

MD explores hidden history of Captain Cook's journey to Newfoundland

As a specialist in internal medicine, Brian Harley explores the intricate terrain of the human body. But as a writer and amateur historian, he turns his attention to the rugged landscape of the place he calls home.

Harley, 76, lives and practises medicine part time in Corner Brook, a small city on Newfoundland's west coast that overlooks the Bay of Islands. He came to Canada from England in 1955 to complete a residency in Ottawa, and after seeing a recruiting ad he set out for western Newfoundland to check out some unknown territory. "The British enjoy discovering new places so I think I had a bit of that instinct when I first visited Newfoundland," Harley says.

The trip to the Bay of Islands piqued his curiosity about Newfoundland, and against the advice of his supervisor back in Ottawa, Harley brought his young family to live in Corner Brook, which was then a burgeoning pulp and paper town.

"I remember my first visit to the west coast and how I felt when I looked out over the land. I could really empathize with someone like Captain James Cook and how he must have felt when he discovered the place for the first time."

It was that keen interest in exploring new ideas and places that attracted Harley to the story of Cook, a merchant seaman who became one of the most significant players in Newfoundland history.

"When people hear about James Cook, the emphasis is usually on his travels to Australia and New Zealand and the discovery of Hawaii," says Harley. His work in Newfoundland is considered little more than an afterthought.

As he explains in his book, *The Legacy of James Cook: The Story of the Bay of Islands*, glaciers carved deep ridges in Newfoundland during the Ice Age, creating the 3 separate inlets of the Bay of Islands, which is dotted with more than a dozen islands. In Cook's day, these were untested waters, rife with danger. After he found himself storm-bound there in 1767, the daring captain set out to survey the coast, and created the first maps of the bay. Cook spent the next 4 summers surveying other areas of Newfoundland, including the southern coast of Labrador and the island's Northern Peninsula.

"I think people have underestimated Cook's contribution to our knowledge of Newfoundland's coastline and to the eventual settlement of this place," says Harley. "That's what made me want to write about him."

The book starts with Cook's adventures but Harley gradually turns his attention to the place and its people, examining the history and economy, the impact of the world wars, the Depression and Confederation, and the evolution of the local health care system.



Dr. Brian Harley: discovering Capt. Cook

Harley came to Corner Brook a few years after Newfoundland joined Canada, when the Western Memorial Hospital was still developing its strengths. He practised general internal medicine and helped to open the Nuclear Medicine Department; he retired from full-time practice last year, but still works part time.

Two of his children are physicians. Daughter Caroline Alteen is a general practitioner in St. John's, while son Richard is a practising radiologist in Corner Brook as well as chief of Staff at Western Memorial.

For Harley, the leap from doctor to local historian was not too dramatic. "I have always been interested in the people here, the work they do, how they live, and I've had the opportunity to meet so many of them. This is a different way of life from the city and I have always been fascinated by it. I feel a real responsibility to the people here to tell their stories."

After a deal with a publisher didn't work out, Harley decided to publish the book on his own, embarking on a somewhat arduous journey through the complicated world of editing, graphics and printing.

"Would I do it again? I don't know. But it would certainly be easier the second time around."

These days, Harley promotes his book to Canadian retailers in the hopes of sharing the story of his adopted home with a much wider audience. Copies of the book are available from Harley, 8 Stonehenge Place, Corner Brook, NF A2H 3B4; bharley@nf.sympatico.ca. — *Beth Ryan*, St. John's