THE FIDDLE ON THE ISLAND: FIDDLING TRADITION ON PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

JAMES JOHN HORNBY

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THE FIDDLE ON THE ISLAND: FIDDLING TRADITION ON PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

by

© James John Hornby, M.A.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to document fiddling tradition in the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island. In particular, it examines the most important contemporary development in fiddling, the revitalistic Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society. The objective is to assess the Society against a background of local history and traditions, and with a knowledge of fiddling traditions and studies from Scotland, Ireland, England, and North America.

A descriptive outline of Prince Edward Island fiddling traditions is extracted from a variety of historical and contemporary sources, based on library and field research. From this a pattern of decline and revival emerges, as fiddling and old-time dancing are seen in the context of local social and musical ecologies. These contexts were changed by many factors -- fashions, population shifts, and technological innovations among them. Among the important technological changes was the coming of radio, and the relationship of fiddlers and provincial radio stations is explored in some detail for the period 1923-1958. Next, the influence of the Scottish-Canadian fiddlers of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, upon Prince Edward Island fiddlers is outlined from the mid-1930s to the present. This influence, and the related propagation of musical literacy by the Fiddlers' Society are

seen in relation to the concepts of "traditional music" that animate said Society. The origins of the Fiddlers' Society (to which the author belongs) are traced and its activities described.

Finally, the Society is evaluated in terms of its uses of tradition and the Island's cultural present, and the importance of local tradition is advocated for this group and other Island fiddlers, and society generally.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish first to acknowledge a debt to my late aunt, Kathleen Hornby (later MacGuigan), who transmitted to me a small part of her knowledge of violin playing; without an early exposure to the instrument from her, this study would never have commenced. As they are too numerous to name individually, I wish to thank collectively my many informants who shared their love of fiddle music with me. My main thanks in the academic realm go to Dr. Neil V. Rosenberg, who interested me in attending the Department of Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland, assisted in many ways while I was in St. John's, and served me well as my thesis advisor.

Many of the Department's professors and students have helped me, but I wish to mention Mac Swackhammer and Colin Quigley, fellow students and fiddlers.

The Inter-Library Loan Department at the Memorial University Library deserves special thanks for responding to my many requests, and I have also had the benefits of libraries at the University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown; Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B.; Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S.; and the Beaton Archive, College of Cape Breton, Sydney, N.S.

For financial assistance to do fieldwork I am indebted to the Department of Folklore, Memorial University of

Newfoundland, the Explorations Program of the Canada Council, and the Prince Edward Island Council of the Arts. For her patience and support, my chiefest debt is to my wife, Susan.

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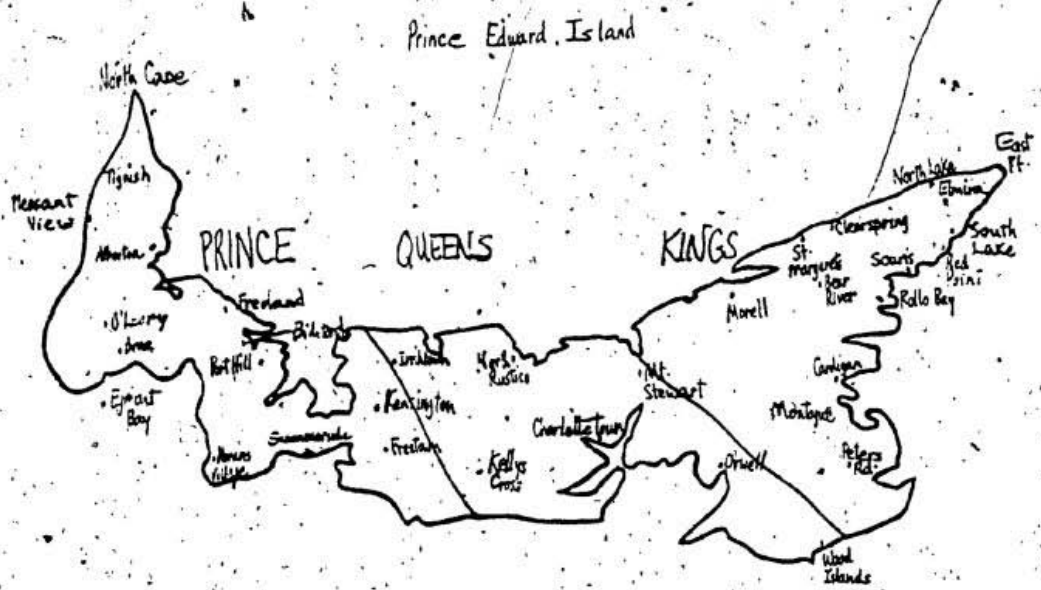


Prince Edward Island, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Canada. County divisions and relevant place-names are shown.

INTRODUCTION

Prince Edward Island, Canada's smallest province (population 125,000), is a fertile 120-mile crescent in the Gulf of St. Lawrence that has, like many other largely rural parts of the nation, a strong identification with fiddle music as a heritage symbol. Like most other traditional aspects of the Island culture, fiddling has received little study, and its particular history and character seem but vaguely understood despite its prominence.

Changes in dance and musical fashions in this century are part of the reason for this confusion of identity. Another factor has been the association of Don Messer, a famous Canadian commercial fiddler, with Island fiddling. Although he was born in New Brunswick, Messer gained his great national popularity during and following the Second World War with his network radio broadcasts and records from radio station CFCY in Charlottetown, the Island capital -- and his band was called "The Islanders." A large contemporary element in this identity problem is Island fiddlers' similarity to, and emulation of, the highly visible fiddling tradition in neighbouring Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

Along with other areas of Atlantic Canada, the Island has seen renewed interest in, and appreciation of, fiddle music in the 1970s. Locally, this came primarily through the formation of the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society in 1976. This organization was directly influenced by the development of the Cape Breton Fiddlers' Association a few years previous, but

it largely depended on a vital local tradition and a supportive public on the Island (as the province is commonly known in a supremely insular shorthand that can be traced back to the aboriginal name "Minago" or "Minegoo" -- that is, "the Island"[1]).

A movement for local history studies gained momentum here during the 1970s and is continuing. The advent of the Prince Edward Island Heritage Foundation in 1970 has given this thrust some visibility and focus. The much older francophone cultural organization, the St. Thomas Aquinas Society (founded 1919) has been caught up in the revival of Acadian pride and is involved in cultural research, publications, and activism.

In this context the Fiddlers' Society has been welcomed as a spontaneous revival of local musical traditions. Interviewed on the supper-hour program on CBCT-TV, 28 December 1980, for a year-end review, then-Premier J. Angus MacLean mentioned the Fiddlers' Society as an example of cultural rebirth in the province. By the time he spoke, an LP recording of the Society[2] had sold over 1000 copies to a market of about 40,000 people (where the record was available) in a month. Its producers, the Caledonian Club, were advertising the disc as containing "traditional fiddle music of P.E.I.," and the Fiddlers' Society was acknowledged as the spearhead of an amazing revival of fiddling on the Island.

The popularity of fiddling and "old-time" music[3] generally seems to be at a high level on Prince Edward Island today, and this popularity is closely related to the high-profile activities of the Fiddlers' Society through its frequent

appearances. The question I have set out to answer herein is: does the Fiddlers' Society indeed constitute a "revival" of Island fiddling tradition? To compare Island fiddling as represented by the Fiddlers' Society against the standards of local tradition, I first had to document this tradition.

In my survey of previous research, I found that the study of fiddling, and of instrumental folk traditions generally, is at a nascent stage in Canada. I doubt that any more evidence of this statement is needed than the fact that a prominent Canadian ethnomusicologist, in an article on "Folk and Aboriginal Music" in Canada, can summarize most of the nation's folk music thus:

> In English and French Canada the violin is the principal folk instrument and is used mostly for dancing. Traditional songs are usually sung unaccompanied. Other cultures have richer instrumental traditions.[4]

This terse description, with its surprising denigration in the third sentence, suggests that Mr. Peacock is not fully aware of the richness of Canadian fiddle music, to name one area. As with many other facets of Canadian life, outsiders seem better able to appreciate our music. For example, Paul F. Wells, an American student of fiddle music, has acclaimed the "remarkable variety" of Canadian folk music, especially fiddling.[5]

However, in Canadian scholarship in this area, negative examples abound. For instance, the article "The Fiddle in Folklore" in the Anthropological Journal of Canada: a mishmash

of American chauvinism (fiddle tunes are American, "derived from" British tunes -- hardly true in Canada, at least) and undigested, mostly literary references whose single mention of Canada is a verbal expression inserted by the editor.[6] And Maritime folklorist Helen Creighton once published an article entitled "Fiddles, Folk-Songs, and Fishermen's Yarns" that contains no mention of fiddles or fiddling, although a fiddler's picture accompanies it;[7] these last references may be the fault of some misguided editor.

While the bad examples are perhaps more numerous,[8] there has been some good research into Canadian fiddling in recent years.[9] However, there is so far little on the scale of American probes into fiddle music.[10] One of the better American studies mistakenly states that Maritime Canadian fiddling is predominantly French, like that of Quebec,[11] but this error seems less culpable than the lack of Canadian research for other scholars to refer to.

The genesis of French-Canadian fiddling is just one subject requiring definitive investigation. The first mention of the violin in New France that I have seen was recorded by a Quebec Jesuit in 1645; Willy Amtmann has suggested that he was referring to viols rather than violins.[12] I have, however, found some indirect support for their being violins because the reference is to a dance. In France, almost from the violin's introduction to the court of Henri II in the late sixteenth century, violins and viols had different functions. Violins played ballets and song airs ("Sonatas"), while the viols and lutes accompanied voices ("Cantatas"). As music historian Maurice Emmanuel writes

of the violin in France, "it is certain that the dances were the instrument's almost exclusive domain," and "their salient quality was placed at the service of rhythm."[13]

Gabriel Labbé has reported that in 1721 a Quebec fiddler performed a selection of Scotch reels, jigs, hompipes, cotillions and waltzes.[14] This repertoire raises the question of whether French musicians brought Scottish tunes with them over to Canada, as many exiled Jacobites from Scotland lived in France after 1715. Helmut Kallman asserts that the French brought fiddle music to Canada, but does not bolster his statement with any evidence.[15] As folklorist Ernest Gagnon has stated, French-Canadians preserved French songs, but not French dance music:

> the purely instrumental music, the music of the uniquely popular Canadian instrument, the violin, is in our days exclusively English, Scottish or Irish; those are the dance tunes, the jigs, the reels, the hornpipes -- nothing of which is French.[16]

The Acadian scholarship I have seen on this question also attributes the traditional dance music to the influence of British and Irish neighbours. Paul Surette claims that for Island Acadians this influence was especially strong because of their relative isolation.[17]

My own search for a further clue to the origins of Island Acadian fiddling is well summarized by the results of Amtmann's more widely-focused research on French-Canadian fiddling:

> A discouraging scarcity of documentary evidence frustrated the effort to reconstruct early musical life in the French colony, and research into the nature and extent of musical manifestations has yielded but few results.[18]

Twenty-six years after Samuel Bayard's pioneering study Hill Country Tunes: Instrumental Folk Music in Southwestern Pennsylvania, his statement that "... instrumental music may perhaps be termed the most tenaciously preserved and most persistently neglected of the folk arts"[19] still seems applicable to Canadian folkloristics, although conditions are improving.

This academic neglect is especially puzzling in view of the number of people engaged in fiddling (I estimate there are at least 150-200 or 0.16 per cent of the population on PEI alone) and its high visibility both culturally and commercially. Groups like the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society do much to promote this visibility through concerts, recordings, radio and television appearances and its newsletter, The Island Fiddler. However, as I intend to show, while the audience assumes that "the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers" (as groups of Society members are known) play traditional, old-time music, in fact the group represents a new era of innovation and change in a process of cultural evolution that has gone on as long as there have been fiddlers on the Island -- approximately 200 years. Yet despite the changes in form, function and fortune, I see also a clear line of continuity in the fiddle music of the Island and its appeal to Islanders over the years.

In attempting, however imperfectly, to define Island fiddling tradition, I have tried to illuminate its persistence and changes in both social and musical terms. This I have done in a chronologically ordered series of probes leading up to the

present, so that the origins and activities of the Fiddlers' Society are seen in historical context -- for some concept of history underlies any understanding of tradition. The components and sources of fiddling repertoire on even this small island are so numerous that it is necessary to generalize and select and so, while I have relied on many individual examples and opinions, I have tried to give a broad and fair picture of a tradition that has a substantial hard core of support on this island province. The diversity both of ethnic strains and outside influences undoubtedly gives this paper some claim to being a case study beyond its ethnographic particulars -- Bruce Hutchison's description of the Island as a "toy continent"[20] being only a slight exaggeration. The pattern of decline, adaptation, and revival traced here is typical of this tradition in twentieth century Britain and North America. More local and regional Canadian studies covering similar ground are needed to define its importance and character as a national folk art.

Research Methods

For most folklore graduate students, a thesis topic is determined after they have begun their studies; for me this order has been reversed. It was in pursuit of my topic that I became a folklore student. My involvement in fiddling began in late 1975, about a year before the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society was started. Having joined the Society and done a radio item on it for CBC Radio's Maritime network, it was a further year later that I entered the Department of Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

As a student there I formed a much broader and deeper interest in the many forms of folklore, including music. However, some of the fieldwork utilized in this study predates my entering the Department -- notably my first interview with (then Father) Faber MacDonald, and "participant observation" (not that I would have so termed it at that time) as a member of the Society and novice fiddler. The study evolved in the course of my time at Memorial. The courses I took and professors I met, fellow graduate students, and the wealth of bibliographic resources at the Department, the University Library, and in private collections, were all of great assistance, as were the resources of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (hereafter MUNFLA), where most of my field tapes are deposited.

With my thesis topic almost predestined from the outset, I embarked while at Memorial on a private course of study on fiddle music. This included finding and reading associated papers and studies concerning North American, British, and Irish fiddling, listening to a wide variety of recordings, and continually upgrading my own playing (and thereby analytical) skills. I spent the summers 1978 and 1979 and most of 1980 conducting fieldwork in Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, with brief sojourns to Boston and Cape Breton. I wanted to see Island fiddling from the outside as well as the inside, and in all contexts, contemporary and historical, folkloric and pop-cultural. In addition to my activities as a member of the Society at practices and performances, and later editing and

co-producing with John Weyman its newsletter The Island Fiddler, I undertook a province-wide series of interviews with fiddlers (Society members and otherwise) and surveyed the provincial literature for references and descriptions in histories, biographical and fictional works, and newspapers.

While I am still an enthusiastic member of the Society I am led, like some others, to question the group's appreciation of local tradition. My documentation of Island fiddling established points of reference for the analysis herein.[21]

NOTES

[1]See Silas T. Rand, Dictionary of the Language of the Micmac Indians (Halifax: Nova Scotia Printing Company, 1888; rpt., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972), p.148. See also Milton Acorn, The Island Means Minago (Toronto: NC Press, 1975).

[2]"The Prince Edward Island Fiddlers," one 12" 33 1/3 rpm phonodisc (Charlottetown: The Caledonian Club), Inter-Media Services IMC-WRC1-1318, 1980. Hereafter, all records cited are 12 inch, 33 1/3 rpm phonodiscs unless stated otherwise.

[3]"Old-time" music is the standard term for traditional instrumental music, especially dance music.

[4]Kenneth Peacock, "Folk and Aboriginal Music," in Arnold Walter, ed., Aspects of Music in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p.87.

[5]Paul F. Wells, "Canadian and Canadian-American Music," Journal of American Folklore, 91 (July-Sept. 1978), 879. I was interested to see the parallels to my study in Mr. Wells's 36-page booklet of notes accompanying his historical anthology, "New England Traditional Fiddling: an anthology of recordings 1926-1975," one disc (JEMF-105, 1978).

[6]Norma and Sirri Moriarty, "The Fiddle in Folklore," Anthropological Journal of Canada, 12 (1974), 1-9.

[7]Helen Creighton, "Fiddles, Folk-Songs, and Fishermen's Yarns," Canadian Geographical Journal, 51 (December 1955), 212-221.

[8]See also my review of Dorothy and Homer Hogan, eds., "Canadian Fiddle Culture," Communique: Canadian Studies, 3 (August, 1977), which appeared in The Canadian Music Educator, 20 (Spring-Summer 1979), 69-71.

[9]See especially George Proctor, "Old Time Fiddling in Ontario," National Museum of Canada, Bulletin No. 190, Contributions to Anthropology 1960 Part II, (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer, 1963), 173-208; R.M. Swackhammer, "I'm a Professional But I'm Not on Records": The Reflection of a Performer's Self-Image in His Repertoire," MA thesis, Department of Folklore: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1979; Roy W. Gibbons, Folk Fiddling in Canada: A Sampling. CCFCS Paper No. 35, (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1981); Carmelle Begin, La Musique Traditionelle pour Violon: Jean Carignan, CCFCS Paper No. 40, (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1981); and Jean-Pierre Joyal, "Le process du composition dans la musique instrumental du québéc," Canadian Folk Music Journal, 6 (1980), 49-54.

[10]Some of the best research on American fiddling is in unpublished dissertations, such as: Richard J. Blaustein, "Traditional Music and Social Change: The Old Time Fiddlers Association Movement" (Department of Folklore, University of Indiana, 1975); Linda C. Burman-Hall, "Southern American Folk Fiddling: Context and Style" (Department of Music, Princeton University, 1973); and Earl V. Spielman, "Traditional North American Fiddling: A Methodology of the Historical and Comparative Analytical Style Study of Instrumental Music Traditions" (Department of Music, University of Wisconsin, 1975).

[11]Burman-Hall, p.74.

[12]Willy Amtmann, Music in Canada 1600-1800 (Montreal: Habitex Books, 1975), p.123.

[13]Maurice Emmanuel, "The Creation of the Violin and Its Consequences," The Musical Quarterly, 23 (1937), 510-511.

[14]Gabriel Labbé, Les pionneurs du disque folklorique québécois 1920-1950 (Montreal: Les Editions de l'Aurore, 1977); p.16.

[15]Helmut Kallman, A History of Music in Canada 1534-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), p.25.

[16]Translated and quoted from Gagnon's Louis Jolliet by Amtmann, p.151.

[17]See Paul Surette, "Le climat musical acadien de l'Ile-du-Prince-Edouard à la fin du XIXieme siècle," Les Cahiers de la Societé Historique Acadienne, 10 (September, 1979), 156-160. Charlotte Cormier stated, in her "La musique traditionelle en Acadie," Memoirs of the Royal Society of Canada, 4th Series, 15 (1977), 241, that while she believes Maritime Acadians had musical instruments before the deportation (1755-58), she has found no supporting documents to prove it.

[18]Amtmann, pp. 9-10.

[19]Samuel Bayard, Hill Country Tunes: Instrumental Folk Music of Southwestern Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Memoirs of the American Folklore Society, vol. 39, 1944). pp. xi-xii.

[20]Bruce Hutchison, Canada: Tomorrow's Giant (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), p. 61.

[21]All generalizations, place names, contexts and identifications herein refer to Prince Edward Island unless commonly known (ex., "Boston") or otherwise identified. Charlottetown, the Island's only city, is hereafter occasionally referred to as "the city."

CHAPTER ONE

A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ISLAND FIDDLING

According to scanty but plausible local legend, the fiddle arrived on the Island with Captain John MacDonald's 210 Highland settlers on the Alexander in 1772.[1] This ship was one of the first of many that brought British settlers to the Island after the fall of Louisbourg, the French military stronghold on Isle Royale (Cape Breton) upon which Isle St. Jean (changed to "Prince Edward Island" in 1799) was dependent. Louisbourg fell in 1758, and that year Island Acadians, who had constantly struggled to survive since their first settlements of 1720, were ordered deported, part of "le Grand Dérangement". Some two or three hundred escaped this expulsion, a few hiding along the Hillsborough River north-east of Charlottetown, the majority moving west to the Malpeque area of Prince County where the British didn't bother to chase them.[2] Some moved as far west as Tignish. This accounts for the large Acadian presence in Prince County today, a presence that is much smaller in Queens and Kings counties to the east.

The question of whether the Island Acadians possessed the fiddle before this take-over is a vexing one, and so far unresolved. D.C. Harvey's authoritative study The French Régime in Prince Edward Island contains a chapter on "Social Life and Institutions" that is bereft of any reference to music or dance, and his book as a whole suggests that survival completely preoccupied Island Acadians. Willy Amtmann has noted that the

French colonies generally had fewer musical instruments than "the more privileged English colonies."[3] Yet an Island diarist, William Drummond, wrote in 1770 (before the Alexander arrived) that he had gone "to a house where the French were convened, had a dance and spent the evening in jollity." And on the following New Year's Day, "the French came to us and made a frolic."[4] There is no way of knowing what kind of music was provided -- it may have been strictly vocal -- nor have I found any other such references from this period.

Concerning the Island's Micmac Indians there is no such confusion. Like Indians in James Bay and across the country,[5] they learned to fiddle from the Europeans. Indians from the Island's Lennox Island, Rocky Point and Scotchfort reserves have played the fiddle for many generations, as evidenced by the special medal awarded to Noel Sapphere, an elderly blind Indian fiddler, at a fiddling contest in Charlottetown in 1926.[6] (See Chapter Four for more on this contest.)

As the Scots are the most significant ethnic group of contributors to Island fiddling tradition, their main areas of settlement deserve to be noted. Captain John MacDonald's 1772 emigrant ship landed in the Tracadie area with 210 Catholic Scots (210 years ago) from the Western Isles (especially South Uist and Barra) and West Highlands (mainly Arisaig and Moydart).[7] These settlers spread along the shore from Malpeque to East Point and Launching about 1796.[8] The fiddle has long been popular and prolific on this coast, perhaps especially so on

what is called "the North Side" of the eastern tip of the Island (roughly from St. Margaret's to East Point). The Scots in the northern areas of the province have been mostly Catholic, a point with some bearing on their acceptance of the fiddle, and one that I will take up later.

After the so-called "Tracadie" settlement of 1770, many other ships brought British settlers, mostly Scots, over during the next 50 years. A significant settlement was sponsored by Lord Selkirk in 1803. His 803 settlers landed in the Belfast/ Point Prim area on the south shore east of Charlottetown, and spread east into southern Kings County to Wood Islands for several miles inland. The settlers in this "Belfast District"[9] were Presbyterian, mostly from the Isle of Skye. Almost all Island Scots have come from the Western Highlands and Isles; it is the area of greatest Catholic presence in Scotland, and the reason that Scotch Catholics were proportionally much more numerous here than in Scotland -- religious persecution of Catholics was a major reason for emigration.[10]

By 1855, when settlements were beginning to consolidate as communities, half of the Island's population of 71,500 was Scottish.[11] The Scots were primarily located in the eastern half of the Island -- that is, eastern Queens and all of Kings counties. They also are quite prevalent in parts of Prince, "The Brae" being a place-name that reflects this: I have collected a tune from there known as "the Brae tune."

The other main ethnic groups that populated the Island

in the nineteenth century -- English, southern Irish, and Anglo-American Loyalists -- were fairly evenly distributed across the Island, although the Loyalists mainly settled in the Malpeque/Bedeque isthmus and around Charlottetown.

Written Accounts

For what little description of musical life exists before the present century, we are indebted mainly to travellers, the Island's first "tourists." Walter Johnstone, an early correspondent from the Island whose letters were published in Scotland, noted that the inhabitants (c. 1820) were "remarkably fond of riding, roving about, frolicking and drinking rum." The term "frolic," as shall be noted, has strong connotations of music and dance (which the drinking of rum in no way discouraged). After a thickening (wool-shrinking or "waulking") frolic, Johnstone added, "a merry night is made of it, in drinking, dancing, and making up of matches."[12] The sparseness of this summary is typical of all the nineteenth century comments on this topic that I have seen. Those few who mentioned musical and dance events did not describe them. It seems that the literate found such activities as fiddling beneath serious notice, while those who were involved lacked, in many cases, the ability to record them, or took them for granted as unremarkable. Also, nineteenth-century Island newspapers were far more concerned with reporting the sensational happenings in the outside world than with the everyday activities of Islanders, and therefore considerable research has found little of use as social history in this area. The following report from the 14 February 1881

Charlottetown Examiner is typical:

> The young folks of Orwell had their annual ball Monday night, Jan. 3rd at Mr. Charles Macdonald's house. There were about one hundred present and with the aid of Mr. Buchanan (piper) and Mr. MacLean (violinist) the dancing continued to 6 a.m.

An early peripatetic diarist on the Island was John McGregor, who published his Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Maritime Colonies of British America in 1828. Although his remarks on music contain little description and no history, they show that music was flourishing among the predominately rural Island population. He writes:

> The amusements of the farmer and other inhabitants settled in different parts of the island, are much the same as they have been accustomed to before leaving the countries they came from. Dances on many occasions are common.[13]

McGregor makes a nice distinction between the uses of that Scottish national symbol the bagpipe, and the more social fiddle:

> No Scottish settlement was complete without bagpipe music. But, as one traveller explains, "At their dances within doors, they, however, generally prefer the old Highland fiddler, or the young one who has learnt the same music, which is at all times played with the spirit and rapidity of which the Scotch reels and strathspeys are so eminently susceptible."[14]

McGregor's informant indicates that the most typically Scottish tunes (the reel and strathspey) were then well established, as they presumably were from the outset.

McGregor uses the word "frolic" to denote many of the

gatherings he mentions, and says he believes it to be a term "peculiar to [North] America."[15] He rightly observes that a frolic involves a sequence of communal work (such as harvesting, stump-pulling, barn-raising, wool-milling) followed by refreshments and a dance. Here is a good short description of the more enjoyable portion:

> Then, when, in the evening, the work was done, all gathered, glad and hearty, around the supper table. After supper the kitchen was cleared for a dance, and reels, Scotch and Irish, with jigs, reels, polkas and schottisches followed in succession to music furnished by the neighbourly fiddler, while in the intervals, songs and merriment prevailed until the back-log in the fireplace had burned low.[16]

An amusing comment about some Kings County fiddlers was recorded in the Royal Gazette newspaper of January 10, 1837. At the end of a detailed account of a tenant meeting at Hay River (near present-day Clearspring) it reports that toasts were drunk to Great Britain and the King (to whom 34 petitions were being sent), with three cheers. Then, it states:

> An attempt was made to play 'God save the King,' but (we must tell the truth) our musicians are better accustomed to Highland Reels.[17]

It is impossible to tell whether this indicates musical narrowness or ancestral rebelliousness.

Several reports published in this century harken back to musical life during the previous one. Greenhill and Giffard's West Countrymen in Prince Edward's Isle recounts the experiences of immigrants from Devon and Cornwall to the Port Hill/Bideford

area of Prince County, in particular concerning the shipbuilding boom. Of the 1860s, the peak years for the industry, they observe the following in a chapter entitled "Two Fiddles and No Plow":

> Some elderly people in the Island still remember hearing in their childhood of this era as the time of "two fiddles and no plow," when the farms were uncultivated and allowed to go to ruin while the men made quick ready credit with the store keeper/merchant/ship-builder by flocking to the woods and ship-building places. When credit was plentiful "it was all the shipyard or the woods, and for the rest to play the old tunes and drink and be as merry and irresponsible as the happy circumstances allowed."[18]

It is clear that the social stigma of the fiddler as an irresponsible, often drunken disrupter of work is of long standing and some foundation. More will be said about this in Chapter Two.

A final retrospective comes from Eastern Kings, one of the centres of old-time musical activity in the province. In the memoir Timothy's Boyhood: or, Pioneer Country Life on Prince Edward Island, the anonymous author (whom I have identified as Harry Mellick) recalls the "Neighbourhood Social Life" of his nineteenth century boyhood. He lived in a place then known as Portage, now called Elmira; the period covered by his book is put into some focus by the fact that the name change occurred in 1872.[19] Mellick noted:

> The only musical instruments we had were the jew's-harp, the mouth organ, the accordian, the concertina, the flute, the bagpipes and the fiddle. The bagpipes made a weird droning sound. They were capable of very lively or

> very mournful music, and responded readily to the skill of the player. It required strong lungs to play them. ...The fiddle was the favorite for social functions.[20]

Among the social functions Mellick mentions are house-warming dances and milling frolics. Despite his apologetic use of the word "only," there seems to have been an excellent variety of instrumentalists. It is interesting that one of the best-known Island fiddlers, Neil Cheverie, (about whom more is said below), came from Mellick's home community, Elmira, which seems to have enjoyed a lively musical life.

Of the other instruments Mellick mentions, the jew's-harp is worthy of a monograph on its own. It seems also to have come here from the Highlands and Isles of Scotland, where it was known as the "trump."[21] A humble relic of the heyday of home-made music, it has perhaps gone totally out of use here; at least, I have not heard of anyone playing a jew's-harp currently. Indeed, many hold it in contempt: a banjoist who played with an early old-time band that included a jew's-harp player scornfully told me that "there's no more music in a jew's-harp than in chewing gum."[22] However, it has considerable seniority on the banjo and most other instruments played on the Island -- Johnstone recorded its use in 1821[23] -- and it and the harmonica shared second place as vehicles of old-time music here until well into this century.

Malcolm Macqueen summarizes many other reports in this statement: "The musical instrument generally used was the fiddle, but in default of it the mouth organ and jew's-harp

were sometimes used."[24] Macqueen recalled that an old woman played for dances with that most modest of membranophones, the comb and paper[25] -- the dancers must have been light on their feet!

The popularity of the flute for dance music as well as airs is well established from reports by Johnstone, Macqueen, R.C. Tuck, and others, and it seems to have been in fairly common use.

Among pipers, the Irish pipes seem to have been much less common than the Highland bagpipes; indeed, the only reference to the Union or uilleann pipes is from a report of a St. Patrick's Day concert in The Islander of March 20, 1868: "The performance on the Irish pipes was highly appreciated."

Related Musical Arts

No review of the history of fiddling on the Island can afford to ignore the music made by "jigging" tunes. Known also as "tuning," "lilting," "chin music," among Gaelic-speakers as puirt-a-beul and to Acadians as "musique (or reel) à bouche" (mouth music in each case), jigging was the practice of rendering a tune with wordless vocals. Macqueen wrote this appreciation of the art:

> When instrumental music was lacking a jigger chanted his wavering melody to the amusement and great delight of the whole party. Some of these jiggers had a ready fund of humorous anecdotes and an uncanny gift of mimicry. They were always welcome guests and did much to improve an evening.[26]

Mellick recalled a fellow worker who jigged excellently: "He was a good substitute for a fiddle at a dance."[27] A very lively dance to music supplied by an "orchestra" of two jiggers was recorded at Long Creek in 1872 by Island architect William Critchlow Harris.[28]

While women fiddlers have been relatively few compared to the number of women accompanists, the women were if anything more prolific at jigging. Many fiddlers heard their first tunes from their mothers in this way. Fifty years ago you could sometimes hear tunes being jigged over the radio in Charlottetown and Summerside. The practice has greatly declined, however, the decline seemingly related to that of the Gaelic language on the Island. Today there are few jiggers who are not too self-conscious to demonstrate this skill even in intimate groups.

The place in the repertoire taken in Irish tradition by slow airs was filled here by popular song airs on the fiddle. If in waltz time, they could be danced to. Conversely, dance tunes were often turned into songs with the addition of words; some of the fiddle tunes to which words were added to make these "lip tunes" were "Soldier's Joy," "Caber Feidh," and "Green Grow the Rushes-O." In many cases the added verses were risqué or obscene; Professor Bayard collected an obscene verse to the tune of "Cock of the North"[29] from an Island fiddler.

Instrumental back-up does not seem to have been a feature of most Island fiddling before the present century, although

some piano accompaniments are reported among the more affluent and official circles in the 1850s. But in the later nineteenth century the pump organ seems to have widely outsold the piano outside the city. While still a feature of many rural households, these organs are today mostly in a state of unplayable disrepair, and serve essentially as decorative furniture. And few contemporary keyboardists have developed the touch to play old-time tunes and accompaniments on them. This is a pity, as the now rare combination of fiddle and pump organ is one that I find uniquely satisfying. Tenor banjo and guitar are more recent fiddlers' companions; the latter has flourished here as elsewhere as an "instrument of democracy." However, for most Island fiddlers today, the piano is first choice for accompaniment.

Of course, fiddlers often perform solo, mostly in informal situations. In a formal performance context -- generally definable as one where the musicians play into microphones -- most will absolutely insist on an accompanist, even if no capable one is to be had.

Techniques of the Fiddlers

Through interviews with the oldest living fiddlers, and a review of the meagre written record, it is possible to portray the nineteenth century Island fiddler in a general way. The most striking feature is that every individual was largely self-taught, learning through ear and example, and therefore each fiddler held the violin and bow in the way that suited him best.

The playing position of the fiddle and the left-hand (fingering) grip, and the bow-grip and its position on the stick, vary so much that a detailed generalization is not possible. But observances of old fiddlers (and old photos of young fiddlers) indicate that most of them held the bow several inches above the frog end, and that the fiddle was usually held lower than the classical position under the chin, with the tailpiece against the chest or left bicep, and the neck of the fiddle supported with the left palm and wrist. As one 80-year-old practitioner said to me concerning fingering: "When you learn by ear, you have to make up your own system."[30] This was true of most aspects of the learning process, including the way one learned to hold the instrument and to bow it, although of course a lot was absorbed by imitation.

Few fiddlers could finger above the first position, but they didn't need to. However, one way of grading a fiddler has been by the number of fingers he can note with. Those who use all four usually have the greatest command of the violin as bowing speed, accuracy, and grace notes are facilitated, and the open notes on the E, A, and D strings can be doubled on the A, D, and G strings for a pleasing sound. Those who note with three fingers (eliminating the little one) can be very effective fiddlers, but are generally not of the top rank. A notable exception was a fiddler from Cardigan, Jack Webster,[31] who is regarded as one of the best despite not having the use of his index noting finger through an accident with a needle. At the

bottom of this scale are a few fiddlers who note with only two fingers, but the process is so slow and haphazard that they are rarely termed "fiddler" without equivocation.

While noting skill is clearly important when it comes to ranking fiddlers, it is commonly agreed that the bow hand is the great divider. One fiddler, in describing the progress in playing skills of another, held up his right (bow) hand and stated; "This is the fella that lets him down." The fiddlers of the past remembered as having been superior are almost invariably described as having had "a great bow hand (or arm)." The better bowers play mostly from the wrist, with the elbow involved mainly in string-changing motions and the shoulder essentially still. Wrist action provides the "cuts," stuttering one note by stiffening the bow-hand wrist to change bow direction back and forth with an abrupt bounce. In notation:

I am at present unable to tell whether the use of cuts is more of a survival of the Scottish "birl"[32] or an importation of the Cape Breton cuts. The latter influence has been strong at least since the 1930s when Little Jack MacDonald and others recorded tunes in which cuts were a prominent stylistic element.[33] Today at least they are identified with Cape Breton style, and those who employ cuts seem almost to use them as a sign of Cape Breton affiliation. There is also evidence that some of the old Island fiddlers in Highland settlements employed

cuts in their playing.

While most fiddle music on the Island in the past was carried in and transmitted through memory until recent years, in many areas there were a few people who could read notation and some (not always the same individuals) who had copies of printed tunes or published tune books. Some fiddlers obtained assistance from a local keyboard player, as these were mostly readers. The Scots are exceptional among fiddling cultures in their extensive use of notation to transmit fiddle tunes.[34] Among tune books, perhaps the most commonly available, and therefore influential, has been the collection known as "the thousand tune book" first published in Boston in 1883.[35]

Musical knowledge of all kinds seems to have been freely shared. Those musically literate would sound tunes so that others could learn them by ear. Joe Chaisson of Bear River remembered that when he visited Charlottetown he would bring some written music along with his fiddle. At sessions with Bill Weatherbie, a fiddling barber who had taught himself to read music, Chaisson would get him to sound tunes from the music he had brought, and learn them by ear.[36] However, he would add very individual touches (such as grace notes, and unexpected crossings to lower strings) to the skeleton of a tune's printed version.

The old-time fiddlers had techniques that augmented their sound to help compensate for the fact that they generally played alone -- and often in an atmosphere with many competing

sounds. One of these was the use of scordatura tuning,[37] altering the violin's standard GDAE tuning. The scordatura tunings I have found on the Island are "high bass" (ADAE) for the key of D, and the far more common "high bass and counter" (AEAE). The latter is usually (and confusingly) simply called "high bass"; I shall follow this nomenclature hereafter, as all "high bass" tunings I will refer to are AEAE.

Use of this tuning means that all open strings can be used as tonic or dominant drones in the keys of A (major, minor, and modal or "bagpipe"[38] -- these being distinguished by sound rather than any names). It makes for a fuller sound, and also simplifies fingering on the lower strings (G and D) as the low A and E notes otherwise requiring a bar of the first finger become open-string notes. Such tunes as the march "Johnny Cope," the strathspeys "Moneymusk" and "Christy Campbell," and the reels "Devil Among the Tailors" and "Big John MacNeil"[39] were done in this tuning. Scottish violinist/composer J. Scott Skinner, who seems to have felt that classical technique improved traditional music, eschewed scordatura tuning, classifying it in his book A Guide to Bowing under "Trick Fiddling, etc."[40]

To get the most out of high bass tuning it is necessary to use a longer, more fluid bow-stroke than the choppier, one-note-per-bow attack of normal reel and jig playing. This type of bowing is associated most closely with the playing of strathspeys and marches. As strathspey dancing (as part of the Scotch

Reel) declined in favor of the quadrille and other set dances, and step-dancing became restricted to reels, the playing of strathspeys also declined. "High bass" tuning began to disappear as accompanying instruments came into use in the late nineteenth century; however, it has only become rare since World War Two, with the death of most fiddlers who learned to play in the previous century.

While some sound-producing tricks of the old fiddlers are not often encountered today, the use of the feet for accompaniment is still common. Some fiddlers beat only one foot, but most set up a solid counter-rhythm with both; leather-soled shoes or boots give the best results. Many old-time harmonica players also do it. The Master's Wife, Sir Andrew Macphail's important memoir of late nineteenth century life in the "Selkirk" Scottish Presbyterian community of Orwell, records this accompaniment:

> The performer on the violin always strove to enforce the rhythm by trampling with his feet to give the effect of drums. He required a firm seat, a level and hard floor. If the floor were not level he would choose the highest corner.[41]

One nineteenth century American description cleverly terms the Canadian fiddler "a stamping machine with a fiddle attachment."[42] The habit of thus keeping the beat is so strong that many Island fiddlers say they couldn't play if their feet were restrained.

On Dance Fashions and the Fiddle

> "When I think of those early days in Souris, it all seems to be just one long great tune on the fiddle, with all of us dancing."
>
> -- A.P. Campbell.[43]

From the fiddler's feet we turn to those of the dancers, and then to the social context which they together created, for it was as a dance player that the fiddler earned most of his status and what little money came his way. Indeed, such was the cultural association of fiddling with dancing in the nineteenth century that it was infrequent that no dancing took place while a fiddler played -- and, as I have indicated, if no fiddler was available, more modest instrumentalists or a jigger substituted music for the dance. Some of the fiddlers even stepdanced as they played, and at some Island fiddling contests as recently as 50 years ago, there was a separate competition category for "Stepdancing Fiddlers."[44]

As the popularity and function of fiddling were tied to dances done to old-time music, fiddling declined where and as those dances did. Of course, changes in dance fashions did not occur similarly in all areas, nor all at once. Charlottetown, the capital, was relatively more attracted to newer fashions, while the outlying communities were more conservative. Although my information on local preferences in dance forms is slight -- unfortunately Lois Fahs did not visit the Island on her 1930s dance-collecting expeditions in the Maritimes[45] -- I know that differences existed, for instance between Kinkora

and Emerald, and Alberton and Tignish.[46] The following incomplete sketch of "old-time" dancing on Prince Edward Island is offered because of the symbiosis between its forms and fortunes and those of the fiddle tunes that precipitated and accompanied it.

The earliest Island dance forms of which I have reports are associated with the Scots. I am aware that they are not the earliest that existed here from William Drummond's previously quoted note of a dance with the French in 1770. The Scotch Reel, and the stepdance (considered separately from the Scotch Reel of which it was also a part), and the country dance "Sir Roger de Coverly" have been recalled as popular in the early nineteenth century, and the first at least was presumably known to earlier Island Scots of the late eighteenth century. The Reel of Tulloch and Gille Callum are two other Scots dances named for the early period, the latter perhaps the specialty of pipers rather than fiddlers.[47]

Many references to dance are found in the 1872-73 diary of architect William Critchlow Harris. An enthusiastic singer, dancer, and fiddler, Harris recorded his participation in many dances, including quadrilles, round dances, mazourkas, polkas, schottisches, and eight-hand reels. But "Sir Roger" (as he calls it) is mentioned most often. He states several times that this dance ended the night, and once observes: "The finishing of these parties by dancing 'Sir Roger' I may say is another very good Charlotte Town custom."[48] However, the

dance was apparently not done to the old tune of the same name found in Sir John Hawkins' 1776 history in 9/4 time, now commonly 9/8;[49] Harris identifies its music as a standard Irish jig: "I found out yesterday that, that tune which Mama used to play for us to dance Sir Roger, is an old Irish melody (Nora Creina)."[50]

The stepdance may have come to the Island as part of the Scotch Reel and become a solo specialty of some dancers, who separated it from the group figures. As Emmerson has observed:

> The step-dance manner of setting and travelling in social dances was apparently carried to Canada, where, in the Scottish settlements on the eastern seaboard, it conspicuously survived into modern times.[51]

The Scotch Reel steps combine "travelling" group figures and "setting" individual stepdancing.[52] One Scottish observer of the eighteenth century (when the dance became popular in Scotland) said its steps "combine gracefulness and muscular culture."[53] Another, Edward Topham, disagreed on the element of grace (the Reel is "entirely devoid of grace") but if anything accentuated its athleticism:

> A Scotchman comes into an assembly room as he would into a field of exercise, dances till he is literally tired, possibly without ever looking at his partner, or almost knowing who he dances with.[54]

In this light we can understand how a 43-year-old Belfast minister ruptured an Achilles tendon while dancing a Scotch Reel at Governor Ready's New Year's party in Charlottetown in

1839.[55] It was noted that he hadn't danced in 20 years, and presumably overextended himself in attempting a dance noted for its vigor.

John McGregor had made similar observations of the Scotch Reel and Maritime Highlanders over a decade earlier:

> Their dancing is at the very antipodes of our fashionable quadrilling; with them every muscle and limb is actively and rapidly engaged, and they often maintain the floor till one, whose strength of body and lungs is weaker than that of the others, yields to the fatigue, and sits down. They have always dances at their marriages, and also when the bride arrives at her lord's house. Christmas is also with them the season of making merry.[56]

McGregor's "fashionable quadrilling" was brought to Britain from fashionable Paris at the time of the War of 1812-14.[57] The dance was naturalized with the substitution of some native steps and the employment of native dance music in Scotland, England, and Ireland. According to Emmerson, the step-dancing steps are "peculiarly associated with Ireland,"[58] and travelled from Ireland to the Hebrides and Western Highlands of Scotland, and from there to Canada.

As the experience of the unfortunate Belfast minister indicates, it took longer for the quadrille to replace the exuberant Scotch Reel on the Island than in London or Edinburgh. The arrival of the quadrille can be dated to about the time of his injury (1839). The approximate date is also supplied by an elderly informant of Malcolm Macqueen:

> At this early period the reel and stepdance were the only ones she ever saw. Mrs.

> Gillis believes that for the first generation the Belfast people [who landed in 1803] never danced the quadrille. It came into favor later.[59]

Other Continental dances arrived quickly: waltzes, polkas, and Highland Schottisches (or "Strathspey Polkas").[60] All were couple dances, not formally dependent upon integration into larger units as before. The popularity of "sets" of quadrilles, especially in the form of "lancers," was immediate -- "spread like measles in a kindergarten."[61] The rapidity of their take-over is possibly indicated by the order of the dances listed at a ball in Charlottetown in 1859: a "temporary orchestra" played "quadrilles, polkas, waltzes, schottisches [sic], and reels" until dawn.[62]

Perhaps this was the same sort of "orchestra" encountered in the city by Isabella Lucy Bird five years previous:

> a pianist and violinist played most perseveringly, and the amusements were kept up with untiring spirit till four in the morning.[63]

Traditional fiddle music, augmented by some newer tune types, was able to adapt to the onset of polkas and waltzes as it was later unable to do when "modern" dances like the foxtrot came into vogue. That dancers were versatile, at least in Charlottetown, is indicated by the dance repertoire of Mrs. Cantello Burris' Dancing Academy, which existed in Charlottetown from 1850 to the 1870s. The dances taught were "slow Waltz, fast Waltz, Polka, Mazourka, Galop, Highland Polka, Plain Quadrille, Lancers, etc."[64] The "Highland Polka" is

presumably the Schottische, a dance that originated on the European continent rather than in Scotland. The Scotch Reel is conspicuous by its absence from this list, unless it is part of "etc." However, around the countryside, the quadrilles and lancers and eight-hand reels were popular, and jigs and reels were played for them; the occasional waltz made a break in the action. In this heyday of community dances, the fiddler was king.

Such dances never really recovered from the interruption of the First World War, and the changes that accompanied it. The disappearance of social dance forms is indicated by the fact that today the stepdance is the only one of the older dances still done (except, of course, the waltz) and it is as a solo demonstration piece -- on stages more than dance-floors. However, even it seems no longer learned socially, but now is usually acquired from a teacher. This system has brought into stepdancing the use of tap-dance steps (and tap shoes) and showy upper-body movements, none of which are traditional, and the loss of strathspey and jig steps. Few of today's Island stepdancers can dance to anything besides reel steps, and many of them will dance to only a few reel tunes such as, "Big John McNeil," "Sheehan's Reel," "Heather on the Hill," "Miss MacLeod's Reel," "Lord MacDonald's Reel," "St. Anne's Reel," "The Growling Old Man and Old Woman." These of course are played by fiddlers, but most find playing "Heather on the Hill" or "Big John McNeil" a dozen times in succession a sterile business,

and no substitute for the days when they had whole communities fighting for space on the dance floor.

Today there are few old-time dances of any regularity. Since the younger generations do not know how to dance the old sets, it is the old-timers, including some senior citizen clubs like Charlottetown's "Go-Getters," that prolong the presence of old-time dances. Young people will readily dance to the fiddle, but it is a dance composed of very rudimentary swings and promenades, and the do-your-own-thing-shuffle learned at rock music dances.

Despite the physical response that still comes, however inchoate, from its auditors, fiddling presently exists, to the sorrow of many, primarily as a listening music rather than a dance music. This is a radical change from the fiddler's role in the "dance fever" era, 1840-1940.

After about 1870, when most communities were fairly well established, the fiddler served as the catalyst of social release. It was incumbent upon him to provide dance music at almost all social events: frolics, house-parties, basket and pie socials,[65] weddings, wedding and baby showers, annual celebrations such as Christmas and Easter, concerts of all sorts, and, in summer, "picnics" (outdoor parties where a platform was erected for dancing and covered with branches to screen the sun) and "trots" (horse races). The former wide popularity of adult dancing is indicated by this list: the term "dance" was not often used, as it was assumed that

dancing would take place at most social events.

In the isolation of Island communities before mass media and mass transportation arrived, the fiddler had tremendous importance. In the next chapter, I will examine the contradictory social cirtumstances that led to his disgrace.

NOTES

[1]Heard or inferred from George MacIntyre and Aeneas MacPhee in Souris.

[2]D.C. Harvey, The French Régime in Prince Edward Island (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1926; rpt. ed., New York: AMS Press, 1970), p.199.

[3]Amtmann, p.123.

[4]David Weale, intro. and ed., "Diary of William Drummond," The Island Magazine, 2 (1977), 30-31.

[5]"The Fiddlers of James Bay," 35 mm film (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1980).

[6]Found in the Charlottetown Guardian, 30 March 1926, p.1.

[7]J.M. Bumsted, "Captain John MacDonald and the Island," The Island Magazine, no.6 (Spring-Summer 1979), p.16.

[8]Anon., The Arrival of the First Scottish Catholic Emigrants in Prince Edward Island and After: 1772-1922 (Summerside, PEI: The Journal Publishing Company, 1922), pp.50-51.

[9]Malcolm Macqueen, Hebridean Pioneers (Winnipeg: Henderson Directories Ltd., 1957), p.26.

[10]J.M. Bumsted, "Highland Emigration to the Island of St. John and the Scottish Catholic Church," Dalhousie Review, 58 (1979), 512-513.

[11]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), p.83.

[12]Walter Johnstone, "Letters and Travels" in D.C. Harvey, ed., Journeys to the Island of St. John: or, Prince Edward Island 1775-1832 (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p.77 and p.141.

[13]John McGregor, Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Maritime Colonies of British America (London: 1828; rpt., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), I, p.73.

[14]McGregor, II, p.451.

[15]McGregor, I, p.73. However, George S. Emmerson, in A Social History of Scottish Dance: Ane Celestial Recreatioun (Montreal and London: McGill-Queens University Press, 1972), p.98, says that "frolic" was used to describe a dance in Edinburgh in the 1770s, and the OED gives as a seventeenth century definition of "frolic" -- "to give 'frolics' or parties to."

[16]W.L. Cotton, Chapters in Our Island Story (Charlottetown: Irwin Printing, 1927), p.49. For a more detailed description of a frolic, see "Frolics" in Mary Brehaut, ed., Pioneers on the Island, Part II (Charlottetown: P.E.I. Historical Society, n.d.), p.63.

[17]Donald McDonald, "Meeting at Hay River," Royal Gazette, January 10, 1837, 3. Thanks to Harry Baglole for this reference. According to The Oxford Companion to Music (London: Oxford University Press, 9th ed., 1955), pp.412-413, "God Save the King" appeared in print in England in 1744; it was presumably well known in this British possession almost a century later.

[18]Basil Greenhill and Ann Giffard, West Countrymen in Prince Edward's Isle: A Fragment of the Great Migration (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p.197.

[19]R[obert] Douglas, Place-Names of Prince Edward Island with Meanings (Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1925), p.24.

[20][Harry Mellick], Timothy's Boyhood: or, Pioneer Country Life on Prince Edward Island (Kentville, NS: The Kentville Publishing Company Ltd., 1933), p.90.

[21]Alan Bruford and Ailie Munro, The Fiddle in the Highlands (Inverness and Glasgow: An Comunn Gaidhealach; 1973), p.7.

[22]Interview with Harold Huestis, Summerside, 22 January 1980.

[23]Johnstone, p.170.

[24]Malcolm Macqueen, Skye Pioneers and 'The Island' (Winnipeg: Stovel Co. Ltd., 1929), pp.29-30. The mouth organ or harmonica is a much later instrument than the fiddle or jew's-harp. The violin evolved about 1550 (see David D. Boyden, "The Violin," pp.103-110 in Anthony Baines, ed., Musical Instruments Through the Ages (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973). The jew's-harp is termed by The Oxford Companion to Music, op. cit., p.545, "one of the most ancient and widespread instruments." According to the same source (p.869), the harmonica was developed in the 1820s.

[25]Macqueen, Skye Pioneers, p.30. George Emmerson, op. cit., p.109, notes the same instrument among the Scots. The morphological term "membranophone" was first used by Curt Sachs and Erich von Hornbostel in Systematik der Musikinstrumente (Berlin; 1914).

[26]Macqueen, Skye Pioneers, p.30.

[27]Mellick, p.104.

[28]Robert C. Tuck, Gothic Dreams (Toronto: Dundurn Press Ltd., 1978), p.24.

[29]Bayard Collection #43. Received from the collector with a letter dated 1 March 1979. The term "lip tune" is from Jim Beairsto, Kensington, 10 January 1980.

[30]Field note of a conversation with Jim Beairsto, Kensington.

[31]For more on Webster, see John Weyman, "Memories of Jack Webster," The Island Fiddler, no.5, (March 1981) pp.4-5,

[32]For the Scottish "birl" or "doodle" see James Hunter, The Fiddle Music of Scotland (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1979), p. xxiii. Seemingly related is the Shetland "shiver," noted in Pamela S. Swing, "Da Farder Ben Da Wylcomer: Shetland Island Fiddle Music," BA thesis, Wesleyan University, Middleton, Conn., n.d., p.34.

[33]Cape Breton "cuts" are described in William Lamey, Fr. John Angus Rankin, and John Shaw, brochure accompanying "The Music of Cape Breton, Vol. 2: Cape Breton Scottish Fiddle," one disc, Topic Records, London, 12TS354, 1978, p.3; and Allister MacGillivray, The Cape Breton Fiddler (Sydney, NS: College of Cape Breton Press, 1981), p.5.

[34]See Francis Collinson, The Traditional and National Music of Scotland (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p.2; David Johnson, Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp.14-16 and 111-129; and George Proctor, op. cit., pp.175-176.

[35]William Bradbury Ryan, Ryan's Mammoth Collection (Boston: Elias Howe, 1883); rpt. as One Thousand Fiddle Tunes (Chicago: M.M. Cole, 1940 and ff.).

[36]Interview with Joseph Chaisson, Bear River, 12 July 1979.

[37]For a historical perspective of this technique, with reference to its use in eighteenth century Scotland, see Theodore Russell, "The Violin 'Scordatura'" The Musical Quarterly, 24 (1938), 84-96; and Henry George Farmer, A History of Music in Scotland (London: Hinrichsen Edition Limited, n.d.), pp.283-284. Peter Cooke's observation of scordatura in Scotland is in his "The Fiddler in Shetland Society," Scottish Studies, 22 (1978), p.74. Dr. Neil V. Rosenberg, St. John's, Newfoundland, reports that an elderly New Brunswick fiddler called AEAE scordatura "French tuning."

[38]Bagpipe scale is one with a flatted seventh, most commonly A major modulating to G major. It is used to play "pipe tunes" which are either derived directly from the bagpipe music or employ its characteristic I-VII^{b} chord progression. A common example is the march "The Inverness Gathering" in A. For a discussion of these typically Scottish tunes, see Gavin Greig's introduction, "The Strathspey," in J. Scott Skinner's collection The Harp and Claymore

(Glasgow: Bayley & Ferguson, 1904), pp.5-9; and also Skinner's note on p.46 of the same collection.

While such tunes come closest to the bagpipe's pitch in the key of A, the same progression is used for fiddle tunes in other keys. An example is the Island favourite "Farmer's Reel," which shifts between G major and F major triads in the first part. This I-VII^{b} progression is termed the "double tonic" in Collinson, op. cit., pp.24-26 and 219.

[39]A scordatura version of this reel played by Island fiddler Lem Jay is notated in Chapter Four.

[40]J. Scott Skinner, A Guide to Bowing (London and Glasgow: Bayley & Ferguson, c.1900), p.3.

[41]Sir Andrew Macphail, The Master's Wife (Toronto: New Canadian Library No. 138, 1977), p.149.

[42]From "A Winter in Canada," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, February, 1884; an excerpt is reprinted as "A Canadian Fiddler, 1883," in The Island Fiddler, No.4, (October 1980), p.6.

[43]A.P. Campbell, "The Heritage of the Highland Scots in Prince Edward Island," Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 44 (Janvier-Mars 1974), 54.

[44]See, for example, the fiddling contest report in the Summerside Pioneer, 24 April 1926, p.1.

[45]Lois Fahs, Swing Your Partner: Old-Time Dances of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (Truro, NS: privately printed, 1939).

[46]The former distinction came in the place cited in note 44. The latter I cannot now credit.

[47]Macqueen, Skye Pioneers, p.30.

[48]This entry in Harris' correspondence diary is undated. My thanks to Robert C. Tuck for the opportunity to read the original manuscript.

[49]A 9/4 version of "Roger of Coverly" appears in Sir John Hawkins, A General History of the Science and Practice of Music, 2 vols. (London: 1776; rpt., New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), p.935. A version in 9/8 is in One Thousand Fiddle Tunes, q.v., p.53.

[50]The date of this diary entry is 18 October 1872. The same name ("Nora Creina") is given to a 6/8 jig in One Thousand Fiddle Tunes, p.76. Irish renderings usually have it as "Nora Criona" -- ex., Pat Mitchell, The Dance Music of Willie Clancy (Dublin: The Mercier Press Limited, 1976), pp.110-111.

[51]Emmerson, p.158.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Emmerson, p.155.

[54]Emmerson, p.256.

[55]Dr. R.G. Lea, History of the Practice of Medicine in Prince Edward Island (Charlottetown: PEI Medical Society, 1964), pp.70-71.

[56]McGregor, British America, II, p.186.

[57]Brendan Breathnach, Folk Music and Dances of Ireland (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1971), p.49.

[58]Emmerson, p.58.

[59]Macqueen, Skye Pioneers, p.31.

[60]Emmerson, p.176.

[61]Beth Tolman and Ralph Page, The Country Dance Book (Brattleboro, Vt.: The Stephen Greene Press, 1956), p.58.

[62]Benjamin Bremner, Memories of Long Ago: Being a Series of Sketches Pertaining to Charlottetown in the Past (Charlottetown, privately printed, 1930), p.80.

[63]Isabella Lucy Bird, An Englishwoman in America (London: 1856; rpt., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p.46.

[64]Bremner, p.75. I'm not sure that the Mazourka and Galop were ever popular among the Island's rural population.

[65] These socials were held in the local schoolhouse or community hall to raise money by auctioning pies or basket lunches. The young men paid for what the young women made, and the successful bidder won the right to share the company of the one whose cooking he had bought. But the auction and lunch were just preliminaries to the serious courting, talking and dancing to follow.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FIDDLER IN ISLAND SOCIETY

In an interview for the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society's newsletter, The Island Fiddler, in 1980, the Society's founder Bishop Faber MacDonald stated that folk revival movements are needed because "modern man . . . has ignored the need to celebrate the way his forefathers did" -- by singing, dancing, and music-making, especially with the fiddle.[1]

It is obvious that these aspects of community and family life have declined substantially since the time when they were common-place, integral with daily life. But in one sense it can be said that MacDonald's is an overly romantic assessment, for the celebrations of his forefathers led to the disrepute of fiddlers generally and even, some claim, to the downfall of communities and retardation of rural progress.[2]

Certainly fiddlers were the primary musical force in the rural areas -- and urban Prince Edward Island was almost a contradiction in terms. The communities that had musicians available considered themselves fortunate, as it was felt that you couldn't have much of a time without at least one present.

But by being the catalyzing force, the fiddler was to a degree held responsible for any undesirable results from the lowering of inhibitions that his music stimulated. Macphail writes: "I was saying things on the fiddle for which they would put me in gaol if only they understood what I was saying."[3]

Bootleggers frequently carried out their trade around dances, and drunkenness and fist-fights became associated with them and therefore with fiddlers. Additionally, the fiddler always had to be among the last to leave, because when he did the dance or party was essentially over. The regular keeping of late hours on demand was doubtless an obstacle to success during daylight working hours. This also became part of a common image of the fiddler: lazy, good-for-nothing.

However, the blame might be more properly laid against the influence of a pandemic over-indulgence in alcohol, from moonshine and home-made beer to the West Indian rum which was cheaper than tea for much of the nineteenth century[4] and flowed, according to the Gaelic bard Malcolm Bàn Buchanan, like water:

> There is fresh red rum
> in every dwelling and shop,
> abundant as the stream, being imbibed there.[5]

That this is no poetic flight of fancy is confirmed by other, more mundane observers. One recalled that "Men . . . would travel 20 to 30 miles to Charlottetown and back the same day, often loaded internally and externally with rum."[6] Another stated bluntly:

> The prosperity of many settlements in the Island was distinctly retarded by reason of the too free indulgence of their inhabitants at the open bars of taverns, at frolics, exhibitions, and other gatherings of the people, as well as in the privacy of the home.[7]

In speaking of the Belfast Scots, Macqueen mitigated such over-

indulgence with this observation:

> Their pleasures and recreations were few. The times were hard. From infancy they knew self-denial and toil. Even the bare necessities of life were only obtained after fatiguing manual labour . . . Only under the spell of whisky did they entirely forget the sober hardships of a life of toil.[8]

While I don't want to restrict this to one group, the militance of imbibing Scots often found an outlet in fights at country dances. J.K. Galbraith speaks from Ontario of "the cry of uncontrollable joy of a drunken Highlander as he rushes toward personal immolation";[9] this cry still seems to echo in some derelict Island halls.

The problems this milieu caused the fiddler, in terms of both health and reputation, is not a recent phenomenon. For example, the father of William Critchlow Harris wrote thus of him in 1895, expressing a long-standing concern:

> He seems to think of nothing but music both day and night. My grandfather used to say that all men who were extremely fond of music and carried it to excess with a few exceptions were mostly idle or drunken and never prospered and generally died in poverty.[10]

Several years ago I collected, quite unintentionally, a brief sketch of the hand-to-mouth existence of one Island fiddler who was well known in the Miramichi region of New Brunswick. During a 1976 interview, the respected woods singer and raconteur Wilmot MacDonald observed the following:

> The best fiddler we ever had, he died here two years ago. Fellow by the name of ____, he belonged to the Island. Um-hm, _____. He followed the lumber camp all the time. Oh, an awful bugger to drink. He never was married y'know, and he'd come out at Christmas and go right back broke again. Yeah, yeah. But he was about the best fiddler we had.[11]

That married fiddlers have also been known to be negligent is indicated by the colloquial Island expression "he leaves his fiddle at the gate," meaning someone who is a great sport with the lads but gets a lot of criticism from his wife, and so keeps his fiddle (or, metaphorically, wilder nature) out of the home. I have also heard the expression used with a slightly different emphasis to mean a person whose more pleasant qualities are displayed only outside the home.[12]

Also to be considered in discussing the fiddler's willingness to play for dances is that here is where he received the most respect and validation from others, was offered the best of everything, and was cajoled and praised. Controlling the music, he ruled the roost. A song from Prince County, "The Chew at Campbellton Green," tells the story of a fight that was started by a fiddler who escalated a family feud by playing undanceable music whenever a member of the rival family took to the dance floor.[13]

It is clear that drunkenness has been an occupational hazard for fiddlers. Not only was liquor usually present where they played, but fiddlers were plied with it -- as a form of thanks and payment, a way to keep them playing (making

them forget when they had planned to leave), and as inspiration (the idea that the more the fiddler drinks, the better he plays). Macphail writes of "the conventional bottle of liquor for the fiddler."[14] Island songmaker Larry Gorman made the same connection in a song verse describing a fiddler:

> His elbows all were greased with gin
> And his heart and soul were warmed within;
> He picked up the fiddle and the bow he drew
> And the dancers like chain lightening [sic] flew.[15]

This association of fiddling and drinking is of course hardly novel, as the fiddler has always been seen as a heavy drinker -- at least as far back as the seventeenth century.[16] An 1811 dictionary of "Buckish Wit, University Slang, and Pick-pocket Eloquence" published in London provides this definition: "Fiddler's pay: thanks and wine."[17]

The definition applies also to Island fiddling, except that here more potent beverages were offered: moonshine, and "vessel" rum, whisky and brandy (from rum-runners) were the staple tipples. Joe Chaisson recalled that, at dances in his area there would often be several bottles of liquor placed under his chair, and he was told to "help yourself." As he said, "[the fiddlers] got the best of everything. If there was a drink, they got it."[18] When liquor was in short supply at a dance, or if its open use was frowned upon, the fiddler was generally invited outside for a few drinks in the shadows. This was often his main payment, although a hat might be passed for a coin collection (this sometimes offered as an inducement

to the fiddler). On a good night this collection could raise three or five dollars; other times, "you were lucky to get the hat back."[19]

Fiddling's Negative Impact

The situation created by this performing milieu was unhealthy aside from reasons of personal and community health. It was also a disincentive to the communication of tradition. I have met a number of Island fiddlers whose fathers were fiddlers, but most of them seem not to have learned from their fathers. In fact, the fathers often actively discouraged their offspring from fiddling.

Joe Chaisson used to get his father's fiddle down from the wall when the old man had gone to Souris with his horse and wagon, ensuring him of a few hours to play the forbidden instrument.

> No he didn't want me to play y'know. Apparently them times it was connected with booze and stuff y'know, and he just didn't want me to be bothered about it because he'd be begged off for weddings and he'd have to go, because he was a good player y'know, a very good player. And I guess he just didn't want me [to] and that was a rule. But I was playing when he'd be gone. If he went to Souris, that'd be six miles, that'd be horse and truck-wagon them times y'know, and you'd know he'd be gone awhile. My mother was neuter about it.[20]

These wedding parties he mentions involved no slight commitment of time, as they went on typically for several days, and might continue as long as a week in extreme cases. But

even a regular house-dance often lasted until daylight, with a break around midnight for lunch. As Joe Chaisson said, apropos his father's attitude toward him becoming a fiddler: "He didn't want me to see as many sunrises as he seen."[21]

Joe's father felt that fiddlers "never amounted to anything for themselves; they played well but they didn't do no work." Joe respected these reasons for the ban on fiddling, although he circumvented it by stealth. It was a visiting uncle who most encouraged him to play, by bringing him a fiddle at age 18. Even then his father's support was grudging:

> But he never did learn me anything, you know, any more than, well, he'd say, "Well, if you're gonna play that, you'd better play it this way. Put something into it that's worthwhile."[22]

Many other fathers tried to prevent their sons from fiddling because they feared it would bring them to ruin. I have heard of families where the strings were taken from the fiddle when the children were born and not replaced until they were grown and gone. Of course, some fiddlers did learn from their fathers, but in many cases these seem to have been fathers who didn't drink or had the discipline to avoid many of the pitfalls. Being a fiddler incurred great demands, and those who had seen what could happen felt guilty about spreading the addiction to their offspring.

While much in demand, the fiddler was held in some scorn

by those more diligent in achieving a modest prosperity. It was felt by some that the fiddler was foolish to be so much on call, and to spend so much time for little or no money --- time that would detract from his ability to carry on a livelihood. He was also blamed for keeping others up "to all hours" dancing and listening to his music. But few in a community were involved in as many parties as a good fiddler, and it was he personally who most suffered the effects of his popularity. I have heard it said of one of the most popular fiddlers of years ago, that it is no wonder he became alcoholic, as he was playing almost every night in the peak winter and summer seasons and needed a stimulant -- "he couldn't get along without it."[23] (And this was conceded by a fiddling teetotaler.)

A striking example of the wider social impact of too much partying and drinking (and by extension, fiddling) can be seen, according to a number of people, in Eastern Kings County; the contrast is made between "the North Side" and "the South Side." As noted previously, while the settlers in both areas were predominantly Scottish, the North Side was almost exclusively Catholic and the South Side mainly Baptist and Presbyterian. A large part of the difference between the two areas is said to stem from different religious attitudes toward music and dance -- the more celebratory and culturally tenacious Catholics contrasting with what George Emmerson calls the "repressive piety" of the Protestants.[24] While I am hardly

unbiased, I cannot refrain from quoting A. Duncan Fraser on the Presbyterians in Scotland:

> The attitude of the Free Church in the Highlands towards all forms of innocent amusements, including piping and dancing, has much to answer for. It has taken all the color out of people's lives, and at the close of the day the tired workers have nothing to look forward to but dreary theological discussions, fittingly carried on in blinding peat-reek.[25]

In the memoir Timothy's Boyhood, set in Eastern Kings, the author records that most Protestants were against dancing, except on very special occasions: "I got the impression that a fiddle (violin) was a wicked instrument; that it had as many devils in it as had the man of Gadara."[26] (The use of a Biblical reference seems typical of the repressive attitude to music.)

The association of the devil with the fiddle is the basis of a prank that took place in the centre of the province, on the Green Road in the late nineteenth century. A Hallowe'en party, including "a fiddle and whisky," is held in the house of an old woman who "is scared to death of a fiddle, and thinks the devil'll come sure if they have such a thing in the house." While the party and fiddle music go on inside, the pranksters are on the roof, stopping the flue with straw. The resulting smoke in the house causes the woman such alarm that a priest is asked to dispossess it before she will return home.[27]

The important nineteenth century Island evangelist, Donald McDonald, founder of the "McDonaldite" Presbyterian sect

in the Maritimes, opposed the violin as "belonging to the flesh" -- which would have brought it under the devil's dominion in the minds of many of his followers -- and convinced at least one Scot to destroy his fiddle with an axe.[28] Macphail noted a similar sentiment among the Calvinist Scots of Orwell:

> Musical instruments were not held in favor. One young man who performed very well on the bagpipes abandoned the practice at the time of his conversion; and to prove his sincerity destroyed the instrument which he had made with his own hands. The violin was unknown, except among the Irish. It was considered a dissolute instrument.[29]

The ridiculous assertion that "the violin was unknown" in Belfast and other Scottish settlements is refuted by other observers of the same area and background,[30] and also by Macphail himself in this same book: see his lengthy digression (pp. 150-155) on fiddler Pat Bolger, who is known to have taught school at Orwell.

The violin was certainly well known to the Scotch Catholics of the North Side, and according to several sources arrived there before 1800.[31] The ups and downs of fiddling tradition in this area is especially instructive in indicating the decline of the Celtic fiddling tradition, especially Scottish. There was a solid tradition built on ethnic and religious affiliations, handed down in such families as the MacPhees, MacDonalds, and MacIntyres, and passed on to local families of French descent, such as the Cheveries, Chaissons, and Longaphies. Until settlement progressed, music was largely

an ad hoc house tradition, reserved for the evenings before bedtime. Later, as a string of small communities developed along the North Side, parties were held from late fall (after the harvest and winter preparations such as the banking of houses and wood chopping) until spring thaw made travel almost impossible. From Christmas until Epiphany there would be a party every night, held in succession from East Point west to St. Margarets, with the circuit starting again once the end was reached.[32] In summer, another round of weddings, picnics, parties, frolics, socials and trots filled the calendar.

The comment made about the North Side is that while it was at one time equally prosperous with the South Side, it is now rundown, overgrown, and depopulated compared with its rival. It is widely believed in both areas that all the fiddling, drinking and dancing on the North Side made its young people untrained and undisciplined, and that its fortune declined over several generations: crops and animals did not receive the necessary care, and fishing traps and boats were neglected. Unable to earn a living from land and sea, many young people moved away to find less demanding work. Since fiddling was the chief essential of a good party, the arguments against it are similar to those concerning gun control today: some blame the instrument, others the way it has been used.

Social Pressures on Fiddlers

On the other hand, the fiddler was under considerable pressure to make his music available, and it was something of a duty to perform when called upon. Just as there were some fiddlers who couldn't say No, there were some occasions that were hard for any fiddler to avoid. Community concerts (especially when stepdancers were performing) and weddings were difficult to refuse, while a house-party (unless it celebrated some special event) was somewhat easier to pass up.

The fiddler also had demands upon his house as a setting for merriment -- which contributed to his reputation as a time-waster. A party could be quickly ignited by bringing the gallon of rum and dancing companions to the fiddler. In Prince County, Delphine Arsenault, a daughter of Acadian fiddler "Joe Bibienne" Arsenault of Abram's Village (14 of whose 15 children played the fiddle and other instruments) recalled that it was often said, "Let's go to Joe B's; we'll never run short of fiddlers there."[33] Edward D. Ives recorded a similar sentiment in the Iona district of Kings County, where well-known fiddler Joe Farrell was raised:

> Farrell recalled that the crowd frequently came to his place, because either his father or one of his brothers or he himself would always be around to play the fiddle.[34]

The adverse reaction to a fiddler who was indisposed to play when the crowd at a house-dance called for his music is illustrated by a song that Farrell gave Ives, "The Spree at

Montague." The song tells how a second fiddler (apparently Will Farrell, Jack's father) saved the day after their first fiddler let them down by not playing, for which he was considered "disagreeable" and "grouchy."[35]

One anecdote I heard illustrated the value of the local fiddler for extra-musical reasons. It came from the South Side where they also had a few fiddlers. Fifty or 60 years ago a man in Red Point had one of his barns catch fire while he was away. His whole property was saved from destruction only because a group of people was visiting his neighbour to hear him fiddle, and they were able to see and extinguish the blaze.[36]

Once a fiddler had started playing, his auditors were generally unwilling to have him stop. Whenever he paused, particularly if he made suggestions of leaving, people would insist upon his having some food or drink. This in turn would obligate him to "play a few more." It would be suggested that he was expected to play as long as people were ready to listen. This was conveyed in such expressions as: "It's not late until twelve, and then it's getting early,"[37] and the rhyme, "The night is long/The pay is small/Work all night/And earn it all."[38] The process of leave-taking itself was often so prolonged that it was known as "the standing ceilidh."[39]

It also must be pointed out that most fiddlers so enjoyed playing that they didn't need much urging to perform for an appreciative audience. As someone has remarked: "Most of the fiddlers are so carried away by their art that they

never bothered to make too much money."[40] On a number of occasions I have heard of fiddlers who would leave the plough in the field for their instrument when a tune struck them. And some were willing to walk many miles to hear another fiddler that they could learn from; as a young man, Lem Jay of Fanningbrook regularly walked to Riverton, a distance of perhaps 10 miles, to visit Ward Crane. This obsessiveness with fiddling undoubtedly did keep some fiddlers from working hard enough to earn more than a marginal existence, and caused them to be seen as negative forces and examples by some of their more proper and assiduous neighbours. An amusing anecdote illustrating their lack of decorum was given by J.A. Ready in The Prince Edward Island Magazine in 1899:

> Thomas Hennessey was a teacher and violinist. He owned a violin that was made in Ireland about the year 1778 and that crossed the Atlantic five times. One St. Patrick's Day that fell upon Sunday, Hennessey obtained permission to play in the [Catholic] church at Park Corner the air "St. Patrick's Day", but was to stop at a sign from the priest. When the time arrived Hennessey stepped forth with eyes dilated and heart beating high and made the holy edifice ring again with the air that Irishmen love so well. At last the priest gave the sign to stop, but Hennessey, transported by the effect of his own music and by the associations which it called up, continued to play with increased animation, when the famous Joe Snake startled the congregation by exclaiming: "You no stop, me dance!"[39]

This incident bears a close resemblance to one related by the English novelist Thomas Hardy.[42]

It seems that when the fiddler was most important --

before transportation and communications brought Island villages from their isolation -- his divergent lifestyle was permitted because of his status.[43] But once entertainment possibilities had proliferated, questions about his conduct were overt and mixed with contempt as his music was compared with the sophisticated jazz, classical, and pseudo-symphonic popular music purveyed over the radio and motion pictures. The erosion of the fiddler's status for these reasons seems to have been gradual, but it began quite abruptly about the time of the First World War.

In some Island circles -- probably not very large ones -- fiddle music had likely always been considered déclassé. This school of thought was expressed by "the Hon. Senator Ferguson," just before the turn of this century, as having its genesis about 1850; its peak was reached about a hundred years later. The yearning for sophistication is described by him with what seems to be appropriate pomposity:

> Violins and concertinas might do well enough to cheer the hearts of the unsophisticated groups around the old-fashioned chimneys, but nothing short of an organ or a piano could gratify the fastidious requirements of a generation which had tasted something more ample or more refined.[44]

The expressed preference for keyboard instruments suggests that musical chromaticism was imported along with these instruments in the latter nineteenth century, and partly displaced the earlier Scotch pipe and fiddle music with its diatonic scales.[45] I suspect that this also led to an

increase in the number of fiddle tunes built on the chromatic chord progression I-IV-V. I recently found some support for this view in the observances of a trained musician on Cape Breton Scots fiddling. There, Jennie Belle Friend noted in 1933:

> Keyboard instruments have not been so popular with the Cape Breton Scotch. It would seem on first thought that this was due to the difference in expense, but one is inclined to believe, after more consideration, that it is due to their kind of musical sense which is wholly melodic. They do not know what to do with a harmonic instrument until taught.[46]

The foregoing is intended to establish that fiddle music has always been threatened and changed, that it has been resisted and detested as well as loved. I also want to indicate the pattern of decline and revival that emerges from this study, and the relevance of the concept of musical ecology. While not always stated explicitly, this concept is basic to my findings, and is increasingly useful as I deal with more complete data from my field research. Let me therefore define it before proceeding:

> the ecology of music presupposes that the dynamics of music shift in proportion to the dynamics of the total culture, and, by and large, are some index of the emotional needs of the culture.[47]

On Prince Edward Island the fiddler was a major contributor to his culture's "emotional needs" for many generations. But as I have shown, he was not universally and unequivocally respected. His social role, and the practices that accompanied

its enactment, were sometimes in conflict with his success in other areas. However, twentieth century society as a whole was facing revolutionary changes in social organization and entertainment.

NOTES

[1]Fr. Faber MacDonald, "Why I Play Scottish Fiddle," The Island Fiddler, no. 3, (March 1980), p.5.

[2]Bishop MacDonald is well aware of this negative side, and I don't mean to suggest otherwise.

[3]Macphail, The Master's Wife, p.154.

[4]W.L. Cotton, op. cit. p.50. A price comparison is given by H.D. McEwen in his "Morell, P.E. Island," The Prince Edward Island Magazine, 3 (1901), 92: in 1850 tea was 4s. 6d per pound, while West Indian rum was only 2s. 6d per gallon.

[5]Translation by Margaret MacDonnell in her "Bards on the Polly," The Island Magazine, no. 5, (Fall-Winter 1978), p.37.

[6]M. Lamont, Rev. Donald McDonald: Glimpses of His Life and Times (Charlottetown: Murley & Garnhum, 1902), p.28. (And not everyone had to travel so far to obtain it.)

[7]W.L. Cotton, "Evil of Intemperance - How Minimized," pp. 86-90 in his Chapters in Our Island Story (q.v.). See also "The Liquor Traffic" in F.L. Pigot, A History of Mount Stewart (Charlottetown: the author, 1975), pp. 99-102.

[8]Macqueen, Skye Pioneers, p.51.

[9]John Kenneth Galbraith, The Scotch (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), p.123.

[10]Tuck, Gothic Dreams, p.112.

[11]Interview with Wilmot MacDonald, Newcastle, New Brunswick, July 1976. I have replaced the man's name with blanks.

[12]Collected from Frank Ledwell, Loyalist Road, in 1979, and later heard several times from others. Dr. Terry Pratt informs me that the expression is recorded in England four centuries previous.

[13]Allan Rankin supplied me with a copy of this song-text.

[14]Macphail, p.32.

[15]A verse from "The Spree at Summer Hill," in Edward D. Ives, Larry Gorman: the man who made the songs (Bloomington, Ind." Indiana University Press, 1964), p.19.

[16]Cf. Sir John Hawkins, A General History of the Science and Practice of Music, (q.v.), pp. 702, 787; and Harold Love, "The fiddlers on the Restoration stage," Early Music, 6 (July, 1978), 391-399, who observes that ". . . the reputation of fiddlers as a class was a pretty unsavoury one" (393).

[17]Captain Grose, comp. A Dictionary of Buckish Slang, University Wit and Pickpocket Eloquence (London: 1811; rpt., Robert Cromie, ed., Northfield, Ill.: Digest Books, 1972). Unpaginated but alphabetised.

[18]Interview with Joseph Chaisson, Bear River, 12 July 1979. Cf. Alan Merriam's remarks on the importance of musicians in contrast to their low status, in his The Anthropology of Music (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p.136.

[19]Interview with Julius "Duke" Neilsen, Milltown Cross, 18 November 1979.

[20]Joseph Chaisson interview. For more on his father, Peter Simon Chaisson, and the fiddling Chaisson family, see Neil Matheson's column ("Across the Island") entitled "Famous P.E.I. Violin Family," in the Guardian, 10 August 1962, p.3. For a transcription of Joe Chaisson's performance of "Pete Simon's Tune" see Appendix B.

[21]Undated field note of Joseph Chaisson, summer 1979.

[22]Joseph Chaisson interview.

[23]Interview with Roland Jay, Mount Stewart, 23 August 1979.

[24]George Emmerson, "The Gaelic Tradition in Canadian Culture," in W. Stanford Reid, ed., The Scottish Tradition in Canada (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), p.239.

[25]Quoted from Fraser's Some Reminiscences and the Bagpipe, by Francis O'Neill in his Irish Folk Music: A Fascinating Hobby. Rpt. ed., Barry O'Neill, intro. (Darby, Pa: Norwood Editions, 1973), p.271.

[26]Mellick, p.90. Proctor found (p.84) that fiddling was considered unholy by some Ontario Scots because of its association with dancing.

[27]Dan Casey, "A PEI Hallowe'en Story," The Prince Edward Island Magazine, 2 (Christmas 1900), 317. For similar folktales on this symbolic relationship, see Herbert Halpert, "The Devil and the Fiddle," Hoosier Folklore Bulletin, 2 (December 1943), 39-43.

[28]Macqueen, Skye Pioneers, p.84.

[29]Macphail, p.149.

[30]See Macqueen, Skye Pioneers, pp. 29-30 and 69, where he records the use of "flute, fiddle and mouth organ."

[31]Interview with George MacIntyre. Corroboration is found in the unpublished paper, "The North Side Fiddlers and their role in Society," by Mary C. MacPhee. This paper was written for a history class at the University of Prince Edward Island taught by Dr. David Weale. I am indebted to Dr. Weale for allowing me to read that and the following papers, also prepared for his History 302 class: "The Role of the Fiddler in the Rural Society of Prince Edward Island," by Mildred Francis; "The Fiddler," by Terry Dunsford; and "A Prince Edward Island Fiddler - Mr. Lem Jay," by John Matheson. All of these unpublished papers supported impressions I was forming, and added some details of their own.

[32]Information from George MacIntyre.

[33]Interview with Delphine Arsenault, 22 May 1979, in Summerside (assisted by Georges Arsenault).

[34]Edward D. Ives, Lawrence Doyle: The Farmer Poet of Prince Edward Island (Orono, Me.: University of Maine Press,

1971), p.230. In Shetland, Peter Cooke, op. cit., p.73, similarly noted the demands on the village fiddler's house as a music centre.

[35]Ives, Lawrence Doyle, pp. 214-215.

[36]Heard from our good Red Point neighbour, Roddie Kidson, who owned the barn. From undated field note, summer 1979.

[37]Told by Elsie Kidson, Red Point, 18 August 1978.

[38]From Russell Garrett, Red Point, 10 August 1978.

[39]James and Gertrude Pendergast, Folklore Prince Edward Island (Summerside: the authors, [1973]), p.16.

[40]Stated by an unidentified man in the film "Don Messer: His Land and His Music" (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1970).

[41]J.A. Ready, "Lot 20 -- From Forest to Farm," III, The Prince Edward Island Magazine, 1 (August 1899), 214.

[42]Thomas Hardy, "Absent-Mindedness in a Parish Choir," one of "A Few Crusted Characters" in F.B. Pinion, ed., Life's Little Ironies and A Changed Man (London: Macmillan London Ltd., 1977), pp. 173-176. In Hardy's story, the muddled instrumental choir strikes up "The Devil among the Tailors" in church. The same collection contains Hardy's short story "The Fiddler of the Reels," (pp. 123-138), about the fascination a woman feels for a fiddler and his music.

[43]Merriam, pp. 133-138.

[44]Hon. Senator (Donald) Ferguson, "A Period of Growth and Transition," The Prince Edward Island Magazine, 1 (October 1899), 266.

[45]Collinson, op. cit., "The Native Idiom," pp. 4-31.

[46]Jennie Belle Friend, "The little known music of Cape Breton Island," Etude, 51 (November 1933), n.p. The popularity of the piano in Cape Breton seems to have grown

considerably since these observations were made.

[47]William Kay Archer, "On the Ecology of Music," Ethnomusicology, 8 (January 1964), 32.

CHAPTER THREE

CHANGE, DECLINE AND PERSISTENCE: ISLAND FIDDLING BEFORE 1930

This chapter examines some of the conditions that led to a post-war decline in fiddling on the Island by the 1920s, the revival spirit that was capped by the big 1926 fiddling contests, and the role of such contests. Some ethnographic information is also gleaned that helps to describe the tradition as it was then.

I was at first amazed when Joe Chaisson told me that fiddle music had "died out" in the 1920s. The statement is a bit exaggerated in that it is still far from dead, but I believe that fiddling had indeed declined by this time, and I will bring in other evidence to support this belief.

Of the many factors that affected the number and activity of Island fiddlers in the late nineteenth century (and for much of the twentieth), emigration must be mentioned first. The large emigration of the Island's Scots and Irish (the single largest source of fiddlers) is well described by geographer Andrew Hill Clark in his Three Centuries and the Island. In the period 1891-1921 Island Celts left in large numbers for New England, Manitoba, and points west,[1] as the Island population fell from 109 thousand to 88 thousand.[2]

Among the reasons for this movement was a depressed economy, the fact that Island farms could not support the large

farm families, and the oft-cited lack of Celtic enthusiasm for farming. A similar emigration occurred in nearby Cape Breton,[3] where D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean concluded: "As a group, the Roman Catholic Highlanders, with a notable exception in education, never permanently adopted the work ethic."[4] This made other forms of employment tempting; according to C.W. Dunn,

> . . . the Gaels submerged themselves in distant industrial and business centres of the machine-age world. They were apparently satisfied with their new setting and did not seem to miss the independence and self-sufficiency of the farmer's life.[5]

This is a diplomatic way of expressing the antipathy of the Celts toward farming. And Clark states that the Acadians, another group of fiddling enthusiasts, were, with the Highlanders, the least productive Island farmers.[6] My previous chapter indicates why some fiddlers had problems with the disciplined life of farming; they were likely candidates for emigration to the industrial centres.

Larry Gorman, an Islander of Irish descent, observed the migration in verse:

> Young men of P.I., you can hardly deny
> That you've many times left a good home;
> A life on the farm for you has no charm,
> You all seem determined to roam.
> Your harness and plows, fine horses and cows
> And your sheep may all die in the ditch;
> Your jobs you will jack and your trunks you will pack
> And away to the States to get rich.[7]

Boston, in particular, was a favorite destination for

many Maritimers -- it and the larger surrounding region known as "the Boston States." Macphail describes this migration:

> Every year the surplus young men and women migrated to Boston as freely as the sea-birds. There they found friends, work and money; but when they came home it was observed that they had exchanged the more fashionable American speech for the tender Highland cadence of their English that had been so hardly won.[8]

Boston is also the reference point that brings together two Island fiddlers of fifty years ago: Neil Cheverie and Lorne Simmons. Cheverie was a celebrated Island fiddling contest champion whose recorded exploits both on the Island and in Boston help portray Island fiddling in the 1920s. Simmons, an Islander whose tunes were collected by Professor Samuel P. Bayard in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the 1930s and '40s, provides some data on the repertoire of one fiddler who left the Island. Ironically, while Cheverie is still well remembered for his fiddling, none of his tunes exist today on tape or paper, while the relatively unnoticed Simmons has left behind some of his renditions in notation. These are the work of Professor Bayard, who generously shared his 16 Island tune items in the Bayard Collection with me. Later in this chapter I shall examine, and comment upon, Simmons' repertoire as recorded by Bayard. But first to Neil Cheverie, a look at fiddling contests and, especially, at the information that is available as a result of the first and largest provincial fiddling championship, held in 1926.

While, as my next chapter indicates, radio had entered the picture by 1926, it is reasonable to suppose that the tunes spoken of in several fiddling contests that year were largely handed on from the previous century. Among other information in newspaper accounts of the time is an agreement with Joe Chaisson's opinion that Island fiddling was then in decline. Some of this information is contained in five songs and poems created to commemorate the Charlottetown and Boston contests; one of these is still in oral circulation in fragmentary form.

The apparent contradiction between expressed enthusiasm and perceived decline seems typical, for the golden age of fiddling, in the minds of many, is always in the past. While some people today look back to the '20s as a great time for fiddling, some observers of that era -- one of whom will be quoted at some length -- looked back to a period perhaps equally removed from their own. The excitement commemorated in my texts about the '26 contest in Charlottetown is similar to that which greets the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers today at the annual Rollo Bay Scottish Fiddling Concert. And the parallel goes further for both the organization of the '26 contest and of the Fiddlers' Society 50 years later were "strength-in-numbers" movements that brought together fiddlers from all over the Island to revive enthusiasm for fiddling.

Fiddling Contests Develop

Fiddling contests on the Island were a twentieth century phenomenon, made possible by improved roads and the

gasoline engine. After the First World War, small, localized contests were common all over the Island in such places as Montague, Lake Verde, Hope River, and Tignish, and were used for fund-raising by church groups, the Young Men's Literary Society, and the Anchors and Stars baseball clubs. Some private entrepreneurs also put them on for the same purpose. Several of my informants recalled that the promoters of fiddling contests usually made good money, and one felt that contests were "a racket"[9] -- in the economic rather than musical sense. It was quite possible to draw a crowd of three or four hundred at 50 cents a head to watch a dozen or 20 fiddlers compete; the top three would win five or 10 dollars (often in merchandize), and the rest got nothing.

In early 1926 a provincial fiddling and stepdancing championship was announced for Charlottetown, billed as "Prince Edward Island's First Fiddlers Contest,"[10] but the description was accurate only in that it was the first one of provincial scope. Although the Charlottetown contest was a logical extension of the smaller ones that had been put on for years, it was sparked by an event in the United States reported in local newspapers. Henry Ford's old-time music revival campaign had received wide publicity in late 1925;[11] S. Foster Damon has noted that "The man who had done more to change the face of America than any other living man also wanted to preserve its past."[12]

It may have been this campaign that inspired the Inter-

colonial Club of Boston to hold a contest down there. The Intercolonial was then the oldest Canadian club in Boston, and quite a prosperous one, as it owned a building at 214 Dudley Street in Roxbury valued at $175,000 in 1925.[13] The club's first local contest was a success, and it led to the promotion of an open international competition which eventually attracted fiddlers from the Maritimes, Quebec, and New England.

The Intercolonial Club had very good contacts throughout the Maritimes as it was involved in fund-raising for church and other groups here, and was largely composed of ex-Maritimers. The Island's Tourist and Publicity Association was contacted, and agreed to sponsor a contest to determine a provincial fiddling champion to send to Boston; the winner's main prize was to have his expenses paid to participate. The Association's motive was expressed in a lead editorial in the March 8, 1926 Charlottetown daily the Guardian: "This competition offers an excellent means of publicity for this province."

The publicity was also seen to be beneficial in helping to revive traditional fiddling and dance on the Island -- 50 years before a similar intent resulted in the Fiddler' Society. The spirit of revival was articulated with great fervor in an unsigned page one article in the Guardian of March 4, 1926. This passionate piece begins with a lament for the passing of ancestral customs, but then it is remarked:

> there is one old time art, not yet altogether lost to us, which however through

> lack of proper appreciation we have allowed to decline sadly from its former prominence. It flourishes now only in out-of-the-way corners in town and country. It is something that we all loved fondly when we were young, but have now, we think, outgrown with the advent of radio and gasoline. It is intimately connected with the past history of the Island; it was a feature of all the social gatherings of our forefathers. It stirred alike the blood of Irish, French, and Scotch, for it appealed to sentiments that were universal. Its exponents -- and Prince Edward Island boasted many star performers in the old days -- were, like the itinerant bards of Scotland, privileged characters for whom every door was open, who received plaudits everywhere as by divine right, and who created at their coming mirth and merriment galore. These were none other than the sturdy knights of the bow, the old time Fiddlers.

My previous chapter indicates that there was another side to the fiddler's social position besides the one presented so enthusiastically here. But with that in mind, I have no doubt that this assessment is accurate. In describing the old-time Island fiddler, the author knowledgeably makes the point that style was chiefly a matter of individual approach when most fiddlers had few fellow performers within easy travelling distance:

> The Fiddler learned his jigs and reels by ear scorning the base help of the printed sheet, and wherever he forgot anything he improvised, often in a marvellous fashion. No two old time Fiddlers ever played Lord McDonald's Reel or The Devil Among the Tailors in exactly the same way; the performances were always highly spiced with individuality; the interpretations were as varied as the style of the fiddle or the position in which it was played.

In promoting the contest, the author warns that "this time honoured art . . . seems to be slipping away from us." Thus, perhaps, the following rules for contestants:

> The Fiddlers entering the contest must be genuine old timers, and at least 50 years of age. Centenarians will be especially welcomed. They may play quadrilles, schottisches, polkas, jigs, reels, hornpipes, or what they please -- but it must be genuine "old stuff"; none of these new fangled fox trots and bear gallops will be tolerated.

The list is interesting in that it associates tunes with at least three popular dances ("quadrilles, schottisches, polkas"); the absence of "lancers" is a bit surprising, as many older fiddlers have some tunes that they identify only as "a lancer jig," "a good lancer" or some such.[14]

The excitement generated by the Charlottetown contest must have been satisfying to this anonymous revivalist. Special excursion trains were arranged to bring in contestants from both ends of the Island (Tignish and Souris stations), and on them were a few non-participants who boarded carrying fiddles simply to get a ride in. The Guardian stated that the contest "is the talk of the Island and nothing in recent years has stirred such enthusiastic interest."[15] There were over 40 contestants, more than twice the 15 expected, and organizers had to schedule two extra nights in the largest theatre in the province, the 1200-seat Strand, to accommodate the demand from the public.

As I have already published a fairly detailed account of this contest and its personalities,[16] I will here say only

that the three top fiddlers were judged to be, in order, Neil Cheverie, Will Harvey, and Robert Weeks. The jealousy-producing effect of fiddling competition is exemplified by the fact that some Islanders still have hard feelings about the results 55 years later. I note also that each of the three counties is represented by a prize-winner, which may indicate that the judging was influenced by political considerations (as it so often is claimed to be). However, the three fiddlers are all remembered in high regard.

"Fiddlers' Contest"

It was not long before an account of this big event appeared in verse. The song "Fiddlers' Contest" was published in the April 6 Guardian -- after the Charlottetown contest and before the subsequent ones in Boston. It was almost certainly written by William-Joseph Cheverie of Souris, a customs agent. The use of a popular tune, "Bonnie Dundee," (whose application is indicated with the text), doubtless aided in the song's transmission in Eastern Kings, home of the author and all the fiddlers it names except Weeks, who lived in Winsloe (near Charlottetown). I have heard only the chorus and a few verses of text in oral circulation, but many people I talked to had heard of it, and a few possess written copies. Here it is from the Guardian:

Fiddlers' Contest

Come all you young fiddlers give ear to my song,
Give me your attention, I won't keep you long,
It's about the great contest in old Charlottetown
Where were gathered the fiddlers of fame and renown.

Chorus: Come tune up your fiddle, and rosin your bows,
Play up the old Scotch tunes that everyone knows.
Just strike up the lilt of old "Caber Feagh"
For we're all set to hear them this great contest day.

Two nights of hard struggle there were to be sure,
Each doing his best to keep time for the floor
And the wealth of jigs, reels, and strathspeys that were heard
Would rival the songs of the sweet mocking bird.

There was old "Tullochgorum" and braw "Soldier's Joy"
"Lord MacDonald's Reel" would bring tears to the eye,
And "Hey! Johnnie Cope" and others so bright
Were played to perfection that great contest night.

And then it began to appear as if Weeks
Was fiddling them almost right out of their breeks,
When up from the East came a fiddling gang,
And when they got started things went with a bang.

There was Joe Angie John and Aeneas and Frank
With Neil and his twin and Phoebe in rank
Marched up to the hall like soldiers, why then
It looked like the march of the Cameron men.

The tunes that they played were as bonny and brave
They would make poor Jim Simmons near turn in his grave.
And Elmira's contingent came to the fore,
I don't think that such fiddling was e'er heard before.

Then play up your fiddles and play them up strong
And give them your best as you fiddle along
You'll need it I'm sure for it's plain for to see
You'll have to go some to beat Neil Cheverie.

And now it is over and Neil has won out,
He goes now to Boston to give them a bout;
And we're sure when he gets there he'll give them his best,
So we'll leave it at that, and he'll do the rest.

Now bring back the laurels from Boston Neil boy,
To every "Spud Islander" this will give joy.
We'll watch your career with interest you bet
And hope that you'll show them we're all living yet.

W.J.C.

Souris, P.E.I.
April 3, 1926

Of the fiddlers named by "W.J.C.," all were from Eastern Kings. Four from this small area qualified among the eight finalists -- Joe Angie John MacDonald, Frank Bell MacDonald, Phoebe Deagle, and the winner, Neil Cheverie. The part of the song best remembered is the chorus and two verses beginning, "There was Joe Angie John. . . ."[17]

The fiddle tunes named in the chorus and second stanza are, not surprisingly, from the Scottish tradition ("the old Scotch tunes that everyone knows") and both the types of tunes and specific tunes seem representative of what was popular among Scottish fiddlers -- very roughly, those in the eastern half of the province. The tunes are: a strathspey ("Tullochgorum"); a march ("Hey! Johnnie Cope"), and three popular Scotch reels, one of which, "Soldier's Joy," seems to have been very popular in the past but is rarely played today. This is because "Soldier's Joy," like many jigs (no example of which is named), is considered simple and too familiar. The relative importance of reels in establishing a fiddler's reputation is suggested by their predominance in the tunes named: in the five contest ballads, six of the eight tunes named are reels. One poem lists "Strathspeys, hornpipes, jigs and reels"[18] as the tunes played.

While not wanting to venture too far into shallow waters of speculation, I feel that the absence of any mention of the enormously popular "St. Anne's Reel" corroborates information I was given[19] that the tune was popularized here by Joseph

Allard's recording, which may not have been issued -- or known here -- until somewhat later.[20]

Neil Cheverie's Technique

Neil Cheverie seems to have played in a largely Scottish style, which he learned typically from his uncle (Neil MacPhee, a captain in the Gloucester fishing fleet).[21] When I asked his nephew, Omar Cheverie (himself a well-known Souris fiddler) what sort of style he played, Omar said that both he and Neil played "a Gloucester style."[22] This raises the possibility that there was a style of fiddling associated with the Gloucester fleet. But as I have not heard the term elsewhere, it may belong strictly to the Cheverie family.

Unfortunately there are no recordings of Neil Cheverie, whom a reporter of the time described in glowing terms:

> Mr. Cheverie won because he excelled in what is known as the technique of old style playing, the ability to put in cuts and slurs, time and grace notes characteristic of such selections.[23]

These attributes are judiciously chosen, and make a formidable catalogue:

"Cuts" or "bow cuts," noted earlier, are made by stiffening the bow-hand at the wrist causing a change of bow direction as quick as a spasm. Usually done on a down bow (i.e., down-up-down), the ability to cut with equal facility on the up-bow is considered a supreme achievement.[24]

A slur is more than one note taken on a single bow-stroke.

Grace notes are usually upper appogiaturas, occasionally lower appogiaturas; a few players (mostly younger, Irish-influenced) play the multi-note Irish grace-notes called "rolls." But most players here use graces sparingly, and some don't use them at all.

"Time": I have saved this for last as I believe it is most important in the judgments of fiddlers. It signifies both appropriate tempo and appropriate expression or accent. I have heard it said of a tune performance that it was played "too fast to put the time on it."[25] The same expression was used by Joe Chaisson to explain what he did to take a tune played from sheet music and make it right: "Put the time on it", "Put something into it that's worthwhile," as his father said.[26]

It is the hardest of these attributes to describe, an historical judgment of what sounds right, but its components are very concrete: rhythm, tempo, cuts, double stops (including open strings doubled with the fourth finger on the next lower string, and drones), and phrasing generally. One might say that without the "time," "old-time" fiddling is just "old."

Boston and More Contest Ballads

From the above description, Neil Cheverie was clearly a superior fiddler. Chosen to joust with other "knights of the bow," he did indeed show the Boston audience, which undoubtedly included not a few former Islanders, that "we're all living yet." He entered the scheduled contest on April 7,

and placed third. A general challenge to the winner (unnamed) resulted in a second contest on April 11. Before it took place Robert Weeks was sent for, and he competed in the step-dancing contest (in which he had taken second in Charlottetown along with his third in fiddling). In this second Boston contest, Cheverie took second place, with a MacEachern from Boston first and a MacInnis from Cape Breton third. Weeks won first place in stepdancing.[27]

These results brought the excitement to a new pitch. The wide interest is indicated by the newspaper notice, shortly after Cheverie and Weeks returned from Boston, that Reverend Neil Herman of Charlottetown's Central Christian Church was giving his "second and last" sermon on "Fiddlers and Fiddling."[28] Regrettably, his remarks were not reported -- although the "and last" sounds a bit ominous. However, four other ballads of these contests exist. Three were printed in the Guardian within the next month, and a copy of the other was in Weeks' family. I will not reprint them in full; two were so reprinted in my article mentioned previously. They are of some general interest for their phrasing and provincial chauvinism rather than any poetic felicity; here I will mention only the details that concern fiddling.

One called "The Fiddlers Contest" contains several lines indicating that the older dances had been eclipsed in the Jazz Age: 'one result of the Charlottetown Contest is that "Even 'sets' came back to life."[29] Then there is this lively quatrain:

> Now give us more Fiddlers Contests
> On with the old time dance.
> Down with Jazz and the Charleston
> Its racket and knock-kneed prance.[30]

But it is uncertain if the didactic message penetrated the mood of celebration:

> And here's to wee Weeks of the twinkling toes,
> Far famed through the Island as everyone knows,
> Long life may you have and joints keep free,
> To dance to the tunes of Neil Cheverie.[31]

Later Contests

Fiddling contests didn't end there, of course; indeed they became very numerous for a few years, and have continued to the present. The fact that none ever captured the public imagination like the ones in 1926 may suggest that the advocates of revival were not tremendously successful. Some of my informants have indicated that this is in the nature of contests, which, they say, produce animosity and secretiveness rather than revival. One does not want to claim that contests are the sole cause of dissension, however, for as Francis O'Neill remarked, "No sentiment betrays itself more commonly among musicians the world over than professional jealousy."[32]

In the next several decades a large annual contest was held in Charlottetown, often in the uninspiring atmosphere of the Forum hockey rink, and usually in conjunction with a fall Potato Festival. Currently contests are held each summer in Tyne Valley, Montague, Egmont Bay and Summerside -- all but the second are in Prince County -- but none is of such scope that it can legitimately claim the status of a provincial

championship -- the latter two, at least, do -- especially as members of the Fiddlers Society very rarely compete any more.[33] There has been a noticeable decline in the number of fiddlers entering the "Garden of the Gulf Fiddle Festival" in Montague. At the bottom of its printed entry form in the 10 June 1981 Eastern Graphic is this italicized note: "Due to the lack of support to date, your response will determine the possibility of this year's festival." (This was only three weeks before it was due to begin.) The next year it was cancelled.

But all the echoes of fiddling enthusiasm from 1926, informative though they are, do not cancel out the transitoriness of that revival, nor the debilitating effects on old-time music and dance from radio and motion pictures, nor the out-migration of many rural Scots and Irish. As the population of the Island Celts dropped, so did the population of Island fiddlers.

Fortunately, some information exists about one of these fiddling migrants, and it adds to the outline of Island fiddling tradition. Professor Samuel P. Bayard, one of the most prominent American tune collectors and scholars of both fiddling and balladry, made several visits to Cambridge, Massachusetts in the 1930s and '40s to collect fiddle tunes from Lorne Simmons.[34] Simmons (c. 1900 - c. 1965) was born and grew up on a farm near Crapaud, in southern Queens County. Besides being a farmer, he was a skilled carpenter, and he and brother Everett (also deceased) made their own first fiddle.

They later played for dances and parties in the area for a number of years. Lorne then moved down to the Boston area, where he worked as a finish carpenter and apartment custodian; the move is said to have been about 1929 or '30. If these dates are correct, then Simmons appears to have been on the Island in March of 1926 when Neil Cheverie earned the fiddling laurels in Charlottetown. However, Simmons does not show up in the list of 41 contest fiddlers printed in the March 27, 1926 Guardian. Sometime after the Second World War Lorne Simmons returned to Crapaud, following approximately two decades "Stateside."[35]

While the 16 tunes that Bayard collected from him are a scanty data base for generalizations, and while I do not entirely trust Bayard's assertion that Simmons learned all his tunes on P.E.I. -- a fiddler would hardly stop learning tunes because of a move to Boston -- I am going to use Simmons and his repertoire to indicate some of the tune types that have persisted and some that have declined in use or disappeared.

Lorne Simmons' Repertoire

The first observation is that most of the tunes are reels: they comprise 10 of the 16 items if you count "Fisher's Hornpipe," which is commonly played as a reel. This fits my impression that reels have traditionally been the most popular tunes with fiddlers. (Among set dancers, jigs would seem to be the favorites.)

Seven of the Simmons' tunes are familiar reels: "Soldier's Joy," "Devil Among the Tailors," "Pigeon on the Gate," "Paddy on the Turnpike," "The Old Man and Old Woman," "Lord MacDonald's Reel," and "Fisher's Hornpipe."

Then there are three reels that I have not previously encountered: "Buckley's Favorite," "Let the Ladies Ride Outside" (which may have been learned in Boston: its title refers to trolley cars), and a "lancer reel."

There is also a "lancer jig" and three Irish jigs that don't seem to be played here as much as they once were: "Swallowtail Jig," "Larry O'Gaff," and "The Orange and Blue."

Another less stable component of earlier repertoire is the song air. From Simmons Bayard collected the second half of the air to the Anglo-Irish ballad "The Boyne Water." Renditions of song airs on the fiddle were formerly quite popular as listening pieces and accompaniment for singalongs, but they don't seem to be played by the active fiddlers today; anyway, there are other instruments to accompany singing, and dance tunes are now played primarily for listening.

I cannot give names of typical song airs as readily as I can with jigs and reels, and suspect that they were more of an individual taste. As well as the airs of popular Irish and Scottish songs, American airs were popular with fiddlers -- from "Old Zip Coon" and "Darling Nelly Gray" to "Pack up your sorrows in your old kit bag" and "Pop Goes the Weasel."

As listening tunes, song airs seem to have occupied the place in the Island repertoire that "slow airs" do in the Irish.

Before I had found any information on Simmons' Island origins, I characterized him as "Irish" on the basis of his repertoire: the Irish song air, the absence of strathspeys and 2/4 marches, and the overall prominence of Irish jigs and reels. While many Irish jigs and reels are part of the common Island repertoire, a distinct Irish fiddling repertoire can no longer be found here, if it ever could.

While I have not met anyone who could describe Simmons' fiddling or its influences, my supposition about its basic Irish-ness is also supported by his place of origin: Crapaud is in the ambit of the Queens County Irish, who are numerous in Kensington/Irishtown to the north, Charlottetown to the south-east, and in the western and central part of the county from Emyvale and the Green Road through Kelly's Cross, which boasted some Irish fiddlers -- Levi Trainor, Joe Kelly, and James Flood among them.

Today the fiddlers of Irish descent are not distinctive among Island fiddlers. The most active players of Irish tunes, especially newer ones, are the younger fiddlers, some of them non-native, who are influenced by the recordings of Irish fiddlers and some of the younger Irish string bands. Through this, Irish fiddle music as a distinct style is becoming more popular. But it is impossible to state what the Irish

fiddling of a century ago was like, or to compare then with now.

Using Neil Cheverie and Lorne Simmons as pegs on which to hang a synthesis of the information I have collected through fieldwork, I have tried to portray Island fiddling in the 1920s, when it still retained many locally distinct features in style and repertoire. The boom period in building community halls was from about 1890 to before 1910, and these were great centres for local music-making and dancing, among other events. But the exodus of Island Celts peaked at this time.

It is clear that fiddling's popularity hit a lull after the First World War as other entertainment options appeared. It is equally clear that fiddlers became very popular again in the Depression when spending money just about disappeared and a cashless agrarian economy briefly returned. This was also a time when some of those who had left the Island returned; as one of them, whose father brought the family back from Boston during the Depression said, they would starve down there, but on the Island they could feed themselves off the land and sea.[36]

Fiddling and dancing remained in vogue until the Second World War, when another lull was reached. But to illustrate this next period, I will have to discuss Island fiddling in relation to the new medium, radio.

NOTES

[1]Andrew Hill Clark, Three Centuries and the Island, p. 155.

[2]Lorne Callbeck, "Economic and Social Developments since Confederation," in Francis W.P. Bolger, ed., Canada's Smallest Province (Toronto: PEI Centennial Commission, 1973), p. 339.

[3]D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean, Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), pp. 8-32.

[4]Campbell and MacLean, p. 281.

[5]C.W. Dunn, Highland Settler: a portrait of the Scottish Gael in Nova Scotia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953), p. 132.

[6]Clark, p. 149.

[7]First verse of "Away to the States to Get Rich," from the text of this "poem" in Ives' Larry Gorman, p. 131. My rendition corrects an apparent copying error in the original by ending the fourth line with a period rather than a comma.

[8]Macphail, p. 89.

[9]Joe Chaisson interview, 12 July 1979.

[10]From an advertisement in the Charlottetown Guardian, 6 March 1926, p. 6.

[11]Two of these reports in the Guardian are: 21 December 1925, p. 6, and "Henry Surely Started Something," 16 March 1926, p. 3. For a general picture of Ford's movement, see Estelle Schneider and Bob Norman, "The Henry Ford Dance Movement: Fiddling while the crosses burned," Sing Out!, vol. 25 no. 7 (1977), 24-25, 27.

[12]S. Foster Damon, "The History of Square-Dancing," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society at the Semi-Annual Meeting Held in Boston April 16, 1952, 62 part 1, 95.

[13]Reported in "Islanders In Active Organization In Boston," Summerside Journal, 8 November 1925, p. 1.

[14]Among these fiddlers are Lem Jay (d. 1960), Joe Chaisson (d. 1981), Hector MacDonald, and Jim Beairsto.

[15]"The Fiddler's Charge," editorial in the Guardian, 8 March 1926, p. 4.

[16]Jim Hornby, "The Great Fiddling Contests of 1926," The Island Magazine, no. 7 (Fall-Winter 1979), pp. 25-30.

[17]These verses and parts of others were recalled for me by George MacIntyre, Joe Chaisson, George Cheverie, and Jim Beairsto.

[18]A hand-written copy of "The Old-Time Fiddling Contest" was given to me by Abbie Weeks, Highfield Heights.

[19]Interview with Hector MacDonald, Bangor, PEI, August 1979. MacDonald said he heard (and learned) the tune from Allard via fiddling friend Ward Crane's phonograph. Allard's recording may have been the first to contribute a widely popular tune to the Maritime repertoire. The tune is likely from Ireland or Quebec. While in Ireland in the summer of 1981 I met a number of Irish whistle players, fiddlers and accordion players, who played this reel; those who had a title for it all called it "St. Anne's Reel" or "The St. Anne Reel." But as Allard played some Irish tunes (ex., his "Reel du rateau" = "The Scholar"), my main reason for suggesting a possible Quebec origin is that the title sounds québécois, in any language.

[20]Joseph Allard's recording of "Le reel de St. Anne" is noted in Edward B. Moogk, Roll Back the Years: History of Canadian Recorded Sound and Its Legacy to 1930 (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1975), p. 160. For more biographical background on Allard see Gabriel Labbé's book, op. cit., pp. 28-33, or his pamphlet of notes to the reissue of Allard 78s that he edited: "Masters of French Canadian Dances [sic] Joseph Allard, violin," one disc, Folkways Records RBF 110, 1979. Labbé's notes with this record are disappointing in their brevity and lack of context. In both places Labbé states that Allard also recorded as "Maxime Toupin"(!); his book, however, inexplicably groups sides of Maxime Toupin with those of Isidore Soucy (p. 117).

[21]From the newspaper report, "Echoes of the Fiddling Contest," Guardian, 3 April 1926, p. 9.

[22]Field note of a conversation with Omar Cheverie, Souris.

[23]Same as note 21, above.

[24]See Collinson, pp. 213 and 221, and my earlier reference to "cuts."

[25]Undated field note of a conversation heard at a practice of the Queens County chapter of the Prince Edward Fiddlers' Society in Parkdale.

[26]See Chapter Two, note 22.

[27]My information on Boston contests comes from many reports in the Guardian in March and April, 1926.

[28]The Guardian, 18 April 1926.

[29]From "The Fiddlers' Contest," which appeared in the Guardian, 16 April 1926, p. 3.

[30]Ibid.

[31]From "To the Fiddlers and Dancers (An Appreciation)," in the Guardian, 12 April 1926, p. 2. I also acknowledge the copy of this ballad that I received from George Gheyerie, Parkdale.

[32]Capt. Francis O'Neill, Irish Folk Music, p. 208.

[33]The fact that three of these four contests are in Prince County indicates the polarity between fiddlers who play in contests and those who belong to the Fiddlers' Society. The Society is not nearly as well established in Prince County as in the other two counties.

[34]Personal communication and photocopies of notations from Professor Bayard dated 1 March 1979.

[35]Information on Simmons from his sister, Mrs. Earl Francis, Crapaud. As a result of a research inquiry placed in Orlo Jones' "Family History Mysteries" column in the Guardian, I interviewed Mrs. Francis by phone in March, 1982.

[36]Field note of talk with Wilbur Jarvis, Kingsboro, 3 August 1978.

CHAPTER FOUR

ADAPTATION AND DECLINE: FIDDLERS AND FIDDLE BANDS ON ISLAND RADIO, 1923 - 1958

Along with fiddlers everywhere, those on the Island were greatly affected by the increasingly pluralistic twentieth century society. This can be seen in the presentation of Island fiddlers on provincial radio stations -- from the earliest test broadcasts to the lowest ebb of their popularity in the late 1950s and '60s, a decline that has been reversed only in the last decade. An historical survey of such presentation reveals that the stations provided local fiddlers with new opportunities, contexts and models. To put this in terms of the increasing diversification required of fiddlers who wanted to perform over the air, and of the shifts in taste to which they (along with all other performers) were forced to adapt, it is necessary to focus narrowly on the presentation of fiddlers on Island stations -- principally CFCY in Charlottetown.[1] I do not mean to imply that changing lifestyles and modes were not caused by, and reflected in, many other factors besides the advent of radio. Nor am I suggesting that other fiddling contexts -- from country kitchens to dance-halls -- were thereby less important. But I believe that the change from folk culture to mass culture took place during this period and that all Island fiddlers were to some degree affected, if only through changes in the attitude of

their audience. As one ethnomusicological observer has cogently stated:

> Music history bears witness to the fact that the forms in which amateur music-making are cast show a close relationship to patterns of living. They are in fact functional. They derive their impetus and vitality from community needs and depend for their survival upon their ability to be modified by and adapted to the changing structure of society. Those which cease to have close links with cultural patterns decline in popularity or simply do not survive.[2]

This statement helps explain why, despite a hard core of support, Island fiddling had declined greatly in popularity and activity by the late '50s as it was increasingly less able to fit in with cultural patterns in popular music and dance, and entertainment generally:

The fiddlers discussed start with the first and longest-active fiddler on Island airwaves, Lem Jay, whose broadcasting era (chiefly on CFCY) spanned 35 years, 1923-1958.[3] By 1958 another long (and much better known) association had ended at CFCY: after 18 years with the station (1939-57), Canada's best-known fiddler, Don Messer, had taken his band "The Islanders" to Halifax where he would become even more famous on television than his national CBC radio program (from CFCY) had made him.[4]

It therefore seems that 1958 marks the end of an era of live fiddling on Island radio stations; it was also during the period when the fiddle's popularity across North America had greatly declined.[5] The versatile Messer, with his more "modern" sound, was a notable exception to this trend. It is

perhaps unnecessarily ironic that Messer was seen to represent the Island and its fiddling, since he was from New Brunswick and his fiddling seems less popular on the Island (certainly among fiddlers) than in most other parts of the country, especially Ontario and the West. And his band's polished professionalism and national success set standards that made the local "old-time" seem "old-fashioned" to a large segment of its audience.

The social impact of radio on the Island has been tremendous. Even a radio enthusiast like Walter Hyndman, the former Lieutenant-Governor who is the Island's only living pioneer in radio, sees a negative side to it:

> It was a great mistake. It killed community life, especially concerts. When I was young, we had operettas here in the old [Charlottetown] opera house, and we had all kinds of good; good concerts, like the Burns concert and the Irish concert and so on, and while we still have them, they're a poor shadow of what they used to be. And, you know, everybody had a piano in their house. Young people starting [in music] couldn't compete with the music coming over the radio, so they lost interest, they didn't try, except in a few exceptional cases.[6]

While Hyndman is speaking chiefly of vocal music in the city, his remarks are relevant to the climate of support for fiddling, although the countryman's need for fiddlers has persisted longer and stronger than the Charlottetonian's desire for bel canto. But, of course, all earlier forms of music-making were re-evaluated through contact with mass media; as Wilhelm Kutter observed in Germany,

> the technical phenomena of the new exerts [sic] a fascination, and . . . it is easier to play through a gramophone record or to press a knob on the radio than it is to make music oneself or to sing. And these new music machines mostly purvey a kind of music which is different from the homemade variety and which is willingly accepted on account of its captivating novelty and its easily assimilable mawkishness.[7]

A typical local advertisement from 1923 offered "High Class Victor Records for the Cultured Taste at Miller Bros."[8]

In the United States the impact of mechanical music was foreseen by John Philip Sousa, "the March King." Writing in 1906, Sousa said that records would not inspire people to find their own music, "the grasp of human possibilities in the art," but would instead replace it: "the tide of amateurism cannot but recede until there will be left only the mechanical device and the professional executant."[9] While it can be argued that radio and records have also promoted musical expression -- many musicians use them as learning devices -- to realize how prophetic Sousa was, just consider how often you have heard people jokingly say that they can "only play the radio."

This "joke" actually occurred a number of times at Island community socials in the 1920s, where the entertainment role traditionally held by singers, instrumentalists, and reciters was taken by a radio demonstration.[10] However, a recorded incident at Birch Hill indicates that mechanical music, while fascinating, had its drawbacks:

> On January 24, 1924, Mr. Allan Palmer, Freeland, P.E.I., came to demonstrate and entertain, by means of the wonderful invention -- Radio. King George Hall was filled to capacity. However, nothing was heard but static. To save the evening's entertainment, an impromptu concert was staged by the members of the audience, followed by a sale of candy.[11]

It is hard now to describe the fascinating effect of radio upon Island society, an impact represented in the following anecdote: The story is told of a travelling radio salesman in Kings County in the late 1920s who approached an elderly farmer to explain the wonders of his product. The salesman described how he could install a receiver which, when hooked up to an antenna out to the barn, would (at very modest expense) bring him a world of musical entertainment whenever he chose it. Dubious, the farmer finally agreed to a demonstration. So the salesman rigged everything up, and pronounced it ready for the farmer's listening pleasure. The farmer said, "I'd like to hear 'Lord MacDonald's Reel.'" The flustered salesman was left to explain that the listener's choice was limited to what could be tuned in, but the incident is said to have ended with the command "Take the damn thing out."[12] I must admit that this story does not indicate the early relationship of fiddle music to radio sales. Radio was promoted by the frequent use of local musical talent of all sorts, the old-time musicians (especially fiddlers) apparently having a special provincial and even regional appeal in the early years.[13]

An informal, homey character was a well-remembered

feature of early radio broadcasts, in particular the old-time music programs. As relatively few people owned one, groups eagerly collected in the living rooms of the fortunate owners; for many years, radio was not merely listened to, it was watched. On some occasions rural phone lines were opened to the radio, and I have heard of places where the phone was placed on a pan or large soup-plate, so that several people could hear the radio.

Lem Jay, the First Radio Fiddler

In a previous chapter I indicated some of the techniques used by Island fiddlers of the nineteenth century. Such an old-time fiddler was Lem Jay (1882-1960) of Fanningbrook, near Mount Stewart. Jay learned his music by ear, beat his feet as he played, and made frequent use of drone strings, especially in high bass tuning which he used often. This description comes both from people like Joe Chaisson who heard Jay, and from private recordings he made in the 1930s and '40s. From these recordings I have collected on tape 33 renditions of tunes -- most in medleys, with a number of repeats.[14] Lem Jay's playing helps me to establish a comparative base for evaluating later fiddlers.

Through his activities as a fox rancher, Jay met Keith Rogers, another Island radio pioneer, and was asked to make test broadcasts over the Radio Club of Charlottetown's amateur station 10AS (owned primarily by Walter Burke) in the fall of 1923. In these experimental broadcasts Jay would play for

60 or 90 minutes, usually unaccompanied, and Rogers would phone around town to owners of receivers to ask if they could hear the music. Appeals were made over the air for those receiving to send in a card so a broadcast range could be determined. After Rogers obtained a commercial license (CFCY) in August, 1924, Lem Jay began making weekly 90 minute broadcasts, at a time when the station was only transmitting six hours a week.

On radio, as elsewhere, Jay generally played solo; however, occasionally his son Roland or daughter Edith accompanied him on the piano. Lem played reels and jigs mostly, favorites like "Big John McNeill," "Speed the Plough," "Pigeon on the Gate," "Lord MacDonald's Reel," "Green Fields of America," "Haste to the Wedding," "Maid on the Green." On a March 17, 1926 broadcast from CFCY, he played the jig "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning" in honor of the saint's day.[15]

Like most of the performers who followed him on radio, Jay received many fan letters, and some of these were kept.[16] They show that his programs were heard in much of the Maritime region, and were well appreciated; northern Nova Scotia seems to have been especially receptive, as letters from there are second in number only to those from the Island. One 1927 letter enthused: "You could drive away the Blues from anyone." Another testified to a medicinal effect from his music: "It certainly put a thrill through the limbs and cause one to forget about Rheumatism in the joints." Several report that someone in their listening group had stepdanced to Jay's music

during a broadcast. One boasted, "had there been a couple of sports like myself we would have had an eight hand reel." Despite its new competition, old-time music clearly had a large and ardent audience before the Second World War. As one listener wrote to Jay in 1932, "I would rather listen to you for an hour than a whole evening of that confounded jazz music from the American stations."[17]

Lem Jay was clearly a popular performer. At this distance it is hard to determine how much his popularity was based on his skill relative to his peers; and how much the result of radio exposure. (The same question will be asked of Don Messer, below.) But from all indications, Lem Jay was well respected by other fiddlers as well as the general public.[18]

Fortunately, some examples of Jay's fiddling survive on private family recordings that are very rare examples of old-time Island fiddling. As much as I regret the almost total neglect of Island stations in preserving their broadcast recordings of local music -- CFCY, for example, burned and sent to the garbage dump most of its records, tapes and files each of the three times it changed addresses from the '30s to the '50s -- it must be conceded that, however indirectly, they helped preserve Lem Jay's fiddling. Without the local fame secured by radio exposure, it is unlikely that anyone would have bothered to cut discs of his playing.

Most fiddlers found that performing for radio required

some adjustments. Roland Jay, who played both piano and fiddle over the air with his father, recalled that Lem didn't beat his feet nearly as vigorously in the radio studios as he had at dances.[19] Hector MacDonald, a fiddler from Bangor (near Morell) who played on CHCK Charlottetown in the late '20s, was unable to mute his feet to the light tapping required by the station manager, and was forced to wear pads under them while broadcasting. Another change that fiddlers found in radio broadcasts was that they had to have a title for each piece. So Hector named a pipe march "Little Donald in the Pigpen" apparently after an anecdote, which he tells before playing the tune.[20] Lem Jay had titles given to some of his tunes by CFCY announcer (and Messer band clarinetist) Rae Simmons, including his well-known "Jay's Reel," and possibly including "Johnny Can You Row a Boat," a seemingly home-made title for a variant of the Irish reel "The Torn Petticoat."[21]

Lem Jay stopped making frequent broadcasts about 1931. Thereafter he played annually for a half-hour on CFCY's "Outports" program during the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve. He is remembered for always playing "Napolean Crossing the Alps" on these occasions.[22] It was dedicated each year to an elderly woman who always requested it. While some listeners grew tired of this march, for others its annual rendition was an event they eagerly anticipated.

Far from fitting the stereotype of the drunken fiddler, Jay never tasted alcohol. It is interesting that he stopped

playing for public dances after he had established himself on CFCY and CHCK Charlottetown. One can appreciate his preference for the relative ease and prestige of radio performance, which gave him wide exposure, over the sometimes rough and drunken behaviour of village dance-hall patrons. Once, an inebriated crowd had kept him playing at a dance against his will until he could escape through a window.

Semi-Professional Radio Bands

Unlike radio performance, playing for a dance could raise a little money, although the fiddler would usually have to walk several miles and play for hours to earn perhaps three or four dollars. While not always guaranteed, this was good money when it came; a dollar a day was a fair wage for the 1920s. In contrast, musicians living some distance from the Charlottetown and Summerside radio studios had to pay their own expenses for train travel and meals. That is why Lem Jay curtailed his broadcasting in the early '30s: radio appearances during the Depression were a luxury that he (and many others) just couldn't afford. This had the effect of cutting out most of the Island's old-time musicians. Lem Jay's annual appearance on "The Outports" was a sentimental exception, and doubtless related to his long acquaintance with station owner Keith Rogers.

This economic reality led toward specialization and a narrowing in the range of performers, as sponsorship created

the distinction between the amateur (i.e., one who plays for the love of it) and the semi-professional (i.e., one who is paid a few dollars by a sponsor, and through the exposure can earn some more by playing for dances and shows). Often a person's status changed back and forth between the two levels several times; those willing and able to get a sponsor were able to broadcast for as long as the sponsor was willing to advertise in this way. Otis Jackson of Peter's Road, who says he was the second Island fiddler to broadcast, was sponsored by Fraser's packing company of Murray Harbour for his only trip in to perform on CFCY in the mid-'20s.[23]

While some Charlottetown-area fiddlers such as Robert Weeks (who was always introduced as having "come in from the highways and byways"), Al Dowling (who often played between periods of local hockey broadcasts on CHCK), and Percy Groom (who also played the bagpipes) fiddled solo over Charlottetown stations in the early '30s, the fiddle band quickly became the basic vehicle of old-time music. In the late '20s Hector MacDonald played over CHCK several times accompanied by jew's-harp, harmonica, guitar and piano.[24] Smaller combos could also be heard, like the harmonica and banjo duo of "Duck and Bill," (Frank "Duck" Acorn, tenor banjo, and "Blind Billy" MacEachern, harmonica, a newsboy/street musician/peanut vendor who broadcast irregularly for many years).

Early in the next decade a band called "The Bristol Wood Choppers," (after a community near Morell), with a line-

up of fiddle, mandolin, jew's-harp, harmonica, piano, and two guitars, played for a couple of years on both CFCY and CHCK. The Bristol Wood Choppers had two members who occasionally sang, but they mostly played reels and jigs for dancing.[25] This seems to have been the norm for Island fiddle bands at this time, as singing -- which was previously done a cappella or with piano accompaniment --- does not seem to have been prominently featured in such bands until U.S. country-and-western music arrived via records and the radio.

The immediate popularity of singing cowboys both in the movies and on the airwaves opened the door for the evolving country-and-western song repertoire.[26] While the adoption of these songs may seem rather incongruous, most had many features in common with both the folk and sentimental songs then current. Local singers soon had regional models in the western style in Nova Scotians Wilf Carter and Clarence "Hank" Snow.

With the western repertoire, in many cases, went the western tag and outfit. Although he used his own name in Canada, in the U.S. Carter was known as "Montana Slim," and Snow at first called himself "Hank the Yodelling Ranger" after his and Carter's idol, Jimmie Rodgers, the famous "Blue Yodeller": after his voice deepened and he couldn't yodel, Snow changed his moniker to "the Singing Ranger."[27] From Hants County, Nova Scotia[28] to CFCY came "Tex" Cochrane, dubbed "the Yodelling Trail Rider," who had his own program before

singing with several well-known Island fiddle bands.[29] Al Nicholson, "your old friend Nick," a popular announcer who hosted the live music shows on CHGS and later CJRW Summerside, named western singer Charles Caseley "the Coleman Caballero" (after his home community in Prince County).[30] He also gave "Smilin' Bill" MacCormack, a blind singer/guitarist/fiddler from Hopefield, the nickname he still uses.[31] Another contemporary "country" singer who has a nickname and does some yodelling is Tignish-raised "Stompin' Tom" Connors, who wears a black cowboy hat and is a great admirer of Wilf Carter. Connors' famous "stompin'," while unusual for a singer/guitarist, is very common among fiddlers; this is where he may have picked it up. The mostly western program of Charlie Chamberlain, New Brunswick's "Singing Lumberjack," was heard on CFCY as early as 1937;[32] later, as "the Singing Islander" with Don Messer, he began to sing mostly stage-Irish numbers and hymns. Two CFCY announcers, Ches Cooper and Loman McAulay, got into the act with a western-garbed combo called "Ches and Loman and the Country Cousins." Their Southern-styled Acadian fiddler from Summerside, Pete Doiron, was given the more genre-appropriate stage name "Fiddlin' Hank."

While Island fiddle bands in the '30s increasingly needed singers to sing hit recordings, they retained their traditional fiddle and harmonica tunes to a large extent. A few fiddlers, like Pete Doiron, preferred Southern American tunes, but most played the old-time favorites. I agree with

Neil Rosenberg where he says that "The appearance of records and the growth of radio affected Maritime instrumental traditions just as it affected the singing traditions."[33] But I must add that singing traditions were generally changed much faster and far more radically. A more important change for the instrumental side was that it was taken, however gradually and partially, from the community dance-hall to the very different listening context of radio, where "the tide of amateurism" quickly receded.

CFCY and "the Kelly and McInnis Program"

Like the musicians, the radio stations promoted themselves with tags and slogans. CHCK billed itself as "The Voice of Canada's Garden Province," while CFCY used the far catchier slogan, "The Friendly Voice of the Maritimes." This famous tag, which the station has now dropped since it was taken over by an off-Island conglomerate in 1971, came from L.A. "Art" McDonald, who some say also popularized the term "Down East Music."[34] His contemporaries give the late McDonald a large part of the credit for CFCY's rise to profitability during the 1930s. A persuasive salesman, he became an inimitable announcer whose voice was heard across Canada on the Messer programs, and was also the station's program director from 1935 to 1945.[35] As such he was heavily involved in both the local production and selling of programs, and the purchasing of them from other sources.

The great selling point of CFCY was, and is, its wide coverage. This became crucially important in the mid-'30s. After the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission was created in 1932 (forerunner of the CBC four years later[36]) the federal broadcast agency moved into territory formerly the province of private stations. Keith Rogers, owner/manager of CFCY, was furious when a giant transmitting tower was erected in creating CBA Sackville, New Brunswick, and many of his national advertisers deserted him, leaving CFCY on shaky financial ground. What saved the station was its great natural advantage in range. Analysis of mail response, and the sending of radio-equipped cars all around the Maritimes and Quebec, confirmed that CFCY reached a larger audience than its competitors. This led to an advertising counter-attack which included the publication of two yearbooks and a promotional newsletter, "The Friendly Voice," all of which pushed the advantage of being "Located in the Geographical Center of the Maritime Provinces."[37]

Of course, range was not enough, the station needed programs that people would listen to. At CFCY, the old-time music programs contributed greatly to its survival and growth. The most popular old-time program from 1933 to the end of the Second World War (when it was dropped) was "the Kelly & McInnis Program" on CFCY in what is now called "prime time": Friday nights from 8:30 - 9:00 from November to May. It always featured a band called "the Merry Makers," and while

the personnel changed, the format remained the same. The show opened and closed with a theme fiddle tune (each fiddler had his own).[38] In between there were three songs, mostly western but also including some Irish standards and the occasional gospel song. The rest of the program featured the fiddle and harmonica playing reels and jigs predominantly.[39] It was sponsored by the Kelly & McInnis men's-wear shop on Great George Street (almost next-door to CFCY for several years), a small store often recalled as "a hole in the wall" that did a tremendous trade as a result of its program. In fact, business was so good that competing clothing stores like Harry A. MacDougall and Henderson & Cudmore were forced to sponsor their own old-time radio shows to keep up.[40]

The best-remembered edition of the Merry Makers was led by two fiddlers, Al Dowling (Charlottetown) and Helaire Gallant (Rustico), who usually played together. The Merry Makers were semi-professionals. They each earned three dollars for the half-hour Friday night broadcast, and played perhaps one or two weekly dances. They were a casual, fun-loving group that did not prepare much beyond writing out a list of titles. The fiddlers did not start precisely together,[41] but are remembered affectionately for their right-spirited presentation of old-time music. I have also heard it said of both this group and the one I am about to introduce that they outdrew Messer's band when playing at competing dances in Charlottetown.[42]

George Chappelle's Rise and Fall, 1932-39

Probably the best-known radio fiddler on the Island during the 1930s was George Chappelle, who was the most active and ambitious performer. Chappelle learned to play after losing a leg in a threshing machine accident: "I had to learn a sitting down job" is how he put it.[43] He was helped to learn by Bill Weatherbie, Al Dowling and Aeneas Curley, all good Charlottetown fiddlers. Chappelle made his debut on CFCY in the fall of 1932 with a 15-minute program and one accompanist. The next year he expanded, adding a second fiddle, a harmonica player and a cowboy singer. This was the first edition of the Merry Makers, and the beginning of the Kelly & McInnis Program.

This group was well received, but all the other players had steady jobs, so when CFCY wanted a band that could tour, Chappelle formed "George Chappelle and the Merry Islanders" in 1936 (although he didn't quit the Merry Makers until '37). The Merry Islanders consisted of people who were, or wanted to be, professional musicians, including "Tex" Cochrane, guitar and vocals, Jackie Doyle, piano, and Larry Rowe, tenor banjo.

In the fall of 1937, through the agency of Art McDonald, Chappelle's band was asked to produce 13 15-minute programs for the CBC radio network. They replaced Wilf Carter, who had had "a falling out" with the corporation.[44] At this time Chappelle stopped playing with the Merry Makers (Charlie Todd from Breadalbane taking over on fiddle) because, he wrote, "I

wanted to put everything into this one big opportunity."[45] He says that at this time he knew between 350 and 400 tunes.

Of this "big opportunity" George recalled:

> We had the first Old Time band to play on the Coast to Coast hook-up of 53 stations from the Maritimes. I was the first one to lead a band on the Coast to Coast Network that didn't know a note of music.

This meant, aside from the publicity for the band's dances, fairly good money at that time; as leader, Chappelle made $15 per show, Cochrane the singer $7.50, and the other band members $5 each. The Merry Islanders toured extensively, playing in 90 Maritime halls in the summer of 1938. The next summer was equally successful, but the peak didn't last long. That fall some of the band members went off to war -- Chappelle was of course exempt from active service -- and he had some friction with CFCY over the exhausting touring schedule promoted by the station to keep its name before the Maritime public, as part of the desperate promotional campaign mentioned previously. Also there was a drinking problem that caused him to miss a CFCY-promoted dance in the Gaspé, and strait-laced management, represented by L.A. McDonald, fired him. McDonald quickly hired Don Messer from Saint John, and got "Don Messer and the (later his) Islanders," the station's new band, the CBC network contract that made them famous.

About this firing, the turning point of his musical career, George Chappelle wrote:

> I felt that I had got a raw deal as I had played over CFCY for a number of years without receiving a nickel from the Station Management; and building up a very large radio audience.[46]

An indication of the size of this audience is the response to the two photos offered of the Merry Islanders by CFCY. The first sold a very respectable 5,500 copies in the spring of 1938 (at 35¢ each); a year later, the second picture sold 16,500. Thereafter barred from CFCY, the only Island station with national network connections, Chappelle played locally in several dance bands (including Pius Blackett's Eastern Rhythm Boys), and even resurrected the Merry Islanders name during 1947-51, but never got another "big opportunity" in radio, and later moved into other lines of work in Ontario.

Don Messer and his Islanders

In replacing Chappelle, McDonald needed a fiddler who was also a professional as a bandleader, and in these respects Messer was a proven quality. He had performed on CFDO and CHSJ St. John from the early '30s, and led a large group on the CBC network program from CHSJ, "National Barndance," probably before Chappelle's first network show.[47] Messer was known to CFCY staff as he had visited the station in 1937.[48] He came over in late '39 with Chamberlain, with Duke Neilsen arriving the following spring after completing a Messer contract at a trade show in Boston (with Ned Landry on fiddle).[49] The band was filled out with Novascotian reedman Rae Simmons, and

three former Merry Islanders: Jackie Doyle, his singing sister Babe Doyle, and drummer Bill LeBlanc.

The use of the name "the Islanders" seems to indicate that McDonald felt it belonged to the station rather than to Chappelle and his group. Chappelle claims that Messer briefly called his band the Merry Islanders, and only shortened the name after Chappelle informed McDonald that he held a copyright on "Merry Islanders."[50] The station's possessiveness about the name seems corroborated by an early ad billing the group as "Don Messer's Orchestra -- CFCY Islanders."[51]

In the matter of names, Messer had the professional's flexibility. In Saint John, he had a group called the New Brunswick Lumberjacks; on the Island, it was Don Messer and the Islanders. The group name was too well known to change when its television career in Halifax, N.S. began in 1957, but it was down-played in favour of the program name, "Don Messer's Jubilee," which came from the local Jubilee Boat Club where the group often played.[52] (And it was this title, rather than the band name, that was prominently lettered on the bass drum.) With musicians from all three Maritime provinces, the Messer band's identity (Maritime/regional) was almost as broadly based as its musical repertoire.

The differences that Messer brought to old-time music on the Island were: 1) his horizons were not bounded by old-time music and cowboy songs, he wanted to play everything that was popular -- including dixieland, swing, novelties, hymns,

ballads and Irish numbers;[53] 2) his fiddling was smoother and less dynamic than that of the better Island fiddlers, and not really old-time by their standards; 3) versatility was required of his players, and during the '40s he gradually replaced the non-readers in his band. His Islanders never used the harmonica or jew's-harp, features of old-time Island bands, especially the former. Instead, Messer made Rae Simmons' clarinet an essential part of his sound, and frequently used a brass section comprised of a trumpet (Harold MacRae), trombone (Neilsen), and saxophone (Simmons), all of whom had trained in Salvation Army bands. And most of his longtime musicians doubled: Simmons on reeds, Cec MacEachern on guitar and fiddle, and bassist Neilsen also took up tenor banjo, most horns and, he says, a total of 17 instruments while with Messer.

Messer's variety approach was designed to provide something for everyone. Along with instrumental versatility, he had versatile singers in Chamberlain and (from 1947) Marg Osborne who projected personality, something that Messer lacked. His announcer (often Rae Simmons) took care of the comedy element along with Neilsen, who was ordered to work up an imitation of Grandpa Jones, his "Uncle Luke" character.[54] The establishing of a musical family that was well loved, and the broad appeal of his format, are likely more responsible for Messer's appeal (on the Island at least) than his abilities as an old-time fiddler, strictly considered.

And while Messer seems about to be revived, or is in the process of revival as a representative of old-time Canadian culture, he is more representative of a professionalism and commercial acumen that created a calculated, syncretistic blend of old-time, popular and swing music that might be called "Eastern Swing."[55]

Messer as an Old-Time Fiddler

My purpose here is not to dismiss Messer, but to put his music in the context of old-time music, especially as performed on Prince Edward Island; I am aware that from other perspectives the judgment could be more positive. It took a special talent and perseverance for Messer to achieve great success with a fiddle band, however sophisticated, at a time when old-time music was in decline. That his success appears to have contributed to that decline is not his fault. But in the public consciousness (as distinct from Island fiddlers and old-time music aficionados) Messer's clean if somewhat mechanical precision tended to reflect negatively upon traditional Island fiddlers, who could not meet Messer's standards any more than he could meet theirs. Perhaps the best statement of Messer's place in this context is by the Montreal virtuoso Jean Carignan, who is widely regarded as one of the most skillful fiddlers anywhere. Carignan has remarked:

> The trouble for fiddle players in this country can be seen if you remember Don Messer. There are people picking potatoes in Prince Edward Island who can fiddle better

> than Don ever could. But people like Messer are good businessmen. They know what the people want and how to give it to them.[56]

To bring the issue back home, consider that both Cec MacEachern and CFCY announcer Loman McAulay (who worked on a lot of Messer's programs as well as announcing several of them) were the sons of Island fiddlers (Aeneas MacEachern and Louis McAulay) who disliked Messer's fiddling.[57] Cec, who played fiddle in the Three Macs band on CFCY (1947-48) before joining Messer in '49, was reportedly told by his father that he was "wasting his time" learning Messer's style.[58] (In professional terms of course, this was not true, although band members made relatively little money considering their popularity and productivity.)

The antipathy or indifference to Messer's fiddling that I have heard expressed by Island fiddlers from Tignish to Souris, has been attributed by some people to professional jealousy or xenophobia. However, I can't imagine such sentiments being expressed had a top Cape Breton fiddler held Messer's job; I believe that the great majority of Island fiddlers simply found Messer uninteresting as a player. The fact that he was nationally popular as a fiddler -- and represented the Island as such through association with CFCY -- only exacerbated the irritation of local players.

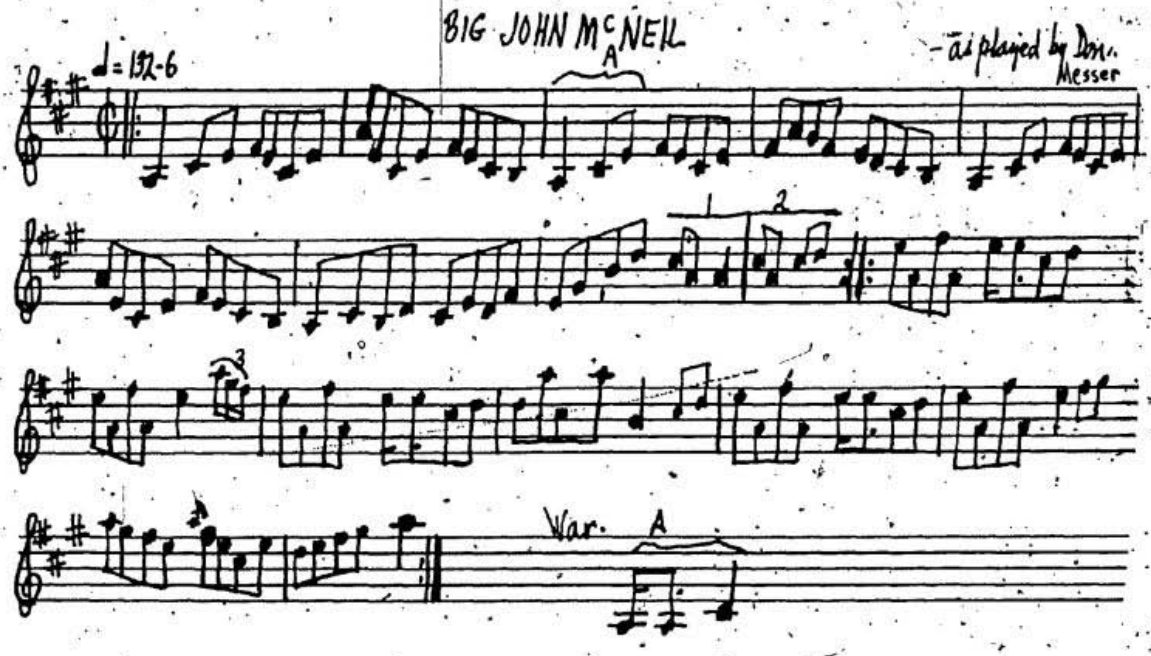
Perhaps an anecdote I heard is the best illustration: About 30 years ago my informant, then a young novice fiddler,

was taken by an uncle who fiddled to see Joe Farrell, a good Kings County fiddler who was, like many fiddling bachelors, temperamental about performing. The object of the trip was for the youngster to hear the old master Farrell. When asked to play, Farrell declined, giving the typical excuses that he had a poor fiddle and hadn't played on it for some time. So the two men talked for a while, the uncle fiddled some tunes, introduced the youngster as a coming fiddler and he scraped out a few tunes. Then Farrell was again asked, indeed implored to play, but he remained obdurate. Finally the uncle tried another tack, asking Farrell "Have you ever heard Don Messer play 'The Mason's Apron'?" At this Farrell grunted, picked up the fiddle and played that and a number of other tunes in a manner that the speaker, now an accomplished and active fiddler, still remembers as most impressive.[59] This is the best illustration I have of the Island-wide sentiment among fiddlers that Messer may have been a good musician, but he wasn't a good fiddler to their ears.

Fortunately, it is possible to go beyond opinions and make a musical comparison. The comparison is limited, based on the recorded performances by Don Messer and Lem Jay of the same tune, "Big John McNeil." The reel, a firm favorite in the Maritimes, is of Scottish provenance and known authorship -- although to the great majority of Maritime fiddlers it is considered traditional. Composed by Peter Milne (1824-1908), a famous Scottish fiddler/composer,[60] it was named, appropriately, after a Highland dancer who was active around the

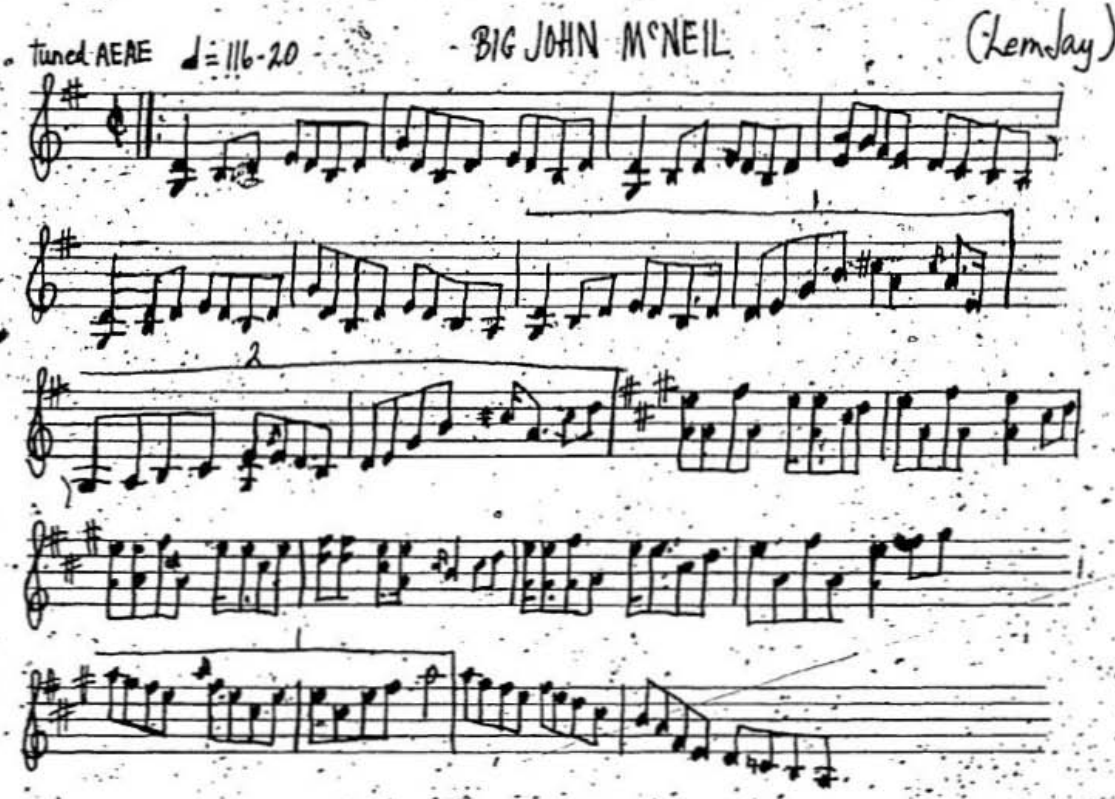
turn of this century[61] and has been very popular on the Island as a dance tune. Milne's title was simply "John McNeil"; I don't know how the "Big" came into it.

Don Messer and the Islanders recorded "Big John McNeil" at CFCY studios in 1942, and it was perhaps his biggest record success,[62] since released (like much of his earlier material) a number of times. I have transcribed Messer's (fiddle) part of the performance as follows:



Lem Jay made a private recording of "Big John McNeil/ Christy Campbell" probably in Charlottetown, and probably in the mid-30s.[63] While Messer's version is in standard tuning,

Jay's solo rendition is in "high bass" (AEAE). I have transcribed Jay's performance as to fingering, which means that the two lower strings are fingered in G, although the tune is played in A.



Jay's scordatura version gets a fuller violin sound, and would likely prove more effective than Messer's in a solo dance-hall performance context. Of course, Messer's context was very different. His band supplied him with a bed of sound to support his melodic line, and as Dr. Rosenberg

observed, neither retuning nor carrying a second fiddle in high bass tuning was really practical for a live radio performer like Messer. This illustrates the different demands of radio, where a clear articulation of melody was much preferred to the broader and more idiosyncratic rhythmic and harmonic possibilities of scordatura tuning.

In terms of tempo, Jay's slower performance seems drawn from dance-playing, and close to John Glen's estimation of reel time as ♩=126[64] Messer's rendition is brisker but less expressive; the comparison seems to corroborate many opinions I have heard that Messer played too quickly and without proper expression. This was memorably articulated for me by Joe Chaisson, who said of Messer's playing:

> I never used to bother listening to it because it was all the same thing and there was nothing to it, only great sound. Great sound, that's all. There was no variation in it.[65]

In contrast to other band fiddlers like Chappelle and Dowling, Messer was a "note-player" who had studied the violin with a teacher in Boston.[66] He played cleanly and started and ended his tunes precisely, and could play accompaniments behind his singers. He was by all reports a very effective bandleader, who could perform a wide range of music from his large sheet music collection; indeed, he always played from notes on his radio broadcasts. His programs were scripted, timed, and rehearsed months in advance.[67] Although his

fiddling didn't satisfy most Island fiddlers, it is easy to see why his absolute professionalism and versatility won him national success. That this success came rapidly is indicated by the fact that he published his first tune-book in 1942.[68]

Changing Times and Modern Music

It is not Messer's success, nor the varying reactions to it among Canadians, that I want to focus on here, but rather his success as a barometer of changing tastes, especially in the post-Second World War period. While Lem Jay outlasted Don Messer on CFCY, it was only because he was an annual institution, and Messer had moved on to bigger things. Even fiddle fans in the 1950s expected a bit of variety and sophistication in their music. Local tradition as represented by the old-time fiddler, was passé in an increasingly urbanized and mass-mediated world. The fiddlers still had their audience, but in formal contexts it was not satisfied with just old-time music. In the post-war era working bands had to provide so-called "modern" music, for which one horn player (usually a saxophone) was a bare minimum.

George Chappelle's Merry Islanders illustrate the point. In the late '30s the band co-featured his brother Garfield on harmonica. During 1947-51 when he revived the name, the band consisted of (besides Chappelle on fiddle and a drummer) pianist Al Blanchard and two tenor saxes (Charlie Munroe and Art Cantwell).[69] As a working professional, Chappelle could draw

on experienced musicians to provide the "modern" requirement. The rural fiddlers could not, and their audience reduced to the point that many stopped playing, at least in public. There simply seemed no future in it. That is why there are today more Island fiddlers in their sixties than there are in their forties.

Cec MacEachern told me that Messer played "what I called a modern old-time fiddle."[70] The fact that older styles were overshadowed by Messer's "modern" blend reflects a shift away from old-time music in the public taste; of course, this was a continent-wide phenomenon during the 1940s and '50s. Messer's sound was a blend of many popular tunes and styles, "down-home" yet sweet toned, the versatile product of a man with an instinct for audience demographics. In addition to his other sources of appeal, for Islanders Messer's national success was doubtless impressive in itself, as our smallest province is not used to producing or even hosting national stars; here he was a large fish in a small pond. While many local fiddlers resented the fact, for many Islanders Messer's association with the place was a source of pride. Messer's biographer (one might say hagiographer) Lester Sellick has even claimed that "a lot of people never heard about the Island until Don Messer got on the CBC."[71]

Nevertheless, Messer's music was most popular in Ontario and Western Canada, which seems related to the fact that the eastern Scottish and Acadian styles call for an

emotional expressiveness that was not in his large repertoire of violin effects. Messer became famous as the king of "Down East" old-time music, but for many fiddle fans on the Island his legacy was one of trivialization, of removing the music from its old-world roots and dressing it up in the "uptown" sounds of clarinet, saxophone, and trumpet. An early expression of this view in print identified a body of critical opinion among

> . . . those who love the old tunes but find the Islanders treat them irreverently. Whereas most old-time bands rely on such basic instruments as the fiddle, banjo, jews harp and washboard, Messer's includes piano, electric guitar, clarinet and trumpet.

The Messer blend was also termed "sophisticated cornball."[72]

While North American fiddle scholar Earl Spielman agrees with the consensus of Island fiddlers that Messer "was not a particularly gifted performer,"[73] I am more concerned with pointing out that he was for some people a scapegoat for post-war cultural changes, including a major shift in musical ecologies everywhere at this time. But unlike those whose audience and economy were limited, Messer could hire and direct musicians who were able to add a bit of big-band smoothness to the old-time tunes. The advent of mass media and thus mass audiences brought professionalism into country and old-time music. In acquiring versatile note-readers, Messer was doing in an individual way what was being widely done in larger country music centres. Bill C. Malone has

described this growth in terms that also apply to Messer's syncretistic musical evolution, and the reactions it received:

> Once looked upon as primitive practitioners of their art, country musicians in the late forties had become highly professional. Masters of their respective instruments, the "sidemen" who assembled in Nashville and other country music centers could play any type of music in a style that would have made their hillbilly precursors either envious or comtemptuous.[74]

Messer's violin playing was geared to a wide variety of tastes, and the radio medium itself - to the point that for many Canadians he defined (and still defines) old-time fiddling. However, his style was more commercial than country, more "refined" than "folk." The point has been made before, but at a greater distance from Messer's regional context, and in less detail. In his 1960 Ontario research George Proctor noted that Messer's style was "a natural outgrowth of the effects of mass communication."[75] And clearly it is mainly Messer that Earl Spielman refers to when he writes:

> Though the Canadian old-time style has evolved over many years and though it is generally considered to be a non-commercial style, its development and popularization on a national level are integrally associated with phonograph recordings and radio and television broadcasts of old-time fiddle music.[76]

One measure of the impact of mass media in popularizing this style is the regularity with which many American and British observers, like Spielman, commit the solecism of referring to "the" Canadian style, when they would never say "the" American style of fiddle playing.

"Messer-style" is a Canadian "superstyle"[77] much copied in Canada, including most of New Brunswick and mainland Nova Scotia, but presently is a definitely minority taste here. Messer had an impact on such fiddlers as Cec MacEachern, Jackie Chipman, Nick Kays, and Ralph Gay. But the followers of Messer have been relatively few; by far the greatest impact of Messer on the local scene seems to have been on the audience rather than the fiddlers. His national success so put local musicians in the shade that the long history (touched on herein) of local radio performers is almost forgotten: Don Messer, and not Jay, Dowling, Chappelle et al, represents local radio fiddlers to Islanders today. As Island priest and fiddler Bishop Faber MacDonald (now of the Diocese of Grand Falls, Newfoundland) told me in an interview:

> Some of these [fiddlers] in PEI whose roots in this music went back generations, they weren't respected you know. I feel that that's one of the problems here on PEI, we have such an awe and a reverence for the outsiders. So when Don Messer comes in with his New Brunswick kind of stylle, we lost all respect completely for a lot of these people who had a treasure in their memory banks and in their hearts and in their violins. And now that this other [Messer style]

> has disappeared, now we're beginning to find out that we nearly lost that you know.[78]

The statement that Messer style has disappeared on the Island is only slightly exaggerated. In particular, his fiddling has not lasted here because it did not come from, or ultimately reach, the grassroots of fiddling tradition on the Island, but was superimposed by mass media.

The commercial style of fiddling popularized by Messer has been variously called "Messer," "Down-East," or "Canadian old-time" style. (For some people it could not be considered "old-time" as that term means generally whatever fiddling the speaker approves of.) Proctor divided the fiddling he found in an admittedly limited survey of Ontario into two main categories. One was "Regular Old-Time," equated with Messer and his "technical polish." The other he calls "Scottish-Canadian," noting that its exponents (I would include those on the Island) "regarded all other styles as cheap imitations."[79] Spielman similarly found that

> The proficiency of Scottish-Canadian fiddlers has led many of them to develop a very possessive and superior attitude about their playing style.[80]

Messer's style seems to have much more Irish ancestry than Scotch.[81] Perhaps that is why the Ottawa Valley fiddlers I have met have a higher appreciation for Messer's music than Island or Cape Breton fiddlers -- or Proctor's informants in

the Scottish Ontario counties of Glengarry and Stormont.

However, the main difference may be not between Irish and Scotch styles, but between what Spielman calls the "vernacular" and "cultivated" types;[82] the distinction locally would be termed "refined" and "old-time." Part of the xenophobic reaction to Messer comes from the fact that he was a "refined" fiddler who was famous as an exponent of "old-time" (or "folk," although fiddlers don't use the term about themselves) music; the fiddlers blamed Messer for some of the disgust they felt for the taste of the public.

Messer moved from local radio to local television (then owned by CFCY) in 1956. A year later, when he began a weekly television program from Halifax, there were no regular radio programs from Charlottetown that featured fiddling. No local fiddlers could imitate him and his band, and his national status was such that no Island fiddler was considered adequate by CFCY. In any case, old-time music seemed dated with the arrival of rock-and-roll.

Also by this time, Island radio stations had come to see themselves less as production centres for the province and more as local franchises for recorded music and programs from the major networks and production centres in North America. An indication of this trend can be seen in a 1948 CFCY advertising boast: "5000 Watts and the Finest Programs We Can Buy."[83] Like other stations, CFCY thought more of program formats than of local productions. Ironically, it was through recordings

that Lem Jay made his last radio appearance about 1958. He was too ill to make his annual visit to the "Outports" program, so announcer Rae Simmons used his home-made recordings to pretend that the fiddler was actually performing as always. Jay was quite moved to hear Simmons introduce him, describe his tie, and say how great he looked.[84] On this occasion at least, CFCY lived up to its billing as "The Friendly Voice of the Maritimes."

Today, there is not a live music program on any Island radio station. The closest approximation is the "West Prince Party Line" program at 11:45 a.m. (Mon-Wed. and Fri.) on CJRW Summerside, which plays music tapes of listeners, largely from Prince County. There are live "hoedown" programs on the local access cable-TV channels in Charlottetown and Summerside which feature fiddling, singing and step-dancing. These however, with their cowby-hats and wagon-wheel motifs, more closely resemble the "Stacey's Country Jamboree" TV program from Maine[85] than they do the off-the-cuff, bantering tone of most of the old live local radio shows.[86] In any case, as Cec MacEachern pointed out to me, in CFCY's new studios there is no room for "an outfit" to perform anyway[87]; they can at best accommodate several persons sitting at a small table. But today radio does not dominate the local music scene as it has in the past, and old-time Island music is returning to the fore, particularly the Scottish-Canadian, where the more congenial and compatible influence of Cape Breton music can be seen.

NOTES

[1]Much of the authority for this necessarily sketchy account of radio on the Island comes from interviews, newspaper and other written accounts and other materials which I have gathered in the absence of a written history. All dates given have been established by several sources.

[2]Nancy Martin, quoted by William Kay Archer, op. cit., p. 32.

[3]The dates of Jay's time on Island airwaves are a synthesis of various indications, including the estimate of his daughter, Mrs. R.B. McLaren, Charlottetown, the note in F.L. Pigot, op. cit., p. 120, and many newspaper reports.

[4]Some later accounts of Messer and his career are: Lester Sellick, Canada's Don Messer (Kentville, NS: Kentville Publishing Company, 1969); Sellick's "Don Messer, His Land and His Music," in his Some Island Men I Remember (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot Press, 1980), pp. 68-72; his "Messer years ahead of his time," Halifax Chronicle-Herald, 20 March 1980, 5: his "Don Messer: Gentleman, musician, patriot," in Notable Nova Scotians (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot Press, 1981), pp. 97-104; Alden Nowlan, "Silver Jubilee," Weekend Magazine, 24 March 1979, p. 10; Heather Moore, "Played with Don Messer for 41 years: Duke Neilsen now retired," Montague Eastern Graphic, September 1979, p. 3; Alan Guettel, "Don Messer: The good old days of music that Canada loved," The Canadian Composer, no. 147, January 1980, pp. 18, 20, 22; Dick Brown, "What's this? A new disc by good old Don Messer," Atlantic Insight, March 1980, p. 72. See also the entry on Messer in the Encyclopedia of Music in Canada (q.v.).

[5]Spielman, pp. 191, 287.

[6]Interview with F. Walter Hyndman, Charlottetown, 23 June 1980.

[7]Wilhelm Kutter, "Radio As the Destroyer, Collector and Restorer of Folk Music," Journal of the International Folk Music Council, 9 (1957), 35.

[8]Advertisement in the Guardian, 26 April 1923, p. 8.

[9]Quoted in Roland Gelatt, The Fabulous Phonograph: From Edison to Stereo (New York: Appleton-Century, 1965), pp. 109-110.

[10]Many radio demonstrations are recorded in the Guardian in the period 1920-23.

[11]Birch Hill Women's Institute, Climbing the Hill: A History of Birch Hill (Summerside: the authors, 1980), p. 195.

[12]Field note from George MacIntyre.

[13]I draw this conclusion from oral reports, but also from the number of times fiddlers like Lem Jay were reported in the newspapers as performing on radio, and from CFCY owner Keith Rogers' address reported in the Guardian -- "Address on Radio by Mr. Keith Rogers," 22 April 1926, p. 14. Rogers' speech to the Y's Men's Club (printed in full) was entitled "Radio, whence it came, where it has arrived, and whence it goeth."

[14]The dates of Lem Jay recordings were estimated by his daughter Edith, Mrs. R.B. McLaren. Mrs. McLaren graciously allowed me to make taped copies of these rare recordings. See Appendix A for a Lem Jay repertoire list, to which these discs contributed.

[15]Reported in the Guardian, 18 March 1926, p. 6.

[16]The quotations are from letters in the possession of Mr. and Mrs. Roland Jay, Mount Stewart, who permitted me to see them.

[17]This statement, similar to the "Down with Jazz and the Charleston" sentiment in the previous chapter's contest ballads, was a common reaction all over North America at this time. Cf. Merriam, The Anthropology of Music, pp. 241-244. This hostility, which reflected the wide popularity of jazz in some quarters, returned with equal intensity when rock-and-roll emerged in the mid-'50s.

[18]I have yet to meet an Island fiddler who has spoken other than approvingly of Jay's broadcasts.

[19]Interview with Roland Jay, Mount Stewart, 23 August 1979.

[20]Anecdote and tune recorded from Hector MacDonald, Bangor, 11 August 1978. A transcription of both is in The Island Fiddler, no. 6, February 1982.

[21]A transcription of "Johnny Can You Row a Boat" is included in Appendix B.

[22]Roland Jay interview. This tune is mentioned in a report of Jay's appearance in the Guardian, 30 December 1937.

[23]Interview with Otis Jackson, Peter's Road, 18 November 1979.

[24]Hector MacDonald interview, 11 August 1978.

[25]Information on The Bristol Wood Choppers came from interviews with Percy Baker, Bristol, 21 August 1980, and Walter O'Brien, Charlottetown, 8 October 1979.

[26]Reported in Bill C. Malone, Country Music USA: A Fifty-year History (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1968), p. 101. This chapter of mine also owes a debt to Malone's chapter "The Cowboy Image and the Growth of Western Music."

[27]Malone, p. 101.

[28]I was given Cochrane's place of origin by Dr. Neil V. Rosenberg. Cochrane's home, I note, is within CFCY's primary coverage area, and he may have heard the station for almost 10 years before he appeared on its programs.

[29]Information on Cochrane's program is from CFCY's newsletter, The Friendly Voice, vol. 2, no. 1, November 1937, 2.

[30]From Bill Pickering, Summerside.

[31]Reported in a feature article in the Eastern Graphic, 22 April 1981.

[32]As in note 29, p. 3. Also offered for national sponsorship in this newsletter were "The Down Sisters" ("A vocal duo. The Singing Sweethearts of Maritime Airways" -- presumably not stewardesses) and "The Doucette Family" ("Four brothers and a singing sister. A corking good band,").

[33]Neil V. Rosenberg, "'Folk' and 'Country' Music in the Canadian Maritimes: A Regional Model," The Journal of Country Music, 5 (1974), 80.

[34]This attribution comes from Loman McAulay, Mrs. L.A. McDonald, and Bill Brown, all of Charlottetown.

[35]From an undated newspaper obituary in the possession of Mrs. L.A. McDonald.

[36]"Canadian Radio Broadcasting Act, 1932-1936," in "A Brief History of Broadcasting in Canada," Report of the Royal Commission on Broadcasting (Ottawa: 1957), p. 303.

[37]The Friendly Voice, p. 3.

[38]According to information from George Chappelle and Raymond Sellick, Chappelle's "Merry Islanders" theme tune, "Up the River," may also have been used in the earlier band. Charlie Todd played "My Silver Bell" with the "Merry Makers" and Dowling and Gallant may have used "The Mason's Apron" as a theme.

[39]Interview with Raymond Sellick and Fanny Bertram, 19 December 1979 in Parkdale.

[40]Reported by former band member Sterling Stead, Charlottetown, 29 January 1980, and confirmed by Charlottetown clothier Brian Cudmore, April 1980. The regional popularity of this program is attested (in a garbled fashion) in Allister MacGillivray, The Cape Breton Fiddler (Sydney: College of Cape Breton Press, 1981), p. 140.

[41]My description of this group comes from interviews with Sellick and Bertram, Stead, McAulay, and Dennis and Ivan Dowling, Charlottetown.

[42]Information from Dennis Dowling, Loman McAulay, and Chappelle's letter of 12 February 1980.

[43]Personal letter from Chappelle, 6 August 1979. All the basic information on Chappelle's career is from this letter unless otherwise specified. Much of it was confirmed in the interview with Sellick and Bertram.

[44] From Chappelle's letter of 6 August 1979. Carter's weekly radio program from Calgary is noted in his autobiography, The Yodelling Cowboy: Montana Slim from Nova Scotia (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1961), p. 59. Carter does not indicate that a conflict was his reason for leaving the program, but implies that it happened because he wanted to be with his wife in New York City.

[45] The information in this and subsequent passages up to the next note are from Chappelle's letter of 6 August 1979.

[46] Chappelle's letter of 12 February 1980.

[47] Interview with Duke Neilsen.

[48] As reported in The Friendly Voice, op. cit..

[49] Interview with Duke Neilsen.

[50] Chappelle's letter of 6 August 1979. CFCY announcer Loman McAulay agreed with Chappelle that the station claimed ownership of the band name. This is subtly shown in the fact that the station always referred to "Don Messer and the Islanders" while Messer called the group "Don Messer and his Islanders." Duke Neilsen denied that Messer ever called his group the Merry Islanders; however, Neilsen arrived in Charlottetown some months after Messer and started his contract at CFCY.

[51] From the Guardian, 2 March 1940.

[52] Interview with Duke Neilsen.

[53] See the liner notes to the Don Messer & his Islanders reissue "The Good Old Days," one disc, MCA Records (Canada) TVLP-79052, (1979). These notes, presumably by producers Alan Guettel and David Pritchard, are hardly "the complete biography" promised on the record jacket, and are inaccurate in some details, but are largely accurate.

Bill Brown, former CFCY announcer interviewed 10 March 1980 in Charlottetown, said that Messer's band usually played only "old-time" to the radio network, but displayed a much greater variety of styles on the local CFCY Saturday night program "Studio Jamboree."

[54]Interview with Duke Neilsen. An overview of the career of Marshall Louis "Grandpa" Jones, a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville, is Alanna Nash, "Grandpa Jones," Frets, 2 (September 1980), 22-25.

[55]Despite some rare jazz touches (like the performance of "Goofus" on "The Good Old Days") Messer and the Islanders did not have the improvisational element of the southern Western Swing bands like Bob Wills & the Texas Playboys.

A more parallel group to Messer's in the catholic variety of its blend of popular and folk music and comedy was the '30s Glasgow band "Bob Smith's Ideal Band"; see the Topic LP reissues "Ideal Music" (12TS319) and "Better Than An Orchestra" (12TS320). Like Smith's Band, Messer & the Islanders achieved variety in their repertoire without improvisation in the jazz sense.

[56]Levi Messier, "Fiddler in a Taxi," Northern Junket, vol. 12, no. 4, (1975), 9.

[57]Reported by Cec MacEachern and Loman McAulay.

[58]Reported by Dennis Dowling.

[59]Heard at the Fiddlers Society's annual meeting, 15 October 1979, St. Margaret's. The anecdote was overheard at the banquet, and not especially directed at the author.

[60]A biographical sketch of Peter Milne is given in Collinson, op. cit.

[61]James Hunter, The Fiddle Music of Scotland (Edinburgh: W. and R. Chambers Ltd., 1979), p. xxxi. Hunter gives the reel's name as "John McNeil's." Sample Irish versions, similarly named, can be found in Allen Feldman and Eamonn O'Doherty, The Northern Fiddler (Dublin: Blackstaff Press, 1980), p. 187, and in Anthony Sullivan Sully's Irish Music Book, vol. one, (Manchester, England: Halshaw Music; 1979), p.8.

[62]So claimed by longtime sideman Neilsen.

[63]The record and estimated date are from Mrs. R.B. McLaren.

[64]John Glen, The Glen Collection of Scottish Dance Music, I (Edinburgh: 1891); n.p. ("General Observations").

[65]Interview with Joe Chaisson.

[66]Reported by Duke Neilsen. See also Lester Sellick, Canada's Don Messer, pp. 13-16.

[67]Messer's professional approach to his program was reported by CFCY announcers such as Brown and McAulay.

[68]His first published tune book was Don Messer, Original Old Time Music by Don Messer & His Islanders (Toronto: Gordon V. Thompson Ltd., 1942).

[69]Chappelle's letter of 6 August 1979.

[70]Telephone interview with Cec MacEachern, 30 March 1980.

[71]The Guardian, 3 January 1970, p. 3.

[72]David MacDonald, "The Breakdown Boys From Spud Island," Maclean's, 15 October 1953, p. 13.

[73]Spielman, p. 445.

[74]Malone, p. 217.

[75]Proctor, "Old Time Fiddling in Ontario," p. 175.

[76]Spielman, p. 442.

[77]The useful term "superstyle" was found in a debate conducted in the pages of the Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Association, The Devil's Box; the argument is whether contests and fiddling generally are being harmed by the widespread copying of impressive recording fiddlers and contest winners, resulting in homogenization and loss of local styles. Some of the debate's highlights: Richard Blaustein, "Preservation of Old-Time Fiddling as a Living Force," 13 (5 September 1970), 6-8; and his "Will Success Spoil Old-Time Fiddling And Bluegrass," 17 (1 June 1972), 21-24; Bill Hicks, "Overgrowth and Superstyle: Some Further Comments," 19 (1 December 1972), 6-9; Wayne Holmes, "Reflections on Superstyle and Overgrowth," 19, 28-31; letters to the editor by R.P. Christeson and Bill Northcutt, 19, 18-20.

[78]Interview with Fr. MacDonald in Parkdale, 6 February 1980. An excerpt was published in Jim Hornby, "Interview with Bishop MacDonald," The Island Fiddler, no. 3, (March 1980).

[79]Proctor, p. 185 and 175.

[80]Spielman, p. 432.

[81]Spielman also noticed this, p. 437.

[82]Spielman uses this distinction, p. 102, having borrowed it from H.W. Hitchcock.

[83]This claim was made in a CFCY ad in the Summerside Journal, 16 September 1948, and likely in other places as well.

[84]Reported by Edith Vessey, Charlottetown, 1 October 1979.

[85]See Harry Flemming, "Insight writer makes good (?) on Stacey's Country Jamboree," Atlantic Insight, January/February 1980, pp. 10-12. Flemming reports that (like many Maritimers) "My favorite program in those pre-TV days was The Outports from CFCY Charlottetown. . . ." (p. 10). Flemming grew up in Truro, NS.

[86]A program excerpt from a 16" disc of CJRW's "Saturday Jamboree" is included in the Appendix. This disc, given to me by Lowell Huestis of CJRW Summerside, is dated on the label Jan./51.

[87]Telephone interview with Cec MacEachern.

CHAPTER FIVE

CAPE BRETON CONNECTIONS

It sometimes seems that Island fiddling tradition, once nationally represented by New Brunswicker Don Messer, is now being revived largely as a subsidiary of Cape Breton fiddling. In this chapter I will explore the Cape Breton influence on Island fiddling, for otherwise no real understanding of contemporary Island fiddling is possible, and the historic context behind the rise of the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society cannot be appreciated.

The current impact of Cape Breton repertoire upon Island fiddlers is striking. This may be represented by the repertoire that appears on the recent LP record, "The Prince Edward Island Fiddlers."[1] Of the 30 tunes on this record in eight medleys, 15 were composed by Cape Bretoners, and at least two others ("An Inverness Reel" and "Whisky" jig) were learned from Cape Breton sources. None of the tunes was composed by an Islander; one is by a Scot, the rest traditional. If anything, these proportions understate the Cape Breton influence which, given the wide dissemination possible through fiddlers' associations, seems to be at an all-time high. Of the repertoire in my personal collection of Fiddlers' Society music in June, 1981, from 42 medleys of tunes actually performed at some time, I identified 90 of the 150 tunes (60%) as having come from Cape Breton sources. This is a necessarily rough estimate, but I believe indicative.

This borrowed repertoire is of two kinds: older, often anonymous tunes, but also Scottish tunes of known authorship and the new compositions that keep the tradition vital. The recent and contemporary compositions of Cape Breton fiddlers seem to make up a large majority of this newly transmitted repertoire.

Fiddle-tune composing has long flourished on Cape Breton, and many Island fiddlers have borrowed heavily from this reservoir to form the new, creative element of their tradition. The prominence of Cape Breton tunes on the Fiddlers' Society's first recording, and in its repertoire, attests to that. The few older Island tunes I have found are not widely known across the Island, with one possible exception.[2] But three Cape Breton reels, "Dismissal Reel," "Heather on the Hill" and "Sandy MacIntyre's Trip to Boston,"[3] are widely known across the Island, so much so that they are sometimes considered old (i.e., traditional) by those who play them, despite the fact that their makers are personally well known as fiddlers.[4] And while the impetus from the PEI Fiddlers' Society has encouraged this activity,[5] those tune-makers prominent in the Society (ex., Peter Chaisson and Bill MacDonald) have clearly been primarily inspired by the compositions of such Cape Bretoners as Dan R. MacDonald, Donald Angus Beaton, and Dan Hugh MacEachern.[6]

Of the older tunes received from Cape Breton, some are obtained by individual fiddlers and privately circulated, others

are received by many Society members every second year as "the Glendale music." This latter is the photocopied collection of tunes for the large Scottish fiddling concert held at Glendale, Cape Breton since 1973. The odd-numbered years are when the big concerts occur; invitations and pages of the "finale" tunes (for massed fiddlers) are sent out, and some are retained by the Island Fiddlers in their own group repertoire.[7]

Even some older tunes traditional -- or formerly traditional -- on the Island became widely performed here again after being recorded by Cape Breton fiddlers. A clear example of this type of influence is the "Picnic Reel."[8] My research shows that this tune was once widely known across the Island, but seemingly had become inactive in many repertoires, and thus had not entered others.[9] Apparently its return to popularity is the result of its appearance on two of the most influential recent Cape Breton fiddle records, "The Cape Breton Symphony"[10] and "The Beatons of Mabou."[11]

I raised the matter of the general dependency of the Fiddlers' Society on Cape Breton, and of the specific example of the Picnic Reel, with Bishop Faber MacDonald in an interview. He responded by saying that Island fiddling tradition had declined because the tradition-bearers "weren't respected" in the past. He continued:

> And some people now will say, "that's a tune that was played down east [on PEI] in the '20s" -- but the guy who played it is

> no longer there. But somehow the authenticity of it was guarded in Cape Breton, and we have to thank them for guarding the authentic expression of the Scottish fiddle. It wasn't that well guarded here; I don't know what the reasons were. I think that's one of the things that grates some people: why do we have to go to Cape Breton to learn this music? Well, that's the reason: we didn't listen to our own fiddlers, and we didn't appreciate them. Like we don't appreciate a lot of things here on PEI that are authentic to PEI. But we listen to the outsider.[12]

While this statement is true as far as it goes -- and especially interesting for its sense of the audience's role in shaping the musical environment -- my problem with it is that it has the effect of using past neglect of local tradition to excuse present neglect, particularly by the Fiddlers' Society. For there can still be found older Island compositions, and many tunes (some of unknown origin) that were played here.

In an earlier interview (22 May 1977) at the time of the official organization of the Fiddlers' Society, MacDonald told me that bringing out local tunes was a goal of the Society. However, this has hardly been done -- and only on individual initiative. (I will discuss the unstated definition of tradition that animates the PEIFS, especially as articulated by its founder MacDonald, in the next chapter.)

Cultural Tenacity and Cape Breton Fiddling

The Scots who settled in Antigonish and Pictou counties in northern Nova Scotia, on Cape Breton, and in the eastern

half of Prince Edward Island, all came from the same general area of Scotland, the Hebrides and Western Highlands.[13] Without hard evidence to base the assumption on, I can only estimate that Scottish fiddling was quite similar in the three regions for much of the nineteenth century. Also, all three areas seem to have lost a large part of their Celtic populations in the period 1880-1920. However, Cape Breton has maintained a stronger Scottish cultural identity in terms of language, music and custom. Today, "Scottish Canadian" and "Cape Breton" are almost synonymous, so strong is the association; Cape Bretoners have become Canada's official Scots.

The reasons for the greater cultural tenacity implicit in Cape Breton's leadership role in fiddling (vis-a-vis the Island and other Canadian regions with a significant Scottish population) are largely beyond the scope of this enquiry. However, in considering the fiddling evolution of my study area and its neighbour Cape Breton, the question is hard to entirely avoid. Compared with Cape Breton, the Island seems detached from its indigenous musical products. Certainly Cape Breton has gone through the same sequence of decline and revival, but the decline seems not to have been as great nor as lasting, so revival there has been easier and is more rooted in local tradition. The celebration of Cape Breton fiddlers and tunes has continued in Cape Breton even during periods when they were unfashionable (to say the least), and Gaelic

speech and song have, if not flourished, at least survived longer there; on the Island there seem to be no Gaelic speakers remaining.

Two Island-born academics have offered opinions on the topic of the relative cultural tenacity between the two islands. Dr. A.P. Campbell, in writing about the lesser cultural tenacity of Island Scots compared with their Cape Breton brethren, observed this:

> It is worth noting that in Cape Breton the [Gaelic] language flourished for a much longer time and still has managed to survive. Perhaps the numbers were larger and there were such institutions as St. Francis Xavier University, where there is a chair of Celtic studies.[14]

D.C. Harvey has said that nineteenth century Cape Breton "came to be the largest centre of Gaelic-speaking Scots outside the mother land."[15] A discussion with Dr. Francis P. Bolger, Island historian, elicited the idea that Cape Breton held onto its ethnic (primarily Scottish) identity because it didn't (like the Island) have a provincial one. A corollary to this is that Cape Breton has always had an adversary relationship with mainland Nova Scotia (symbolized by the provincial capital, Halifax) and has always felt exploited and kept down; this perhaps had the effect of heightening attachment to local cultural life. In North American experience, Cape Breton today seems more remarkable for keeping its ethnic character and symbols than does the

Island for losing them (in relative terms). The fact of having provincial status (long coveted by Cape Bretoners) may have been responsible for giving the Island better roads, and transportation and communications systems generally, which would tend to break down ethnocentric isolation earlier.

On the Island, the minority Acadian population has felt the threat of losing its culture, and has responded in progressive and significant ways.[16] This, of course, is typical of the Canadian experience: the anglophone cultures tend to lose their uniqueness because they never see it as being in danger.[17]

However accurate these cultural speculations, the fact remains that Cape Breton fiddling is now a superstyle, with an impact, on the Island and elsewhere, similar to that of "Sligo" style in Irish-music circles,[18] "Texas" style in the United States,[19] and the influence of James Scott Skinner in Scotland. Perhaps the closest analogy to my Maritime comparison is the influence of Shetland fiddling in the Orkneys: these also are neighbouring islands of similar ethnic stock and fiddling traditions. Francis Collinson has stated that "it must be concluded . . . that most of the native music of Orkney has failed to survive."[20] In Shetland, tune composition presently thrives; however,

> In Orkney there seems to be as yet no comparable creative activity, although it now has a flourishing reel and

strathspey society, which may perhaps provide a first step for its emergence.[21]

Cape Breton Fiddling on Regional Media

Island fiddlers and fans of fiddling got a boost when Cape Breton fiddle records began to appear in the mid-'30s with such players as Colin Boyd (the first, though from Antigonish), Dan J. Campbell, Angus Allan Gillis, Angus Chisholm, Hugh A. MacDonald (also from Antigonish), Bill Lamey and Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald. These records had an impact on Island fiddling tradition out of proportion to their limited sales (and distribution) nationally. There may have been more Don Messer records sold generally on the Island (I have no figures on this) but the fiddlers as a group favoured the Cape Breton records, and learned from them. These records sounded like true "old-time" music, and became musical models for a society whose own musical resources were unrecorded and, after the war, rarely heard even on local radio. Island fiddlers who liked Scottish style -- as most naturally did -- found Cape Breton records and radio programs an excellent source of stimulation and new repertoire. The records supplied the necessary "creative" element in a "static" musical culture[22], and, among the proliferation of entertainment choices found in mass media, became a rallying point for those who appreciated Scottish fiddle music.

Older fiddlers are unanimous in their belief that Island fiddling was always different from that in Cape Breton;

however, I have never heard anyone articulate the difference. Whatever stylistic distinctions might have existed both between the two islands and within each of them, most Scottish-Canadian fiddlers today try to follow the complex "Cape Breton" or "Inverness"[23] style. This style uses more grace notes and bow cuts than other Maritime styles, and currently a wide range of Scottish fiddle music from printed collections is played, much of it in flat keys which exponents of most other styles avoid. This tendency toward homogenization in repertoire and style has occurred within Cape Breton[24] as well as in northern Nova Scotia (Antigonish and Pictou counties) and eastern Prince Edward Island.

I have obtained some Cape Breton perspective on the development of this influence from interviews with well-known fiddlers Angus Chisholm and Bill Lamey concerning their visits to the Island in the 1940s. Chisholm remembered playing for dances from Souris to Tignish, and hearing many Island fiddlers in the course of his tour. Asked to comment on the resemblance of fiddling style in the two islands, Chisholm told me that there were many Island fiddlers who were different from the Cape Bretoners, especially "up west" -- still true today -- but also many who were similar. He cited Jack Webster of Cardigan as "a very good Scotch player" who was yet unlike Cape Breton fiddlers; however, he was unable to elaborate on the distinction. He also recalled hearing Bill Weatherbie's young son George in Charlottetown: "He was my idea of a very

nice player; he gave me quite a surprise."[25] The surprise was that George could not only play old-time music as he had learned it from his father and others, but he could also duplicate the fiddling on Cape Breton recordings.

Bill Lamey hosted a radio program on CJCB Sydney in the early '40s when, he recalled, his "biggest audience was from PEI."[26] Lamey believes that it was in 1940 (Messer's first full year at CFCY) when he received a petition from the Island with a thousand names attached, requesting that his weekly fifteen-minute program be increased to a half-hour. He presented it to his station manager and this was done. As it is doubtful that his station could be picked up west of Charlottetown, this indicates that he had a very large audience in the Scottish end of the Island.

Visiting the Island around this time on his honeymoon, Lamey found that few fiddlers here were readers. Those in the Souris/Bear River area "depended [for new tunes] on what they heard on records." He was amazed at the facility with which Island fiddlers could "emulate" Cape Breton records. Hearing Peter Chaisson Sr.[27] play, Lamey said, "You'd close your eyes and you'd swear it was Angus Allan Gillis, but he learned it off a record."[28] This is no small praise from a Cape Bretoner, as Gillis is still remembered as perhaps their best dance player.[29]

This explains why today the well-known Chaisson Brothers (Peter and Kenny alternating on fiddle and, sometimes, guitar,

Kevin on piano) are very difficult to distinguish from the top Cape Breton players. With their father Joe's purchase of the entire series of Celtic 78s,[30] and frequent opportunities to hear excellent Cape Breton fiddlers on the radio and in person (sometimes in their own home), it is hard to imagine how they might have gotten any more training in Cape Breton music if they had grown up in Mabou or Margaree.[31] Today, they regularly play in Cape Breton and continue to receive much of their musical stimulation from contacts there. They are also very active in the PEI Fiddlers' Society.

Influence on Musical Literacy

Through contact with Cape Breton fiddlers, Island fiddlers found that many of the best players could read music, and had begun ordering tune collections from Scotland. Notable collectors of Scottish music were Bill Lamey, Dan Joe MacInnis, and Joe MacLean (all of whom were recorded),[32] and the trend spread after Dan R. MacDonald returned from war service in Scotland where he had performed on the BBC and met many of the musically literate Scottish fiddlers, who generally followed the classicist approach of J. Scott Skinner.[33] Island fiddlers saw that note-reading -- previously disdained -- was a boon to learning "correct"[34] versions of tunes and acquiring a large repertoire. Through the popularization of previously-unknown tunes on Cape Breton records (which the players had acquired from printed music[35]) it was seen that

the old collections contained many great tunes that weren't hackneyed from over-exposure, that were "new" to their peers -- and every self-respecting fiddler likes to have a few of these in reserve.

It did not matter how musical literacy was acquired. Bill Lamey joined a brass band in Sydney to pick up note-reading,[36] while Angus Chisholm received a few lessons from a travelling tutor which he augmented with a correspondence course in music.[37] On the Island, literate piano players were sometimes prevailed upon to initiate fiddlers in the mysteries of the treble clef.[38]

Despite evidence of some earlier fiddlers who could read,[39] it seems clear that most Island fiddlers didn't have a real interest in musical literacy until the Cape Breton influence grew. The attitude previously expressed by the anonymous 1926 revivalist (p. 69) that fiddlers on the Island "scorned the base help of the printed sheet" seems, despite the exaggerated rhetoric, to have been largely true; fiddle tunes were learned from fiddlers, and written music was for symphony orchestras and brass bands. Even someone like Joe Chaisson, who possessed some printed fiddle music, was content to have others "sound it off" for him rather than learning to read.[40] To use a local expression, most Island fiddlers "didn't know a note from a bull's foot"[41] and didn't care to. However, the realization that Cape Breton fiddlers were picking up some of their tunes from notation had a

revolutionizing effect upon that attitude. It is too early to tell if reading will become the primary means of learning tunes on the Island, despite the fact that it is promoted by the Fiddlers' Society, because most of the senior fiddlers cannot or will not learn. Eventually this may happen because of the Fiddlers' Society's sponsorship of classes whose basic goal is the teaching of "the notes."

In teaching one of these classes for several months, I found that both novices and fairly accomplished players wanted to learn note-reading.[42] It is considered acceptable for instructors in these classes to be non-fiddlers as long as they are literate, but they can't be fiddlers who do not read, however well they may play. At the 1980 annual meeting of the Fiddlers' Society, the issue of the Society's responsibility to teach came up, and it was suggested that more individual fiddlers should be teaching in their own areas. Immediately several members objected that these members would have to be able to read before they could teach. The reaction reminded me of Angus Chisholm's exclamation on hearing that a non-literate Boston fiddler was charging students for lessons: "What a break they're getting, for God's sake!" was his sarcastic remark.[43]

The trend toward literacy seems general in fiddle cultures; Professor Bayard found his Pennsylvania fiddlers becoming more reliant on what they (also) call "the notes." Bayard found this "decadent" in terms of tradition.[44] Most

members of the Island Fiddlers' Society would disagree. They would argue that note-reading has expanded the horizons of local repertoire, made their renditions more correct, and enabled large groups of fiddlers to play together. However, as I shall discuss in my next chapter, this Society is much less concerned than Bayard with loss of local repertoires and styles, and most interested in learning good tunes. And what is considered good by many of them is based on what they have heard on Cape Breton records over the years.

I must also point out that even the greatest advocates of musical literacy appreciate that there is more to good fiddling than accurate note-transmission. This fact, combined with the common difficulty in obtaining rhythmic knowledge from notation, make the notes more of a finding aid to the tune than a prescriptive system for most Island fiddlers.[45]

In showing this influence toward literacy I do not want to imply a polar contrast between the Island Scottish and Cape Breton Scottish fiddlers. The impact of literate players who could plumb the riches of tune collections was much the same within Cape Breton as on PEI, although possibly with more immediate results there. The biographies of Cape Breton fiddlers published within the last decade[46] show a great similarity in learning practice: almost invariably the Cape Breton fiddler learned his first tunes by ear, then gained a basic musical literacy and sought out printed or written tunes. This combination of learning

methods gives the fiddler who is adept at both a great advantage in terms of repertoire (not necessarily playing skill) over those less versatile.

Dissenting Views

However, the homogenization connected with the Cape Breton influence, especially now that it is being fostered in an organized way by the PEIFS,[47] has not been wholeheartedly welcomed by some fiddlers; it has, in fact, created something of a backlash. A number of people across the Island have expressed the feeling that there used to be more individualism in fiddling before the Cape Breton influence took over, (including the desire for musical literacy). George Chappelle offered this comment in a letter:

> The Original 'Old Time Fiddlers' knew nothing about notes, they learned the tunes from one generation to another by ear, and each fiddler expressed the tunes in a different way, this makes for good listening.[48]

Years ago when travel was difficult, most people stayed in their home districts unless they had some compelling reason to travel. It is probably that there were distinguishable regional fiddle styles on the Island before mass media and mass transit arrived. Today one can readily distinguish only Prince County fiddlers in that they have less Cape Breton influence. Delphine Arsenault, who is not a Fiddlers'

Society member but comes from an Egmont Bay family of twelve fiddlers and herself plays fiddle and organ, complained about Cape Breton music:

> Oh, that's all you can hear now -- we're out. See, that's not fair, we're kicked out. All you hear is [Winston "Scotty"] Fitzgerald and everything else.[49]

She feels that tunes should be played as her father "Joe Bibienne" and other old-timers played them.

Ervan Sonier, another Summerside fiddler from Egmont Bay, said that Winston Fitzgerald once told him that Island fiddlers were fortunate to have so many differences: "You have 57 varieties here" Sonier remembers him saying.[50] Like some others in Prince County, Sonier feels that Fiddlers' Society members (who are predominantly from Kings and Queens counties) play too much alike. Some Fiddlers' Society members agree.

Access to Superstyles

As with fiddle records everywhere, Cape Breton records are now more numerous and available than ever, and can be found in cassette and 8-track formats as well as LPs. When one adds the home-made tapes of live performances, (which seem more in evidence than the commercial tapes), the question must be raised as to the effect of this proliferating amount of musical data on local traditions. One producer

of fiddle and string band records has observed:

> By far the vast majority of persons learning to play "traditional" music today learn from phonograph records, sometimes of traditional performers and sometimes of persons who have learned from traditional performers, and more frequently these days, from someone who learned from the record of the person who learned from the traditional performer.[51]

While Island fiddling has not yet reached this last state, it is certainly true that repertoire is now being learned mostly in non-traditional ways. Even non-literate fiddlers have access to many more tunes and performances of tunes than formerly, and their active repertoires are being changed as well as enlarged by the new tunes they are learning (from cassettes in many cases). This has a significant impact on tradition, a body of knowledge that is learned rather than inbred. It means that local tradition is now being defined anew by local preferences in an infinitely expanded range of choices. Before the Fiddlers' Society arrived to establish a repertoire, these preferences were strongly affected by recordings, especially of Cape Breton fiddlers.

Despite the number and variety of Canadian fiddle recordings presently available, some areas have been under-represented. Old-time Prince Edward Island fiddling is one of them, and the insidious effect of learning from records

is indicated here: now that records are being made of Island fiddlers they are more of a testimonial to contemporary preferences (for Cape Breton music) than a document of Island tradition. And because of a movement toward Celticism on the Island, the audience here has accepted the Fiddlers' Society as representative of Island fiddling. Some of it of course is, but even "the old Scotch tunes that everyone knows" are not being learned traditionally and from Island players in the main.

This situation presents a theoretical problem. Although Scottish fiddling is traditional on the Island, will it continue to deserve that description if, in the future, our Scottish fiddle music is learned exclusively from written music and Cape Breton records, and from Island fiddlers who learned from Cape Breton sources? Spielman has similarly wondered about "the point at which a tradition is so altered by cumulative changes that it is, in essence, a new tradition."[52] I will consider this question further in terms of the Fiddlers' Society in my next chapter.

It is well known that Cape Breton fiddling is a rich, highly-developed and prolific tradition that has produced many excellent fiddlers. However, it may be hoped that Island fiddlers will begin to emulate not just their tunes and their festivals but also, and more basically, emulate their pride and interest in, and support for, the most local and traditional musical expressions. For if Cape Breton

fiddling is supported because it is good, it is also good because it is, and has been, supported; in the musical ecology, the support of the local public is the ground in which the seed of tradition is nourished. In discussing Cape Breton dance halls, Sam Cormier made an observation that also associates the strength of a fiddling tradition with the social importance attached to it:

> Talent may be born within a person but it requires the proper social environment in order to emerge and develop. It's doubtful that Cape Breton has more raw square-dance fiddling talent than elsewhere but it certainly has provided the ultimate in schooling for a budding fiddler.[53]

Cape Breton is both a basis for comparison with Island fiddling and an increasingly major influence on it. To many of the Island's fiddlers, Cape Breton tunes -- regardless of how recently they may have arrived -- define what is worthy (and "old-time") in fiddle music. Most of those actively involved with fiddle music on the Island today grew up with Cape Breton fiddling on records and the radio and it speaks clearly to their sense of what is traditional. This influence is best seen in the most significant contemporary development in Island fiddling, the creation of the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society.

NOTES

[1]See Introduction, note 2.

[2]The exception is "Kennedy's Reel" which is known in all three counties; this may be partly as a result of its appearance in The Island Fiddler.

[3]All three have been recorded by Island fiddlers. Sandy MacLean's "Dismissal Reel" was recorded by Eddy Arsenault under a different name on "Eddy Arsenault Egmont Baie," (one disc, Wellington, PEI: Les Productions de l'Ile, ILE 1001, 1981); see my review of it in The Island Magazine, no. 11, (Fall-Winter 1981), pp. 43-44. Dan R. MacDonald's "Heather on the Hill" is played by Kenny Chaisson on "Atlantic Fiddling," (one disc, Toronto: CBC, LM 470, 1980; John Campbell's "Sandy MacIntyre's Trip to Boston" is played by the Fiddlers' Society on its LP, q.v.).

[4]For an exposition of this regarding "Heather on the Hill" see my sleeve notes to "Atlantic Fiddling," cited above.

[5]Father MacDonald encouraged composition at a farewell dinner tendered him by the Fiddlers' Society in Parkdale, 24 February 1980.

[6]These are perhaps the three most noted Cape Breton tune-makers, and copies of their tunes are in circulation in both handwritten copies and photocopies.

[7]Some of the medleys, or parts of medleys, from the music for the 1977 and 1979 Glendale concerts are in the PEIFS repertoire. See my notes with the PEIFS record for examples.

[8]The tune is found in One Thousand Fiddle Tunes, p. 43, where some people have learned it.

[9]The popularity of "Picnic Reel" years ago was reported by Joe Chaisson, Omar Cheverie, Otis Jackson, George Weatherbie, Jim Beairsto, and Anthony F. Arsenault.

[10]"The Cape Breton Symphony Fiddle," one disc, Glendale Music (Markham, Ontario) GMI 001, 1979.

[11]"The Beatons of Mabou," [Donald Angus and Kinnon, fiddles, Elizabeth and Joey, pianos], one disc, Rounder Records 7011.

[12]The Island Fiddler, no. 3, (March 1980), pp. 4 and 7.

[13]D.C. Harvey, "Scottish Immigration to Cape Breton," Dalhousie Review, vol. 21 (October 1941), 313-315.

[14]A.P. Campbell, "The Heritage of the Highland Scots in Prince Edward Island, op cit.

[15]D.C. Harvey, "Scottish Immigration," 314.

[16]Prominent in this renaissance on the Island has been the St. Thomas Aquinas Society.

[17]For a strong statement of this observation, see Carole Henderson Carpenter's Many Voices: A Study of Folklore Activities in Canada and Their Role in Canadian Culture, CCFCS Paper no. 26, (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1979), pp. 27, 119-120.

[18]Miles Krassen, intro. to O'Neil's Music of Ireland New & Revised (New York: Oak Publications, 1976), p. 13.

[19]See the previous chapter, note 77, for discussions on the "overgrowth" of this style in the United States.

[20]Collinson, The Traditional and National Music of Scotland,

[21]Collinson, ibid.,

[22]The terms are borrowed from MacEdward Leach, Folk Ballads and Songs of the Lower Labrador Coast, Bulletin no. 201 (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1965), p. 12.

[23]Inverness is the county of Cape Breton most renowned for Scottish culture, especially fiddling. The term "Inverness style" is used in the sleeve notes to the LP of Celtic 78s, "Cape Breton Violins," Celtic CX-1.

[24]According to Bill Lamey, interviewed 29 April 1978, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

[25]Interview with Angus Chisholm, 22 June 1978, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[26]Lamey interview.

[27]Peter Sr. is a brother of the late Joe Chaisson, and thus the uncle of his son Peter (of the Chaisson Brothers).

[28]Lamey interview.

[29]My understanding of this is largely from word-of-mouth, but is reflected in MacGillivray, pp. 26-27, and in the notes to Joe Cormier's first record, "Joseph Cormier," one disc, Rounder Records 7001, 1974.

[30]The Celtic series of 78s (CX 001-?055) has not been defined in print to date.

[31]Two historic centres of fiddling tradition in Inverness County, Cape Breton.

[32]See the biographies in MacGillivray, op cit.

[33]Skinner was classically trained as a violinist.

[34]The concept of "correctness" is widely used by fiddlers, and seems most often to refer to a printed version of the tune in question.

[35]According to my interview with Angus Chisholm, op cit.

[36]Lamey interview.

[37]Chisholm interview.

[38]Some of the Island fiddlers who noted this were George MacIntyre, Otis Jackson and Jim Beairsto.

[39]MacIntyre and Beairsto were two sources of this statement.

[40]Interview with Joe Chaisson. Joe changed his opinion in later years, saying that he wished he had learned to read music when he was much younger.

[41]This is a fairly common expression which I have heard mostly from Kings County people.

[42]I taught a "beginners" fiddling class for the Prince County chapter of the Fiddlers' Society from November 1980 to February 1981.

[43]Angus Chisholm interview.

[44]Bayard, Hill Country Tunes, p. xix.

[45]Cf. Charles Seeger, "Prescriptive and Descriptive Music Writing," The Musical Quarterly, 44 (April 1958), 184-195.

[46]Besides the MacGillivray book earlier cited, some notable collections of Cape Breton fiddler biographies are by John G. Gibson: a series of profiles in The Scotia Sun (Port Hawkesbury, Cape Breton), c. 1972-73; "Fiddlers to the Fore," special edition program to the 1975 Glendale concert (published at The Scotia Sun); and (with Joey Beaton) "Highland Heritage," special edition program to the 1977 Glendale concert (also printed at the Port Hawkesbury newspaper).

[47]As I shall discuss next chapter.

[48]Chappelle's letter to me dated 12 February 1980.

[49]Interview with Delphine Arsenault, Summerside.

[50]Field note from Summerside, 1980.

[51]Philip L. Williams, "Electronics and Traditional Music: The Recording Process," Seattle Folk Song Journal, 5 (June 1974), 13.

[52]Spielman, p. 290.

[53]Sam Cormier, brochure notes to Joe Cormier's, "The Dances Down Home," one disc, Rounder Records 7004, 1977.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND FIDDLERS' SOCIETY: REVITALIZATION AND TRADITION

The Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society is currently perhaps the most visible symbol of traditional Island culture. The regional magazine, Atlantic Insight, has featured the Society, judiciously describing it as "part of a renaissance of old-time music on Prince Edward Island."[1] Its founder, Father (now Bishop) Faber MacDonald, has spoken of the Society as a "revival" movement,[2] and this seems to be a generally accepted concept. Undoubtedly there has been a revival in terms of activity, but in terms of repertoire, learning and teaching practices, and playing contexts, the term is problematic. If one takes an historical perspective on Island fiddling, as I have done, and then considers what is traditional about the Fiddlers' Society, the necessity to qualify and explain becomes apparent.

However, before discussing the Society in this sense, it is important to establish how and why it arrived on the local scene, and what its function seems to be. While there have been reel and strathspey societies in Scotland as far back as 1881,[3] and more recently a fiddlers' association movement in the United States that started with the Idaho Oldtime Fiddlers' Association in 1960,[4] the Island Fiddlers' Society's most immediate antecedent and model is the Cape

Breton Fiddlers' Association, founded about 1972.[5] This association was also primarily led by a parish priest, Fr. John Angus Rankin of Glendale, a noted old-time piano player and authority on Cape Breton music.[6]

The initiative for this organization came from a televised report that fiddling on Cape Breton was moribund. The rumor was broadcast on a CBC-Maritimes TV documentary, "The Vanishing Fiddler."[7] The angry reaction to its depressing message of decline led Fr. Rankin to organize, first, the Cape Breton Fiddlers' Association, and then a mammoth fiddling festival at Glendale, on the grounds of his church.

Cape Breton fiddling's great "coming-out" party was that first big Glendale concert in the summer of 1973, when over one hundred fiddlers were mustered to play together on a stage. This Cape Breton movement stimulated Fr. Faber MacDonald to send out letters to several dozen Island fiddlers, inviting them to a gathering in October 1976. That meeting was the first step in the Island Fiddlers' Society's formation.

Revitalization Movement

To examine this formation, I have applied anthropological descriptions of the dynamics of cultural change. In terming the Society a revitalization movement I am using Anthony F.C. Wallace's definition: "a deliberate, organized,

conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."[8]

The motivation for such an effort, according to Wallace, is the presence of a stress. The publicized threat of extinction of Cape Breton fiddling clearly applied also on PEI; indeed, some Island fiddlers probably suggested that it was already too late here for revival. But because the fiddle still, in the 1970s, carried symbolic weight on the Island, the threat of its loss had an impact on Islanders. To many people here fiddling represents social integration and cultural expression on an authentic and popular basis. In terms of social integration it also relates (if only subliminally for most) to the transition of Islanders from a rural culture to a more urban, technological one. But the fiddle and its importance were not given public recognition here until Fr. MacDonald began to articulate a cultural connection between fiddling and society in his vision of the fiddlers' movement.

To trace the development of the PEIFS as a revitalization movement, I am using the five processual steps in Wallace's "event-analysis": 1) Steady State, 2) The Period of Increased Individual Stress, 3) The Period of Cultural Distortion, 4) The Period of Revitalization, 5) The New Steady State. The first three steps trace social responses to an increasing level of stress. Step one, Steady State, where the level of stress is tolerable,[9] is essentially

preliminary to step two, where "there is continuous diminution in [a culture's] efficiency in satisfying needs," (p. 269), and step three, where "symptoms of anxiety over the loss of a meaningful way of life . . . become evident" (p. 270).

In Island fiddling this loss was manifest in two areas identified by Wallace: 1) acculturation, the growing preference for mass-mediated musical forms and entertainment contexts, neither of them community-based as before. Especially troubling for fiddlers was the acculturation of local musicians, as guitar-strumming became the most popular form of musical expression; there is also a suggestion of diminished standards as the guitar is understood to be easier to achieve an acceptable competence on. 2) "the regressive response . . . exhibits itself in increasing incidences of such things as alcoholism, [and] extreme passivity and indolence. . . ." (p. 269). Many Island fiddlers remember a time when they gave up fiddling, years of little or no music-making.

While some fiddlers say that an organization similar to the Fiddlers' Society had been suggested earlier, the founding of the Society must be described in terms of the leadership of Fr. Faber MacDonald. In the effort to, in Wallace's words, "construct a more satisfying culture," (p. 279), Fr. MacDonald was the catalyst. His feelings and experiences are herein recorded in some detail as they are relevant beyond giving background to the Society. As

MacDonald has pointed out, his experiences as a fiddler are common in most respects; this indeed was the basis of his ability to communicate with other fiddlers.

Father Faber (as he was known) was uniquely positioned to take the primary leadership role in the Fiddlers' Society. He associated with other fiddlers as a peer, but also had the authority, as a well-known priest, to have his leadership accepted by the disparate individuals to whom he appealed, many of whom are Catholic. That MacDonald saw this movement as having both a spiritual dimension and a broad potential impact upon Island life generally will be seen from his own statements.

As a priest he was vocationally involved in many people's struggles and problems, and as a man from a small Island village (Little Pond), he felt as well as saw the loss of older ways and ties. Born in January, 1932, he took up the fiddle at 12,[10] just before the great eclipse in its popularity, which occurred during his twenties. He had witnessed the fiddle's social impact: "the violin was a powerful force in the community from which I came,"[11] he has written. MacDonald had grown up listening to the local players -- Wilfred Campbell was one in his area[12] -- on any occasion, and absorbing their musicality.

But he found that this "powerful force" was not well respected when he moved to town and university training in

the 1950s:

> During these years I did not concentrate on the fiddle. What had once filled me with pride became . . . an embarrassment. No one appreciated the fiddle the way I did, or understood my need for it.

The clash between the old and new cultures on the Island was something that MacDonald grew up with; he found that fiddling

> was, ah, considered a very kind of inferior art form and form of entertainment, and so, you were just made to feel as someone that really wasn't, didn't, belong at all.[13]

From this low point, several factors induced him to reorganize Island fiddlers. The Cape Breton influence became strongly implanted in him when, after university, he joined the Royal Bank and was posted to Sydney, Cape Breton. There he found fiddle music more appreciated, and he was able to hear in person the two Cape Breton fiddlers widely considered the greatest: Angus Chisholm and Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald. Moved by their artistry, he was also impressed with the variety of tune types and keys being used, and the number both of traditional and newly-composed tunes circulating by ear and notation. This created a personal rivival within him, and he began fiddling more seriously, and collecting music.

Returning to the Island after he had become a priest, Fr. MacDonald began to play for parish events and meet other fiddlers. He played for several weddings with Tracadie fiddler Reuben Smith, and found he enjoyed fiddling with others. Thus he was ready to respond to the massed Cape Breton fiddlers he heard at Glendale in 1975. He felt that such a gathering on the Island "would be great for the people and great for the fiddlers"[14] -- these being the two components of his objective.

The stress caused by his experiences and perceptions can explain why MacDonald was stimulated to organize Island fiddlers. Linked with these stresses was the pressure of seeing the decline of Island fiddling in comparison with the Cape Breton situation where the fiddlers were banding together to assume a larger, more public role that had aspects of militance -- and was finding immediate acceptance. However, there was a particular experience that precipitated him into action. He had what seems from his description to have been an almost visionary experience in his last meeting with a Charlottetown fiddler who was well known but yet "not as well appreciated as he could have been."[15] This was Al Dowling, mentioned previously in Chapter Four.

Al Dowling's Inspiration

Wallace's step four, "The Period of Revitalization," can be seen to have been triggered by Fr. Faber's last visit

with Al Dowling. In ministering to this man shortly before his death, a man with whom he had often shared music, MacDonald received what Wallace calls (p. 270) "a moment of insight, a brief period of realization of relationships and opportunities . . . in the mind of a single individual." This is how MacDonald described it on the night of the Society's official founding, 22 May 1977:

> A couple of years ago a very fine old violinist here on PEI repaired my violin and, ah, he, the night I was in to receive it he showed me, before I left, he wanted to play some tunes, and then before I left he asked me to look at something that he had carved. And when he brought it out it was a little glass cage representing a living room, and in one corner of the living room was a table with three chairs, and in the middle of the table there was a bottle marked Rum, and it was only half gone, and in the other corner of the living room there was a piano and a piano player playing it, and a violinist fiddling, and a stepdancer. And he said to me, two or three times he said, look at the expression on that fiddler's face. And he had drawn those figures.
>
> And I couldn't help but think that somehow or other this man was trying to tell the story of his life, and the expression that was on the man's face who was playing the music and the expression on the dancer's face responding, ah, was interesting. He, he was trying to say something through all that and that really impressed me because two days later, ah, he was dead. He died very suddenly, and I was asked to officiate at his funeral, and to preach. And, ah, it was a very important moment for me to reflect deeply on that man -- he had spent his whole life on the violin, and he had played over the radio here locally, and he was recognized

> as one of the best -- and he wanted to say something, and he said it in that carving, just a few days before he died.
>
> And my being involved with him, my being invited by him to see this, the story, carved out in figures, and my being invited to try and interpret that in the light of his passing from this world you know, and the word of God and all that, ah, it caused me to really reflect deeply on the, on the deep spiritual significance of all this, and how important it is, and I guess perhaps that's one other reason why I as a priest got involved in trying to bring the fiddlers together and help them to acquire a sense of dignity about themselves, and how precious it is to possess a gift, to be able to produce this for people to enjoy, you know, and to live better, to be happy. Those are the things that God wants eh? And so it's something very deeply spiritual.[16]

Almost three years after this interview MacDonald termed the event just described "one of the most touching memories that I have."[17] Both the cultural and spiritual elements of this revival as they motivated MacDonald are here summarized -- in Wallace's terms, "secular action" and "religious action" (p. 277); both bear examination in discussing the Fiddlers' Society's relationship to Island fiddling tradition.

Secular Action: Organizing

Following the moment of insight, the next stages in step four, "Communication" and "Organization" (p. 273), depended upon the infectious enthusiasm and leadership of the Parkdale-based priest and a few cohorts. They began by

sending a letter to all the Island fiddlers they could identify, inviting them to a meeting and get-together. Following this October 1976 meeting, group practices were held during the winter. Then came the 22 May 1977 meeting at St. Pius X church hall (MacDonald's parish hall) in Parkdale, a Charlottetown suburb. The fact that approximately seven months elapsed before the Society publicly declared itself indicates the caution and conservatism of the participants, and also their desire to organize socially as well as musically.

> It enabled the fiddlers to get to know one another, and to meet on the local level, and it provided an opportunity for the ideal, to have this society come from the grassroots, rather than have something imposed as a structure from on top. . . . Besides that, there was, over the years, a lot of jealousy generated through . . . the fiddling contest. Not that I'm against competition and that, but it, I feel in my heart it did more harm than good, and this meeting locally in small groups enabled that kind of thing to be healed and get people to become friends.[18]

Wallace's next phase in "The Period of Revitalization," "adaptation" (to resistance), was not immediately apparent because the embryo group was well received by fiddlers and the general public from the outset. Some adaptation now currently seems to be taking place in redefinition of the original constitution; however, it is too soon to evaluate

adaptation capacity in this organization.

As a constitution, the founding meeting adopted the "Proposed Guidelines for the P.E.I. Fiddlers' Society" written by Fr. MacDonald and read by him at the meeting. The goals of the organization were expressed in Section 2, "Aims and Purposes," which contains two main sub-sections. Sub-section B. is self-explanatory: "To provide a climate of understanding, love and trust among fiddlers of all ages and of both sexes.". This purpose was explicitly linked that day with the policy discouraging members' participation in fiddling contests, although the policy is not stated in the document.

Sub-section A, "To serve the gift of music," contained the following points:

(a) The Society will be devoted exclusively to Celtic music of the Scottish type.

(b) The Society will work at rejuvenating this music as it was written and played for centuries and as recorded in ancient collections.

(c) The Society will also play this music as it is being given rebirth presently in Cape Breton and other areas and made available in the different collections being published.

(d) The Society will encourage the young to take up this challenging art form and help hand this heritage on to future generations.

To reflect the Society's practice and MacDonald's probable intent, the first point might be written: "(a) The Society will be devoted to Celtic music, especially Scottish."[19]

The next two points (b and c) are very indicative of the attitude which makes the Fiddlers' Society, in a fundamental sense, anti-traditional. Their unstated concept of musical correctness does not credit local playing tradition at all; rather, the best sources are deemed to be printed collections (not all of which are "ancient") and recordings (both commercial and live tapings) of Cape Breton fiddlers. The main point to make here is that nowhere is Prince Edward Island or its traditions mentioned (unless it is one of the "other areas"!). This document reveals that both the assumed superiority of written versions of tunes (and thus musical literacy over "ear-playing"), and the "Cape Breton branch-plant" mentality, have been integral to the Society from the beginning. I can see that the competitiveness and jealousy of contests might be seen to be related to local performance models, and the judgment of them, and that it was wished to avoid this in the Society; however, it was replaced by a new status order based on degree of emulation of Cape Breton style and repertoire.

Following the adoption of guidelines, it was decided to set up a maximum of five chapters (called "growth groups" in the guideline document) in the Island's three counties,

so that weekly meetings would be feasible and the initial momentum maintained. Of this initiative MacDonald recalled:

> It took very little effort. They were waiting for someone to light the spark; and once a significant number had the experience of playing together and enjoying playing together, and having the music revived, that was enough to convince others that they should join, and the thing snowballed.[20]

If Father Faber was the "spark" that ignited the movement, the various chapters may be described as conflagrations that flare and subside, then flare up again, sometimes in other areas.

Originally, chapters of the Society were based in Souris (Kings County), Parkdale (Queens), and Summerside and Bloomfield (Prince). That there were two Prince County chapters is misleading: both together had fewer fiddlers than either Souris or Parkdale, and the Bloomfield group soon dissolved. Currently there is a fairly active Summerside/Kensington chapter sponsoring lessons and building membership in Prince County. Down east, the Souris group (sometimes calling itself the Eastern Kings Fiddlers' Association) has met infrequently except in the summer. It has, however, financed and equipped a young beginners' class with proceeds from its annual Rollo Bay Scottish Fiddling Concert. It is commonly believed throughout the Fiddlers' Society that the Souris-area fiddlers, mostly

Chaissons, are so proficient and active that they don't need to practice regularly. In Montague, a group of perhaps a dozen fiddlers (sometimes called the Southern Kings Fiddlers' Association) has met for about three years; many of these fiddlers attend practices in Charlottetown and Souris as well.

Queens County Meetings

The various chapter meetings have almost always been in an institutional rather than domestic room. A fire-hall, school music-room, service-club hall, grocery store and restaurant have all been used for meetings and practices. Musical medleys are there presented and developed, and thereafter performed publicly in a variety of contexts: the Rollo Bay Concert (a weekend in July), the annual Charlottetown concert in October, and various other concerts, guest appearances, benefits, conventions and other performances by groups of Society members.

The Queens County meetings have always been held in the Charlottetown area -- so far either in the suburb of Parkdale, or across the river in Southport. Although the specific location has shifted a number of times over the almost five-year existence of the Society, the Charlottetown meeting has been the only regular (weekly) one in the Society over this period.

These practices have always been on Thursday night.

They started at 8 p.m. for the first few years, but most fiddlers preferred to start and finish earlier on a work night, so now it begins at 7:30 and sometimes earlier; there are always some fiddlers tuning and playing soon after 7. Usually between 10 and 35 fiddlers show up, with 20 or more commonly present. To get things underway, someone names a selection or a group starts to play and others join in. (Starting together has never been given much attention.) If the regular piano player is not present, one of the fiddlers chords on the piano for the others; there is little enthusiasm for playing without a piano.

The arrangement of seating (at practices) and standing (in concerts) during Society music-making is hierarchical, reflecting a status order that is neither exact nor inflexible but is well understood by all the participants. At practices, stacks of chairs are pulled into a series of roughly semi-circular rows around the piano. The fiddlers acknowledged as superior usually sit at the front, nearest the piano. Often when one of these has sat toward the rear, to seemingly ignore this status arrangement, he will be loudly urged to sit at the front by other fiddlers. These "front-line" fiddlers are also generally to the fore in public performances. And while no one has to my knowledge been encouraged to sit further back, many of the fiddlers, on finding themselves at the front in a show, will work themselves "back in the pack," especially if they see a better

player behind them.

Despite its success, the Society has not developed complete confidence in itself. This insecurity operates on two levels. On the performance level, the groups feel very insecure without the presence of certain individuals; this despite the fact that one or two persons, no matter how good, can't make much difference in the sound of 15 or 20. In terms of sponsoring concerts, neither Queens nor Kings groups are confident enough to put on a program without the presence of some guest fiddlers from Cape Breton. They don't feel secure enough to headline their own shows, or believe that the audience will turn out for a strictly Island program. (It is my belief that they are seriously misreading the Island public.)

Another area of Cape Breton emulation is in tune medleys. Traditionally on the Island tunes are usually played one at a time; a medley of two or three might be performed by some fiddlers. The Fiddlers' Society, however, has never publicly performed a tune that was not accompanied by at least two others; they perform tune medleys rather than tunes.

These medleys are arranged by a few fiddlers who have the ability to transcribe tunes from records and tapes. These are photocopied and presented at the meetings, and natural selection determines those that are popular; they obviously won't work if most of the members refuse to play

them. The process involves continual compromise of tastes and preferences, yet seems generally satisfactory to those who attend regularly. The intrinsic musical and social satisfaction of group playing makes up for the element of dissatisfaction in concerted actions.

Although on several occasions a cassette tape of Glendale or Rollo Bay music was copied and distributed to members who didn't read, the distribution of photocopied sheets is the basic method of musical dissemination in the Society. This music is handed out at the intermission about 9 p.m., when a 10-20 minute meeting is held to hear of, discuss and vote on any business -- mostly future engagements. Also at this time the rent for the hall is collected: a dollar or two per person. After this, the fiddlers resume playing for about an hour, pepile their chairs and leave.

In late 1979 two Queens County members, Ralph Gay and Shirley Barrett, collected the medleys issued to date and issued them in a ring binder, with all the sheets in clear plastic covers. Many fiddlers in the Queens and Kings groups acquired them and update them as new tune groups are issued. The blue binders of tunes (with music stands to set them on) are seen regularly at the Queens meetings. The better fiddlers generally disdain this aid unless they are unfamiliar with the tunes; some, of course, can't read the notes anyway. The group therefore excludes the good player/mediocre reader more than the good reader/mediocre player.

Religious Action and Cultural Transformation

In Wallace's revitalization movement paradigm, after the organization of "converts," comes a "Cultural Transformation" where

> a noticeable social revitalization occurs, signalized by the reduction of the personal deterioration symptoms of individuals, by extensive cultural changes, and by an enthusiastic embarkation on some organized program of group action. (p. 275)

At this early stage in the life of the organization, it would be presumptuous to offer detailed parallels to the above in the Fiddlers' Society, much less society at large, but some similar if more modest changes seem to have occurred within the membership.

Besides contributing to the morale of fiddlers and the old-time music public, this transformation was seen by MacDonald to have a philosophical aspect, what Wallace (p. 277) calls the "religious function." Fr. MacDonald expressed this connection directly: "The music of the people has a very intimate relation with their pilgrimage towards God in this world."[21] While the Fiddlers' Society is by no means a group of "muscular Christians" armed with fiddles, or "knights of the bow" seeking a Holy Grail, the religious connection and sociocultural pride, articulated by MacDonald have certainly had a positive influence on how the fiddlers see themselves.

MacDonald's linking of the rebirth of fiddling on the Island with spiritual and sociocultural rebirth is well known to the members as he has expressed himself on the subject on a number of occasions, as well as in the interview and his essay "Why I Play Scottish Fiddle" in The Island Fiddler. The connection is readily understood even by members who are not religiously oriented, for fiddling may be seen metaphorically as a religion with some people, a form of (at least) life celebration to which many had become apostate, and through the Society are now "born again." This hackneyed phrase helps explain the fervour with which new tunes and playing contexts are embraced, for to be born again implies radical change in order to become new and improved. MacDonald, who has been involved in the charismatic movement in the Roman Catholic church, speaks of "the intimate relationship between this kind of revival and other kinds of spiritual revival I have experienced."[22] In a sense, for the Society local tradition is regarded as a dead skin to be cast off, along with old tunes, old disputes, and the negative associations that came with the fiddlers' role. In the Fiddlers' Society, the role was redefined to suit the times.

MacDonald's point of view is that the decline in community life has given people more freedom and mobility but less intimate human and spiritual relationships. He has cited television as a medium that induces passivity and

separate-ness -- unlike "this spontaneous, creative music by people and for people."[23] He believes that "there is a lot of erosion and breakdown of the spirit of man today" as evidenced by the rates of juvenile crime, alcoholism and suicide on the Island; "if the people on PEI knew the figures on suicide they would stand aghast." Most people, he maintains, are "hungry for art forms that touch the human spirit more profoundly." Music, especially fiddle music for its historical importance, is seen by him as a major countervailing force in

> seeming to answer a tremendous basic need in people; I see that this is one antidote for an awful lot of the alienation and the loneliness and the oppression and the anxiety that weighs heavily on the heart of modern man.

It answers this need firstly by drawing Islanders together: "The violin is an instrument that has gathered people in the past. It can continue to do so if it is played well." (Thus the fiddlers seem to have a social responsibility to improve.)

MacDonald sees the music as functioning most successfully by regaining, as much as possible, its traditional context and role:

> And it doesn't have to be brought into the ballrooms of the hotels y'know, and it doesn't have to be brought onto the grand stage, it has to be left in the

> country kitchens and the parlours of homes, that's where it belongs, and perhaps community halls. And there doesn't have to be bars and all that stuff. But that [music] has to be given back to the people, the people have to come back to that as ways of being liberated in their lives.[24]

His thoughts on the value of music are similar to these expressed by ethnomusicologist John Blacking:

> The function of music is to enhance in some way the quality of individual experience and human relationships; its structures are reflections of patterns of human relations, and the value of a piece of music as music is inseparable from its value as an expression of human experience.[25]

For MacDonald, the sharing of human experience through music and dance is a sine qua non of holistic community life as well as personal health; "someone who stepdances never needs a psychiatrist, all his defences are down"[26] is one statement by him in this vein. And he has written:

> Modern man has spent himself in the pursuit of material things, to the neglect of the soul and spirit. He has ignored the need to celebrate the way his forefathers did. . . . If we strive to become rooted in this [Celtic] music we will eventually generate the inspiration that will continue to give rebirth to our rich heritage.[27]

However, this "rebirth" is seen as a way to expand local repertoire, which is happening almost to the point of re-definition. To MacDonald, Island fiddling seems to contain only vestiges of the essential purity that is found in the "tune Bibles" -- especially the great Scottish collections. For him the goal seemingly is to transcend local tradition in its present state, to seek the higher realm of truth transmitted in music notation. The role of the local fiddlers therefore is less to serve as models of tradition themselves than to lead others to the "Bibles":

> We have to stop looking at who's playing what. . . . you bring all this human perspective into the thing, and you forget the music. And then, 'this is the way Scotty played it, it has to be right,' or 'this is the way Joe Chaisson played it, it has to be right.' Well, that's wrong. We have to pass by the individual who's playing the fiddle, and the fiddle that he's playing on, and get into the music. And the key to that is learning to read, and being able to grasp it oneself and having some common denominator.[28]

Musical Literacy, "the common denominator"

When I asked MacDonald if musical literacy should be the immediate goal in the upgrading effort, he responded:

> Musical literacy is one thing that is very important, but I think what comes before that is the desire for unity, and to be one, and to strive against competition and jealousy and this kind of thing.[29]

However, while musical literacy is useful as an organizing principle -- especially when new repertoire is emphasized, as here -- it seems to have some divisive aspects as well. It has been observed that the Society, like most organizations, operates along hierarchical lines; musical literacy is one of the means by which repertoire and status are earned. While superior playing and repertoire are still most important to a fiddler's status, literacy is universally considered to contribute to both.

Participation in the Society almost demands some note-reading ability. The number of photocopied medleys is so large, and the choice of tunes for practices so unpredictable, that members have been basically responsible for knowing them all at all times. This clearly is frustrating to many of the fiddlers, who cannot learn so many tunes as rapidly nor retain them as well as this presupposes. And while the "top" fiddlers in the group are never stuck in performance (if only because they decide what will be played), from my observations I doubt that any fiddler could play from memory every medley in the theoretical repertoire.

This randomness tends to discourage some members who would participate more fully if they had less material to be responsible for, if a working repertoire was more closely defined and redefined over time. Some good fiddlers and

valuable members have fallen away from the organization because they don't read music or are frustrated with the lack of direction.

A related problem pertains to "new blood." With the size of the repertoire it would be very difficult for a new person to join the group unless he was extremely quick at learning tunes and had time to devote to doing so. Thus, one effect of the pursuit of literacy has been an over-reaching in terms of repertoire and the exclusion of some people thereby.

The effects of musical literacy have been questioned by scholars and collectors of fiddle music, like Professor Bayard, who have expressed doubts about the divorce from local traditions caused by the learning of "frozen" versions of tunes in standard collections, and the resulting homogenization of regional styles. In Hill Country Tunes Bayard stated that the fiddlers he knew were divided on the merits of literacy; some no doubt felt that frozen versions could sound mighty hot. Bayard himself lacked ambivalence: he stated that the proliferating use of sheet music "is a sure sign of the decadence of traditional art."[30] Francis O'Neill, the great collector and publisher of Irish tunes in America, expressed rather McLuhanesque doubts about the benefits of literacy for repertoire expansion:

> The saying that the invention of

> writing injured the power of memory, finds much support from the fact that musicians ignorant of written music, possess the faculty of memorizing tunes to a far greater degree than those who acquire their repertoire from that source.[31]

From personal experience with both "systems" I can agree, adding the observation that non-readers remember tunes better while readers remember titles of tunes better. But I also observe that O'Neill supports literacy, both implicitly in publishing tunes, and explicitly regarding pipers. In criticizing Irish pipers he praises the Scots pipers for their standardized system of notation, because "they are enabled by the uniformity of their system to play together in perfect accord upon all occasions."[32] This is the goal to which the PEI Fiddlers' Society aspires, and to which they grow closer with greater experience. The tradition of Scots piping schools in the Maritimes is another possible influence for uniformity on the fiddlers, who often share the stage with pipe bands.[33] But I have seen no direct indication of it.

Tradition versus Innovation

In discussing the Fiddlers' Society's identification as a form of traditional culture, I refer to another statement by Wallace:

> Although almost every revitalization movement embodies in its proposed new cultural system large quantities of both traditional and imported cultural material. . . each movement tends to profess either no identification at all, a traditional orientation, or foreign orientation. This suggests that the choice of identification is the solution of a problem of double ambivalence: both the traditional and the foreign model are regarded both positively and negatively. (p. 276)

The "traditional orientation" of the PEIFS gives it perfect liberty to chose its "material" from new and imported sources since a traditional Island-wide repertoire has not been defined. So long as the Society's music has the old-time sound, it fulfills its function. The repertoire may be characterized as developmental rather than preservationist,[34] old-time rather than Island. But according to Wallace (p. 278): "nativism is a dimension of variation rather than an elemental property of revitalization movements."

The audience, even less than the fiddlers, doesn't keep score on the component of local tradition in what it hears; in the absence of clearly contrary characteristics, it is supposed that what "the Island Fiddlers" play is traditional with them. Outside contexts which encouraged familiarity and feedback -- such as regular dance playing, or even regular radio programs that drew mail requests -- the audience impact on repertoire today is negligible.

I have previously indicated the definitional problem posed by the situation in which a large portion of the PEI Fiddlers' Society's repertoire comes via neighbouring Cape Breton. This fact skews the traditional balance in the musical ecology between the older, well-established tunes and those newer ones that, through natural selection, enter that category. In the rural isolation of earlier days, new tunes were harder to encounter much less acquire, and thus were a smaller part of a fiddler's tune-stock than the "old, old" ones. This basic continuity and stability of repertoire is essential to the concept of "traditional" music. David Johnson has observed that

> Folk music . . . has little inherent desire for change, and if the society where it flourishes remains stable, it will stay the same for an indefinite period of time.[35]

If changes in society are reflected in changes in repertoire, then there are also parallels in their rate of acceleration. Yet in the consciously Celtic-revival context of the Fiddlers' Society, this acceleration away from traditional and local repertoire is celebrated as an attempt to grasp an ancient purity in Scottish music as mediated through its chief apostles, the fiddlers of Cape Breton. The concept of tradition does not concern what was, but what might or should have been. In the process, older Island repertoire and

styles -- admittedly much harder to obtain than Cape Breton fiddle records -- are either ignored or disdained.

A Fiddling Support System

In the changes brought by modern technology, the fiddler's old support systems were largely eroded and displaced. The Fiddlers' Society is a way of providing new contexts and support systems to replace the old. It has some characteristics of a folk society, based on common interests and backgrounds instead of community and kinship ties. Both at practices and public performances, it recreates the groups that gravitated around fiddlers at frolics, ceilidhs, soirees and other community events of earlier days. In this it is quite typical of fiddlers' associations:

> The growth of the old-time fiddlers associations . . . can be connected with a . . . desire to recapture roots, to preserve some semblance of identity and continuity in the midst of the fastest paced, most rapidly changing society that has ever existed.[36]

Of their new context Richard Blaustein has said that "One of the ways a folk tradition can survive in a modern society is in the form of a hobby and vacation pastime."[37] Earl Spielman adds that

> Fiddling, for the most part, is far more than just a passive hobby, but in fact is of central importance in the lives and interests of many fiddlers.[38]

By re-socializing fiddling for its members, the Society has turned some formerly passive people into active fiddlers.

But here identity-preservation is allied with homogenization, adoption of a superstyle. However, the Fiddlers' Society is a protean and ever-evolving group, and some other direction may be explored in future. As confidence increases through exposure, and as chapters and the provincial organization mature, there may be a return on the part of some to local repertoire as one of the many options and models available.

NOTES

1 Marian Bruce, "Fiddle fever on the Island," Atlantic Insight, August 1980, p. 36.

2 Interview with Fr. Faber MacDonald, 22 May 1977, and in his "Why I Play Scottish Fiddle," op. cit.

3 Edinburgh's "Highland's Highland Reel & Strathspey Society" was founded in this year, according to Henry George Farmer, A History of Music in Scotland (Edinburgh: Hinrichsen Editions Limited, n.d.), p. 360.

4 Richard Blaustein, "Traditional Music and Social Change," p. 1. A secondary study to Blaustein's on the subject is George Kenneth Leiver's, "Structure and Function of an Old-Time Fiddler's [sic] Association," MA thesis, Department of Anthropology, California State University (Chico), 1974.

5 Cf. Paul G. Brewster, "Notes on the Contribution of the Clergy to Folklore and Allied Fields," Southern Folklore Quarterly, 7 (1943), 173-184, and Francis O'Neill's section on "Reverend Musicians," Chapter Six in Irish Minstrels and Musicians.

6 Fr. Rankin is a piano player who has recorded with Lamey and others. Along with Lamey and John Shaw, he prepared the brochure of notes accompanying the Topic LP; "Cape Breton Scottish Fiddle," op. cit.

7 This half-hour Maritime network program, produced by Ron McInnis at CBC Halifax, was broadcast on 17 November 1971. Its impact on Cape Breton fiddlers can be read in MacGillivray's The Cape Breton Fiddler. The reaction to McInnis and the program has so improved that the producer was presented with a citation by the Cape Breton Fiddlers' Association, onstage at the 1979 Glendale Concert. This was in recognition of how much he had alerted them and stimulated their movement.

8 Anthony F.C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," American Anthropologist, 58 (1956), 265. A similar definition had been used by Ralph Linton in "Nativistic Movements," American Anthropologist, 45 (1943), 230.

9 Wallace, ibid., p. 268. Further page numbers in this article will be cited in brackets in the text.

10 He gave this age in his "Why I Play Scottish Fiddle." In an earlier interview with me he recalled being about 10 when he took up the fiddle.

11 MacDonald, "Why I Play Scottish Fiddle."

[12] Information from Poplar Point fiddler James Banks, February 1981; in Charlottetown. Wilfred Campbell is mentioned with other area fiddlers in Those Were the Days: A History of the North Side of the Boughton River (Little Pond, PEI: Little Pond Community Club, 1982), p. 82.

[13] Interview with Fr. MacDonald, 6 February 1980.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Interview with MacDonald, 22 May 1977.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Interview with MacDonald, 7 February 1980.

[18] Interview with MacDonald, 22 May 1977.

[19] In the 1981 draft version of a new constitution for the PEIFS, the first point was rewritten to elaborate and change the emphasis to provincial tradition. It reads in part: "The Society will be devoted to old time fiddle music, and in particular to rejuvenate, record and play the older tunes that have become part of the heritage of our Island. . . . Special consideration will be given to those tunes written by P.E. Islanders & Society members." However, there is as yet no evidence that this is being followed.

[20] Interview with MacDonald, 22 May 1977.

[21] Interview with MacDonald, 6 February 1980.

[22] Interview with MacDonald, 22 May 1977.

[23] Ibid. Quotes in the following two paragraphs of text are from the same interview.

[24] Interview with MacDonald, 6 February 1980.

[25] John Blacking, "The Value of Music in Human Experience," Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council, 1 (1969), 34.

[26] Interview with MacDonald, 6 February 1980.

[27] MacDonald, "Why I Play Scottish Fiddle."

[28] Interview with MacDonald, 6 February 1980.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Bayard, Hill Country Tunes, p. xviii.

[31] O'Neill, Irish Minstrels and Musicians, p. 126.

[32] Ibid., p. 45.

[33] This suggestion I owe to Dr. N.V. Rosenberg. Cf. Pipe Major S. MacKinnon, "The Bagpipe in Canada," Canadian Geographical Journal, 4 (1932), pp. 233-241.

[34] These different tendencies were discussed in another fiddling context in Neil Johnston, "Folk Fiddling - Part I: Which Direction:- Preservation or Development," The Devil's Box, 23 (1 December 1973), 17-19.

[35] Johnson, Music and Society in Lowland Scotland, p. 87.

[36] Blaustein, "Traditional Music and Social Change," p. 7.

[37] Ibid., p. 110.

[38] Spielman, "Traditional North American Fiddling," p. 159.

CONCLUSION

The question I set out to answer in this study was: does the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society reflect Island fiddling tradition? In practice I have concentrated on the aspects of repertoire and style, as it is clear that the group setting and its performance contexts are non-traditional. My approach was to develop an ethnography of Island fiddling tradition through both oral sources (chiefly obtained through personal field interviews) and printed sources turned up in my research. These sources would, it was hoped, provide a comparative base against which I could measure the Fiddlers' Society and trace its development. It was understood from the beginning that the Fiddlers' Society was not the first, nor possibly the most significant, change in the local musical ecology, and that change itself is a traditional element in culture. As Ralph Vaughan Williams once observed: "Traditional art, from its very essence, is always in a state of flux, and varies according to the natures of those successive generations who practise it."[1]

As a corollary to this, I found that the concept of tradition likewise varies over generations, and in my experience seems to mean a given speaker's idea of what was done about 50 years ago -- approximately the remote limit of the memories of active fiddlers. Not surprisingly, then,

the Fiddlers' Society reflects concepts of tradition that developed in the 1920s and '30s -- the primary dislocation of dance music from dancing, the use of the piano for accompaniment, the absorption of Cape Breton music as a major source of repertoire and style, and the performance of tune medleys rather than single tunes for listening variety.

Among the social forces that shape fiddle music are religion, fashion and technology. Of the former two a Scottish fiddler remarked, early in this century, that

> the Puritanic spirit of religious teaching operating at the lower half of the social scale, and the new French fashions capturing the half above -- went far to drive our old dance music into oblivion.[2]

Parallel cultural patterns have emerged from my Island research. Today, however, homogenization has replaced ignorance as the main threat to the integrity of traditional dance music, with technological dissemination of superstyles and vast printed and recorded repertoires. As Reg Hall observed,

> A side effect of this [dissemination] is the very sad breakdown of regional styles. Perhaps more people are playing more music but they are all beginning to sound alike.[3]

Of course, to the activists of the Fiddlers' Society,

"playing more music" was seen as the only alternative to playing less, and eventually none -- the fiddling tradition had languished. And as for sounding alike, a group of violinists that doesn't risks embarrassment. But one might also expect that a Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society would risk embarrassment if it did not feature and identify performance material from Prince Edward Island tradition -- yet this is indeed the case. The organization's emphasis has been on Cape Breton music (and even Cape Breton musicians, as the endless parades of them at the annual "highlight" of the Fiddlers' Society calendar, the annual Rollo Bay concert, emphasize), while Island fiddlers feel left out. In cultural terms the Souris-area fiddlers and many other Society members are affiliated with Cape Breton.

On one hand, it must be recognized that culture is no respecter of geographical boundaries, and we cannot fault fiddlers for using non-local influences to keep their interest and art alive, especially when they are so ingrained and congenial as Cape Breton music among the Island's fiddling celtophiles. But an organization that both explicitly and implicitly represents Island tradition should show some respect to that tradition. Such a group can never be considered wholly satisfactory so long as local tradition is accorded only lip-service. It would require little effort for the Fiddlers' Society to incorporate some local

content, identified as such, in their programs. Without local pride and participation, the long-term future of the Society seems problematic, that of a tree-top whose roots are allowed to wither.

It is too soon to forecast the flexibility and maturity that may come to the Fiddlers' Society, especially as it has a number of sensitive and dedicated members. However, I note a tendency in 1982 toward a "dressier" standard of stage attire than the earlier standard of white shirt and dark pants. The latest move has been for the members to purchase a red neckerchief with a fiddle pin, and a fiddle belt-buckle. It reflects the desire of some members to stylize the group as a way of registering an identity, one moreover that is quasi-professional and stage-oriented. It tends to alienate some fiddlers who are willing to contribute on occasion to group performances but dislike the element of costuming and the suggestion of a uniform. For others it appears to be a means of defining the group, the purchase and wearing of items indicating the committed and active member. Yet whatever benefit it may have for group identity, it brings the Fiddlers' Society ever further from traditional Island fiddling and its largely informal context. Most concretely, it further removes the Society from the older rural fiddlers who were its stated focus and inspiration.

There seems to be an element of schizophrenia about the Fiddlers' Society's importation of Cape Breton tunes on such a large scale that the group's use of traditional tunes -- such as the medley of "Flowers of Edinburgh/The White Cockade/Little Stack of Barley" on their record -- actually seems to be declining. This was enthusiastically fostered by Fr. MacDonald at the same time as he spoke reproachfully about Islanders' "awe and reverence for outsiders." But unlike the music of Don Messer (his referent here), MacDonald sees Cape Breton music not as a domineering outside influence but as a superior repository of a Maritime Scottish music that once belonged equally to Prince Edward Island Celts. This attitude allows the Society to define its music in generic terms (as "old-time," "Scottish," or "Celtic") without regard to how it is learned or where -- if anywhere -- it is traditional. As a result the Society really excludes the most traditional Island fiddlers, who play by ear and whose repertoire has remained relatively stable over the years.

As I neared the completion of this essay I was most interested to read an articulate statement of the loss of local traditions in the Irish folk revival; it is from The Northern Fiddler, an excellent account of traditional fiddling today in Donegal and Tyrone:

> The revival of interest in traditional music that has occurred in urban Ireland within the last ten years has ironically not ended the musical isolation of the players we recorded; in fact it has deepened their sense of separation and may have put the final touches on the extinction of regional style and repertoire. . . . folk revivals are often highly selective as to which particular aspects of traditional culture they choose to resurrect. They are quick to develop their own mythologies concerning the traditional culture. . . . By virtue of the media and cultural organisations the folk revivals can feed distorted cultural images back into that traditional society which was the original source.

Furthermore,

> There has been a tremendous change of the social context of the music and the folk revival has unconsciously compounded this situation by developing into an a-historical movement ignorant of the importance of regional styles. . . . Instead of acknowledging the rich diversity of the collective tradition, especially in instrumental music, it has arbitrarily concentrated on the popularised traditions of Sligo and Clare as the mean by which all other traditions are evaluated -- and at times dismissed. This has led to a uniformity of style and repertoire among the new generation of fiddlers that was not present in the older regional traditions.[4]

How well this fits my study of the Fiddlers' Society, and the present state of Maritime Canadian fiddling, can be readily seen by substituting "Cape Breton" for "Sligo and

Clare" in the latter statement above.

Fortunately, I do not see the present or future of Island fiddling only in terms of the philosophies, prospects and activities of the Fiddlers' Society. The success of the organization in attracting respect, interest and publicity to fiddling benefits equally those fiddlers who are not members, although their activities are harder to document. I have tried to involve them in my main activity as a Fiddlers' Society member -- production of The Island Fiddler newsletter. Membership has not been a factor in selecting fiddlers to be profiled; what is sought is experiences that relate to other Island fiddlers, and interesting local and traditional tunes that they know. This is but one example of ways that local tradition may be appreciated and preserved.

That technology of many kinds can be used to perpetuate local fiddling traditions is not only inevitable but appropriate. It seems that technology gives with one hand and takes away with the other. It took away the conditions that created the interdependence of community life, and thus local traditions. But it also contributed opportunities to hear and learn music and, for a favoured few, to reach a larger audience than ever before. That these opportunities accelerated the traditional rate of change in repertoire was perceived by many fiddlers as being to their

great good fortune. The loss of local traditions and styles has been an unfortunate byproduct of change.

The learning of repertoire mainly from tapes, records and musical notation is today a fact of life. The issue, it seems to me, is how to retrieve local traditions and represent them in the lives and repertoires of fiddlers, especially fiddlers in the future. It is a matter of using this technology, of representing local fiddlers and tunes on recordings and musical notations. The Fiddlers' Society may not be the organization to undertake this collecting or publishing, but is a potential vehicle for distributing the material, as it now does by financing the newsletter. In any case, well-presented material will find its own audience both on the Island and off it. The Fiddlers' Society seems to be part of the pattern lamented by an Irish fiddle-music researcher:

> If current trends continue the performance of traditional music will adapt more and more to the 'pop' music pattern, with star instrumentalists and groups spreading the music through concerts, broadcasts and records and with amateurs imitating the currently fashionable sounds rather than learning the style and repertoire of their own locality. One does not wish to turn back the clock . . . but it is essential that the richness and diversity of the local music . . . should be recorded before it vanishes. . . .[5]

Today each musician, with a bit of effort and

aptitude, can assemble a repertoire that is highly individual rather than traditional, and, as I have indicated, a folk revival organization like the Fiddlers' Society can go a long way toward creating its own traditions. As Allen Feldman observed,

> The historical regional isolation of the musical tradition has been transformed into the individualised isolation of the lone musician.[6]

Cut loose from the anchors of local tradition and community involvement, many fiddlers can reflect only imitations of the recorded virtuosity of others. In isolation the musical art can be developed, but as Bishop MacDonald has rightly said, it is nourished in social contexts. Yet without an underlying sense of local history, such social contexts must inevitably smack of fraudulence.

In 1930, Sir Andrew Macphail could indicate our people's inward focus and identity by writing "His wife was a foreign woman, that is, from Nova Scotia."[7] In this insularity was an identity, however spurious or narrow some of its elements. Today a local cultural identity even in this small place will take considerable effort to document and promote. Some customs (and in this case, some tunes) will have a merely historical rather than contemporary function; as Ferguson observed in 1899: "The oldfashioned

wedding has its counterpart in the milder festivities of the modern wedding; but the thickening frolic has passed away forever."[8]

What seems needed most, beyond the basic work of collection and archiving of traditional Prince Edward Island culture generally, is its publishing and promotion -- in printed and broadcast media, in festivals, concerts and tours of Island communities. These activities would doubtless encourage fiddle-playing, and conceivably appropriate dancing to accompany it. Advocates of Transcendental Meditation once hoped to convert one percent of the populations of major cities to daily meditation; if, as seems statistically possible, one percent of the Island population played the fiddle regularly, the results might be interesting. As I hope this essay has demonstrated, traditional Island culture has a history and heritage, but will not thrive without dedicated efforts to authenticate and assert its continuing importance to the life of the province and its communities.

NOTES

1 Ralph Vaughan Williams, letter to the editor ("From Our Postbag"), English Dance and Song, 22 (November/December 1957), 64.

[2] Andrew Mackintosh, "The History of Strathspeys and Reels," Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, 27 (1908-1911), (Inverness, Scotland: Gaelic Society of Inverness, 1915), 275-290.

[3] Reg Hall, brochure notes to "Irish Dance Music," Folkways LP FW8821, (1973), p. 1. Clearly, Hall is using "breakdown" in a different sense than Don Messer did in calling one of his early groups "The Backwoods Breakdown" and one of his most popular tunes "Don Messer's Breakdown." But one can see that Messer's breakdowns helped to break down local traditions in fiddle tunes where he was popular.

[4] Allen Feldman and Eamonn O'Doherty, The Northern Fiddler (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1980), p. 29.

[5] Ibid., p. 11.

[6] Ibid., p. 17.

[7] Macphail, The Master's Wife, p. 72.

[8] D. Ferguson, "Social Enjoyment in the Old Times," The Prince Edward Island Magazine, 1 (Nov. 1899), 7.

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Sullivan's Shamrock Band. Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band. Topic 12T366. Jacket notes by Mick Moloney and Leo Sullivan. 1979. (Includes Island banjoist Neil Nolan.)

APPENDICES

Appendix A: A Repertoire List for Lem Jay

The following list is a conglomerate of titles from a) lists made by the fiddler in possession of Roland Jay, Mount Stewart, and b) private recordings of Jay in possession of Edith MacLaren, Charlottetown. While hardly definitive or complete, the list gives some idea of the repertoire of an older fiddler. Arranged alphabetically.

Angus Campbell
Big John McNeil
Braes of Mars
Barren Rocks of Aden
Cock of the North
Christy Campbell
The Cuckoos Nest
Devil among the tailors
Fishers Hornpipe
Flowers of Edinburgh
Green Fields of America
Growling old man and old woman
I don't want your gold or silver
The Irish Washerwoman
Jay's Reel
Jerome's Farewell

Johnny can you row a boat

Johnnie Cope

Neil Gow

Lord MacDonald's Reel

Miss MacLeod's Reel

Moneymusk

Mount Stewart jig

Napolean Crossing the Alps

An Old Jig

Old lancer tune (jig)

The Old Rake

Over the Hills to Gowrie

Pigeon on the Gate

The Pride of the Ball

Quadrille tune (jig)

The Queens Wedding

Rakes of Kildare

Soldier's Joy

Speed the Plough

St. Patrick's Day in the Morning

Take a tater and cut it in two

Touch me if you dare

Turkey in the Straw

The Wedding Reel

Well done you meddling wife

Appendix B: Tune Transcriptions

Professor Bayard once observed (1957: 151) that

> the tune items we collect seem themselves to be our basic units, which have to be examined as wholes or in sections of such length that the relation of parts is not obscured.

My purpose in presenting some of these "basic units" is twofold: 1) to provide notations of tunes illustrating points made in the text; 2) to preserve in this form some local tunes and versions, especially those that I have not seen in notation.

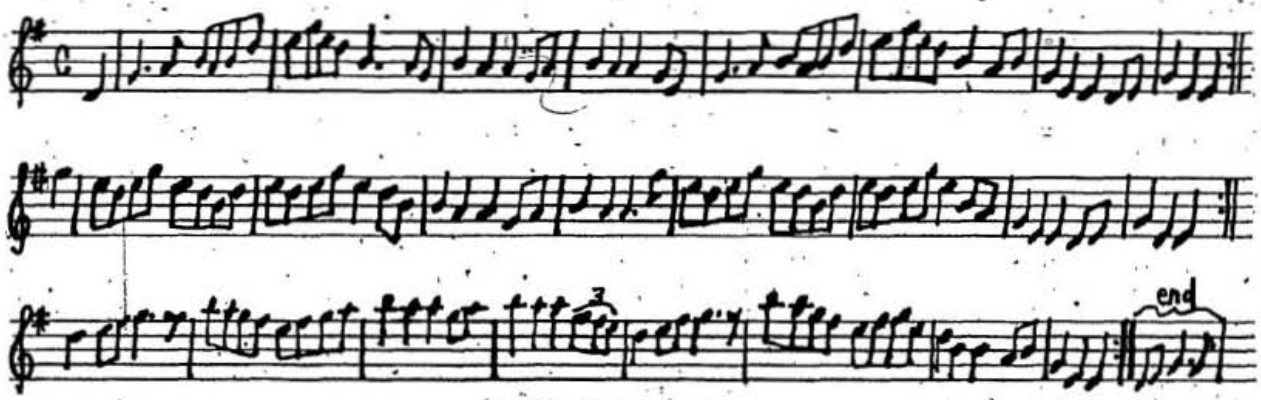
Most of these tunes are reels, which again indicates their predominance in popularity, especially among fiddlers. Many other tunes of similar interest, and in some cases greater complexity, have been collected. My transcriptions are basic melodic contours, the sort of notations many fiddlers make for their own use and which are published in The Island Fiddler.

All notations are by the author, and except where noted all performances transcribed were recorded by the author.

B1. An Old Eight

Source: Jim Beairsto, Kensington, Prince County, 11 February 1980.

Tempo: ♩=108-112



Performer's comment:

Jim Beairsto: They danced what they call the eight, 8-hand reel, years ago. There was an old, old tune that was played, my father played it, [tuning his fiddle].

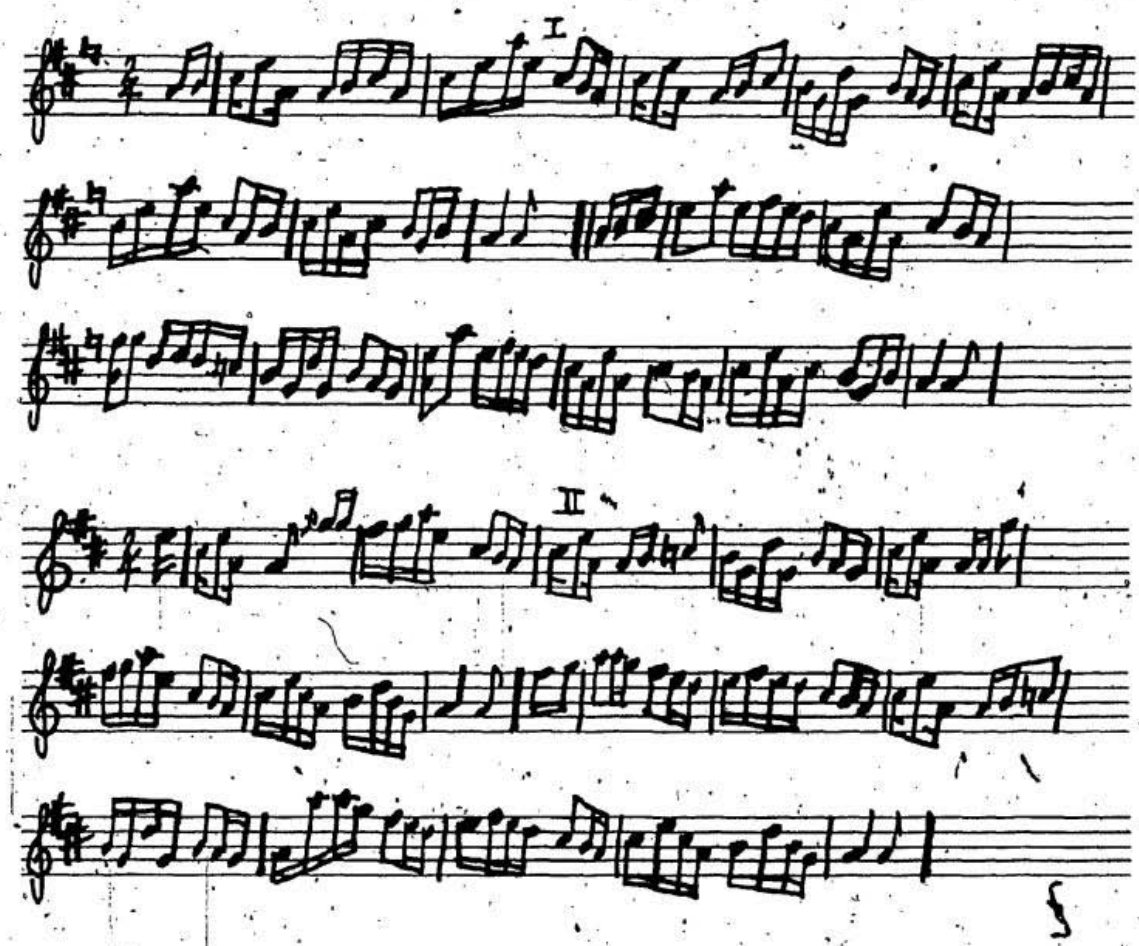
They call this tune an old eight, and they called the tunes eights. I don't know why they should call them that though. There's several more, but I never learnt any.

Remarks: To illustrate the problems in pronouncing a tune either Scotch or Irish, the following two printed tunes are the closest parallels I have found to the above: "An Old Reel (Irish)" p. 57 in The Robbins Collection of 200 Jigs, Reels and Country Dances (New York: 1933 and ff.); and "Highland Laddie" no. 95 in The Fiddlecase Book of 101 Polkas (Harrisville, N.H.: Fiddlecase Books, 1978). In both cases the two turns printed resemble the first and third turns, above.

B2. The Miramichi Fire I and II

Source: Jim Beairsto, Kensington, Prince County, 11 February 1980.

Tempo: ♩=106-110 (I); 104-108 (II).



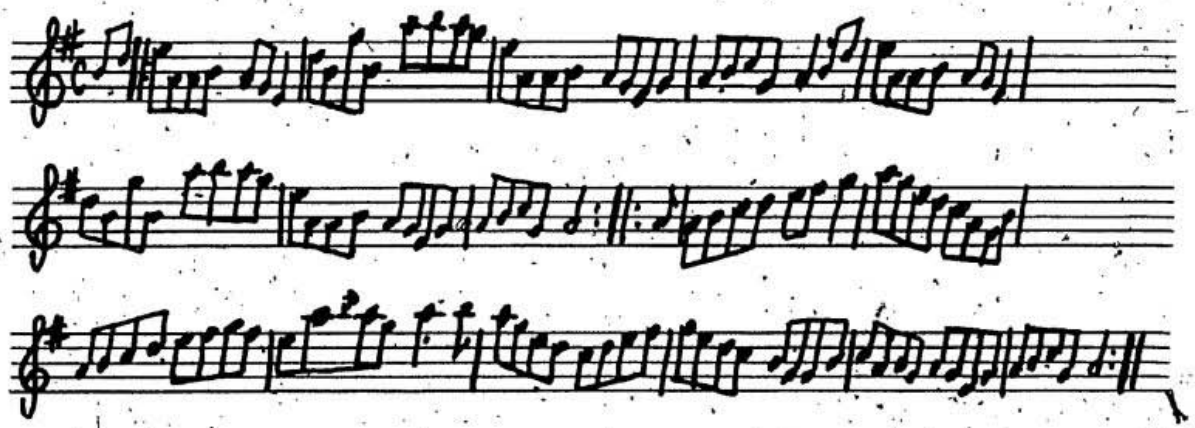
Performer's comment (after playing both): "That's the same tune; a different version of it."

Remarks: The performer started to tell me how "it" was a bagpipe tune when we were interrupted by a visitor. I believe that most fiddlers would identify the I-VII^{b} modulation as that of a "pipe tune." The Miramichi Fire was the legendary conflagration of 1825 that destroyed some four thousand square miles of New Brunswick woodland. Ashes from it landed on the Island.

B3. Johnny Can You Row a Boat

Source: Lem Jay, Fanning Brook, Kings County, on a private 78 rpm recording, probably made in Charlottetown, possibly c, 1935.

Tempo: ♩=108-110

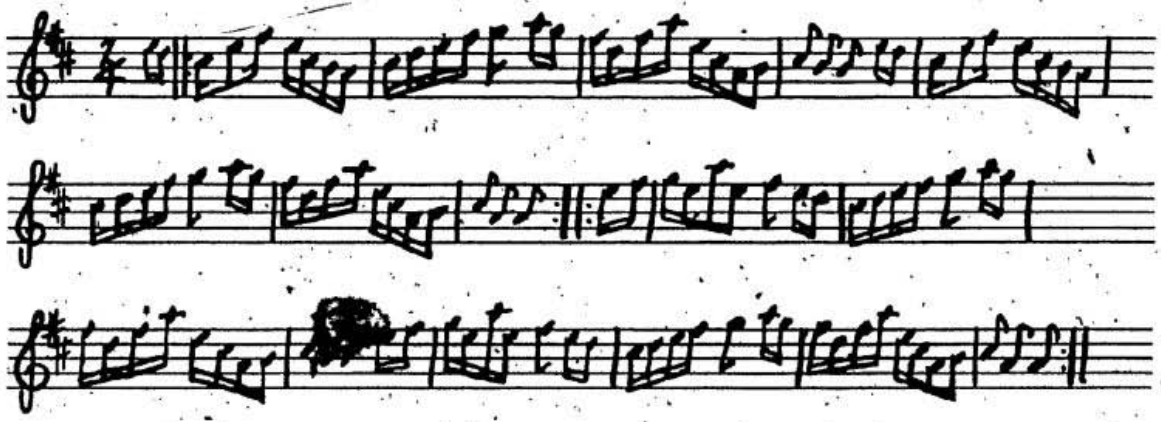


Remarks: This was played in AEAE "high bass" tuning, but I have transcribed it to indicate the melodic line rather than fingering. The second part of the tune resembles some printed second turns of the Irish reel "The Torn Petticoat," such as those in Music and Song from The Boys of the Lough (Edinburgh, 1977), p. 10, and Anthony Sullivan, Sully's Irish Music Book, Vol. One (Manchester, 1979), p. 16.

B4. Jay's Reel

Source: Roland Jay, Mount Stewart, Queens County.
Recorded 23 August 1979.

Tempo: ♩=108

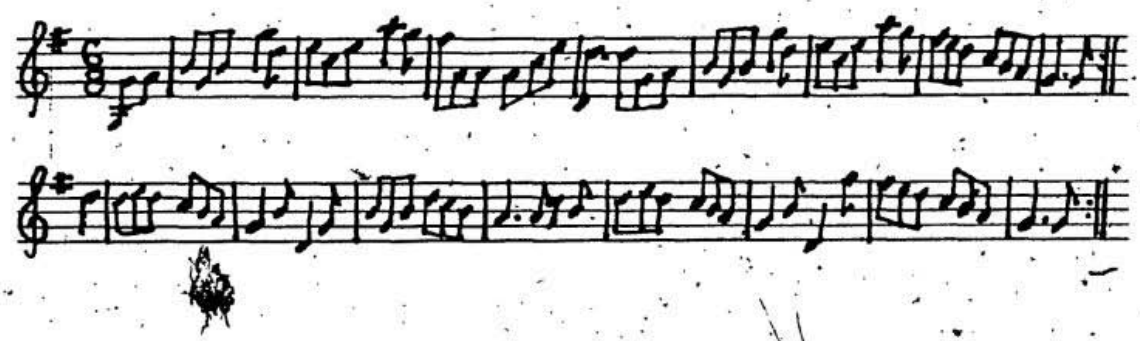


Remarks: The tune was popularized by Lem Jay; the title may have been given by a CFCY radio announcer. It is a pleasant, repetitive, old-fashioned sort of tune, beneath the notice of those who pursue virtuosity in fiddling. But it was a very serviceable dance tune, and was also much played by the well-known dance fiddler Jack Webster of Cardigan.

B5. Daisy's Tune

Source: Tape of Hector MacDonald, recorded 11 August 1978.

Tempo: ♩. =132-138

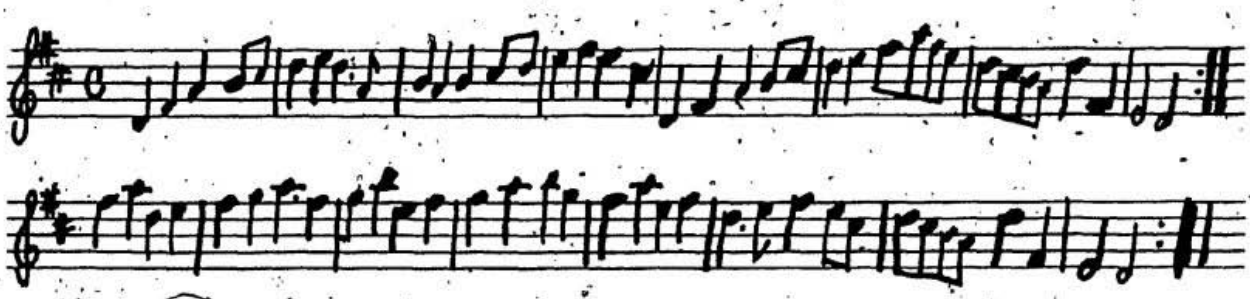


Remarks: The performer gave no source for this jig, which is of a common type. It was doubtless a dance tune, the sort that many would term "a good lancer."

B6. Polka

Source: Joe and William Kearney, Sturgeon, Kings County, fiddles, with Matilda Murphy, piano. Taped by John Weyman in 1980.

Tempo: ♩ =106-108

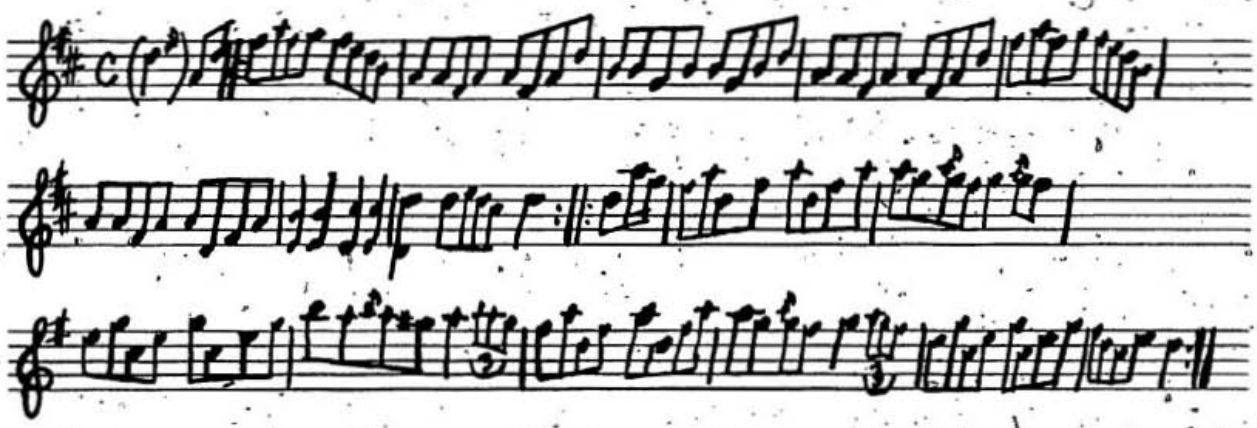


Remarks: The term "Polka" is the judgment of the author, as no information was collected about the tune except that it had been played for years. A few polkas, generally of a Celtic character, are still to be found among fiddlers, but they seem to have gone out of fashion with their accompanying dances.

B7. St. Anne's Reel

Source: Andrew Jones, Pleasant View, Prince County, 12 July 1980.

Tempo: ♩ =104.



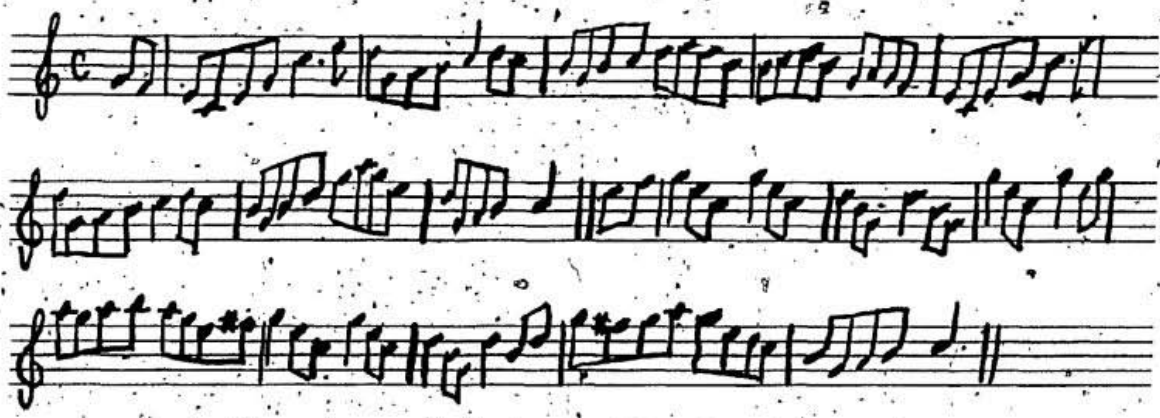
Performer's comment: Jones identified this as a West Prince version of the popular reel. "That's the way that we had to play it for stepdancers. If you played it the other way, I play the other way too, they'd get all mixed up, you had to have a . . . kind of a rhythm to it, rhythm to dance."

Remarks: I commented previously (pp. 73-74, 84) on this tune's dissemination via Joseph Allard's early recording. An Irish version is found in D.R. Bulmer and N. Sharpley, Music From Ireland, Vol. One, (Lincolnshire, 1972), p. 3.

B8. La toune à Joe Bibienne

Source: Eddy Arsenault on Les productions de l'Ile disc ILE 1001, accompanied by unidentified guitar, piano, electric bass and drums. Recorded in Wellington, Prince County.

Tempo: ♩=116-120.

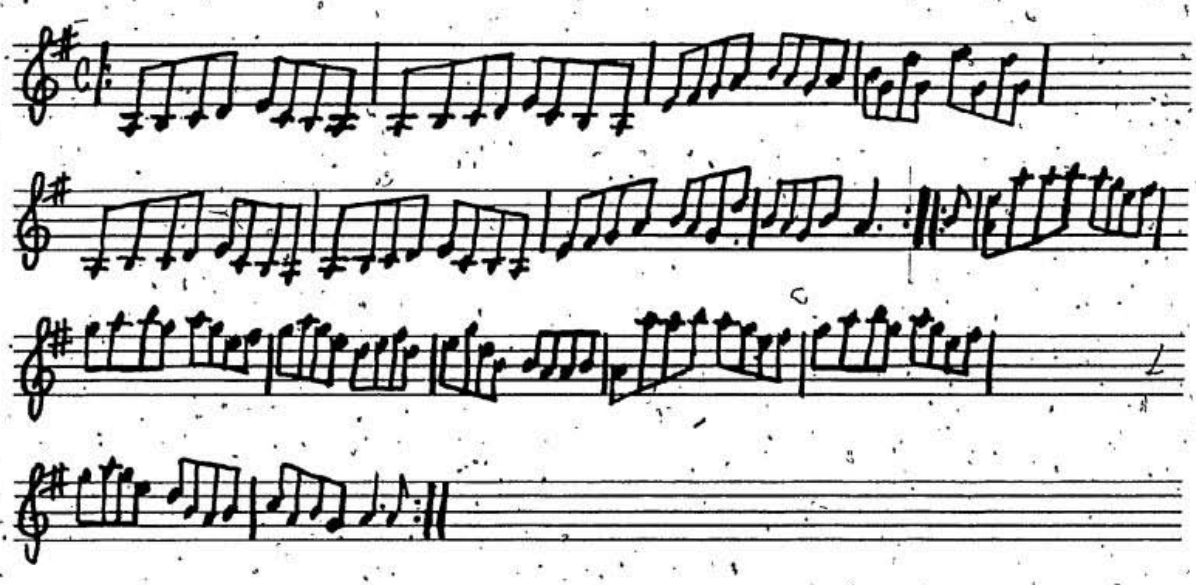


Remarks: The reel's title commemorates Joe "Bibienne" Arsenault of Abram's Village, a fiddler who sired 14 fiddlers. I know nothing of its origin.

B9. The Brae Tune

Source: Elmer Robinson, Woodstock, Prince County, fiddle and feet, accompanied by Jerry Peters, piano. Recorded 11 July 1980 at Fortune Cove, Prince County.

Tempo: ♩=112-116.



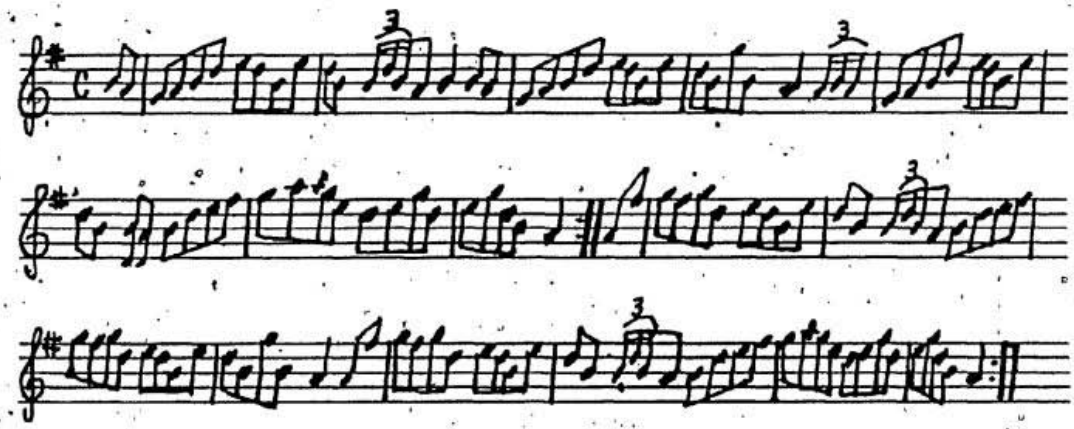
Performer's comment: "I think old Neil MacKinnon made that tune up there in the Brae. That's why they call it 'the Brae tune.'"

Remarks: Neil MacKinnon is mentioned as a fiddler in the history of this Prince County community, Past and Present: A History of Brae (Summerside: 1976), p. 72. Eddy Arsenault, who learned the tune from Elmer, recorded it on his LP (ILE 1001).

B10. Pete Simon's Tune [Kennedy's Reel]

Source: Tape of Joe Chaisson, recorded 12 July 1979.

Tempo: ♩=80-84



Performer's comment:

Joe Chaisson: That's the tune. Now they don't find that in any books.

JH: Where did that come from?

JC: Well, my father played it. That's all I know about it. So . . . he didn't make it [JH: No] that I know of. There's a lot like that, tunes around y'know, that . . .

JH: You don't know where they're from.

JC: No, that's right, that's right. But that makes sense that piece there, I only played the second, high turn once there. Y'see it all makes sense, and it's pretty well put together, and it's a great stepdancing tune.

(Recorded 12 July 1979)

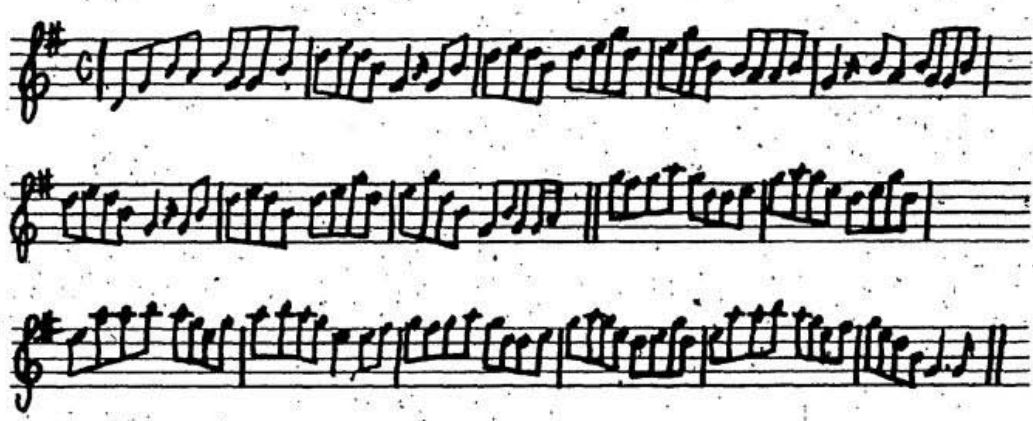
Remarks: The given name is a local one, deriving from the tune's association with Peter Simon Chaisson, Joe's father. This tune is also known as Chaisson's Reel; however, it is said to have been made in Eastern Kings by a man named Sandy Campbell. See The Island Fiddler, no. 5, for description and notation as "Kennedy's Reel."

Joe Chaisson's version was quite similar to this notation except that, characteristically, it was much slower than other renditions. Thus his occasional triplet and drones are not found in other versions I have heard.

B11. Heather on the Hill

Source: Kenny Chaisson on CBC disc.LM 470. Accompanied by Kevin Chaisson, piano, and unknown electric bass. Recorded in Halifax in 1979.

Tempo: ♩=116-120



Remarks: In my sleeve notes for the record on which this performance appeared, I noted that "Heather on the Hill" was a reel composed by Cape Breton tunemaker Dan R. MacDonald about 1942 that has found its greatest popularity in PEI. Here it seems to have entered tradition so rapidly that some fiddlers remember playing it years before it was composed. This is a fairly standard version, albeit with Cape Breton style bow-cuts. Kenny is one of the fiddling sons of the late Joe Chaisson, who performed B10.