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Published by Ronald Caplan on 1986/6/1

song. We think part of the key is Ray's "anything serious happened." Besides murder songs, Phil Penney wrote a song about the shipwreck of the Watford. (The story of that wreck was told by Sara MacLean in Issue 16 of Cape Breton's Magazine.) And he wrote humorous songs, such as one Ray discusses below about "Dirty Danny"--humorous, but about a serious happening all the same. In the case of "George Beckett's Lament," the song, in its restraint, strikes us at first as an artful condensation of Beckett's story. Penney probably knew considerably more about Beckett than even the newspapers told. He had taken such interest, as Ray told us, that he even went to the hanging in Sydney, getting there early enough to see Beckett going to the gallows. And then there must have been many rumours in Glace Bay that a topical songwriter could use. But Penney deliberately limited himself. He did not, for instance, dwell on the gore of the murder, nor mention Beckett's long string of previous crimes. It is Beckett himself speaking in the song, a Beckett already resigned and accepting, praising and forgiving others--but a songwriter hoping to win over his audience might have included a little sensationalism, such as mention of Beckett's wife's sexual disloyalty, his girl friend of low repute, the post-murder partying, and the hard trek home. This was the stuff that sold newspapers, and Penney chose not to include it in his song. Apparently, Phil Penney's goal was neither to tell the "whole" story nor to portray the "real" Beckett. And this is not said critically. We would suggest that using such detail was not part of Penney's goal. Penney's concern was with his living community. He skilfully used the event of murder/hanging to get people's attention and drive home moral information. He used the event to reaffirm certain community standards. And while it is impossible to say how much of this was conscious, we do know that he felt a social calling--that of songmaker. We know the kinds of subjects he chose--no less than 4 murders and a shipwreck in the 7 songs we've heard about so far. When he made the song, his moral ideas--not rumours and news accounts--were his principal guides. And in the case of "George Beckett's Lament"--but not in all his songs--Penney was also guided by a knowledge of traditional songs still quite popular in the 1930s. A comparison of his songs to traditional songs that he may have known reveals that he carried considerable information about the old songs. We hope to discuss this in more detail in a future article, after we have gathered more of Penney's songs. But looking at "George Beckett's Lament," there are the obvious phrases from traditional songs--lines such as "My parents reared me tenderly"; the "My name is..." opening; the series of events often found in old songs: the mother's unheeded advice, the stanza of warning ("Don't ever murder anyone"), and the naming of the murdered person in the final stanza. And we would suggest that his moral ideas plus the old songs that supplied

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