

GARY
COLLINS

Soulis Joe's
Lost Mine

A Newfoundland Memoir



“There is a magic in the interior of this island that few will write about or speak of to others – an endless fascination with the land. Gary Collins is entranced in the same way that the allure of rock, tree, and bog seized the indomitable Allan Keats, and before him, his ancestor, the Mi’kmaq Soulis Joe. This book gives voice not only to these men but to the great and wonderful wilderness of Newfoundland. Read it and be prepared for the wonder and love of the wild places. It will grab and hold on to you, too.”

J. A. RICKETTS, AUTHOR OF
THE BADGER RIOT

“Gary Collins simply gets better and better. This is his best.”

GARRY CRANFORD, AUTHOR OF
*NEWFOUNDLAND SCHOONER:
NORMA & GLADYS*

SOULIS JOE'S LOST MINE

A NEWFOUNDLAND MEMOIR

GARY COLLINS

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Some racial epithets appear in this book to reflect
the prejudices of the characters who use them.

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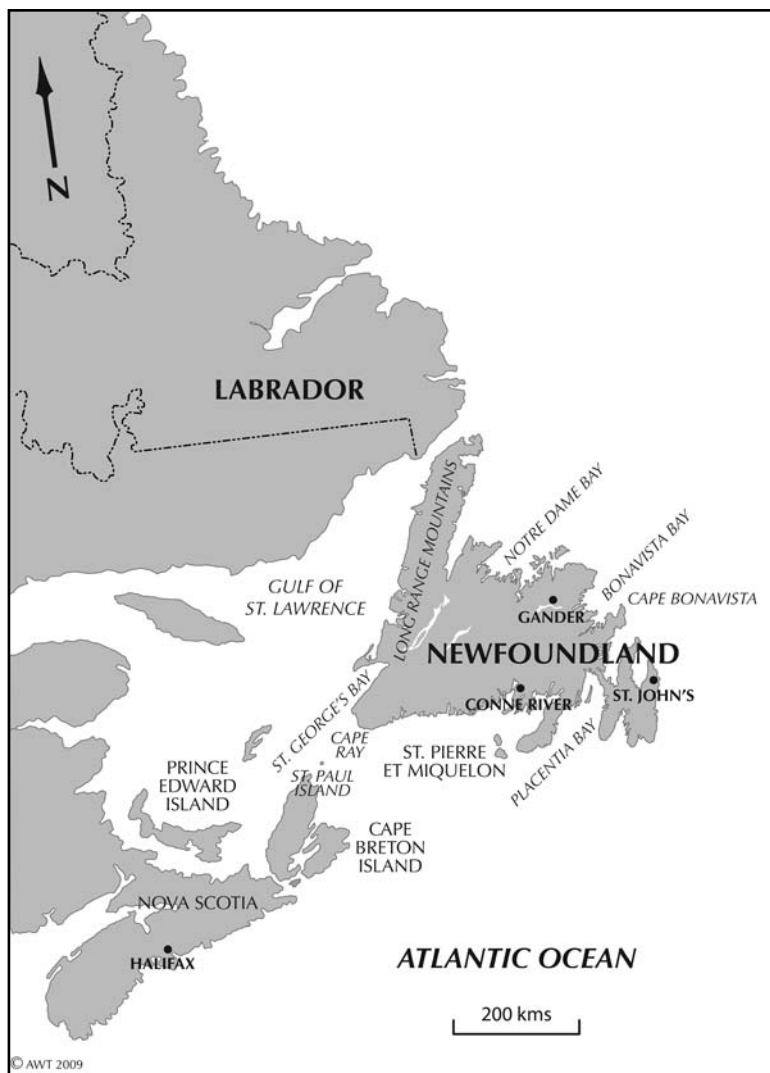
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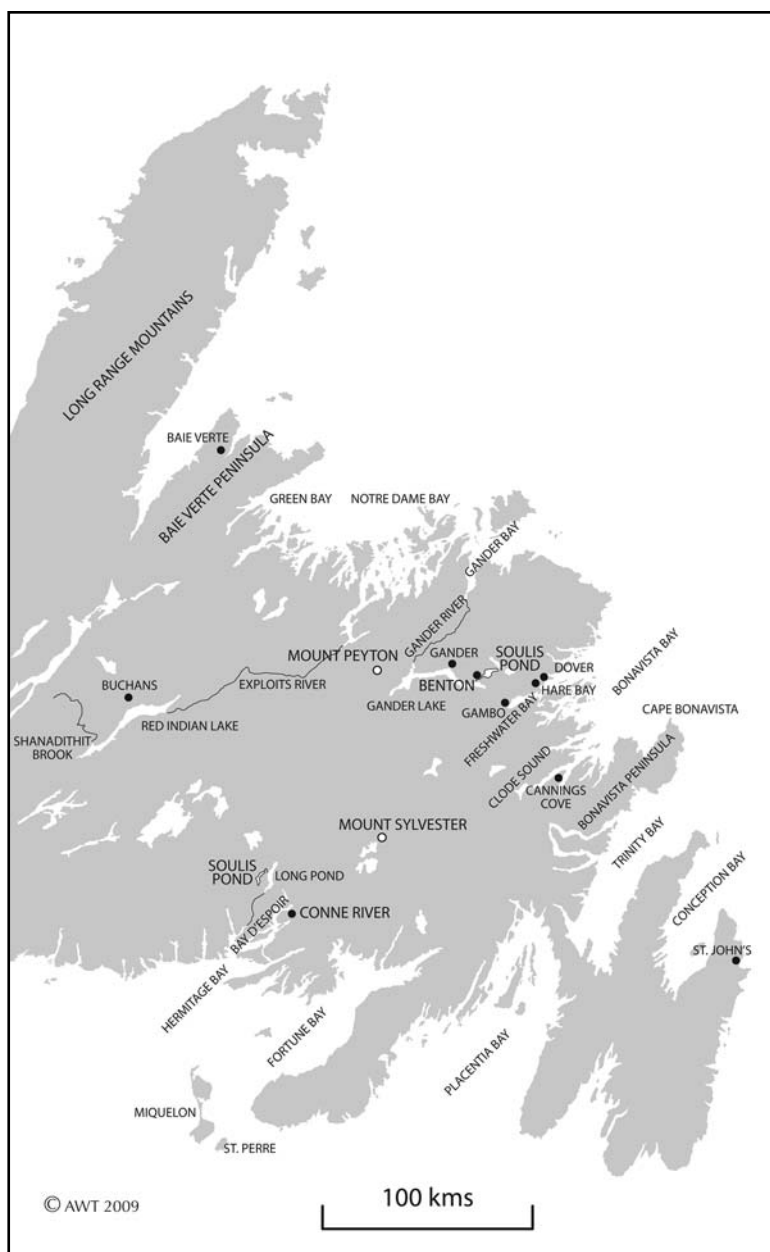
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If the reader will allow, I will make three dedications in this book. First, I respectfully dedicate these pages to the Mi'kmaq people of Newfoundland and Labrador, whose contribution to the progress of the European exploration of this land is unequalled in the annals of any native peoples, anywhere. Second, to the true Red Indian, the Beothuk, whose spirit I found still moving through the shadowed glades above the shores of the huge lake which still bears their name. Third, and with much respect, to Allan Keats, a consummate woodsman, proud advocate of his Indian heritage, and ever a searcher of mysteries. I am proud to call him my friend.

Also by Gary Collins

Cabot Island
The Last Farewell





Prologue

I met him at a cancer relay function. He and his wife, Christina, their two sons and daughter were walking for Kevin's mother, Norma. I was walking for my wife, Rose. They were both cancer survivors. The rain was pouring, making the raw June 13 night even darker than normal.

"Kevin Keats," he said, reaching out a big hand. We shook firmly.

Don't look much like an Indian, I thought. Big bugger, too.

We talked for a while about the terrible cancers that seemed to seek out and invade every family. He wore a trendy below-the-waist-length jacket and a ridiculous-looking woollen hat on his head, complete with tassels that drooped below his earlobes. His eyes were dark above high cheekbones, deep-set and capable of compassion as well as dogged determination. On second glance, I decided he could be Indian after all.

We were under a huge tent erected by the town of Gambo for their very first Cancer Walk for Life event. "I read your

two books,” he said as we waited for the first part of the walk to begin. “I like your style of writing. Especially how you portray our own way of life and language. I really enjoyed them both. Good job.”

I thanked him for the compliment, a bit uncomfortable as always when praised for my writing ability. I could get used to it, though.

“I’d love to write a book about my family history, too, but hell, I could never find the time. How about you writing it for me?” He was very direct.

“You mean ghostwrite it?” I asked, surprised at the request.

“I’m not sure what that means,” he replied.

I explained I would do the actual writing, but the book would carry his name.

“Not a chance in hell!” he retorted right away. “I’ll take no credit for something I didn’t do. I’d like for you to write the book, bring my great-great-grandfather, the old Indian, Soulis Joe, alive. Tell the story of our family history as it relates to the Mi’kmaq nation, like you did with the people in your other books.”

I knew he was involved in the mining industry, particularly in the prospecting part of it. My son-in-law, Mike, was working for him somewhere in Nunavut, looking for uranium.

The Keats family lived in the tiny hinterland town of Benton. They were the sixth generation of Newfoundland prospectors known the world over for their ability to find ore bodies and precious metals. Everyone in our area knew about the Indian prospectors from Benton. They were of Mi’kmaq Indian descent and had just received an international award

for their abilities. This much I knew about them. Nothing else. I told him I would be happy to give him any assistance I could in compiling a manuscript of his own, but that I was already under contract with my publisher for another book.

"I could probably do the book," Kevin replied, "but I just don't have the time, b'y. You think about it some more and let me know."

We talked some more about his business. He was very excited about his work. It was kind of contagious to hear him go on about the exploration for minerals all over the world, especially here in our province. It was his passion, I could tell.

Still, I knew nothing about minerals at all. Not the geology part of it, about faults and sliding masses of whole continents and volcanic eruptions, least of all where to look for minerals. Besides, I had to tell him, I didn't think a book about prospecting would be a very good seller. I thought it would be a bit boring, actually, but I never told him that.

"You'd be surprised at how many people would be interested in what's going on," he replied. "The world is on a 'mineral high' right now."

From outside the crowded tent a voice crackled through the rain-drenched loudspeaker and informed us it was time to line up for the first walk. Kevin strode away.

"Give it some thought," he said in parting, and disappeared with the crowd out into the driving rain. We met once more that miserable night but spoke no more about the idea of a book.

Over the next few days, I gave the idea of writing about the Mi'kmaq prospectors some consideration. I figured I could write the book if I was given enough information. But

how would I get it? I'm a stickler for detail and won't write anything without having complete knowledge of it. It was then I had a wild idea. Still, even if my idea got Kevin's approval, it would need the complete endorsement of the most important player of all, my publisher, Flanker Press. After all, it was one thing to write a book – I shuddered at the amount of research involved – but quite another to convince a publisher, who would be expected not only to promote and sell the book but also foot the production costs, as well as take care of the actual distribution and sales.

I called my publisher and got my first surprise. Garry Cranford of Flanker Press had spent five years of his earlier life prospecting. He knew first-hand that it was very interesting. Still, a book about prospecting? Probably not very interesting to the general public. He voiced my own feelings.

We talked awhile. I told him about the idea I had. I also informed him this was a family of Mi'kmaq Indian descent, who had more than a hundred years' involvement with prospecting, much of it for major mining companies. I also informed him they were known the world over in mining circles. He already knew about their recent award.

I also ran by him the way in which I would like to do the work. It wouldn't be a document about minerals and metals and mines, but a brought-to-life story about the search for minerals, both the old way and the new.

My second surprise: "Tell you what. You write it in your style of telling stories. Tie in some history of the Mi'kmaq people on the island, and if I can get this guy, Kevin Keats, to take a few copies of the book to his conventions, we'll publish it."

And that was that.

"About the book you want written," I said to Kevin when I finally got him on the phone several days later. He has few idle moments. "Believe it or not, my publisher used to be a prospector himself. He will publish the book if I do it in my style. You know what I mean. Walking, talking, living the life of a hands-on prospector."

Kevin was very pleased. There was nothing he couldn't tell me about prospecting, he said.

"Ah – as to that part of it," I interrupted, "here's my idea. Hire me for the summer, pay me the wage of your other guys in the field, and put me as a partner with someone who knows the prospecting end of your business, as well as your family history, if possible. I'll get a summer's wage, learn about your work first-hand, and pick up your family history. I'll get the royalties when the work is released and you will get my total dedication to prospecting. You will also have your book written."

My biggest surprise of all: there was no hesitation.

"Deal!" he said. "You won't believe this. My dad and I were thinking the same thing. As a matter of fact, he'll be the man you'll be with. He knows our history, and he knows almost all there is to know about finding base minerals. He is the best prospector alive," he added proudly.

"Wonderful!" I exclaimed. I was very pleased. "Oh, by the way," I said, "you have to call my publisher. It is most important." I hung up the phone.

With that, and with few other preliminaries, I plunged into the prospecting work with Allan Keats, the consummate, always-seeking prospector. Complete with heavy pack, rubber

GARY COLLINS

boots, thirty-degree temperatures, four-wheel-drive trucks, four-wheelers, canoes, endless walking, and accompanied by hordes of the finest biting specimens our Newfoundland island has to offer, I would come to love it all. Well, not the flies so much.

I

Soulis Joseph

And a cry came from the people as from a single heart, and it rose the dusk and was carried out over the sea like a great trumpeting.

Kahlil Gibran

1

When the wind breezes high through the canopy and softly swishes down, and the handsome dragonfly flits around you, hunting the bothersome mosquitoes that always seek your blood, it is pleasant to lay on a mattress of damp summer moss beneath the trees, and listen and watch as nature passes along.

Sweat trickled down the channel between my shoulder blades and over my back, seeking the moving parts below my belt. I wiped the top of my scorched bare head and, without removing the heavy bag from my back, paused in my walk to dig a baseball cap out of one of the side pockets. I placed the cap on my head, hiding my scalp from the relentless July sun.

A mixture of salty sweat and fly dope drained into the corner of my left eye and stung like hell. I didn't try to wipe away the misery. I had learned that burning lesson years ago.

Allan Keats and I were trudging through a bed of very dense alders somewhere south of Red Indian Lake in the centre of Newfoundland. Everyone in Newfoundland knows that these common lush growths are to be avoided at all costs. They are not only jungle-like in nature and very difficult to get through; they are also breeding grounds for every insect that likes stagnant water, damp ground, green foliage, and sweating prospectors. They had to be gotten through to reach our destination. The only saving grace for the torment of these tangled beds was the shade they provided, and the damp, cool ground from which they grew.

Al had spent most of last night sitting in silence – unusual for him – before several maps laid out on our cabin table, plotting the course we were now trying to follow. Lines on a map are seldom easy to follow on the ground. Hidden from the paper surface are streams and dense growths which must be gotten through or around or across, while still maintaining the predetermined direction of travel. Even the best of maps, with all of today's technology, never show the underbrush that a person must travel through, most of it "pecker high," a prospector's description of waist-high growth, such as *gowithy*, that I had learned from Al.

"What if the prospector is a woman?" I wanted to know.

"By God, now that's a good point you've raised. I never thought about that before. A lot of female prospectors around, these days. Never used to be, you know. Great to see women doing this kind of work, too. We have to work with one later this summer. When we gets the chance, we'll let her tell us the name she puts on 'pecker bush.'"

Al laughed aloud, his mind racing with the thought.

He announced a stop to consult his GPS and his topographical map. We had just stepped out of the alder bed into a loose mature forest, and faced the direct glare of the sun. He set the navigation device down and waited for the data to come in.

Removing his red pack, Al settled back against a spreading birch tree. He dug into one of the pockets of his bag, produced a bottle of Gatorade, and let the blue liquid run into his mouth while a sucking, bubbly sound came from the vented lid. Not far away I sat against a tree of my own and quenched my thirst with tepid water.

"Don't know how you can drink that bloody stuff," I commented. "You sound like a hungry baby at its mother's breast."

"By God, this contraption *does* look a bit like a nipple, don't it? And me suckin' on it, imagine that." He burst into laughter at the thought, placing the bottle back into the relative coolness of his packsack.

"We're right alongside where we want to be, according to the GPS. Only three hundred metres more, I'd say. The going should be better now that we're clear of them alder beds. Steep, though, by the looks of it. We're coming into sediments. Did you notice that?"

"No, I can't say that I did," I returned.

"You'll learn. It takes time to notice the difference in the rock changes, moreover when the change is gradual," Al said good-naturedly.

"I don't 'low the summer will be long enough for me to learn all the stuff you're trying to pump into my head," I said.

"Well, you said it, I didn't," he replied, his chuckle coming easy.

About the Author

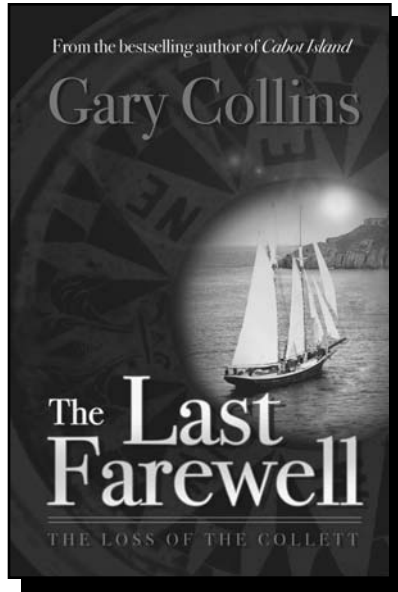
Gary Collins was born in a small, two-storey house by the side of the sea in the town of Hare Bay, Bonavista North. He finished school at Brown Memorial High in the same town and resides in Hare Bay still.

He spent forty years in the logging and sawmilling business along with his father, Theophilus, and son Clint. Gary was once Newfoundland's youngest fisheries guardian. He managed log drives for years down spring rivers, spent seven seasons driving tractor trailers over ice roads and the Beaufort Sea of Canada's Western Arctic, and has been involved in the crab, lobster, and cod commercial fisheries. His writing career began when he was asked to write eulogies for deceased friends and family. He spent a full summer employed as a prospector before he wrote *Soulis Joe's Lost Mine*. He liked the work so much, he went back to school to earn his prospecting certificate.

His favourite pastimes are reading and playing guitar at his log cabin, and now, "banging rocks." Gary Collins is married to the former Rose Gill, and together they have three children and three grandchildren.

Soulis Joe's Lost Mine is Gary Collins's third book. His first two books, *Cabot Island* and *The Last Farewell*, are Newfoundland bestsellers.

ALSO BY GARY COLLINS



“Read *The Last Farewell* not only because it is a moving historical tale of needless tragedy but also because it’s a book enriched with abundant details of Newfoundland life not so widespread anymore.”

The Pilot

The Last Farewell tells the true story of a crew of logger-sailors who left their home port of Hare Bay aboard a two-masted schooner in early June of 1934. Along her route to St. John’s, the crew of the *Ethel Collett* tell each other stories of life and death on the sea. They relive some of Newfoundland’s richest historical moments, from shipwrecks and sealing disasters to political strife and financial ruin. But little do they know that they are heading toward one of the most astonishing tales of them all: their own.