

[Page 42 - A Milling Frolic on the North Shore](#)ISSUE : [Issue 21](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1978/12/1

Thomas A. MacDonald: The custom was to have the cloth • the blankets and the home? spun • soaked in warm water and oatmeal. I don't know why the oatmeal. Then when the crowd came, they'd bring it out • they wouldn't wring it out dry at all • just dry enough so it wouldn't drip on your knees. And then as the milling went on, after 3 or 4 songs, the water would be pretty well out of it. And they'd come around and sprinkle more water over it. In some instances, like down at Wreck Cove where they had a regular milling board, with the big grooves, they used to have that and put it up in the different places where they'd have millings. But in most places all along here the people that were going to have a milling would always have lumber and make a milling board themselves. These would not have grooves. There weren't too many of the ones with grooves. They were just milling boards made on the same principle as the old time homemade washboards, ridges in them. That was the idea of it. It would mill the cloth more uniform, better. If you have a bunch of smooth boards on the milling board, well, if they wouldn't be good old-time millers on it, they'd just swish the cloth along and it wouldn't have too much effect on it. The old-time millers, they'd usually start off by giving it a light pounding first, give it a hit and pass it, rub it along, passing it to the next fellow, he'd do the same--and that was bringing the nap out and shrinking it. And then when they'd come to the last part, the finishing it up, they'd just hold it in their hands and pound it on the table • not pass it along at all, just pound it • that really shrunk it, you know, that last going off. I think the idea of not giving it too much pound? ing in the start, it would shrink it too much in a hurry and not bring the nap out. (Who would make the decision to change from pound and pass to holding it in place and pounding it?) Well, the fellow who was leading the singing. When they'd get to that point, he'd hang on and then every? body would hang onto the cloth and pound and pound it instead of passing. No one would tell us. He'd just hold tight and that was the signal. (Would the songs change?) No, the same songs, You'd get the same swing to it as you'd use for passing it. The table would be set up in the kitchen. The milling board was always put in the biggest room. And in some instances, I didn't see too many but it was quite com? mon • when time came to have something to eat • usually the milling tables were pret? ty big because they'd all have a long piece of cloth probably • you'd have prob? ably 10 or perhaps 12 on each side of the milling board • and the women would tell them to have a rest, we're going to eat. They'd take the whole thing to the milling board, take the cloth away, and they didn't have to move out of there. Very of? ten they'd have baked beans, sometimes po? tatoes and meat, potatoes and fish • but very often a great big pot of nicely baked beans. Eat it right at the milling board. Biscuits and perhaps brown baked, Boston baked beans • brown bread. Then when they'd be through, another bunch would sit up to . the milling board and have a feed. Milling would start in some cases very early in the evening • and usually some of the women would have perhaps 30 yards of homespun. That is for trousers and jackets. And that required 3 or 4, perhaps 5 hours of milling. And then perhaps 30 or 40 yards of blankets, which didn't require



so much milling. In that case they'd very of? ten have to start 4 or 5 o'clock in the evening in the fall of the year. Getting dark then, you know. And that would continue on till sometimes 2 and 3 o'clock in Where Better Service Costs No More MacLeod's FINA Baddeck WindowSf Doors?? Amiiings, Railings* Siding Modern Aluminum PrcxJucts lfeiton streett Sydner 562.1104 / 562-1105 A Shop for Cape Bretoners and Their Friends Island Crafts For a distinctive gift or souvenir item, visit our store. You'll like what you see. There is something for everyone and all items are made by Cape Breton hands. Open year round. 335 George Street, Sydney, Nova Scotia, BIP IJ?