



# TURPIN'S ISLAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT



## MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY FIELD SCHOOL

Students of Memorial University's Department of Archaeology will be conducting the first long-term archaeological excavation on Turpin's Island, Little St. Lawrence from June 24 to July 19, 2024. This opportunity allows students to enhance their technical archaeological skills in a hands-on environment. Students will engage in archaeological excavations, artifact analysis, and laboratory research to further their knowledge for future career and research endeavours. This research will provide the students and the community with a better understanding about the long-term occupation of Little St. Lawrence. The archaeological potential of the site on Turpin's Island has been assessed through field surveys in 2006, 2009, and 2015. In 2023, archaeologists from Memorial University conducted archival and documentary research, surveys of the site, and test pitting to confirm the potential. They found evidence of Basque, French, and British activity starting in the 16th century. The interest in the site from the Provincial Archaeology Office, Memorial University, and Little St. Lawrence and St. Lawrence community has allowed for the current research to go forward.

We would like to thank the community of Little St. Lawrence and St. Lawrence for welcoming our team and providing resources for our research. We would also like to thank the Provincial Archaeology Office, Memorial University Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Department of Archaeology, and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council for providing the funding and means to conduct this research.



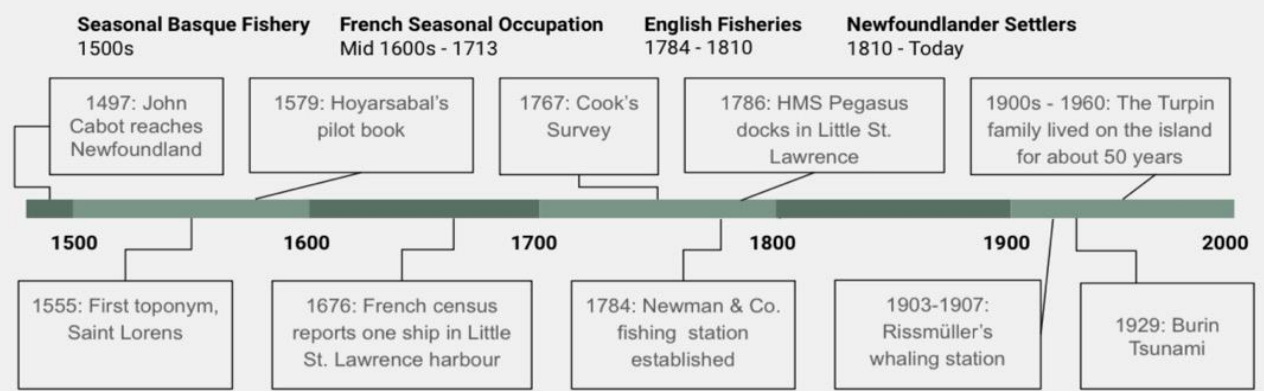
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# SITE CHRONOLOGY



Little St. Lawrence Harbour (Meres, HMS Pegasus, July 14th 1786)(Canada Archives)



A chart of the sea-coast of Newfoundland between St. Lawrence and Point May survey'd by order of Hugh Palliser esqr. Commodore & c. & c. By James Cook (1765) (Archives Canada)

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although there are no known Indigenous pre-contact sites identified on Turpin's Island at the moment, there is evidence that Indigenous groups were present on the Burin Peninsula, as four pre-contact sites are located less than 50 kilometres from Little St. Lawrence. Current archaeological data indicates that Turpin's Island was occupied since the first European occupation in Newfoundland, occurring at the beginning of the 16th century.

One of the earliest mentions of St. Lawrence appears on a 1555 map made by cartographer Guillaume Le Testu, showing the toponym Saint Lorens. Following the map, the next mention of St. Lawrence was in the Basque mariner Martin de Hoyarsabal's pilot book in 1579, which provided routes to and from St. Lawrence. The earliest record of human activity in the area mentions a Basque presence in St. Lawrence and Little St. Lawrence in 1597. Following the earlier Basque occupation, the area was utilized by the French fisheries in 1640. In 1672, the merchant Henri Brunet visited a man named Fontanelle in Little St. Lawrence. Brunet revisited the area two years later to meet a man named La Rue. The year 1713 brought the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht, forcing out most of the people engaged in the French fishery, at which point it was slowly replaced by the English. Another account of the French presence at Little St. Lawrence is provided by

William Taverner, who mentions in his second report (1718) written in the aftermath of the War of the Spanish Succession: "There ffishes one planter, who hath not taken the Oath, he caught the last year about 280 Quintls of ffish p boat, there are Two ffishg Roomes. for Ships, which is all ffakes".

A survey conducted by James Cook in 1767 highlighted three convenient places for building fishing stages on Turpin's Island; two of these could be the fishing rooms mentioned by Taverner. This survey is thought to have influenced the establishment of a fishing base on the Island by Newman & Co. in 1784. Fishing stages can be seen in a 1786 drawing by James S. Meres, which depicts Prince William Henry's ship, the HMS Pegasus, in front of Turpin's Island. We can still see the foundation of the stages at low tide today.

In 1903, a whaling station was constructed in Little St. Lawrence by Ludwig Rissmüller. However, declining whale populations led to the station's closure only four years later in 1907.

Both St. Lawrence and Little St. Lawrence were impacted by the 1929 tsunami, ravaging the coastlines of the Burin Peninsula and disrupting local fishing operations. Records from Emergency Preparedness Canada note the impact of the disaster on the two communities, describing Mrs. Turpin and her children's escape from the Island during the disaster and the destruction that followed.