

POINT AMOUR MEMORIES

What was the purpose of Point Amour Radio Station?

Point Amour Marine Radio was the first such Station built on the whole of Labrador. The Station at Point Amour was built in 1903 and this is correct as I had often seen the building forms in the old file at Point Amour. I don't know about the beginning but the Station was operated by the Marconi Company of Canada for quite a few years. Using Morse code, the station maintained radio contact with shipping traveling through the Strait of Belle Isle. While I don't know who the early staff were, I do remember that Mr. W. F Barrett, ex Bay Roberts area and Mr. Herb Hardy were two of the radio operators who spent years at Point Amour. Mr. Barrett lived in the old station while Mr. Hardy lived in L'Anse Amour and walked back and forth to and from the Point. Both raised rather large families and all were educated, in the beginning at L'Anse Amour and later other areas of Newfoundland. By the way I remember on a visit to Point Amour(walked from L'Anse au Loup) when I was about 10 or 12 years old, the big attraction of the day was not the Tower or the Marconi pole, it was the parrot that the Barretts had as a pet. It was chained to its perch near the stove and was quite alert when strangers arrived. I also remember that the bird had a rather mixed vocabulary and it wasn't all nice.

How many of my fellow Straits folk know that the first automobile on the coast operated from Point Amour in the 40's. I managed to get one ride from Point Amour to Schooner Cove hill in the old model T owned I think by Mr. Wyatt. After that Mr. Wyatt took a step backward I think and got old Dolly(Nfld Pony). News of the arrival of the first east to west airplane flight across the Atlantic which made emergency landing on Greenly Island was flashed to the world from Point Amour radio back in the 20's.

In later years Point Amour lost its full Marine radio capabilities and became a relay point for Telegrams originating from Long Point in the west to Red Bay in the east. This service was carried out along with Quebec Telegraph Lt(QTL) operating out of Rimouski, PQ. That company maintained the pole lines along the coast and local people were hired as repairmen. One of these was our own Bill Barney (deceased) of nearby Fox Cove. Along with the transmission and reception of personal messages, Point Amour had a Marine Beacon which had to be turned on during foggy weather. If the fog arrived when us Operators were sleeping, one of the assistants at the Lighthouse had a key to the beacon room and he turned it on. These guys were up and alert all night in case the fog came in and the fog alarm had to be started. When I was stationed there, we had a bit more responsibility, placed upon us, we were given the Blanc Sablon Non Directional beacon to look after and make sure we monitored it continuously, making sure it was operating properly. This was a radio aid for Aircraft landing at Blanc Sablon. Its still there I think. Everytime I pass by the beacon mast, I remember the one time that I climbed half way up but chickened out and came back down.

During the time I was at Point Amour, the road from the main highway was finished as far as Fox Cove, the Power house was established at Lanse au Loup, a regular ferry began operating on the Straits just prior to my leaving. It was after I had left that Premier Moores' Government dug the big hole and forever changed the face of the area , something that I noted few years ago when I took a walk around.

Soon after the electricity was brought to the area, Telephone company arrived and began installing phones. The Telegram service was phased out at Point Amour and myself and by 1965 with a wife and five small children we sadly bade farewell to Point Amour as I was transferred by Dept of Transport to Goose Bay. Bobby (Davis) stayed around until the final day and then terminated his employment and went to live in Forteau.

Before concluding let me mention the staff of both Lighthouse and Radio. In charge of the lighthouse for many years was T.J. Wyatt(I called him TJ), his assistants would vary but my good buddy Gilbert(Gibby) Jones was there for quite a few years and we did many hunting trips etc together. Phil Hancock and Margie spent a few years there. George and Billy Roberts spent various length of times with Mr. Wyatt as did Clarus Flynn. Bridgie O'Brien was our faithful friend who worked at the Lighthouse residence for many years. These were probably the most prominent of lighthouse assistants etc(Dad worked there years ago also my Uncles).

At the Radio was Bobby and his wife Clarissa Davis and from 1961 myself and wife Ethel and later on Calvin, Donna, John JR, Glen and Gary all born while we were at Point Amour. Nearby Fox Cove were the Barney's, our neighbors and we also had great neighbors , a mile to the west at L'Anse Amour. At this time again, I wish to Thank and salute you one and all....

John M.Earle/Lewisporte

MEMORIES OF POINT AMOUR PART 2.

WHY I WAS STATIONED AT POINT AMOUR:

In 1957, I was stationed at the Montreal Air Radio station at Dorval, P.Q. and not even dreaming of ever being transferred to Point Amour. Headquarter staff realizing that I "belonged" down in that area, one day called me in. Of course, I hardly knew what was up and then they asked the question "When can you be ready to leave for Point Amour and how would you expect to get there?" Needless to say I was almost speechless but I told them I could be ready in a few hours and that I could fly Trans Canada Airlines (now Air Canada) to Sept Iles and bush plane (Northern Wings) from that to Blanc Sablon. They told me that Bobby (Davis) was ill and needing to go in to hospital and they did not want to close the Station. Bobby maintained the radio beacon there and also was the main link in communications from that part of the coast. There were no outside telephone link with the rest of the world except for the radio (morse code) link he had with St. John's, Belle Isle and Battle Harbour. Telegrams took the place of phone calls in them days. These were collected by hand held crank phones and each village from Long Point to Red Bay had one. I shall have to go into details of the old phones in another section of Memories.

Due to the time of year (breakup) in May, I got as far as Harbour (?) St. Pierre the first day and was there a week as all gravel air strips were too wet to use. Finally after the week, I managed to get the coastal vessel "North Shore" and returned to Sept Iles. I was only there a few days when Department of Transport chartered a twin engine Beech and took me direct to Blanc Sablon. I remember after we landed, a group of folks from Lanse au Claire who wanted to get to Sept Iles to work helping to turn the plane around in the soft surface. I came down to Lanse au Claire with I think was Wallace Letto on Dog team while Dad was at Lanse au Claire to meet me, also on dog team. We got to Point Amour on a Friday evening and both Bobby and his wife, Clarissa were admitted to Long Point hospital on Sunday, both with pneumonia.

Needless to say, I was a very busy individual for a few days until I got used to the system. There was the contact with St. John's to keep up, had to make sure the beacon was on the air during foggy weather, look after the two little diesel engines which supplied our power plus deal with my phone customers. Bobby helped me as much as possible in the day he had with me before leaving for hospital. I had my own room at the residence and Mena Barney (nee Fowler) did the cooking, cleaning etc while Ed, then her boyfriend kept us company during the off hours.

To shorten this article, I was at Point Amour then until October when I was off to Hopedale to relieve the Operators there who hadn't had any annual leave. I was at Hopedale until May 1958 when I returned to Point Amour. Bobby and I were there then until June 1965 when we left for Goose Bay.

Since I have kept a diary all through those years (and still do) you may be sure there are some very interesting entries, some sad, some happy and a lot of names of people along the coast have been mentioned.

That then is how John M. Earle, the Wireless Operator from Lanse au Loup ended up as Radio Operator at nearby Point Amour. It was a great seven years, the fun we had there would be unbelievable nowadays, great bunch and they will never be forgotten.

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MEMORIES OF POINT AMOUR; part 3

Structures at Point Amour 1950's and 1960's

As I recall from the mid 50's to the mid 60's here' s what Point Amour looked like as regards to the buildings. Of course the main building was the Tower and the dwelling attached. Underneath the bank in front of the Tower was the spacious Fog Alarm building, locally called the Whistle House. There were two fog horns one pointing to the south and the other to the west. The three blasts every minute or two were much louder than those of today and with westerly wind we always heard the blasts of the fog horn at Lanse au Loup.

Up from the Tower and building was a storage shed, barn type roof and locally called "the barn" and I am not exactly sure but I think another shed, probably built in the 60's was a bit to the southwest. The new residence for the light keeper was built in late 60's, I think and is farther again to the west.

To the east of the Tower was the Residence of the Radio operator(s), a 3 bedroom bungalow also containing the radio room and equipment. Just a few feet from the residence was the little power house containing two Pewter Diesels for most of the time I was there. Going farther eastward was an old shed where we kept fuel , oils etc and still farther to Southeast was the "old Station". This structure was built to house the Radio Operators and the radio equipment in 1903. I am positive of that because I saw the actual documents.

About 50 yards farther eastward was a lone wooden antenna pole, locally called "the Marconi pole". This was used as part of our antenna system and worked well considering the old equipment. In them days , of course there were always a few de-commissioned boats over on the lighthouse property a tribute to Mr. Wyatts passion for boats. Once while at Point Amour, I climbed up in the attic of the old station and the whole area was filled with boxes and boxes of "old" telegrams, with news reports etc . While I just read a few things with the aid of my flashlight, the rest was left as it was and eventually it was all burned when the building was sold and dismantled. I regret not saving at least a box of that treasured material.

Before concluding I want to tell you about how the Lightkeepers used to keep the buildings and grounds in immaculate shape, a credit to them all. An example is that I often had said then that one could eat lunch off the Fog Alarm floor and considering the oil and grease, that was really something, always spic and span.