

Woody Island

- Woody Island is a roughly rectangular island in northwestern Placentia Bay, about 3 km long from north to south and about 1.5 km wide.
- It was settled at Old Cove (on the north side facing nearby Sound Island) and on its west side, at Jean Cove, which faces the mainland across a 1 km wide reach and is further sheltered by several islets.
- European settlement began in the early 1800s, and by the 1820s the Rev. Charles Blackman had noted a small Protestant congregation there.
- James Slade and a family named Andrews were living on the island in 1835 when missionary Edward Wix visited, holding Church of England services for the 13 families in the neighbourhood.
- At the time of the first government census, in 1836, 93 people were living on Woody Island.
- They supplemented the shore fishery with gardening and keeping livestock.
- A Church of England church was built by 1845 and a growing Methodist congregation had constructed a church by 1869.
- At that time the two chief residents were James and Robert Barrett, while other family names included Bollard, Emberley, Piercey, and Williams.
- Apart from the cod fishery, the main industry was a herring fishery conducted in the reach.
- In the late 1800s the lobster fishery spurred further population growth, from 128 people in 1891 to 237 in 1901 (in which year 24 lobster canneries were noted.)
- The population peaked at 341 in 1966, but a decline in the lobster, cod and herring fisheries had prompted many residents to look for work somewhere else.
- Sound Island had been resettled in the 1950s and soon the option of resettlement was being widely discussed on Woody Island as well.
- In 1965 the government assistance program was changed, substantially increasing the sums available to move households and dropping a requirement that for removal assistance all residents would have to agree to move.
- Further, the announcement that an oil refinery would be constructed at Come By Chance seemed to offer a promise of employment on the mainland.
- Soon most residents had applied to resettle to nearby communities such as Arnolds Cove, Garden Cove, North Harbour, and Swift Current. However about 10 families decided to stay on the Island. Including that of merchant Alec Lockyer.
- In the early 1970s MacLean's magazine published an article by Harold Harwood qv, extolling the virtues of Woody Island and lauding the pluck of the holdouts. Soon, a few of the outsiders arrived at the isolated island, including the Canadian folksinger Valdy (whos attempted to start a commune) and Randy Lieb. While most soon left, Lieb stayed on the island, began farming and keeping small livestock, built a house of local stone at Back Cove, acquired a lobster license and became the community post master.
- Over the next few years most residents left the community, as heads of the household aged or left the fishery.

- By the early 1980s there was only 10 residents, and 10 years later only Lieb remained. However, some lobster fishermen continued to fish out of the island.

H.C Brown 1985) Randy Lieb (Interview Dec. 1993) E.R Seary (1977) Edward Wix (1836) Census (1836-1991) Lovell's Newfoundland Directory (1871) List of Electors (1966) Statistics: Federal-Provincial Resettlement Program (1975?) Census (1836-1991) Newfoundland Historical Society (Woody Island) ABC/RHC