

## Unit 10: Video 3 Transcript

**Q7: What was the Harbour Grace Affray? What is the significance of this event?**

**A:** The Harbour Grace Affray and its significance in Newfoundland history. It's an interesting case. It is one of those moments that—in which we see ethnic tensions flaring. It's one of those moments that challenges the idea that these ethnic tensions were coming from the elites, because the elites really didn't have anything to do with this particular episode and many others that happened.

Harbour Grace was really Newfoundland's second town. It almost was the capital of Newfoundland. St. John's eventually, for various reasons, beat it out. But it was a very significant centre. It was in Conception Bay, which is that area that I've described as having a mixed sort of English Protestant, Irish Catholic population. Harbour Grace itself was predominantly Protestant, about 60 percent in this period. But about 40 percent Irish Catholics, okay. It's one of the places, and there were a number of them, where there were mixed populations, where the neighbourhoods were still quite segregated. So a lot of Catholics lived in a farming area called Riverhead. Not many farming areas in Newfoundland, but that one was able to produce a bit of decent stuff. And this was really a falling out between, you know, if you want to call them "working class" so much, maybe "popular class," English Protestants and Irish Catholics in Harbour Grace. What happened, and I think maybe what we need to keep in mind here is you're looking at another period of economic recession, quite serious. And Harbour Grace is itself very hard hit in this period. The sealing industry is not doing well, and that had been huge for Harbour Grace. The cod fishery has gone into another decline. So things are really tough for people on the ground. On this particular day in—actually in December, the Orange Order are marching on St. Stephen's Day, which is Boxing Day if you like. The reason they did that was because Orangeman's Day, July 12th, is in the middle of the fishing season. So nobody could afford that in Newfoundland. So the Orange Order had come to Newfoundland in the late 1860s. Later than in other areas. Very much associated with Confederates actually, and because it sort of arrived at the same time that the debates about the 1867 Confederation were going on. And so they were seen as agents of Canada, especially in that—you know, they were trying to take Newfoundland away from Britain. And so it all sort of got mushed up in people's minds. So many people were a little suspicious of the Orange Order initially. But it did grow, and of course obviously it grew

among the English Protestants. No Irish Protestants worth talking about in Newfoundland. So you've got this worsening economic condition. You've got the Orange Order coming on the scene for first time. And so there were many tensions around Orange marches. This particular Orange march, the Orange Order had paraded in Harbour Grace area before. But they always stuck to a particular route in the main part of the town. This time word went out that they were going to come outside that route and go down Pippy's Lane and into Riverhead, which was the Irish Catholic neighbourhood. So the Irish Catholics, the Riverhead crowd, they were very nonchalant. They just were hanging about in Riverhead on the day. Somebody put up a Green flag on Middle Bridge, which was—that sort of meant, "Oh, come down. We'll have a chat." They all sort of went down to Middle Bridge and for whatever reason, the flag started moving up towards the Orangemen who were coming from the other direction. And the two crowds ultimately met.

There were 23 people seriously wounded in that riot. Five of them were killed. There were a number of arrests. I think 19, and all of them were Catholic except for one. So you can see that the authorities are going to side with the Orange Order in this matter regardless. But when they're marching towards—I mean, the sense of sort of territorial invasion is palpable there. And the Orange Order is marching and it's playing its Protestant hymns, and it's banging the old Lambeg drums and the joy guns are being fired and whatnot. I don't know. To me it really does sound like they are deliberately being provocative to go into Riverhead. Why—who in your right mind would do it? The confrontation actually happens in a place that's close to Courage's Beach, and this is the working class or popular class English Protestant neighbourhood. And this is where the whole powder keg goes up.

In the aftermath, they couldn't—there were many Catholics charged, but they couldn't make it stick because they couldn't get a jury that would convict them. And so I mean, it sort of—but it lives on. I mean, the idea of it lives on as another sort of very tragic episode of ethnic tensions. It was interesting to me, I think, for a number of reasons. One was that in this really difficult economic time, working class or popular class people didn't pull together against their economic betters. They turned on each other. And so that—a number of people like to sort of dismiss the idea of ethnic tension. And I keep thinking, that's silly. You've got to call what you see. So that's one interesting thing.

Another interesting thing that you see happening, it's already starting to happen anyway. But it takes off significantly after the Affray. Is that in Conception Bay, where there is this mixed population, and until—and people

always talked about it as having mixed population, you see that even though the numbers of people there in the bay remain the same, English vis-à-vis Irish, they actually segregate into different communities. So—now not everywhere. I mean, in the towns they continue to be segregated by neighbourhood. But in the smaller communities you can see suddenly that they really don't want to live with each other anymore. And so numbers, big numbers look the same. Small numbers, community by community, you can see a massive change as communities become more homogeneous ethnically. So that's another thing.

And the other thing I found really interesting about this moment was the roles that women played in the Affray. The women from Riverhead, the Irish Catholic farming area, very much involved in the farm work. Also involved in the fishery. Again you see this authority, this sense of, "Look, I'm standing for my community and my family." They're there at the Affray. They walk along with the men. They've got their aprons full of rocks. They're throwing the rocks. Some of them have ammunition. Some of them have been storing guns, and they give out the guns. Some women actually have guns, and they're certainly doing all the catcalling and hooting at the other side. And in the aftermath they—you know, they cover up for anybody who's being hunted down by the police. They're tending to one—so they're very, very much a part of this moment. As—it's a very communal effort and there's no thought that, "Oh, put the womenfolk to the back." You have a wonderful image of one of them with two guns, one in each hand, on the front veranda of her house. The English women from Courage's Beach, English Protestant women, they have started to move more into that sort of notion of women being in the home. The male breadwinner is out earning a wage in the town, or a wage at sealing, or what have you. And they are not involved in the same way in the fishery, and there's no agriculture in that area. They actually are not at the Affray. When they talk about it, they hear things in the distance. One woman faints in her back garden at the sound of a gun and so on. The difference in tone, in the description and the testimony from people, again, it's quite palpable. So I found that interesting. Again, I see a difference in terms of their economic role, which spins off, then, into the way that they're viewed as being part of the community. And I also think that they—because of the dominant group in the town are English Protestants, that they are getting more of that trickle down about respectability than perhaps the Irish Catholic women of Riverhead.