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The Cape Breton Shelf: A Review of The Last Stronghold: Scottish Gaelic Traditions in Newfoundland A Book by Margaret Bennett This is a wonderful new book about an interesting man and a lovely relationship. Words like "collector" (for Margaret Bennett) and "informant" for Allan MacArthur, the Codroy Valley Highlander who is the centre of this book, are cold terms and belie the real relationship that resulted in this book. The Last Stronghold (really Allan MacArthur himself) is the product of a Masters Thesis in Folklore at Memorial University, a thesis that has undergone years of re-consideration, leaving a lot of the scholarly requirements behind. What we are left with is good folklore presented in a rounded setting--and it is first of all good reading. And The Last Stronghold is a Cape Breton book, even though the sub-title reads: "Scottish Gaelic Traditions in Newfoundland ." It is about the last wave of the Highland Scots who emigrated to Cape Breton Island. They stayed several years in Cape Breton but, according to Allan's family tradition, there was little hope of ever owning a portion of land. The period of EXPLORE SYDNEY'S PAST... at the CAPE BRETON CENTRE operated by the- s "' HERITAGE & SCIENCE .Old Sydney Society >) 225 George Street ' ' ~ OPEN YEAR ROUND ~ Winter Hours: 10-4 Tuesday to Friday • 2-5 Sunday For information call (902) 539-1572 land grants was over. The emigrants could rent, work on someone else's farm and only hope to have something of their own. According to Allan, "They started moving from Cape Breton on account of the hard rules and everything else--Cape Breton was a poor country too, but they were under Confederation rules...well in Confederation rules you don't own the land, you don't own the house, you don't own the furniture, you own nothing if you don't pay the taxes.... And those people, a lot of them left that settled from Scotland out to Cape Breton, and they lived there for a good many years--some of them not too long, probably ten, fifteen years--and they heard of Newfoundland, you see. Well, Newfoundland was a free country for anybody. ... Probably eighty or a hundred years ago you could come to Newfoundland and you could take up two, three, four hundred acres and there was no tax, there was nothing to pay; it was yours...." While scholars have suggested several reasons for this migration from Cape Breton to Newfoundland, the chance of actually owning land and the good quality of the soil in the Codroy Valley seem to have been the principal factors. The Last Stronghold is, then, the story of a group of Highland Scots who came via Cape Breton to make their lives in the Codroy Valley of Newfoundland, and in particular it's the story of Allan MacArthur's family as pioneer settlers and keepers of tradition. The first half of the book sets the scene and the second half is chapters about traditional crafts, ritual and lore, stories and songs. Cape Breton readers will often note similarities with elements alive or remembered here. And the similarities and differences are a part of the pleasure of this book. The book will undoubtedly be enjoyed in that way even by those with only an English knowledge of Gaelic traditions. But first of all The Last Stronghold is Ron May Pontiac 147 Prince Street Sydney 539-6494 Hawkesbury Pontiac GMC



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