

Havilah Jane Thorne's Music Book (1839)¹

Kate Dunlay, Saint Mary's University, Cape Breton University



Figure 1: Havilah Jane Thorne.

Until the middle of the 19th Century, it was fairly common for musicians who played instrumental dance tunes to copy melodies into personal notebooks by hand. Although published collections were available by the second half of the 18th Century, they were not necessarily easily accessible, so musicians shared their books and manuscripts and copied favourite tunes. Some tunes were also transcribed by ear from aural sources. Surviving notebooks provide excellent clues to individual repertoires. Among the holdings of the Nova Scotia Archives is one such manuscript compiled by Havilah Jane Thorne of Bridgetown, Annapolis County, Nova Scotia, in 1839 (Thorne 1839).

There is little accompanying documentation, but it is not difficult to find information about her background. Havilah Jane Thorne was part of a prominent family of English descent who belonged to the Church of England. Her father's grandfather, Edward Thorne, was a Loyalist from New York who immigrated to Nova Scotia in 1753. He was a magistrate. Her father, Stephen Sneden Thorne (1795-1874), was a merchant, the business partner of Timothy Ruggles (his uncle, a grandson of Loyalist General Timothy Ruggles), who was a representative of Granville in the House of Assembly for many

years. Stephen Sneden Thorne himself represented Granville from 1836-57. His son-in-law, Timothy Dwight Ruggles, Esq. (Havilah's husband and cousin), succeeded him as representative of Granville. Stephen Sneden Thorne was Chairman of the Board of Works, and Collector of Customs at Bridgetown, Nova Scotia. Havilah's mother was Mehitable Hall, a granddaughter of John Hall, a pre-Loyalist settler of Lower Granville, Nova Scotia (Calnek 1897, 393; 429-31. Coward 1955, 113; 154-6).

Information about Havilah's personal life has proved elusive. Since both she and her husband were from prominent families, an obituary for Havilah probably would have been published. She died in April 1892, but the January through June 1892 issues of the *Bridgetown Monitor* are missing at the Nova Scotia Archives, and the Annapolis Valley MacDonald Museum is also missing issues from 1892. The manuscript file at the James House Museum in Bridgetown does not contain any relevant materials either. The Nova Scotia Archives does own a composition book written by Havilah's son, Timothy Ruggles, while he was attending the Halifax School for the Deaf and Dumb. He must not have always been completely deaf, since in his entry for Friday, May 18, 1860, he wrote of remembering hearing a band play

when he was a “pretty large boy” (Ruggles 1860). He did not mention his mother playing music, though. Havilah’s notebook is dated 1839, when she would have been 16 years old. Some of the entries may have been written after that date, but seven children undoubtedly kept her busy after her marriage in 1842.

It is not immediately obvious what instrument Havilah played. It is possible that she played a melody instrument such as violin or flute, although this would not have been common for a woman of that time. Pianofortes, chamber organs (not reed organs), guitars, and strings for spinets and harpsichords were available for sale in Halifax by the late 18th Century (Hall 1983, 281-3. McGee 1969, 383). Pianos would not have been common yet in rural Nova Scotia in 1839, but Bridgetown is located on the Annapolis River, which was an important shipping route. Additionally, Havilah’s father, Stephen Sneden Thorne, was a well-to-do merchant and politician and probably traveled to Halifax often. The inventory of furnishings compiled when Stephen Sneden Thorne’s will was probated does not include a piano; however, there is a piano listed among the personal possessions of Havilah’s husband, Timothy Dwight Ruggles, at the time of his death, five years after Havilah herself passed away (Court of Probate Records for Annapolis County, 1897).

Although the majority of the pieces in Havilah’s manuscript consist solely of a melody line, it is reasonable to assume that she played the piano or other keyboard instrument. Early dance tune publications did not always supply bass lines either. It would not be difficult to improvise simple chordal accompaniment for most of the pieces in the manuscript. On the other hand, more of the pieces towards the end of the music book have bass parts than do tunes in the middle of the book, which could indicate a progression of skill. Pages 3-22 of the manuscript are missing, though, so it is hard to justify such an assumption, especially since the tune on page 1 does include a bass line. (The index gives the tune titles for missing pages at the beginning of the book, but does not indicate anything more about the contents of those pages.)

It is not surprising that Havilah was musically literate. In his *History of Bridgetown*, John Irvin wrote that by 1825, singing classes were popular in Bridgetown, so young people learned to read music (Irvin 1914, 40).

Irvin also supplies us with some context for music making in Bridgetown around 1825:

Evening parties for the young were held after tea, at which games and forfeits were the dissipation indulged in. But among that class of people who

did not regard dancing as wicked, “frolics” as they were called were frequently held, at which dancing was the chief, if not the only pastime. Round dances were unknown, but “eights” and “reels” and “fours” were indulged in with a zest that nothing seemed to tire. The “frolic” began early and was kept up till a late hour. There was generally in the neighborhood some one who could play the violin, and whose stock of tunes consisted of “The Flowers of Edinboro”, the “Soldier’s Joy”, “Old Dan Tucker”, and “Catch the Squirrel” ... After supper for a half hour or so, would come the opportunity of the old folk to show their accomplishment in dancing, while the younger people looked on. The oldest of the guests would take their place on the floor in eights and fours. (41-42)

Irvin continues with a description of similar activities in the 1840s:

The cultivation of literature and music among the younger portion of society was encouraged and stimulated by the musical and literary parties held at the houses of these, and other residents.

In winter these weekly entertainments were varied by parties at which, after supper, dancing was moderately indulged in by the youthful members, while the elders lingered at the table and related stories and witty anecdotes or sang some of the long old-fashioned ballads which existed in that day. Each guest was expected to contribute something to the evening’s amusement, Colonel Poyntz being an excellent performer on the flute, frequently delighted the guests with his skill on this instrument. (45)

In addition to being exposed to a musical environment such as in the above descriptions, Havilah took music lessons. According to Elizabeth Ruggles Coward, who donated Havilah’s music book to the Nova Scotia Archives, Havilah and her sister Anna studied with William Monk (Thorne 1839, note inside cover). His name, or perhaps his signature, appears on one of the pages with a date. He may have written out some of the music for the girls. The book seems to have been shared, as Anna’s name or initials are appended to some of the tunes while Havilah marked other tunes as her own. A few of the pages have other names on them as well, which could indicate that some of the tunes were obtained from friends. Sources for the melodies probably include published books, sheet music, magazines, and other musicians. More than one hand seems to have written the music and titles.

Table 1: Summary of findings after annotating the pieces in Havilah Jane Thorne’s music book.

Total Number of tunes identified and/or categorized	73 (or 71, not including duplicated titles)
Number of tunes not sourced	2 (plus a few guesses on tune names that appear only in the table of contents)
Melodies from (composed for) operas	3, not including duplicated title
Melodies from plays, pantomimes	6
Melodies from ballets	2
Melodies from songs by Irish poet Thomas Moore	3
Melodies from songs by Scottish poet Robert Burns	1
Songs from sheet music – identical match	1
Patriotic song melodies	1 (2 settings of “Rule Britannia”)
Popular song melodies not otherwise categorized	~ 8
Traditional song melodies	~ 4
Tunes from Gow publications (Scottish) – identical matches	5 – probably 6
Tunes from Aird publication (Scottish) – notes match	1
Jigs	16 (~ half Scottish, ~ 2 Irish, the rest English or indeterminate British Isles)
Reels	6 (4 of Scottish origin)
Strathspeys	2 (Scottish)
Hornpipes	1
Other duple-time country dance tunes	3
Waltzes	8
Minuets	1
Mazurkas	1
Pieces with bass lines as well as melody lines	15 (The rest have only melody lines.)
Songs with lyrics included in the manuscript	3

Havilah’s music book contains an eclectic mix of music, encompassing light classical, popular, and traditional (“folk”) pieces. Melodies from operas, plays, and ballets mingle with favourite songs, waltzes, and country dance tunes. Nearly all the pieces in Havilah’s music book can be traced to European sources and most are from the British Isles. None can be shown to have originated in Nova Scotia, although the simple waltzes titled “James Waltz” and “Stephen’s Waltz” could have been composed by and/or for members of the family, since James and Stephen were the names of Havilah’s brothers. Her father was also Stephen.

Some of the popular music included in the manuscript was fairly new at the time. For example, the amusing feminist song “The Lords of Creation Men We Call” was first published in New York in 1838 (J.S.R. 1838). It appears, complete with lyrics, in a different hand near the end of the manuscript, so it could have been added after 1839, even though 1839 is written twice in Havilah’s manuscript. The newly-composed ballad “Alice Grey” was published around 1830, and the English parlour song “The Rose of Allandale” may not have been published until the 1830s. “The Swiss Boy”, a “Tyrolese Melody”, was published in 1827, and “The Green Hills of Tyrol”

came from Rossini’s 1829 opera *William Tell*. The latter two tunes reflect a vogue for Alpine music that swept Britain and North America in the early 19th Century.

Some of the books which are now considered to be classic sources of traditional dance tunes were not terribly old in 1839 either. For example, it is clear that two of Havilah’s tunes, “Caller Herring” and “Cameron’s Got His Wife Again”, were copied directly or indirectly from the Second Part to *The Beauties of Niel Gow*, which was published in Edinburgh in 1819 (Gow 1819, 60, 71). Havilah must have had either direct or indirect access to other Gow publications as well. “Miss Forbes Farewell” comes from *Part Fourth of the Complete Repository of Original Scots Tunes* (Niel Gow and Sons 1817, 5) and “The Sailor’s Wife” from *Part Second of the Complete Repository of Original Scots Tunes* (Niel Gow and Sons 1802, 32-3). The first tune in Havilah’s manuscript, “Mr. Stirling of Keir’s Reel”, comes from *A Collection Of Strathspey Reels...Containing The Most Approved Old & The Most Fashionable New Reels* and appears to have been published only in that collection, although it may appear under another name in one other source (Gow and Gow 1797, 4; Gore 1994, Tune Title Index

I 112, Theme Code Index 75). Both treble and bass lines for all these tunes, as well as ornaments and

markings (when they occur), were copied carefully into Thorne's music book.



Figure 2: "Mr. Stirling of Keir's Reel" in Gow and Gow 1797.

Despite Havilah's strongly English background, many of the tunes in her music notebook are of Scottish and Irish origin (although they are not labeled so). This isn't surprising, since collections of tunes of mixed British Isles origin were being published as early as 1778, when James Aird of Glasgow issued *A Selection of Scotch, English, Irish, and Foreign Airs...*, the first of six influential volumes. Most of the tune books published in Scotland around this time contained mainly Scottish repertoire, but tune books published in London often contained some Scottish and Irish melodies alongside the English tunes. Likewise, "Scotch songs" were particularly popular in the 18th Century and into the 19th in Britain, North America, and beyond. (Haydn and Beethoven were even commissioned to arrange Scottish and Irish songs.) Songs by the Irish poet Thomas Moore, composed in the first two decades of the 19th Century and set to traditional melodies, were fashionable as well. Not surprisingly, there are three melodies popularized by Moore's songs in Havilah's manuscript: "'Tis the Last Rose of Summer", "The Meeting of the Waters", and "The Minstrel Boy". In 1839, these songs were probably fresher than those of Scottish national poet Robert Burns; "Comin' Thro' the Rye" ("Gin a Body Meet a Body") is the only melody from a Robert Burns song in Havilah's music book, although there are two settings of it, one written in strathspey rhythm and the other in jig time.

In 1839 in Bridgetown, struggles between England and both Ireland and Scotland seem to have been removed enough that there is no particular political agenda expressed by the musical selections beyond the requisite "Rule Britannia". The melody for

"Boyne Water" is included in the manuscript, with the note "for Mrs. Thorne" (presumably Havilah's mother Mehitable). This Ulster-Irish ballad and march commemorates William of Orange's victory over James Stuart at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. However, the melody may have been a favourite of Mrs. Thorne purely for musical reasons, rather than indicating a political view, since "Wha'll be King but Charlie", a Scottish Jacobite song and jig, and "Over the Water to Charley" are also included in the manuscript.

Many of the pieces in Havilah's notebook are dance tunes. Of these tunes, most are 6/8 jigs, but reels, strathspeys, and waltzes are also represented. The jigs, reels, and strathspeys would be referred to as traditional music today, but many of these pieces were part of popular culture in the early 19th Century. Two of the dance tunes in Havilah's music book, "Speed the Plough" and "Paddy Carey", even began life as theatre pieces before being absorbed into traditional music.

It would be interesting to know whether or not Havilah and her sister Anna ever played the dance tunes in their manuscript for dancing. It would not have been uncommon to dance a few quadrilles at a social gathering in a home. The tunes may have been familiar from attending dances outside of the home. In any case, playing these dance tunes would have been good for developing basic musical skills.

Most of the dance tunes seem to be fairly close to standard published settings, although they are not always set in the keys that a fiddler would expect to see them. "The Wind that Shakes the Barley", in the key of C major rather than the more typical D, is the

one unusual variant of a dance tune that appears in the manuscript. Anna's initials are appended to this tune. The version in the manuscript begins on the tonic note, whereas most settings of the tune usually begin on the dominant. Thorne's opening measure also implies a different chord (vi rather than I) from standard versions. While this could have been an error of transcription (there are evident errors in a number of the tunes), it may represent a local variant.

Aside from the first measure, the stressed notes in Thorne's variant of "The Wind that Shakes the Barley" match published versions of the tune fairly closely, although resolving to the tonic chord halfway through the B-section may be unique to Thorne's variant. Thorne's B-section also makes more use of arpeggiated figures than most. The implied dominant chord (V) in the second half of the second measure of the B-section is somewhat unusual, but not unknown.

The Wind that Shakes the Barley



Figure 3: "The Wind that Shakes the Barley" as in Havilah Thorne's music book (with repeats corrected).

There are contemporary historical references to some of the melodies in Havilah's manuscript being performed in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The *Novascotian* for 26 December 1833 prints a letter reviewing a performance at a Halifax theatre:

...The Orchestra was occupied by three fiddlers, for whose cat gut there were no bowels of compassion in the gallery – the gods, were obstreperously given to music, and whatever might be served up upon the stage, were determined to have their quarter dollars worth out of the fiddlers; who were compelled to play every thing from Alice Gray down to Paddy Carey.

"Paddy Carey", the aforementioned jig derived from a popular Irish theatre song, also appears on several lists of songs/tunes performed at Saint Patrick's Day celebrations in New Brunswick in the 1830s and '40s. The original tune lists are more extensive; only songs/tunes also in Havilah Thorne's manuscript are given below:

The *New Brunswick Courier*, 22 March 1834, "St. Patrick's Day – Sons of Erin," music for toasts at dinner:

- Patrick's Day [jig, set dance]
- Sprig of Shillelagh
- Paddy Carey [song, jig]

The *New Brunswick Courier*, 22 March 1834, St. Patrick's Day toasts by The Friendly Sons of Erin:

- Patrick's Day [jig, set dance]
- March to the Battle Field
- Rule Britannia
- The Minstrel Boy [Thomas Moore song]

The *New Brunswick Courier*, 21 March 1840, "The Dinner of the Society of St. Patrick," music for toasts:

- Patrick's Day [jig, set dance]
- Haste to the Wedding [jig]
- Rule Britannia
- Spring [sprig] of Shillelah

The *New Brunswick Courier*, 3 April 1841, "St. Patrick's Day toasts at St. Stephen" (Sullivan, 1841):

- Patrick's Day [jig, set dance]
- Paddy Carey [song, jig]
- Sprig of Shillelagh
- Rule Britannia
- Speed the Plough [reel]
- Money in Both Pockets [jig]
- March to the Battle Field

Instrumental tunes in Havilah's notebook that are still popular today in Nova Scotia include:

- Lord McDonald's Reel
- Wha'll be King but Charlie (jig)

- The Flowers of Edinburgh (reel/Scots-measure)
- Cameron's Got His Wife Again (strathspey)
- The Sailor's Wife (jig)
- The Wind that Shakes the Barley (reel)
- Scots Come Over the Borders (Blue Bonnets Over the Border, air and jig)

A number of the other tunes would also be familiar to many players of traditional music today.

Havilah Jane Thorne and her sister Anna kept up with current musical fashions in Britain and North America, but they also appear to have enjoyed melodies and songs from their parents' and grandparents' eras. The diverse mix of tunes in Havilah's music book may not be representative of the repertoires of Nova Scotian musicians from other backgrounds and social classes in 1839. However, it does provide a window on popular and traditional-style music in Nova Scotia at this time. Very few clues remain as to the traditional dance music played by musicians in mainland Nova Scotia before the era of Don Messer, so Havilah's manuscript is particularly valuable in this regard.

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Notes

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