

GAELIC IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND: A CULTURAL REMNANT (GAELIC FIELD RECORDING PROJECT)

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Indexed and introduced by Dr. Michael Kennedy 2002

PREFACE

Prince Edward Island is Canada's most Scottish province – a fact not commonly known. By the time the first British census of Prince Edward Island was conducted in the late eighteenth century Scots already nearly outnumbered all of the Island's other ethnic groups combined. By the time of the first Canadian census for Prince Edward Island in 1881 when the Island's population had reached its post immigration peak, their status was unchanged, comprising nearly half of the population. In Nova Scotia, by contrast, which is more usually recognized as the pre-eminent seat of Scottish culture in Canada, the Scottish portion of the population peaked at only about a third of Nova Scotia's total, although that was sufficient to make Scots the largest ethnic group in the province for about a decade.

Provincial boundaries, however, mask more than they reveal. In truth, the concentration of Scottish Gaels in eastern Nova Scotia and particularly in Cape Breton made for an even larger and more homogeneous community than in Prince Edward Island. Perhaps more importantly, however, the Scottish communities of the two provinces were essentially parts of one larger whole – in some areas more tightly concentrated - in others less so. They were the result of the same large-scale settlement in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sharing close ties and developing under similar circumstances. Together, they became the richest Gaelic culture zone in the New World, maintaining some important forms of cultural expression that disappeared even from the ancestral Scottish Highlands.

Regrettably, despite its size and importance, this community has received little academic attention. This is particularly true of Prince Edward Island, where, to date, not so much as a single scholarly book has been published on the subject of the Island's Gaelic heritage. This represents not only a major local research lacuna but also an international one. In recognition of this, and also of the critical state of Gaelic culture in Prince Edward Island after centuries of intense assimilative pressures, the Institute of Island Studies together with the Celtic Studies Committee at U. P. E. I. commissioned Celtic scholar, Dr. John Shaw, to record the best remaining examples of Gaelic culture in Prince Edward Island in 1987.

Shaw was able to identify one remaining fully fluent speaker of Prince Edward Island Scottish Gaelic and a number of "semi-speakers" (who had undoubtedly been fluent in their youth), in addition to other important non-Gaelic speaking informants and traditional musicians. Recording sessions with these people over a few short weeks in the late summer of 1987 resulted in 33

audio reel-to-reel tapes and three videocassette recordings. The tapes consisted largely of oral tradition in English and Gaelic as well as traditional violin music. To accompany the tapes and field notes, Dr. Shaw produced a report outlining the scope of the recording project and the outcome. Resources were not then available to produce a detailed index to the recordings.

In August of 2002, the Institute of Island Studies, in conjunction with the Special Collections section of the Robertson Library at U. P. E. I., commissioned Dr. Michael Kennedy to review the collection with an eye to making it more accessible to the general public. Dr. Kennedy wrote a preface explaining the rationale for the collection and how it reached its present form; edited, for public review, Dr. Shaw's field notes and summary report to the Institute of Island Studies on the scope and importance of the material collected; extracted information (where available) from the recordings and field notes in order to compile brief biographies of the informants; wrote a biography of the collector, Dr. John Shaw; and created a detailed item by item index of the recordings, including a list of most of the tunes that were played during the traditional violin music recording sessions. It is hoped that the valuable material that has been recorded can now be readily used by researchers and will prove a popular research resource.

INTRODUCTION

Prince Edward Island's Celtic and Gaelic Heritage

Prince Edward Island is Canada's most Celtic province. Two thirds of the immigrants to the Island were Celts and more specifically Gaels. However, severe cultural decline both internationally and locally, married to often confused interpretation in the media has very much obscured what those terms mean today even to the descendants of those same immigrants. Even less clear may be what cultural markers most distinguished these people from other ethnic groups and, therefore, what sorts of materials would be sought (or ignored) for a field recording project such as this. In order to best understand the collection it is helpful to have some knowledge of the historical context of Gaelic or Celtic culture, including a brief overview of its evolution in Prince Edward Island and other attempts to document the tradition.

Gaels form one of the two branches of the modern Celtic language family tree. Their division originated in Ireland before spreading north into the Isle of Man and Scotland. Scotland, in fact, takes its name from the Latin term for these Gaelic-speaking people. Following the collapse of the Roman Empire this large Gaelic cultural zone became one of the most important and influential intellectual regions in Europe. It developed as a stronghold of Christianity and Classical learning and centres of higher education were established not only throughout Ireland and Britain but also throughout Dark Age Europe. During this period, Gaels became the first Europeans after the Greeks and Romans to develop a written language (centuries before English was written down). Over the centuries Gaelic eventually developed into three distinct languages – Irish, Manx and Scottish Gaelic – but Gaels maintained a common literary language referred to as Classical Gaelic - which was used by political leaders, scholars and other professionals throughout the Gaelic world. This common literary language, an integrated educational system and the movement of scholars and artists back and forth throughout the various regions of Gaeldom helped keep the large region intellectually and culturally united during the middle ages.

However, centuries of warfare with incoming Germanic tribes saw this large Gaelic culture area begin to fragment, retreat and eventually collapse. Gaelic slowly began losing ground, as the other Celtic languages in Britain were, to English. Lowland Scotland, the seat of government and of the most important trading and economic centres in Scotland, became so thoroughly Anglicized that Gaelic eventually came to be seen in many circles as a foreign language and culture. The Gaelic language had, by that time, retreated almost to the Highlands, with which it became indelibly associated.

The Conquest of Ireland in 1603 represented a grievous collective blow as well. The professional and institutional infrastructure of Irish Gaelic society was destroyed in the wake of the conquest. Since the Gaelic educational infrastructure in Ireland was such an important part of Scottish Gaelic intellectual and cultural life, its disappearance also had a profoundly negative impact on the Highlands. Although the Highlands would maintain a traditional, integrated Gaelic society for roughly 150 years after its counterpart had been dismantled in Ireland, effectively surviving until the mid-18th century, it became seriously retrenched over that century and a half. The Gaelic educational structures would slowly deteriorate and the common literary language, as well as Gaelic literacy, generally, would go into steady decline, further undermining the natural links between Ireland and Gaelic Scotland.

Following the last Jacobite Rising of 1745 what remained of Gaelic independence in the Highlands was lost and measures were quickly taken by British authorities to finish breaking up the region's unique social organization and economic structure and to replace the Gaelic language and Gaelic culture with English. Gaelic had been the subject of repressive legislation for centuries and this new round of legal restriction revived something of the philosophical approach to Celtic culture regions developed under the reign of Henry VIII some 200 years earlier for England, Wales and Ireland, going so far as to forbid traditional, distinctive forms of Highland clothing in an effort to entirely eradicate the people's sense of a Celtic identity.

As had been the case in Ireland, the Gaelic leadership and the Gaelic professional classes were almost immediately deprived of any sort of meaningful role in the new social order that was being created. Similarly, the Gaelic institutional infrastructure and Gaelic formal culture, long in a process of slow strangulation, were finally dismantled. Even families such as the Beaton physicians and the Currie dynasty of poets, who had been literate for more than 500 years, appear, for the most part, to have been unable to read or write so much as vernacular Gaelic let alone its literary counterpart by the time they began settling in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. All of the great centres for the Gaelic arts closed their doors before the end of the 18th century as patronage disappeared and the practical role for their students disappeared from society.

However, as had also happened in Ireland, to a degree, a great deal of material was reabsorbed into the folk culture, rather than lost entirely. Much literary material was simply transferred to the oral tradition and formal methods of education and training were replaced by more informal methods of cultural transmission. Gaelic tradition would now be passed on almost solely in the intimate environment of the home and among family and close friends. Despite the decline of the overarching institutional and formal cultural infrastructure, Gaelic culture remained remarkably uniform throughout Gaelic Scotland. Certainly, there was a powerful tradition of local creativity,

but all Gaelic art operated within a cultural idiom familiar to all in the Highlands and all Gaels, in all social classes were familiar with the same master literary works, mythology, beliefs, history, music and dance. It was largely in this form, as a dynamic folk society, structured around the oral tradition, that Gaelic society was established in the New World.

Establishing the Gaelic Community in Prince Edward Island

At the dawn of the emigration era, Scottish Gaelic society was undergoing profound change. A new social and economic order was taking shape in the Highlands, which included rapidly escalating rents, confiscation of land, loss of customary rights and widespread attack on traditional beliefs, cultural forms, and the native language of the region. Many Highlanders, as a result, looked to the New World as a place where they might find freedom and prosperity.

They would be aided in the realization of this hope by the fact that their old social order had not yet been entirely dismantled, except, possibly, for the part played by Highland Chiefs, who had been the earliest target of assimilative measures and who were rapidly adapting to their new roles as wealthy landlords and English aristocrats. The Gaelic professional classes – or tacksmen – by contrast, may have lost their traditional cultural functions, like the chiefs, and were in the process of being squeezed out of their economic and social roles entirely but remained in the late 18th century an important pool of well-educated, cosmopolitan, multi-lingual and, for the most part, culturally loyal leaders. They would play a critical role in organizing the early migrations to the New World.

Ironically, it was the revitalization of one of the tacksmen's traditional roles by British authorities that helped them play a particularly informed and useful part in the emigration process. Chiefs and tacksmen traditionally organized and led the military wing of the clan. Following the subjection of the Highlands, British authorities saw merit in using this system to raise entire Highland regiments, under British leadership, of course, to supply much needed manpower for Britain's imperial wars. Three such regiments saw action in North America during the Seven Years' War, which culminated in the fall of Quebec and the loss of most of France's North American possessions to Britain following the Peace of Paris in 1763. Many Highlanders gained first hand knowledge of the New World and its great potential, as a result. As importantly, land grants were offered to those who would stay in North America. Included among those was an 80,000-acre grant in Prince Edward Island, then part of Nova Scotia, for the Fraser's Highlanders.

Not much of the initial grant in Prince Edward Island was taken up but there was some settlement as early as 1764. An important outcome of this was the information sent back to increasingly desperate friends and family in the Highlands. There was not, then, a great deal of intercourse between the Highlands and North America, particularly with the new Canadian territories, and landlords predicted that attempted settlement would end in disaster. In part, this prediction was made to intentionally discourage prospective emigrants as most landlords and British political figures were strongly opposed to losing a large pool of people for whom they had other planned uses. The example and information provided by actual settlers whom those in the Highlands could trust, which contradicted the landlord rhetoric, was a strong encouragement for prospective emigrants. This, coupled with the organizational skills of the tacksmen, helped

overcome the potent obstacles to 18th century emigration. By the 1770s, Gaels began leaving for North America in earnest and alarmed officials in the Highlands were remarking on the "rage" for emigration that was sweeping through the region.

In spite of the many obstacles, not least of which was opposition to emigration on the part of powerful officials in Britain, major Highland settlements were established in North Carolina, New York and Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island in the late 18th century. The American War of Independence essentially cut off the settlement in North Carolina from further immigration and the colony in New York was relocated to Glengarry County in Upper Canada following the cessation of hostilities, becoming a rather difficult and expensive destination to reach. These developments helped make the settlements in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island the most important New World destination for prospective emigrants from the Highlands.

Such external factors played a significant role in making the large settlement area in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island indisputably the most important Gaelic cultural zone outside of Scotland but there were internal factors at work as well. Gaelic society was structured around the family and was resolutely rural. Gaels vastly preferred to migrate in community groups organized around extended families and with the intention of getting freehold land upon which to establish new rural communities. It was not at all unusual to see everything from infants to pregnant women to the very elderly in the Gaelic emigrant stream in addition to the young adults who were more characteristic of many other emigrant groups.

Additionally, the early emigrant groups tended to represent a fairly complete cross-section of Gaelic civilization. As a mostly subsistence society, almost everyone worked the land in some fashion or other but there were also those who fulfilled roles as doctors, clerics, sailors, poets, musicians, teachers, tradesmen and the like. Once established in the New World, these first pioneers generally encouraged others to follow and assisted them in making the transition to the new environment. This process of "chain migration" generally went on for generations, ensuring a remarkably complete transfer of old communities and old cultural forms to Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia.

This cultural orientation resulted in very distinctive migratory patterns. Prince Edward Island received immigrants from virtually every corner of the Scottish Highlands and Islands but the bulk of the settlers came from five fairly distinct regions, reinforced by geography and clan ties. These tended to recreate themselves in large discrete settlement districts in the New World. They were: Clanranald, Skye, Argyll, Sutherland and Perthshire.

The earliest to come to P. E. I. in large numbers were from the Clanranald territories, arguably the most culturally conservative bastion of the former MacDonald domain and the Lordship of the Isles (and essentially Catholic). This emigration zone comprised territories in the west central Highlands, the Small Isles and the southern Outer Hebrides.

The next important group (and the largest overall) came from the Isle of Skye and neighbouring areas, including the Isle of Raasay and the adjacent mainland of Wester Ross. The MacDonalds, the MacLeods and the MacKenzie's were the dominant political families in this area at the time of emigration and most of the area had been recently converted to Presbyterianism.

The third largest group first emigrated in the same expedition as the Skye people and hailed from the northern Isles of Argyll – principally, Mull, Coll and Colonsay, with much smaller representation from the mainland of Ardnamurchan and the other Isles. This territory was, for the most part, traditionally overseen by the MacLeans, formerly important lieutenants to the MacDonalds during the era of the Lordship of the Isles. Most of this district had also been recently converted to Presbyterianism.

The fourth largest group came from Perthshire in the eastern Highlands. This area tended to be divided between traditional clan organization, such as the Stewart controlled territories in the west and by organizational structures more in step with the neighbouring Scottish Lowlands, such as the regions controlled by the Duke of Athol and by the Gordons of Huntly. This area tended to be somewhat more fragmented along religious lines as well, with a strong representation of Episcopalians, a smaller but significant Baptist following and, of course, Presbyterians.

The final group came from Sutherland – principally from the north and west of that district, an area traditionally known as, *Dùthaich Mhic Aoidh* (MacKay Country). It was one of the earliest areas to have been converted to the Presbyterian faith and the only one of the regions represented in Prince Edward Island to have fully supported the Hanoverian dynasty during the Jacobite Rising. The Gaelic literary tradition, however, suggests that support was not especially passionate.

As might be expected, given the preferred method of migration, this regional pattern was essentially recreated in Prince Edward Island. The Clanranald settlers, who began arriving in the 1770s spread out along the "Northside", from the original settlement in Tracadie to East Point and from there, down the south coast as far as Cardigan. There were also smaller settlements in western P. E. I. (primarily from South Uist and Barra) around Indian River, Grand River and Brae. Settlement from the Catholic Highlands tended to be redirected to Nova Scotia and Cape Breton by the beginning of the 19th century.

The major locus of settlement for the "Skye" people, who first came to P. E. I. in the famous Selkirk expedition of 1803, was in southern Queen's and King's County, moving inland from the earliest communities along the coast of the Belfast district to the backland areas such as Valleyfield and Caledonia. There were also significant later settlements in central Queen's County around Strathalbyn and pockets of settlement in eastern King's in places such as Forest Hills, Lorne Valley and Dundas.

There was settlement from Argyll along the north shore of Prince Edward Island as early as 1770, if not before, but this was a comparatively isolated expedition, which did not expand much after it was initially established, and was seemingly unconnected to the main body of migration from northern Argyll. It is not even certain whether Gaelic was widely spoken among these Malpeque settlers (who hailed from Kintyre) although it seems very likely that the language had at least some presence in the community. The major Argyll settlement in P. E. I., instead, would trace its origins to northern Argyll, which was one of the indisputable bastions of Gaelic culture, being home to some of the last traditionally trained and patronized Gaelic professionals. These pioneers came out with the Skye people in the Selkirk expedition of 1803 and established two

important settlement districts. The first was just south of the Skye settlement in Belfast and stretched along the coast from Flat River to Little Sands. The larger was located across Hillsborough Bay, along the West River and spreading down the southern coast of Prince Edward Island as far as DeSable. Internal migration would later establish settlements in western Prince Edward Island, in Prince County around Dunblane on the south coast and Coleman closer to the north shore.

The smallest discrete Gaelic settlement district in P. E. I. was founded by the Sutherland emigrants in Queen's county in 1806. They took up land in the vicinity of New London and French River along the north shore and a few miles inland in the Granville hills. Although migration spanned nearly half a century, the waves were smaller and fewer than from the other regions and, as a result, settlement remained localized in this comparatively small district. This region, too, like the other Gaelic emigration districts was resolutely Gaelic in its cultural orientation.

Settlers from Highland Perthshire composed the final important segment of P. E. I.'s Gaelic population but they did not establish major settlement districts like the other settlers. Perthshire was a landlocked region that straddled the Highlands and Lowlands. The Highland settlements there tended to be in mountain valleys, which were comparatively separate from one another, unlike the communities of the coastal western Highlands and Islands, which enjoyed somewhat easier communication. The region also tended to be somewhat more broken up in its governance between not only various clans or families but also between Gaelic and Lowland systems than was the case with the other large emigration districts that have been identified. Perthshire settlements in P. E. I. largely mimicked this and were smaller and more dispersed than their other Highland counterparts. Otherwise the patterns of migration and settlement were quite similar.

There was an early Perthshire settlement along the North Shore in 1770 but, like the Kintyre settlement of that same year, this was an isolated venture and not, apparently, a predominantly Gaelic community, although Gaelic is known to have been spoken by at least some of those first immigrants. The earliest indisputably Gaelic settlement began in 1803 in the Brudenell and New Perth area and was followed by a series of small settlements: along either side of the Hillsborough River; in the inland sections of central Queen's County; mixed in among the major Skye and Argyll settlements in southern Queen's and King's Counties; and along the south coast of eastern King's County, east of Souris, predominantly. Because of their proximity to the Scottish Lowlands in the Old Country, Perthshire emigrants often had earlier access to the improved farming techniques that were being developed there but also to the distinctly negative attitudes towards Gaelic that were also frequently met with. This, combined with their more dispersed settlement pattern, tended to make their communities quicker to assimilate in Prince Edward Island.

Gaelic Culture in Prince Edward Island

Gaelic culture was undergoing a sweeping transformation at the time the first Gaelic communities were being established in P. E. I. in the 18th century. Gaelic social structure was changing dramatically and that dealt a deathblow to what remained of the Gaelic professions. Already weakened, the great centres of learning and art began to fade away in the late 18th

century as the social roles for which they prepared students disappeared – at least in a Gaelic context. There was no longer a demand for judges, doctors, administrators, poets, musicians or any of the other learned orders trained in the Gaelic tradition as English culture began to forcibly intrude on the Highlands and as the former patrons of these professions, the Highland chiefs, began embracing the new culture's values and its professional classes.

A Collapsing Infrastructure

By the emigration era, the traditional Gaelic education system had long been in ruins. Judges, doctors and the like, trained in the traditional Gaelic manner, disappeared from Gaelic society. Classical Gaelic, the language of scholarship, governance and literature had all but disappeared by the late 18th century and with it a highly evolved literary tradition and access to a great deal of written literature. Alexander MacDonald or *Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair* (Alexander, son of Master Alexander) as he is better known, was arguably the most important literary figure in the 18th century Highlands, despite his own conviction that his art was inadequate due to his lack of fluency in this older tradition. When his relatives began emigrating for Prince Edward Island in the 1770s he is believed to have been one of the last, if not the last person in Scotland who could read and write Classical Gaelic. His poems, composed in the vernacular, made the transition to the New World very strongly but the classical, literate tradition to which he had been exposed, did not; nor did it survive in Gaelic Scotland. In fact, the ancient tradition of the professional literary figure effectively came to an end in Gaelic Scotland roughly two generations later in 1819 when John MacLean of Tiree left his patron the Laird of Coll and migrated to Nova Scotia.

These educational centres were not simply training grounds for "artists" but for the Gaelic political and intellectual leadership. Their demise could not help but erode Gaeldom's intellectual strength. Scholars have indicated that by the latter half of the 19th century, for instance, there was a notable decline in the quality of Gaelic poetry, the chief means of literary expression for Gaels. This extended not only to poetic technique and richness of language but also to social and political insight and commentary. Those who wished to play any sort of influential role in those domains would henceforth need to depend almost entirely on an English education and would be, consequently, drawn even further away from their native culture.

Even the great centres of musical instruction failed to survive the transition to the new anglocentric social order. Harping disappeared by about the middle of the 18th century and the great piping colleges ceased to operate shortly thereafter. By the late 1700s, the Rankins of Mull and Coll closed their centuries-old college of piping, possibly the oldest in Scotland, and the heirs to that tradition left their ancestral homeland. Con Douly, who would have become piper to the principal family of the region, the MacLeans of Duart, and his brother, Eachan, who would have succeeded their father as head of the college, immigrated to Prince Edward Island. Similar events were occurring across the Highlands.

Beneath this collapsing institutional culture was a robust folk culture that was comparatively insulated from these socio-political changes. It made the transition to the New World quite strongly and was probably strengthened by the absorption of at least some elements of the former professional Gaelic arts. Gaelic society may have been stratified but it was comparatively

compact and intimate and there is good reason to believe that there was much overlap and interchange between the folk and professional layers of the culture even when the latter was at its zenith. It is abundantly evident that the chiefs and tacksmen, the class from whom these professionals were drawn, actively engaged in the cultural pastimes of the wider community, indicating familiar cultural reference points between the two streams. The merging of these two disparate tributaries – the folk and the professional – as the elite cultural structures faded may be part of the reason why Gaelic has been referred to as the richest folk culture in western Europe.

Literature

The blending of the two strands of Gaelic culture was evident in the development and transmission of literary material from the 17th century onward. Manuscript redactions of traditional tales which were meant to be read aloud at the court of the chieftain and which date from the 12th century correspond exceedingly well in their essentials with tales that have been passed down, after the decline of this manuscript tradition in the 17th century, solely by the oral or folk tradition to the present day. These tales were, in fact, already centuries old when they were written down in the medieval period, many of them dating to the pre-Christian era. Even the somewhat newer Fenian tales, which dealt with the exploits of a semi-legendary band of warriors who protected Gaeldom from invaders (particularly the Vikings), included much older elements of mythology and belief.

It is entirely likely that these oral and literate traditions survived side by side until the more formal literate tradition was reabsorbed into the oral tradition over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. These larger tales were the gems of the prose tradition and were highly prized by Gaels. They were the purview of master storytellers and frequently took several nights to recount. Examples of this genre have been passed down to the present day in Nova Scotia but have not survived in Prince Edward Island.

These large tales took pride of place in the Gaelic prose tradition but probably the most common stories were those that related to the history and traditions of the clans. They were preserved with the same customary attention to accurate transmission as other items in the Gaelic oral tradition and supplemented the ancient mythology of the larger tales, providing the foundation for the understanding of medieval and early modern Highland society. Maintaining this genealogical and historical material had once been a key function of professional men in the Gaelic court but transferred entirely into the oral tradition after the demise of court life. A great deal of the important historical and genealogical information recorded generally by amateur scholars in the late 19th and 20th centuries and often written up into community, parish, church or family histories was taken from this body of material. A familiarity with Gaelic genealogy and the sense of its importance to community life was very evident among the informants recorded for this collection.

Even more durable than historical tales, however, have been the many timeless tales relating to the supernatural. For some reason, tales of the supernatural seem to be the most successful survivors in cultures that suffer language death. Several good examples of this genre were recorded for this collection.

Humorous tales were arguably the most creative aspect of the Gaelic tradition. Although humorous tales were passed on from generation to generation like other elements of the prose tradition, a large portion of this body of oral literature appears to have been created to describe contemporary events and individuals. Tales or anecdotes in this genre, however, had an intimacy and an immediacy that meant they frequently did not travel well. As a result, many humorous tales tended to drift in and out of the communal repertoire on a regular basis. Like the supernatural tales, humorous tales have made a comparatively strong transition to the English language environment of modern day and several good examples in Gaelic and English were recorded for this collection.

The literate tradition of poetry failed to achieve the same impressive result as its literate prose counterpart in making a transition to oral form and surviving to the present day as a living part of Gaelic social culture. This is hardly surprising considering that much of the art in poetry is in the creative use of language and that the language used for the literate tradition was no longer well understood by the 1700s when elements of the elite culture were being reabsorbed into the folk tradition. Much of the subject matter of that poetry also concerned the Gaelic court, which itself had become an anachronism. The highest poetic achievements in common Gaelic, by contrast, such as the poems of *Iain Lom* (John MacDonald), *Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair* (Alexander MacDonald) or Duncan Ban MacIntyre, which succeeded this classical written tradition in the late 17th and 18th centuries, were immensely popular throughout all ranks of Gaelic society and have been faithfully passed on for centuries via memory and oral transmission. There are literary references to some of these songs in Prince Edward Island but, unlike Nova Scotia, none appear to have survived long enough to be audio recorded.

In addition to the works of the known master poets of the late 17th and 18th centuries, who emerged following the decline of the literate tradition, a huge number of anonymous songs began to come to light. Working songs composed by women, for example, and offering important insight into their lives, have survived from as early as the 1600s. Songs such as these in the vernacular tradition had undoubtedly always played an important part of artistic life in Gaelic communities but it was only as the professional or elite tradition of poetry began to fade that the extent of their strength became apparent. At least one of these 17th century songs was recorded in written form in Prince Edward Island, surviving into the 20th century, although none survived long enough to be recorded for this collection.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of poems were passed on through the generations in Gaelic society both in the Highlands and in the communities of the New World but there was also a dynamic tradition of creativity. All Gaelic communities had their own respected (and sometimes feared) poet or poets who were considered pre-eminent in their district. They chronicled important events in the life of the community and were occasionally engaged by others to make particular statements of celebration or criticism. They would have existed in a stratum just below that of the former master poets, who were extremely active in the political sphere and often tackled issues of a national scope. Their songs, instead, tended to have a strong currency in the local community although their best efforts sometimes travelled farther a field.

Many of these village bards were noted for an ability to compose verse on the spot – some even while engaged in a conversation on the very theme they would versify. The better poets also

tended to have a large store of traditional poems in addition to their own compositions and were frequently very knowledgeable about Gaelic literature in general. However, this knowledge and the talent for composition were by no means restricted to this particular group. Poetry was highly regarded by Gaels and there was heavy participation in composition, recitation (singing), discussion and the transmission of older poetry throughout the ranks of Gaelic society. Gaels also made use of this store of literary material as a form of living dictionary, referring to it for guidance in grammar, vocabulary, idiom, pronunciation and diction among other things. The quality of the spoken language in Gaelic communities, as a result of the widespread familiarity with the best of Gaelic literary tradition, tended to be very high.

Music and Dance

Gaelic musical culture at the elite levels suffered the same precipitous decline as the professional literary arts during the century leading up to emigration. Like them, however, it managed some degree of transition into the folk idiom but also enjoyed a strong counter current of cultural growth. The *clàrsach* or Gaelic harp had been the pre-eminent musical instrument at the Gaelic court until the late medieval period when it was superseded, although not entirely replaced, by the Highland bagpipe. Harping survived up until about the time of the last Jacobite Rising in 1745 but was not absorbed into the folk tradition, perhaps because the expense of procuring and maintaining such an instrument was prohibitive. Piping declined in importance at pace with the general deterioration of the court and the other Gaelic professions but did have a strong parallel folk tradition into which the elite pipers appear to have been largely reabsorbed by the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This once highly popular folk tradition, however, has been largely overshadowed by a more modern style of piping that developed in the Scottish Lowlands in the late 19th century, including the emergence of the pipe band. This modern style has generally replaced the older style of playing in the Highlands and in Highland communities in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island in the modern era. No examples of the Gaelic style of piping survived to be recorded for this collection.

One area of strong cultural growth in 18th century Gaelic Scotland was in the playing of violin music. The violin appears to have established itself as the pre-eminent bowed string instrument in Scotland by the end of the 17th century. It was noted in the courts of chieftains but had not developed into a full-fledged professional instrument in the fashion of the harp or pipes, with training centres and dynastic families of players before the Gaelic court ceased to function. It was, however, extremely popular and widespread throughout the Highlands before emigration to the New World began. In fact, at the end of the 18th century, just as emigration for the New World was reaching a fever pitch, Scotland had entered into what has become known as a "golden age" of violin music. The most important centres for the tradition were in the eastern Highlands but the influence was wide ranging, reaching into Ireland, Lowland Scotland, and England and even in some respects to Continental Europe, where it arrested the attention of some of the great composers such as Beethoven and Mendelssohn.

This tradition made a strong transition to the New World and it is in the communities of Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia (and especially in Cape Breton) where it has flourished best, all but disappearing in the Scottish Highlands. A wide variety of tunes were popular but the most common and most distinctively Scottish were the strathspey and reel. The strathspey, named for

the valley of the River Spey in the eastern Highlands appears to have developed in conjunction with the violin tradition in Scotland but appears to have been widespread by the emigration era.

The disappearance of the strathspey and the decline in the tradition of stringing groups of tunes together in a medley by the early decades of the twentieth century suggest that the Gaelic violin tradition was in some trouble in Prince Edward Island before the significant changes in rural social life brought on by what historians have termed "the break", following the Second World War. The advent of local radio, which brought Cape Breton music into the homes of eastern P. E. I., and increased interaction with violinists from that island appear to have had an impact on the local violin tradition from the 1930s on. Comments from some of the informants interviewed for this collection, as well as interviews conducted elsewhere in eastern P. E. I., however, strongly suggest that the older generation considered that the changes that came into the P. E. I. tradition as a result of this increased interaction with Cape Breton represented a return to the older style once common in Prince Edward Island as well. Some excellent recordings of the Prince Edward Island tradition are included in this collection. They could be usefully supplemented by a reading of Jim Hornsby's informative and highly entertaining, but, as yet, unpublished thesis on Prince Edward Island fiddling, available in the Robertson Library.

Music was a passion for Gaels and it is probably not surprising, as a result, that dancing was immensely popular as well. Ancient ritualistic dances with pagan overtones were known to have made it to the New World but no trace of them has yet come to light in Prince Edward Island. Social dances, mostly reels of some sort or another, by contrast, have been well attested. They were the main form of dancing in New World Gaelic communities until about the beginning of the 20th century. They were largely replaced by incoming square dances, such as quadrilles and lancers, which were, for the most part, heavily adapted to the Gaelic tradition by incorporating traditional Gaelic stepdancing and setting them to Gaelic music. One more ritualistic reel, however – the Wedding Reel – did survive well into the 1950s, complete with its social function of welcoming the bride and groom into the community in their new roles as husband and wife. Although the dance itself could not be taped for this collection several settings of the tune popularly played for this dance in eastern P. E. I. were recorded.

Stepdancing, which was performed as a solo dance (both to strathspeys and reels) and also as an integral part of Scottish reels, and later square sets, is probably the most conservative dance form remaining in Highland communities in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. The tradition has remained very conservative in Cape Breton until very recently and its evolution and context is comparatively well described by oral tradition. In Prince Edward Island, by contrast, it is more difficult to make a definitive statement. Interaction with Cape Breton, the influence of Irish dancing, tap and other forms and the decline of traditional social dances have all undoubtedly influenced the Scottish stepdancing style of Prince Edward Island but there is a lack of both folk tradition on the subject and scholarly work to make an accurate assessment.

It is ironic, however, that forms of Gaelic cultural expression such as stepdancing and traditional violin music, which demonstrate the greatest continuity within a community context, are so frequently not recognized as particularly Scottish, or even Scottish at all, while the traditions that are most often given the greatest symbolic recognition, such as Highland dancing, modern piping, Highland games and so on, evolved into their modern form in the Scottish Lowlands

largely from the later 19th century onward and largely in response to Victorian and later tourist tastes. Other forms of dance now considered as especially symbolic of a Highland Scottish heritage, such as Scottish Country Dancing originated in England and did not even reach the Scottish Highlands until the second half of the 19th century and, as a result, were entirely unknown in New World Gaelic communities. Despite this rather widespread (and usually innocent) tendency toward misrepresentation of Highland tradition, the violin tradition remains the healthiest expression of Gaelic culture in modern day Prince Edward Island and stepdancing remains strongly linked to it.

The Social Context of Gaelic Folk Culture

The Gaelic society that was established in Prince Edward Island consisted of a healthy, rural-bound folk culture with a severely eroded professional class that was being rapidly pushed into oblivion by an incoming English institutional infrastructure. This same process of change would eventually destabilize the culture as a whole but not until well after it had put down strong roots in New World soil. Gaels obviously had to make some adaptations to the new environment but these do not seem to have significantly affected cultural process in Gaelic communities. Certainly, there is no evidence of any of the cultural art forms failing to make the transition from Scotland to Canada. In fact, some of these arts, such as traditional violin music and stepdancing flourished to a degree not evident even in the Highlands themselves.

Cultural process in Gaelic communities was very localized. The oral tradition is inherently intimate as it requires close interaction and is not well suited for mass transmission. People shared songs, stories, witticisms, riddles, weather lore, prayers, beliefs, tunes, dance steps and the like at every available opportunity. Communal work was often lightened by the use of work songs. Songs and stories helped pass the time while waiting on tides or fishing nets or while doing repetitive handiwork such as weaving or knitting. Prayers and charms played an integral role in many work and social processes. There was little or no formal separation between the cultural arts and the normal processes of working life.

There were, of course, moments when the celebration of the cultural arts took on heightened importance. As an example, there were numerous calendar celebrations and festivals, in which all in the community had an active part to play, including, in some instances, the very young. Many of these had ancient ritualistic significance, predating Christianity. Valuable recollections regarding New Year's Eve practices were recorded for this collection – a particularly important calendar event in the Gaelic world – as was some material related to weddings such as courting practices, inauspicious and auspicious days for marrying, and ritual dance – such as the P. E. I. Wedding Reel.

Some communal activities tended to be less ritualistic and more segregated. Dances, for instance, in the home, might include younger members of the family but such was not generally the case in larger venues, such as at dances held in barns, on wharves, in schoolhouses, and later in community halls. Children did tend to learn the dance steps and patterns – and certainly the music – long before they themselves became participants in these other venues, as some of the interviews for this collection highlight. Dance could have a ritualistic role to play but Gaels had a tremendous love of dancing just for the pure joy of the art and frequently used it as the climax to

other sorts of gatherings, such as communal work parties, house parties and other sorts of social get-togethers. The potent opportunity dancing provided for members of the opposite sex to socialize was one important reason for its popularity.

Another one of the more restricted gatherings was the Milling Frolic. This was a gathering, originally of women only, to work freshly woven cloth to make it suitable for tailoring and dyeing. This was done by soaking the web of cloth and then pounding it on a hard surface for several hours in order to shrink the cloth and raise a nap. Although onerous work, this became one of the most popular events in the Gaelic social calendar. Rhythmic singing lightened the work and the exchange of song – mostly compositions by women about important events in their lives – was an important means of self-expression. As mentioned previously, some of the oldest songs in Gaelic vernacular, dating back well into the 1600s, were passed on from this tradition into 20th century Prince Edward Island.

An older woman with a good knowledge of songs and of the milling process, generally led the singing with the others joining on the choruses. It has been recorded that as the work was drawing near to its end, that the lead singer might engage one of the younger single women in friendly banter about her lover or lack thereof; the young woman generally had only the time that passed while the other women sang the chorus of the song to come up with a suitable verse to sing back either praising or rejecting the prospective suitor named by the older woman.

In Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island men began to participate in these gatherings at least by the late 19th century if not earlier, a practice never adopted in Scotland. Their participation also introduced a wider range of song types, such as rowing songs, more typical of men's experiences. Usually the milling frolic would be followed by a dance. This tradition has long since fallen by the wayside in Prince Edward Island but it is still practiced in Nova Scotia for its social enjoyment.

The chief forum for education and socialization in the various Gaelic cultural art forms was the home. The family played the most important role in introducing young people to the various arts and demonstrating how they integrated with life in their community. There was no formal way of doing this. It was a case of learning by example and by emulation. Children were exposed to these art forms immersed in their all-important social context before they were old enough even to comprehend them. They informally absorbed not only the art forms but also the values associated with the modes of transmission, such as hospitality, pride, patience and respect as well as a myriad of other subtle social intricacies. They heard their mothers, grandmothers, elder sisters, aunts and other women in the community singing or exchanging tales while working in the home; reciting prayers to accompany their many domestic chores; and creating various folk tonics for illness; they heard their fathers, grandfathers, older brothers, uncles and other men in the community referring to ancient rhymes about the weather; reciting charms to protect livestock from ill fortune; and singing (and making) songs about events, both trivial and important, while working around the farm. Poetry (always in the form of songs), stories, history, mythology, music, dance and other such pursuits were the common fare of Gaelic family and community life. Young Gaels were wrapped up in a rich folk-cultural milieu just about everywhere they went in their community and during virtually every waking hour that they interacted with their family and neighbours.

Despite the omnipresence of the cultural arts in the community, evening gatherings in homes, particularly in the winter when the workload was eased somewhat, were an especially important and popular means for celebrating the cultural arts. Every home would be a forum but some were particularly popular gathering places within a community. Such homes generally went by the name *taigh-cèilidh* (ceilidh house) from the Gaelic word *cèilidh* meaning "to visit". The fact that these homes were known as "visiting houses" rather than as "cultural houses" or some other such term, demonstrates how important the social context was to the sharing of the cultural arts. Children generally did not actively participate in these evening gatherings but were often allowed to observe. General news of the community or of wider importance was usually discussed, followed by poetry and tales and sometimes by music and dancing. It is clear that the importance of the ceilidh house survived the decline of Gaelic in some areas, apparently enduring in a comparatively complete form until the popularization of other forms of entertainment such as radio and television and the decline of more traditional rural social patterns.

Much depended upon who was in attendance at a ceilidh but Gaels were generally exposed to the entire gamut of their cultural heritage and developed knowledge in depth concerning their traditions. There were, of course, those in the community who developed particular expertise in various fields such as history, lore, tales, songs, music and dance but even they were generally deeply acquainted with and, often highly skilled in the other arts. The variety and complexity of many of the arts made prodigious intellectual demands since everything had to be remembered and passed on largely without the benefit of written sources. Tradition bearers, as a result, tended to have staggering memory skills. Because the forum for cultural expression was a dynamic one, it was stabilized by those who actively participated and by those who may have had no apparent active skills but who were often extremely knowledgeable "passive" tradition bearers. The latter helped by supplying missing verses to songs or correcting mistakes in the recounting of an item of history and so on and by making the sort of extremely high demands on what might today be called "the performers" that only an audience highly educated in the art form possibly could.

Such interchanges were critical to intellectual life in Gaelic communities. No longer enjoying a formal education in their own culture, they used their cultural arts to teach the complexities of grammar, word meaning, poetic technique, history, morality and ethics, musical forms and such and drew from that well to develop strategies for dealing with issues that confronted them. This required not only accurate reference to old traditions but also vital creativity. Many of the new compositions, usually in the form of poetry, were not strictly for entertainment; they were often expected to have a real social impact, just as one might expect from newspaper columns and editorials today. The recordings in this collection indicate that the tradition of hiring poets to make social commentary continued into comparatively recent times in Prince Edward Island.

Interestingly, the respected poets did not need to be high status members of the community either to master their art or to earn the admiration (or fear) of their neighbours for their skill. One such individual, Jane MacLeod, known generally as, *Sine Mhòr* (Big Jane), is probably the best Gaelic poet to have survived into the modern era in Prince Edward Island but was an itinerant, who travelled from home to home between Caledonia and Valleyfield and was known as a "character". There are several valuable references to her in this collection. Although none of the informants interviewed for this project were active poets, the tradition of composition was well

remembered, as was its importance to the community. A considerable number of Prince Edward Island Gaelic compositions have been published but only a few fragmentary verses were recorded for this collection.

With such a high regard for literature and with such wide participation, it is perhaps not surprising that Gaels began redeveloping their written literary tradition, despite facing daunting obstacles, such as no longer having a standard literary language or any means for formal instruction. Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia both became active in publishing Gaelic material during the 19th century. Original literature as well as classics from the Gaelic tradition and other translated works began appearing in newspapers, pamphlets and books. Traditional songs were especially popular but there were also items on history and tradition and substantial works on religious and ethical matters, including, not only Bibles but also books of Gaelic hymns, such as the collection composed by Rev. Donald MacDonald and Ewen Lamont of Prince Edward Island. Classic anthologies of Gaelic poetry published in Scotland were reprinted in Canada and Canadian anthologies of the great literary works were also compiled and published in P. E. I. and Nova Scotia. Original literary compositions from Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia appeared in Nova Scotia's Gaelic newspaper, *MacTalla*, which flourished at the turn of the 20th century (and still holds the record as the longest running Gaelic weekly in the world) as well as in prestigious journals such as the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, the latter courtesy of Rev. Alexander MacLean Sinclair, a noted Nova Scotian Gaelic scholar who ministered in the Belfast district of Prince Edward Island in the late 19th century. An emphasis on home Bible study in Protestant communities and the increasing availability of Gaelic Bibles in the 19th century helped offset the complete lack of formal education in the language. However, it seems that the oral tradition remained paramount even here, as at least one account in this collection indicates that members of the community preferred to gather together to have these works read aloud by one particular individual.

In many ways it would seem a rural folk society such as this could remain vigorous and vital so long as the wider society of which it was a part maintained its stability. To a certain extent that was true and many of the traditions survived comparatively strongly until after the decline of subsistence farming as the backbone of Prince Edward Island social and economic life by about the time of the Second World War. However, on a more fundamental level Gaelic culture was in an advanced state of decline by the beginning of the twentieth century. This was largely due to the fact that even in the relative independence of the rural subsistence community institutions had become increasingly influential by the 19th century. Even the remotest rural-dwellers had to deal with systems of governance, commerce and education, regardless of their day-to-day work and, as the 19th century wore on, those systems and their associated institutions grew increasingly intrusive. In Prince Edward Island those institutions were resolutely English and that meant that as they grew in importance in daily life, the scope for Gaelic language use and for its associated forms of cultural expression began to severely erode.

Fragmentation and Decline

Despite the fact that Gaels made up two thirds of Prince Edward Island's population and that Scottish Gaelic folk culture was particularly vigorous, the strength of the community was not what it seemed. Gaelic society was badly fragmented and, in many fundamental ways,

substantially undermined. Scots and Irish, for example, no longer shared a common language. There are anecdotal accounts of Irish and Scots conversing with one another using their respective versions of Gaelic but mutual intelligibility could only have been rudimentary at best; certainly it would not have been in any way adequate enough for them to have established a common forum for education or literature, let alone fluent communication. Moreover, Ireland had been exposed to more intense anglicizing forces than the Scottish Highlands for some time and the number of Gaelic speakers was in decline. Along with that came increasingly negative attitudes towards Gaelic – a sense that it was backward. For every anecdote of Irish and Scots attempting to use Gaelic to communicate, one generally encounters another, such as the one recorded for this collection, of the Irish mocking their Highland counterparts for their backwardness due to their loyalty to the language and culture. Irish and Scottish Gaels were unable to mutually support one another in the New World environment in the way they had centuries earlier in Europe and failed to constitute a united collective.

Similarly, within the Scottish community, which still accounted for nearly half the Island's population, there were serious divisions that substantially weakened Gaelic's prospects. A small portion of P. E. I. Scots had come from the Scottish Lowlands and according to reports they demonstrated naked hostility to Gaelic – more so than any other ethnic group. One account of this negative attitude is included in the recordings in this collection. Areas that bordered the Lowlands, such as southern and eastern Perthshire, tended to absorb many of these negative attitudes and there are anecdotal accounts of immigrants from that area also mocking settlers from other regions of the Highlands for their backwardness, due to their slowness in acquiring English.

The most important fault lines, however, ran within the Gaelic-speaking Highland Scottish community itself. The Highlands were a remarkably well-integrated cultural area, considering the long exposure to intense assimilative pressures and the breakdown of the overarching and unifying institutional structures that had once served the region. This was equally true of the Gaelic settlements in the New World but there were strong regional rivalries and in some important ways these were exacerbated by the social changes of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Chief among those divisive social forces was religion.

Catholicism was heavily repressed in the Highlands following the Scottish Reformation but Protestantism – and particularly Presbyterianism – did not establish a strong hold there until after the long and vicious religious wars between Episcopalians and Presbyterians in the Scottish Lowlands concluded at the end of the 17th century. Highlanders, for the most part, did not share the same dogmatic approach to religion as their Lowland counterparts and relations between Catholics and Protestants and between the various Protestant denominations that began to emerge were generally good. Indeed, even into the late 18th and early 19th centuries some Presbyterian clerics noted with dismay that there was little to distinguish Catholic and Protestant Highlanders in their religious observances. Certainly, this was true of their general social patterns and their cultural life. In the 19th century that began to change significantly.

A series of remarkable evangelical "awakenings" throughout North America and Europe encouraged increasing orthodoxy in Protestant religious practice. This began to polarize the Highland Scottish community and relations are noted to have soured as the 19th century wore on.

One notable outcome was the decreased ability of Highlanders in New World communities to find marriage partners within their own ethnic group as religion, rather than language and ethnicity, became the ultimate arbiter for determining suitable pairings. The environment for intermarriage between Catholic and Protestant Highlanders grew increasingly negative, while marriages outside the ethnic group but within the same religion – with Irish and Acadians, primarily, in the case of Catholic Highlanders, and with English and Lowland Scots, primarily, in the case of Protestant Highlanders - became increasingly acceptable. Because the community was so large in Prince Edward Island and the settlements relatively homogeneous, this did not result in abrupt change but did help speed the process of anglicization.

Arguably more noteworthy was the effect that this increasingly dogmatic environment had on cultural life in Highland Protestant communities themselves. Many of the traditional Gaelic cultural practices and beliefs were deemed sinful in this era of heightened religious sentiment and were actively condemned by clerics. Music and dance were particularly strongly discouraged. By the end of the 19th century it appears that the formerly rich musical heritage of Highland Protestant communities and their accompanying dance traditions had all but vanished in Prince Edward Island, as the recordings in this collection, again, help to demonstrate. This seems to be broadly similar to experience in Nova Scotia and the Scottish Highlands.

Ironically, the many supernatural beliefs that clerics condemned with equal fervour seem to have survived just about as well in Protestant communities as in Catholic, demonstrating that it is easier to control what people do than what they think. Activities which had a particularly public face, such as gathering to dance or playing music, which could be heard outside the home even when it was not played publicly, were easy targets for social approbation whereas personal belief and private conversations shared in the home, were much more difficult to stigmatize or, at least, to actively discourage.

While the decline and even loss of many of these cultural traditions such as music and dance in Protestant communities is comparatively easily observed, less obvious is the impact that such decline would have had on social interaction and the socialization of younger generations as these cultural practices had formed much of the matrix of community life. An important cultural touchstone lost a good deal of its relevance to a significant segment of the Highland Scottish population. This would almost certainly have profoundly affected not only how that part of the community came to understand and identify Gaelic culture but how non-Gaels did as well. Considering that the most culturally vital Gaelic area of Prince Edward Island in the modern era was that settled by people from the Isle of Skye, who were Protestant, and that this was possibly the most culturally rich Skye settlement in the New World, this is particularly unfortunate as a window on a very important aspect of that regional cultural group's cultural continuity and evolution was effectively closed.

None of the various weaknesses in Prince Edward Island's Gaelic community were fatal or necessarily even severely debilitating had it not been for the powerful external pressure Gaelic culture was under. Centuries of repression had severely damaged Gaelic society, most notably its institutional culture. By the 19th century, active repression declined only to be replaced by the strongly anglicizing effects of an increasingly important English institutional infrastructure in Gaeldom. Gaels who settled in places like Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island may have

escaped the worst effects of land dispossession and the deterioration of the Highland economy but they were still within the same larger cultural environment and governmental structures of the British Empire and those were not only resolutely English but decidedly hostile to Gaelic.

In this continued environment of heavy pressure on the local culture, Gaels began to make a strong association between power, progress and the English language – a message that was overtly inculcated by various authorities intent on eliminating Gaelic and other languages from within the Empire. Moreover, as institutions began to re-establish themselves in Gaeldom, they were effectively barred to Gaelic, exacerbating the growing impression that Gaelic was inherently backward and unsuited to advanced social functions such as governance, commerce or education and, therefore, of little practical use in the modern world. This message, in fact, was not only inherent in the way institutional life in Gaelic communities was being constructed but was overtly and frequently stated by native English speakers.

Education was the most conspicuous domain for this process of assimilation. From as early as 1609 British authorities had enacted legislation designed to remove Gaelic children from their home environment to be educated in the linguistic, religious and cultural mores of the Scottish Lowlands or England. It was not until the 18th century, however, that an effective anglicizing educational system was put in place. This series of evangelical schools established throughout the Highlands was designed again to anglicize the population and also to inculcate Protestant religious belief. Gaelic was absolutely barred, even though the prospective students and most of the parents understood no other language. Notwithstanding the fact that some educationalists argued that even assimilation, let alone education, would be greatly aided by at least some use of the Gaelic language, the English only delivery of education continued for roughly a century. In 19th century P. E. I., the ban on Gaelic was likewise almost complete, again despite the recommendations of some educational authorities who observed that where Gaelic was used in the classroom, children generally seemed to progress much more rapidly in their education and in their acquisition of English.

Formal education in Gaelic communities helped undermine rather than reinforce inter-generational cultural transmission. Gaelic was generally barred as a medium of instruction, as a language and culture worthy of study and even as an acceptable medium of communication among students. Indeed, some of the informants interviewed for this collection remembered forms of punishment that were still being used in their day to discourage children from speaking Gaelic in and around the school. Accounts throughout Gaeldom speak not only of corporal punishment but also of abusive stigmatization of the language spoken by students (not to mention their relatives in the community) as nothing but "gibberish". The educational system refused to operate in the language of the community that schools ostensibly served. It failed entirely to draw from their rich cultural store or to use culturally relevant references and indoctrinated students with both directly and indirectly negative messages about Gaelic's value and usefulness. Allied with outright punishment merely for using the language even while at play on the school grounds this system of education instilled in students a whole host of harmful associations to attach to their culture such as humiliation, backwardness and wrongdoing.

What this system of education succeeded in doing was not merely to introduce English to the Gaelic community and underline its importance, which might have led to a slow assimilation of

the community, but to actively disparage Gaelic culture and advocate its immediate abandonment. It is not surprising as a result, that observers noted a strong inferiority complex developing around the language and culture by the late 19th century. Jonathan G. MacKinnon, the editor of Cape Breton's Gaelic newspaper, *MacTalla*, provided one such valuable account. Visiting relatives in Prince Edward Island at the end of the 19th century he remarked that there were many Gaels on P. E. I. and that some of the Island's Gaelic communities such as Valleyfield and Heatherdale were as Gaelic as any to be found in Canada. However, he then went on to mention that he encountered many people there, as he did in his home province of Nova Scotia, who were too embarrassed to admit that they spoke the language tongue even when it was readily apparent from their abysmally poor English that Gaelic was their mother tongue.

The Gaelic language seems to have been in widespread decline across Prince Edward Island by about the time Jonathan G. MacKinnon made his observations at the dawn of the 20th century. Fluent speakers of the language appear to have been rare by the 1920s and 30s in most districts but this was not true of the backland Skye settlements. Areas such as Strathalbyn received substantial settlement in the 1850s and areas such as Valleyfield and Caledonia were still receiving immigrants through the 1860s. In general, this was about a generation later than any of the other 5 regional settlement districts and two generations later than the Catholic districts. This helped refresh that community and consequently language retention was much stronger in those districts. There were still people in Prince Edward Island into the late 1930s who spoke only Gaelic and understood no English and it is likely that most of them were in these later settled districts. In general, the last generation who were more comfortable in the Gaelic language than in English began dying out in these backland communities by the 1950s but fully fluent speakers survived long enough to be interviewed and recorded for this collection in 1987 and at least one native speaker remains to this day.

As has been noted in other ethnic groups, the loss of language appears to seriously destabilize other aspects of culture, too, although the effects are often uneven. Within Prince Edward Island, it is impossible to create an accurate timeline of cultural decline or even, with absolute certainty, a really accurate picture of regional linguistic decline but there are some interesting references in this collection to the disappearance of some practices and the greater retention of others, which will help researchers construct a broad picture of Gaelic's general evolution and decline.

Some aspects of supernatural belief have proved particularly durable although belief in such phenomenon, generally, is in decline in modern society and, as a result, they are unlikely to survive much longer. Elements of Gaelic musical and dance culture have also reached the present day in relatively robust form, although this continuity has been much more restricted to Catholic communities than other survivals of the culture have been, a circumstance which is beginning to show signs of slow change for the better now that religious attitudes have once again changed. In recent years there have also been classes offered in Gaelic at the University of Prince Edward Island, helping ensure that one of the most important tools for understanding the culture as it once existed will remain available to future generations. In this context, the Gaelic Field Recordings by John Shaw are an invaluable resource.

Significance of the Shaw Gaelic Field Recordings

Despite being one of the outstanding folk cultures of Europe, Gaelic has received comparatively little attention. This is undoubtedly a direct consequence of the value that was attached to the culture in the many years of repression and discouragement it suffered. When the brothers Grimm of Germany spurred the organized collection of folktales in Europe with their famous publication of what are now generally and inaccurately known as "fairy tales", Gaelic culture was fortunate in having its own renaissance man, John Francis Campbell of Islay, on hand. Campbell was independently wealthy and possessed of an amazing array of talents, not the least of which was an inherent understanding of how the nascent science of folklore collection should be approached. Unlike many of his contemporaries in 19th century Europe, John Francis Campbell understood that the manner of presentation was as important as the artifact itself. Most felt that folklore needed to be "improved" by educated collectors before being presented to the public, substantially lowering the actual value of the material collected. Campbell likened this to gilding an ancient copper penny. His published collection of unvarnished folktales from the Scottish Highlands remains the most extensive of its kind nearly a century and a half after it was first published notwithstanding the fact that it represents only about half of what he and his researchers collected.

Despite the promising start, the organized documentation of Gaelic folk culture and the associated collection of materials stalled. When another independently wealthy Gaelic scholar, John Lorne Campbell of Canna, tried to find a home for his valuable collection of material in the 1930s, including some of the earliest wax cylinder recordings of Nova Scotian Gaelic songs, he found that no institution in Scotland was able or willing even to receive them, let alone to do anything useful with them or sponsor further collecting.

Professional, academically backed collecting did not get underway in any serious fashion until the 1940s when the Irish Folklore Commission in Dublin, Ireland dispatched Calum MacLean of the island of Raasay back to his native Scottish Highlands. MacLean, incidentally, was a cousin to the late Hon. Angus MacLean, former premier of Prince Edward Island. Calum MacLean complained bitterly about the relative indifference of Scottish academics to Gaelic culture but, in spite of the apathetic institutional attitudes, his collecting helped establish the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh in the 1950s. In the years that followed much valuable field recording was done throughout the Highlands. Unfortunately, despite knowledge of the rich traditions in Canada, resources did not allow for serious collecting expeditions and the amount of Canadian material in the School of Scottish Studies archives, as a result, is minimal. A massive digitization project is currently underway in Scotland, however, to make thousands of hours of oral tradition available online and this will probably include John Lorne Campbell's important Nova Scotian collection.

Collection of material in Canada was even less extensive than in Scotland. However, there was some important activity. As was happening in Scotland, publishing houses were busy turning out Gaelic material both in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia during the 19th century. Newspaper articles, pamphlets, magazines and books were all appearing in Gaelic and due to the nature of the culture they chronicled tended to be dominated by traditional material. Because the community's oral tradition was usually the most important source for these published works and

because of the subsequent decline of the culture, these published works have become an important archive of Gaelic tradition in the New World. To be certain, this was not organized collecting or documentation but it is difficult to underestimate its importance in transmitting valuable material to the present day and in offering a glimpse of the cultural and intellectual life of Gaelic communities before they faded into obscurity.

The most important collector of Gaelic cultural material in the New World in the 19th century was the Reverend Alexander MacLean Sinclair of Glenbard, Nova Scotia. He was the grandson of John MacLean of Tiree, known generally as the Bard MacLean, the last professional Gaelic poet in Scotland, who migrated to Nova Scotia in 1819. A Presbyterian minister, MacLean Sinclair conducted his ministry in Prince Edward Island in the late 19th century and in Nova Scotia and actively collected and published Gaelic material from both provinces.

His output was prodigious. He wrote numerous booklets and smaller articles, including submissions to Nova Scotia's Gaelic newspaper, *MacTalla*. It appears that Alexander MacLean Sinclair may have also submitted many of the traditional songs that were anonymously published in *MacTalla* while he was minister in the Belfast district of Prince Edward Island. They appear to correspond very closely with material in his personal notes, in any event. He collected over 600 lines of traditional and original poetry from *Sine Mhòr* (Big Jane) MacLeod of Caledonia and published some of this in the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*. He also published most of the Bard MacLean's poems and some of his hymns as well as the poetry and hymns of other Gaelic poets in *Clàrsach na Coille* (The Harp of the Forest). He published an anthology of traditional Gaelic poetry entitled, *The Glenbard Collection*, as well as a four-volume anthology of various Gaelic poems composed between 1411 and 1875 entitled, *The Gaelic Bards*. He published two volumes of Gaelic poems by various MacLean poets and two miscellaneous volumes of Gaelic poems entitled, *Filidh na Coille* (The Forest Poet) and *MacTalla nan Tùr* (Echo of the Towers). He also produced a volume of the poetry of *Iain Lom* (John MacDonald) and of Alexander MacKinnon. In addition to these editions of literary works, he produced an extensive volume on the genealogy of the MacLeans, entitled, *The Clan Gillean, or History of the MacLeans*. Much of the material as well as the associated background information needed to properly edit the volumes was collected in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia and several of the volumes were published in Charlottetown.

The one drawback to MacLean Sinclair's extraordinary efforts was that, unlike his predecessor, John Francis Campbell of Islay, Sinclair subscribed to the "improver" mentality of the late 19th century making editorial changes to the oral tradition in order to make it more morally or aesthetically acceptable as he saw it. Despite this unfortunate, decision, MacLean Sinclair left an astounding legacy of the oral tradition current in Gaelic communities in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island at the turn of the century. Even this impressive output, however, gives only the scantiest glimpse of the intellectual and cultural life of Gaelic communities at that time. MacLean's son, Rev. Donald MacLean Sinclair, also a keen amateur Gaelic scholar, kept the parish in Valleyfield in the 1930s and is known to have collected material. He did publish some observations relating to Gaelic Nova Scotia in the *Dalhousie Review* in the 1950s but does not appear to have made much reference to Prince Edward Island in any of his publicly available writing.

In Nova Scotia, audio recordings began to supplement written recording of Gaelic tradition from the 1930s onward. John Lorne Campbell and Nova Scotian native Helen Creighton both began documenting the Nova Scotian Gaelic song tradition at that time on wax cylinders. Creighton carried on her recording work through the 1960s, publishing in concert with Major C. I. N. MacLeod of St. Francis Xavier University a book of Nova Scotian Gaelic songs transcribed from her field recordings. MacLeod, too, published several small books on Gaelic story telling and poetry collected in Nova Scotia around this time. Sister Beaton was also active at Xavier College (later University College of Cape Breton) in Sydney from the 1950s onward, gathering together amateur recordings of Gaelic material for that centre's Beaton Institute Archive (named posthumously in her honour).

Unfortunately, very little collecting of any sort was done in Prince Edward Island after Rev. Alexander MacLean Sinclair left Prince Edward Island at the beginning of the 20th century. John Lorne Campbell visited Prince Edward Island in the 1930s as part of his early recording expedition to Nova Scotia but although he left an account of some of the places and people he visited and conducted an invaluable parish census of Gaelic use in P. E. I. and in Nova Scotia, he did not record any P. E. I. tradition bearers during that visit. Campbell was particularly interested in the folk traditions of Catholic settlements and an informed recording trip through the Catholic settlements of P. E. I. at that critical time would have been of tremendous significance. He may have been in time to record the last fluent speakers of the language in those districts and, at the very least, would certainly have found many semi-speakers and a wide variety of songs still current. Recordings of the violin music of that era would have told much about the evolution of the tradition as well during a period of rapid cultural decline. Similarly, John Lorne Campbell's contemporary, Helen Creighton, does not appear to have recorded any Gaelic songs in Prince Edward Island throughout her long, distinguished career as a collector of folklore.

It was not until roughly three quarters of a century after MacLean Sinclair left Prince Edward Island that a skilled Gaelic scholar conducted an organized expedition to record Prince Edward Island tradition. Alphonsus "Phonsie" Campbell, a native of the Souris Line Road in eastern Prince Edward Island encouraged Gaelic scholar Gordon MacLennan to investigate the remnants of Gaelic culture in Prince Edward Island, while a professor at the University of Ottawa in the 1960s and 70s. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, MacLennan concentrated his efforts on the Catholic districts of eastern P. E. I. where his colleague Phonsie Campbell had been raised. At that late date, however, a full generation after John Lorne Campbell had last visited the Island, MacLennan was able to collect only very fragmentary pieces of Gaelic tradition, which are now archived in Ottawa. Had he been more familiar with Prince Edward Island, he might well have decided to concentrate his efforts on the much stronger survival of Gaelic culture in the Skye settlements of southern Queen's and King's County, in areas such as Valleyfield, Heatherdale, Caledonia, Glen William and so on. There were still a considerable number of fluent speakers of Gaelic in that district at that time and a collecting trip would have almost assuredly succeeded in gathering full texts of songs and a great deal of other valuable material. Recording efforts in Nova Scotia have generally proved more successful in targeting areas of greatest Gaelic cultural strength.

It was not, in fact, until 1987, when the Institute of Island Studies and the Celtic Studies Committee of U. P. E. I. sponsored the recording of this collection, that an organized attempt

was made to identify and record the best examples of Prince Edward Island's Gaelic tradition and to provide an overview of Gaelic life on the Island. The timing could not have been more fortunate as Gaelic was then at its terminal stage in Prince Edward Island; there were only a handful of fluent and strong semi-speakers still living at the time, and they were quite elderly. Regrettably, there was no longer a diverse regional mixture of Gaelic traditions to be recorded by that late date. Examples of the Gaelic traditions of the Sutherland and Perthshire settlements of Prince Edward Island, for instance, seem to have gone entirely unrecorded throughout their long history in P. E. I. and did not survive into the 1980s. One song from Sutherland, thankfully, was collected and published by Rev. Alexander MacLean Sinclair. The song is not known elsewhere and would certainly have disappeared had it not been for the P. E. I. source. What must have been a phenomenally rich Argyll culture in Prince Edward Island was also largely missed but it is quite possible, however, that a great deal of Alexander MacLean Sinclair's published material, which is largely concerned with Argyll tradition, was derived from the community culture of the Argyll districts in late 19th century Prince Edward Island. This, however, can never be known for sure. The only regional areas strongly represented in these recordings, as a result, are the Clanranald and Skye settlement districts. By 1987, the Gaelic speech community was restricted almost entirely to the Skye settlements and the best examples of surviving musical tradition were all but exclusively in the Catholic (or Clanranald) districts of eastern P. E. I.

The 1987 recording project, then, helped identify the discrete cultural districts remaining in Prince Edward Island, illuminate their relative rates of decline and target the best surviving examples of Gaelic culture in Prince Edward Island for recording. This process and the results of the project are described in detail in the summary report submitted by Dr. John Shaw and included in the collection. Shaw had extensive experience in this field. He compiled the Gaelic Folklore Project recordings of Nova Scotian material (almost exclusively from Cape Breton) for St. Francis Xavier University in the late 1970s and early 1980s. That project, which received \$150,000 in federal funding, ran for five years and resulted in the recording of more than 2,000 items on 350 tapes from 168 informants, in addition to gathering several other collections of taped material, which had been compiled informally by amateur enthusiasts.

The 1987 Prince Edward Island recording project, by contrast, produced 192 items on 33 tapes, recorded from 20 informants. While clearly not as impressive in scope as the Nova Scotian project, this was a significant result from a community that was, even in its most conservative districts, at least a full generation ahead of Nova Scotia in terms of Gaelic cultural decline. Had the same generous federal funding, which had allowed five years of collecting in Nova Scotia, been available in even a proportional amount, considerably more time than a few weeks would have been allowed to cultivate Prince Edward Island informants and to collect material. In light of the virtually complete dearth of academic study that has been conducted into the Gaelic cultural community in Prince Edward Island, however, it is difficult to underestimate the importance of the present collection of Gaelic field recordings. They make an important contribution to the wider study of Gaelic culture, particularly in the New World, and also to the social history of Prince Edward Island by opening a window on the cultural life of what has been, historically, the Island's largest ethnic group.

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GAELIC IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND: A CULTURAL REMNANT

Final Report ~ Sponsored by the Institute of Island Studies, U. P. E. I. and the Celtic Studies Committee

Compiled by John Shaw, Summer, 1987

Edited by Mike Kennedy, Fall, 2002

SUMMARY AND FINAL REPORT BY DR. JOHN SHAW

The present report describes the project titled *Gaelic in Prince Edward Island: A Cultural Remnant* sponsored by the Institute of Island Studies at U. P. E. I. and the Celtic Studies Committee. Briefly, the project consisted of compiling field recordings of the most important items of Scottish Gaelic tradition on the Island. The recording in the field was carried out over the period from August 17 to September 12, 1988 by Dr. John Shaw of Cape Gael Associates Co-operative with the assistance of Mr. James Watson of the same agency during the week of August 21-30, with an additional music recording session by John Weyman on September 19.

The greater part of the collected material is in the form of sound recordings made on an UHER 4200 Report Stereo reel-to-reel machine. Interviews were done in mono, singing and music in stereo. In addition, selected sessions were video-recorded. These included all of the music sessions, in order to furnish as complete a record as possible of the Island's traditional Scottish and Irish fiddling techniques; a singing session in Caledonia with the Island's last active Gaelic singers; and a Gaelic interview with John (*Iain Néill*) MacLennan, age 88, the last remaining fluent speaker known to us in the province.

Although John MacLennan may now be unique in this regard, the region is the home of a number of good semi-speakers, many of whom were doubtlessly fluent as children, whose information in terms of language, folklore, sociolinguistics, ethnography and music has been valuable indeed. Many of the important informants were identified prior to the field recording stage by John Weyman of the Celtic Studies Committee, whose excellent volunteer work expedited the entire project by many days and contributed greatly to the final results.

Of the 192 items recorded on the project 153 were sound recordings and 39 were videotaped. These were recorded from a total of 20 informants out of the 29 informants visited over 31 visits. A look at the relative frequencies of the kinds of items recorded gives a fair indication of the internal strengths and weaknesses of a culture in its terminal stage, and a comparison on this basis with folklore materials from Cape Breton would reveal much about the progressive effects of language loss on Gaelic culture. It is not surprising that items from music and dance with accompanying lore should be the most numerous category (47), since such items are quite capable - in some form, at least - of crossing language barriers. The relatively high frequency of song items collected (21) is misleading, since these are either extremely fragmentary, often consisting of a single verse or a part thereof, or are reinforced by a standard printed text. The 19 story items clearly reflect the end of a tradition, since they are either anecdotal and/or humorous, or concern psychic phenomena: these are the brief, simple and hardy remnants of a larger,

highly-evolved tradition, including the recitation of major international and hero-tales, of which no trace remains now on the Island. Materials reflecting language attitudes (19) owe their frequency to the collector's attempt to record an internal account of the demise of the language in a once vigorous Gaelic area and some of the social causes underlying this. Much work remains to be done to expand on the number of miscellaneous folklore items (nicknames, Placenames, yearly festivals: 15) which can still be found in all the Island's Scottish communities. P. E. I. informants are quite aware of their family origins, as the 14 items under this category show. Our impression is that the area of genealogy and accompanying family stories has assumed more importance here than among Cape Breton informants. A large proportion of P. E. I. informants are able to trace their families back to the time of settlement, and some cases beyond, while the time elapsed with its intervening social changes has been at least as great as that applying to Cape Breton. Anecdotes concerning bards and characters (often one and the same: 9) could also be profitably added to: we would suggest that one of their major functions was to embody and pass on much that was admired in Gaelic culture but at variance with English-speaking values being introduced. The 7 proverbs and expressions recorded are of some interest, since most of them are not familiar to us from other Gaelic-speaking areas. The dialect items (5) hint at the beginning of some independent developments in the vocabulary of P. E. I. Gaelic. A thorough analysis of John MacLennan's dialect would reveal more in this regard.

Before examining the materials recorded in the field we should remind ourselves that the portrait drawn from these is only a partial one, and that the most complete and accurate account of Gaelic life on the Island can only be achieved by combining the orally transmitted materials with information contained in the written documents. We hope to compile a more complete account of this kind at a later date.

It became evident quite early in our recording with the Island's Gaelic informants that family histories, both in the sense of genealogy and family based anecdotes, provide an ideal starting point from which to explore an informant's knowledge of the culture. These accounts are among some of the best to have survived among Gaels into our own time, and as we shall see from the following items recorded from Rev. Donald Nicholson of Clyde River and a native of the Gaelic-speaking community of Hartsville, they supply fascinating glimpses into the Gaelic settlement of the Island, and of the Western Islands in the first half of the nineteenth century. The first story concerns a Murdoch MacLennan of Raasay, near Skye, a first cousin to Rev. Nicholson's grandfather, and his encounter with army recruiters whose use of liquor and other devices to fill their ranks have been well described in more than one Gaelic song. In Rev. Nicholson's own words: "When they would get the young man pretty well over the bend they would get him to sign up for the army." Murdoch was more fortunate than most, for the transaction was observed by two of his brothers, who during the night somehow managed to get him out of the building where the recruits were being held until the morning. The narrow escape earned him the Gaelic nickname of *Murchadh an Saighdear* "Murdoch the Soldier" forever after.

Two of Murdoch's brothers, John and Ronald, arrived in Hartsville (then known as Scotch Settlement) in 1855 and moved in with an uncle for their first year. After the year had passed "John began to feel that he had been mistaken leaving the old country and he got lonesome and wished to return." He packed his belongings and Big Murdoch, a cousin, agreed to take him to a cattle vessel that was scheduled to leave the Island. Murdoch's planned departure, however, was

regarded as a major mistake by his relatives and neighbours and Big Murdoch consequently took the longest possible route to the wharf, passing the time with conversation and stories. They arrived in time to see the ship departing under sail some 500 yards from the shore, and had to return home. This was the only instance known to Rev. Nicholson of a settler in the Scotch Settlement wishing to return to Scotland and the story has it that Murdoch never again mentioned returning to the old country. A few months later both he and his brother took up land in the Scotch Settlement.

The above family stories are also distinguished by the wealth of old country Placenames given, which indeed are far more numerous than those generally heard from Cape Breton informants. These include the small-island names of Flodda and Rona off Skye, as well as Sleat in the southern part of the island. The names are all linked with precise genealogical references, and dates (some of which can be found published in local histories) are frequently included.

The Hartsville-Scotch Settlement area is not alone in retaining a strong attachment to Scotland through family histories. Theresa Wilson (née MacPhee) of Goose Cove on the North Shore can recite her genealogy back over five generations to Highland settlers (some of whom arrived with Lord Selkirk), and Mary Bruce, raised in Valleyfield remembers that her mother regularly wrote MacKinnon cousins in Uig, Isle of Skye. Her mother's family arrived in the Island in 1857.

Despite the strong bonds with Scotland maintained in families, written and oral sources stress the rapid and progressive changes that characterized the Gaelic-speaking settlements, particularly when compared to Cape Breton, and this being so, it is no surprise that views of Gaelic language and culture should be complex. A fascinating, almost global view of this comes from my friend Dan MacPherson of Caledonia concerning the demise of the language based on a very ordinary circumstance in 1980. I quote this in full:

I was shingling there that day. There was nine of us altogether. There was Neil MacLean, who was married to my sister, and there was Dan Duncan MacFarlane, an old Scotchman... and he got this kilt from Scotland. And he went to the Scotch gathering and there was no one showed him how to put it on. And Angus MacLean... he saw Angus MacLean and went over and Duncan he was a cross fellow: right right cross and a real, real Scotchman. A good piper and a good fiddler. "Can you put this damn thing on me?" "Oh well," says he, "you got a MacFarlane plaid" – pretty red, you know – and, "To tell you the truth," says Angus, "I don't know the first thing about it." And it was a hot, hot day. And he put it on his arm and carried it around. Isn't that something? But anyway, he was there and Neil MacLean, and Neil MacLean looks up and he says, "There's something happening right now here in this house that will never happen again. I can swear to that: it will never, never happen again. There's nine people here and every one can talk Gaelic." Isn't that something? And there was one woman near ninety who was a scream altogether: she was a storyteller. And it'll never happen again.

One family that showed unusual loyalty to the language in the Caledonia area is that of Percy MacPherson from Glen William. This family, descended from Skye immigrants, was anxious that the children should speak Gaelic and in no way equated the language with social or cultural backwardness. Family worship was conducted in Gaelic only: Percy's grandmother, who lived

with them, was a strong influence that assured he spoke the language well as a child. Although Percy also spoke English before he began school, Gaelic was used in the home perhaps more often than in other families. Older people spoke the language well, but not all the young people of his generation. Catherine MacLean of nearby Iris describes the older people's preference for Gaelic, saying that "They wouldn't want to learn anything else...They thought the Gaelic was the only thing." One old lady in Caledonia so vastly preferred the language that she was heard to remark to local visitors that she hoped they had Gaelic the next time they called in.

Whether real or imagined, the advantages of knowing the language became part of the storyteller's repertoire, as illustrated in the following story, apparently originating in Cape Breton, told by Rev. Donald Nicholson:

Two men, one of them Gaelic speaking, were walking through the countryside on a warm day. The man without Gaelic said he saw no great purpose or advantage to knowing Gaelic, and the Gaelic speaker replied that it could prove handy at times. They stopped at a house to ask for a drink of buttermilk and as the buttermilk was brought up the elderly lady there said something to her daughter in Gaelic. The Gael politely declined the buttermilk but the other man, unheeding, drank it down and they continued on their way. And after they were on the road again the English speaking man said "Now why didn't you drink the Buttermilk?" "Well," he said, "if you'd had the Gaelic you would have known the woman said, "Give them the buttermilk that the rat was in."

In the early days of the Gaelic settlement, at least, institutional views toward public use of the language were not always unfriendly. Rev. Nicholson's account of tradition from his native Hartsville shows a degree of institutional understanding and enlightenment toward Gaelic which may well be unique in the history of the Maritimes:

The first settled minister in Hartsville Congregation – or Strathalbyn as it was called at the time – was linked with Clifton-New London. And this man, Alexander Sutherland, when he came out he did not have the Gaelic, especially sufficiently to preach in Gaelic. And in the Strathalbyn church practically the entire congregation were Gaelic and the older people had nothing else but Gaelic. So this elderly man was asked to lead in prayer. And during his prayer he mentioned to the Heavenly Father, what did they ever do to bring such judgement upon them that He should send a minister who could not speak unto them in their own tongue? And later on one of the parishioners informed the preacher either trying to excuse the man or otherwise and the minister said, "I understand it very well. I think I'll be able to correct that." So he took some time off and went to Scotland to a school – a Gaelic school – and came back and preached Gaelic and English.

Oral accounts show a rate of literacy in Gaelic that is surprising considering the absence of the language from the school system. The mainstay was naturally enough the Bible, but the fact that the Gaelic newspaper *MacTalla* published in Sydney, N. S. around the turn of the century was not uncommon points to a recreational aspect to literacy in Gaelic. No less noteworthy is the number of women able to read Gaelic, and in some families both parents were literate in the language.

There is some evidence from informants, both in private and public settings, that would lead us to believe that the language transition, during the nineteenth century at least, was not as smooth as might appear from our modern perspective. In a humorous anecdote one old timer with rudimentary English after a day in town remembered on the way home that he had forgotten to purchase ginger. The word gave him trouble, so before sending the young lad who was with him home, he rehearsed the pronunciation carefully and returned, asking the merchant, "Have you got any danger here?" "No danger here." "Any danger in town" "Oh, yes. There's a lot of bad places in town" Another man in describing his responsibilities at home is reputed to have said, "I have two blind mans on my hands and one of them is a woman."

The language according to our informants seems to have fallen out of usage at various rates and times which differed according to locality and could probably be correlated with time elapsed since the period of settlement, and, possibly, with religion. The language seems to have persisted in Caledonia as long as anywhere else: Dan MacPherson, now well into his nineties, remembers a monoglot woman when he was nine. English here appears to have been often used here in the majority of households by 1900, with the consequence that the younger children within a large family did not know the language. Mary Bruce from Valleyfield mentions that the family worship would be conducted in Gaelic or English depending on which children were present. This led to linguistic scenarios well known in other Gaelic areas. We have come across frequent memories of Gaelic being used as a code within a family to talk over the heads of the younger members, and in one instance children were teased for their mistakes when they attempted to speak a language which was becoming increasingly inaccessible. Catherine MacLean of Iris, near Caledonia, remarks that the monoglot generation ceased to exist around the time of her grandmother's death in 1936, adding that Gaelic effectively disappeared from usage in her area in the late 1920s. The major cause for this language change, according to informants, is that parents did not "teach" their children to use it.

Goose Cove, on the North Shore, witnessed much the same process: Gaelic ceased to be heard in the early 1930s; in fact, the first fluent Gaelic heard by our informant Theresa Wilson was from a Cape Breton man, Dan MacEachern of Judique, who visited the area in 1937-38. Before this time, however, Gaelic was used in a large number of households, with some literacy among speakers: Theresa's grandmother often read the Gaelic newspaper *MacTalla* to an enthusiastic audience. This was in spite of Theresa's grandfather, who being of Lowland extraction, opposed the use of Gaelic on the grounds that it would spoil one's English.

There is ample oral evidence that many of the Island's schoolteachers were Gaelic-speaking – schools mentioned are Springton, near Hartsville (founded in 1837), and High Bank – but no accounts have come down to us of the language being used in any capacity in the schools, and as was often the case with native peoples well into this century, children were not encouraged to speak in their native language in the schoolhouse. As a rule the English-only policy stopped short of physical punishment. However, Margaret MacLeod (103) of Little Sands, our oldest informant, states that this did occur in the local school, where Gaelic was actively discouraged with switches from the woods or a strap. In this case methods extended to a version of the *maide-crochaidh* or "hanging stick": "Perhaps they'd have the shingle themselves, you know, and they'd be watching for Gaelic and then it would be put on them... No Gaelic allowed, and the children would tell on each other if the other fellow was talking Gaelic."

In Goose Cove, King's County, Gaelic was likewise ignored in the school. In Theresa Wilson's grandmother's time (c. 1856) the school inspector was reported to have expressed his displeasure with the quality of English spoken by the pupils. However Theresa recalls hearing from her father, born in 1889, that Greek was at one time taught in this same school.

Field recording has yielded some information regarding linguistic features of P. E. I. Gaelic which deserve to be commented on in passing and show some signs of linguistic adaptation and innovation in the Gaelic settlements. Historically the most interesting is the term *pàirc-coillidh* or *pàirce-choilleadh*, literally a woods-field, referring to the burnt clearings where the settlers planted their potatoes. This differs from the term used universally in Cape Breton which is *coille dhubh* or "black woods". Another Gaelic term which is unfamiliar to me outside of the island is *lòdan* meaning the little velvet pouch on the end of the stick used for church collections. For "farming" we have encountered *fermeireachd* instead of the common term *tuathanachas*. In more than one instance we have observed the genitive singular of the personal name *Niall* as *Nèill* rather than the form *Nìll* so often used by Cape Breton speakers. Finally there is one small piece of evidence pointing toward dialect differences within a single family of mixed Skye and Colonsay origins in the pronunciation of the word *caoraich* "sheep".

Storytelling is the most extensively represented of the various kinds of Gaelic folklore materials recorded over the past summer. It was, in an informant's words, "the entertainment people had." In living memory stories were told in English as well as Gaelic, and apparently achieved a fairly high standard in the second language, yet one informant has observed that "stories sound better in Gaelic" echoing a widespread and possibly accurate piece of storytelling folklore that is frequently encountered among Cape Breton reciters. The repertoire includes both local Island stories and those brought over at the time of settlement from western Scotland. Percy MacPherson of Glen William recalls hearing the following two stories, the first of which very likely originated in Scotland:

I heard a story one time that happened in Scotland: it was about witchcraft. This man had quite a herd of cattle and he was losing them one by one and one morning he got up at daylight and he looked out and he saw a neighbour coming to his barn. The neighbour opened the barn door and he put something above the door. And after the neighbour left he went out to see what he was doing and he found this stick above the door and he took it out and he laid it outside someplace and whenever it got dark he took the stick and he went to this neighbour's place that had put the stick above his door and he put it above the neighbour's door. And the next morning one of the neighbour's cattle was dead. *Nach robh sin eagalach?* (Wasn't that frightful?)

This couple were going home after getting married. And this cat came from nowhere and it was going around the bride's feet and tripping her. And he had a long knife and he pulled it out of his pocket and he stabbed the cat, and the cat left. And the next day there was one of the neighbours sick and he went over to see him. And he was in terrible bad shape, and the bridegroom, he pulled the clothes off him in bed and when he pulled the clothes off him he was all bandaged up where this stab wound was in him.

Whether or not this second story originated in Scotland it bears a strong resemblance to tales of witchcraft, cats and shape-changing current in Skye until our own times.

A further item of witchcraft tradition from Skye, this time linked with a fragment of song, is recalled by Dan MacPherson and concerns the Martins:

'S ann à Baile Throtairnis a dh'fhalbh nan còmhlan grinn

Dol a dh'ionnsaigh Port Rìgh mar a dh'òrdaicheadh leinn

Gun do bhàsaich dithis còmhla riu'...

Our fine company set out from Trotternish

Going to Portree as had been set out for us.

Two of our number perished...

"They came to the river and the witch was there and she killed them both."

Another interesting story brought over from Scotland, this time concerning the devil and having at least one close parallel recorded in Cape Breton was told to us by Catherine MacLean of Iris:

There (was) the story in the Old Country there about a man who was fond of playing cards and there was a big rock there. He was sitting on this rock playing cards and this man came along and asked him if he could have a game of cards with him. So he sat down and he was getting every game – couldn't get a game on the man at all. So the man got up and went away: he left the man and the cards there and he went. After a while he came back and there was no sign of the man and the edge of all the cards was a little burnt – a little burnt corner of all the cards... We know who that was.

Stories concerning the *sìthichean* – the little people or fairies – for some reason are relatively rare among Gaels in North America. Among the few that may have survived on the Island, we recorded this one from Rev. Nicholson which was known in his family.

Big Murdoch would be telling about the fairies that he had seen in the Old Country. And he said that the way [one] could escape the fairy, if there was a field of potatoes – rows of potatoes – rather than trying to run away from it you'd run criss-cross on the potato-patch. And he said the fairies would have to run up and down each row in order to get across.

No less popular than witch stories and fairy stories are those dealing more directly with the supernatural in the form of ghosts and forerunners. Indeed, we have recorded only a very small proportion of those known during our fieldwork, for such stories, along with humorous anecdotes, seem to have most successfully survived the language change. Witch stories enjoyed some popularity, and one family is reputed to have practised witchcraft within living memory, but it is the stories dealing with forerunners, especially death premonitions, which seem to have held the most enduring interest for Island Gaels. Examples of these latter are numerous, and the examples given here are typical of many Gaelic communities. The first, from Catherine MacLean, contains the frequent motif of lights being associated with an impending death:

My father-in-law, when he lived in Lewes, he was coming home from somewhere one night and little light lit on his shoulder. And that light stayed on his shoulder until he got to wherever this place was. And it was a child that died and he helped make the coffin for

the little child. And that's what it was: the light stayed on his shoulder until he got to this place where the child died.

A further story featuring lights as forerunners, this time with an almost chilling quality, has been passed down through the family of Rev. Nicholson of Hartsville:

When I was quite a young lad I had an uncle living in the neighbourhood and his son became very ill with double pneumonia. But some weeks prior to his taking ill they were having breakfast early in the morning in the wintertime and there was a light shone through the window. And the uncle thought, well, that might be a forerunner that someone was going to pass away there. When the son took ill the doctor gave him no encouragement that he would ever recover. He had been very sick for a couple of weeks, but he did recover. But during that time his father going for a doctor got a severe cold and before the son recovered the father passed away. And two weeks later the mother passed away with pneumonia. I can remember the folk talking that that undoubtedly was a forerunner: that they had seen the light shining in on their table in the early morning.

Such lights occur here and elsewhere in a more specialized form: that of the *dreag* of traveling light, much like a large shooting star in appearance, which has been sighted in Caledonia. It is believed by Gaels that the length of the trail corresponds to the importance of the person whose death it presages, the longest trail indicating the death of a clergyman. Other signs mentioned by informants are the face of the deceased appearing clearly in a dream, and the appearance of a single bird inside a house. This last tradition is widespread and, along with other signs, was part of the tradition of Theresa Wilson's family in Goose Cove, King's County:

If a bird flew in your house, that was somebody was bringing bad news to your house and there was a lot of things: dishes rattling in the cupboard was the sign that somebody was going to die; and a picture falling off the wall was another; and if you opened the stove and the sparks flew at you... that was supposed to mean you'd hear of a death.

The key to association with birds in this family's tradition was that birds were souls from purgatory, and a search for parallels to this belief elsewhere in Gaelic written or oral literature could yield some interesting results; as far back as medieval Irish literature birds were a clear sign – almost a literary convention – indicating passage through the membrane separating this world from the other world. Theresa's people further associated such flocks of birds with the *sluagh* (lit. the host) which was capable of transporting people quite rapidly and over considerable distances. Here is her account of her paternal grandfather's experience with the *sluagh*.

The *sluagh* – I don't really know what the name for *sluagh* was. Apparently if you went out after night you could be taken by the *sluagh*. And some believed that it was like a flock of birds would come, take you off your feet and carry you away. And my grandfather – my father's father – he would go to lie down after his hard day's work and get up to go outside at night before he'd go to bed and he'd probably never come back in until the next day they'd see him coming. One night he woke up on the railroad track and it was in the morning. He woke up with the vibration of the train. He walked in his sleep.

And he believed that the *sluagh* took him... and if you rolled your pants legs up that the *sluagh* wouldn't take you.

Signs of death with more obviously religious overtones occur, as in the case of the appearance of the form of a lamb superimposed in an old woman who was on her deathbed.

No discussion of Gaelic stories would be complete without some mention of humorous anecdotes, and these too have often crossed intact into English. One such anecdote is of special interest, incorporating as it does the faculty of *geur-bheachdachadh* or close and detailed observation, so highly prized by old Gaeldom. According to Mary Bruce of Valleyfield a minister called on an old lady who lived by herself and was not as concerned with modern hygiene as some of her neighbours would have liked. The minister knew full well that he must accept the inevitable cup of tea so after it was poured into the slightly discoloured cup – the only one left in the house – and he had taken it gingerly in his left hand in order to sip out of the safest side the old lady remarked brightly, "I see you hold your teacup with the same hand as I do."

Field recording has garnered no full text of Gaelic songs from the Island, but a good number of fragmentary ones have appeared along with ample evidence of a strong song tradition generally similar to that in Cape Breton. Our informants tell us that singing was passed on largely by ear and informally: young singers just "picked it up". Most people interviewed had some memories of family members who sang Gaelic, and many could name close relatives who composed songs in Gaelic. Singing, of course, was an important form of recreation, rivaling stories and in some localities instrumental music, but interestingly there is only the scantiest evidence of singing during work, as was observed among Gaels from at least the end of the eighteenth century. More research in the Catholic areas of King's County might throw some light on this apparent anomaly. As we have noted in the case of storytelling, some local bards made songs in both languages. The songs sung or mentioned in our collecting cover the whole range of Scottish community life, taking in humour, love songs, the "big songs" of the eighteenth century bards, local events and satire. One vastly intriguing aspect of Gaelic songs is the nature of the repertoire preserved: there is a marked preference for songs of the nineteenth century composed in a "new" style in Scotland after the middle of that century, and a corresponding scarcity of songs transmitted from the older tradition. How this reflects the state of affairs during the initial decades of Gaelic settlement is a good question, for the Gaelic population of Cape Breton shows a far higher degree of conservatism in its repertoire. The answer may lie in a higher rate of literacy in P. E. I.

Nevertheless traces of some of the old song customs are present, not least among them the belief in the power of satire. Often as not a community would contain someone who was particularly adept at this song form, and as Rev. Nicholson's account shows, it was often a form of retaliation as a last resort when all else failed:

One crippled man who used to make the rounds of settlements staying [in] each for a few weeks or months. In one of these the younger men were teasing him, a court case resulted and someone had to pay a small fine. So he went to Murdoch MacKenzie, as people often did who were sinned against, to make a song for him against the man who had injured him:

Cha tèid mi 'n-diugh dhan Èipheit Cha tèid mi measg nam bèisdean

Air eagal gun coinnich Blake rium

'S gun tugadh e an t-anam dhìom

I'll not go to Egypt today,
and join that brutish company
for fear I'll meet up with a fool
who will strip me of my immortal soul

Dan MacPherson has furnished a good example of the link between song and story that is known elsewhere. This particular item also touches on instrumental music being based on the mouth-music words to a popular fiddle tune *Miss Drummond of Perth*:

Calum Crùbach anns a' ghleann

*Cum thall na caoraich agad
Calum Crùbach anns a' ghleann
Cum a thall na caoraich.
Ged a tha do leth-shùil cam
Chì thu leis an t-sùil a th' agad
Ged a tha do leth-shùil cam
Chì thu leis an aon shùil.*

Lame Malcolm in the glen
keep you sheep over yonder
Lame Malcolm in the glen
keep your sheep there.
Though you are blind in one eye
you can see with your good eye
though you are blind in the one eye
you can see with the other.

"He was making out he was so blind and he was letting his sheep over to graze on the other fellow. The other fellow wasn't letting him, you know. He was pretty good too."

The practice of precenting the psalms, a distinctively Gaelic form of religious singing is remembered by one of the oldest of our informants. Alice MacLeod, raised in High Bank, remembers thickening frolics, known in Scotland as waulking the cloth and in Cape Breton as milling or, rarely, tucking frolics. It has been mentioned that men on the Island also participated in these work songs. If so, this is a practice shared with Cape Breton and absent in Scotland. What the original state of affairs was is a good topic for future research. A further exception to the general lack of work songs is Alice MacLeod's memory of women singing at their spinning.

Associated with the Island's Gaelic songs are a series of anecdotes about song composers, many of whom were memorable characters in themselves. Among these, most frequently mentioned is a certain Jane MacLeod of Caledonia, who was blind. Sine Mhòr, as she was known in Gaelic, seems to have had little material wealth and visible social standing, yet her gifts as a bard and her

whimsical independence established her as a cultural reference point. Her songs were said to have been written down and lost, but the orally surviving fragments range from humorous songs to prayers, and had they survived intact would have furnished a valuable internal record of the life of her community. Hers was a role shared by many old itinerant women in Cape Breton who left many of their traditions behind them with young children; the kindness they received is an indication of the degree of tolerance found in Maritime Gaelic communities.

Family nicknames are widely recalled on the Island, and often have much to say of the histories of families at the time of emigration, or before. Thus on the North Shore we have MacInnises styled Tinkers; MacDonalds styled Bornish, after a small locality in South Uist, which has its parallel in my own parish of Glendale; a certain family styled *Bòcain* "ghosts" also with a Cape Breton parallel; and another styled *Giobain*, meaning something like "tatters". The nickname *Alasdair Mucach* does not refer to a swinish individual, as some Gaelic-speakers might reasonably suppose from Gaelic *muc* "pig", but rather to his family origins on the Isle of Muck in the Inner Hebrides.

Gaelic Placenames are relatively rare in peoples' memories, perhaps because of the widespread renaming with the introduction of rural post offices, yet the old name *An Tuiric* for Lewes in King's County may share its origins with the identical old name for Glencoe in Inverness County, Cape Breton, possibly the Bridge of Turk in Scotland.

Proverbs in Gaelic are also infrequently encountered, though many more could be likely recorded than have appeared so far. John MacLennan's *Chì an òige an aois 's chì an aois am bàs* "Youth sees old age and old looks at death" was unknown to us before.

John MacLennan was able to recall the practice of applying water with a silver coin to animals in order to protect them. This is known to him as *uisge far airgid* "water over silver" which is the equivalent of the *uisg'-airgid* "silver-water" used elsewhere. Chester Martin of Caledonia mentions that a Gaelic rhyme was recited with this and recalls an account of the efficacy of the technique against the curses placed on a horse by a man in Glen Martin who wanted it but could not obtain it.

This recalls a cursing of animals in the Highlands arising from envy called *aithiseachadh*. People also placed silver money in churns in order to bring the butter.

Memories of beliefs and customs relating to the seasons have likewise been retained. One such item is a seasonal rhyme concerning the privations of early spring which arrived from Scotland. The custom of striking houses on Hogmanay was often recalled, and we were most fortunate to collect from Dan MacPherson a good example of one of the Gaelic *duain* or chanted verses that accompanied this yearly ceremony where youths would make the rounds with a sack full of food, treats, or in this case a sheep's head:

*Hé o ill é o
Thàna mise a- nochd dhan Challainn
Caisean Challainn na mo phòca
'S math an cèò thig bhon fhear sin.*

He o ill e o
I have come tonight for New Year's
the sheep's wooly breast bone in my pocket
and good the smoke that will come from that one.

"...the sheep's head you know, and the woman would have to come across with it. She couldn't stand the stink (and) she'd have to come across with the goodies."

Traditional dishes with their Gaelic names have also been recorded, and the list could doubtless be added to. These include *maragan*, a kind of blood pudding; *stapag*, a meal and cream mixture; *bainne deasgainn* made with milk and rennet; and a dish called *càraich* made with cracked oats. Various tonics, mostly from tree bark, have been retained as well, along with the old pan-Gaelic belief in the healing powers of the seventh son of the seventh son.

Descendants of the Island's Gaelic immigrants have long been conscious of their music and dance traditions, and the extent of these, along with their Cape Breton parallels is nowhere more apparent than in the material recorded from Theresa Wilson and her sister Emilina Crossman of Goose Cove, an area once noted for its Gaelic. The sisters belong to the sixth generation of a family of MacPhees which originated in South Uist. In the old days, they tell us, it was all Scottish music along the North Shore from St. Peter's eastwards. People danced both four and eight-hand reels, and the older people stepped through these as Cape Bretoners do to this day. Dance music consisted mainly of jigs and reels, and music and dance were performed to a high standard. Theresa first heard strathspeys when the Antigonish station began broadcasting around 1938, introducing a strong influence from Cape Breton players to that region of the island. She mentions, nonetheless, that the strathspey was very likely reintroduced at this time, for Jimmy MacCormick, a local fiddler born in the mid-1800s and regarded as old-fashioned in his musical style, is reported to have played strathspeys before her time. In the meantime an Irish element in the tune repertoire had gained popularity among local fiddlers. This area also featured some local pipers, the best remembered of whom seems to have been an Emmanuel MacInnis.

Hugh MacPhee of Fairfield, further east along the same shore, is an active fiddler whose grandfather Archie Angus MacPhee was Gaelic-speaking and a dance player. The original settler received the grant of land held today for having fought among the Highlanders at the Siege of Québec. Many of Hugh MacPhee's tunes came down through his father, and he himself became a dance player. Much like Cape Breton fiddlers, he employs cuts in his bowing and knows a number of tunes on the high bass. One of the most interesting items recorded during our visit with Hugh was a local story concerning a piper Peter MacPhee and how he acquired a certain tune:

In the early days of the land settlement they had live on a piece of property a couple of months or something per year in order to hang onto it. And this chap, a Peter MacPhee, he had a grant of land in Rockbarra way back in the woods and he had a log cabin on it and no well – there was a spring there. And he used to go out in the summer and he'd spend his two months out there hanging on to the grant or whatever. And he was at a spring there to get a pail of water and he fell asleep. And there was a fairy came out of the spring and played this tune. This old chap incidentally was a piper. And this fairy

played the tune and after a while the fellow woke up. He had a strange name: they called him Togany (*Toganaidh*). Well, this Togany, he went back to his log cabin and he got his pipes and he played the tune. That was it.

Omar Cheverie is also an active old-style fiddler and a descendant of a Captain Neil MacPhee from the North Shore. His grandmother, a Campbell from Fairfield, spoke Gaelic more easily than English. Certain homes in those districts became recognized as gathering places for music and dance, corresponding to the *taigh-cèilidh* of Scotland and Cape Breton. Omar's grandfather played tunes on the high bass, and it was often the custom for fiddlers to double up at dances, as was also frequently the practice at the old schoolhouse dances in Cape Breton. He remembers seeing note-players from the time of his youth, and mentions that there were a number of active women fiddlers. Although he has never seen them danced, Omar thinks it likely that four-hand reels were present: in any case dancers step-danced through sets, and strathspeys were danced to. Cape Breton influence on the music of the North Shore, at any rate, may well have started at an early stage through tunes brought back by Islanders fishing mackerel off the Cape Breton coast, and there was doubtless contact through the Cape Breton music featured on the Sydney radio station before the founding of CJFX in Antigonish. Scottish music on the Island was a style easily distinguishable from that of the French-speaking musicians. Scottish music was often accompanied on the organ, as it was in Cape Breton before the introduction of pianos; occasionally rhythmic accompaniment was provided by a second person striking the strings with knitting needles as the fiddler played. Chording on the piano has suffered a general decrease in quality in recent years because young people cannot seem to find the time to develop the skills.

Francis MacDonald of St. Peter's, a Scottish-style fiddler who played his first dance at age 14 agrees wholeheartedly with the essence of this last observation, remarking that playing fiddle in his area is not considered "cool" by today's youth. His father was a fiddler, yet Francis' development as a musician owes much to a range of outside influences including old-time music on the radio, Don Messer, and Acadian and other French-speaking players. In Francis' youth, dance-sets consisted of jigs, reels and waltzes, with strathspeys apparently not in evidence, although there were other noted Scottish players in his district.

The main exponent of Scottish fiddling in the Caledonia area, John Dan MacPherson, played pipes before he took up the fiddle. His father was a brother to Dan MacPherson mentioned above, spoke Gaelic "all the time" and played the pipes. Many of the tunes learned on the pipes carried over into John Dan's fiddle music, but he recalls a Scottish fiddler John MacLean in his neighbourhood who was an early influence on his playing. At any rate he early on acquired a taste for the Cape Breton style and made some effort to model his playing after this. Due no doubt to his exposure to pipe music, John Dan's style contains the most interesting and varied ornamentation we have observed among the Island's Scottish players; this is reminiscent of such Cape Breton piper-fiddlers as Gordon MacQuarrie of Inverness County and Michael MacLean of Big Pond and may point to a close association between fiddling and piping in the Western Highlands before the period of emigration.

Further conversations and recording sessions leave us with the general impression of a vigorous fiddling tradition in the region around Caledonia which thrived until three generations or so ago. Alice MacLeod mentions a family in High Bank with six boys all learning fiddle at once; both

Dan MacPherson and John MacLennan are able to list the names of Gaelic-speaking musicians in the area, many of whom played dances.

Emmett Hughes' family background and fiddling repertoire are Irish. He is a sixth generation descendant of pioneers from Dromore, Co. Monaghan. Tunes from his family's tradition – his father was a player – consisted of jigs, hornpipes and reels, but did not include strathspeys or slow airs. He developed a vigorous and accurate style of Irish music largely his own, based partly on the music of Cape Breton's Angus Chisholm taken from phonograph records. This influence may be most apparent in the bowing, employing a large number of single strokes, when compared to the bowing styles of old country Irish fiddlers. An informed survey of bowing techniques among fiddle players in the Island's Irish districts would be timely.

We return to the North Shore for a moment to remark on an item of musical lore which to our knowledge has never before been recorded. It concerns the story behind the mouth-music words to the strathspey *Lord Moira*, much like the words to *Miss Drummond of Perth* that we have already seen. The words to the tune given by Theresa Wilson accurately reflect those recorded elsewhere in Scotland and Cape Breton, but the accompanying story describing the jilting of a wishful old maid is new to us and may have reached the Island with the settlers, having been lost elsewhere.

The mouth-music words were also important for jigging tunes, an art that Theresa Wilson's mother learned from her own mother. Jigging, called *puirt-a-beul* in Gaelic, was a frequent feature of wedding and dances on the North Shore, where two people would be hired to sit on either side of the fiddler and jig the tunes as they were played. Theresa's mother also regularly jiggged tunes unaccompanied at home for her children to dance to. Omar Cheverie recalls an Angus Smith near Souris who was noted as well for jigging tunes.

As for stepdancing, Mary Bruce, raised in Valleyfield, remembers clearly the way dancers used to step through the sets, though there were not so many stepdancers in her time, but in her own words "just the occasional one". In the square sets: "When they'd be standing on one side and the other side joined they'd be stepdancing and stepdancing at the corners."

She does not remember seeing people perform tricks – snuffing out candles with the two heels and the like – as they stepdanced.

John MacLennan of Caledonia was able to describe in his own language the pipers he knew in his youth, among them a Willie Alex MacQueen whose sister, a fiddler, is still living. He added during another interview that local pipers on occasion played for dances, which recalls the lively dance-playing of pipers such as Neil MacIsaac of Big Pond, Cape Breton whose art lasted until the first decades of this century but has now disappeared entirely.

Our survey of items and observations from fieldwork in Gaelic on the Island is, of course, selective, presenting only some of the many questions that such a project raises. There remain many items yet to be recorded, and important comparisons to be drawn.

INFORMANT BIOGRAPHIES

Rev. Donald Nicholson

Rev. Donald Nicholson was born in Hartsville, Prince Edward Island in 1906 and was 81 years old at the time he was recorded for the Gaelic field-recording project. His grandparents immigrated to Prince Edward Island from Rona, Raasay and the Isle of Skye in the 1850s, settling in the Strathalbyn district of central Queen's County. This was one of several large communities in the province settled predominantly by people from this district in Scotland and was established in the 1830s. Rev. Nicholson's ancestors were part of a later immigrant group known in Strathalbyn as the "late comers". The Strathalbyn district was overwhelmingly Scottish but was already in transition from Gaelic to English language use when Rev. Nicholson was growing up in the early decades of the 20th century. His older brother (who emigrated to Quincy, Massachusetts along with many others from the district) was a fluent Gaelic speaker, while Rev. Nicholson had only a partial command of the language – a situation very common in families of that era. Rev. Nicholson supplied many story anecdotes in Gaelic and English.

Dan MacPherson

Dan MacPherson was in his 90s when interviewed and hailed from the Caledonia district. His people were from the Isle of Skye and were part of the movement from that Island to the backland settlements like Caledonia in the latter half of the 19th century. Dan was undoubtedly completely fluent in Gaelic as a youngster and demonstrated a good command of the language and a large store of Gaelic material when interviewed. Dan noted that his people were recognized as great tradesmen but did not say whether this originated in Skye or in Prince Edward Island. Several members of his family were good storytellers and singers, such as his uncle, Johnny MacLennan. Dan had a particularly strong interest in Gaelic songs and in local composers, supplying a great many interesting references to the tradition around the Caledonia area as well as fragments of songs and Gaelic anecdotes from Skye and Prince Edward Island. His brother was a piper, as is his nephew, John Dan MacPherson, who was recorded playing the violin in this collection.

Margaret MacLeod (née MacNeil)

Margaret MacLeod was the oldest informant interviewed for this collection. She was born in Little Sands in October of 1884 and was about a month short of her 103rd birthday when she was interviewed. She was a daughter of Murdoch MacNeil, son of Archie and Sarah (Currie) MacNeil of Little Sands. This district of Prince Edward Island had been settled by people from Argyll and her paternal grandfather, Archie, had come out directly from Colonsay. Her mother's people, however, like her late husband, were Skye people. She was raised in a still strongly Gaelic environment but English was making headway by the late 19th century. Her father had very little English as a young man, while her mother spoke good English. English had become an important language in their family by the time of Margaret's youth and her sister, consequently, had very little Gaelic. Their uncle, Ewen Lamont, by contrast, was a famous Gaelic poet, whose hymns were published in a joint volume with those of the Rev. Donald MacDonald in the 19th century and enjoyed several printings.

John MacLennan

John MacLennan was born in Caledonia in 1901 and was 87 years old at the time he was interviewed. He was the only fully fluent speaker to be recorded for this collection and most of the material he recorded is in Gaelic. John was descended from Skye people who came late to Prince Edward Island, settling the backland districts, like his native Caledonia. He left P. E. I. at the age of 22 to work in the Maine lumber woods but returned to the Island a few years later to become a farmer and raise a family. John noted that children spoke Gaelic in Caledonia school when he was a student and that Gaelic songs and storytelling were popular forms of entertainment at that time. There were several Gaelic poets in his close family, such as his uncle, *Seonaidh* (Johnny) MacLennan. John was able to provide several fragments of Gaelic songs composed in the district as well as a host of other items during his interviews.

Percy MacPherson

Percy MacPherson was approximately 76 years of age when interviewed in his home in Glen William. His people came from the Isle of Skye, his grandfather originally settling in nearby Bellevue. His parents had an unusually positive attitude towards Gaelic and did not consider it a backward language. Percy's father conducted family worship exclusively in Gaelic every morning and evening. Both parents were literate in Gaelic and sang Gaelic songs. They encouraged the use of the language in the home when Percy was growing up, particularly for the benefit of Percy's grandmother, who lived with them. This contributed to Percy's fluency in his youth, although he also had English before going to school. English was generally used with visitors but many families in the district still spoke Gaelic when Percy was growing up. Percy was able to recount some particularly interesting anecdotes concerning the supernatural.

Mary Bruce (née MacDonald)

Mary Bruce was born in Kilmuir and was 88 years old when she was interviewed at her home in Valleyfield. She was the daughter of John Neil MacDonald and Effie MacKinnon. Her people came from the Isle of Skye and were part of the later settlement of the backland districts of Valleyfield, Heatherdale, Kilmuir and Caledonia in the second half of the 19th century. Her father's people were from Kilmuir in Skye and her mother's from Uig. Her mother's people came out in the 1850s and the families in Skye and P. E. I. were still in touch at the time Mary was interviewed. Both of Mary's parents were literate in Gaelic. Family worship was conducted in both Gaelic and English when Mary was growing up, depending upon which children were present. Mary was taught English in preparation for school, although Gaelic was her mother tongue. This, she believed, was rather typical of the district when she was a child. Many of the children she attended school with understood Gaelic but she did not remember children speaking the language, which was discouraged, in any event. She, however, was encouraged to use Gaelic in the home in order to be good company for her grandmother Mary (wife of Neil MacDonald), who lived with them. Her grandmother could speak only Gaelic but understood a small amount of English. Mary noted good storytellers in her family and at least one minor poet. Gaelic songs were commonly sung in her family when she was a child.

Catherine MacLean (Mrs. Jim MacLean)

Catherine MacLean was born in Poplar Grove in western Prince County in 1921 and was 66 at the time she was interviewed. Her family moved to Iris, or Caledonia West in 1928 where she was raised. Catherine's people were originally from the Belfast district, her great grandparents having come out from the Isle of Skye with the Selkirk expedition of 1803. Catherine's parents were both native speakers of Gaelic but had worked for a time in the United States and were also fluent in English. Catherine's mother tended to use English in the home with the children but spoke Gaelic with her brothers. Catherine's grandmother Mary Gillis, who lived with them, had only a few words of English and always spoke with Catherine in Gaelic. She also read the Gaelic Bible aloud. She died in 1936, when Catherine was 15. Catherine did not hear Gaelic spoken in the Caledonia school when she was a student. Gaelic songs and stories were popular in her youth and older people in the community would gather to speak in Gaelic.

Theresa Wilson (née MacPhee)

Theresa Wilson was born in Goose Cove on the "Northside" of Prince Edward Island, an area settled in the late 1700s by settlers from the Catholic Highlands. Her people were primarily from the Isle of South Uist and her first ancestor in Goose River, Murdoch MacKinnon, came out in the Selkirk expedition of 1803. Gaelic was commonly spoken in the Goose River area in Theresa's grandparent's generation but her parent's generation was not fluent. Theresa's mother's aunt Cicily, for instance, spoke Gaelic with very little English and used to sing Gaelic songs to Theresa's older brothers in the 1920s and 1930s. Theresa's mother could understand Gaelic quite well and perhaps generally better than most in her generation because of Cicily's influence. Her mother could sing *puirt-a-beul* (mouth music) and Theresa was able to sing at least part of one herself during her interview. Theresa indicated that in her early years in the 1930s few people in the Goose River area spoke Gaelic fluently anymore. In fact, the first fluent speaker she remembered hearing was Dan MacEachern who visited the area from Judique, Cape Breton around 1936-37. Gaelic was not spoken in the schools in the district. Music and dance traditions, however, were very strong in the Goose River area when Theresa was young. Her father and many other relatives played violin and several traditional style pipers were still active in the area. Theresa and her siblings could all play violin as well and frequently danced in their home either to their father's playing or their mother's singing.

Allan Cameron and Chester Martin

Allan Cameron and Chester Martin were born in Caledonia at the turn of the century and grew up in that district. Allan was born in 1899 and Chester in 1902. The ancestors of both men came to Prince Edward Island from the Isle of Skye. Allan and Chester grew up with some Gaelic but were never fluent speakers. They developed an interest in the language as youngsters and in Gaelic singing. Allan's father sang a bit of Gaelic but Chester's father, although a Gaelic speaker and member of the Caledonia choir, apparently did not. Allan also improved his Gaelic while in military service, learning material from a Padre by the name of Gillies. Chester's grandfather was a fluent reader of Gaelic but Chester had to teach himself to read the language as an adult, visiting an older gentleman in the district for assistance. Allan and Chester used to sing in a Gaelic singing group with Willie Bruce from Valleyfield, known usually, as the Caledonia Trio.

Most of their song repertoire came from published collections of a more modern style rather than from the traditional genre or from the local tradition of composition. They frequently sang hymns and psalms at community concerts and, in later years, at funerals of Gaels from the district.

LIST OF MUSICIANS

Violinists:

Omar Cheverie (Souris)

Peter Chaisson, Sr. (Bear River)

Dan MacPhee (Bayfield)

Hughie MacPhee (Bayfield)

Emmett Hughes (Dromore)

John Dan MacPherson (Caledonia)

Francis MacDonald (St. Peter's)

Jack Webster (Cardigan)

Carl Webster (Cardigan)

Joe Kearney (Sturgeon)

Pianists:

Kevin Chaisson (Bear River)

Ann MacPhee (Bayfield)

Guitarist:

Gerard Murphy (Montague)

CONTENTS OF GAELIC RECORDINGS FONDS

1. 33 half-track reel to reel audio tapes (tape 31 is missing from master collection - check to see if it is in with copies)
2. 3 standard VHS tapes of traditional music and interviews with tradition bearers
3. 1 standard VHS tape; excerpt from *Compass* profiling Dr. John Shaw interviewing Rev. Donald Nicholson (Ann Thurlow, reporting)
4. 1 large blue binder with field notes and contact information
5. 3 small bound notebooks of field notes and contact information (2 orange; 1 green)
6. 1 Photocopy of computer print out of Dr. Shaw's field notes
7. 1 Photocopy of computer print out of final report by Dr. Shaw
8. 1 copy of project proposal submitted by Dr. Shaw prior to making recordings
9. 2 small bound booklets - Strathalbyn Jubilee (green); History of Valleyfield (red) (These should probably be removed from the fonds)

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BIOGRAPHY OF DR. JOHN SHAW

John Shaw was born 9 March 1944 in Baltimore, Maryland. He demonstrated an early interest in Gaelic culture, which eventually led him to Scotland and Canada. In 1961, while still a teenager, he began an intensive academic study of Gaelic, spending the summer studying with renowned Gaelic scholar, John Lorne Campbell, at the latter's estate on the Isle of Canna, Scotland. Campbell had been one of the early pioneers in the recording of Gaelic oral tradition in Scotland and had also made some of the earliest wax cylinder recordings of Nova Scotian Gaelic tradition, during trips to Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island in the 1930s (See: *Songs Remembered in Exile*). Campbell felt that Nova Scotia's rich Gaelic heritage was under appreciated and under studied, and encouraged the young scholar to turn his investigation in that direction.

Taking Campbell's advice, John Shaw enrolled at Harvard University in Boston in 1962, spending the summers during his four-year degree program studying with Rev. John Angus Rankin at St. Mary of the Angels parish in Glendale, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Rev. John Angus Rankin was not only a fluent Gaelic-speaker, a traditional musician and a strong source of Gaelic tradition in his own right, he was also very knowledgeable about other tradition bearers in Nova Scotia's Gaelic community and an active promoter of Gaelic culture. With this excellent portal to Nova Scotia's Gaelic culture and a strong academic grounding, Shaw developed a fluent command of the Gaelic language and an intimate knowledge of Cape Breton's Gaelic community.

In 1966 he graduated from Harvard University with a degree in Linguistics and German Languages. He spent the following year in France as a Fullbright Scholar at the University of Paris. In the 1967-68 academic year he entered Harvard Graduate School to study Celtic Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, spending the summer of 1968 on the Isle of Skye, Scotland. In 1969 he was awarded the degree of M. A. in Celtic Languages and Literatures and took up a post as a teaching fellow in Scottish Gaelic at the Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures at Harvard. In 1971 he was awarded a Harvard Travelling Fellowship to study in Ireland at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

After his time in Ireland, Shaw returned to Nova Scotia. In 1975-76 he was a researcher at the Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton. In 1977 St Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia hired Shaw to conduct the Gaelic Folklore Project. During this five-year, federally funded program he recorded approximately 2,000 items on audio reel to reel from some 168 individual Gaelic tradition bearers in Cape Breton. In 1982 he was awarded his PhD from Harvard University for his work with one of these informants - Gaelic storyteller and tradition bearer, Joe Neil MacNeil of Middle Cape, Cape Breton. This relationship resulted in the award-winning McGill-Queen's book, *Sgeul gu Latha (Tales Until Dawn): The World of a Cape Breton Gaelic Story-Teller*.

In 1987, the Institute of Island Studies and the Celtic Studies Committee of U. P. E. I. provided funding to record the remaining Gaelic tradition bearers in Prince Edward Island. During August and September of that year, with the assistance of Jim Watson of Cape Gael Associates in Cape Breton and John Weyman of Prince Edward Island, Dr. Shaw interviewed informants throughout the province. This resulted in the recording of 20 Scottish Gaelic tradition bearers on reel-to-reel

and videocassette in both Gaelic and English. The recordings also included a sampling of the Island's traditional Gaelic violin style.

After his recording project in Prince Edward Island, Dr. Shaw worked as a Gaelic Development Officer in Scotland and as a lecturer in Celtic Studies at the University of Aberdeen. He is currently a senior lecturer at the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh and has recently published another seminal book on Cape Breton Gaelic tradition: *Brìgh an Òrain: The Tales and Songs of Lauchie MacLellan*.

BIOGRAPHY: DR. MICHAEL KENNEDY

Michael Kennedy was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia on 12 June 1962. His ancestors were part of the wave of emigration from the Scottish Highlands to Prince Edward Island, mainland Nova Scotia and Cape Breton in the 18th and 19th centuries. The language and traditions they brought to these communities were passed on through the generations but served almost as a backdrop or secret culture which seemed quite distant from the images of "Scottish" culture popularly portrayed in the media. This apparent anomaly fuelled Kennedy's early interest in understanding the foundation, evolution and presentation of Gaelic culture in the Maritime Provinces. He was able to begin pursuing that interest academically while still a student at U. P. E. I. majoring in English literature. A summer course taught by Dr. John Shaw introducing students to the language, customs and history of Scottish Gaels helped put a lot of his informal observations in perspective and encouraged a deeper interest.

After a term of service in the Canadian navy as a navigating officer, Kennedy was awarded scholarships to undertake postgraduate work at the School of Scottish Studies and the Department of Celtic Studies at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. He studied history, Gaelic language, literature and culture while at the University of Edinburgh and conducted field research in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. His thesis work focused on the establishment of Gaelic communities in Prince Edward Island. By its very nature, this required a similar assessment of the Gaelic settlement of Nova Scotia. He attempted to access the Gaelic sources so central to the immigrant story which historians working in the field of the Highland clearances and in Scottish history generally have so largely ignored. In so doing he developed an intense interest in the presentation of ethnic or minority historical viewpoints and, in particular, in the many misleading stereotypes surrounding the history and culture of the Scottish Highlands and the Gaelic Diaspora. In 1995 he was awarded his Ph. D for his thesis: *Is leis an Tighearna an talamh agus an lan (The Earth and all that it contains belongs to God): The Scottish Gaelic Settlement History of Prince Edward Island*. The title was taken from a Gaelic inscription in Belfast, Prince Edward Island, an acknowledgement of both his own ancestors, who first settled that parish in 1803, and of the collective, articulate commentary on the Highland Clearances left by a once flourishing Gaelic community.

After graduating from the University of Edinburgh, Kennedy returned to Canada, where his main academic interest lay. He continued his studies in the Gaelic cultural strongholds of rural Cape Breton and worked independently as an historian and heritage consultant. In 1998-99 he attended a Gaelic immersion course at the Gaelic college, *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig*, on the Isle of Skye. The following year he worked as a sessional lecturer in the Department of Celtic Studies at St.

Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. As an independent consultant, Kennedy assisted in the creation of a 5-year development plan for the Nova Scotia Highland Village Museum and recently authored the report, *Gaelic Nova Scotia: An Economic, Cultural and Social Impact Study*, for the Nova Scotian Department of Tourism and Culture.

Dr. Kennedy is currently living in Calgary, Alberta. In his spare time he is working on two books examining the history and culture of Gaelic Prince Edward Island.