

FOCUS: Beaton Institute of Cape Breton Studies

Cape Breton Island has one of the longest recorded histories in North America. Micmacs, French, Scots, English, Irish, Eastern Europeans and Asiatics have made significant contributions to its development. Therefore it seems strange that no archives was established on the island until 1960 when Sister Saint Margaret of Scotland, librarian at what is now the College of Cape Breton, began a small manuscript collection which she named Cape Bretoniana. The late arrival of an archives may be attributed to the lack of a centre of higher learning here before 1951. The Public Archives of Nova Scotia in Halifax managed to acquire documents relating to Cape Breton, but was hampered by distance and Cape Bretoners' desire to keep mementoes of their history at home.

That there was a need for a local archives had been proven by the rapid growth of this institution. The collection soon outgrew the College library and has been housed in two locations since 1960. The archives is now occupying a former automobile showroom in the centre of Sydney. Next year we will move to the new College of Cape Breton Campus where the archives will have six thousand square feet of space. The staff has grown to include an archivist, three full-time assistants and two volunteer workers.

Our collection represents every period in the history of Cape Breton. Manuscripts are divided into eighteen groups representing types of papers; for example, business papers, or, those of ethnic groups such as the Micmacs, or a period such as 1713-1758, when Cape Breton was "Isle Royale" and its capital was Louisbourg. Originally, papers had been arranged in collections according to donors, but the system broke down as the quantity of material increased. While our collection is of great interest to Maritimers, certain parts of it claim wider attention. Many people are aware of our papers which document the development of the mining and steel industries and related manuscripts on labour history and union development. The institute possesses papers from such organizations as the General Mining Association, Canada's first mining company, from the Dominion Iron and Steel Corporation, the United Mine Workers of America, the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, the United Steelworkers of America as well as personal papers of important labour leaders and politicians such as J.B. McLachlan and Senator "Billy" MacDonald. Closely allied to the development of unions in this area has been the growth of the co-operative movement. The Institute has the papers of both Father Moses Coady and Rev. J.J. Tompkins who laid the foundations of the movement. Other papers deal with early coal strikes, mining disasters and conditions and early arbitration awards.

Another important area of our collection involves material relating to the Celtic history of Cape Breton. This consists of fifteen hundred books, as well as pamphlets, plays, and manuscripts. A good deal of this documentation is in Scots Gaelic and a member of our staff is fluently bilingual. We also possess a valuable Gaelic manuscript collection, and of course complete runs of *MacTalla* and other Cape Breton Gaelic periodicals and newspapers. The wealth of material in *sgeulachdan* (folk tales) and music is our proudest possession for it deals with the roots of our Cape Breton identity.

The Beaton Institute is not simply called an "archives," for it serves the wider purpose of disseminating Cape Breton culture. Our aim is to provide a centre where Cape Bretoners can come to listen to and maintain their heritage. With this in mind, we are acquiring a tape collection which already numbers fifteen hundred tapes with three thousand separate items recorded. Sister Saint Margaret began the collection in the early 1960s, so that many bards, fiddlers and local historians now dead can still be heard. The collection touches on every conceivable phase of Cape Breton life, and copying is allowed. Since a good deal of Cape Breton culture is oral, these tapes play an irreplaceable role in our archives. To further our aims, the institute has begun a videotape collection. We began with filming step-dancers in



A display case at the entrance to the Beaton Institute, College of Cape Breton, showing some mining exhibits, including various artifacts, maps and plans. For the uninitiated, "Ciad Mile Failte" means one hundred thousand welcomes in the "Language of the Garden." (Raytel Photography, Sydney, N.S.)

order to record an art form now dead in Scotland, but preserved as a Cape Breton form of entertainment. We hope to be able to use the tapes to help in maintaining the purity of this art form. Our next project involves the videotaping of fiddling techniques, since the Cape Breton fiddler is as revered here as a banker in Toronto, and his role is just as important.

In other respects, we provide normal archival services. The College of Cape Breton accommodates our microfilming services and we maintain a microfilm collection of Cape Breton census returns, private papers and newspapers which include complete runs of the *Steel Worker*, the *Labour Leader*, and the *Steelworker and Miner*. We also have a collection of theses, and research and government reports dealing with Cape Breton. Our map collection of five hundred items boasts the DesBarres *Atlantic Neptune* and Cape Breton maps from the seventeenth century to the present. The Institute has a collection of prints, sketches, and paintings which include early and rare views of Cape Breton. The Institute maintains scrapbooks on topics such as steel, coal and the fishery, and a good file of newspaper clippings on a diversity of topics dealing with Cape Breton.

The reader need not ask if we are busy. A good deal of our time is spent answering inquiries. Since Cape Bretoners have spread to all parts of the world and because they all seem interested in their family connections, genealogical requests have been turned over to a full-time researcher.

With our growing activities, we are looking forward to our new quarters. Our aim is to complete the organization of our manuscripts and tapes before we move, while continuing to serve scholars and our community. If you visit we can guarantee a cup of Cape Breton tea and bonnach as well as an interested staff who will do all they can to help you. Our hours are Monday to Friday, 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., but we will be happy to extend our hours if necessary.

Robert J. Morgan
Beaton Institute of
Cape Breton Studies

Bob and Jill Parliament announce completion of their new facilities for conservation of paper and books.

**PARLIAMENT
BOOK
CONSERVATION**

3728 E. Hastings Street
Burnaby, B.C. V5C 2H5
291-1568

A complimentary brochure of services may be had by request.

***The
Association
of Canadian
Archivists***

**Announces the new membership
fee schedule:**

Professional	\$30.00/annum
General	20.00
Student	15.00

Cheques or money orders should be sent to:

ACA Membership
University Archives
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Canada S7N 0W0

✓ organized representation

✓ *Archives Bulletin* ✓ *Archivaria*