

# ARCHAEOLOGY ON TURPIN'S ISLAND IS BACK

This summer, the Department of Archaeology at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador is undertaking another field season on Turpin's Island, Little St. Lawrence. A brand-new group of archaeology students will build on the immense success of the previous work on Turpin's Island. The research conducted thus far has uncovered many artefacts and features that corroborate existing knowledge of the island's history and has generated new information concerning the daily lives of fisherfolk during the five centuries of occupation.

This invaluable work will allow students to gain experience in archaeological techniques and procedures, and it is our hope to broaden the historical knowledge of Turpin's Island and the *Chapeau Rouge* region.



Faculty of Humanities  
and Social Sciences



Newfoundland  
Labrador  
Provincial  
Archaeology  
Office



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Canada

We would like to thank the communities of Little St. Lawrence and St. Lawrence for welcoming our team and providing resources for our research. We would also like to thank the Provincial Archaeology Office, Memorial University Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Department of Archaeology, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Ocean Frontier Institute for providing the funding and support for this research to be conducted.

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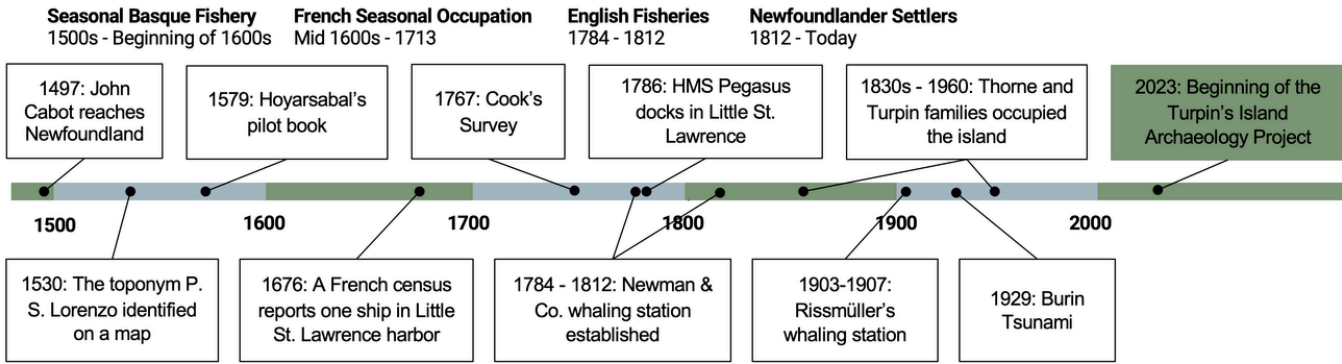


@TurpinsIsland\_Archaeology

# TURPIN'S ISLAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT



# THE HISTORY OF TURPIN'S ISLAND



There are no known Indigenous sites identified on Turpin's Island; however, four pre-contact sites have been found within a 50 kilometres radius of Little St. Lawrence. Archaeological evidence and historical documents suggest that Turpin's Island was occupied in the early 16th century, following the arrival of European fishing crews in Newfoundland.



The toponym *P.S. Lorenzo* first appears in an anonymously authored map dated c.1530, currently kept in the Vatican collection. It appears again on a map by Guillaume Le Testu dated c.1555, and in the Basque mariner Martin de Hoyarsabal's pilot book of 1579, where he provided routes to and from St. Lawrence.



The discovery of red clay roofing tiles on Turpin's Island indicates the presence of Basque mariners. After the Basque occupation, French fishing crews used the site until the end of the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714). The 1713 Treaty of Utrecht forced most French fishers to leave, gradually replaced by the English. A survey conducted in 1713 by Captain William Taverner confirms two French fishing rooms at Little St. Lawrence.



The fishing premise built by Newman & Co. in 1784 appears in a 1786 drawing by James S. Meres, which shows HMS Pegasus anchored in front of Turpin's Island. The foundations of the stages are still visible at low tide today. After Newman & Co. departed, Newfoundland families settled on the island—beginning with the Thorne family around 1830.



In 1903, Ludwig Rissmüller constructed a whaling station in Little St. Lawrence (on the western shore of the harbour). However, declining whale populations led to the station's closure only four years later, in 1907. During the first half of the 20th century, the Turpin family moved to the island, building a house and other structures whose foundations remain today.



# BENEATH THE SURFACE



The archaeological potential of the site on Turpin's Island has been assessed through field surveys in 2006, 2009, and 2015. Since 2023, archaeologists from Memorial University have conducted archival and documentary research, surveys of the site, and test pitting to confirm the potential. They found evidence of Basque, French, British, and Newfoundlander activity starting in the 16th century.



Since 2023, the crew has excavated 54 test pits, and has recorded eleven features and two fishing stages. Hundreds of artefacts dating from the 1500s to the 1900s were found. These finds include pipes, tiles, pottery, glass, buttons, and even gunflints used in flintlock pistols. These artefacts illustrate life on Turpin's Island and stories from people that history books often neglect.