

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910807111103321
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Titolo	Hope and deception in Conception Bay : merchant-settler relations in Newfoundland, 1785-1855 / / Sean T. Cadigan
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Toronto, [Ontario] ; ; Buffalo, [New York] ; ; London, [England] : , : University of Toronto Press, , 1995 ©1995
ISBN	1-282-04564-4 9786612045646 1-4426-7585-3
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (257 p.)
Collana	The Social history of Canada, , 0085-6207
Disciplina	338.3/727/09718
Soggetti	Fish trade - Newfoundland and Labrador - History Fisheries - Economic aspects - Newfoundland and Labrador Fisheries - Social aspects - Newfoundland and Labrador History Electronic books. Newfoundland and Labrador Economic conditions Newfoundland and Labrador Social conditions Conception Bay (N.L.) Economic conditions
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Bibliographic Level Mode of Issuance: Monograph
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	""CONTENTS""; ""PREFACE: The Chimera of Newfoundland History""; ""ACKNOWLEDGMENTS""; ""Part One: Setting and Context""; ""Introduction""; ""1 Political Economy of the Resident Fishery""; ""Part Two: The Household Fishery""; ""2 Fishing Households and Family Labour""; ""3 Household Agriculture""; ""4 Women in Household Production""; ""Part Three: Fishing People and Merchants""; ""5 The Legal Regime of the Fishery""; ""6 Truck as Paternal Accommodation""; ""Part Four: The Chimera""; ""7 Agriculture and Government Relief""; ""8 Liberals and the Law""; ""Conclusion"" ""APPENDIX A: The Law of Wage and Lien""""APPENDIX B: Selection of Court Record Evidence""; ""NOTES""; ""BIBLIOGRAPHY""; ""INDEX""; ""A""; ""B""; ""C""; ""D""; ""E""; ""F""; ""G""; ""H""; ""I""; ""J""; ""K""; ""L""; ""M"";

Sommario/riassunto

"Besides newspapers accounts, missionary correspondence, and local government records, Cadigan makes use of court records that have never before been systematically used. These records provide evidence that serves as the basis for his discussion of family production in the fishery, the unsuccessful attempts by families to diversify production through agriculture, the gender division of labour, and economic development."--Jacket.

"In late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Newfoundland, the evolution to colonial self-government within the empire was accompanied by an economic transition from a migratory to a residential fishery. This was the beginning of the modern liberal order for Newfoundland." "The standard view is that the truck system, wherein merchants supplied fishing families with provisions, gear, and so on against the season's catch, shamefully exploited resident fishermen, as well as planters and servants. Sean Cadigan reviews the economic and social developments of this period from a new perspective. He contends that the persistence of independent commodity production in the fishery of northeast-coast Newfoundland from 1785 to 1855 cannot be attributed to merchant-imposed truck credit practices. He calls for a reassessment of the truck system as a realistic accommodation to the limited possibilities and requirements of the local economy. The rise of the truck system and the household-based fishery was above all a historical outcome which involved the adjustments of settlers, merchants, and governments during a complex period of transition. Elements of the staple model are used to suggest that the resource base of the fishery and the legal institutions of the initial fishing industry limited the ability of fishing families to respond otherwise to exploitation by merchants. Later, reformers struggling for colonial self-government obscured the staple restraints on fishing families in order to discredit fish merchants politically by saying the latter purposefully used truck to impoverish the fishery and prevent agricultural development in order to preserve their hegemony in Newfoundland's economy and society."
