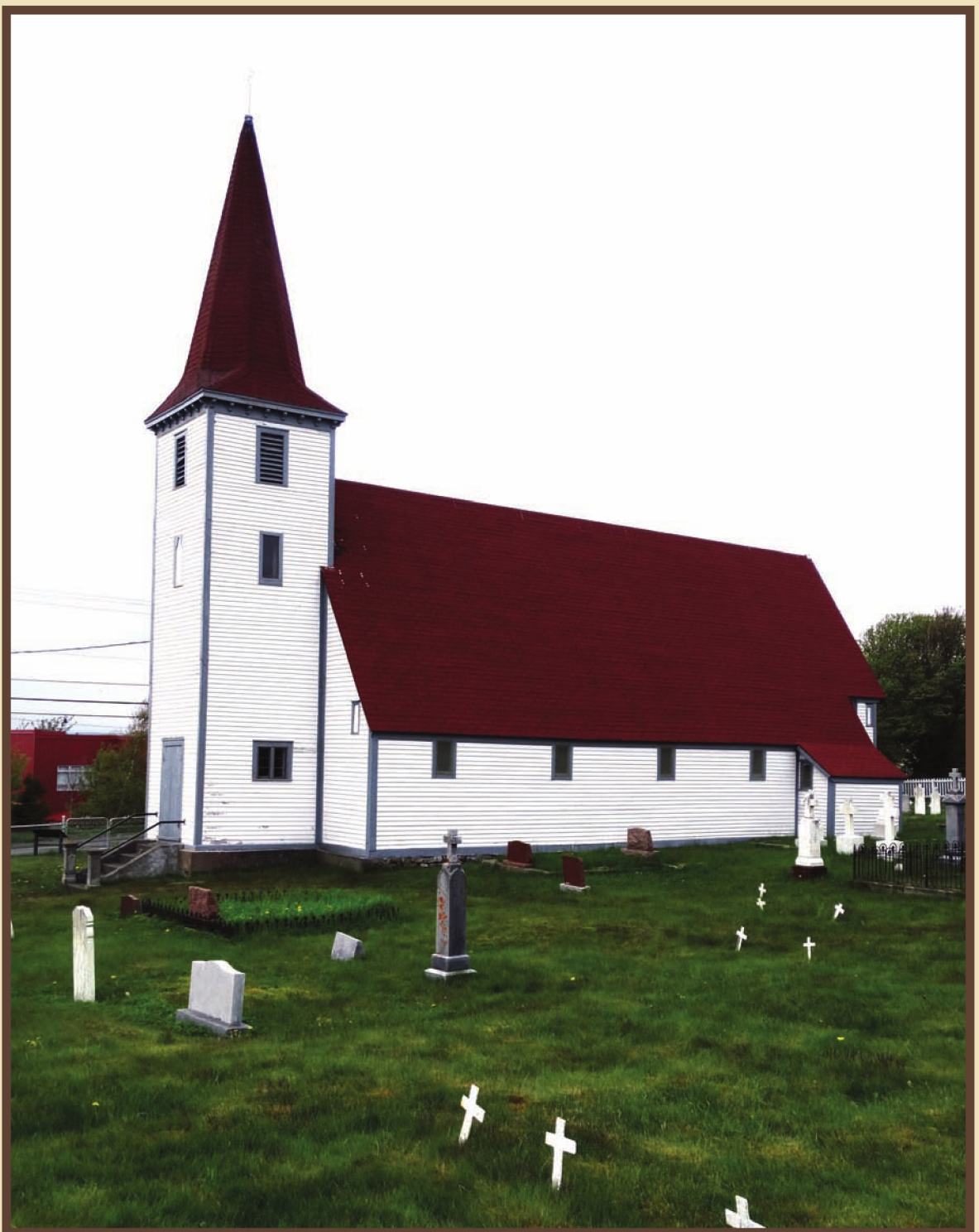
The name comes from the Portuguese and first appears on a world chart of 1505-08 as *Baia de Conceicao*. It is presumed in honour of the Feast of the Conception on December 8. There are several major islands in the Bay, and besides Baccalieu Island at the northwestern entrance (tip) of the bay, there are three other islands near Topsail, namely Bell Island, Kelly's Island, and Little Bell Island, each of which can be viewed from points along the T'Railway.

The “Topsail Fault” runs from just north of Topsail Beach to Cape St. Francis and is one of three major faults in the Bay. In geological terms, the Topsail Fault separates the Cambrian and Precambrian ages. The green, black, and grey shales and siltstones lie side-by-side with volcanic rocks. The waters along the coastline of Conception Bay are generally, shallow, but deeper over the Topsail Fault.



Steam engine 103 chugs and billows smoke as it climbs Topsail Hill in the 1890s.

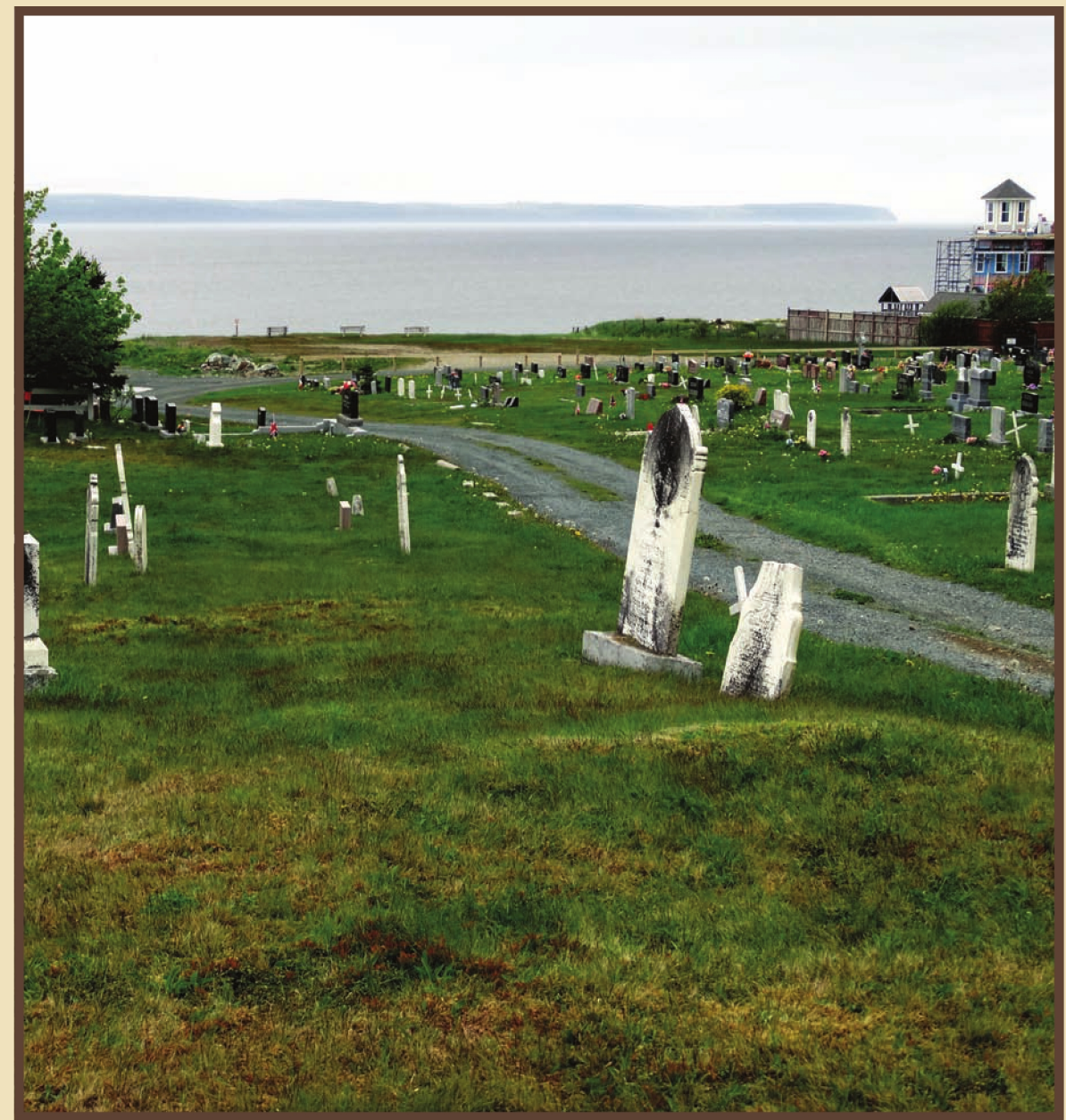
Historical Sites in Topsail.



St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church was consecrated in June 1861, and awarded the Conception Bay South Historic Trust Award in 1999.



The cemetery for Topsail United Church, known as the Church by the Side of the Road, has many historic graves and became a Municipal Heritage Site in 2003.



The earliest headstone in St. Thomas of Villa Nova Cemetery is 1848. Some markers show Irish roots; others “part time parishioners” who vacationed in the area during the summer, but were residents of St. John's. The cemetery became a Municipal Heritage Site in 2009.