

[Inside Front Cover - Lizzie Belle Grant: A Family History](#)

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Lizzie Belle Grant: A Family History by Chris Grant Fitt Editor's Introduction: By Family History we mean that kind of story that members of a family gather, bit by bit, usually in conversation, telling and re-telling particular events in the family's life. It differs from most history in that it does not try to tell all the events or all the details and transitions. Rather, this kind of family history points to the things that shaped the family or one particular person within the family. These are important stories, important ways of telling stories-and it is rare that people outside the family are able to share in this special kind of recalling. Chris Fitt's article about her mother, Lizzie Belle (Elizabeth Isobei), is a fine example. Elizabeth Isobei (Allnutt) Grant [Lizzie Belle] was born in Summerville, Mass., daughter of Ernest Augustus Allnutt of Oxford, England, and Annie MacKinnon of Sydney River, Cape Breton. Her Cape Breton Heritage: The Story of Annie MacKinnon Annie MacKinnon was born at Malagawatch, the daughter of Duncan MacKinnon, his twenty-first child. Duncan MacKinnon was a deeply religious man, holding Sunday school in his home. When the Morrison girl in his class was asked who was the oldest man who ever lived, she quickly answered "Thusela." She became known from that moment on as Thuse-la Morrison. When Duncan MacKinnon's first wife died, he married Thusela Morrison and the child Annie was born. This was the time when calico was becoming fashionable and when Annie was two years old she had a calico dress. One morning, while making a little fire of her own at the corner of the hearth, the dress caught fire. She was badly burned. Had she been wearing the homespun it might never have happened. The father Duncan started across the ice to North Sydney for a doctor and was never seen alive again. Some days later a neighbour, an old lady, came to the house and was aghast at the sight of the child. She said to the young mother, "Are you just going to leave her to rot there?" Then she proceeded to show her how to poultice the wound with tea leaves. Annie survived but was quite crippled. The older brother took the mother and child to see a doctor in North Sydney. As was the custom, they took a lunch and stopped in at a house on the way to eat. The children in the home were crying and when Thusela asked what the matter was, she found that the father had gone to the mill with grain to be ground and had not yet returned. They were hungry. The doctor at North Sydney wanted ??100 (100 pounds) to cut the cords on the child so that she could walk without a limp. He might as well have asked for the moon. There was no money. Some time later the family heard of a British Man-o-war in at Sydney with a surgeon aboard. They took the child to him but he said he wouldn't operate for any amount of money. The best thing for her, he claimed, was exercise. And so they returned home and Annie MacKinnon grew up with a limp. She became a school teacher at Beechmont School near Coxheath and lived with her brother Hector at Sydney River. She became engaged to be married and the young man had started to build a house. One day, his mother, who was a noted gossip, said something about how lucky she was that her son didn't mind marrying a cripple. This was probably the last straw and Annie decided to call off the marriage. She set out for



Boston on the mail-coach taking the train at the Strait of Canso. In Boston she met Ernest Allnutt whom she married. They had a few brief happy years until she became very ill with T.B. When she was too far gone to care for her two daughters, Agnes and Lizzie Belle, she wrote to her brother Hector to come for her. She wanted to die in Cape Breton. He did come and took her and the two children home to Lizzie Belle Grant continues on page 44 Front Cover Photograph: A photograph In lieu of a fiddle tune • "Murray Caplan's Welcome to Cape Breton." Murray Caplan with his nieces Breton and Tyana, during his first visit to Cape Breton Island.