

[Page 87 - Stories Told about the Bagpipes](#)ISSUE : [Issue 50](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1989/1/1

almost imagine that you were hearing the words. But they had the Gaelic touch, you see, that was it. Well, it wouldn't bother me at all to write down the name of at least 150 tunes that I was familiar with, that he played. And that was only a few of his tunes. (Did he teach pipes? Was that a way of making a living, for him?) No, no. But some people came to him and learned a little off him, you know, and picked tunes off him, and one thing and another. And those that did learn off him--learned a good bit of music off him--we could tell them again, they had that touch--they had something different about them. There's not too many left now, that I know of.... Oh, I used to spend hours with him. We'd be talking back and forth, talking about pipers and about tunes and one thing or another. He wouldn't play the pipes for me unless he was in good trim. He wouldn't bother taking the pipes out of the box to play for me, if he wasn't in the rare mood for playing. No, no. Because I wouldn't tell him to play, never ask him to play a tune for me. He knew well enough that I didn't care for the tunes, for the music, unless he was in the mood to play, himself, the way he wanted to play.... (Would you say there was a time when the pipes in your area were as popular as the fiddle?) No, no. There was only a few that could play them. There weren't enough pipers. I remember there was a piper up in Johnstown. I didn't hear him play the pipes. I heard him play the violin. I understand he was a pretty good piper, too. There was a piper at Irish Cove, he played the violin and played the pipes. He read music, for the violin and for the pipes. There were no more pipers in my time, unless you'd get down to Ben Eoin where that MacIsaac was. Then there was another MacIsaac, he was out in the Rear of Big Pond--he was good, he was very, very good to play the pipes. He was a lot with Neil R. • -of course, they'd be back and forth. But then when it came, down to East Bay, in that area--those 3 pipers that I mentioned--MacGillivray and Morrison and MacKinnon. But long before then--the place was full of pipers down in that area. I was told that there were 12 pipers out here at one time. Rear of East Bay-- between there, and down towards Mira-- there were 12 pipers in the area at one time. Of course, they were moving out here from those places--they moved out to the industrial centres, the mining district and all. Pipers left there, and there was nobody left. The youngsters, if there were any in the family, they didn't stay there. And when pipers went away, they went to work in the mines--piping went out a lot. They didn't hold onto the piping so much. The MacIntyres from out the French Road area, and the Mira district--they held on to the piping pretty well for a long time. They went down to Glace Bay, they were still going strong with their music... It's dying out. And then it came down that there was only the people went in for the band music. They only learned tunes they'd play in the band. What MacIsaac used to say, "band pieces." They went in mostly for that. Today, I'm sure you wouldn't get a piper today that would play for what they call the square dancing, today. They play for the Highland dancing, the "Sailor's Hornpipe," and they play for sword dances and Highland fling, that's about the limit.... (Joe, in the stories that you were learning over the years, did the pipers, or the bagpipes themselves--did they play any



role in the stories that you were hear? ing?) Well, not in so many, no.... We had stories about tunes. There were certain tunes--a heck of a lot of tunes that those people played--we knew the lines, we knew the words off of those tunes. They're a verse composed, like a song--all of those tunes, most all of those tunes, were songs. In a sense. They had words. For instance, the tune "Cutting Ferns"-- Home of Solid Birch Furniture Sofas Sofa Beds Coffee & End Tables XuoxLci Rockers Recliners Tables & Chairs All Your Home Furnishing Needs 1115 Kings Road, Sydney River, N. S. BIS 1C6 \* 539-1715 Enormous Showroom at SYDNEY RIVER We Install LeBlanc Siding Ltd. .\*\* Professi Authorized Dealer for ICAYCAN Aluminum & Vinyl Siding margaree windows Aluminum Windows & Doors - Shutters Softfit - Fascia - Awnings 109 Reservoir Road Sydney FREE ESTIMATES Professional installation of Aluminum & Vinyl Siding in Cape Breton County for over 10 years. Free Estimates for R.R.A.P., N.S.H.C, & C.M.H.C. Programs and all other siding inquiries. Call collect: SONNY MacPHERSON 539-4626