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Joe Jimmy Alec Visits the Gaelic Mod and Escapes Unscathed:  
The Nova Scotia Gaelic Revivals

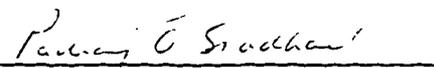
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A thesis submitted by Jonathan Dembling in partial fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree  
in Atlantic Canada Studies at Saint Mary's University

September 1997

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Joe Jimmy Alec Visits the Gaelic Mod and Escapes Unscathed: The Nova Scotia Gaelic Revivals**

**Jonathan Dembling**

**September 1997**

Attempts to revive the Gaelic language in Nova Scotia have failed numerous times in the past. Now another Gaelic Revival is underway. This thesis looks at the history of Gaelic Revivals in Nova Scotia and how they reflected the evolving Gaelic identity and its relationship to the wider provincial and Canadian society. The first eighty years of Gaelic life in Nova Scotia saw a taking root and strengthening of the language and its attendant cultural expressions. The following half decade shows a marked decline in the numbers of Gaelic speakers, a result of outmigration and the internalization of negative attitudes toward Gaelic culture held by outsiders. This period is followed by the first organized attempts from outside the Gaelic communities to revive the language, usually accompanied by romantic and tartanist ideals of Gaelic culture with which Nova Scotian Gaels could not identify. Since the 1970's, a new sensibility has accompanied efforts at language revitalization, one which attempts to identify and promote those aspects of Gaelic life which have been part of the lived experience of Nova Scotian Gaels, but were heretofore unknown or unappreciated by past Revivalists. The current situation reflects a continuing dialog over what constitutes "real" Gaelic culture, while at the same time some parts of that culture are being promoted worldwide under the assimilative labels "Celtic" and "East Coast". As the native Gaelic speakers age and diminish in numbers, the future of Gaelic society in the province is increasingly in the hands of adult learners. Data from a survey of sixty-six such learners indicates that, as they become more fluent in Gaelic, they interact more with native speakers and become more in tune with the lived Gaelic reality, as opposed to the more romantic notions derived from the tartanism which is still ubiquitous throughout the province.

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**Note:**

Interviews conducted with Gaelic instructors are quoted throughout this paper. The interviewees are coded as GI-1, GI-2, etc.

## Introduction

*Roughly every 20 years there's a lot of talk about a Gaelic revival, and after every Gaelic revival there are fewer people speaking Gaelic than there were before.*

Frances MacEachen, editor, *Am Bràighe*

According to numerous splashy headlines over the last few years, Nova Scotia is currently in the midst of a Gaelic Revival. What exactly is meant by “revival” seems to vary according to the journalist, but only rarely does it refer to linguistic regeneration or revitalization. In the case of Gaelic in Nova Scotia, the following factors are often mentioned as part of the definition:

- more people are learning Gaelic
- more people (especially younger people) are taking an interest in things Gaelic
- Gaelic songs, bagpipe and fiddle music are popular
- there are many young people singing Gaelic songs and playing the pipes and fiddle
- some of these young people have achieved national and international fame

In these stories, the actual survival of the spoken language is rarely dealt with in any depth. When it is, the prognosis is usually pessimistic. Clearly then, there is a distinction to be made between a Gaelic Revival, encompassing the phenomena listed above, and a revival of Gaelic.

But how accurate are the media reports? Are more young people learning Gaelic and playing strathspeys on the fiddle? If so, a number of interesting questions are raised. How do these younger people — the Revival community — differ from their elders from whom

they take their inspiration? What form of Gaelic culture will they hand down to the generation that follows them? How is this Revival different from all other Revivals?

There are two major aspects to the issue of the Gaelic Revival which are closely linked: the language and the culture. While it is important to determine whether or not the language is making a comeback, it is equally important to determine its social context, and how this context may have changed. If a revival is the result of the efforts of second-language learners, then it is crucial that the community formed by those learners be examined, to see in which ways they have changed the culture, and in which ways they have kept it intact. The same goes for the particular aspects of the culture: if there is a new generation of Cape Breton fiddlers, it is important to see what they keep, what they throw away, and what they modify of the tradition they inherited. In other words, the question is not just “will Gaelic survive?”, but “what Gaelic will survive?”

This is not the first Gaelic Revival in Nova Scotia. They have come and gone all throughout this century. In many ways, the current Revival is an extension of the last one, which began in the early 1970's. Like its previous incarnations, this Gaelic Revival is not just a struggle for the language. It is an ongoing debate over culture and identity, the authentic and the ersatz, right and wrong. There are clashes of ideology, egos, and financial interests.

This thesis will examine the nature of the current Gaelic Revival in Nova Scotia, comparing it with previous Revivals. Particular emphasis will be placed on the historical perspective, the evolution of disparate Gaelic identities, and the role of adult second-language learners of Gaelic. Results of a survey of active Gaelic learners will be analyzed and com-

pared with the historical record. In the conclusion, these factors will be synthesized into a prognosis for the future of the Gaelic language and culture in Nova Scotia — its viability as well as its composition.

## **Theoretical Background**

Language is more than sound and grammar. We use it not only to convey information, but also to express emotion, to enlighten and deceive, to oppress and to resist oppression. It is both the means and the product of social interaction. It is indeed the case that “social life must be seen as a source of the organization of linguistic means.” (Hymes 1974)

Language is an important social marker. It unites people and divides them, helping to define the “us” and the “other”. Many linguists agree with the Whorfian theory of linguistic determinism (though not expressly stated by Whorf himself), which holds that language, to a greater or lesser extent, determines thought and, by extension, behavior (Fishman 1989). It is the basis of ethnicity and a primary rationale of nation-states. The social implications of language can be seen around the world, from the Middle East (where one’s position on the disputed development in East Jerusalem can be determined by whether one refers to the neighborhood as “Har Homa” or “Jabal Abu Ghunem”) to the “language police” of Québec and the English-Only movement in the USA (Fishman 1989).

As language affects society, it also impacts the individual. A person’s language or accent marks them and associates them with a particular ethnicity, class or other group (Labov 1969; in Giglioli 1972). One may get or be denied a job, make friends and business partnerships, be regarded as intelligent or unintelligent, etc. all on the basis of how one speaks. In short, “language acts are acts of identity”:

Individual identity and social identity are mediated by language. Language features are the link which binds the individual and societies together. Language offers both the means of creating this link and that of expressing it. Such features imply the whole range of language use, from phonetic features to lexical units, syntactic structures, and personal names. (Tabouret-Keller 1997)

If language is crucial to individual and social identity, then to change one's language is equal to changing one's identity. Language change at the societal level is a common phenomenon, known as language shift. Language shift usually occurs when the speakers of an economically and politically subordinate language gradually begin to speak the dominant language and abandon their own. Language death or obsolescence occurs when an entire language community undergoes language shift (Dorian 1981).

According to Edwards (1985), ethnic identity is not strictly bound to language, and ethnic self-identification may continue after language shift. He does not suggest, however, that cultural composition — traditions, expressions and values — remains unchanged in this process, rather that the ethnic identity becomes redefined according to its new composition. This of course leads to the potential for conflict when this process occurs while there is still a viable ethnic language which claims the same ethnic identification. An example is Ireland, where an English-language Irish identity was created and maintained despite the continuance of a quite distinct Gaelic Irish identity.

While much scholarship has been dedicated to the study of language shift and obsolescence, relatively little has been focused on efforts to combat these trends, a phenomenon termed Reversing Language Shift (RLS) by Joshua Fishman (1991a). Fishman notes that such inattention is unjustified, considering that there are millions of people currently en-

gaged in RLS efforts worldwide. The studies which have been done tend to focus on governmental efforts (e.g. bilingual education and minority-language media) to the exclusion of grass-roots social movements. Fishman's own work has done a great deal to fill in this gap. His main thesis is that in order for RLS efforts to succeed in their stated goals (usually the restoration or revitalization of the minority language), they must focus on inter-generational transmission within the family and the community. If this is not accomplished, larger scale efforts and lobbying government for assistance prove ineffective and are a drain on resources which are usually scarce to begin with.

On the other hand, both Fishman (1991a) and Nancy Dorian (1987) note that there are potentially beneficial side effects to RLS efforts even if they do not succeed in language restoration or revitalization. These include the destigmatization of the minority language (and by extension the minority community) and the recovery or reassertion of the minority community's history.

The role of adult second-language learners is critical to many RLS efforts, particularly those in which the native speakers are beyond child-bearing age. It is therefore disappointing that so little scholarship has gone into the social perspective of learners, as opposed to the thoroughly investigated linguistic perspective. Trosset's (1986) ethnographic experience among Welsh learners and native speakers provides a relevant exception. She describes learning Welsh as "an interactive process of entering a community and acquiring a new identity," in which both the learner and the native speaker negotiate and renegotiate their social relationships. She further notes that, once fluency has been achieved, it is often neces-

sary to pass oneself off as a native in order to engage in conversation with native speakers which does not center on the learner's status as a learner.

The connection between cultural identity and RLS efforts is often problematic. McDonald's (1994) study of Breton-language activists revealed that they form a *de facto* separate community from the native Breton-speaking community to which they presumably aspire. Their assumptions about the nature of the "true peasant" Bretons often clash with reality, particularly as regards attitudes toward the language itself. For example, the native community is quite unselfconscious in its use of Breton, and is equally unselfconscious in its use of French. Activists, on the other hand, view Breton as everything from a badge of separateness to a political weapon, and are often adamant about not speaking French.

Ian McKay (1994) also notes this conflict between the idealized core community (the Folk) and those who presume to speak for them. In his view, many of those who aspired to either assist the Folk or become one of them were little more than exploiters of identity and history (and often labour), part of the hegemonic process:

To rewrite the history of subaltern classes and groups in ways that ostensibly pay them homage, all the while draining their history of specificity, is one subtle and effective method of preserving their inferior position. (McKay 1994:xvi)

The case of Gaelic in Nova Scotia involves all these issues of language, identity, ethnicity and class. They exist, implicitly or explicitly, in all minority language situations.

## **Other Minority Language Revivals**

There are numerous cases of minority language and cultural revivals to compare with the situation in Nova Scotia. The cases with the most similarities are outlined briefly here.

### **Gaelic in Scotland and Ireland**

Gaelic is currently spoken by roughly 70,000 people in Scotland (less than 2% of the population), almost all of whom are native-speakers. In the last few decades there has been a steady increase in the range and availability of language-learning opportunities throughout Scotland, and a recent survey suggested that as many as 250,000 people in Scotland are currently learning Gaelic (*The Scotsman*, 13/1/96), although the survey does not say to what extent — serious learners who attain second-language-speaker status would likely comprise a tiny portion of that figure. Recent developments have included the expansion of Gaelic on television and radio, the growth of Gaelic-medium and bilingual schools, and a similar growth in the number of Gaelic-medium playgroups (*Cothrom*, no. 8, summer 1996). Pop groups that sing in Gaelic such as Runrig and Capercaillie are popular, while at the same time there is growing interest in Scotland in the musical traditions of Nova Scotia, which are only now being recognized as an important cultural heritage which had been lost there.

Increasingly, Gaelic-language activity is taking place in Lowland and urban areas of Scotland. There are several reasons for this. A large percentage of Scotland's Gaelic-speaking population lives in and around the cities, Glasgow in particular (Thomson 1983:111). The cities also have high concentrations of learners. The combination of the two makes for a largely middle-class and culturally confident Gàidhealtachd (Gaelic-speaking area or com-

munity), which is more likely to push for such things as Gaelic-medium education through the secondary level (something not achieved in the Western Isles, where Gaelic-speakers are the majority [Finlay MacLeod, personal communication]). While it would be a gross exaggeration to claim that Gaelic Scotland is dividing between urban “haves” and rural island “have-nots”, there is a difference between the two communities, along the lines of those noted in Brittany by McDonald (1994), where the urban Gaels place more of an emphasis on Gaelic as an entity unto itself.

In Ireland, Irish has been a compulsory school subject since the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. Since that time, the Gaeltacht, or largely Irish-speaking communities scattered mostly along the west coast, has been legally defined as such, and most native Irish speakers come from there. There is however a significant population of non-Gaeltacht native Irish speakers, as well as of learners who have achieved fluency.

As a result of Ireland’s education policy, the number of “learners” (i.e. virtually the entire population of the Republic of Ireland) far outstrips the number of native-speakers. Thus while the 1981 census reported that one third of the population of the Republic claims fluency in Irish, the vast majority of these would be learners (Fishman 1991a:127). However, the number of people who are self-motivated learners, i.e. who apply themselves beyond school hours to learn and interact in the language, is only a fraction of the population. Nonetheless, the combination of a small number of native-speakers and a huge population of non-native speakers with significant exposure to the language in some form means that Irish learners are very significant in the overall Gaelic-speaking community of Ireland.

In the six counties of Northern Ireland, where Irish has little official support, there have been some successful grassroots developments, the most impressive of which is the establishment by second-language learners of a fully functional Irish speaking community in the middle of Belfast, complete with an Irish-medium school which attracts students from beyond the community. This has led to a level of incipient bilingualism throughout West Belfast which is notable for the “spontaneity of the phenomenon.” (Maguire 1991:237)

### **Welsh and Breton**

Welsh and Breton are both spoken by roughly a half million people in populations of approximately 3 million. However Wales benefits from a much greater government commitment to the Welsh language than Brittany does for Breton, providing such things as limited official status, radio and television stations, and Welsh-medium education (Davies 1993). Welsh-language education for adults has also become a booming business, encompassing evening classes, immersions, television programs and the like. Trosset’s observation that “the real reason people do not speak Welsh to learners is that they have no real concept of a non-Welsh Welsh speaker” (Trosset 1986:172) grows less true by the year; perhaps only in Ireland is there more visible a phenomenon of adult learners of a minority language. Learners are now prominent as Welsh teachers and writers (Davies & Bowie 1992:176-181).

Welsh is also experiencing a Revival in Patagonia in Argentina, where it has almost died out more than a century after an intentional Welsh-speaking colony was established there. The gains being made are necessarily modest, largely taking the form of a renewed

interest in things Welsh, as opposed to more serious RLS efforts (*The Economist*, 25/11/95:44).

Breton faces the problem of a more antipathetic central government. Nevertheless, there is a good deal of grassroots activity on behalf of the language, of which the DIWAN movement is perhaps the most notable. DIWAN is a locally organized Breton-medium school system which manages to survive with minimal government support. There are also Breton-speaking “communes”. McDonald (1994) notes, however, that there is often a disconnect between native speakers and adult learners. Learning Breton is generally considered much more of a political act than, say, learning Gaelic in Nova Scotia. Part of the reason for this is the French government’s resistance to recognize Breton as a legitimate language and culture. There are also political fissions going back to World War II, when some Breton activists collaborated with the Nazis in exchange for limited autonomy, which continue to this day (McDonald 1994).

### **Cornish and Manx**

Cornish and Manx are both “revived” languages. Cornish died out in the 18th-19th centuries, while the last native-speaker of Manx died in 1974 (Thomson & Pilgrim 1988:2). Both languages now have populations of several hundred learners with varying degrees of fluency (Thomson & Pilgrim 1988:2; Madeg 1994:12). While the numbers are small, they are interesting in the context of this study in that the *entire* community is in each case composed of learners. In both cases they are “intentional communities”, dependent on proactive interaction among adult learners. In a few cases, those who have acquired Cornish or Manx

in adulthood have attempted to raise their children in the language, but as yet there have been no studies done on the children's use of language (Madeg 1994:12). The situation today in Cape Breton strongly resembles that of the Isle of Man a half century ago, when there were still a few older native Manx speakers and a small but enthusiastic group of people who learned Manx from them (Thomson & Pilgrim 1988:2). Those learners are now the elder statespeople of the Manx Gaelic community. A study of Gaelic in Man today would likely be full of lessons — positive and negative — for revivalists in Nova Scotia.

### **Hebrew and Yiddish**

Hebrew is perhaps the best-known “success story” of language revival, a language which had been “dead” (i.e. as an everyday spoken language) for 2000 years, then revived within a half-century in Palestine/Israel. Therefore, like Cornish and Manx, Hebrew was at one time a language community composed entirely of learners. Today it is still an acquired language for many Israelis (and others outside Israel). Hopeful comparisons with Hebrew are common among enthusiasts of languages such as Cornish and Manx, but the circumstances in which Hebrew was revived — no other universally common language (although Yiddish came close; however it was largely disdained by the Zionists: see below), common familiarity with Biblical Hebrew, and the peculiar nationalism of the Zionists, to name a few — would be difficult to replicate anywhere else.

Yiddish, by contrast, has been in decline for a century. The combination of assimilation in the Americas and Western Europe, suppression in the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries, and the extermination of 6 million Jews in the Holocaust (the vast majority of

whom were Yiddish-speakers) have left the Yiddish-speaking community on extremely shaky ground. The language could not even find support in Israel, where it was seen simultaneously as a competitor with Hebrew and a shameful reminder of life in Diaspora (Fishman 1991b). Apart from ultra-Orthodox circles, where it is still thriving across all generations, Yiddish is largely the language of an increasingly ageing population. Simultaneously there is an increasing interest in the study of Yiddish, and the numbers of Yiddish-learners continues to grow as the (secular) native-speaking population declines (Fishman 1991b). Thus the importance of the learner of Yiddish is similar to that of the Gaelic-learner in Cape Breton, in that non-native speakers are increasingly defining the secular Yiddish-speaking community.

## Historical Background

### Gaelic in Scotland

Although Gaelic was perhaps never the native language of all of Scotland's people, it was for a time the lingua franca of the country. The first Gaelic speakers came to Scotland from Ireland in the fifth century C.E. as an invasionary force (Chadwick 1979:76). By 1000 C.E. the Gaelic kingdom had expanded over the lands of the Picts, the Britons of Strathclyde, and the Angles of Lothian. Gaelic displaced Pictish and British, but English held on as a minority language. Gaelic was the language of government, the church, and the courts. Gradually, however, the English spoken in the southeast began to gain prominence, due to a number of factors, among them: the influx of large numbers of English-speaking refugees after the Norman invasion of England; the establishment of *burghs*, or centers of commerce, in the southeast in the early Middle Ages; and the Anglicization of the royal family, which also brought about the Romanization of the church, all around the year 1100 C.E. (Prebble 1971:34-50)

By 1500, some form of English was spoken over almost all of southern and northeastern Scotland. 1513 saw the death of the last king of Scotland, James IV, who was even capable of speaking Gaelic. The "Highland Line" dividing the rolling Lowlands from the rocky Highlands became more than a physical boundary; it became the border between two opposing cultures, speaking different languages, practicing different economies and customs, and each regarding the other as heathen barbarians. The division was considerably sharpened by the Reformation, which swept the Lowlands but left the Highlands largely

unaffected (Prebble 1971:229). With the ethnolinguistic distinction intensified by Calvinism, the animosity between the two groups became great. Donaldson noted that “to certain parts of the Lowland mind the Highlands were equally a *tabula rasa* upon which could be projected whatever was most feared. Paganism, cannibalism, lycanthropy — anything could be attributed to the inhabitants of these barbarous parts.”

. . . on the one hand he was regarded as a species of vermin fit merely for extermination, while on the other he was seen as a relatively harmless buffoon, a proper object of raillery and satire and figuring in a comic role in many Lowland songs. (Donaldson 1988:38,53)

The culmination of tensions between the two Scotlands came with the Jacobite rebellion of 1745-46. Although the larger aim of the rebellion was the restoration of the Stuarts to the British throne (an attempt about which there was much ambivalence within the Highland and Lowland populations), Highlanders and Lowlanders for the most part took opposite sides. After the defeat of Charles at Culloden in 1746, Gaelic culture came under assault from all directions. Highland dress was outlawed, and the clan system was forcibly dismantled. Where once the Highlands had simply been more or less cordoned off by successive Scottish and British governments, authority was now very visible. Army patrols pursued fugitive Jacobites in the hills, and fortress-towns were established throughout the Highlands to assist in the “pacification” of the Gael. The Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge set up schools throughout the Highlands and Islands in an effort to bring the Presbyterian religion and the English language to the population. Samuel Johnson, while largely contemptuous of the Highlanders, observed with some sympathy the breakdown of Gaelic society:

We came thither too late to see what we expected, a people of peculiar appearance, and a system of antiquated life. The clans retain little now of their original character, their ferocity of temper is softened, their military ardour is extinguished, their dignity of independence is depressed, their contempt of government subdued, and the reverence for their chiefs abated. Of what they had before the late conquest of their country, there remain only their language and their poverty. Their language is attacked on every side. (Samuel Johnson 1924, orig. 1775:51)

The political economy in the Highlands changed greatly after Culloden. Under the clan system, tenants were understood to have rights to the land in perpetuity so long as rents were paid (Thomson 1983:50). With the transition from clan law to British law, tenants were left with neither title nor right to the land, and those who had been their chiefs and protectors were now strictly landlords. Emigration started in the late 18th century among the middle-class tacksmen, whose roles in the post-clan Highlands were uncertain (Thomson 1983:50). They were followed in the 19th century by much greater numbers of the tenantry, who were either evicted outright from the land to make room for more profitable large-scale sheep folds (a series of events known as the Highland Clearances), or otherwise fleeing the poverty and desperation brought on by other events such as the collapse of the kelp industry in the 1820's and the potato blight of the 1840's (Thomson 1983:45-6; Campbell 1990:58-76). Nova Scotia received the bulk of its Scottish population as a result of this period of emigration (roughly 1770-1850). In most places where the emigrant Gaels settled, they rapidly assimilated into the culture of their surroundings. Nova Scotia was the most significant exception to this rule.

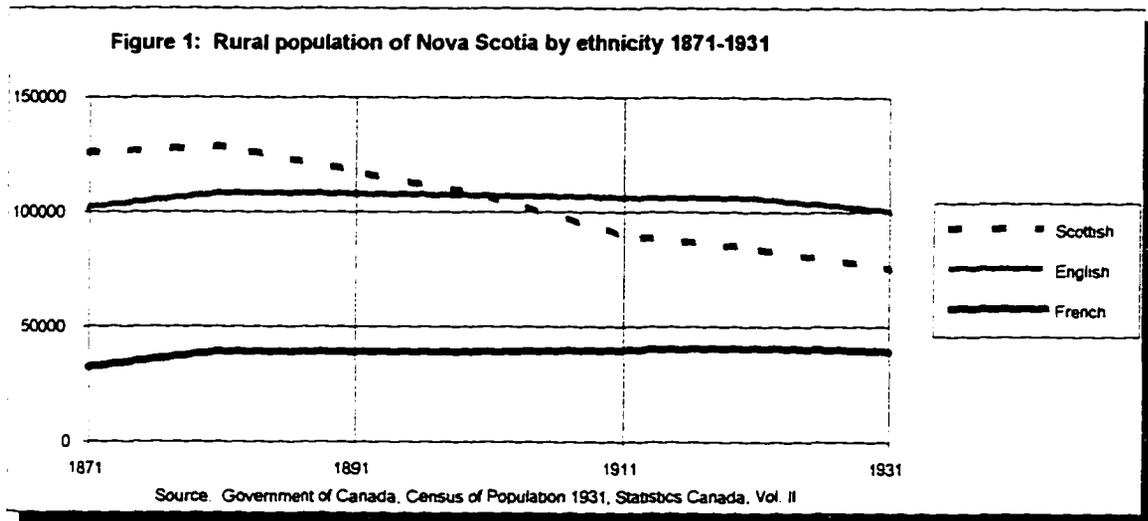
## **Gaels in Nova Scotia**

The first Gaelic settlement in Nova Scotia dates from 1773, when the first boatload of Gaels arrived in Pictou. The trickle became a stream beginning around 1800 with settlements in Mabou and Iona, and then a flood; by 1830 the Gaels were the largest ethnic group in Nova Scotia. They settled almost exclusively in the eastern counties of the province: Pictou, Antigonish, Inverness, Victoria, Cape Breton, and, to a lesser extent, Richmond and Guysboro (Campbell & MacLean 1974:35-78). The settlement patterns resulted from chain-migration, whereby people from the same area in Scotland settled together. This is still reflected in the Gaelic spoken today in Nova Scotia, where the dialects of the various islands and regions of the mainland in Scotland are maintained almost without alteration by 5th and 6th generation Nova Scotians (Shaw 1978).

The Scottish settlements of eastern Nova Scotia also reflect the religious dynamic in Scotland at the time. Most of the earlier settlers were Roman Catholics, many coming from parts of Scotland which are now Presbyterian. Presbyterian settlers tended to come later, and were among the last to ride the immigrant wave from the Highlands and Islands.

The Gaelic population of Nova Scotia seems to have reached its peak around 1880, when Gaelic-speakers made up the majority of the population of Cape Breton Island (Edwards 1988:5), in addition to large numbers of speakers in Antigonish County and diminishing numbers in Pictou and Guysborough. The emigrants of the 19th Century settled in rural areas and lived largely on subsistence farming and fishing. Towards the end of the century, large numbers of rural Nova Scotians left for the coal mines of Sydney, or to the New

England states. Rural outmigration was a constant feature of Maritime life during this period, but the Scots (the vast majority of whom would have been Gaels) lost more of their rural population, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the rural population as a whole (see fig. 1). It was during this period that English became a fashion of necessity in the Gaelic-speaking areas. Parents began speaking both Gaelic and English to their children, a trend which continued until the 1930's, when children ceased to be socialized in Gaelic at all.



Today Gaelic has disappeared from mainland Nova Scotia, except for a handful of elderly speakers in Antigonish County, so it is common now to refer to Nova Scotian Gaelic as Cape Breton Gaelic. In Cape Breton there are perhaps 1000 speakers of the language, almost all of them over 50 years of age. There are a few families (mostly comprised of learners or native-speakers from Scotland) who are socializing their children in Gaelic, but the total number of children probably does not exceed a dozen.

The areas where Gaelic is still fairly common among the older generation include the Roman Catholic communities of Iona, Christmas Island and Boisdale on the Bras d'Or Lakes; a string of villages running from Margaree down the west coast of Cape Breton to Port Hood, including Inverness and Mabou; and some parts of the interior of Inverness County, including Glendale and River Denys. Protestant Gaelic-speaking communities include North River and the North Shore in Victoria County and an area straddling Richmond and Cape Breton counties which includes Framboise, Loch Lomond, Enon and Gabarus. There are many other communities whose Gaelic-speaking populations have disappeared over the last century, such as Black Point in northern Cape Breton and Boularderie Island.

Why did Gaelic fall into decline in eastern Nova Scotia? The culprits most commonly cited are economics, outmigration and, especially, education. Certainly these are all credible factors. Economic hardship forced integration into the industrialized, English-speaking world. Outmigration disproportionately affected women. The few jobs available in rural areas — lumber, construction, pulp mills — were primarily men's work, forcing young women to leave in greater proportions, leaving Gaelic communities with natural increase rates far below the national or provincial average. English-only education was the rule throughout Gaelic Nova Scotia. However these factors do not tell the complete story. The key to the decline of Gaelic in Nova Scotia was the denigration of Gaelic society by the outside world, and the internalization of that denigration by the Gaels themselves (Mertz 1982). This is the overriding factor which was carried into Gaelic society via the above-mentioned combination of poverty, outmigration and English-only education.

Anglophone authorities in the province seemed convinced of the barbarism and ignorance of the Highland settlers, specifically as related to their language, and this prejudice influenced the province's education policy (Cox 1994). As a result, there is evidence of occasions where children were punished, even beaten, for speaking Gaelic in school. While evidence of systematic enforcement of an English-only code is sketchy, there is no doubt that the children understood full well that Gaelic was not a language to be used in school, whether or not any punitive action was taken against it. Storyteller Joe Neil MacNeil remembers that when he started school, he knew almost no English, but even so was able to get the message:

Ach tha cuimhn' agam a' latha a lean an cù dh'ionnsaidh an taigh sgoil mi 's cha robh mi ach glé òg as an am. Agus thuigeadh a' bhan-sgoilear a bh' againn — an té bha teagasg sgoil 'san am sin — thuigeadh i Gàidhlig: bha beagan fhaclan aice cuideachd do Ghàidhlig. Ach chaidh an cù astaigh dha 'n taigh sgoil agus bha e 'gam leantail fhéin astaigh agus thòisich e air an cù a chuir amach as a' sgoil. Agus thuir fear dhe na gillean "Amach thu!" neo "Cuir amach e". Agus tha mi smaointinn air réir nam beagan fhaclan a dheanainn seòrsa do thuigsinn air do Bheurla gun deachaidh a bhruidhinn ris — a bhacail — airson Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn.

But I remember the day that the dog followed me to the schoolhouse when I was only very young. The schoolmistress who was teaching us at the time could understand Gaelic; she spoke a few words of the language too. But the dog entered the schoolhouse after me, and people began to try to put the dog out of the school. And one of the young boys said in Gaelic, "Out you go!" or "Put him out." And I believe from the few words of English that I was able to understand vaguely, that the lad was spoken to — was censured — for speaking Gaelic. (MacNeil 1987:11)

Another factor whereby negative attitudes toward the language impacted the Gaelic community was through outmigration. The period between 1880 and 1930 saw many Gaels leave their homes for economic opportunities in the United States. It was apparently quite common for those who returned (whether indefinitely or for short visits) to speak with a

“Yankee” accent and claim not to speak or understand any Gaelic whatsoever. This phenomenon is described in many locally composed Gaelic songs.

Saoilidh mi gur amaideach do neach a bhi cho stairneil  
An deidh bhi anns na *States* car bliadhn' gu'n dhiochuimhnich e a'  
Ghàidhlig

Tha moran ann ar duthaich — gun teagamh 's e cuis-nair' e —  
Gun Bheurla a chuireadh 'mach an cù 's nach can iad aon ghuth  
Ghàidhlig

I think it is foolishness that one should be so stupid  
That after a year in the States he should forget his Gaelic

And many in our country — it's certainly most shameful —  
Whose English can't put out the dog won't speak a word of Gaelic

(“Oran do'n Mhod” by Garrett MacDonald, in Fergusson  
1977:126-127)

Despite the indignant reaction of the bards (and undoubtedly many others), the Gaelic language was the choice of fewer and fewer parents in the 1930's and 1940's to speak to their children. By the mid-40's, it became clear that few children in the rural Gaelic communities were able to speak the language. And while there was some gnashing of teeth, there was little consensus on what to do about it. By the 1950's, Gaelic had ceased to be used as a language of transmission to children. This happened roughly simultaneously over all of Cape Breton Island (the Gaelic speaking communities of mainland Nova Scotia shifted to English much earlier). There is strong evidence to show that negative images of Gaelic among non-Gaels produced a stigma which, at least in part, persuaded Gaels not to speak Gaelic to their children. In her study of language shift in two Cape Breton Gaelic communities (Mabou and the North Shore), Elizabeth Mertz (1982) argues that it was not the direct pressure from the dominant English language society (i.e. the stigma attached to the lan-

guage and its attendant culture) which accounted for the shift, but rather the effect of that pressure on the “interpretive filter” through which Gaels viewed their situation. But the result was direct enough: Gaels came to equate their language and culture with poverty and backwardness (i.e. rurality, an identity weakened by the effects of outmigration mentioned above), and so to prepare their children for a better (or perhaps in their view, given 50 years of steady outmigration, inevitable) economic future elsewhere it was deemed necessary to drop Gaelic. The belief that a knowledge of Gaelic (or even exposure to it in the home) interferes with one’s ability to speak English is still common, as Mertz (1982) has carefully documented:

Informants today recall the influence of this “bilingual deficit” folk theory: “Parents thought teaching Gaelic would — ’twould sort of confuse the two languages in their minds” [M-14]. If the goal was to learn perfect, unmarked English with the accompanying cognitive benefits and increased possibilities for assimilation, parents must limit their children’s exposure to Gaelic from the very beginning, “because when you start out and use Gaelic . . . [learning English is] really hard.” [M-6] (Mertz 1989:111)

This belief in the “bilingual deficit” has a familiar ring to it if one recalls the efforts of the education authorities to spank Gaelic out of the children. This is what Mertz means by the indirect effect of stigma on language shift; the Gaels did not stop speaking Gaelic because they were punished by their teachers, but because the actions of those teachers (and others in authority) influenced their own beliefs about their language. This is a rather common situation in cases of language death. David Bradley found stigma to be a factor in the death of Ugong in Thailand (1989:39), and Aleya Rouchdy noted a similar process among the Nubians of Egypt:

Young Nubians, more than the older ones, come to identify with the negative attitude of the dominant group, Arab Egyptians, in that Nubian “is not a real language” and “not an important language”. (Rouchdy 1989:101)

Today, most people of all ages in Cape Breton voice sentiments of good will toward Gaelic, although Mertz (1982) has concluded that for many the old stigma still exists beneath the positive veneer.

### **The Oral Tradition**

Cape Breton Gaelic is an example of a culture which in many ways has changed very little over a very long period of time. As Celtic scholar John Shaw has stated, “Cape Breton is the most recent and far-flung outpost of the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* (Gaelic-speaking region), and it is a well-documented phenomenon that archaic survivals of social and cultural institutions are most likely to be found at the periphery of a given cultural area.” (MacNeil 1987:xix) While the shift from Gaelic to English is near complete, certain cultural expressions, especially music, are still vibrant in Cape Breton today.

While the fiddle has always been, and remains today the favorite instrument of Cape Breton Gaels, piping was present from the days of the first settlements. This was not the competition-oriented bagpipe music of pipe bands, but rather an indigenous style passed down orally as part of the folk culture of the Gaels. The fiddle became popular in the Highlands of Scotland in the 18th century, and its popularity continued unabated in Nova Scotia, even as it fell into disfavor in Scotland, thanks largely to the Presbyterian clergy who opposed all forms of popular music and dance (Thomson 1983:74-5). In the post-WWII era, the fiddling and piping traditions became moribund, due to the popular stigmatization of

all aspects of Gaelic culture. While the piping tradition has yet to recover fully (although there are a handful of young Cape Breton pipers who play in the old style), Cape Breton fiddling made a big comeback in the 1970's. Today fiddle music is ubiquitous throughout the island, much of it coming from players under the age of 30.

The influence of Anglo-Saxon cultural standards, Western European "art" music and military music had a homogenizing influence on music in Scotland. These effects were for the most part not felt in Cape Breton, where, although innovations such as the introduction of pianos did occur, influence and change on the music came from within the Gaelic community. As a result, some Scottish musicians are now looking to Cape Breton to recover their original musical heritage. In the liner notes to his album *Damnsa air an Drochaid* (Stepping on the Bridge), Scots piper Hamish Moore (1994) writes: "I am grateful that Cape Breton exists and has preserved and held our music and dance culture in trust." Moore goes on to claim that the continuation of step-dancing is largely responsible for the continuation of traditional musical styles, because the dancing dictates the rhythm. Anyone who has tried step-dancing to a Scots fiddler will easily recognize the difference.

But rhythm and tempo are only part of the difference. Gaelic music is intimately connected to the language. In an interview with Mike Kennedy in *Am Bràighe*, Scottish piper Allan MacDonald uses the example of the song "Mairi's Wedding" to demonstrate how language can also dictate rhythm. Using a dash (—) to indicate a longer stress and a "v" for shorter stress, the English version of the song goes:

Step we gaily on we go	heel for heel and toe for toe
— v — v — v —	— v — v — v —

Whereas in Gaelic it goes:

Mòrag bheag nighean Mhurchaidh an t-Saoir, 's aotrom a dh'fhalbh i, 's aotrom a dh'fhalbh i  
— v — v v v v v v — — v v v v v — v v v v v  
(Kennedy 1994:12)

Compared to the Gaelic version, the English version is much more regular (some would say bland). For Gaelic music and songs, the intrinsic rhythm is just as important as the more general rhythm of the tune itself.

The traditional method of learning fiddle or pipe tunes was through *puirt-a-beul*, or mouth music. A fiddler or piper would typically learn to sing a tune (with Gaelic words) before learning to play it. In Cape Breton today, the Gaelic-speaking fiddlers and pipers such as Alex Francis MacKay, Joe Peter MacLean and Alex Currie can sing or “jig” virtually any tune they play, and even non-Gaelic speaking musicians like Bill Lamey and Buddy MacMaster grew up hearing others jig tunes. As John Shaw notes:

Bill Lamey didn't speak Gaelic, but learned the correct tunes by vocal transmission from his mother. Words serve as a kind of map to where you put the snap. The long notes correspond to the long vowels in Gaelic. Words serve as an active mnemonic device for memory. (MacDonald 1995:22)

In this way it was possible for musicians without the language to still be strongly influenced by it. The younger musicians, however, seem to have “crossed the language line”, as John Shaw puts it. As storyteller Joe Neil MacNeil said:

There is a little difference even in the younger generation following the style learned from the older generation. Over time, the old Gaelic flavor will be lost. (MacDonald 1995:22)

The difference may not be important or even noticeable to non-Gaelic speakers, but among Gaelic-speakers there is a consensus that the Gaelic element in fiddle and pipe music

is essential. The late Lauchie Dan N. MacLellan, a noted tradition-bearer from Inverness County, once related the following:

There's more to it than we imagine. I believe there is a great deal of difference in pipers today. The old pipers put the Gaelic into it. I once requested a tune from a young piper. He said "yes, I play that." Well, he played a nice tune, but I never heard it before. (MacDonald 1995:22)

None of this is to say that Cape Breton Gaelic music is not open to innovation and adaptation. Certainly the cleared Highland settlers did not bring any pianos with them on the emigrant ships. But it is important to note that, just as the clarinet and accordion were successfully assimilated into Yiddish and Louisiana Cajun music styles, respectively, Cape Breton Gaels made the piano speak Gaelic.

Before pianos were introduced to Cape Breton the accompaniment to the music was the rhythm of the stepping feet. The Cape Breton style of piano playing has developed directly from the rhythm of the steps and has evolved into a sophisticated chordal and rhythmic accompaniment. (Moore 1994)

A field recording of Cape Breton Gaelic songs and music released in 1978 presents tunes played on the fiddle, piano, mandolin and harmonica (Shaw 1978). None of these are of themselves Gaelic instruments, but they can be said to produce Gaelic music when manipulated by musicians whose playing reflects their Gaelic sensibilities.

Gaelic singing flourished in Nova Scotia throughout the 19th century. Hundreds, if not thousands of songs were carried across the Atlantic, and many songs still popular among Cape Breton Gaels have been long forgotten in Scotland. A similar number of songs have been composed in Nova Scotia. Indeed, the genius of local bards continued until the last few decades, well after the break in inter-generational socialization in Gaelic.

Similar to the song tradition was the storytelling tradition. Storytelling was the lifeblood of an oral culture such as Gaelic, and Nova Scotia produced many remarkable storytellers with each generation of Gaelic-speakers. One of the most extraordinary was Eòs Nill Bhig, Joe Neil MacNeil, of Middle Cape, Cape Breton, who passed away in October 1996. His repertoire included tales from the Fenian cycle, which date back two thousand years, and was one of only a very small handful of storytellers in the present-day Gaelic world (including Ireland and Scotland) who possessed such tales. Stories of this order, known properly as *sgeulachdan*, were the highest form of storytelling, and one tale could take an entire evening, or even several evenings, to complete. More common were the shorter tales and humorous anecdotes known as *naidheachdan* (literally “news”).

## The Gaelic Identity Transformed

*"You working in the pit?"*

*"I was. I started but I got fired."*

*"You look like you could shovel. Why'd they fire you?"*

*"I wouldn't talk English to the foreman."*

*"You an Eytalian?"*

*"No."*

Sheldon Currie, *The Glace Bay Miners Museum*

It is perhaps the fate of marginalized cultures to be reinvented in the minds of those in the dominant society. Even the continued presence of the minority culture may fail to dissuade those in the majority from abandoning their closely held notions of the "other", regardless of how inaccurate they may be. A Native American anthropologist once reported that:

A woman who was both an anthropologist and an art collector told me that pottery was no longer produced at Laguna Pueblo. She continued to insist on this, even after I told her the names of the women who produce it there. (Rose 1992:406)

It is also commonly observed that the minority group frequently accepts (or is forced to accept) the costume created for it by the majority. Again, this can be such a powerful persuasion that one's words can openly contradict one's actions, as in the following account from Brittany:

A secondary school teacher at a parent-teacher meeting in a strong Breton-speaking area was approached by a parent who questioned the idea of teaching his children Breton. After all, he said, speaking in good native Breton, "Breton is not a living language." (Ó Ciosáin 1991:5)

After 1746, when the Highlanders no longer posed a threat, Lowlanders, and to an extent the English as well, embarked on a era of fascination, romanticization and glorification of the Gael. This entailed a complete reinvention of the Lowlanders' self-perception vis-à-vis the Highlands and England. Jacobism may have died on the battlefield, but it trans-

formed the mindset of the Lowlands, which now viewed the English as the enemy (as they had been, in a real sense, for centuries prior to the union of crowns in 1603). The Highlanders became their noble, proud, and fierce brethren, keepers of the essence of the “Scottish Race” (Donaldson 1988). Where prior to 1750 the vast majority of Jacobite verse had been composed in Gaelic, by 1800 there was a flood of Jacobite poetry in English and Scots which praised the Highlanders for their qualities. The late rebellion was no longer a struggle between Jacobite and Hanoverian, Whig and Tory, or Celt and Saxon; it was instead an attempt by the Scots to regain their liberty from England.

It should be noted at this point that fascination with and the romanticizing of the vanquished is not unique to 18th century Scotland. North America is fertile ground for this sort of behavior. William Tecumseh Sherman, a famous Union general in the U.S. Civil War, was born in Ohio just ten years after Tecumseh, the Shawnee resistance leader, was killed by Ohio settlers. And according to Native American artist Jimmie Durham:

There is in the United States — and to a lesser extent in Chile and Argentina — a curious phenomenon that is seldom given intellectual consideration: whites claiming to be “part Indian”, and even more, whites who claim to be Indian. Surely there is not another part of the world wherein members of a racist oppressor society claim to be members of the oppressed group. (These Euroamericans do not, of course, claim any of the disadvantages of being an Indian.) (Durham 1992:424)

And in a recent article in the Yiddish newspaper *Forverts* (Forward), we find that:

. . . the most important change is the fact that the silent majority [of Poles] shows a great interest in Jews, in Jewish customs, in Jewish culture and literature in general and the Jewish past in Poland in particular. Translated books on Jewish subjects are snatched up like hotcakes. . . . 100,000 copies of Sholem Aleichem’s *Funem Yarid* were published (in Polish) and were entirely sold out. When the publishers obtain a translation on a Jewish subject it is immediately published. (Markus 1995:19, my translation)

This is taking place in a country, Poland, where there are today only 5,000 to 7,000 Jews, compared with a pre-Holocaust population of 3,300,000.

In Lowland Scotland, and to a lesser extent in England, all visible aspects of Highland culture were appropriated and altered to conform to anglicized tastes. This was quite literally the case with the kilt, originally little more than an oversized blanket wrapped around the waist and draped over the shoulders. Hugh Trevor-Roper has claimed that the kilt in its current form was invented by an English industrialist not long before 1745 (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). Although much of his essay is contentious, Trevor-Roper gives ample evidence that, at least, the kilt in its modern form was not indigenous to the Highlands. He also documents the evolution of the idea that each clan had its own particular “sett”, or pattern, of tartan, an entrepreneurial venture started by two brothers who claimed to be descended from Bonnie Prince Charlie. McCrone gives a good summation of tartan when he writes, “A form of dress and design which had some real but haphazard significance in the Highlands of Scotland was taken over by a lowland population anxious to claim some distinctive aspect of culture at a time — the late nineteenth century — when its economic, social and cultural identity was ebbing away.” (McCrone 1992:184)

In addition to kilts and tartans, bagpipes became enormously popular in the Lowlands, but only after the “proper” style and technique of playing were strictly codified. Gaelic fiddle tunes were tamed, slowed down, and made to conform to a stricter and more regular tempo. What could not be altered was invented outright, from James MacPherson’s *Ossian* to Highland dance. It was in this fashion that invented traditions such as kilts, tartans, and

pipe bands came to belong to *all* Scots. Lowlanders were even encouraged to think of themselves as Celts, a view which is still common. Of course, as in the example cited by Jimmie Durham above, these newfangled Celts did not claim any of the disadvantages of being Celtic.

Even Gaelic language-based traditions were appropriated. Around the turn of the century, Gaelic songs became popular with Anglo-Saxon listeners who could not understand the lyrics. But in order to suit the tastes of such an audience, the tradition had to be tidied up a bit. In the first decade of the 20th century, Marjory Kennedy-Fraser made her claim to Gaelic fame with her collection *Songs of the Hebrides*. Kennedy-Fraser's aim was, in her own words, "to blend traditional melody with appropriate harmonic setting." (Thomson 1983:142) Her sanitized versions of Gaelic songs were accompanied by singable translations, which became even more popular. "Mairi's Wedding" and "Eriskay Love Lilt" are but two examples. Noted poet and Gaelic scholar Sorley MacLean wrote of such appropriation:

Of course, with the kind of people who call Mrs. Kennedy-Fraser's travesties of Gaelic songs "faithful reproductions of the spirit of the original", I have no dispute. They are harmless as long as ignorance and crassness are considered failings in criticism of poetry. They have had their hour in the drawing-rooms of Edinburgh and London: they have soothed the ears of old ladies of the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie: they have spoken after dinner, hiding with a halo the bracken that grew with the Clearances. (MacLean 1985:20)

Kennedy-Fraser's collection coincided roughly with the establishment of the National Mod, a series of competitions in Gaelic singing, with a panel of adjudicators. It began in the 1890's and immediately began to impose standards on Gaelic song which were neither native nor natural to the form. Much as English grammarians in the 18th century tried to impose the grammatical standards of Latin (considered a more "perfect" language) onto English, the

Mod officials of the late 19th and early 20th centuries imposed Western European art music forms and arrangements onto a vernacular Gaelic style. The merits of the newly emerged “Mod style” singing are still debated, but it was so successful that

. . . when Kitty MacLeod, a traditional singer from Lewis sang on stage in Glasgow around the time of the last war, singing in the traditional way rather than the Mod way, an acrimonious letter appeared in the press from a prominent Gael complaining about her dreadful style of singing. So, . . . the Mod could convince people in 50 years that this was not their tradition. (Kennedy 1994a:13)

The result of the co-opting of Gaelic cultural expressions was to lump all cultural expressions, real or imagined, Highland and Lowland, together under the heading “Scottish”.

By the end of the 19th century, this process was so complete that an American tourist in Cape Breton could comment thus:

This was nothing short of refreshing, to find a Scotchman who had never heard of Robert Burns! It was worth the whole journey to take this honest man by the hand. How far would I not travel to talk with an American who had never heard of George Washington! (Warner 1874:108)

The fact that the Cape Bretoner had a cultural and literary inheritance completely divorced from Robert Burns could not have occurred to the writer.

Two types of false images of the Gael have now been brought up to date. The first is a set of material images which can be summed up in the term “tartanism”: kilts, tartans, bagpipes (in the form of pipe bands) and Highland dancing. To this we could add some related images, such as the notion of clanship, whereby a person with the right surname anywhere in the family tree can, for a small fee, “officially” become a member of a Highland Clan. The second is the more general notion that Highlanders and Lowlanders are rather the same, and all Scots are Celts, and therefore equally entitled to the above-mentioned material culture.

But even though the Highlanders and Lowlanders were now thought of as one, there still persisted a number of qualities (or deficiencies) which were attributed solely to the Highlanders. These were the old Lowland attitudes of the Gael as both barbarian and buffoon; the Highlanders as Britain's own "noble savages".

With regard to tartanism in Nova Scotia, it is apparent from several 19th century travel writers that tartanism was not in evidence in the Gaelic-speaking areas of the province.

(McKay 1992:10) This seems to have displeased at least one of them:

I have a reasonable amount of respect for a Highlandman in full costume; but for a sandy-haired, freckled, high-cheeked animal, in a round hat and breeches, that cannot utter a word of English, I have no sympathy. (Cozzens 1877: cited in Mertz 1982:67)

Angus L. Macdonald, in his capacity as Premier of Nova Scotia, was instrumental in the imposition of the tartaned image of Nova Scotian Gaels on the entire province. While stemming at least in part from his fervent pride in his heritage (or rather the romantic heritage of his imagination), the emerging tourism industry was also a factor. Macdonald effectively married these two causes — tartanism and tourism — to the point where such non-Gaelic communities as Amherst, Yarmouth and Peggy's Cove are full of bagpipers and tartan souvenirs during the tourist season.

The influence of the tourist industry on Gaelic cultural expression in Nova Scotia is a somewhat complex matter. The primary traditional setting for such expression is in the home, a *cèilidh* (house visit) in which all the neighbors turn up for an evening of singing, storytelling, music and probably a square set in the kitchen. Despite the adoption of the word *cèilidh* into English to mean a staged concert, the *cèilidh* in its original sense is still a

part of Gaelic life in Cape Breton, and as such is beyond the reaches of the tourist industry. As Gaelic cultural life was and is community-based and informal, the “authenticity” of a staged concert is something of a moot point. One can argue about whether the entertainment being provided would be authentic at a house visit, much as many people in Cape Breton argue about the liberties taken with the Gaelic tradition on recordings by artists such as Ashley MacIsaac and the Rankin Family, and there is a validity to such a debate. But as we are concerned here with the Gaelic tradition, of which concerts and cds are not a part, the question of the influence of tourism (and by extension, stereotypes) on the various summer concerts is beyond the scope of this study, except to say that the influence is great and the resulting content is, as Norman Macdonald notes, markedly different from that of events organized by local communities for esoteric purposes (Macdonald 1988:132-146)

There is one example of Gaelic cultural expression which has come, to varying degrees, under the influence of tourism: the milling frolic. In the days when people weaved their own cloth, the freshly-woven cloth had to be beaten in order to shrink it. This tedious work was transformed into a popular social occasion where the community would gather to sing *òrain luadhaidh*, milling songs, and beat the cloth to the rhythm of the songs. The milling frolic is still popular today even though no one weaves their own cloth anymore (for modern milling frolics, an old blanket which has been pounded dozens of times is used). Usually a milling frolic is locally organized and, though visitors are always welcomed, it is primarily an esoteric event. There are a growing number of milling frolics, however, which either rely on out-group participation or are solely intended for non-Gaels. In the former case, the milling

is usually held as part of a larger event or is confined to one end of the room. In this case its intention is as a piece of exotic interest for tourists. The latter type of milling frolic, wholly exoteric in nature, can be for tourist consumption but is often also for the benefit of Gaelic learners, as an opportunity for them to witness an artificial reconstruction of an authentic activity, learn Gaelic songs, and meet native speakers from the local community. Macdonald (1988) has detailed examples of the esoteric and tourist-consumption models, though educational milling frolics have been given little attention.

As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of tartanism and tourism in Nova Scotia has been widely commented on, but little attention has been paid to the impact of tartanism on the Nova Scotia Gaels themselves. One could get the impression at any of the “Scottish concerts” held in Cape Breton during the summer that, given the fusion on stage of Gaelic songs, fiddle music and step-dancing (authentic Gaelic traditions) with kilted pipe bands and Highlands dancers, the material images of tartanism have been incorporated by the Gaels into their tradition. There is little evidence, however, that tartanism has been taken very seriously by those within the Gaelic-speaking community itself. Where the language is still spoken, the emphasis in cultural expression still takes the form of Gaelic songs and stories, fiddle music (and occasionally vernacular pipe music) and step dancing. Individuals may wear skirts or ties made of tartan on formal occasions, perhaps even a kilt, but there is nothing which manifests itself within the culture to suggest that present-day Nova Scotian Gaels view these articles with any more reverence than they might a nice suit or dress. Macdonald (1988) came to a similar conclusion in his study of ten nominally “Scottish”

events taking place in Cape Breton during the summer of 1987. The most esoteric of these events — a milling frolic and two church services — showed minimal signs of outside influence, while the more exoteric events (which attracted largely non-Gaelic-speaking audiences) displayed much higher degrees of tartanism, with little authentic cultural content.

In other words, tartan is not essential to one's Gaelic identity. On the contrary, Nova Scotia Gaelic speakers often find manifestations of tartanism amusing. A recent article in *Am Bràighe* relates the reaction of an Inverness County Gael on meeting his "clan chief":

"And so Ronald says to me, 'I'm going to introduce you to the chief.' And I said, '*Tha mise 'dol a bruidhinn ris anns a' Ghàidhlig.*' (I'm going to speak to him in Gaelic.) . . . So Ronald said, 'This is Sandy Cameron from Nova Scotia, from a place called Mabou.' I said, '*Ciamar a tha sibh?*' (How are you?)" Sandy imitates the chief's blank stare. . . . "I met him before. He was in Baddeck, so we went down. I wasn't impressed. He had the kilts on and the bony legs on him!" (*Am Bràighe*, Vol II, no. 2:12)

I can corroborate this example with an example of my own. In August of 1994 I was attending a function at the Gaelic College and speaking with an elderly Gaelic-speaking woman with whom I am familiar. A young man, not of the local area, walked by wearing a kilt. My friend looked impressed and said, "Look at that one, with the skirts!" This same woman owns several household items — blankets, pillows, etc. — made of her "clan tartan". However when she showed them to me, she praised them for the beauty of the colors and not for their alleged hereditary significance. Margaret Bennett found a similar view of tartanism from the perspective of the Scottish Gaels of Newfoundland:

. . . the real identity lay in something much deeper. Certainly they admired the tartan! The *Reisimeid Dhubh* (Black Watch) look magnificent in it, and the Scots Guards too! And the pipe bands... how they would love to see one in the Valley! But the idea of those splendid colours as the main identity was something to question. . . . The real identity was in the fabric of the people themselves: their language, their lore, their lifestyle, all woven into the very essence of their individuality. (Bennett 1989:192)

Two contemporary writers, Alistair MacLeod and D.R. MacDonald, have addressed the conflict between the Cape Breton Gaelic community and its tartaned periphery in their short stories. In the works of both writers, tartanism appears as a foil for the central Gaelic-speaking protagonists. In MacDonald's story "The Wharf King", three restless local boys are asked if they plan to go to the Gaelic Mod at the Gaelic College. Their response reflects both the ambivalence and the remoteness of such an institution to their lives:

"You men going to the Mod?"  
"Jesus, half the pipers are Yanks!" Kenny said.  
"Oh, we'll go over one night or other," Rob said. "Might find a couple of girls among the tourists and throw a little Gaelic at them. Some go for that."  
"It's damn little I'll be throwing at them," Kenny said.  
"And then what anyway? We ask them to hitchhike somewhere with us?" John Allan said. (MacDonald 1988:120)

MacLeod's Gaelic characters are similarly multidimensional, and are given their full expression in contexts which emphasize the rural experience, work (fishing, farming, coal mining), closeness of family and connection to ancestors who are known by name. The importance of traditional Gaelic cultural expressions are often brought to bear on his stories, and in one, "The Tuning of Perfection", we have in the character of Archibald the last Gaelic-speaker in his family, and therefore the only one unwilling to cut short a narrative song for a television performance. The words mean too much; the song tells a story which has relevance to the singer, if to nobody else, and Archibald is compelled in the end to dash his

family's hopes for their 15 minutes of fame (and a free trip to Halifax) to preserve his own integrity as well as the song's. In another story, "The Closing Down of Summer", MacLeod relates the thoughts of an aging miner who discovers that he and his fellow miners have unconsciously begun to speak Gaelic to each other, and to sing the Gaelic songs of their childhood in place of the popular songs on the radio. The narrator compares this revival to the more institutional one:

There is a "Celtic Revival" in the area now, fostered largely by government grants, and the younger children are taught individual Gaelic words in the classrooms for a few brief periods during each month. It is a revival that is very different from our own and it seems, like so much else, to have little relevance for us and to have largely passed us by. Once, it is true, we went up to sing our Gaelic songs at the various Celtic concerts which have become so much a part of the summer culture . . . but that too seemed as lonely and irrelevant as it was meaningless. It was as if we were parodies of ourselves, standing in rows, wearing our miners' gear, or being asked to shave and wear suits, being plied with rum while waiting for our turn on the program, only then to mouth our songs to batteries of tape recorders and to people who did not understand them. It was as if it were everything that song should not be, contrived and artificial and non-spontaneous and lacking in communication. (MacLeod 1988:217)

Tartanism seems to play an important role in Nova Scotia not among Gaelic speakers, but among those English monolinguals with Highland ancestry. For them, the trappings of tartanism enable them to feel that they have not been cut off from their heritage. For A.W.R. MacKenzie, there was the notion of "clanship". For Angus L. Macdonald, an imperfect Gaelic speaker who was raised in an English speaking household (McKay 1992:20), tartanism was a means to enhance his tenuous ties to Gaelic culture. Thus he could invoke Robert Burns as "the greatest of Scotsmen" (Macdonald 1960:193), perhaps to atone for the sin of the farmer encountered by Warner. Increasingly, however, tartanism seems to have devel-

oped a “heritage” of its own, rather than trying to attach itself to Gaelic culture. In an interview, one Gaelic instructor commented:

By and large, people who are attracted to wearing tartan, or see that as an identity are not looking at it as Gaelic, they’re looking at it as Scottish. And “Scottish” takes in that wide spectrum . . . . Now when people try to say, “This [tartanism] is Gaelic, and if you want to be Gaelic, if you want to express your Gaelic-ness, then you need this,” that’s where it encroaches on Gaelic. I think that’s been refuted. (GI-2)

## **History of the Gaelic Revival**

### **Settling In: 1800-1880**

The first eighty years of Highland life in Nova Scotia were ones of expansion and relative prosperity, and the same can be said of Gaelic culture during this time. Just as the Gaels made the transformation from desperate exiles to established locals, so too their culture adapted and prospered in a new land. It was therefore not a period of time in which there was any manifestation of language revival efforts, as the language was strengthened and naturalized over the first three quarters of the 19th Century. It may be useful though to examine some factors which indicate just how precarious this apparent strength was.

First is the fact that the Highlanders did not come to Nova Scotia from a position of cultural health in Scotland. Due to centuries of neglect and persecution, the Gaelic language was stigmatized, its speakers impoverished both physically and emotionally. Years of living as a linguistic minority in their own country were not erased upon their arrival in a new country which, after all, was dominated by the same culture which had been hovering over them all along.

Second, the period of adjustment was often a difficult one for the first settlers, who were unused to the harsh winters and thick forests of Nova Scotia. Although most Highlanders settled together in groups, many found themselves deprived of Gaelic-speaking neighbors (many of these later moved on to established Gaelic-speaking settlements). In all cases, however, there was danger in the early years of starvation, disease, and cold, and the overall situation must have been one of anxiety.

Finally, as mentioned above, there was always a consciousness of the fact of Anglo-Saxon cultural hegemony in the province, just as there had been in Scotland. As soon as the Gaels stepped outside their communities, they were usually in contact with English-speakers, and inevitably the power relationship was in favor of the English-speaker (there was also considerable contact with Acadian French and Mi'kmaq speakers, but in these cases they would have been on more or less equal terms).

Gaelic culture is firmly rooted in the oral tradition, and this was especially true of the Nova Scotian Gaels in the period before 1880. It is therefore difficult to compile a hard record of the Gaels' responses to these factors mitigating against them. For the most part we must look to the oral tradition itself. The bards (song-composers) among the earliest Highland settlers were numerous, and among them there was no shortage of opinion on their new surroundings, both positive and negative. Perhaps the best known of the latter is "A' Choille Ghruamach" (the Gloomy Forest), composed by John MacLean (1787-1848), who came to Barney's River in Pictou County from the isle of Tìree in 1819. In the song he laments that:

Tha mulad diomhair an deigh mo lionadh  
Bho'n is eiginn strìochdadh an seo ri m' bheò  
Air bheag thoil-inntinn 's a choille chruinn seo  
Gun duine foighneachd an seinn mi ceòl

A secret sadness has filled me  
Since I must surrender to this place forever  
With little contentment in this dense forest  
Where no one asks me to sing a song

(Cormack 1989)

It is perhaps telling that in the same song, which is regarded as a classic, the Bard MacLean complains that "my Gaelic is nothing compared to what it was, when I was in yonder country [i.e. Scotland]." The popularity of the song in Nova Scotia and Scotland,

and the praise heaped upon it, indicate the modesty of this statement. It is common for Gaelic songs to contain apologies for the quality of the composer's Gaelic within its verses, but in this case there probably was a real fear on MacLean's part that his fluency would deteriorate in the absence of Gaelic-speaking neighbors. MacLean later moved to a Gaelic settlement in Antigonish County, and by all accounts was much better disposed toward the New World after that.

While it is difficult to gauge the attitudes of the Gaels toward their English-speaking neighbors (or the extent to which they concerned themselves with those outside their communities), there is some evidence that English values could be worthy of praise, as evidenced in a song composed by Allan "the Ridge" MacDonald, "Oran do Aonghas Dòmhnallach"

(Song to Angus MacDonald):

Lamh as grinne thairmeas sgrìob thu le ite phinn,  
Gum bu ghrinn do mheòirean  
Sgoilear Beurla cho math 'sa leughas le barrachd cèile,  
'S tu beusach bòidheach

Neatest hand in drawing a line,  
Your fingers are nimble with the quill pen  
A scholar of English as good as any to read;  
You are clever, virtuous and handsome

(printed in Rankin, undated)

It should be noted however that poets such as Allan the Ridge and the Bard MacLean came from a more affluent background in Scotland than did the majority of Gaelic immigrants to Nova Scotia. Although their material situation in Nova Scotia was little better than that of any of their neighbors, they did not necessarily have the same values as the majority of settlers who had been worse off in Scotland.

After the initial period of adjustment and until the beginning of industrialization and outmigration, Gaelic culture flourished in Nova Scotia. This is evident not only in the large body of locally-composed songs from this period (roughly 1840-1880), but from the overall content of the songs, in which the word “Gaelic” rarely appears. Where it is mentioned, it is from a position of relative security, even when acknowledging the physical limits of the Gaelic-speaking communities:

Chan'eil àit' an diugh fo'n ghréin  
`S am b'fhearr leam-fhéin bhi tàmhachd  
Na Bràigh' na h-Aibhne measg nan sonn  
O'm faighte fuinn na Gàidhlig

There is no place to-day, under the sun, where I would prefer to live  
than in the Braes of the [Margaree] River amongst the heroes who  
were wont to sing Gaelic songs.

(printed in Creighton & MacLeod 1979:64-5)

Songs praising the Gaelic-speaking communities of Nova Scotia would be composed into the early 20th century, but by then they were using the past tense.

The period from 1800-1880 was then perhaps the only true revival of Gaelic which took place on Nova Scotian soil. A society and culture which was undergoing tremendous upheaval at home had in the Maritimes a renaissance, forming not only a solidly Gaelic-speaking continuum across much of eastern Nova Scotia, but also bearing new generations of great bards and musicians, singers and storytellers who had never seen the old country.

#### **Decline: 1880-1940**

In 1841, the Nova Scotia Assembly passed a bill allowing for the use of English, French, Gaelic and German as a medium of instruction in schools throughout the province, but this provision was dropped in 1864 (Mertz 1989:110). The Gaels were hardly in a position to

take advantage of this limited opportunity, partly due to the lack of Gaelic teaching materials. In 1879, during a debate in the House of Assembly on whether to provide bonuses for French-speaking teachers, some members felt that the same stipends should be provided for Gaelic-speaking teachers. One member from Victoria County gave a long speech in Gaelic, prompting a rebuttal in French from the sponsor of the bill. “Finally, to add a tone of humor, another member, ‘after explaining that he was not acquainted with the German language, said he had learned, as a lad, to talk in broken Dutch, and that . . . , he would give the house a sample.’” (cited in Mertz 1982:70). This is the first evidence of any public effort on behalf of Gaelic in Nova Scotia. It is important to consider, however, that the debate focussed on the need for native-language teachers in order to better teach children English. Thus, what appears on the surface to be a rallying cry for linguistic minority rights, is in fact a call for more effective linguistic homogenization. This is a pattern which was oft repeated in future years.

1880 was roughly the beginning of rural depopulation in the Gaelic-speaking areas of Nova Scotia, and thus the beginning of the decline of the language itself. Looking again to the oral tradition, we see that locally composed songs begin to reflect the social dynamics of the times. Around 1880, the Bard MacDearmid of North Shore, Victoria County composed a song called “An Tè a Chaill a Gàidhlig” (the woman who lost her Gaelic), a sharp commentary on the young Gaels who returned home after working in places like Boston. In the song, the narrator tells of meeting his former sweetheart who has just returned from the city. Upon greeting her in Gaelic, she replies in English: “you’re a Scotchman I reckon; I don’t know

your Gaelic, perhaps you're from Cape Breton, and I guess you're a farmer — you're too saucy for better — so I will not shake hands, and I would rather at present be going off.”

(printed in Creighton & MacLeod 1979:26-30) The phenomenon of young people coming back from the cities, feigning ignorance of Gaelic and regarding it with disdain, was apparently quite common. Many songs composed in this time remark on this, such as Garret MacDonald's “Oran do'n Mhòd” (Song to the Mod), in which he lambastes those “whose English can't put out the dog, yet won't speak a word of Gaelic.” (printed in Fergusson 1977:126-7) Other songs simply comment on the depopulation itself, some exhorting the young to come back from the cities and the mines to the farm:

Nam biodh dòigh agam dheanainn dichill  
Rachainn dhachaidh as na mèinnean  
Gu na càirdean o'n bha iad dileas  
'S chan fhàgainn tuilleadh ged gheibhinn dileab

If I had the means of doing it, I would be diligent  
I would return home from the mines  
To my friends since they were faithful  
And I would not leave again though I would receive a legacy  
(“Oran na Bochdainn”, printed in Creighton & MacLeod  
1979:236-8)

The early 20th century also saw the composition of many “reminiscence” songs, which praise people and places in the past tense (as opposed to earlier compositions like Malcolm Gillis' “Am Bràighe” quoted above), longing for the cohesive communities which were rent as a result of industrialization and outmigration:

'N uair a thigeadh oirnn an gearmhradh cha bu ghann an spòrs leinn  
Bhiodh na luaidh ann 's bhiodh na bainnsean, 's bu chridheil ann an òigridh  
Bhiodh na h-ighneagan gu baididh, togail fonn nan òran  
Ach dh'fheumadh cùis a thighinn gu ceann, 's cha mhaireadh àm dhomh 'n còmhnuidh

When winter would descend upon us, we would not be lacking in  
fun  
There would be milling frolics and weddings, and the young people  
would be gay  
The modest young girls would sing the melodies of the songs  
But such things had to end, and time did not always last out for me

(“Oran mo Sheann Dachaidh” by Big Norman Matheson, Breton  
Cove; printed in Creighton & MacLeod 1979:238-42)

The first half of the 20th century also saw the emergence of Gaelic “rallying songs”,  
songs which praise the Gaels and specifically the Gaelic language. Songs with titles like  
“Oran do’n Ghàidhlig” (Song to Gaelic) and “Oran do Mhod Gaidhealach Cheap Breatuinn”  
(Song to the Cape Breton Gaelic Mod) combined praise for the language with scorn for  
those who apparently disdained it. Consider the chorus and first verse of “Moladh na Gàidhlig”  
(In Praise of Gaelic), composed by Calumm Iain a’ Mhuilleir (Malcolm MacNeil) of Ironville,  
Cape Breton County:

O gur toil leam, e gur toil leam, o gur toil leam-fhin a’ Ghàidhlig  
'S mòr an toileachadh do m'inntinn a bhi cluinntinn caint mo  
mhàthair

'N Gàidheal nach deanadh còmhraidh mar bu chòir dha anns a'  
Ghàidhlig  
Cùl mo làimhe ris an còmhuidh; chan iarrainn 'n a chòmhdhail gu  
bràth e

O I love it, e I love it, o I love the Gaelic  
Great is the pleasure to my thoughts to hear the speech of my mother

The Gael who won't converse in Gaelic as he should  
The back of my hand to him always; I would never want his com-  
pany

(printed in MacLeod 1970:58-59, my translation)

The need to compose songs in praise of Gaelic, and the frequent mentioning of those  
who “won't converse in Gaelic as he should” indicates the increasing stigmatization of the  
language, particularly among young people. Many of these songs were composed by people

who were elderly at the time, and therefore unlikely to leave, temporarily or permanently, for other employment. In any case it is apparent that many young Gaels did not heed the bards' advice. The outmigration trends continued, and those who returned introduced English into their communities, in particular to their children (Dembling 1991). Yet even at this point, the efforts of the bards cannot be viewed as attempts at a "revival" of Gaelic, as the language was still spoken by all, including the children of the "returnees". However, it is clear that the bards saw the danger of the events of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Beginning in the 1920's, and continuing through the 1930's, the children of the "returnees" began to have children, and in almost all cases spoke only English to them. By the outbreak of World War II, socialization of children in Gaelic had effectively ceased (Mertz 1982).

Although the shift from Gaelic to English was swift and sudden, it was at the same time subtle in its own way. The generation which came of age in the years between 1880 and 1910 was the first to leave home in large numbers, and those who came back bore the scars of the negative stigmatization of their language and culture. Not quite comfortable with Gaelic (due to the stigma) or English (for most still a second language), they generally spoke both languages to their children (Dembling 1991). The children thus grew up naturally bilingual and equally comfortable in both languages. The experiences of school and work would have enforced the use of English between them, with Gaelic largely reserved for speaking with older people. When this generation, the last Gaelic-speakers alive today, had children, they quite naturally spoke only English to them (it would have been rather odd for parents to speak to their children in a language which they did not speak to each other).

Perhaps because of this subtlety, or its touchiness, there is little record in the oral tradition or otherwise of protestation at this turn of events. Whether Allan the Ridge's respect for English learning was anomalous in the early 19th century, it was the norm in the early 20th, and few would have advocated the withholding of English from a child. Aside from a general lamentation from some quarters (bards, some clergy, etc.) over the overall decline of Gaelic in the air, there was no specific protest or concerted action. Mertz (1982) attributes this to a particular set of folk-beliefs, still widely held, which hold that knowledge of Gaelic interferes with one's ability to learn English properly. And since not even the most conservative bard was advocating ignorance of English, the Gaelic rallying songs could not compete with such beliefs.

In 1892, Jonathan G. MacKinnon of Whycocomagh started a Gaelic weekly newspaper, *Mac-Talla* (Echo). It ran for twelve years, making it the longest-running Gaelic newspaper anywhere in the world, including Scotland. *Mac-Talla* drew subscribers from Baddeck to Bangkok, but folded in 1904 due to rising production costs and falling subscriptions. In the later years of the paper, MacKinnon frequently berated his readers for failing to support him, thereby implicating them for the decline of Gaelic generally:

Air son *Mac-Talla* a chur a mach uair 's an da sheachdain cha b'fhuilear air a chuid bu lugha da mhile fear-gabhail a bhith aige. Dh'fhaodadh sin a bhith aige ged nach biodh ann de luchd-leughaidh Gailig ach na th' air eilein Cheap Breatuinn; ach nuair nach faighear an aireamh sin air fad us leud an t-saoghail, chan urrainnear tighinn gu co-dhunadh sam bith eile ach nach eil paipeir Gailig a dhith air na Gaidheil, gu bheil iad riarachta le bhith comharraichte mar an aon chinneach Criosdail a th' air thalamh nach cosd ri paipeir a chumail suas 'n an cainnt fein.

In order to bring out *Mac-Talla* once every two weeks, it would require not less than two thousand subscribers. The paper could easily have that, even if there were no other Gaelic readers except those in Cape Breton; but when this number cannot be found throughout the length and breadth of the world, we can reach no other conclusion than that the Gaels do not want a Gaelic paper and that they are content to be classed as the only Christian race in the world who will not pay to keep up a paper in their own language. (cited in Dunn 1953:86)

MacKinnon was better educated than most Gaels, having graduated from Sydney Academy. To this end, Mertz notes that most of those active in the Gaelic Revival were either “outsiders” or Gaels with a higher degree of education and participation in the English-speaking world (Mertz 1982:219-20). This raises the issue of class, which is rarely discussed in the Nova Scotia Gaelic context. It is usually presumed that the rural Gaelic communities were devoid of class differences. With regard to the 19th century, this is merely an oversimplification; some Gaels were better off than others, but the best off were still poor. By the beginning of the 20th century however, a Gaelic middle class emerged, composed of people like MacKinnon as well as a decreasingly parochial clergy. These were people who had established themselves in the English-speaking world and could therefore afford to promote their Gaelic side. But young Gaels who hadn’t made it on the outside could not find security in their Gaelic identities, for it seemed to them that the two cultures could not be simultaneously proclaimed, and putting potatoes in the pot was the first priority.

The period from 1880 to 1940 saw the effects of rural outmigration and increasing stigmatization of the Gaelic language, ending with a rapid and complete shift from Gaelic to English as the language of socialization of children. Efforts to combat these trends were minimal and ineffectual, and were largely maintained by outsiders or semi-outsiders such as

J.G. MacKinnon. The local bards maintained a conservative stance on behalf of Gaelic, and this may have contributed to the reasons why the generation of “returnees” socialized their children in both languages (as opposed to English only). But even if this were the case, the effect was only to prolong the shift for one more generation.

#### **1940-1990: Praising Gaelic (in English)**

In 1939, Angus William Rugg MacKenzie, a Presbyterian minister from Scotland, founded the Gaelic College in St. Ann’s, Victoria County. Though he grew up on the Isle of Skye, MacKenzie spoke no Gaelic, and could not have been very familiar with the Gaelic communities of eastern Nova Scotia, having only arrived in Cape Breton four years earlier, where he served as a minister in Baddeck, near to several Gaelic-speaking communities but itself (by this time) thoroughly anglicized. In founding the Gaelic College, MacKenzie hoped to preserve the language which was still widely spoken in Cape Breton at the time, particularly in the communities neighboring the College. However, MacKenzie’s goals were broader than just reviving the language. He had, as did many of his contemporaries, an idea of a totality of Gaelic culture which was quite divergent from reality. A Scot who identified himself as a Gael, MacKenzie grasped onto two hundred years of Lowland and English concoctions of Gaelic-ness in a wistful attempt to “become” a Highlander. Ian McKay (1992) refers to this process as “tartanism.” Tartanism was, and is, a means by which those who wish to be Gaels can become so simply by adorning themselves in all the trappings of artificial Gaeldom: kilts, tartan, and so on. It is not surprising to discover then, that MacKenzie, a crusader for Gaelic who was not a Gael, should subscribe wholeheartedly to tartanist

notions of Gaeldom. Thus MacKenzie was not just interested in promoting Gaelic, but in “reviving” all sorts of cultural manifestation which were completely foreign to Cape Breton

Gaeldom. At one point he chided the Gael for:

allowing his rich heritage of Gaelic to decline; bagpipe music could be heard in a few isolated glens; Highland dancing had died out completely; Clan sentiment and Clanship lore were being forgotten; the whole Island could boast of only a single Pipe Band outside military circles. (cited in Foster 1988:85)

More than a few Gaels must have done a double-take when the Gaelic College foundation introduced their slogan in 1944: “A loom in operation in every rural home and more sheep on these Cape Breton hills.” (Canadian-American Gael, vol. 2:2) A more apt example of the callous manipulation of discourse embedded in tartanism would be difficult to find; the same sheep which forced their forbearers from their homes have now followed them across the ocean to take their place alongside the Gaelic language as part of the Gaelic “essence”.

MacKenzie and the Gaelic College printed two editions of a publication called *The Canadian-American Gael*. The two volumes reflect MacKenzie’s romantic ideals, as well as the differing perspectives on Cape Breton Gaeldom held by native Gaelic-speakers. The subtitle of the CAG was “The Romantic Nova Scotia Highlands”. On the cover of one issue is a picture of “Cape Breton ‘Highland Lassies’” receiving instruction in “Highland folk art” (Highland dancing) in full regalia. Inside is a four-page article on Robert Burns. In addition to more sheep, MacKenzie has other ideas for the “improvement” of the Cape Breton Gael, including improved roads, beautified public buildings, and “the resettlement of rural Cape Breton farms — (a) with Native Sons, — (b) with Highland Scottish immigrants who are suited to the soil, sea and forest way of life.” (CAG, vol. 1:16[a]). The issue of race is dealt

with delicately here — Volume 1 having been issued in the middle of World War II — but

MacKenzie manages to trip over his own words when he states:

We are not propagating and seeking to preserve racial characteristics merely for the self-aggrandizement of the Scottish race as such — as to ensure the perpetual supply of these superb Highland-Lowland qualities of spirit and character, carrying their influence for good intact, to the common melting-pot of races, and there, making for a better Canadian or American citizenship. (CAG, vol. 1:16[a])

In the end, *The Canadian-American Gael* provides a clear blueprint of MacKenzie's goals. Referring to the “so-called Gaelic Movement”, he emphasizes repeatedly the role of his “throbbing institution” in promoting all aspects of “Celtic culture”, as opposed to the “dry principles of Gaelic grammar, syntax and vocabulary”:

So, on visiting the Gaelic College you will certainly be met with “Ciad Mile Fàilte” [100,000 Welcomes] — but what the eye will thrill to will be the beautiful tartan woolen goods being woven on the hand-loom by student-apprentices — yards and yards of it. . . . Then, what the ear will thrill to will be the enchanting lilt of the traditional milling song or the ever-fascinating wailing of a' Phìob-mhòr [the bagpipe] doing duty to the steps of Cape Breton lassies who are trying to master the Highland Fling or Seann Triubhas. The setting for all this being the beautiful Cape Breton Highlands — forested hills and harbor waters — that's St. Ann's. (CAG, vol. 2:2)

Only a romantic non-Gael such as MacKenzie could refer to a milling song — a work song sung while beating newly-woven cloth — as “enchanting”. Even the clichéd greeting “Ciad Mile Fàilte” is discounted in his grand vision of “Celtic culture.”

The Gaelic content of the CAG (and there was a good bit of it) contrasts sharply with the English-language content. While romantic in its own way, praising the Gaelic heroes past and present, there are no references to kilts, pipe bands or the like. Two Gaelic columns from volume I flatly state the limitations of MacKenzie's cause:

Ged tha colaisde Ghàidhlig, na sgoilean Gàidhlig, an cèilidh agus an comunn glè mhath, cha dean sud a chuis.

Although a Gaelic college, Gaelic schools, the ceilidh and the society are very good, they won't get the job done.

(CAG, vol. 1:14, my translation)

Tha e glè mhath thigh'nn gu coinneamh 's eisdeachd ri oraidean am moladh na Gàidhlig, 's fonn a thogail "Suas leis a' Ghàidhlig," ach cha chum sin suas a' Ghàidhlig nas mo no shabhaileas duin' anam le eisdeachd gu dluth ri deagh shearmon air latha na Sabaid mar cuir e an gnìomh na comhairlean a fhuair e a' chuid de'n t-seachdainn.

It's very well to come to a meeting and listen to orations in praise of Gaelic and to sing the song "Suas leis a' Ghàidhlig" ["Up with the Gaelic"], but that won't keep up the Gaelic any more than it will save a man's soul to listen intently to a great sermon on Sunday while he ignores the advice he received for the rest of the week.  
(CAG, vol. 1:60, my translation)

Although there is no record of MacKenzie expressing his opinion on some of the more authentic manifestations of Gaelic culture in Cape Breton, such as step dancing or the vernacular fiddle music, it is doubtful that he would have thought very highly of them, if in fact he knew of their existence at all. Therein lies the problem with MacKenzie's brand of "revival"; a genuine concern for the survival of the language was lost in the larger attempt to fit Cape Bretoners into his tartanist mold. Mertz' notion of the outsider-revivalist comes into play here, but there is also a parallel with McKay's (1994) assessment of other "outsiders" such as Helen Creighton. Just as Creighton misrepresented "the Folk" in her own upright, conservative image and marketed them for personal profit, so did MacKenzie, whose institution continues to ensure that government funds and tourist dollars are diverted away from the very people who are meant to be honored. At the same time, the Gaels, as with Creighton's Folk, are denied what McKay calls their "specificity of history", rendering them as caricatures of themselves. It is interesting that simultaneous with the founding of the Gaelic Col-

lege, MacKenzie established the Nova Scotia Gaelic Mod, based on the National Mod in Scotland.

Ultimately, the sort of “Gaelic Revival” which MacKenzie espoused was never really inspired by real Gaelic life, but by non-Gaelic speakers’ ideals of their Highland ancestry. He could never allow his institution to evolve in a way which would expose his own estrangement from the culture which he championed, and as a result he served only to alienate the very people he had hoped to improve. MacKenzie gave Cape Breton Gaels the choice between tartanization and anglicization, either path eventually leading to the other, and both perpetuating the stigma of Gaelic life in Nova Scotia.

While MacKenzie was attempting to transform the Cape Breton Gael according to his romantic image, Angus L. Macdonald was advocating the same fate for all Nova Scotians. Macdonald, Premier of Nova Scotia from 1933-1940 and 1945-1954, was instrumental in the commodification of “Scottishness” as a tourism draw. Himself a semi-speaker of Gaelic, Angus L. shared with MacKenzie a romantic and essentialist interpretation of Gaelic culture (McKay 1992). But Macdonald took this a step further, casting all of “New Scotland” into the mold, so that whether you were Acadian, German, Loyalist or Portuguese, your Nova Scotian essence made you Scottish too (unsurprisingly, Macdonald did not extend this paradigm to include Blacks and Mi’kmaq). Thus, kilted pipers are present at tourist attractions not just in Baddeck and Inverness, but in Amherst and Yarmouth as well.

In addition to the external pressure from figures like MacKenzie and Macdonald, the Nova Scotian Scottish identity was changing from within, particularly in the industrial towns

of Cape Breton. The coal mines and factories of Cape Breton County attracted large numbers of people from the rural Gaelic-speaking communities. While they still comprised a large plurality of the urban population, they were joined by sizeable numbers of Acadians, Mi'kmaq, Blacks, Italians, Poles, Belgians, Chinese, Syrians, Jews and others. This ethnic mix, combined with a drastically different environment of regimented work schedules, company houses and stores, labour strikes and political wars led to a syncretic new culture, drawing from the Gaelic tradition but heavily influenced by modern working-class urbanism.

Traditional singers were valued, but a singer could earn no higher compliment than to be compared to Harry Lauder, the former Lanarkshire miner who brought light-hearted Highland themes to the music halls of industrial Scotland. There was continued admiration for traditional bards, but come January in Sydney Mines the Sons of the British Isles, in Glace Bay the Scottish Catholic Society, and in New Waterford a Burns Club, all celebrated Burns Day. (Frank 1985:205-6)

This urban Scottish identity was initially very much bound up with the Gaelic language. There were regular Gaelic services in the Presbyterian churches, and Gaelic was commonly heard on the street and in the pit. (Frank 1985:205) However, the fate of Gaelic in the towns was to be the same as most other urban immigrant languages, virtually disappearing after two or three generations. As urban Cape Breton became less Gaelic in speech, the Scottish identity of the region became more detached from its rural origins. This was a community which occupied a third space, separate from both the rural Gaelic communities and the romantic community of MacKenzie, Macdonald et. al. It shared many of the notions and aspirations of the latter (as in the Harry Lauder and Burns Night examples above), but on a class and power level was closer to the rural Gaelic-speakers, and usually had relations

among them. Thus its position vis à vis the Gaelic Community was neither completely inside nor outside.

While those within the tartanist community were pursuing their romantic vision, those within the community were active in their own way, although often within the tartaned framework. Jonathan G. MacKinnon continued to publish occasional Gaelic articles in English-language newspapers in Sydney, and taught Gaelic at the Gaelic College. In *The Canadian-American Gael*, another Gaelic instructor, Malcolm MacDonald, contrasted MacKenzie's ramblings with a straightforward plea:

Feumaidh sinn an dileab phriseal so ionnsachadh do'n òigridh le  
bhi 'ga bruidhinn anns na dachaidhean . . . . agus ma ni sinn an ni  
so, cha'n eil teagamh nach dean iadsan an ni ceudna ri'n gineal.  
We need to impart this precious legacy to the younger generation by  
speaking it in the homes . . . . and if we do this, no doubt they will do  
the same with their children. (CAG, vol. 1:14, my translation)

This example makes clear the differences in approach to the Gaelic Revival between Gaelic-speakers and non-Gaelic-speakers. Although the admonitions of the former would probably have been no more effective in arresting the decline of the language had they been removed from the circus atmosphere at the College, they may have at least helped to remove the stigma associated with everything Gaelic, something which was not possible when buried in a magazine celebrating Highland dancing and Robert Burns.

A.W.R. MacKenzie died in 1967, and the Gaelic College has been on a roller coaster ride ever since. MacKenzie's next two successors, Leonard Jones and Evan Lloyd, were businessmen with political connections who had no relation to or stated interest in Gaelic culture (Foster 1988:96-101). Lloyd went so far as to use the terms "tourist-trap" and

“mini-Disneyland” as ideals to which the College should aspire (Foster 1988:98). Jones and Lloyd were followed by Norman MacDonald, a Gaelic teacher from Skye, who was to be the College’s first and (so far) last Gaelic-speaking director. MacDonald expanded the Gaelic program, which created some resentment among those representing other interests, such as the College pipe band\* and supporters of Leonard Jones, whom MacDonald replaced and who had a financial interest in the College’s gift shop. A financial scandal led to MacDonald’s firing and accusations by his supporters that the scandal was manufactured to discredit and remove him (Laskey 1986). He was replaced by Jim MacAulay, and later Sam MacPhee, both businessmen with no Gaelic connections.

Today there is still an ambivalence about the place. Certain efforts are made to improve the state of Gaelic instruction, such as weekend and week-long immersion programs, but at its heart it remains a tourist mecca for the antimodernist audiences who yearn to see the kilts and hear the pipes in their “natural” setting. The physical presence of Gaelic (on signs, etc.) is small and often appears to have been an afterthought, such as the handwritten signs giving the Gaelic words for “men” and “women” taped onto the washroom doors of the College’s museum, the Great Hall of the Clans.

A common feature of activity on behalf of Gaelic during this time was the codification and regimentation of the language and culture. Organizations from the Oranaiche Cheap

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\*In conversations with parents of piping and pipe band students in 1990 and 1991, I encountered a good deal of residual bitterness at MacDonald for what they felt was his short-changing of the piping program. Conversely, Gaelic-speaking residents of the area around St. Ann’s (where I spent the summers during this period) would often express regret that MacDonald was not still in charge.

Breatuinn (Cape Breton Gaelic Choir) to the Scottish Catholic Society sought to impose order, whether by performing a traditional song in four-part harmony, or by appointing a “seannachaidh” (storyteller) to provide entertainment at SCS Council meetings. The reading and writing of Gaelic were given greater importance than they had among most Gaelic-speakers, and adjudication and competition in all things Gaelic were encouraged. The Gaelic Mod at the Gaelic College has for over fifty years centered on competitions in Gaelic singing and recitation, piping and Highland dancing. Piping itself is taught as a science rather than an incitement to dance.

Beginning in the 1970’s, the Gaelic Revival was transformed by the counterculture movement, represented in Cape Breton by back-to-the-earthers, draft-dodgers from the US, and assorted other hippies. Many of these newcomers had a vague idea of the Gaels as real “salt of the earth” types with whom they would find a natural affinity. For the most part they were disappointed to find that the Gaels’ values were not as “crunchy” as they had hoped. Even today, a Gaelic-speaking friend of mine will occasionally shake her head and say “o na hippies, cho salach ’s a tha iad.” (“oh the hippies, they’re so dirty.”) The difficult relations between the Gaels and the newcomers is exemplified by an anecdote told to me by a Gaelic instructor about a young newcomer who was arguing with an elderly local woman. “But we’re living the way your grandparents did,” protested the newcomer, to which the old woman replied, “my grandmother would never go out dressed like that!”

This clash of cultures was by no means confined to Cape Breton. McDonald (1994) relates a similar disparity between Breton language activists within the counterculture move-

ment and native Breton speakers. Similar conflicts took place across North America, particularly in “Indian Country”:

Those hippies offended our way of life. They hugged each other and kissed in public as if they didn't have anything else to do and nowhere to go. I went out there and spoke to some of them. I said, “Why are you here? Why do you behave in this way, doing anything that comes into your head? We do not like the way you are behaving. It's not our way. It's improper.” They said, “What's wrong with what we are doing? We are here because we're on your side . . . .” I told them, “No, you are not on our side. You don't behave well.” (Peter Nuvamsa, Sr., Hopi, cited in Nabokov 1992:390)

Yet for the general failure of the majority of newcomers to fit in with their surroundings, there has been some notable success. Some of the newcomers had a better understanding of the culture they moved into, or else came to appreciate it. Ronald Caplan, the editor of *Cape Breton's Magazine*, is but one example. Others have become outright Gaelic activists and otherwise established close bonds in their communities. Hippies joined with fishermen and priests in the repopularizing of Gaelic fiddle music, which began in the 1970's as an overt response to the airing of a documentary called *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*. Today, newcomers, whether part of the counterculture movement of the 1970's or later immigrants, can be counted among the island's Gaelic teachers, musicians, and community organizers.

The counterculture movement thus had two effects on the Gaelic community. One was the creation of a new Gaelic “essence”. In place of A.W.R. MacKenzie's hard working, God fearing, noble “race” was an equally ill-fitting image of a subversive, irreverent reveler. The other was the establishment of a small but active group of people creating ties with the local community and raising the profile of Gaelic culture as actually practiced by their new neigh-

bors. These two legacies have contributed a great deal, for better or worse, to the current makeup of the broad Gaelic community in Nova Scotia.

## The Gaelic Revival of the 1990's

### The Media Perspective

Owing largely to the commercial success of artists such as Ashley MacIsaac and the Rankin Family, national and international media attention has come to focus on the 1990's version of the Gaelic Revival in Nova Scotia. The emphasis typically lies in the following themes: an ancient culture breathing new life, recovering from its deathbed; a new found sensibility, especially among young people, to reassert their Gaelic identity; international acceptance of Cape Breton Gaelic culture; and an optimistic finale wherein the Gaelic language and culture will thrive as long as there are people who wish it to continue.

An article in *Maclean's* (December 6, 1993) refers to Cape Breton fiddling as "the music of the ancient Celts" and notes the novelty of "primly dressed senior citizens" speaking Gaelic with "black-garbed, Sinéad O'Connor look-alikes." Proof of the resurgence of Gaelic culture is offered in the form of "Celtic performers such as Big Pond's Rita MacNeil", an internationally popular singer who not only does not incorporate any Gaelic traditions into her music, but does not attempt to sound "Celtic" in even its vaguest sense. The Gaelic language, claims *Maclean's*, is "making a surprising comeback." The evidence: the interest of some students in Mabou in continuing their Gaelic classes after the class (the only one in the province) was canceled (it has since been re-added), and the appearance of *Am Bràighe*, a Gaelic-interest newspaper "hoping to capitalize on the Celtic craze." Finally, the article refers to the Rankin Family, the Barra MacNeils, Rita MacNeil, Natalie MacMaster and Ashley MacIsaac as "proof, it seems, that Cape Breton's Celtic culture is in good hands."

*Canadian Geographic* (January/February 1996) featured an article called “Re-Gaeling Cape Breton”, by writer and naturalized Cape Bretoner Silver Donald Cameron. The article pointedly distinguishes between the surge of Gaelic music and the increasingly precarious state of the language: “the music is thriving, yes, but at its moment of triumph — Juno awards, TV specials, international tours, profiles in national magazines — the language and the culture are fading.” After convincingly making the case that a Gaelic world-view exists, and is central to the continuance of a distinct music and dance, Cameron goes on to distort that world-view, using every myth and stereotype at his disposal. Gaelic is “proverbial, bardic and mystical.” A Gaelic teacher at the University College of Cape Breton is imagined as looking “at once natural and terrifying brandishing a claymore.” There are the legends of Bonnie Prince Charlie and the MacNeil chiefs. Mabou is a Gaelic center because, in addition to *Am Bràighe* being located there, the post office has a Gaelic sign, and “the Mull Restaurant serves Scottish oatcakes — bannock — and marag, a spicy white Scottish sausage.” The Mull also serves pastrami on rye, but it is doubtful that Cameron would consider Mabou to be a center of Jewish culture as a result of this. As with all coverage of the Gaelic Revival, Cameron can’t resist ending on a positive note. After quoting a co-publisher at *Am Bràighe* (“But when you cross the Canso Causeway, how do you find [the culture] . . . How do you touch it?”), Cameron waxes:

You can touch it at the Gaelic College in St. Ann’s — the language, the music, the dancing, the crafts — and at the Highland Village in Iona, with its historic Scottish houses assembled from all over Cape Breton along with a store, a blacksmith shop and other buildings. You can touch it at the innumerable summer festivals and Scottish concerts.

In *The New York Times* (June 17, 1994), the headline “Nova Scotia Hears the Lilt of ‘Gibberish’ Again” appears over a picture of two young men playing the fiddle. The article focuses on three main issues: the increasing popularity of fiddle music, the increase in the number of people studying Gaelic, and the appearance of the newspaper *Am Bràighe*. This is the only article to claim a resurgence in the language which presents evidence that the number of people learning it are increasing. Specifically, it quotes a professor at St. Francis Xavier University who noted that the yearly enrollment in Celtic studies had increased from 10 to 20 in the 1980’s to over 100.

The most recent appraisal of the Revival appeared in the *Boston Globe* (October 21, 1996). The article begins with a mention of bagpipes and kilts, but goes on to contrast this in the next paragraph with a description of a *cèilidh*: “rollicking celebrations where step-dancers kick their heels and fiddlers unleash Gaelic reels whose rhythms haven’t changed in centuries.” Again, Gaelic-based traditions such as fiddle and step dancing are thrown together with pipe bands and caber-tosses. The author of the article repeats the official line of the Gaelic College - “the only institution on the continent dedicated to the teaching of Gaelic language as well as Highlands culture, including bagpipe music, fiddling, clan law and lore, and the hand weaving of family tartans.” Early on the article acknowledges that Gaelic is barely surviving in Nova Scotia, but finishes off with a contrived-sounding quote from a Gaelic teacher: “so long as we have our music and our tales and our gatherings, we’ll likely endure in Canada.”

The problem most of these articles seem to have is that they aren't able to provide much evidence of a Gaelic revival beyond a few famous musicians, increasing enrollments in a B.A. program at one university and the appearance of a newspaper. For some writers this was proof enough of a revival. Others found it necessary to point out that, despite these encouraging developments, the language continues to decline, before ending on a positive note. Every article included references to the non-Gaelic, quasi-Gaelic or ersatz, such as Rita MacNeil and the Highland Village.

It is perhaps to be expected that media will latch onto whatever Gaelic clichés are available. I attended a press conference in Halifax announcing the official proclamation of May 1996 as Gaelic Awareness Month in Nova Scotia. The visual provided for the very brief coverage on the local evening television news consisted largely of a shot of the lap of a man sitting in the audience. The man was the only person at the conference wearing a kilt.

What, then, is the reality behind the hype of the latest Gaelic Revival?

#### **The Current State of Affairs: Gaelic**

It is unclear how many Gaelic-speakers there are in Nova Scotia today. The figure of 1000 speakers has been bandied about for several years, but I could locate no reliable source for this figure, so it is at best a rough estimate. Defining who is a Gaelic-speaker is part of the problem. Semi-speakers, passive bilinguals and intermediate learners may well outnumber fluent native speakers at this point. In any case, the vast majority of fluent speakers are from the core Gaelic communities in Cape Breton. There are also a handful of native speak-

ers from Scotland and learners who have achieved fluency. Some people from the latter two categories are now raising Gaelic-speaking children, although the total number is small.

### **The Institutions**

There has been a change in Gaelic activity in the province in the last few years. The Gaelic College continues to be a haven of tartanism, but the Gaelic component has improved. The College now offers regular weekend immersions, as well as a week-long immersion in the summer. In the summer of 1996, a full-time Gaelic Director was appointed for the first time, with a mandate to increase the presence of Gaelic in all the College's programs (Parsons 1997). The Mod has put increasing emphasis on more celebratory and participatory events, such as milling frolics, while decreasing its focus on competitions, so that the Mod now resembles more a feis (in fact it is now called "Feis a' Mhòid", the Feis of the Mod). Material for the classes come increasingly from the oral tradition of the province, often inviting native tradition bearers to give the classes a cultural context. The College also now gives classes in Cape Breton fiddle, piano and step dancing, subjects which were not taught there prior to the late 1980's. On the other hand, they have also recently introduced classes in Scottish country dancing and Lowland bagpipes, adding to the list of non-Gaelic and non-Nova Scotian traditions promoted at the College. The new director of the College is a non-Gaelic speaker from New Brunswick with no ties to the community. He is, however, active in pipe band circles.

Both universities in eastern Nova Scotia — St. Francis Xavier and the University College of Cape Breton — continue to offer courses in Gaelic and Celtic Studies. The M.A.

program in Celtic Studies at St. F.X. is currently dormant due to a lack of funds for faculty support, but the B.A. program is enjoying its highest enrollments ever. Since 1994, St. F.X. has offered a third-year Gaelic course, the first time it has ever done so (Parsons 1997). Both St. F.X. and UCCB have active student-run Celtic societies, which organize events ranging from Gaelic conversational lunch tables to evening ceilidhs.

The Highland Village's Gaelic content, such as it is, has been declining steadily in recent years. The staff's requirement to receive a short Gaelic lesson or two during the day has come to be seen as a formality for most, and the Gaelic instructor's hours have diminished to ten weeks per year. Bilingual signs have been replaced with English-only ones. An introductory video shown to visitors allegedly depicts the life of the first Gaelic settlers in the area (Iona), but no Gaelic is spoken in the video, despite the fact that one of the actors is a native speaker. The only Gaelic content consists of two young girls singing "Chì mi na Mòrbheanna" as they perform their chores, a song composed in Scotland a half century after the Gaels settled in Iona (and made popular more recently by the Rankin Family).

The Cape Breton Gaelic Society still exists but is relatively quiet, hosting occasional events and otherwise maintaining a place for Gaelic in Sydney. It has been eclipsed by the recently-formed Nova Scotia Gaelic Council, an umbrella organization which represents organizations and individuals active in the promotion of Gaelic. Among their accomplishments has been, in conjunction with the Halifax Gaelic Society, the successful lobby of the Nova Scotia Legislature to have May officially declared "Gaelic Awareness Month".

The emergence of the Halifax Gaelic Society is an indication of the spread of Gaelic activity outside its traditional heartland in Cape Breton and the eastern mainland counties. In addition to its lobbying efforts, the HGS has sponsored Gaelic classes, concerts, conversation groups and even a children's playgroup modeled on those in Scotland started by Comhairle na Sgoiltean Araich, the Gaelic Playgroup Association. Gaelic is also taught at continuing education classes. Some of the bigger names within the Gaelic community have Halifax associations. Archie Alec MacKenzie, a noted bard from Christmas Island spent the last decades of his life in Halifax, while guitarist and fiddler Dave MacIsaac is a native of the city. The Cape Breton Society sponsors regular square dances in Dartmouth, and some downtown pubs have frequent Cape Breton music nights. Windsor, Nova Scotia is also beginning to emerge as a mini-center of Gaelic activity, largely through the efforts of a small number of native Gaelic-speakers from Scotland who have settled there and offer classes.

### **The 70's Legacy**

The counterculture movement put credence in viewing history, society and culture from a "bottom-up" perspective. Their involvement in the Gaelic Revival led to a similar reevaluation of priorities. The appearance of *Cape Breton's Magazine* in 1972 gave a new validity to the oral tradition. The bulk of the magazine's contents was, and is, composed of the oral histories of farmers, fishers, miners, lumberers, and so on. Many stories are printed in Gaelic, Mi'kmaq and Acadian French. The new heroes of the Gaelic revival are people like Joe Neil MacNeil, a Gaelic storyteller whose repertoire contained an oral tradition going back two thousand years. He did not graduate from Sydney Academy, as did Jonathan G. MacKinnon,

or from any institution of higher education. He earned his livelihood from a variety of trades, ranging from carpenter to electrician. In short, his profile is one which would have gotten him little or no respect in the class-conscious Gaelic revival of A.W.R. MacKenzie's time. Conversely, enthusiasm for someone like Senator Allan J. MacEachen (now retired) is more muted. In 1993 I attended a week-long Gaelic immersion at the Gaelic College, where Joe Neil was a featured performer in the evenings. Allan J. attended classes as a student, and was largely treated as such by the other participants.

As this new perspective on Gaelic culture has grown in acceptance, it is increasingly forming the basis of new activity on behalf of Gaelic. For example, Feis an Eilein, or Festival of the Island, began as a small-scale Gaelic festival in Christmas Island in Cape Breton County as an antidote to the formality of the Gaelic Mod on the one hand, and the diluted Gaelic content of the various summer concerts on the other. It now ranks as one of the more popular summer festivals in Cape Breton, and has spawned other *feisean* throughout the island. Its focus is solely on the Gaelic tradition, offering workshops in Gaelic language, song and storytelling, fiddle, step dancing and square dancing, combined with nightly concerts, ceilidhs, dances and beach parties. In the off-season the feis organizers have undertaken other projects, such as the placing of Gaelic place-name signs below their English counterparts throughout the community. Feisean are unique among Nova Scotia's summertime Scottish festivals in that they are genuinely community-based affairs, relying on locals for every duty from planner to cook to t-shirt seller to step dance instructor.

Gaelic instruction at the more formal institutions has also been affected by this new sensibility. Classes at the Gaelic College, for example, are focusing more on social interaction and cultural context than they did in the past. The example of Joe Neil MacNeil as a featured speaker is a case in point. Meanwhile, other more informal venues for Gaelic instruction are becoming available. These might take place in someone's home, and a day's instruction might evolve into an evening's cèilidh.

Another big player among the new breed of Gaelic activists is the quarterly newspaper *Am Bràighe*, which started up in 1993 and has since been a consistent advocate for rehabilitating the image of the Gael and working for the language. In addition to providing a fair amount of Gaelic content, mostly taken from the oral tradition of Cape Breton Gaels, its editorials and reviews consistently emphasize native Gaelic traditions while largely ignoring manifestations of tartanism, except occasionally to criticize them.

While much of the above-mentioned activity represents the positive legacy of the 70's, there is also the legacy of the hippie flipside of the old distorted image of the Gaels. The emphasis on songs, stories, music, dance, drinking, joking and partying are sometimes presented as the total Gaelic experience, and some of the more somber and conservative aspects of the culture are often overlooked. As one Gaelic instructor put it:

It just strikes me that some people who talk about culture going on choose the parts of culture that they want to see go on. They pick and choose. They might not take the religious side of things, for instance. (GI-1)

## Music, Song and Dance

Gaelic-based music has been popular worldwide since the 1970's, when groups from Ireland and Scotland such as Planxty and Silly Wizard adapted the Folk Revival of England and North America to their respective musical traditions. Gaelic songs joined the music in popularity in the 1980's, when groups such as Clannad and Capercaillie created a sort of Gaelic-pop fusion. In Nova Scotia, Gaelic songs were popularized first by the Rankin Family, three sisters and two brothers from Mabou Coal Mines, Inverness County. They are now one of Canada's most popular music groups, and are widely credited with giving Gaelic music a national and international appeal. But how Gaelic is their music? The majority of their music is firmly centered in pop and country-pop traditions, with no connection to the Gaelic tradition. On their earlier albums they included some sets of fiddle tunes played more or less in the traditional style, but that content has all but disappeared on their more recent albums. They have consistently included one or two Gaelic songs on each recording (at least one member of the band is an active Gaelic learner), but their arrangements of these songs have everything to do with contemporary pop music tastes and little to do with the Gaelic tradition. They typically edit out verses from narrative songs, such as "An t-Each Ruadh" on their album *Fare Thee Well Love*, distorting the meanings of the songs in the process. On their most recent album *Endless Seasons*, they intersperse verses of two Gaelic songs. As one reviewer commented in *Am Bràighe*, "it seems their desire is always to do something artsy with Gaelic song while the most artistic thing they could do is learn the song well." (*Am Bràighe*, Vol. III, no. 2:17)

Other artists have since incorporated Gaelic songs into their repertoires. The Barra MacNeils, a group from Sydney Mines with a sound similar to the Rankin Family, recently started to include Gaelic songs on their albums. Two other Rankin sisters, Rita and Mary, released an album of songs, half of which were in Gaelic. There is also an increasing trend of including Gaelic songs on instrumental albums. Pipers Jamie MacInnes and Paul MacNeil, pianist Tracey Dares, and fiddlers Natalie MacMaster and Ashley MacIsaac have all included one or two Gaelic songs on recent albums. The treatment of the songs varies from a cappella to hip hop, and the reaction of Gaelic speakers to these recordings has been accordingly mixed.

One full-time Gaelic singer has emerged from the province, Mary Jane Lamond. Lamond sings with Ashley MacIsaac in addition to performing on her own. Her two recordings reflect an eclectic taste; some songs are sung unaccompanied in the traditional style, others have quite modern pop or world beat arrangements. Regardless of her treatment of the songs, Lamond has received more praise than the other artists mentioned above. This is perhaps due to her choice of songs, which tend to be songs popular in Gaelic communities in Nova Scotia rather than the popular standards of Mod songbooks and Marjory Kennedy-Fraser. More likely, it is the fact that Lamond is a serious student of the language and the song tradition, and is seen as more of an advocate for Gaelic than, say, the Rankin Family, who often seem reluctant to get too involved with that particular aspect of their music.

While Gaelic singing has become more commercial and controversial on one level, it continues in a less altered form at a more informal level. At local ceilidhs, milling frolics and

house visits, it is not at all unusual to see young people singing Gaelic songs in traditional unaccompanied style, including some of those who experiment with the songs on more formal stages. Most, however, are not professional singers, nor are they necessarily Gaelic activists in any sense. They do not exist in great numbers, but it is a trend which many have noticed.

The current mass appeal of young musicians with Cape Breton Gaelic roots has added fuel to an ongoing debate over what makes “authentic” Cape Breton music. For the most part this debate centers on whether one thinks of it as “Gaelic music” or some other appellation such as “Cape Breton music” or “Celtic music”. By using either of the latter terms, the option is left that the music can be unique without remaining dependent on the language for its uniqueness. However, these specific rationales are rarely articulated and must be inferred. In the mass media, popular Cape Breton artists are usually called “Celtic” or “East Coast” musicians, a vague term which is used to peg virtually any acoustic musician from Atlantic Canada. The semantics of such a label equate the music of Buddy MacMaster with that of Stan Rogers (and put them in the same section of the record stores), thereby denying the distinctiveness of Gaelic language-based musical traditions.

The two main Gaelic-based music traditions in Nova Scotia, fiddling and piping, have different problems regarding their proper place in Nova Scotia today, and will thus be treated separately.

While the piping tradition was being transformed in Scotland into a regimented and codified system, the Gaelic style remained popular in Gaelic communities across Nova Scotia.

The introduction of military (and later civilian) pipe bands in the early 20th century coincided with a gradual decline in the popularity of piping in Gaelic circles, although these two events were not necessarily related. Today there are very few pipers left from the older tradition, but a small number of younger pipers, trained in the military/competitive style, have begun to change their style of playing in accordance with that of the older pipers. This has caused some friction in “traditional” piping circles, where this vernacular style is often regarded as inferior, but there is no denying its increasing popularity.

Unlike the piping tradition, Gaelic fiddle music never had to contend with its Victorianized cousin from across the Atlantic. The challenge of Cape Breton fiddling, as it is commonly called, is the question of whether the style can remain unique after having crossed the language barrier.

Natalie MacMaster, the niece of Buddy MacMaster, is widely considered to be much more traditional in her approach than other young players (in particular Ashley MacIsaac). Nevertheless, her penchant for simultaneously playing fiddle and step dancing (a trait she shares with MacIsaac and other young fiddlers), while winning her huge applause at concerts, leaves some older listeners shaking their heads. Her current repertoire includes many Irish, Appalachian and other “outside music”, and she has been influenced by the many fiddlers from these other traditions to whom she has been exposed in her touring schedule. More recently she has also taken to using drums and bass in addition to the more traditional accompaniment of piano and guitar.

It is difficult to divide everyone into a “Gaelic” or “Not Gaelic” camp, and Ashley MacIsaac is a good example of this problem. He is not a Gaelic-speaker, but he is surely familiar with a few words and phrases, and more generally, growing up in Creignish, would surely have heard the language and the rhythm of the language on the speech of the older people. He also would have grown up being exposed to a vibrant, Gaelic-based musical tradition, and may have heard older people jigging tunes. Yet he clearly is heavily influenced by “outside”, popular music, and even when he does try to “play it straight” at a square dance, the dancers sometimes complain that he plays too fast. His most recent album, *Hi™ How Are You Today?*, places traditional tunes in a mix of thrash-punk electric guitars and bass-heavy hip-hop rhythms. While the album has gone platinum nationwide, he has gained many critics back home for his innovations. MacIsaac responded to his critics in a recent interview in *Campus Canada*:

“[Some people back home] are afraid that the true music, the pure music is going to disappear and get lost if I put a backbeat to it,” he says. “You know, if I add a bass and a guitar, or a hip-hop rhythm, they think it’s watered down, commercial. They think it’s going to go the way reggae and native music has — appropriated. . . . But really, if you listen to the album, it’s still traditional fiddle music. It’s what I know how to do best. I don’t know *how* to play any other way.” (Carnwarth 1996:19)

One might respond that his music could be traditional fiddle music *and* still be watered down, but MacIsaac does have a point. Another Cape Breton musician, Dave MacIsaac (no relation), recently released an album called *Nimble Fingers* in which he plays traditional tunes on an electric guitar and sometimes in a blues style. Yet his critics are few and far between. On the other hand, the discussion above regarding the internal rhythms of Gaelic music and song which, for example, the piano has been well adapted, would indicate that the

use of more regular percussive rhythms (especially at the volume at which they are present in *Hi™*...) can have a standardizing effect on the music. The fiddle itself may be played exactly the same way, but the overall Gaelic-ness of the tune may indeed be “watered down” by the regular pounding of the drum machine. It would be interesting to hear what would result from a more complex, Gaelic-based arrangement of percussion, but as yet no one has tried it.

From the mass culture perspective, debates over the Gaelic-ness of MacIsaac’s music are irrelevant; MacIsaac is a hot commodity and his image sells as many albums as his music does. Indeed, “it was ultimately MacIsaac’s stage presence that convinced [A&M executive Allan Reid] of the fiddler’s place on the label.” (Carnwath 1996:19) And to have gotten to where he is, MacIsaac had to cater to the sensibilities of millions of non-Gaelic speakers who wouldn’t know a strathspey from a merengue. That is perhaps the best evidence of the un-Gaelic side to MacIsaac’s music: that it is being driven by “outside” influences.

There are other young fiddlers besides Natalie MacMaster and Ashley MacIsaac who, without making much of a splash in the pop music scene, are earning their livings from Cape Breton fiddle music. These musicians do not shy from innovations, but perhaps due to their regular gigs playing for square dances, tend to do so less often and less extravagantly. But even these fiddlers fail to completely satisfy the older Gaelic-speaking audiences. Their compliments are inevitably followed by the diplomatic disclaimer, “but he’s not like the old timers.”

While the emergence of young fiddlers has been shown to be somewhat problematic with respect to the Gaelic tradition, there is another development which is less ambiguously

positive. The older fiddlers, many of them Gaelic speakers (the rest from Gaelic speaking environments) are also becoming more popular. In addition to Buddy MacMaster, other older “Gaelic” fiddlers such as Carl MacKenzie, Joe Peter MacLean, and Alex Francis MacKay have been gaining respect among young fiddlers and audiences alike.

The repopularization of Cape Breton fiddle music has resulted in the concurrent increase in step dancing and square dances. The weekly summer square dances in Glencoe in Inverness County provide a good example of the positive and problematic aspects of this popularity. On the one hand, the dances are very well attended by people of all age groups, although not everyone comes to dance. Still, the young are, if anything, overrepresented on the dance floor. On the other hand, square sets are sometimes overwhelmed or otherwise disrupted by inexperienced participants.

## Instructors

Before turning to the subject of Gaelic learners, some space should be given to the instructors. This is particularly true in the case of Nova Scotia, where most of the province's Gaelic instructors are learners themselves.

The instructors see their job as much more than the teaching of grammar and vocabulary. The teaching of Gaelic, like the learning of Gaelic, is among other things an attempt to save the language, and by extension the culture. And though they may disagree over the finer points of what constitutes Gaelic culture, they all agree that part of their job is to represent the culture to their students in what they consider to be its most accurate form.

If all you teach is a code, you know, "to say *I am well* you say *Tha mi gu math*," then that's all you're going to achieve, is that student's going to learn a code. . . . In some ways you're acting as an educator, in some ways you're acting as an animator, in some ways you're acting perhaps even as a salesperson, in addition to teaching the language. (GI-2)

To these one could also add folklorist, historian and singer.

Gaelic instructors in the province have made a number of innovations in teaching methods in recent years. The determination to produce functional Gaelic speakers has led to immersions, role-playing, and visiting native speakers in the classroom. The emphasis on cultural context has resulted in the inclusion of ceilidhs, nature walks and milling frolics into the curriculum. The instructors know what is at stake, and in their own ways they all strive for the same thing:

We just try to do our best to see that there's a generation of younger people who can handle Gaelic, from a scholarly point of view, and from a conversational point of view, so there will be people here who can . . . go out to the remaining speakers and talk to them, communicate with them, and pass on to the next generation some accurate representation of what Gaelic culture is. (GI-1)

To an extent, the attitudes of the instructors owe something to the Revival of the 1970's. Most instructors in the province today came of age and/or learned Gaelic themselves during or after this time. It is therefore unsurprising that many (though by no means all) of them should hold with such concepts as "cultural content" and incorporate nature walks and milling frolics into their classes. However, these practices are commonplace in classrooms the world over, and reflect a broad trend in language instruction.

## Learners

Adult learners of Gaelic are the future of the Gaelic community in Nova Scotia. In order to determine what Gaelic in Nova Scotia will consist of in twenty years time, it is necessary to look to the learners. Of particular interest are the notions of Gaelic culture they bring with them to the learning process, and how these notions are challenged as their fluency and participation in Gaelic society increases.

In order to get a sense of the community of learners, I handed out a five-page questionnaire at several Gaelic language-related events throughout the winter, spring and summer of 1996. These included university classes at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish and the University College of Cape Breton in Sydney, a Gaelic Day at St. F.X., a weekend immersion in Margaree, and Feis an Eilein, a Gaelic festival in Christmas Island. In addition, whenever I came across individual learners, particularly in the Halifax area, I gave them questionnaires as well. In all I received 66 responses.

The often acrimonious debate over authenticity and cultural appropriation, and the Gaelic College's position as a frequent target of criticism, has made Gaelic a sensitive issue there. The director of the College objected to the questions on the survey relating to the institution, and I was therefore unable to collect any surveys from the students attending the adult summer sessions there.

## Results

### FLUENCY

Respondents were asked to rate separately their ability to speak, understand, read and write Gaelic on a 5-point scale. The results were as follows:

**Table 1: Sample breakdown by fluency**

Gaelic ability	Fluently	With minor difficulty	Well enough to get by	With great difficulty	Hardly or not at all
Speak	2	9	19	29	6
Understand	2	11	18	27	6
Read	3	16	19	21	6
Write	2	10	17	27	9

I divided the sample into three groups. Those whose ability to speak and/or understand Gaelic was “fluent” or “with minor difficulty” were labeled advanced learners. Those who both spoke and understood Gaelic “well enough to get by” were put in the intermediate group. The remainder were grouped as beginners. There were thirty respondents in the beginner group, twenty intermediates, and sixteen advanced learners.

## GENDER

Thirty-five of the respondents were male, thirty-one female. The breakdown by fluency was:

**Table 2: Distribution of fluency by gender**

gender	beginners	intermediates	advanced	total sample
Female	17	10	4	31
Male	13	10	12	35

$\chi^2 = 4.31$ : critical value = 5.99 at .05 level with 2 d.f. not significant

## AGE

The age of the respondents ranged from 13 to 69. The numbers break down as follows:

<u>age</u>	<u># of respondents</u>
under 20:	12
20-29:	15
30-39:	19
40-49:	10
50-59:	4
60-69:	4

## RELIGION

The majority of respondents (36) were Roman Catholic. Seven identified themselves as Presbyterian, and fifteen more claimed another Protestant denomination. The remaining eight respondents gave other responses (e.g. Christian, deist, multiple denominations, etc.) or no response.

## EDUCATION

Most respondents (43) had at least an undergraduate degree, and many of the rest were university students who will presumably attain degrees. The results were:

<u>level of education</u>	<u># of respondents</u>
Less than high school diploma	4
High school diploma	4
some undergraduate	13
undergraduate degree	22
some graduate	6
graduate degree	15

## OCCUPATION

Students formed a plurality (26) of the sample. Eleven were teachers (including three Gaelic teachers). Five were retired, and the rest were scattered among varied occupations, including professionals, manual labourers, civil servants, homemakers and clergy. Also included were one farmer and one fisher.

## POLITICAL PREFERENCE

Of those respondents who stated a preference for a political party, a plurality (15) supported the New Democratic Party, followed by the Liberals (12), Progressive Conservatives (5) and Reform (2). However, 24 respondents had no particular preference, and six did not respond.

## HOME COMMUNITIES

A majority of respondents (39) grew up in eastern Nova Scotia (considered for these purposes to be composed of Cape Breton Island and Antigonish, Pictou and Guysboro counties on the mainland); of those, fourteen grew up in communities where Gaelic is still spoken.

Twenty-two grew up outside the province, and the remaining five were raised in other parts of Nova Scotia.

#### CURRENT RESIDENCE

Forty-one respondents currently live in eastern Nova Scotia, fifteen of whom are resident in Gaelic communities. Sixteen live in other parts of the province, and nine live outside Nova Scotia.

#### YEARS OF STUDY

Responses ranged from zero (rank beginners) to twenty, the majority having less than three years of Gaelic instruction.

<u># years studying Gaelic</u>	<u># of respondents</u>
less than 2	27
2-4	13
4-7	14
7-10	4
more than 10	8

#### METHODS OF STUDY

Most respondents have used a variety of methods to learn Gaelic. Fifty-five have taken at least one Gaelic class, and fifty-one have used some sort of self-instruction materials. Thirty-five have practiced their Gaelic on native speakers, and twenty-nine have attended a Gaelic immersion at least once. Twenty-two respondents cited other methods, including conversation groups, practicing with more fluent learners, transcribing and translating recorded speech, and the internet..

## OTHER LANGUAGES STUDIED

Other than Gaelic, French was the language studied by the most respondents with fifty-seven. Only three other languages were studied by more than two respondents: German (14), Latin (11) and Spanish (7). Chinese, Greek, Irish and Welsh were studied by two respondents each. The remaining languages were studied by only one respondent. These were: Japanese, Russian, Hebrew, Hindi, Portuguese, Filipino, Swedish, Esperanto, Yiddish, Manx, and Mi'kmaq.

## REASONS FOR LEARNING GAELIC

Respondents were asked to give the reason or reasons for their decision to learn Gaelic. The most common motivation was pride or interest in heritage, with twenty-six respondents giving some variation on this theme. Twelve respondents mentioned family members who speak or spoke Gaelic. Other common motivators were music (two respondents specifically mentioned the Rankin Family as having inspired them to learn Gaelic), a desire for cultural access, regional pride, and interest in languages.

## PLANNED USE OF GAELIC

Respondents were then asked what use they hoped to make of the Gaelic they were learning. Twenty-seven indicated a desire for social interaction and conversation in Gaelic, particularly with native speakers. Ten mentioned a desire to keep the language alive, and nine said they hoped to pass the language on to their children. Other common answers included: accessing a different world view; using Gaelic for work or academic study, and learning songs, poems and stories.

## GAELIC IN FAMILY

Thirty-seven of the sixty-six respondents (56%) have or had family members who speak or spoke Gaelic. For most it was an older relative (e.g. grandparent), although a few claimed Gaelic-speaking spouses or children.

## SCOTTISH ANCESTRY

Fifty-seven respondents claimed to be of Scottish decent, with only nine answering in the negative.

## USE OF GAELIC WITH CHILDREN

Twenty respondents have children. Of those, four always speak Gaelic to their children, one usually, six sometimes, four rarely, and five never.

## GAELIC ON ANSWERING MACHINES

Forty respondents have answering machines. Of those, seventeen have used Gaelic on their machines.

## FREQUENCY OF USE OF GAELIC

Respondents were asked to state how frequently they speak, read, write, and sing in Gaelic. The results follow:

**Table 3: frequency of use of Gaelic: total sample**

<i>how often do you . . .</i>	frequently	often	sometimes	rarely	never
speak Gaelic with native speakers	5	10	18	19	11
speak Gaelic with other learners	12	15	26	11	1
read Gaelic	11	16	26	9	2
write Gaelic	4	14	30	11	5
sing Gaelic songs	13	17	20	10	5

## OPPORTUNITIES TO SPEAK GAELIC

When asked if they felt they had enough opportunities to meet native speakers, twenty said yes, and forty-five said no.

## DIFFICULTY IN SPEAKING WITH NATIVE SPEAKERS

Seventeen respondents said they had difficulty getting native Gaelic-speakers to speak Gaelic to them, while twenty-nine said they had no such difficulty. Twenty did not respond to this question.

## LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a list of statements pertaining to Gaelic. The results were:

**Table 4: language attitude results: total sample**

Statement:	agree strongly	agree somewhat	no opinion or not sure	disagree somewhat	disagree strongly
Gaelic is an ancient language	46	11	1	4	4
Gaelic is of little use in modern society	3	4	8	14	37
It's broadening to have more than one language	55	8	3	0	0
Gaelic is a beautiful language to hear and speak	58	6	0	1	0
Gaelic is the language of a people rooted in the land, rejecting modern ways	1	15	12	19	18
To really understand Nova Scotian Scottish culture, you need to know Gaelic	28	17	4	14	1
There are important things that can be expressed in Gaelic which can't be expressed in English	32	16	9	7	0
Gaelic culture is more environmentalist than Anglo-Canadian culture	5	11	40	2	4
Gaelic is the language of backward country people	3	1	2	6	53
Minority languages everywhere should be preserved and promoted	52	10	3	0	0

When the results were broken down by fluency, there was one statement with which advanced learners were significantly more likely to agree than intermediate and beginning learners.

**Table 5: responses to the statement by fluency**

In order to really understand Nova Scotian Scottish culture, you need to know Gaelic					
level of fluency	agree strongly	agree somewhat	no opinion or not sure	disagree somewhat	disagree strongly
beginner	6	10	4	9	0
intermediate	8	6	0	4	1
advanced	14	1	0	1	0

$\chi^2 = 23.99$ : critical value = 20.09 at .01 level with 8 d.f. significant

#### FUTURE OF GAELIC IN NOVA SCOTIA

The vast majority of respondents (56) felt that Gaelic can be saved in Nova Scotia, while four answered in the negative, and six did not respond.

## PARENTAL CHOICE OF LANGUAGE

Given the hypothetical situation of a bilingual Gaelic/English couple with young children, half of those who responded (32) said the parents should speak Gaelic to their children. The other half said the parents should speak both languages to their children. The breakdown by fluency was:

**Table 6: support for language of socialization by fluency**

Which language would you advise a bilingual Gaelic/English couple to speak to their children?			
level of fluency	Gaelic	both	English
beginner	11	17	0
intermediate	10	10	0
advanced	11	5	0

$\chi^2 = 3.45$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

## CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

Respondents were asked to rate several forms of cultural expression according to how relevant they are to Nova Scotian Gaelic culture. The results are as follows:

**Table 7: Importance of cultural expressions: total sample**

expression:	very important	somewhat important	not important
Gaelic songs	62	2	0
Gaelic stories	60	3	0
fiddle music	53	10	0
bagpipe music	44	18	0
kilts	9	21	27
step dancing	44	17	1
Highland dancing	23	20	19
square dancing	32	25	5
tartan	22	24	15
milling frolics	56	7	1
Scottish concerts	42	21	1
Gaelic choirs	34	22	7
clanship/clan associations	19	29	15
house visits	54	7	1
pipe bands	16	26	20

Broken down by fluency, the results are as follows:

**Table 8: Importance of Gaelic songs, by fluency**

<b>Gaelic Songs</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	27	1	-
<b>intermediates</b>	19	1	-
<b>advanced</b>	16	-	-
<b>total sample</b>	62	2	-

$\chi^2 = 0.77$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

**Table 9: Importance of Gaelic stories, by fluency**

<b>Gaelic Stories</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	25	2	-
<b>intermediates</b>	19	1	-
<b>advanced</b>	16	-	-
<b>total sample</b>	60	3	-

$\chi^2 = 1.22$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

**Table 10: Importance of fiddle music, by fluency**

<b>Fiddle Music</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	23	4	-
<b>intermediates</b>	14	6	-
<b>advanced</b>	16	-	-
<b>total sample</b>	53	10	-

$\chi^2 = 6.03$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

**Table 11: Importance of bagpipe music, by fluency**

<b>Bagpipe Music</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	20	6	-
<b>intermediates</b>	13	7	-
<b>advanced</b>	11	5	-
<b>total sample</b>	44	18	-

$\chi^2 = 0.83$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

**Table 12: Importance of kilts, by fluency**

<b>Kilts</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	5	11	10
<b>intermediates</b>	4	11	5
<b>advanced</b>	-	3	12
<b>total sample</b>	9	25	27

$\chi^2 = 11.72$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. significant

**Table 13: Importance of step dancing, by fluency**

<b>Step Dancing</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	19	8	-
<b>intermediates</b>	14	6	-
<b>advanced</b>	11	3	1
<b>total sample</b>	44	17	1

$\chi^2 = 3.55$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

**Table 14: Importance of Highland dancing, by fluency**

<b>Highland Dancing</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	13	9	5
<b>intermediates</b>	9	7	4
<b>advanced</b>	1	4	10
<b>total sample</b>	23	20	19

$\chi^2 = 13.56$ : critical value = 13.28 at .01 level with 4 d.f. significant

**Table 15: Importance of square dancing, by fluency**

<b>Square Dancing</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	15	9	3
<b>intermediates</b>	10	10	-
<b>advanced</b>	7	6	2
<b>total sample</b>	32	25	5

$\chi^2 = 3.39$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

**Table 16: Importance of tartan weaving, by fluency**

<b>Tartan Weaving</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	12	9	5
<b>intermediates</b>	9	8	3
<b>advanced</b>	1	7	7
<b>total sample</b>	22	24	15

$\chi^2 = 9.15$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

**Table 17: Importance of milling frolics, by fluency**

<b>Milling Frolics</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	22	5	1
<b>intermediates</b>	19	1	-
<b>advanced</b>	15	1	-
<b>total sample</b>	56	7	1

$\chi^2 = 4.18$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

**Table 18: Importance of Scottish concerts, by fluency**

<b>Scottish Concerts</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	21	7	-
<b>intermediates</b>	15	5	-
<b>advanced</b>	6	9	1
<b>total sample</b>	42	21	1

$\chi^2 = 9.14$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

**Table 19: Importance of Gaelic choirs, by fluency**

<b>Gaelic Choirs</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	17	8	3
<b>intermediates</b>	13	7	-
<b>advanced</b>	4	7	4
<b>total sample</b>	34	22	7

$\chi^2 = 9.17$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

**Table 20: Importance of clan societies, by fluency**

<b>Clan Societies</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	6	17	4
<b>intermediates</b>	10	7	3
<b>advanced</b>	3	5	8
<b>total sample</b>	19	29	15

$\chi^2 = 13.01$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. significant

**Table 21: Importance of house visits, by fluency**

<b>House Visits</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	23	3	1
<b>intermediates</b>	15	4	-
<b>advanced</b>	16	-	-
<b>total sample</b>	54	7	1

$\chi^2 = 5.17$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. not significant

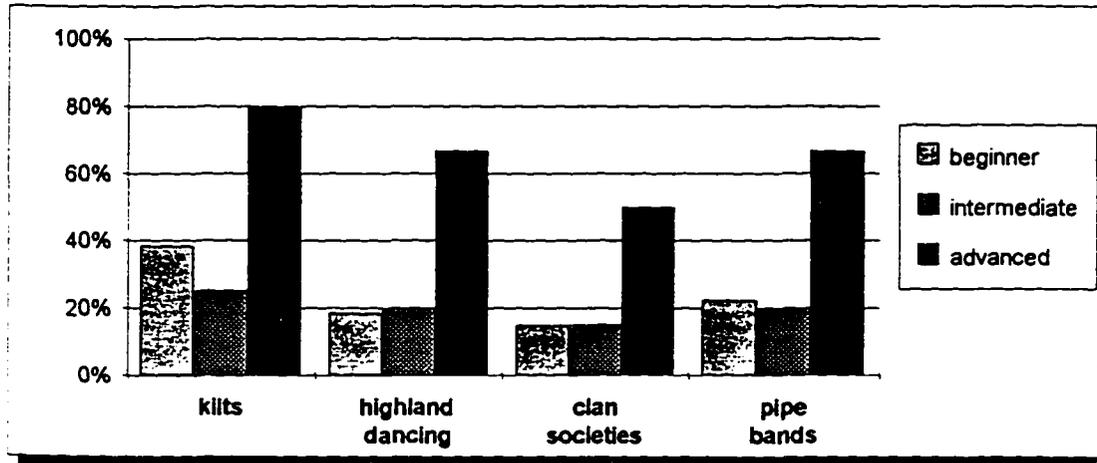
**Table 22: Importance of pipe bands, by fluency**

<b>Pipe Bands</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginners</b>	10	11	6
<b>intermediates</b>	6	10	4
<b>advanced</b>	-	5	10
<b>total sample</b>	16	26	20

$\chi^2 = 13.19$ : critical value = 9.49 at .05 level with 4 d.f. significant

Significant differences occurred in the responses to kilts, Highland dancing, clan societies and pipe bands. In each case, the advanced learners were significantly more likely to give a response of “not important”.

**Figure 2: Percentage of respondents regarding kilts, Highland dancing, clan societies and pipe bands as “not important”, by level of fluency:**



In addition, when the responses of the beginning and intermediate learners were grouped together and compared with those of the advanced learners, three other categories produced significant differences:

**Table 23: Importance of tartan weaving, advanced learners vs. all others:**

Tartan Weaving			
level of fluency:	very important	somewhat important	not important
beginner & intermediate	21	17	8
advanced	1	7	7

$\chi^2 = 8.95$ : critical value = 5.99 at .05 level with 2 d.f. significant

**Table 23: Importance of Scottish concerts, advanced learners vs. all others**

<b>Scottish Concerts</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginner &amp; intermediate</b>	36	12	-
<b>advanced</b>	6	9	1

$\chi^2 = 9.14$ : critical value = 5.99 at .05 level with 2 d.f. significant

**Table 23: Importance of Gaelic choirs, advanced learners vs. all others**

<b>Gaelic choirs</b>			
<b>level of fluency:</b>	<b>very important</b>	<b>somewhat important</b>	<b>not important</b>
<b>beginner &amp; intermediate</b>	30	15	3
<b>advanced</b>	4	7	4

$\chi^2 = 7.78$ : critical value = 5.99 at .05 level with 2 d.f. significant

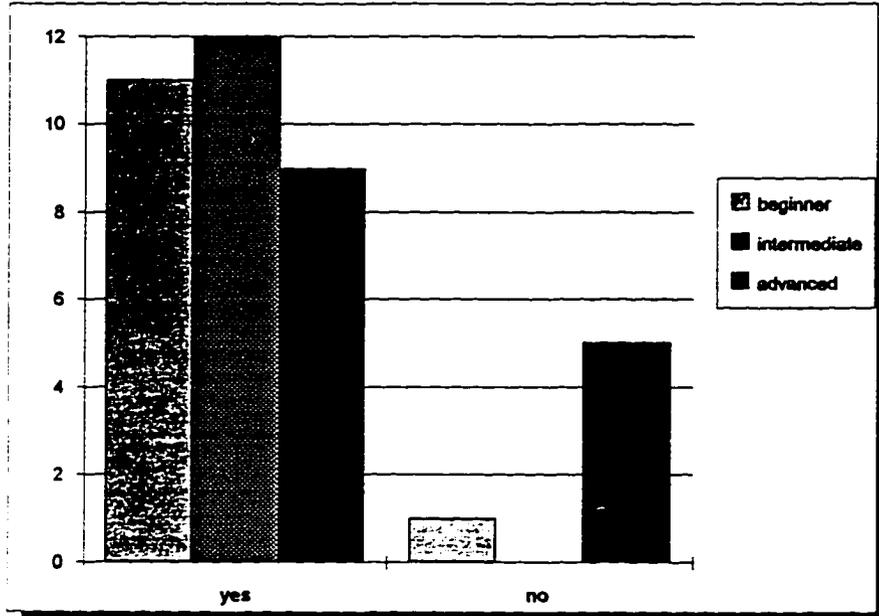
#### **Gaelic College Attendance AND OPINIONS OF THE COLLEGE**

Forty-three respondents have attended the Gaelic College in the past. Of those, thirty-six have gone there for Gaelic instruction. Fourteen have taken classes in other subjects, and sixteen have attended the Gaelic Mod. Eight respondents have had contact with the Gaelic College in some other capacity, ranging from a tour of the grounds to serving on the College's board of directors.

Of the forty-three who have been to the Gaelic College, thirty-two said it is a good place to learn Gaelic. Sixteen said the College does a good job of promoting and preserving Gaelic, and eight said the overall image presented by the College is an appropriate representation of Nova Scotian Gaels.

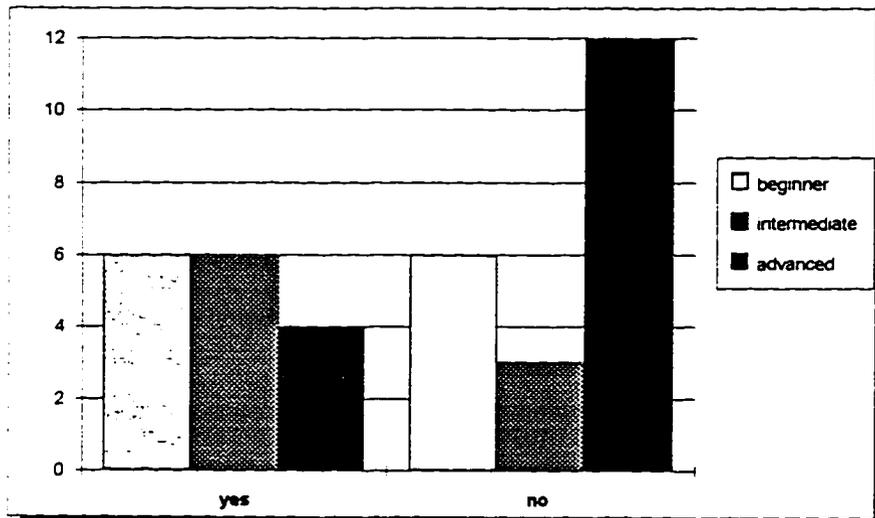
Response to the three questions broken down by fluency was as follows:

**Figure 3: Responses to the question, "Is the Gaelic College a good place to learn Gaelic?", by fluency**



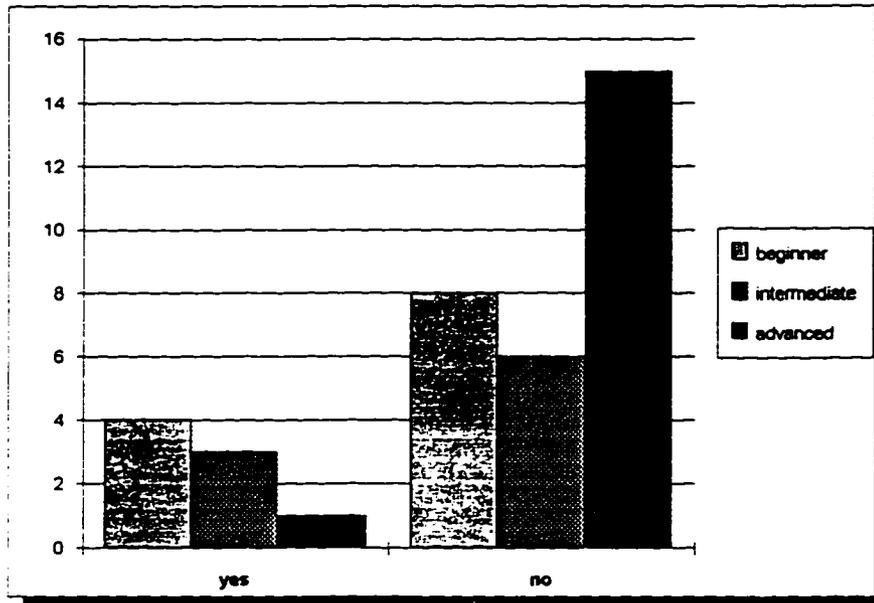
$\chi^2 = 6.93$ : critical value = 5.99 at .05 level with 2 d.f. significant

**Figure 4: Responses to the question, "Does the Gaelic College do a good job of preserving and promoting the Gaelic language?", by fluency**



$\chi^2 = 4.40$ : critical value = 5.99 at .05 level with 2 d.f. not significant

**Figure 5: Responses to the question, "Is the image presented by the Gaelic College an appropriate representation of Nova Scotian Gaels?", by fluency**



$\chi^2 = 3.93$ : critical value = 5.99 at .05 level with 2 d.f. not significant

Advanced learners were significantly less likely to agree that the Gaelic College is a good place to learn Gaelic than all other learners.

## PERSONALITIES

Respondents were asked to rate several individuals according to their importance to the Nova Scotian Gaelic identity. Due to a clerical error, several respondents from U.C.C.B. did not receive this page of the questionnaire. The results therefore are based on a total of 48 responses:

### **Robert Burns**

Robert Burns was a famous 18th Century Scottish poet. He wrote in a Lowland Scots dialect, and though he is often claimed as “the national poet of Scotland,” he had no relationship to Gaelic culture, other than to be among the first to romanticize it.

very important	6
somewhat important:	8
not important:	28
not familiar:	2
no response:	4

### **Bonnie Prince Charlie**

The Young Pretender, Charles was raised in Italy and spoke no Gaelic. His armed struggle to gain the British throne in 1745-46 was supported largely with Highland troops.

very important:	4
somewhat important:	26
not important:	11
not familiar:	3
no response:	4

### **St. Columba**

St. Columba was the Irish monk whose led the first major Gaelic invasion and subsequent settlement of what is now Scotland. There is a St. Columba church in Iona in Victoria County, Cape Breton.

very important:	8
somewhat important:	19
not important:	9
not familiar:	8
no response:	4

### **John Knox**

John Knox was the Lowland Scot who led the Reformation in Scotland. Although he was not a Gael (and regarded the Highlanders with contempt), he is an icon in Presbyterian Gaelic communities, and several churches are named after him throughout eastern Nova Scotia.

very important:	8
somewhat important:	7
not important:	18
not familiar:	11
no response:	4

### **Alan the Ridge**

Alan “The Ridge” MacDonald was one of the first Gaelic settlers in Inverness County, and is well-known for his bardic compositions.

very important:	32
somewhat important:	0
not important:	0
not familiar:	11
no response:	5

### **Sir Walter Scott**

Sir Walter Scott was a famous 19th century Lowland writer, and was one of the people most responsible for the development of tartanism. His novels such as “Rob Roy” contributed to the romanticization of the Gael.

very important:	3
somewhat important:	8
not important:	23
not familiar:	7
no response:	7

### **Malcolm Gillis**

Malcolm Gillis was a well-known bard and fiddler from Southwest Margaree. Many of his compositions were published in *Smeòrach nan Cnoc 's nan Gleann* and are still popular in Cape Breton.

very important:	25
somewhat important:	0
not important:	0
not familiar:	18
no response:	5

**Robert the Bruce**

Robert the Bruce was king of Scots in the early 14th century and led the Scots army at the decisive battle of Bannockburn, in which they drove out the English army and secured Scottish independence for several centuries.

very important:	4
somewhat important:	12
not important:	22
not familiar:	6
no response:	4

**Jonathan G. MacKinnon**

Jonathan G. was a Gaelic scholar from Whycomagh and the editor of *Mac-Talla* from 1892-1904, making it the longest running Gaelic newspaper anywhere in the world.

very important:	18
somewhat important:	3
not important:	0
not familiar:	19
no response:	8

**Angus L. Macdonald**

Premier of Nova Scotia and a semi-speaker of Gaelic, Macdonald was instrumental in the tartanization of the province as a tourism draw.

very important:	8
somewhat important:	18
not important:	5
not familiar:	12
no response:	5

**Rev. Norman MacLeod**

The Rev. Norman and his followers settled in St. Ann's, Victoria County for thirty years before leaving for New Zealand. MacLeod's legend is part of the history of the Gaelic College, which is situated on his former property.

very important:	12
somewhat important:	20
not important:	3
not familiar:	8
no response:	5

**A.W.R. MacKenzie**

MacKenzie was the founder of the Gaelic College.

very important:	9
somewhat important:	12
not important:	4
not familiar:	17
no response:	6

**Màiri Mhòr nan Oran**

Màiri Mhòr (Mary MacPherson) was a bard from the Isle of Skye most noted for her songs about the Clearances.

very important:	14
somewhat important:	15
not important:	4
not familiar:	11
no response:	4

**Joe Neil MacNeil**

Joe Neil was a major Gaelic tradition-bearer whose store of traditional stories made him a celebrity in Gaelic circles on both sides of the Atlantic in his later years. He passed away in 1996.

very important:	40
somewhat important:	1
not important:	0
not familiar:	2
no response:	5

**Bard MacLean**

John MacLean was the composer of “A’ Choille Ghruamach” quoted earlier. He settled in Pictou County in 1819 and later moved to Antigonish County. He composed many songs which are still sung in Nova Scotia and in Scotland.

very important:	29
somewhat important:	3
not important:	0
not familiar:	9
no response:	7

**Father Rankin**

Father Rankin was a well-known advocate of Gaelic culture in Cape Breton, in particular fiddle music. He was one of the organizers of the Glendale Fiddle Festival, started in the 1970's in response to the film *The Last Cape Breton Fiddler*.

very important:	35
somewhat important:	5
not important:	0
not familiar:	4
no response:	4

**The MacKenzies of Christmas Island**

Archibald J. MacKenzie was the author of *The History of Christmas Island Parish* and the composer of many songs still popular in Cape Breton. His sons Hugh and Archie Alec were also well-known bards, singers, and musicians.

very important:	25
somewhat important:	3
not important:	0
not familiar:	16
no response:	4

**Buddy MacMaster**

Buddy is the best-known of the older generation of Cape Breton fiddlers.

very important:	32
somewhat important:	12
not important:	1
not familiar:	0
no response:	3

**Ashley MacIsaac**

very important:	10
somewhat important:	23
not important:	13
not familiar:	0
no response:	2

### **Marjory Kennedy Fraser**

very important:	5
somewhat important:	10
not important:	13
not familiar:	14
no response:	6

### **The Rankin Family**

very important:	19
somewhat important:	26
not important:	2
not familiar:	0
no response:	1

There were no significant differences in the responses to the above individuals when broken down by fluency.

It is difficult to assess how representative this sample is of the Gaelic learner population in Nova Scotia. No one knows how many Gaelic learners there are. One can count the numbers of students registered in classes, but not those who study on their own. Nevertheless, this sample does include learners from as broad a range of sources as possible. These included classes at two universities, a one-day class, a feis, meeting of the Halifax Gaelic Society, and several house visits.

The absence of responses from the Gaelic College was unfortunate; however in my own experience there as a student and instructor, most of the students come from outside the province and have limited exposure to the Nova Scotian Gaelic community as a whole. This is not to say that such students make for undesirable respondents — several such learners are included in this survey — but rather that their capacity to answer questions such as “how

important is x to the Nova Scotian Gaelic community?" is necessarily restricted. Therefore an over-representation of "visiting learners" might skew an attempt to establish an accurate picture of the future Gaelic community of Nova Scotia. Furthermore, those students from outside Nova Scotia whose commitment to Gaelic in the province is more solid will likely show up at other Gaelic events such as those listed above. At the same time, visiting learners who attend the Gaelic College for a few weeks and then leave are still one integral aspect of Gaelic life in the province, or at least in Cape Breton in the summertime.

Apart from the missed opportunity at the Gaelic College, there are undoubtedly other learners who rarely attend organized events such as classes or feisean. They might be local residents or people from away with relatives in Nova Scotia who learn from family members or neighbors or in an otherwise private fashion. These learners are the most difficult to enumerate and represent yet another unknown quantity. The following discussion should therefore be considered with these factors in mind.

Roughly half the sample claimed at least a modicum of ability to speak, understand, read and write Gaelic, the other half claiming only rudimentary ability. The trend from the sample would indicate that only a few learners persist to the higher levels of fluency. For many this may be intentional, i.e. not every learner wants to achieve full fluency, many being content with a few phrases or the ability to carry a simple conversation. For others it may reflect the difficulty of access to a Gaelic-speaking environment. There is nowhere on earth where one is forced to speak Gaelic in order to function, and precious few places where Gaelic is spoken at all, so the opportunity of fluency through social interaction is very re-

stricted. This is a problem common to learners of minority languages. For example, Trosset notes that the learners she encountered regarded the lack of opportunity to speak Welsh as the hardest aspect of learning it (1986:169).

The sample as a whole was more proficient at understanding and reading Gaelic than speaking and writing it, which is typical of second language learners. On average they are slightly better at reading and writing than speaking and understanding, which is of course strikingly different from the situation with native speakers, most of whom are unlettered in Gaelic.

The majority of the 66 respondents were young people under 30, a large number of them university students. This is hardly surprising, as the survey was given out, among other places, at university-level Gaelic classes at St. Francis Xavier University and the University College of Cape Breton. Most students in these classes are of typical university age (i.e. 18-21), although there were a few mature students in these classes. It is quite possible that there are more older Gaelic-learners than is reflected in this sample, because it is much easier to find learners in organized class settings (which, when inclusive of university classes, would tend to weigh in favor of younger students) than to seek out individual learners using self-instruction methods, who may be of any age. Despite this, there are reasons to believe that learning Gaelic is more popular with younger people in Nova Scotia. Inasmuch as musicians such as Ashley MacIsaac and the Rankin Family spark an interest in Gaelic in their fans, those fans would tend to be young. The younger generation is the first to grow up in the aftermath of the previous Revival of the 1970's, in which many of the anti-Gaelic sentiments

which had been prevalent were refuted. Someone who came of age in the 1950's or 1960's may still carry some baggage of this stigma. I have heard more than one person observe, for example, that it is common to see both young and old people at local square dances in Cape Breton, but middle-aged people are more rare.

The sample was roughly evenly balanced between men and women. However, only one-quarter of the advanced learners were women. The advanced learner sample was small (16 respondents), so caution must be taken not to over-interpret this gap. Finlay Macleod, a noted Gaelic activist in Scotland, has said that “successful” learners (i.e. learners who achieve functional conversational ability in Gaelic) tend to be male (personal communication). His explanation is that, unlike a learner of a major language like French or German, Gaelic learners must be aggressive and persistent in getting native speakers to speak Gaelic to them. Therefore, assuming that men are, on the whole, more aggressive than women — whether by nature, nurture, or a combination of the two — this may explain a tendency for women to be less present at the higher levels of Gaelic fluency. This is a dubious assertion, however, and it remains to be proven conclusively that more men achieve fluency than women. Even if this were to be proven, there would be a multitude of possible explanations.

The majority of respondents were raised Roman Catholic, a result which is unsurprising, given that Catholics make up the majority of the Scottish population of eastern Nova Scotia. Also, two of the venues where I collected surveys, St. Francis Xavier University and the Christmas Island Feis, are places where one would expect to find disproportionately more Catholics; St. F.X.U. is a Catholic university in a predominantly Catholic area, and Christmas

Island is a Catholic community. Presumably if I had handed out surveys at the North Shore Feis, a Protestant area, there would have been more Protestant representation. This is not to suggest that there is any sectarianism at work in Gaelic communities, but rather that local representation tends to predominate.

It was interesting to note the popularity of the New Democratic Party among respondents, although broad interpretations would be dangerous for two reasons. First, almost half the respondents (30) stated that they had “no particular preference” or did not respond. Second, Gaelic is not much of a political issue in Nova Scotia, despite some efforts to politicize it. None of the political parties in Nova Scotia has a policy on Gaelic, unlike the situation in Wales, where Plaid Cymru has support for Welsh as an integral part of its party manifesto. However, support for an endangered minority language is a value more easily fitted into the multicultural and social welfare ethos of the NDP than, say, the more Darwinist approach of the Reform Party. Note that the respondents were almost unanimous in their support for minority languages in general.

People learn Gaelic for a number of different reasons. The responses given by the sample are necessarily shorthand answers — interest in heritage, grandparents who spoke Gaelic, and so forth. After all, there are many more people who are interested in their Scottish or even Gaelic heritage, or who have or had Gaelic speaking relatives, than have taken the further step to try to learn the language. In interviews with several Gaelic instructors, some deeper motivations were revealed. One instructor said that people’s reasons for learning Gaelic tended to differ according to age group. Older learners, he said, were usually

looking for a sort of reconnection with the Gaelic environment they had experienced in their younger years. Many learners in their child-bearing years, on the other hand, spent their childhood in a partially Gaelic environment, but were cut off from it by virtue of their not knowing Gaelic.

And very often they'll say things like . . . "they'd be over our place singing all the time in Gaelic, and I never understood a word." . . . . They missed out on something. It was something that should have been theirs, but it wasn't there *for them*. It was there but no one expected them to participate in it, they didn't participate in it, and at the time they probably didn't have a heck of a lot of interest in participating in it. But with hindsight, especially being in that time in your life, you want to fill in those areas, because you want to have something to offer your children. (GI-2)

These explanations indicate the sincerity behind simple phrases like "I want to get in touch with my heritage." Of course, there are learners with less serious motivations, especially among the younger learners (although there are young learners with real emotional attachments to the language as well). The current fashionability of all things Gaelic attracts many casual learners who may or may not go very far in their studies. And there are also those who might be called "hobbyists", who, as one instructor said, "take Gaelic the way they take knitting or tennis."

The desire to make a connection to one's roots is probably the most common reason for learning many minority and heritage languages. Davies and Bowie (1992) relate the experiences of many Welsh learners who overcame the ambiguities of their Anglo-Welsh identity by "discovering" a Welshness encompassed by the language, and Trosset notes that monolingually Anglophone Welsh people who learn Welsh are considered to "regain their complete identity." (Trosset 1986:172)

The idea that one's identity can be less than complete is perhaps what some learners are admitting by studying Gaelic. Certainly there are alternate Scottish or Nova Scotian identities — such as tartanism — which are readily accessible without going through the trouble of learning a language. For a minority, however, these are insufficient.

I remember my brother coming back from Scotland with the crest — the MacNeil tartan in the background and Kisimul Castle in the middle, you know, and those funny words you couldn't say but somebody told you meant "Victory or Death" — and forming an attachment to that, you know? And then you realize that, "Jesus, it's right here under my nose the whole time — the old man who was right here. . . . That bothered me. (GI-2)

A similar conflict exists for people who learn Yiddish. There are many ways in which to be Jewish, but many of those who study Yiddish feel a need for a connection to the lived reality of their parents or grandparents, something which can feel much more immediate than, say, religious study or current events in Israel (Shmulevitsh-Hofman 1995).

It was interesting to note that none of the respondents mentioned anything related to tartanism as a motivating factor in their decision to learn Gaelic. This is not to say that none of them have tartanist notions, but perhaps, as noted earlier, tartanism has developed an identity apart from Gaelic, without one necessarily depending on the other. The instructors I interviewed said that some students do come in with a tartanist idea of Gaelic culture, though they are relatively rare.

And I guess it kind of . . . what's that mythical Scottish place, in the play? Brigadoon, yeah, that kind of Brigadoon mentality . . . . And they're disappointed or maybe just don't accept that Joe Jimmy Alec down the road, that's the real stuff. I mean, he drives a back hoe, and he's got four kids, and that's the real Gaelic culture right there, as opposed to something more flamboyant, something more romantic, something more perhaps refined, you know, that "If I look deep enough at this I'm going to find that all my ancestors lived in a castle and ate off fine china. I mean, this is what I know — Joe Jimmy Alec, I *know* Joe Jimmy Alec. Not too much excitement there. I'm looking for something that's more exotic than this fella."  
(GI-2)

The sample was more likely to speak Gaelic with other learners than with native speakers. This is understandable, as many learners do not live near native speakers, and attending a class or immersion necessitates interaction with other learners. That almost half the sample (30) rarely or never speak Gaelic with native speakers might be cause for concern among teachers and activists, but it must be taken into consideration that most in this category are beginners who haven't been learning for very long, and will doubtless have more contact with native speakers if and when they advance to higher levels.

Despite the fact that there is little reading material available in Gaelic, most respondents claimed to read Gaelic at least "sometimes". For many this would probably consist of material specifically geared toward learners, such as reading exercises in textbooks. Articles in periodicals such as *Am Bràighe*, children's books, folktales, poetry and the Bible are also common reading materials for learners.

The sample is largely a singing sample, and no doubt this is true of most learners. Gaelic songs are one of the more enduring enticements to learning Gaelic, whether it comes from a grandmother in the kitchen or from a pop band on the radio. Songs are commonly learned in Gaelic classes not just as an alternative method of teaching vocabulary and gram-

mar, but because it is in demand from most students. This is common for many minority and heritage language instruction environments. Most Yiddish textbooks, for example, include several songs (Zuckerman 1987; Weinreich 1992; Zucker 1994).

It is unsurprising that the vast majority of respondents (45) said they didn't get enough opportunities to speak Gaelic. In addition to an otherwise busy life, opportunities to speak Gaelic have to be sought out, for some at great expense. A learner living in Halifax, for example, may take an adult education class and practice with the other students there, or go to the bi-weekly Gaelic conversation evenings sponsored by the Halifax Gaelic Society. But an enthusiastic learner would not be satisfied with this, and he or she could not just pop over to Mabou or Christmas Island any day of the week. Even those learners living in communities where Gaelic is spoken typically have to set aside the time to socialize with Gaelic speakers, and few people would consider themselves as having copious free time.

Somewhat more surprising was the plurality of respondents who said they had no difficulty getting native speakers to speak Gaelic to them. Native Gaelic speakers, along with their counterparts in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Brittany and so on, are supposedly famous for their reluctance to speak their native language to outsiders, especially those not fluent. This has been blamed on everything from a sense of politeness to the effects of anti-Gaelic attitudes. However, those who said that they did not have difficulty getting native speakers to speak Gaelic to them were not necessarily saying that these native speakers were speaking Gaelic exclusively or even primarily. It may be that many of these respondents were only looking for a willingness to speak a few words of the language or have a simple conversa-

tion. This would be especially true of beginners. Trossett (1986) and McDonald (1994) both observed a reluctance on the part of native Welsh and Breton speakers respectively to use their language with learners.

The sample was in broad agreement on most of the language attitude statements, supporting what could be considered to be the “pro-Gaelic” side of every issue. There were only two statements where more than ten respondents opposed the popular consensus. In the first — “Gaelic is the language of a people rooted in the land, rejecting modern ways” — the split response can be seen as reflective of the values of individual learners, and how they project their values onto the culture. Many people view Gaelic culture with the antimodernism described by MacKay (1994), and some consider the Gaels to be the spiritual cousins of First Nations peoples. For such people, the image of the Gaels as people rooted in the soil is a positive image, perhaps their inspiration to learn Gaelic in the first place. For others, this image may smack of the old stigma which depicted Gaels as ignorant, unkempt bumpkins, an image prevalent until recently. A breakdown by fluency does not demonstrate any divergence in response to this statement. McDonald (1994) noted a similar tendency among Breton activists to regard the “true” Bretons as uncorrupted peasants.

The other controversial statement was, “To really understand Nova Scotian Scottish culture, you need to know Gaelic.” “Nova Scotian Scottish culture” may mean different things to different people, but it would appear that the more advanced learners regard a knowledge of Gaelic as more essential to an understanding of it than less advanced learners. This would indicate that the more fluent one becomes in Gaelic, the more one appreciates

what distinguishes it from the more material (and the more ersatz) aspects of the Scottish identity. Such a pattern parallels other minority language situations. Welsh speakers are of course much more likely than the Anglo-Welsh to believe that one must know Welsh in order to be “fully” Welsh. In a place like Wales or Ireland, such differences of opinion are more contentious than in Nova Scotia, where the issue of one’s identity is both less divisive and overarched by wider Canadian identities.

Gaelic learners of all levels of fluency show themselves to be activists to some extent by virtue of their unanimous advice to bilingual parents: speak Gaelic to your children. Half recommended speaking only Gaelic, the other half both Gaelic and English. The advanced learners were more heavily Gaelic-only, the beginners leaned more toward both languages, and the intermediates were evenly split, though the differences were not statistically significant.

It is interesting to compare these results with the results of my earlier study among residents of Christmas Island and the North Shore, in which I posed the same question (Dembling 1991:34). In that survey, the majority of Gaelic-speakers recommended speaking only English. This is one area where the difference in the attitudes of learners and native speakers differ. While many native speakers may encourage the use of English-only as a result of the internalization of anti-Gaelic attitudes, as Mertz claims, others appear to see raising a child in Gaelic as meaningful only the context in which they were raised — i.e. with a whole community of Gaelic speakers to support it. A common rationale for advocating English-only was “things are different now” and words to that effect.

By contrast, learners may tend to see Gaelic as more of a self-standing idea which can have meaning in the absence of the complex familial and community relations which made it so relevant to native speakers in their childhood. This can be seen as a parallel to the situation of Yiddish among secular Yiddishists and the ultra-orthodox. The Yiddishists, whether native speakers or learners, see Yiddish as an entity in itself; indeed, it is their central cause. Among the ultra-orthodox, Yiddish is rarely given a second thought. Rather, it is propagated in the context of its role as the vessel of Jewish learning, and in the absence of such a cultural context little value would be placed on the language (Fishman 1991b).

Certain cultural expressions were given unanimous or near-unanimous endorsements as integral aspects of Gaelic culture in Nova Scotia. Among these were: Gaelic songs and stories, fiddle and bagpipe music, step dancing, milling frolics and house visits. Square dancing was only slightly more contentious. The expressions which received divided opinions were the wearing of kilts, Highland dancing, tartan weaving, Scottish concerts, Gaelic choirs, clanship/clan associations, and pipe bands. Advanced learners on the whole considered these latter expressions to be less important to Gaelic Nova Scotia than did the beginning and intermediate learners. It is possible that some learners (in particular beginners) were reluctant to consider anything on the list as unimportant, and some respondents checked “very important” for every category. In any case, the responses reflect a changing dynamic of the Gaelic identity in Nova Scotia, which is turning increasingly away from tartanism and toward traditions which have traditionally been practiced by Gaelic speakers in the province. Certainly tartanism continues to thrive outside Gaelic circles, and even among learners it still

has it hold. And while time will tell if future beginners place less importance on these traditions, the results of the survey indicate that most learners who achieve proficiency in Gaelic will shed many of the tartanist notions they may have, or otherwise compartmentalize them as separate from their Gaelic identity.

Despite being unable to collect any surveys at the Gaelic College, a certain level of opinion of that institution can be gleaned from the sample, especially among the 43 respondents who have attended the College in the past. While most of this subsample (32) said the College is a good place to learn Gaelic, only half that number (16) said it does a good job promoting and preserving Gaelic, while just one-quarter (8) say the College presents an appropriate image of Nova Scotian Gaeldom. Attitudes toward the Gaelic College are complicated, for it is a complicated institution. It presents one of the few opportunities to learn Gaelic, and especially for outsiders, it is the only place to “go to” to learn Gaelic (i.e. one can take evening classes in Gaelic in Halifax, but prospective learners from away do not go to Halifax to learn Gaelic). This near-monopoly makes it difficult evaluate for lack of competition. There are people who despise the place, yet attend regularly. Some comments echoed that of one activist who said:

I would suggest to you that the best way to deal with the Gaelic College, if you really want to put them in proper perspective, and in their right place, is to simply ignore them, and concentrate on something else. I think you can say the same thing about Highland Village. These are anglo institutions. (GI-3)

but those people are likely in the minority. Many endorse the College’s Gaelic program, but have problems with the rest of the whole: the classes in Highland dance and Scottish country dance, the pipe band, the “Great Hall of the Clans” museum, etc. Inasmuch as the Gaelic

College has never been able to conclusively decide whether it is a vehicle for Gaelic language regeneration or a tartan tourist trap, so the respondents to the survey tend to have an ambivalent overall impression of the place. The advanced learners were generally more negative in their assessment of the College, which fits in with their more negative view of tartanism as a whole. However, many advanced learners still attend classes, immersions, and milling frolics at the College, and some stated that they owe their proficiency in Gaelic in large part to their attendance there. Support for the Gaelic instructors is high; however, the instructors themselves are often quite critical of the College's perceived lack of attention to Gaelic. It should be noted as well that much of the survey was conducted before some encouraging developments at the College: the hiring of one of the instructors as the full-time Gaelic Director, and the de-emphasis of competitions at the Gaelic Mod, with more focus put on other activities such as milling frolics and ceilidhs.

The response to the question of the importance of certain individuals to the Gaelic identity of Nova Scotia proved somewhat problematic. Aside from the problem of one group of respondents not getting that page of the survey, many respondents were not familiar with most of the individuals listed. Nevertheless, certain patterns emerge from the responses as given. Many individuals were considered important to some degree by all or nearly all of those who gave an opinion. They were: Alan the Ridge, Malcolm Gillis, Jonathan G. MacKinnon, Joe Neil MacNeil, the Bard MacLean, Father Rankin, the MacKenzies of Christmas Island, Buddy MacMaster and the Rankin Family. Those with solid but less than unanimous support included the Rev. Norman MacLeod, A.W.R. MacKenzie and Màiri Mhòr

nan Oran. Those who were considered “not important” by a majority of those giving an opinion were: Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Robert the Bruce and John Knox. Individuals whose importance were contentious included Bonnie Prince Charlie, St. Columba, Angus L. Macdonald, Marjory Kennedy Fraser and Ashley MacIsaac. Among the first category (unanimous or near-unanimous support), there were four bards, one storyteller, one publisher, two fiddlers and one music group. All are from Nova Scotia and most are or were Gaelic speakers. Among the three in the second group (less solid support), two were Gaelic speakers, but only one of those was from Nova Scotia. In the third category (contentious) two were Nova Scotians, one of whom was a semi-speaker of Gaelic. In the last category (majority “not important”) were four Scots, of whom only Robert the Bruce was a Gaelic speaker.

Perhaps the most notable of these responses was the response to Joe Neil MacNeil. Few people, even learners, would have heard of Joe Neil before the publication of his collection of stories, *Tales Until Dawn*, ten years ago. In that short space of time, he has become one of the more well-known names among learners. This is a testament to the priorities of the Gaelic instructors in the province, who unanimously saw in MacNeil a valuable resource of Gaelic learning, both from the quality of his Gaelic and his cultural credentials.

## **Lessons from the Other Minority Language Revivals**

The challenges facing Gaelic in Nova Scotia are similar to those facing many other minority languages, some of which were outlined in the beginning of this study. It may now be useful to return to them to note how they have dealt with these difficulties, and to see if there are any lessons or warnings for Nova Scotia Gaelic in the process. The two major challenges of the Gaelic Revival in Nova Scotia which have been focussed on here are the revitalization of the language and the emergence of alternate Gaelic or Scottish identities.

In Scotland most comparisons with Nova Scotia in terms of revitalization methods will be flawed, because Scotland has an enormously important resource for RLS which Nova Scotia does not: large numbers of Gaelic-speaking children and adults of child-bearing age. Much of the RLS activity in Scotland centers on Gaelic-medium and bilingual education, which may have already begun to turn the tide in the downward trend in Gaelic-speaking children (MacKinnon 1984). The chances of achieving widespread Gaelic education anywhere in Nova Scotia are next to nil, as it has taken as much energy as could be mustered simply to retain one Gaelic teacher in the Mabou school district. In the absence of a sizeable population of Gaelic-speaking parents or a strong ideological aspect to the Nova Scotia Revival, sufficient popular will is lacking. In any case, the agitation for minority language education for a language so far diminished as is Gaelic Nova Scotia would be counterproductive and drain precious resources away from more useful activities (Fishman 1991a).

There are other Scottish initiatives which can or could relate to the Nova Scotian situation. One is the Gaelic Playgroup Association, Comhairle na Sgoiltean Araich (CNSA).

CNSA began as a volunteer grassroots effort to provide pre-school-aged children (both Gaelic-speaking and monoglot English) with daily exposure to Gaelic, to prepare them for Gaelic-medium education. From its founding in 1982, it has grown from 4 playgroups to 150, serving 2,600 children in 1996 (*Cothrom*, no. 8, summer 1996). Playgroups have been attempted both in Cape Breton (Iona) and Halifax, but currently none exist. In Cape Breton, interested parents tend to be scattered across the island, making it difficult to attract enough participants in any one area. Nevertheless, this is a potential vehicle for future RLS efforts in Nova Scotia, as it does not require Gaelic-speaking children or parents. What the children then graduate on to is of course another problem.

Related to the playgroup experience is an effort to gather older Gaelic-speakers, in those parts of Scotland where no children or adults of child-bearing age speak the language, and bring them together with children. This was mentioned to me by an activist in Scotland, although I have yet to read of any such effort being put into practice. It is a creative use of limited resources (i.e. Gaelic-speakers) and one which fits the Nova Scotian situation well. In theory this could be done with adult learners as well, and has been put into practice on a small scale. At immersion classes at the Gaelic College, native speakers from the area are invited to stay or visit for the week and interact the students.

Whereas the existence of an alternate Scottish identity provides a way for some Nova Scotians to “regain” their heritage without the need for Gaelic, in Scotland there is something of a reverse trend. As tartanism and the glorification of the Gael during the Burns/Scott era have become bound up with the overall Scottish identity, many Lowland Scots

with at best tenuous ties to a Gaelic heritage are nevertheless pursuing Gaelic as an aspect of their Scottishness. So while there is a danger that the existence of a Scottish cultural identity independent of Gaelic can divert RLS efforts, there is a flipside which encourages those who might not otherwise be interested to learn Gaelic. The identification of all Nova Scotia as Scottish, as Angus L. Macdonald tried to do, may have produced a similar effect, as evidenced by the nine learners in the survey who do not have a Scottish background.

RLS efforts in Ireland are often pointed to as the way *not* to go, given the continued decline in native Irish-speakers despite 75 years of independence. While the state made Irish the first official language, compulsory as a subject in school and a prerequisite for civil service jobs, it has done little to make more substantive efforts, such as widespread Irish-medium education (actually, this was attempted in the 1960's, but was abandoned under pressure from the protests of some parents [Fishman 1991a]).

Despite the fact that the Irish government's efforts on behalf of Irish have been "replete with tokenism" (Fishman 1991a:141), there are a few grassroots initiatives which could have some bearing on Nova Scotia. The most drastic example is the Shaw's Road Community in Belfast, in which a number of young second-language learners established an Irish-speaking community in which to raise their children (Maguire 1991). Such a community could theoretically be established in Cape Breton, but for now the few Gaelic-speaking families are too scattered, and even if they banded together in the same area there numbers would likely be too small to form a cohesive community.

More easily emulated would be such smaller-scale initiatives as Éigse-Carlow. Éigse-Carlow is a two-week festival combining music, sports, drama and poetry, films, contests and quizzes all conducted in Irish. As such it is not too far removed from the local feisean in Christmas Island and other communities, but more comprehensive. Despite its temporary nature, it has created some level of pro-Irish momentum in the community which carries throughout the year (Fishman 1991a:130-31).

Irish in Ireland does not have a counterpart to tartanism to contend with, but it must vie with a strong English-speaking Irish identity. The Irish of the Republic no longer need the language as a badge of distinction or non-Englishness. Moreover, the rest of the world recognizes the Irishness of such English-language writers as Joyce, Yeats and Wilde (not to mention Roddy Doyle, U2 and the Cranberries). Many Irish people rarely use Irish at home, but employ it abroad, as an antidote to homesickness or to avoid being mistaken for English people (Fishman 1991a:143). As there is no movement for independence or general feeling of cultural oppression emanating from Ottawa, this has little relevance for Gaelic in Nova Scotia. However, a certain parallel can be seen in the emergence of a “Cape Bretoner” identity, ethnic-neutral and English-speaking, originating in industrial Cape Breton County but gaining acceptance throughout the island. This is another identity with which RLS activists will have to contend.

Welsh and Breton make for poorer comparisons with Gaelic in Nova Scotia, as their sheer numbers of speakers so far exceed even those of Gaelic in Ireland and Scotland. Welsh also enjoys a good deal of official support and subsidy. Both Welsh and Breton have a

variety of adult learning methods available, including immersions. The Wlpan immersion course in Wales, modeled on the Hebrew Ulpan system, has been singled out for praise for its effectiveness (Davies 1993:82-3).

The Anglo-Welsh identity is something of a newcomer, as English-monoglot natives of Wales have only emerged in large numbers since the Industrial Revolution turned the South Wales valleys into a series of coal towns. But while the Anglo-Welsh increasingly develop their own culture, the Welsh language is never far away, geographically or emotionally. And those Anglo-Welsh who become fluent in Welsh are considered by Welsh-speakers to have “regained” their identity (Trosset 1986:172). This may be an oversimplification, but it points out the difficulties for learners of Gaelic in Nova Scotia, who would not necessarily be considered “Gael” by Gaelic-speakers even after becoming fluent in Gaelic (although the Nova Scotian equivalent of the Anglo-Welsh, i.e. natives of the province’s rural Scottish communities would have an easier time claiming the title).

Things appear not to be as simple in Brittany, where the value systems and language activism of the Breton RLS’ers so contrast with the native speakers that in some cases they do not associate with each other (McDonald 1994). Irregardless of whether the value systems of Gaelic learners in Nova Scotia clash with native speakers, there is always the danger of a similar de facto split in these two halves of the Gaelic community. As evidenced by the survey, Gaelic learners associate more with each other than with native speakers, whether because of convenience or a higher comfort level. This is a potential impediment to a cohesive Gaelic community, which can ill-afford such splits with such small numbers.

In Cornwall and the Isle of Man, RLS efforts have gone on for decades without the benefit of native speakers. Both efforts revolve around a hardcore group of activists. Unfortunately, much of the Cornish activity is spent bickering over which orthography should be used (there are three different spelling systems, each with their own adherents). The real example for Gaelic in Nova Scotia must be Manx. Manx RLS efforts began in the early decades of this century, when interested learners sought out the last native speakers of the language, analogous with learners in Nova Scotia from the 1960's to the present day. Despite the passing of the last native speaker, Ned Madrell, in 1974, the 1991 census counted 643 people claiming fluency in spoken Manx, more than double the number in 1971 (the question was not asked on the 1981 census) and representing about 1% of the Manx population (Miller:1993). The situation on Man has now progressed to the point where Manx is taught in all public schools on the island and a Manx Gaelic playgroup association, modeled after CNSA, has been established.

No academic studies of the Manx revival have been published, so it is difficult to ascertain the connectedness between the current Manx-speaking community and the last generation of native speakers. In Cornwall there was a disruption of at least a century between the last native speakers and the first revivalists, so the question of authenticity is entirely subjective.

Yiddish is a bit of a different case. It has no "home" and Yiddish-speaking communities exist across the globe. Additionally, secular Yiddishist and Ultra-Orthodox communities are mutually exclusive and do not generally interact. While Yiddish is fairly secure in Ultra-

Orthodox communities, it is in much worse shape among secular Yiddishists. Secular schools such as the Arbeter-Ring (Workmen's Circle) and Sholem Aleichem Folk schools from New York to Buenos Aires have either closed down or evolved into more generic Jewish schools where Yiddish is de-emphasized (Fishman 1991b:96-7). There are some activities which encourage fluency among learners of Yiddish, such as immersions, retreats, conversation groups and even a basketball league, but the dispersed nature of the Yiddish-speaking world makes serious organized efforts difficult.

Yiddish also suffers from conflicting identities. Not only is it quite possible to be a Jew, in many definitions of the word, without knowing Yiddish, but for some it is not enough to know Yiddish. I have heard several religious (though not Ultra-Orthodox) Yiddish speakers say that without a thorough knowledge of Biblical Hebrew, and of the religious practices and rituals attending it, no one can claim to be truly Yiddish. Secularists vehemently deny this, but it can and does cause some unease among Yiddish learners who do not have a religious background. This debate echoes the comments of the Gaelic instructor quoted above who questioned the authenticity of a Gaelic learning experience which ignored the religious aspect of the culture.

In summation, the examples of the above language situations point the way for some small-scale models for achieving positive RLS results in Nova Scotia. They also provide warnings for those who would concentrate on the more public and official realms before attending to the language at the family and community level.

## Conclusion

*This is a niche community which is going to be intentional. It already is intentional. We are all here intentionally. People will be coming to the area because of Gaelic, rather than remaining in the area as a result of Gaelic.*

GI-3

What gets termed a “Gaelic revival” can be viewed from many angles, the assessments varying as a result. From the most narrow perspective — the maintenance of the Gaelic language as a communally spoken language in everyday life — there has never been a Gaelic revival in Nova Scotia in the sense that most people think of it. However, the ability of a destitute and broken people to achieve a cultural and linguistic prosperity throughout the nineteenth century, creating a legacy of native Gaelic speakers which will live into the twenty-first century, is remarkable, and it is an accomplishment matched by few immigrant languages not attached to a colonial power. In this respect, the period of 1800 to 1880 must be seen as a real revival, not just from a Nova Scotian perspective, but from the perspective of Gaeldom as a whole.

After this period came outmigration and language shift, followed closely by the widespread introduction of tartanism to the Maritimes. The ensuing Revivals of the 20th century were a mix of tartanism and linguistic activism, concerned outsiders and alienated insiders, money and politics.

Current activity around Gaelic in Nova Scotia does contain some elements which could be considered the beginnings of a linguistic revival. The numbers of people learning Gaelic have increased, by all accounts, over the last decade. The small proportion of these who have achieved or will achieve fluency will necessarily be very small, but their impact has

already been noticeable. For the first time since the Second World War, there are children being raised in Gaelic in Cape Breton. A good deal of the linguistic activism has found its inspiration from the lived experience of those making up the last of the Gaelic community, as opposed to earlier (and some current) activities which viewed Gaelic culture through tartan glasses. These are all trends which began in the 1970's, concurrent with the revival of Cape Breton fiddling and the in-migration of back-to-the-earthers locally, and the explosion of interest in minority cultures globally.

Although small in number, the learners who achieve fluency, together with the odd immigrant from Scotland, represent the future core of Gaelic culture in Nova Scotia. It is their combined knowledge which will sustain any future generations of learners and children socialized in Gaelic. And though most in this group would like to think that they are doing their best to present as accurate a representation of Gaelic culture to the future, few would claim that they are presenting an unchanged version of it. The lived experience of these people is in many ways radically different from the last generation of native speakers. Apart from the obvious fact that most of this core group does not have Gaelic as their primary language of reference, there is a further difference of material experience:

The best Gaelic speakers of course are profoundly based in an agricultural lifestyle view of the world, as urbanized as they may be at the same time, simply because they're not active in agricultural pursuits. They buy white bread at the store, they don't raise potatoes anymore, but their reference points are still in that world. These people are all going to disappear. (GI-3)

Many people — including some supporters of Gaelic — feel that for Gaelic culture to be authentic, it has to be based in this rural lifestyle view of the world, and some point to the

impossibility of maintaining such a world view as proof that Gaelic cannot survive as a living language. Similar charges are often leveled against modern-day Native Americans — that they can't be real Indians if they don't wear buckskins, live in teepees and hunt with arrows. Such a black-and-white view of the world is of course quite at odds with reality. What, for example, is “authentic” English verse: Byron? Shakespeare? Beowulf? Every culture undergoes change, and Gaelic is no exception. The issue to be considered is not whether Gaelic culture will change in Nova Scotia, but how it will change. Will it be in accordance with underlying Gaelic sensibilities, along the lines of the adaptation of the piano into the Gaelic musical repertoire? Or will the change come from without, like the organization of military pipe band music? The answer is likely to include some of both. It is true that the future Gaelic community “may be different in terms of its material reference points, but it need not necessarily be significantly different in terms of its intellectual foundations.” (GI-3) But this does not guarantee that this such will be the case.

The view of the commercial success of some musicians as evidence of a Gaelic revival is dubious. Mass culture's taste in popular music is notoriously fickle, and if Ashley MacIsaac and the Rankin Family are only mentioned ten years from now in the “where are they now?” context, this will say nothing about the state of Gaelic culture in Nova Scotia at that time. The preponderance of young musicians performing in the traditional style can be seen on the one hand as evidence of a resurgence in the Gaelic tradition or an anglicization or appropriation of it. If it were only necessary to nourish the non-Gaelic speaker's sense of the Gaelic tradition to effect a revival, then A.W.R. MacKenzie's efforts would have been sufficient. To

the extent that Gaelic speakers see a departure from Gaelic music in the younger musicians (as much as they may enjoy the music itself), one must question whether Cape Breton fiddle music will be an integral part of the Gaelic tradition in another generation's time, or if it will acquire its own unique place in the picture. On the other hand, even those young musicians who depart most radically from the Gaelic tradition still look to the older generation of musicians and singers for their inspiration, and many make some attempts to learn at least enough Gaelic to help their musicianship. There is at least a latent potential for the musical tradition to be "re-Gaelicized".

If all the efforts of the current Gaelic Revival will have accomplished nothing else, we should at least be able to say that, after the last of the older generation of Gaelic speakers passes on, there will be a core population in Nova Scotia who will carry with them a knowledge of the Gaelic experience in the province which is much closer to its lived reality than previous Revivalists have had. Even with the alterations that are bound to come with an evolving Gaelic culture, and even if the language cannot survive, then perhaps at least its speakers can be remembered for who they were and what they valued.

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