COUNTY of INVERNESS

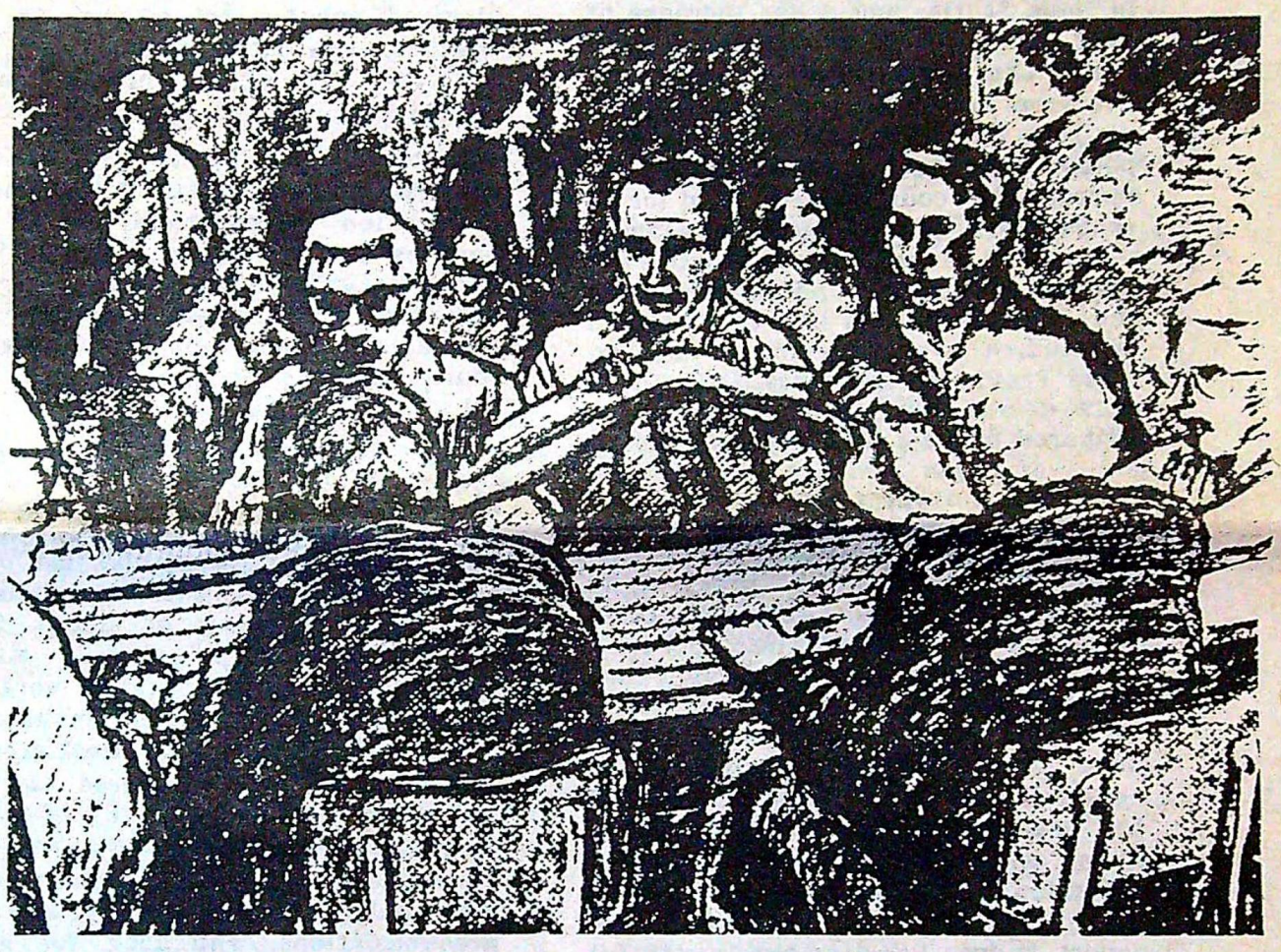
October, 1987
Vol. 8 No. 10

Partici~Paper

Covering culture, heritage, recreation, physical fitness, tourism, and community activities in Inverness County since 1979.

"We may travel far before seeing clearly the place we've called home."

- Ellison Robertson



Ellison Robertson, Òran Luaidh (The Milling), 1986, pastel, 22 x 30 in. (Gaelic transcription by James Watson.) Photo: Warren Gordon.

The Hidden Cape Breton

ARTS ATLANTIC, a magazine published by the Confederation Centre Arts Gallery and Museum in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, contains a significant article in the summer/fall 1987 issue called THE HIDDEN CAPE BRETON.

Written by writer-artist Ellison Robertson, the article deals with the demise of the Gaelic culture in Cape Breton and serious efforts to keep it alive." It may be the last chance we have" he believes, agreeing with Dr. John Ewards of St. Francis Xavier University who says that "Gaelic in Cape Breton seems to be nearing its final chapter as an ordinary spoken language."

Robertson sees hope, however." It may be that a combination of research, scholarship, contemporary art forms, business and technology can celebrate and help to maintain the unique Caelic culture of Cape Breton."

Robertson grew up in Cape Breton aware only peripherally of the traditions from which he descended: tunes on the fiddle,and badly pronounced Gaelic greetings. As so many others in his acquaintance, he had to go away for a time to find his identity. "We may travel far before seeing clearly the place we've called home," he says.

continued, page 7

The title THE HIDDEN CAPE BRETON was taken from THE HIDDEN IRELAND, a study of neglected and outlawed Irish poets of the 18th century. There is a reluctance of the Celtic people to commit their vast store of scholarship and knowledge to written records, because so much of the manuscript material had been supressed or destroyed through centuries of English conquest. Thus the Celts are 'hidden people.'

"The Celts are hidden people."

Viewpoint

Tourism: Summer of '87

by Mary Anne Ducharme

John MacIsaac, tourism minister, announced in August that this could be Nova Scotia's best tourist season of the decade. Don Blackwood of the Cape Breton Tourist Association, says that "if there's one area in the province where tourism is booming, it's Cape Breton." Marilyn Carter, President of the Central Nova Tourist Association says that Nova Scotia's major entry point at Amherst is "the busiest in five years."

However, there are puzzling factors in this picture. With an overall increase in motor vehicle traffic of 5% in Nova Scotia, and a net increase of over 18,000 passenger cars entering the Canso Causeway, there is a startling decrease since 1985 of over 34,000 visitors who were assisted by travel personnel at the Port Hastings Travel Bureau. This could be accounted for by repeat visitations, by increase in family visits or in several other ways, but the reasons are unclear and undocumented thus far, and trends like this need to be studied over a period of several years. Provincial statistics also point to a 4% decrease in American traffic as compared to a 7% increase in Canadian points of origin. Much has to be done to understand our tourist market and what factors would improve it.

The recent Devco report "Cape Breton Tourism Strategy" prepared by consultants for the Industrial Development Division of the corporation contains provocative material that should stimulate intensive discussion by those with tourism interests. The ideas need to be sounded thoroughly by people in every part of the Island, and the hearings scheduled next week in Mabou and Cheticamp need to be well-attended. Whatever agreement or disagreement may exist with the report, it deserves deep and thoughtful study in great detail.

What is a "typical tourist" in Inverness County?

What is a "typical tourist" in Inverness County? The surveys completed by tourism workers for the County this past summer provides some eye-opener hints as to the identity of the guests we share our part of the island with every summer. Trends in the past have changed because of the increased costs of gasoline and other commodities and a new profile is emerging, one that could significantly affect the way we perceive the traveller and how we propose to entertain and otherwise accommodate him.

In the past two or three decades, more young people could afford to travel cheaply, bringing along the whole family, and they tended to have camper-trailers, or tents, and economy was important to them. They didn't seem to mind "roughing it" and some enjoyed biking and hiking and other physically demanding sports or entertainments. Others liked "tail-gate picnics," spent a lot of time at the beaches, and more often opted for activities in which children could participate.

Now the perception is that keying tourism to unpredictable weather-controlled attractions, such as beaches and hiking is self-limiting, and that auto-touring is our largest potential. Culture and heritage are increasingly important, and walking tours seem to be the wave of the future.

Now travel to a destination at any great distance from home is affordable by a much smaller segment of the population, frequently those with above average incomes of $30,000. per year and up. Over 60% of the individuals in a tourist sampling of about 200 individuals this summer were professionals or white collar workers who had already "achieved" financially and were aged 40 or over. Most groups travelling together numbered two to four individuals and only 18% of those surveyed were travelling with children. They like to stay at the better motels and like Bed and Breakfast accommodations, and look for good restaurants. They also like to park their luxury recreational vehicles in the best campgrounds. On the average, they will spend four days in Inverness County and a group will spend approximately $100. a day.

A significant number retired

A significant number of individuals, one fifth of the total, were retired and were on their first visit to Cape Breton. They came for sightseeing, relaxation, heritage, and the friendly reputation of the local people. Tour buses are gaining in popularity for the retired segment of the tourism industry, and there is a growth in Elderhostel programs which are geared to the demands of older people who are seeking more depth in knowlege and experience of their destination areas.

All of this paints a different tourism picture, if the aim of facility operators is to find and please his potential guests, and to compete in a tourism market which in the 80's caters to a more affluent and very discriminating travelling public.

Most of the tourists in the survey learned of Inverness County "by word of mouth" or through the Nova Scotia Tour Guide or because of friends and relatives. A surprising 20% of those interviewed were from Ontario, as compared to 11% from Nova Scotia.

In a larger sampling of 5,000 individuals who completed form surveys placed in overnight accommodations, Ontario was again shown as a significant contributor to Inverness County tourism. The Nova Scotia percentage in this sampling was 32%--closer to the norms shown in statistics gathered by the Cape Breton Highlands National Park in previous years.

two-thirds have Canadian points of origin

Ontario contributor to County tourism

In all about two-thirds of our tourists have Canadian points of origin, with Ontario leading, then Quebec, and with a surprisingly low New Brunswick percentage which is roughly equivalent to visitors originating from Alberta.

One third of the tourists completing the form survey were from the United States, lead by Massachusettes, then New York, Maine, Maryland, followed by Florida, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. European visitors comprised a small percentage of the total, originating in the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Holland and other points.

continued, page 6

Partici-Paper

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Special thanks to the Port Hood Post Office for cooperation in distribution.

NEXT DEADLINE:
October 26

NEXT PRINTING:
November 6