

An Operative Model for Analyzing Kenneth Peacock's Newfoundland Song Collection

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Between 1951 and 1961 Kenneth Peacock (1922-2000), a classical musician and composer and native of Toronto, visited Newfoundland six times on behalf of the National Museum of Canada (today known as the Canadian Museum of Civilization) to do folksong research (Guigné 2000). During this period he interviewed 118 individuals in 38 communities. He also collected 766 songs and melodies: 638 on tape and an additional 128 by hand that are in manuscript form. Peacock later published two-thirds of this material in a three-volume collection *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* (1965; here referred to as *Outports*).

As one of the pioneers of the Canadian folk revival movement, Peacock intended that *Outports* would serve as a general source book. The work was pivotal to the shaping of the Newfoundland-centered folk music revival, providing source material by way of songs and singers for those interested in their own musical heritage. *Outports* is soon to be re-released by SingSong Productions in a new CD ROM format.¹ For the first time, users will be able to listen to sound bites of many singers performing these songs as originally field-recorded by Peacock. At the Canadian Museum of Civilization's request, the publication is to be reproduced as is.² Herein lies the problem. Considering its size and magnitude, *Outports* cannot be dismissed by simply calling it a collection. But in their attempts to use it as a resource, researchers have not moved beyond commenting about Peacock's treatment of the texts and songs; for example his tendency to create composites (Carpenter 1979, 415; Mercer 1979, 16; Narváez 1995, 218). Most people working exclusively with the publication wonder just how much the texts and songs Peacock selected to publish differ from the original recordings in his vast field collection. I would therefore like to discuss how a working tool in the form of a computerized database, combined with a new operative model, provides a means of getting beyond Peacock's editing while highlighting the importance of his field collection as

a valuable resource with the potential for new investigations.

In 1987 the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) acquired a copy of Peacock's Newfoundland field recordings from the National Museum of Canada along with his original field inventory.³ Typical for the period in which the inventory was created, this in-house document provides only the most rudimentary details of Peacock's field activities in Newfoundland, i.e., the tape number, the song-title number, the singer, as well as the year and month in which Peacock recorded the material. MUNFLA did not receive copies of the songs Peacock collected by hand-transcription mainly between 1951 and 1952; the archive was unaware that they existed.⁴ As researchers gained access to Peacock's field recordings, rumors surfaced about his editing practices. One regularly-circulated example pertains to the song "The Emigrant from Newfoundland" and his supposed substitution of the word "unregretted" for the word "Regatta," an annual event held in St. John's during the month of August (Peacock 1965, 2: 360-61). As one person remarked, "Anyone in their right mind would know the difference."⁵ Most individuals couldn't tell me the song which contained the error, but many students at the time had begun to call into question Peacock's fieldwork approach and his methods of transcription. But Peacock evidently did employ some kind of aesthetic judgement when preparing songs and melodies for publication, as he wrote in *Outports*: "I reproduced them as the singer used them except where there were obvious mistakes"; understandably remarks such as this have only added to the confusion (1965, 1: xxiii).

In 1994 I took a cursory look at Peacock's collection to see what all the rumblings were about. I listened to the first seven of his 1951 tapes and compared various singers' performances to the versions published in *Outports*. I readily picked up such editorial changes as the reordering of verses and

lines, the inclusion of lyrics, which the singer had not provided, as well as words Peacock incorrectly transcribed because he misunderstood the singer. I also discovered that Peacock hadn't actually published everything he collected. For example, although Ewart Vallis of Grand Bank had provided Peacock two songs in 1951, the only reference to this singer was a cryptic note under "Feller From Fortune" in *Outports* about "a cowboy type singer who also sang a variant" and that the "guitar drowns out most of the words" (1965, 1: 54). Listening to Mike Kent's spectacular rendition of "My Old Dudeen," I also recognized the challenge Peacock faced in attempting to encapsulate, on a single page, any one singer's performance (Peacock 1965, 2: 377-78).⁶ Hearing children laugh as Monica Rossiter performed the comic song "The Old Grandma," I realized that Peacock had indeed documented something particular to a time and a place and I took on a new appreciation for the Newfoundland singing tradition which he had begun to record that first summer (1965, 1: 81-82).⁷

That February I found Peacock's address, called him and obtained permission to do a series of long-distance interviews about his Newfoundland work.⁸ Peacock was delighted to be asked and during these initial sessions told me much about his early career.⁹ He said that in 1951, at age 29, he was really a classical composer; the fieldwork that year was nothing more than a summer job he had acquired through his predecessor and music school friend Margaret Sargent and, in turn, her connections to folklorist Marius Barbeau (1883-1969).¹⁰ We discussed his musical interests and his encounters with various Newfoundland singers. On the subject of Ewart Vallis, from whom he recorded just two songs, Peacock said he was not interested in collecting "cowboy music" as you could get that in Alberta.¹¹ But he was clearly fascinated by many other kinds of traditional music. He recounted his first trip to King's Cove, Bonavista Bay, where he encountered many gifted singers. As this part of the province was unelectrified, he could not use his tape recorder and so resorted to transcribing the music and texts by hand. Peacock enjoyed the whole experience so much that he returned again in 1952 and just kept on going.

Through our discussions I began to draw connections between his work and that of such pioneers as Helen Creighton (1899-1989), Edith Fowke (1913-1996), Samuel Gesser (1930-), Alan

Mills (1913-1977) and Tom Kines (1922-1994), who shared a mutual interest in collecting and disseminating Canadian folksong, greatly contributing to the folk revival in the 1950s and '60s.¹² Peacock also spoke about his ethnic research after Newfoundland which led to such landmark publications as *Twenty Ethnic Songs from Western Canada* (1966), *Songs of the Doukhobours: An Introductory Outline* (1970) and *A Garland of Rue: Lithuanian Folksongs of Love and Betrothal* (1971). He said that at the time of his retirement in 1970, he had accumulated over 3000 sound recordings from a multitude of cultures across the country.¹³

My small folksong project subsequently turned into one very large PhD.¹⁴ As one small aspect of this study I took on the arduous task of listening to Peacock's Newfoundland field recordings at MUNFLA. I reconstructed his field activities from 1951 to 1961, sorting out what songs he had included in *Outports* and how this related to his entire field collection. Using my own copy of *Outports* I systematically analyzed individual songs by comparing the singer's actual rendition with the version Peacock published and noting any changes. I determined what portion of his collection remains unpublished and I compiled a list of songs Peacock collected by hand. Missing titles not accounted for in *Outports* were tracked down among Peacock's papers at the Museum.

All this information was then pulled together into a keyword searchable Excel database called "A Catalogue of Kenneth Peacock's Newfoundland Song and Music Collection 1951-1961". This working tool now brings Peacock's entire collection together into one complete usable unit which links the material Peacock published in *Outports* to the field collection. The catalogue incorporates such information as Peacock's original tape and song number or manuscript number, the song title, the singer, and the community. Users will now be able to distinguish those songs he published from those which are unpublished along with MUNFLA's tape number for easy access. The catalogue also provides a method for considering Peacock's editing techniques and directs researchers to any additional variants and their singers.

An undeniable limitation for researchers is that at present they are unable to distinguish how the unpublished component of Peacock's work relates to the finished product. We are fortunate to have

Peacock's original field recordings at our disposal; he was a meticulously organized collector and worker. By comparing his earliest transcriptions and field tapes to *Outports* and accounting for the kinds of changes he did make, it is now possible to see both the benefits and the limitations of his work. For example, by simply filtering information, which I entered in my database, I came up with new observations pertaining to performers who contributed songs to Peacock's collection. Although Peacock collected 766 songs from 118 informants, 52% of them, or 397 titles, are derived from the repertoires of only fifteen individuals who gave him seventeen songs or more. Secondly, although Peacock collected songs from 38 communities, the bulk of his field collection was actually in two areas of concentration; 38% was derived from the Great Northern Peninsula where he had worked extensively between 1958 and 1960 and 15% was collected on the Avalon Peninsula where he spent considerable time in 1951 and again in 1961.

The database also provides new information on both individual repertoires and community singing traditions. For example, between 1958 and 1960 Peacock concentrated his collecting efforts in St. Paul's on the Great Northern Peninsula. Here he spent considerable time with the Bennett family collecting 139 songs from 8 individuals. Peacock acquired the bulk of this material, or 121 songs, from three informants; Becky Bennett, her husband Freeman and his brother Everett. This information is worth knowing because members of this family were visited by a succession of researchers, starting with Herbert Halpert and John Widdowson in 1966 (Halpert & Widdowson 1966). When Peacock's material is linked with these other collections in MUNFLA, our understanding of the St. Paul's musical tradition is broadened.

Scrutiny of Peacock's entire field collection reveals specific editing patterns. When the texts in *Outports* are compared against the recordings he made, one finds a spectrum of changes. At one end are songs which (for the most part) closely compare to the variants he recorded. At the other end of the spectrum are songs which are far removed from the performances of individual informants. Somewhere in the middle are songs which contain part of the original content, as recorded, but which have also been considerably reworked. This is because when preparing materials for publication Peacock aimed to present both the text and a generalized musical

composite scheme of the melody. Any one song published might be the product of several treatments based on such considerations as recording difficulties or his misunderstanding of the culture, Peacock's personal aesthetic and his desire to see music used.

This continuum is best expressed within the framework of an operative model which takes into account (1) Peacock's attempts at replication based on his experiences collecting in the field; (2) changes he made to the original field material through either the addition, subtraction or re-arrangement of song material for publishing; and (3) Peacock's own attempts to simulate folksong materials through invention and borrowing. Three small but typical examples highlight the kinds of treatment one may anticipate in *Outports*.

Comparison of several published texts with the field recordings reveals that his transcriptions closely resemble the singers' performances. As the tapes also show, Peacock often dealt with difficult field recording situations; singers mixed up lines, they remembered extra stanzas or they started on the wrong pitch and continued. Transcriptions of field recordings also highlight Peacock's own perceptions of poor grammar.

In "Some Effects of Scribal and Typographical Error on Oral Tradition," W. Edson Richmond notes that no matter how good the recording equipment, when there is "any mass of materials" corruption of this material still occurs due to "scribal error" and "typographical error" brought about through efforts to "set in print what arises from oral tradition" (1951: 163). For example, Peacock sometimes misconstrued local terminology. In the song "Blow the Wind Westerly" (156-1009) the word "sculpin" was interpreted as "dolphin" in the line "Up jumps a dolphin [sculpin] with his chuckle-head" (1965, 3: 859).¹⁵ Peacock evidently didn't know that "sculpin" is an indigenous term for a species of scavenger fish. Similarly, vernacular terms employed by occupational groups were perceived to be the result of poor grammar. In the song "The Loss of the *Sailor's Home*" (144-967) Peacock changed the phrase "We then laid on a fire" to a more general statement "We then lit up a fire" (1965, 3: 962).¹⁶ However, as Story, Kirwin and Widdowson observe in their *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, the verb "lay hold" or "lay up" means, among other things, "to take in hand or prepare oneself" and is frequently used by fishermen (1982, 299).

In “A Model For Textual Variation in Folksong” (1970: 49-56), Tom Burns identifies sixteen specific categories of textual change linked to the addition, subtraction or rearrangement of material by singers. Paul Smith’s work on contemporary legend and film also illustrates that any time folklore is used, “a highly complex set of direct and indirect interactions, transformations, simulations and applications are in constant and simultaneous operation” (1999: 148). By extending applications of these models to examinations of field collections, it is possible to scrutinize changes consciously brought to bear on material by collectors when they publish their findings. Examination of songs contained in *Outports* shows for example that nine of Burns’s categories of textual change and variation are present in versions published as a result of Peacock’s editing. As one example, Burns notes that a merger is “the process whereby two songs become one either through compounding or through fusion of their elements” and “when the songs involved are close in content, mood and theme” (1970: 53). Peacock regularly created composite texts by merging variants obtained from additional recordings of the song from the same singer, or from a recording taken from another singer’s performance or multiple singers’ performances. This is reflected in his treatment of the song “Young Charlotte” (1965, 3: 735). Peacock made a hand transcription of “Young Charlotte” in 1951 from the performance of Charles Elliot of Keels who called it “Frozen Charlotte”(MS-40).¹⁷ He also recorded Charlotte Decker of Parson’s Pond singing the song in 1958; she gave it the title “Young Charlotte”.¹⁸ Peacock elected to publish Decker’s eleven-stanza variant making no reference to the eleven-stanza variant provided by Mr. Elliot (1965, 3: 736-37). Comparison of the original transcriptions done by Peacock with the published version shows that he borrowed phrases from stanza five of Elliot’s “Frozen Charlotte” variant to “improve” the Decker variant which is in *Outports*:

Peacock’s hand transcription of stanza 5 of “Frozen Charlotte” performed by Charles Elliot.

Her clothes being on, her gloves also, She jumped into the sleigh;
 Away she drove by the mountainside, For fifteen miles away.
 There’s music in those merry merry bells, As over the hills we go;
 What a creaking noise those runners make, As they creep over the frozen snow.

Peacock’s transcription of stanza 6 based on his field recording of “Young Charlotte” performed by Charlotte Decker.

The musical sounds of those runners as they cut the frozen snow,

 “Such another night I never did spend, my reins I can scarcely hold.”
 When Charlotte spoke with a feeble voice, “I am exceedingly cold.”

Stanza six of “Young Charlotte” performed by Charlotte Decker, which Peacock published in *Outports*. Lines in bold indicate the phrases borrowed from Charles Elliot’s variant.

- (L-1) **“What creaking sounds those runners make** as they cut the frozen snow,”
- (L-2) **There’s music in those merry bells as over the hills we go.**
- (L-3) “Such another night I never did spend, my reins I can scarcely hold”.
- (L-4) When Charlotte spoke with a feeble voice, “I am exceedingly cold.” (1965, 3: 736).

In line one of stanza six of the published version, Peacock imported text from stanza five of Elliot’s “Frozen Charlotte” and substituted it for part of the phrase used by the singer. In line two of the same stanza, Peacock again placed phrasing from stanza five of Elliot’s variant to create a balanced four-line stanza, which would be in keeping with the remainder of the song. Although the melodic phrase structure is ABBA, for stanza six Decker actually sang ABA or basically three lines of text. By adding the additional line, Peacock aimed to harmonize the text with the melody thereby making the song more complete and singable.

Several published composites of songs are the result of material Peacock borrowed from other printed sources. In a couple of instances, Peacock appears to have been on a restorative path with some of the material. In 1951 he hand-transcribed an eleven-stanza variant of “Doran’s Ass” from the performance of James Heany of Stock Cove. Upon discovering the song in Manus O’Conor’s *Irish Come All Ye’s*, Peacock borrowed stanza eight from the publication because it was “missing in the Newfoundland variant”(Peacock 1965, 1: 52; O’Conor 1901: 43).

As all this suggests, by presenting the songs in *Outports* in a manner in which they could be sung, Peacock's personal aesthetic considerably affected his treatment of this material. Examination of the collection shows that he preferred older texts, good melodies and musical examples which stood out as being exceptional. Working at the height of the Canadian folk revival movement, Peacock understandably aimed to offer a multi-purpose publication for singers and scholars alike; in fact, this happened. Peacock also aspired to provide a document reflecting Newfoundland's extensive singing tradition; in my estimation, he admirably accomplished this with the creation of his huge field collection.

Realistically we should view *Outports* as an innovative, artistic literary work resulting from Peacock's experiences in Newfoundland and reflecting his attempts to produce a product to serve many needs. A methodology is now in place for determining how he approached the musical and textual transcription of individual songs. The newly created catalogue of his Newfoundland material provides a systematic, effective means for researchers to access Peacock's entire collection. It also expands our ability to work with the songs and music he so diligently assembled. Finally, the operative model presented here provides a practical means to critically assess his overall treatment of the Newfoundland field collection and serve as a guide by which to appraise other field work he carried out during his career by highlighting the general patterns which are evident overall.

In the end, if we want to know how works such as *Outports* were shaped and assembled, we have to be able to look at the motivations of the producer. In the case of *Outports*, Peacock's editing practices are the result of his desire to see the Newfoundland music he so diligently collected appear in a form which could be useful to both singers and scholars. As I have discovered by examining his entire collection, Peacock successfully assembled a tremendous cultural resource, which even now opens up doors for the exploration of both family and community singing traditions. From this we may conclude that the greater our ability as researchers to establish how a published collection links back to the field data, (particularly with materials derived largely from field recordings), the better our ability to work with the entire collection, not just with the product.

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Notes

1. Jim Payne, SingSong Inc., interview with Suzanne Woolridge, *Morning Show*, CBC, St. John's Sept. 1997, MUNFLA Tape, 98-033/C16642.
2. Anna Guigné, recorded interview with Jim Payne, 9 Nov. 1998.
3. Kenneth Peacock Collection, MUNFLA 87-157.
4. For these materials see the Kenneth Peacock Collection, Textual and Musical Transcriptions, Pea C, 1-128 Boxes 302 to 304, Library and Documentation Services, Canadian Museum of Civilization.
5. This error supposedly occurred in line 4, stanza 5 of the song. See "The Emigrant From Newfoundland," performed by Andrew Nash, MUNFLA Tape, 87-157/C11098A. Having listened to the original recording, I would argue that Andrew Nash may have actually sung "unregretted".
6. "My Old Dudeen" (Pea 3-20) performed by Mike Kent, MUNFLA Tape, 87-157/ C11031A, MUNFLA.
7. "The Old Grandma" (Pea 6-38) performed by Mrs. Monica Rossiter, MUNFLA Tape, 87-157/ C11033B, MUNFLA.
8. Julia Bishop had previously contacted Peacock. Kenneth Peacock, letter to Julia Bishop, 29 Feb. 1988; Julia Bishop Collection, MUNFLA 91-42, p. 9. I am grateful to Philip Hiscock for calling the existence of this letter to my attention.

9. Anna Guigné, recorded interviews with Kenneth Peacock, 8 Feb., 20 Feb. and 16 Mar. 1994.

10. I discussed Sargent's activities at the annual meeting of the Folklore Studies Association, 27-29 May 1998, Ottawa Ontario. See Guigné 1998: 21. See as well Renée Landry and Denise Ménard, "Barbeau, (Charles) Marius," in *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, referred to below as *EMC* (Kallman, Potvin & Winters 1992), pp. 87-88.

11. For Ewart Vallis's songs "The Roving Newfoundlander" and "Feller From Burgeo" see MUNFLA Tape, 87-157/C11032B

12. See Ruth Pincoe, "Fowke (b Fulton) Edith (Margaret)"; Suzanne Thomas, "Gesser, Samuel, (Sam)," ; Lynne Hoover, "Mills (B. Miller), Alan (b Albert)," and Mark Miller, "Kines, Tom, (Thomas Alvin)," *EMC* 2nd ed., pp. 494, 525-26, 857 and 684.

13. See the Kenneth Peacock Collection, Pea-A-1 to Pea-N-3&4, 1951-1973, Library and Documentation Services, Canadian Museum of Civilization.

14. My doctoral thesis "Kenneth Peacock and the Songs of the Newfoundland Outports: the Politics of a Newfoundland Song Collection" will be completed in the fall of 2003.

15. "Blow the Wind Westerly" (Pea 156-1009), performed by Charlotte Decker, MUNFLA Tape, 87-157/C11076A.

16. "Loss of the Sailor's Home" (Pea 144-967), performed by George Decker, MUNFLA Tape, 87-157/C11070A.

17. "Frozen Charlotte" (MS-40), performed by Charles Elliot contained in the Kenneth Peacock Collection, Textual and Musical Transcriptions, Pea C 1-128 Boxes 302 to 304, Library and Documentation Services, Canadian Museum of Civilization.

18. "Young Charlotte" (Pea 102-784), performed by Charlotte Decker, contained in the Kenneth Peacock Collection, Textual and Musical Transcriptions, Box 282, F 13, Library and Documentation Services, Canadian Museum of Civilization. See as well "Young Charlotte"(Pea 102-784) performed by Charlotte Decker, MUNFLA Tape, 87-197/C11054B.
