

The Maritimes

We would know very little about Canadian vernacular music were it not for the efforts of a fairly small number of song collectors. The Maritimes are rich in traditional song and instrumental music, and there is a vibrant regional musical culture that has built on that legacy and still flourishes today. It is in part thanks to Helen Creighton's dedication of her life to the collection and promotion of Nova Scotian traditional music (including Acadian song) that we can enjoy this cultural legacy and watch it develop further as a living phenomenon. But Creighton was not the only collector-scholar to focus on the traditional music of the Canadian Maritimes. Without neglecting Creighton's work, we must therefore go beyond it to obtain a broader picture of the varieties of folk song in the Maritimes, paying attention to New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island as well as Nova Scotia. We must recognize the work of other important collectors in the region, including Roy Mackenzie, Louise Manny, and Sandy Ives. Although the main focus is on English-language song, some attention is also paid to the Gaelic tradition in Cape Breton and recent attempts to revive it, and to the legacy of francophone song from Acadia. We also recognize that Nova Scotia has a small corpus of industrial song, deriving from the history of coal-mining in the province, especially in (but not limited to) the island of Cape Breton.

To begin with, how can we obtain an overview of the different kinds of folk music found in the Maritime provinces and of the song-collecting that had been done there by the early 1970s? One way is to read Helen Creighton's own survey of the subject in the 1972 issue of *Ethnomusicology*. It was titled "Canada's Maritime Provinces – An Ethnomusicological Survey."¹ Another way is to obtain an initial sense of the lives and work of the major collectors in the region: Creighton, Mackenzie, Manny and Ives. For the first three of these it is easy to consult the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* articles that are now found in *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.² However, for Sandy Ives one needs to turn elsewhere, to the New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia, where one can find a brief overview of the career of Edward "Sandy" Ives.³

Roy Mackenzie was Creighton's precursor in mainland Nova Scotia. The quickest way of getting a sense of what Mackenzie achieved is to consult Martin Lovelace's 1977 article in *Canadian Folk Music Journal*, titled "W. Roy Mackenzie as a Collector of Folk Songs."⁴ Going beyond this is a matter of studying Mackenzie's two important books, *The Quest of*

*the Ballad*⁵ and *Ballads and Sea Songs from Nova Scotia*.⁶

Roy Mackenzie's successor was one of the greatest Canadian folklorists and collectors. Helen Creighton's base was Halifax, although she collected in Cape Breton and New Brunswick as well as on the mainland of Nova Scotia. She is a controversial figure who has excited as much condemnation as praise. Her legacy has been approached from different perspectives, positive and negative, which reflect alternative schools of thought in folklore, ethnomusicology, and cultural studies. Often in academic disputes the protagonists' values and ideological commitments are implicit in their arguments but not stated overtly. On this occasion, however, they are easy to discern. The scholarly debate about the nature of "folk song" has revolved around the claim made by David Harker⁷ and Georgina Boyes,⁸ using a neo-Marxist perspective, that the Late Victorian and Edwardian collectors created a body of "fakesong" that they attributed to romanticized peasants living in an "imagined village".⁹ In Canada, a parallel and somewhat derivative debate was initiated by Ian McKay in his book, *The Quest of the Folk*, in which he criticized Creighton for allegedly promulgating a misleading image of Nova Scotia as a rural backwater.¹⁰

Creighton, McKay claims, had an equally romantic conception of Nova Scotian informants as peasant-like "folk," and so fell into the same errors that Harker and Boyes attribute to such pioneer English song collectors as Sabine Baring-Gould and Cecil Sharp. By extension, it could be suggested that much the same failing vitiated the work of all, or nearly all, the pioneer Canadian collectors, including not only such an overt disciple of Sharp as Maud Karpeles but also such respected figures as Marius Barbeau and Kenneth Peacock. However, McKay made Creighton the Canadian 'test case', and it is only by a detailed examination of Creighton's work as a folklorist and song-collector that one can evaluate the legitimacy of his claim.

McKay's essential charge against Creighton is that she privileged in her collecting and publications rural Nova Scotia and its older traditions, thereby presenting an image of the province that ignored its modern and urban aspects. More specifically, Creighton has been attacked for not collecting songs from Cape Breton miners and their families. Like Cecil Sharp, it is claimed, she was a Late Romantic who disliked industrialization and thought it inimical to folk song. So she ignored 'modern' Nova Scotia, and, like the tourist industry today, projected a false

image of the province that distorted its history and denigrated its industrial workers by airbrushing them out of existence. To what extent is this critique of Creighton valid? Clary Croft's biography, *Helen Creighton: Canada's First Lady of Folklore*, combined with a full list of Creighton's publications, will give one much of the evidence one needs to make up one's mind.¹¹ Croft's biography was reviewed by David Gregory in *Canadian Folk Music*,¹² and Croft contributed his own thoughts in "Looking Back on Helen" in the same 2004 issue.¹³ One can also consult Creighton's autobiography, *A Life in Folklore*.¹⁴

It is true that Creighton did not collect miners' songs, but she did collect songs from the people involved in Nova Scotia's other main industry, shipping. She did collect predominantly in rural areas, but also in smaller towns such as Lunenburg and in the capital, Halifax, including from black inhabitants there. She ignored neither Cape Breton nor such linguistic minorities as Gaelic and French speakers; indeed, her books on Acadian and Gaelic folksong are classics in their respective fields. In short, she was remarkably eclectic in choosing the subjects of her fieldwork and her publications provide a panorama of Nova Scotian song, but admittedly with that one significant gap. So why did she omit mining songs? My guess is that, as a conservative, middle-class lady from Dartmouth, she had no contacts with the working-class males of the Cape Breton coal industry, and plenty else to concern herself with. So it was a job she left for someone else, and John O'Donnell would later take it on and plug the hole.¹⁵

So we are left with a mixed answer. No, Creighton did not focus exclusively on the most traditional aspects of Nova Scotia culture, but was in fact quite eclectic in her collecting from a wide variety of the province's songsmiths. Yes, she did ignore the industrial songs of Cape Breton miners and her politics were conservative and somewhat anti-working class. We are left with another question. Should one blame a collector for what she did not do, when in any case she did so much more than anyone else? It is a question that could be posed about almost any of the major collectors, since nobody is perfect. But is it not better to appreciate what they achieved rather than denigrate them for what they did not attempt? Which in Creighton's case means going beyond this scholarly debate to explore in more detail the ballad and song legacy of her collecting in Cape Breton, on the mainland of Nova Scotia, and also in New Brunswick

An overview of Creighton's fieldwork and legacy for her native province can be found in David Gregory's article "Helen Creighton and the Traditional Songs of Nova Scotia" in that same special issue of *Canadian Folk Music* devoted to

Creighton.¹⁶ Two other useful articles in *Canadian Folk Music* are Croft's guide to the Creighton archives at the Nova Scotia provincial archives in Halifax,¹⁷ and Creighton Barrett's "From Acetate Disc to Digital Audio: Tracing the Copies of Helen Creighton's Sound Recordings," which is, of course, focused on her later fieldwork with a tape recorder.¹⁸

Unfortunately, most of Creighton's major published song collections are out of print and not available as e-books, but they can, of course, be found in good libraries. The first was *Songs and Ballads from Nova Scotia*, published in 1932.¹⁹ Creighton noted the tunes as well as the words by ear and she was never entirely satisfied with the accuracy of her fieldwork, so she was overjoyed to find a friend and collaborator in English musician-teacher Doreen Senior. They worked together during the 1930s, with Senior taking down melodies and Creighton lyrics. David Gregory has given an overview of their collecting expeditions together in his 2004 *Canadian Folk Music* article titled "The Creighton-Senior Collaboration, 1932-51,"²⁰ Many of the fruits of their labours were eventually published in 1950 as *Traditional Songs from Nova Scotia*.²¹ Senior had previously selected some of the best songs in "Folk Songs Collected in the Province of Nova Scotia, Canada."²²

Thanks to the generosity of Alan Lomax, Creighton started collecting with a disk recorder during World War II, which she later exchanged for a tape recorder. Although most of her recordings ended up in either the Library of Congress archives or the Canadian National Museum archives, she found a few publishing outlets for some of her collecting. In 1950 "Dances, Games, and Songs" came out in *Folklore of Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia*.²³ Five years later "Fiddles, Folk Songs, and Fishermen's Yarns" appeared in *Canadian Geographical Journal*.²⁴ In 1964 her Gaelic collecting from Cape Breton saw the light of day in *Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia*, co-edited with Calum MacLeod.²⁵ Another major work was her *Folk Songs from Southern New Brunswick*, which featured the repertoire of Angelo Dorrnan.²⁶ And her francophone Acadian collecting was finally published as *La Fleur du Rosier: Chansons folkloriques d'Acadie*.²⁷ As for the songs of the Nova Scotia black community, she reported in 1980 on what she had gathered in "Collecting Songs of Nova Scotia Blacks" in a Festschrift for Herbert Halpert.²⁸

Following Creighton as important Maritimes folklorists and song-collectors were Sandy Ives and Louise Manny, who was the leading authority on traditional song in northern New Brunswick. Manny, who ran the Miramichi Folk Festival, featuring traditional singers and instrumentalists, published *Songs of Miramichi* in 1968.²⁹ An introduction to her life and work can be found in a biographical article in

Encyclopedia of Music in Canada.³⁰ A sample of the songs she collected is given in *11 Miramichi Songs, Sung by Marie Hare*.³¹

Edward “Sandy” Ives also collected in New Brunswick and in Maine, but he was an authority on the song culture and fiddling traditions of Prince Edward Island. His 1977 article in *Canadian Folk Music Journal* titled “Lumbercamp Singing and the Two Traditions” provides a good sample of his approach as a collector and the kind of material he recorded.³² This can be supplemented by his article on “Twenty-One Folk Songs from Prince Edward Island”³³ and his book on *Folk Songs of New Brunswick*.³⁴

We can conclude by recognizing some good entry points into the study of certain major currents in Nova Scotian folk music. There is, of course, the Scottish heritage: songs in both Gaelic and English, and the tradition of Highland piping. We have already noticed Creighton’s pioneering collection of Nova Scotian Gaelic song.³⁵ The Gaelic language and song traditions are strongest in Cape Breton, as Richard Mackinnon’s survey “Cape Breton Scottish Folk Song Collections” underlines.³⁶

Also from Cape Breton there is a body of industrial song, mainly reflecting the stormy history of coal mining on the island. John O’Donnell is the authority on this, and his articles not only discuss the body of song that reflect the mining experience in Canada but also examine the cultural impact of labour songs on Cape Breton communities. The two essential readings are his “Labour’s Cultural Impact on the Community: A Cape Breton Perspective” and “Towards a Collection of Coal-Mining Songs in Canada,” both written for *Canadian Folk Music Journal*.³⁷ Another interesting article by O’Donnell is “Blackleg Miners in Cape Breton,” which appeared in a 1984 issue of *Canadian Folk Music*.³⁸ He has also edited two song collections: ‘*And Now the Fields Are Green*’: *A Collection of Coal Mining Songs in Canada*³⁹ and *Men of the Deeps*.⁴⁰

Finally there is the francophone wing of Maritimes folk music, a longstanding tradition of Acadian song that is still vibrant today. This is a very significant aspect of Maritimes song culture. One standard collection of Acadian songs is *Chansons d’Acadie*, edited by Anselme Chiasson and Daniel Boudreau.⁴¹ Another, more recent, is *Acadie/Expérience: Choix de textes acadiens: plaintes, poèmes et chansons*, edited by Jean-Guy Rens and Raymond Leblanc.⁴² And we must not forget Creighton’s *La Fleur du Rosier: Chansons folkloriques d’Acadie*.⁴³ Ron LaBelle, the current academic authority on Acadian traditional music, co-edited that, and his articles on Acadian songs and performers are most valuable. See, for example, “Some Acadian Ballads” in a 1984 issue of *Canadian Folk Music*,⁴⁴ and LaBelle’s article on Al-

lan Kelly, one of the most respected masters of the Acadian song tradition.⁴⁵ Another expert is Charlotte Cormier, but her useful overview of Acadian traditional music titled “La musique traditionnelle en Acadie” can be difficult to track down.⁴⁶ However, her article titled “Situation de la recherche en folklore acadien” in the 1975 issue of *Canadian Folk Music Journal* is a good place to go to find out more about other collections of Acadian songs and older secondary literature on the subject.⁴⁷

Notes

¹Creighton, Helen. “Canada’s Maritime Provinces – An Ethnomusicological Survey,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 16, September 1972, 404-414.

²“Helen Creighton,” “Roy Mackenzie” and “Louise Manny,” *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.

³“Edward Dawson “Sandy” Ives,” *New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia Online* at http://w3.stu.ca/stu/sites/nble/i/ives_edward_dawson.html

⁴Lovelace, Martin. “W. Roy Mackenzie as a Collector of Folk Songs,” *Canadian Folk Music Journal*, Vol. 5 (1977), 5-11.

⁵Mackenzie, William Roy. *The Quest of the Ballad*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1919.

⁶Mackenzie, William Roy. *Ballads and Sea Songs from Nova Scotia*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1928. Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1963.

⁷Harker, Dave. *Fakesong: the Manufacture of British ‘Folk Song’ 1700 to the Present Day*, ix-xvii. Milton Keynes, U.K.: Open University Press, 1985.

⁸Boyes, Georgina. “A Name for Our Ignorance: The Invention of the Folk,” in *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology, and the English Folk Revival*, 1-21. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1993.

⁹For a critique of this thesis, see Gregory, E. David. “Fakesong in an Imagined Village? A Critique of the Harker-Boyes Thesis,” *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Fall 2009), 18-26.

¹⁰Ian McKay. *The Quest of the Folk*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994).

¹¹Clary Croft. *Helen Creighton: Canada’s First Lady of Folklore*. Halifax, NS: Nimbus, 1999.

¹²Gregory, E. David. “Review of Clary Croft, *Helen Creighton: Canada’s First Lady of Folklore*,” *Canadian Folk Music/Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol 38, No. 2 (Summer 2004), 41-42.

¹³Croft, Clary. “Looking Back on Helen,” *Canadian Folk Music/Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol 38, No. 2 (Summer 2004), 36-37.

- ¹⁴Creighton, Helen. *A Life in Folklore*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975.
- ¹⁵O'Donnell, John C. "Towards a Collection of Coal-Mining Songs in Canada," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 12 (1984), 30-37. O'Donnell, John C. "Labour's Cultural Impact on the Community: A Cape Breton Perspective," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 14 (1986), 49-59 and 64.
- ¹⁶Gregory, E. David. "Helen Creighton and the Traditional Songs of Nova Scotia", *Canadian Folk Music/Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol 38, No. 2 (Summer 2004), 1-17.
- ¹⁷Croft, Clary. "The Helen Creighton Fonds at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia," *Canadian Folk Music/Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol 38, No. 2 (Summer 2004), 37-39.
- ¹⁸Barrett, Creighton. "From Acetate Disc to Digital Audio: Tracing the Copies of Helen Creighton's Sound Recordings," *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Summer 2009), 9-19.
- ¹⁹Creighton, Helen, ed. *Songs and Ballads from Nova Scotia*. Toronto: Dent, 1932. Reprinted: N.Y.: Dover, 1966.
- ²⁰Gregory, E. David. "The Creighton-Senior Collaboration, 1932-51," *Canadian Folk Music/Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne*, 38: 2 (Summer 2004), 18-35.
- ²¹Creighton, Helen and Doreen H. Senior, eds. *Traditional Songs from Nova Scotia*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1950.
- ²²Creighton, Helen and Doreen H. Senior. "Folk Songs Collected in the Province of Nova Scotia, Canada," *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* (1951), 83-91.
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- ²⁶Creighton, Helen, ed. *Folk Songs from Southern New Brunswick*. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1971.
- ²⁷Creighton, Helen and Ronald LaBelle, eds. *La Fleur du Rosier: Chansons folkloriques d'Acadie*. Sydney: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1988.
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- ²⁹Manny, Louise and James Reginald Willson, eds. *Songs of Miramichi*. Fredericton, N.B.: Brunswick Press, 1968.
- ³⁰"Louise Manny," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.
- ³¹Ives, Edward D. and Louise Manny, eds. *11 Miramichi Songs, Sung by Marie Hare*. Newcastle, N.B., New Brunswick Travel Bureau., 1962.
- ³²Ives, Edward D. "Lumbercamp Singing and the Two Traditions," *Canadian Folk Music Journal*, 5 (1977), 17-23.
- ³³Ives, Edward D. "Twenty-One Folk Songs from Prince Edward Island," *Northeast Folklore* 5 (1963), 1-87.
- ³⁴Ives, Edward D, ed. *Folk Songs of New Brunswick*. Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane, 1989.
- ³⁵See note 25.
- ³⁶Mackinnon, Richard. "Cape Breton Scottish Folk Song Collections," *Culture and Tradition* 4 (1979), 23-29.
- ³⁷See note 15.
- ³⁸O'Donnell, John C. "Blackleg Miners in Cape Breton," *Canadian Folk Music/Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne* 18: 3 (July 1984), 1-4.
- ³⁹O'Donnell, John C. *'And Now the Fields Are Green': A Collection of Coal Mining Songs in Canada*. Sydney, NS: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1992.
- ⁴⁰O'Donnell, John C., ed. *Men of the Deeps*. Waterloo, ON: Waterloo Music Company, 1975.
- ⁴¹Chiasson, Anselme & Daniel Boudreau, eds. *Chansons d'Acadie*. Moncton: Editions des Aboiteaux, 1942, 1944, 1946, 1972 and 1979. First four volumes reissued as *Chansons d'Acadie. Séries 1 à 4*. Moncton: Centre d'études acadiennes, 2002.
- ⁴²Rens, Jean-Guy et Raymond Leblanc. *Acadie/Expérience: Choix de textes acadiens: plaintes, poèmes et chansons*. Montréal: Partis pris, 1977.
- ⁴³See note 27.
- ⁴⁴Labelle, Ronald. "Some Acadian Ballads," *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne* 18: 3 (July 1984), 11-15.
- ⁴⁵Labelle, Ronald. "Reflections on the Passing of Allan Kelly: A Master of the Acadian Song Tradition," *MUSICultures* 34/35 (2007/2008), 95-110.
- ⁴⁶Cormier, Charlotte. "La musique traditionnelle en Acadie," *Mémoires de la Société royale du Canada*, 4e série, tome 15 (1977), 239-259.
- ⁴⁷Cormier, Charlotte. "Situation de la recherche en folklore acadien," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 3 (1975), 30-34.