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areas had their outstanding violin player, and they stuck right behind him the way they would behind a good football team, I suppose. They were very proud of them, and they spoke of them for generations after. I found that in every area I went. An outstanding player in a community--one jumps to mind--Ned MacKinnon from a little area in Cooper's Pond, over by Christmas Island. That man is revered to this day, and in 1926 he died. People still say, "I remember the day I saw Ned MacKinnon walking down the road. A violin tune struck him, and he was so obsessed, he raced into the nearest house and grabbed a fiddle off the wall. He just had to play it. He played 3 or 4 versions, and when he was through, he announced which version he thought was the oldest. But whatever it was, he had got it out of his system." Ned was also the sort of guy, when he worked in the woods, they could hardly get a day's work out of him. Because he'd get out there and he'd start humming a tune that he'd heard some old fellow play one time--and it would distract him so much, he'd be humming to himself--he'd put the ax down, and they'd get nothing out of him the rest of the day. And as soon as they were released for the day, he'd make a beeline home and play that tune. He's a great hero over in that area. Still spoken of very well, and it was in 1926 that man died. I checked around other communities that I knew he had visited, and sure enough, he was a terrific violin player. He'd been note-reading, playing James Scott Skinner way back then. Scott Skinner was the great Scottish composer. He died in 1927, but I guess he had had some publications out. To play his music, you would have to be a note-reader--it wasn't part of the oral tradition--he was composing, doing variations and themes on old music. This Ned MacKinnon was supposedly into the Scott Skinner stuff way back then, in the '20s. And he was an outstanding player. And he just happened to be the hero in that community. I think the violin playing in Cape Breton and the dancing ran parallel; I've been led to believe this. The whole inflection of our playing, the Gaelic flavour of it, the lift or the Cape Breton swing--it's a kind of thing that makes you want to beat your feet and get up out of your chair. What's happened in Scotland, they've lost the stepdancing, and maybe that's why they've lost the lift as well. I think the great dance players in the 1800s were always the ones that were the heroes. Back then, they wanted a good dance player, and as simple as that. You find around, say, the 1930s onward, you'd be getting players where someone says, "He was a nice player to listen to as well as to dance to." Today there are lots of great violin players who wouldn't do so well at dances. Now we've accustomed ourselves to sitting down and listening to the guy go through his repertoire, not wanting to get up on the floor, just listening to his technique. I don't know if that would have gone down as well in the 1800s, as well as it does today. Some of those wouldn't have the finesse if you were to make a record of them or tape-record through the P.A. system when they were playing at a dance. You would be having a wonderful time there, but they may have missed a note here or there or, because of the excitement or noise of the dance, play a little rougher than a slicker, more concert-style, player. You'd have people who were outstanding



dance players, who wouldn't do so well at a concert. Some guys who didn't play so well were wonder? ful composers. Others just provided music whenever they were asked. There were play? ers you just listened to. There were oth? ers you could listen to and you could dance to--they'd play maybe two different styles. A Cape Breton fiddler, of course, is a com? plex creature, so you have all different types of personalities and all different styles of fiddling. Although we associate the violin and the dance quite closely, you had fellows who just wouldn't play at a dance--"Oh no, I don't care for playing at dances, I like to be heard." Little Jack MacDonald, if there was a rustle in the room or somebody coughed, there was a very good chance, immediately after the cough, he'd whip his violin in the case and lock her up, and that would be it for the night. Or if you requested the wrong tune, and he thought the tune was a bit be? low him. Angus Chisholm was known to re? fuse to play if the conditions weren't ex? actly right. This is the personality of the player coming into it. And you met oth? er fellows that would cut loose under any conditions. That doesn't mean you're ei? ther a good player or not a good player. There's a type that runs through our fid? dling tradition that probably goes back a ?? long time--of the bachelor violin player. There's a lot of that. Ned MacKinnon was one of those, Dan R. MacDonald, Angus Chis- holm--I can name all kinds. Gordon MacQuar? rie, scores of them. Because they were so busy, because they'd have a drink now and then, or they'd end up sleeping over, or they'd be called away to weddings and have to stay 3 and 4 days at a time. Because they were so interested in tunes that they'd seek out another fiddler in other parts of the island and stay there for days, maybe weeks, swapping tunes with them--it wasn't very conducive to raising families or having wives. The term was used often--"They were married to their vi? olin." I don't think there was any disput? ing their sexuality--they were all very virile men--but they wouldn't marry be? cause they were just on the move so much and so consumed by the music. That is a character and that is a type. There are others who've been able to play the violin and have a good family life. I suppose they've just been able to control it, they knew when to say no. Generous up to a point, or played until they realized they (40)