

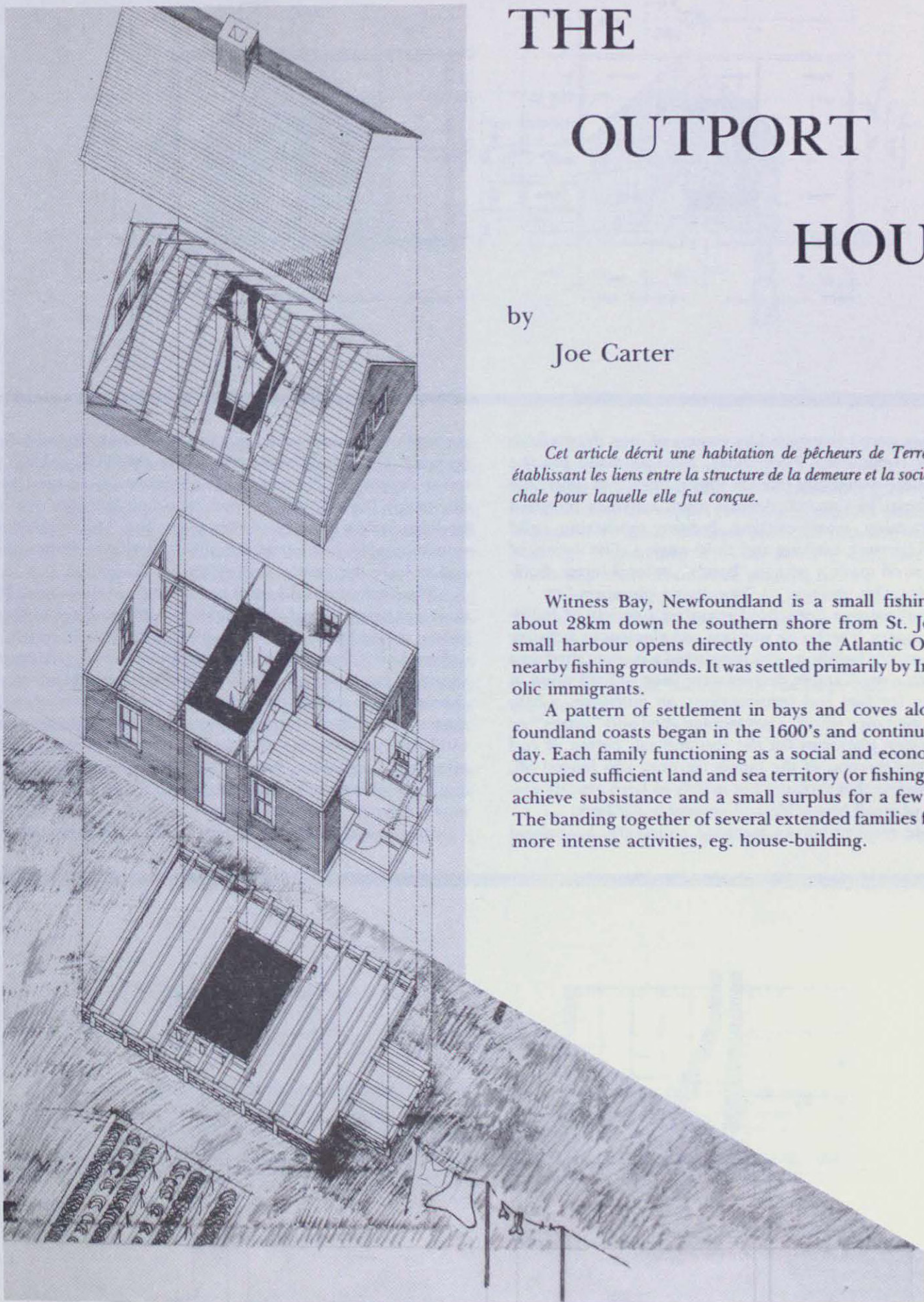
THE OUTPORT HOUSE

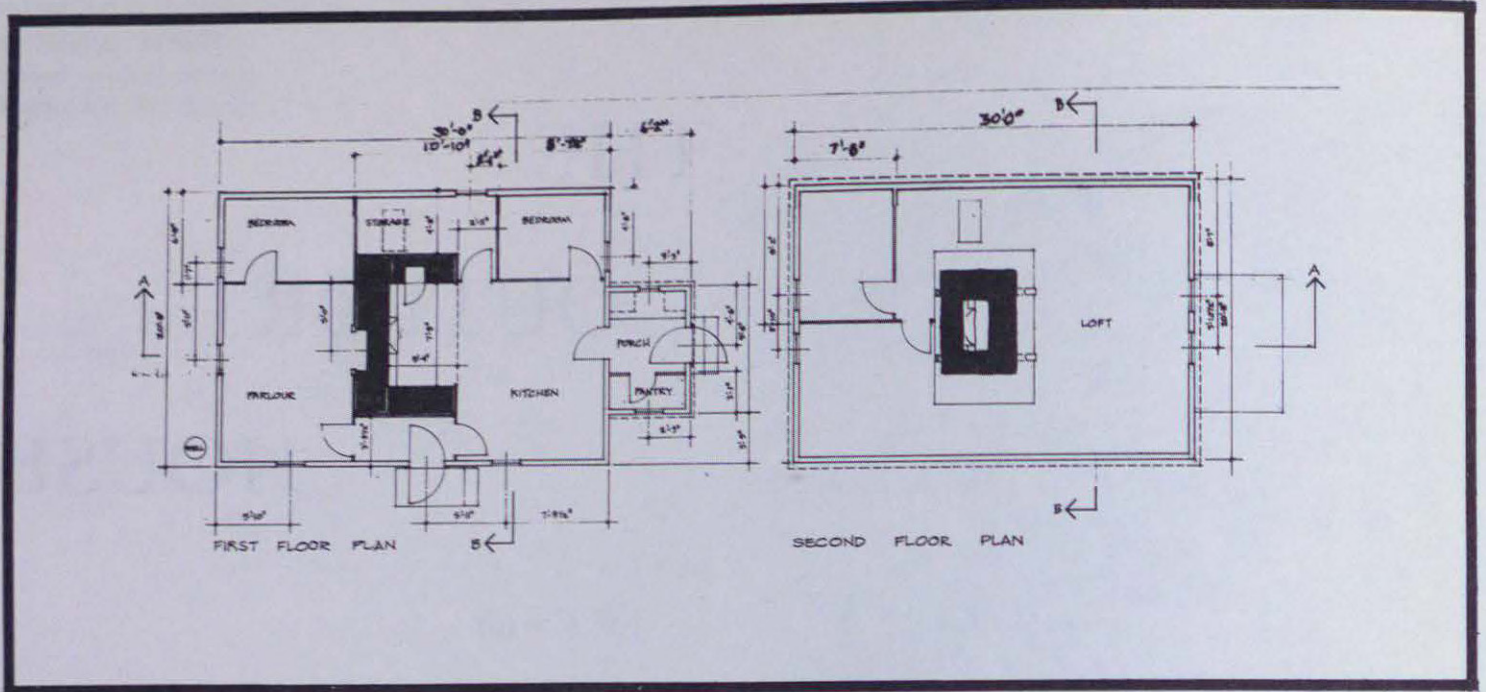
by
Joe Carter

Cet article décrit une habitation de pêcheurs de Terre-Neuve en établissant les liens entre la structure de la demeure et la société patriarcale pour laquelle elle fut conçue.

Witness Bay, Newfoundland is a small fishing village about 28km down the southern shore from St. John's. Its small harbour opens directly onto the Atlantic Ocean and nearby fishing grounds. It was settled primarily by Irish Catholic immigrants.

A pattern of settlement in bays and coves along Newfoundland coasts began in the 1600's and continues to this day. Each family functioning as a social and economic unit, occupied sufficient land and sea territory (or fishing berth) to achieve subsistence and a small surplus for a few luxuries. The banding together of several extended families facilitated more intense activities, eg. house-building.





Houses were constructed by groups of men drawn from the larger community. Even today, Newfoundland has the highest home-ownership rate (or lowest degree of mortgage indebtedness) in Canada. Annual work activities included fishing, farming, wood-working, hunting, gathering (wild fruits and berries), cooking and child-raising. The variety of skills required made a person "handy" in local terms. Sociologists describe this trait as "vocational pluralism."

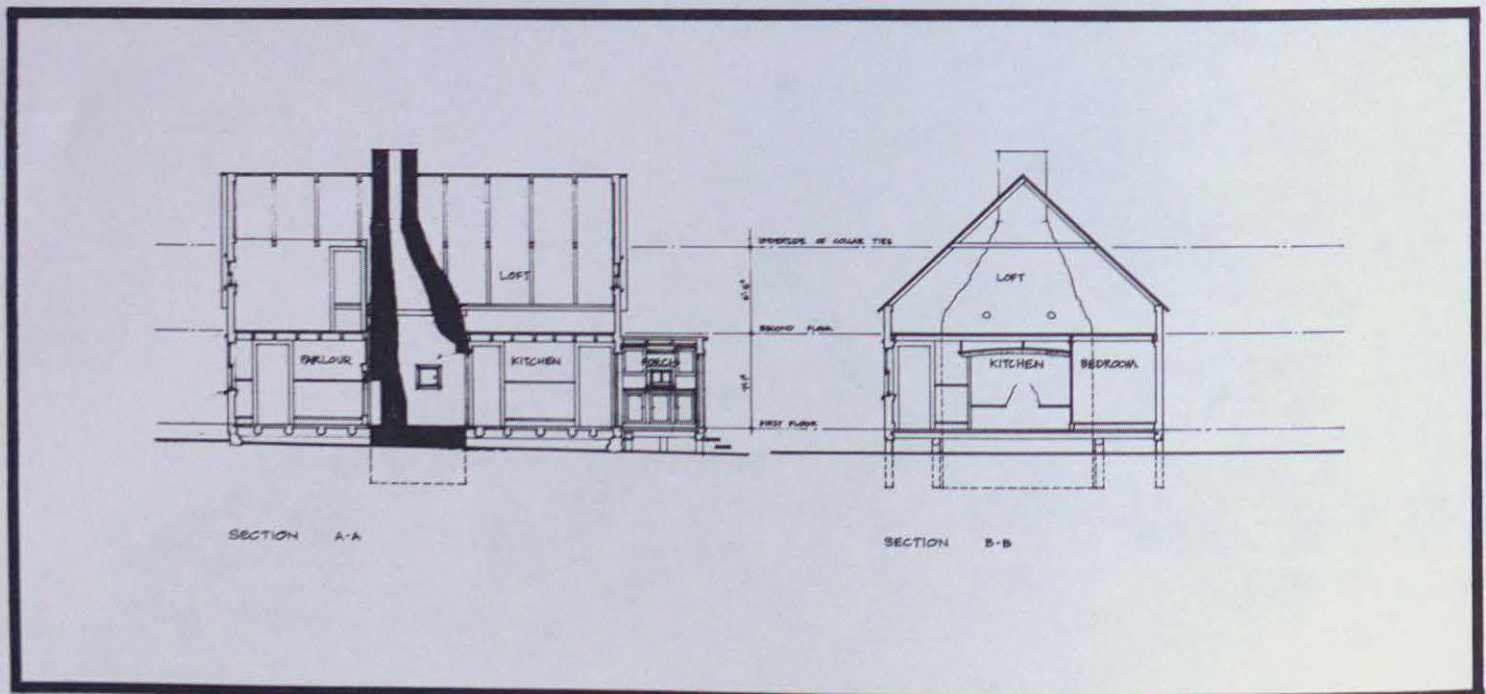
The subsistence household required a variety of buildings and spaces. The house was just one element in a cluster of family-owned buildings which included a storage shed on a roof cellar, a small stable (horses were used to haul wood in the winter for fuel and construction), an outhouse, a fish-splitting shed on a wharf, a net storage shed and "stages" or large wooden platforms for the sun and salt curing of cod fish. A good portion of the family territory was fenced off, partly to define that territory but mainly to keep grazing animals out of small hay fields and vegetable gardens.

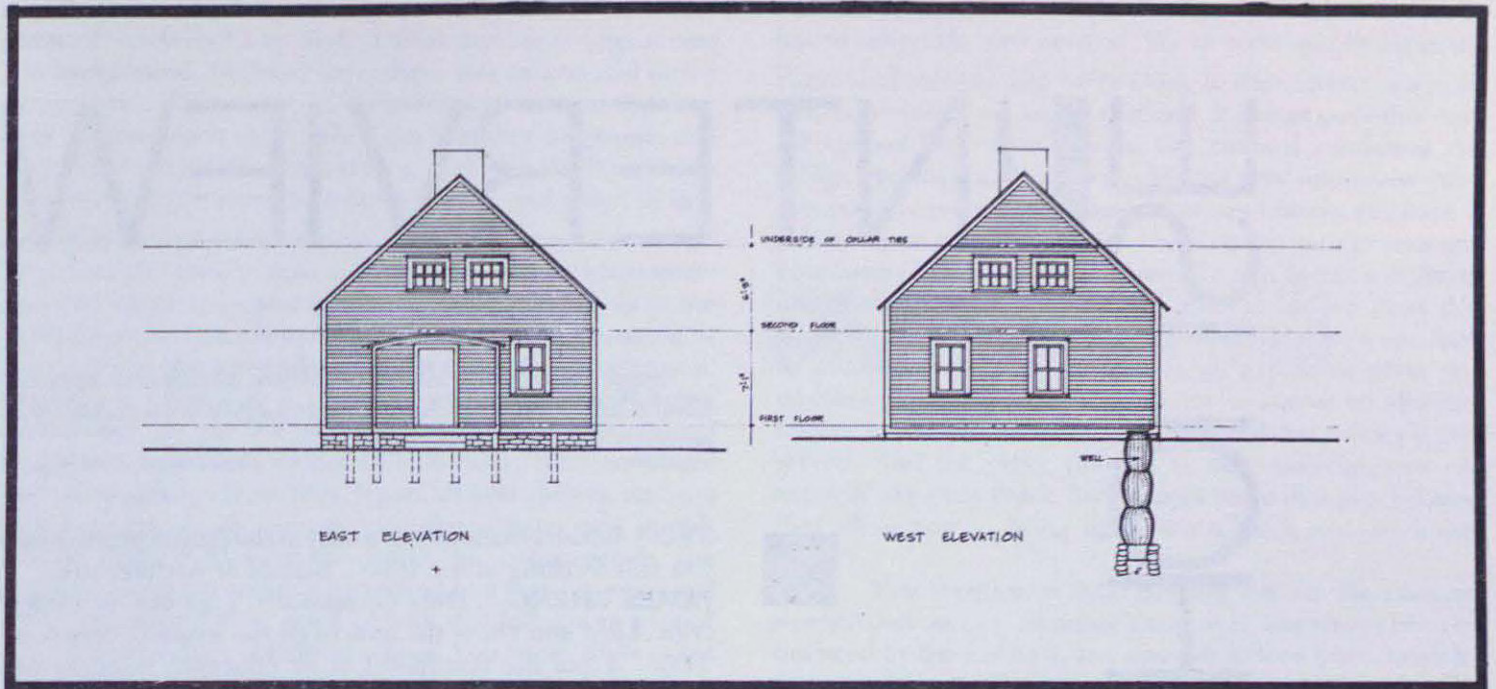
Female responsibilities included child-care, household

management, some gardening and some shore-based fisheries work. Household management consisted of cooking, interior design and furnishing. The house was oriented (why do we say "orient"ed and not "occident"ed?) so that the kitchen window had a good view of the bay. This enabled the woman to see when her husband was coming in from fishing and to have the family meal ready for his arrival.

The kitchen was the most public space in the house. The door was never locked and neighbours did not have to knock before entering. Of the time spent in the house, nearly all waking hours were spent in the kitchen. Eating, talking and snoozing on a "day-bed" all took place here. Most of the chimney's capacity is thrown towards the kitchen. A community event like a wedding results in the kitchen packed with well wishers. House parties today in Newfoundland often have a kitchen crowded with talking, singing and drinking, while other rooms are almost empty. Crowdedness is an important part of celebration.

In contrast to the public nature of the kitchen, the par-





lour was off-limits to the community and even to the children of the household. Visitors from outside the community or the local priest were brought to this room through the "front" door, on the longest wall of the house, and presented with family treasures and the best of everything the family could provide. The parlour (derived from the french *parler*) would have store-bought furniture, finer room finishes, fine dishes, family pictures, a pump organ, and in more recent times, graduation photographs and sport trophies. Despite the relative lack of "creature comforts" by modern standards, almost thirty percent of the floor area was devoted to this expression of the importance of the family and to provide hospitality for "strangers" or formal visits. This expression obviously had great importance with so much space set aside for such infrequent use.

The most private spaces were the two bedrooms along the rear wall of the house. Children had access to the sleeping loft up a ladder in the storage room.

This fifty-eight square metre house is supported by a

wooden sill on field stones with vertical logs forming the exterior walls. These logs were slightly flattened inside and out to receive wood sheathing and clapboard respectively. Rafters and collar ties support roof sheathing and wood shingles. A massive two-flue chimney provided heat for warmth and cooking. Water came from an outdoor well, the lining of which was made from three wooden barrels.

This particular house was typical in the early to mid 1800's, and is similar to houses built in Ireland. These measured drawings were done by the author and Robert Mellin in 1982. The house was since demolished in 1984. It was one of the last remaining examples of the large chimney house in the province.

Joe Carter is a practising architect who has just received a six month teaching appointment in China.

