

CONCEPTION BAY SOUTH T'RAILWAY.

Kelligrews.



the town of
**Conception
Bay South**

Early History.

The name "Kelligrews" is thought to derive from the surname of a Port de Grave family that settled here in the late-1700s. Others believe it is after the 1600s pirate, Capt. Kelly. Although a few families lived in the area in the 1800s, it was in the 1820s that several families moved here (especially from Port de Grave) to fish, notably the Anthony, Dawe, Hibbs, LeDrew, Nugent, Tilley, and Walsh families. By 1845 the population was 78 and 300 in 1891, most of whom were farmers. Road (1857) and railway (1882) connections enabled farmers to more easily transport agricultural products to St. John's; other residents found employment at the new iron mines on Bell Island after 1895.

The area along Middle Bight (a 'bight' is a curved recess in the coastline) with its productive fields alongside the T'Railway is a testament to the strong ties to the land. This area was named Codner since 1906, in honour of Samuel Codner who founded the Newfoundland School Society in 1823, and is listed as Middle Bight in the 1921 Newfoundland Census with

Historical Site.

The Prince of Orange Loyal Orange Lodge #23 was built at Middle Bight in 1875 by society members who cut and sawed the timber themselves. Before this building was constructed, they walked or rowed to Portugal Cove to attend meetings at the lodge there. Used ever since for lodge meetings and gatherings for the residents, it has been the site of polling stations, war recruiting, dances, classroom, and community social

Heritage Personality.

Richard Hibbs was born at Kelligrews in 1876. A farmer, he formed the Farmers' Protective Association in 1912. Hibbs joined the Fishermen's Protective Union in 1913, and within two years FPU President William Coaker made him chief union organizer in Conception Bay. Between 1919 and 1932 he represented Fogo and Trinity Districts as a Liberal-Union Member in the House of Assembly and was a strong booster of road construction and improvements. He was a justice of the peace for the Kelligrews area until his death in 1941.



A 1778 chart of Conception Bay with Kelligrews Head labelled.

257 persons in 58 households. Westward, Lower Gullies had 134 people in 31 households and was renamed Riverdale in 1923.

In 1961 the community's population was over 1,000 residents, many of whom commuted daily to St. John's for employment. When Kelligrews joined Conception Bay South in 1971 there were 2,046 residents.

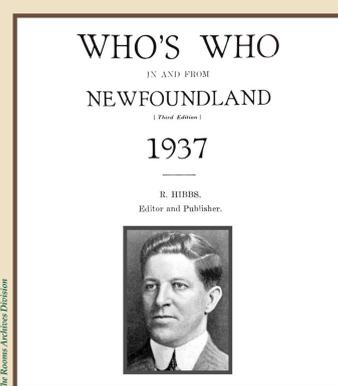


Codner School in Middle Bight, 1946.

events. The structure remains essentially unchanged since 1875.



The Loyal Orange Lodge received the Town's Historic Trust Award in 1999.



Hibbs published the *Who's Who of Newfoundland* in 1927, 1930 and 1937.

Memories from the 1930s.

Gordon Bastow was one of many St. John's families who owned or rented summer residences in Kelligrews and other communities along the South Shore. The daily arrival of trains through Kelligrews was a particular source of entertainment. The "really big show" around the railway premises he recalled in 2003, was the "arrival on Sunday and Wednesday (the half-day holiday then) afternoons of the 'Excursion train' from St. John's, crowded with families coming out to spend the day on the beach and to have a family picnic.



The station was built in 1906 and a freight shed added in 1910 when the government constructed a public wharf to accommodate the needs of a steamship company which operated between Bell Island and Kelligrews and connecting with Portugal Cove.



The Newfoundland Express coming into Kelligrews Station. Cronins Head can be seen in the background.

In Our Roots.

Trees were first cut for firewood and lumber, then land was cleared and gardens set as the population grew. In April 1891, about 70 farmers formed the Kelligrews and Middle Bight Agriculture Society. Mr. W. LeDrew was the first president.



Ron Walsh recalls they "grew vegetables and had two pigs, a cow and a horse. Nearly everyone did. Everyone had their own hens for eggs. You had your own vegetables and you didn't have to go to the store for too much."



Successive generations of farmers have tilled this productive roadside field.

Excursion to Kelligrews.

An excursion train will run to points as far as Kelligrews this afternoon, leaving here at 2.30, and returning will leave Kelligrews at 8.07 p.m.

A newspaper advertisement.

It arrived at 3 p.m. and left again at 8 p.m., parking in the meantime on the long siding running from Marsh Road to near Farrell's Grove on the eastern end. In the later summer they would also head up any of the side-roads on the south side of the Main Road, with their buckets, to pick blueberries, later moving to partridge berries. They would perhaps buy some fresh vegetables from the local farmers. One met up with friends and relatives to enjoy the day together and gathered with them as they left for the city."

"Even with no rail traffic about, one could at any time of the day or night listen to the clackety-clack of the sounders relaying messages through the landline Morse telegraph system, and watching the stationmaster interpreting and writing out the messages directed to his station, or sending his messages, and wonder how it was done."

Kelligrews Soiree.

The church was the connection that linked the community together and their cooperation and determination to have a place of worship was a communal commitment. It was a common practise for most communities to join together to raise money to build and maintain a church. It took community effort to "keep the church going". This was done with funds raised by teas, dances, and concerts. With the coming of the railway also came excursion trips that were made popular by groups such as the Society of United Fishermen, and later the Coopers' Union. The fairs that took place in Kelligrews each year soon became known as the Kelligrews Soiree. These day trips and soirees provided an opportunity for the local people to raise money to invest in their church and their community. The completion in 1883 of St. Michael's in Kelligrews was made possible by the joint efforts of Father Michael Morris and the community. It would serve the community of Kelligrews for many years.

The Soiree was immortalized and put into song by the Bard of Prescott Street, Johnny Burke, a well known poet and St. John's songwriter of the late-1800s and early-1900s who wrote about local people and events. His storytelling included local



Johnny Burke's Song Sheet.

words and phrases indigenous to the area; however, the meanings are now lost to most people except to some of our elderly population. His writing recounted the historic, the tragic, and the common place, like the annual harvesting of blueberries. Burke printed his compositions on single sheets of paper called 'broadsides' which were sold on the streets of St. John's by neighbourhood boys for two to five cents each. Despite his talent and the large quantity of work he created, Burke lived his life meagrely. He died in 1931 at the age of 80 but left behind songs that give us a glimpse back into history to the ways of the past. In his words "I tell you, boys, we had a time at the Kelligrews Soiree."

Memories from a Railway Man.

When Ron Walsh began work as a trainman first, he recalls, "In 1951, we got 90 cents an hour. I had to do the rule book for Newfoundland Railway and about six months after, I had to do it all over again for the Canadian National Railways. There was no phone service after 10 o'clock at night on the Shore. There must have been 8 or 9 railway men who lived up in this area. They gave us a telephone service - a party line. We went to the superintendent and told them we were on call. The only ones who were kept plugged in were the policemen, the clergymen and the railway men. We were important."



Above: Engine #801 heads the Carbonear Mixed (passenger and freight) coming into Kelligrews. The wharf and Cronins Head are at right.

Below: The Train continues its eastbound run, 1967. Farrell's Grove is up ahead.

