

[Page 36 - Neil MacNeil and The Highland Heart](#)ISSUE : [Issue 58](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1991/8/1

at the table. There he was astounded to discover that she had cut the ears and tail off the living pig and served them to him for his dinner. As Grandfather ate, the pig continued to shriek. Needless to say, Grandfather did not enjoy the dinner any more than did the unfortunate pig; but for the rest of his life he extolled the widow's spirit of hospitality. The charity of the people of Washabuckt was as simple and kindly as was their hospitality. It consisted in taking care of their own. It had a community spirit that is rare these days, anywhere. Their old folks, no matter how senile and decrepit, even if bedridden for years, were kept in their homes and made to feel welcome. Moreover, they were treated with respect. The same was true of the mentally deficient and the deformed. They were never permitted to feel burdensome; and in fact they seldom were, for they could be helpful about the farms and the homes. Widows and orphans were helped to live on in their own homes on their own farms. There were, of course, public institutions to take care of such persons; but they got no tenants from Washabuckt. The idea never occurred to these Scots, although they knew about the institutions. Nor did they like persons who did not take care of their own. There was the case of a wealthy merchant in Baddeck, who sent an aged relative to the poorhouse. Many of his customers deserted him at once, for they felt that he was not a fit person with whom to do business. They never trusted him again. The Washabuckt people enjoyed their charities, for they made them pleasant occasions such as another excuse for a frolic. Take for instance a planting frolic. The boys and girls of the neighborhood would gather on the farm of some widow or aged couple and would spend the long day planting the crops. If seeds, horses and implements were needed, these would be provided. Towards evening the girls would prepare a feast from baskets they had brought with them. After all had eaten well, fiddlers or pipers would appear and all would dance far into the night. Sometimes the affair might end in a good fight as some of the men would be certain to do some drinking and all loved fighting. There would be frolics for the fencing, the harvesting, the plowing, and the cutting of the winter's wood. These frolics took the place of the movies as sources of entertainment. The recipients of the charity always joined in the fun and there was never any condescension or humiliation about it.... Old Black Hector unwittingly expressed Washabuckt philosophy on his death bed. In his day Black Hector was a dashing young man with subtle humor and a roguish delight in flaunting the local social conventions. He married a charming and beautiful French lady from Arichat and proceeded to beget nine children. With a household full of bawling brats he left her and the community and from then on showed no more interest in his offspring than did Jean Jacques Rousseau, another lover of nature and the natural life, although unknown to Hector. When he was an old man and obviously dying, his French wife in her charity rushed to his bedside to nurse him and to prepare him for the end. She forgave him his trespasses, which were not



few, and when she had him ready to meet his God, Whom she hoped would be equally forgiving, she asked him: "What are you going to leave me. Hector?" With the old roguish glint in his black eyes, he looked at her for a moment and replied: "Ain't I leaving you the whole world! What more could you want?"... Our thanks to Neil MacNeil, Jr., Bethesda, Maryland, for supplying photographs of his father. And to Laura Peverill, librarian, U.C.C.B., for her help in obtaining information about Neil MacNeil, Sr. When *The Highland Heart* in Nova Scotia was first published, a book reviewer in *Queen's Quarterly* wrote: "It is not easy to build a work of literary merit around the commonplaces of everyday life. The writer promises much in his description of the snow-beleaguered country on a moonlit night in deep winter, seen when, while still a child, he drove with his father, aunt, and infant brother the nine miles from the station to the grandfather's farm. Then, with vivid narration, well chosen anecdotes, and close appreciation of the fundamental values of life, he fulfils this promise. It is to be hoped that other well-defined groups of our far-flung population will find writers of equal talent to tell their several stories." *The Highland Heart* in Nova Scotia is still available through book stores and gift shops. It can be ordered directly from the publisher, Formac Books, 5502 Atlantic Street, Halifax, N.S. B3H 1G4. *Highland Heart* sells for the extraordinarily reasonable price of \$6.95. WE BUY AND WE SELL AND WE'RE AS NEAR AS YOUR TELEPHONE Sid's Used Furniture Phone 564-6123 436 Charlotte Street, Sydney 36 The only key to trouble-free and long car life is regular and careful maintenance. For over 25 years, maintenance • solely of European cars • has been our occupation. if you don't wish to maintain your car, neither do we!! If you do, we'd like to help!! EUROCAR SERVICE LTD. 649 WESTMOUNT ROAD SYDNEY 564-9721