

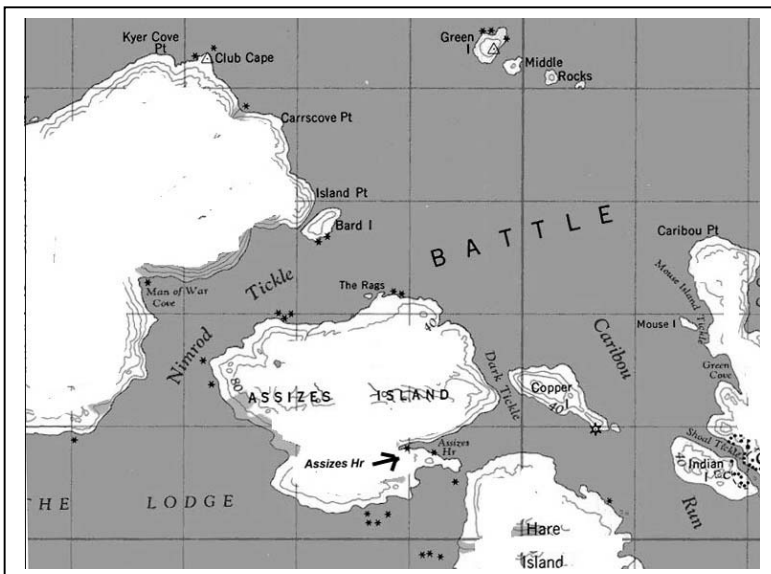
The short life of Charles Roberts of Hare Bayand the long search to discover what happened to him.

On a small scrap of paper from the 1970s I had scribbled a list of names told to me by my grandmother, Mary Jane (Roberts) Elkins. I had asked her to tell me who her parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts were. One name on the list was Charles Roberts, her father's brother. I had only written down his name, with no other details. Twenty years later, when I looked at that paper again, somewhere in the back of my mind I remembered that she told me he had drowned, and for years I have been trying to find the story behind the name. I did not know when he was born, nor when he died, but since his father's will, which was written in 1915, did not mention his name, I assumed he had died sometime before that date. As I exchanged family information with fellow researchers, a series of events happened, each giving me some insight into the life of Charles Roberts.

What follows is his story as I now know it.

Charles was born in Pound Cove, Bonavista North, about 1888 to James and Mary Roberts. His ten year old brother, Alphaeus, who is my great-grandfather, was born on Cobbler's Is. He must have welcomed his new brother, since up to this point he had only sisters. An older brother had died as an infant, and his youngest brother, Daniel, was born four years after Charles. When Charles was a teenager the family relocated to Hare Bay, Bonavista North (before 1904).

By the time he was twenty, Charles sister, Gertrude, had married the widower Arthur Vivian. In the summer of 1908, Arthur was captain of the fishing vessel "Dart", which went to Labrador for the summer fishery. As crew that season, Skipper Arthur took along two of his brothers-in-law. One was his sister Delilah's husband, Kenneth Abbott, the other was Charles Roberts.



By July, they had set their traps in Assizes Harbour, which is located in Caribou Run, near Battle Harbour, Labrador. It was there, on 18th of July, that both Charles Roberts and Kenneth Abbott lost their lives. Although the Daily News reports did not record the names correctly, both of these articles describe the events and sad deaths of the two men from Hare Bay:

"The Daily News, St. John's, NF July 22, 1908: Drowning accident at Assizes Harbour--Saturday last there was a drowning fatality at Assizes Harbour, Labrador, two men named Hollett & Robinson lost their lives. They were out with others of their

crew removing a trap and were in the small boat, which tripped in the moorings, and the sea breaking capsized her and both were thrown in the water. Before assistance reached them, the men, who were heavily clad, sank from view. Both men belonged to Bonavista Bay, one being married and leaves a large family. The bodies were not recovered."

"The Daily News, St. John's, NF July 25, 1908: Further particulars on the drowning accident at Assizes Harbour Saturday last were received by the Prospero. The two men Charles Roberts and Kenneth Roberts of the schooner, Dart, Capt. Vivian were out taking up the trap leader, and their boat was tripped by the trap and struck by a sea and capsized. For some days after the accident the crews kept up a search for the bodies but without success. Abbott is a married man with a family and Roberts a single about 20 years. Both belong to Bonavista Bay. Owing to the loss of the two men Capt. Vivian had to abandon the voyage, being unable to fill their places."



It must have been a sombre voyage home on the *Dart* that year, and the heaviness in Skipper Arthur's heart can perhaps never be imagined as he told his wife and sister of the fateful events of July 18th. Although Charles was not married, Kenneth left behind a wife and three daughters. The youngest, Mary Ann, was born the same year her father drowned. Little did her mother know at the time, that this daughter would meet the same fate just 18 years later. Mary Ann Abbott was one of the crew who drowned when the *Ella M. Rudolph* was wrecked off Northern Head, Catalina in 1926. Skipper Arthur Vivian's son, Joseph, drowned in this same tragedy. (photo left: Arthur Vivian, his second wife, Gertrude Roberts, and their son, Henry, taken around 1912).

So finally the story of Charles Roberts will have a place in my family's history. Charles was one of four sons and five daughters born to James and Mary (Way) Roberts. James, who was born on Cobbler's Island, married Mary Way in 1876. Their children were James William, Alphaeus, Beatrice, Caroline, Gertrude, Mary Elizabeth (Lizzy), Charles, Daniel and Violet. The oldest children were born on Cobbler's Island, but by 1884, the family had moved to Pound Cove, and then by the early 1900s they had relocated to Hare Bay. Mary Roberts died in 1913 and her husband, James, died two years later. They are buried in Hare Bay.

Information Sources: Oral histories, family documents, PANL parish records and the St. John's Daily News. Special thanks to Randolph Vivian for the photo of Arthur Vivian, and to friends who helped with details of the story: Rosalind Downey, Susie (Elkins) Oram, Cindy Gibbons, Janice Hopkins and Domino Howse.

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