

Kean, William (1810 - 1887)

Mariner; merchant. Born Flowers Island, son of Samuel and Mary Kean. Married Anne Janes. Kean was a pioneer sealing skipper out of Pool's Island, Bonavista Bay, where he was also the major merchant. A Labrador fisherman, sealer and schooner owner, Kean moved from Flowers Island to Main Pool's Island circa 1850. From his base in Pool's Island he was in charge of sea-going operations of one of the larger fishing and sealing firms in Bonavista North, in partnership with his brother Joseph, who remained based at Flower's Island. William Kean became the leading merchant and schooner-owner of Pool's Island and was the driving force in the building of St. James Church there in 1862. By 1871 the partnership owned four schooners (the Shaver, Gleaner, Emerald and Barbara) and was a leading factor in establishing Bonavista North as a center for the Labrador fishery and the seal hunt. Kean's ability as a sealing master was acknowledged throughout Newfoundland and when the first two steamers went to the front in 1863 he was chosen by Grieve and Co. to take command of the Wolf. Many of the Bonavista North captains who later went on to long careers as sealing masters and Labrador skippers began under him (including his nephew, Abram Kean qv, whose autobiography describes his uncle as being a more significant influence than his own father). William Kean died at Pool's Island on May 2, 1887.

L.G. Chafe (1923),
Abram Kean (1935),
E.R. Seary (1977),
Naboth Winsor (1988),
Newfoundland Historical Society (Pool's Island).
RHC