

# Proud To Be An Islander: Newfoundland Identity as Revealed through Newfoundland Song

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*I'm a Newfoundlander born and bred, and I'll be one' til I die  
I'm proud to be an islander and here's the reason why  
I'm free as the birds, and the waves that wash the land  
There's no place that I'd rather be than here in Newfoundland.*

## Introduction

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador (to give it the title it adopted in 2003) was a late entrant to the Canadian confederation, finally, and with a notable lack of enthusiasm, joining its mainland neighbour in 1949, 81 years after most other British North American colonies began the process. From its origins as a 'fishing station' for west-country Englishmen to full dominion status in the early twentieth century it bred a people for whom resilience in the face of hardship was the norm. A hundred miles from mainland Canada, its unpredictable climate and limited natural resources made it an unlikely destination for emigrants from Europe. The majority of its population lives around its coasts, mainly on the eastern side of the island and facing away from Canada and, until comparatively recent times, were cut off from each other. The only urban centre was the city of St. John's. It is widely regarded as the most 'quirky' of the English speaking provinces<sup>1</sup> and can, with some truth, claim to be Canada's other 'Distinct Society.'<sup>2</sup> One of the things that make it different is its musical heritage, both traditional and contemporary, which is probably richer than anywhere else in the country. This article will explore the body of songs created and sung by Newfoundlanders and will argue not only that they reflect the harsh but beautiful landscape of the province and its history as a colony and independent dominion, but that they reveal an ambivalence towards its place within Canada. Newfoundland's identity is thus articulated as much through its songs as its literature and although the latter has attracted attention in recent years, it is the former that is the more enduring and the more potent.

## Traditional Folksongs

The population of Newfoundland, currently just over half a million, is the most homogenous in Canada, a huge majority of its people being born on the island to parents whose own parents and grandparents had

been born there.<sup>3</sup> There has been little inward migration since the first half of the nineteenth century. This homogeneity hides just one major division within the population, the two places from whence the original settlers came. One is Ireland, but contrary to current mythology, that island was not the largest provider of emigrants to Newfoundland. The majority of its population is of West of England origin, particularly the counties of Dorset and Devon. It is difficult to be precise but it appears that the proportions are 60:40 English to Irish,<sup>4</sup> and, in pointing this out, it is not simply a pedantic point that is being made. Where political song is concerned, there is an erroneous belief that the Irish have a monopoly of this type of material. However, the English also have their own rich tradition of 'singing against injustice' as scholars such as Lloyd and Palmer have shown. Lloyd's *Folk Song in England* is still the definitive work on the subject, despite being published in 1967, and in it he argued strongly that "in England, folksong is the musical and poetic expression of the fantasy of the lower classes...in the main the songs are evolved by labouring people to suit their ways and conditions of life, and they reflect the aspirations that rise from those ways and conditions."<sup>5</sup> He acknowledged that this was probably also true of other places, and it will be argued that Newfoundland is one such place. Palmer, in his *A Touch on the Times* and *The Sound of History*, cites scores of songs that reveal the thoughts and attitudes of ordinary people to the changing world around them.<sup>6</sup> Thus, this article maintains, the songs of Newfoundland owe as much to the province's English identity as they do to its Irish one.

It was that English identity that first attracted folklorists, particularly Maud Karpeles, a young woman who had, in 1916, visited the Appalachian Mountains with the founding father of the English folksong movement, Cecil Sharp. The large number of traditional songs that they found there led them to plan a visit to another part of North America that they hoped would match the Appalachians as a repository of English material, Newfoundland. Sharp died

before the trip could be made, but Karpeles eventually made two visits to the island in 1929 and 1930. During her time there, she succeeded admirably in what she set out to do, for she collected a total of 191 songs that were undoubtedly of English (or British) origin. However, heavily influenced by her time in America with Sharp, she ignored anything that failed to meet her definition of a 'folksong', neglecting most of the locally produced songs that people sang to her. Ironically, her greatest 'find' was indeed a uniquely Newfoundland song, "She's Like the Swallow",<sup>7</sup> but that particular gem is probably of English or Irish origin but has been forgotten in the British Isles.

Karpeles was not the first song-collector in Newfoundland, for nine years earlier, the American Elisabeth Bristol Greenleaf made the first of her three visits.<sup>8</sup> She returned in 1921, collecting thirty songs, and again in 1929 with her colleague from Vassar College, Grace Yarrow. Her collection of 189 songs was published in 1933 as *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*.<sup>9</sup> It consisted of songs of mainly British origin but she also included some created locally. So too did Kenneth Peacock, the third of the 'scholarly' collectors of Newfoundland songs, who produced the most comprehensive survey yet undertaken. He was a trained musician, and in six visits over a ten year period collected over 700 songs, publishing 350 of them as *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* (three volumes) in 1965.<sup>10</sup> Between them, these three collections form the great body of Newfoundland music, both traditional and (to use Peacock's term) 'native.'

### 'Native' Songs

There is, though, a fourth name to be added to the list, and it is the highly influential one of Gerald S. Doyle.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Karpeles (English), Greenleaf (American) and Peacock (Canadian), Doyle was a Newfoundlander, and he was not a professional folklorist. Instead, he was an enthusiastic amateur and a 'man of the people.' His contribution came in the unlikely form of free pamphlets or booklets of songs, given away to advertise the Chase Company's patent medicines. Doyle was the Newfoundland agent and distributor for these medicines, but he was also a genuine enthusiast for songs about Newfoundland life who became a collector himself. His real importance lies in the fact that he set the agenda for Newfoundland songs for generations to come. The contents of his booklets considerably narrowed the perception of what a Newfoundland song was, both inside and outside the island. With a few exceptions, usually culled from Greenleaf, the songs are indigenous creations, and as Peacock noted, "It is

strange to think that Newfoundland's wide reputation as a treasure house of folk songs, though fully justified, is actually based on fifteen or twenty native songs from these booklets."<sup>12</sup> Doyle's first collection of songs, which contained only lyrics, was published in 1927 (before those of the other 'mainstream' collectors)<sup>13</sup> and, as Rosenberg says, his "uses of Irish and Catholic identity in this first edition of his songster appear to reflect a perception of a close fit between his Irish-Catholic identity and the Newfoundland identity he was advocating in compiling his songster."<sup>14</sup> Thus, from the earliest time that folk songs from Newfoundland were published, there was an attempt at marrying song with identity, albeit from one particular perspective.

Doyle's collection, entitled *Old-Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland*,<sup>15</sup> made much of the hardships experienced by Newfoundlanders, saying in the preface to the first edition that "In selecting our Newfoundland songs we have made a special effort to give precedence to those that are racy of the soil and illustrate the homely joys and sorrows of our people." The word 'racy' is a curious one, or at least in this context. It doesn't occur in the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* but presumably means 'deep-rooted' or more simply, 'home-grown.' Doyle used a variant of that phrase himself when he talked of "homely joys and sorrows", thus alluding to the uncertain nature of life on the island. He was curiously accurate in his choice of phrasing, though, for there are two main themes that run through the 'native' songs. One is a love of Newfoundland life and lifestyle, the other is a love of country, in the patriotic sense of the term, which frequently verges on the defiant.

It has to be admitted that these themes also occur in Irish song, but are largely absent in those from England. However, one of the great achievements of Newfoundland has been its rejection of sectarianism for, as O'Flaherty put it when discussing the bitter political strife of the 1830s and 1840s, this island "was not another Ireland. It was a British North American Colony. The population that had settled before the Irish influx of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had its own 'habits of mind'....To try to make this half-awake colonial society....into a surrogate Irish state [would be] to make it into something it could never be..."<sup>16</sup> Those who had left Ireland for a better life found themselves having to co-exist and co-operate with the West Country English and for both groups survival was more important than politics and religion. Thus, despite the Irish Catholic tone of Doyle's first edition, it would be a mistake to draw too close a parallel with the great canon of sentimental and nationalist songs from Ireland.

Nationalism in Newfoundland has, seemingly, been based upon a wariness of Canada and Canadian intentions rather than a cry for independence. As early as 1869, when Newfoundland was pondering on whether to join the newly created Dominion of Canada, a song known simply as the “Anti-Confederation Song” appeared. Its chorus says much about Newfoundland’s long established ambivalence towards mainland North America;

Hurrah for our own native isle, Newfoundland  
Not a stranger shall hold one inch of its strand  
Her face turns to Britain, her back to the Gulf  
Come near at your peril Canadian wolf.<sup>17</sup>

Note the geographical reality – the majority of the population lived either in or near St. John’s or in the outposts on the eastern side of the island. Ireland was a mere 2,000 miles away whilst the nearest Canadian city, Halifax, was itself a long way from the Dominion’s political and economic centres in Montreal and Toronto. Boston, in what Newfoundlanders called the ‘Boston States’, was by far the most important mainland city.

If the “Anti-Confederation Song” was the first overtly political song, “Ode to Newfoundland”, written in 1904, can be seen as the first ‘love of country song’ despite being written by the then Governor of the colony, Sir Cavendish Boyle, and set to music by Sir Hubert Parry.<sup>18</sup> It gave rise to the phrase “God guard thee Newfoundland” which, along with a map of the island, formed the front page of the St. John’s *Evening Telegram* on 1 April 1949, the day Newfoundland became a Canadian province, and reveals something of the reluctance with which Confederation was finally embraced. Its lyrics are about as emotive as they come.

When Sun-rays crown thy pine-clad hills,  
And Summer spreads her hand,  
When silvern voices tune thy rills,  
We love thee smiling land,  
We love thee, we love thee,  
We love thee, smiling land.

When spreads thy cloak of shimm’ring white,  
At Winter’s stern command,  
Thro’ shortened day and starlit night,  
We love thee, frozen land,  
We love thee, we love thee,  
We love thee, frozen land.

When blinding storm gusts fret thy shore,  
And wild waves lash thy strand,  
Thro’ spindrift swirl and tempest roar,  
We love thee, wind-swept land,  
We love thee, we love thee,  
We love thee, wind-swept land.

As loved our fathers, so we love,  
Where once they stood we stand,  
Their prayer we raise to heav’n above,  
God guard thee, Newfoundland,  
God guard thee, God guard thee,  
God guard thee, Newfoundland.<sup>19</sup>

The above is obviously a contrived piece, witness its use of ‘thee’ and ‘thy’ and the replacement of certain vowels with apostrophes, but it had a certain resonance with Newfoundlanders and remains very popular today. Indeed, its one hundredth birthday was recently celebrated by the publication of a poster of its lyrics, and to many Newfoundlanders it is *their* ‘national’ anthem.

### Pre-Confederation Songs

Two phases in ‘recent’ Newfoundland musical nationalism can be identified, and these are, roughly, before and after Confederation. This is perhaps natural, as that event gave Newfoundlanders, in the form of the Canadian state, a new authority figure to, if not attack, at least criticize whenever they felt aggrieved. There is also the simple fact that, from the 1960s onwards, lyrics to popular songs throughout the English speaking world frequently took on a more direct, often political tone. No longer were the songs that people heard every day on the radio simply about love and romance. Many called for social justice or an end to unnecessary war.<sup>20</sup>

Newfoundlanders were already familiar with such sentiments, and those native songs written before Confederation were overwhelmingly about Newfoundland life, with the majority of them being about fishing and sealing. Thus songs such as “Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary’s”<sup>21</sup>, “Jack Was Every Inch a Sailor”<sup>22</sup>, “I’se the B’y”<sup>23</sup>, “A Noble Fleet of Sealers”<sup>24</sup> and “The Wreck of the Steamship *Florizel*”<sup>25</sup> all tell of the pleasures and hazards of earning a living from the sea. Probably the most famous of all was “The Squid Jigging Ground”<sup>26</sup>, written by a fifteen year old, Art Scammel from the Change Islands, Notre Dame Bay, in 1928, which, as its title suggests, is about the skills and peculiarities of fishing for squid.

Oh! this is the place where the fishermen gather  
With oilskins and boots and Cape-  
Anns<sup>27</sup>batt  
ened down,  
All sizes of figures with squid lines and jiggers  
They congregate here on the squid jigging ground.

Some are workin’ their jiggers while others are  
yarning,  
There’s some standin’ up and some more lyin’ down  
While all kinds of fun, jokes and tricks are begun

As they wait for the squid on the squid-jiggin'  
ground.

The song goes on to name and describe a number of people, all real, and it became a very popular piece, especially after it appeared in the second edition of Doyle. Its appeal lay, in Scammel's opinion, in that "everything in it was true" with the names being based on real people, and the description of the activities being extremely accurate. Such was its impact that on 1 April 1949 the carillon in the Peace Tower in Ottawa played it as Newfoundland was welcomed into the Canadian confederation.

There were and are occupations other than fishing, and one song from this period that remains popular is "The Badger Drive".<sup>28</sup> Its title refers to the town of Badger, in central Newfoundland, and it is about the emerging logging industry. Like the "Squid Jigging Ground" it includes the names of people living and working in the area at the time it was written.

There is one class of men in this country  
That never is mentioned in song  
And now, since their trade is advancing  
They'll come out on top before long.  
They say that our sailors have danger  
And likewise our warriors bold  
But there's none know the life of a driver  
What he suffers with hardship and cold.  
Chorus:  
With their pike-poles and peavies and bateaus and all  
And their [sic] sure to drive out in the spring,  
that's the time  
With the caulks in their boots as they get on the logs,  
And it's hard to get over their time.

The third verse says much about where Newfoundland's allegiance lay, for it begins

I tell you today home in London  
'The Times' it is read by each man

and goes on to point out that "paper is made out of pulpwood". Its last verse is wonderfully sycophantic, reflecting the desperate need for alternatives to the fishery in early twentieth century Newfoundland.

So now to conclude and to finish, I hope that ye  
all will agree  
In wishing success to all Badger and the A.N.D.  
Company.  
And long may they live for to flourish, and  
continue to chop, drive and roll,  
And long may the business be managed, by Mr  
Dorothey and Mr Cole.

As well as the 'love of country and its people' songs, there were several that can loosely be described as political. As Rosenberg notes, they tend to attack

"unfair or harsh authority figures [such as] merchants, politicians and shippers."<sup>29</sup> A typical example is another Art Scammel song, "The Shooting of the Bawks", which protested about government (i.e., British)<sup>30</sup> interference in domestic matters. Another example is one entitled "The Merchants" that Doyle included in his songster, which harks back to an earlier era with its damning criticism of those who ran the fishery.

### Post Confederation Songs

It is a truism that war changes societies and World War Two had a radical effect on Newfoundland. Unlike Canada, it went to war on 3 September 1939 because of its reversion to colonial status. Geography also played a major role because, unlike the rest of North America, it was perceived as being particularly vulnerable to German attacks. Thus Canada, and later the United States, became heavily involved in the defence of Newfoundland, with thousands of military personnel stationed there. When the war ended in May 1945 a new British government had to decide just what was to be done with the former dominion. Should it remain a colony, revert to dominion status or become a Canadian province? As is well known, in a second referendum in July 1948 (the first not delivering a 'clear' result), Newfoundlanders voted by a majority of 7,000 to join Canada. This, it is argued, led to a change in both the general tone of Newfoundland songs, and the targets at which they were aimed, although the change was not an immediate one. Indeed, it can be argued that it began changing some twenty years into the island's life within Canada.

All of this can be tied into the phenomenon of a reborn Newfoundland nationalism and a recent report by Dr. Jerry Bannister of Memorial University. In March 2003, for the *Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada*, he produced a perceptive analysis of the way Newfoundland's history had been interpreted since 1895, when D.W. Prowse ('Judge Prowse') published what became the accepted account of the way the island had been colonized and governed. He laid most of the blame for the failures of the past on the West Country merchants and saw Newfoundland history as being the story of "perseverance in the face of political repression and economic adversity".<sup>31</sup> Thus Newfoundland identity is based, not upon the folk memories of its English and Irish settlers as Gregory sought to demonstrate, but on a feeling of battling against the political and geographical realities of their chosen home. The early native songs clearly reveal this, but what of the more recent ones?

Bannister takes 1972 as his starting point for no apparent reason, although he maintains that from the late 1960s Newfoundland experienced a “remarkable cultural transformation”, a “renaissance” as Sandra Gwyn called it.<sup>32</sup> Thus various art forms began to flourish in Newfoundland and of course Newfoundland literature is a recognisable genre, witness the success of authors such as Bernice Morgan, Wayne Johnston, Michael Crummey et al.<sup>33</sup> Music, or to be more accurate, song, evolved along new, more political lines although some of the themes were familiar ones.

The issue that has long dominated Newfoundland’s economy and culture is the cod fishery and those engaged in it. Almost by definition it was prosecuted by small coastal communities, frequently isolated, and often living in relative poverty. In the 1960s, in order to alleviate the “decreasing catches among inshore fishermen, low incomes and under employment”, about 250 of them disappeared as their populations, numbering around 30,000 people, were resettled in ‘growth centres’ in other parts of Newfoundland.<sup>34</sup> This near compulsory movement of people away from their traditional communities eventually gave rise to Gary O’Driscoll’s song “Out from St Leonard’s”<sup>35</sup> with its highly emotive chorus:

And it’s out from St Leonard’s and out from Toslow,  
They steamed cross the bay with their houses in tow,  
With their beds in the bow and their stoves in the  
stern,  
Sailed away with their sons and their daughters.

The image of families packing up and leaving, but taking their houses with them has become something of an icon to the resettlement programme, but as O’Driscoll showed, there was cynicism about what awaited them:

Now the word it went out round the harbours and  
coves  
That the young crowd was leaving in hordes and in  
droves,  
To go to Toronto to follow their goals  
Or to go to Placentia and live on the dole.

Now skipper Jim Pittman said he wouldn’t go,  
While there’s nets to be mended and hay to be mown  
He said he’d never work, no matter the pay  
In some hockey stick factory out Stephenville way.

There are actually two points being made in these verses, the first being the obvious one about re-settlement policy, but there is also the reference to Toronto. Newfoundlanders have always emigrated for economic reasons, as have other people from the Atlantic Provinces. This issue is addressed in another

song<sup>36</sup>, this time by Ron Hynes and Murray McLauchlan, about Newfoundland’s capital city, St. John’s, rather than the outposts:

We were promised the sun and the moon and the stars  
We got weathered old clapboard and salt rusted cars  
So I’ll join in the leavin’ like all of the rest  
Montreal, Calgary, Vancouver, west.....

It is, though, the decline of the fishery that is the recurring theme in contemporary Newfoundland song and it is not in a ‘let’s feel sorry for ourselves’ sort of way. Instead, there is anger, and it is directed against those who make the decisions. A song recorded in 1993 by the very popular group Great Big Sea<sup>37</sup> has the seemingly innocuous title “Fisherman’s Lament”, but it carries a powerful message. It was written by Edward McCann, the father of one of the group, who was a fisherman himself, and the song’s conviction and anger is all the more potent for it.

I spent my whole life out there on the sea  
Some government bastard now takes it from me  
It’s not just the fish, they’ve taken my pride  
I feel so ashamed, I just want to die.

That the decline of the fishery is the (Canadian) government’s fault is emphasized in a later verse that states:

DFO<sup>38</sup> regulations permitted the rape  
Of our beautiful ocean from headland to cape  
They brought in big trawlers, they tore up our twine  
Politicians don’t care for what’s yours and what’s  
mine!

It is significant that the ocean is described as “beautiful”, reinforcing this paper’s earlier theme of ‘love of country’, and to Newfoundlanders, who have only ever lived close to the ocean,<sup>39</sup> it is part of their landscape. McCann makes another important point in his song when he says “I’m too old to change”, a phrase that could be read as a metaphor for Newfoundland, which was British (well, English) almost 200 years before becoming Canadian. The idea of “being too old to change” occurs in another song about the decline of the fishery, that has the line

Wouldn’t I look like a fool, goin’ traipsin’ back  
to school  
After forty years of working on the sea...<sup>40</sup>

It also refers to the young people leaving Newfoundland because there is nothing left for them:

Now my son he’s barely twenty one and handy at the  
trawl  
For years he helped me fish the Labrador,  
Now he’s moving to Ontario before the first snow  
fall,

Dad, there's nothing left for me round here no  
more  
And I wonder will I see his children born  
And I wonder will they lie there evermore.

It is the dislike and mistrust of politicians that manifests itself in a number of songs about the fishery. In "Someday Soon"<sup>41</sup> written by Great Big Sea's Alan Doyle, he says

They keep talking of the things they'd do if we'd  
only vote them in  
One more dollar and all the bickering and suffering  
would end.  
If you'd sign your 'X' in favour it's three jobs for  
every man  
You can burn your boats, that's what they said,  
It seemed they had it planned,  
And I hope they haven't forgotten the promises  
they made.

This anti-government, anti-politician theme is a strong one in Newfoundland song. The previously mentioned "Out from St Leonard's", for example, has a verse that begins "Now on all politicians they cursed and they swore", and this is clearly not a new theme. Neil Rosenberg of Memorial University, in an article about Gerald S. Doyle, points out that "Leaders, from skippers to politicians to merchants, are portrayed in less than complimentary terms as quaintly harsh and untrustworthy."<sup>42</sup>

It is sometimes difficult to discern whether Newfoundlanders are 'anti-Canadian' or simply 'anti-government.' One of its problems before Confederation was its lack of a governmental infrastructure in the traditional manner. Apart from St. John's, there was no local government in Newfoundland. The only other urban centres, Grand Falls and Corner Brook, were both 'company towns', and the rest of the population lived scattered around the coast and islands in outports. When things went wrong, and they frequently did, it was easy to blame the government in distant St. John's. When Newfoundland ceased to be a dominion and became a colony again (in 1934), distant London, and eventually, distant Ottawa were the obvious targets for its people's anger and bitterness. Nationalism began to re-emerge as a strand in Newfoundland attitudes.

### Newfoundland Nationalism

Nationalism is a curious beast. Its early stages are frequently ridiculed or ignored by the existing centres of power. Manifest symbols begin to appear, particularly 'the flag.' This is currently happening in England (and in Cornwall) and it is also happening in Newfoundland. Originally Newfoundland's flag was

the Union Jack and its official provincial flag is clearly paying homage to that distinctive emblem, albeit in a somewhat stylized form. But there is another Newfoundland flag and, like England's Cross of St George, it is increasingly being used to remind people of their distinct identity within a larger union. For England this means the United Kingdom and increasingly the European Union, for Newfoundland it is, of course, Canada. This flag is the Newfoundland Tricolor, a pink, white and green creation, similar to that of the Irish Republic but with pink instead of orange. It was a product of the late nineteenth century and Doyle's collection included a song praising it.

The pink the rose of England shows,  
The green St Patrick's emblem bright,  
While in between the spotless sheen  
Of Andrew's cross displays the white.  
Then hail the pink, the white, the green,  
Our patriot flag long may it stand  
Our Sire-lands twine their emblems trine  
To form the flag of Newfoundland.

#### *Chorus:*

Fling out the flag o'er creek and crag  
Pink, white and green so fair, so grand,  
Long may it sway o'er Bight and Bay  
Around the shores of Newfoundland.

What e'er betide our Ocean bride  
That nestles 'midst Atlantic's foam,  
Still far and wide we'll raise with pride  
Our native flag o'er hearth and home.  
Should e'er the hand of Fate demand  
Some future change in our career,  
We ne'er will yield on flood or field  
The flag we honor and revere.

The "future change in our career" line is a prescient one.

Over the past few years a number of manifestations of this latent Newfoundland nationalism have appeared, including prominent businessmen openly calling for a debate on separatism. Bannister maintains that the salient feature of Newfoundland nationalism is

the remarkable consistency of its basic rhetoric since the early nineteenth century. Its essential logic has remained basically the same for almost two centuries: Newfoundland has a poor economy but is rich in natural resources; its poverty is due to incompetent resource management by state agencies based outside the island.<sup>43</sup>

It should be remembered that Newfoundland's natural resources are more than fish and timber. It produces massive amounts of hydro-electric power in Labrador which, thanks to an agreement made in the

1960s, is sold cheaply to Quebec, which in turn sells it at a handsome profit to New York State. It also has considerable off-shore oil reserves but (curiously) these are the property of the federal government.<sup>44</sup> Alberta's oil, though, belongs to that aggressively confident province because it is land based.

Another manifestation of the new nationalism is the island's music. An album appeared in 1998 entitled *We Will Remain – Patriotic Songs of Newfoundland*. It contains twenty tracks, mainly based upon the historic debates over confederation. In addition to traditional anti-confederation songs, and a number of historic speeches, there are a number of new songs. Two examples will suffice. The notes for "The Republican Song" say "Borrowing a martial beat from our Irish heritage, this is a shout of anger at our current condition, particularly as it affects our young people. A call to revolution!" Another song, "Final Breath", has notes that say "As Newfoundlanders struggle to survive once again, will anyone take the lead?" Will they? Who knows?

## Conclusion

Newfoundlanders are not 'natural' Canadians – both geography and the evolution of their economy and culture, based for centuries solely on primary industries, made them 'different' from the other colonies of British North America. Newfoundlanders are, arguably, Newfoundlanders first and Canadians second. And it is not just the old (those born before 1949 *became* Canadian) who feel this. Why? Newfoundlanders resent their poverty, they are traditionally *the* 'have-not' province of Canada.<sup>45</sup> No Newfoundland has ever been appointed to Canada's Supreme Court, whilst the former fisheries minister Brian Tobin, despite his ability and charisma, was ruled out by many as a potential prime minister simply because he was from Newfoundland. They do not like being the butt of all the jokes (the dreaded 'Newfie' jokes) and they always look back with nostalgia at an imagined time when they were both independent and prosperous. Many look enviously at countries like Iceland and Ireland, other Atlantic island nations who have prospered without having to be attached to a larger neighbour.

The use of music to make social and political points is a time-honored one and Newfoundland, if not unique among the English speaking Canadian provinces, is certainly a leader in this activity. The province has a proud record of producing and nurturing their indigenous songs, whether traditional or contemporary. The title of this article comes from a song made popular in St. John's (and elsewhere) by a duo called Shanty. It is, in essence, a typical Newfoundland song in that it speaks strongly of its

people's love of their island yet also includes a stinging political message. The third verse warns:

In Montreal the Frenchmen say that they own  
Labrador  
Including Indian Harbour where me father fished  
before  
And if they want to fight for her, I'll surely make  
a stand  
They'll regret the day they tried to take my  
Newfoundland.<sup>46</sup>

This song speaks for Newfoundland. It is *my* Newfoundland. Newfoundlanders are "free as a bird" and there is no place a Newfoundlander would rather be "than here in Newfoundland". No other province (with the obvious and possible exception of Quebec?) has such songs. The Nova Scotia 'anthem', "Farewell to Nova Scotia",<sup>47</sup> is hardly flattering to that province. As its chorus says:

Farewell to Nova Scotia, the sea bound coast,  
Let your mountains dark and dreary be,  
When I am far away on the briny ocean tossed  
Will you ever heave a sigh or a wish for me.

Across Canada, in the pubs, musicians and singers perform and there are many favourites that the audience joins in with, but they are usually Stan Rogers' compositions or popular 'Irish' ones like "The Black Velvet Band" and "I'll Tell me Ma". These are popular in St. John's, of course, but they exist alongside the great body of indigenous songs. Newfoundland music still belongs to Newfoundlanders. It is one of the things that make them different.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps best demonstrated by a comment made to the author by his cousin, Mary Piercey of Grand Falls, who said "You're in Newfoundland now, b'y, you can't make a fool of yourself here....."

<sup>2</sup> The origins of this statement lie in a letter to the *Toronto Globe and Mail* in which the writer comments that having read the autobiography of the Newfoundland-born Canadian politician, John Crosbie, he wondered why Newfoundland had not pursued 'distinct society' status as vigorously as Quebec!

<sup>3</sup> Of Newfoundland and Labrador's 508,075 population, 474,075 were born in the province. Source: Statistics Canada, using figures from the 2001 census.

<sup>4</sup> This figure is based upon correspondence between the author and John Ashton and John Mannion, both of Memorial University, Newfoundland, and is discussed more fully in his article "Where Have all the (English) Folk-songs Gone?" in the *British Journal of Canadian Studies* Vol. 14, no.2, (1999), pp. 180-192.

<sup>5</sup> A.L.Lloyd, *Folksong in England*, (London, 1967), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> R. Palmer, *A Touch on the Times – Songs of Social Change, 1770-1914*, (Harmondsworth, 1974) and *The Sound of History – Songs of Social Comment*, (Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> An excellent version of this song can be found on June Tabor's CD *At the Wood's Heart*, Topic TSCD557, 2005. It was also recorded by Anita Best and Pamela Morgan on their *The Colour of Amber* CD.

<sup>8</sup> Isabelle Peere, "Elisabeth Greenleaf: an Appraisal", in *Canadian Journal for Traditional Music*, Vol. 13, (1985).

<sup>9</sup> E.B. Greenleaf (ed.) *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*, (Cambridge MA, 1933.)

<sup>10</sup> K. Peacock, *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*, 3 vols. (Ottawa, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> 1892-1956.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Paul Mercer, *Newfoundland Songs and Ballads in Print* (St. John's, 1979), p.39.

<sup>13</sup> Doyle was not the first person to publish a collection of Newfoundland songs for, as David Gregory points out, James Murphy published a collection in 1902 which was followed by another six editions.

<sup>14</sup> N.V. Rosenberg, "The Gerald S. Doyle Songsters and the Politics of Newfoundland Folksong", in *Canadian Folklore*, 13:1, (1991), p.51.

<sup>15</sup> Gerald S. Doyle, *Old Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland*, (St. John's, 1927). It was subtitled *Songs of the People from the Days of our Forefathers*.

<sup>16</sup> P. O'Flaherty, *Old Newfoundland – A History to 1843*, (St. John's, 1999), p.204.

<sup>17</sup> Its tune is a variant, indeed an improvement, on a common English one usually called "Villikins and his Dinah". In the United States it is known as "Sweet Betsy from Pike". It can be heard on the CD *We Will Remain – Patriotic Songs of Newfoundland*, Singsong SS9803, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Parry, who never visited Newfoundland, is best remembered for composing the music to that other unofficial anthem, England's "Jerusalem". Curiously, he was born in Bournemouth (in 1848), a town that adjoins Poole, for centuries the town with a near monopoly over trade with Newfoundland.

<sup>19</sup> The song is on the *We Will Remain* CD, see note 17.

<sup>20</sup> The name Bob Dylan is obviously the most relevant one to this assertion, but he was and is, far from unique. The sixties gave rise to singer-songwriters on both sides of the Atlantic whose lyrics argued for social and political change.

<sup>21</sup> This can be found on the Irish Descendants' tape cassette (and CD) *Gypsies and Lovers*, released in 1994.

<sup>22</sup> It can be found on the Dunganvan CD *The Old Dunganvan Oak*, on the Peperstock label. It has also been recorded by the British folk group the Yetties, and appears on their recent DVD *It's a Fine Thing to Sing*.

<sup>23</sup> There are many recordings of this song. Great Big Sea's eponymous CD on the NRA label, CD10088, is as good as any.

<sup>24</sup> This is included in the Doyle collection, but no recent recording can be found.

<sup>25</sup> Again, it is in Doyle, but there appears to be no recent recording.

<sup>26</sup> Recorded by Ryan's Fancy on their CD *Songs from the Shows*, 02-02025, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Named after Cape Ann, in Massachusetts, it is "a fisherman's oilskin cap, with a broad brim, sloping at the back, and side flaps tied under the chin." (Similar, but not identical, to a 'sou'wester.') Source: Story, Kirwin and Widdowson, (eds.) *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Toronto, 1990.

<sup>28</sup> Recorded by Bob MacDonald on *Gold in the Water* Tape Cassette, PSI-85830, 1997.

<sup>29</sup> N.V. Rosenberg, "The Gerald S. Doyle Songsters and the Politics of Newfoundland Folksong" in *Canadian Folklore*, Vol. 13, no. 1 (1991), p.48.

<sup>30</sup> It was written at a time when Newfoundland's government had been suspended and Britain had resumed responsibility for the island.

<sup>31</sup> J. Bannister, *The Politics of Cultural Memory: Themes in the History of Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada, 1972-2003* (Memorial University, St. John's 2003), p.128.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.129.

<sup>33</sup> The author who has, arguably, made the rest of the world aware of Newfoundland and its ways is not a Newfoundlander or even a Canadian. Annie Proulx, who wrote the highly successful *The Shipping News*, is an American.

<sup>34</sup> D. Stanley, "The 1960s: The Illusions and Realities of Progress" in E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muike (eds.), *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto and Fredericton, 1993), p.432.

<sup>35</sup> Recorded by (among others) the Ennis Sisters on their CD *Red is the Rose*.

<sup>36</sup> Its title is "No Change in Me" and it was recorded by the Ennis Sisters on their CD *Red is the Rose*.

<sup>37</sup> CD 10088 on the NRA label.

<sup>38</sup> Department for Fisheries and Oceans.

<sup>39</sup> It is hard to identify an 'inland' Newfoundland community. Its 'third city', Grand Falls, a paper mill town, is only thirty miles from the port of Botwood, whilst the second city, Corner Brook (another paper mill town) is on the Humber River and is, de facto, a port, despite its apparent inland location. The mining town of Buchans, south of Grand Falls, is the only true non-maritime town; although it has recently gained a new lease of life through the discovery of new ore bodies, its long term future cannot be guaranteed.

<sup>40</sup> "Will They Lie There Evermore?" Recorded by the Irish Descendants on their CD *Gypsies and Lovers* in 1994. The 'they' are the fishing boats.

<sup>41</sup> On Great Big Sea's CD 10088.

<sup>42</sup> Rosenberg, op.cit., p.51.

<sup>43</sup> Bannister, op.cit., p.147

<sup>44</sup> However, in 2005 the federal government agreed that Newfoundland should receive all the royalties from its offshore oil until it becomes solvent.

<sup>45</sup> There is now more optimism, of course. But, like the reference to the town of Buchans in note 39, one wonders whether this will prove to be a permanent salvation.

<sup>46</sup> The Shanty CD was released in 2000 as *Our Newfoundland Favourites*, OTCD0500. "The Islander" is included as a bonus track (# 14), although it is not listed.

<sup>47</sup> There are many recorded versions of this song including eminent Canadian singers such as Anne Murray and Stan Rogers.