

encourage such ideals. Too bad, we might have an even better body of labour and union songs had she not allowed her own personal biases to sway her choice in this genre. However, often the singers themselves felt uncomfortable in sharing such material. When Dennis Smith of Musquodoboit, on Nova Scotia's eastern shore, sang a variant of "The Honest Working Man" for Helen in 1943, he also asked that his name not be attached to the song "unless some Cape Bretoner heard it on the radio from New York and came and beat him up." [Diary, 7 August, 1943, Helen Creighton Fonds, NSARM Mg1 Volume 2830 #2]

Until I had completed my biography of Helen I had, for the most part, kept my opinions about her work to myself. Now, in the book's final chapter, I have addressed many of the criticisms aimed at her work. Some I agree with – others I feel are based on mis-information and ulterior agendas. But ultimately I go back to the value of Helen's

collection. She left so many observations – in her correspondence, research notes and diaries, that, whenever possible, I have been able to allow Helen to speak on her own behalf.

I believe we should judge Helen in the context in which she lived. Today's standards in folklore studies have changed radically since she helped pioneer the field. A new guard is already reexamining the way we look at folk and material culture today. But, in Helen's case, keep in mind that the material is there for us to examine, appraise, critique, study and, hopefully, enjoy. She knew her weaknesses and her strengths, and she brought her own personality to her collection. She no doubt missed some songs, but she nonetheless collected far more than perhaps any other individual collector in Canada. The fact that for evermore we will have to acknowledge her work when we speak of Canadian folklore is an amazing testimony to a passionate and dedicated collector.

The Helen Creighton Fonds at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia

[<http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/creighton/intro.asp>]

Clary Croft

Clary Croft, personal diary, 1 October 1986: "Today I begin work on the Helen Creighton Collection. It is perhaps the most important work I have been asked to do so far." Thus I began cataloguing the largest individual personal fonds [collection] housed at NSARM – the Nova Scotia Archives and Record Management [formerly, The Public Archives of Nova Scotia].

I had known Helen since 1974 when I telephoned her for advice on folk songs. She quickly became my mentor and a cherished, much loved friend. I was already an established performer and had experience working at various museums in Nova Scotia as well as working on term projects at the Public Archives since 1984. My new job, Contract Archivist, was sponsored by federal and provincial grants awarded, in part, to specifically develop an archival description for Helen Creighton's collection – most importantly, while the progenitor was still alive. What an amazing opportunity! I had to go through every file, image, recording and research note in Helen's personal folklore collection and meld that with the huge storehouse already deposited with the Archives. But the great luxury I had, to which few

archivists are privileged, is to have the collector right there to answer questions. Helen knew her collection inside out and most times offered insights and observations to which few people were privy. Out of that two year contract, along with our deep friendship and Helen's willingness to share "another one for your journal", I based my 1999 biography, *Helen Creighton: Canada's First Lady of Folklore* [Halifax: Nimbus, 1999].

Helen began depositing portions of her collection at PANS [the Public Archives of Nova Scotia] in the 1930s and by 1987 had completed the transfer of her personal collection from her home to this repository. After her death in 1989 some additional personal material came to PANS and, in 1995, more material was transferred from the estate of her nephew and executor, Jake Creighton.

Until recently, the only way to access Helen's fonds was by a visit to her archives. Fortunately, over the past two years, the Nova Scotia Archives and Record Management [with funding assistance from the Helen Creighton Folklore Society Grants-in-Aid Program] has developed a fine on-line site, including a special

Virtual Exhibit with over 50 photographs, several sound clips and a selection of online documents. Since this site is so inclusive and contains descriptions of most individual holdings, it would be redundant for me to list contents – besides it would make this issue of the magazine run close to 500 pages. What I would like to do is give you some idea of the range of items and highlight a few examples.

Helen's Personal Library: Helen donated 596 published works to the NSARM Library. She had accumulated an extensive folklore library in addition to her own many publications. The finding aid lists only 35 of Helen's own works, but many more were found scattered among her papers. For a more exhaustive list see the bibliography in *Helen Creighton: Canada's First Lady of Folklore*.

Photography and Documentary Art: This includes 2788 prints [the majority being black and white], 1045 negatives, 20 glass slides, 7 drawings and 1 print. From a young age Helen was an avid and very good photographer, and during her childhood and early teens her family had a darkroom in their house. There are 15 albums dating from ca. 1865 to ca. 1959. Albums 1 to 13 are family and early non-folklore career related; albums 14 and 15 contain some of the earliest images of Helen's collecting days and continue on to ca. 1959. The famous image of Helen carrying the melodeon in a wheelbarrow is included in this lot [NSARM Helen Creighton Fonds, Binder 16:0383] as well as wonderful photos of some of her most important informants – Ben Henneberry, Catherine Gallagher and Nathan Hatt. The collection of individual prints and slides is arranged by decade [1910 to the 1980s] and includes images of informants, personal photos, career appearances and scenic locations through the Maritime provinces. The artwork includes an original sketch of Helen by famed political cartoonist Robert Chambers [NSARM Helen Creighton Fonds 2319] and some of Ed McCurdy's whimsical bird note cards. [Any one who knew Ed and received correspondence from him during the last decade of his life probably received one of his "bird" images.]

Manuscripts: This is a huge section that included diaries, research papers, personal papers, publication drafts and proofs, a collection of file cards, typescripts of talks given by Helen and correspondence from over 1800 individuals. The bulk of manuscript items is found in MG1 Volumes 2790 to 2845. Volumes 2790 to 2791 contain personal papers – the earliest is a letter written by Helen to her father, dated 1905 [MG1 Volume 2790 #1]; a range of files pertaining to subjects such as the

Rockefeller Foundation, from which Helen received some of her earliest financial support [MG1 Volume 2790 #9] to her professional affiliations such as the Canadian Authors Association [MG1 Volume 2790 #27-28] and the American Folklore Society [MG1 Volume 2790 #25]. Volume 2791 holds papers concerning her awards and honorary degrees; volume 2792 – individuals Helen worked with; volumes 2793 to 2796 – publication and royalty information; and volumes 2797 and 2798 – programs, lectures, broadcasts and performances either by, or about, Helen. Volume 2799 contains notation books, including the earliest extant variant of *The Nova Scotia Song* [MG1 Volume 2799 #3]; music analysis, including notes on song structure by Hungarian musicologist Laszlo Vikar [MG1 Volume 2799 #16]; and various arrangements of material from Helen's song canon.

In 1957 Helen received one of the first Canada Council grants and used it to have Kenneth Peacock make transcriptions of her songs [MG1 Volumes 2800-2801] and to have her original audio discs transferred to tape. As the work was being duplicated, Helen sat in the Crawley Studios in Ottawa and made notes about the songs [MG1 Volumes 2802]. Volumes 2803 to 2808 hold material on various material folklore genres as well as Helen's field research reports. Volume 2809 is a file on Acadian history and lore.

Correspondence and Diaries: Volumes 2810 to 2819 are the correspondence files. The correspondence was scattered throughout the collection and I removed it from its original location, noted the move in the document file and created an individual file for each correspondent. It is a virtual *Who's Who* of people in the field of folklore – Marius Barbeau [MG1 Volume 2810 #75], Richard Dorson [MG1 Volume 2812 #53], Edith Fowke [MG1 Volume 2812 #116], Edward D. (Sandy) Ives [MG1 Volume 2813 #247], Maud Karpeles [MG1 Volume 2814 #50], Alan Lomax [MG1 Volume 2814 #173] ... the list goes on and on. Equally important is the fact that Helen kept her correspondence from informants [and in a few cases from people who wrote on their behalf because they were illiterate]. Perhaps two of the most interesting are Angelo Dornan [MG1 Volume 2812 #52], whose traditional repertoire made up the majority of *Folksongs from Southern New Brunswick* [Ottawa; National Museum of Man Publications in Folk Culture, No. 1]; and Laura Irene McNeil [MG1 Volume 2815 #160], who was Helen's friend and gateway to the world of Acadian tales and songs.

Volumes 2820 to 2826 contain field journals, reports and copies of talks and lectures given by Helen, while volumes 2827 to 2829 contain scrapbooks assembled by Helen and others. Helen's diaries [MG1 Volume 2830] range from 1937 to 1988 and offer invaluable insights into her thoughts and opinions about her personal and professional life. Most of these (and several other files on the supernatural) were, at her request, closed to the public until 15 years after her death. The original restriction was lifted in 1999. Before that, the provincial archivist and I were the only ones permitted access to them. Fortunately, they are now open to everyone. Volumes 2831 to 2841 hold hundreds of individual file cards containing references from field research and biographical data on informants. Volume 2842 is a collection of published non-folk sheet music; volume 2843 consists of posters from Helen's professional career; and volumes 2844 and 2845 contain newspaper and magazine clippings relating to Helen's work.

Recordings: Readers of *Canadian Folk Music* will, perhaps, be most interested in Helen's sound and moving image collection. This consists of 4 wax cylinders, 307 discs [acetate and vinyl], 553 reel-to-reel tapes, 15 cassette tapes, 4 video-tapes, and 3 film reels. Helen's early folk song collecting was done by transcribing the words and noting the music as best she, and her collecting partner Doreen Senior, could by hand. Around 1932-33, she used wax cylinders, but they proved too fragile for field work and wore out quickly when trying to make transcriptions. In 1943 she began recording on acetate discs using a Presto Recording Machine, on loan from the Library of Congress. In 1949 she began using a tape recorder and told me she thought she had died and gone to heaven. The material from the acetate discs was transferred to reel-to-reel in 1958. Therefore, all of her recorded material, with the exception of the recordings made on the wax cylinders, was available for listening when I began

my cataloguing. I sent the four wax cylinders off to the National Museum to access the damage and copy them to tape; two were beyond repair. Today, almost all of the original material has been transferred to listening tapes for researchers.

The recorded material contains folk tales and lore, interviews, recordings of military and civic events [part of Helen's agreement with the Library of Congress was to record military and civilian life during WWII] and over 4000 individual song titles, many with several variants. Helen collected songs in English, French, Gaelic, Mi'kmaq, German and several other languages. She has some of the earliest recordings [1943] of African Canadians. Before she got the tape recorder, Helen had to be frugal with supplies. There is little on the discs except the actual song or story, except in a few instances where she recorded the informant's voice for its unique dialect. However, she could be more generous with her reel-to-reel tapes and these have more dialogue between the informants and herself. She collected from individuals, groups, adults and children – and even the odd oxen and occasional group of spring frogs. Her song collection is legendary so I will refer you to the listing on the Archive's web site. It was a joy to listen to these gems. In fact, it took me forty weeks of eight hour days just to listen and catalogue all the songs and stories. [Tough gig!]

I was privileged to have been archivist for this amazing collection. I gained new insights and appreciation for Helen the collector and a great sense of humble gratitude to the hundreds of informants who shared their gifts with her. While cataloguing Helen's collection, I conducted a series of interviews with her and asked what she felt her collection's legacy would be. She told me she had assembled it and now it was up to others to use it. Thankfully, it is now a very public and accessible collection and, I believe, a National Treasure.

Songs of the Sea: Traditional Folk Songs and Narratives from the Dr. Helen Creighton Collection.

Helen Creighton Folklore Society, 2003. PO Box 236, Dartmouth, NS, B2Y 3Y3.
<http://www.corvuscorax.org:80800~gseto/creighton>

This is a two-CD compilation of recordings made by Helen Creighton between 1943 and 1954. The first CD comprises twenty-one performances of ballads and songs the subject matter of which is linked in one way or another with the sea; there are eighteen different songs (three items, "The Sailor's Alphabet",

"Golden Vanity" and "Nova Scotia Song" are included in two versions) sung by twelve informants. The second CD has twenty-six items, most of which are shanties, the remainder consisting of comments on the songs or accounts of the functions of shanty-singing in the days of sail.

Although little or nothing has been done to enhance the quality of the original recordings, they are, in the main, remarkably good for their time. Curiously, the disc recordings made by Helen in 1943 for the Library of Congress on a Presto machine loaned by Alan Lomax sound marginally better than the slightly muddy-sounding tape-recordings made for the National Museum between 1949 and 1954, except where the discs have obvious and irritating imperfections, such as the regularly repeated clunk that mars Catherine Gallagher's rendition of "Henry Martyn".



Obviously, for anyone interested in Helen Creighton's work as a collector or in Nova Scotia's heritage of traditional song, this pair of CDs is a welcome and important release. The more so, perhaps, because the accompanying booklet informs us that "Songs of the Sea" is only the first in a series of projected issues of field recordings from the *Creighton Fonds* at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. Plans are apparently underway for releasing "recordings from Mi'kmaq, Acadian, African Nova Scotian and Gaelic speaking informants as well as a series of Songs and Ballads and Instrumental Music". Great, I look forward to these eagerly. It would be particularly nice to see a CD devoted to each of Helen's most celebrated informants, including Ben Henneberry, Catherine Gallagher, Walter Roast, Richard Hartlan, Dennis Smith, Nathan Hatt, and Angelo Dornan. But I do hope subsequent issues will make careful and limited use of a digital editing program to compensate for damage incurred by the original discs and tapes. It seems surprising that the option of so doing was apparently rejected for this first compilation.

For me, the most valuable thing about this particular release is that we finally get to hear what a few of those famous source singers sounded like. Ben Henneberry is unfortunately missing, and so is his son Edmund. One wonders why, since they both knew plenty of maritime ballads and sea songs, and a few of the items that were included do not seem absolutely essential candidates for inclusion. Nor are Nathan Hatt or Angelo Dornan included, although perhaps their repertoires didn't fit the theme of this collection. On the other hand, Catherine Gallagher is featured prominently, singing (in addition to "Henry Martyn") "Golden Vanity", "The *Chesapeake* and *Shannon*", and the famous "Broken Ring Song", a distant relative of "The Dark Eyed Sailor". We get two examples of Walter Roast's excellent singing: a remarkable ballad of the supernatural titled "The Ghostly Sailors" about the aftermath of a collision between two ships that occurred in the 1860s, and his fine performance of "Nova Scotia Song" (aka "Farewell to Nova Scotia"). There is only one example of Richard Hartlan, perhaps not quite at his best, singing "The Banks of Newfoundland", in an accent that suggests an Irish, or perhaps Newfoundland, ancestry. Dennis Smith is missing, but Dennis Williams of Musquodoboit is represented by the better (and earlier) of the two accounts of "The Sailor's Alphabet".

The decision to feature sea-related material has led to the inclusion of various less well-known or less prolific informants. For example, Earl Smith of Lower Clark's Harbour was one of the first of many sailors or ex-seamen that Helen recorded with a National Museum tape-recorder, and here we have him singing "The Golden Vanity" and "The Mermaid" (a version identical in tune and words to the one I learned in elementary school in rural England in the early 1950s). John Obe Smith of Seabright was visited by Helen a year later, in July 1950, and he contributes "Quays of Belfast" as well as the other variant of "The Sailor's Alphabet". The very same month Helen also discovered Otis Hubley, and his account of "The Dreadful Ghost" is one of the highlights of the CD, as is Dan Livingstone's "The Wreck of the *Cariboo*", which dates from a year later. On the other hand, I was less than overwhelmed by Stillman Muise's two songs, performed to country & western style guitar accompaniment, about the loss of the *Vestris*, and Tom Cornealy was better at reciting his ballads than singing them. In short, as might be expected, the performances vary in quality, although the material is always interesting. Overall this is a fascinating CD that I am very glad to have available for repeated hearings.

Compared to the first, I have to confess that I found the second CD less enthralling. Not that it is poor; indeed it is a very valuable historical document. Perhaps it is just that the genre of the shanty is limited in variety, and the songs have to be performed really vigorously and tunefully to sustain extended listening. There are lots of shanties here, most of which are sung fairly effectively, although too often the informants end abruptly after a stanza or two with an apology that the remaining verses have slipped their memories. The result is that several of the items are fragments rather than complete songs. Many of the best performances date from 1943, and, luckily, there are quite a few of them: for example, Arthur Hilton, leading a group of Yarmouth Sea Captains in “Blow the Man Down”, “Whiskey Johnny”, “Robin Ranzo”, “Shenandoah”, “Homeward Bound” and “Poor Old Man”. Other informants include William H. Smith, recorded in Liverpool in August 1948, and Sandy Stoddard of Lower Ship Harbour, recorded four years later. Tom Cornealy, one of my least

favourite performers on the first CD, reappears on this one too, with a similar mix of tentative singing and confident recitation. Perhaps the two best tracks are Paul Myra’s version of “Blow My Bully Boys Blow”, which includes an account of rigging the schooner *Bluenose* for the legendary skipper Angus Walters, and Leander Macumber’s fragment of “Leave Her, Johnny, Leave Her”, which is beautifully sung but all too brief. This CD has its moments, and it certainly does not lack interest, but musically it is inferior to its companion. Frankly, I would have preferred to have seen a second CD of ballad and other sea songs, with a few shanties mixed in. But perhaps the Creighton society has a specialized local market of Maritimes sailing buffs in mind with this one. My advice is to buy the set anyway, but primarily for the singing of Catherine Gallagher and Walter Roast on CD # 1.

David Gregory, Athabasca,

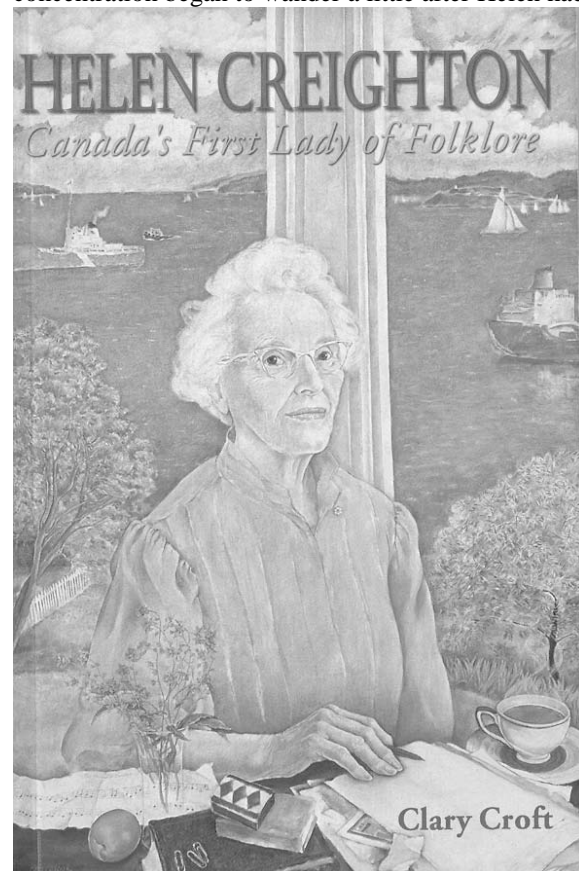
Alberta

Clary Croft, *Helen Creighton: Canada’s First Lady of Folklore.*

Halifax, NS: Nimbus, 1999.

It is five years since Clary Croft’s biography of Helen Creighton was published, and I’ve no idea why it has taken the magazine so long to get around to reviewing it, except, I guess, that there can be many a slip ‘twixt cup and lip, and this one somehow did slip between the cracks. We owe Clary an apology, since this is an important work which will be of interest to anyone with a love of Canadian traditional song, and that presumably means just about all the readers of *Canadian Folk Music*. I suspect, in fact, that many of you will have already read the book, in which case, if you happen to disagree with anything I say, please write in and tell us why. To my shame I had not read it before, which is probably why I ended up with the reviewing assignment. On the other hand, I had heard a few comments about it, some of which led me to expect the worst. I was told (correctly) that Clary was Helen’s personal friend and disciple and (incorrectly) that in consequence the book is hagiography. I was told that Clary provides a year-by-year account of Helen’s public activities supplemented by as much detail on her personal life as her diaries afford, and that the reader quickly gets bored with all the minutiae. Well, this reader was not bored. Indeed, I had no difficulty in going through the book from cover to cover in the space of a couple of days. Admittedly I skimmed the first two chapters covering the early years of Creighton’s life before she had so much as heard of folk music, and to be truthful my

concentration began to wander a little after Helen had



stopped working for the National Museum and had

effectively given up collecting. But the main body of the book, dealing with the four decades from 1928 to the end of the sixties, is fascinating. The last chapter, in which Croft sums up his perspective on Helen and takes on her critics, is also a must.

One should be clear about what biographer Croft does well and what, on the other hand, he does not try to do. Essentially this is a blow-by-blow, chrono-logical account of the main activities of a person whose work was her life, and who had a public persona from her early thirties onwards. Because the biography is based to a considerable degree on Helen's diaries, extant correspondence and auto-biography, we usually see incidents as she perceived them, and there are plenty of insights into how she responded to events and to other people. But the primary focus is on the public figure, and in the main we are left to build up from all this information about Creighton the folklorist our own portrait of Helen the human being. To be sure, there is some evidence from the diaries about the crises in her personal life: the ups and downs of her relationship with her mother, for example, or her abortive emotional entanglements with several male friends, almost all of whom, curiously, seem to have been called Joe. To some extent we do see Helen from the inside, warts and all, but just as she never really knew how she appeared to other people neither do we get a well-defined picture of her from the perspective of someone observing her life from the outside, as it were. For better or for worse, Croft mainly allows his sources to speak for themselves, making little attempt to extract from them a coherent, sharp-edged portrait. In a sense this is good, since we can be assured that he has not fitted Creighton into a predetermined mould, the way Ian MacKay did. Yet, one might be pardoned for concluding on reaching the final page that one still does not have a firm grasp of what Helen Creighton was really like. Was she a warm and considerate person, or was she egocentric and ruthless? It is difficult to be sure. No doubt Croft's aim was to demonstrate that she was both, at different times, but what is lacking is the overall balance sheet. Ultimately was she a cold person who, when it came to the crunch, repelled those who showed her affection, or was she just unlucky in love? When she treated a close friend badly, as she did on occasion with both Doreen Senior and Edith Fowke, did she regret her conduct, apologize for it, and do everything in her power to re-establish a warm and close relationship, or did she shrug it off and take refuge in her work? We are never really told Croft's own opinion. Obviously his own perception of Helen in the last decades of her life was as a friendly and considerate individual, but did his research ever lead him to question that image? It would be nice to

know.

It is also important to recognize that this is a biography, not a study of Creighton's work as a song collector or as a quasi-academic folklorist. Despite Croft's own love of the Nova Scotian folksongs that Helen was instrumental in rescuing from oblivion, there is virtually no discussion of the details of her collecting. Nor is there much detailed information on her informants, although the book does include quite a few interesting photographs of source singers. In pointing this out, I am not criticizing Croft; he had his hands full reconstructing the events of Helen's career, and the book would have had to be twice the size had he made any serious attempt to deal with her *oeuvre* as well as her life. Moreover, although he does not get deeply into the specifics of her collecting, he does deal head on with some of the bigger issues that emerged in the course of her career.

Croft addresses the issues of Helen's supposed anti-modernism and ethnocentrism, and provides a sensibly nuanced response, which recognizes her political conservatism while rejecting MacKay's claim that she vigorously "resisted" the modern world and promoted an image of the province as peopled by an "imagined Folk" of her own devising. Again, while accepting that Creighton was not at her most comfortable when collecting from aboriginal or Afro-American Nova Scotians, Croft underlines that she nonetheless did her best to do so, as well as collecting extensively from other ethnic minorities such as francophone Acadians and Gaelic-speakers, even though she had no proficiency in either language. Nor does Croft duck such controversial incidents as Helen's suggestion to Carmen Roy that the National Museum should check to see if either Edith Fowke or Pete Seeger were communists before having any further dealings with them, or the manifest territoriality inherent in her rivalry with Laura Bolton. Furthermore, while it is evident that, in the main, Creighton maintained friendly and open relationships with her informants and that they liked and trusted her, Croft also makes it clear that she rarely paid them for their songs, nor did she make any attempt to share her (admittedly meagre) royalties with them, except when their contributions were used in movies or radio programs. Collecting folksongs and other kinds of folklore was for Helen a means of earning a living, although she never made much more than a subsistence wage while doing it. Of course, it was a job that she quickly came to enjoy. Creighton's love for the songs, as well as her absolute commitment to her adopted profession, comes through loud and clear in this biography. If it is hardly the last word on her work, it is nonetheless essential reading for anyone who wishes to

under-stand her career.

David Gregory, Athabasca,

Alberta

***A Sigh and a Wish: Helen
Creighton's Maritimes.***

National Film Board video cassette.

1-800-267-7710; <www.nfb.ca/homevideo>

Canada owes a great debt of gratitude to the legendary Helen Creighton (1899-1989) for the incredible tenacity she showed when travelling the shores and inlets of Nova Scotia, collecting and writing down the rich folk culture she found there. In 1928 Creighton began searching for Child ballads as they were sung in Nova Scotia. She travelled for sixty years collecting the music and lore of her beloved province, and by the time she retired she had amassed over 40,000 documents, the largest body of individually collected lore in Canada. Though her efforts garnered her a meagre living, she was honoured with worldwide recognition.



The NFB film *A Sigh and a Wish* explores the life of Creighton as seen through the eyes of Donna Davies, the film's director. It is a very successful film, chronicling the life of Creighton in 74 short minutes. I love the film, and have shown it to my students of folk music at the University of Calgary. My students and I question the validity of delving so deeply into the popular criticisms of Helen Creighton's work. One of these criticisms is that her upper-middle-class assumptions cloud her reflection of the true nature of Nova Scotia's culture. She did not collect any songs that showed her beloved Nova Scotia in the bad light of poverty and social unrest. Of course a collection of songs will reflect the collector's background – this goes without saying – and should remain unsaid. Why do Canadians seek to find the Achilles heel of their most revered heroes?

In *A Sigh and a Wish*, Davies successfully weaves the original field recordings and video footage with

modern accounts of the same songs. Popular and talented Maritime artists such as Raylene Rankin, Teresa Doyle, Mary Jane Lamond and Lenny Gallant sing and comment on the profound influence Creighton's efforts had on their careers. Each in turn cites her as a major player in the folk music scene in modern Nova Scotia. Pete Seeger is also interviewed, speaking about such lofty topics as what a folk song is. He also sings a few song fragments from Creighton's collection.

I found it most interesting that Creighton was able to collect music from so many of the minority cultures in Nova Scotia. She brought her clumsy recording machine and melodeon into several musical homes of the Cape Breton Gaelic, French Acadian, Mi'kmaq and black communities of Nova Scotia. Her cultural difference made it difficult for her to continue a relationship with the black and Mi'kmaq people. What little she did collect from these cultures is a valued resource for those like Catherine Martin, a Mi'kmaq singer. In the film, Davies captures Martin with her drum and a tape recorder, singing along to the recorded music of her people saying "it's amazing to have it [the authentic version of her traditional music] in this little box".

Clary Croft's latest CD release

Clary Croft. *Still the Song Lives On*. CCROFT 01. 5959 Spring Garden Rd., #1008, Halifax, N.S. B3H 1Y5 (no postal address on packaging); <cs.croft@ns.sympatico.ca>; <www3.ns.sympatico.ca/cs.croft>

Nova Scotia folksinger Clary Croft is perhaps best known as champion and biographer of his late mentor, Dr. Helen Creighton. His LP *False Knight Upon the Road* (re-released on CD in 1986) consists of traditional songs from the Creighton collection. It's no surprise, then, that Clary's 2001 CD, *Still the Song Lives On*, includes a number of songs from that collection. Nevertheless, he's a fine songwriter in his own right, in a more contemporary folk vein, and many of the songs on the CD spring from that source. Not all are written by Clary, either; he has a good ear for a song, and includes "Theresa E." by Vince Morash, about the end of the fishing, but from a slightly different angle: a veteran fisherman must retire because not enough young men can be found to crew his boat; they've all taken jobs on big trawlers or have given up the trade. "Kilkelly Ireland", credited to Peter and Stephen Jones, is here as well, a magnificent emigration song which should be in far more singers' repertoires. Perhaps so many of us have

Helen published many books and had her greatest success with her book of ghost stories, *Bluenose Ghosts*, which enjoyed 13 printings. Yet she also endured rejection. Her collection of Acadian songs *La Fleur du Rosier* was rejected 17 times in nine years before it was finally published in 1988, the year before her death.

It is curious to note that many other collectors of Canada's rich musical culture have also been women. Edith Fowke, Barbara Cass-Beggs and Elisabeth Greenleaf also had the foresight to set out to record the wealth of folk music that we as Canadians are so fortunate to possess. When asked about this fact, Creighton replied that women collect more than men "because we have a little more patience".

"The Nova Scotia Song" was collected many times by Creighton in the 1930s. As did the song, the film *A Sigh and a Wish*, which takes its title from the chorus, will find its place among the treasures of Nova Scotia's rich folk culture. It is an excellent portrayal of a pioneer Canadian folklorist. Bravo to Donna Davies for seeing the importance of filming such a lasting tribute to a true folk hero.

Maureen Chafe, Calgary, Alberta
moved far from our families that the lyrics strike too painfully close to home. Clary gives it a fine rendering. Larry Kaplan's "Dearest Lavinia" is a poignant song about an immigrant returning to the old country after being unsuccessful in the new, a slant not often treated in emigrant songs.

Of Croft's own compositions, "Still the Song Lives On", which ends the album and gives it its title, fittingly expresses his love of the old songs and respect for the old singers and the continuity of the tradition. "Black Sails" is based on a story told to him of a prophetic dream concerning an 1894 shipwreck. He wrote "The Sackville" for a Navy film about the WWII corvette, now docked in Halifax as a Naval Memorial Trust site. "Tigh Sòlas" was inspired by a house whose lights played the role of a beacon for

returning fishermen. "Beautiful Pain" is a song of bittersweet remembrance for his late brother, although it could easily function as a song of lost romantic love. All the songs are finely crafted.

I enjoy hearing versions of traditional songs which differ from those versions which have been popularized; it makes me think of the variation processes constantly at work in oral tradition, and reminds me that so many great songs are still out there in field recordings, waiting to be heard by the

rest of us. The first two tracks on the CD, "If I Were a Blackbird" and "Rinordine", do that for me; songs which I know well from other sources make me sit up and take notice in these renditions. "The Swan" (from the singing of Fred Redden) and "The Braes of Belquether" (notable for a bouncy accompaniment) are both romantic songs, from the Irish and Scottish traditions respectively; "Moonlight Tonight" seems to be a more recent song, perhaps from a Victorian sentimental source. "Un matin je me lève" springs from Creighton's often-overlooked collection of Nova Scotia Acadian songs.

I particularly enjoyed "The Banks of Sweet Dundee". Clary performs it *a cappella*, although he uses accompaniment for all the other traditional songs, which I see as a weakness of the CD. I don't find that the arrangements add much to the "feel" of the traditional songs; at best, they're unobtrusive, and in "The Braes of Belquether" they perhaps lead us away from the true ambiance of the song. The musicians are tasteful throughout and are right at home with the contemporary material. However, I would have preferred to hear the traditional songs performed in the traditional way. My other small quibble is that Croft's fine clear tenor voice is a tad bland, and sometimes fails to deliver a robust rendition when the song calls for it.

This album is a nice blend of traditional songs, and songs written or chosen by a person who respects traditional songs. It is well-targeted for lovers of traditional music. *Still the Song Lives On* should be on your CD shelf.

John Leeder,

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