

The Murder of Lieutenant Lawry: A Case Study of British Naval Impressment in Newfoundland, 1794

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ON 10 MARCH 1794, HMS *Boston* was anchored at Portsmouth, the Royal Navy's main base in southern England, getting ready for its Atlantic voyage to Newfoundland. Sitting astern in his cabin was Captain J.N. Morris, writing an urgent letter to Philip Stephens, Secretary of the Admiralty. Scheduled to sail the following week, Morris requested a quick officer exchange: Lieutenant John Edwards of the *Boston* in return for Richard Lawry of HMS *Comet*. The swap was initiated by Edwards and Lawry, not their captains, and for reasons that were not recorded by the Navy. Lawry was a young officer, having only received his Admiralty commission as a lieutenant in October 1793. In terms of seniority, he now became the second lieutenant of the *Boston*, while Robert Alexander Kerr, previously third in command, received an unexpected promotion to first lieutenant. Kerr attained the rank of captain during the War of 1812 and was later distinguished as a Companion of the Bath. Lawry, on the other hand, was not destined to climb up the ranks of the Royal Navy. Seven months after the exchange, in October 1794, he and Kerr led a press gang ashore in St. John's that culminated in a vicious attack by a local crowd. Several of their comrades were left bloody and scrambling for safety, while Lawry remained motionless, beaten to death in the streets. The government's reaction was swift and strong. Marines rounded up dozens of suspects, two men were tried and condemned to death by the Supreme Court, and the criminals were hanged in a public ceremony.¹

This is the story of one of the most serious crimes in Newfoundland history. It is an ironic tragedy because Lawry personally requested the North Atlantic mission that led to his death. The narrative begins with the *Boston*'s daily routine in October 1794: loading the warship with victuals, Morris preparing to sail with the Iberian convoy,

and the movements of the press gang that resulted in Lawry's murder. It continues with the interrogation of the suspects and their criminal trial. The state executions and military funeral that followed were theatrical events designed to reinforce the power and legitimacy of the Royal Navy. Lawry's murder was clearly an extraordinary event, but it was not extraordinary for the reason historians have traditionally assumed. It was exceptional in the sense that it was the only time press gangs sparked a large-scale demonstration in Newfoundland, not because they were illegal or non-existent there, or because the colony was a safe haven from naval recruitment. Press gangs operated in Newfoundland with the statutory backing of the British Parliament, and were an occupational hazard there throughout the Napoleonic Wars. In terms of composition and behaviour, the *Boston's* press gang was much the same as other recruiting parties in this period. Kerr and Lawry followed legal-customary manning parameters that had been forged locally between naval commanders and colonial elites. Subsequent press gangs followed the same procedures; in this way the Navy saved face after the attack, and prevented impressment from sparking much violence in the future. Viewed through the lens of one case study, this is the first serious analysis of press gangs in Newfoundland. Admiralty records have been used to quantify recruitment in Newfoundland, demonstrating that thousands of men entered the Navy there. There is also a panoramic description of impressment and the cod fishery in the North Atlantic world, which challenges the argument that the Newfoundland trade was not a productive nursery for seamen. The essay begins with Lawry's homicide in 1794 and traces its impact on British naval impressment in Newfoundland to 1815.

The murder of Lieutenant Lawry is situated within the broader history of naval-civilian relations in Newfoundland, which in the eighteenth century developed a unique system of government: in place of a resident governor, domestic assembly, executive council, and civilian courts, the Royal Navy doubled as a quasi-colonial administration. The commander-in-chief was the governor, and captains and lieutenants formed the backbone of a surrogate court system. The outer shell of this 'naval state' looked different from the system in place in Nova Scotia, but on the inside its judicial skeleton and military organs functioned just as effectively as the governments of other British possessions. Lawry's murder did not challenge the viability of this system, nor did it undermine the relatively cordial nature of naval-civilian relations. While the homicide has traditionally been portrayed as an Irish crime, one in a lengthy series of disloyalty allegations in eighteenth-century Newfoundland, it was not interpreted in this way in 1794. With respect to press gangs more generally, the Lawry affair likely improved the Navy's relationship with government officials, merchant traders, and maritime workers. It did not precipitate further protests, let alone calls for a prohibition on impressment. The Navy was also not scared away from conscripting men in Newfoundland; rather than fade away, press gangs actually became more common over time. In the wake of Lawry's death, however, there was a change in Newfoundland's relationship with the Navy,

leading to a major overhaul of manning policy. Governor James Wallace had no qualms about dispatching press gangs into town in 1794, but thereafter impressment was confined to guard boats that boarded incoming merchantmen, particularly in St. John's harbour. Volatility on land ensured that press gangs were relegated to the water. William Pryce Cumby, Captain of HMS *Hyperion*, found this out the hard way when he butted heads with the St. John's magistracy in 1813, which prevented him from landing a press gang on shore. While fish merchants and naval officers shaped most recruitment parameters from above, it was plebeian unrest and social instability on the ground that forced magistrates to reconsider the danger of allowing press gangs into the town.²

I

HMS *Boston* was typical of the small warships on the Newfoundland station; she was classed as a sixth rate, a frigate with 28 guns and approximately 220 men. She arrived on the Grand Banks in July 1794, and before warping into St. John's harbour fired the customary salute to Fort Amherst and signaled for a pilot to escort her through the rocky narrows. Captain Morris kept the crew busy for several weeks, initially caulking the vessel and mending sails, and then stowing large quantities of fresh beef, spruce beer, coal, rum, and molasses, as well as water and firewood. Stocked with sufficient victuals, the *Boston* cruised off the south coast of the Avalon Peninsula in tandem with HMS *Amphion*, captained by Herbert Sawyer. They boarded every vessel that crossed their paths, which in the early days of the French Revolutionary War meant large numbers of American merchantmen, neutral carriers from seaports like Boston and Philadelphia. Morris stopped in Aquaforte for a few days, where he again purchased beef and beer; then it was back to St. John's where the *Boston* joined the rest of the squadron in filling their holds with bread, flour, butter, and rum. Morris spent the bulk of September patrolling the North Atlantic sea-lanes, all the while keeping an eye out for strange sail and communicating with Sawyer. The warships relaxed for a few days in Caplin Bay (now Calvert), but come 3 October they were moored in St. John's, this time for good. At month's end Morris signaled for Europe-bound vessels to assemble in a convoy, and he loaded the *Boston* with three months worth of provisions. Several marines had to be given six lashes each for drunkenness and fighting, but by the afternoon of 2 November the *Boston* and HMS *Monarch* were tacking east off Cape Spear with 57 sail to keep them company.³

On the day of Lawry's murder, then, the *Boston* was at St. John's preparing to escort a fleet of fishing and sack ships to markets in Portugal and Spain, and back to Britain. The order to prepare had been given about a week earlier, on 18 October, by Governor James Wallace. The *Boston* was short fourteen men, and rather than take to sea with a diminished crew, Morris asked for permission to distribute posters to attract volunteers. Warships did not require full complements of men for coastal duties

in Newfoundland, but this was not an ordinary voyage — Britain had recently declared war on France, and the convoy was headed for hostile waters in southern Europe. It was imperative that the *Boston* be prepared for battle when she took to the high seas. Wallace was surprised by Morris's request, since the latter was allowed to procure "seamen in any way in [his] Power," which meant impressment. Invited by the governor to seek a second opinion from Captain Sawyer of the *Amphion*, Morris learned that men had been conscripted in St. John's in the previous few weeks. Even so, Morris posted the handbills. No volunteers had come forward by 24 October, and the *Boston* was scheduled to sail the next day. Persuaded by Wallace and Sawyer that a single press gang would provide "no apprehension of giving an Alarm, that might frustrate an intended general Press," he ordered Kerr and Lawry to row ashore that evening to press any seamen or fishermen "they might find Idling about."⁴

Later that night the lieutenants crept back to the *Boston* with the seafarers they had pressed in town. Morris later deemed the mission a success, as it was "performed without Interruption or Riot." We cannot be certain of the total catch on that evening, but evidence suggests that it was in the order of ten to twenty men, at least some of whom had worked in the cod fishery the previous summer. It is possible that the recruits were apprehended in a local tavern, the most common and fruitful recruiting ground for press gangs. The conscripts were fastened aboard the *Boston* for the night. The next morning, 25 October, Morris inspected his detainees, releasing those "whose Masters appeared to Claim them"; the eight men who remained volunteered to join the Royal Navy and were scheduled to have their names entered into the *Boston*'s muster book. The new ratings were also awarded "the bounty." This was a financial inducement reserved for genuine volunteers, but it was also common practice to give pressed men a gratuity for good behaviour, to lessen their resentment at being forced into the Navy. Able seamen received £5, while ordinary seamen and landsmen pocketed £2.1.0 and £1.1.0 respectively. At least five of Lawry's eight volunteers were rated landsmen, suggesting that Morris entered more green hands than deep-sea mariners, who were always preferred in recruitment drives.⁵

Once the crew had eaten dinner, at approximately 2 p.m., Lieutenant Kerr, as the commanding officer, sent Lawry into St. John's with two of the new recruits, to retrieve their personal belongings. The sailors needed to pick up clothes and sea chests, and to collect wages for their work in the cod fishery. This was standard practice: the Navy regularly ensured that sailors were not cheated out of their due. Lawry headed ashore in a cutter, armed only with his dirk, a short dagger which was a common naval side-arm. The party landed at the upper end of St. John's harbour. Accompanied by four sailors from the *Boston*, Lawry escorted the men to "Noble's Room" to receive their wages. This was the headquarters of John Noble, the men's former employer, a well-known merchant on the St. John's waterfront and a senior partner in the English house of Pinson and Noble. It was a Saturday, and as neither Noble nor his business agent, a Mr. Payne, was in the office, Lawry shepherded the

men to their lodgings. It was a pleasant day. The sky was clear of clouds and fog, and the wind was calm. Sawyer drilled his crew in a small arms exercise, and Morris had his men patch up the *Boston*'s sails and make brooms for sweeping the decks. The squadron fired nineteen guns to celebrate the anniversary of King George III's accession to the British Crown. All in all, the squadron enjoyed a leisurely Saturday afternoon.⁶

Lawry's group ducked under some raised fish flakes, and had walked quite a distance from Noble's property when it was confronted by a crowd approaching from a "Lower road." The people in the crowd were armed with wattles and bludgeons. Behaving in a "Riotous and tumultuous manner," the crowd liberated the two pressed sailors and then beat "Mr. Lawry in so unmercifull a manner that he died the next morning of the wounds he had received in this fray." According to Wallace, one segment of the crowd stalked the naval party from behind, while another met it head on, cutting off all possible exits. Having drubbed Lawry with "Savage ferocity," and rescued the two pressed men, the crowd turned its attention to the sailors. This was a premeditated attack, and, according to Aaron Thomas, an able seaman from the *Boston* who kept a diary of his experiences in Newfoundland, two of the sailors were "beat in a terrible manner, and their lives for some time despaired of. One other got off with a few strokes, and his Messmate got off, perhaps with his life, by running for, and gaining the boat." The latter was the only sailor to escape. He dashed back to the cutter and alerted the squadron's guard, including Morris. Reinforcements carried the injured sailors back to the *Boston*, and Wallace sent a contingent from the *Monarch* to "Quell a Riot."

No contemporary estimate of the size of this gathering has survived, but the terms "riot" and "mob" indicate a significant number of participants, as does the ease with which the crowd overpowered five naval seamen in two coordinated attacks. In his subsequent offer to informers, Wallace also implied that it was a large group. He was only interested in the "Principals" in the attack, he said, and promised a pardon in return for the names of those who struck Lawry. Survivors recalled that the crowd approached from a "Lower road." Since the town had only two thoroughfares at this time — the lower path and upper path, present-day Water and Duckworth Streets — this episode must have occurred on Duckworth Street below Fort Townshend.⁷

We know remarkably little about press gangs in Newfoundland, particularly when they operated on shore. Logbooks describe the movements and business of warships, including the weather and wind, vessel sightings, discipline and punishment, as well as provisioning issues. They do not give much attention to recruitment, and there are few specific references to press gangs. The ones that exist are vague in terms of size, composition, weapons, and movements. The *Boston*'s logbook says nothing about impressment until after Lawry was murdered. Descriptions of press gangs are usually like those from the logbook of HMS *Fox* in 1793, where "Cutter on the impress Service" appeared five times, or that of HMS *Castor* in 1799, in which references such as "sent Boats to impress" and "employed man[n]ing"

can be found. These press gangs worked in St. John's, and while it is possible that they ventured into town, we cannot say this for sure. Most references give the number of men taken, and say nothing about the press gangs themselves: for instance, HMS *Camilla* "Pressed 5 Men," "Received 6 Pressed Men," and "Pressed one Man," at various times in 1806. However, although we lack data on press gangs in Newfoundland, including Lawry's recruiting party in 1794, we can fill in some of the details from other settings, since impressment was common throughout the British Atlantic world.⁸

Press gangs were composed of ten or eleven sailors, called gangsmen, and one commissioned officer, usually the first or second lieutenant. A petty officer or midshipman commonly tagged along, but it was rare for press gangs to exceed twelve men. Contrary to folklore, they rarely included local toughs and rattan-swinging boatswains, particularly in colonial settings, but rather trustworthy seamen from particular warships, men who had been in the service long enough that they could be trusted not to desert. Press gangs were simply groups of regular sailors. The fact that Kerr and Lawry both escorted the *Boston*'s press gang may indicate that it was abnormally large, perhaps in the order of twenty men. This would have given them security in numbers and the ability to restrain the twenty or so recruits they took that night.



"An unwelcome visit from the Press Gang," from an old print. J.R. Hutchinson, The Press-Gang: Afloat and Ashore (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1913), frontispiece.

Some press gang stereotypes are accurate, regarding their weaponry, for instance. Gangsmen rarely used muskets, for the simple reason that they were too dangerous and the Navy wanted to avoid bloodshed. Press gangs did carry cutlasses from time to time, and when marines headed ashore they marched with bayonets. There are many references to press gangs armed with cudgels and sticks. These weapons may have been unsophisticated, but they also enabled coercion and brute force, and were much less likely to produce fatalities than pistols and swords. Press gangs often targeted inns and taverns, where they enticed potential recruits with liberal amounts of grog and beer. The party that the crowd attacked in 1794 was not a press gang, in the literal sense that it was not in St. John's to recruit men, but it was also not a press gang in terms of size and armament. On the other hand, it was likely seen as a press gang by many St. John's residents since Lawry had led the recruitment drive the night before, and he was marching through town with two of the pressed men. Dressed in the blue uniform of a commissioned officer of the Royal Navy, Lawry stood out as a symbol of British imperial authority. This was a dangerous situation for naval officers. Townsmen knew that the Navy collected recruits' belongings and wages before sailing, and that this was likely to occur shortly after their initial impressments. The crowd that murdered Lawry was probably aware of standard naval procedures, and pounced on the *Boston's* sailors when they were most vulnerable. Another instance occurred in 1798. Two days after HMS *Mercury* pressed four men from the *Elizabeth* in St. John's harbour, the recruits were "rescued by the Inhabitants when sent for their Cloaths."⁹

II

Lawry's murder was part of the only known large-scale press gang disturbance in Newfoundland's history. It was not the only press gang to operate in the "Empire of Frost and Snow," as Thomas so affectionately referred to Newfoundland, but this is how the episode is routinely portrayed in the historiography. Historians have confined their discussions to this one case, implying that the Lawry homicide was not only an aberration, but that press gangs were illegal and non-existent in Newfoundland. Thus Gerald S. Graham and David J. Starkey both attacked the mercantilist dictum that the Newfoundland fishery was a training ground for the Royal Navy, dismissing its role as a 'nursery of seamen' as government rhetoric and commercial propaganda. However, Graham and Starkey had not investigated what happened on the ground. Neither historian undertook a serious analysis of trans-Atlantic impressment, nor did they understand how press gangs operated in Newfoundland. Like other scholars, they thought that seafarers were immune from the press in Newfoundland — "by law and custom," according to Keith Matthews — and it has been suggested that West Countrymen flocked to the island in wartime to evade naval conscription. Some remained, others moved on to Nova Scotia and New Eng-

land, not caring where they ended up as long as they avoided the press on the return voyage to Britain. Some popular writers have pushed the press gang's mythical influence back to the seventeenth century. In this version, with the collapse of the proprietary colonies, the migratory fishery dominated Newfoundland. Planters became targets of an anti-settlement campaign spearheaded by West Country merchants, backed by the English government, and enforced by the Royal Navy. Fearing banishment on the one hand and press gangs on the other, residents hid in small coves to evade the authorities, and populated new frontiers on the northeast coast. In this fictional narrative, fear of press gangs not only contributed to the permanent settlement of Newfoundland, but explained its scattered nature as well. It also provided a romantic twist: fugitives, law-breakers, and naval deserters had peopled the colony.¹⁰

Sailors and fishermen were not immune from the Navy in Newfoundland. In 1708, during the War of the Spanish Succession, Parliament passed a statute that became known as the "Sixth of Anne" — 6 Anne, c. 37 (1708) — "An act for the encouragement of the trade to America." Although it was not directed at Newfoundland, the Sixth of Anne prohibited impressment (except for naval deserters) in the American colonies and "along its coasts and seas." While the British government held that this was a temporary measure, expiring with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, popular opinion in the Thirteen Colonies held that it was perpetual, and that impressment there was illegal. This issue remained a significant colonial grievance until the outbreak of the American Revolution, since the Navy ignored the statute in practice and continued to press sailors in Massachusetts and New York — a practice that sometimes caused urban unrest and popular backlash against imperial authority. The Sixth of Anne was eventually repealed by 15 Geo. III, c. 31 (1775) — "Palliser's Act" — a statute that was designed specifically for Newfoundland, and which formally sanctioned the use of press gangs there.

Legalizing press gangs fitted the broader purpose of Palliser's Act, which was to resurrect the migratory ship fishery by circumscribing the movement of maritime labour. Though Newfoundland was beginning its transformation from fishing installation to colony, Palliser's Act tried to limit settlement by securing the annual return of fishing servants to Britain. With war on the horizon, and Yankee-Newfoundland trade banned by the Continental Congress, the traditional migration outlet for footloose servants was now closed. No longer were they able to slip away to New England; Palliser's Act removed their ability to stay in Newfoundland as well. It even attacked the British tar's desire to travel to the colony in the first place. For those fishermen who envisaged Newfoundland as a press-free sanctuary, it now became a less appealing hiding place, for here too sailors were now conscripted into the Royal Navy. Newfoundland lost its eighteenth-century reputation as a safe haven, though some British politicians felt that Newfoundland was "unfairly treated" when it came to press gangs. William Pitt the Younger argued in 1783 that conscription should be forbidden outright during the fishing season, or permitted only upon license by the governor.¹¹

In September 1794, a month before Lawry's murder, Thomas noted in his diary that Queen Anne, "in the Sixth Year of her Reign, passed an Act of high favor and indulgence to the New World, for it said that it should not be Lawfull for her Naval Officers to press the Seamen from Private Ships in America or *Newfoundland* ... neither should they press persons who were on shores at these places." He also stated that this "Statute of Arms" was now repealed by Palliser's Act, which he analyzed in some detail. From his travels around the Avalon Peninsula, Thomas found himself in a unique position to learn both naval and civilian perspectives on impressment. Earlier that summer, Thomas had trekked back to St. John's after a visit to Portugal Cove. Thomas and his companion, a fisherman named Murphy, were overtaken on the "Indian Path" by some locals carrying a catch of salmon. It was getting dark, and since new guides were on hand, Murphy returned to Portugal Cove. When they learned that Thomas belonged to the *Boston*, it became a "serious concern to one of them, for my society impress'd upon his weak intellect the certainty of being impress'd into the King's Service [and he] absolutely avail'd himself of running into the woods with the Salmon on his back, supposing I had sent Murphy forwards for the purpose of bringing a Gang of the *Boston's* people to force them on board the Frigate." Even in fishing hamlets like Portugal Cove, then, residents were well aware that press gangs were legal and active in Newfoundland. While the Navy ignored the Sixth of Anne and continued to press seamen in the mainland American colonies, Thomas's testimony, Palliser's Act, and the dearth of impressment before 1775, suggest that it respected this prohibition in Newfoundland.¹²

During the Lawry affair, Morris behaved as if he was uncertain whether he could press in Newfoundland, even though he had commanded warships there on two separate occasions, including HMS *Pluto* in 1793. He became captain of the *Boston* that October and served the next four years in Newfoundland and the English Channel. Morris entered dozens of men in St. John's in 1793 and 1794, and the Newfoundland squadron as a whole recruited more than 500 in those same years, including some 200 pressed men. Indeed, Morris had actually pressed men for the *Pluto* in St. John's in 1793. Morris's behaviour suggests that impressment was uncommon in Newfoundland before the 1790s, undoubtedly because of its previous statutory prohibition. However, it is also clear that press gangs became a fixture there in the same period. It could be that Lawry's murder involved an early instance of press-ganging on shore, and that this was the reason for the attack on the *Boston's* sailors. However, this was not mentioned during the criminal investigation, and as Sawyer informed Morris at the time, several press gangs had preceded him in the previous few weeks. What can be said for certain is that impressment became commonplace in Newfoundland during the Napoleonic Wars.¹³

It is difficult to quantify the number of men pressed in Newfoundland. Muster books rarely distinguished between voluntary and coerced recruitment — most specify where a man was entered but not how he was entered. This was not always

the case, however, and the survival of some 40 musters that do separate these categories provides an estimate of impressment at Newfoundland.

Table 1. Men Recruited at Newfoundland, 1793-1815

| Year | Warship | Total Recruits | Pressed Men | Percentage Pressed | Source |
|------|------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1796 | HMS <i>Venus</i> | 40 | 25 | 63% | ADM 36/13212 |
| 1798 | HMS <i>Brilliant</i> | 27 | 10 | 37% | ADM 36/13115 |
| 1799 | HMS <i>Castor</i> | 24 | 14 | 58% | ADM 36/13299 |
| 1803 | HMS <i>Isis</i> | 78 | 36 | 46% | ADM 36/15910 |
| 1803 | HMS <i>Lapwing</i> | 38 | 18 | 47% | ADM 36/16978 |
| 1805 | HMS <i>Isis</i> | 54 | 27 | 50% | ADM 36/15913 |
| 1805 | HMS <i>Rattler</i> | 35 | 17 | 49% | ADM 36/17175 |
| 1806 | HMS <i>Camilla</i> | 43 | 20 | 47% | ADM 36/16959 |
| 1806 | HMS <i>Isis</i> | 56 | 30 | 54% | ADM 37/603 |
| 1807 | HMS <i>Mercury</i> | 54 | 18 | 33% | ADM 37/1105 |
| 1809 | HMS <i>Jamaica</i> | 36 | 17 | 47% | ADM 37/1869 |
| 1809 | HMS <i>Comet</i> | 48 | 25 | 52% | ADM 37/1571 |
| 1810 | HMS <i>Comet</i> | 43 | 27 | 63% | ADM 37/3023 |
| 1811 | HMS <i>Antelope</i> | 30 | 11 | 37% | ADM 37/3509 |
| 1811 | HMS <i>Recruit</i> | 26 | 12 | 46% | ADM 37/4757 |
| 1812 | HMS <i>Comet</i> | 26 | 11 | 42% | ADM 37/4539 |
| 1813 | HMS <i>Bellorophon</i> | 38 | 15 | 39% | ADM 37/3917 |
| 1813 | HMS <i>Crescent</i> | 33 | 21 | 64% | ADM 37/4254 |
| 1814 | HMS <i>Pioneer</i> | 20 | 10 | 50% | ADM 37/4938 |
| 1815 | HMS <i>Salisbury</i> | 19 | 9 | 47% | ADM 37/5800 |

Table 1 illustrates the twenty musters with the largest number of recruits, and therefore the smallest margin for error. A conservative estimate is that 40 percent of recruits in Newfoundland were pressed. A more realistic estimate, taking into consideration the ambiguity of the term ‘volunteer’ as well as the silences of coercion, is that some 50 percent were forced into the service. Sailors commonly resisted press gangs only to cry ‘volunteer’ when there was no chance to escape. Many did this to receive a bounty. The Admiralty turned a blind eye to this practice, hoping to avoid protests and to obtain more skilled mariners. While some warships entered abnormally high percentages of volunteers, perhaps because of captains’ reputations and geographic followings, there were also those that pressed abnormally high percentages of recruits. For instance, HMS *Concorde* pressed twelve of its thirteen recruits in 1801, and HMS *Prometheus* conscripted all twenty in 1814, for percentages of 92 and 100 respectively. Historians still know very little about the manning of the British navy during these wars. Existing studies suggest that the impressment figure overall hovered around 50 percent for most of the period, increasing to 75 percent around the War of 1812.¹⁴

It is impossible to compare Newfoundland quantitatively to the mainland British colonies, since comparable data does not yet exist. Press gangs certainly instigated more popu-

lar protests in colonies like Massachusetts, New York, and Nova Scotia than they did in Newfoundland, but this may speak to domestic politics and imperial tensions rather than impressment frequency. Thousands of fishing servants and sailors travelled to Newfoundland each summer, and it was the density of this migration that made the fishery a training ground for the Navy. Anonymity was also valuable, for most of the men pressed in Newfoundland were transients, who lacked the family networks and friends that would have come to their rescue in Britain. Most press gang riots occurred when local citizens had been conscripted. The migratory and seasonal nature of Newfoundland's labour force therefore mitigated the threat of naval-civilian discord. A sample of 172 warships from 1793 to 1815, representing approximately 75 percent of the Navy's presence, provides a clear picture of recruitment in Newfoundland.

Table 2. Men Recruited at Newfoundland, 1793-1815

| Year | Ship Sample | Recruits | |
|-------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| | | Recorded | Estimated |
| 1793 | 6 | 205 | 256 |
| 1794 | 7 | 266 | 333 |
| 1795 | 7 | 214 | 268 |
| 1796 | 5 | 133 | 166 |
| 1797 | 6 | 91 | 114 |
| 1798 | 5 | 110 | 138 |
| 1799 | 6 | 63 | 79 |
| 1800 | 6 | 52 | 65 |
| 1801 | 6 | 48 | 60 |
| 1802 | 7 | 25 | 31 |
| 1803 | 6 | 252 | 315 |
| 1804 | 5 | 126 | 158 |
| 1805 | 6 | 108 | 135 |
| 1806 | 10 | 158 | 198 |
| 1807 | 9 | 197 | 246 |
| 1808 | 8 | 75 | 94 |
| 1809 | 7 | 169 | 211 |
| 1810 | 8 | 162 | 203 |
| 1811 | 9 | 158 | 198 |
| 1812 | 8 | 113 | 141 |
| 1813 | 11 | 213 | 266 |
| 1814 | 14 | 171 | 214 |
| 1815 | 10 | 109 | 136 |
| Total | 172 | 3218 | 4025 |

Note: "Recorded" figures indicate actual recruitment. This sample contains approximately 75 percent of the naval presence in Newfoundland. "Estimated" figures extrapolate these numbers to 100 percent. This provides an estimate of total recruitment, had the sample in-

cluded the entire naval presence. Hundreds of recruits were later discharged for various reasons.

Source: TNA, ADM 36-37: Muster books for 172 warships in Newfoundland. Keith Mercer, "North Atlantic Press Gangs: Manning the Royal Navy in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, 1749-1815" (PhD thesis, Dalhousie University, forthcoming).

As conflict with revolutionary France gave way to the Napoleonic Wars, Britain expanded the size of the Navy, and this increased the demand for men to fill the lower decks. Newfoundland was not immune from this search for sailors. Volunteers were available in considerable numbers, particularly in St. John's at the end of the fishing season, but there were never enough and press gangs stepped in to fill the void. Manning was intense at the outset of the conflict, tailing off steadily until only a few dozen men were taken during the Peace of Amiens. Recruitment took off again when the Napoleonic Wars commenced in 1803, and there was a steady intake of men through the War of 1812. Sailors were now pressed into an expanding Newfoundland squadron, even though many of the small warships stopped at the island only for a few weeks on convoy duty. Taking a conservative estimate that 40 percent of seafarers were forcibly entered into the Navy, some 1,500 men were pressed in Newfoundland.

III

The Newfoundland fishery was certainly a nursery for seamen, one of several maritime trades prized for their roles in training manpower in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These included Britain's coasting trade, especially the traffic generated by the northeast coast coal industry, and the inshore fisheries. There were also the African slave trade, the West Indian fleet, the East India Company's ships, and those on the North American route. Merchants promoted their respective nurseries in order to secure government concessions, particularly naval convoys and economic incentives. They also sought to protect their men from the press gangs, even though these same men were needed for the war effort. It does not follow, however, that these trades were unproductive nurseries for seamen. The Newfoundland fishery is a prime example, best illustrated in a trans-Atlantic context. Thousands of men entered the Royal Navy in Newfoundland, but this was only a fraction of the number taken from the larger cod fishing industry during the Napoleonic Wars. Newfoundland was integrated into Britain's Atlantic manning system in the long eighteenth century: there was no urgency to press in North America because naval convoys did this with ease on their return voyages, near the English and Irish coasts.¹⁵

Press gangs were a nuisance in the West Country. The diaries of Benjamin and Isaac Lester, merchants in the Poole-Newfoundland trade, are littered with references to them. The worst time for impressment was the spring. Merchants spent considerable time and money organizing labour and fitting out vessels for the fishing

season, and to have men pressed from convoys at Plymouth or Spithead spelled delays and losses. For example, the Lesters' brig *Hope* had just arrived from London in 1793, and was being loaded for a convoy when her seamen were pressed. The master set out to recruit more men but met with little success. The *Hope* could not clear Poole until she was manned. In 1799 they heard from Thomas Gaylor, one of the Lesters' former ship captains and a contact in the Newfoundland trade, who reported that his men had been pressed in the West Country. Merchants were sometimes successful in petitioning for the release of pressed men, as technically out-going vessels were exempt from the Navy. For instance, in the spring of 1779, Governor Richard Edwards received word from Dartmouth and Poole that men had been pressed from the Newfoundland convoy assembling at Spithead. He ordered their immediate release.

There were also manning problems in Ireland. Captain Thomas Cadogan, stationed off Waterford, the main port in the Irish-Newfoundland trade, sent the cutter from HMS *Licorne* to press from merchant vessels, "without exception." Lieutenant Rudsdale boarded the *Triton* brig at night and took a few mariners from their beds. Abused by the *Triton's* master, Cadogan resolved to take the rest of the crew as well, but when the press gang returned they were armed with handspikes and hatchets, determined to repel all boarders. The Lesters' brig *Amy* arrived in Brownsea shorthanded in 1770, since most of the crew had been pressed in Ireland at the start of the voyage. Warships regularly took advantage of the Irish labour market, such as the *Concorde* in 1800, which recruited a dozen men at Cork. The Newfoundland squadron also manned other ports. For example, HMS *Camilla* stopped at Jersey in the Channel Islands in 1803, where she entered 27 men, at least eight of whom were pressed. The *Mercury* even hauled to off the Lizard in 1798, on the way to Newfoundland, to press three Cornish fishermen out of their shallows.¹⁶

During the Atlantic crossing, warships were usually too busy protecting convoys to press many sailors. When they did press, men usually came one or two at a time, from merchantmen that had been boarded to inspect their papers. The *Castor* took several men from Dundee and Torquay in 1799, from two separate vessels on the high seas. Recruitment in Newfoundland occurred primarily in St. John's, but men were pressed all over the English Shore. For instance, HMS *Bonetta* took nine at Trinity in 1793, HMS *Shark* entered ten at Fogo in 1795, the *Camilla* recruited nineteen at Placentia in 1803, HMS *Rosamond* picked up a few in Cape Broyle in 1813, while HMS *Hazard* pressed twelve at Ferryland the same year. Even the North American squadron, stationed in Nova Scotia, took advantage of Newfoundland's reputation as a nursery for seamen and sent warships there to recruit. In October 1794, when Lawry was pressing men in St. John's, HMS *Thisbe* set up shop in Trepassy. Naval officers carried handbills to a host of south Avalon villages advertising for volunteers, including St. Mary's, Placentia, Fermeuse, Renewes, Aquaforte, and Ferryland. *Thisbe* managed to carry away 42 recruits in a single fortnight, predominantly Irish fishing servants. While the Admiralty failed to provide its governors and captains in Newfoundland with specific impressment regu-

lations, it still understood that the cod fishery was a valuable source of manpower. During the American Revolutionary War it repeatedly ordered the Newfoundland squadron to replenish its complements there, and commanded successive governors to enter as many supernumeraries as possible once the fishing season was over, to distribute amongst the fleet. In 1777, Governor John Montague claimed that he could enter 300 to 400 men in one year, assuming that he could offer the same bounty advertised in Britain. In 1803, the Admiralty told Governor James Gambier that it had no men available for HMS *Falcon*, and that she would have to sail for Newfoundland short-handed and complete her complement there. Warships on the Newfoundland station were on the lookout for men wherever they sailed, including cruises on the Grand Banks as well as reconnaissance missions to neighbouring colonies. HMS *Crescent* was on a cruise in 1813 when she pressed six men from the merchantmen *Martha*, *Two Brothers*, and *Vulture*, and in the same year HMS *Dryad* entered 24 men in western Newfoundland, the Strait of Belle Isle, and on the Labrador coast. For various reasons, several warships made the short trip to Nova Scotia each year. During one visit in 1795 the *Bonetta* took six men at Halifax, while the *Shark* picked up a sailor at the Sydney coal mines in 1797.¹⁷

The voyage back to Europe was the most dangerous time for impressment. For instance, the *Mercury* took at least a dozen men from the Newfoundland convoy in 1797, while HMS *Brilliant* entered 25 before making a British landfall in 1799. The Lester brothers saw this firsthand, since press gangs and naval cutters laid in wait for the Newfoundland fleet. The *Betsy* returned from St. John's in 1793 to have "all her Men pressed," while a rival fish merchant, John Slade, experienced the same hardship in 1770 when *Jano* returned from Newfoundland and saw her crew conscripted. West Countrymen regularly jumped ship to escape press gangs, and on more than one occasion they violently resisted them, especially in Poole. Merchants viewed press gangs more pragmatically. The Lesters saw them as occupational hazards, and accepted that they were bound to lose a few men during the fishing season. Benjamin Lester kept on good terms with the local regulating captain. He even dined with press gangs on several occasions, welcoming one into his Poole home in 1787. Ten years later he hired a press gang to repair and load one of his vessels, perhaps because of a labour shortage.

Fishermen were not safe from impressment anywhere in the North Atlantic world. The Lesters received word in 1800 that the *Lion*, one of their fishing ships, had arrived safely in Leghorn [Livorno] and that its cargo was selling well. The master was directed to return to Newfoundland, but "all his English men" were pressed there. It is unclear how or when the *Lion* escaped from the Mediterranean. Portuguese markets were also open to British shipping, and the Newfoundland squadron conscripted men there before returning to Spithead, Portsmouth, and Plymouth. For instance, HMS *Aurora* entered two men at Lisbon in 1803 and *Camilla* took four there in 1804. Similarly, HMS *Latona* escorted fishing and sack

ships to Portugal in 1797, where she recruited two men at Lisbon, three at Fayal, and another in the Tagus River.¹⁸

Press gangs were constrained in a number of ways. In addition to the Sixth of Anne and Palliser's Act, the Royal Navy was guided by a protection system wherever it sailed. An assortment of statutes protected masters and chief mates from the press, in merchantmen of 50 tons burden. Apprentices were exempt in their first three years at sea and landsmen during their first two years. Generally, seamen on either side of the ages of 18 and 55 were protected, as were foreigners, and seafarers in other industries, such as the Greenland whale fishery and England's northeast coal trade. On the other hand, the Newfoundland cod trade was never protected for significant periods of time, because it was simply regarded as too valuable a source of manpower.

The Navy also faced internal restrictions from the Admiralty, which granted protections to privateer crews, transport vessels, dockyard workers, and a range of ships and sailors in government service. Of course, none of these protections mattered unless a seaman was carrying his 'papers' when confronted by a press gang. For instance, when Joseph Cain, a young Dorset apprentice, was shipped to Newfoundland in 1805, not only was he armed with an apprenticeship indenture but also a protection certificate.

The Royal Navy followed domestic laws and regulations as well. The most important were the St. John's port orders, passed down from one governor to the next during the Napoleonic Wars. The only extant copy dates from the administration of John Holloway, governor from 1807 to 1809. They originated as customary guidelines that were later institutionalized as formal naval procedures. Naval guard boats patrolled St. John's harbour day and night, inspecting arrivals and departures, except for Newfoundland-based fishing craft. For instance, on 30 October 1794 the *Bonetta* "Answered the Signal to take the guard," and was relieved the next day by a guard boat from the *Amphion*. One of the patrol's duties was to keep an eye out for naval deserters. The Navy also used impressment as a form of punishment for civilians who harboured deserters; masters of merchant ships and fishing vessels could be fined £50 and £20 respectively, while planters were fined £10 per deserter and had an equal number of their servants pressed. In September 1811, for instance, F.W. Aylmer, captain of HMS *Narcissus*, conscripted five fishermen for this offence at St. Julien's on the northeast coast. Their employer, a planter, was charged with harbouring deserters from the *Narcissus*. Because he lost his entire shore crew in the bargain, at the height of the drying season, Aylmer was ordered to relinquish three of the recruits.¹⁹

Commanders respected customs too, especially the seasonal rhythms of Newfoundland's fishing economy. Deep-sea mariners were fair game all year long, and dozens were pressed from incoming vessels during the spring and summer months, particularly in St. John's harbour. Fishermen, on the other hand, as well as drying crews and sack shipmen, were protected from the press until September and October, to safeguard labour demands and financial commitments during the fishing season. In 1800 the Admiralty received a memorial from St. John's merchants com-

plaining that naval captains were pressing men during the fishing season, and that business suffered as a consequence. Governor Charles Morice Pole ordered the Newfoundland squadron to leave fishermen alone. In September 1798, the *Mercury* pressed James Kenny, but was forced to discharge him a few weeks later because “his ship [was] being employed as a Banker.” Similarly, in July 1805, HMS *Rattler* entered three supernumeraries in St. John’s, but all of them were discharged when “Claimed by the Fishery.”

Contracts expired in Newfoundland in early autumn, providing an ideal opportunity for the Navy to round up mariners without annoying merchant employers. Boatloads of men from all over the English Shore flocked to St. John’s, looking for winter employment or passages back to Britain, perhaps doubling the population for a couple of weeks. They were easy pickings for the press gangs — and for the army. In 1805, Governor Erasmus Gower allowed Major General Thomas Skinner of the British army to beat recruitment drums as early as 10 October, even though the fishing season had not ended. But he also followed his predecessor, James Gambier, in protecting trading vessels from the press, and formally prohibiting the conscription of mariners and fishermen without the consent of their employers. Benjamin Lester informed Gower that in Trinity and Bonavista bays, fishing contracts were settled on 20 October, and recruitment for the armed forces began only five days later. Thus the Navy had a small window in which to press fishermen in Newfoundland, perhaps only a few weeks, between the termination of shipping papers in October and the embarkation of British and European convoys in November.

Finally, naval captains released men who had been advanced credit in the cod and seal fisheries, and as we saw in the Lawry case, those recruits with existing contracts. The primary difference between impressment in Newfoundland and impressment in colonies such as Nova Scotia or Massachusetts was government procedure and chain of command. Newfoundland did not possess a civil governor, executive council, or house of assembly. In Nova Scotia, for example, the admiral submitted a formal request to the governor, before he could press sailors on shore. The governor consulted with the executive council on matters of precedence and the law, time and quota restrictions, and perhaps the social volatility of the populace. Some of these requests were denied. A similar chain of command did not exist in Newfoundland, where the admiral was also the governor, and he personally decided on impressment procedure. Seen in this light, it should be no surprise that Wallace was so confident about the legality of press gangs in Newfoundland in 1794.²⁰

IV

Word of the attack on Lawry and his party spread quickly in St. John’s. According to Aaron Thomas, it ignited a “great noise” and sent shockwaves through the mercantile establishment. Lawry passed away at approximately 1:30 a.m. on Sunday,

26 October, and was “Discharged Dead” from the *Boston*’s muster book with the inscription “murdered at St. John’s” next to his name. Wallace was aboard the flagship, HMS *Monarch*, preparing to put a convoy to sea when he heard the news. Enraged, he sent word to D’Ewes Coke, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, that he was coming ashore at 8 a.m. the following morning to investigate and expected his “attendance with the Constables and the whole force of the Civil Power.” In the meantime Wallace targeted the murderers. About 10 p.m. that night he signalled to the squadron’s warships to man and arm their boats with marines, which rowed ashore immediately. Naval parties from the *Boston*, *Monarch*, *Bonetta*, and HMS *Lutine* stormed through St. John’s, but met with little success. The streets were eerily quiet, and the “mob” that only a short time before had pounced with “Savage ferocity” was nowhere to be found. The next morning Wallace met with the Chief Justice, agreeing to coordinate naval and civilian search parties to canvass the town and look for suspects. With magistrates and constables at their side, marines detained about 100 fishermen and shoremen; the *Boston*’s muster book alone identifies 33 of them, listed as supernumeraries who were “Prest to find out the murderers of Lt. Lawry.” This description does not say much about the suspects, however, since fishing servants were the norm on the English Shore, and “shoremen” resonates with the hundreds of stevedores and drying crews employed in Newfoundland. Most of the suspects were imprisoned for the night aboard the warships, but the commodore isolated some individuals and sent them directly to the St. John’s jail.²¹

The next morning Wallace interrogated the suspects aboard the *Monarch*. They were not forthcoming, and his frame of mind was not improved by the weather, since the season’s first snowfall came in the middle of the investigation. Wallace wanted to settle the case quickly and put the squadron to sea before the weather worsened. Growing increasingly frustrated, he lashed out at the suspects, demanding to know who “gave the deadly blows” and threatening to “hang them instantly at the Yard Arm if they did not disclose and inform who the Murderers were.” An Irish suspect, learning that “his own Neck was in danger,” turned King’s Evidence and identified three ringleaders in the homicide. A grand jury was impaneled early in the week, and magistrates arrested two of the three suspects, Garrett Farrell and Richard Power; the third suspect, William Burrows, remained at large. Wallace also requested a written statement from Morris describing the activities of the *Boston*’s press gang. This narrative was received on Tuesday, 28 October, compiled from eyewitness statements from members of Lawry’s boat crew. The captain told the story both carefully and assertively, having “particular satisfaction in so doing as I am confident I can vindicate [Lawry] of any rash or imprudent conduct ... and I flatter my self [that] my Conduct throughout the whole will meet [your] approbation.”²²

Farrell and Power were charged with murder and tried and convicted in the Supreme Court on Tuesday and Wednesday, 28 and 29 October. Coke was the judge,

but a panel of local jurors ultimately sealed the defendants' fate. The next day, 30 October, Coke condemned Farrell and Power to death. Wallace in turn ordered the sheriff to execute them on Friday afternoon, 31 October.

Aaron Thomas made some interesting observations on the trial. He thought the people in the crowd were, "in the Eye of the Law, Guilty of *Murder*." The conscripted fishermen had agreed to enter peacefully, had claimed a bounty, and Lawry went ashore with them in both a civil and military capacity. Wallace was fortunate the trial took place in Newfoundland, for if the "transaction [had] happened in England a great scope offer'd itself for the pleading of Counsel," and the case might well have deteriorated into a political debate on impressment and the liberty of freeborn Britons. Thomas thought that the verdict might have been contested, perhaps even overturned, if appealed to a British court. In particular, the jury was in the wrong for striking out Wallace's conduct from the court's evidence, particularly his threat to hang the suspects from the *Monarch's* yardarm. Wallace disagreed. Writing to the Admiralty in November, back in Portsmouth, the governor did not even hint at irregular conduct. On the contrary, he argued that the accused had received a "fair and Candid Trial," a civilian jury of their peers had found them guilty on clear evidence, and they suffered the appropriate punishment for capital offenders.²³

Opposition to impressment was gaining momentum in Britain in the late eighteenth century. There had always been protests, especially in large maritime ports, but from the 1770s popular radicals and constitutional reformers took up the cause on the national stage, and began to take naval officers to court. In St. John's, however, the crowd was found guilty of murdering a commissioned officer of the Royal Navy, and under these circumstances, Farrell and Power would have been executed in most places in the British Atlantic world. Wallace informed the Admiralty that this was a particularly heinous crime, since it was both premeditated and unnecessary. Lawry escorted the fishermen ashore to collect their wages, and the press gang did not provoke the onlookers. On the contrary, if the crowd's objective was to rescue the two fishermen, "they had gained their Object before they [even] began the assault" on Lawry.²⁴

In the midst of the trial, the grand jury sent an urgent letter to Chief Justice Coke, expressing concern that Wallace was putting the squadron to sea. It was imperative that the governor should remain in Newfoundland until the trial was over. In "consequence of the Riot," the grand jury pleaded, "great disquiet and alarm have been experienced by the Inhabitants, so as to prevent the regular Business of the Place [from] being carried on, and also to stop the intercourse with the out Ports." In the absence of the Navy, the military presence was not sufficient to deal with a rescue attempt. Moreover, Farrell and Power were likely to be convicted of murder, and the convicts could not "suffer for the atrocious deed" until Wallace returned the following summer, since governors were required to be present for executions. Allowing the condemned to bide their time in a weakly fortified prison over the winter

was tantamount to inviting another popular disturbance. The grand jury concluded that the “disagreeable ferment raised in the town [will not] entirely subside until the said investigation is brought to issue, [so] we therefore beg leave to request you would make known to his Excellency, how much in our opinion his stay here a few days longer may be instrumental to the reestablishment of good order.” The grand jurors were mostly propertied businessmen, merchants with significant capital in the Newfoundland trade, who stood to lose if order was not restored. Some were agents of West Country mercantile houses, such as John Congdon and John Codner, while others were successful traders in their own right, such as Alexander Cormack, William Underhay, John Rendell, William Dixon, and John Job. Despite their judicial duties, these men had a personal interest in settling the case quickly. Wallace agreed to stay, and turned his attention to the third suspect, William Burrows. He offered a reward of £50 for information that led to his arrest. This did not work, so Wallace tried again, this time promising a pardon. Eyewitnesses not physically involved in the murder would be forgiven if they identified the guilty parties. The offer was good for three months, but again no one stepped forward. In the end, Burrows was never brought to justice, and there is no evidence that anyone else was charged with this crime.²⁵

Lawry’s murder has traditionally been cast as an Irish story, but we actually know very little about the faces in this crowd. Evidence for Irish participation comes exclusively from the diary of Aaron Thomas, who did not like Irishmen and was perhaps not even a reliable source, since he was not an eyewitness to the murder. He nonetheless described the crowd as “a number of Irishman [*sic*].” Farrell and Power, the two men found guilty by the Supreme Court, were both Irish and Roman Catholic. William Burrows, the third suspect, had an Irish surname but there is no direct evidence that he was Irish. The final reference to Irish involvement comes from Thomas’s commentary on the interrogation aboard the *Monarch*: “an Irishman who was the principal, when he found his own Neck was in danger, turn’d King’s Evidence.” The frightened seafarer was likely a principal suspect in the governor’s investigation, not a principal actor in the protest. He may not have been a member of the crowd at all. There probably were Irish elements in the crowd for the simple reason that Irish-Newfoundlanders dominated St. John’s at this time. Some of the pressed men were Irish and this may have factored into the attack. The *Boston*’s muster provides a fragmented picture of recruitment, but it does identify six of the men who volunteered for the bounty, although not the two fishermen Lawry escorted into town. Three of them were Irish, including William Aiken, Timothy Kough, and Patrick Fowlor, while a fourth recruit, Thomas Richards, hailed from Shropshire. The origins of the other two remain a puzzle. At the same time, it is telling that Wallace, Morris, Coke, and the grand jury never once mentioned ethnicity in this case — not of the pressed men, the crowd, the suspects, or Farrell, Power, and Burrows, who were identified by name. Had ethnic and religious cleavages caused the riot, Wallace would have reported this to the govern-

ment. He did not, and neither did James Louis O'Donel, the Roman Catholic bishop, mention the homicide in his correspondence. This is telling because O'Donel became personally involved in an uprising in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment in 1800 that did have Irish connections. Put simply, the murder of Lieutenant Lawry was not seen as an Irish crime in 1794.²⁶

V

The sheriff carried out his orders on Friday, 31 October, hanging Farrell and Power by the neck until they were dead. The executions took place on the barrens near Fort Townshend, the military headquarters and the summer residence of the naval governor. Located on a steep incline overlooking St. John's, the bastion commanded the attention of the commercial and domestic districts. This is where executions usually took place. They were publicly orchestrated events designed to achieve maximum exposure to the community, particularly in volatile situations. To this end, the sheriff escorted prisoners to the gallows in a procession, always between 10 a.m. and noon, to ensure that as many people as possible witnessed some part of the event. Soldiers protected the procession and made a barrier between the crowd and the scaffold. Clergy were present at most hangings, and those sentenced to death forfeited their bodies as well as their lives, and were denied a Christian burial. Hangings were political as well as legal events: they were an expression of the raw power of the state that utilized the terror of the gallows to diminish threats of social unrest.

At 8 a.m. Wallace hoisted a flag signalling to the *Boston* and other warships that they should "man and arm" their boats with marines. Two hours later the *Monarch's* contingent was in place, and the *Bonetta's* marines were standing to attention, acting as a guard for the criminals' procession. Farrell and Power were Roman Catholics and attended to by a priest in the last minutes of their lives.²⁷

Thomas, an attentive onlooker in the scaffold crowd, adds some details on the hangman and the convicts. Regarding the former, an "Executioner is so detested in this Country that were he known he would entail disgrace on his posterity." The executioner was in disguise, wearing a "Wigg made of Black Sheep's Wool which cover'd his head and shoulders, he had a Mask on, and was cover'd with a large long Cloake." Thomas then looked at the convicts: "The Two Culprits walked from the Gaol to the fatal spot. Each wore on his head a kind of Bonnett or Turban made of fine Linnen, which contained Three or Four yards at least."

Although it has been suggested that Farrell and Power were imprisoned on Signal Hill, it is more likely that the gaol was a warship moored in the harbour. Farrell and Power would have been rowed to the King's Wharf and paraded through the streets and up the steep incline to Fort Townshend. Hangings were not common in St. John's, but few people could have avoided these public spectacles completely,

whether civilians or sailors from a British man-of-war. At the same time, we know little about the cultural significance of such events, and nothing at all about the dynamics and motives of execution crowds. There is no evidence that hangings became popular carnivals and critiques of state authority, as they sometimes did in Britain.²⁸

Following the executions, Farrell and Power were cut down from the gallows and delivered to the surgeons for dissection and anatomization, a final act of punishment and disrespect. Surgeons required cadavers for medical experimentation and teaching purposes, and rather than “savage retribution,” hangings and dissections were commonplace in British legal culture. In 1752, the House of Commons passed the “Murder Act,” making dissection and anatomization mandatory post-mortem punishments for capital offenders. At the same time, judges like Coke still possessed some discretion: they could order corpses to be hung in chains rather than sending them to surgeons. That this sometimes occurred is illustrated by an eighteenth-century painting of St. John’s. In the background is “Gibbet Hill,” towering over the port so that all could see the chained corpses of serious criminals. The gibbet was situated below Signal Hill, and while it was removed in 1796 to make room for a military battery, Gibbet Hill remains a fixture in local nomenclature to this day. The government’s use of dissection and anatomization was similar to the terror employed by metropolitan and colonial governments, which publicly executed pirates to send a message to other freebooters if they dared come ashore. Marauders rotted in chains for months near the coastal approaches of major ports. Gibbeted corpses were believed to deter crime and terrify spectators into obedience throughout the British Empire.²⁹

Lawry’s funeral was also a grand spectacle designed to reinforce the authority of the naval government. On the day he died the *Boston*’s carpenters immediately made a coffin. Two days later, on the afternoon of 28 October, Lawry was buried with military honours. The coffin was moved ashore from the *Boston* in the same cutter which Lawry had used to take the pressed sailors into town, or as Thomas put it, “the same Boat in which he went to lose his life.” The cutter rowed slowly toward the King’s Wharf, escorted by similar craft from the squadron’s flagship, the *Monarch*, as well as the *Amphion*, *Pluto*, *Bonetta*, and *Lutine*, with two additional boats from the *Boston*. This symbolic flotilla carried every officer on the Newfoundland station. It took a “circuitous route in the Harbor and moved in a slow and solemn manner,” to lengthen the ceremony and dramatize its significance. Lawry’s boat reached the docks last, where marines from the different warships and three companies of military volunteers waited. They carried the coffin to the Church of England cemetery in a “great funeral parade, attended by all the Captains of the Squadron and the Principal Officers, several Gentlemen of the Town, all the Volunteers, and all the Officers and Troops stationed” in Newfoundland. Soldiers were in attendance, but Thomas’s narrative suggests that they played a minor role. Lawry’s hat, sword, and dirk were placed on top of the coffin.

Given the trial, the executions, and the funeral, few would have downplayed the seriousness of the crime or doubted the government's resolve to use all its resources to prevent sedition. When Governor Wallace described Lawry's death to the Admiralty about a month later, he concluded with a hint of strategic optimism: although the episode was violent and tragic, it "may probably in its consequences have a good effect." He hoped the theatre of state authority which he had orchestrated would subdue the town and prevent impressment disturbances in the future.³⁰

VI

Wallace returned to England in late November to find a letter informing him that the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty had been briefed on Lawry's murder, and were "much concerned at the Melancholly Event." This was the only time that the Admiralty commented on the homicide. It did not revise its instructions to future governors relating to manning policy, and the changes that did take place in Newfoundland during the Napoleonic Wars occurred on the ground, without metropolitan guidance.

The Newfoundland squadron continued to use press gangs. A year later, in October 1795, Wallace was petitioned by 40 merchants and ship owners in St. John's, complaining that a "hot press" was ravaging local trade: fishing vessels were too afraid of the press to join convoys assembling in St. John's, coasting schooners stayed away, and the fishing economy would be severely depressed unless the governor reined in the press gangs. The merchants did not contest the legality of impressment in Newfoundland; they understood that this was a maritime dependency in wartime, and they knew only too well that the Navy safeguarded their business interests. Wallace responded curtly, claiming ignorance of the press and requesting more details. The merchants left the issue alone. This was not the first mention of a "hot press" in St. John's, for Morris had asked Sawyer the year before whether the *Boston's* press gang would undermine a "general press."³¹

Press gangs were an occupational hazard in Newfoundland throughout the Napoleonic Wars. They were concentrated in St. John's because the naval squadron was based there, and recruitment increased over time, especially when danger loomed of a maritime conflict with the United States. Aggrieved family members and merchant employers, praying for the discharge of sons and servants from the Navy, frequently petitioned John Thomas Duckworth, governor from 1810 to 1812. He handled individual cases with discretion and foresight, sometimes retaining locally conscripted seafarers, while liberating other mariners. Duckworth sprinkled acts of mercy and paternalism on top of the manpower imperatives of the Navy. This strategy legitimized the legal-customary impressment parameters in the popular mind without compromising the naval government's search for sailors. In February 1814, the Admiralty awarded Newman and Company the privilege of flying a

“white ensign” over its establishments in Newfoundland. This recognized the services of about twenty Irish fishing servants, conscripted at sea by Captain Philip Broke of HMS *Shannon*, while en route to Newfoundland. The youngsters fought so bravely in the *Shannon*’s celebrated battle with the American frigate USS *Chesapeake* in 1813, that the Admiralty protected Newman and Company from the press for the duration of the war. Press gangs continued to operate in Newfoundland until 1815. In the end, Lawry’s murder diminished neither the scale nor the long-term viability of impressment in Newfoundland.³²

Yet this is not the whole story. In August 1811, a fifteen-year-old apprentice named John Grigg was on shore leave in St. John’s. He was stretching his legs after the *Adonis*’s voyage from London. Grigg did not have his protection certificate with him, and was promptly snatched up by HMS *Antelope*. Duckworth eventually agreed to discharge him, but the significance of this incident is that Grigg is the only seafarer known to have been pressed on shore in Newfoundland after Lawry was attacked in 1794.³³ This does not mean that it never happened, but it is clear that press gangs were rarely on shore after 1794. But if press gangs also became more common, where and how did they actually operate?

When Newman and Company asked Wallace to put a stop to a hot press in 1795, the firm was not concerned with stragglers on the streets, but with conscription from incoming vessels. According to port orders, warships manned a guard boat that patrolled the harbour, inspecting arrivals and departures, and keeping an eye out for naval deserters. These boats also carried two extra men to serve *in lieu* of seafarers pressed from inward bound merchantmen. Guard boats were floating press gangs. Manpower quotas were fixed in customary law: no more than one man in five could be pressed from a single vessel, and each merchantman was subject to impressment just once per voyage. Recruits were interrogated aboard the flagship before they could be assigned to a man-of-war. On 4 August 1814, the Scottish brig *Swiftsure* had just arrived in St. John’s when members of a press boat from HMS *Sabine* climbed over her gunwales. Thirteen of the crew jumped into the sea to escape, including Adam Ross, the second mate, who drowned. This case captures the St. John’s guard boats in action, deceptively changing into press gangs to conscript bewildered sailors. Men must have been nervous when approaching St. John’s. How could a jack tar know, even at the moment of boarding, if a guard boat was on regular duty or if it came to press him into the Navy? For instance, Duckworth received a complaint from John Duniam, master of the brig *Devonshire*, chartered to deliver fish and oil to Portugal. As she navigated through the Narrows a press boat from HMS *Mackerel* quickly took one of Duniam’s sailors. In September 1810, Michael Swim, a Nova Scotia farmer, complained that his son, working on the *Concord*, a coasting schooner on a summer voyage to Newfoundland, had been conscripted by HMS *Jamaica*. Similarly, in October 1810, Thomas Brenock, skipper of the *Peggy* of Liverpool, lamented that the vessel’s mate, John Dunigan, had been pressed upon



ROYAL NAVY IN ST. JOHN'S HARBOUR

“Royal Navy in St. John’s Harbour,” undated, likely early nineteenth century. British warships were painted black and yellow, and when their gunports opened for battle they had a chess-board pattern. Joseph R. Smallwood, ed., The Book of Newfoundland (St. John’s: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1975), Vol. 6, 117.

arrival and detained aboard the *Antelope*. The officer left his protection certificate in Waterford, where the *Peggy* had provisioned for the Atlantic crossing.³⁴

Back in 1794, Wallace instructed Morris that sending press gangs into town was both a legal and standard procedure, while Sawyer pointed out that other warships had dispatched manning parties into St. John’s in the past few weeks. If press gangs were subsequently driven off the land and relegated to the water, was the move spearheaded internally by the Royal Navy, or did colonial officials force the government’s hand? Moreover, was there a direct correlation between Lawry’s murder and this change in manning policy? The first question has been answered already, at least partially: during the Napoleonic Wars, press gangs stalked their prey with boats and oars, not through foot races and domicile searches. Newfoundland’s floating legal system was reformed in the early 1790s, and from that point on civilian magistrates sat alongside naval officers as surrogate judges. Therefore, it is no surprise that justices of the peace increasingly flexed their authoritative muscle. At the same time, however, the governor was still the commodore, and he alone made executive decisions on impressment. Recruitment policy filtered through the Navy.

If press gangs were relegated to the water, they were banished there with the approval of the governor of Newfoundland. On the other hand, magistrates did take a stand against press gangs, and the latter's retreat to guard boats was linked directly to the fear of violence in St. John's.³⁵

Frustrated by desertion, in 1813 William Pryce Cumby, captain of HMS *Hyperion*, proclaimed "the notorious fact, that the Crime of Desertion from His Majesty's Ships is practiced to a greater extent in this Island than in any part of the World besides." Cumby told Governor Richard Keats that he followed the port orders, but had failed to replenish the *Hyperion's* numbers by pressing from incoming vessels. Cumby lashed out at Thomas Coote, the Chief Magistrate in St. John's, stressing the importance of having warships fully manned during the War of 1812. Failing to press afloat, Cumby demanded the magistracy assist him in pressing on land. Coote politely informed the captain that although he wanted to assist the Navy, particularly in rounding up deserters, he could "by no means sanction the landing of parties from the King's Ships for the purpose of Impressment on shore, well knowing, that such a measure would inevitably lead to the most serious and dangerous consequences." While Cumby was disappointed with the response — having "deeply to lament the acknowledged incompetency of the Civil Power in this Island" — he assured Coote that press gangs would not venture into town without the backing of the justices of the peace. Whether territoriality led Coote to withhold press warrants, or perhaps fear of social discord, it mattered not to Cumby for the result was the same: Newfoundlanders considered themselves immune from impressment, a "universal practice in every other part of His Majesty's Dominions."³⁶

Cumby may not have pushed too far because he made the request in April, well outside the seasonal impressment parameters in Newfoundland. It is more likely, however, that this case symbolizes a larger trend at work in St. John's. If press gangs were confined to the water, something Coote confirms, how could he know that if sent ashore they would "inevitably lead to the most serious and dangerous consequences"? He had not witnessed a press gang riot in Newfoundland, for the simple reason that there were none after Lawry's murder. While Coote may not have been in St. John's when Lawry was murdered, he was a law officer there throughout the Napoleonic Wars, appearing as a surrogate judge in the Supreme Court. In 1810 he was the Chief Magistrate in St. John's as well as the Supreme Surrogate of Newfoundland, placing Coote at the apex of the Royal Navy's legal system, ahead of naval captains as well as justices of the peace. Next to the Chief Justice he was the most powerful law officer on the island. One of Keats's final acts as governor was to sing Coote's praises to the Secretary of State, describing his "Meritorious Services" and the "ability, Integrity, and Moderation that has procured him my Approbation, and the Confidence and respect of the Inhabitants at large." Coote enjoyed Keats's full trust and it was his job to gauge the social temperature of St. John's, drawing on past experience to protect its citizens. It took considerable fortitude to stand up to a senior British naval officer, which makes it

unlikely that he would have done so without historical precedent and genuine concern.

Coote was in fact no stranger to press gangs. In 1806 a guard boat from the *Camilla* boarded the merchantman *Euphemia* in St. John's harbour, but no sooner had the master realized that it was there to press sailors than he rallied his crew to resistance, beating a midshipman unconscious in the process. Coote was Clerk of Arraigns in the Supreme Court at the time, and he instigated the prosecution against the master for resisting the *Camilla*'s press gang.

In the end, Cumby's objections fell on deaf ears: Keats did not overturn Coote's resolution, he accepted the magistrate's authority, and press gangs did not set foot in town. There were not many popular disturbances in St. John's in this period, but Coote knew firsthand that press gangs could inflame the population. Although neither Cumby, Coote, nor Keats mentioned the *Boston* tragedy specifically in 1813, that does not mean they were not thinking about it. It was less than a generation old, and it is difficult to imagine such a violent and high-profile case disappearing that quickly from the region's collective memory. Put simply, the murder of Lieutenant Lawry probably informed Coote's decision to bar press gangs from shore in 1813, and was the primary reason for the restriction of impressment to St. John's harbour during the Napoleonic Wars.³⁷

VII

According to the Victorian historian Charles Pedley, the murder of Lieutenant Lawry was a disturbing relic of Newfoundland's heritage:

Here was an instance of swift retribution. The criminals had been full of lusty life and riotous liberty on the Saturday evening. On the Tuesday they stood in peril before the tribunal of justice: on the Wednesday they heard the sentences of death passed on them; on the Friday they were dangling lifeless from the gallows, and on Saturday — all within a week, they had probably become the mangled offensive material of the dissecting room.³⁸

Pedley was an English Congregationalist minister who took up residence in St. John's with the Colonial Missionary Society. Writing in the late 1850s, his book was a product of its time, particularly the political, constitutional, and sectarian turmoil that surrounded the granting of responsible government to Newfoundland in 1855. Pedley was sensitive to Newfoundland's ethnic and religious divisions, and one of his objectives was to chronicle its early history to ascertain how the colony had arrived in its current perilous condition. This may explain his sympathy for the Irish convicts. In this version of events, Farrell and Power are victims, and for some historians even heroes and martyrs, since they died as a result of a protest against

the moral and social injustice of impressment. These were Irishmen rescuing locally conscripted seafarers, fighting back against the long intrusive arm of Britain's fiscal-military state. This type of interpretation is not unique to Newfoundland. Press gangs were detested at the time and continue to be a lightning rod for scholarly criticism. What is unique is the perception that press gangs were illegal and non-existent. Lawry's murder has consequently been dismissed as a peculiarity, while impressment has largely been omitted from the history of Newfoundland during the Age of Revolution.³⁹

This essay paints a very different picture. The murder of Lieutenant Lawry was a high-profile affair in its day, had significant implications for naval-civilian relations in Newfoundland, and can be used to seriously analyze British naval impressment in the North Atlantic world. It demonstrates that the traditional view of impressment was wrong: press gangs were neither illegal in Newfoundland nor unusual. They had statutory backing and were commonplace throughout the Napoleonic Wars. The Royal Navy worked under a legal-customary framework for manning its ships in Newfoundland, meshed together from an amalgam of imperial statutes, Admiralty law, local regulations, and customary impediments. They were not imposed on Newfoundland by a distant metropolitan government, but rather negotiated informally over time by British naval commanders, local elites, and magistrates. The result was a set of working guidelines that reflected, on the one hand, the pragmatic wartime needs of the Navy, and, on the other, the financial commitments of merchant capital. Since fishing contracts expired in the autumn, the same period in which the Newfoundland squadron assembled overseas convoys, impressment became restricted to that time of the year for men involved in the cod fishery. This was a well-timed compromise. The naval government respected the seasonal contours of the economy and agreed not to pillage the island's labour market; in return, it could press seafarers and fishermen without raising the ire of merchant employers. The migration of a large number of men to St. John's in the autumn, from the outports, gave the men-of-war some easy pickings. Confining naval conscription temporally secured the legitimization of Newfoundland's colonial-mercantile establishment.

In October 1794, Lieutenant Richard Lawry of HMS *Boston* led a press gang ashore in St. John's, which culminated the next day in a brutal attack on his boat's crew by a local crowd. Armed with sticks, the crowd battered the naval officer to death in the streets, and rescued two recently impressed fishermen. Lawry's murder triggered both short and long-term developments in Newfoundland. Governor Wallace spearheaded a manhunt, two suspects were tried and convicted by the Supreme Court, and they were hanged in a public ceremony near Fort Townshend. Demonstrations of state authority were orchestrated at every turn. Lawry's funeral was a theatrical event designed to reinforce the authority of the Navy. There were no future demonstrations against the press in Newfoundland, and naval-civilian relations operated relatively smoothly there to 1815. Although the murder has been

linked to allegations of Irish disloyalty to the British Crown, both naval and colonial authorities did not see it as an ethnic or religious crime in 1794. Nor did the homicide frighten the Navy away from deploying press gangs in St. John's; naval recruitment actually increased over time, reaching its peak during the War of 1812. On the other hand, Lawry's murder first diminished tolerance of press gangs, and then precipitated significant manning reforms. In the early nineteenth century impressment was relegated to guard boats that boarded incoming merchantmen. Press gangs were no longer welcome on shore. It was the fear of more violence that drove them into St. John's harbour. Although governors of Newfoundland continued to make executive decisions on impressment, justices of the peace like Thomas Coote now enjoyed the discretion to refuse press warrants on land. This was a remarkable turn-around from 1794, when Wallace dispatched press gangs into town without a second thought.

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Notes

¹Morris to Stephens, 10 March 1794, The National Archives [TNA], ADM [Admiralty Papers] 1/2128, Captains Letters, Surname 'M', 1794, J.N. Morris, n.p.; Muster Book of HMS *Boston*, ADM 36/11913; Pay Book of HMS *Boston*, ADM 35/257. When Lawry entered the *Boston* on 19 March 1794 he was senior to its third lieutenant, John Macredie, meaning that this officer was not affected by the exchange. Behind Morris were Kerr and Lawry, who as first and second lieutenants, were second and third in the *Boston's* command structure. Roger Knight, "Sir Philip Stephens (1723-1809)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB] (Oxford, 2004), Online Ed. [www.oxforddnb.com]. David Syrett and R.L. DiNardo, eds., *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy, 1660-1815* (Aldershot, 1994), 255 & 268. The latter volume incorrectly lists the year of Lawry's death as 1800. Unfortunately, neither the muster book nor the pay book give Lawry's age or place of birth. Kerr received his commission as a lieutenant in 1790. Lawry first appeared in the record as a lieutenant in April 1794. *Steel's Navy List* (London, 1794), April, 37.

²Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland, 1699-1832* (Toronto, 2003), and “The Naval State in Newfoundland, 1749-1791,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, New Series, No. 11 (2000), 17-50.

³HMS *Boston* was a member of the *Richmond* class of British warships, dating from 1756. She was built in Rotherhithe in greater London, launched in 1762, and broken up by the Royal Navy in 1811. See David Lyon, *The Sailing Navy List: All the Ships of the Royal Navy — Built, Purchased and Captured — 1688-1860* (London, 1993), 83. Captain’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 51/1146; Captain’s Log of HMS *Amphion*, ADM 51/1153; Jean M. Murray, ed., *The Newfoundland Journal of Aaron Thomas: Able Seaman in H.M.S. Boston* (Don Mills, ON, 1968) [hereafter *Journal of Aaron Thomas*], chs. 9-14; Master’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 52/2793; Master’s Log of HMS *Bonetta*, ADM 52/2870.

⁴Morris to Wallace, 28 October 1794, Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador [PANL], Colonial Secretary’s Letter Book, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 294-295; *Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 178; N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, Volume 2, 1649-1815* (London, 2004), ch. 28.

⁵Morris to Wallace, 28 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 294-295; *Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 178; Wallace to Philip Stephens, 27 November 1794, ADM 1/473, 132-133, Letters from Senior Officers at Newfoundland, 1793-1797; “Port Orders,” undated, PANL, Sir John Thomas Duckworth Collection, MG 204, Part 1, Series A, 247-249; Muster Book of HMS *Boston*, ADM 36/11913; Pay Book of HMS *Boston*, ADM 35/257.

⁶Morris to Wallace, 28 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 294-295; *Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 178; Wallace to Stephens, 27 November 1794, ADM 1/473, 132-133; Captain’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 51/1146; Captain’s Log of HMS *Amphion*, ADM 51/1153; Master’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 52/2793; Lieutenant’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM/L/B/140, National Maritime Museum [NMM], Greenwich, England; Dudley Pope, *Life in Nelson’s Navy* (Annapolis, 1987), 101-102. To situate Noble’s property visually in St. John’s, see John Mannion, “St. John’s,” in R. Cole Harris, ed., *Historical Atlas of Canada, Volume 1, From the Beginning to 1800* (Toronto, 1987), Plate 27. The population and property map for 1795 places “Noble’s Cove” at the upper end of St. John’s harbour. It has been misinterpreted that the ratings’ employer was “Payne Noble,” when “Mr. Payne” was simply the business agent of John Noble. Paul O’Neill, *The Oldest City: The Story of St. John’s, Newfoundland* (St. John’s, 2003), 730; E.R. Seary, *Family Names of the Island of Newfoundland* (St. John’s, 1977), 356.

⁷Morris to Wallace, 28 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 294-295; “Wallace offers Pardon,” 30 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 302; *Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 178; Wallace to Stephens, 27 November 1794, ADM 1/473, 132-133; Captain’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 51/1146; Master’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 52/2793; Master’s Log of HMS *Monarch*, ADM 52/3247; Lieutenant’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM/L/B/140. Thomas was a 24-year-old able seaman from Suffolk, England. Pay Book of HMS *Boston*, ADM 35/257. On the roads, see *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* [ENCNL], s.v. “St. John’s.”

⁸Captain’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 51/1146; Captain’s Log of HMS *Fox*, ADM 51/371; Captain’s Log of HMS *Castor*, ADM 51/1305; Captain’s Log of HMS *Camilla*, ADM 51/1667; Muster Book of HMS *Mercury*, ADM 36/13233.

⁹N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London, 1986), 168, states that press gangs in Britain during the Seven Years War rarely exceeded twelve men. Denver Alexander Brunzman, “The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment

in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World" (PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2004), 23, argues that press gangs in the British Atlantic world, led by one lieutenant and often accompanied by a mate or midshipman, also rarely numbered more than a dozen men. See his Appendix B, "Survey of the Impress Service, 1793-1815," 383-385, from which one can calculate the size of press gangs for all the major towns in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. The average press gang contained about twelve men, in all of these settings. See J.R. Hutchinson, *The Press-Gang: Afloat and Ashore* (London, 1913), ch. 3, for a traditional description of press gangs.

¹⁰This essay does not engage the literature on popular protest to provide a detailed analysis of crowds and mobs. The term riot is used to describe large-scale popular disturbances involving serious physical violence. These crowds usually consisted of twenty or more people. Not all crowds used physical violence, and not all gatherings were large enough to be considered crowds. This working definition excludes many other forms of popular resistance, including several protests against press gangs cited in this essay. Put simply, "riot" distinguishes large-scale, violent protests from smaller and less contentious gatherings. Admiralty and colonial documents suggest that Lawry's murder stemmed from the only press gang "riot" in Newfoundland's history. *Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 52 & 158. Thomas also referred to Newfoundland as "this land of Frost and Fish." Charles Pedley, *The History of Newfoundland: From the Earliest Times to the Year 1860* (London, 1863), 166-168; O'Neill, *Oldest City*, 729-730; Frederick W. Rowe, *A History of Newfoundland and Labrador* (Toronto, 1980), 221; Mike McCarthy, "The Press Gang Murder, St. John's, 1794," *Newfoundland TV Topics*, 13 November 1979, 9, and *The Irish in Newfoundland, 1600-1900: Their Trials, Tribulations and Triumphs* (St. John's, 1999), 82-84; *ENCNL*, s.v. "Conscription and Impressment." Christopher English, "The Official Mind and Popular Protest in a Revolutionary Era: The Case of Newfoundland, 1789-1819," in F. Murray Greenwood and Barry Wright, eds., *Law, Politics, and Security Measures, 1608-1837: Canadian State Trials*, Vol. 1 (Toronto, 1996), 309; Patrick O'Flaherty, *Old Newfoundland: A History to 1843* (St. John's, 1999), 111; Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals*, 213-214, 219-221. Judge Prowse did not discuss Lawry's murder in the text of his book. D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland: From the English, Colonial and Foreign Records* (London, 1895), 654. Gerald S. Graham, "Fisheries and Sea Power," in G.A. Rawlyk, ed., *Historical Essays on the Atlantic Provinces* (Toronto, 1967), 7-16; David J. Starkey, "The West Country-Newfoundland Fishery and the Manning of the Royal Navy," in Robert Higham, ed., *Security and Defence in South-West England before 1800* (Exeter, 1987), 93-101; Keith Matthews, *Lectures on the History of Newfoundland, 1500-1830* (St. John's, 1988), 33; Shannon Ryan, "Fishery to Colony: A Newfoundland Watershed, 1793-1815," *Acadiensis* 12.2 (Spring 1983), 34-52; *ENCNL*, s.v. "Napoleonic Wars"; Fred W. Rowe, "Myths of Newfoundland," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 74.4 (Winter 1979), 9-14, and *ENCNL*, s.v. "History"; Peter E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, 2004).

¹¹Dora Mae Clark, "Impressment of Seamen in the American Colonies," in *Essays in Colonial History: Presented to Charles McLean Andrews by His Students* (Freeport, NY, 1966 reprint), 198-224; Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 25.3 (July 1968), 371-407; Douglas Edward Leach, *Roots of Conflict: British Armed Forces and Colonial Americans, 1677-1763* (Chapel Hill, 1986), ch. 7; Brunsmann, "Evil Necessity," chs. 3-5. North Atlantic press gangs have been largely ignored. See Julian Gwyn, "Poseidon's

Sphere: Early Naval History in Atlantic Canada,” *Acadiensis* 31.1 (Autumn 2001), 152-163. 15 Geo. III, c. 31, s. 19 (1775) (my emphasis). This legislation and governor have been traditionally studied for other reasons. See Jerry Bannister, “Palliser’s Act,” in Gerald Hallowell, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History* (Don Mills, ON, 2004), 472; Sean T. Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay: Merchant-Settler Relations in Newfoundland, 1785-1855* (Toronto, 1995), ch. 5; Olaf Uwe Janzen, “Showing the Flag: Hugh Palliser in Western Newfoundland, 1764,” *Northern Mariner* 3.3 (July 1993), 2-14; William H. Whiteley, “Hugh Palliser,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography [DCB]* (Toronto), Online Ed., [www.biographi.ca/EN/index.html]. W.L. Morton, “Newfoundland in Colonial Policy, 1775-1792” (PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1935), 127 & 132; “W. Pitt, MP, From an Act of Parliament ... From Ministers,” 12 February 1783, TNA, Colonial Office Papers [CO] 5/43, 449; J.P.W. Ehrman and Anthony Smith, “William Pitt,” *ODNB*.

¹²*Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 71-74 & 169 (my emphasis). Christopher English suggests this ban was “always ignored” in Newfoundland. See “Introduction” in English, ed., *Two Islands: Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island: Essays in the History of Canadian Law*, Vol. 9 (Toronto, 2005), 6-7.

¹³*Journal of Aaron Thomas*, xviii. Morris was commissioned as a lieutenant in 1780 and made commander in 1790. He was appointed to the *Boston* in 1793. Morris led HMS *Collossus*, a 74-gun warship that suffered heavy damage in Nelson’s line-of-battle formation at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. He was promoted to the rank of rear admiral during the War of 1812, knighted in 1815, and became a vice admiral in 1819. Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 442; Muster Books of HMS *Boston*, ADM 36/11913-14; Pay Book of HMS *Boston*, ADM 35/257; Muster Books of HMS *Pluto*, ADM 36/13503-04; Morris to Wallace, 28 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 294-295.

¹⁴Muster Book of HMS *Concorde*, ADM 36/13912; Muster Book of HMS *Prometheus*, ADM 37/4751; Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seaman, 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (London, 1968), 196; Peter Kemp, *The British Sailor: A Social History of the Lower Deck* (London, 1970), 165; Daniel A. Baugh, “The Eighteenth Century Navy as a National Institution, 1690-1815,” in J.R. Hill, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy* (Oxford, 1995), 138-139; Michael Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793-1815* (London, 1960), 135-139; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 443.

¹⁵Brunsmann, “Evil Necessity.”

¹⁶Lester-Garland Papers, Dorchester Record Office, Dorset, D/LEG, Diaries of Benjamin and Isaac Lester, 1761-1802. Hereafter cited as Lester Diaries, without reference to original volumes. The author is grateful for a computerized typescript, prepared by Gordon Handcock and supplied to him by Jerry Bannister. Lester Diaries, 9-11 May 1793; Lester Diaries, 16 April 1799; W. Gordon Handcock, *So long as there comes noe women: Origins of English Settlement in Newfoundland* (St. John’s, 1989), 202; Edwards to Stephens, 22 April 1779, ADM 1/471, 332; Edwards to Stephens, 8 December 1779, ADM 1/471, 385-388; Lester Diaries, 4 December 1770; Muster Book of HMS *Concorde*, ADM 36/13910; Muster Book of HMS *Camilla*, ADM 36/16956; Muster Book of HMS *Mercury*, ADM 36/13233.

¹⁷Muster Book of HMS *Castor*, ADM 36/13299; Muster Book of HMS *Bonetta*, ADM 36/11451; Muster Book of HMS *Shark*, ADM 36/13526; Muster Book of HMS *Camilla*, ADM 36/16957; Muster Book of HMS *Rosamond*, ADM 37/4766; Muster Book of HMS *Hazard*, ADM 37/4592; Muster Book of HMS *Crescent*, ADM 37/4254; Muster Book of HMS *Thisbe*, ADM 36/13276; Master’s Log of HMS *Thisbe*, ADM 52/3491; Montague to Stephens, 14

March 1777, ADM 1/471, 92; Montague to Stephens, 24 March 1777, ADM 1/471, 98; William Marsden to Gambier, 16 June 1803, ADM 2/930, 161, Secretary's Letters to Commanders-in-Chief, Newfoundland, 1795-1815; Muster Book of HMS *Dryad*, ADM 37/4258; Muster Book of HMS *Bonetta*, ADM 36/11452; Muster Book of HMS *Crescent*, ADM 37/4253; Muster Book of HMS *Shark*, ADM 36/13526.

¹⁸Muster Book of HMS *Mercury*, ADM 36/13232; Muster Book of HMS *Brilliant*, ADM 36/14614; Lester Diaries, 16 December 1793; Lester Diaries, 29 October 1770; Lester Diaries, 16 November 1770; Lester Diaries, 30 October 1770; Lester Diaries, 29 September 1787; Lester Diaries, 1 April 1797; Lester Diaries, 30 October 1800; Muster Book of HMS *Aurora*, ADM 36/16936; Muster Book of HMS *Camilla*, ADM 36/16958; Muster Book of HMS *Latona*, ADM 36/12324.

¹⁹Peter Kemp, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* (Oxford, 1976), 415-416, 672; Rodger, *Wooden World*, 177; Lloyd, *British Seaman*, 158-160; Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy*, ch. 8; Stephen F. Gradish, *The Manning of the British Navy during the Seven Years War* (London, 1980), ch. 3; Daniel A. Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (New Jersey, 1965), ch. 4; "Joseph Cain's apprenticeship agreement," 9 April 1805, and "Cain's exemption from Impressment," 13 April 1805, PANL, Joseph Cain Collection, MG 241; "Port Orders," MG 204, 247-249; Master's Log of HMS *Bonetta*, ADM 52/2870; Master's Log of HMS *Amphion*, ADM 52/2732; Lewis Amadeus Anspach, *A Summary of the Laws of Commerce and Navigation, Adapted to the present State, Government and Trade of the Island of Newfoundland* (London, 1809), 135-136; Cunningham, Bell, and Company to Duckworth, 5 September 1811, MG 204, Part 1, Series C, 1846-1847; Aylmer to Duckworth, 5 September 1811, MG 204, 1849-1850; Patrick Hine to Duckworth, 7 September 1811, MG 204, 1861-1863; Duckworth Journal, 1810-1811, 5 September 1811, MG 204, Part 1, Series F, 5648-50.

²⁰Evan Nepean to Pole, 20 June 1800, ADM 2/930, 124; Muster Book of HMS *Mercury*, ADM 36/13233; Muster Book of HMS *Rattler*, ADM 36/17175; Gower to Viscount Castlereagh, 25 October 1805, CO 194, vol. 44, 180-181; John Clinch to Joseph Tunsell, 10 October 1805, CO 194, vol. 44, 182; Lester and Company to Gower, 10 October 1805, CO 194, vol. 44, 184-185; Gower to Magistrates of Newfoundland, 15 October 1805, CO 194, vol. 44, 186-187; Gower to Skerrett, 14 October 1805, CO 194, vol. 44, 188; Skerrett to Gower, 15 October 1805, CO 194, vol. 44, 190-191; Gower to Skerrett, 15 October 1805, CO 194, vol. 44, 192-193; Skerrett to Gower, 17 October 1805, CO 194, vol. 44, 194-195; Gower to Skerrett, 17 October 1805, CO 194, vol. 44, 196-197.

²¹*Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 178-179; Captain's Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 51/1146; Jonathan Hill to Coke, 25 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 294; Wallace to Stephens, 27 November 1794, ADM 1/473, 132-133; Master's Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 52/2793; Master's Log of HMS *Lutine*, ADM 52/3159; Master's Log of HMS *Bonetta*, ADM 52/2870; Master's Log of HMS *Monarch*, ADM 52/3247; Muster Book of HMS *Boston*, ADM 36/11913; Pay Book of HMS *Boston*, ADM 35/257; Lieutenant's Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM/L/B/140. On 28 October, John Macredie officially replaced Lawry as the second lieutenant, and George Faulkner was appointed the third lieutenant. Lieutenant's Log of George Faulkner, HMS *Boston*, NMM, ADM/L/B/140. Lawry was not removed from the record until December 1795, *Steel's Navy List* (London, 1795), December. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court records for Newfoundland date from 1795 and do not record this case.

²²*Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 178-180; Wallace to Stephens, 27 November 1794, ADM 1/473, 132-133; Morris to Wallace, 28 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 294-295; Coke to Wallace, 30 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 298; "Wallace offers Reward," 29 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 301. O'Neill, *Oldest City*, 730, asserts without evidence that Farrell and Power were arrested in a tavern on Duckworth Street.

²³32 Geo. III, c. 46 (1792). Although Governor Wallace referred to the tribunal as a Court of Oyer and Terminer, he was mistaken, for that bench had been replaced by the Supreme Court in 1792. Coke correctly identified it as the Supreme Court. Wallace to Sheriff, 30 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 299-300; Coke to Wallace, 30 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 298; Grand Jury to Coke, 29 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 296-297; *Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 178-179; Wallace to Stephens, 27 November 1794, ADM 1/473, 132-133.

²⁴John A. Woods, "The City of London and Impressment, 1776-1777," *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society* 8.11 (1956), 111-127; Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1999), ch. 3, and "Impressment and the Law in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in Norma Landau, ed., *Law, Crime, and English Society, 1666-1830* (Cambridge, 2002), 71-96; Peter King, "War as a Judicial Resource: Press Gangs and Prosecution Rates, 1740-1830," in Landau, ed., *Law, Crime, and English Society*, 97-116; Philip Woodfine, "'Proper Objects of the Press': Naval Impressment and Habeas Corpus in the French Revolutionary Wars," in Keith Dockray and Keith Laybourn, eds., *The Representation and Reality of War: The British Experience* (Stroud, 1999), 39-60; Wallace to Stephens, 27 November 1794, ADM 1/473, 132-133.

²⁵Grand Jury to Coke, 29 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 296-297; Coke to Wallace, 29 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 296; "Wallace offers Reward," 29 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 301; "Wallace offers Pardon," 30 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 302. Grand Jury: Richard Reed, Robert Tremblett, Christopher Graham, Alexander Cormack, James Stokes, Roderick Robertson, William Underhay, John Rendell, Abraham Hingston, Stephen Harvey, William Henley, David Rennie, George Gaden, Robert Boden, Jonathan Bell, John Congdon, Benjamin Bidgood, John Codner, Thomas Kough Jr., John Job, William Jeffery Dixon, J. Williams, and Elias Rowe. Seary, *Family Names*, 93, 99, 104-105, 133, 409, 488; Keith Matthews, *A "Who was Who" of Families engaged in the Fishery and Settlement of Newfoundland, 1660-1840* (St. John's, 1971), 46-54; G.M. Story, "William Eppes Cormack," *DCB*; J.K. Hiller, "Thomas Bulley Job," *DCB*; O'Neill, *Oldest City*; 719-720; *ENCNL*, s.v. "Job Brothers and Company"; *ENCNL*, s.v. "John Job."

²⁶John Mannion, "'Notoriously disaffected to the Government ...': British Allegations of Irish Disloyalty in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland," *Newfoundland Studies* 16.1 (Spring 2000), 1-29, and "Transatlantic Disaffection: Wexford and Newfoundland, 1798-1800," *Journal of the Wexford Historical Society* 17 (1998-1999), 30-60; Morris to Wallace, 28 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 294-295; Grand Jury to Coke, 29 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 296-297; Coke to Wallace, 30 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 298; Wallace to Sheriff, 30 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 299-300; "Wallace offers Reward," 29 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 301; "Wallace offers Pardon," 30 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 302; *Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 178-180; Wallace to Stephens, 27 November 1794, ADM 1/473, 132-133; Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 51/1146; O'Donel to Joseph Octave Plessis, 14 May 1800, in Cyril Byrne, ed., *Gentlemen-Bishops and Faction Fighters: The Letters of Bishops O'Donel, Lambert, Scallan and Other Irish Missionaries* (St. John's, 1984), 160-163; Wallace to Dundas, 30 November 1794, TNA, War Office Papers 1/15, 145-148,

Newfoundland, 1792- 1794; Muster Book of HMS *Boston*, ADM 36/11913; Pay Book of HMS *Boston*, 35/257.

²⁷Wallace to Sheriff, 30 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 298. It has been written that Farrell and Power were hanged “without visible emotion,” although no contemporary document describes the criminals’ disposition. O’Neill, *Oldest City*, 730. Thomas was in the crowd and noted that each convict “wore on his head a kind of Bonnett or Turban made of fine Linnen, which contained Three or Four yards at least,” meaning that Farrell and Power had their faces covered during the executions. *Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 178-180; Bannister, *Rule of the Admirals*, 212-215; Captain’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 51/1146; Master’s Log of HMS *Amphion*, ADM 52/2732; Master’s Log of HMS *Bonetta*, ADM 52/2870; Master’s Log of HMS *Lutine*, ADM 52/3156; Lieutenant’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM/L/B/140.

²⁸*Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 178-180; O’Neill, *Oldest City*, 730; V.A.C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770-1868* (Oxford, 1994).

²⁹Wallace to Sheriff, 30 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 298; J.M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (New Jersey, 1986), 525-530. On “savage retribution,” see McCarthy, *Irish in Newfoundland*, 84. On the picture, see the images prefacing Bannister’s *Rule of the Admirals*, n.p. *ENCNL*, s.v. “Gibbets”; David Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life among the Pirates* (New York, 1997), ch. 12; Robert C. Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates* (Cambridge, MA, 1986); Marcus Rediker, *Villains of all Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston, 2004); Peter Earle, *The Pirate Wars* (London, 2004), esp. ch. 10; Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (New York, 2002), 39; E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London, 1975), 76-77, 228-229; Peter Wood, “Slave Resistance in Colonial South Carolina,” in Alan L. Karras and J.R. McNeill, eds., *Atlantic American Societies: From Columbus through Abolition, 1492-1888* (London, 1992), 158. In “Press Gang Murder,” 9, McCarthy maintains that because the hangman in this case was inexperienced in the art of drawing and quartering, the two corpses were handed to the surgeons by default. In a later work, *Irish in Newfoundland*, 84, McCarthy changes his mind and asserts that the Lawry backlash witnessed the one and only instance of hanging, drawing, and quartering in Newfoundland. Byrne, *Gentlemen-Bishops*, 35; English, “Official Mind,” 309; and O’Neill, *Oldest City*, 555, make the same mistake. This punishment was reserved for celebrated cases of high treason in Britain, falling into disuse after the Jacobite Rebellion in 1745. Byrne and English err in thinking the event took place in 1793.

³⁰*Journal of Aaron Thomas*, 179. Thomas incorrectly states that the funeral took place on Monday. Captain’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 51/1146; Master’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM 52/2793; Master’s Log of HMS *Amphion*, ADM 52/2732; Master’s Log of HMS *Bonetta*, ADM 52/2870; Wallace to Stephens, 27 November 1794, ADM 1/473, 132-133; Lieutenant’s Log of HMS *Boston*, ADM/L/B/140.

³¹Stephens to Wallace, 29 November 1794, ADM 2/608, 103-104, Secretary’s Letters to Public and Flag Officers, 1794-1795; Newman and Company et al. to Wallace, 13 October 1795, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 356-357; Jonathan Hill to H.W. Brown, 13 October 1795, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 357-358; Morris to Wallace, 28 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 294-295.

³²A.C. Wardle, “The Newfoundland Trade,” in C. Northcote Parkinson, ed., *The Trade Winds: A Study of British Overseas Trade during the French Wars, 1793-1815* (London, 1948), 246; Percy Russell, *Dartmouth: A History of the Port and Town* (London, 1950), 127.

³³Francis Baron to Duckworth, 28 August 1811, MG 204, Part 1, Series C, 1794- 1796. Grigg was discharged on 31 August. Muster Book of HMS *Antelope*, ADM 37/3509.

³⁴Newman and Company et al. to Wallace, 13 October 1795, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 356-357; "Port Orders," MG 204, 247-249; Kemp, *Ships and the Sea*, 539; *Royal Gazette and Newfoundland Advertiser*, 11 August 1814; Duniam to Duckworth, n.d., MG 204, Part 1, Series C, 1079-1080; Swim to Duckworth, 15 September 1810, MG 204, 1317-1320. The governor discharged his son, most likely because the sailor-farmer was carrying a certificate from his commanding officer in the Nova Scotia militia. Brenock to Duckworth, 24 October 1810, MG 204, 1556-1558.

³⁵Morris to Wallace, 28 October 1794, GN 2/1/A, vol. 12, 294-295.

³⁶Cumby to Keats, 20 April 1813, GN 2/1/A, vol. 24, 217-220; Cumby to Coote, 14 April 1813, GN 2/1/A, vol. 24, 220-221; Coote to Cumby, 14 April 1813, GN 2/1/A, vol. 24, 221-222; Cumby to Coote, 15 April 1813, GN 2/1/A, vol. 24, 223-224. Cumby complained to Keats that large numbers of British fishermen were permitted to remain in Newfoundland during the winter, "where they are taught to consider themselves ... secure from being impressed into that Service." The same letter refers to this "supposed protection from impressment."

³⁷*ENCNL*, s.v. "Thomas Coote"; Keats to Bathurst, 17 May 1816, ADM 80 /151, 380-381, Letter Book of R.G. Keats, 1815-1816; Governor Charles Hamilton to Lord Bathurst, 28 July 1818, CO 194/61, 72; John Bowen, Captain of HMS *Camilla*, to Governor Erasmus Gower, 19 December 1806, ADM 1/476, 145-146. This case is documented in the Supreme Court Minute Book, 1806-1811, PANL, GN 5/2/A/1, Box 25, 68-77. Coote became the Chief Magistrate in 1803. Prowse, *History*, 654.

³⁸Pedley, *History of Newfoundland*, 167-168.

³⁹Peter Neary, "The Writing of Newfoundland History: An Introductory Survey," in James Hiller and Peter Neary, eds., *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Essays in Interpretation* (Toronto, 1980), 4. On the fiscal-military state, see John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge, MA, 1988).