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A Milling Frolic on the North Shore Milling Frolic; (rt) John Alex John X. MacDonald, Tommy Peggy MacDonald, John Shaw John Alex John X. MacDonald: (Where would you learn songs?) Ach, you'd hear songs in the homes. Yes. My father was a great sing? er, and he had a wonderful memory. Every? body talked about him even after he was dead, you know. He'd remember everything. And if he'd go to a milling and hear a song for the first time • he'd sing the whole thing for you the next day, and just heard it once. Sing every verse of it. As far as singing is concerned, it was quite common to go to three millings a week. I was to four millings one week. And the homespun was five times as Tiard to mill as the blankets • the blankets were light, you know. They used to have some millings in the daytime and there'd be nobody there but women. And there were so many women then that could sing, beautiful singers and a lot of songs • no end. I remember millings right in this house • and the house was packed tight. They'd be in the kitchen • the harrow (milling board • cliath) would be right here. And people sitting a- round the room, and upstairs. And where the beams are cut there for the stairway, my father was quite nervous one night • there were so many up there in the hall there, that he was scared that the header would give way with the weight that went on it. But it didn't. My father would be sitting there where the cat is there. He'd be so tired every night he'd be there • but if we'd start singing a song, part of one we'd heard at a milling • he'd start over there and he'd finish it off • perhaps there'd be 13 or 14 verses. So there was no trouble to learn. He had them there in bushels. He learned songs though I don't think he ever composed any. But he told me one time there was a mil? ling up at Denny's place and he was only 14 • and boys of that age were to be home at 10 o'clock. Up till 18 or 19 you weren't out on the road, you were home. Really they were too young to go to the milling. They walked 3 miles. They went to the window to look in. The window was up • the house so warm and a big fire on. And there was a fellow there singing a song that Murdoch MacDermid had composed from Wreck Cove. He made a song for a girl he had been going with and she had been in Boston and when she came back she had lost her Gaelic • it's in the songbook here • and my father outside the window. He had heard the tune but never heard the song. He told me himself that when he woke up in the morning, he was lying in bed, and he had the whole 14 verses. Now I couldn't do anything like that. My father at 90, when he died • two weeks before he died, if you came to the house and asked him to sing a song he would, he'd remember it that well. If there was anyone to sing the chorus, good and well; if not, he was going to sing it for you anyway. You know, if you weren't asked to a mil- Cape Breton's Maga2ine/39