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The Cape Breton Shelf: John Lorne Campbell's Book *Songs Remembered in Exile: Songs Collected in Nova Scotia and Antigonish County* • A Review by Norman MacDonald

It's very unusual to find a Cape Breton-Scotland book that gives an insight into three major areas of the human experience; when a new work covers the people of Cape Breton from the early 1930's, the Barra which so many of their forefathers left in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the joyous conviviality of Cape Breton mill? ing frolics, then it is certainly worth sitting up and taking notice. Such a book is *Songs Remembered In Exile* by John Lorne Campbell of Canna, one of Scotland's leading folklorists and Gaelic song experts. As I sit in the Isle of Skye with the sturdy 282-page text on my lap, the cover displaying a black-and-white photograph of Washabuckt from the top of Beinn Bhreagh with the shore of Christmas Island in the distance, I thumb the pages instinctively in search of the 20 other photographs. I know that that will be the first reaction of most of the home-based and exiled Cape Bretoners fortunate enough to get their hands on this book. Indeed, the volume's photos alone are an evocative portrayal of Cape Breton over the past half century: Mgr. P. J. Nicholson of St. F. X., General Roderick MacNeil, the last chief of the MacNeils of Barra in the male line; a farm near Castlebay with two small children; old Mrs. Nell MacInnis of MacKay's Corner, Glace Bay, pictured in October, 1937, grasping determinedly a small boy • and what a link with the Gaelic past that grip symbolises. Mrs. MacInnis (nee Ann MacDonald) was born in Rear Christmas Island in 1860 and with 21 songs in this book • most of them never before published in their Cape Breton versions • she is the best represented tradition-bearer. Ann MacDonald MacInnis' father Neil was the only one of the children of Iain Ruadh MacDonald, a native of South Uist and one of the Clan Ranald MacDonalds, to be born in Cape Breton, there being three older boys and two girls born in Barra. "Worthy to be classed with her best contemporaries in South Uist and Barra," is Campbell's assessment of Mrs. MacInnis as a Gaelic tradition-bearer. Though little knowing it, that small boy, who will today be barely 55 years of age, hung on, not only to a great singer of Gaelic song but also, according to the author's examination of her pedigree, to a scion of three distinguished Hebridean clans, MacDonalds, Macleans, and MacNeils. *Songs Remembered in Exile* makes few claims for the intrinsic excellence of most of its songs but it does make a case for their interest and importance in terms of the historical context in which they survived and were remembered. In this respect, the chapter which deals with emigration from Barra to Cape Breton between 1790 and the official bankruptcy in 1836 of General Roderick MacNeil, last chief of the MacNeils of Barra in the direct line, is particularly enlightening as it contains transcripts of letters, preserved on Barra, received by the parish priest of the island, Fr. Angus MacDonald, from both the General (1789-1863) and his father, Colonel Roderick MacNeil, whose death in 1822 resulted in a Decree which named all persons "immediately or remotely concerned" with the succession: "a document



of great genealogical interest," Campbell calls it though it has been "surprisingly ignored by the Clan MacNeil historians." The listing of the names here is quite likely to rekindle interest in the matter as the document was not among evidence considered by the Lord Lyon in deliberating the MacNeil succession in 1915. Fr. Angus left Barra in 1825 to become Rector of the Scots College in Rome and letters to him from his successor in Barra, lodged in the Rome library, also add significantly to our knowledge of Barra in the late 1820's. People were "actually starving, fainting away in different parts of the Island • had it not been for the cockles of Tra-Mhore (Traigh Mhor), there would have been hundreds dead this day in Barra," the priest wrote John Lorne Campbell and Margaret Fay on 7 October 1827. Shaw, husband and wife, aboard their motor yacht, the Gille Brigtime, 1935 Many interesting matters are examined in the one-fourth of the book which does not deal directly with the songs: the reader is given original and analytical history; fascinating travelogue in the extracts from the author's diary on the first visit which he and his future wife made to Cape Breton in 1932, and previously published reports of their trips in 1937 and 1953; the writer's own Census of the numbers of Gaelic speakers in Cape Breton and Prince Edward island in 1932 conducted on such a basis as would put to shame most university social science surveys of the period; succinct character portraits of his many informants, among them Nova Scotia's two outstanding Gaelic literary figures- Jonathan G. MacKinnon (d. 1944), editor of the all-Gaelic newspaper *IVlacTalla* and the Rt. Rev. Patrick J. Nicholson (d. 1965), Professor of Physics, University President and a folklorist whose status in that field is considerably enhanced by this book both by the evidence of his own assiduous collecting and by the dedication of the volume to his memory; evidence of the co-operation of most of the leading Gaelic folksong specialists of the century, among them Professor Delargy, Calum MacLean, the author's wife, Margaret Fay Shaw, and Seumas Ennis who was responsible for most of the tune transcription.

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