

# SONG AND STORY TRADITIONS

OF THE LOGGERS OF  
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

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# MENTIONED IN SONG

**Song Traditions of the Loggers  
of Newfoundland and Labrador**



A CD featuring rare archival recordings from across Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as new arrangements by Crooked Stovepipe, Shirley Montague, Pamela Morgan, and Newman Sound Men's Choir. The accompanying booklet features archival photographs, song notes and lyrics, and a social history of logging and song. Produced by Ursula Kelly.

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**Song and Story Traditions of the Loggers of Newfoundland and Labrador**  
**Final Report by Ursula A. Kelly**

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### **Executive Summary**

Songs, stories and recitations offered entertainment and built camaraderie in the twentieth century logging camps of Newfoundland and Labrador. They were the means by which loggers documented and shared their experiences of doing this historic work. Today, these occupational songs, stories and recitations would be considered significant everyday literacy practices. Yet, there existed no acknowledgement or examination of them as such. Nor was there any musical compilation that focused exclusively on and celebrated these songs and their meanings. With the exception of a small handful of well-known songs, most were lost amidst the plethora of sea songs that dominate the provincial repertoire. With the exception of the research of John Aston, there is also a dearth of scholarship related to logging songs in the province. In this research, I highlight the logging songs composed by loggers themselves that were collected by Ashton and other folklorists, including student folklorists, and are housed in the MUN Folklore Archives. In partnership with The Research Centre for Music Media and Place (MMaP), twenty-seven of the over seventy songs identified were selected to represent the various communities and cultural influences of the province. These archival songs were digitized and, in four instances, prominent local artists created new arrangements. The published package, which includes the 27-track CD recording and a 90-page booklet of archival photos, an essay on logging and song, song lyrics, a glossary and a timeline of logging, was published in late fall 2014 as *Mentioned in Song: Song Traditions of the Loggers of Newfoundland and Labrador*. Several community presentations of the research followed – to overcapacity crowds - including a launch in each of St. John’s and Gros Morne and out of which other community engagement partnerships and projects have emerged.

### **Introduction**

#### 1. Background and Rationale

Despite the significance of forest resources and the occupations associated with them to the economy and culture of Newfoundland and Labrador, the cultural preoccupation – in study, story, and song – has been largely fishing and sea-related. There exists a dearth of historical accounts of logging and logging-related culture in Newfoundland and Labrador. In his social history of pulpwood logging during the Great Depression, John Sutherland (1988) commented on the inattention to logging in key cultural texts. This inattention is also evident in the work of folklorists who collected songs from Newfoundland and Labrador. John Ashton (1986) that, despite being overlooked, “the repertoire of songs circulating in the Newfoundland lumber woods was an extensive one” (Ashton, 1986, p.222). He further noted, “as yet,

however, there has been no systematic attempt to investigate lumber camp songs and lumber camp singing as distinct traditional phenomena” (Ashton 1986, p. 218).

John Ashton’s (1985) pioneering research on lumber camp song traditions was intended to recompense by emphasizing this cultural contribution and highlighting a small sample of occupational songs of logging itself. Although Ashton himself collected only a handful of new songs and while he did not reference the specific musical traditions of Labrador, his pioneering work provided the first substantive analysis of the local logging song tradition. Furthermore, through his teaching, Ashton inspired student collectors to attend to this song tradition, thereby ensuring that additional songs were recorded and archived.

There are rich studies of logging song traditions in various regions of North America where logging and forestry were central to life and economy. They include the rich and varied studies by Franz Rickaby of the woods of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin (Rickaby, 1926), Edward Ives of the songsters of the Maine and New Brunswick woods (Ives, 1978, 1989), and Robert Bethke of the northwestern Adirondacks of New York (Bethke, 1981). There are also the studies of Louise Manny of the Miramichi River of New Brunswick (Manny, 1968) and Phillip Thomas of British Columbia (Thomas, 1979). Most noteworthy in Canada is the research of Edith Fowke into the lumbering song traditions of Central Canada through which she collected, transcribed and published 65 songs (Fowke, 1970). The songs of the loggers of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve a place within this research and scholarship.

Over a century since the industry began in earnest, there is now renewed interest in logging history in this province. There is the publication of the highly successful historical fiction trilogy by J.A. Ricketts: *The Badger Riot*; *The Badger Confession*; and, *The Badger Redemption*. Others have also published their voices of memory and experience of the lumber camps (Kitchen, 2005; Sparkes, 2102; Collins, 2012; White, 2012). These stories sit against the backdrop of the closure of the Grand Falls mill and the demise of pulp and paper production, more generally. It was timely to turn attention to the song tradition of logging and to the rich intersections of music, oracy, and literacy that they represent before the last post of the industry is sounded.

## 2. Objectives

This research consisted of the identification, review, selection, analysis, recording and publication of logging songs and stories or recitations as historic, everyday cultural and literacy practices that represent and communicate the meanings and experiences of loggers and logging communities and the history of logging in Newfoundland and Labrador. The specific objectives of this research were:

- A review of literature related to logging and logging culture;
- The identification and review of existing archived logging songs housed at the MUN Folklore Archives, including the pioneering research of John Ashton, as well as other professional and student collectors;
- The selection of a sample of songs with attention to diversity based on place, community, culture, gender, genre / type, language, etc., for restoration, rearrangement and recording;
- The production of a written booklet that included an analysis of music and logging culture and a multi-track CD recording of representative songs of the repertoire; and
- The mobilization and sharing of this research with the (former) logging communities from which the research arises.

## 3. Methodology

The primary focus of this research was the field recordings of both professional and student folklorists in Newfoundland and Labrador that are housed in the MUNFLA archives to identify logging-related songs and recitations as the basis of a study and comprehensive listing of the songs, as well as recording and publication of a sample of the songs.

To guide selection and writing, a thorough review of the literature related to logging life was completed. A list of criteria (related to quality, locale, diverse representations of stories, cultural groups, singers, and genres) was developed to guide selection. Songs were identified for restoration, rearrangement and recording. Rearrangements addressed gaps and created a more representative collection. Permissions and

licenses were secured from all collectors and culture bearers and / or their families. When all selections were finalized, pamphlet writing and booklet design were completed. Archival photographs were chosen from the collections of various provincial groups and individuals to reflect the family and community importance of logging and the occupational culture itself.

### **Project Details and Results**

Archival research began in the summer of 2013 and continued throughout the 2013-14 academic year. Over seventy songs and numerous poems and life histories that document logging life in Newfoundland and Labrador were identified. As well, a review of logging-related literature was also completed. By spring 2014 the final selection of tunes for the CD was completed along with audio restoration of archival tunes and new arrangements. By the end of summer 2014, the booklet materials, which included an essay on logging and song in Newfoundland and Labrador, a historic timeline, a glossary, and song lyrics and notes, were completed. Also finalized was the selection of 45 archival photos chosen from the collections of The Rooms Provincial Archives, logging companies, community heritage organizations, and individuals.

Initial results of the research were shared in a presentation that included live performances at The Harris Centre MUNbuttoned Festival in the fall of 2014. Following editing and design consultation, the production of the CD and package was finalized in late fall 2014. In early 2015, a launch was held to an overcapacity crowd at the MMaP Gallery. Through winter and spring, the research was featured on several key CBC radio programs throughout the province (Weekend Arts Magazine, On the Go, Radio Noon Crosstalk, Central Morning Show and Western Morning). A west coast launch in spring 2015 at the Bonne Bay Marine Centre as part of the Trails Tails Tunes Festival also drew an overcapacity crowd. The research was also featured in a 45-minute interview on VOBB, the community radio of Bonne Bay that broadcasts out of Norris Point. Collaboration for a radio documentary is planned with VOBB. Initial consultation has begun with the Ballater Historical Society, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, as the basis of a future collaboration on the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit (NOFU). A presentation at The Rooms is scheduled for December 2015. A presentation in Labrador is planned but not yet scheduled. A book-length manuscript is also in progress that will document the full repertoire of songs identified through this research.

### **Recommendations**

This research reaffirms remembrance as a means by which to build community engagement and celebration. The research was possible because of the resources available to researchers that archive and honor cultural memory. The vast yet delicate nature of this material culture, in particular, that of the MUN Folklore Archives (MUNFLA), suggests a need for additional study and digitization of song and story culture.

1. Recommendation:

That an Intangible Cultural Heritage fund to support researchers and units such as MMaP, MUNFLA and others in their efforts to preserve and to recirculate the culture and heritage of this province be considered.

The success of this research is grounded in the power of collaboration across disciplines and university constituencies. In particular, the research was possible because of the kind of mission and practices of a unit such as MMaP that embraces interdisciplinary and inter-and intra-community collaborations.

2. Recommendation:

That the University encourage infrastructure that further encourages and supports collaborative and collegial opportunities as a means to intensify research productivity.

The goal for dissemination of this research was to return logging songs to the communities out of which they had emerged, that is, to ensure that the families and communities of loggers were given an opportunity to engage and to celebrate this research. The huge (ongoing) success of these public engagements and the partnerships that have resulted are a crucial result of this research.

3. Recommendation:

That research grants include funding for mandatory broad-based community dissemination in forms that engage and build University and community relationships.

As this research documents, all cultural sectors were represented in the logging industry and in the songs and stories that emerged from it. Yet, there are few public accounts of the diverse experiences of those who worked as loggers.

4. Recommendation:

That further research is undertaken to document the diverse voices of experience within the logging industry and the insights into social history that they provide.

Two units of loggers served the world wars to support the British war effort. The Newfoundland Forestry Corps (NFC) of World War 1 of over 500, and the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit (NOFU) of World War II of over 3500, are often side notes in both the history and memorialization of those who served.

5. Recommendation:

That the University, as a living memorial to those who served, highlight more fully the role of the loggers of the NFC and the NOFU as part of its responsibility to educate about, so as to remember, those who served.

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