

# The Labrador Boundary

## GRADE 8 SOCIAL STUDIES

- The Labrador Boundary Victory in the Seven Years' War gave Britain control over New France, including Labrador.
- In 1763 the British government organized these new territories, in part by creating the province of Quebec.
- The 1763 proclamation also stated that "to the end that the open and free fishery ... may be extended to and carried on upon the Coast of Labrador ... we have thought fit ... to put all that Coast, from the River St. John's to Hudson's Straights ... under the care and inspection of our Governor of Newfoundland."

- The interior boundary - that is, the boundary between the "Coast of Labrador" and the territory then controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) - was not defined.
- The situation was complicated by a series of changes after 1763.

- Considerable friction between the governments of Newfoundland and Quebec was generated by the complaints of those who had obtained Quebec grants to settle along the coast to conduct sedentary fisheries - the Newfoundland government wanted to encouraging the migratory fishery.
- In 1774 Quebec was received all the "territories, islands and countries" in Labrador that had been placed under Newfoundland jurisdiction in 1763.
- However, instructions issued to governors of Newfoundland after 1774 required them to supervise the fisheries at Labrador, and to protect the Moravian mission settlements in Labrador.

- This vague division of responsibility proved unworkable.
- As a result of lobbying in London, in 1809 the Labrador coast (as defined in 1763) was returned to Newfoundland.
- There remained, however, the problem of the proprietors on the North Shore, and this was finally settled by an act of 1825, which moved the southern boundary from the River St. John east to Blanc Sablon, and extended the boundary line inland to the 52nd parallel.

- The interior boundary remained undefined.
- Active discussion of the interior boundary issue began in the late 19th century.
- In 1898, the Canadian government extended the northern boundary of Quebec. The line was to run from the coast of James Bay, along the Eastmain River and the Hamilton (now Churchill) River, and then through the middle of Hamilton Inlet until it reached territory under Newfoundland jurisdiction.

- In Canada's view, Newfoundland could claim only a coastal strip of land. This legislation ignored the 1825 act.
- Quebec soon tried to enforce the new boundary.
- In 1902 the Newfoundland government granted a timber concession on both sides of the Hamilton River (297 sq mi) to a Nova-Scotia based company.
- The Quebec government promptly protested that part of the concession was - by virtue of the 1898 act - in Quebec.
- The company responded that it was not trespassing on Quebec territory since Newfoundland claimed all lands north of 52 latitude and east of 64 longitude. Quebec appealed to the federal government to intervene.

- Canada agreed that the "coast" of Labrador could not include the Hamilton River, and so informed the British government.
- It was eventually agreed to submit the dispute to the *Privy Council*, Newfoundland claiming that the boundary was defined by the height of land.
- The case was heard by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in 1927.

- The court upheld the Newfoundland arguments, and declared the Labrador boundary to be
- *... a line drawn due north from the eastern boundary of the bay or harbour of the Anse au Sablon as far as the fifty-second degree of north latitude, and from thence westward ... until it reaches the Romaine River, and then northward along the left or east bank of that river and its head waters to the source and from thence due northward to the crest of the watershed or height of land there, and from thence westward and northward along the crest of the watershed of the rivers flowing into the Atlantic Ocean until it reaches Cape Chidley.*

- This decision has always been unpopular in Quebec. Ironically, in 1925, the Newfoundland government had offered to sell Labrador to Quebec in order to pay down the public debt, but the Quebec premier turned the offer down.