

## The Newfoundland Connection

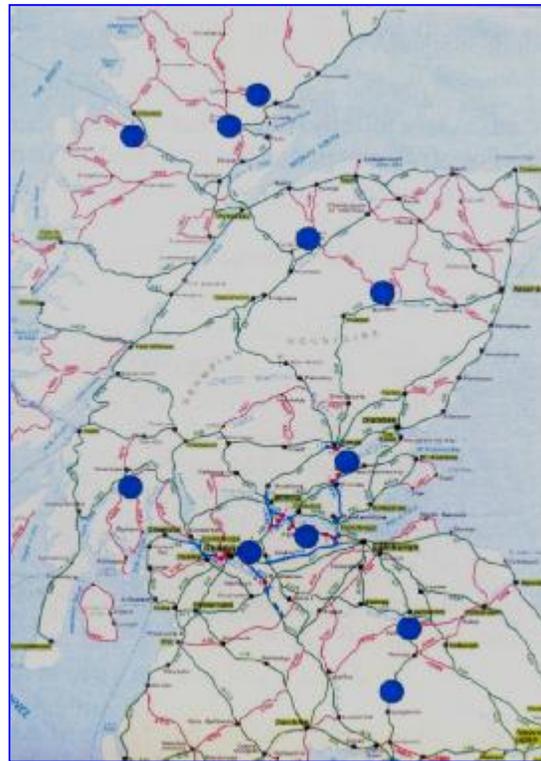
Alexander Robertson

About 45% of Newfoundland and 60% of Labrador is covered with boreal forest (compared to the forest cover in Scotland currently at 17% compared 5% in 1930). It begs the question, why would Newfoundland need a reforestation program before WWII. The simple answer is that, in many cases fires were started by lightning strikes and carelessness – which rendered many areas barren. It takes an extremely long time for forests re-colonize exposed, windswept barrens on the Avalon Peninsula, for example. The other reason was simply that during the WWI, many Newfoundland veterans – the Royal Newfoundland Regiment most famous of all – were impressed by the remarkable productivity of plantations in Scotland by the ‘planter Duke’s’ century 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> established. Among the veterans was who visualize the potential in transforming the barrens and scrubland of with plantations based on the Scottish model.

Lt. Col. Jack Turner MC., CBE., was a remarkable man and a much-decorated soldier. He was awarded the Military Cross for action in WWI in the capture of Vimy Ridge and in WWII he commanded the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit. Between the wars he was a surveyor and woods manager with Anglo-Newfoundland Development (AND) company of Grand Falls and appointed Chief Forestry Officer in 1934.

In addition to reforming forestry on many fronts, he also saw the need to include a tree nursery at Salmonier to provide seedlings for reforesting denuded areas on the Avalon Peninsula. The site of The National Tree Nursery was cleared in 1938.

While the National Tree Nursery continued to operate throughout the war, Lt. Col., Turner was commanding the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit. The unit operated mainly in the North of Scotland. One of his senior officers, Maj. J.M. Curran - awarded the M.B.E in 1943 for stellar work in creating the 3<sup>rd</sup> Inverness (Newfoundland) Battalion of the British Home Guard. Before the war, Joe was General Superintendent of logging operations at Salmonier. He was also a General Superintendent and second-in-command of both



the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit and 3<sup>rd</sup> Inverness (Newfoundland) Battalion. Despite the heavy duties associated with the war effort, Newfoundland’s forestry was very much on the minds of both Col Turner and Maj. Curran. - especially the aspect of reforestation.

They were well aware that they were cutting timber on the plantations established since the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries on the private estates of the “Planter Dukes” such as Dukes of Argyll, Dukes of Athol (notably Planter John, 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Athol who planted 27 million larch on 6,400 hectares and other species on many more thousands of hectares) and, chief among them, the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry who established the largest private forest estate in Britain mostly in the border shires of Dumfries, Selkirk, Roxburgh, Berwick and

Northumberland. Besides the Dukes, many responsible Highland laird's engaged in large planting schemes. Like Grant of Monymusk who started planting en masse in 1716 and had 50 million trees planted by the time he died. Starting in 1767, Lord Findlater had 11 million planted on his estate by 1800. Lord Moray had more than 12 million planted on the barrens at Dar

Besides plantations, there were also sizeable tracts of natural forest. For example, Alexander Struan Robertson, writing from the Barony of Struan, "*Cradle o' a hie an mighty race o' kings,*" to a prospective timber merchant in 1732, notes that "*Charles Robertson in Perth tells me you want 100 trees 20 feet long I am willing to serve all of mankind*" Like generations of Robertsons before him, he had the advantage in being able to raft his logs along the lochs, down the River Tummel and River Tay to the shipbuilders and timber merchants in Perth. In fact, the highland forests also sustained a flourishing trade in wild animal furs until Hudson Bay and The Northwest Company flooded the market with Canadian furs in the 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The native pine trees were and still are enormous<sup>2</sup>

The Newfoundlanders also had close contact with the Forestry Commission which was established in 1921 and which had a vigorous planting programme to replenish the timber resources depleted during World War I. After the Newfoundlanders had finished logging an area, Forestry Commission squads moved in to replant it.

Needless to say, all of this made a great impression on both men, and they took careful note of the Scottish forestry practices, particularly seed collecting and processing, nursery and planting techniques. So much so that, when Joe returned to Newfoundland in 1943 on compassionate leave, he was well prepared to take over the National Tree Nursery. That explains why his approach to nursery practice and reforestation was distinctly Scottish - with the approval and full support of Col. Turner, I may add. After the war, the Forestry Commission embarked on a massive reforestation program engaging thousands of forestry workers and foresters, many of them Newfoundlanders who settled in Scotland. To date, the Forestry Commission has reforested about one million hectares of new forests - the bulk of it planted by my generation of forestry workers in the 1950-1960's.

In the 1925 report of The Fire Patrol Committee of Newfoundland, Col. Turner wrote the following passage:

*A very wise man once said; "We must never forget that we are not owners, but only tenants, of the riches of the Earth and, when our tenancy expires, must be ready to hand them over to those who come after us improved rather than diminished by our management ". Now that we are at the crossroads, and we must choose the way we go. We have destroyed the greater part of our forests, but the small part we have left will take care of most of our legitimate demands, if we but use it wisely and guard it carefully. We still have woods to use, but we have none to waste.*

In fact, long before Col. Turner became acquainted with the Forestry Commission, he promoted the concept of multiple-use forestry - in spirit if not in name. Proof of that was his persistent drive to have Salmonier Valley established as Newfoundland's first National Forest Park (Newfoundland was still a Dominion then - albeit under Commission Government). Although he was unsuccessful on that score, his management plans were all-encompassing.

For example, not far from the Salmonier tree nursery (which is now an informal arboretum) is the Salmonier Nature Park [www.env.gov.nl.ca/snp](http://www.env.gov.nl.ca/snp) began in 1973 specifically

*"For education, not as a tourist destination, and environmental education continues to be its primary goal. However, over time the Park's role as a major tourist destination has increased. In recent years, the Park has expanded its role in wildlife rehabilitation and research and in environmental monitoring."*

