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GLENGARRY'S GAELIC HERITAGE

GLENGARRY COUNTY and its local writers have profited mutually from one another. The county has supplied the colourful background of its Highland Scottish traditions. Its literary publicists have in turn attached a special aura to the county. By the magic touch of the pen, Ralph Connor, Carrie Holmes MacGillivray, Marion Keith, Grace Campbell, and Dorothy Dumbrille have brought its history to life. As a result, to be a Glengarrian is a matter for boasting. No other county in Canada, so far as I know, with the exception of Pictou County in Nova Scotia, has attained such status.

How can this tradition best be represented in the new Museum which is being prepared at Dunvegan by the Glengarry Historical Society? Though not a Glengarrian myself, I venture here as a folklorist to suggest some possibilities.

The Upper Canada Village at Morrisburg, opened in 1961, already displays with a beautiful and dramatic simplicity a wealth of details about the settlers' way of life in the three United Counties of Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry. It does not, however, reveal the peculiarities of any one ethnic culture. The Glengarry Museum should follow the successful method of the local writers in portraying the distinctive and homogeneous folk-culture of the emigrants from the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland. The earliest settlers were Gaelic-speaking Loyalists who left New York State in 1784 and Highland soldiers who were brought with their families from Knoidart in 1786 to St. Raphaels by Father Alexander Macdonell (Scotus). Other settlers, both Catholic and Protestant, military and non-military, followed them from a variety of Gaelic-speaking areas in Scotland. To mention only a few of the groups, Presbyterians came from Glenelg in 1793 and from Lochaber in 1802; Catholics, led by Father Alexander Macdonell of Glen Urquhart, in 1803; and Baptists from Breadalbane in 1815.

Relics of their material culture must, of course, be preserved, but beyond that

lie other important desiderata. The characteristic features of their Gaelic tradition, although rapidly disappearing from Glengarry today, must be represented. Adequate maps must be prepared to show the role of clan and military and religious affiliations in the selection of homesteads. The traditional customs of the people at home, at work, at church, and at play must be recorded. The intangible oral culture which they transmitted must be collected. To fulfil this urgent need, all traces of printed or manuscript Gaelic writings extant in Glengarry, especially those originating in the county, must be gathered together; and the tenacious memories of those who still speak Gaelic must be ransacked by means of the tape-recorder.

This programme may sound rigorous, but I can mention some encouraging yields from a search of the written and oral Gaelic tradition. Written records are likely to be scarce, for the Gaelic speaker customarily relies on his memory rather than on print; but some traces are at least extant, even if not voluminous or ancient.

Elsewhere among Gaelic-speaking settlements in North America, as early as 1791 Dugald Crawford's *Gaelic Sermons* were published in Fayetteville, North Carolina. In 1832, a Gaelic translation of Dyer's *Titles* was published in Prince Edward Island. In 1836 the first original Gaelic volume composed in Canada appeared in Pictou, Nova Scotia—Alexander MacGillivray's *Companach an Oganach* (The Youth's Companion). In this same year the *Gaelic Hymns* of the Scottish composers Dugald Buchanan and Patrick Grant were reprinted in Montreal and, no doubt, circulated in the Three Counties; but there is no evidence of Gaelic publication in Glengarry at this early date.

In the chronological spread of Gaelic publications the next records occur farther west in Upper Canada. Donald MacLean's bibliography of Gaelic lists a periodical named *Cuairtear na Coille* (The Forest Traveller) published at Kingston between 1840 and 1841, and another named *Am Fear-Teagaisg* (The Teacher) published at some unspecified locality, also in Ontario, in 1850. No surviving copies of either of these ephemeral works have as yet been found, but they may still be lurking in some Glengarry attic.

The earliest Gaelic publication known to have originated in Glengarry is apparently *An Teagasg Chriosd* (The Teaching of Christ), a catechism prepared by the Rev. John MacDonald, Vicar General of Alexandria. It was printed in Toronto in 1871 and republished in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1874. From this time on, there is at least some trace of the Gaelic tradition in print. *The Glengarry Review* (1884-88) and its successor *The Glengarrian* published some Gaelic items. Dr. Donald MacDiarmid of Maxville (a dentist) ran a series of Gaelic lessons in *The*

Glengarrian. Dr. D. D. MacDonald of Alexandria, among others, provided Gaelic songs.

Occasionally, also, some writer who understood Gaelic culture as an insider would produce an invaluable study of the Glengarry tradition. J. A. Macdonell (Greenfield) first published his important *Sketches Illustrating the Early Settlement in The Glengarrian* (in 1889, republished separately in 1893). George Sandfield MacDonald wrote on the county's literary background in the *Transactions of the Celtic Society of Montreal* (1887). Miss C. A. Fraser published a paper on Glengarry folktales in the *Journal of American Folklore* (1893). John MacLennan, M.P., Lancaster, wrote an historical sketch entitled *The Early Settlement of Glengarry*, which is now preserved in manuscript in the Public Archives of Ontario.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century Glengarrians were in contact, moreover, with Gaelic literary journals of a wider sphere. Angus Nicholson began publishing *An Gaidheal* (The Gael) in Toronto in 1871 and appointed agencies in Williamstown (Glengarry) and South Finch (Stormont). Later, Jonathan G. MacKinnon of Cape Breton published his excellent and readable journal *Mac-Talla* (Echo) in Sydney (1892-1904) and attracted numerous and enthusiastic subscribers from Glengarry and its vicinity. An informant recently remarked to me, "Our neighbours used to get *Mac-Talla*, and they'd scarcely let you look at it, and then only if you'd put on spectacles first."

According to a count of the subscription lists, there were in Dunvegan alone eighteen subscribers: D. M. Campbell, Mrs. Donald Campbell, Farquhar Dewar, Malcolm Dewar, Alexander Fraser, Donald MacCrimmon, Duncan MacCrimmon, John D. MacCuaig, John MacGillivray, A. N. MacLellan, Kenneth MacLennan, Norman K. MacLeod, Rev. Roderick MacLeod, Roderick MacLeod, D. MacMillan, John D. MacMillan, Donald MacPhee, and John Morrison. There were eleven subscribers in Laggan, and smaller numbers in Alexandria, Dalkeith, Fassifern, Glen Robertson, Glen Sandfield, Kirkhill, MacCrimmon, Martintown, Maxville, Skye, VanKleek Hill, and Williamstown; and in Avonmore, Cornwall, Finch and South Finch, and Moose Creek in Stormont County.

Scattered through the pages of *Mac-Talla* are frequent references to the Glengarry settlements and even some Gaelic songs. One by Alexander MacMillan (III, 26; X, 224) celebrates Donald (son of John Donn) MacDonald the hunter, who had emigrated from Lochaber in 1816. There are two songs by Donald Morrison (Fiddler) (III, 34; IV, 17), one of which deals with the killing of a deer in Glengarry around 1825. There is one signed by Angus son of Allan, a Glengarry Gael

(IV, 43). There are three by Miles MacMillan of Finch (in Stormont) (IV, 42; VI, 120; X, 160), the first to John Sandfield MacDonald, the second written on the poet's death-bed, and the third, four years later, auspiciously beginning "As I arose one morning in May."

Such songs provide real treasures for the Glengarry Museum. In all Highland communities, local bards are quick to compose occasional songs for deaths, weddings, dances, elections, and miscellaneous comicalities. Customarily they are transmitted orally. Frequently they are soon forgotten. But in Glengarry some have been published or written down in manuscript collections, and some are remembered even now by singers who also know the accompanying melodies.

In every Gaelic settlement in the New World, moreover, it is possible to find songs that considerably predate the earliest extant published Gaelic. A song composed in 1770 in North Carolina is still known to Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia, although Gaelic is now a dead language in the area where it was composed. In Glengarry I have recorded Neil Austin R. MacDonald singing a song which was composed by John Liath (grey) MacDonald after he came from Knoidart in 1786 to the vicinity of Glen Roy. He was one of the band of five hundred emigrants brought out by Father Alexander MacDonell (Scotus), mentioned above. The bard paints the scene as if it were only yesterday:

's ann air maduinn Di-dòmhnuch . . .

It was on Sunday morning
We set sail from the land
On a large three-masted ship,
And our parish priest with us.
He himself raised a prayer on high
To the King of the Elements to protect us,
And to the Angel St. Raphael
To set us safe on land.

When we drew from the harbour,
There were many weeping and lamenting,
As they went off at each glen,
Sending farewells upon us.
They were beating their palms,
Not expecting ever to see us again,
When she turned her back to the land,
And the white sails to the mast.

We hear of the discomforts of the settlers' lives. John Liath complains, in a subsequent stanza:

But a thousand curses on the wind!
 It's forever from the north
 And gives force to the Wolf-month
 So that people are cold
 All winter and spring.
 The storm-wind is as lasting
 As are in summer the flies
 Which wage onslaught on our ears.

Other composers are less pessimistic. Anne Gillis of Morar, who married a MacDonald of Knoidart and emigrated with him in 1803, sang happily:

In Upper Canada
 There is every joy and delight;
 All requirements will prosper together.

 The wheat grows
 Richly, plump to harvest,
 With only three months to bring it to full season.

 Sugar is yielded by the tree
 With only the setting of a tap in its side,
 And not one of its branches is damaged.

 We'll get berries and wine
 And all else to our wish;
 Nothing under the sun will fail us.

Difficulties were met with a sense of humour. An anonymous bard laments "the savage stumps and crooked roots" in his new settlement. Then he considers draining his swamp:

"I'll let it out at John Stewart's,
 To pour it on down."

 Then John Stewart said,
 Facing up to me,
 "I don't need your wet.
 I've a swamp of my own.
 Let it run out around
 To Roddie's, in a rush,
 And Alec Tailor can make
 A canal that's right neat."

One curious song sung to me by Donald Fletcher of Dunvegan is a complaint attributed to a newcomer who disliked the hardships of settling. On his way home

at night from visiting a neighbour he saw, for the first time in his life, the alarming light of fireflies and cried out, "The country's on fire."

There's many a thing in this place
That wasn't in the place we left—
Green flies in swarms
Turning into fire at night.
Oh, 'tis sad I am!

Election songs must have abounded at one time among people who are still notorious for their political temper. "Scotia" composed a song in honour of W. D. McLeod's victory (May 29, the year not specified in newspaper clipping). The refrain is still sung in Glengarry:

Ho, gur toil linn, he, gur toil linn . . .
Ho, we like, hey, we like,
Ho, we like the tune of the Gaels,
And we like the outstanding gentleman
Who is arising in his pride.

According to the bard, the opposition had tried to subvert the candidate's followers:

They tried to deceive us with boodle,
They tried every trick of Satan.

But, with an incredible unanimity, all the Gaels of Glengarry are said to have supported him:

The Knoidart men, the men from Eigg,
Men from Glengarry and strong men of Glen Elg,
The MacPhees from beside Loch Arkaig,
And the Kennedys, who won't allow refusal.

The Camerons from Lochaber,
Clan MacLennan from Kintail
Clan MacMillan, the heroes,
Who are not mild to opposition.

Another song, printed as a broadside, satirizes a political leader who is "worse than Mohammed Ali or old Nebuchadnezzar."

Your conscience is as wide
As Loch Ness or the St. Lawrence,
And your heart is just as hard
As a piece of steel from the smithy.

The owner of the only known copy of this broadside has suggested, however, that even now it would be better for the peace of the community not to reveal the name of the victim.

Such songs are, in a sense, neither literary nor historical, for the bards who composed them were unpretentious songsters. But they followed an ancient tradition of extemporizing and often crystallized the opinion and emotion of the moment in a way unmatched in the folk-culture of other immigrants. If collected, they would undoubtedly reveal, as they do for Cape Breton, the entire pattern of the Highlander's experience, his excited hopes and his bitter nostalgia. He loved his original homeland; through persecution and poverty he turned against it; he longed for a finer life in the New World; he was here at first disappointed and overwhelmed; he prospered and came to love his new home; his descendants scattered from the rural areas which he had settled and then experienced a new nostalgia for the happy homes and farms which they had deserted.

Furthermore, the original Gaelic often has a charm which the translation cannot suggest, and the words are usually wedded to a traditional Gaelic air which imparts a distinctive warmth unfortunately absent in cold print. In the ancient Gaelic tradition, the worth of a song used to be measured by the number of cows that the composer would receive for it. In the entirely different circumstances of a modern folk-museum, I would suggest that one song is worth five spinning wheels. No other item can better represent the invisible but genuine tradition of Glengarry.

Happily a number of songs have already been recovered from oral or written sources, and singers can still be found who remember the appropriate tunes. George Proctor of the National Museum and some other collectors have already recorded living singers on tape. Duncan Angus MacRae prepared a private series of His Master's Voice records of his own singing in 1914 or earlier and thus provided what must be one of the first recordings of Gaelic songs made anywhere in the world. With this nucleus and further additions, the Glengarry Museum can present its visitors with a permanent representation of its Gaelic tradition by the mere pressing of a button on a tape recorder. An accompanying translation and perhaps a photograph of the singer are all that is necessary to provide a demonstration unique among museums.

To amplify and set this material in a wider context, collectors might well have a working questionnaire in mind when they meet an informant. Some of the following queries might be productive:

1. *Do you know any Gaelic songs that came from Scotland?* These may

be of value to round out the collection now being amassed in the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh. In any case, even if fragmentary, they will reflect the role of the Old Country tradition in the New Land.

2. *What songs did you sing at fulling bees, at quiltings, at weddings, at dances, at milking, at spinning?* The Gaels used to know songs appropriate to every occasion.

3. *What Gaelic hymns and prayers did you use?*

4. *Do you know any songs that were composed in Canada?* Generally, these are likely to be either eulogies, elegies, satires, or occasional songs.

5. *What rhymes did you recite at Hallowe'en, Christmas Eve, or New Year?*

6. *What stories do you remember?* These may concern second sight (*dà shalladh*), witchcraft (*buidseachd*), the evil eye (*an droch shuil*), the little people (*sithichean*), the water horse (*each uisge*).

7. *What were the favourite anecdotes in your district?* These are likely to concern witty replies and deeds of phenomenal strength, with an even higher esteem placed upon wit than upon strength, particularly if it is an inferior who defeats a superior. Typical is the Glengarry story of Donald and the zealous new priest. "Well, Donald," said the priest, "what are you doing? Sowing oats?" "No, feeding the birds," said Donald. "Oh, Donald," said the priest, "it would be better if you'd turn your ingenuity to learning the Catechism." "But I know it already," said Donald. "Well, if so, what is Baptism?" "One dollar, before you came, and now," said Donald, "it's two."

8. *What charms (eolas) do you have to cure lameness, warts, tooth-ache?*

9. *What pipe tunes and fiddle tunes do you know, and what are their names and associations?*

10. *What were the old Scottish dances like? What steps and patterns were followed?*

11. *What recipes do you have for Scottish dishes—oat-cake (aran corc), sausage (iosban, maragan)?*

12. *What is your genealogy, what part of Scotland did your forebears come from, and why did they emigrate?*

13. *What Gaelic place-names did they have for the places they settled, and what stories were attached to them?* Such names are sometimes merely translations of the English, as *Baile Uilleim* (Williamstown) or *Cnoc na h-Eaglaise* (Kirkhill); sometimes, however, they preserve an older or alternate place-name, as *Baile Ur* (New Town = New Johnstown = Cornwall), *Muileann an t-Sagairt* (Priest's

Mill = Alexandria), or *Muileann a' Chaluim* (Malcolm's Mill = Martintown); and sometimes they refer to an area for which no English name exists, as *Braigh na h-Aibhne* (River's Brae = slopes above the Baudette River near Glen Roy).

14. *What heirlooms did your family bring from Scotland?* St. Fillan's Crosier-Case was brought to Kingston, Ontario, by a member of the Dewar family who had been hereditary custodians of it since the fourteenth century. It remained there for some sixty years and was only returned to the National Museum in Edinburgh in 1876 through the intervention of Sir Daniel Wilson. Equally spectacular recoveries can hardly be expected, but even lesser items can have great associational value.

Thus it still seems possible to assemble a representation of the vanished generations. The task will be rewarding. The first settlers may have been poor, but their Gaelic folk-culture was rich and well integrated. Their earliest experiences in Canada must have been brutal and exhausting, but they were a race of bards and musicians. Their saying was, "Thig crìoch air an t-saoghal, ach mairidh gaol us ceol—An end will come to the world, but love and music will last." If a museum preserves something to reflect their human affections and beliefs, their wit and their melancholy, and their songs and music, it will have achieved a monument worthy of the Man from Glengarry.