

HORSES IN THE FOLKLINE OF WESTERN PRINCE
EDWARD ISLAND: CUSTOM, BELIEF AND ORAL TRADITION

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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JOHN ROBERT COUSINS



**Horses in the Folklife of Western Prince Edward
Island: Custom, Belief and Oral Tradition**

By

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Folklore
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Abstract

This study has as its primary goal the analysis of oral/verbal forms of folklore connected with horses in a small North American region, that being the western end of Prince Edward Island, Canada. The area is unique in that horses remained at the centre of its economic life and folklife until the early nineteen fifties.

The work begins with a preliminary survey of Island agricultural history. This analysis indicates that environmental factors, lack of stony walking surfaces, for instance, combined with compelling economic considerations created, for horses, an ideal environment. In turn, the value of the horse to this farming society created an attachment which outlasted their economic value. The work identifies and analyzes the unique alliance of official (political, educational and media) and unofficial aspects of culture which, over time, supported and promoted the Islanders' steadfast devotion to horses. An examination of the Islanders' resistance to the automobile demonstrates the power of this bond.

The work's discussion of daily farm life illustrates set patterns of behaviour related to horses and horsemen. These patterns include childhood initiation into work with horses, the naming of horses, and daily and yearly routine involving horses. The function of horses in specific aspects of social life such as courtship and entertainment is

also examined. Research shows that the pervasiveness of the horse in everyday life, combined with the cultural propensities of foundling ethnic groups, especially the Scots, created distinctive marks on the area's folklore.

Analyses of those marks found in narrative and belief about horses indicates story-telling techniques utilizing specialized simile, metaphor, stock expression, and beginning and ending formulas. The beliefs carried by both narrative and song display strong historic connections with those found in the British Isles. Further examination illustrates both the power and function of horse-related belief in Island agrarian society. The analysis of horse-related culture, its priorities, and even its language.

Finally, research illustrates that, even today, the largely rural even the vocabulary of an earlier horse-drawn era. An analysis of this phenomenon suggests that the so-called cultural lag represented by the continuance of horse-relatedlore may be a valuable therapeutic tool in a rural agrarian society undergoing dramatic change.

Acknowledgements

Many individuals have contributed to this thesis. I acknowledge, first of all, the support of my wife Bethany, and my two sons, Andrew and David. Without them, this work, whatever its merits, would have gone uncompleted.

I want to especially thank Dr. David Buchan, my thesis advisor, whose good Scots patience with my slow pace and my many mistakes continued over a number of years. His guidance and editorial pronouncements were invaluable. He has, as a teacher, the most important of all gifts, that of kindness and consideration for his students' feelings while he attempts to keep them on the right course.

Memorial University of Newfoundland gave me generous financial support without which this work would have been much more difficult.

I am deeply appreciative for the help and advice of Dr. Gerald Thomas, Dr. Neil Rosenberg and Dr. Martin Lovelace, teachers of Folklore at Memorial University who lent a supporting hand to a willing but inexperienced scholar.

My debt to Philip Hiscock, Folklore Archivist at Memorial University, is deep and lasting. He was a true friend who kept me going when the road was roughest.

On Prince Edward Island Harry Baglole's interest and insight over the long haul gave me moral support and David Weale, like a good neighbour, lent me his fine tape collection of oral history.

I thank my informants, both students and neighbors, who are too numerous to list here. I acknowledge four special ones: Donald Benjamin MacKay, whose patience, insight and sense of perspective I cherish, and my parents, Mary and Elbridge Cousins whose narratives, many years ago, laid the foundation for this work.

Finally, I want to thank Sandy Ives who, over thirty years ago, came to my place for supper and told me about folklore.

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Chapter I

Folklore and Island Horses: Approaching the Source

This work will describe and analyze folklore related to horses in a North American farming community before the coming of the farm tractor around 1950. Its main purpose is to examine the way in which tradition, belief, and customary practice shape, and are shaped by, the pattern of everyday life in an agrarian culture. This is a huge topic and to cover it in any comprehensive way would be the work of at least one long lifetime. To keep it within manageable limits, therefore, discussion of horse-related lore will be, for the most part, restricted to its oral/verbal forms.

The subject geographical area is Prince Edward Island, mainly western Prince County, that part of the Island which lies to the northwest of the Bedeque-Malpeque isthmus (See maps, pages 30 and 31). This area has certain distinct, socio-cultural characteristics, for a large part because twentieth century economic changes had little impact there until the late nineteen fifties. Consequently, twentieth century "progress" came slowly and the area is rich in cultural survivals. Although a few sources from outside the area have been utilized, the heart of this work comes from west of the town of Summerside.

The time span covered by this study lies for the most part within the first fifty years of the twentieth century, a period chosen for two reasons: first, during that time, horses were absolutely vital to the functioning of Island farm life; second, the oral raw material for the work is still readily available in the narratives of the men and women who spent their lives working with horses.

Having stated what this work is to be, the question, "why," remains to be answered. This answer really has two aspects, one personal and the other professional. First, I have always had a keen interest in horses. I grew up in what was, for all intents and purposes, a horse-drawn society. Along with virtually every child in that society, I absorbed more than an average share of folklore associated with horses. I knew their names and personalities. I worked horses, though I was not a particularly good horseman. Two of my earliest memories are, as a six-year old, being in a wagon pulled by a runaway horse and, a couple of years later, going to see my first movie by horse and light wagon. And I remember listening, hour upon hour, to talk about horses.

The professional motivation for this work came to me through my training as a folklorist. From that experience I was able to see that horses were very special to the people around me and that there was an immense amount of tradition attached to them. I resolved, as a folklorist, to examine the oral aspects of that tradition.

My preliminary research bore out some conclusions which I had previously made, namely that the Island had been, throughout most of its history, a special place for horses. There are numerous

comments by nineteenth century observers about this aspect of Island life. Writing in 1876, John J. Rowan, noted :

The province is famed for its horses. Labour being scarce, and hay and oats abundant, the farmers do as much work as possible by horse power. Numbers of horses are bred for exportation and they have deservedly a high reputation. Thorough bred [sic] stock has at different times been imported from England, and the progeny, though slightly undersized, are tough, hardy animals, with a turn of speed.¹

Half a century later, when the tractor was coming to dominate farm work in the rest of North America, horses were as much a part of life on the Island as they had been five decades earlier. George Nestler Trioche, a visiting Englishman noted that the Island had "four times as many horses . . . as any other Province in the Dominion." According to Trioche, the striking prevalence of horses and horse-drawn vehicles was, to visitors from elsewhere, "an evocation of the past:"

Passenger automobiles and motor trucks are the exception. On Market Place [in Charlottetown] or in front of farmers' hotels, rows of unhitched wagons, with upturned shafts, are a novel sight, [for the visitor] although reminiscent of by-gone days. One still hears, in many places, the almost forgotten sound of the farrier's hammer; and the smithy's profession is still a lucrative one, if we should judge by this characteristic-- and old-fashioned-item, [sic] culled from a local paper:

¹ John J. Rowan, *The Emigrant and Sportsman in Canada: Some Experiences of an Old Country Settler with Sketches of Canadian Life, Sporting Adventures, and Observations on the Forests and Fauna* (London: Edward Stanford, 1876) 184.

" Proud and Moreside, blacksmiths of this city, shod 72 horses on Monday. This establishes a new daily record for such work. The best previous record for one day being 65 . . ."²

This preoccupation of Islanders with horses was a common note struck by nineteenth and early twentieth century observers. Remarks made by A. H. Clark in his seminal historical geography *Three Centuries and the Island* are more intriguing. He comments on the large numbers of horses (21,000) still used by Islanders in 1951. At that time, the Island seemed to have many more horses than it should have had given the circumstances. In addition, Clark notes that: "It is [also] of special interest that the number of horses [on the Island] declined so slowly."³ Consequently, a major undertaking of this work is to explore the nature of this "special interest" which Islanders have in their farm horses.

The written sources for this thesis can be divided into three main groups. There are, first of all, published works on or connected with the subject from related cultures. Second come the theoretical works which enable us to make an analysis of the oral raw material. Finally, there is the Island-focussed material, little of which is directly connected with folklore.

² George Nestler Tricoche, *Rambles through the Maritime Provinces of Canada: A Neglected Part of the British Empire* (London: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1931) 157.

³ Andrew Hill Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island: A Historical Geography of Settlement and Agriculture in Prince Edward Island, Canada* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1959) 178.

The importance of the horse in oral folklore has long been recognized by scholars. In *The Folktale*, Stith Thompson notes:

Of all helpful animals, none has been so popular with taletellers as the horse. In not fewer than five well-known folk stories he plays a role almost as important as the hero himself.⁴

The place of the horse in other oral genres is equally important. Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*,⁵ Baughman's *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*⁶ and Frank C. Brown's *North Carolina Folklore*⁷ have substantial sections related to the folklore of horses. There are literally dozens of minor works of which Joseph D. Clark's *Beastly Folklore*,⁸ Fanny Bergen's *Animal and Plant Lore*,⁹ O'Sullivan's *A Handbook of Irish Folklore*¹⁰ and Walter Gregor's contributions to *Transactions of the*

⁴ Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946) 59.

⁵ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols. (Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications, 1932-1936).

⁶ Ernest W. Baughman, *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*, Indiana University Folklore Series no. 20 (The Hague: Mouton, 1966).

⁷ Newman Ivey White, ed. *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, 7 vols. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1952-61).

⁸ Joseph D. Clark, *Beastly Folklore* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1968).

⁹ Fanny D. Bergen, ed. *Animal and Plant Lore* (1899; New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969).

¹⁰ Sean O'Sullivan, *A Handbook of Irish Folklore* (1942; Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1970). To avoid inconsistency, O'Sullivan's name will be spelled throughout the work using the above Anglicized form rather than its Gaelic counterpart.

Banffshire Field Club are the most useful.¹¹ Literally every local, regional and national study of folklore provides information dealing with horses. Added to those is the almost unlimited amount of relevant material in literary works from Chaucer's time to the present.

In general, scholars who have concerned themselves with the folklore of horses have concentrated on compilations, that is, lists of superstitions, beliefs and customs related to horses. The indices of Thompson and Baughman and the collection of Frank C. Brown are relevant examples. Joseph D. Clark's work is also typical of this listing-categorizing approach. His index, as it relates to horses, consists of the following headings: "Derivative Names," "Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions," "Superstitions and Motifs," and, "Quotations-Literary and Otherwise." These works, and many others like them, perform the invaluable service of showing us what forms the lore takes. We owe a debt to scholars such as Gregor, Clark, and Fanny Bergen for at least showing us the kinds of traditions and customs which exist in cultural areas related to our own. Bergen, for instance, worked during the eighteen nineties collecting literally thousands of beliefs and customs relating to plants and animals throughout North America. While she followed the contemporary practice of giving little contextual material, she did, at least, mention the area where the material was collected. The whole work was published as *Plant*

¹¹ Walter Gregor, "The Horse in Scottish Folk-Lore," *Transactions of the Banffshire Field Club* (1889-90) 55-65. See also by Gregor, *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the North-East of Scotland* (1881; Nendeln, Leichtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967) 27-28, 130-131.

and Animal Lore in 1899. When used along with the motif collection of Baughman, (particularly with his documentation of tall tales), Bergen's work helps provide a perspective on Island oral lore as it relates to horses.

The major exception to the general rule of simply collecting and listing horse lore comes in the last thirty years with the work of George Ewart Evans whose remarkable writings on daily farm life in East Anglia and to some extent Scotland are inspirational to any one working in this field. Evans, who died in 1988, wrote seven books, each containing a great deal of information relevant to folklore and horses. They are: *Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay* (1956), *The Pattern under the Plow* (1966), *Where Beards Wag All: The Relevance of Oral Tradition* (1970), *The Horse in the Furrow* (1972), *The Days We Have Seen* (1975), *From the Mouths of Men* (1976) and *Horse Power and Magic* (1979)¹²

Evans casts a remarkably wide net, gathering in oral history, folklore, anecdote and atmosphere. Each of the works mentioned above contains significant material on various aspects of folklore as it relates to farm horses, especially those in East Anglia. The consistent and apparent motivation throughout this whole series of works was expressed in his first one:

To take down first hand information from the men who knew the old [horse centred] regime in its most complete form, before the changes of the last fifty years had begun to revolutionise agriculture.¹³

¹² All published in London by Faber and Faber.

¹³ Evans, *The Horse in the Furrow* 15.

His coverage of material culture, harness and farm machinery, folk medicine and the traditional methods of handling horses is especially complete. Evans's purpose, though much broader in scope than this one, is the only one I have found which come close to the aims of this work. A happy find which complements Evans's work and which was invaluable for this one was James Britten's *Old Country and Farming Words*.¹⁴ Part of my work deals with the traditional language used with working horses. Britten's work, though not extensive, gives an invaluable perspective on the British roots of the language of the Island's horsemen.

Scholarly analysis of horse-related folklore, though fairly extensive, is still spotty, however, largely because so little work has been done in the analysis of the lore's function and context. Its role in the lives of people who used horses has not been explored. Any examination of this area, then, must start with an application of general theoretical works which focus on specific aspects of function and context. A mention of the most important of these is necessary at this point.

For the analysis of memorate and its place in the study of folk belief, works by Lauri Honko and Sandra Stahl are important.¹⁵

¹⁴ James Britten, *Old Country and Farming Words : Gleaned from Agricultural Books* (London: English Dialect Society, 1880).

¹⁵ Sandra Stahl, "The Personal Narrative as Folklore," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 13-14 (1976-77): 9-30, "The Oral Personal Narrative in its Generic Context," *Fabula* 18 (1977): 18-39, and, "Narrative Genres: A Question of Academic Assumptions: A Reply to Ronald Grambo," *Fabula* 21 (1980): 82-87. It should be noted Sandra Stahl sometimes writes under the surname Dolby-Stahl. For the sake of clarity, she will be cited as Stahl.

Honko's comments on the links between belief and the narrative forms in which it is carried were particularly helpful in the analysis of folk beliefs about horses. His references to the "collective tradition," present in a "neglected traditional genre," help illuminate elements of collective tradition present in the telling of Island horse narratives.¹⁶ Linda Degh's article on the personal experience narrative provides a useful practical definition of the genre's basic form. This general form is useful in interpreting Island horse narrative where, to use Degh's words, "structure and patterning is determined by [the narrator's knowledge of] the laws, customs and cultural knowledge of society."¹⁷

Articles by Van Dijk,¹⁸ Robinson,¹⁹ and Bauman,²⁰ are indispensable for a proper analysis of narrative. Robinson's

¹⁶ Lauri Honko, "Memorates and the Study of Folk Beliefs," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 1-2 (1964): 5-19, and Honko, "Genre Analysis in Folkloristics and Comparative Religion," *Temenos* 3 (1969): 48-66.

¹⁷ Linda Degh, "The Theory of Personal Experience Narrative" *The 8th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research*, eds. Reimund Kvideland and Torunn Selberg, 4 vols. (Bergen: International Society for Folk Narrative Research, 1984-85) 3: 242. Afterwards cited as *8th Congress* along with the volume number. See also Degh, "Social Change and Folklore: The Interpretation of Social Structure and Culture," *8th Congress* 3: 285-298.

¹⁸ Tuen A. Van Dijk, "Action, Action Description, and Narrative," *New Literary History* 6 (1974-75): 273-294.

¹⁹ John A. Robinson, "Personal Narratives Reconsidered," *Journal of American Folklore* 94 (1989): 58-85.

²⁰ Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Bauman, "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community," *Journal of American Folklore* 85 (1972): 330-343.

summarizing points in particular are crucial for the examination of narrative which is the focus of Chapter Four.

Essential for examining the place of the various genres within culture are the works of Bascom,²¹ Buchan²² and Ben-Amos.²³ Though they have a narrower focus, Herbert Halpert's ground-breaking articles on supernatural sanctions and the legend²⁴ and Kathryn C. Smith's "The Role of Animals in Witchcraft and Popular Magic"²⁵ are particularly valuable in the analysis of the function of folk belief. Among the most useful sources for the study of horse-related folksong are David Buchan's *A Scottish Ballad Book*²⁶ and Ives's works on Larry Doyle and Larry Gorman.²⁷

21 William R. Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore," *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 279-298.

22 David Buchan, "Anecdote and Identity in the Glasgow Underworld," *8th Congress I*: 103-113. See also Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) and Buchan, ed., *Scottish Tradition: A Collection of Scottish Folk Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

23 Dan Ben-Amos, ed., *Folklore Genres* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976).

24 Herbert Halpert, "Legends of the Cursed Child," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 14 (1958) : 73-81, and Halpert, "Supernatural Sanctions and the Legend," *Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Venetia Newell (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1978): 226-233.

25 Kathryn C. Smith, "The Role of Animals in Witchcraft and Popular Magic," *Animals in Folklore*, eds. Joshua Roy Porter and W. M. S. Russel (Cambridge: Folklore Society, 1978): 97-110.

26 David Buchan, ed., *A Scottish Ballad Book* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973). See in particular the Bothy Ballad section, 185-206.

27 Edward Dawson Ives, *Larry Gorman: The Man Who Made the Songs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964) and Ives, *Lawrence Doyle: The Farmer-Poet of Prince Edward Island. A Study in Local Songmaking* (Orono, Maine: University of Maine Press, 1971).

Keith Thomas has written two fine works which are crucial for any study of folk belief and its uneasy coexistence with official Christianity in agrarian societies. They are *Religion and the Decline of Magic* and *Man and the Natural World*.²⁸ The latter work is particularly relevant to any analysis of folk belief as it relates to animals. It was especially important in the examination of the witchcraft beliefs which remain associated with farm animals on Prince Edward Island. When the seventeenth-century beliefs discussed by Thomas are considered with those found on the Island, it can be clearly seen that many beliefs related to animals survived, relatively unchanged, well into the twentieth century. Katharine M. Briggs's analysis of fairy beliefs in Shakespearian times is a useful addition to Thomas' work.²⁹

Supplementing the works of Briggs and Thomas are valuable articles by J. A. MacCulloch³⁰ and Gillian Bennett.³¹ These analyses shed welcome light on a phenomenon which I noted early in my research, that being the mingling of witch and fairy belief as they relate to horses on the Island. MacCulloch's article, dealing with

²⁸ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) and Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

²⁹ Katharine M. Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Successors* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

³⁰ J. A. MacCulloch, "The Mingling of Fairy and Witch Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Scotland," *Folklore* 32 (1921): 227-244.

³¹ Gillian Bennett, "Ghost and Witch in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Folklore* 97 (1986): 3-14.

sixteenth and seventeenth century Scotland, was particularly helpful in pointing towards the probable origin of these Island beliefs.

John Langdon's fine study of the change from oxen to horses in medieval England showed some surprising parallels to the North American situation in the last three centuries.³² In both cases there came an initial wrestle with a stubborn wilderness by an undermanned and technologically deprived culture. Then came a transition from oxen to horses when the wilderness was finally beaten back. Obviously the North American development happened at an accelerated pace compared to that of medieval England. In both cases, however, the same sequence occurred, that being the use of "cheap" oxen to clear land followed by "expensive" horses which worked best on cultivated fields.

No work on this specific topic has been done in relation to Prince Edward Island. This, however, this is not as serious as it might appear. Horses have played such a prominent role in Island culture that information about them is found in all manner of works. As noted earlier, A. H. Clark's *Three Centuries and the Island* contains invaluable information about virtually all aspects of Island agriculture over the last three centuries. The works of early authors such as John Stewart³³ and John MacGregor³⁴ provide valuable

³² John Langdon, *Oxen and Technological Innovation: The Use of Draft Animals in English Farming from 1066 to 1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³³ John Stewart, *An Account of Prince Edward Island* (1806; Rpt. New York: S. R. Publishers, 1967).

³⁴ John MacGregor, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Maritime Colonies of British America* (1828; Rpt. New York: S. R. Publishers, 1968).

detail on nineteenth century customs and traditions. Three important primary sources make up *Journeys to the Island of St. John*, edited by D. C. Harvey.³⁵ These documents describe, in the first person, the varied and often unpleasant experiences of a shipwrecked Hampshire sawyer in 1775, a Scots missionary in 1822 and a Welsh farmer in 1826. *Journeys* is a valuable sourcebook for the study of the social history of eighteenth and nineteenth century PEI. Useful unpublished sources included Michael Griffin's *Diary*,³⁶ and Samuel Hill's *Immigration to Prince Edward Island*.³⁷

Andrew MacPhail's fine monograph *The Master's Wife* was particularly useful in making a connection between the folk beliefs within the Island tradition and those in Scotland.³⁸ When the Island sources are combined with those from culturally related areas, especially Scotland, a fairly clear historic-geographic picture emerges. For example, MacPhail's work, when accessed along with the "Highland" collection of Francis Thompson,³⁹ and the fine studies

³⁵ D. C. Harvey, *Journeys to the Island of St. John or Prince Edward Island: 1775-1832* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1955).

³⁶ Unpublished manuscript in writer's possession.

³⁷ S(amuel) S(mith) Hill, "Immigration to Prince Edward Island, Designed for Information of Agriculturalists and Immigrants of Small Capital," Unpublished manuscript, Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation, [1820?].

³⁸ Andrew MacPhail, *The Master's Wife*, intro. Ian Robertson (Toronto: McLellan and Stewart, 1977).

³⁹ Francis Thompson, *The Supernatural Highlands* (London: Robert Hale, 1976) 37.

of Keith Thomas, shows the origins of many of the folk beliefs current in nineteenth century PEI.

Newspapers, as Jan Brunvand notes, are a valuable and often under-utilized source of information for the folklorist.⁴⁰ Island newspapers, first published in the early seventeen-nineties, contain invaluable information on Island social history. They also provide wonderful glimpses of the unofficial aspects of Island's culture throughout the last two centuries. In an almost totally rural and agricultural area, they generally represent the farmers' views, beliefs, and attitudes. The material they chose to print reflects and also reinforces attitudes about horses. Papers like the Summerside *Journal* and the *Pioneer* give important background information on such customs as the "travelling" of stallions. Their often partisan coverage of the horse-car confrontation between 1905 and 1920 is crucial to the interpretation of that social conflict.

Three other sources of material provided helpful information on the folklore of Island horses. The first was a mixed collection which is kept by the Social Studies Department at Westisle Composite High School, Elmsdale, PEI. This exists in three forms: first, standard folklore survey cards which use the same format as those at Memorial University of Newfoundland. These were done by high school students under the supervision of the writer beginning in 1985. They number about two thousand at the time of writing and they are catalogued by year only. The second part of this particular

⁴⁰ Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978) 14.

collection consists of cassette tapes (roughly two dozen). These for the most part are interviews which senior high school students have done, often using relatives--parents, grandparents--as informants. These again were done under the writer's supervision. The material disproves Richard Dorson's contention that regional or local collecting of this nature "will yield an aimless piling up of folklore bric-a-brac."⁴¹ In this regard, I agree with Richard Tallman's point in "Folklore in the Schools,"⁴² that the best way for students to come to an understanding of folklore in their lives is to collect it themselves. And I would add that given proper supervision under a competent folklorist, senior high school students can make valuable additions to the folklore studies in their particular region. Often, local studies reveal hidden patterns and textures which comprehensive generic studies miss. Finally, the third part of the Westisle Collection is a small number of student papers on various aspects of West Prince folklore.

Two final sources of information were tape collections of Prince Edward Island oral history, one done under the direction of social historian David Weale at the University of Prince Edward Island and the other by staff at the Provincial Archives of Prince Edward Island. Weale's tape collection, which concentrates on social history and the role of the horse in it, was particularly useful. Although neither of the collections mentioned above concentrates on horses and folklore

⁴¹ Richard M. Dorson, "A Theory for American Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 72 (1959): 201.

⁴² Richard S. Tallman, "Folklore in the Schools," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 28.3 (1972): 169.

per se, both were useful in providing supporting material for the lore which I collected myself.

It is necessary at this point to explain the cataloguing system which I used for the various tape collections. A sample citation from my own collection goes as follows: T55A: 20/30/88. Vance MacKay, Bloomfield. In the system used here, "T" indicates cassette tape, "55" refers to the number of the tape in the collection and "A" indicates the specific side of the tape on which the material can be found. The figures 20/3/88 refer to the day, month and year of recording. The name or names of the informant(s) follow. The last item in the citation is the informant's place of residence. Finally, where applicable, the home community of the informants will be given in brackets. The distinction between *home* and *present* community is made necessary because many informants have moved away from the community from which their narratives and their experiences were drawn. For instance, many of the older informants have had to move off their farms and into senior citizens housing in nearby villages. Thus, George Dewar's narratives are drawn from his youth in the Scotch community of New Perth and not from the village of O'Leary where he now lives. A sample citation for him reads: T65A: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth].

Tapes from the Westisle Collection are catalogued in a similar way, with the interviewer's name and *Westisle Collection* added. The uncatalogued David Weale Oral History Collection is cited by giving the day, month and year of recording along with the informant's name, the interviewer's name and the informant's place of residence. Example: 8/10/82. Jim Craig to Susan Hornby,

Sherwood [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection* is added. Finally, the uncatalogued PEI Archives collection, which was used sparingly, is cited as *PAPEI* along with the informant's name, home community and approximate date of recording. A list of all informants and their place of residence is given in Appendix A. All communities mentioned are in Prince Edward Island unless otherwise indicated.

The field work for this thesis was extensive and was certainly the most enjoyable aspect of the whole effort. I know of no topic in Island folklore where informants would have been easier to find. Almost every person over the age of forty had a horse story he/she wanted to tell. Barre Toelken has noted that "weak folklore studies are more often than not the hasty output of writers who have failed to take into consideration a fair and representative sampling of variants."⁴³ If the present study has weaknesses, they should not come from the cause which Toelken notes.

Throughout, my purpose was to allow informants to tell their own stories. The analysis of those narratives, whatever its weaknesses, is my own. The narrators speak for themselves. Always, I have kept in mind the occasion of the telling and the background of the teller. The reader will note a considerable number of field notes along with the requisite tape citations. These can be explained by the fact that I did field work at every opportunity and there were many opportunities. Often the "work" was completely unscheduled and informal and there was no

⁴³ Barre Toelken, *The Dynamics of Folklore* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1979) 35.

opportunity to use a tape recorder. Many times, I wrote the material down on the spot, whether I happened to be in a store, a school or visiting a neighbour. I had occasion, over the last five years, to attend many wakes and the narratives I heard at those times, among older rural men sitting in the small side rooms of funeral homes, were wonderful. On those occasions, the producing of a pen and paper was inappropriate and I would rush home keeping in my head a particularly interesting story or expression about someone's horse. Of all sources, however, the most useful are the recordings of two or three horsemen, sitting together, becoming so engrossed in the talk about their beloved animals that they forgot about the tape recorder.

Earlier I noted that the field work for this thesis was based mainly in the West Prince County. Although that area remains the central focus, I do not want to exaggerate the cultural differences between it and the rest of the Island. Although there was an economic time lag here, it is also true that where folklore relating to horses is considered, Islanders are, in general, one folk group.

I was born and raised in this area and, as a fieldworker, I found myself very much a cultural insider. This full cultural awareness is an advantage if the "outsider" perspective can be maintained. However, this is not always easy. From the beginning, I felt that perhaps the most rewarding approach to the work was a combination etic/emic one. Without a thorough knowledge of, feeling for, and similar viewpoint to the culture under discussion, the subtleties of its oral aspects are almost impossible to comprehend. As William Bascom has pointed out "the folklore of a people can be

fully understood through a thorough knowledge of their culture."⁴⁴ This deep, inside appreciation is the "cultural key" cited as necessary for understanding by emicists such as Edward Sapir. Without this key, Sapir writes, the writer

may succeed in giving a picturesque account of what he sees and hears, or thinks he sees and hears, but the chances of his being able to give a relation of what happens in terms that would be intelligible and acceptable to the natives themselves are practically nil. He will be guilty of all manner of distortion. His emphasis will be constantly askew. He will find interesting what the natives take for granted as a casual kind of behaviour worthy of no particular comment, and he will utterly fail to observe the crucial turning points in the course of action that give formal significance to the whole in the minds of those who do possess the key to its understanding.⁴⁵

On the other hand the search for patterns of behaviour and cross-cultural comparisons will be unsuccessful without some utilization of the outsider approach advocated by eticists such as Marvin Harris.⁴⁶

The people of West Prince did not play the folklorist's game. My informants, for the most part, did not consider themselves to be informants nor did they consider me to be a folklorist. Instead, I was "Johnny" Cousins whom they had always known. I was expected

44 Bascom 285.

45 Cited in Pertti J. Pelto and Gretel H. Pelto, *Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 55. A full discussion of the approach of emicists Boas and Sapir can be found on pages 54-66.

46 Pelto and Pelto 60-61.

to visit and talk and, very often, much of the talk was on subjects other than horses. As a result, I found myself using the "vacuum cleaner" approach to fieldwork suggested to me in the winter of 1984-85 by Dr. David Buchan, the supervisor of this work. My tape collection is huge and eclectic. To paraphrase Shakespeare, I became a snapper-up of hundreds of unconsidered trifles⁴⁷ to add to my general collection of lore.

This position of an insider attempting to play the analytical role of an outsider is an interesting one. One is accepted as a neighbor. However, the agenda of an analyst must be foremost in one's mind. This dual vocation brings to mind Samuel Johnson's remark about the woman who "under the pretence of keeping a bawdy house was a purveyor of stolen goods."⁴⁸

The ages of those who helped with this work cover many years. Informants ranged from sixteen year-old student Nancy Cahill to fifty year-old Bert Thomson to eighty-five year-old Tom Duncan. Strong traditions relating to horses were found in all age groups and both sexes although they are beginning to wane among the younger people. This wide spread in the ages of informants is noteworthy because it shows that the oral traditions analyzed for this work are not restricted to "the old people." Information came easily from all

⁴⁷ A *Winter's Tale* IV. ii 26. *The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, eds. William Allan Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942). All future references to Shakespeare's plays are from the above edition.

⁴⁸ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, selected and abridged by Edmund Fuller (New York: Dell Publishing, 1960) 295.

age groups. It is clear from this study that oral traditions related to horses are not restricted to one sex or one age group.

At the time of writing, all the information was flung into the air, figuratively at least, to allow the chaff to be blown away. What fell were five chapters to accompany this general introduction.

Chapter Two will trace, in broad outline, the cultural history of the Island's horses and the men who farmed with them. The role of the horse in colonial social and cultural life will be examined.

Reference will also be made to the function of horses and oxen in pioneer society and the eventual replacement of oxen by horses. The unique conflict between horse and car owners in the period 1905-20 will also be examined for what it shows about the institutionalization of Islanders' attitudes and opinions about horses.

Whereas Chapter Two deals with broad cultural patterns, the third chapter will examine the folklore of horses in the pattern of everyday life on the family farm. Practices such as the naming of horses, the initiation of children into working with horses and the role of horses in courtship will be discussed. Also examined will be the attitudes towards good and bad horsemen as units of a specific world view.

Narrative and conversation about horses will be the subject of Chapter Four. Not surprisingly, the folk speech of the Island contains many horse-related expressions. There is also a distinctive traditional formula for telling of stories about horses. These narratives and the conversational medium which encloses them will be described and analyzed. Traditional narratives such as tall tales, legends and jokes will also be analyzed as will be the language and

technique of the teller of horse stories. Reference will also be made to the role of the folk song in casual conversations about horses.

Customary beliefs relating to horses form the basis of discussion in Chapter Five. Specific analyses will be made of the witch and fairy belief which was so strongly attached to horses on the Island. Reference will be made to the historic and geographic roots of these beliefs and to their function in this horse-oriented culture.

The final chapter will examine the role of the horse and the folklore related to it in present-day Prince Edward Island. The last thirty years have brought dramatic changes to the horses' world here on the Island. Horses still have a place in the collective consciousness of Islanders but it is a much different one from that in their Golden Age which ended in the early nineteen fifties. Today, they are identified more with leisure than they are with work. Changes in the technology of farming have removed horses from the centre and placed them on the edge of Island life.

It is of special interest, though, that even with these changes, horses have retained a unique place in Island life. The Island has the highest density of horses of any province of Canada. Kent Oakes, who specializes in "horse matters" for the PEI Department of Agriculture, believes that it may be the highest in North America.⁴⁹ The lore connected with them is still strong and the rest of this work will concentrate on an examination of its oral/verbal aspects. That

49 9/2/90. Kent Oakes, Charlottetown, field note. All field notes will be cited in the fashion shown here. The first item is the day, month and year of recording. The second item is the name of the informant followed by his place of residence. The last item will be "field note."

analysis may help illuminate the relationship between man and horse in North American agrarian society.

Chapter II

Horses on the Island: Environment, Culture and History

The special place of the horse in the oral and customary folklore of Prince Edward Island is directly related to the Island's background as a predominantly farming society. From the beginnings of European settlement in 1719 until the middle of the twentieth century, Prince Edward Island remained a rural, agricultural community.¹ As late as 1951, for instance, seventy-five per cent of its population was rural, and its proportion of farm to total population was the highest in Canada.² Before the late nineteen forties, farm tractors had made no significant impact on farm life. Work on the land was done by men and horses. At mid-twentieth century, nine out of ten Island farmers still used horses,³ depending on them almost as much as they had a century earlier.

¹ D.C. Harvey's *The French Regime in Prince Edward Island* (1926; New York: AMS Press, 1970) is the most authoritative work on Acadian settlement on the Island. According to Harvey, two families from Normandy settled in St. Peters in 1719. In the same year, a "Canadian" family, probably from Quebec, settled at East Point. Major settlement actually started in 1720 with Compte de St. Pierre's initiative. See p. 45.

² Clark, *Three Centuries* 131.

³ Clark, *Three Centuries* 179.

Nowhere in Canada have there been such numbers of horses relative to the number of people. And nowhere, as A. H. Clark notes, have those numbers been sustained for so long. In 1911 there were 36,000 horses on the Island -- roughly one for every three people. By 1951 there were still 21,000 horses on the Island, or one for every four people.⁴

That the Island was such a special and inviting place for horses has partly to do with its unique geological features which merit a short comment. Prince Edward Island is a crescent-shaped, 2000 square mile island lying in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, off-shore from the New Brunswick and Nova Scotian coasts. It is roughly 120 miles long following its curve. Once it lay on the bottom of the Gulf which was filled by waters flowing from highlands in what is now Cape Breton and New Brunswick. The soft sedimentary stone which forms the Island bedrock was laid down by sediments carried by these waters. When ocean levels dropped, the ocean floor was laid bare. When the oceans rose again, 7000 to 9000 years ago, part of the sedimentary plain was separated from the mainland by a narrow strait. That separated territory was the Island.⁵

It is a low land, mostly under 200 feet in elevation. Rarely does it exceed 400 feet and there are few steep hills. In western Prince County, the area upon which this study focuses, the land is

⁴ Clark, *Three Centuries* 180.

⁵ Francis F.W.P. Bolger, ed., *Canada's Smallest Province* (Charlottetown: Prince Edward Island Centennial Commission, 1973) 1.

particularly flat (See photo, p. 32). This absence of steep hills gives a gift to both farmer and horse. The problems of hauling heavy machinery up steep grades are eliminated as are the difficulties of farming the sides of hills with unstable farm machinery. A second advantage, in a job where traction is a main consideration, is the nature of the soil. It tends to run to light, sandy loams which dry quickly after heavy rains.⁶ Heavy, sticky soils are almost non-existent. Added to these features is an almost total absence of stone. Man and horse can tramp a plowed or harrowed field all day and walk only on a soft surface. The stone which does exist appears as small, isolated pieces of glacial till which work to the surface and are picked up by farmers. Building stone is virtually non-existent. In fact, immigrants from regions where stone was used for building complained about this lack. Writing in 1805, John Stewart noted that

The want of stone is perhaps the greatest natural want on the Island, it being in general of a soft sandy nature, and in some places difficult to be had of any kind.⁷

For horses, men and machinery, however, the lack of stone was a known blessing. Writing in the eighteen twenties, Walter Johnstone, who may have been struck by the dissimilarity to his native Scotland, commented on the pioneer wagons he had seen:

⁶ Clark, *Three Centuries* 19.

⁷ Stewart, *An Account of Prince Edward Island* 25-26.

They run almost all their cart wheels without any iron round them, the soil being so free from stones or gravel, that bare timber lasts a long time.⁸

Extolling the virtues of the Island soils in 1828, John MacGregor writes that, "There is scarcely a stone on the surface of the island that will impede the progress of the plow."⁹

In this physical environment the horse prospered. John J. Rowan, an Englishman visiting the Island in 1876, commented that the Island was famous for its horses and went on to note:

The Island-bred horses have grand constitutions and are as tough as nails; owing to the absence of iron in the roads their legs and feet wear well; one rarely meets with an old horse groggy about the knees. Fifty miles a day for several days with a horse and buggy is thought nothing extraordinary, and the horses do not receive one-half the care or attention we are in the habit of bestowing upon our nags in England.¹⁰

The picture Rowan gives, of a rather poor, pastoral area with green fields and hedgerows, where farmers "do as much work as possible by horse power,"¹¹ is a fairly accurate picture of the western

⁸ Harvey, *Journeys* 96. Johnstone was a lay preacher from Dumfriesshire who travelled through the Island in 1820-21 attempting to start Sunday schools. His "travels," describing the Island and its inhabitants, are included in Harvey, *Journeys* 87-172.

⁹ MacGregor 17.

¹⁰ Rowan 185.

¹¹ Rowan 184.

end of Prince Edward Island as late as mid-twentieth century. Because that area is the geographical focus of this work, it is necessary to describe it in more detail.

"West Prince," as it is called by most Islanders, is connected to the rest of the Island by the Summerside-Malpeque isthmus. Any one of the Island's first sixteen townships or "lots" would be considered part of West Prince County. The term "lot" has a unique usage on the Island and should be explained. Informants habitually utilize it to indicate a geographical location or to supplement various place names as in: "He lived in Lot Two," or, "They came from Lot Sixty-Seven." Letters are still addressed to "Campbellton, Lot Four." The term's origin goes back to the beginnings of British settlement, and, for North America, to a unique system of land tenure. In 1764-65, an extensive survey of the Island was done by Samuel Holland, a British Army officer and surveyor who had been with Wolfe at the fall of Quebec in 1759.

Holland's survey divided the Island into 67 townships, most being in the range of 15,000 acres (See maps p. 30-31). In its wisdom, the British government gave these individual townships to British citizens -- Scots and English politicians, army officers and civil

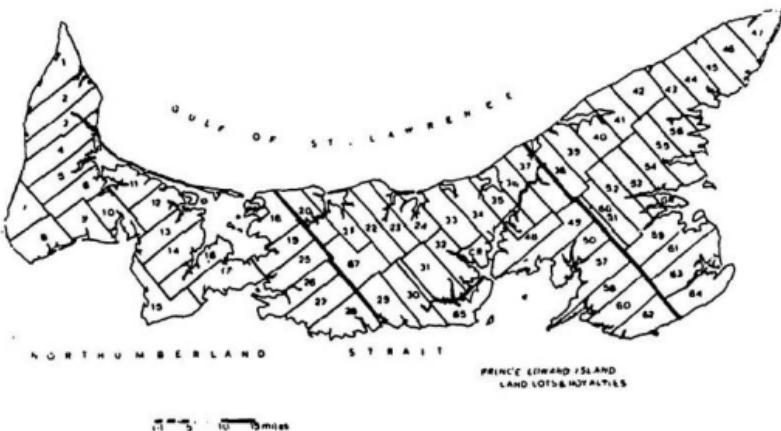
servants--deserving of crown patronage. This was done by drawing lots in the following manner: names of candidates were plucked from a ballot box, the first name drawn being allotted Township or "Lot" One, the second being given Lot Two and so on.¹² In one day, the whole of the Island was parceled out to about 100 individuals. (Some lots were given to partnerships of two or three people.)¹³ In a short time, the term "lot" came to be used interchangeably with "township," and in the last century and a half has completely supplanted it. Outsiders find this oft-used term confusing. In the younger generation of Islanders, its use seems to be waning.

Lots One to Sixteen, which make up West Prince County, differ physically from the rest of the Island, being somewhat flatter. The square, level, green fields run to the edge of the low capes. The soil here, as in the rest of the Island, is reddish brown, the result of high concentrations of iron oxide. There are substantial areas of bog and the land, in general, is of poorer quality than that of neighboring Queen's county. A. H. Clark suggests that this poor land caused the area to be settled later than the rest of the Island.¹⁴ Before 1800, only a few dozen people had located here.

¹² Bolger 38.

¹³ For a comment on the negative social implication of this tenant-landlord system, see footnote 40.

¹⁴ Clark, *Three Centuries* 208.



Map of Prince Edward Island showing the disposition of the lots and royalties. Lot One is at North Cape on the Northwest end of the Island. Lot 47 is at East Point, the easternmost point of the Island. West Prince comprises Lots One through Sixteen.



Map of West Prince, showing communities mentioned in this work.



Man and horse with hay rake. Notice the extreme flatness of the land and the absence of rock, features which characterize so much of the Island. When these fields were plowed and harrowed, farmers picked up the few pieces of stone which worked to the surface. The horse in this photo, with its clean limbs and fine head, was very much the "blood" animal. They were often used for jobs like raking hay, which required a fast-stepping animal. (Photo credit: Public Archives of Prince Edward Island)

The central part of the Island settled first and it was there that French pioneers brought the first horses. We know that it was sometime after 1720 because, late in that year, a French official, Sieur de Gotteville de Belleisle, noted in a report that the Island lacked both horses and dogs.¹⁵ De Gotteville was the commandant of the first major settlement attempt on the Island. In the late summer of 1720, a French nobleman, Compte de St. Pierre, landed three hundred settlers across the harbour from present-day Charlottetown, at a spot he called Port La Joie.¹⁶ At the time, prospects for a fishing-farming colony on the Island looked favourable. First, English pressure on the Acadians in Nova Scotia was forcing them to consider migration from lands they had settled in the early sixteen hundreds.¹⁷ To a farming people, the Island was a much more attractive place than Ile Royale (Cape Breton Island). Second, French officers at Louisbourg soon recognized the possibilities of Ile St. Jean as a breadbasket for the great fortress in Ile Royale.¹⁸

St. Pierre's colony did not prosper, however. Almost every

15 Harvey, *French Regime* 44.

16 Bolger 15.

17 Clark, *Three Centuries* 25-27.

18 Harvey, *French Regime* 59.

misfortune which could happen to a new settlement did happen. The capital was on the wrong side of the Island for a successful prosecution of the fishery. There were shortages of salt, plagues of field-mice and forest fires.¹⁹ In 1725 Compte de St. Pierre went bankrupt and left, forcing the farmer-fishermen tenants to fend for themselves. Many left, and the ones who remained lived on the edge of starvation. Unlike the Scots and Irish who came later in the century, the French never grew the potato, a vegetable uniquely suited to Island soils. In the case of the latter two peoples, the presence of the potato often meant the difference between a fed population and a starving one. As A. H. Clark writes:

It was a great misfortune for the Acadians that they did not have the potato among their domesticated crops. With codfish, the potato was to be a famine-defence and a basic food staple which, perhaps more than any other plant or animal guaranteed the success of British settlement against what . . . seemed insuperable odds. For the soils and climate of the Island the *solanum* potato might well have been especially designed. . . . There are few instances in the history of pioneer settlement where cultural ignorance of, or indifference to, one uniquely suitable plant . . . did so much to hamper the development of satisfactory practices of land use.²⁰

¹⁹ A.B. Warburton, *A History of Prince Edward Island* (St. John, New Brunswick: A.B. Warburton, 1923) 25, 54-61. Almost immediately, St. Pierre began a fishing settlement on the north side of the Island. He named it after himself.

²⁰ Clark, *Three Centuries* 39. Potatoes had been introduced into France by the end of the fifteen hundreds. However, the extent of their use by the seventeen hundreds has not been ascertained. It is possible that they did not come into widespread use until the latter part of the eighteenth century. Perhaps these first French settlers were simply unaware of the possibilities of the potato. See Redcliffe N. Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (1949; London: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 84-95, 572-75.

In 1727, a small garrison was established at Port La Joie which helped encourage some immigration from Nova Scotia. During the next fifteen years, a handful of families, seeing no future living in English territory, drifted to the Island.²¹ They were farmers and they probably brought livestock with them as those did who came later in the forties and fifties.

In 1732, an independent colonization attempt was begun at Trois Rivieres (now Brudenell Point), twenty-five miles east of Port La Joie. Its founder was Jean Pierre De Roma, a fanatical worker, a careful planner and a meticulous keeper of records. It is in his correspondence, between 1732 and 1734, that horses are first mentioned.²² Plundering New Englanders killed four of them when they burned his settlement in 1745.²³ It is possible, as noted previously, that St. Pierre's settlers owned horses in the seventeen twenties.

Judged by numbers alone, the use of horses by the early

²¹ J. Henri Blanchard, *The Acadians of Prince Edward Island 1720-1964* (Quebec: n.p., 1964) 27,31.

²² Harvey, *French Regime* 86. De Roma's settlement was looted and burned by New Englanders after the fall of Louisbourg in 1745. When archaeologists excavated the site in 1970, one of the artifacts discovered was a riding spur. See E. Frank Korvemaker, *1970 Excavation of the De Roma Site* (Ottawa: National Historic Sites Service, 1972) 127.

²³ Blanchard 30.

Acadians was minimal. In 1739 there was a total of 14 horses on the Island compared to 166 oxen (one ox for every 2.7 people).²⁴ This preponderance of oxen is not surprising. Horses are of comparatively little use in wilderness farming. They require much more hay, oats and shelter than oxen. Also, oxen surpass the horse in what David Street calls the "brute, stump-pulling strength" so badly needed in clearing new land.²⁵

This overwhelming reliance on oxen characterized not only the Acadian pioneers but also the British settlers who followed them. Oxen were the main source of power on the farm until well into the 1830's. The last of them did not disappear until sometime during World War One.

What horses the Acadians did have were used mainly for travel. It is logical to assume that they were imported from the nearby, long-established settlements in Quebec and Nova Scotia. Clark, for instance, notes that by the seventeen fifties the Nova Scotia Acadians had a surplus of horses and were exporting "substantial" numbers of

²⁴ *Resensements De L'île Saint-Jean, 1728-1758* (France: Archives Nationales) (Microfilm, University of Prince Edward Island) n. p. Hereafter cited as *Resensements*.

²⁵ David Street, *Horses : A Working Tradition* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976) 9.

them out of Louisbourg.²⁶ Observations made by early nineteenth century observers identify the breed.²⁷ They were the Canadian or French Canadian horse, descendants of small, tough animals which had been imported into the French colonies in the early sixteen hundreds from Normandy and Brittany. They may have been related to the Percheron.²⁸

After importation they had been allowed to breed (and probably inbreed) freely so that, within a century, a unique type of horse had evolved. It was, according to David Street:

a sturdy workhorse, good tempered, with sound feet, a small appetite, and, as might be expected, the ability to cope with Canadian winters. Sizes varied considerably, but the average height was about fourteen hands, the average weight was about 1200 pounds. The coat was rather rough and shaggy; the mane and tail thick, glossy and wavy.²⁹

There seems to have been little tendency among the Acadians to use these horses in any numbers, even when their farms were

²⁶ Andrew Hill Clark, *Acadia: The Geography of Early Nova Scotia to 1760* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968) 291.

²⁷ Among these observers was Lord Selkirk. See Patrick C.T. White, ed. and intro., *Lord Selkirk's Diary 1803-1804: A Journal of His Travels in British North America and Northeastern United States* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1985) 18.

²⁸ Street 9.

²⁹ Street 9.

relatively well established. The community of Malpeque, for instance, had been established for at least a generation by 1753. Yet the community at that time owned no horses.³⁰

By 1748, after twenty-eight years of settlement, the Island's population had reached only 735. Ironically, instead of supplying Louisbourg with food, the Island itself had been periodically aided with provisions from stores at Louisbourg, Québec and even France.³¹

In Nova Scotia, meanwhile, intense pressure was being put on the Acadian population to leave the lands settled by their ancestors. Mainland Nova Scotia had become officially British in 1713 and, as Britain and France moved towards the Seven Years War, the pressure on the Acadians to move increased. As a result, Isle St. Jean got its first substantial population. Beginning in 1748 and ending in 1756, almost four thousand destitute people crossed Northumberland Strait from as far away as the Annapolis Valley. They were refugees in the truest sense of the word.³²

Some of them, from areas in Nova Scotia which were nearby, drove their livestock with them and ferried the animals across the straits in small boats. By 1753, the population had reached 2236 people with 152 horses, 823 oxen and 1079 cows and calves. Many horses were being brought by the refugees and the mortality rate in

30 *Recensements* n.pag.

31 Clark 39.

32 The plight of these refugees was described in a letter from Pere Girard, a priest who had fled with the refugees from Cobiquid in what is now Nova Scotia. See Harvey, *French Regime* 179.

the wilderness seems to have been high since the census taken in 1752 had listed the number of horses at 197.³³

War between Britain and France broke out officially in 1756. In July, 1758, Louisbourg fell to Amherst and Wolfe. With that fall came the loss of its dependency, Ile St. Jean. That autumn British troops under Lord Rollo rounded up all the Island Acadians they could find and shipped them back to France. Two to three hundred people, mostly "older" families who had come in the twenties and thirties, hid in the woods west of Port La Joie and escaped the deportation. From them have descended virtually all the twenty thousand Acadians who live on the Island today. Three quarters of their number live in Prince County.

The substantial clearings left by the French were taken up by incoming British settlers. So too, it seems, were the horses which had been abandoned at the time of the deportation. Two pieces of evidence support this contention. One is the numerous references to "Canadian" and "French" horses made by late eighteenth and early nineteenth century observers such as Lord Selkirk who notes in his diary (August 15, 1806) that, while touring that part of the Island near his estate, he had borrowed "an excellent stout pony of the Canadian breed."³⁴

The second piece of evidence is an oral tradition recorded by John McGregor, a Scot who visited the Island in the eighteen twenties :

³³ *Recensements* n.pag.

³⁴ White 18.

I have been told by an old Acadian Frenchman, that for several years after the island was taken, [1758] a vast number of horses were running in a wild state about the east point of the island.³⁵

As late as 1805, as John Stewart notes, some of these horses were still fending for themselves, especially during the winter:

In some parts of the island they are allowed to run out all winter, when they are not used, and maintain themselves by scraping away the snow with their hoofs till they come to grass, on which they live, and keep in tolerable order till spring.³⁶

A few years later, John McGregor describing the descendants of those horses stresses, as do others, two main features: their small size and their use in travel:

The horses are, with few exceptions, small, but capable of performing long journeys, and enduring great fatigue with much spirit. During summer it is usual to take them off the grass, and to ride them thirty or forty miles without feeding, frequently through bad roads, and afterwards to turn them out to feed on the grass during the night, while little scruple is made to ride them back the same road the next day: all of which is generally performed without apparent injury to the animal. ³⁷

Samuel Hill, a West County merchant with holdings in the Cascumpec area, noted in 1839 :

The horses are small, but strong, hardy and docile, patient of fatigue and strong-built, they will draw greater weights and when taken directly from pasture

³⁵ McGregor 55-56.

³⁶ Stewart 131-32.

³⁷ McGregor 56.

will perform longer journeys than English ones, they are also sociable animals.³⁸

These, then, were the horses inherited by the British settlers when they began straggling into the colony in the seventeen sixties.

British settlement, like that of the French, began slowly in its newly-acquired territory and it was 1800 before the population reached the pre-Expulsion levels of the mid-seventeen fifties. According to the census of 1798, the population had reached 4272 people of whom the Scots formed the most important group equalling all other groups combined (2124 Scots compared to 669 Acadians and 1579 others identified as English). This large Scottish element in the population continues to be a major cultural factor in Island society.³⁹

Plagued with an absentee land ownership system which condemned the immigrant to the status of perpetual tenant, the Island was not well thought of.⁴⁰ A few years after the turn of the century, William Cobbett wrote:

38 Hill 7.

39 In 1951 they were still, at one third of the population, the largest single ethnic group on the Island. See Clark, *Three Centuries* 61, 67 and 207.

40 The landholding system which resulted from the lottery of 1767 hampered the Island's development for over a century. In the vast majority of cases, immigrants were condemned to a leasehold rather than a freehold system. As Selkirk noted in his diary (August 11, 1803), proprietors were clinging to "the impractical idea of getting a Tenantry like that of Europe." See White 7. To Old World, rural peasantry whose vision was to own land, this was an intolerable situation. After a century of political and social turmoil, the situation was resolved when, after Confederation, the Island government bought out the proprietors with federal government money. Material on the so-called "Land Question" is extensive. See especially Harry Baglole, *The Land Question: A Study Kit of Primary Documents* (Charlottetown: Queen's Printer, 1978?), Jack M. Bumsted, *Land, Settlement and Politics in Eighteenth Century Prince Edward Island 1767-1798* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), and Ian Ross Robertson, ed., *The Prince Edward Island Land Commission of 1860* (Fredericton, NB.: Acadieinsis Press, 1988).

From Glasgow the sensible Scots are pouring out a main.
 Those that are poor, and cannot pay their passage, or can
 rake together only a trifle, are going to a rascally heap of
 sand, rock and swamp, called Prince Edward Island, in
 the horrible Gulf of St. Lawrence. . . . that lump of
 worthlessness . . . bears nothing but potatoes. . . .⁴¹

Scottish immigration continued strongly until the eighteen fifties at which time they made up almost half the total population.⁴² As yet, no exact figures are available on the relative numbers of Highland to Lowland Scots. However, virtually all Scottish immigrants before 1803 were Highlanders. Argyllshire people settled on Malpeque Bay in 1770.⁴³ A large movement of Catholic MacDonalds from Glenaladale came to Lots 35 and 36 in 1771-72.⁴⁴ Settlers from Skye (brought by Lord Selkirk) started a major and prosperous settlement at Belfast in 1803.⁴⁵ Many other smaller communities such as West Point and Dunblane and Brae were begun by Highlanders.⁴⁶ The majority of the family names in all these communities continues to indicate Highland roots. We can thus safely

⁴¹ Cited in Clark, *Three Centuries* 65.

⁴² Clark, *Three Centuries* 91.

⁴³ Lorne C. Callbeck, *The Cradle of Confederation: A Brief History of Prince Edward Island from its Discovery in 1534 to the Present Time* (Fredericton, NB: Brunswick Press 1964) 59.

⁴⁴ Bolger 47.

⁴⁵ White, *Lord Selkirk's Diary* xviii-xix.

⁴⁶ See Eva MacNevin, *Past and Present: A History of Brae* (Summerside, PEI: Brae Heritage Group, 1979) 3.

accept A. H. Clark's assessment that the origin of most Island Scots is in the Highlands:

Most of the [Island] Scots were Highlanders; few of them spoke English easily or naturally when they arrived. They formed the bulk of the immigration of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and they continued to come in some numbers with the larger English and Irish immigrations of the 1820-1850 period.⁴⁷

After the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Scots were joined by the southern Irish and West Country English, the latter coming mainly from Bideford and Devon. The movement of rural, West Country people to the Island was related to the fact that West Country merchants such as James Yeo, James Peake and William Richards initiated and controlled the boom in Island shipbuilding which took place between 1810 and 1870.⁴⁸

As new emigrants drifted in, the people of West Prince, poor and without roads, limped along, economically speaking, behind the rest of the Island. By the eighteen thirties, an export trade in farm goods had started with the great lumbering areas on the Miramichi River in New Brunswick. A seasonal migration to "the woods" of young Island men began at this time and continued until the nineteen fifties. Edward Ives has pointed out that, in some aspects of the area's

47 Clark 207.

48 For an account of the West Country migration to western PEI, see Basil Greenhill and Ann Giffard, *Westcountrymen in Prince Edward's Isle: A Fragment of the Great Migration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967).

folklife, specifically singing traditions, the West Prince area is closer to the Miramichi than to the eastern end of the Island.⁴⁹

The three groups from the British Isles, along with the Acadians, pioneered the West Prince County area of the Island in the first half of the eighteen hundreds. The Acadians founded the communities of Tignish and Fortune Cove in 1799 and 1801 respectively.⁵⁰ The Irish settled in Nail Pond in 1811⁵¹ and Lot Seven in 1820.⁵² The Scots settled in the Lot Eight area--West Point, West Cape, and Dunblane--around 1805. As suggested by their community names, West Countrymen settled at Tyne Valley, West Devon, Bideford and surrounding areas. By the end of the eighteen sixties British immigration into the Island had virtually ceased.

Unquestionably, the immigrant Scots and Irish brought their customs and traditions with them. Although he tended to idealize his fellow Scots, John McGregor was probably not too far from the mark when he described their pastimes on the winter evenings. MacGregor's picture of pioneers attempting to retain a cultural continuity in the face of a trying wilderness is no doubt as true of the other groups as it was of the Scots and is worth citing:

49 Edward D. Ives, "Twenty-One Folksongs from Prince Edward Island," *Northeast Folklore* 5 (1963): 5-8.

50 The Inheritors, *History of Saint Anthony Parish* (Summerside: Bloomfield Historical Society, 1980) 4-5

51 Francis J. Nelligan, "The First Irish Settlers of Tignish," *Souvenir Program of the Centennial Celebration: Saint Simon and Saint Jude Roman Catholic Church* (Tignish, Prince Edward Island: n. p., 1961) n.p.

52 John Cousins, "The Irish of Lot Seven," *Abegweit Review* 4 (1983): 37-45.

I have observed, that wherever the Highlanders form distinct settlements, their habits, their system of husbandry, disregard for comfort in their houses, their ancient hospitable customs and their language, undergo no sensible change. They frequently pass their winter evenings reciting traditional poems, in Gaelic, which have been transmitted to them by their forefathers; . . . Of the Highlanders who settled in this colony about fifty years ago, there are numbers still living in excellent health and spirits, although from seventy to ninety years of age. They relate the tales of their early days, and the recollections of their native land, with enthusiastic rapture, and the wish to tread once more on ground sacred to their dearest feelings, and hallowed from containing the ashes of their ancestors, seems paramount to the ties of property, and every connexion which binds them to a country in which they have so long been domiciliated. There are but few indeed that I ever met with . . . who do not, in a greater or less degree, feel a lingering wish to see their native country. . . . This feeling even descends to their children who are born in America, and all call the United Kingdoms by the endearing name of "Home."⁵³

MacGregor is less accepting of the behaviour of the young men in the pioneer settlements whose pastimes involved too much time on horseback:

that which they most delight in is galloping up and down the country on horseback. Indeed many of the farmers' sons who could make a certain livelihood by steady labour, acquire a spirit for bargain-making, dealing in horses, timber, old watches &c. in order to become what they consider (by being idle) gentlemen: those who lead this course of life seldom do any good and generally turn out lazy, drunken, dishonest vagabonds.⁵⁴

⁵³ MacGregor 70-71.

⁵⁴ MacGregor 73.

The use of horses in courtship and socializing were traditions which became a prominent part of Island culture. And much of that lore, especially its oral forms, was part of the cultural baggage brought here by the first generation British settlers.

The first six decades of the nineteenth century were the true pioneer times on the Island. The land filled up; immigration and a high birth rate doubled the population in the 14 years between 1827 and 1841 (from 23,000 to 47,000). By 1861 it had reached 81,000. It grew by only 18,000 more in the next ninety years.⁵⁵

This was a pioneer culture which was aggressively agricultural. Farmers were in the vast majority and their spokesmen in politics and in the printed media were quick to defend agriculture against any threat. The shipbuilding industry, with its lure of easy money, was attacked because it took young men away from the farms. In one of its many homilies in the subject, the *Islander* newspaper wrote:

a man nominally a farmer but obtaining liberal wages which shipbuilders generally pay would in the long run, do better for his family, and consequently for the public, by devoting the whole of his labour to the clearing and cultivation of his farm.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Clark 9.

⁵⁶ *Islander* [Charlottetown] 26 April 1850: 2. Identification with an idyllic farm life has been used successfully by Island politicians for a century and a half. It shows no signs of diminishing, even at a time when the importance of agriculture has waned. It is surely one of the most successful combinations of folklore and politics in Canadian history. For an examination of the "Garden Myth," see David A. Milne, "Politics in a Beleaguered Garden," *The Garden Transformed*, eds. Verner Smitheram, David Milne and Satadee Dasgupta (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1982) 39-72. The reader should note that the first time a newspaper is cited, as above, its place of publication will be given.

In later years this shipbuilding era, identified as it was with neglect of agriculture and easy money, was characterized as the time of "two fiddles and no plow."

The years between 1800 and 1860 were a long wrestle with the forest in West Prince County. And the clearing of land was a job for men and oxen. After describing the felling and limbing of trees, John McGregor continues:

The whole is left in this state until the proper season for burning arrives, generally in May, when it is set on fire, which consumes all the branches and small wood. The large logs are then either piled in heaps and burnt, or rolled away for fencing stuff: some use oxen to haul them off. The surface of the ground after burning the wood on it, is quite black and charred; and if it be intended for grain, it is now sown without further preparation or tillage, other than covering the seed with a hoe. By some a triangular harrow drawn by oxen is used in preference to the hoe and to save labor.⁵⁷

When the trees were cut, the stumps remained. Large stumps were almost immovable. Pine and hemlock stumps were especially troublesome because they took so long to decay. For years, the farmers simply plowed around them. "Little regard," McGregor notes, "is paid to making straight furrows."⁵⁸

In an environment like this, oxen more than held their own. Pioneer country is, in general, not good horse country. In "West

⁵⁷ McGregor 57.

⁵⁸ McGregor 57.

Prince," which settled later than the rest of the Island, we find oxen predominating in the farm work until well into the eighteen forties. Oxen are stronger than horses. They eat less and will survive on poorer food. And they can be eaten themselves. Besides, horses are too valuable to risk injuring in a rough pioneer wilderness. As a result, we find, in 1833, that the Scots in Lot Eight and the Irish in Lot Seven owned 34 oxen but only 6 horses. At the same time, in the more advanced, central part of the Island, the ratio was 2 to 1 in favour of horses.⁵⁹

John Langdon, in his excellent study of the replacement of oxen by horses in late medieval England, notes a division of labour between the two animals. Oxen were used for plowing and hauling and horses for transportation. It seems likely that a similar situation existed on this side of the Atlantic.⁶⁰ Indeed, the struggle with the forest and the clearing of land in Britain during the Late Middle Ages bears physical similarities to the North American pioneer situation during the nineteenth century. This was a wilderness area, "the thicket of the forest and the haunt of wild beasts," as James H. Fitzgerald put it, describing the West Prince area as it was when he went to teach there in 1840. There were no roads, he said:

The only way was by wood-paths, zigzagged and crooked, from tree to tree, knee deep in mud and mire or around the shores, creeping along the brow of the cliffs eighty or

⁵⁹ Robert Montgomery Martin, *Statistics of the Colonies of the British Empire* (London: Wm. Allen and Company, 1839) 253.

⁶⁰ Langdon 27.

one hundred feet above the surfy beach and attended with no small danger to life and limb.⁶¹

Without roads, horses were often more trouble than they were worth. The account of William Harris, which is supported by others, is revealing in this regard. He was a Bible Christian minister in Prince County in 1846 with a flock scattered from Lot Seven to Lot Twelve, a distance of twenty two miles. The following excerpts from his diary, covering a four-week period in the spring of 1846, show what horse travel could be like:

Friday April 25. I left Lot 7, to take my regular round in the Circuit. I might have had a horse, but I did not take it for fear of an accident; as the roads are so very bad, on account of the thaw. . . .

14th [May]. Accepted the kind offer of Br. Bell and took his colt, and got it shod. He has promised me the loan of it for the summer.

16th [May]. Left Lot 7 for Cascumpeque, and took with me my young horse, but the portage here being so very bad, I chose rather to wade through the mud and water, than run the risk of riding the young animal among the roots. . . .

17th [May]. Mr. Meggison promised two canoes to take my horse across the river, but we found impossible to get the animal into them, and after between two and three hours' fruitless toil, we were compelled to drive the horse into the channel and make him swim across.

. . .

21st [May]. In order to get to my appointment, I had to travel about three miles through a road in the woods, much like what is called in this country, a timber road. Two friends went with me, one walked before with his axe on his shoulder, and sometimes cut a tree out of the way, which obstructed the road . . . I went next, and led my horse the greater part of the way, as I did not consider it safe to ride. . . .

⁶¹ *Progress* [Summerside] 31 December 1866: 2.

22nd [May]. A friend came with me, about a mile and a half through the woods, as the road was very bad indeed. One thing happened here, which I cannot help recording. I had walked over a tree across a brook which was 6 or 7 feet wide, and after trying in vain for some time, to get my horse through, while standing directly opposite, the animal made a sudden spring and in a moment was [on] the same side of the brook [as] I was, standing by my side. Had he jumped on me (and I wonder he did not) the consequence must have been alarming. . .⁶²

It is little wonder, given these trying conditions, that pioneers preferred the oxen for their land-clearing operations.

As the process of land clearing and road building accelerated in the forties and fifties, the need for oxen diminished.⁶³ In fact, they brought about their own demise by getting the farmer through the wilderness period and creating the flat level fields where horses could work so well. Certainly the oxen had their supporters who resisted the move to horses at the close of this era. There was a practical side to the use of oxen pointed out by Hughie Joseph MacDonald, a farmer-poet of the eighteen-sixties. He summed up what was probably a fairly widely-held opinion in 1864 in his poem about earlier days in the Island:

⁶² William Harris, *The Bible Christian Magazine for the year Eighteen Forty-Six Being a Continuation of the Arminian Magazine* (Shebbear, Devon: Bible Christian Book Committee, 1846) 40-41.

⁶³ The process of road building, so essential for horse usage advanced further, earlier, in the more settled areas near Charlottetown. J. E. Llewellyn was obviously referring to the settled areas when he commented in 1832 that, "The Island horses are very hardy and good for their size; but now that we have good carriage roads they would be better with a little heavier bone." See Harvey, *Journeys* 205.

The oxen, beast of burden was used to drive the plow,
Much better way to work the earth less labour than a
hoe.

It is true they did have horses , who worked so swift and
good,
But the ox gave summer labour and oft times winter
food.⁶⁴

By 1881 there were only 84 working oxen on the Island. Not surprisingly, over half of those were in Prince County. The 1891 census lists 116 in use and by the turn of the century those were virtually all gone. ⁶⁵ By the time the last ox had been retired, around 1918, horses had been the chief source of power on the farm for over half a century.

Louis Arsenault of Bloomfield was still working his ox during the First World War. Both Elbridge and Mary Cousins recalled him and his goad:

Elbridge Cousins: You never got nothing about Louis and the ox, John, when he used to have the ox ? Louis used to do all t
 John Cousins: Louis? Yes. You remember him using the ox do you?
 E. C. : Yes, yes.
 J. C. : How did he drive him?
 E. C. : Reins. [laughs]
 Mary Cousins: A stick with a brad on the end of it.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ George Laird Collection (Charlottetown: PEI. Public Archives) Microfilm, Reel 1, Index 1 245.

⁶⁵ *Census of Canada 1880-81* ,vol.3 (Ottawa: n. p, 1882) 118.

⁶⁶ The term "brad" is archaic in contemporary PEI. As an insider, I had never heard it before. Terms like this seem to be elicited when informants are called upon to describe a situation which is archaic. Dr. David Buchan mentions that the word is still used in the shoemaking profession in Scotland. It also remains in current usage in the West of England.

He walked beside him with a stick with a brad on it.

E. Cousins: But he could set on -- he'd set on the wagon.
He'd come out here to the shore for gravel.

M. C. : Sometimes he'd set on the wagon when he got him going right. He'd want to turn him on to another road you see. He'd have to get off and turn him. He had this sharp nail on the end of the stick.

J. C. : Oh, he'd poke him?

M. C. : He'd poke him with that.

J. C. : For God's sake!

E. C. : He had the bow, you know, the yoke.

J. C. : Oh, he had the yoke?

E. C. : And the bow and he talked ox talk to him. I remember being out there [in Bloomfield] and Louis came over with a puncheon of molasses for Art Pratt and he talked ox talk to that [ox] and he turned that old wagon and he backed right to the door.⁶⁷

With the decline of the oxen came a transfusion of new blood into Island horse stocks. Actually, this practice had started quite early in the British settlement period and was very much in keeping with the eighteenth century interest in the breeding of bigger, stronger animals. Island farmers were obviously looking for replacements for the old French Canadian stock.

As early as 1792, horses were being imported by farmers in the cleared and settled areas near Charlottetown. The following reference from the Island's first newspaper, the *Royal Gazette and Miscellany of the Island of St. John*, is worth examining for several reasons:

⁶⁷ T64A: 20/3/88. Mary and Elbridge Cousins, Campbellton. Readers should note that the speaker's full name is given the first time it is used in transcripts of conversations. In following speeches in the same conversation, the initials of the speaker will be given as in the above.

To be let to Mares at Lawrence Butler's Red House the celebrated English Horse Noble, Not less remarkable for his pedigree, as is well known to the Gentlemen of this Island and Nova Scotia, then for his get, which is allowed by the best Judges to be superior to any as yet seen in these countries. As an encouragement to propagate the breed of this famed Horse, through the Island, he shall be let out at so low a Price as Fifteen Shillings per Mare, and One shilling to the Groom. Six Months Credit will be given - and to make the mode of payment the easier, all sorts of Country Produce (Potatoes excepted) will be taken. Noble may be seen alternately, every Sunday during the Season, at Scots Fort, and Savage Harbour. Notice is hereby given, to such as wish to have their Mares served by Noble, that they should immediately shew them to the Horse, and keep them from the common Horses that run through the woods, until it is known they are with foal by mine, which will be told by shewing them ten days after they have been first served. . . . These latter trials will be gratis.⁶⁸

The reference to "common horses that run through the woods" suggests that male horses were not castrated, or at least that a good number were not. Unsupervised breeding was going on as it had among the "Canadian" horses in Quebec.

More interesting, perhaps, is the custom of "travelling" a stallion to which the paper refers. Owners of stallions would take them to "stand" at a customary location, a farm, perhaps, or a prominent corner in the community. Any farmer who had a mare in heat would

⁶⁸ *Royal Gazette and Miscellany of the Island of St. John* [Charlottetown] 21 May 1792: 4.

bring her to the stud. After a day or so the stud and his groom (the latter term is still used to designate a man "travelling" a stallion) would move on to "stand" at the next spot (See photo, p. 55). From the wilderness farms of the seventeen nineties to the villages of the nineteen thirties, the travelling of stallions was a springtime event. Donald MacKay remembered,

a half dozen of so. They were travelling up into the thirties. I can remember a man coming into our yard one evening and he had a big grey stallion -- a big Percheron. [The man was] on a road cart; that's what they travelled them with. And they'd have certain places they'd stop at over night and people would bring the mares there and they'd come back about a month later. They'd normally stay at the same place [each time]. There used to be a Flood man from back of Kelly's Cross, before my day, that used to stay at our place and I've forgotten the name of the horse. I guess he was a Percheron and my father had a blood mare and I think he had four foals from him -- one each year.⁶⁹

Word of the stallion's arrival travelled "from the neighbors" as Mackay put it, and by way of newspaper advertisements like the following:

Island Hero

Beginning with the 1st May I will travel the stallion "Island Hero" from Tignish to Bloomfield , passing by Horse Head, Thomson's Road, Palmer Road, Western Road, thence to Bloomfield . For further particulars see posters. Agape D. Chaisson in charge.⁷⁰

69 T68A: 3/4/88. Donald Mackay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

70 *L' Impartial* [Tignish] 26 April 1894: 2.



A stallion and his groom. This picture was taken in the village of O'Leary, c. 1910. This stallion, which is being travelled, is a draft animal. Its white markings and hairy hoofs indicate Clydesdale breeding. Its color is probably dun, although that is difficult to tell from the photo. Notice the striking length of the mane and tail. Judging from the presence of the jaunting sleighs in the background, this photo was taken in springtime, before the sleighs were stored in a building for the summer. (Photo credit: Public Archives of Prince Edward Island.)

And:

**The Young Entire Horse
Dexter**

From the Flying Frenchman out of a Canadian Mare-Will travel for the Season, beginning his route about the first of May - through the following places, viz. - Commencing at Wellington, Lot 16; thence through Lots 14, 13, 12, 11, 5, 6, 3, 2, 1: and thence back again through Lots 4, 7, 8, 9, and 15.

For further particulars apply to the Groom,

**Robert Sutherland,
Proprietor.**

New London, April 13, 1868.⁷¹

The actual breeding, according to informants, was supervised by men only. The prohibition against women being involved in an activity surrounded with such a sexual aura was complete and will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The importing of breeding stock like Noble became common in the eighteen twenties. Leadership came from Lieutenant-Governor John Ready, a popular Irishman who gave to Island agriculture a priority it has never lost.⁷² He promoted the formation of an agricultural society and in 1826 brought from England the thoroughbred horse Roncevalles and a thorough-bred mare Roulette.⁷³ Importers leaned, at first, towards smaller types such as the Hackney and not to the heavy draft horses advocated by some. In fact, this importation

⁷¹ *Progress* 20 April 1868: 3.

⁷² Bolger 95.

⁷³ Harvey, *Journeys* 210.

of carriage and racing types was frowned upon as a frivolity. "We confess," the *Register* noted, [that] "we are no friends to mere speed in horses for the use of this country."⁷⁴

The heavy draft horses came in the late eighteen thirties, beginning with Clydesdales from Scotland. The stallion Columbus, like his namesake, was something of a first when he crossed the Atlantic. Although Grant MacEwan dates the coming of the first Clydesdale (to Ontario) as 1840,⁷⁵ Columbus came to the Island the year before. His arrival was noted by the *Colonial Herald* on June 12, 1839:

A stallion of the Clydesdale breed ordered from Scotland by the Central Agricultural Society, arrived safely in the steamer from Miramichi on the 6th inst. This, together with the two Ayrshire Bulls and Heifers which arrived the week previous completes the Society's importation of livestock. We subjoin the copy of a letter from Professor Low which accompanied the animals.

College, Edinburgh, 2d April,

1839

Sir;

I beg leave to state that I have this day shipped, by the Columbus for Miramachi, the stock for the Central Agricultural Society of Prince Edward Island, consisting of one stallion, of the Clydesdale breed, rising three years old, and two Bulls and two Heifers of the Ayrshire breed, two years old. The Clydesdale Stallion I have procured by the assistance and advice of Mr. Dick, who examined a considerable number before making a selection. The animal sent is a fair specimen of the genuine Clydesdale

⁷⁴ *Prince Edward Island Register* [Charlottetown] 16 October 1827: 3.

⁷⁵ Grant MacEwan, *Hoofbeats and Hitching Posts* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1964) 91.

breed. You will be pleased to observe that the Clydesdale horses are chiefly valued for their steadiness and usefulness in draught. They are not noted for gaiety of appearance like the Cleveland Bays. The one sent is free from vice, and possesses that docility and quietness of temper, which form the characteristics of the true breed. Again I have to express my hope that the animals will afford satisfaction to the members of the Society, and be found useful in improving the Stock of the country.

I am, Sir,
Your most obedient humble servant,
David Low.⁷⁶

Columbus was the first of many Clydes. With some Island farmers, they became a tradition. Horses for breeding purposes were also imported from England's West Country on immigrant ships. It is quite likely that these were Suffolk Punch breed. The loading of four Island-bound stallions at Bideford quay in 1853 was described by the *Bideford Journal*:

Exportation of entire horses. On Saturday last some interest was excited in the vicinity of the quay, by the circumstance that Mr. Thorne, of Prince Edward Island, was about to ship four beautiful horses on board the emigrant ship 'Nugget'. A large company assembled to witness the embarkation. The animals were hauled on board by means of slings. Some of them whilst slung aloft beat the air violently with their feet, causing all present to look on with bated breath. On the horses being lowered into their berths, a general rush was made on board the vessel, and not till the mate had dealt out a plentiful supply of water, which proved more potent than peace officers, could the crowd be dispersed. In the course of a couple of hours the animals were shipped

⁷⁶ Colonial Herald [Charlottetown] 12 June 1839: 3.

safely without injury to horses or men. The beasts are considered perfect models for symmetry and power.⁷⁷

Four other horses, shipped on a sister ship, the *Attwood*, died during the voyage.⁷⁸ In the mid-nineteen sixties, an old seaman who had sailed on the *Nugget* seventy years before commented, "Fancy going over to the westward in a craft like the *Nugget* with horses. They kept them alive because they never 'et them lay down."⁷⁹

The importation of the heavy horses, Clydes followed by Percherons and Belgians, ushered in a new era for the Island. The settled, remarkably stable, rural way of life which characterized the period between the eighteen seventies and the nineteen forties was the Golden Age for the Island's horses and horsemen. Because this is the era we have under focus, a brief look at some general features related to farm life is necessary.

It was a time of small, very mixed farms, where forests had at last been conquered and farms cleared. At its end, in the nineteen forties and fifties, the average size holding was 107 acres⁸⁰ and that figure varied little in the previous three quarter century. Actual arable land was much less than this, however, because often a third or a half of the farm would be forested. Farm numbers, between 1871 and 1911,

⁷⁷ *Bideford Journal* 26 May 1853. Cited in Greenhill and Giffard 189.

⁷⁸ Greenhill and Giffard 190.

⁷⁹ Greenhill and Giffard 200.

⁸⁰ Clark, *Three Centuries* 9.

remained stable at roughly 14,000, ten times what they are today. On those farms the horse was king. In 1911, their numbers reached 36,000, roughly one for every 3 people on the Island.⁸¹

What follows is a composite picture of a typical farm of that period. It is drawn from two main sources: first, A. H. Clark's description from his field notes of 1934-35, and, second, my own consultations with various informants.

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| <i>size</i> | approximately 100 acres |
| <i>popular origin</i> | Scots or Irish |
| <i>farmstead</i> | 7-room, two story, frame, shingle-sided house, painted once; barn and stable, four other other buildings white-washed; four fruit trees and a garden; all on two acres. |
| <i>livestock</i> | |
| horses | 3-4 |
| cattle | 20 (8 milk cows) |
| pigs | 2 brood sows (20 pigs raised) |
| sheep | 10 |
| poultry | 60 |
| wood lot | 25 acres (spruce and hardwood) |
| pasture | 15 acres |
| <i>field crops</i> | <i>in acres</i> |
| hay | 20 |
| oats | 8-10 |

⁸¹ *Census of Canada*, Vol. 4, Agriculture (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1914).

| | |
|----------|------|
| wheat | 3 |
| potatoes | 6-10 |
| turnips | 1 |

equipment and implements single plow, gang plow, drill seeder, harrows, hay mower, hay rake, grain binder, (all horse drawn).⁸²

Only at the end of this period, between 1945 and 1950, did the influx of farm tractors begin to change the work-life of the Island farmer appreciably.

Most Island farms during the period under discussion did not vary appreciably from the one described above. The customary practice on farms like this was to keep three or four horses. Of those, two or three would be heavy draft types, Clydesdales or Percherons or a mixture thereof. "Till I was about ten years old, I never heard of a draft horse on the Island except a Percheron or a Clyde," Donald MacKay said.⁸³ These draft horses were the foot soldiers of the Island farms. They were heavy, tough, mild tempered and slow. One of their most valuable attributes was that they could be trusted with children.

Often, noted stallions dominated the breeding of mares and hence the bloodlines of their particular type, over a considerable area. Jim Craig describes the situation in this regard:

They [Island farmers] held to the Clydesdale and Belgian horses. That was the main [breed]. . . . But the Clydesdale

⁸² Clark, *Three Centuries* 254-255.

⁸³ T53A: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

was the main working horse and, of course, when you got into that you got all different set-up[s] in Clydesdales. Each one would have their own name now. Around Hunter River, the Stead's Barrister was the name of the Clydesdale horse. . . . they got spread out, they were in Charlottetown. They were a terrific working horse. . . . and down through Rollo Bay, the Townsends down there, they had a big Clydesdale stallion there and they went around mostly in the eastern section of the Island. . . . There was a lot of horses bred after that horse. I have pictures of him. . . . And colts after him were high class and easy to sell. . . . because people knew the breed.⁸⁴

Virtually all farmers kept at least one other horse, a smaller type, often a mixture of draft horse and "blood horse." In their pure form, "blood horses" were carriage or racing horses but on Island farms, blood lines were for practical reasons often mixed. Called "drivers," "driving horses," or "roaders," the smaller types did the same work as the heavy horses. However, they were also used for fast transportation and for conveying the family in its dealings with the outside world. As Alban Craswell said, "There was always one in the number that was a pretty good driver."⁸⁵

In spite of the fact that they were outnumbered by the heavy horses, there is a romanticism attached to the driver which is unique. Informants talk readily about the exploits and virtues of these fast, tough horses and the majority of horse narratives one hears are about this type. Their role in the social life of the family and community was special and will be discussed in a later chapter.

⁸⁴ 14/5/80. Jim Craig to Susan Hornby, Sherwood, [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection.*

⁸⁵ T6A: 22/5/85. Alban Craswell, Bloomfield.

Donald MacKay's succinct description of the relationship between driving horses and heavy horses summarizes accurately the breeding custom on most farms of the period :

When I got the first tractor [around 1946] most of the farmers around would have two heavy horses and one roader, what we called a blood horse. A lot of them used to take a blood horse and they'd breed them to a Percheron or a Clyde and they'd get a smart horse that was fairly big. But a lot of those blood horses, if they weren't too slim -- a lot of them would go in a binder all day and tire some of the big horses.⁸⁶

Of the heavy horses, each breed had its characteristics and backers :

A Clydesdale horse was more likely to be disagreeable. Percherons were very docile, easy to work wit., you know. They wouldn't kick or that type of thing. But a lot of Clydes, you know, they'd kick or they'd run on you or something like that. They were very smart horses as a rule and they'd eat all the hay you could grow.⁸⁷

Sometimes certain breeds became traditions. Donald MacKay noted that "Most of the Scots, the Clyde was the only horse they knew." He went on to tell the following anecdote :

My grandfather MacDonald bought a farm down in Breadalbane corner, oh, [it] could have been in the early 1870's. My mother was born in '81 and there were older members in the family. And he brought a mare from home, I believe she was a Clyde, from Glen Valley. And [pause] his son, my uncle, died in 1954 and he still had

86 T53A: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

87 T53A: 2/1/88. Donald Mackay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

two horses there descended from that horse. And it didn't matter how bad they were, he'd keep them.⁸⁸

In 1970, Harry MacKay (no relation to Donald) told me that his horses were descended from "Just Right" out of 'All Right,'" information which meant little to me until I found a picture of "All Right" in Meacham's *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Province of Prince Edward Island* (1880).⁸⁹ MacKay had just reached back a century in his horses' family tree. Elmer Cook, going back over 60 years, recalled the genealogy of a neighbour's horses, "Welsh always kept Princetons. They were terrible ugly."⁹⁰

It was a stable or at least a non-changing society. There was a great deal of out-migration of young people and very little in-migration. Since the older tradition-bearers remained within the community, it was their traditions and their standards which tended to be the accepted ones. Because of a suffering economy, farms did not expand, even when the ones next door were abandoned. Instead, vacant farms grew up in trees while the farmers who stayed continued to cling to a stable, if precarious existence. Of course, it was the older people who stayed and, as in most rural societies, they fought fiercely when their cultural icons were threatened. That happened when the auto came to replace the horse.

88 T53A: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

89 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Province of Prince Edward Island* (Philadelphia: J. H. Meacham and Company, 1880) 126. It is a measure of the horses' importance during that era that notable stallions such as All Right were portrayed along with the Island's prominent men.

90 T36A: 18/10/86. Elmer Cook, Cape Wolfe.

To an extent, the introduction of the automobile met with resistance throughout North America, especially in rural, agricultural areas.⁹¹ Nowhere, however, was the resistance as strong as it was on the Island. What happened here was unprecedented.

The first "modern" car came in 1902.⁹² By 1905 there were five cars and by 1908 there were enough cars on the Island to make them the focus of resentment. At that point the farmers dug in their heels and did battle with the auto. In the face of bitter complaints, letters to the newspapers, and other forms of obvious discontent, Island legislators responded quickly by passing a law prohibiting the automobile from public roads.⁹³

The problem, according to innumerable complaints, was the horses' reaction to cars. They were terrified of them. "There was horses that would run away every time they met a car."⁹⁴

When I was small you'd probably drive a couple of miles you'd meet a couple of cars and they were all the open touring type with them things flapping. And nearly all the horses were scared of them and horses that weren't on the road much -- they'd start throwing up their head.⁹⁵

⁹¹ For a full discussion of the resistance of rural people to the auto, see Michael L. Berger, *The Devil Wagon in God's Country : The Automobile and Social Change in Rural America* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1975).

⁹² Deborah Stewart, "The Island Meets the Auto," *The Island Magazine* 5 (1978) : 9.

⁹³ Stewart, "Auto" 9.

⁹⁴ T64A: 20/3/88. Mary Cousins, Campbellton.

⁹⁵ T53B: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

There is a whole body of oral narratives about horrendous runaways, frenzied animals and injuries -- all caused by cars. Willie Macdonald who grew up in West Point remembered one incident:

My brother, he was on a dry [drag] sleigh going home. A car came by and his horses got scared and ran away on him. One ran right into the back of the car. She was a big horse. You know, she got up and took the harness right off the other horse, passed the car, and took off down to West Point's wharf. My uncle caught her down there. she was so scared. She never was anymore good after that. It just spoiled her, no good after that. And she never got used to cars.⁹⁶

A constant theme from the anti-car forces was the danger to "women and children," "women and girls," and "wives and daughters." It was true that horses ran away on men, but the stress on the plight of the supposedly weak and defenceless members of the society made the argument against the cars almost irresistible. An infuriated Robert Jenkins wrote :

On another occasion when I was driving through Bunbury as soon as my horse saw the automobile he wheeled in his tracks and began kicking in the wagon. Those in charge of the automobile brought the machine to a halt and it was only after I backed the horse past it that I felt safe to get into the carriage again. . . . Many farmers refuse to let their wives and daughters drive on the road unless accompanied and the pleasure of a quiet ride on our country roads will be rare if those vehicles are allowed to travel as they are now.⁹⁷

96 Stewart, "Auto" 10.

97 *Guardian* [Charlottetown] 6 March 1908: 2.

The narratives still told, and the outraged letters to newspapers, could be extended indefinitely. Suffice to say that virtually all of rural Prince Edward Island was up in arms. "The introduction of the auto to our narrow country roads will be a nuisance, a menace and a common danger," was the conclusion of a farmers' meeting in Freetown.⁹⁸ Then, members of the Assembly, especially those from rural areas, came under pressure and began to speak out. The *Pioneer* reported on a speech made by one country member:

He said that he spoke on behalf of his constituents, who said they had a lot of hard work to do, and the women and young people rendered much valuable assistance. If the women and girls are to be prevented from driving on the roads on account of the automobile this will place still heavier burdens on the men.⁹⁹

The resistance eventually went far beyond speeches and letters. Tires were flattened, roads were booby-trapped and drivers assaulted. Queenie Taylor's father was among the first of the Island's doctors to use a car in making medical calls. She remembered the pitfalls he encountered:

Like all Islanders, you know, they're like that about everything. They hate change. They used to put spikes on the roads, do you know, for to bust the tires, put fences up, and [threw] sticks and stones and everything. It's really ridiculous when you look back on it now. But I know people in the districts that were like that.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *Pioneer* [Summerside] 26 April 1913: 3.

⁹⁹ *Pioneer* 26 April 1913: 1.

¹⁰⁰ Undated tape, C. 1980. Queenie Taylor, Charlottetown *Weale Collection*.

Islanders, seeing the world through the eyes of their horses, recognized immediately how their horses felt when faced with what some called the "modern death producer."¹⁰¹ Neil Matheson recalled hearing, as a boy, a conversation between two farmers who were discussing the horses' fear of cars. One of them explained it this way:

The horse is used to seeing a wagon coming down the road with another horse in it. If you saw a pair of pants coming down the road with no man in them, you'd be scared too.¹⁰²

It was not just the practical problems of runaways which aroused opposition to the car. There was, also, the deep-seated cultural disposition of a people to react when a valued part of their life style was threatened. Men and women who worked with horses and who loved them refused to even consider that their beloved animals might be replaced. Deborah Stewart writes, "Hudson Jeffery revealed that when his brother first told him that cars would replace horses, he was so angry that an argument resulted."¹⁰³ Faced with almost total unanimity against the car, the Island legislature moved quickly. Early in 1908, the lawmakers voted 28 to 0 to ban the automobile from Island roads. The *Agriculturalist* breathed an almost audible sigh of relief:

101 Bolger 350.

102 *Guardian* 28 June 1963: 3.

103 Stewart, "Auto" 11.

The Bill to prohibit the running of automobiles in this province received its second reading in the Legislature Wednesday. It went through committee without a hitch making a record run. It was unanimously passed and reported[ly] agreed to without amendments and set down for its third reading. Thus is removed the peril of the autos, and roads of this Province will be once more safe for women and children.¹⁰⁴

It was an act unparalleled by any legislative body in North America and it held for five years. The horsemen had won the first battle against the auto decisively.

As it turned out, the auto could not be denied. Pressure on the members built up, coming mainly from the urban centers of Summerside and Charlottetown. The government attempted a minor amendment to the act in 1913, allowing cars to operate on Mondays Wednesdays and Thursdays and then only on roads where local plebiscites were in favour of them. Even this small concession to the auto brought charges of corruption. Premier Mathieson was castigated for being "soft" on automobiles. A cabinet minister, Murdock Kennedy, resigned over the issue.¹⁰⁵ Five Conservative members left their party and joined the opposition Liberals. Among them was John Dewar. His son George, who also became a member of the Legislature, remembered his father's fiery defence of the Island's horses:

George Dewar : He was in the Legislature then and I remember -- I still remember him talking about it. And he said it was a very great case of corruption, he said as far as he was [concerned]. He was on the

¹⁰⁴ *Prince Edward Island Agriculturalist* [Charlottetown] 11 April 1908: 5.

¹⁰⁵ Bolger 319.

government side [of] the Mathieson government.

John A. Mathieson, [was] the Premier. I guess he and my father fell out over the [cars]. [That was] one of the things that they fell out very severely over, and my father ran as an independent.

John Cousins : Oh, it was the next election?

G. D. : Yeah, but anyway, I can remember him talking about that vote and the lobbying that was going on. And he said, "And do you know that Henry Ford's yacht was right in the harbour when that bill was passed?"

J. C. : Do you suppose?

G. D. : Well, that's what he used to say, and I don't think he would have said that unless it was actually the case.¹⁰⁶

Having been condemned as a group of "Judas Iscariots and Simon Peters," and facing a flight of its own members, the government took fright. In June of 1913, it allowed individual school districts to decide, through public meetings, whether cars could be used locally. Horace Wright summed up the general feeling among the farmers when he said at one meeting, "We're going to keep them cars out if we have to take a pitch fork and drive it through them."¹⁰⁷ The following plebiscites, held in the local school houses, went ninety percent against the cars.

The Summerside *Journal*, on the "pro" side, viewed the fight as a conflict of traditions. In the conflict between old and new, the paper noted, "the older men had things all their own way."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ T65A: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth].

¹⁰⁷ Stewart, "Auto" 11.

¹⁰⁸ *Journal* 25 June 1913: 4.

In retrospect, defeat for the horsemen was inevitable. The coming of the First World War accelerated a process which had a foregone conclusion. In the national emergency, cars were allowed to drive anywhere at any time. Not only that, but the pro car forces, from the centres of Charlottetown and Summerside, gradually closed ranks and mounted a propaganda campaign of their own, as the following letter indicates :

A farmer from one of the anti-automobile sections in the neighbourhood of Charlottetown, drove into the city the other day for the purpose of giving a demonstration of the danger to which drivers of ordinary rigs are subjected when they come in contact with the dreaded auto. His horse was a particularly nervous one, shied at everything it saw, was scared of the cows on the farm and went literally into fits at the sight of a live[?] clothes line. Taking everything breakable out of his carriage, an old one whose conversion into scrap would mean no pecuniary disadvantage, he drove cautiously down to the vicinity of the Victoria Hotel where autos were in evidence. There were some half a dozen autos, some of them in motion, others stationary and with their motors in operation, an ideal medley for a demonstration. In relating his experience afterwards he remarked that although he was not scared, he said his prayers before going in and he expected the horse would immediately proceed to climb a telephone pole or at least to hunt for a distant gutter to hide in. What was his amazement when the timid horse refused to even look at the autos and passed them with a snort of contempt. He then trailed one of the autos, passed it, was passed by it and [there was] still no sign of recognition from the nervous brute. The man was simply disgusted with the unreasonable conduct of his horse and declared in the presence of witnesses that he never again wanted to hear anything about autos scaring horses. ¹⁰⁹

109 *Guardian* 10 July 1915: 13.

So the partial victory won by the horsemen in 1913 was hollow. By 1918, all restrictions on car travel were relaxed. The horsemen went down fighting, however. Mathieson's Conservative government, which had passed the legislation loosening the restrictions on cars, was defeated in part because of its failure to defend the rights of horses. The whole drawn-out episode is indicative of the depth of feeling and the attachment that this culture bore towards its horses. A whole century of hated landlordism had been endured by Islanders with little more protest than this.

Though no one perceived it, the end of the horsemen's era on the Island was coming. There was, admittedly, a period of grace when horse and car coexisted. Horses got used to the automobile and, for another thirty years, remained supreme in their role as the main source of power on the farm. When tractors finally came, in the years immediately after the Second World War, they were welcomed as a wonderful help to the struggling farmer. The decade after 1950 saw the disappearance of most Island horses and a large percentage of its farmers.

According to Paulo Carvalho-Neto's definition, the Island horsemen's reaction to the coming of the automobile was prelogical. That is, it was "motivated by individual feelings rather than scientific reasoning."¹¹⁰ Given the known intelligence of horses it should have been apparent that through time they would get used to cars, which they eventually did. Given also the powerful physical and cultural

¹¹⁰ Paulo Carvalho-Neto, *The Concept of Folklore*, trans. Jacques M. P. Wilson (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1965) 40.

considerations discussed earlier it is not surprising to find a strong element of what Donald Pierson calls ethnocentrism in the behaviour of the folk group under discussion. He writes:

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to see the world and what goes on in it through the colored glasses of the primary group, which places it in the centre of everything. Their own customs are felt to be natural, true and superior.¹¹¹

The statement is certainly true of the Island's horsemen.

Looking at the 1870-1950 period from a distant perspective, we can say that the cultural behavior, as it related to horses, was a remarkably strong force. Its power came, in part, from an alliance between the unofficial, traditional parts of culture and the official parts of the same culture. Governments, as has been shown, responded quickly and decisively to the wishes of the electorate because government members approached the problem in the same way as the voters. That approach was not based on any particularly rational thinking. Custom and tradition were supported by, and in turn supported, officialdom. The outlawing of the automobile in Prince Edward Island is a prime example of what Abraham Myerson was referring to when he wrote: "In a democracy only those laws which have their bases in folkways or the approval of strong groups have a chance of being enforced."¹¹²

111 Cited in Carvalho-Neto 41.

112 Cited in Peter Laurence, *Peter's Quotations: Ideas for our Time* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979) 131.

A similar alliance can be seen in the education of children where custom and family tradition were reinforced by the schools. Many people recall the so-called galloping poems: "Gillespie," "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," and "Bannerman of the Dandenong" which were pounded into children's heads through memorization.¹¹³ Practical information about horses was also taught. Donald MacKay recalled:

Donald MacKay: See, when we went to school, we learned the breeds of horses, I guess, normally used in Canada.

John Cousins: Well, I never knew that. So you learned them.

D. M. : You never learned that?

J. C. : Never.

D.M. : Oh. we had to memorize them and their characteristics and their weight. and their colors and how you'd recognize them and what each was used for.

J. C. : Well, I never knew that.

D. M. : And the main ones in that book. I don't think there's one of these [here]. It must have been a nature study book. That was about all we got on agriculture--was in that little book which was probably a little bigger than a *Reader's Digest*, but not as many pages. But there was a picture of a Clyde and where they originated and a little information on them, and the Percheron and the English Shire, which was a fairly heavy built horse. Some of them I think went up to nearly a ton and . . . Some of them had big hairy feet too, like the Clydes, but they were a slower moving horse. . . . The Hackney was in that [book]. It wasn't so far away from the times when they used

¹¹³ Madeline Pierce and Lorne Pierce, eds., *Beckoning Trails: Canada Book of Prose and Verse* (1927; Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1948) 28-36. This was the Grade Seven literature text book in Island schools from the nineteen forties until the mid-nineteen sixties.

carriage horses. See, I went to school in the twenties.¹¹⁴

George Dewar recalling his childhood noted:

I remember, we had a book one time at home. It was a general *Vade Mecum* for every thing that happened around the farm, making wills and all that sort of thing. But I found [inaudible] a picture of Nancy Hanks in it. [Nancy Hanks was a notable race horse named after Abraham Lincoln's mother] . . . And there was a poem and I can still remember that poem, just a picture of a horse, [a] eulogy to the horse.

I love my God the first of all,
Then I: who perished on the cross.
And then my wife and then I fall,
Down on my knees and love the horse.¹¹⁵

Donald MacKay's account of his schooling in regard to horses is evocative of another, related culture, three thousand miles away and almost a century earlier, described by Charles Dickens. Even in industrializing England, demonstrable knowledge of horses was expected of males, especially. In *Hard Times*, Mr. Gradgrind, disgusted with Sissy Jupe's inability to define a horse turns to Bitzer, a veritable fountain of knowledge on the subject :

"Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!" said Mr. Gradgrind, for the general behoof of all the little pitchers. "Girl number twenty possessed of no facts in reference to one of the commonest of animals! Some boy's definition of a horse. Bitzer, yours."

To which Bitzer replies:

¹¹⁴ T53A: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

¹¹⁵ T65A: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth].

116 Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*: An Authoritative Text [with] Backgrounds, Sources, And Contemporary Reactions [plus] Criticism, eds., George Ford and Sylivere Monod (New York: W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1966) 3.

horses." Bert Thomson was exaggerating when he said, "I knew comment which is often heard is, "We all thought we had the best knowledge. Everyone knew horses and had opinions about them. A is a potent force. The result was a tremendous body of communal tradition, supported by and acting in concert with, officialdom

should always prove remunerative.¹¹⁷

No province in Canada [can] boast a greater number of smart thoroughbreds, . . . This seems to be the natural home of the horse and so long as we continue to raise them the buyers from abroad will come here and make purchases, and thus the horse industry

comments like the following:

Agriculturalist, an Island newspaper which was in wide circulation between 1889 and 1915, reflected on a weekly basis the tremendous interest which the mass of the population had in its horses. The knowledge and pride of the horsemen's culture is evident in reinforcing the attitudes promoted by the farm family. The print media, like the school system reflected and

Bilizer,¹¹⁸ known by marks in mouth. Thus (and much more) Hoods hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age coat in spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoods, too. Four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds

every horse's name for forty miles."¹¹⁸ However, his point is well made. Michael Cole and John Gay write:

We learn what we are culturally fitted to learn. The Swazi's so-called remarkable memory regarding cattle is equalled by the American Jock's command of baseball and hockey statistics.¹¹⁹

And, it might be added, by the rural Prince Edward Islander's knowledge of horses.

Sir Andrew MacPhail in his classic account of his boyhood in Orwell, PEI, writes of his mother:

She reckoned the date of events by the age of her children, and epochs by the life span of a horse. She remembered their names, knew their pedigree and personal history, and would recall the feats of strength, speed and endurance they had performed.¹²⁰

C. C. Ince, remembering his boyhood in the DeSable area writes:

The writer can remember as a boy listening to elderly men of an old generation talk deep in their beards of great horses of the past, horses whose names , record and the reputation of the stock they had sired had become a by-word and legend.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ 23/6/85. Bert Thomson Roseville, field note. When asked who among her neighbors had the best horses, Mary Bradshaw said almost the same thing: "Everybody thought they had the best horses." 4/6/87. Mary Bradshaw, Middleton, field note.

¹¹⁹ Michael Cole and John Gay, "Culture and Memory," *American Anthropologist* 74.5 (1972): 1068.

¹²⁰ MacPhail 143.

¹²¹ C. C. Ince, *Old Desable* (Charlottetown: n.p., 1975) 25.

MacPhail was writing of the eighteen-eighties, and Ince of the early years of this century. Their words apply equally well to those informants who grew up in the third or fourth decades of this century. The narratives of MacPhail's mother about horses are not too different from the narratives of the older generation living in Prince Edward Island today. Horse-related culture, superimposed on environment, evolved through the French and British colonial periods into settled, stable patterns and customs : the travelling of stallions, the practical combination of heavy horse and driver, and the communal and individual knowledge of horses and their genealogy. Out of this came an attachment to horses which bordered on the irrational and which made the Islander's resistance to the automobile unique in North America.

The two centuries between 1720 and 1945 saw the cultural-environmental nurturing of a unique set of values and attitudes relating to the horsemen's society. From the importation of the tough little French Canadian breed to the plodding dominance of the sturdy Clydes and Percherons in the Golden Age between 1860 and 1945, the horse was central to Island farm life. The steadfast attachment of Islanders to their horses has been demonstrated by what we have seen of the broad manifestations of the Island horseman's culture. The powerful combination of "official" and "unofficial" aspects of culture created an advocacy for the horse which is still strong.

Unquestionably, the folklore attached to horses was strengthened, as we have seen, by the Island's physical environment

and fused into the individual psyche by the pattern of everyday life on the farm. It is to individual horsemen and horses, and the pattern of their lives, to which we now turn.

Chapter III

The Nurturing of Tradition:

Horses in the Pattern of Everyday Life in Rural Prince Edward Island

The folklife of the family farm on Prince Edward Island in the period 1870-1950 exhibits two main elements. One was concerned with the inward-looking world of the farm, a world of everyday work, tedium, practicality, and family preservation. The other aspect of the folklife which we see was, really, an extension of the first. This was the outside world a family dealt with : a social world of wakes and weddings, of courtship and social gatherings. In both these worlds the horse was cast in the role of helper, playing a part so pervasive that it contributed visible elements to the folklife and worldview of this particular culture. The physical environment, as has been previously pointed out, was kind to horses, their value to the culture was indisputable, and virtually every family owned horses. The diary of Michael Griffin, a farmer in Burton, Lot Seven, illustrates clearly the pattern of daily life and the place of the horse in it.¹

Griffin seems to have been an "average farmer" on an average farm in Burton, overlooking Northumberland Strait. He did not have

¹ *Michael Griffin Diary*. Photocopy in writer's possession. There is no pagination in the diary so it is necessary to be guided by dates of entry.

a reputation as a horseman or a man who had a more than ordinary interest in horses. What is notable about him is that he wrote, in a combination diary-account-book-reminiscence, the events of the day and of previous times, which were important to him. Griffin was not a voluminous writer. He simply recorded what was significant in his life. The following extracts were lifted, unchanged, from a seven month period (June-December, 1903):²

June 8, 1903: *The Friz [z]le colt doctored [castrated] by Crosman.*
\$1.00.

June 20, 1903: *Turned back to the field on the back road 11 yews and 9 lambs all marked.*

June 29, 1903: *A suit of close made by Paul Dasant [Dystant] \$5.00. Three pairs of boots bought from Ellis \$3.30. 1 shirt and collar 90 cents. Paid McEwan \$1.00. Starch [bought at] Turners 90 cents. Two figs of tobacco.*

July 1, 1903: *Sold the horse Jack to Pates' agent Wilfred McKinnon on the 24 day of June 1903 for one McCormick mower and \$45.00 cash. Took the horse up to Pate on the 27th day of June 1903. Got \$45.00 cash and brote [brought] the mower from Bloomfield on the first day of July 1903. Charged \$55.00 as for the mower.*

July 4, 1903: *Paid Checkly Wilk[in]son the sum of Seven Dollars for the road cart.*

July 8, 1903: *Began haying July [June?] the last and finished July the seventh, 1903. 16 team loads. Wright put up the line fence on the 8th [July] 1903 and I bet him five Dollars that the fence he put up was not on his land. Eddie Haywood witness.*

July 10, 1903: *First trip to [?] July 9th. Came home on the 10th.*

² I have added whatever punctuation is necessary for clarity. Explanations and clarifications are within brackets.

July 15, 1903: *Last tea party at St. Mark's [Church].*

August, [date?] 1903: *Age Din eight years old on May 1903. Bill [was] 11 in August 1903.*

[Din and Bill were two of his horses. The former is sometimes spelled "Dine" and may actually have been Dinah]

September 19, 1903: *Got from Ingham Wright 127 lbs of wire 1 lbs staples.*

October 17, 1903: *Banking and repairing . Michael Dalton \$4.50 George Dalton making on fire \$4.50. Get[ting] of wood [for] school \$14.00.*

December 2, 1903: *Bid in the getting of wood for Burton school on 17th of October 1903 for the sum of \$14.00 . John Griffin Secretary. Hauled three loads in Nov. split ,too old , one green. [The blocks of wood were split open to allow them to dry faster. "Too old" refers to the fact that two of the loads of wood which he hauled to the school were aged and dried. They would be worth much more than green or new wood].*

Dec. 2, 1903: *one load blocks.*

An examination of these entries, which are typical of the diary as a whole, reveals the extent to which horses and men interacted in their everyday lives. Nine of the thirteen entries mention horses or activities in which horses were used. Examples are the selling of Jack, banking the house, and "halling" hay. One is struck by the sheer amount of time which this individual obviously spent with horses. Haying, hauling wood, and banking the house, were jobs which required long days, and in the case of haying, long weeks spent working with horses.

Interesting also are the glimpses we see of the other world, off the farm. "Taking the horse up to Pate," for instance, meant a 16 mile

round trip and the best part of a day by horse and wagon on the road to O'Leary. The "last tea party" of the year at St. Mark's meant a trip by horse to the church picnic, a special excursion into the social life of the community (Saint Marks was the parish church, two miles from Griffin's home).

Taking the diary as a whole, the number of entries concerning horses is striking. Life crises which we associate with humans are associated with horses. Pregnancies, parentage, births, sicknesses, ages, and leave-taking of horses are all recorded. Without context, it would be difficult to tell at times whether the farmer is referring to animals or humans. Some of this emphasis can be attributed to the economic importance of horses in his life. It does not explain why he would go to the trouble, for no apparent reason, of recording the ages of his horses.

More revealing, perhaps, are Griffin's views of horses compared to the other farm animals. Horses, for example, have human names such as Polly and Jack. Cattle, which were, in economic terms, almost as important as horses, were designated by some physical characteristic such as color. He writes (28 June 1905) that the "Mull he[i]fer had [a] calf. In a later entry (13 July 1918) he writes that he had "bread [sic] [the] red cow [and the] blue cow, both to Jerry Dalton's Bull."³ Sheep and pigs are equally anonymous. A typical reference is recorded as follows: "Let the ram go on the 13th Dec. 1909. Served [bred] the broken leg[ged] sheep and the Jumper." [The

³ As a general rule, the fewer cows a family had , the more likelihood there was of them having names. Also, the naming of farm animals by color was a common tradition both on the Island and in England.

Jumper probably referred to a sheep which caused problems by jumping fences]. In contrast, the birth of a foal is always acknowledged, usually with the names of its parents. Sometimes the time of breeding is accompanied by a reference to the state of the moon. One example of many is the following where he notes that he had bred one of his mares to "French Bar[r]ister, July 11th 1903, too [two] days after the full moon."⁴ In another he summarizes a foal's conception, birth, and a third important life passage: "Dina, July 10th, 1905 bread [sic] to Princeton. Foaled [sic] June 22, 1906. Weaned October 13, [1906]."

Much of what Griffin wrote about horses is what we would expect to see written about members of his family. He noted their ages. He remarked on their leave-taking. He was concerned about their fertility and well-being. Keith Thomas's description of rural sixteenth-century England comes quite close to the world view we are discussing here:

Dwelling in such proximity to men, these animals were often thought of as individuals, particularly since, by modern standards, herds were usually small. Shepherds knew the faces of their sheep as well as their neighbors, and some farmers could trace stolen cattle by distinguishing their hoof prints.⁵

⁴ The period close to the full moon was, of course, a time auspicious for its fertility. This belief is still strong in west Prince County, especially in regard to the planting of gardens.

⁵ Thomas, *Man* 95.

Thomas goes on to quote a late seventeenth century observer as saying that "farmers and poor people" made little difference between themselves and their beasts: "They went out with them to the fields in the morning, toiled with them all day, and returned home with them in the evening."⁶ Really, that statement is very applicable to many poor agrarian societies well into the twentieth century and certainly to the one under study here.

There was an articulated view that horses, while not human, had very human characteristics and that they actually felt happiness, sadness, joy, sorrow, love, hatred, depression, vindictiveness, pettiness, and numerous other human emotions. Conversations with informants, both men and women, who worked with horses, reveal, over and over again, the imputation of human feelings to them. "She couldn't talk," Edward MacWilliams said, referring to a good mare he had owned, "but she never did a wrong thing in her life. If she stepped over a trace, she felt some bad. She'd do everything she could to get her foot back."⁷ Donald MacKay mentioned a team that he had who wouldn't walk fast "unless they thought you were heading for home with the plow."⁸ "Prince knew everything,"⁹ Leith Thompson said of a smart horse. "Some horses were so good," Alban Craswell said, "that you couldn't make them do wrong if you tried. They know

⁶ Thomas, *Man* 98.

⁷ T52A: 8/1/88. Edward MacWilliams, O'Leary [Dunblane].

⁸ T53A: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

⁹ T25A: 8/8/85. Leith Thomson, Toronto, Ontario [Roseville].

better than a man."¹⁰ And Harry MacIntyre, summing up a view which I heard many times, said, "There's good and bad in them all, just like people."¹¹

Sometimes the behaviour of the horse was believed to be, as in the case of some humans, deliberately contrary. One informant was still vexed at a bad horse three decades after it had been sold:

I said, "You know very well that he didn't work unless he wanted to and I said he wouldn't come home if he didn't want to. He did what he liked."¹²

The extension of this anthropomorphic view of animals, where horses were viewed as having human characteristics and were treated as such, is shown by a rather curious expressiveness about horses. Throughout much of Anglo-American culture, men have traditionally prohibited themselves from expressing feelings of strong affection toward children and wives, siblings and parents. These feelings of affection do exist however and need an outlet. If a man feels that he cannot articulate feelings of affection toward his wife, horses, his other great love, may provide a relief valve where he can express emotion without fear of embarrassment or losing face. Using words and expressions that we would ordinarily expect to see applied to a wife or lover, Tom Duncan told me about the horse his father had given to him when he was sixteen: "I know I broke this colt in. I

10 T6A: 22/5/85. Alban Craswell, Bloomfield.

11 T49A: 18/4/87. Harry MacIntyre to Lyn Phillips, Bayside. *Westisle Collection*.

12 T24B: 28/5/85. Mary Cousins, Campbellton.

loved him. I thought he was the only thing in the world. I thought I was rich when I got him."¹³

Physically, horses were given preferential treatment. In the field, men took an hour for dinner, not so much for themselves, but because the horses needed an hour to eat. When the going was heavy, farmers never considered stopping themselves, but they did change horses when they could.¹⁴ The treatment of horses compared to that of cattle is, today, a source of amusement. In bad times, however, the poor cattle suffered because of the horses. In economically depressed areas, animal food was often scarce. When a choice had to be made, the cattle were fed straw and the horses were given any hay and oats that there was to give. "There's no doubt that horses were an expensive thing to keep," Donald MacKay said, "because they ate a lot and they [farmers] had to make sure they fed the horses. You couldn't have the horses on the lift in the spring. It was [better] to let the cows go on the lift."¹⁵

The long hours spent with horses which we see indicated in Michael Griffin's diary were only one factor in the strong emotional bonds that developed between man and beast. Another reason was that men started to work with horses as children. Virtually every

13 T37A: 14/11/86. Tom Duncan, Mill Road.

14 T53A: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

15 "On the lift" or "on the lifting" was the phrase used to describe a horse or cow which lay down and couldn't get up. This was a fairly common occurrence in the period under discussion. As spring approached, animals which had been malnourished all winter sometimes were unable to regain their feet. This was especially common among cattle who had to contend with spring calving. In a bad spring, men would gather and go from barn to barn helping to lift downed animals and get them started walking.

informant I discussed this with described the same basic initiation. The situation would be casual; often the boy and his father would simply be driving in a wagon -- to a neighbors, to the store, or back to the field. The boy would be young, usually around six years of age, and he would be closely supervised (See photo, p. 89). Alban Craswell's experience is so typical of all informants that it is worthwhile citing:

I drove a horse along the road, I think, when I was about six years old, sitting between my mother and father. He passed the reins.¹⁶

The father would pass on rudimentary knowledge at this time. The boy would probably be instructed in how to guide the horse to turn right by pulling on the right rein, and to the left by pulling on the left rein. John Millar's experience with his father was similar to Craswell's:

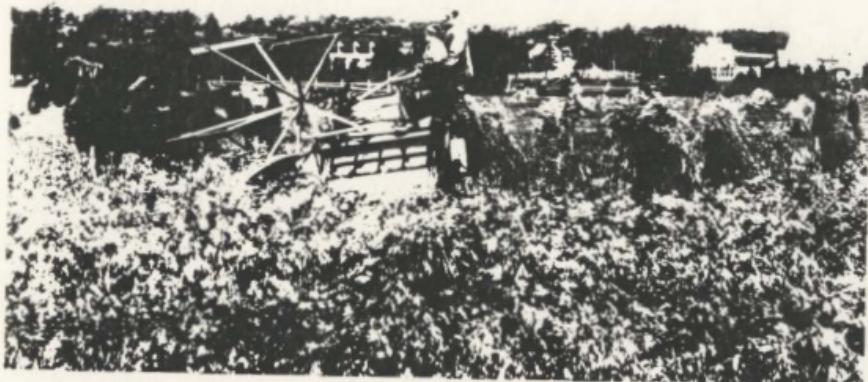
Mostly we'd go in the wagon . . . for a drive in the wagon, like, and I'd be with him and he'd let me drive and then it got so I drove her alone.¹⁷

Johnny MacLeod from St. Peters remembered the part his father played also:

When I was a little kid my father always liked me to drive the horses you know. I learned right from the time I knew anything I guess. He would put me on the horses,

¹⁶ T6B: 22/5/85. Alban Craswell, Bloomfield.

¹⁷ T46A: 4/5/87. John Millar to Lea Millar, Birch Hill. *Westisle Collection*.



Man and child with three-horse team and binder. This man is driving the team and holding a small boy, probably his own son, on his knee. This photograph demonstrates the initial stages of teaching children to handle horses. Boys, especially, would have begun their training in ways like this, with the father doing the driving and the child watching. Later, the child would be allowed to hold the reins.
(Photo Credit: Public Archives of Prince Edward Island.)

the backs, and he would be going back and forth to the fields to work, so I guess I learned from there.¹⁸

And finally, Harry MacIntyre:

The first experience that I [remember] was scuffling potatoes [with] the old single row scuffer. And we'd get on the horse's back and Dad would have the scuffer. We'd drive old Topsy around the field¹⁹

In this initiation to the world of work, "Dad" was always there, giving the child the feeling of security, the foundation as it were, which he needed to begin a man's work. The process is illustrated by a comment by Yehudi Cohen in which he notes that:

initiation ceremonies . . . help to establish a sense of social-emotional anchorage for the growing individual. Every social system works as if each of its members were anchored and felt anchored at a particular point on the social map.²⁰

As Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence comments, "the horse could indeed be associated with marking the passage from childhood to adolescence for certain individuals."²¹

¹⁸ Street 35.

¹⁹ T49A: 18/4/87. Harry MacIntyre to Lyn Phillips, Bayside. *Westisle Collection.*

²⁰ Yehudi Cohen, "The Establishment of Identity in a Social Nexus: The Special Case of Initiation Ceremonies and Their Relation to Value and Legal Systems," *American Anthropologist* 66: (1964) 529.

²¹ Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, *Hoofbeats and Society : Studies of Human-Horse Interactions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 185.

An interesting prioritization of events on the part of informants should be noted here. When they were asked to tell about the first time they drove a horse, they usually skipped the telling of the initiation event just described, going back to it only when pressed. If they did mention it, it was only in passing as in the following:

Preston Grigg: The first time I drove a horse?

Donald Grigg: Just any horse. How old were you?

P. G.: Six or seven year old. *I plowed when I was eight years old, single plow too*²² (emphasis mine).

Grigg mentioned that his father had turned around and left the field, leaving him alone.

Tom Duncan ignored my question about his first driving experience and concentrated on the ownership of his first horse:

John Cousins: Now how old would you have been the first time you ever drove a horse? Do you remember?

Tom Duncan: Well, I owned a horse of my own. My father gave me a horse of my own when I was sixteen.

J. C.: Is that so?

T. D.: Before that [pause] well, I broke him in myself. My father told me, "Now, there's your colt. You can do what you like with him but you got to break him in yourself. You got to feed him yourself. You got to curry comb him yourself and look after him. I've got nothing to do with that horse. It's yours."²³

²² T45A: 15/6/87. Preston Grigg to Donald Grigg, Tyne Valley. *Westisle Collection*.

²³ T37A: 14/11/86. Tom Duncan, Mill Road.

So Tom like the others, was left alone in charge of his horse.

The pattern in these narratives is easily seen. The informant virtually ignored the intent of the question and focussed on what he felt was important. What they invariably stressed was the first time they were left on their own to accomplish a specific task with a horse or a team of horses. Thus, Donald MacKay said, "I don't remember the first time I drove a horse but *I remember the first time I raked hay and I was nine*" (italics mine).²⁴

The mere driving of a horse did not confer status: to drive alone did, especially when the child was doing a man's work for the first time. Grigg's focussing on the plowing, with his father gone from the field, was typical of other informants. Donald MacKay explained:

I was nine and my father thought he had it [the hay] made. Before that, I would be in the truck wagon, driving when we'd be loading hay or something like that. I'd be building a load and he'd be pitching it on. He'd pretty well build it but I'd have to walk around on it [to pack it down]. But anyway, one afternoon he decided, [he] had a quiet horse there, he'd put me on the rake and he could coil. And I went across the field once and I came back where he was standing--there was a line fence. He was talking to a neighbor. And just as I turned I looked at them to see what they were talking about and I turned my foot and it tripped the rake and that big arm came down on my toe. There's a heavy iron; the lever would come down on that. You would trip it by hand if you were strong enough and it squeezed my toe and until I could trip it again I couldn't get it off. And my little toe on my right foot is still double the size it should be and every time I get a new pair of boots it hurts. But I couldn't walk for a month afterwards.²⁵

²⁴ T53B: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

²⁵ T53B: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

Alfred Smith from Miminegash remembered:

That summer I was ten in July and I followed the team all that summer. I plowed and harrowed and hauled manure. I did a man's job.²⁶

The men in this culture initiated the children into the traditional jobs associated with farm work, the only work they knew. Although it was done under supervision at first, eventually, as both MacKay and Grigg pointed out, the time came when the boy was left alone with the horse to do the job. For the child, the sense of isolation and fear must have been strong because this is the part informants invariably remember. The following is Bert Thomson's account when he was asked about the first time he drove a horse alone:

The first time I ever took a horse [alone] was one time my father sent me up to Gerald Murphy's to get a pig. I met Pius Finnian and Frank Holloran. They were both drunk -- running the horse. Frank was leaning sideways out of the wagon. I was terrified.²⁷

Lawrence Doyle's folksong, "When Johnny Went Plowing For Kearon," still strong in oral tradition in Eastern PEI, describes the terror of a young boy doing a man's work with horses for the first time. Johnny, a young boy goes to work for Kearon, a hardbitten old neighbor. He is not used to the "enjyne," that is, the plow, and bogs it in the ground. The frightened boy wants "to leave all and run."

26 18/10/1988. Alfred Smith, Miminegash, field note.

27 28/9/86. Bert Thomson, Roseville, field note.

Kearon arrives back, scolds the boy, and in a comic touch, manages to bog the plow himself:

Kearon cursed and he swore and he looked at the sun,
And poor Johnny thought his last hour had come.

Finally, Johnny masters the art of plowing the way Kearon wants him to. His relief at the end of the day is palpable:

So Johnny gave ear to what Kearon did say.
He plowed all along for the whole of the day.
The sod it was wide but the plowing was done.
And poor Johnny would laugh when he'd look at the sun.²⁸

Edward Ives points out that only a person who knows the details of plowing would get the fun of the song.²⁹ Bert Thomson, remembering his own plowing experiences, listened to the song and said, "That was exactly what it was like."³⁰ And he wasn't referring to the fun.

Boys who achieved the special status of doing a man's work with horses were raised in the estimation of both their peers and even adults. Some of them were very young when they passed through this rite. They were still male children doing the work of a man. Indeed, as Van Gennep points out, this passage from the asexual world of childhood to the male working role had nothing to do with

²⁸ Ives, *Doyle* 121-123.

²⁹ Ives, *Doyle* 126-127.

³⁰ 28/9/86. Bert Thomson, Roseville, field note.

puberty at all. In his *Rites of Passage*, Van Gennep notes that such instances in the lives of individuals are rites

whose sexual nature is not to be denied and which are said to make the individual a man or a woman, or fit to be one. . . . These are rites of separation from the sexual world, and they are followed by rites of incorporation into the world of sexuality and in all societies and all social groups, into a group confined to persons of one sex or the other.³¹

What faced a boy, after his introduction to man's work, was a pattern of hour upon hour of solitary, quiet tedium following horses. The yearly round included the spring plowing, the harrowing, the planting, the cultivating and the harvest. Added to this were a dozen and one other tasks to be done with the help of the horse: the hauling of firewood, the weekly trips to church and to the store, and the social visits. The following anecdotes are typical of many:

From the time I was nine, I guess, I did most of our plowing with two slow, slow horses and a single plow. And I'd be plowing all the time I'd be home, any time I'd be home, all fall.³²

George Dewar told the following story of his older brother:

I remember my mother saying that when my brother Bob was nine years old that he did all the plowing -- all the plowing, with a team of three horses. . . . I can still

³¹ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, intro. Solon T Kimball, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrieille L. Coffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) 67.

³² T53A: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

remember her talking about Robert and about how hard he worked there.³³

Gradually a boy would be instilled with enough knowledge so that he could be left alone to do a day's work with a horse. When that time came on the farm, the amount of time that individuals spent with horses dwarfed the amount of time spent on anything else.

After being guided and trained, children were brought into the world of working horses. Though they were not fully fledged members of that world there were functions which were left to them almost exclusively. One of these traditional "jobs" was the naming of new foals on the farm.

The coming of a new foal was a significant event, important enough to be remembered years later or to be noted in a diary, as has already been seen in the case of Michael Griffin. Mares getting ready to foal were watched carefully. Sometimes older people, who wanted company, invited youths in to help watch the mare. Vance MacKay remembered that as a youth he was summoned with other boys, by "Red Joe" MacDonald, an old neighbor who had a mare which MacDonald said was getting ready to foal. MacKay said that, in fact, Joe just wanted someone to talk to:

Vance MacKay : It was a social event and was something that he expected the whole settlement to gather [at]. Because if you didn't go you were in the Black Books.

John Cousins: Is that right?

33 T65A: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth].

V. M : I guess likely. And this went on for about a month—every night. I'm sure Harry Thomson spent a month there, every night.

J.C. : Well, what was the story on the egg?

V. M. : Well, he had an egg. Lizzie laid the egg out on the table every night and this was to be given to the foal as soon as it was dropped. [pause] There was great virtue in this egg. And of course, he got up and he went over to the stove to light his pipe or something. And Harry Thomson took the egg and put it on the seat of his [Joe's] chair. And he came back and he never looked and he just plunked himself down. [pause] And of course, after awhile, I said, "You should have the egg ready." He said, "We'll goddamn soon have the egg ready, Vince" [Laughs]. [Vince was MacDonald's mispronouncement of MacKay's name]. He got up after awhile and the egg shell was hanging from the arse of his pants. And Harry Thomson said, "He's just coming out." Just like a chicken coming out of an egg.³⁴

Previously Vance had told me about how, at two o'clock in the morning, they had gone to the barn with Joe to check the mare. On the way back, in the pouring rain, Joe had stopped in the doorway, with the boys on the outside, and sung "The Flying Cloud."³⁵

When foals finally did arrive, their names were carefully chosen. Writing in the eighteen nineties on folklore connected with horses in Banffshire, Scotland, Walter Gregor notes that, "the names given to young horses and the words used in managing horses are curious and full of interest."³⁶ Similarly, on Prince Edward Island, the naming of a foal was a significant act by the farm family. Donald

³⁴ T55A: 17/1/88. Vance MacKay, Bloomfield.

³⁵ T55A: 17/1/88. Vance MacKay, Bloomfield.

³⁶ Gregor, "The Horse in Scottish Folk-Lore" 59.

MacKay said, "We never had horses that didn't have names on them and they all knew their names."³⁷ A study of those names reveals a good deal about the significance of horses in West Prince communities.

Virtually all informants agreed on one thing: that it was the "kids" who named the foals. There seems to be no clear reason for this but two possibilities come to mind. First, it was a way of giving the children a stake in something valuable on the farm. By putting a name on a foal, a child automatically had part ownership in the animal. The second reason may come from the cultural make-up of the fathers. In what was essentially a patrilineal society, men were hesitant to express sentimentality, or even worse, childish excitement. The naming of a "baby" horse may have been a pursuit so childlike that they were too embarrassed to indulge in it. However, the traditional nature of the names which were used indicates that, behind this concession to the children, there were adults doing considerable manipulating.

The names given to working horses in the period under study indicates the close relationship men had with them and reveals the esteem in which they were held. They were, first of all, short, seldom more than one syllable, so that they could be said, heard, and understood easily. More important, however, were the types of names used. They fall into three main categories of which human names are by far the most important. These were common, everyday, conventional names not much different from that of the

37 9/10/86. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane] field note.

neighbor who lived on the next farm.³⁸ By humanizing the horses through their names, the family was making a statement about the horses' importance. What follows is a representative sample of names mentioned by informants:

| | |
|--------|--------|
| Babe | Goldie |
| Peggy | Harry |
| Dean | Maud |
| George | Pansy |
| Bill | Dot |
| Jack | Tony |
| Dina | Bess |
| Maizie | Doll |
| Polly | Lou |
| Bob | Peter |
| Topsy | Sam |

The second, smaller category of names consists of names of royalty, or of names associated with royalty. Prince Edward Islanders, it should be noted, display strong and positive feelings toward royalty and the Royal family. Again the choice of a "royal" name for a horse indicates his importance to the family. Names in this category include :

³⁸ For some reason, the names of horses in East Anglia, where George Ewart Evans worked, contrast sharply with those in PEI. Those he mentions, in our period, have distinctly non-human names. He lists, among others, Boxer, Matchet, Dapper, Scot, Diamond, Darby, Sharper, Captain, Procter, Briton, and Smiler. Evans, *Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay* 225. Sharper was a traditional name given to dogs in western PEI. The name "Smiler" given to a horse seems to have been fairly widespread throughout England. Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*, based in the West Country, features a horse named Smiler. See Richard Doddridge Blackmore, *Lorna Doone: A Romance of Exmoor* (1869; New York: Airmont Publishing Company, 1967) 24.

Queen (often Queenie)
Prince
King
Victor
Champ or Champion

One informant mentioned that a neighbor's horse, born around 1936, had been named Wally, after Wallis Warfield Simpson.³⁹

A third method of naming horses was to give them surnames, like that of humans. A first name would be prefixed to the name of an ancestor as in "Bill Gullare" or "Billy the Belle."

Names in this category sometimes took the form of a "clan" or "family" appellation. These family names were generally those of a notable stallion who left large numbers of progeny around the countryside. They were often mentioned in discussions about horse genealogy. Horses were thus identified with their ancestor in the following ways: Dot was a Hanson, Bill was a Wilkes, Jack was a Scottish Chief, or Queenie was a Princeton.

Pure-bred stallions or mares had, then as now, more pretentious names such as Iron Duke, Aurelian, and Roncesvalles. These names are more apt to be found in the newspapers of the period than heard in the narratives of horsemen. Unlike those of working horses, the names of racing horses and pure-bred stallions were and are, merely titles, rarely if ever used in calling or directing the animal. As one

39 16/7/88. Leith Thomson, Toronto, Ontario [Roseville] field note.

informant put it , "I don't think that those race horses know their names."⁴⁰

The tradition of children naming horses continues today on farms where horses are raised.⁴¹

Farm horses not only knew their names, they knew a great deal more. In the 5500 years since the horse was domesticated, a language developed between man and horse that, on the one hand, was quite complex and on the other, immensely practical.⁴² Men communicated with horses in a number of traditional ways of which speaking to them was the most intricate and the most important. During training , horses learned to respond to commands such as "Gee," "Haw," "Whoa," "Gittap," "Go ahead," and "Back up." Gervase Markham, who wrote a treatise on horses in the 16th century, said that in communication with horses, the most important factor was "the voice, which should be delivered smoothly and lovingly, as in crying halloa, so boy, there boy, there."⁴³ Interestingly, the term "so" was used only to address cattle in the culture under discussion. As Terry Keegan's informants told him, "To train a horse to working meant talking to him all the time." Keegan then cites a Mr. Fisher of Yorkshire who pointed out, "it wasn't what you said, but how you

40 9/10/86. Donald MacKay, Kensington, [Breadalbane] field note.

41 One farmer, whose family have been fine horsemen for two generations, told me that the race horses which he now raises are still named by his children. 20/3/88. Fenton Shaw, Bloomfield, field note.

42 For an extensive list of words and phrases relating to the care, management and working of horses, see Clark, *Beastly Folklore* 309-324.

43 Gervase Markham, *The Compleat Horseman*, ed. Dan Lucid (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.,1965) 22.

said it. Different inflections of the voice meant different things to the horse."⁴⁴

According to Keith Thomas, the vocabulary used with horses was probably rooted in the ancient Celtic or Anglo-Saxon languages.⁴⁵ He lists some 16th century directions to horses : "Or," "Whor," "Woot," "Hoot," "Ree," "Heeck," "Wo," "Wey," and "Prut." He notes also that a carter in Chaucer's "Friar's Tale" says "Hayt" when he wants his horse to turn left. It is a fair assumption to say that the Prince Edward Island equivalent of "Wo" and perhaps "Whor" is "Whoa," and that the term "Haw" used by Island farmers when directing horses to the left was the "Hayt" used by Chaucer's carter. "And they knew what "Gee" and "Haw" meant, don't you think they didn't," Tom Duncan said emphatically.⁴⁶

There was also the custom of chirruping to horses. This was a short, sharp sound, similar to the chirp of a bird, made with compressed lips. Its origins, as far as working with animals is concerned, are lost in the mists of time. With horses it was used for encouragement to replace "gittap." Chirruping meant instant communication. It was also used for calling dogs who, along with horses, were believed to understand human speech.

In 1880, James Britten compiled the vocabulary used in directing horses in a number of areas of the British Isles.⁴⁷ A comparison with

⁴⁴ Terry Keegan, *The Heavy Horse: Its Harness and Harness Decoration* (South Brunswick and New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1973) 117.

⁴⁵ Thomas, *Man* 97.

⁴⁶ T37A: 14/11/86. Tom Duncan, Mill Road.

⁴⁷ Britten 148.

those used on the Island shows obvious similarities. Britten's list is partially recreated here, along with the terms ordinarily used on the Island:

| | Scotland | P. E. I. | Yorkshire |
|----------|---|---|------------------------|
| To right | <i>Hupp</i> <i>Gee</i> <i>Hip</i> | <i>Gee</i> | <i>Gee , Gee back</i> |
| To left | <i>Hie</i> | <i>Haw</i> | <i>Half, Half-back</i> |
| Go on: | <i>The name of the horse</i> | <i>Gittap</i> | <i>Gehup</i> |
| Stop | <i>Wo</i> | <i>Whoa, Whoa back</i> <i>Ho there</i> | <i>Wo-ho</i> |

This language was an audible part of the folklife of the culture and, in the last forty years, it has completely vanished. "I remember George Lacy [a neighbor] yelling 'Gee' and 'Haw' at the horses. You could hear him all the way across the fields from our place," Lorne Luxton said.⁴⁸ With the coming of the tractors, the language spoken to horses simply disappeared.

Horses were spoken to for various reasons; sometimes men talked to them for the company it provided. In the long hours in the fields, men spoke to their horses simply because there was no human there to talk to. One of the first things that children learned about horses

48 22/4/88. Lorne Luxton, Knutsford, field note.

was to speak to them before going into the stall.⁴⁹ A startled horse might kick someone who walked up along side them without warning. Nor should they be approached quickly if they were eating something they were really fond of. "The average horse, you wouldn't go too close [without speaking] when they were eating oats, because they didn't like that," Donald MacKay said.⁵⁰

Men, on occasion, would try to reason with horses which were misbehaving. One informant told me about hearing a neighbor trying in a low tone to "talk sense into" a balky horse which had stopped and refused to move. "He was saying to the horse, 'As the saying is', we can't stay here all night."⁵¹

Communication was also carried on through touch. The picking up of the reins meant that the horse could start. The laying down of the reins was a signal that the horse should remain standing. A slight pull on the right-hand rein, which put pressure on that side of the horse's mouth caused the animal to veer right and a similar pressure on the other side caused him to turn left. Leon Woodside gave a succinct summary of communication through touch:

You'd get the horse[s] hitched in the God-damned binder and give a little tug on one rein and the other one would go slack, and they'd come right around and they'd stop in

⁴⁹ The writer, whose father farmed and fished, was given his first instruction about horses at age six: "Always speak to a horse before you walk into the stall alongside him." This came from an older brother.

⁵⁰ T53A: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

⁵¹ 28/9/86. Bert Thomson, Roseville, field note. "As the saying is" was a preface to almost all statements made by the neighbor. Bert was mimicking him with some amusement.

the right place and they'd take off without you chirruping to them. That's satisfaction.⁵²

Nor, according to most informants, was the communication all one way. Horses "talked to" men in various ways. Jim Craig noted the "great closeness between a lot of horses and the men who used them." Donald MacKay, who is not given to making exaggerated statements, said that when horses knew and liked men they would "talk" to them:

They knew you and what you were going to do and all this. And when you went in the stable door, that kind of horse would be talking to you. When you'd come in he'd say something to you . . . He knew he was going to get the harness on . . . Most of the horses that were around for quite awhile and you were friendly with, they'd hear you coming across the yard. You'd hear them kicking the front of the stall with their front foot. They'd start pawing and they'd start talking to you before you got there.⁵³

Communication and proximity over long years caused powerful bonding. Thus, it is not surprising that the death of a horse often brought trauma to a family.⁵⁴ When Kip, the family favourite, died,

52 T52A: 8/1/88. Leon Woodside, O'Leary [Mount Royal].

53 T53A: 2/1/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

54 For a fine account of the life and death of a favourite horse see Walter Shaw, *Tell Me the Tales* (Charlottetown: Square Deal Press, 1969) 131-134. Significantly, Shaw saves his account of "Jack" to the end of his book. Shaw, a farmer and one-time premier of the Island, was near the end of his own life when he set down his reminiscences. Of Jack's death he wrote: "Sometimes, I feel that somewhere I will see Jack again. . . . Perhaps I may wake some day [and] see . . . old Jack, the wonder horse. . . ."

George Dewar said, "There was great mourning in the household."⁵⁵ Dewar, a medical doctor in the village of O'Leary, went on to tell the following story of how a neighbor was affected by the death of a horse which he had driven for years :

That was what I was telling about about Bill Ellis, about that white mare of Bill's. He got her bred one fall and in [the] spring she was going to foal and I don't know, there were no vets around then who knew very much. Anyway, she had trouble foaling and they had to take her out and shoot her. Well, look, I don't believe Bill ever recovered from that. I don't think he's ever been well since that happened. I'm sure he went into a depression and he's been an invalid ever since. And I've always attributed a lot of Bill's troubles to the fact that [the] white mare had to be shot.⁵⁶

Unlike cattle, which might be hauled to the woods and left for the birds and animals, there was a general rule that when a horse died, it would be given a burial. As with humans, death and burial were connected. Cows died, but horses died and were buried. Death and burial of horses are invariably mentioned together as in the following anecdotes:

She's not for sale
I'll give you a hundred and fifty dollars right in your hand right now.
She's not for sale.
He turned around and got in his car and said , "A hundred and seventy five. That's my last cent."

⁵⁵ T65A: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth]. Kip was named after Rudyard Kipling.

⁵⁶ T65B: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth].

She's not for sale. Ten days afterward, I buried her. Down she went. I had the vet a dozen times. She got down and she couldn't get up . . . a lovely little mare.⁵⁷

Alban Craswell told of a mare dying suddenly in harness on Saturday evening and his having to dig a grave for her that night.⁵⁸ Quite often, as can be seen from the following account, outsiders were engaged to act as undertakers. Tom Sanderson told Susan Hornby of the death of Dean, the best horse he ever had:

Tom Sanderson: He was a good horse. We had him until after my brother was killed overseas. And we did away with him on the farm, and buried him on the farm. Hired a man to do it.

Susan. Hornby: You did away with him?

T. S.: On the farm, yeah. And buried him on the farm.

S. H.: Was that hard for you?

T. S.: I'd imagine it was.⁵⁹

Quite often, on poor farms where nothing was wasted, conflict arose when a horse had to be killed. Should the carcass be sold for animal feed, or should the horse be killed and buried on the farm? Elmer Cook told of a favourite mare he had sold for foxfeed. As she was being taken away , the children came home from school. At that point , the mare had put her head over the back of the truck and squealed. "I was pretty near going to say, 'I'll take her and kill her

⁵⁷ T45A: 15/6/87. Preston Grigg to Donald Grigg, Tyne Valley. *Westisle Collection.*

⁵⁸ T6A: 22/5/85. Alban Craswell, Bloomfield.

⁵⁹ 14-15/5/80. Tom Sanderson to Susan Hornby, Hunter River. *Weale Collection.*

'myself.' That mare knew she was done."⁶⁰ In most cases, the pressure to bury the animal seems to have been greater than the desire to get remuneration from the hide or carcass. Robert Shaw told in incredible detail about the death of Prince, the best horse he ever owned, over fifty years before. Prince had dropped dead in the harness on the Trainor Road. This black horse was special not only because he was a great worker, but because "I had done my courting with him." These were Depression days and Robert could have got good money for Prince's body by selling it for fox feed. Instead, he buried the horse on the farm.⁶¹ His son Allan told me why. His father thought so much of the horse that he had said: "There'll never be a fox eat him."⁶²

There existed a strong feeling that to leave a horse unburied was inappropriate and somehow degrading to a noble animal. Elbridge Cousins remembered, with disapproval, that a neighbor, three quarters of a century before, had left "Old Bill" lying in the yard for two days before the horse was buried.⁶³ In an area where the satiric song and verse were lethal weapons, anyone who flouted community standards in this regard was a target. A young man in the community of Campbellton who was not overly concerned about his horse's welfare, had driven an old mare to Bloomfield. She died there and he dragged her body up the road and sold her for foxfeed. The

⁶⁰ T36A: 18/9/86. Elmer Cook, Cape Wolfe.

⁶¹ 23/3/90. Robert Shaw, Bloomfield, field note

⁶² 24/3/90. Allan Shaw, Bloomfield, field note.

⁶³ T5B: 17/5/85. Elbridge Cousins, Campbellton.

fragment of the song made about the incident catches the disgust which people felt about the spectacle:

He took her out to Bloomfield and she laid down and died
[line missing]

They hauled her up to Hubert's and they skinned her like a whale
And sold her to Jack Adams the man from Ellumsdale (Elmsdale).⁶⁴

Sometimes the death of a favourite horse elicited responses which border on the ritualistic. One informant told of an neighbor's mare having to be "done away with" to use the emic term. She was a special horse, the mother of most of the colts on his farm. He took her to the local butcher to have the man kill her because she was old and he could not bring himself to do it. When the killing was done, the owner took the mare's heart home. "I think he was going to bury it someplace on the farm," another informant said.⁶⁵ This story was told in a light-hearted manner, because the man being discussed had been the butt of many local jibes. Nevertheless, the symbolism of his act is both serious and significant. The account of it begins in the middle of a discussion of the genealogy of "Harrison's" horses :

John Cousins: Well, did Harrison raise them horses?

Where did they come from?

Thane Cousins: They were always there when we were kids.

⁶⁴ I first heard this song recited by Harry MacKay, a neighbour who was visiting our home when I was about eight years old. I heard it many times after that, mostly from older boys including my older brothers.

⁶⁵ 25/6/88. Mary Cousins, Campbellton, field note, .

J. C.: Well, they didn't have the same mother?
 Maisie and Goldie, or did they?

Bert Thomson : Yes, they'd have the same mother. It would be old Jennie that he thought so much of. He had her killed, and wasn't it Leo McCarthy's pig stole the heart? [laughter].

Marion Thomson: He killed her up at Harry Mackay's.

T. C.: Leo McCarthy's sow likely [ate the mare's heart]. There was always a sow pig walking around [the village].

M. T.: He took the hide. It was Jennie that he made the buffalo out of.

J. C.: Well, why did he take the heart home?

M. T.: Because Jennie was such a special horse. He took the heart home.

B. T.: [emphatically] She was special.⁶⁶

The emphasis on the burial of horses, the taboos against desecration of the corpse and the subsequent grieving process are evidence, once again, of their status in this culture. These death ceremonies bear similarities to those associated with humans. As Rosenblatt points out :

Rites of passage include some kind of disconnection with an initial status and role, a liminal or in-between period , and the incorporation into a new status and role. Van Gennep and others have pointed out that in societies throughout the world, death is followed by passage ceremonies for the deceased - who must be removed from the world of the living to the symbolic world of the dead - and for the immediate survivors.⁶⁷

66 T25A: 8/8/85. Bert and Marion Thomson, Roseville.

67 Paul C. Rosenblatt, R. Patricia Walsh, and Douglas A. Jackson, *Grief and Mourning in a Cross-Cultural Perspective* ([New York?] : Hraf Press, 1976) 87.

Though the process was not as elaborate as that for humans, the passage ceremonies for horses did exist.

It was a traditional culture with decided and definite views on both people and animals. Since knowledge of horses was so widespread, it is not surprising to find a set of agreed-upon beliefs about good and bad horses and what justified these assessments. Good horses were willing, obedient, self-disciplined, intelligent and kind. Strength and speed were admirable traits also, but it is intelligence and self-discipline which are stressed first. Leon Woodside, as noted previously, gave his example of ideal behaviour on the part of horses. This was when, "they'd come around and they'd stop in the right place, and they'd take off without you chirruping to them."⁶⁸ Donald MacKay told about his mare:

This mare, oh, she was a beautiful mare, probably weighing twelve hundred pounds. She was scared of nothing and if you put the harness on her you could leave her standing. You could leave her all day. She'd never move till you got back.⁶⁹

Jim Craig said :

If you had good farm horses, you didn't have to tie them up in order to walk away. You could just drop the reins and they would stay there until you came back, perhaps eat some grass or something like that.⁷⁰

John Millar told of a horse he had worked with as a child:

68 T52A: 8/1/88. Leon Woodside, O'Leary [Mount Royal].

69 T68: 3/4/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Mount Royal].

70 14/5/80. Jim Craig to Susan Hornby, Sherwood [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection*.

I'd say the best horse I ever had was Hanson. He was real smart. He'd twitch wood alone. You'd just hang the reins on his harness and he'd go out of the woods and stop at the pile and you'd unhook him and send him back in and if he got caught in a stump or anything he'd go sideways and pull it clear. . . . If you went to load him on a truck to take him with you you could put him on the back of a big truck with a flat bottom on it. You could take and put one foot up and lift one foot up and he'd climb right up himself. . . . He was a real nice horse to work with. I was about twelve when I started to work with him and we did away with him when I was twenty four or twenty-five.⁷¹

If there was agreement about the qualities of good horses there were also decided opinions on the qualities of bad ones. Bad horses were flighty, would not stand unattended, would crush or kick a man in a stall, would kick machinery to pieces, would run away or would pull on a tie rope until they got free or strangled themselves. Elmer Cook remembered a mare his father had bought:

Momma went wild because she [the mare] was supposed to be the worst kicker on the Island. [pause] She was just a great devil to hell. You couldn't work her, that's all. She'd break poles and it weren't safe to go alongside of her. I was working as a kid and getting hurt, jammed.⁷²

John Millar said:

I've seen lots of bad horses. There was a horse we had here one time Don had bought. It was a Colonel Auberry

⁷¹ T46A: 4/5/87. John Millar to Lea Millar, Birch Hill. *Westisle Collection*

⁷² T36A: 18/9/86. Elmer Cook, Cape Wolfe.

horse and he was real bad. He tackled George one day [and] hurt him quite bad. . . . He was a real bad horse.⁷³

Often faults or strengths in horses were attributed to a general trait of character :

Billy didn't have the heart Flicka had. You'd get the harness on him and he'd always shit as soon as you had the harness on. A shitting horse is no good.⁷⁴

There was also general acceptance of what made a horse bad. Interestingly enough, informants were more apt to tell about the bad horses they owned than about those owned by their neighbors. One informant pointed out that in small, rural, close-knit communities, people needed their neighbors. To criticize them publicly was, and still is, to create tensions which damage community solidarity.⁷⁵ Even today, it is hard for the folklorist to gather stories critical of a neighbor's handling of his horses. The subject of horses is still a powerful one and the subject of handling and mishandling them arouses strong feelings. Thus, to talk negatively about a man's horses or his handling of them is still a closely followed taboo. All agreed that there were "bad" horses, and all agreed that that they were made that way by cruelty. This knowledge, too, was passed on from generation to generation in exchanges like the following :

When the boys was growing up here, the Blanchards had one up there that was a patent devil. Allan and I was coming down the road. [pause] She was just standing

⁷³ T46A: 4/5/87. John Millar to Lea Millar, Birch Hill. *Westisle Collection.*

⁷⁴ 28/9/86. Bert Thomson, Roseville, field note.

⁷⁵ 19/5/88. Frank Pigot, Charlottetown, field note.

there [and] she kicked. She'd kick your brains out. Ferne Blanchard owned her. He traded her. He traded her twice and each time he had to take her back. She was a handsome thing. Allan got quite a kick out of seeing her kicking. He said, "What's she kicking for, Daddy?" Now," I says, "She 's been spoiled when she was young, and ruined, and she hates people and she's bad."⁷⁶

Some informants stuck to generalities: "A lot of horses were made bad by the people that were using them."⁷⁷ Sometimes they would discuss the behaviour of an individual's horses in such a way that an insider would instinctively know that the man was cruel to his horses.⁷⁸ Only occasionally would one hear stories of cruelty like the two which follow:

Jack told us the last time he was here about the horse that Kenny Shaw had and he beat him so bad every time he took him out. He beat him in the barn and this day he took him out and the horse got clear of him and he run and he run out into the river and drowned himself. He drowned himself he said to get away from him.⁷⁹

I knew a man that drove horses [in the lumberwoods]. His name was Charlie MacNeill and there's no doubt that they was related to the MacNeills [from Campbellton] because he looked a lot like him. And he was a cruel horseman they told me. His horses wasn't [pause] right. They would crowd, get them on a narrow road, you know, they'd crowd one another, you know, what they call crowding . . . There was this fellow told me, true or false,

⁷⁶ T36A: 18/9/86. Elmer Cook, Cape Wolfe.

⁷⁷ 14/5/80. Jim Craig to Susan Hornby, Sherwood [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection*.

⁷⁸ I ran across no testimony regarding women and the bad usage of horses.

⁷⁹ T25A: 8/8/85. Bert Thomson, Roseville.

I don't know. By God, he'd just jump off the wagon and he'd take a big safety pin, [a] big lumbering safety pin, you know what they was like. And he'd pull their heads over and he'd pin their ears together. And that would make them pull away, you see. So they told me that. I didn't see him do it, but I know he got a bad name.⁸⁰

Though there was clear agreement that cruelty made a bad horseman bad, I was never able to find out from any informant exactly what made a good horseman "good." There was not the kind of mysticism which G. E. Evans found among horsemen in East Anglia and Scotland. There is little evidence, for instance, of the existence of the "Horsemanship's Word," or of secret horsemen's societies which had wide currency throughout the northeast of Scotland.

Men here find the special qualities of good horsemen very hard to put into words. Jim Craig, a blacksmith, was a man known to be a good horseman. He found his own abilities with horses difficult to express :

In fact, I never had really had any problems with any horse. In all the years I was in the shop I could get along, that was one thing I could do, was get along good with animals. But some people [it] just seemed some people could get along with horses and other people couldn't. Some people, even [when they] walk[ed] into the blacksmith shop would make horses nervous. I don't know why. And quite often , if the man that owned the horse was in around, you couldn't do anything with them. And the best thing to do was put him [the man] out. I had a farmer that had a team of horses and if he was standing in around or near the horses [you] couldn't do a thing with them and if [he] took off into the other side of

80 TSB: 17/5/85. Elbridge Cousins, Campbellton.

the shop, sit down and talked to people that was in there,
I could shoe those horses. They wouldn't even move.⁸¹

There was a belief among some Island horsemen that certain people had special powers when it came to working with horses. Some people, for instance, believed that the simple-minded had gifts which enabled them to communicate with horses better than the average person. Donald MacKay spoke of the abilities of

simple fellows, half retarded , that were awful good with horses. My uncle had the worst pair of Clydes I ever saw. You couldn't do anything with them. And those fellows could work around them all day, go up alongside them. Of course they talked to them all the time. That was probably it.⁸²

Often, kindness is mentioned when good horsemen are being discussed. Frank Lea said:

You break them in and you're careful with them, you know, and be good to them. You never want to be rough with them. They'll come back at you if you do. Well, you've got to be kind to the horse. He loves kindness.⁸³

The birth, the death, the naming, the long hours of work, the knowledge of good and bad horses and horsemen, all were woven

⁸¹ 14/5/80. Jim Craig to Susan Hornby, Sherwood [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection*.

⁸² 26/8/1988. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane], field note. It is just possible that this view may be a vestige of the belief held in northeast Scotland, where, as Walter Gregor notes, "the deaf and dumb were looked upon with particular awe . . . This faculty was given to them to make up for the loss they suffered." Walter Gregor, *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the North-East of Scotland* 27.

⁸³ Uncatalogued tape, c. 1980. Frank Lea to Susan Hornby, Belfast PAPEI.

solidly into the pattern of the individual's life on the inward-facing world of the farm. Adding to the pattern were the various elements of the world off the farm and in that world, also, horses played a central role. This outside community was where the family, collectively and individually, showed its face to the outside world, in rituals of marriage, courtship, death, the birth of babies, tragedies and collective entertainment. The dual-purpose driving horses played a special role here. Anecdotal material concerning their exploits is voluminous.

The smaller, faster driving horses were deliberately bred for quickness, endurance, and smart appearance (See photo, p. 119). It was firm policy on the part of most farmers to have at least one horse that could be depended upon to make a fast trip. Leon Woodside's account of a mare he owned is a typical description of the "good" driver:

The best I ever had was an old mare my father had when we were home. She'd drive you a mile every four minutes from here to Summerside and never turn a hair. She was good. Tom Silliker had a racing mare that was good for short spurts. He followed me to O'Leary one day and I'd get ahead of him and, Jesus, he'd start her and he'd go by me and away down the road and [inaudible] the old mare, she just sauntered along, the way she travelled. His horse, the water was dropping right off her belly when he got to O'Leary. Our mare was as dry as a cucumber.⁸⁴

A "smart" appearance was all important. Horses were on display and had to look their best if they were going into the outside world.

84 T52A: 8/1/88. Leon Woodside, O'Leary [Mount Royal].

George Dewar, talking about the coming of the tractors, told of how his father had actually hired one of these new-fangled machines to do the fall plowing. He wanted to make sure the horses were rested and looking their very best when he took them to the agricultural exhibition in nearby Montague.⁸⁵ Jim Craig, telling about the way it was, explained :

They wouldn't take a horse out now, on Sunday to go to church unless the harness was all shined up and the horse was well groomed. Oh, you spent a lot of time with horses, brushing them and that type of thing. People took great pride in the horses those days. The majority of farmers [did] because there was quite a bit of competition amongst farms because this [these] would be things that would be talked about -- who had the nicest team of horses. . . .⁸⁶

A statement by an informant of Evans from East Anglia is so similar that it is worth quoting here:

Look at the competition in those days. There'd perhaps be twenty stables of horses in one village and they'd all be out to see whose horse would come out the best. Look at the pride they'd got in them. If you had horses yourself and somebody said to you: "Have you seen old So-and-So's horses? I've never seen horses like them in my life! As soon as you went home that night you'd think to yourself: "Well, I'm a-going to beat him if I can," and you'd feed up your horses till they glowed.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ T65B: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth].

⁸⁶ 14/5/80. Jim Craig to Susan Hornby, Sherwood [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection.*

⁸⁷ Evans, *The Farm and the Village* 110.



A driving horse and his master [1908]. Notice the clean limbs and proud stance of the horse and the expensive driving robe of the young man. The photograph was taken near O'Leary. This would have been classed as a "nice rig," and would have been as impressive in 1945 as it was in 1908. Without clear evidence, a photograph like this is hard to date since the design of the sleigh, harness, and robes remained virtually unchanged between the eighteen nineties and the nineteen fifties. (Photo credit: Public Archives of Prince Edward Island.)

During the period under discussion, pride and self worth in rural Prince Edward Island were tied to the family's horses. Tom Duncan said "We had, I don't know, people have a lot more today than we ever thought of having. We didn't have anything clear of horses. We had no television, no radios no nothing."⁸⁸

Though they worked alongside the draft horses, the driving horses were used, when opportunity offered, for racing in its many forms. Horse racing is as old as horse domestication itself and it played a prominent role in the social life of the Island from the earliest pioneering days of the British immigrants. It was a popular and much discussed custom throughout the Island during the period under discussion and it is still enormously popular. Much of the racing was casual, between youths challenging one another, in the same way as is now popular with cars. "We all thought we had the best horses," is a common saying. Young men raced one another at the slightest excuse. Bert Thomson told how his brother condescendingly told him, "not to try to pass him with Lou" who was getting old. But, Bert maintained, "Lou was the fastest horse we had."⁸⁹ Bert plotted revenge, took his brother by surprise, and left him far behind.

Racing, of course, was done on an organized level throughout the period and is a large subject in itself. Small communities sometimes organized their own races. Racing of horses on the ice of rivers and

⁸⁸ T37A: 14/11/86. Tom Duncan, Mill Road.

⁸⁹ 26/12/87. Bert Thomson, Roseville, field note.

on the sea was a popular sport. Elbridge Cousins remembered the young men racing "for a bridle" on the sea ice off the village of Campbellton:

There was Steven [MacKenzie] and Pat Holleran and Frank Butler came out one time to race, and Harold Doyle [came] with a yellow beast they called the Juno.⁹⁰

Horse races in larger centers such as O'Leary and Alberton drew people and horses from dozens of miles away.⁹¹

This competition between horsemen was also intimately connected with the ritual of courtship. Horses, as has been made clear, were a status symbol and as such were used by young men to attract girls. The role of the horse in the custom and practice of courtship shows a curious ambivalence in the rural culture of Prince Edward Island. Undeniably horses were used as a lure to attract the attention of females. Their beauty, grace and awesome power were alluring and at the same time, frightening to everyone, both male and female.

On a purely practical level, a fine horse and harness connoted wealth, a weighty consideration for a girl contemplating marriage :

Oh, yes. You always had a good horse, [and a] good sleigh.
Oh, yes. That was part of it. I don't know whether it had

90 T5B: 17/5/85. Elbridge Cousins, Campbellton.

91 The contrast between the common names of farm horses and the pretentious ones of race horses is worth noting. This is a list of names from a horse race in Tyne Valley, printed in the *Journal* 20 February 1879: 3. They were: Telegraph, Maid of the Mist, Bideford Fairy, Black Deceiver, Pocahontus, Bismarck and Western Boy.

any bearing on the girls or not, but they always seemed to like to go with somebody that had a good horse.⁹²

Central to the courting ritual was the rural church which served as a meeting-place for young couples. In Island rural society, church meetings and events like them provided one of the few settings where young people could socialize. The trip home, especially, was a magical time when the boy and girl could escape from the prying eyes of the adults. There was much posturing, with the horse as unwitting helper, on the way home. The boys would race their horses to make an impression on the girls. As Buck Hill said:

After the church was over at night, they'd have a little race up and down the road -- with the girls. They [the young men] were after the girls.⁹³

The psychological ramifications of this practice are interesting. Ironically, the loss of control and the fear of the speed and power of a racing horse were a means of pushing the female into the arms of the horse's controller and master, that is, the young man who created the situation in the first place. "Oh, that was a regular thing," Jim Craig said, "I've been involved in that. Everybody would always take the best horse that they had, or that their farm owned or their parents, whatever you happened to be working."⁹⁴ Lucy Maud

⁹² 14/5/80. Jim Craig to Susan Hornby, Sherwood [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection*.

⁹³ 7/5/80. Buck Hill to Susan Hornby, New Glasgow. *Weale Collection*,

⁹⁴ 14/5/80. Jim Craig to Susan Hornby, Sherwood [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection*,

Montgomery, as a sixteen year old getting ready to leave home, confided the following to her diary. Her words catch the sense of the power of the horse and her own sense of loss:

We had a prayer meeting tonight instead of last night. Don McKay took me driving afterwards and the way that wild mare of his flew over the road made me dizzy. It is over for me though not for others. Prayer-meetings will go on, the girls will hurry down the dark roads when it is out, go driving with the boys, sit in the back seats. . . . But I'll be far away, among strange new faces and ways of life. It makes me sad to think about it.⁹⁵

As older women freely admit, the horse in this situation served as the bait which attracted them. One elderly lady was asked if a young man's ownership of a nice horse and carriage was a "big" thing to a girl when she was young. She replied , "Big, Big."⁹⁶

Rivalry involving horses extended beyond racing. A swain was not safe from interference even when he went to visit a girl on his own :

They were never through playing tricks with horses. A lot of men would go to see a girl and would tie the horse

⁹⁵ Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, eds, *The Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery* Vol. I : 1899-1910 (Toronto : Oxford University Press, 1985) 92. The complement to this "out of control" situation which we have observed is illustrated in a comment by Bruno Bettelheim. He posits that teenage girls love *riding* horses precisely because they have control in that particular situation. He writes: "by controlling this powerful animal she can come to feel that she is controlling the male, or the sexually animalistic, within herself." See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976) 56.

⁹⁶ 3/5/89. Mrs. John Platts, Howlan, field note.

up outside or even put him in the stable. He was liable to come out to go home and wouldn't have a sleigh, a wagon, a horse or anything. They'd be hid on him, I know one chap that [pause] they took the wagon on him. I don't know where they hid it, but he couldn't find it. And he was seen going home at daylight leading the horse.⁹⁷

For the prospective swain, a horse and wagon was a prerequisite. In a poor area like this, not every young man had a horse. If he were lucky, he could borrow one from a kind neighbor. Sometimes, borrowing had unhappy effects. Elmer Cook remembered a neighbour's horse:

Elmer Cook: My God, he was a nice horse.

John Cousins: Is that so?

E. C. : He was the most noble animal I think I ever seen.

J. C. : Is that so?

E. C. : And Jim didn't know how to load him.

J. C. : Is that so?

E. C. : He'd take him to the woods. He was a noble animal, a nice kind horse. Well, anyway, Hillis [borrowed the horse]. If anyone had a nice girl or two there'd be no trouble to get Jim's horse. Old [inaudible] on the Howlan Road, out there, he had some lovely girls. And [Hillis] took him [the horse] and he died in there on the Howlan road.⁹⁸

In courtship, the horse was a powerful lure, attracting girls to young men. The common saying was, "You need a good horse to catch a good girl." The appearance of wealth in the form of a fine

⁹⁷ 14/5/80. Jim Craig to Susan Hornby, Sherwood [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection.*

⁹⁸ T36A: 18/9/86. Elmer Cook, Cape Wolfe.

horse and carriage was an important factor in courtship. The unconscious sexual symbolism was equally important, however. For instance, the folk speech used to describe a fine horse and trappings was "a nice rig." This phrase in rural PEI had another meaning: it was used when referring to the male genitals. In both senses of the word, a nice rig was considered to be a prerequisite for successful courtship. In a very real way, the term serves to describe both the attraction to horses and the sexual taboos associated with them. These taboos, particularly those involving sexuality and stallions, when combined with an inhibited Victorian frame of mind, provide an interesting glimpse into sexual attitudes in this agrarian culture.

As Beryl Rowland has noted, sexuality in connection with horses is ancient, primarily because of the horse's "dominant role in myth, legend, superstition, and anxiety dreams."⁹⁹ The subject is huge, but we need not go further than Celtic Britain to see its roots in Island culture. Part of this horse-linked belief may come from the ancient fertility rituals of Devon and Cornwall. The symbolic horse, the hobby horse, played a leading and uninhibited part in these celebrations. Howey writes:

Nowadays the horse only demands a kiss, but in ancient times he used to try to drag the girl under the skirts of his costume and pull her skirts around her waist. No doubt there was once a caress of the sexual organs, laid

⁹⁹ Beryl Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973) 103.

bare for a momentary laughing contact in the name of good luck.¹⁰⁰

This sort of antic was not popular with a Christian Church preoccupied with stamping out vestiges of paganism and, along with it, any unlicensed sex it could find.

However, sex, women and horses remain connected in the folklife of peoples throughout the world. Throughout history, according to Rowland, "The body of the horse is the repository of sex and as such is often equated with women."¹⁰¹ Proverbial expressions in many countries compare courting a woman to buying a horse. There is a celebrated Island folksong attributed to Larry Doyle with exactly this message. In the song, Fogan MacAleer, a shy young farmer attempts to buy a mare from a neighbor. The neighbour mistakes Fogan's purpose and believes the young man has come to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage. Things turn out all right in the end, but not before a rustic farce has been enacted :

"Oh well now" says Fogan "my business I need not tell.
 For Sandy has already told how I like her very well;
 Oh I like her breed and color, she is everything that's nice,
 I will water, brush and bed her, keep her in in stormy weather,
 And in daytime out on tether, don't you know what I mean?"¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ M. Oldfield Howey, *The Horse in Magic and Myth* (New York: Castle Books, 1958) 74.

¹⁰¹ Rowland 104.

¹⁰² See "Fogan MacAleer," in Ives, *Doyle*, 35-46.

One informant told Ives that originally, the song contained a reference to "riding her bareback" and that the parish priest made the song writer remove the offending phrase.¹⁰³ There is, as David Buchan notes, a "fresh and healthy eroticism"¹⁰⁴ in double-entendres such as these. In *Scottish Tradition* he includes a fragment of a much more bawdy song of the same type from Perthshire. The girl speaking of herself as "This field" tells the young man:

And if you want a crop of it this very present year.
 Just draw out your horses and then commence to feere'
 Then drawin out his horses, the number being three
 . . .
 Twa big geldins gaun abriest and Whitey gaun afore,
 For want o yird the missel pin was in its highest bore.¹⁰⁵

Sexual symbolism as it relates to horses has been a powerful part of folk language throughout western culture. The word "jade" is still used here to describe females though it seems to have dropped much of its negative connotations. For instance, one might ask, "Who are the two jades walking down the road?" The sexual connotations of the words "ride," and "prick" in connection with both horses and woman are obvious. In Scotland, the source of so much Island folklore, the ability of a stallion to arouse lust in a woman was something to be guarded against.¹⁰⁶ Considering the cultural

¹⁰³ Ives, *Doyle* 45.

¹⁰⁴ Buchan, *Scottish Tradition* 238 [note 20].

¹⁰⁵ Buchan, *Scottish Tradition* 110-111. In addition, Beryl Rowland examines the history of the traditional metaphor of woman as horse in *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World* (n.p. : Kent State Press, 1971) 124-26.

¹⁰⁶ Rowland, *Animals* 111.

background of the majority of Islanders, it is thus not surprising that we would find the same sort of beliefs and attitudes impressed on the culture here, where the horse was so much a part of the folk life. The aura of sexuality surrounding stallions was so strong that the word itself was largely taboo. Women, for instance, simply did not say it at all. And even male informants still avoid the term. It was a standard joke in my own family, when times became more open, that our spinster aunt would not say "stallion." Even today, it is a word which is rarely used by any of my informants. The word used as a replacement is "horse." "He was travelling a horse" is the common euphemism for "He was breeding mares with a stallion."

It was considered improper for a woman to drive a stallion. One informant mentioned a "horse" that had been kept by a neighbour, saying significantly that "Sadie used to drive him."¹⁰⁷ The tone of voice implied that this was an extraordinary and disgraceful thing for a respectable woman to have done.

The witnessing of the breeding of a mare was an unthinkable thing for a woman. The Scots, as noted previously, had particularly strong taboos in this regard. In his introductory remarks to the original, c. 1800 edition of *The Merry Muses* James Barke notes:

I have been assured, on unimpeachable testimony, [that] the effect on certain otherwise staid and respectable women (married and spinsters) of witnessing the mating of mare and stallion was to induce an almost

¹⁰⁷ TSB: 17/5/85. Mary Cousins, Campbellton.

instantaneous fainting away (orgasm) and an inability to resist the sexual advances of any male who might be on the spot, regardless of age or social condition.¹⁰⁸

On the Island, even boys were kept from witnessing this act until they were well into their mid-teens :

I can remember the last five years of the twenties. I'd be twelve. [inaudible]. If somebody drove into our yard with a stallion, I was only twelve years or so, my mother wouldn't let me look out the window. No, I wouldn't [be allowed to] see a stallion. That was something bad.¹⁰⁹

Ironically, a boy was expected to handle horses as early as eight or nine, yet the viewing of sexual acts between stallion and mare was something a boy was shielded from until he was physically a man.

Unlike the previous chapter, which was concerned with the broad outlines of the Island's horse-drawn culture, this chapter has taken a narrower focus, dealing with the individual and the pattern of everyday life as it related to his/her experience with horses. To a significant extent, the folk life of those individuals was formed, in the period under discussion, by the presence of the horse in it. Horses shaped the economic and social life of the culture. The culture, in which the farm family was the basic unit, reciprocated by viewing and treating horses in specific ways. These ways are a significant part of the folklore of individual Islanders.

¹⁰⁸ James Barke, and Sidney Goodsir Smith, eds., *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* (Edinburgh: M. MacDonald, 1959) 21.

¹⁰⁹ T68A: 3/4/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane].

The total pervasiveness of the horse in the life of rural people was such that a host of ritual passages were, and, to a good extent, still are intimately bound up with it. The birth of a foal was a significant event, not only for children but also for adults, as Michael Griffin's diary attests. The naming of horses, on the other hand, reveals an allocation of roles between children and adults in the farm family. The choice of names, human and royal, is indicative of the special status of horses. The death of a horse brought mourning and a series of funeral acts which symbolized the near-human view of the horse in this culture. The initiation into solitary work with horses was a traumatic experience which remained fixed in the minds of informants for years. As the testimony of many informants has revealed, a boy who began working with horses at the age of nine or ten had left most of his childhood behind.

The role of the horse in courtship and marriage was also a major one. The traditional views and taboos connecting horses, sex and women reveal interesting aspects of the culture from a psychological, historiographical, and geographical point of view. So too does an examination of the language and other forms of communication between men and horses. These illustrate significant relationships between the language of horsemen here and in the British Isles. In both cases the roots of traditional language used with horses lie in ancient Celtic and Anglo-Saxon languages.

In the next chapter, we shall see how the pervasiveness of the horse in the region's folklife gives those animals a prominent place in the conversation, narrative and song of the people.

Chapter IV

"We Had a Little Mare." Horse Narrative and Song in Prince Edward Island.

Although traditional narrative forms have attracted a good deal of attention from folklorists, certain aspects of narration have been ignored. Traditional conversational patterns relating to specific subject areas, for instance, have not been explored in depth. We are referring here to conversational contexts where fishing stories are told by fishermen or, where, in our case, horse stories and songs, both fictional and non-fictional, are told and sung by people in a horse oriented culture. This whole phenomenon raises the question of how context, function, listeners and tellers relate when such stories are told and songs are sung. It also raises issues about how one strong element may give a distinctive form to the folklife of a particular folk group. These questions and issues we now proceed to address.

Conversations about horses in Prince Edward Island were set against a background of comfortable, traditional, conversational contexts. Jim Craig gives us a picture of a typical one when he describes the Woman's Institute meetings. By definition, these were "women's meetings." However, "Pretty near all the men used to go, as well as the women, because they [the men] would be driving their wives. The women gathered in the room and the men gathered in the kitchen talking [about] farming and horses and cattle and events

that were going on in the community.¹ Much of the talk, however, would be even more casual than this. It might take place at a farm kitchen visit when a neighbor couple drove in with horse and sleigh on a winter's night. It might be between two farmers standing in a barn door waiting for the rain to stop. Because they were so much a part of farm life, any opportunity for conversation could have talk about horses.

As Lauri Honko has pointed out, we can, from a distance, isolate clear-cut narrative genres.² However, in social contexts like the one under discussion, the relating of memorate, legend, tall tale, song and recitation are inextricably bound together within the folk group's socializing. The people whose conversation contains those narratives and songs make no academic distinction. We will, therefore, approach the whole group of genres, including both song and narrative, in this chapter.

Most Island horse stories are marked by the same broad criteria which define folk narrative in general. Tuen Van Dijk maintains that in order to be a narrative, the item must have a quality of *remarkableness*. He then notes that at least one of the following criteria should be met:

- (i) the actions performed (in the possible world at which the narrative is true. . .) are *difficult*.
-

¹ 14/5/80. Jim Craig to Susan Homby, Sherwood [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection*.

² Honko, "Genre Analysis in Folkloristics and Comparative Religion" 50.

- (ii) the initial situation of an action sequence is a *predicament*, i.e., the agent has no obvious choice which course of action to take in order to change the state which is inconsistent with his wishes.
- (iii) in the course of a normal sequence of events there appear *unexpected* events, which may cause the agent to change his purposes in order to avoid a predicament;
- (iv) one of the states or events (e.g., certain objects or properties) are *unusual* or *strange* for the agent.³

Having placed horse stories within the confines of narrative, we should now deal with the crucial questions relating to the tellers and hearers of these tales. In part, these questions may be approached through the important element of commonality of experience. In both the preceding chapters, I made reference to the shared knowledge of horses by the people in this culture. As both tellers and listeners, the tradition bearers carried the same store of knowledge to their conversations, creating a verbal medium where stories could be accessed, compared, enjoyed and savored. Commenting on this phenomenon, Polanyi makes a valid assertion about personal narratives which is relevant to this situation:

stories, whether fictional or non-fictional, formal and oft-told, or spontaneously generated, can have as their *point* only culturally salient material generally agreed upon by members of the producer's culture to be self-evidently important and true.⁴

³ Van Dijk 286-87.

⁴ Livia Polanyi, "So What's The Point?" *Semiotica* 25 (1979) : 207.

Further to this, members of the horseman's culture would know almost instinctively what was important or remarkable in a personal narrative about horses. Outsiders might miss the point altogether.⁵ The following story, one of dozens which I collected about well-behaved horses, may help to illustrate the validity of Polanyi's assertion:

Edward MacWilliams: I had a mare I bought from Dan MacPherson, a black mare. She was after that La Belle [?] horse of Milligan's. She couldn't talk but she never done a thing wrong in her life

John Cousins : Is that so?

E. M : Not if she could help it anyway. Put her in the binder next the grain and probably once in the afternoon she'd put her head down and take a bite.

Leon Woodside : We always wore the wire mask on them.

E. M : Never on her. She never done anything wrong. If she stepped over a trace she felt some bad. She'd do everything she could to get her foot back.⁶

What appears as a simple unadorned anecdote to an outsider has implicit content which marks it, for an insider, as a rather remarkable story about a remarkable horse. It is, first of all begun by the formulistic recital of the horse's lineage. Any farmer in the community would immediately summon up a body of knowledge

⁵ Melville Jacobs comments on this phenomenon in his study of narratives of the West Coast Indians: "Narrators usually delivered relatively bare bones of their stories, while the native audience immediately filled in with many associations and feelings which a non-member could not have." See Melville Jacobs, *The Content and Style of an Oral Literature: Clackamas Chinook Myths and Tales* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959) 1.

⁶ T52A: 8/1/88. Edward MacWilliams, O'Leary [Dunblane].

about the "Labelle horse," the mare's sire. (Note the use of the word "horse" rather than stallion or stud.) MacWilliams also includes another customary element found in horse stories: the physical description of the animal. She was "a black mare." Now, "this mare couldn't talk," the implication being that she could do everything but talk. The story progresses to a point where the mare was put in the binder, "next the grain." Here a test was presented because "next the grain" and close to the oats was the place where a horse was most likely to misbehave. MacWilliams' admission that "maybe once in the afternoon" the mare would succumb to temptation seems to have been deliberately said in order to add balance after he had said that "she never did a thing wrong in her life." The phrase "stepped over the traces" is used in its true sense here, but it should be noted that it is an expression, which, in everyday Island conversation, is used to describe a person who has broken a moral or community rule. Under the circumstances, though, the mare's behaviour came as close to perfection as we could expect of any horse. Edward MacWilliams considered his mare to have been a remarkable horse. In that particular cultural context, any other farmer would think the same and would measure the narrative and the horse against one of their own.⁷

⁷ In its spare form, this story is a reminder of Sandra Stahl's comment that "the 'text' of an oral storytelling is inevitably deficient because that great sea of 'associations and feelings' tacitly recognized and relied upon by storyteller and audience alike cannot be captured in the bare bones of the words spoken." See Stahl, "A Literary Folkloristic Methodology for the Study of Meaning in Personal Narratives" *8th Congress I*: 147. One might add that "deficiency," like beauty and pornography, is dependent on the perspective of the beholder.

The previous narrative should be considered as part of a larger conversational unit, a series really, since anecdotes like this are rarely told in isolation. David Buchan's comment, although directed at the study of urban occupational groups, is quite relevant here. He writes: "for a full understanding, traditional narrative needs to be considered not as isolated units but in terms of the performer and the socio-cultural contexts of his group."⁸ Research in the folklore connected to horses in PEI confirms this observation. In the normal course of a relaxed conversation, dozens of these stories, the majority being memorates, might be told, all self contained, all about horses and tied together by a series of standard motifs, such as the well-behaved horse, the smart horse, the helpful horse, the bad horse or the fast horse.⁹ Allowed to run an unimpeded course, conversations like these could last hours at a time.¹⁰ As Richard Bauman points out "the conventionalized patterned organization of performance events is amenable to ethnographic description."¹¹ For rewarding analysis, however, such events need to be viewed from a distance.

⁸ David Buchan, "Anecdote and Identity in the Glasgow Underworld," *8th Congress I*: 113. Unfortunately few scholars have taken Buchan's cue. One looks in vain for an in-depth analysis of folk narrative coming from the angle of which he speaks.

⁹ Questions about the broad thematic concerns of the memorate are still being debated. When folk groups discuss a subject such as horses, the range of themes is surprisingly narrow. However, the variants on the themes are only as finite as the number of memorates themselves.

¹⁰ Extended stories within folk groups assume, as we shall see, a serial-like form. This type of narrative is complex and interactive. For a short comment on this type of story see Michael Leabonitz, "Creating Characters in a Story Telling Universe," *Poetics* 13 (1984) : 171.

¹¹ Bauman, *Story, Performance and Event* 4.

When folk groups converse, one sees a totally different dynamic from a situation where two people are speaking. There is a strong communal aspect to story-telling in groups. Once a topic is introduced, virtually everyone present, sharing the common knowledge previously discussed, participates. A good storyteller may often take up more than his share of the time, and, indeed, there are often prompters, the wife perhaps,¹² who draw certain well-known stories out of the teller's repertoire. Virtually everyone in the room participates in the long run.

A good example of this strongly communal type of story-telling took place at a farmer's house in Roseville, on 8 August 1986. This was an impromptu taping which, as most folklorists know, is often the best kind. I was visiting Bert and Marion Thomson who are related by marriage to my family and, once the conversation turned to horses, I got my tape recorder and caught a number of stories in full flight. At that point, Bert's brother Leith, his wife Ester, my older brother Thane, and his wife Ruth dropped in. The conversation begins just after I had asked Bert Thomson about an incident regarding a neighbor's horse which had run away and had stayed in the woods all winter :

Bert Thomson: I was just wondering if it wasn't the time [that] Bob's horse got loose. Bob Shaw had a western horse.

12 As an insider, I often played the role of prompter, for two reasons: first I enjoyed the stories very much and always wanted to hear them, and second, as a folklorist, I had an academic interest in eliciting them from my informants.

Marion Thomson: A mare.

B. T. : No, a western horse.

Leith Thomson: He traded the western mare, I think for him.

B. T. : And he was bad. He was a desperate bad horse.

And he [Bob Shaw] went to Uncle Alfred's wake.

L. T. : No, the horse, did he?

B. T. : Yes, the time Uncle Alfred died.

L. T. : I was going to say it was George Murray's wedding. But you're right, it was [the wake].

B. T. : And they put him in the cow stable [laughs] and Uncle Bob went home with Stanley. Stanley had a car. And in between, they went to put the cows in and George Murray took the horse out and [inaudible] it got away on him and they chased him with the car and they caught him and got him back in the barn. So when he [Bob Shaw] went to go home, they knew *they were going to have trouble with the son of a gun as soon as I took him out of the barn*. [Italics indicate a change of tone as the narrator was mimicking the way the horse's owner talked]. So he started off pretty wicked and he let him, he let him go. He thought he would drive the hell out of him. [to tire him out] [At this point two or three voices say,"Yeah," or "Oh yeah," in understanding of why the man would let his horse run "pretty wicked"]. But this side of Ernest Myers' he met a car [voices : Oh yeah] and he wheeled and he upset the wagon into the ditch, upset them out and he got away. And he come up here and he went in the Lot Four Road and he went in back of Emmett Sentner's place, where they picked potatoes, [voices : Yeah, yeah] way back there. And there was a swamp, a big swamp and he crossed that. There's a dry hill. And he was back there. And they seen him.

L. T. : Some of Antoine's seen him. It must have been nearly two weeks [later].

B. T. : Oh, two or three weeks. It was late in the fall and [pause] they seen him and Emmett Sentner had a brown horse with a white face and they told him and the word got out. So Daddy and him, Uncle Bob, came down here on Sunday and him and Daddy went in Sunday afternoon [to drive the horse out]. I

remember we heard him coming. There was a whole bunch of them up here [at Antoine's which was in the path of the running horse] and [sarcastically] Benny could catch anything and hold it. And they were going to catch him. [Laughter from everyone present to think that Benny would try to stop a runaway horse in this way]. [Benny "Antoine" was a son of Antoine Clements] They were going to lasso him.

- L. T.: Benny was going to lasso him.
B. T. : He ran up the road and he ran right through them. And he went home. The horse was in the barn when Bob got home with the car.¹³

The second story was also told by Bert Thomson and was linked to the first by the "runaway horse" theme. This time, however, the bad horse was not the issue. Instead it was a bad horseman, a man so cruel that his horse had run away and drowned himself. "to get away from him" [his master].¹⁴

This, in turn, engendered a story from Thane Cousins who remembered as a child the burning of a neighbor's barn and of being afraid the horses would run back into the building:

and the horses, somebody let them out, I guess [pause] but they were running around that barn like something that was crazy. You know [pause] I had heard [that horses would try to get back into a burning building]. We were not that old of course. We were in school up there. And I was terrified the horses were going to run back in that barn.¹⁵

13 T25A: 8/8/85. Bert Thomson, Roseville.

14 See page 114.

15 T25A: 8/8/85. Thane Cousins, Toronto, Ontario [Campbellton].

At this point , I asked Leith Thomson if the stories about a horse called Prince were true. As everyone in or near the community of Bloomfield knows, Prince belonged to George Palmer who was a local carter, a subsistence farmer and a taximan for agents who came around to the local merchants. George was nicknamed "the Nighthawk" for two reasons: first, he was extremely eccentric in his working habits, doing his barn work in the middle of the night; second, like the hawk he was often accused of theft. As one critic put it, "He worked by day and stole by night."¹⁶ Prince was one of his horses during the thirties and forties.

It is not surprising, considering their importance, that certain horses achieved the status of "characters" in their communities. Some of them , like Prince, reached almost legendary status. The subject of the horse as individual takes up a great deal more time and space than we can devote to it here. Suffice to say, stories of Prince are told by almost everyone who lived in Bloomfield during his day. Those who are too young to remember him tell the stories they have heard from their parents. All good "horse story" tellers in the community of Bloomfield have an anecdote about Prince in their repertoire. Most of them are comical narratives concerning Prince's eccentricity and his remarkable intelligence.¹⁷ In Leith Thomson's particular "Prince" stories, the narrator was continuously interrupted by laughter:

¹⁶ This was Harry MacKay's reply when I asked him what George Palmer had done for a living. 14/1/1978. Harry Mackay, Campbellton, field note.

¹⁷ In spite of the fact that Prince has been dead for more than forty years, there are literally dozens of anecdotes still in circulation about him. Without

John Cousins : Well, well, [much interruption from children running through room] so this horse of George Palmers, well, Leith, you'd likely remember him.

Leith Thomson : I remember Prince. Oh, Hell, yes.

J. C. : And he was [pause] he was very smart?

L. T. : Prince knew everything. Prince knew it all.

J. C. : Well look, could he really sort of, back the [wagon]?

They said when George was loading stuff [that] he could.

L. T.: He could. If Palmer would leave him alone he could back the wagon in [to the freight shed] right. And Palmer would be steering, you know, and if he put the wagon in wrong and Prince had to go ahead again and put it back a second time he'd be in the worst rage. I tell you he'd drive that old wagon [back] and he'd nearly tear the station down. He'd just come thundering back and he'd be that cross, his ears back, raging, oh yes.¹⁸

Leith Thomson then told a second story about Prince:

There's a difference in horses. We were talking about Palmer's horse. Now I was at Palmer's one time. I don't know how come I was around Bloomfield, I was fairly young. Palmer was threshing and I helped him. We started to thresh in the morning and we started to put in straw. He wasn't using the loft; he was just in the mow. And he put Prince and the old black mare he had in there to tramp. We thrashed all forenoon and at noontime when we went in to have dinner some of the fellows came in later. I was one of the first ones in, I suppose. But when they came in they said Prince slid down off the loft . And we went outside. And the old mare tried to slide down and she fell on her head on the barn floor

[laughter]. And he said, "She's laying on the barn floor" [laughter, and someone says "My God!"]. See, Prince was a lot smarter than the old mare. He slid down successfully and went outside to eat. So that's the difference in horses. Like people, I suppose. . . . Prince, they said slid [down]. The old mare fell down. she fell on her head and she turned completely over.¹⁹

Prompted by a question from me, Leith then recounted a story about George Palmer being beaten by a young man to whom he had sold a horse. When that was done, Thane Cousins said "there was always a horse story and a [story about] a horse running away:"

Thane Cousins : I remember Gerald O'Halloran's team running away. I remember the team running away on Daddy, Harrison's team, that long Goldie and Mazie.

John Cousins : Oh, They ran away on Daddy?

T. C. : Oh, Jesus Christ!

J. C. : Is that right?

T. C. : Spring of the year. We were looking after Harrison's place. He [Daddy] took a load of manure up to [pause] the place up by Justin's. What did they call that place? The O'Halloran place?

Marion Thomson : The O'Halloran place.

T C. : And that Mazie was bad. Of course, you know she was a fiery devil. And he started for home because he had the truck wagon. And she started to run and of course, Goldie wasn't bad, but I suppose she had to go along or be pulled.

Ruth Cousins : She had to run or else.

T. Cousins : They run. He pulled the wagon box right up unto their backs practically and he still couldn't stop them.

J. C. : God Almighty!

R. C. : When they're running away, you think they're going awful fast. ²⁰

19 T25A: 8/8/85. Leith Thomson, Toronto, Ontario [Roseville].

20 T25A: 8/8/85. Thane Cousins, Toronto, Ontario [Campbellton]. Marion Thomson, Roseville [Campbellton].

At this point I told a story about horse which had run away on my mother and brother when I was six years old. The conversation then shifted back to Harrison's horses and that exchange is interesting because almost everyone in the room became involved. I mentioned that I couldn't remember what Harrison's horses looked like. Five people contributed to my enlightenment on this point:

John Cousins: Did those tend to be a smaller type horse?

Leith Thomson: Yes, yes. Mazie was very much the blood horse.

J. C. : Okay. Okay. So they weren't Clydes or whatever.²¹

The next three speakers spoke almost simultaneously:

Leith Thomson : No.

Marion Thomson : No, no, no. They were a small. . . .

Ruth Cousins : Spindly legged. . . .

Thane Cousins : Twelve hundred. . . .

L. T. : She [Mazie] probably wouldn't weigh twelve hundred.

T. C. : What would Mazie weigh, Bert? You'd remember.

Bert Thomson: [Shakes his head indicating that the mare wouldn't weigh twelve hundred].²²

This exchange led, in turn, to a story told by Marion Thomson about the death of Jennie, and the saving of her heart by "Harrison,"

21 T25A: 8/8/85. Leith Thomson, Toronto, Ontario [Roseville].

22 T25A: 8/8/85. Leith Thomson, Toronto, Ontario [Roseville]. Marion Thomson, Roseville [Campbellton]. Thane Cousins, Toronto, Ontario [Campbellton]. Bert Thomson, Roseville.

already considered in Chapter Three. At this point, Thane Cousins, because the death of a horse was being discussed, recited, spontaneously, a fragment of a local song written about the death of another horse.

They took her out to Bloomfield and she lay down and died.
[This line omitted]

They took her up to Hubert's and they skinned her like a whale
And sold her to Jack Adams, the man from Ellumsdale [Elmsdale].²³

The final story was told by Bert Thomson when I asked if anyone in the community had ever got lost driving a horse in a storm :

John Cousins: Did anyone around here ever get lost with horses?

Bert Thomson : Edmund Kelly.

J. C. : Is that so ?

B. T. : I'll not say the horse was lost, [but] Edmund was lost.

J. C. : Yeah.

B. T. : He went to the gristmill.

J. C. : In Coleman?

B. T. : In Coleman. And coming home it was a hell of a storm. He got in back of the fields there opposite Alf Jones's, way in back there, and he was there all night.

J. C. : Jesus.

B. T. : He unhitched the horse and circled around the sleigh. He was there till Jim Trainor got up in the morning. He saw Jim Trainor's light.

J. C. : God Almighty! Its a wonder he didn't freeze.

B. T. : Well, he kept walking.

Leith Thomson: He had his fur coat on.

23 See page 109.

B. T. : Yeah, he kept walking the whole time, walking
the horse.

J. C. : It must have been an awful storm.

B. T. : Terrible storm. He couldn't see. He didn't know
where he was.

Marion Thomson : It was in March.

B. T. : It was just before Keith Kelly was born, [c.1928] a
short time before Keith was born, the
first day of April.²⁴

Conversations such as the one just recounted are still very common in rural Prince Edward Island. The members of the participating folk group share elements which are worthwhile noting. All seven people in this particular group grew up in one small area, the adjoining fishing-farming communities of Campbellton and Roseville, in a specific time frame between the late twenties and the late forties. Though they do not articulate it to an outsider, their identity is clear and concise. As children, they shared the same lifestyle, they knew the same people (and the same horses) and enjoyed the same entertainment. A major part of that entertainment consists of conversations like the foregoing. An outsider would have been struck by the definite sense of savouring, the sheer enjoyment of talk, among the participants on that rainy morning in August of 1986. A point worth remembering is that the events described by the various narrators took place when the speakers were children and, from that standpoint, their ability to recall detail is remarkable.

In his article "Personal Narratives Reconsidered," John A.

24 T25A: 8/8/85. Bert Thomson, Roseville. This story was also told to me by Jerry Richard, St. Lawrence. T57A: 6/7/88.

Robinson makes three assertions all of which have been alluded to in the foregoing analysis. Because they jibe with observations we have made, they are worth citing. He writes:

(1). . . personal narratives are not limited to remarkable or unusual experiences; (2) the point of a story can be implied or even unknown; and (3) the formal organization of personal narratives is jointly determined by norms of conversational etiquette, the discourse structures of narrative, and the pragmatic functions that prompt narration.²⁵

Analyzing the forty-five minute interaction, we can easily identify three facets which merit further consideration. There is, first of all, the conversation as a totality, a living body of interactive communication with individual narratives as its main components. A salient feature of the conversation is its communal nature as members continuously added to, questioned, and even mildly criticized, the stories being told by others.

In his article, Robinson uses the term "conjunction of perspectives" which is surely applicable to this conversation. He maintains that for this conjunction to exist, two criteria must be met : there must be a "synchronic perspective which embraces the participants or potential listeners." Second, there must also be "the diachronic perspective which reflects the individual's stance toward his personal past."²⁶ Clearly, in the above conversation the conjunction of perspectives relating to horse narratives is there.

²⁵ Robinson 85.

²⁶ Robinson 61.

Within the large conversational unit are the narratives themselves. There were at least eight distinct stories told, all of them well within the mold of the traditional horse story as it is related on the Island. They are units unto themselves : neat, complete, and closely tied to environment and culture. As has been previously noted, horse stories on Prince Edward Island cover a relatively small number of standard themes : the runaway horse, the bad horse, the helpful horse, the eccentric horse, the cruel horseman, and, of course, the ever-present element of horse genealogy. The conversation being discussed contains variations on all those topics. There is also an element of folk poetry in the recitation of a horse song by one speaker.

The narratives are marked by a number of identifiable patterns which should be examined. Where there are accepted and selected conventions in the conversational pattern, listeners are "programmed" to act in certain ways. When we hear a comedian say, "Wait 'til your hear this one, Folks," we are programmed to laugh. In the same way, when in rural PEI a story teller begins with a formulaic opening to a horse story, a similar programming also takes place. To a large extent, listeners are trained through enculturation and tradition to get ready to "see the story." This is the effect that Shakespeare was attempting to promote when he exhorted his audience to

Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth.²⁷

Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman have a comment which is relevant here. They write, "The textual marks that set folklore apart as a particular kind of communication are the opening and closing formulas of tales and songs and the structure of action that happens in between."²⁸ In so-called "horse stories," these opening formulas are often based on a variation of the following: "I had a mare" or "I had a little horse." This beginning is used so widely used that its place in horse stories is pronounced and secure. Edward MacWilliams, for instance, starts his story with, "I had a mare I bought from Dan MacPherson, a black mare." The following openings from six individuals scattered throughout the Island illustrate a pattern which I heard from virtually all informants:

That little black mare I was telling you about . . .²⁹

A little black mare we had here . . .³⁰

I had a little black mare here one time . . .³¹

²⁷ *Henry V.*, I. Prologue 26-27

²⁸ Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman, eds. *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore* (Austin and London: American Folklore Society, 1972) 10.

²⁹ T52A: 8/1/88. Edward MacWilliams, O'Leary [Dunblane].

³⁰ T48A: 2/5/87. George Phillips to Lyn Phillips, Arlington. *Westisle Collection*.

³¹ T46A: 4/5/87. John Millar to Lea Millar, Birch Hill. *Westisle Collection*.

My brother had a little pacing mare . . .³²

The fastest thing that went by here was a little red mare . . .³³

I had a mare I bought from Dan MacPherson, a black mare . . .³⁴

Quite often, the word used to denote ownership was "we" instead of "I," as though the horse was communally owned by the farm or the farm family rather than by the narrator. This may be because sons so often inherited the farms, and the horses with them, from their fathers.

Though these previous statements act as openings to narratives, it is apparent that they also serve as links between one narrative and the next. If a speaker has been "waiting his turn," these standard beginnings are always given a particular muted tone as if the speaker wants to say, "I don't claim to be an expert, but here is my contribution." The choice of a standard beginning takes advantage of the commonality of experience of the men and women present.

Another element, as constant as the openings just described, is a recitation of the horse's genealogy :

We had a mare at home. She was a Banks.³⁵

32 7/5/80. Jim Craig to Susan Hornby, Sherwood [Hunter River]. *Weale Collection*.

33 28/9/85. Bert Thomson, Roseville, field note.

34 T52A: 8/1/88. Edward MacWilliams, O'Leary [Dunblane].

35 10/8/89. Eva MacMillan, Charlottetown [Campbellton], field note.

He was some horse. His father was an Eastland. One of the
beautifulest horses. . . .³⁶

When I was a kid we used to work with Beaut. She was a
Brilliant Barrister mare.³⁷

Looking back over half a century's distance, Alban Craswell said:

We called her Topsy. Her mother's name was Polly and her
grandmother's name was Dot.³⁸

Leon Woodside, recounting a story of how a horse had brought
him and his family safely home in a blizzard, began like this:

I had a wild-headed mare. She was a little Clyde, but she was
out of a Cresus [?] mare, and she was after a Western horse that
[inaudible] had brought home.³⁹

Closing formulas in horse stories are less distinct. Often, the
narrator will simply end and wait for an appropriate response from
his listeners. Usually that response will come in a form like the
following: "Well, we had a mare one time," or "We had one one time."
This reaction doubles as a closing formula for the preceding narrative
and an opening one for the next story.⁴⁰

The formulaic opening, along with the genealogical aspect, marks
the narratives as a whole. Moving away from the individual

³⁶ T37A: 14/11/86. Tom Duncan, Mill Road.

³⁷ T46A: 4/5/87. John Millar to Lea Millar, Birch Hill. *Westisle Collection*.

³⁸ T6A: 22/5/85. Alban Craswell, Bloomfield.

³⁹ T52A: 8/1/88. Leon Woodside, O'Leary [Mount Royal].

⁴⁰ This was pointed out to me by Dr. David Buchan.

narratives, we come to the third noteworthy element in conversations about horses. This is the use, *within* the narratives, of smaller, traditional units, stock words and phrases and with them simile and metaphor, all geared to the horsemen's audience. These, along with the formulaic openings, serve to illustrate and decorate the narrative. An observation made by Roy Willis is interesting in this regard. In his study of the Nuer of central Africa, whose economy and way of life are centered on cattle, he notes that they cannot think of cattle in the detached way that they do of other animals. He goes on to say than when a Nuer speaks of cattle, "he is pre-eminently an artist."⁴¹ To a good extent, this is true of the horsemen of Prince Edward Island in their conversations about horses. And it is no doubt true of Newfoundland fishermen when they speak of fish and fishing.

The expressions used in talking about horses are colorful, descriptive and numerous. For instance, a narrator telling a story about a poor or lazy or useless horse may use the traditional expression, "He couldn't haul the hat off your head." Expressions like this one, in their use of device, come close to folk poetry: e. g., the use of haul, hat, and head, with its series of hard h's is evocative of the strain of a horse pulling a load. Similarly, when Harry MacKay described a slow horse as being able to "trot all day in a pot," the terminal t's in the words summon up the very familiar, echoing sounds of a horse's hoofs on a hard surface. There are many other

41 Roy Willis, *Man and Beast* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1974) 14.

phrases utilized for various purposes.⁴² I include a representative sample here along with a note, when necessary, on their meaning.

He couldn't haul the hat off your head. (The horse was of little use in pulling a load.)

He could trot all day in a pot. (The horse was very slow.)

They'd be hard as iron. (The horses would be in good shape because they had been working hard.)

You'd be liable to get the heels. (The horse was apt to kick you.)

She'd wash all the harness. (This meant that the horse would urinate, probably at an inappropriate time.)

They'd eat all the hay you could grow.

She'd never turn a hair. (She could work hard without sweating.)

You could drive her all day with a bagstring. (She was extremely obedient. A bagstring was a light piece of twine used for tying bags of oats. Used for a rein, it would break at the slightest touch.)

There was nothing on this road that could smell his arse. (There were no horses in this community who could catch this horse in a race.)

In the use of these expressions within traditional stories we see a great deal of traditional borrowing, a phenomenon noted by Pierre and Elli Kongas Maranda. Though they were referring to the plots of

⁴² For a short examination of simile and metaphor in the language of horse traders, see William Ferris, "The Horse Trader in American History," *Mississippi Folklore Register* 12-14 (1978-80): 12-13.

narratives, what they say applies equally well to devices used within the narratives:

. . . the most important frame of a narrative is its own socio-cultural background, even in the case of borrowed plots, for plots (and other narrative materials) can only be borrowed if they fit or can be molded to fit the culture, more exactly than the level of the culture which we would call deep structure.⁴³

The socio-cultural background of these stories, then, leads to a great deal of borrowing, much of it consisting of figures of speech. In narratives like these this borrowing comes from within the genre itself. The listener is helped because the traditional and colorful terms provide guidelines to the central focus which the narrator is illustrating. More important, they help the narrator, who chooses traditional words and expressions in the same way as a carpenter chooses the traditional tools of his trade. Certain jobs require specific tools which work particularly well. In the same way, words and expressions, having undergone the process of cultural selection, like carpenters tools, serve as helpers in specific situations. Children learn these expressions through traditional means and, in doing so, realize what makes a narrative acceptable and interesting.

In terms of number and versatility, the memorates discussed above are the work horses of narrative in folk groups. As we have seen, the traditional themes they carry are fairly limited in number

43 Pierre and Elli Kongas Maranda, *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition* (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971) ix.

but unlimited in variation. As Linda Degh writes, their scope encompasses "highly elaborate stories about narrow escape, disaster, embarrassment, unbelievable fateful coincidence, absurd and humorous encounters that approximate the realm of fiction."⁴⁴ Their highly personalized nature does not mean that they are highly innovative. As Sandra Stahl correctly points out, in personal narrative, "there is much more that is traditional than innovative."⁴⁵ Though their themes and motifs do not vary widely, story tellers do tend, as can be seen, to be innovative in their selective use of traditional devices such as simile, metaphor, and traditional phrasing, all of which are used to strengthen narration. These are also utilized in the other narrative genres but in the factual memorate they have a very direct impact. The heavy use of these traditional devices gives memorates the power of tradition and at the same time allows the tellers of these narratives to put old wine in new bottles.

Another element we see within the narrative is a phenomenon noted by Lawrence G. Small. In an article on genre change and functional variability Small notes that certain well known stories may change form "from narrative to shorter expression" when used "at the appropriate time to the appropriate people."⁴⁶ This genre change, Small points out, is a conversational technique which good narrators

44 Linda Degh, "'The Theory of Personal Experience Narrative,'" *8th Congress* 3: 240-41.

45 Stahl, "The Personal Narrative as Folklore" 10.

46 Lawrence G. Small, "Traditional Expression in a Newfoundland Community: Genre Change and Functional Variability," *Lore and Language* 2 : 3 (1975): 16.

may use in a number of ways. For instance, as in the cases discussed by Small, they may evoke the original, much longer narrative. Second, they may be used to introduce or embellish a character or reinforce a characteristic of that person. There are numerous examples of this in the conversation discussed earlier. At one point in his narration about the runaway horse, Bert Thomson changed his tone of voice, saying, "They knew they were going to have trouble with the son-of-a-gun." He was, in fact, mimicking the individual involved with the runaway horse. He sounded like the person and he used a phrase (son-of-a-gun) which was a trademark of that individual's own narrations. The technique encapsulated, not a short narrative, as in the case discussed by Small, but an individual's idiosyncrasy. The effect was the same. As Small says, elements such as these have no meaning outside the group but are full of meaning for insiders. They have several functions. First of all, they add a humorous effect, making the narration more interesting. Second, because they have meaning only for those within the group, they serve to solidify group identity.

More than any other genre, the memorates have a teaching function. They serve as training manuals for younger members of the audience. They are yardsticks by which to measure horses and horsemen. Bert Thomson's story of the cruel horseman carried an unstated, but clear message that this sort of usage of horses was not acceptable. Leon Woodside's and Edward MacWilliams's descriptions of their horses leave no doubt in the mind of the listener as to just what a good horse is supposed to be. Richard Bauman notes a similar

educational function in the stories told among Nova Scotia fishermen when he writes:

the community had much to gain by sanctioning relative accuracy . . . in order that each man's experience might contribute to the communal wisdom. . . . the telling of yarns in group situations, may be seen as a kind of adaptive mechanism, making available to all the benefits of individual wisdom born of experience. By participating in the sessions . . . an individual was able to become familiar with a wide range of situations as well as possible responses to those situations, against the day when he too might confront similar situations.⁴⁷

It might be noted that Bauman's remarks regarding communal education may be more relevant to Prince Edward Island farm life than they are to the fishermen's group in Nova Scotia. First, in the Island folk group, the story-telling situation is not restricted to one sex (men) and one age (adult) as it is with the LaHave fishermen. As can be seen, women are present and contribute, simply because they have had the same experiences as the men. Secondly, there are no restrictions on children. They are very much a part of the farm kitchen group and the narratives are very much a part of their education. And, finally, perhaps because of the diversity of the group and the fact that, to a great extent, it is family oriented, arguments do not play the significant part in conversation that they do among the Nova Scotia fishermen.

47 Bauman, "The LaHave Island General Store" 337.

Memorates such as the ones we have discussed indicate, as Sandra Stahl points out, "the appeal of the factual"⁴⁸ and are very much a part of the daily round of life in rural areas of the Island. It is this factual aspect, more than any other single factor, combined with the broad front on which they operate, which sets them at some distance from other narrative genres such as the tall tale and the folktale.⁴⁹

Not surprisingly, tall tales about horses are widespread in this culture. They follow the same pattern as tall tales everywhere, in that they are usually attributed, rightly or wrongly, to some minor Munchausen and are based on the humour of lies and exaggerations.⁵⁰ In general, they are international in their geographical spread, and, alone among the narratives about horses in PEI, a few have gone into print.⁵¹ They are as much culture-bound as

⁴⁸ Stahl, "A Literary Folkloristic Methodology For the Study of Meaning in Personal Narrative" *8th Congress I*: 146. I find Stahl's comment that "Some people who impatiently turn away from fantasy, delight in the secular reality of everyday narratives," falls short of the mark. In folk narrative, where there is often a mix of the various narrative genres, I have not noticed a conscious veering to or away from any particular one. The factors which control the switch from one genre to another seem to be much more complex than a plain matter of "turning away" because one type of story is preferred over another.

⁴⁹ This having been said, it should be noted that some stories, told as true, lie in a no-man's land between memorate and tall tale. This applies particularly to narratives about remarkable horses such as Prince who was mentioned earlier.

⁵⁰ For a listing of the salient features of the genre, see Gerald Thomas, *The Tall Tale and Philippe d'Alcire* (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Publications, Monograph Series No. 1, 1977) 8.

⁵¹ Alice Green and the Alberton Historical Group, *Footprints on the Sands of Time : A History of Alberton* (Summerside: New Horizons Committee, 1980) 267-268.

the memorates, incorporating local individuals and communities into themselves.

Perhaps the most notable of the tall tales told in the area covered by this fieldwork are those of Joe MacDougall who lived in the village of Alberton. In the small area where he lived, his stories are well known and still well entrenched in oral tradition. The two which follow are among his most popular:

I had one of the fastest horses that was ever on the Island. He was a little brown three-year old and he could travel. This day I went to Tignish and bought two little pigs. I did some shopping for mother and by the time I was ready to go home it looked like we were in for a bad rain storm.

I put the pigs in a bag in the back of the wagon and started for home. I could see the storm coming behind me and I knew I'd have to hurry if I didn't want to get real wet. I piled the whip to the horse and we got home without getting a drop of rain on me or the horse, but the two little pigs were drowned in the back on the wagon.⁵²

The second narrative, recounted by a niece of MacDougall's, goes as follows:

They had good horses at the MacDougall farm when Joe was a young man and one of them was a "blood" horse called a driver in those days. The term Standard Bred is mostly used now.

Most horses used to cringe and crowd up into the stall as far as possible when someone shook a whip at them. But the MacDougall horse was so full of life and pep, he used to jump an even foot straight in the air. Of course,

52 Green 263.

everyone admired the animal and nobody in the family would think of actually striking him with the whip, least of all Joe.

But the young man often shook the whip behind the horse and watched with admiration how the nimble animal sprang straight into the air just about a foot. Well, the time came when the horse died as all the horses do eventually. The family thought so much of him that they carefully removed his hide, cleaned, tanned and lined it and made a beautiful floor rug out of it. The MacDougall family thought so much of the horse, they put the rug in a little used corner of the living room, where the rug would be admired by visitors, but trod on by as few as possible.

Joe, then a young man, had a whip in his hand one day as he strode into the dining room and the shook it in sort of an absent-minded manner. "And," he reported, "The rug rose exactly one foot off the floor."⁵³

Though Stith Thompson's index contains few tall tale motifs related to horses,⁵⁴ Ernest Baughman's work, with its greater emphasis on North America, is more helpful. We see that MacDougall's story about the fast horse is a well travelled one. Closely related versions have been collected in New York, Illinois, Idaho and Texas.⁵⁵

The second story has a familiar ring to it, yet no version can be found in either Thompson's or Baughman's indices. We expect it to appear in some sort of folk tale, yet it does not. The shaking whip and the jumping rug give it an element of magic which most modern-

53 *Guardian* 18 March 1965: 5.

54 Thompson, *Motif-Index* See Motif section X 1700-X1900.

55 Baughman, *Motifs* X1796.3.1, X1796.3.1 (a), and X1796.3.1 (b).

day tall tales do not have. MacDougall is deceased and so, until another version turns up, we may be left in the dark about its variants and its geographical distribution.

Another tall tale regarding horses comes from the late Joe Gaudin who lived in the Campbellton area of western PEI. Gaudin has attributed to him dozens of stories based on ridiculous or absurd logic. Many of them concern his experiences working on the farm of Senator Sinclair, a wealthy farmer in the central part of the Island. They resemble, in fact, those discussed by Gustav Henningsen in his study of European tall tales.⁵⁶ Perhaps the story heard most often in the Lot Seven area is Joe's tale about the incredible number of cattle the Senator possessed. Someone asked, "How many cows goes the Senator have, Joe?" To which Joe replied, "I don't really know, but just to give you an idea, he's got sixty bulls."⁵⁷

This particular horse story concerns the days before snowplows, which in West Prince extended well into the nineteen fifties. After a snowstorm, local men would bring their horses out and "break the road" by making a track through it. Harry Mackay said he was

56 The studies of Gustav Henningsen have laid to rest the belief, held up until the last generation, that the tall tale is an overwhelmingly North American genre. See in particular Gustav Henningsen, "The Art of Perpendicular Lying," trans. Warren E. Roberts, *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 2.2 (1965) : 180-219 and also Henningsen, "The Great Farmhouse," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 3.1 (1966) : 50-69.

57 I remember hearing this story when I was about ten years old. It was recounted to me by an older boy, Peter Monagan, who was telling funny stories. The reference to cows and bulls made the story slightly risque. Ten year-olds did not tell such stories in front of their parents. Incidentally, Joe Gaudin was living in the community at the time and his stories, lies being the comic term, were known to most children and all adults.

breaking the road after a storm and, as he was going by Joe's house, Joe came out and jumped on the sleigh with him. "This reminds me of the time when I worked for Senator Sinclair," he said. "After we had a storm and the road had to be broke, we'd just let out the old grey mare and her thirteen colts."⁵⁸ Tall tales about well-trained horses are common throughout North America. This particular one comes fairly close to a Texas variant noted by Baughman.⁵⁹

Two comments regarding tall tales and horses on the Island are appropriate here. First, although they appear to be drawn from a North American context, it is probable, as Henningsen's studies suggest, that versions of many of them will be found in the British Isles and Western Europe. More important, the tales show a consistency with other narrative genres, especially memorate. They stress, in their unique way, the same motifs we see in the personal narratives, for example the good horse, the well-trained horse, the willing horse and the fast horse. This raises the question of whether tall tales may come from oft-repeated motifs in personal narrative.

Along with tall tale, there is a considerable amount of other narrative whose intent is humorous. Jokes often are similar in motif to the lying stories, concerning themselves with very fast or very slow horses. Cheating during horse-trading deals is also a source for many humorous stories. George Dewar told me the following one which supposedly happened to an old farmer in Wellington:

58 Harry MacKay told me this story sometime between 1963 and 1965.

59 Baughman, Motif X1241.2.1. Horse takes cattle out to pasture, brings them in by herself.

He traded horses with this fellow and the fellow came back the next morning [laughs] and [pause] told him the horse had died during the night, you know. And [pause] he [the horse trader] shook his head. "Well, well, well," he said, "You kept him too long."⁶⁰

Unlike the other genres, however, jokes and funny stories are more apt to be off-color or scatological. Sometimes, as in the following story , the narrative seems to exist only to carry the funny saying, that is, the punch line at the end. This story, copied from field notes, contains the actual words of the speaker in quotation marks:

Jack Coughlin's [family] lived in Ellerslie and they were poor. He had a good horse, a very cranky wife, and bunch of boys who liked to tease her. Jack went away this day and Mrs. Coughlin asked one of the boys where he had gone. The boy said that he had gone to trade the horse. She was shocked. "What in God's name is he doing that for, trading our good horse?"

The young fellow said, "Oh, Mom , you know the horse was getting old and he was sort of ugly."

Mrs Coughlin wheeled on him. "He might have been old," she said, "But there was nothing on this road that could smell his arse."⁶¹

Much of the humour is sexual, based on plays on words. Older men still tease teenage boys about their girlfriends by asking with a snigger, "Will she 'stand' for you?" This question means nothing to an outsider, but to the youth whose girlfriend is likened to a mare being

⁶⁰ T65A: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth].

⁶¹ 13/11/86. Mary Cousins, Campbellton, field note.

bred to a stallion, it is infuriating. A well-known joke concerns a rather pompous gentleman whose way is accidentally blocked on the street in Alberton. He says to the farmer, "Don't you know me, I'm the mayor of Alberton?" To which the farmer replies, "Too bad I didn't bring the little horse [stallion]."⁶² Another example of this sort of wordplay happened when I was visiting a neighbor in Bloomfield. Another neighbor came in and in the course of a discussion about Jack MacDonald, a neighboring farmer, mentioned that Jack had a horse called Dick. (Here as elsewhere, the word "dick" is the folk term for penis.) Jack had allegedly said that "This spring, my Dick is as round as a bottle and as hard as an apple."⁶³ Another informant related the following anecdote:

Old Bob Ellis was in O'Leary one day at the fertilizer plant and someone said to him "Bob, Your fly is open." And Bob said, "That's all right. A horse that's down can't get out."⁶⁴

The following story is a good example of the bawdy language used and the context in which it was used. One informant told me about a man whom we both knew who had a driving horse which he

62 6/6/1966. Steve Doyle, Glengarry, field note.

63 3/4/88. Claire Smith, Fredericton, New Brunswick [Bloomfield], field note.

64 21/10/85. Charles Gorri, Dunblane, field note. In another variant of this story the man is told "The barn door is open," which was a common euphemism for "Your fly is open." 15/12/89. Mary Cousins, Campbellton, field note. This expression was used by boys all the time the writer was in elementary school. It is going out of use.

quite innocently called "Tricker." Like "dick," this term is used within the West Prince culture to refer to the penis. It is puzzling why the man would call his horse by this name since he should have known that jokes would be made. On one occasion, Tricker stopped on the road in front of the informant's home. The horse at that point was being driven by the man's old maid sister :

One time Lottie and Mrs. Dodd was coming from Bloomfield and he balked right up there where Frank McArthur's house is, up there by Loman's. He would not go another step and Lottie had to walk across the field to our place to to get some of the men to go . . . She said, "Tricker balked." . . . And that's what Russ called him, and then when he got down, [laughs] the young fellows, I wish you could have heard them. They discussed it one night, at a meeting of some kind and they said, "He [Russell] had him [Tricker] in some mashy [marshy] places." This was why he got down and couldn't get up." [laughs] Ah, them Shaws and Harry MacKay and Harold Doyle! They'd just ask, "Did you hear the news? Russell's Tricker is down and can't get up. Well, I'm not surprised."⁶⁵

As indicated earlier, relaxed conversations within folk groups such as the one under study here are rarely restricted to one specific narrative genre. In such contexts, people talked, recited, and told stories of all kinds. Often, song was intermingled with conversation. Elmer Cook, when recounting a story of a horse that had brutalized

65 T5A: 12/5/85. Mary Cousins, Campbellton. The word "tricker" as a euphemism for penis was used to the almost total exclusion of other terms when the writer was a child in the Lot Seven-Campbellton area. It is still a commonly used term. I have not heard "tricker" elsewhere. Is there a connection with "Trickster," I wonder?

him when he was a small boy, sang a song he had composed about her and told how he first came to sing it to his neighbors. His brief picture, of four or five farmers talking on the way home from a meeting is representational of how such songs came to be introduced to the folk group:

Bennett Howard, George Shaw, Pete Bulger, Clem Connors and myself all went to a Credit Union meeting, I think we went to Tignish. And somehow or other, the talk came up about kicking horses. Everybody had, a lot of people, had them. They weren't worth the ball to brain them, to knock them down. I wouldn't have them about the place. And she was the worst on the Island. She was the very devil. Bennett Howard was bringing this thing up [about the bad horse] when we were coming from the Credit Union Meeting. I said, "Do you remember the one that Pop had over home?"

Oh, Bennett, of course, started to laugh and [said], "Yes, I never forgot her."

"If you don't mind," [Elmer said] "I made a song about her. I swore I'd get even with her. I went to work and I made a song." I had it already made. And George Shaw hadn't heard [it].⁶⁶

Elmer sang his song for me of the mare which was so vicious. The last two verses are especially interesting because they contain what appears to be the genuine reaction of his father when the child was

⁶⁶ T36A: 18/9/86. Elmer Cook, Cape Wolfe. The socializing of folk groups shows interesting similarities throughout Anglo-American tradition. Elmer Cook's recounting of the farmers on the trip struck me as being similar to the farmers who went to Widdicombe Fair: "Bill Brewer, Jan Stewar, Peter Gurney, Peter Davis, Daniel Widden, Harry Hawke, old Uncle Tom Cobley and all." Cook's story is also reminiscent of Blackmore's description, in *Lorna Doone*, of a group of West Country farmers, "riding home from Porlock market on a Saturday evening . . . singing godly hymns and songs to keep their courage moving." See Blackmore 33-34.

hurt by the horse. (The incidents described must have taken place three-quarters of a century ago, since Elmer is now in his mid-eighties):

One day in the field she kicked everything off the rake.
The old man came on the run and he said " For God's sake."
I could tell by his voice that the old man was wild
He gathered me up and said, "Are you killed Child?"

" Now keep this a secret and not a soul tell,
If I live to this fall, I'm going to blow her to hell."
So he brought her to an end one day late in the fall,
When he took her to the woods and he gave her the ball.⁶⁷

Often, in conversation there would be spontaneous singing performances like the above or recitations such as the one by Thane Cousins cited on page 109.

Songs about horses and horsemen are common in the folk traditions of the British Isles and North America. Edward Ives, for example, cites "the remarkable tradition of plowman songs, particularly among the Lowland Scots."⁶⁸ Of nine so-called Bothy Ballads included by David Buchan in *A Scottish Ballad Book*, seven deal with horses or horsemen to one extent or another.⁶⁹ A similar

⁶⁷ Elmer's wife Milla noted before Elmer sang the song that Bennett Howard had died short time after the Credit Union trip and that Elmer had said that it was because Bennett had laughed so hard at the song. T36A: 18/9/86. Milla Cook, Cape Wolfe.

⁶⁸ Ives, *Gorman* 169.

⁶⁹ Buchan, *A Scottish Ballad Book* 185-206.

situation can be found in local song-making traditions in the West of England and in Ireland.

As with narrative, there is, in Island oral tradition, an abundance of such songs and poems. These cover a wide range of theme and motif similar, not surprisingly, to those found in narrative. Given the limitations of time and space, wide-ranging discussion on song and poetry is impossible here. However, concentration on a specific sub-genre may help complete the picture we have begun to draw of the traditional views towards the use and misuse of horses in this society.

Cruelty and the bad usage of horses comprise one of the most common themes of horse song and poetry on the Island. The original models for many of these compositions can be found in Britain, the source of so much of Island lore. Many of the songs are satires, which as Edward Ives notes are a "general part of the British bequest," having "nothing particularly [North] American" about them.⁷⁰ Many of the Island compositions lack the subtlety of good satire. Instead, they are heavy-handed, direct and melodramatic statements about cruelty to horses. As a sub-genre, they have a long history. Ives cites the following verse from "Robin Spraggon's Auld Grey Mare," from the North of England:

The miller of Ogle bred me , as I have heard them say
And gallantly he fed me with the best of corn and hay

⁷⁰ Ives, *Gorman* 169.

For meal and malt I wanted not when in his custody
 But now I'm Robin Spraggon's auld grey mare, ae how he's
 guided me.⁷¹

The abundance of songs on the Island containing this theme is indicative of the value placed on the good care of horses. One of the earliest we find, and certainly the best known, is "The Horse's Confession," composed by Larry Gorman in the eighteen seventies. Briefly summarized, Gorman's brother James had bought a horse from the local Presbyterian minister and Larry felt that his brother was abusing the horse by overwork. Worse still, he lent it to neighbors such as "White Alec" who beat it cruelly:

Another thing I've got to tell-
 I'm subject to a colic;
 And before I am right well
 They lend me to White Alec.

Oh, he's the boy to make me fly,
 It's the truth I can't deny;
 And he takes me to a place where I
 Hear nothing spoke but Gaelic

When he gets me it's his delight
 To canter me and run me;
 Instead of coming home at night
 He keeps me over Sunday.

He is the boy to make me jump,
 He leaves great welts upon my rump,

⁷¹ John C. Bruce and John Stokoe, *Northumbrian Minstrelsy* (Newcastle - upon-Tyne: n. p., 1882) cited in Ives, *Larry Gorman* 169.

He keeps me tethered to a stump
From Saturday till Monday.⁷²

Gorman is only the best known of the song-makers who wrote about horses. One well-known song in the DeSable area tells the story of Pony Racker, a faithful horse which was traded by an uncaring master to an abusive farmer on the Green Road. Like many of the horse laments, it is told in the first person:

My name is Pony Racker and I'll not deny my name.
My mother was a Saladin mare forever known to fame.
I never was a fast horse, and I never won a prize.
But there wasn't a horse in Argyle Shore could lick me for my size.

The first trade is to Andrew White :

When I first went with Andrew White I liked him very well.
But I wasn't with him long and the truth to you I'll tell.
'Twas there I lost my strength, which I never did regain.
By plowing sod and stubble land with that and hauling grain.

Pony Racker is traded again, to an even more uncaring master, for a beaver hat:

When Andrew wanted me no more and all his work was done.
He swapped me for a beaver hat to Mick McGaughey's son.

⁷² Ives, *Gorman* 25-26. I have heard two tunes for this song. One was sung by Mrs. Jim Pendergast in Charlottetown in 1968 and the other by George MacKay in Bloomfield. Although I did not record the Pendergast version, Edward Ives did. A discussion of these tunes is outside the scope of this chapter. However, Mackay said that he had heard the song sung by Tom Gorman who was a nephew of the songmaker and that the tune was called "Comin' Through the Barley."

After being abused, the horse runs back home to his original master at Argyle Shore :

When I first went to the Green Road, I thought I'd get some hay.
 But all I got was buckwheat straw and hard work all the day.
 The Green Road hills I did not like they were so mighty high.
 So I left there one Friday night and went back to the shore to die.

Here he is driven away with sticks and stones. He goes to the beach at De Sable and dies:

And now farewell to the Green Road, likewise to [De] Sable too.
 Not forgetting my old master, John Archie "Ansth Roo."
 Farewell to John McGaughey, don't forget to tell him that.
 And a curse on cruel Andrew, who swapped me for a hat.⁷³

Another song having the same theme from the same area is "Old Sam."

This horse he being a noble horse and the joy of his master's heart,
 Until one evil moment with his horse he did part.
 He traded him with Ashly upon the Appin Road;
 And with him he was strong enough to haul Dan Campbell's load.⁷⁴

Although he does not comment on it, Wayne Fanning records the same sort of traditional song in rural Nova Scotia.⁷⁵

⁷³ Inc 26-29.

⁷⁴ Collected by Tony Reddin, Charlottetown, c. 1987. Informant: Dave MacMurrer, New Argyle, Prince Edward Island. Longhand copy in writer's possession.

⁷⁵ See "Henry Ebbs' Nag" in W. Wayne Fanning, "Storytelling at a Nova Scotia General Store," *Culture and Tradition* 3 (1978) 61.

Well within this tradition of lament is a song composed and recited to me by Elmer Cook about a "dandy little horse," a "lovely mare" his brother once owned :

My name is Bully Cook, the truth to you I'll tell.
 I was born in old Lot Seven on that farm you all know well.
 I came of good Island breeding, this I will say with thanks.
 I being the last descendant of the Julias and the Banks.⁷⁶

When my master gave up farming, my joy it knew no bounds.
 And for a few short years there, I simply laid around
 I lived to be a ripe old age of twenty-seven years.
 The story I relate would start a horse's tears.

I thought that when I got so old that I would surely stay
 And in the lonely old back field my moldering bones would lay.
 But fate had ruled me otherwise and I didn't have that much luck.

[Pause]

And early one spring morning I was loaded on a truck.

But don't you weep and mourn for me for I led a horse's lot.
 And likely down in Summerside I'll be led out and shot.
 But I had a lovely sister her name was Nelly Queen.
 She was as true an animal as this Island ever seen.

It breaks my heart and grieves me for this I understand.
 For she was loaded on a truck all bound for Newfoundland.
 There's one thing I can never tell why a beast that was so grand,
 With her kind ways should end her days on the rocks of Newfoundland.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Note the recounting of the horse's genealogy, a feature in song as well as in narrative.

⁷⁷ T36A: 10/9/86. Elmer Cook, Cape Wolfe.

The above songs are a small sample of a pronounced sub-genre concerned with the misuse and/or abuse of horses. Given the numbers I found without really looking, it is a fair guess to say that those mentioned here are hardly a scratch on the surface. Yet few of these songs have been noted by folklorists or remain in widespread tradition. There are a few notable exceptions from the Atlantic provinces along with the ones mentioned above: "Rufus's Mare" and "The Messenger Song" from New Brunswick,⁷⁸ "Concerning Charlie Horse,"⁷⁹ and, questionably, "Tickle Cove Pond" from Newfoundland⁸⁰ and "Henry Ebbs' Nag" from Nova Scotia.⁸¹ Two reasons for their lack of circulation come to mind. First, the day of the horse has been gone for almost 40 years and, with it, horse songs. Second, people are reluctant to sing songs of this particular type to outsiders. As has been noted in the previous chapter, the bad treatment of horses is a touchy subject in this society. Men are reluctant to talk about it to any extent, and, with a stranger, they often simply refuse. The reasons for this reticence are at least partially clear. Horses and the

⁷⁸ Louise Manny and James Reginald Wilson, *Songs of Miramichi* (Fredericton, N. B.: Brunswick Press, 1968), G. Malcolm Laws, *Native American Balladry: A Descriptive Study and a Bibliographical Syllabus* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1964) 275.

⁷⁹ Omar Blondahl, "Concerning Charlie Horse" *Songs of Sea and Shore*, Arc Records A537, n. d.

⁸⁰ Gerald S. Doyle, ed., *Old Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland: Songs of the People from the Days of our Forefathers*, 5th ed. (1927; St. John's: Gerald S. Doyle Limited, 1978) 48-49.

⁸¹ Fanning 61.

care of them were so closely tied to the self-image of their owners that to criticize a man's horse was to criticize the man himself. In poor, close-knit communities, talk of this nature bred tension and bad feelings, two things which were totally contrary to both community and neighborly solidarity. Most people avoided (and still avoid) creating troubles with neighbors. Ironically, the local nature of the song worked against its acceptance into circulation.

Interestingly enough, when we do find comments on misuse of horses, it is often in folksong or rhyme. One reason for this may be that those two modes of expression are identified with "fun," or "humour" and, as William Bascom points out, tabooed subjects can be raised under the guise of fun.⁸² Also, the formality and structure of song and rhyme helps the poet distance himself, to some extent, from the personal comments which are his creation.

Song, however, was not only for attacking individual offenders. Folksongs which targeted individuals were generally not sung in the presence of that person, anyway. Perhaps as important was their function as a means of social control for the community in general. They were, in fact, weapons to intimidate people who might violate the acceptable norms of the group. "Pony Racker" and "The Horse's Confession" have remained in tradition for many decades, and in the case of the latter for well over a century. One suspects the emotional draw of the suffering horse has kept them there. What Bascom says of African proverbs comes surprisingly close to this particular sub-genre of Island folksong. Chaga proverbs, he writes,

⁸² William Bascom, "Four Functions" 290.

are considered as especially appropriate to adult life. . . [They are] highly effective in exercising social control. Because they express the morals or ethics of the group, they are convenient standards for appraising behaviour in terms of the approved norms. Because they are pungently, wittily and sententiously stated, they are ideally suited for commenting on the behaviour of others. They are used to express social approval and disapproval: praise for those who conform to accepted social conventions, and criticism or ridicule of those who deviate. . .⁸³

Because rhyme and song are identified with "fun" it is more acceptable when it is done this way. Really, it is criticism under the guise of entertainment.

The presence in culture of so many songs in the category of "The Horse's Confession," and "Pony Racker" over such a long period indicates, on the one hand, the value placed on the horse and, on the other, the recourse Island culture took to protect one of its most precious resources.

Several themes are apparent in "lament songs." First they are, in the vast majority of cases, composed in the first person, with the horse doing the "talking." This gives the song greater immediacy and impact.⁸⁴ Second, in many cases there has been mismanagement on

83 Bascom, "Four Functions" 295.

84 Considering the strong cultural presence of the Scots on the Island, a comment made by Dr. David Buchan has relevance here. On reading this particular section, he noted that there is a longstanding tradition "in vernacular Scots poetry . . . of poems with an animal (sometimes a horse) speaking throughout in the first person."

the part of the horse's master. He has allowed the horse to get into the hands of people who abuse it or he has misused the animal himself. In virtually all the songs the composer stresses the virtues of the horse, his willingness to work, and his long years of service. Implicitly he points to the unthinking, ungrateful behaviour of the original owner who, in some way, misuses a horse which should be rewarded for a lifetime of service.

There were found, in this culture, many other kinds of songs about horses. One particular group which should be noted is a hybrid type: songs with obvious literary origins which were transmitted into the culture by young men returning home from the lumberwoods or from work in the cities of New England. This phenomenon is particularly true of the period 1880-1930. One popular song which fits into this category is "Dinny Grady's Hack," two verses of which go as follows:

One Sunday morning early we started out so merry..
Mrs Clancy , Mrs. Tracy , there was me and my son Pat.
And the noble Dinny Grady , with his livery coach and Katie,
Rode gentle as a lady in his yellow painted hack.

Chorus:

So come on Napoleon, come up me dandy.
Napoleon is a pacer, he's the fastest on the track.
So come on Napoleon, come up me dandy.
He can beat two-forty pulling Dinny Grady's Hack.

Oh , we rode along quite merry, drinking wine and sherry,
A little over-beery , when we were coming back.

When the cart it struck a boulder, and the horse fell on his shoulder,
And the wheel fell off and we fell out of Dinny Grady's Hack.⁸⁵

The origin of this song proved impossible to trace, even with careful research in nineteenth-century Irish popular music. However, it seems highly likely that it was one of a number of "music hall" songs which had wide currency with the Boston Irish in the late-nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Songs like this and others such as "Muldoon, the Solid Man" met with a welcome reception in Irish areas like Lot Seven, where they rapidly reverted to oral tradition. "Dinny Grady's Hack" was a raucous, slapstick type of song with a lilting melody having nothing satiric about it.

There was, to a considerable extent, a blending of folksong and so-called popular song which came into Island society through the official media. With the coming of radio in the nineteen twenties, commercial compositions like "Strawberry Roan" and "Patanio, the Pride of the Plains" were widely sung. Where entertainment was involved, the culture made few distinctions between locally made songs and imports and, as with simile and metaphor, there is a good deal of borrowing. There are many examples of radio tunes being utilized in local compositions. Elmer Cook's song about the vicious horse his father owned, for instance, was put to the tune of "Strawberry Roan." It is safe to say, however, that in terms of staying power, the radio songs such as those just mentioned do not have the

85 This was very much a "drinking song" sung to me on many occasions by the late Harry MacKay of Campbellton.

longevity of the local songs which became deeply entrenched in the life of the small communities. One notices, in informants like George MacKay and Elmer Cook, a sense of pride in being "still" able to recite or sing verses of "The Horse's Confession." So-called radio songs are ignored as not worth mentioning.

Above from the large number of songs about horses, there were many rhymes which remain in tradition. The writer remembers a nonsense verse recited by children in his community in the mid-nineteen fifties :

I'll sing you a song and it's not very long.
And it all consists of a murder.
MacKendrick's horse got stuck in the mud.
And couldn't get any further.⁸⁶

The name of the farmer mentioned could be changed, from "MacKendrick's" to "Harrison's." Invariably, though, the name of the horse's owner was a local one.

Recently, a high school student contributed to this research by writing about a play rhyme she learned as a child :

When I was about six, my little brother was born and my father used to say a rhyme to him. It went like this.
Shoe a little horsie,
Shoe a little mare,
Let a little foal go,
Bare, bare, bare.

86 I was about seven years old when I first heard this rhyme, and as I recall, it was from my teenage brother. It was a "boy's" rhyme and I remember repeating it to other children in school.

He would pat my brother's feet on the first line and part of the second, and tickle him on the last part of the second.⁸⁷

Walter Gregor recounted one, repeated in part here, which may have a connection with the variant found on the Island. He writes:

To please the child when the shoes are being put on, the following formula in various forms is repeated, and the action of the smith in shoeing a horse is imitated as closely as possible.

John Smith, a fellow fine
 Can ye shoe a horse o' mine?
 Yes, an that I can,
 As well as ony man.
 We'll ca a bit upon the tae,
 T' gar the horsie clim' the brae;
 An we'll pit a bit upo' the heel,
 T' gar the horsie trot weel:
 An we'll pit a bit upo' the sole,
 T' gar the horsie hae a foal.⁸⁸

There were many rhymes incorporating specific beliefs about horses, a subject to be discussed in the next chapter. One of the most common of these was the following bit of folk wisdom, recited by older males for the benefit of children. For elementary school children, it was just off-color enough to be fascinating:

⁸⁷ 19/12/88. Angel Perry, Tignish, Folklore Survey Card.

⁸⁸ Walter Grego "The Horse in Scottish Folk-Lore" 59-60.

A farting mare [or horse] will never tire.
 A farting man is the man to hire.⁸⁹

It had many variants including the following:

A farting man is the man to hire.
 A farting mare is the one so buy her.⁹⁰

Very often horses were mentioned in rhymes or songs about local people. "The Campbellton Song" for instance, mentions Joe Ramsay, the local cooper :

As you come to the turn as you're leaving the cove,
 You see an old fellow, they call him old Joe.
 He coughs and he spits and he's fond of his beer,
 And he's all the time praising his young trotting mare.⁹¹

This song, called "The Campbellton Song" was composed some time during the nineteen twenties. It typifies a common songmaking technique found in the communities of western PEI. This was for the songmaker to simply devote a verse to each household in the community. For the most part the men, who were recognized as the head of the household, were singled out, usually by highlighting some idiosyncrasy which was known to the community at large. Thus, Joe

⁸⁹ This rhyme is also widely known in Ontario. See Allan Anderson, *Remembering the Farm : Farming , Ranching, and Rural Life in Canada, Past and Present.* (Toronto : MacMillan of Canada, 1977) 86.

⁹⁰ T48A: 2/5/87. George Phillips to Lyn Phillips, Arlington. *Westisle Collection.*

⁹¹ I have never heard a tune for this song, but I first heard it recited to a neighbor by my mother, Mary (MacKay) Cousins, when I was about ten years old.

Ramsay's pride in "Campbellton Belle," his "young trotting mare," was well known and was a subject of some amusement.

It would be fair to say that both narrative and song about horses give a great deal of pleasure to Prince Edward Islanders.

Conversations about horses and the traditional narrative and song carried within them add a unique flavor to the Island's culture. To a good extent, that flavor still exists, especially in the rural parts of the Island. We have identified three salient features of these conversations. The first is their strongly communal nature, nurtured by an immense amount of common knowledge. There is also an unconscious division of the talk into individual narratives, marked by formulaic openings and closings and concerned mostly with the doings of individual horses and horsemen. The third aspect to the conversations is the use of specialized, traditional words and phrases born out of the horsemen's world. These too are communal property. A quite obvious borrowing takes place between speakers who utilize descriptive phrases for their own narratives. These give a unique color to narratives about horses.

We have examined many types of traditional narrative including memorate, tall tale, joke, and anecdote. In terms of numbers, memorates occupy a special place. They often emphasize the horse as "individual" and they are the most strongly educational of the narrative types. The tall tale is not strikingly different from tall tales about horses found throughout North America. It is told for entertainment and we find in it a range of subjects which do not differ appreciably from the subjects of memorates told about horses. The main difference between these two narrative genres is the

humorous intent of the tall tale. It is significant that of all the narrative genres, the one most concerned with sex is the joke. As in the case of song, in which reference to the bad usage of horses could be made, sex could be discussed under the guise of "fun." Folksong and rhyme, it has been noted, often act as a social control on those who would abuse horses. They also indicate the tremendous depth of feeling experienced when horses were misused in any way.

One major narrative form not stressed thus far is the legend which, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, is often used as a vehicle to carry the various beliefs relating to horses. Legends and the beliefs attached to them are our main focus in the following pages.

Chapter V

"Four white feet and a mealie nose,
Cut off his head and feed him to the crows"

Horses and Folk Belief on the Island.

Though all farm animals have connected to them a certain number of customs and beliefs, unquestionably, horses have more than their share in the folk traditions of the British Isles and North America.¹ And, although the day of the working horse is virtually gone on Prince Edward Island many elements of traditional folk belief relating to these special animals remain. Much belief, of course, is carried by folk narrative which formed the subject of the previous chapter. That phenomenon in itself justifies the setting down of a representative selection of horse-related beliefs present within Island culture, both in this century and the last. An analysis of their historical-geographical aspects, their function and their transmission should help reveal some of the inner workings of this complex agrarian culture.

Folk belief has been defined by Otto Blehr as "notions about magic, omens and supernatural beings which are outside any religious system as this is expressed by the church."² Implicit in

¹ Evans, *The Pattern Under the Plough* 158. In his work in East Anglia, Evans says that he found few customs related to farm animals, with the exception of the horse, "the chief source of power and the most important animal on most farms."

² Otto Blehr, "The Analysis of Folk Belief Stories and Its Implications for Research on Folk Belief and Folk Prose." *Fabula* 8-10 (1966-67) : 259.

Blehr's comment is that folk belief has an automatic conflict with church teaching. However, a good many folk beliefs, about animals foretelling weather, for instance, co-exist quite peaceably with organized religion. Technically, though these latter beliefs fall outside official church doctrine, they are rarely, if ever, singled out as being particularly heretical.

The strength of the folk belief existing today is substantial, as can be seen in the testimony of many of the informants for this work. A glance backward reveals just how pervasive these beliefs were and how the official organs of culture, such as organized religion, responded to them. In 1857, the *Islander* newspaper initiated a small crusade against what it felt was a wide-spread and pernicious belief in witches. "In this Island," the writer notes, "the good old belief in ghosts and witches is held as tenaciously by the mass of the people as it was in Britain two hundred years ago." The writer then goes on to comment on an incident near Charlottetown in which a man who had been victimized by thieves consulted a "witch wife." The local minister found out with the result that he

not only administered a rebuke to the delinquent in Church, in the face of the congregation, for seeking council from satan, through the medium of the witch wife, but preached two sermons on the subject, on the same day. What the Minister's opinion was we have been unable to learn satisfactorily, but the effect of the sermons has been to confirm his hearers in the reality of witchcraft, and in the ungodliness of seeking advice in so diabolical a quarter. Some of his hearers observed to us that it was unfair to make a spectacle of the unfortunate . . . man, because almost every one of the adult congregation had also consulted the witch wife at one

time or another [Islander's italics]. Is the School-master abroad? ³

Previously, the paper had commented on an incident closer to the subject of this work, that is, folk belief, witchcraft, and farm animals :

There is hardly a more engrossing belief in this Island, than this uncharitable and mischievous superstition. It taints the mass of the people , whatever be their origin or creed. About two weeks ago, a middle aged woman, from Lot 67, came to town, with a number of her friends, to make oath that she had not *bewitched* her neighbours' cows. Her affidavit was not taken, which we think rather unfortunate, as the refusal will probably confirm her supernatural reputation in the settlement. We should suppose there could not be any impropriety in permitting a person to swear that she had not committed an impossible and imaginary crime. The cows having been fed of straw during the winter , the young grass, instead of being converted into milk and butter (as the owners very unreasonably expected,) went to put a little beef on their bones. Let them next winter feed their cattle well, and they will not, twelve months hence, slander and libel their neighbours for bewitching the milk and butter from their bone rattlers. They may depend that the Devil drives a far more extensive trade than to trouble himself with stealing a *driblet* of milk from one neighbour, and transferring it to another, *both* whom he stands a fair chance of ultimately nabbing, without any trouble. . .⁴

The evidence for the pervasive belief in witches could be multiplied many times over and there is little reason to dispute the

³ *Islander* 19 June 1857: 2.

⁴ *Islander* 28 June 1850: 2. Lot Sixty-Seven, whose center was the community of Breadalbane, was almost exclusively Scottish and Presbyterian at this time.

Islander's claim that "heathenish superstition" was wide-spread in Island culture at that time. It is also true that folk beliefs associated with witches remained strong well into this century and are still very much in evidence. Today, there are many people on the Island who retain beliefs which, to the more "enlightened," appear archaic. On the subject of witches, for example, many informants respond in the following rather interesting manner. The common answer from the majority of them is that "the old people" believed in that sort of thing. They will then recount a local legend on the subject without affirming or denying its truthfulness. The following field note is a good example. Wilbur MacWilliams, a retired farmer, came into the writer's yard looking for some genealogical information on his own family. Eventually, the conversation came around to the "old days" and superstition. When asked if he knew anything about witches he thought for a moment and then replied:

Wilbur MacWilliams: Everybody believed in them in the old days. The Stewarts at the West Point were awful scared of that sort of thing. If anyone went by their place and looked at them , they were scared he was putting a curse [the evil eye] on them. Did you ever hear of Leo Harts?"

John Cousins: I've heard of him.

W. M.: Well, Alfred [MacWilliams, a prominent shipbuilder and politician at West Cape] was terrified of him. He [Leo] was working there, and he rowed with [Amos] Alfred's brother and left. And they were scared he was going to do something to them.

[From the context of Wilbur MacWilliams' story, it is apparent that the two men were afraid that Harts would put a curse on them which would cause trouble when they launched the ship they were building].

So Alfred sent word to tell Leo to call in on his way home. So that evening he [Leo] went in and Alfred gave him a quarter of beef and the next day [when the ship was being launched] the rollers were right and the skids were right and everything went just great.⁵

Stith Thompson calls narratives in this form local legends.⁶ His term is, thankfully, shortened to plain legend by other folklorists including David Buchan, whose extension of Thompson is worth quoting. Buchan's definition hinges partly on the crucial subject of belief : "the legend purports to be an account of an unusual happening believed, by some people at some time, to have occurred."⁷ The "some time" is crucial because it addresses the issue of whether the belief continues to exist. It is a matter which continues to perplex folklorists who are naturally interested in whether the narrator believes the story or not. Otto Blehr, for one, strongly supports the hypothesis "that the most important task of the contextual elements [in a legend] is to form a natural frame for the folk belief elements."⁸

I have heard dozens of legends and my own answer to the problem is a subjective evaluation, based, in large part, on socio-cultural context. Do the people of the area generally believe in witches? If they do, then there is a greater than even chance that

⁵ 17/6/89. Wilbur MacWilliams, West Cape, field note.

⁶ Thompson, *The Folktale* 8.

⁷ Buchan, *Scottish Tradition* 18.

⁸ Blehr, 259.

the narrator carries the "collective tradition" mentioned by Honko⁹ and others. My own assessment of the situation is that a good many of the older citizens have a niggling fear that witches have done depredations in the past and, possibly , if conditions were right, might do them again.

Since horses were so close to the centre of the Island's economic and social life it is natural that a good deal of superstitious belief would focus on them. They were , as noted earlier, special creatures, with anthropomorphic characteristics, and with traits which at times seem quite magical. Perhaps because they were so precious , they were prey to all sorts of malevolent forces. Within the folk beliefs of the Western World, as Christina Hole notes, horses were "believed to be very susceptible to the influence of witches and fairies . . ."¹⁰ Sir Andrew MacPhail, writing of his boyhood in Orwell in the 1870's, speaks of the malevolent power of witches. When they were at work, "The evil usually fell upon (the) horses. . . . It was a common sight of a morning to see a horse in a sweat with a tangled mane where a witch might well have clung during her nightly ride."¹¹ It is safe to say, in fact, that within the horseman's culture of the Island, they were a central target of witches and fairies. This aspect of the folk belief system has had surprising tenacity and is still relatively intact especially among older people.

⁹ Honko, "Memorates" 9.

¹⁰ Christina Hole, ed. and rev., *Encyclopedia of Superstition* (Chester Springs, Pennsylvania: n. p., 1961) 194.

¹¹ MacPhail 55-56.

This connection between malevolent beings and farm animals in agrarian cultures is not surprising. Keith Thomas, in describing behaviour attributed to witches in sixteenth and and seventeenth century England notes that they were believed to cause harm in two main ways: first, by injuring people in some way, and secondly, by injuring farm animals.¹² Kathryn C. Smith's comment on nineteenth century Yorkshire is applicable to Prince Edward Island well into the twentieth century. Referring to a time when horses were central to the life of a community, she writes :

Animals were central to the livelihood of most working people at this period. Family life was bound up with animals to a greater degree than can perhaps be imagined now. Thus, the sickness of an animal was a catastrophe to a family and household. Bewitchment of stock, then, was a direct attack on the well being of the family.¹³

The subject of witches and their connection with horses is perhaps best approached through a small case study of a "witch" and the horses he is alleged to have harmed. When the matter of witchcraft and horses is raised in the Campbellton-Bloomfield area of West Prince County, the name of Will Riley is invariably raised. Riley was not the only alleged witch in the area nor was he the only one to be accused of harming horses. He is notable, however, for the fear he engendered and for the legends which still exist about him.

12 Thomas, *Religion* 436-37.

13 Smith 106.

Riley was born on a farm in Campbellton shortly after 1881. His father was Charles Riley and his mother was Caroline Colfer. The Colfer connection may have some significance because they were connected with a family of Whites who were also accused of being witches.¹⁴ When Vance MacKay was asked where the Rileys had got the witchcraft, he replied, "The Colfers . . . They [the people of the community] all figured they had that [ability], you know."¹⁵ In one important way, Riley differed from most people who were accused by their neighbors of being witches. Most informants who knew him maintain that he actually stated his claim to be able to bewitch people. "Oh, he'd entertain you for hours about how he could put the spell on people," said an informant who knew him well. He was "a terrible bastard."¹⁶

Riley left the Island in his teens , removing to Boston with his family. Sometime in the nineteen twenties he arrived back in his home community and lived there the rest of his life, a tall, scary-looking, eccentric individual. He died in 1959. Shortly after his return to the community, he bought a small farm in the woods in nearby Bloomfield and, after a few years there, moved into the village itself, living on precarious terms with his neighbors at all times.

¹⁴ Harry MacKay, for instance, was convinced that Mag White , who lived in the village of Campbellton when he was a child, had the power to put "the curse" on people. 2/8/78. Harry MacKay, Campbellton, field note. As a schoolchild in the community, I remember being told by older children that there was a ghost in Mag White's Hollow, not far from the school house.

¹⁵ T55A: 17/1/88. Vance MacKay, Bloomfield.

¹⁶ T55A: 17/1/88. Vance MacKay, Bloomfield.

Whatever diagnosis might be made of Riley's behaviour by modern psychiatry, there is no doubt that he was a disturbed man. Throughout his life, he accused almost everyone he dealt with of attempting to harm him in some way. Perhaps it was this paranoia on Riley's part together with a healthy dose of witchcraft belief present in the cultural tradition which combined to form the mystique which grew up around him. Two things made people fear him. First of all, as just mentioned, he let it be known, through not-very-veiled hints, that he could "put the curse on people." Second , it was and still is generally accepted that he kept some sort of books which he used in his witchcraft.

Riley's mutterings and threats would have been inconsequential had he been ignored. However, the belief system still firmly entrenched in the twenties, thirties and forties did not allow that. The result was that many people feared him to one extent or another. Even those who claimed not to fear him gave him a wide berth. Vance MacKay said, "Jesus, Mrs. Ray Gallant and Ray was terrified of him." When asked if the people of the community in general were afraid of Riley, MacKay responded, "Well, I guess they were. They were terrified."

He put the spell on George Palmer , you know. . . . Oh yes. George Palmer sold him an old horse . . . about the same type as George sold Avard Shaw [a reference to another story regarding a fight over a horse]. . . . The old horse, of course, died and George -- Will had give[n] George, for the horse, about fifteen sheep -- ewes, the whole damn flock he had and they were all damn good sheep, too. He gave him the whole flock for this old horse and he had only had the old horse a very short while and he died

and, of course, he [Riley] slapped the curse on George. . . . And the sheep started to die, and the calves started to die and everything started to die and Jesus, George rushed up with a bottle of jam. . . . someone told him [to do] this. And . . . [they] said, "You better go up to see him and see what he can do for you" [to remove the curse]. George went up with coddles of strawberry jam, raspberry jam, all this for Riley. . . . And of course, Riley [inaudible] threw it all out. And he told George, "I can't do anything about it. It's higher powers."¹⁷

The most widely-known incident involving Riley, witchcraft and horses centered on a row which he had with the Adams family.¹⁸ They were his only neighbors in the wood where he lived. At some point, by all accounts, Riley hired them to haul some wood for him. According to local tradition he accused them of not hauling the full amount. One informant said that Riley had commented : "That's all right. They won't be hauling any more wood with those horses."¹⁹ Shortly after, the team ran away in the binder and injured themselves so badly that they had to be destroyed. Further, Riley continued to curse the Adams's horses. What follows is a field note, written after a conversation with Harry MacKay of Campbellton on June 15, 1983:

Harry felt there was no doubt about Riley cursing Adams's horses. It had started over a dispute which occurred when [the] Adams [boys] had hauled wood for Riley. He claimed that they had cheated him. MacKay

¹⁷ T55A: 17/1/88. Vance MacKay, Bloomfield.

¹⁸ The point must be made that Riley fought with them and not they with him. The Adams family were peaceful, honest folk who would have preferred to have had nothing to do with Riley and his rantings.

¹⁹ 18/1/86. Mary Cousins, Campbellton, field note.

said that Riley had told them [the MacKay family] about it and had given a short laugh saying, "Well, they'll never haul any more wood with those horses anyway." One horse died, one horse ran away with the binder and cut itself so badly that they had to kill it. Harry claimed that for years, [the] Adams [family] couldn't raise a colt. They would put young, healthy horses in the field in spring and they would be dead before fall.²⁰

Another member of the community gave his version of some of the events relating to the cursing of Adams's horses:

Vance MacKay : I remember one spring [when] George [Adams] had a lovely pair of horses. They were coming three years old and [a] damn nice young team. The first thing, they got sick and they both died. Richard [Adams] when he went there , he lost more horses than you could count. And he spent enough money buying horses, you could have bought the Titanic. I remember one year he had. . . two or three beautiful colts there. There was one of them, I suppose about three years old and she was a lovely mare. And she just got so that she couldn't eat and she just faded and faded and faded. And you know what happened? She grew two sets of teeth, a double set of teeth and she starved to death. . . . I remember another one , about the last one they lost, a young mare about four years old. Jesus, you wouldn't see anything better in the exhibition. She had a foal and she just shrivelled up and died, without any cause. And he spent hundreds of dollars in vets coming to see her, all these fellows from O'Leary. They couldn't do a damn thing for her. . . . I remember the time he bought the first stallion, beautiful horse, best horse he ever had. . . . He had them hitched in the team, in the harrows. Just going up the field and he [the stallion] dropped dead.

John Cousins: The Riley curse?

20 15/6/83. Harry MacKay , Campbellton, field note.

V. M : The Riley curse, yeah.²¹

Keith Pratt who, like Harry and Vance MacKay, knew Riley well, told about another incident :

Keith Pratt: Well, it was this way, that Gilbert [Gaudet] bought lumber from Will Riley. . . . And he bought, he was road master, and he bought lumber from Will Riley and he made a bridge and somehow or other, it was a matter of something in the payment. . . . There was some dispute and anyway, Will Riley didn't get as much as he expected. So he said to Gilbert, he said, "You'll lose more than you gained." And, I guess, a day or two later, Gilbert's horse went into [through] a bridge and broke his leg and they had to shoot him.

John Cousins : Yes.

K. P. : And the same with George Palmer. George had a dispute with Riley. And Riley told him he was going to lose more than [he gained]. And George's sheep all died.²²

Another informant told of being asked about Riley by some young people from Toronto who , while visiting the community, had heard stories about him. She told them :

I don't know if the stories are true or not, but one time a man bought wood or lumber from Riley and Riley said he took too much and so he said, "He won't haul any more with those horses." And the next week the man hitched the horses in the mower and went out to cut hay and the horses walked into a bee's nest and run away. They ran

21 T55A: 17/1/88. Vance MacKay, Bloomfield.

22 T72A: 10/7/88. Keith Pratt, Jacksonville, Florida [Bloomfield].

into a wire fence and cut themselves so bad that they had to kill them both. The man was a Frenchman.²³

In spite of her initial statement, it was clear that this informant felt that her story proved to the young people that Riley was not a man to be trifled with.

As mentioned, Riley was not the only person in the community accused of practising witchcraft. Mag White of Campbellton was said to be able to put the curse on people who wronged her. The following story came from Harry MacKay. It is drawn from an untaped narrative, written as it was told in 1983. MacKay's actual words are in quotation marks :

Many people were terrified of Mag White. Pete O'Halloran said that Mag " never walked to O'Halloran's but she was drove home." They were scared of her because she was supposed to be able to put a curse on anyone. Pete recalled one evening she walked into their yard when he was a boy. She was in bad humour. She had gone to Archie MacDonald's and asked him to drive her home. Archie had three beautiful horses but he declined. He said his horses were to go in the binder and needed the rest. She was cross at Archie and Pete's father told her that sure they'd drive her home and that Archie should have taken her. She made some off-handed comment that Archie's horses "wouldn't be able to drive anyone next week." Sure enough, in the morning one of Archie's horses was dead.²⁴

23 30/7/89. Mary Cousins, Campbellton, field note. Some people in the community believed that Riley had special power over bees and wasps. Mrs. Cousins, for instance, told about Riley picking up a bees nest which some children had found. He was supposed to have taken the nest into his house.

24 11/6/83. Harry MacKay, Campbellton, field note.

Tom MacPherson of Dunblane was well known in the community of Dunblane as one who could and would "put the curse on you." One informant told of an incident in Dunblane where MacPherson had asked a neighbor to bring some groceries back from the store. The neighbor went to the store but forgot to get the groceries. On the way home he remembered the favour he was supposed to do but decided that it was too much trouble to return to the store. "Before he got home," the informant said, "his own groceries caught fire and burned in the back of the wagon."²⁵

Lorne Luxton told the following story about MacPherson :

One time Tom got a horse from Ches Woodside. Ches was a blacksmith. Well, anyway, Tom wasn't satisfied with the horse. She wouldn't work out and he went back to Ches. Ches was working in the [blacksmith] shop and Tom was telling him about the horse -- this was wrong and that was wrong. And Ches was working away in the shop and he would say "I see, I see," and Tom got mad and he said to Ches, "You see too damn much." And five minutes after Tom left, Ches was cutting a piece of hot iron and a piece flew and hit him in the eye and he lost the eye.²⁶

An interesting aspect of this so-called cursing of people and/or their horses is the subtlety of the statements attributed to the witch. I have heard of no case where the threat was blatant or overt. According to all informants who mentioned it, Riley usually said something like the following, "Well, they won't haul anything more

25 2/1/1978. Fred Livingstone, Glenwood, field note.

26 7/9/88. Lorne Luxton, Knutsford, field note.

with those horses." Tom MacPherson's expletive "You see too damn much," is the strongest statement I have heard and it was a retort rather than a threat. The pronouncements allegedly made by Mag White and Will Riley are more like predictions. One thinks of the witches who work their evil on Macbeth, not by making threats, but by giving him veiled forecasts of the future. Closer to the point is an incident cited by Smith from England :

As late as 1890 at Sible Hedingham in Essex, an old labourer was accused of bewitching a cartload of hay. His words were to the effect that *the carter would not get far with his load.* [italics mine]. Further along the road the horse fell down and had to be destroyed. . .²⁷

These statements, which eventually prove so malicious, are clothed in innocent language. What is the motivation behind this evasiveness? Is it an attempt by the "witch" to escape blame, to be able to say, in effect, "I didn't really *threaten* you with harm; I only predicted that harm would come to you." Or is it a hedging of bets so that if the 'curse doesn't really work, the witch can say, "I didn't really say anything was going to happen anyway."

The event at Hedingham occurred a century ago whereas the alleged incidents cited from the Island occurred within living memory. The beliefs both implicit and explicit within the narratives still have the power of conviction in them when they are recounted by the older generation on the Island. It seems that the beliefs

²⁷ Smith, 105-106.

involving witchcraft retained as much strength here as they did on the other side of the Atlantic.

Horses could be harmed in a number of ways by people who possessed supernatural powers. More specific than the witches' general forecasts was the use of the evil eye, called "blinking" in some communities.²⁸ Leaving the emic term aside, the belief is certainly not out of joint in a Scottish society one generation removed from the Highlands. Certainly it was known in the nearby Scottish areas of Nova Scotia. Mary Fraser writes in *Folklore of Nova Scotia*:

When a person who had the Evil Eye wished to buy an animal, it was best to let him have it, even at his own price, for otherwise something or other usually would happen to the animal. Mr MacLeod, in Inverness Co., had a very fine horse, for which a man in the neighborhood who coveted the animal, offered a good price. MacLeod refused to sell it at any price. A couple of hours later, the horse was found with its leg broken.²⁹

In Scottish tradition, livestock was particularly susceptible to this form of attack.³⁰ George Dewar told of a case of 'blinking' related to him by his father:

They [the witches] would put a curse on the horse and it would die. And in fact, they had . . . a trial in Georgetown one time . . . I suppose it would be something

²⁸ T55B: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth].

²⁹ Mary L. Fraser, *Folklore of Nova Scotia*, (1932? Halifax: Formac Books, n. d.) 67.

³⁰ Francis Thomson, *Supernatural Highlands* (London : Robert Hale and Company, 1976) 42.

like the witchcraft trials. But they had this fellow up in court in Georgetown for blinking someone's horse on the Baldwin's Road. Yes, the trial actually took place in Georgetown. I remember my father telling of it and I don't know whether he was there. I believe perhaps he was at the trial. But they had the same fellow from the Baldwin's Road and the other judge or one of the lawyers said, "Now, Mr. Baldwin," he said, "Do you honestly, sincerely, believe that there are people on the Baldwin's Road that are practicing witchcraft?" He [Baldwin] said, "Indeed I do. There's a bunch of blinking buggers from one end of the road to the other."³¹

This belief was not totally concerned with livestock, nor for that matter with witches. No one ever claimed, for instance, that all the people on the Baldwin Road were witches. Here, almost anyone with evil intent might put the evil eye on you. Francis Thompson documents the same sort of belief in the Highlands:

the 'evil eye' is one which is animated by a discontented and unhappy mind, full of envy, . . . covetousness. . . and similar feelings which it conveys to the objects it sees, to injure them in the process. The objects can include an animal, a person or a possession of another.³²

In *The Supernatural Highlands*, Thompson also documents a cure used to combat the effects of the evil eye. Water was taken from a stream "where the living and dead pass alike":

On returning a wife's gold ring, a piece of gold, of silver and of copper were put into the ladle. The sign of the

³¹ T65A: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth]. I can find no evidence of the witchcraft trail which Dewar mentions.

³² Thompson, *Supernatural Highlands* 42.

cross was then made and a rhyme repeated in a slow recitative manner, the name of the person or animal under treatment being mentioned towards the end. In the case of an animal, a woollen thread generally of the natural colour of the sheep, was tied round the tail. The consecrated water was then given as a draught, and sprinkled over the head and backbone.³³

It is easy to see that the above is the source of a similar Island belief. Here is Sir Andrew MacPhail's account of his grandmother, Mary MacPherson, who had come directly from the Highlands to the Island. The old lady

was quite familiar with the best practice of exorcism. A piece of silver was put into a white bowl, and the bowl allowed to fill from a running spring. The vessel was turned slowly, and "suitable words" were spoken, until the contents were poured over the afflicted animal. A threepenny bit of silver was used; it was the smallest silver coin, and the exorciser always retained it as a fee for the service.³⁴

The belief in the "evil eye," or more specifically accounts of it, continues to exist, particularly in Scottish areas such as West Point and Dunblane. As remarked earlier, an informant from nearby West Cape noted that "if anyone went by the Stewarts [a family from West Point] and looked in at them, they were scared he was putting the curse on them."³⁵ Though the phrase "the evil eye" is still used, it is commonly utilized to describe in a humorous way someone who

33 Thompson, *Supernatural Highlands* 52.

34 MacPhail 55.

35 17/6/89. Wilbur MacWilliams, West Cape, field note.

stares in anger, as in "She put the evil eye on me." However, the belief does not have the wide currency as that in witches generally.

Until now, we have, for the most part, focussed our discussions on witches and their behaviour as it affected horses and a short recapitulation is necessary. It should be noted, for instance, that we have been discussing real identifiable people whose behaviour was alleged to affect others in two main ways : by harming the people themselves or by harming precious livestock. These characteristics fall well within the description of witches and witch behaviour in the folk belief system of the British Isles and, more specifically, of Scotland.

The preventatives for the sort of harm which witches might do were relatively few. We have mentioned direct, positive action in the case of the "evil eye." This was in MacPhail's day, in the nineteenth century. There is little evidence of ritual of this kind in recent decades. It was always easier, as MacPhail noted, "to avoid a spell than to remove it once it was cast."³⁶ As the strength of the belief waned, therefore, we find that placation of the witch was the chief method of allaying any harm he or she might do. Great care was taken not to give offence. The O'Halloran family's fear of Mag White led them to drive her home every time she visited them. She did not have to ask. In the same way, people in the community, believing themselves to be cursed by Will Riley attempted to "buy

³⁶ MacPhail 78.

him off." As previously noted, Vance MacKay related how Riley had cursed George Palmer's animals, and how Palmer, in a panic, had presented Riley with bottles of jam which Riley had promptly thrown away.³⁷

And, according to Wilbur MacWilliams, Leo Harts had been appeased with a quarter of beef.³⁸ In the everyday round of life, those who feared the power of the witch simply took care not to give offence.

Belief in witches and the behaviour associated with it was perhaps the most striking of the superstitions held by this culture. There were other aspects of belief, however, which fall into a no-man's land, occupied by both witches and fairies. This middle ground is interesting because it represents a transition from beings who were actually human beings, i. e., witches, to fairies, who were definitely otherworldly. In this middle ground we find, at times, the same traits and powers attributed to both witches and fairies.³⁹ Why the same acts would be attributed to both is difficult to say but the same phenomenon is apparent in folk traditions throughout the British Isles.

Gillian Bennett, for instance, explores the close connection between witches and ghosts in sixteenth and seventeenth century

³⁷ T55A: 17/1/88. Vance MacKay, Bloomfield. It is not surprising that Riley would throw the jam away. One of his main charges against his neighbours, especially the local storekeeper, was that they were trying to poison him.

³⁸ 17/6/89. Wilbur MacWilliams, West Cape, field note.

³⁹ MacPhail 56. MacPhail said that his grandmother found it difficult to explain the distinction between a fairy and a witch.

England. She points out that in the British folk belief system, ghosts and witches were so closely allied in peoples' perceptions that "they constituted a single subject."⁴⁰ She further notes that though folklorists are aware of the connection they tend to separate the two for "convenience sake." This separation does not correspond to the reality of the situation because, in fact, these beings often did the same mischievous acts:

Witches, imps and ghosts were all responsible for twitching bedclothes off the insomniac, buffeting the sceptical, and causing madness. Both imps and witches could turn the heads of cattle awry.⁴¹

Though unfortunately she does not explain why this may be so, she notes that "in the early modern period . . . the distinction between classes of supernatural creature seems to have been particularly hard to maintain."⁴²

Somewhat closer to the point are the observations of J. A. MacCulloch who examined the same phenomenon in sixteenth and seventeenth century Scotland. Analyzing the evidence he finds numerous similarities between witches and fairies:

The supernatural powers possessed by both are the same --invisibility and shape-shifting, as well as that of taking the substance of food-stuffs from their rightful owners. . . the essence of milk or corn or of an animal. Both steal

40 Bennett, 3.

41 Bennett 4.

42 Bennett 4.

children or exchange them for their own kind, and both are apt to extract the soul or heart of a man leaving him with none. . . . Both do serious injury to horse or cattle, riding them by night to exhaustion, twisting their manes or tails, or shooting at them with a deadly invisible arrow. . . .⁴³

I would hesitate to connect witches and fairies as closely as MacCulloch, sixteenth century Scotland being far removed in time and space from twentieth century PEI. Nevertheless, the parallels are there in Island folk belief. For instance, both witches and fairies were accused of molesting horses at night by riding them and/or tangling their manes. Forms of this belief pre-date Christianity. Beryl Rowland writes :

Since primitive times, female night-fiends have ridden on horses, become horses, and acquired masculine characteristics. Petronius, in the time of Nero, believed in them and throughout the early Christian era they were the subject of innumerable clerical denunciations. Witches, flying to the Black Sabbath to have intercourse with the Devil were said to mount a broomstick, a token form of the horse, or the Devil himself in the form of either a horse or a he goat.⁴⁴

Leaving the pre-Christian era aside, it is apparent that the more immediate source of these beliefs is the British Isles. The origins lie, for the most part, in Scots and Irish folk traditions. In the North East of Scotland, J. M. MacPherson writes, "It was believed that, seated upon a horse, a witch might cover vast tracts of country

43 MacCulloch 228-229.

44 Rowland. *Animals* 106.

during the night."⁴⁵ It is also possible that folk traditions from the West Country may have contributed to this particular tradition. Pioneers from Devon, it will be remembered, had a strong presence in the Bideford-Port Hill-Tyne Valley area of West Prince. They brought their place names and their folk traditions with them. Of the West Country, Howey writes :

The Piskies or pixies of Devon and Cornwall are greatly interested by mortal horses, and though they have been described as "invisibly small" yet they do delight in riding the farmers' horses on dark nights, and in plaiting their manes, . . . into inextricable knots.⁴⁶

This belief, then, which could have come from almost anywhere in the British Isles, was common here and still exists. MacPhail mentioned horses that were found in a sweat "with tangled mane, where a witch might well have clung during her nightly ride."⁴⁷

Sidney Frost from Enmore told the following story :

Mrs. MacArthur, Aunt Mary, she was great for ghost stories, old Scottish superstitious stories and . . . she used to tell us about the witches and how they would put a spell on the cows and the cows would stop giving milk. And one man had a horse that was always tired. And he wasn't using the horse but when he'd go to the barn in the morning the horse would be all sweated and played out and people used to see this horseback rider travelling

⁴⁵ J. M. MacPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929) 157.

⁴⁶ Howey, 174.

⁴⁷ MacPhail 55-56.

around the country and found out that it was a witch riding this horse.⁴⁸

Though Island folk belief held that fairies and witches sometimes perpetrated the same mischief, there were clear distinctions between the two. To begin with, fairies were clearly nocturnal and witches were not necessarily so. Secondly, witches had many spheres of influence besides the harming of horses, whereas, in the belief system as it presently exists, fairies do little else but bother horses. In fact, this seems to be the last bailiwick of the fairy on the Island. One hears little about them in any other capacity. The large number of beliefs related to fairies which once existed throughout the Western world seems to have lost strength. Only in Newfoundland is fairy lore found in depth.⁴⁹ In Island folk belief, fairies were simply not taken as seriously as witches.

Though they were not feared as much as witches, fairies were said to bother horses in a number of ways. The chief complaint against them was that they came to the barns and tangled and knotted the manes of horses in the night. The historical-geographical aspects of this belief are fascinating and cover much more space than can be devoted to it here. It is international⁵⁰ and, in all probability, its Island roots spring from British folk traditions. Shakespeare, for

48 T76A: 3/6/87. Sidney Frost to Susan Frost, *Harmony, Westisle Collection*.

49 For an in-depth discussion on fairy lore in Newfoundland, see the forthcoming Ph.D thesis for Memorial University of Newfoundland by Barbara Rieti: "Newfoundland Fairy Traditions: A Study in Narrative and Belief."

50 See Bergen 82.

instance, expressing the common superstition of his day, notes this trait of fairies when he has Mercutio describe the fairy queen:

This is that very Mab,
That plats the manes of horses in the night.⁵¹

Not surprisingly, this belief was common throughout much of the Island. Jerry Richard, though reluctant to speak freely about the subject, said:

I've seen the horses' manes all platted and was told that that's the way it was done. It was nothing new at that time, and . . . [the older people] wouldn't like having inquiries, you know.⁵²

Fairy lore was strong, not only among the Scots and Irish, but also among the Acadians who may have retained an independent strain of it from their own folk traditions which stretch back to seventeenth century Normandy and Brittany. Mrs. Bradley Gaudet of Tignish told her grandson, Reg Porter that

when she was young , her family kept horses and often she would find their manes braided and these braids further tied together at the end[s]. These were found in the area of the ears like two handles on each side. The

⁵¹ *Romeo and Juliet* I. iv 88-89.

⁵² T57A: 6/2/88. Jerry Richard, St. Lawrence. Shakespeare's word "plat" (rhymes with mat) is still used here to describe the action by fairies. The more modern-sounding "plait," with its long "a," is not used, at least not to describe the braiding of horses' manes. The use of anachronistic words to describe anachronistic acts is interesting. In Chapter One we noted the use of the word "brad" used to describe a goad for driving oxen. I have not heard that word used in any other context.

explanation then was that during the night fairies used to ride the horses and so had grips to lead [i. e. drive] them. This was often seen on horses that had spent the night in pasture and it's when they were fetched in the morning that these braided tresses were to be found.⁵³

Connected with this belief was the conviction that to untangle the fairies' work would give offence and bring more malevolent action from them. This idea, too, has a long history. Shakespeare refers to it, noting that fairies create "elf-locks [braids in the horse's mane] in foul sluttish hairs." And if these are untangled, "much misfortune bodes."⁵⁴ This was a part of fairy lore here well within living memory. George MacKay, a definite sceptic regarding fairies, told of an incident which had happened when he was about 14 years old. He was visiting "Red Joe" MacDonald, who was a firm believer in the powers of the little people. George knew this, and, wanting to tease the old man undertook to comb the knots out of Joe's mare's mane. "Joe flew at me and said,' Stop that , you God-damned fool or I'll drive this [pitch] fork through you.'"⁵⁵

Fairies, like witches, turned humans into horses and rode them. Tom Dunn, of Lot Seven, told of being ridden to the point of exhaustion by fairies who drove him around the countryside at

⁵³ This information, in the form of a field note, was given to me (18/7/86) by Mr. Porter, Charlottetown, who wrote it down approximately thirty years previously.

⁵⁴ *Romeo and Juliet* I. iv 88-91.

⁵⁵ 19/6/88. George MacKay, Bloomfield, field note.

night.⁵⁶ This belief, like most of the others, was international in scope. There are numerous accounts from Scotland and Ireland in particular. In *Lorna Doone*, Richard D. Blackmore has his West Country hero, John Ridd, say of a difficult horse, "there were rumors abroad that she was not a mare after all, but a witch."⁵⁷

The folk beliefs of the area show a certain ambivalence toward both witches and fairies. Good witches were not unknown. One man told of being cured of a toothache as a child by an old woman who lived in the same fishing cove. She was poor and the informant's mother sent him with a bottle of milk to give to the old lady. When he got there, he was crying with the toothache, and the woman, Margaret "Weasel," asked him what was wrong. When he told her, "She put her hand on my face and she said, 'There, there, Dear, it won't ache any more.'" This informant, who died at 86, claimed never to have had a toothache after that. "Margaret Weasel put a charm on my teeth," he said.⁵⁸ Even fairies, within their sphere of influence, might be helpful. One man from Egmont Bay wrote :

A horse at night would rub its mane against a fence. The tangled hair formed a sort of a stirrup and the man of the

⁵⁶ 19/6/88. George MacKay, Bloomfield, field note. In Scottish tradition, witches could actually turn people into horses. Howey points out that the last execution for witchcraft was a case where a witch had allegedly turned her daughter into a pony, and further, had made pact with the devil to shoe it. See Howey 173-174.

⁵⁷ Blackmore 37.

⁵⁸ 20/6/88. Elbridge Cousins, Campbellton, field note. Margaret "Weasel" was married to "Weasel John" MacDonald. The word "charm" is used in Devon and elsewhere to describe the work of good witches. See Theo Brown, "Charming in Devon," *Folklore* 81 (1970) : 37-47.

farm would notice it in the morning and say that the Elfs [sic] had been visiting the horse. [If] this horse happened to be the best in the stable, and [then?] of course it would be fat and slick because the Elfs [sic] fed it oats after their ride (italics mine).⁵⁹

On the Island, during the early part of the century, witchcraft and fairy beliefs continued to attach themselves strongly to horses. Even today, they continue to be widely held, though their strength is waning. But they were not, by far, the only beliefs relating to horses. Along with them, we find numerous other commonly held opinions regarded as having veracity.

A pervasive theme found in belief about horses is that of the horse as helper. It may be remembered that we have already discussed this topic in non-belief narratives. In Chapters Three and Four, for instance, we noted accounts of horses' willingness to work, their self-discipline, and their toughness and speed. One of the most common beliefs carried in these narratives is the unshakeable conviction that horses have a homing instinct bordering on the miraculous. Informants recounted testimony of how horses saved man, wife and child from danger in storm, on river ice and in forest on countless occasions. Recalling how he had been caught in a blizzard with his wife and two kids, Leon Woodside said, "You couldn't see. If you opened your eyes to see what [the mare] was doing, you couldn't tell where she was. . . . I never tightened the reins on her. She took me home. They'll make it every time."⁶⁰ Both

59 A[ubin] E[dmond] Arsenault, *Memoirs of The Hon. A. E. Arsenault* (Charlottetown: n. p., [1925?]) 8.

60 T52A: 8/1/88. Leon Woodside, Mount Royal.

Jerry Richard and Elbridge Cousins told me the same story of Richard's blind odyssey in a storm on "a little mare" to fetch a doctor for a boy who fell sick in the lumbercamp where they were working. "The horse will take you out," Jerry said.⁶¹ Cousins put it this way: "A horse will always go back to his hovel."⁶² Bert Thomson recounted a story about a man lost in a storm who made a mistake and tried to get his horse to turn the wrong way and of the horse's refusing to go.⁶³ This belief, present in so many of the memorates, often borders on the irrational.

But the horse also appears as helper in a supernatural sense. Stith Thompson remarks about the horses' central role in folktale :

Of all helpful animals, none has been so popular with taletellers as the horse. In not fewer than five well-known folk stories he plays a role almost as important as the hero.⁶⁴

In the agrarian culture of Prince Edward Island, with its constant pre-occupations with life , safety and livelihood, the role of the horse in legend is as important as it is in European folktale. Horses helped men in many ways. They could foretell weather for instance. A common dite in Campbellton, the writer's village, went: "The horse

⁶¹ T57A: 6/2/88. Jerry Richards, St. Lawrence.

⁶² T24B: 14/8/85. Elbridge Cousins, Campbellton.

⁶³ T25A: 8/8/1985. Bert Thomson, Roseville.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *The Folktale* 59.

rolled when it came out of the barn, so it will rain."⁶⁵ Horses often rolled, of course, after their harness was taken off. George Dewar recalled the same belief from his boyhood in New Perth: "My mother . . . watched the horses rolling a lot and I knew it was a sign of something. Probably it was. We were going to have rain."⁶⁶ Although many of the beliefs are waning, the foregoing one remains strong, even today. Older people and young ones believe, as this high school student wrote, that, "If a horse rolls over on his back, it is sure to rain."⁶⁷

The horse's role in warning of bad news and/or danger was even more important and belief in it is still strongly held. One high school student wrote recently, "If you hear a horse galloping by, bad news is coming to you."⁶⁸ Another stated, "If a horse looks in a window [of your house] it means there will be a death in the family."⁶⁹ The other aspect of this "warning" belief concerns a horse's ability to sense a malevolent presence. Again, the British Isles is the most apparent source for this widely held view. From Ireland, Daithi O'Hogain cites an informant who said that "Any type of horse can sense

⁶⁵ I heard this as a child of eight or nine and have heard it many times since. It was a saying that was not taken particularly seriously. It was an agricultural statement in an area where many beliefs about the weather came from the fishermen." Red sky in the morning/ Sailors take warning" carried more weight.

⁶⁶ T65B: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth].

⁶⁷ 15/3/88. Kelly Dunn. Folklore Survey Card. The informant indicated that her mother had been told this by the informant's grandfather.

⁶⁸ 10/1/89. Julie Desroches. Folklore Survey Card.

⁶⁹ 12/5/89. Scot Wells. Folklore Survey Card.

a thing such as a ghost or a spirit within fifty yards of him."⁷⁰ From Scots tradition comes this testimony: "Horses were known to Martin which had panicked and reared up when they saw sights unseen by ordinary men."⁷¹ Christina Hole cites an example from recent (1926) Scottish tradition:

Alexander Polson relates how on one occasion he saw a carter's horse refuse to go by a gate, although there was apparently nothing alarming there. The carter had to lead it past, while it showed every sign of fear and, once beyond the opening, could only be restrained with difficulty from bolting. A few days later, a corpse was carried through the gate on the way to the funeral.⁷²

Witches, of course, could not cross running water and there are numerous stories regarding the strange behaviour of horses near bridges and streams. Joseph Bulger from the Irish community of Foxley River in Lot Eleven said of a bridge where he lived: "That bridge was supposed to be haunted. The horses would come up to it at night and stop. They could hear something."⁷³ Coming from a related culture are the folk beliefs of Robert Burns, a formidable bearer of Scots tradition. In "Tam O' Shanter," he tells of the escape from the witches of Tam and his mare Maggie :

⁷⁰ Daithi O Hogain, "An Capall," *Bealoideas* 45-47 (1977-79) : 200.

⁷¹ Anne Ross, *The Folklore of the Scottish Highlands* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976) 43.

⁷² Hole 194.

⁷³ 8/7/88. Joseph Bulger, Foxley River, field note.

Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
 And win the key-stane of the brig;
 There at them thou thy tail may toss,
 A running stream they dare na cross.⁷⁴

As can be seen from the previous references from Scotland and the Island there are found in belief narratives about horses the common elements of horses, malevolent beings, bridges and hence running water. These motifs are very much a part of international folklore.⁷⁵

Horses warned of impending disaster by their behaviour. The following accounts of danger warnings from horses are worth examining, not only in their own right, but also for their similarity in theme and motif. We turn first to Shakespeare where we find a narrative which is especially interesting because of beliefs carried within it. In *Macbeth*, the noble Ross and an old man discuss the fact that King Duncan's horses warned of his impending death by their strange behaviour. Ross mentions, along with signs in the heavens, the strange actions of the horses:

Ross: And Duncan's horses-- a thing most strange and certain--
 Beauteous and swift , the minions of their race,
 Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
 Contending 'gainst obedience , as they would make
 War with mankind,
 Old Man : 'Tis said they eat each other.

⁷⁴ James Kinsley, ed, *Robert Burns : Poems and Songs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) 448.

⁷⁵ Thompson, *Motif-Index* Motifs E272.1, E421.4.2, G303.9.9.15, G273.4.1, J21.7, B63.1.1.

Ross : They did so , to the amazement of mine eyes
 That look'd upon't.⁷⁶

Transferred to a different culture, horses foretell, not danger to kings, but danger to farmers. One teenage informant wrote :

My two great-uncles, Everett and Clifford Cahill remember one time they were going home from playing cards at my grandfather's house, Parnell Cahill. As they were going home they always went across Foley's Pond because it was winter and it was the shortest way to get home. As they got to the pond there was a big bright light and the horse wouldn't cross the pond so they had to go all the way around [the pond] to get home. The next day they came back to see what had happened and they found out that the pond had thawed and that if they would have crossed they probably would have drown[ed]. They don't know why the horse wouldn't cross the pond. It was like she knew. Clifford still swears to this.⁷⁷

The parallels between the narrative motifs in Shakespeare's story and the Kildare (West Prince) farmer's account are interesting. We have, first of all, the danger warnings. In *Macbeth* it is the troubled heavens and the strange behaviour of Duncan's horses. In the case of the Cahills, the heavenly omens are there (the "big bright light"). So is the out-of character behaviour of the horse: "The mare wouldn't cross the pond." Both Duncan's horses and the Cahill mare "contended 'gainst obedience." The motif of the strangely-behaving horse is quite common and in virtually all cases it signals impending danger. In both cases, the "informant's" testimony includes an

⁷⁶ *Macbeth* II. iv 14-19.

⁷⁷ 17/3/88. Nancy Cahill. Folklore Survey Card.

emphatic statement intended to drive home the veracity of the narrative: "They did so to the amazement of mine eyes that looked upon it," and "Clifford still swears to this."

Actual visions of horses themselves are widely believed to be omens of dire happenings. Phantom funerals accompanied by horses are very much a part of folklore in Western Europe, particularly Brittany and Scotland.⁷⁸ On the Island, Milton Furness told this story about an experience which his father had:

Thomas Furness was driving his horse on the [river] ice once when he stopped the animal and kept him standing for several minutes. When a companion asked why he was stopping, Mr. Furness said that he was meeting a double funeral. Of course the companion couldn't see any funeral, but several days later Mr. Furness did meet the funeral procession and it was a double one -- there were two hearse sleighs as he had seen in the forerunner.⁷⁹

Certain sounds associated with horses are considered to be portents of death, especially if they are heard at night. This belief is still widely held. One student wrote that her grandmother told her: "If you hear a horse galloping by at night, then that is supposed to mean that there will be a death." One informant mentioned that the night his grandmother died, the family heard the sound of a horse going by the house although there was no horse handy.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ C. I. N. MacLeod, *Highland Scottish Folklore and Beliefs* (Antigonish, Nova Scotia: Formac Books, 1975) 37.

⁷⁹ Sterling Ramsay, *Folklore: Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown: Square Deal Publications, [c. 1975]) 9.

⁸⁰ 16/10/88. David Herlihy, Hebron, field note.

George Dewar remembered hearing stories about

a team of horses or a horse and carriage or a funeral, horses going the road before the fellow had died. Some of them maybe a forerunner. I remember my grandmother saying about so and so before he [?] died that they heard the funeral going down the road the day before. They could hear the horse up on the road going down to the funeral⁸¹

There were other beliefs, many of them expressed in the form of dites, which remain strong. One, already mentioned, stated that horses have the power to forecast weather. "If a horse rolls when you let him out of the barn, it will rain."⁸² Others have to do with the handling of horses or managing of horses. Horses could be cured of balking, according a widely-held belief, by biting them on the ears.⁸³ Fanny Bergen recorded this belief in Vermont.⁸⁴ Slitting the ears of a horse was also believed to be a cure for balkiness. Mutilated ears on a horse were also a warning to prospective buyers. Donald MacKay told the story of a horse trader who had driven into his yard with "a lovely Percheron mare." She was such a lovely animal that he bought her, "and I never noticed that her ears were split. They used to do that, you know to make them go. They thought it would when

⁸¹ T65A: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth]. See also Ramsay 5-6.

⁸² See footnote 65.

⁸³ 18/7/87. Bert Thomson, Roseville, field note.

⁸⁴ Bergen, 22. Bergen also wrote (p.82), apparently without giving it much thought, that one way to stop a runaway horse was to bite its ears. This would be an act to be approached with trepidation. See Bergen 82.

they balked." ⁸⁵ It is quite possible that the physical torture of having the ears split *would* make a balky horse move.

Folk beliefs relating to white horses have been recorded among Indo-European peoples for thousands of years. The ancestor of the domestic horse, in fact, turned white in winter. There is fairly good evidence that white horses were sacrificed in religious rituals in prehistoric Europe.⁸⁶ The Bible legitimizes the belief that white horses bode ill in the oft-repeated verse in Revelations (Ch. 6, Verse 8): "And I looked, and behold a pale horse and his name that sat upon him was Death, and Hell followed with him." This long line of folk tradition extending to ancient times may explain why horse coloration is such a prominent part of tradition in agricultural societies well into this century. Seeing a white horse presaged bad luck or even death. Here on the Island, one informant told of a woman who lived in St. Louis, Lot Two, who

happened to look out her window. She saw a little white casket being hauled by white horses coming towards her house. She followed this mirage right into her living room, and then everything [horses and casket] disappeared. The next morning the woman's young daughter was dead.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ 28/8/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington, [Breadalbane], field note.

⁸⁶ J. P. Mallory, "The Ritual Treatment of the Horse in the Early Kurgan Tradition," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 9-10 (1981-82) : 217-218.

⁸⁷ 9/1/87. Sheila McCue, "Folklore," Research Paper 11-12. *Westisle Collection*.

White markings on the feet or nose were also believed to be bad luck or, at the very least, the sign of a bad or worthless horse. The fear of owning an unlucky animal led breeders to indicate that their horse did not have the bad luck color as in this advertisement from the *Royal Gazette* in 1835 :

The entire Horse **Revenge**, from Nova Scotia will attend. . . He is 16 hands high, with the power and substance of a wagon-horse, *without white* [italics mine].⁸⁸

The stigma attached to the white horse focussed, in part, on the feet, as though their color symbolized the color of the whole horse. A rhyme collected from nineteenth century Scottish tradition by Walter Gregor sums it up:

If he has one white foot try [buy] him.
 If he has two white feet, you may try him.
 If he has three white feet look shy at him.
 But if he has four, go by him.⁸⁹

Gregor collected several variants of this rhyme in Scotland and there are many in the folk traditions of Prince Edward Island. One of the most common goes as follows:

One white foot buy him.
 Two white feet try him.
 Four white feet and a white nose,
 Cut off his head and feed him to the crows.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ *Royal Gazette* 14 April 1835: 3.

⁸⁹ Walter Gregor, "The Horse in Scottish Folk-Lore" 60.

⁹⁰ 28/10/88. Mary Cousins, Campbellton, field note.

A variant collected here has, as its third line, "Four white feet and a mealie nose." The word "mealie" sounds Scottish. Donald MacKay, who recited it for me, thought it referred to "the Clydes" as he called the Clydesdales.⁹¹ Many of them had white noses. Venetia Newall collected the following version from Devon:

If you have a horse with four white legs,
Keep him not a day.
If you have a horse with three white legs,
Send him far away.
If you have a horse with two white legs,
Sell him to a friend.
If you have a horse with one white leg,
Keep him to his end.⁹²

Christina Hole, in her *Encyclopedia of Superstition*, implies that the belief is restricted to Devon,⁹³ but the evidence which we have examined suggests that it is much more widely spread than that. Tracing just the roots of the rhyme could be a daunting task. It is known in the West Country of England, in Scotland and throughout much of North America.⁹⁴ Its geographical spread alone is evidence of the power of the belief that white horses are bad luck.

⁹¹ 14/7/88. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane], field note.

⁹² Venetia Newall, *Discovering the Folklore of Birds and Beasts* (Tring, Herts.: Shire Publications, 1971) 38-39.

⁹³ Hole 193.

⁹⁴ Bergen 28.

If white horses are "bad," then there are other types which are believed to be good. As we have noted, rhyme, like legend, often serves as a vehicle to carry belief. In the following case a rhyme, wide-spread on the Island, carries the common notion that flatulence is the sign of a good horse and, indeed, a good man. This piece of folk poetry is also well-known in Ontario.⁹⁵ Carried in rhyme, it goes :

A farting horse will never tire;
A farting man is the man to hire.⁹⁶

Another variant went :

A farting man is the man to hire;
A farting mare is the one so buy her.⁹⁷

Finally, there is the horseshoe, still a powerful symbol of good luck particularly but not exclusively in rural society in the Anglo-American culture. "Virtually everyone kept horses," George MacKay said, "and virtually everyone kept a horseshoe nailed over the barn door, and even over the kitchen door."⁹⁸ It is probable that one sees more good-luck horseshoes displayed on the Island than anywhere else in Canada. It is still nailed on doors, usually of barns. It also

⁹⁵ Anderson 86.

⁹⁶ See page 177. This was a very common rhyme amongst school children when I was growing up. I first learned it from Robert Ramsay, a boy younger than myself, when I was about nine years old.(1954). Bert Thomson recited it for me in the summer of 1987.

⁹⁷ See page 178.

⁹⁸ 9/3/86. George MacKay, Bloomfield, field note.

hangs, not on doors of houses, but on inside walls particularly of farm kitchens. If attention is drawn to the shoe, most people will point out the significance of the open end pointing up: "so the luck can't run out." Initially, these were hung in barns "to guard . . . stock from witchcraft and, in the case of horses, from 'hag riding' at night by fairies or demons."⁹⁹ Their use now, as it is throughout the whole culture, is to bring good luck or keep away bad luck. The horse shoe, the variety of pictures of horses hung in houses, and the folk art figures of horses (mostly draft horses) are still evidence of the strong, positive feeling towards these special animals.

In Chapter Three we referred to the transmission, within families, of traditional beliefs relating to horses. Much traditional custom and belief was passed on to children through the pattern of everyday life on farms. But transmission of folk belief, in the case of pioneer societies especially, is less simple than it appears at first glance. Unquestionably, people wrenched from a way of life which had remained relatively stable over centuries clung even more fiercely to parts of their culture which provided links with the past. The Irish in isolated settlements remained securely attached to their homeland for decades after they had arrived on the Island.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Reverend James MacGregor, who travelled throughout the Island and Nova Scotia in the seventeen nineties, comments that

⁹⁹ Hole 199. Hole notes [same page] that in Somerset, "No good results could be expected unless the horns [of the shoe] were upwards."

¹⁰⁰ As late as 1841, the Irish of Lot Seven who had settled there two decades previously, were still sending money to Ireland to support various causes. See the *Palladium* [Charlottetown] 2 May 1844; 7

Scots of both religions spent too much time discussing the past, telling "absurd tales about ghosts, witches, fairies, etc." He adds :

The minds of the Protestant Highlanders, being partly tinctured with these superstitions before the arrival of the Roman Catholics, were less prepared to resist their influence than the minds of more reasoning and sceptical Christians. They had been pretty much weaned from the remains which the first settlers brought from Scotland, but we have not got wholly over these bad lessons.¹⁰¹

To a large extent, the passing on of tradition was carried on within the family or the extended family. Evidence suggests that transmission took place when parents who had been enculturated in one of the "Mother Countries" passed the non-institutionalized aspects of their way of life to children born on the Island. But in pioneer immigrant culture there were complications. Language, it should be remembered, is the chief determinant of culture and the language was changing. The children learned English, though in the case of the Highland Scots especially the older people often kept the Gaelic. Sir Andrew Macphail, born in 1864, described the situation in his village of Orwell when he was growing up:

The language of the community was Gaelic. Many of the old people spoke no other; all the young "had the English," but they spoke it with a peculiar accent, tone, and expression. English was considered to be merely a translation from the Gaelic, and the wonder was, since it

101 Cited by D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto: Carleton Library, 1974) 41.

was thought necessary to translate it at all, why the work should have been so badly done.¹⁰²

The stories, the legends, indeed the oral traditions in general, were passed in Gaelic from the older generation to a new generation whose first language would soon be English. Given the perils of transition from one language and culture to another, it is not surprising that much oral tradition, including many of the old beliefs, weakened. However, major aspects did survive, to be passed into the new language with their contents, belief and narrative, true to tradition. MacPhail recounted the following story told, in Gaelic, by his grandmother. It is, of course, a remarkably complete version of the famous "Witch of Laggan" legend of the Scots Highlands.¹⁰³ MacPhail's account goes as follows:

Of these [tales she told] the most specific was the account of the Witch-woman of the Cairngorm Hills. She had taken the form of a gigantic cat and attempted the life of a hunter. By some contrary magic he gave her a mortal wound. She fled home to her cottage and, resuming her natural form, died in the presence of her neighbours. At the hour of her death, a shepherd was walking from Dalarossie, where there is a church-yard so holy that all magic and witchcraft lose their power. A woman passed him running for refuge. She was desperately wounded in the back and breast. Following her was a black man on a black horse, riding hard with two black hounds in full cry. Before long the shepherd was overtaken by the same crew; but now the black man carried the body of the woman across his saddle-bow with the dogs clinging by their teeth. The soul of the witch had sought

102 MacPhail 87.

103 Thompson, *The Supernatural Highlands* 37.

sanctuary in the sacred enclosure but was overtaken and carried off to its own place. For children, these were rich stories¹⁰⁴

The "Witch of Laggan" is not found in oral tradition today in Prince Edward Island. It was part of MacPhail's traditions, but not of ours. We know it only because he wrote an account of it in the nineteen twenties. The rough passage from Gaelic to English, the loss of specific place, and the passage of time had proved too much for this fascinating bit of Scottish folk tradition.

But, stories, anecdotes and legends, many of them carrying belief, did survive the transition. Sometimes, an individual would pass along such tradition in song or narrative that not only the family but the whole community would benefit from its transmission. The case of Thomas Dunn of Lot Seven is illustrative of this phenomenon. Tom Dunn came from southwest Ireland, probably Kerry, around 1830 and died, poor, in the 1880's. The large number of narratives which he left are still a part of living folk tradition in the area. These have survived the passage from one continent and one language to another. They have also survived a century and a half on this side of the Atlantic. The following is one of his best known:

Tom told the story of a mowing match he had with the Devil. They were mowing with scythes, of course, and Tom was afraid that the Devil would beat him. Sure enough, when they started to mow, the Devil started to get ahead. Tom had a trick up his sleeve. He took harrow teeth and planted them in the grain where the Devil was mowing. The Devil would hit the harrow teeth with his

scythe and dull it and he would get mad. He would say "Sharp , Sharp, More Sharp." and Tom would reply, "Everybody sharp for himself."¹⁰⁵

The story, is, of course, a folktale which has an international spread. It is a variant of Aarne-Thompson Tale Type 1090.¹⁰⁶ O'Sulleabhairn's and Christiansen's research into the Irish folktale shows that it remains strong in oral tradition throughout that country.¹⁰⁷

The exchange between Tom and the Devil is interesting. Though the writer heard the story as a child, and many times since, I was never able to see the real "fun" in Tom's answer. Yet, the elders in the community would repeat the story as a joke, laughing each time it was told. A remark in 1984 by David Buchan may explain why the humour is not apparent to us. He noted that the story in its original form would have been told in another language (i.e., Irish Gaelic). Thus we miss the nuance which makes story funny. What we are getting, really, is a translation from the Irish Gaelic which has survived for over a century and a half in Prince Edward Island. The survival of folk traditions, particularly belief as opposed to custom, is remarkable when the problem of language is taken into account.

¹⁰⁵ 2/6/88. Mary Cousins, Campbellton, field note. This was one of many tellings.

¹⁰⁶ Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale : A Classification and Bibliography* (Helsinki: FF Communication, 1961) Tale Type 1090.

¹⁰⁷ Sean O'Sullivan and Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Types of the Irish Folktale* , FFC 188. (Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran julkaisuja 1967) See especially 162-3 and 212-13.

The foregoing obstructions were only part of the forces which contended against the survival of traditional beliefs. We noted in an earlier chapter that certain traditions, customs, and attitudes relating to horses were encouraged by official organs of culture which included the school system and the media. This may help explain why some of them survived and prospered within Island folk culture. Communal knowledge of horses, their genealogy, and their folk cures were nurtured and recirculated in the form of memorate and anecdote. In the case of traditional belief, however, it was a different matter. Folk beliefs about witches and fairies causing mischief or death to horses, for instance, were directly attacked by the media, the church , and the educational system. Large doses of education were considered to be the chief remedy for what the *Islander* newspaper attacked as "uncharitable superstition." The *Islander* was only doing its job as one of the three opposition forces when it invoked the assistance of the other two:

If the Schoolmaster were supported as he ought to be, the belief in witchcraft would soon be eradicated, root and branch; but in the meantime it is surely the duty of the clergy to disabuse the minds of the people on that score. The belief in the Devil milking cows -- or in old women turning themselves into cats or horses for the first dog to worry--or in riding through the air on a broomstick . . . is a relic of the heathenish superstition descended to us from our Pagan and Druidical ancestors.¹⁰⁸

The forces contending against the transmission of the traditional beliefs we have been discussing were formidable. However it is fair

to say that beliefs relating to horses proved to have surprising tenacity over a long period of time. Perhaps this was because the horse was so important to all aspects of life in this society.

In terms of function, much of the lore relating to horses was strictly educational. For example, the language used in working with horses was preserved and passed on for good practical reasons. It was a tool which was sharpened over a thousand years of horsemanship and was not to be dispensed with easily. The beliefs in cures for balky or sick animals have a similar history and function.

One practical value of this system of beliefs was its role in interpreting the forces which might threaten the animal at the centre of the culture. This society could not have functioned without horses. Horses sickened and died, horses hurt themselves in a number of ways. The inexplicable question of "why" was ever-present. The presence of witches and fairies explained the cause, even if it did not give a solution. If a valuable horse died of unknown causes, then a witch like Will Riley or Tom MacPherson, who had been offended in some way, was responsible.

Further, tradition and belief must, in this transplanted culture, have helped satisfy a nostalgic yearning for a return to another time and another place.¹⁰⁹ When traditions are threatened, they are often held all the more tenaciously. Narratives and beliefs served as vessels for carrying parts of a remembered and longed-for way of

¹⁰⁹ This is not one of Bascom's "four functions" of folklore. It should be remembered that Bascom, as he says himself, "oversimplified the varied functions of folklore" in order to stress what were, to him, the most important ones. Bascom, "Four Functions" 297.

life. As Bascom says, they act as "an important mechanism for maintaining the stability of culture." In some cases, the vessels undergoing the rough weather of immigration were lost within a couple of generations. In other instances, as in the Tom Dunn stories, the traditions survived, perhaps nourished by the medium of a poor, physically-isolated community. Poverty and separation, though negative in themselves, can be wonderful preservatives of tradition.

Unquestionably, some of these beliefs functioned as a means of social control. The number of didactic legends in this culture is considerable and deserves further attention. Not a few of them deal with horses who, we find, were often pawns in the game of "placate the witch." It is taken as a norm by all cultures that the old, the poor, and the sick must be protected. According to prevailing folk belief, when these were refused help by the well-to-do, retribution occurred. A summary of the Mag White story told earlier may show the function to which such belief stories may be put. Consider the following elements : Mag White, a poor old woman needs a ride home. She asks Archie MacDonald, a well-to-do farmer. She is refused. Next day, Archie's horse is dead. The attitude of the narrator of such didactic legends is worth noting. In such stories, it is clear that the tale-teller is agreeing with the end result, and is really suggesting that the well-to-do have got their just desserts as a result of the witch's action. The message is clear: community members, especially those who are in a position to do so, are obligated to help the needy. If they do not, punishment will follow. Mag White, the witch, spoke through the narrator for the down-trodden, and horses, an icon in this culture, suffered when she was

not answered. Keith Thomas's research in seventeenth century England turns up many incidents not substantially different from the one discussed above. Noting that refusal of alms was the most characteristic way in which the witch's supposed victims had failed in their obligations towards her,¹¹⁰ he cites the case of Margery Stanton of Wimbish:

Richard Saundar's wife had refused her yeast, whereupon her child was 'taken vehemently sick, in a marvellous strange manner.' Robert Petie's wife had her turned away from his house, and her child fell ill. William Torner denied her requests, and his child was taken with a fit. Robert Cornell's wife refused her milk, and was taken sick with a great swelling. John Hopwood denied her a leathern thong, and his gelding suddenly died.¹¹¹

He also cites the case of Elizabeth Peacock who through witchcraft was accused of "killing four persons, laming another and bringing about the death of four geldings and seven mares."¹¹²

Thomas's research, and the legends which still exist in agrarian PEI, are illustrative of a concept first proposed in English by Sean O'Sullivan¹¹³ and analyzed in a very useful way by Herbert Halpert. This is the concept of a traditional code of right and wrong within folk belief. Halpert suggests that this code governs three main areas: "man's behaviour towards supernatural beings, towards the divine,

¹¹⁰ Thomas, *Religion* 555.

¹¹¹ Thomas, *Religion* 554-555.

¹¹² Thomas, *Religion* 454.

¹¹³ O'Sullivan 434-38.

and towards his fellow human beings."¹¹⁴ The folk's view of "wrong acts," Halpert suggests, may vary from culture to culture and from time to time. As yet a comprehensive examination of them has not been done. They include sacrilege of various kinds, dishonesty, cruelty and, what concerns us here, refusal to help the poor, or old or weak.¹¹⁵ Halpert's analysis focusses on a specific result of the breaking of these codes, that being the birth of a "cursed child" to the perpetrator. For instance, a woman's refusal to help a pedlar with a withered arm led to her giving birth to a deformed baby.¹¹⁶ Every culture values children, hence the wide-spread existence of "cursed child" legends. In our case, however, the refusal to help the poor old woman led to the death of the man's horses. The existence on Prince Edward Island of a moral code teaching that harm comes to the horses of the wrong-doers says a great deal about the importance of horses to that particular culture. Unquestionably, kindness to the old and poor and weak was part of "what folk tradition would regard as a moral code."¹¹⁷ Breaking that code in this case led, not to a "cursed child," but to dead horses.

Such beliefs and the narratives which carry them have a similar controlling function in nonliterate societies where, as Bascom points out, a "proverb, riddle or folktale" may "be employed against

¹¹⁴ Halpert, "Supernatural Sanctions" 227-228.

¹¹⁵ Halpert, "Supernatural Sanctions" 227.

¹¹⁶ Halpert, "Legends" 234

¹¹⁷ Halpert, "Legends" 240.

individuals who attempt to deviate from social conventions with which they are fully familiar."¹¹⁸

Further, ways were devised to help people to cope with and understand the hostile forces which surrounded the animal at the centre of the culture. Function and existence are complementary. Folk beliefs tend to be self-affirming because one aspect of the belief backs up or strengthens the other. For example, if people believe in witches, that belief will be strengthened by hearing stories about how witches harm or kill precious farm animals such as horses. Conversely, if doubt is expressed in any one of the beliefs, whether it be in regard to the magical homing instinct of horses or in witches harming horses, the doubting person may expect to hear a dozen and one narratives about specific incidents where horses took people home in blizzards or were killed by witches.¹¹⁹ As Bascom points out: "When dissatisfaction with or scepticism of an accepted pattern is expressed or doubts about it arise, . . . there is usually a myth or legend to validate it: or a so-called 'explanatory tale,' a moral animal tale, or a proverb to fulfill the same function."¹²⁰ Focussing on the special, the precious, or the notable validates and strengthens the belief even more. In a culture with horses at its centre, people will pay much more attention to a narrative in which a horse is threatened than one in which a cow is threatened.

¹¹⁸ Bascom, "Four Functions" 294.

¹¹⁹ When I asked Leon Woodside about the "superstition" that horses never get lost, he said emphatically, "That's no superstition, that's a fact." T52A: 8/1/88. Leon Woodside, O'Leary [Mount Royal].

¹²⁰ Bascom, "Four Functions" 292.

What are we to make of this huge amount of folk belief among Prince Edward Islanders concerning horses? Several general observations might be made. Many of the folk beliefs about horses which remain are surprisingly strong. They float on the surface of culture as everyday things. Horses forecasting rain, white horses as bad luck omens, horses sensing things that humans are unaware of: these come naturally and spontaneously to the majority of people. Other beliefs, such as those which connect horses with witches and fairies are known but are waning.

Not surprisingly, they are international in scope. There are inescapable analogies with the beliefs found throughout Europe, the British Isles and North America. Beliefs about horse coloration, for instance, may begin with Kurgan people, an Indo-European culture of 6500 to 8000 years ago.¹²¹ However, it is apparent from many different examples presented here that the vast majority of folk beliefs attached to horses on the Island come directly from the British Isles. The immediate historic-geographic roots of most of them can be given a fairly specific location there. Because of characteristic theme, motif, and narrative, it is obvious that much of this lore springs from the Celtic fringe: Scotland, Ireland, and the far west of England, with the exclusion of Wales.¹²² These beliefs can be followed back to their roots, through individuals who left there

121 Mallory 205.

122 Welsh settlers made up a minuscule handful of nineteenth century pioneers on the Island.

and came to the Island in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. And so their tenure on the Island is two centuries or less.

In support of this argument for a "Celtic connection" is the belief, commonly held on the Island today, that it was the Irish, and even more, the Highland Scots who believed in "that old stuff." As we observed in Chapter Two, the majority of Island Scots were of Highland origin and the prevailing belief continues to be that they had more than their share of superstition. Edward MacWilliams expressed an attitude I heard many times. In discussing beliefs which "the old people" held about horses, he said, "The Scotch people . . . was superstitious, but the English people wasn't."¹²³ George Dewar, a Scot himself, said, "There was one other thing I thought I should mention to you about the Scottish people. They were superstitious and they believed in ghosts and everything, you know."¹²⁴ It is, perhaps, no accident that the majority of informants for this chapter on folk belief were of Highland Scottish background. Further, the two areas where, past and present, witchcraft belief seems to have been held the strongest are Lot Sixty-Seven and West Point, both populated by Scots Highlanders. Dewar and MacWilliams are probably right in terms of witch belief, though, in all fairness, the Irish and Acadians had liberal portions of their own folk traditions.

These traditions, whether from Scotland, Ireland or the West Country of England are, at any rate, strongly Celtic. Their origins, prior to setting down roots in the Islands of Britain, were in the great

123 T52A: 8/1/88. Edward MacWilliams, O'Leary [Dunblane].

124 T65B: 1/4/88. George Dewar, O'Leary [New Perth].

Celtic civilization whose smiths were the first to shoe horses and whose chief deity was Epona, the Horse Goddess.¹²⁵ To this civilization, we trace back a line of folk tradition from the rural culture of Prince Edward Island, whose people for the most part come from the Celtic fringe of Britain. In its original essence, therefore, folk belief, as it applies to horses on the Island, is essentially Celtic. It has added a special and very strong flavour, this "horse lore" of the immigrated Celt, to the folk traditions on Prince Edward Island.

¹²⁵ Nora Chadwick, *The Celts* (New York: Penguin Books, 1970) 154.

Chapter VI

The Modern Tradition: Horses in Contemporary Prince Edward Island.

The geographical focus of this work on oral folklore and horses is, as noted, on the sixteen lots or townships which lie furthest to the northwest of Prince Edward Island. The time frame covers mainly the century or so which ended about 1950. As we conclude the examination of horses and oral folklore several questions should be addressed. What, for instance, remains of the previously large numbers of Island horses? What is the status of the horse in the work life of Islanders today? What oral folklore connected with horses remains in the culture and what part does it play in the lives of the people?

Although the way of life and the work of men and horses has changed drastically over the last forty years, the attachment of Prince Edward Islanders to their horses remains extraordinarily strong. However, the relationship between horses and the Island culture in general has changed in two major ways, both of which have societal implications.

The first change is one of numbers. While it is true that, in relative terms, there are still more horses per capita on the Island than in any other province of Canada,¹ they are a small fraction of

¹ Joseph J. Revell, *Recommendations for the Improvement of the Horse Industry on Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown: Prince Edward Island Department of Agriculture, 1987) 14.

what they were in the period which ended in the late nineteen forties. In 1911, there were 36,000 horses on the Island. In 1951 there were still 21,000. A. H. Clark notes that, even at that late period, "a farm without horses was a rarity."² The West Prince area at that time had one horse for every two farm people, virtually all of the animals being used for farm work.³ In contrast, the census of 1979 showed 4,178 horses on Prince Edward Island.⁴ Of these, only 30 were registered draft horses, 16 Belgians, 4 Percherons, and 10 Clydesdales. In the last ten years, the numbers have begun to climb, suggesting that horses are making a modest comeback. By 1985, it was estimated that there were 7,000 horses, registered and unregistered.⁵ That is one-third of the 1951 figure.⁶

When one looks at the number of horses presently doing farm work, however, the change in the number is even more striking. In 1910 and 1951, the vast majority (ninety percent is a conservative

² Clark, *Three Centuries* 178.

³ Clark, *Three Centuries* 179.

⁴ This figure is low because it includes only registered horses. Many people in rural PEI do not register their horses. 16/2/90. Kent Oakes, PEI Department of Agriculture Charlottetown, field note.

⁵ *Island Farmer* [Supplement to the Guardian] 6 March 1989: 7.

⁶ Clark, *Three Centuries* 178. Matthew Kust attributes the slight resurgence of the horse on North American farms to two factors. He writes "In part it is nostalgia. But mostly it is the sudden rise in the cost of petroleum products needed for both the tractor and the inorganic fertilizers and other requirements of modern agriculture." See Kust, *Man and Horse in History* (Alexandria, Va : Plutarch Press, 1983) 131. The rising number of horses on the Island, however, is probably due to the increasing number of race horses that are being bred here.

estimate), would have been employed in farm work. Today, there are probably no more than four hundred working horses on all the Island. Of those, probably no more than a few dozen are used on farms doing traditional farm jobs. Johnny MacLeod of Saint Peters was still using a team of Belgians on his farm in 1976. His account of what he was doing with horses could have come from Michael Griffin's diary (see Chapter Three) or indeed any farmer's account from before 1945:

I still use the horses for just about everything around the farm. This spring I sprayed the fields out the back [probably "out back" meaning behind the farm buildings] and spread manure. We used to use three horses hitched for that but I've done it with the two. It's a bit slower though. The other day I had a big roller here to roll the grain in. That was four acres; the roller makes a nice clean job of it. Last winter I cut fourteen cord of wood and hauled it in by myself, with the team like. I'll put it this way, the horse still has a place on the farm today, I think, at least it has for me but maybe not for too many.⁷

More recently, (1988) I spoke with David Kinch, a farm labourer who has a relative who still uses a horse for farm work:

Dave Kinch: Well , I was looking at one today up at Jiggs Kinches, my cousins. Lord love [me], what a size.

John Cousins: Is that so?

D. K. : He took him home and you'd swear he was going to die

J. C. : Well, now.

D. K. : His sides was together. He was barely able to walk.

J. C. : Well, well.

D. K. : He took him home and put him in the barn and started putting the feed to him and the carrots. You should see him.

J. C.: [Did] he put on weight?

D. K.: I guess [he] put on weight. I'm not telling you a word of a lie, he'd weigh eighteen hundred.

J. C. : My God!

D. K. : What a big son-of-a-gun of an animal.

J. C. : Well, look, does he use him?

D. K. : He hauls wood with him every day. . . . [He] goes back to the pile of wood in the field, and he shovels off a load of [manure] and it just gives him exercise. And he hitches him up every day to clean the stable.⁸

These are the rare exceptions. There are simply very few working horses left and of those that are, few are on farms. The number of horses has changed, and so has the type of work they do.

What then, do the working horses do if they are not engaged in farming activities? In West Prince, a new job, the gathering of Irish moss has taken, in small part, the place of farm work. There are probably more working horses involved in this than in any other type of work, farm work included.

In the last 40 years the harvesting of Irish moss has become an important industry on the Island. This plant, used to manufacture such things as cosmetics and soft ice cream, grows in shallow water near the Island shores. The moss is gathered in two ways. It is raked from the flat sea bottom by men in fishing boats using special rakes which collect the moss plants between their teeth. The second

⁸ T. 66A: 1/2/88. Dave Kinch, Elmsdale.

method involves waiting until the mature moss breaks away from the bottom and drifts to shore during storms. Here it is gathered by "mossers," men, women, and children, who sell it to local drying plants. Competition among mossers using the beach-gathering method is fierce because this kind of work is done on a "first come, first served" basis. It is a wet, cold difficult job to stand in the surf, often in pitch darkness, and gather the moss as it drifts in.

As the industry developed, local entrepreneurs developed technology to meet its demands.⁹ That technology involves horses. Wire-enclosed baskets, built so that they can be pulled on their flat sides through the surf, are used. These are actually sieves, straining the water to collect the moss which is caught on the fine-mesh wire. Tractors are too cumbersome, too susceptible to stalling when wet and too valuable to be used in such a precarious situation. Instead, horses are used, the drivers walking beside them or, often, riding on their backs. This is brutal work for horses, especially in early spring or late fall. They are required to spend long hours walking on uncertain footing, in cold water up to their bellies, with surf breaking over them. (See photo page 239.) There have been cases where men and horses have drowned. There is also a good deal of negative comment on this sort of treatment for the animals. (I have not seen similar comments on the plight of women and children who are subjected to the same ordeal.) Nevertheless, the plight of the

⁹ The use of traditional materials and methods to cope with the demands of a new industry is an amazing and largely untold story. The evolution of the technology connected with the present-day Irish moss industry on the Island is worthy of a sizable study.



The Irish Moss horses. This picture gives a good depiction of the process of gathering Irish Moss from Island beaches with horses. Island beaches are like the Island fields in that they are flat and there are few rocks. The water near shore is shallow and the change in depth near land is very gradual. Notice the flat-saddled wire basket. This picture was probably taken after a strong northwest wind had diminished. This is when the moss usually drifts in. (Photo Credit: Barrett and MacKay Photographers, Charlottetown.)

so-called moss horses is not pleasant. As long as the "mossing," as it is called, continues to prosper, there will be, as Lloyd Palmer points out, "constant demand for that type of horse."¹⁰ Indeed, there are probably more horses used by moss harvester-fishermen than there are by farmers.

Leaving aside the few farm horses and the few hundred moss horses which are used for work of one kind or another, what about the rest of the Island's horses? The remainder, around 6500, reflects the new status of the horse in Island society, not as a beast of burden, man's best friend on the farm, but as an object of entertainment--in the standard-bred harness racing industry, in equestrian shows and in exhibitions for exhibition's sake. The horse industry today is equated with the harness racing industry. A PEI Department of Agriculture publication gives the following facts which reveal, perhaps, where its present priorities lie :

Prince Edward Island has more horses per square mile than any other province of Canada. The total economic impact of the P. E. I. Horse Industry is estimated to be in excess of \$20,000, 000. Latest estimates place the total horse population on P. E. I. to be approximately 7,000. P. E. I. has two pari-mutual tracks, Charlottetown and Summerside. In 1988, pari-mutual wager was approximately \$7,200,000 all on standardbreds. P. E. I. has an active draft horse sector, with a limited number of quarter horse and hunter breeders. . . .¹¹

¹⁰ H. Lloyd Palmer, *Prince Edward Island Horse Industry: A Study of Development Opportunities* (Charlottetown: Department of Agriculture and Forestry, 1980) 43.

¹¹ *Profile of P. E. I. Horse Industry* (Charlottetown: Prince Edward Island Department of Agriculture, 1988) 1.

The active "draft horse sector" is restricted, for the most part, to a few owners who breed draft horses for showing. Horses have moved, in fact, from the centre of Island work life to its periphery. They are one small part of the social life of Island people and summer tourists. In a sense, the much loved driving horses have gained complete dominance over the faithful farm workhorse.

Racing, as previously noted, has been part of the traditional horse-oriented pastimes of Islanders for two centuries. Even in the days when workhorses dominated, the Islanders' love of horse racing earned the province the title of "the Kentucky of Canada."¹² And in spite of the changes in Island farm society, one still sees, in the keeping of race horses, an interesting continuation of a farm tradition. Very often, in rural PEI farm families who were noted, in former times, as being good horsemen, kept their connection to their beloved animals by raising standard bred horses for racing. This is no accident. The lure of the horse and the love of the animals is so strong that it would be surprising if one did not find this continuation of the horsemen's tradition. A newspaper article on the breeding of race horses is supportive of this observation:

P. E. I. already possesses many of the requirements for the expansion and enhancement of the horse breeding sector. We have the land, the feed production capability, the capital infrastructure and most importantly, the human resource. Islanders have always demonstrated a natural affinity for horses of any breed. This, many feel,

¹² Revell continues to use this term in his report. See p. 16.

is due to our strong rural heritage, where horses were an integral part of traditional farming on P. E. I.¹³

One good example of the continuance of the horseman tradition on the Island is the Shaw family of Bloomfield. In discussing good horsemen of the area, Robert Shaw was the first man mentioned by Bert Thomson, himself a man of great feeling for and knowledge of horses.¹⁴

Robert Shaw was a farmer and a man who delivered the rural mail. Six communities knew him and his horses over a period of 40 years. His neighbors say that, in his day, he was perhaps the best man with horses in the area. He has worked horses since he was nine or ten years old and his narratives about them are recounted with a detail that I have not seen equalled. He has always had good horses, those which were used for farm work and those he used for driving the mail. At 86 he is in active retirement. His farm, where working horses no longer have a place is still the home of racing horses kept by his sons Wendell and Allen. "Right now, we have six or seven altogether. For awhile, we had a barn full. Wendell [his son] took three of them to Summerside." Many would-be farmers have been drawn into other vocations. Wendell Shaw, the second son, is a good example of this. He grew up in the transition years of the late forties and early fifties. Though he grew up on a farm, agriculture at that time was a downhill road for most young men.

13 *Island Farmer* 6 March 1989: 7.

14 3/6/87. Bert Thomson, Roseville, field note.

however hardworking and ambitious. He became a school-administrator, but has never lost his connection with the farm or with horses. Like many professional men of his generation who grew up on farms, he keeps racing horses. "He works awfully hard," his father said. "He's up at half-past four in morning working the horses on the track. Then he comes home, has his breakfast and goes to school."¹⁵ This is an Island phenomenon: professional men whose early life was on farms keeping their connection with horses. Wendell's son, according to his proud grandfather, loves working with horses. This makes three generations of horsemen in the Shaw family. Long-standing family traditions in raising and caring for horses may be the reason why there are now more race horses per capita in Prince Edward Island than anywhere else in Canada.¹⁶

In West Prince, perhaps more than in the rest of the Island, the horse remains visible. This area is still very rural. There are still farmers who have not been driven from the land who cling to their horses. This is also the centre for Irish moss harvesting on the Island. The Island perception, which has some validity, is that this is a "backward" area. A comment still often heard regarding the area goes as follows: "Prince Edward Island is fifty years behind the rest of the country and West Prince is fifty years behind the rest of the Island." That was an "old saying." Recently the Economic Council of Canada supported the traditional view when it commented on the economic prospects of the area.

15 20/3/90. Robert Shaw, Bloomfield, field note.

16 Revell 14.

Over the past several decades, the West Prince region of Prince Edward Island has failed to keep pace with the rest of the province. Heavily dependent on farming and fishing, it has witnessed an exodus of people and has fallen behind in terms of income and employment levels. In the face of profound economic and social changes, increasingly fragmented and dispirited, the region has watched as control over its future has drifted from its hands.¹⁷

The report is true. The economy here has remained stagnant as it was throughout the horse and buggy days. West Prince is still a depressed area which sends its sons and daughters to the cities of Ontario and Alberta.

In the last forty years, the basic and fundamental shift in the structure of the community's worklife, from horses to cars and tractors, has completely altered important elements of traditional life. To a good extent, the customary language used to direct horses is disappearing. "Gee" and "Haw," after being with us from the time of Chaucer, have gone according to Bert Thomson¹⁸ and Tom Duncan.¹⁹ Both note that it is because horses are not used as much. Children are no longer exposed to horses in any numbers. Even horses' names have changed--to the pretentious and for all practical purposes, meaningless ones of race horses. And as Donald MacKay noted, "Those race horses don't know their own names."²⁰ The old

17 Wayne MacKinnon and Jon Pierce, *The West Prince Industrial Commission : A Case Study* (Ottawa: The Economic Council of Canada, 1989) 3.

18 15/8/86. Bert Thomson, Roseville, field note.

19 T37A: 14/11/86. Tom Duncan, Mill Road.

20 9/10/86. Donald MacKay, Kensington [Breadalbane] field note.

relationship between man and horse is gone. As Kathryn Smith recently pointed out, modern society has reached a crossroads in its relationship with the animal world:

The knowledge of animal life is already limited to a small minority; it remains to be seen whether industrial societies will reduce or increase this minority. In either case it is probable that the assumptions about animal behaviour and the nature of the relationship between men and animals will change. In a society which holds a magical world view the function of animals within that view is clear. It will be interesting to note how a technological society deals with those aspects of the animal world which may not fit in with an industrial philosophy. Sufficient material survives, to show how, in previous periods, men saw the role of animals within their own belief system. ²¹

Unquestionably, for Islanders the changes during the last four decades are striking. During the heyday of the horse, a man's sphere of action was, on a daily basis, restricted to how far he could travel with a horse and return in that day or by nightfall. Earlier, we discussed the role of the horse in courtship. In horse-drawn societies, young men courted girls who could be reached by walking or by a single drive by horse and wagon. The range was relatively small, at the most seven or eight miles. The reality of a car-oriented society was a courting range which was almost unlimited. Time and distance, for courtship, for shopping , indeed for work and travel of any kind changed completely. Taking courtship as a small example.

²¹ Smith 109-110.

an examination of its travel pattern shows a dramatic shift which came in the period between 1940 and 1950.

The farming-fishing village of Campbellton is typical of the West Prince area. In 1950, the following 19 married men were living there:

Harold Doyle
Chester Reid
Elbridge Cousins
Pius Finnian
Russell MacNeill
Meritt Ramsay
Andrew Luttrell
Justin MacArthy
Leo MacArthy
Harry MacKay
Kenneth MacKendrick
Willie MacKendrick
Joe Jones
Everett Jones
Fred Ramsay
Calvin Ramsay
Gerald Murphy
Jack Monaghan
Bill Monaghan
Lloyd Bradshaw

Of these men, only one, Russell MacNeill, had a wife who had not been courted in the community of Campbellton or in a community which could be reached by a horse in an evening.²²

Without going into detail about the sons of the above men, it may be taken as fact that a tracing of their wives would show an entirely different picture. The courtship radius was extended immensely when the car came into common usage. Technological changes eliminated the horse and when that happened, the culture's realities of time and space changed. This result, which can be seen in dozens of rural communities, was a centre which could not hold: educationally, economically or socially. The dozens of depopulated villages on the Island testify to that. Older people who long for a return to the "horse and buggy days" are, in part, longing for the community life which left with the horses.

Though they no longer see or work with horses on a daily basis, Islanders are still exposed to an extremely important element of the horseman's unofficial culture, that being the talk about them. Social historian David Weale, in a recent lecture on oral history, commented on the subjects most often encountered in his talks with informants:

In my talks with older Islanders, [I found that] some of them want to talk about work, some want to talk about

22 MacNeill met and married his wife while he was working in Boston. Occasionally, as in the case of Myrtle Deahan, the wife of Harold Doyle, the wives would have come into the community from a distant place. She came from Kinkora, about 50 miles away. Individual migrations like this allowed a courtship to take place which would not have ordinarily happened.

school or the fiddle or the good times, but they all want to talk about horses.²³

These oral traditions are not inconsequential. The conversations recorded for this work are so animated, the beliefs so strong, the narrative and song so interesting that it is easy to forget that things have actually changed. Even young people who are not physically near horses are exposed to the pervasive oral traditions about them. Though they do not have firsthand experience, they carry the narratives and beliefs which have been given to them. Those oral traditions which remain create an oral milieu which is distinctive. To sit among people who spent their lives working with horses it is quite evident that, orally, the "old ways" are still with us.

The phenomenon of oral traditions surviving the physical transformation of the culture is worth examining. The shift in the culture's fundamental structure from horse power to mechanized power took place in two stages. We have already noted the first one, when Islanders went to war with the automobile and horses were physically replaced by autos and tractors. That war did not end until the nineteen fifties and was characterized by a rearguard action which was surprising in its strength. Some of its manifestations are worth noting. George Dewar, for instance, recalled his first speech as a member of the Provincial Assembly in 1954. Like many others, he refused to recognize the end of the era. Horses, to him and to many

²³ David V'cale, "Oral History on Prince Edward Island," *Making Connections: A Symposium for Teachers on the Creative Use of Heritage Resources*, Confederation Centre, Charlottetown, P. E. I., April 26, 1990.

of the people he spoke for, were still an icon in need of protection. Looking back, he recalled ruefully:

I can remember something about that because I remember there was a piece in the paper sometime around 1953 or 1954 about how the horse population in the province had diminished so seriously. And [laughs] I remember I went to the legislature and one of the first speeches I made there . . . I guess I was giving the government the Devil about how things were going to Hell on the Island and [about how we] were losing this and losing that). And I even said . . . about how the horse population [had] gone down so drastically, you know in the last [previous] ten years or something like that and I can still remember Alex Matheson. Alex was Premier at the time and, [I can] still . . . see Alex shaking his head [saying], "That fellow, he's behind the times. He doesn't know that horses [are] going out of fashion." I realize[d] that we were in a new age. I knew that tractors were [coming] in time. But I still had a great feeling that horses shouldn't be eliminated.²⁴

Even today, hard-nosed civil servants, caught up in the strong positive feeling toward horses, sometimes forget that they are living in the day of the tractor. As recently as January 1987, a provincial commission in Prince Edward Island produced a report on the horse industry on Prince Edward Island. One of its central statements, sounding like a comment from Island newspapers of a century ago, goes as follows:

Prince Edward Islanders possess and demonstrate a natural affinity for the horse of any breed. Our culture and heritage have a long and strong association with the

equine species and Islanders have achieved many accomplishments from which we all take pride. Virtually all the horses produced locally and offered for sale are very well grown, developed and presented, although many lack quality in the area of conformation and/or performance as a result of their genetic background.²⁵

Earlier in the report the commissioners commented on the contemporary situation:

Prince Edward Island is reported to have more horses per square mile and more people involved with horses per capita than any other province in Canada. Therefore, relating Canadian figures to Prince Edward Island by any standard (ie. [sic] percentage horse population; percentage of farms; etc.) the proportionate economic impact is considered to be well in excess of twenty million dollars . . . annually.²⁶

Even within government circles, there is a thinking bordering on wishfulness, that "draft horses are showing a return to their place on some farms, [and] in some woodlots."²⁷

The present popularity of horses is evidenced by the number of publications in newsstands. A check at one newsstand in Charlottetown turned up six different titles devoted exclusively to horses: *Canadian Horseman*, *Eastern Horse and Pony*, *Horse and Horsemen*, *Western Horseman*, *Horse Illustrated*, and *Equus*.

25 Revell 15.

26 Revell, 14.

27 Palmer 4-5.

The culture's continuing interest in horses was evidenced by the immense public sympathy raised by a recent and rather bizarre court case. It concerned a Herbert Cole, an old man who lived in Rustico, near the centre of the Island's booming tourist industry where the majority of the Island's three-quarters of a million yearly visitors go. Cole lived fifteen miles from Charlottetown, and when he travelled there he drove his horse "Fay." In August of 1988 he and Fay were in a collision with a van in the village of Cavendish. He was accused of driving a horse and wagon while inebriated and Fay was seized by the RCMP.²⁸ The first time, a sympathetic judge supported by a very interested public found him not guilty and Cole, "triumphant," according to the news broadcaster, left Charlottetown driving his horse on the 22 mile trip back to his home. A crowd cheered as he left the court house.

A few months later he was charged again by the RCMP. This time, he was accused of lying drunk in the bottom of the wagon while the horse went on its way home. He, in turn, offered to bet anyone twenty dollars that the horse could take him home and "never hit a mailbox"²⁹ Again he was found not guilty. To the Island's horse lovers, this was affirmation by an underdog. All forms of the official media reported the details of the case with commentators leaving a very distinct impression they were on the side of the drunk driver and his faithful horse. His contention about

28 The saga of Cole and his horse was the subject of numerous media reports between August and November, 1988

29 28/11/89. "Compass" CBC [Charlottetown] News.

the horse's marvellous homing instinct was taken as a fact by virtually everyone. Island horsemen support their own. In court, the RCMP were portrayed as being, at worst, oppressive and at best, rather stupid.

But this, as noted, is a rearguard action. These active horsemen are what is left of the flesh and blood reality of the Island's horsemen's culture. The last ditch stand by men like George Dewar, Johnny MacLeod and Herbert Cole represent the final skirmish in a lost war. Contemporary farm culture is tractor rather than horse oriented.

There is a second stage in this transformation of culture which remains after the hopeless war to retain physical reality has ended. That stage is represented by the phenomenon referred to earlier -- the existence of a strong oral tradition connected with horses but without the horses' physical presence. Though horses are no longer part of the base structure of this society, the oral lore connected with them remains in the conversation of the people. In practical terms, very few informants for this work have worked actively with horses within the last two or three decades, yet they bear with them the oral traditions associated with those animals. Virtually all the generic elements of oral lore are there; the legend, the memorate, the tall tale and the song all carrying beliefs wrapped within traditional "horse talk." The conversations are so interesting and the stories so enjoyable that it is easy to believe that their horses are still alive and the informant is still following them through the fields. People who have not worked with horses for decades speak about them in the present tense. Listening to them it is easy to agree with

Linda Degh's comment that "it is simply not true that tradition or folklore has been lost; it has been changed."³⁰

The figures of speech, the simile and metaphor, which have crept in from the horsemen's world are still present in conversation. Recently, I listened to a conversation between two women who were discussing a highly-sexed local politician. One woman finished by saying that "He stood Belinda" to which the other agreed that, "He stood her for years."³¹ A year ago, I would have been like any outsider, chuckling at the word "stood" but not realizing that it derived from the act of a stallion breeding a mare.

Children still repeat the anecdotes which they hear from their elders. A 16 year old high school girl noted recently that her grandfather used to have a horse which he called Rommel, after the famous general.³²

Though part of the language, custom and narrative from the old horse-farming culture is still present, especially among older people, it will soon die as it did in East Anglia earlier in the century. When it does, a useful and colorful part of the oral culture will have been lost. What Evans says about East Anglia is equally true of the Island:

To them the dialect was an extra tool: it enabled them to do their work. They kept their ancient vocabulary because at this level society had kept its ancient techniques : in most areas of East Anglia up to the end of

³⁰ Linda Degh, "Social Change and Folklore" *8th Congress* 3: 286.

³¹ 7/1/90. Mary Cousins, Campbellton and Marion Thomson, Roseville, field note.

³² 15/1/90. Moira McGuire, Folklore Survey Card.

the last century the farmer plowed, reaped and harvested with men and animals as he had always done since the beginning of history. The names of the tools had remained the same for centuries, and social relations within the arable farming culture remained largely the same over a similar period. . . . the Industrial Revolution did not reach East Anglia until the present century when the self-propelled machines changed the nature of farming completely. In thus changing the nature of the work it made a large sector of the old language truly archaic.³³

Today, one often hears nostalgic remarks in conversations about horses. Indeed, nostalgic comments must follow the disappearance of any beloved part of tradition. These standard remarks are heard as soon as the lost/precious item is discussed. Informants, indeed, all humans must find acceptable ways of lamenting the disappearance of something loved. Discussions about lost precious things or times meet a human need and provide what an older Island generation called "melancholy pleasure."³⁴ The laments often take the form of comments such as, "We were better off back in the days of the horses." Johnny MacLeod put it this way :

I really feel bad to see them go out so much from use. They started to go out about twenty-five years ago around here. That's when the tractors came in. Then most people who kept them on got too old to work with them, I guess, and the horses just stopped. There's very

³³ Evans, *Where Beards Wag All* 176-177.

³⁴ This is a phrase which an older Scottish generation used. I have heard it occasionally and, without having particularly good reason, I suspect that it has a perhaps more usable counterpart in Scots Gaelic. It expresses very well, I think, the particular mood which conversation about lost times sometimes takes.

few young people now who care too much for horses. They wouldn't know how to harness one up, never mind work a team. . . . Some never care if they see a horse; but me, I do. I tell you truthfully, if I couldn't keep at least one horse around me I couldn't stay here. I'd give it up, truthfully.³⁵

Across the ocean, a Lowland Scot, the folk artist William Robbie used a similar lament about the disappearance of the beloved Clydesdales which he had painted all his life:

My hairt's aye in the Clydesdale horse yet. It's a pity that they're dyin oot. It's a damned shame. The tractors has jist clean spoil't the landscape a' thegither. What wis bonnier than a fairm an' twa, three pair o' horse pullin o the ploo . . . an' their tails a' tied up?³⁶

When I asked Edward MacWilliams who the good horsemen were around where he lived, he said, sadly, "They're in the cemetery now."³⁷ Susan Hornby discussed with Blair and Leta Andrews the loss of the last horse on their farm:

Leta Andrews: We just got clear of our last horse last fall.
It was sad.

Susan Hornby: Did you really?

L. A.: I didn't want to see her go and [I don't want] to speak about it. I want to forget about it.

Blair Andrews: Thirty years old.

35 Street 36.

36 Kenneth S. Goldstein, "William Robbie: Folk Artist of the Buchan District, Aberdeenshire," Pamphlet reprinted from *Folklore in Action: Essays for Discussion in Honor of MacEdward Leach*, ed. Horace P. Beck (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, Inc., 1962) 105.

37 T52A: 8/1/88. Edward MacWilliams, O'Leary, [Dunblane].

L. A. : And she still loved to get her neck into the collar.³⁸

A recapitulation is necessary at this point. The disappearance of the horse from Island farms and its replacement by the tractor illustrates what happens within culture when a major (in this case technological) change takes place in its basic structure. We saw, first of all, an initial resistance and a slow adjustment to the new technology. That phase has been accomplished. The physical reality of everyday life has been changed and the culture has adapted to the new physical circumstances. However, what seems evident now is that there is a second phase to this transformation in which narrative elements of unofficial culture did not change. They have lagged behind perhaps because they have been clung to grimly by two or three generations of Islanders who continue to utilize them.³⁹

This phenomenon, where one part of a culture, for whatever reason, changes more slowly than the other parts has been examined by William Fielding Ogburn whose general comments can be related to the specific situation on Prince Edward Island. He writes:

The thesis is that the various parts of modern culture are not changing at the same rate, some parts are changing much more rapidly than others; and that since there is a correlation and interdependence of parts, a rapid change

38 16/6/80. Blair and Letta Andrews, New Glasgow. *Weale Collection.*

39 They are encouraged in this by official organs of society represented by politicians. As noted in Chapter Two (note 52), politicians have learned that identification with rural, agricultural elements in the Island gets votes. Angus MacLean, who broke four decades of almost uninterrupted Liberal hegemony in 1979, highlighted, in his campaign literature, the statement "I am a Country Man." In fairness to him, Maclean was, indeed, a farmer, but fewer than 3000 voters were.

in one part of our culture requires readjustment through other changes in the various correlated parts of culture.⁴⁰

Ogburn's hypothesis, supported by Linda Degh,⁴¹ applies to the situation created when a change occurs in a society's material culture. In our study the change was in the technology of farming--from horse to tractor. Other elements of culture, including "customs, beliefs, philosophies, laws, governments. . . . folk ways and social institutions" Ogburn calls adaptive culture.⁴² He suggests that these elements, to one extent or another, will eventually accommodate themselves to the change in material conditions. However, adjustments come slowly and, often, as in the case of horse lore on Prince Edward Island, there is a cultural lag. Here, a major, oral, unofficial part of culture--legend, belief, superstition--subsumed by narrative has, during the process of cultural change, lagged behind the reality of material culture.

What we have here is a fundamental change in the actual worklife of the culture without a corresponding change in oral traditions. Degh refers to this phenomenon as structure "leading" that is staying ahead of, culture.⁴³ There has been, quite obviously, slippage where unofficial culture has lagged behind technology. We

40 William Fielding Ogburn, *Social Change with Respect to Cultural and Original Nature*, intro. Hendrick M. Ruitenbeck (New York: Delta Books, 1950) 200-201.

41 Linda Degh, "Social Change and Folklore," *8th Congress* 3: 286.

42 Ogburn 202-203.

43 Degh, "Social Change and Folklore," *8th Congress* 3: 286.

tell narratives and hold beliefs about horses though the horses themselves are no longer a part of our everyday lives. Old taboos, for instance, those against criticizing another man's usage of horses, remain rigidly in effect. We carry on conversations using figures of speech (He "stood" Belinda, for instance) which, in effect are antiquated. We have occupational vocabulary without the occupation.

The reaction of some folklorists to this rather common phenomenon is surprisingly negative. Linda Degh comments that "this lag . . . poses problems for the folklore romantic."⁴⁴ Toelken refers to this body of "information, beliefs, styles, customs, and the like" as a "conservative" force within culture.⁴⁵ However, cultural lag as discussed here need not be regarded as either conservative or problematical but rather a healthy reaction to loss. Looking at the broad picture, one might contend this is, in part, the way that the unofficial part of culture (folklore) helps us adapt to and cope with change. Oral lore related to horses is not a negative, antiquated, behind-the-times aspect of our lives, but rather a healthy antidote to the stresses brought by change within culture. As Dan Ben-Amos points out, oral elements of folklore do not exist as static verbal forms. They "also play an active role in social affairs."⁴⁶ And as

⁴⁴ Degh, "Social Change and Folklore," *8th Congress* 3: 287-288

⁴⁵ Toelken 35.

⁴⁶ Ben-Amos xxiii.

Malinowski contends, their presence is a contributing factor in the maintenance and continuity of the social group.⁴⁷

Along with the therapeutic effect of conversation, the entertainment value of the legend, anecdote and tall tale is undisputed. Thus the implied view of oral lore as a passive cultural survival from a lost time misses the mark. It is, in fact, a dynamic aspect of a changing culture, a main function of which is to provide cohesiveness to the folk group. The common knowledge of horses is a tie that binds both individuals and groups together in times of stress and change. The remembrance of the common loss when shared by its losers sustains them.

Special adaptive mechanisms are needed to maintain the integrity of an evolving way of live. It is probable, then, that the pervasive oral horse lore present within Island folklife contributes to the health and adaptability of the changing culture. Writing of human loss, Sigmund Freud notes that the gap created by a loss "can never be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else. *And this is how it should be.* It is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish" [Italics mine].⁴⁸ Changes in fundamental cultural make-up, then, if not so drastic as to destroy the society, may, through the continuation of oral traditions, actually make the society stronger and more adaptable. On the Island, the

47 Malinowski, cited in Ben-Amos xxiii-xix.

48 Cited in John Bowlby, *Loss, Sadness and Depression* vol.3. (New York: Penguin Books,1981) 23.

continuing presence of oral/verbal forms of horse-related lore gives comfort to the old and a sense of place to the young who listen to it.

Meanwhile, the evolution of Island rural culture continues. It is in a much different form from the horse-centered one which existed in the century before 1950. Horses no longer play the role which they once did at the centre of economic, social and cultural life. The various narrative genres, the folk songs and the belief associated with them no longer have the myriad functions they once had. Horses still have great presence, however, and Islanders still retain their historical attachment to them. The contemporary traditions related to them are part of the dynamics of a changing culture. Those traditions function as a stabilizing hand, slowly helping the adjustment of society through a time when, as Linda Degh puts it, "all (cultural) moorings have been lost."⁴⁹ As oxen once facilitated the coming of horses by clearing the land for pioneers, the lore of horses in modern Prince Edward Island is easing the passage of rural culture from old to new. As the end of the twentieth century approaches we may say that the Islanders' "special interest" in horses, noted by A. H. Clark in 1951, is still very strong.⁵⁰ Horse lore and the Prince Edward Islander are still coexisting comfortably.

⁴⁹ Degh, "Social Change and Folklore," *8th Congress* 3: 288.

⁵⁰ Clark, *Three Centuries* 178.

Appendix A

Informants

All places mentioned are on PEI unless otherwise indicated.

Bradshaw, Mary. Middleton.

Bulger Joseph. Foxley River.

Cook, Elmer. Cape Wolfe.

Cook, Milla. Cape Wolfe.

Cousins, Elbridge. Campbellton, Lot Four.

Cousins, Mary. Campbellton, Lot Four.

Cousins, Thane. Toronto, Ontario (formerly Campbellton, Lot Four).

Craswell, Alban. O'Leary.

Dewar, George. O'Leary (formerly New Perth).

Doyle, Steve. Charlottetown (formerly Glengarry).

Duncan, Tom. Mill Road.

Gorrell, Charles, Dunblane.

Hierlihy, David. Hebron.

Kinch, David. Dock Road.

Livingstone, Fred. Dunblane.

Luxton, Lorne. Knutsford.

- MacKay, Donald. Kensington (formerly Breadalbane).
- MacKay, George. Bloomfield Station.
- MacKay, Harry. Campbellton.
- MacKay, Vance. Bloomfield Station.
- MacMillian, Eva. Charlottetown (formerly Campbellton)
- MacWilliams, Edward. O'Leary (formerly Dunblane).
- MacWilliams, Wilbur. West Cape.
- Oakes, Kent. Charlottetown.
- Pigot, Frank. Saint Peters.
- Platts, Mrs. John. Howlan.
- Pratt, Keith. Jacksonville Florida (formerly Bloomfield Station).
- Richard, Jerry. O'Leary (formerly St. Lawrence).
- Shaw, Allan. Bloomfield Station.
- Shaw, Robert. Bloomfield Station
- Shaw, Fenton. Bloomfield Station
- Smith , Alfred. St. Lawrence.
- Smith , Claire. Fredericton, N. B. (formerly Bloomfield Station).
- Thomson, Marion. Roseville.
- Thomson, Bert. Roseville.
- Thomson, Leith. Tor (formerly Roseville).
- Woodside, Leon. O'Leary (formerly Mount Royal).

Informants from other taped sources

Weale Collection University of Prince Edward Island

Andrews, Blair. New Glasgow.

Andrews, Leta. New Glasgow.

Craig, Jim. Sherwood (formerly Hunter River).

Hill, Buck. New Glasgow.

Taylor, Queenie. Charlottetown.

Sanderson, Tom. Rustico.

Westisle Collection Westisle Composite High School, Elmsdale,
EI.

Frost, Sidney. Harmony.

Grigg, Preston. Tyne Valley.

MacIntyre, Harry. Bayside.

Millar, John. Tyne Valley.

Phillips, George. Arlington.

PAPEI Collection

Public Archives of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, P. E. I.

Lea, Frank. Belfast.

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