

## Unit 9: Video 1 Transcript

**Q4: How was Newfoundland's colonial administrative structure different from other colonies? How did it compare with the French colonial administration?**

A: So in terms of sort of administration of Newfoundland, the colonial legislature, but before that, really, a naval regime in place. Let's see where we can begin with this. Remember that Newfoundland is a giant fishing station at this point in time. So you've got a population that's spread out all around the coastline. You don't have little market towns that would have developed around other colonies, around agriculture and those kinds of meeting places. You really do have a bunch of people living as close as possible to the water, right out over the cliffs.

So what do you do with all these people? In the early days, the fishing admirals were basically given the right to maintain law and order in as much as it affected the fishery. And really that's all that was supposed to be there as far as Britain was concerned anyway. So the fishing admirals, they were the first fishing captains to arrive in any given harbour in any given year. So could be somebody completely different the next year. But for this year, these are the first three who arrived. They are in charge. They get to resolve any sorts of disputes about the fishery and I guess trespass and those kinds of things that would have arisen in this particular kind of society. Later in the 17th century, they also, then, allowed naval officers to hear appeals because of course you can imagine that the fishing admirals would have privileged perhaps themselves and their own crews over other people who might be complaining about them. So there were all those kinds of complaints. So the naval officers come on the scene. But then there are disagreements between the naval officers and the fishing admirals, and so it goes.

The 18th century saw the development, I think, of that sort of more naval system of justice. By 1729, naval governors were appointed for Newfoundland. Now, they didn't stay all year. They only came out with the fleet and went back again. But these are now naval governors as opposed to just the naval officer, okay. And they have junior officers who were surrogates. The surrogates go out to various districts around the island and hear big cases. And then there are justices of the peace or magistrates who can be appointed, and they're appointed in all the districts. And they hear the smaller stuff. They take depositions and they have the petty trials and whatnot. So you've got this rudimentary system that actually sort of stumbles along fairly well. And the magistrates are in place. They're local men.

They're—and they are men, of course, needless to say. They're merchants more than likely or probably related to a merchant household. Or they—yeah, mostly merchants. They could be possibly in later years politicians as well. But for the moment we'll stick with the primarily merchants. And they know the local scene, and they actually have—they're allowed to tweak the rules a little bit to fit the local communities. And you see them doing it throughout the 18th century, which is kind of interesting.

You get a customs house that comes along—by the end of the 18th century, you've got a growing colony. You've got more population. The migratory fishery is failing. The resident fishery is ascendant. And so you've got to do something more. So again, Britain has been sort of reluctantly dragging its feet, but finally gives Newfoundland its own constitution and its own supreme court. In the next century there's even a bigger boom with the Napoleonic Wars in the very early part of the century. Great wages in the fishery. People are coming out hand-over-fist, and the sealing industry is really taking off. And that gives people a reason to stay on the island for the winter, because the fishing season usually is over. And it can be a long winter twiddling your thumbs. So that provides even more demand. So finally you see that in 18—the eighteen-teens to 1830, there's a big push for reform. Now this is coming from everybody really. I mean, sometimes there's a notion that it's only a middle class liberal movement. But the working people in Newfoundland want the reform too. They're sort of fed up with this older regime. So by 1825 Newfoundland is finally—finally officially recognized as a colony. And then in 1832 Newfoundland received representative government. So that was an appointed—two appointed councils and an elected assembly. They got it wrong so badly that it was called the Bow Wow Parliament. So they moved to an amalgamated assembly, which was even worse because then they were all in the same room together. Finally in 1855 Newfoundland received responsible government. So you can see that it caught up quite quickly—not having been acknowledged as a colony for so long, once things started to happen. And I think Britain itself was moving away from that sort of mercantilist idea about the colonies, and the home country and kind of anxious to push them off a little bit anyway. So it worked out that way.