

Baile nan  
Gàidheal  
Highland Village  
MADE OF STORIES



The Highland Village  
Gaelic Folklife Magazine

# an rubha

HIGHLANDVILLAGE.CA

VOLUME 19 • NUMBER ONE



**Indigenous Tourism and Culture**  
*A Conversation with Robert Bernard*

**Rekindling a Relationship**  
*A Visit with John Sylliboy*

**Mi'kmaw Baskets**  
*A Visit with Margaret Pelletier and Dolena Poulette*

**An Gàidheal Portmhor | Scotch Music**  
*Elmer Briand's Jig by Wilfred Prosper*

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Stòras na h-Òigridh | Treasures of Youth Scholarship Fund provides financial support and assistance to up-and-coming Nova Scotia youth between the ages of five and twenty-one, who are keen to advance their skills in the Gaelic tradition including: fiddle, pipes, piano/guitar accompaniment, language, storytelling, song, and dance.

The Fund welcomes donations. A downloadable brochure with details and a pledge form is available on our website. Donations may also be made online through Canada Helps.

Since 2014, the Highland Village has distributed \$15,500 to 17 youth to help them with their cultural journey. For more information see [treasuresofyouth.ca](http://treasuresofyouth.ca)

2024 Stòras na h-Òigridh/ Treasures of Youth. Pictured with committee members Meaghan O'Handley, Lisa Gallant MacNeil, and Susan MacLean, are scholarship winners Archie MacDonald, Ainslie Glen, Lachlan MacNeil, Christmas Island, Luke Boudreau, Port Hastings, Floragael MacNeil, Mabou, and Olivia Burke, Sydney.



[WWW.TREASURESOFYOUTH.CA](http://WWW.TREASURESOFYOUTH.CA)

# an rubha

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# Facal bhon Neach-stiùiridh | From the Director's Desk

## STÉIDHEACHADH A SHEASAS RIS AN ÀM | A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE



*Melissa Blunden, Executive Director  
Baile nan Gàidheal | Highland Village*

Dear Friends,

I am deeply honoured to step into the role of Executive Director at Baile nan Gàidheal | Highland Village. As we embark on this new journey, I am profoundly grateful for the warm welcome from the Board of Trustees, staff,

and the entire community. Learning about the Society's remarkable 65-year legacy has humbled me, and I am inspired by the dedication and hard work of those who have come before me. Their tireless efforts have laid the foundation upon which we stand today, and I am committed to honouring their legacy as we move forward together.

Baile nan Gàidheal | Highland Village is at a historic juncture, having just completed significant improvements on-site, including the new Welcome Centre and enhanced accessibility for visitors on the Hill. Under my direction, we will build upon these successes, focusing on enhancing our connections both locally and globally, and partnering with our communities to achieve this. I have spent much of the past few months reflecting on the mission of the Comunn Baile Ghàidheal nan h-Albann Nuaidh | Nova Scotia Highland Village Society – to serve as a vibrant hub for the preservation and celebration of Gaelic culture and language. This involves not only supporting regular community Gaelic language classes and cultural events but also strengthening regional ties through strategic partnerships and offering integrated Gaelic programs, festivals, and finding new opportunities to engage with the community.

The coming year will also see the L'nu Advisory Group of Baile nan Gàidheal | Highland Village continue in its important work in including the Mi'kmaq people and sharing the Mi'kmaq-Gaels story on-site. This is a critical part of our mission, and I am eager to contribute to these efforts myself, and am so pleased that this issue of the An Rubha is able to highlight some of the many incredible people who are part of these efforts.

With the support of our partners, staff, volunteers, and community members, I am confident that the Highland Village will continue to thrive and evolve. I extend my deepest thanks to all who have supported us over the years. Your dedication drives our mission forward, and I am honoured to continue this journey with you.

I invite you to join us in the exciting path that lies ahead.

Best wishes & warmest regards,

*Melissa Blunden*

*Melissa Blunden, Executive Director  
Baile nan Gàidheal | Highland Village*



*Leanaibh dlùth ri cliù bhur sinnsir.*

**Comunn Baile Ghàidheal na h-Albann Nuaidh |**  
The Nova Scotia Highland Village Society was incorporated on November 3, 1959 under the Societies Act of Nova Scotia. Its purpose was to construct and operate an outdoor folk museum dedicated to the Scottish Gaelic culture in Nova Scotia.

Since 2000, the Nova Scotia Highland Village Society has operated *Baile nan Gàidheal | Highland Village*, A Part of the Nova Scotia Museum, in

A PART of THE NOVA SCOTIA MUSEUM

**Baile nan Gàidheal**  
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partnership with the Nova Scotia Museum (Dept. of Communities, Culture, Tourism & Heritage).

Our vision is to be the leading Gaelic folklife centre, recognized in Nova Scotia, nationally and internationally as an essential institution for continuing development and representation of a vital and sustainable Gaelic community.

Our mission is to grow as a Gaelic folklife centre

that bilingually nurtures, communicates and celebrates the heritage and cultural identity of Nova Scotia's Gaelic community.

We are a member of Association of Nova Scotia Museums (ANSM), Canadian Museums Assoc. (CMA), Heritage Cape Breton Connection, Council of NS Archives (CNSA), Genealogical Assoc. of NS (GANS), Cape Breton Genealogical & Historical Association, Assoc. of Living History, Farms and Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM), Celtic Heart of North America Marketing Cooperative, Tourism Industry Assoc of NS (TIANS), Baddeck & Area Business Tourism Assoc. (BABTA), Sydney & Area Chamber of Commerce, Strait Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Cape Breton Partnership.

# Mar is léir dhomh fhìn | As I See It

## AN RUBHA AGUS AN ACAIR | THE HEADLAND AND THE ANCHOR

With many mixed emotions, I made the decision last fall to accept a position with the Nova Scotia Museum, and as a result resigned as Executive Director of Baile nan Gàidheal | Highland Village. While this decision led to an exciting new career opportunity within the management team of the provincial museum system, it brought to a conclusion my 30 year tenure of leading Baile nan Gàidheal.

Baile nan Gàidheal exists today because of the pride of our people and our community in their language, culture, traditions and kinship. The drive and pure tenacity of volunteers to bring the concept of a Highland Village in Iona to fruition was built on that pride, in spite of centuries of systematic efforts to eradicate Gaelic language and culture in both Scotland and Nova Scotia. In 1955, Iona was chosen as the site for the proposed Highland Village through a province wide competition. With the excitement of the competition over, the province-wide enthusiasm for the project waned. Local leaders and the Grand Narrows & District Board of Trade picked up the torch and began to bring the concept to reality. The Nova Scotia Highland Village Society was incorporated in 1959.

The following 40 years saw much of the Village as we know it today come together. The first Highland Village Day concert was started in 1962 to raise funds. The first government funding was received from the Municipality of Victoria County. The first buildings were brought to the site. Staff were hired and new programs, including Gaelic language programs and a new genealogy program, were offered. Those first four decades were both exciting and challenging as the museum became an integral part of the Iona community, the Island tourism industry, and the wider Nova Scotia Gaelic and heritage communities. The commitment of the community, board, staff, and volunteers to keep the Village running with limited resources during those early years was nothing short of remarkable.

All of that hard work paid off in 2000, when Baile nan Gàidheal became part of the Nova Scotia Museum. With this new status and

new resources, the Society was able to significantly increase the interpretation and presentation of Gaelic language, culture and history on site. First person interpretation was introduced, as were new hands-on experiential programs. The museum also took on a leadership role in the community to sponsor and advance other important Gaelic Nova Scotia initiatives. New branding was introduced. The Malagawatch Church was brought to the site in 2003, and in 2019, Baile nan Gàidheal launched its most ambitious program yet - a 3 year \$6.8 million site development project in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia, Government of Canada, the Municipality of Victoria County



*Rodney Chaisson,  
Former Executive Director of the Highland Village*

and our community and private sector friends. This significant capital project resulted in the construction of our new 7,700 square foot An Taigh Fàilteachais | Welcome House Cultural Centre, Cash's Shingle Mill, and other projects to increase the operational capacity and visitor experience at Highland Village.

Also important to recognize when reflecting on our story, is the way acceptance of Gaelic language and culture has changed in Nova Scotia over the past two decades. There is much more enthusiasm for Gaelic in our communities, and our institutions. The Nova Scotia Office of Gaelic Affairs was established. Investments were made in Gaelic projects, community learning

programs, community festivals and events, and in our core Gaelic institutions (such as Baile nan Gàidheal and Colaisde na Gàidhlig). While we experienced the loss of many rich tradition bearers, we are seeing an increase in the number of younger people showing an interest in the culture, learning the language, and becoming involved in the traditions. We have been part of that change.

Baile nan Gàidheal has also begun to recognize its wider role in Society. Over the past two years, we have been working with a wonderful group of L'nu knowledge keepers to explore the connections between our peoples, and how we can better reflect the L'nu and our shared experiences at the Village. We have also started to respond to the impacts of climate change. Our new Welcome Centre is of passive house design, a high standard in building efficiency. The Verschuren Centre at Cape Breton University prepared a strategy for Highland Village to become a net-zero operation. We began a pilot project with ICOM Canada (International Council of Museums) and Ocean Wise to reduce the use of plastics in our operation.

Baile nan Gàidheal has proven itself to be a resilient and innovative museum and community leader. I very much value my experience and tenure with the Society and am very much indebted to all of those who supported me, steered me, and led with me over the past three decades. The success of Highland Village has always been due to its great team (board, staff, volunteers, and community) and will continue to be so. I will miss working with all of them.

I am excited to welcome our new Executive Director Melissa Blunden, who has an established track record in the Alberta museum community. I very much look forward to seeing the impact of her new energy and enthusiasm on Baile nan Gàidheal, its offerings, and its impact. I also look forward to supporting the Village, and all of the other NSM sites, in my new role.

Tapadh leibh. Wela'lioq. Thank you. ©

*Rodney Chaisson,  
Former Executive Director of the Highland Village*

# Naidheachd a' Bhaile | The Village News

## AITHISG NA RÀITHE | A SEASON REVIEW

As we approach the 2024 season, we reflect on the year that's passed and all it brought with it. There's been a lot of changes and goodbyes, and exciting new opportunities lay ahead.

It was with great sadness that we bade a final farewell to our dear colleague Sandy (Mick) MacNeil, who was a fixture on the hill for many years. We send our sincere condolences to his family and friends. Bidh iondrainn mór air. He will be greatly missed.

We wish the best to several members of staff, Rodney Chaisson (Executive Director), Katherine MacLeod (Manager of Visitor Experience), and Shannon MacMullin (Coordinator of Cultural Experiences), who have left the Village to pursue new opportunities over the past year. We thank you for all you've done for Baile nan Gàidheal over the years, and how you've helped shape the museum into what it is today. We have no doubt you will continue to do great things in your work. Buaidh is piseach oirbh uile.

We also recently welcomed Melissa Blunden, our new Executive Director. We look forward to getting to know and work with her. Fàilte mhór oirbh, Melissa!



Hannah Krebs,  
Manager of Visitor Experience

Back to the hill, 2023 was a busy season, with visitation numbers just shy of our record 2019 year! We welcomed many new and familiar faces back to our site for special events and programs like Là Mór a' Bhaile | Highland Village Day, Eilean na h-Òige | Living History, and Oidhche nam Bòcan | The Night of the Spirits, as well as plenty of folks stopping by off the road or visiting us as part of a cruise ship tour.

This was the first full season we had with the our new Taigh Fàilteachais | Welcome House Cultural Centre. There was a rather large fellow visiting us through the winter while we hosted the Age of the Mastodon exhibit from the Museum of Natural History for several

months. We look forward to exploring the possibilities of new, and off-season, program offerings in the new building.

As always, we couldn't have done it without our amazing team of staff who consistently provide an excellent experience to visitors, bringing our Gaelic story to life and keeping the museum running smoothly. Mo mhile taing dhuibh uile. ©

Hannah Krebs,  
Manager of Visitor Experience

Anyone who has spent much time on site quickly realizes this is no sleepy museum. We're busy all year long, with projects major and minor occupying our attention. Since starting this position last spring, I've been glad to have the support of colleagues and friends new and old. In addition to our day to day activities that support Gaelic, we have three major projects underway. All of these involve community research and engagement, key objectives in our future plans.

Over the last two years, we have prioritized efforts to engage members of the Mi'kmaw community in our work at Baile nan Gàidheal. I have been privileged to help establish an advisory group, composed of eight knowledge keepers from around the island. Group members have come together several times now, both on-site and in their own communities. During these meetings we have explored ways to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the story we tell on-site while encouraging visitors to explore Indigenous tourism outlets around the province. In many ways, this has been one of the most rewarding parts of my work. It's been wonderful to get to know such an interesting and generous group of knowledge keepers and I look forward to the changes we can make together at Baile nan Gàidheal. I'm also glad to see their contributions form such a prominent theme in this issue of An Rubha.

The village has also taken the lead on an innovative project to explore the role Gaelic language and culture play in the lives of residents of Nova Scotia. This research will build on a curatorial report issued by the Nova Scotia Museum in 2002, which assessed the social, cultural, and economic impact of Gaelic in Nova Scotia. Since that time, government investment has resulted in significant growth in the number of residents learning Gaelic. Supported by the Office of

Gaelic Affairs, the current project is intended to provide a new baseline for understanding the Gaelic community, while giving greater emphasis to the personal and social relevance of Gaelic. As project lead, I was fortunate to be able to count on the support of project coordinator Shannon MacMullin, who oversaw the efforts of fieldworkers Amber Buchanan, Ed MacDonell, and Colin Watson. Over the course of several months, this project saw more than 150 people interviewed, and resulted in the creation of a searchable index of more than 210,000 words. This information will be used by consultants Drs. Tiber Falzett, John Shaw, and Zeynep Ozkok to help produce a report for government and community which is expected to be released later this year.

Our third major project draws on a partnership between Saint Mary's University and Historic Environment Scotland. Spearheaded by Dr. Karly Kehoe, the project will bring together students, historians, archaeologists, and Gaelic scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. As part of this work, Baile nan Gàidheal has partnered with the Boisdale Historical Society to coordinate an archaeological assessment of Rear Beaver Cove. This area was first settled by immigrants from the Outer Hebrides in 1821, and abandoned a century later. Members of the historical society have worked for many years to document the history of this backland settlement. Their work provides an invaluable record of the area and its inhabitants. We are thrilled to be able to work with them alongside researchers from at home and abroad to better understand the history of Rear Beaver Cove.



Shamus Y. MacDonald, PhD  
Manager of Culture and Language

I hope you enjoy this issue of An Rubha and look forward to seeing you at Baile nan Gàidheal. Chì mi sibh air a' bhruthach! ©

Shamus Y. MacDonald, PhD, Stiùiriche na Gàidhlig/Manager of Culture and Language

# Indigenous Tourism and Culture

## A CONVERSATION WITH ROBERT BERNARD

As our museum works to strengthen connections with the Mi'kmaq, it's been a real privilege to count on the support of Robert Bernard. He's the Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Indigenous Tourism Network (NSITEN). The volunteer-based not-for-profit organization works to encourage the growth of Indigenous tourism and cultural enterprises in Nova Scotia. To make that happen, Bernard is often on the road, meeting with government, Indigenous tourism operators, knowledge keepers, and artists. But he also makes time to help facilitate the L'nu Advisory Group at Baile nan Gàidheal. For that reason, we thought readers might like to learn more about him.

In a wide-ranging interview, Bernard touched on many issues related to his work and life. He grew up in a family of twelve in We'koqmaq. His father was a woodsman and folk artist, whose sense of cultural identity and connection to the natural world continues to be felt today, "The big picture about who I am today is about remembering my father's connection to who we were growing up. Like it would be ridiculous to speak to our brothers, sisters, family, or community members in English... He would always talk about the importance of the relationship with the land and with the water, and with the animals, with fish. And even the knowledge of ice."

Culture and language are important to Bernard. That's why he's working hard to ensure his grandson speaks Mi'kmaw. But maintaining that sense of identity has not been easy for the Mi'kmaq, "...the loss of identity was a huge target of colonial impacts by government. They were trying to take apart every piece of us so that we wouldn't be L'nu, so that we wouldn't be Mi'kmaq, so that we wouldn't be Indian."

Today, Bernard believes tourism can play a role in cultural revitalization efforts while providing economic opportunities for his community and educating visitors about the Indigenous culture and language of Mi'kma'ki. Reflecting on the early days of Celtic Colours, Bernard recalls his efforts to push for the inclusion of Mi'kmaw culture and language in some island concerts. Despite some initial skepticism from organizers, the response from audiences was immediately overwhelming, "To some degree, it was beautiful to see. It was an awakening of culture. But it also hit hard, you know. Why hadn't society opened its eyes and ears and hearts to this way sooner?"

Making space for a variety of Indigenous artists and perspectives is a priority for NSITEN. However, Bernard doesn't believe that should come at the expense of what it means to be Mi'kmaq, "There's a lot of conversation about authenticity. Like, are we stuck in the old days, or are we embracing the new approaches? The conversation is always about making sure that you tell the story and the connection to our people and that you are connected to our people...because it's not something you can just step into. It's not a puddle, it's an ocean. That's our life. That's who we are."

Bernard wants to help share elements of that identity with others. That's part of his motivation for working with Baile nan Gàidheal. It's a way visitors can learn about Mi'kmaw culture and history, while developing interest in Indigenous tourism and cultural enterprises nearby, "We certainly are excited about future opportunities with the Highland Village, and what we can bring there while people visit, but even more excited about connecting those people and opportunities to our communities and building resources and locations and establishing the welcoming protocols to visitors that will come."

While he sees educational and economic potential in partnering with Baile nan Gàidheal, Bernard is clear that there are other reasons that make the effort worthwhile as well, "We work with people that are genuine and want to make change happen in the way that we believe is the right way to make change happen. And when you have that in a partner, you stick to it. You connect to it, and you support it....I just want to thank the leadership of the Highland Village for believing in us, for trusting us, for opening the doors, for wanting to work together with us, for



Robert Bernard,  
Executive Director of the Nova Scotia  
Indigenous Tourism Network (NSITEN).

understanding and believing in our stories, and our journey, and our loss. Our loss is real. It's not something that we share lightly. And we want that story to be shared with the world, with the people that visit your location." ©

Shamus Y. MacDonald, PhD, Stiùiriche na Gàidhlig/  
Manager of Culture and Language

# Rekindling a Relationship

## A VISIT WITH JOHN SYLLIBOY, L'NU ADVISORY GROUP MEMBER

John Sylliboy has been a good friend to Baile nan Gàidheal. His interest in our work and visits to the museum did much to encourage our early efforts to strengthen connections with the Mi'kmaw community. Since its establishment last year, Sylliboy has also been a generous and supportive member of the L'nu Advisory Group. Earlier this year, we sat down to learn more about his background and interest in our work.

Sylliboy began by explaining how his sense of identity is grounded in his connections to his grandparents, particularly his grandfathers, Newell Sylliboy and Chief Gabriel Sylliboy. He outlined the importance of these family connections within the Mi'kmaw community and went on to discuss his lifelong interest in history and culture. As a former interpreter at the Fortress of Louisbourg, the Eskasoni resident was well positioned to explore these interests. As our conversation progressed, it became clear his personal and professional background has given him a unique perspective on our work at Baile nan Gàidheal.

**SM: How long were you in Louisbourg?**

**JS:** "I was at Louisbourg for approximately seventeen years. I absolutely loved it. It gave me access to the history of the British, and the French, and also my people, the L'nu. And it helped to explain a lot of misconceptions that we have today and helped me to move forward in my thinking on the relationships between these three different Peoples."

**SM: Why do you take part as an advisory group member?**

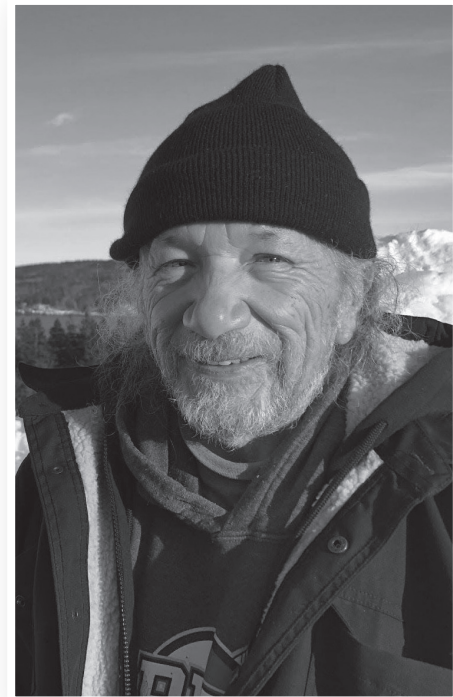
**JS:** "I want to know the truth. I love pursuing truth. Growing up, there was a lot of unknown stuff between me and the rest of the world. Now, when we're talking about the rest of the world, the first person you're going to talk about is the one next to you. Who's next to me here? The Gaels, right? And I felt being next to each other for a few hundred years, there should be something...I found that when I was a kid, I'd see parts that

would tell me there was deep history and I'd see parts where it says no history either. For example, my father, I'd go with him to visit people in Benacadie. We'd go into a home and he'd start speaking Gaelic with them. And that shows, there's history there. And I didn't have a clue about it one way or the other. But in seeing those glimpses, it sparked my curiosity. Because I don't see it any more today, you know. And I question that. Why? Why has that stopped? What caused it to stop? All these different questions, so that's ones that I'm curious about these days. And I feel that relationship should be rekindled, instead of just being lost and forgotten. And this is the place to rekindle such a relationship because there's interest on both sides."

As many readers will know, some of the early roots of that relationship are commemorated in a painting that now hangs in the new Welcome Centre. It depicts the day the Mi'kmaq encountered the Gaels in central Cape Breton. According to local tradition, Indigenous residents made the settlers welcome when they saw their crucifix. While he is glad to see the painting at the museum, Sylliboy believes there is more to the story it depicts than meets the eye.

Although the Mi'kmaq had been converted generations before the arrival of the Gaels, Sylliboy believes the cross held sacred significance to the L'nu long before the arrival of Christianity. In the following, he shares a remarkable story about how his ancestors were gifted with three crosses during a period of extreme hardship thousands of years ago. According to oral tradition, the first cross symbolized peace, the second, harmony, and the third, full provision. Moving through one to the other was considered the good path. Sylliboy takes up the story:

"An old man in the Gaspé area had a dream, had a vision. And in the vision bear came to visit him. And the old man told bear about all the problems our people were having at that time. He told the bear that our people were dying out, the animals were dying out, there were great fires everywhere in the



*John Sylliboy*

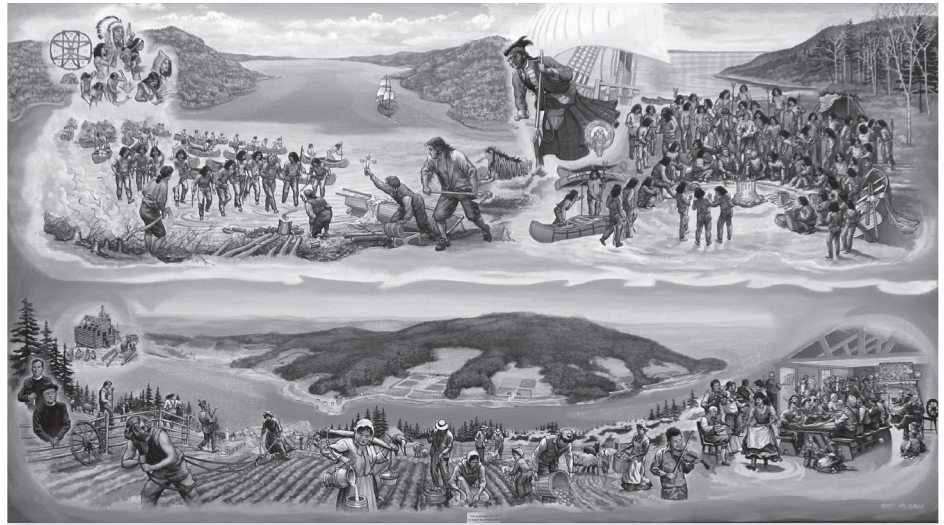
forests, great flooding happening, fire from the sky, the sun darkening out, going out and about the enemy at our door. And the old man told the bear if the creator didn't help us out soon, we would all die out. The bear told the old man he would come back the next day with a friend that will have an answer to our problems. So the old man had another vision the next night. The bear came back to him, and he brought a friend with him. And the friend was an otter. The otter had three crosses in his arms. And the old man proceeded to tell the otter about the problems our people were having. And after he told otter the story about our people the otter told him that if our people followed the way of the three crosses, which he held in his arm at the time, our people would be saved, and we would be here until the end of time."

Though he concedes the story is not well known, Sylliboy sees its truth all around him: "The messenger, the otter, mentioned that if we followed the way of the three crosses we would be here until the end of time. See, that puts a lot of weight into that



legend for me because I'm still here. I'm still speaking my language. I'm still living my culture."

The Mi'kmaq were among the first Indigenous Peoples in North America to have sustained contact with Europeans, and their resiliency is a theme that comes up often in our discussions with the L'nu Advisory Group. As our conversation drew to a close, John Sylliboy shared his final thoughts on the role Mi'kmaw language and culture play in his life today. No doubt his words will resonate with many others, including members of the Gaelic community in Nova Scotia:



Barramen's Feast, Donald Òg

**SM: How important is your language and culture to you, John?**

**JS:** "Wow. It's everything. It's me. It's all my identity. It's everything that has made me what I am. It has. If I didn't have my culture, if I didn't have my language, I'd be a totally different person, I'm positive of it. It has made me look beyond. It has taught me patience, it's taught me not to be judgmental. I try very hard to be on that good path. It has shown me that path, and I'm trying as best as I can to stick to it." ©

*Shamus Y. MacDonald, PhD, Stiùiriche na Gàidhlig/  
Manager of Culture and Language*



**L'nu Advisory group.** *Sitting, left to right:* Margaret Pelletier, We'koqma'q, Miney Johnson, Eskasoni, Dolena Poulette, We'koqma'q. *Standing, left to right,* Evan Googoo, Wagmatcook, Terry Denny, Potlotek, Ernest Johnson, Eskasoni, Graham Marshall, Membertou, Robert Bernard, We'koqma'q. *Missing from photo,* Albert Marshall, George Sylliboy, John Sylliboy, Eskasoni.

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NOVA SCOTIA  
INDIGENOUS TOURISM  
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# Mac-Talla.

*"An nì nach cluinn mi an diugh cha'n aithris mi maireach."*

VOL. II

SIDNI, C. B., DI-SATHAIRNE, JANUARY 6, 1894.

No. 27.

## BHO MHARGAREE GU SYDNEY

Air an ath latha, bha picnic gu bhi aig Camus nan Éirionnach goirid bho na h-Eileanan Dearga. Is ann gu airgiod a chuir cruinn gu pàigheadh eaglais tha iad a' cuir suas a rinn muinntir a' pharaisid' an cruinneachadh seo. Smaointich sinn bho nach cuireadh e 'bheag far ar cùrsa sinn gu rachamaid dha ionnsaidh. Ged a bha 'm bàta-toite, am May Queen, a' falbh glé mhoich anns a' mhaduinn, bha sinn fhéin 'us feadhainn eile air bòrd ann an àm. Bha a' mhaduinn chiùin, soilleir agus bu taitneach da-rìreadh 'bhi air bòrd a' bhàta 'gluasad sios an caol, a' ghrian a' dearsadh 's a' dannsadh gu solasach air uachdar an uisge 'bha cho ceidh-ghorm ciùin ri sgàthan.

Bha pìob agus fìdheall air bòrd; thòisich an dannsa agus lean e gu caithreamach gus an d' ràinig sinn an Caolas Mór mu ochd uairean. Dh'fhuirich sinn ann an seo mu dhà uair a' feitheamh ris a' charbad iaruin a' tighinn bho Shydney. Ghabh sinn sàr bheachd air an drochaid mhóir tha tarsuinn air a' chaol agus air an taigh-bhòrdaidh ainmeil sin 'tha làmh rithe. Tha seo 'na fhìor àite-tathaich aig luchd-cuairte beartach an àm an t-samhraidh.

Tha glinn, srathan, beannan 's deagh rathaidean-móra mu' cuairt los gum bheil e glé fhurasda do dhuine a thoileachadh a ghabhail air feadh na dùthcha; tha a-rithisd bàtaichean beag 'us móra an còmhnuidh deiseal leis am faod neach a dhol a' luingearachd air feadh an loch 's a dhol mu 'n cuairt air gach rudha is eilean bòidheach a tha ro lìonmhor ri 'm faicinn an uisgeachan a Bhras d'Òir.—Ach chaidh mi far mo chùrsa. Có dhiù, thàinig an carbad iaruin, bhrùchd an sluagh a-mach às agus thug iad sios orra' dh'ionnsaidh an uisge far an robh an dà bhàta-smuid, am May Queen agus am Blue Hill 'gam feitheamh gus an giùlain thun an àite an robh 'm picnic.

Chaidh mu sheachd ceud pearsa air bòrd 'nam bàtaichean agus ann am beagan mhionaidean, bha iad a' gluasad gu réidh sunndach taobh ri taobh sios a dh'ionnsaidh Camus nan Éirionnach. Bha dà bhand air bòrd gach bàta; agus eadar an ceòl 's an aighear 's gach tlachd eile 'bh' air a' chùis, cha dug sinn móran céill gus an d' ràinig sinn an ceann-uidhe ged a bha mu 'n cuairt de dhà mhìle dheug anns an astar. Chaidh sinn air tìr agus dh'ìrich sinn uchdan cas a dh'ionnsaidh an ionad anns an robh an sluagh cruinn.

Bha gach toileachadh is greadhnachas a 's gnàth 'bhi 'n cleachdadh aig an leithidean seo de chruinnichean ann gu pailt agus bha gach nì gu h-òrdail, dòigheil mar a dh'earbainn às a' cheannard thapaidh agus deagh bhuaichaille a' pharaisde sin—an t-Urramach Ruaridh MacAonghais. Bha deich no dusan de shagairt eile a mhuinntir an eilean am measg na cuideachd agus earran mhath dhe 'n cuid

## FROM MARGAREE TO SYDNEY

The following day, there was a picnic to be held at Irish Cove near to Red Islands. It was to gather funds to pay for the church they are erecting that the community organized the gathering. Since it wouldn't take us far from our course, we thought we'd go. Although the steam ship, the May Queen, was leaving very early in the morning, ourselves and others were on board on time. The morning was calm and bright and it was certainly pleasant to be on board the boat moving down the narrows, the sun shining and dancing luminously on top of the water that was as light blue as a mirror.

There were pipes and a fiddle on board; the dancing started and it continued on triumphantly until we reached Grand Narrows around eight o'clock. We stayed there about two hours, waiting for the train coming from Sydney. We took a great opinion of the big bridge that goes across the narrows and the famous hotel beside it. It is a popular hangout place for many wealthy tourists in the summertime.

There are glens, valleys, mountains and good highways so that it is very easy to please those travelling the countryside; again there are big and small boats always ready for a person to go sailing around the lake and to go in and around every point and lovely island which are abundantly seen in the waters of the Bras d'Or.—But I've gone off my track. Anyway, the train came, the crowd burst out of it, and they took off down toward the water where the two steamships, the May Queen and the Blue Hill were waiting for them to take them to the picnic.

About seven hundred people came on board the boats and within a few minutes, they were moving smoothly and cheerfully side by side down toward Irish Cove. There were two bands on board each boat and between the music, the merriment, and every other delight, we didn't notice much until we arrived at our destination although there was about twelve miles in the distance. We went ashore and climbed the steep embankment toward the venue where the crowd was gathered.

Every pleasure and merriment that is usually at these sorts of gatherings was plentiful, and everything was orderly and well arranged as I would trust from the smart leader and good shepherd of that parish - the Rev. Roderick MacInnis. There were ten or twelve other island priests in the crowd, and a good number from their



In this issue, the second half of the letter 'Bho Mhargaree gu Sydney' is printed. See issue 18-2 for the letter's beginning. This letter first appeared in Mac-Talla Vol II No 27, dated January 6, 1894. Mac-Talla, published in Sydney, Nova Scotia, was the longest running Gaelic weekly paper, ending as a bi-weekly (1892-1904). Eòin Aonghais Chaluim | Jonathan G. MacKinnon, editor, was a life-long promoter of Gaelic and was involved in other publications including Gaelic translations of English literature.

co-thionalan còmhla riutha. Cha robh caoimhn' air airgid agus chaidh an latha seachad gu ciatach.

Mu shia uairean feasgar, thill a' mhór chuid air a' Bhlue Hill. Chaidh mu chóig ceud air bòrd agus bha sinn, gun teagamh, glé dhòmhair. Bha gach cùis a' falbh gu ceart gus an robh sinn a' teannadh faisg air a' Chaolas Mhór, nuair a chuir an éigheach "duine far bòrd!" giorag tro gach neach a chual' e. Is ann an sin a bha 'bhreisleach 's a' luasgan! Chaidh mnathan 'us clann gu caoineadh agus fir gu gluasad. Mara biodh beagan de dhaoine agus mhnathan tapaidh ceannsalach a bha 'nar measg a bha cumail rian 'us smachd air an t-sluagh, tha mi glé chinnteach gun rachadh am bàta 'chuir thairis le miad na troimh-chéile a bh' air bòrd anns an àm. An gille mì-fhortanach a thuit a-mach, theabas a bhàthadh oir bha e mu fhichead mionaid anns an uisge ma 'n d' fhuaradh a thoirt air bòrd.

Ràinig sinn an caolas ma dhorch na h-oidhche agus ann an tiota, bha sinn air bòrd a' charbaid iaruin a ghùilain sinn ann an uair no dhà de thim gu ruige Sydney Tuath. Rinn ar caraide Aonghas Mór agus a bhean ar beatha gu suilbhearra, càirdeil agus dh'fhuirich sinn còmhla riutha earran de thrì latha. Fhuair sinn eòlas math air roinn de mhuinntir a' bhaile anns an ùine sin.

Bha 'n acarsaid làn de gach seòrsa shoithichean agus bha móran guail 'ga chuir air falbh gu bailtean-móra gach rìoghachd. Bha móran sluaigh air ghluasad anns an àm agus bha h-uile coltas gun robh an t-airgid pailt 'nam measg. Thug sinn sgrìob do Sydney Deas a choimhead MHIC-TALLA. Fhuair sinn esan 'na fhìor Gàidheal mar 'tha fios aig a h-uile neach 'tha leughadh a' phàipeir aige; agus ma chuidicheas Gàidheil na dùthcha seo leis mar is còir dhaibh a dheanamh, chan eil aon teagamh agam nach cum esan suas a thaobh fhéin 'na chùis.

DÒMHNALL. ©

congregations with them. There was no expense spared and the day went by pleasantly.

At about 6 o' clock in the evening, most of the people returned on board the Blue Hill. About five hundred boarded the vessel and we were, without a doubt, in close quarters. All was going along well until we were approaching Grand Narrows, when the holler "man overboard!" put dread on each person that heard it. That's when the panic and hustling set in! The women and children began to cry and the men moved. If there hadn't been a few smart and authoritative men and women among us keeping order and control of the situation, I am quite sure that the boat would have capsized with the amount of confusion on board at the time. The poor fellow who fell overboard was almost drowned after being in the water for twenty minutes before he was rescued.

We arrived at the narrows around dusk and in a moment, we were onboard the train that carried us to North Sydney in an hour or two. Our friend Big Angus and his wife gave us a joyful and friendly welcome and we stayed with them throughout the three days. We got to know many of the town's people quite well during this time.

The harbour was full of every sort of vessel and there was a lot of coal shipped to the large cities of every realm. Many people were travelling at the time and it appeared that the money was plentiful among them. We went to the south end of Sydney to visit MAC-TALLA (Jonathan G. MacKinnon). We found him to be a true Gael, as everyone who reads his paper knows. And if the Gaels of this country help as they have a duty to do, I don't have one doubt that he will keep up his end of the deal.

DONALD. ©

*Edited and translated by Shannon MacMullin,  
Ban-chleasaiche | Former Cultural Experiences Coordinator.*

*Comunn Baile Ghàidheal ha h-Albann Nuaidh | The Nova Scotia Highland Village Society gratefully acknowledges the support of its government partners. In addition to our core funding from the Province of Nova Scotia through the Department of Communities, Culture & Heritage (Nova Scotia Museum), support has also been received from:*

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*Municipality of Victoria County through District 1 and the Recreation & Tourism Department.*

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# Mar Chuimhneachain | Dedication

## SANDY (MICK) MACNEIL

At some point in time, you have probably heard the proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child”. One of the questions that always comes to my mind is, what are the demographics of these villages.

A village is more than a place name. It is more than a cluster of buildings, a marketplace or meeting areas. A village is its people, each bringing something different to the table but each working together towards a common goal. A village is a place where folks can mingle, where doors are open, and visitors and friends are welcome, sharing stories and beliefs, music and song, agreeing to disagree. But, what happens when one of those villagers dies? Depending on the location and cultural beliefs of a village, perhaps a sadness settles in, perhaps not. Family and friends are left to mourn, perhaps tears are shed, stories told and memories shared.

On September 07, 2023, Baile nan Gàidheal | Highland Village. experienced the loss of a friend and co-worker, Roderick Alexander MacNeil. He died with his family by his side.

Prior to the start of our 2023 season, staff were informed that Sandy or Mick as he was sometimes called, would not be returning to work due to medical issues. He had been ill but was hoping to return in 2024. His physical absence was felt by staff throughout the summer months, visitors came and went, unaware of the sadness on the hill. Sadly his return is not going to happen. With his death, our demographics have changed. Tears were shed, stories told and memories shared.

Life presents us with opportunities to meet and get to know some unique and interesting individuals. Sandy was one of those individuals. He was always willing to lend a helping hand, a wise

man of few words. As one of our animators, Lolaidh MacLellan commented, “he had such a great way of saying so much with so few words”.



She then recounted the day he dropped in for a céilidh in the Nash house. At the time, she was trying to figure out which jar held the baking soda and which jar had the baking powder. She asked Sandy if he knew how to tell the difference, so he asked her for a spoon. After tasting both contents, he grimaced and said, “I know nutting” and left the building. As Lolaidh said he was always willing to help in any way he could even he wasn't 100 percent sure of how to solve the problem.

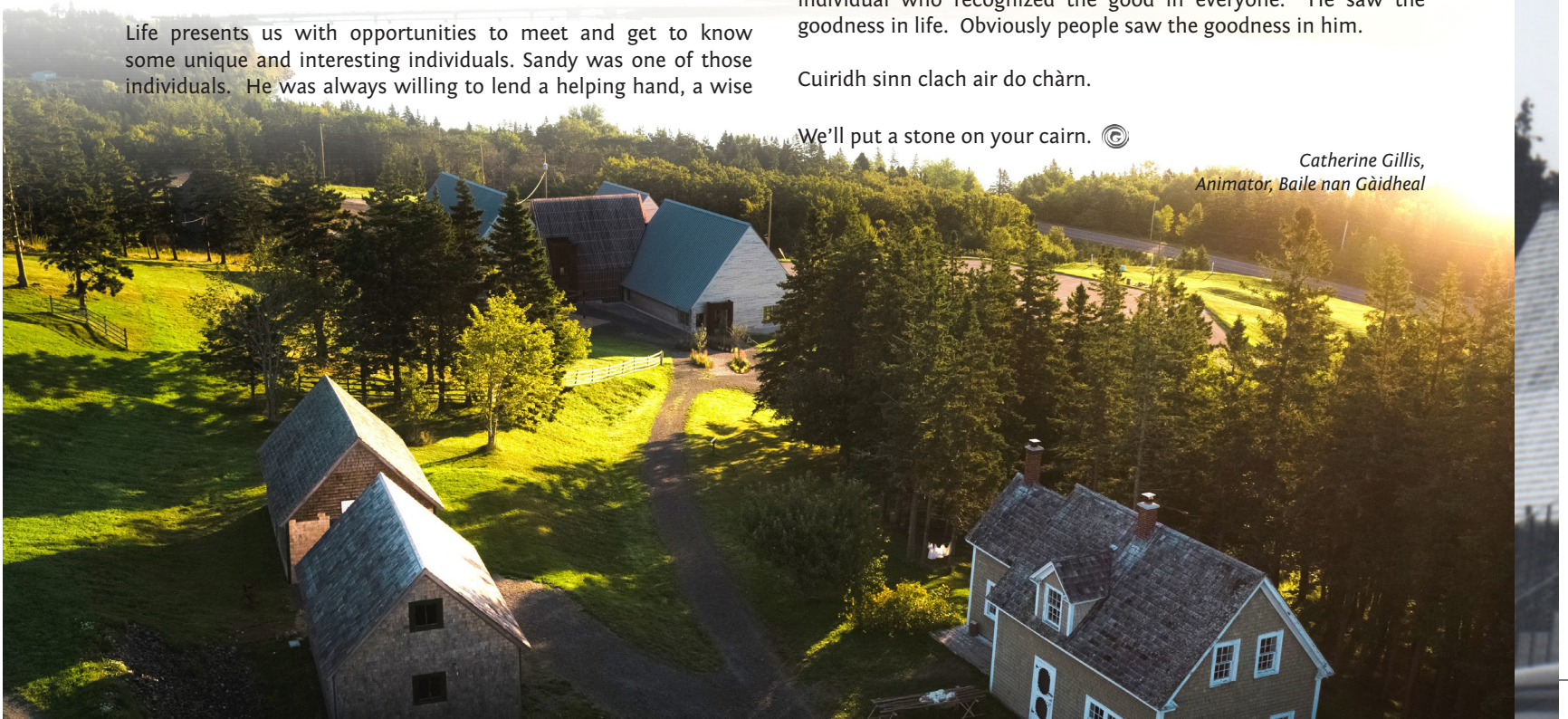
Walking with both hands behind his back, head slightly bent reading the path ahead, Sandy presented an unforgettable personality on the hill. But it was in the new Shingle Mill where Sandy found his niche. John MacLean brought the machinery of the Mill to life while sharing information and stories. Sandy brought the Mill and John to life when sharing stories of his own, stories unknown to either John or Hoss MacKenzie next door in the Carding Mill. As Hoss said, “he played his part so well. Probably one of the best photographed animators, sitting in that old rocking chair, you knew he was the real deal”.

Listening to staff recount memories of Sandy, a common picture was framed. A picture of a kind and humble man, a gentle man, and a gentleman, a man aware of the world around him. A man who never spoke an unkind word about anyone, an unpretentious individual who recognized the good in everyone. He saw the goodness in life. Obviously people saw the goodness in him.

Cuiridh sinn clach air do chàrn.

We'll put a stone on your cairn. ©

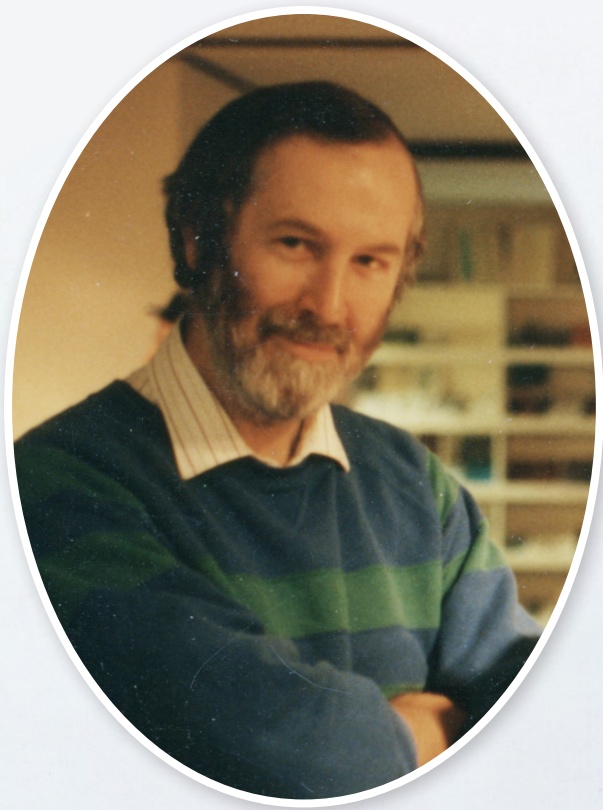
Catherine Gillis,  
Animator, Baile nan Gàidheal



# Mar Chuimhneachain | Dedication

## BRIAN MCCORMACK

The Board and Staff of the Nova Scotia Highland Village Society acknowledge the passing of Brian McCormack at the age of 77. Brian was manager of the Highland Village from 1973 until 1992. He was instrumental in the establishment and growth of many Highland Village initiatives during his tenure including Highland Village Day, construction of a new administration building and stage in 1979, launch of the Award of Merit program, and Gaelic programming - just to name a few. There was really no significant monies for the Village in those days. It was basically a hand-to-mouth operation, but it succeeded because of the dedication of Brian as manager and so many other dedicated volunteers. Brian always had the success of the Highland Village uppermost in mind. His father, Bill, had been one of the more prominent community volunteers who helped in its creation. Brian was also a dedicated member of the Grand Narrows & District Board of Trade too, and one of his greater achievements was being one of three original committee members of its Permanent Crossing Committee that eventually lead to the successful construction and opening of the Route 223 Barra Strait Highway Bridge in 1993. Our sympathies are extended to his wife Rosemary and his daughter Mairi-Irene. Cuiridh sinn clach air a chàrn. ©



Brian McCormack & Allan J. MacEachen



Mairi-Irene, Ross Nobel, Brian McCormack



# Cainnt is Ceathramhan | Language and Lyrics

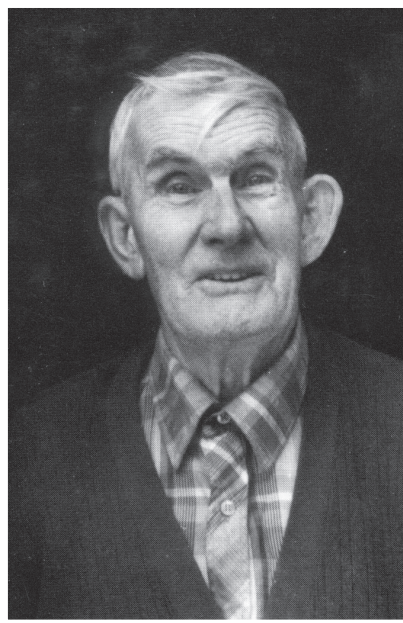
## CÙL NA CÒMHLADH | ON OR BEHIND THE DOOR?

The Cainnt is Ceathramhan | Language and Lyrics project is currently working in close partnership with Highland Village to re-catalogue, transcribe, and improve access to the Cape Breton Gaelic Folklore Collection. The project is hosting regular online transcription frolics where we gather with community members on Zoom to work on various items from the collection. As many of us know, sometimes “it takes a village to transcribe a song”!

At our January frolic, we listened to two different versions of the port-à-beul “Màiri Nighean Mhór/Mairearad Mhór,” recorded from Lauchie MacLellan (Lachlann Dhòmhnall Nìll) and Joe Neil MacNeil (Eòs Nìll Bhig) and endeavored to decipher them. You can listen to the recordings by searching for the GF numbers at <https://stfx.cairnrepo.org/islandora/object/stfx%3Agaelstream>. Here’s what we got:



Lauchie MacLellan



Joe Neil MacNeil. Photo by Tom Ptack

The word “còmhladh,” meaning a door frame or door leaf, was new to some and we were grateful to Dùghall Mac a’ Phì for bringing it to our attention. It prompted an interesting conversation around the meaning of “dannsadh cùl na còmhladh / danns an cùl na còmhladh” and whether this meant dancing *behind* the door or literally *on the back* of the door.

It was certainly a practice in Ireland as well as among Nova Scotian Gaels to take the door off its hinges to use as a smooth, reverberant dance surface (Brennan 1999: 111; McGillivray 1988: 153). Since wood was often scarce among island communities in Scotland, and folk often lived in homes with packed earth floors, we might reasonably assume this was done in the “Old Country” as well. Alongside bridges and flagstones (sometimes hollowed out underneath with pans of stones or horse skulls for extra acoustic effect), these doors would perhaps have facilitated the expression of more percussive forms of dance long before wooden floors were commonplace in Gaelic homes. Whether that is what is implied in this song, however, we offer as a question to the wider community. ©

Màiri Britton and Mary Jane Lamond,  
Cainnt is Ceathramhan

### Màiri Ni’n Mhór (L. MacL.) - GF046i07

Tha Màiri ni’n Mhór is lùireach oirre  
Giobal oirre, lùireach oirre  
Màiri ni’n Mhóir is lùireach oirr’  
’Na suidh’ aig cùl na còmhladh

Chuir mo leannan culthaobh rium  
Cha laigh e rium, cha lùb e rium  
Gun cùm mo leannan culthaobh rium  
Cha tig e leam a dhannsadh

*Màiri, daughter of Sarah, is wearing rags  
Wearing tatters, wearing rags  
Màiri, daughter of Sarah, is wearing rags  
Sitting behind the door*

*My sweetheart turned his back to me  
He won’t lie with me, won’t bend to me  
My sweetheart keeps his back to me  
He won’t come with me dancing*

### Mairearad Mhór (J. MacN.) - GF148i09

Tha Mairearad Mhór is lùireach oirre  
Lùireach air muin lùireach oirre  
Tha Mairearad Mhór is lùireach oirre  
A’ dannsadh cùl na còmhladh

Gun d’ shaoil leam fhìn nach b’ fhiù leat e,  
Nach b’ fhiù leat e, nach b’ fhiù leat e,  
’S gun shaoil leam fhìn nach b’ fhiù leat e  
A bhith ’danns an cùl na còmhladh

*Big Margaret is wearing rags  
Rags upon rags  
Big Margaret is wearing rags  
Dancing back of the door*

*I thought you did not approve of it  
You didn’t approve of it, you didn’t approve of it  
I thought you didn’t approve of it  
To be dancing behind the door*

References: Brennan, Helen. 1999. *The Story of Irish Dance* (Dingle: Brandon). McGillivray, Allister. 1988. *A Cape Breton Ceilidh* (Sydney, NS: Sea-Cape Music Ltd).

# An Gàidheal Portmhor | Scotch Music

## ELMER BRIAND'S JIG BY WILFRED PROSPER

Wilfred Prosper was born in Potlotek. Though his grandfather and great-grandfather were musicians, he didn't have musical instruments of his own growing up. His neighbours did, however, so he'd visit them often. As a teenager, Wilfred had his own guitar and fiddle.

At that time, dances were held around Barra Head and Soldiers Cove, and Wilfred would go and listen to the music. He also enjoyed listening to players like Simon Cremo and Frank Paul at house parties - even if he had to listen from outside the window sometimes!

After moving to Eskasoni when he was 20, Wilfred got more into the Scottish style of fiddle playing than the Don Messer style stuff he had started out with. He heard folks like Tena Campbell on the radio, and was inspired by the playing of Winston Fitzgerald and Angus Chisholm.

Wilfred came to be a well-respected fiddle player, winning a number of awards for his music throughout his lifetime. He was an active member of the Cape Breton Fiddlers' association, and did

some composing as well. He often played with Lee Cremo, and Lee credits Wilfred as an inspiration in his own playing. Wilfred's granddaughter, Shawnee Paul, carries on the family fiddle playing tradition today.

In addition to his musical prowess, Wilfred was a well respected Mi'kmaw elder, translator and teacher of Mi'kmaw hymns and traditions. He passed away in 2005 at the age of 77. We've chosen to include a tune he composed for fellow fiddler Elmer Briand. ©

Hannah Krebs,  
Manager of Visitor Experience

Elmer Briand's Jig Wilfred Prosper

jig

*Thank you to Paul Cranford for supplying the tune.*



Top: Wilfred Prosper, Maynard MacDonald, Charles MacCuspic  
Bottom: Shawnee Paul

## Mi'kmaw Baskets: A VISIT WITH MARGARET PELLETIER AND DOLENA POULETTE, L'NU ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS



When Gaels began arriving in Nova Scotia in large numbers in the early 1800's, they met the Mi'kmaq, the native people of the Maritimes. This may have been a new experience for the Gaels, but not for the Mi'kmaq. They had already lived through centuries of contact with Europeans.

The Mi'kmaq have long been known for fine craftsmanship—decorative regalia, jewelry, dyed porcupine quillwork, root, bark and reed weaving. Although they were already making baskets using various plant materials when first encountered by Europeans, it took a gradual evolution of tradition, technique, and artistry to develop the wood-splint basketry we see today.

Excavations of pre-European contact sites show that the Mi'kmaq had many natural materials available to make their containers and textiles. Sweetgrass and beach grass were used to make small twined baskets for example. Written descriptions of Mi'kmaw life by Europeans appear early in the seventh-century. Mat weaving and dyed quillwork garner more attention than baskets. An account from a young French lawyer, Marc Lescarbot, who visited Port Royal in 1606, describes floor and seating

mats made from intricately woven and dyed rushes. Other accounts mention cattail leaves woven into seat or floor mats for canoes or other uses. Wicker weaving for fishing weirs was used, so it is thought that this method was probably used for some basketry as well.

Evidence of basket-making with wood splints begins to appear around 1800. Splint baskets were portrayed in a series of watercolours of a Mi'kmaw camp near Halifax. Moreover, an English observer in 1837 noted that the Mi'kmaq "...earn a... subsistence by weaving baskets ingeniously inwrought with withs (splints) stained in different colours, by dyes procured from native stores, these they offer for sale from house to house."

The steady arrival of Europeans beginning in the 1600's meant steel tools had become available, and the Mi'kmaq had quickly adapted by taking metal blades and fashioning 'crooked knives' (waqa'qinkn) and other tools. With these implements they were able to produce an increased quantity of hardwood splints, especially with white and black ash. They cut the trees into long rectangular pieces, then pounded and split these into wood strips, using mauls and axes. Other woods such as poplar and

maple were also used. Although they were not as strong as the ash, they could be used for decorative baskets and fancy items.

The splints and quills were often dyed with natural dyes such as alder or spruce bark, bedstraw roots, or goldthread to make blacks, reds and yellows. These were mostly replaced with aniline dyes by the 1870's. Strong, functional baskets were needed on farms for carrying potatoes, apples, eggs and other items. Both functional and decorative baskets were popular trade items by the early 1800's. The Mi'kmaq were now selling baskets to the newly-arrived settlers in Nova Scotia, including their Gaelic neighbours in Cape Breton.

Basketmaking was a family affair and the required skills have been passed down, generation to generation, until the present. The Mi'kmaw community of We'koqma'q, in Cape Breton, was home to a number of basketmakers and their families. At one time, in the early 1970's, there were at least three basket shops in the area.

Margaret Pelletier is a master basketweaver, and a We'koqma'q resident, whose baskets are works of art, with some displayed in museums and art galleries.



Her family owned one of these shops, and she grew up at a time when the whole family worked on making baskets.

Interested in learning about Mi'kmaq basket-making traditions, Shamus MacDonald and I paid Margaret a visit one cold, rainy day back in March. Afterwards, we took Margaret with us to Dolena Poulette's nearby house to see her huge collection of baskets. Both of these women are deeply involved in tradition—Margaret as an artist and maker of baskets that are rooted in and created from traditional forms; and Dolena, in the preservation of the tradition.

Margaret began by telling us about her childhood in a basket-making family. Her father prepared most of the wood. It was often ash, white or black, although she says that black ash is not found on Cape Breton now. Long strips of the squared-off wood would need to be pounded or shaved to separate it into flexible strips. Her mother would start the baskets, but then Margaret and her sisters would continue the work, making various baskets to sell in the shop.

Margaret also remembers going along with her parents and an older sister on trips to peddle their baskets. They often went to Canso or Antigonish. The baskets were packed in large burlap bags and were sometimes sent ahead on the train to be picked up at their destination—or sometimes at a friend's house—later. She even went as far as Grand Manan Island with her mother; and her mother would also make trips to Cape North, North Sydney, and Newfoundland. Her father would also go to Port Hood now and then to take ash axe-handles to sell.

They made and sold baskets throughout the year, taking advantage of all the different seasons. Berry-picking baskets were peddled in the summer, when the berries were ripe. Easter baskets provided money for the extra clothes needed at Eastertime. And before Christmas, of course, the baskets made money for presents, "We didn't know we were paying for Santa," Margaret said, with a laugh.

Although the basket shop did well, Margaret's father wanted her to get a good education so that she wouldn't have to depend on basketmaking to survive. She studied nursing at St. Rita's Hospital in Sydney, where she was the first Indigenous student. Though she sometimes encountered instances of prejudice, she persevered, working as a nurse throughout



*Margaret Pelletier, We'koqma'q, holding a couple of baskets she made.*

Canada and the U.S. Her husband was a teacher in Maine, where they lived for a time, and raised a family. Basketmaking wasn't a large part of her life at that point, but her mother would visit her in Maine for a few weeks every summer, bringing supplies with her and they would work together on baskets for the shop. This began to reawaken her interest in the craft.

Margaret's mother was Caroline Gould who was not only a shop owner, but also a well-known and respected basketweaver. (In 2010, she was chosen to present one of her baskets, a black ash and sweet grass lidded sewing basket, to Queen Elizabeth II on her visit to Cape Breton.) Margaret and her mother shared a love and respect for basketmaking. They were both very particular when working together. If they discovered a mistake, they would rip it out and re-weave it. Her mother had a special way to join the splint ends as she was

weaving, using a knot to start and end the binding of the two pieces. This care would, of course, result in a higher quality, more durable, basket.

Margaret wove baskets with her mother when she and her husband moved back to We'koqma'q. This was when she also began doing quillwork and moose hair tufting. She would do the intricate quill work while her children were sleeping. And even after she began to work in 1993 as a liaison between the local First Nations communities and the new hospital in Baddeck, and then worked to start a medical clinic in We'koqma'q, she still continued with her basketmaking.

Now she combines many techniques in her work, whether with quillwork on bark, moose and caribou hair tufting (a type of embroidery), or baskets of any shape or size. She has even made a basket in the shape of a sphere. She claims she has a

spiritual connection with each basket she makes, not knowing when she starts out, exactly what shape it will take, or materials will be used.

Like her mother, Margaret is a well-known basketmaker and has been honored in many ways. She was chosen to make a replica of a quillbox, that was found in Louisbourg. It's now displayed at the Fortress. And in 2022, the Indigenous Delegation to Rome presented to Pope Francis a black ash basket she created.

Dolena Poulette also has a family connection to basketmakers through her grandparents and uncles. Although she has made baskets herself, she prefers collecting other people's work. Dolena grew up in We'koqma'q and Eskasoni. She earned degrees at St. Mary's University and Mount Saint Vincent University, then became a teacher in We'koqma'q. For years she tried to get a class started in the community to promote language learning, and finally succeeded. She's now retired, but still working to protect both her language and her culture.

Dolena believes that one way to keep the spirit of her ancestors alive is through the baskets they made, so she began collecting baskets. She now has well over 300 baskets

(she's not sure of the exact number herself), as well as crooked knives and other tools. The baskets—all sizes and shapes—fill floor-to-ceiling shelves in her collections room, and she doesn't have room to display all of them. She also keeps some extra splints on hand so that she can make repairs to the baskets that have major damage.

Like Margaret, Dolena speaks of a strong spiritual connection with the baskets. She will be drawn to a particular basket and in handling it, can get a sense of the person who made it. She can tell if the maker was experienced, or a newcomer to the craft (by the skill involved); if it was the work of a man or a woman (if it is delicate or sturdy); or even whether they were rich or poor (by the type of materials they used and whether it was hastily constructed or woven in a more complex, time-consuming pattern).

When asked if she had a favorite, she hesitated, then told us about a man named Henry Knockwood, living near Dartmouth, who was eager to make a carrying basket. Living in the city, he had no access to the materials he needed to make the wood splints for it. But one day he happened to see some nylon strapping that had been tossed into a dumpster, and had the idea to

use that to do the weaving. Dolena showed us the basket. It may have been an ordinary-looking object, but it took on a new elegance and meaning with the story of its origin.

Margaret was able to immediately recognize some of the baskets in Dolena's collection as ones her mother made. She was able to confirm them as her mother's by looking for her binding and tucking technique for the splint ends. Saving details such as these is another reason this collection is so important.

Years ago, Margaret's mother used to sell baskets for \$5, but as time passed, more and more people began to recognize the artistic merit of the craft. Her mother's high quality work was undoubtedly a part of that transition, and now Mi'kmaw baskets can sell for hundreds of dollars. But we should also remember that they are still built on the foundations of tradition and carry the spirits of the ancestors. ©

*Vicki Quimby, Animator, researcher & textile consultant at Baile nan Gaidheal*

*Dolena Poulette visiting the Highland Village with a selection of her baskets.*



# Fois gu Sìorraidh | Dedication

## FIONNLACH MACLEÒID | FINLAY MACLEOD

Bha sinn fo dhubh-bròn gun do shiùbhail Fionnlaigh MacLeòid. 'S e "Fionnlagh na Strì" mar a bha aig cuid 's a' choimhearsnachd Ghàidhlig 's a' mhòr-roinn air.

'S ann 's na h-ochadan a' chiad turas a thàinig Fionnlagh a dh'Albainn Nuaidh. As deaghaidh dha fiathachadh 'fhaighinn bho Sheumas Watson nach maireann a bha 'na Stiùiriche na Gàidhlig aig Baile nan Gàidheal is bho Fhrangag NicEachainn, a bha 'na h-Oifigear-Prògraim aig seann Roinn na Turasachd, a' Chultuir is an Dualchais 's an àm, thill e a-rithist ann an 2004. Rinn e iomadh taisbeanadh is trèanadh air a' mhodh, Total Immersion Plus (TIP). Modh, a chruthaich e fhéin is ris an d'thug a dheagh charaid, Derek Farber nach maireann taic dhan robh leabhrair-iùil do thaoitearan is luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig an cuide ri leabhrair anns a' robh molaidhean a thaobh ùrlaran a dh'fhaodadh a bhi mar phàirt do sheiseanan, TIP.

Thill e a-rithist ann an 2007 agus 2016 gus taisbeanadh is trèanadh a libhrigeadh do thaoitearan na Gàidhlig is e a bha a' brosnachadh a' mhodh 's a' choimhearsnachd Ghàidhealaich. Tha iomadh taoitear a bha an sàs 's an trèanadh a libhrig Fionnlagh a' cumail orra a bhi a' teagasg is a' compàirteachadh nan cèard-eòlasan a bh'aige ri luchd-ionnsachaidh.

'S e na dòighean a bhiodh daoine a' toirt cànan dh'a chèile 'nan rudan as cudthromaiche air an do chuir Fionnlagh prìomhachas dhan choimhearsnachd Ghàidhealaich ann an Albainn Nuaidh. Bhiodh e a' toirt a-staigh chèard-eòlasan ùra is fiosrachaidh o chèarnan eile cuideachd coltach ris an fheadhainn a bha a' buntainn dha na cànanan Hawaiiian ann an Hawaii is Maori ann an Sealain Nuaidh.

Dh'ionnsaich e dhuinn gum b' urrainn dhuinn ar cànan ionnsachadh, gu robh rathad ann far am b' urrainn dhuinn fuireach 's a' chànan againn.

Dh'fhaodadh e bhi dùbhlach is rag a thaobh a' mhodh a bh' aige. Cha do chuir siod air Fionnlagh. Bha fhios aige nam biodh luchd-ionnsachaidh a' gabhail ris na bha e ag ionnsachadh dhaibh gun soirbhicheadh leò is iad a thigeadh gu bruidhinn na Gàidhlig!

A thaobh dualchas Gàidhealach na h-Albainn Nuaidhe, thuir Fionnlagh nach ruigeadh duine leas ach a bhi a' sgrìobadh cuideigin ann an Albainn Nuaidh airson faighinn a-mach an e (ban-)G(h)àidheal a th'ann/a th'innte!

'S e am modh TIP a tha 's an là an diugh 'na bun-stéidh dhan mhodh, Gàidhlig aig Baile

a bhios Oifis Iomairtean na Gàidhlig a' brosnachadh thro na prógraman aice.

Chuidich an fheallsanachd, na cèard-eòlasan is an dìcheall a thaisbean e dhuinn gus oidhirpean ùrachadh na Gàidhlig ann an Albainn Nuaidh ann an iomadh dòigh is dh'fhairichear buaidh a dh'leib fad bhliadhnaichean a thig.

Bha Fionnlagh daonnan a' brosnachadh oidhirpean buill na coimhearsnachd Ghàidhealaich 's a' mhòr-roinn is bha e a' creidsinn gum b'urrainn ùrachadh na Gàidhlig is a' cultuir a thachairt a' seo.

An t-urram as motha a 's urrainn dhuinn a thoirt do dh'Fionnlagh sin a bhi a' cumail oirnn leis an obair gus a' Ghàidhlig ùrachadh is a thoirt air ais is i a bhios ann mar rathad a-staigh dhan fhéin-aithne chultuirail is dualchasaich againn mar Ghàidheal.

Tapadh leibh, a ghaisgich chalma. Tha sinn fada fada 'nur comain.

Cuiridh sinn clach air ur càrn.

.....

We are truly saddened by the passing of Finlay MacLeòid. "Fionnlagh of the Struggle" as some in the Gaelic community of the Province called him.

Fionnlagh first came to Nova Scotia in the 1980s. After receiving an invitation from the late Jim Watson, Manager of Interpretation at Highland Village Museum and Frances MacEachen former Program Officer at the then Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, he returned again in 2004. During this visit, he gave a number of presentations and provided training on the Total Immersion Plus (TIP) language learning methodology. A methodology that he created and his late friend, Derek Farber, supported which contained methodology guides for tutors and learners of Gaelic along with suggestions on learning topics that could be included during TIP sessions. He returned again in 2007 and 2016 to deliver presentations and training to Gaelic tutors and promote his methodology with community members.

Many of the instructors that were involved in training that Fionnlagh delivered continue to teach and to share his techniques with Gaelic learners.

The manner in which people pass on language to each other was the most important aspect that Fionnlagh focussed on with the Gaelic community in Nova Scotia. He would also introduce new techniques and information

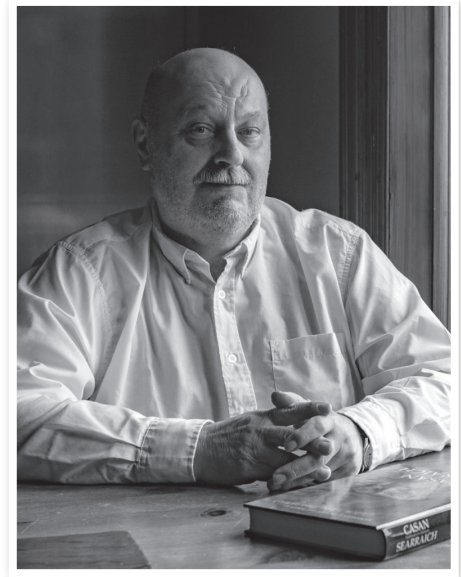


Photo credit: Jason Hedges, Press and Journal.

from other corners of the world such as those pertaining to Hawaiian language in Hawaii and Maori language in New Zealand.

He could be challenging and rigid regarding his method. This didn't bother Fionnlagh. He knew that if learners would accept the way he was instructing them that they would succeed and come to speaking Gaelic!

Regarding Nova Scotia's Gaelic heritage and identity community, Fionnlagh said that all a person had to do was scratch someone in Nova Scotia to find out if they were a Gael!

It is the TIP methodology that today is the foundation for the Gàidhlig aig Baile methodology that the Office of Gaelic Affairs promotes through its programs.

The philosophy, techniques, and commitment Fionnlagh demonstrated assisted efforts to renew Gaelic language in Nova Scotia and the impact of his legacy will be felt for years to come. Fionnlagh was always promoting the efforts of the Gaelic community in the Province and he believed that Gaelic language and cultural renewal could happen here.

The greatest honour we can give Fionnlagh is to keep going with the work to renew and reclaim Gaelic language as the pathway into our heritage and cultural identity as Gaels.

Thank you resolute warrior. We are deep in your debt.

We will place a stone on your cairn. ©

Lewis MacKinnon,  
Executive Director, Office of Gaelic Affairs

# Mar Chuimhneachain | Dedication

## REMEMBERING SISTER MARGARET MACDONELL

How is one to remember Sister Margaret? Her remarkable and long life was so rich and varied and she played many roles and made valuable contributions as a teacher, a sister of the Congregation of Notre Dame, a professor, a valued family member, and a friend. I will just highlight a few things for this remembrance.

Sister Margaret was born at Hillsdale, Cape Breton (known in Gaelic as Beinn Noah), on December 13, 1920, into a thoroughly Gaelic family and surrounding culture. She was the second oldest of her family. She often looked back on her early years with great fondness - recalling local characters and anecdotes, and her first words of English.

As a young woman she left Cape Breton and went to Truro to go to Normal College and train for a teacher. It was in a summer upgrading course that she had her first formal Gaelic lessons - Major MacLeod was working for the Education department and offered Gaelic classes. On the first day he came in and wrote the word "òrd" on the blackboard and told them that it was a hammer. Sister replied that in her community the word was also used to mean a portion such as "òrd sgadain". Major MacLeod looked doubtful, but he returned the next day and said, "I stand corrected" - he had done some homework and found that this too was a meaning!

She made ten trips to Scotland over the years. The first one was in the 1950s with her beloved friend Sister St. Veronica - a grand tour it was, including time in Rome. Annie Johnson came over from Barra to meet them in Canna and then they all went to South Uist together. Sister often recounted how the two Canadians rode in a car together with Annie Johnson and Calum MacLean, and the songs that they heard as they drove.

Sister Margaret did so much for the Gaelic cause. Sister St. Veronica had great vision for what could be done, and it was she that pushed for Sister Margaret to do a doctorate in Celtic Studies at Harvard in the 1960s. This opened up a whole new world for her. She was encouraged by the great Irish scholar Máire MacNeill to pay attention to her own Gaelic tradition from her home community of Hillsdale. She certainly took that advice to heart, and one can see glimpses of it in her doctoral dissertation (particularly as it relates to the celebration of the feast of Saint Michael,

and also eating blackberries), which was published by the University of Toronto Press as *The Emigrant Experience*. The work that she later undertook with John Shaw, which resulted in the magnificent book *Luireagan Eachann Nill*, was a direct result of this advice from MacNeill. When Sister Margaret wrote MacNeill to acknowledge this, she replied, "I feel very happy at having had even a small part in your endeavour to have these footprints made indelible. Heartiest congratulations to John Shaw and to yourself."

Being at Harvard also gave her the opportunity to take a summer course at the University of Edinburgh. Here she met Próinséas Ní Chatháin (another lifelong friend) and they took a trip together to Eigg, from whence her people came. Sister often described how much this meant to her - to meet people that spoke "her" Gaelic, but also hearing a fiddler warm up to play tunes using the same run of notes that her own mother Sarah would use. It was something that she never forgot.

Upon completion of her doctorate and after the death of Major MacLeod, she became a professor of Celtic Studies. While in this position she did two things, the value of which is beyond measure for Nova Scotia Gaelic - she worked with her good friend Allan J. MacEachen to secure multi-year funding for the Cape Breton Gaelic Folklore project, and she also secured permanent funding for the Sister St. Veronica Chair in Celtic Studies. The Folklore project was led by John Shaw and resulted in an outstanding collection of material - folk-tales, songs, proverbs, charms, cures, weather lore - from across Cape Breton.

Sister Margaret had a great capacity for friendship. She became fast and life-long friends with so many of the people that she encountered and engaged in lively correspondence with far-flung friends. Perhaps the greatest friendship of her life was that with John Lorne Campbell and Margaret Faye Shaw. They corresponded regularly and Sister went to Canna to visit on several occasions. Her last trip to Scotland, in 2007, was to give a talk in South Uist, at a conference in honour of Margaret Faye Shaw. Her talk was based on their correspondence and it was the highlight of the conference for all attendees. And even more fun was to see her exchanging Gaelic words with George, the housekeeper at Boisdale House for the conference.



*Photo courtesy the Antigonish Heritage Museum*

After she retired from St. FX Sister remained very active in the Gaelic community and in the St FX Celtic Studies community. She was a great support to Ken Nilsen, who succeeded her as Department Chair. She attended the first Gaelic Immersion week at the Gaelic College in St. Ann's in 1993 and taught at the 1994 immersion week. It was wonderful to have her there - we all thought that our heads were going to explode after the first class, so deep was her knowledge - so challenging, but such a gift. She participated in the "Highland Settlers" conference in Richmond Virginia in 2003. She participated in the Christmas Island Feis symposium in 2004, when the topic was "John Lorne Campbell and Christmas Island." She then spoke warmly of her dear friend. She also attended the Féis symposium in 2007, when the topic was "The St FX Folklore project and Christmas Island." At the interval, she asked to participate in the informal part of the evening. How could such a request be refused? She made herself at home on the stage and spoke *ex tempore* - that it had been wonderful to hear about the people who contributed to the collection but that not enough had been said about John Shaw. She spoke very warmly of him and the work that he had done to make the project the success that it was. She also gave a paper at the 2008 Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig at St FX. She did a session sponsored by the Office of Gaelic Affairs on Gaelic words that had gone out of usage. She was always generous with her knowledge to those who would visit.

Visiting with Sister Margaret was always a delight. She had a capacious mind and enjoyed conversation on many topics. She would relate funny stories of long-ago Gaelic events and would chuckle as she did so. She would teach you new words that may or may not be found in the Gaelic dictionary - "perhaps I've told you this one before" she would say. She was very precise in her use of language, in both English and in Gaelic. She once translated the Gaelic word "sunndach" as meaning "upbeat" - a very precise definition, and not the same as the translation

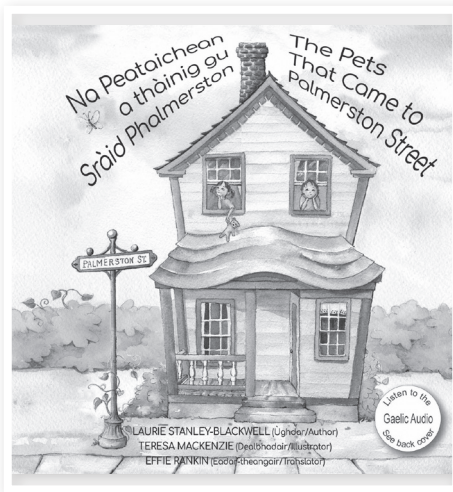
"happy" that one often hears. She followed current events very closely, and enjoyed discussing them, particularly Canadian politics. She loved to read and to discuss books. She enjoyed the spiritual works of the American writer Kathleen Norris.

Sister's last years were spent in Sydney. It was difficult to be away from her beloved St FX, her family, and Antigonish. However, she soldiered on in a new ministry - spending time with the people at Parkland (where she lived), many of whom were in failing health. She

enjoyed the opportunities for visits and for speaking Gaelic with residents such as Jamie MacNeil and Kay MacDonald. Even on her 102nd birthday when Dawn Beaton kindly visited to play her some tunes, Sister responded by teaching her some Gaelic phrases. A long life, well-lived, with a wonderful legacy. Chan fhaic sinn a leithid a rithist. ©

*Lorrie MacKinnon is a Gaelic enthusiast and researcher living in Oakville, Ontario*

## Léirmheasan | Book Reviews: NA PEATAICHEAN A THÀINIG GU SRÀID PALMERSTON | THE PETS THAT CAME TO PALMERSTON STREET



An exciting new Gaelic-English publication has been released by Pictou Bee Press. Pictou County, the "Birthplace of New Scotland," has a vibrant history of Gaelic language and culture. Beginning with the arrival of the ship Hector at Pictou Harbour in 1773, tens of thousands of Gaelic-speaking immigrants came to the province and set roots in Nova Scotia soil. "Na Peataichean a thàinig gu Sràid Phalmerston/The Pets that came to Palmerston Street" is a recent publication out of Pictou and is a marvelous collaboration between author Laurie Stanley-Blackwell, Gaelic translator, Effie Rankin, and illustrator, Teresa MacKenzie.

According to publishers John Blackwell and Laurie Stanley-Blackwell, "this children's book commemorates the 250th Hector Anniversary and pays homage to the remarkable contribution of one of Pictou's earliest publishers, James Dawson, who published in 1836 the first Gaelic book written and printed in North America. This work celebrates the dedication of Nova Scotia's Gaels to preserve their language and to pass it down to their children."

"Na Peataichean a thàinig gu Sràid Phalmerston/The Pets that came to Palmerston Street" delights young readers, and those young at heart. It tells the story of siblings, Henry and Abby, who feel their lives are incomplete without the addition of a pet dog. Their mother, concerned about the tidiness of their home, is hesitant to oblige, and suggests "easier" pets. Before they know it, Palmerston Street becomes a bustling home to a multitude of climbing, twittering, and nibbling animals! This lively story is beautifully conveyed through MacKenzie's warm illustrative style.

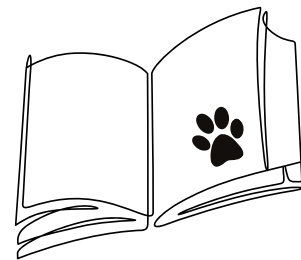
Stanley-Blackwell's cleverly written story is ideal for readers and Gaelic learners of all ages. Each page seamlessly provides Gaelic and English text. The text is light, giving the reader the option to read in one or both languages. Learners of any age can benefit from the simple, repetitive phrases that build as the story progresses. Visual cues tie in well with the text, making the beginner learner or young viewer able to follow the story. The story can be enjoyed by families, in classrooms, or other Gaelic learning settings. It is a fun and effective way to expose readers to the language. On the back of the book, readers are given the option of listening to Effie Rankin read the story in her beautiful North Uist Gaelic, accessible via QR code.

The storyline is simple and suitable for younger audiences; it is definitely 'kid-approved' at our house. The funny storyline quickly drew in my two children. My youngest is an animal lover and was delighted to see what animal would appear on the next page. Last fall, we were fortunate to attend an event at An Drochaid in Mabou where local children's publications were shared and celebrated. Local Gaelic speaker, Dougie MacPhee, shared an expressive

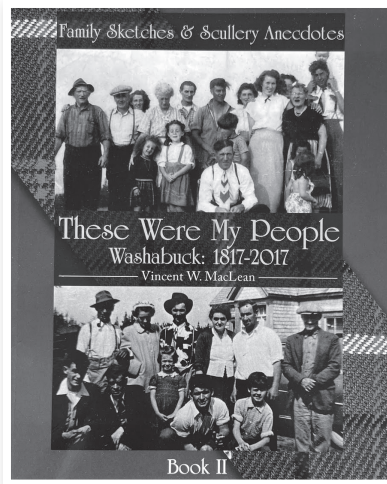
reading of "Na Peataichean a thàinig gu Sràid Phalmerston/The Pets that came to Palmerston Street". It was a special moment to have this new publication in the hands of a native Gaelic speaker, who laughed as he told the story in his great Barra Gaelic, giving youth an opportunity to naturally absorb the positive associations with Gaelic language and culture.

I suspect "Na Peataichean a thàinig gu Sràid Phalmerston/The Pets that came to Palmerston Street" is already becoming a staple in children's book collections around the province. The publication signifies more than just a new addition to bookshelves but is a celebration of the Gaels' persistence in Nova Scotia. This is a new treasure to share "bho ghluìn gu gluìn," from knee to knee. Well done to Dr. Laurie Stanley-Blackwell and her capable team for releasing this sweet story and resurrecting the Gaelic publishing tradition in Pictou County! ©

*Emily C. MacDonald,  
Ban-chleasaiche | Gaelic Cultural Animator*



# Léirmheasan | Book Reviews: THESE WERE MY PEOPLE, WASHABUCK: 1817-2017, FAMILY SKETCHES AND SCULLERY ANECDOTES



Vince W. MacLean, a retired Nova Scotia Community College teacher, has once again demonstrated his deep understanding of the people of his home community of Washabuck. At the Along the Shores of Washabuck Festival in 2023, Vince launched his second book, *These Were My People, Washabuck: 1817-2017, Family Sketches and Scullery Anecdotes*. It is a story of faith, determination against significant challenges, family growth, community cohesiveness and triumph.

Vince earned his stripes as a genealogist starting at St. Francis Xavier University between 1962 and 1966, where he was one of the many students of Professor Reverend John Hugh Gillis, “The Deacon”, originally from MacKinnon’s Harbour, who was a renowned scholar and, at one time, archivist at the university. Father John Hugh’s

uncle, Stephen Rory (S.R.) MacNeil of Barra Glen, published his remarkable book *All Call Iona Home* in 1979 with the assistance of Reverend Gillis. In that project Vince was recruited to help. This, among other things, kindled an interest that has been nurtured over the intervening years. This musing resulted in the publication of *These Were My People, Washabuck: An Anecdotal History*, launched at the Along the Shores of Washabuck Festival in August 2014. This excellent piece of history, reminiscences, and stories of the people was very well received by the local Washabuck community and by many others connected to the larger Scottish diaspora. Encouraged by that reception Vince continued his pursuit into the family genealogies of the area. The result has been an impressive and detailed recalling of the immigration, settlement, growth, dispersal, and successes of the Scottish families who came to Washabuck from the Isle of Barra and elsewhere in the Highlands.

Thinking of the story of his family’s migration from Scotland, Vince, forty years ago asked his friend, Reverend John Hugh Gillis, if he would prepare a homily on what he imagined might be expressed to those departing their homeland. This homily is printed in the epilogue of the book. It begins with, “We have come to the parting of the ways, and hearts are laden with loneliness and grief. But loneliness and grief are an inseparable element in all parting this side of the grave.” The enduring message of faith and resilience addressed to the migrants is eloquently expressed by this son of a family that dared to leave home. Vince’s work

epitomizes this depth of pathos and joy that is the story of the Gaels in the new world. For those who have an interest in the families and the anecdotes that some of us recall from our youth, this is an enduring story that will be treasured for decades to come. It is meticulously researched, integrates many private sources, and acknowledges others with twenty-seven pages of detailed references. This story of 96 families, contained in 541 pages, is a marvelous work that will proudly stand tall on the shelves of genealogists to accompany the previous high standard established by books like the *History of Christmas Island Parish, To the Hill of Boisdale, All Call Iona Home, and Mabou Pioneers*. Few researchers have better demonstrated, with empathy and understanding, the experience of the Gaels in Cape Breton over the last two hundred years and worked to preserve that memory for posterity.


Vince and his wife, Charlotte (MacKenzie), are both natives of Washabuck and have lived and raised their family there. ©

*M.A. MacPherson, Former Board Chair, Highland Village Museum Society*

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### Congratulations & Thank You

Rodney Chaisson, 30 years; Katherine MacLeod, 15 years; Janet MacNeil, 20 years; Tim MacNeil 35 years.

### Sympathies

To the families of Byron Donovan, Truro; Flòridh MacIsaac, Boisdale, Michael Johnathan (Mickey John H.) MacNeil, Jamesville, Brian MacCormack, Alberta, Helen (Helen Peter F.) MacDonald mother of Shamus MacDonald Stiùiriche na Gàidhlig | Manager of Culture and Language at Baile Nan Gàidheal.



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