

# Newfoundland and Labrador

We begin our cross-Canada survey with a look at the rich variety and history of Newfoundland and Labrador traditional song. We will trace the evolution of folk song collecting in the province and review the secondary literature that can help us understand when the collectors were active and what they discovered. We can then go on to examine some aspects of Newfoundland song tradition from different perspectives.

First, we look at the pioneer song collectors in the British colony before and during Newfoundland's brief flirtation with self-government in the years before the two World Wars. Before the late 1920s, Newfoundland collecting was done by inhabitants of the island, and they placed stronger emphasis on securing song texts than tunes. Four of the earliest song collectors in Newfoundland were James Murphy, Johnny Burke, Joey Smallwood (later premier of the province) and Gerald Doyle.

Murphy's collecting, principally from sealers and fishermen, was done mainly before and during the Great War, while Burke's dates mostly from the early 1920s. Burke, however, was also a poet, and many of the songs in his publications may well be his own creations. Neither collection appears to be easily accessible, and the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* ignores Murphy and provides only a very brief entry on Burke.<sup>1</sup> Smallwood's own illustrated article on "Poetry and Ballads of Newfoundland," along with Charles Johnson's "Songs and Sagas of Newfoundland" and Frederick Emerson's "Newfoundland Folk Music", appeared in 1937 in the first volume of *The Book of Newfoundland*, a seminal work that is unfortunately not yet available online.<sup>2</sup>

Earlier in the interwar period another important collector had joined in the hunt for local Newfoundland songs. Gerald S. Doyle's classic *Old-Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland* was first published in 1927, but the expanded edition of 1940 was considerably bigger and more valuable.<sup>3</sup> It focused mainly on locally-composed songs. Doyle was a home-grown and patriotic Newfoundlander, interested primarily in songs that expressed his fellow islanders' culture and politics. His songbook is not available online but there is a brief but useful *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* article about him,<sup>4</sup> and Neil Rosenberg wrote an excellent article on "The Gerald S. Doyle Songsters and the Politics of Newfoundland Folk Song" in a 1991 issue of *Canadian Folklore*.<sup>5</sup>

Newfoundland melodies were neglected until the advent of two non-Newfoundlanders who were interested as much (or more) in tunes than lyrics. They were both female, one American and one English.

Elisabeth Bristol was a visitor from the United States who lived temporarily on the island as a volunteer worker and then returned with Grace Yarrow for one song-collecting trip in 1929. They concentrated mainly on the northern coast of Newfoundland and were fairly eclectic in what they noted down. Their collection was published in 1933 as *Ballads and Sea Songs from Newfoundland* (by which time both women had married, with Bristol becoming Greenleaf and Yarrow adding Mansfield to her name).<sup>6</sup> While there is no substitute for perusing this pioneer book itself, two articles can help one's study of Greenleaf's achievements. In 1985 Isabelle Peere contributed to *Canadian Folk Music Journal* a useful survey titled "Elisabeth Greenleaf: An Appraisal,"<sup>7</sup> while in 2003 David Gregory provided in *Canadian Folk Music* an introduction to the contents of the Greenleaf archive at Memorial University: "The Elisabeth Greenleaf Collection at MUNFLA: An Overview".<sup>8</sup>

The other non-Newfoundlander to make a major contribution to the recovery and preservation of Newfoundland balladry and folk lyrics in 1929 was Maud Karpeles. Karpeles was looking for ballads and songs of British origin, similar to those she had collected in the Appalachian mountains with Cecil Sharp during World War I. She made two collecting trips to the island, in the summers of 1929 and 1930. Selections from her collecting were published (with piano arrangements by Ralph Vaughan Williams, among others) in the mid-1930s,<sup>9</sup> and she followed this in 1943 with *Fifteen Folk Songs From Newfoundland*,<sup>10</sup> but it would be 1971 before a complete edition of her Newfoundland collecting was available as *Folk Songs from Newfoundland*.<sup>11</sup>

Karpeles' two visits to the island are the subject of four articles by David Gregory. The first, "Maud Karpeles, Newfoundland, and the Crisis of the Folk Song Revival, 1924-1935," was published in a 2000 issue of *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*.<sup>12</sup> Two others appeared in *Canadian Folk Music* in 2008-09, titled respectively "Song Collecting in Newfoundland: Maud Karpeles, 1929"<sup>13</sup> and "Song Collecting in Newfoundland: Maud Karpeles, 1930."<sup>14</sup> The fourth was "Newfoundland Traditional Song: The Legacy from the English West Country" in the 2004 issue of *Canadian Journal for Traditional Music*.<sup>15</sup>

When combined, Doyle's, Greenleaf's and Karpeles' collections together provide a comprehensive survey of Newfoundland vernacular song before the Second World War. They give us a good benchmark against which to compare and assess the fieldwork of such later collectors as Margaret Sargent, MacEd-

ward Leach and, especially, Kenneth Peacock. The first two post-war collectors to visit Newfoundland were Margaret Sargent and MacEdward Leach. Sargent's relatively brief encounter with Newfoundland song has been described and assessed by Anna Guigné in *Ethnologies*,<sup>16</sup> but we have to rely on a Memorial University website for an introduction to MacEdward Leach's work on the island.<sup>17</sup> Leach was in fact a major collector in Newfoundland and the Maritimes, but it was his fieldwork in Labrador alone that was published by the National Museum of Canada as *Folk Ballads and Songs of the Lower Labrador Coast*.<sup>18</sup> This impressive book is out of print and not available online, but, as mentioned, part of the Leach collection is online at Memorial University, Newfoundland.

By the time Leach's Labrador collection found its way into print, Kenneth Peacock had been collecting for some time with a tape recorder in the small coastal communities of Newfoundland. The first fruits of Peacock's fieldwork are to be found in a National Museum Bulletin<sup>19</sup> and a 1954 article in *Journal of American Folklore*.<sup>20</sup> His celebrated *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* was originally published as a three-volume printed set,<sup>21</sup> but an audio version of Peacock's collection, which includes selections from his field tape-recordings, is now available on CD-ROM, edited by Jim Payne and Don Walsh, as *Kenneth Peacock's 'Songs of the Newfoundland Outports'* (St. John's, NF: Singsong, 2006).<sup>22</sup> It provides an excellent means of experiencing Newfoundland traditional song at its most authentic. You might also like to consult David Gregory's review of this CD-ROM in *Canadian Folk Music*.<sup>23</sup>

Any investigation of Peacock's work also involves a scholarly assessment of it. Anna Guigné is the scholar who has devoted most attention to Peacock's fieldwork and to his method of editing it for publication. Her interesting book on the subject is titled *Folk Song and the Folk Revival: The Cultural Politics of Kenneth Peacock's 'Songs of the Newfoundland Outports'*.<sup>24</sup> A quicker way of obtaining her perspective on his achievements and limitations is to read two of her articles. Guigné's overview of Peacock's life and achievements as a folklorist is to be found in a 2001 issue of *Canadian Folk Music* titled "Kenneth Howard Peacock: Composer and Folkmusic Specialist, 1922-2000."<sup>25</sup> It should be supplemented with her "An Operative Model for Analyzing Kenneth Peacock's Newfoundland Song Collection," found in *Canadian Folk Music* for 2003.<sup>26</sup> Another useful, although more specialised, article of Guigné's is "The Songs that Nearly Got Away: An Examination of the Unpublished Portion of Kenneth Peacock's Newfoundland Field Collection" in the

2003 issue of *Canadian Journal for Traditional Music*.<sup>27</sup>

Song collecting in Newfoundland by no means ended with Peacock, although the size and quality of his collection have never been surpassed. One example of an important later collection is that made by Anita Best and Genevieve Lehr and edited in 1985 by the latter as *Come and I Will Sing You: A Newfoundland Songbook*.<sup>28</sup>

There also exists a small body of valuable secondary literature examining various Newfoundland song traditions. The island was settled in roughly equal proportions by immigrants from the southeast of Ireland and from the southwest of England (the counties of Dorset and Devon). Some Newfoundland outport communities are predominantly Irish in origin (especially along the northern coast), some are predominantly English (especially along the southern coast), and many, perhaps most, have a mixture of traditions. Added to this musical legacy from England and Ireland is a home-grown song culture which has evolved since the seventeenth century and which expresses various aspects of the lifestyle of rural Newfoundlanders, including a spirit of independence and Newfoundland nationalism.

David Gregory's article on the legacy of folk-song from the English counties of Devon and Dorset was mentioned earlier,<sup>29</sup> but the same author also contributed "Vernacular Song, Cultural Identity, and Nationalism in Newfoundland, 1920-1955" to *Canadian Folk Music* in 2006.<sup>30</sup> Also on the subject of Newfoundland nationalism in song is Terry McDonald's "Proud To Be an Islander: Newfoundland Identity as Revealed Through Newfoundland Song," printed in *Canadian Folk Music* the same year.<sup>31</sup> A wider-ranging analysis of Newfoundland folk music styles can be found in "Repertoire Categorization and Performer-Audience Relationships: Some Newfoundland Folk Song Examples" by George Casey and Neil Rosenberg, published in a 1972 issue of *Ethnomusicology*.<sup>32</sup> This far from exhausts the scholarly—and not-so-scholarly—material available on the history and characteristics of Newfoundland folksong, but it is surely sufficient as an introduction to the subject. From here on in you can do your own digging.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>"Johnny Burke," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.

<sup>2</sup>Smallwood, Joseph R., ed. *The Book of Newfoundland, Vol 1*. St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1937.

<sup>3</sup>Doyle, Gerald S., ed. *Old-Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland*. St. John's, NF: Gerald S. Doyle Ltd, 1927, 1940, 1955, 1966 and 1978.

<sup>4</sup>"Gerald Doyle," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.

- <sup>5</sup>Rosenberg, Neil V. "The Gerald S. Doyle Songsters and the Politics of Newfoundland Folksong", *Canadian Folklore canadien*, 13.1 (1991), 45-57.
- <sup>6</sup>Greenleaf, Elisabeth Bristol and Grace Yarrow Mansfield, eds. *Ballads and Sea Songs from Newfoundland*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933. Reprinted, Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1968.
- <sup>7</sup>Peere, Isabelle. "Elisabeth Greenleaf: An Appraisal," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 13 (1985), 20-31.
- <sup>8</sup>Gregory, E. David. "The Elisabeth Greenleaf Collection at MUNFLA: An Overview," *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, 37. 3 (Fall 2003), 10-16.
- <sup>9</sup>Karpeles, Maud, ed. *Folk Songs From Newfoundland*. 2 Vols. Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1934.
- <sup>10</sup>Karpeles, Maud, ed. *Fifteen Folk Songs From Newfoundland*. London: Oxford University Press, 1943.
- <sup>11</sup>Karpeles, Maud, ed. *Folk Songs From Newfoundland*. London: Faber & Faber, 1971.
- <sup>12</sup>Gregory, E. David. "Maud Karpeles, Newfoundland, and the Crisis of the Folk Song Revival, 1924-1935", *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 16. 2 (Fall 2000), 151-165.
- <sup>13</sup>Gregory, E. David. "Song Collecting in Newfoundland: Maud Karpeles, 1929," *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, 42.3 (Fall 2008), 12-25.
- <sup>14</sup>Gregory, E. David. "Song Collecting in Newfoundland: Maud Karpeles, 1930," *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, 42.4 (Winter 2008-09), 1-13.
- <sup>15</sup>Gregory, E. David. "Newfoundland Traditional Song: The Legacy from the English West Country", *Canadian Journal for Traditional Music/Revue de musique folklorique canadienne*, 31 (2004), 50-65.
- <sup>16</sup>Guigné, Anna K. "'The Folklore Treasure There Is Astounding': A Reappraisal of Margaret Sargent McTaggart's Contribution to the Documentation of Newfoundland Folk Song at Mid-Century," *Ethnologies*, 29.1-2 (2007), 171-214.
- <sup>17</sup>Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) and Research Centre for the Study of Music, Media and Place, Memorial University of Newfoundland. "MacEdward Leach and the Songs of Atlantic Canada." Online at [www.mun.ca/folklore/leach/](http://www.mun.ca/folklore/leach/).
- <sup>18</sup>Leach, MacEdward, ed. *Folk Ballads and Songs of the Lower Labrador Coast*. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, Bulletin 201, 1965.
- <sup>19</sup>Peacock, Kenneth. "The Native Songs of Newfoundland," Ottawa: National Museum, Bulletin 190, n.d., 213-239.
- <sup>20</sup>Peacock, Kenneth. "Nine Songs from Newfoundland," *Journal of American Folklore* 67 (1954), 123-136.
- <sup>21</sup>Peacock, Kenneth. *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*. 3 vols. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, Bulletin No. 197, 1965.
- <sup>22</sup>Payne, Jim and Don Walsh, eds. *Kenneth Peacock's 'Songs of the Newfoundland Outports'*. St. John's, NF: Singsong, 2006 (CD ROM).
- <sup>23</sup>Gregory, E. David. "Kenneth Peacock's *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*", *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, 40.3 (Fall 2006), 1-20.
- <sup>24</sup>Guigné, Anna Kearney. *Folksongs and Folk Revival: The Cultural Politics of Kenneth Peacock's 'Songs of the Newfoundland Outports'*. St. John's: ISER Books, 2008.
- <sup>25</sup>Guigné, Anna Kearney. "Kenneth Howard Peacock: Composer and Folkmusic Specialist, 1922-2000," in *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin/Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne*, 35. 1 (Spring 2001), 22-25.
- <sup>26</sup>Guigné, Anna K. "An Operative Model for Analyzing Kenneth Peacock's Newfoundland Song Collection," *Canadian Folk Music/Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne*. 37. 2 (Summer 2003), 1-5.
- <sup>27</sup>Guigné, Anna Kearney. "The Songs that Nearly Got Away: An Examination of the Unpublished Portion of Kenneth Peacock's Newfoundland Field Collection," *Canadian Journal for Traditional Music* 30 (2003), 47-63.
- <sup>28</sup>Lehr, Genevieve, ed. *Come and I Will Sing You: A Newfoundland Songbook*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press & St. John's, NF: Breakwater, 1985.
- <sup>29</sup>See note 15.
- <sup>30</sup>Gregory, E. David. "Vernacular Song, Cultural Identity, and Nationalism in Newfoundland, 1920-1955," *Canadian Folk Music/Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne*, 40.2 (Summer 2006), 1-14.
- <sup>31</sup>McDonald, Terry. "Proud To Be an Islander: Newfoundland Identity as Revealed Through Newfoundland Song," *Canadian Folk Music/Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne*, 40.2 (Summer 2006), 15-22.
- <sup>32</sup>Casey, George J., Neil V. Rosenberg and Wilfred W. Wareham. "Repertoire Categorization and Performer-Audience Relationships: Some Newfoundland Folk Song Examples," *Ethnomusicology* 16 (1972), 397-403.