

## Unit 1: Video 1 Transcript

A: My name is Willeen Keough. I am an Associate Professor with the Department of History at Simon Fraser University. I am also the Chair of Gender Sexuality and Women's Studies here at the university. The area that I specialize in is gender history and hence the crossover between departments, in terms of regional specialization, Canadian, but primarily Newfoundland history and Irish history.

**Q8: Have you had any "a-ha" moments during your research?**

A: When I think about "a-ha" moments in my research, I'd have to say there were probably several. Of course there always are, I mean, and as you continue to research, you have those wonderful, lovely moments. But in terms of the work I did on Irish women on the Southern Avalon, I think my first "a-ha" moment was in the archives. I had been warned that I wasn't going to find anything about these women. That there would be nothing there. That I was wasting my time. This was a PhD project, so I was panic stricken. At about two weeks in, I began to sort of see through the sort of—very sort of male centred nature of the sources. And this is something that I think lots of social historians and women's historians will tell you, that you need to read against the grain. So you look at court records and your original response to seeing women there, saying, oh, these poor women. Oh, they're victims of this or that. And then you start to think, "Wait now, these women were really there." Like, they're really all over in all sorts of capacities, as complainants and defendants. They're mixing things up. They're there. There's something more going on here. So that's a very exciting moment, I think really, especially when you start at the point where all the archivists are saying, "There's nothing here." To realize that there was a whole richness of information there if only you could find a way to sort of tease out the interpretations. So that was one.

Another "a-ha" moment I think for me was doing oral history, and realizing how much the oral history reinforced what I was drawing from the written sources and vice versa. And that is very reassuring in some respects. Sometimes you expect to hear something completely different, and sometimes you do hear things that are quite different. Because they're not even covered in the written sources. But it still made sense, if that means anything sensible to you. You're getting different information, but it's not uncomfortable. It's not making you think, "Oh, this is completely different from what I understood over here." One absolutely wonderful story from the oral history—do you have time for my little tale from oral history? Was about

a Mrs. Clancy. Now Mrs. Clancy was in Caplin Bay. She lived in Caplin Bay, which is now Calvert, on the Southern Shore. And it's very close to Ferryland, and the two communities are so close together actually that they share a graveyard. So that graveyard lies between the two communities. And if you actually go out the back of the graveyard, you're going to drop into a little cove called Lance Cove, okay. So I had to give you a little bit of geography there, so you'd understand the story. So this is a story I heard many times from the oral tradition. So you've got two families. You've got the Clancys and the O'Tooles. A fellow by the name of Martin O'Toole, or Mart Tool as he was known, came to the end of his labours on this earth. And he was duly laid out and waked in proper fashion. But a dispute arose about the ownership of the grave that had been dug for him. According to the Clancy family, his grave had been dug in the Clancy family plot, rather than the O'Toole family plot. Anyway, there was much heated debate and much backing-and-forthing. But poor old Mart Tool wasn't holding up so well. So they figured they'd better get him in. So down into no-man's land he went. Now Mrs. Clancy was away at the time. But she soon came back and she heard about it, and she wasn't one bit pleased about what she heard. Now she was just a little bit of a scrap of a woman, I'm told. But she was a real boss. You didn't cross her. So anyway, she's not best pleased about all this. A couple of days later, Mr. Johnny Heinz is walking over from Ferryland to Caplin Bay. He's going to go out with a friend in Caplin Bay to go fishing. And all of a sudden this voice rises up from the graveyard.

"Johnny Heinz," she says.

"What?" says Johnny.

"Give us a lift," she says.

"A lift at what?" says he.

"Help me heave Mart Tool over Lance Cove."

Well, this was Mrs. Clancy. She had the corpse dug up—had the coffin standing on its end in the grave. Had managed to push it upright and was trying to heave it up and out over the cliff into Lance Cove.

Now to me, I just so enjoyed this story, even for its own sake. But it didn't jar me. A lot of people might say, "Well, that's only old foolishness. My God, they could see the academic coming up over the road with a tape recorder. Yeah, they had that story up for you all right." But in terms of a very strong woman, being very defensive about family property, and when nobody else is willing to do something about it, she did something about it. And her sense

of her position in the sort of spiritual world of the community, it was all there. And wouldn't you know, about three months later I'm in the archives and I actually came across a letter from the justice of the peace in the place at the time. And he's writing the Attorney General of Newfoundland, and he's talking about this highly unusual case that has come before him. This woman has dug up a corpse, and she tried to send it over the cliff. And the brother of the deceased was outraged, and who could bring charges? Was it the next of kin? Or was it the priest? And what kind of fine should be assessed? And perhaps a prison term was the right way to go. So it actually, really, honest to God, did happen. Not that I doubted the oral tradition. But for people who were naysayers and say, "Oh, that's only old foolishness." There it was. All nice and tidy in the written source. So that was a fabulous "a-ha" moment.