

Tilting, Fogo Island, Newfoundland and Labrador

When Leo McGrath and his brothers worked the cod fishery, they did things the old way, as their father and grandfathers before them. They cleaned, split, and salted the fish on traditional wooden stages, and put the fish to cure and dry on spruce boughs in the store their grandfather had built. In a good season the brothers might produce 500 quintals (that is 50,000 kilograms).

With the cod moratorium, the McGraths, like other fishers in Newfoundland, have had to diversify. These days Leo fishes for turbot and crab.

The McGraths live in Tilting, on remote Fogo Island. It is one of the only Catholic Irish settlements on the northeast coast of Newfoundland. Like most Tilting families, the McGraths trace their roots back to 18th-century Ireland. That is when the Burkes, Foleys, Greenes, Dwyers, Kinsellas and other families from Waterford, Cork and nearby counties in Ireland established themselves as permanent residents in Newfoundland. They were “planters,” rooted in the new land.

At first glance, Tilting might not look different from what you would expect of a fishing outpost. There is a variety of building types—colourful saltbox houses, outbuildings, fishing premises—perched on a rocky treeless landscape, with open fields punctuated by winding picket fences.

To understand what makes Tilting special, you have to look more closely. For instance, take the way peoples' houses are arranged. Families in Tilting live in extended family neighbourhoods. The McGrath brothers, for instance, live in the McGrath neighbourhood,



where their homes are shouting distance from each other. Houses face the harbour where the shared fishing premises are spread along the shore. For a family-based inshore fishing village it has made good sense for families to live and work near each another.

Another special feature of Tilting is that houses have traditionally been sold separately from land. When people moved, their houses moved with them. As folks in Tilting say, the houses were “launched” to the new location. In the old days, this took many men pulling together. Now tractors make the job of house launching easier.

The system of raising animals is also special. Until recently, every family raised sheep for wool and mutton. Animals were open grazed, as was the practice in Ireland. People built picket fences to keep the animals out of the vegetable gardens and off the root cellars, not to fence them in. Although people no longer raise sheep, the picket fences remain. These days the fences deter any caribou that wander by.



Eileen, Gladys and Leo McGrath in front of mother Gladys' saltbox style house built in 1944

Photo: Debbie Neil, Town of Tilting

The government of Canada designated the entire village of Tilting a national heritage district. All the built structures—brightly painted saltbox houses, fishing stages, flakes and stores, wood picket fences, bridges and gates, and even paths and gardens—show how Tilting's residents have lived and worked for generations.

Two historic homes have been converted into museums, so that visitors to the region can learn about the community and its fishing industry.

For additional information, follow this link:

http://www.historicplaces.ca/rep-reg/affichage-display_e.aspx?id=2731