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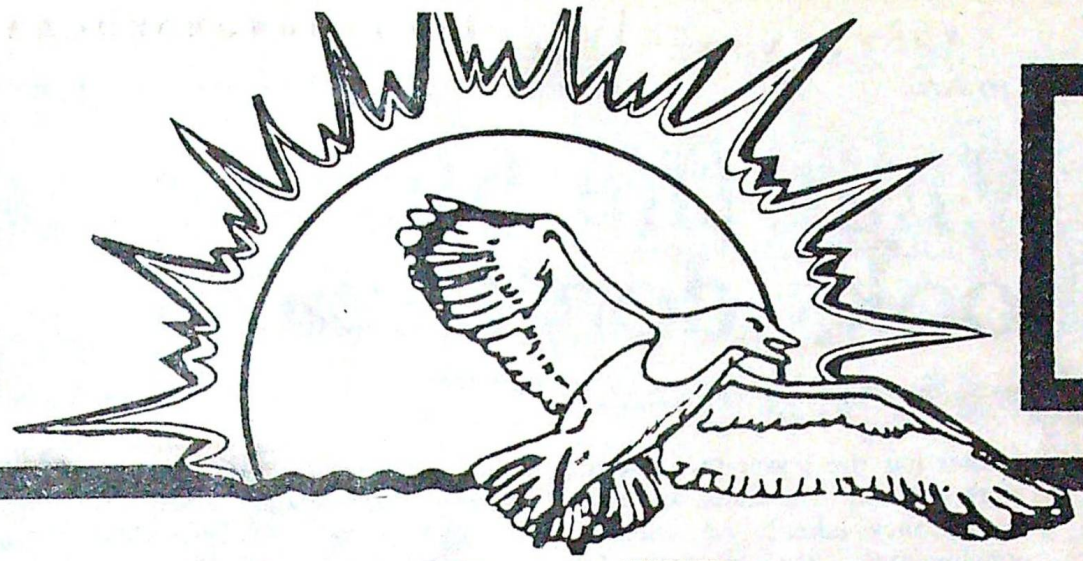

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Partici-Paper

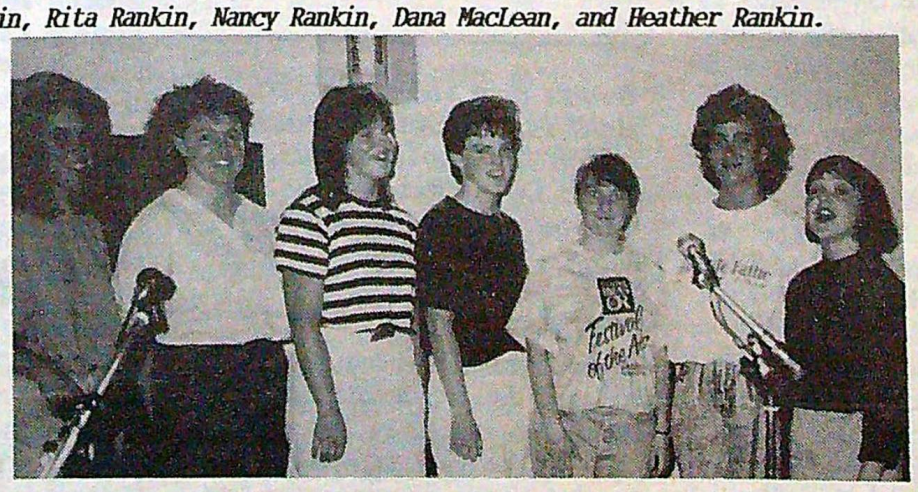
October 1990 Volume 11, no.10

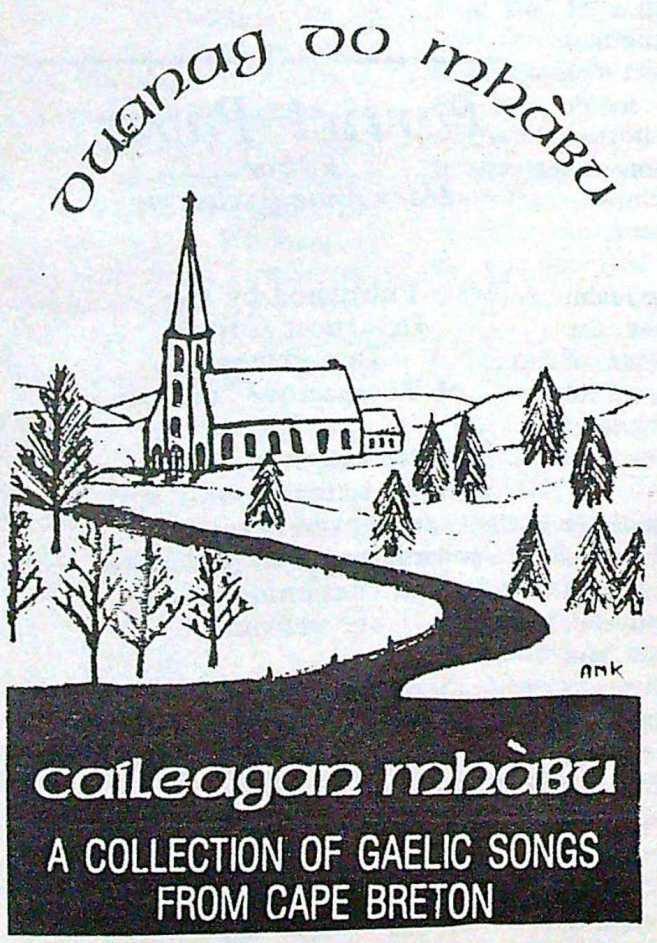
A free monthly newspaper for the people of Inverness County since 1979

Our Songs Shall Rise

Duanag Do Mhàbu, A Song from Mabou, is a new tape of 12 traditional Gaelic songs familiar to generations of Cape Bretoners. It is music that rises from the natural gifts, the identity, and the culture of the people of Mabou.
See story, p. 3

Caíleagan Mhàbu, the Girls of Mabou, carried home prizes galore from Mod Ontario in 1986. They have kept Gaelic alive and young with their many performances through the years. Standing left to right are: K.C.Beaton, Nancy Rankin, Heather Rankin, Dana MacLean; seated are Mary Rankin, Leona Beaton, Suzanne MacDougall (pianist), Karen MacDonald, and their director Maureen Rankin MacKenzie. In the recent photo below are, l. to r.: Suzanne MacDougall, Christina MacEachern, Mary Rankin, Rita Rankin, Nancy Rankin, Dana MacLean, and Heather Rankin.





From the Editor

What the history books don't teach

"Education which is simply intellectual taxidermy is worthless"
-William Donaghy

Frank Macdonald's Comment in the September 5th issue of *The Oran* was about students of Canadian history in the future reading about The Year of the Barricade, the confrontation at the Kahnesatake settlement near Oka, Quebec.

Cultural awareness week, October 15-21, is an appropriate time to think about a barricade in our schools that is not exactly enhancing to the cultural life of people here. It is a barricade that keeps us from our own history.

History is the essence of our culture and identity; it is knowledge that belongs to us. We have the right to learn about it in school, whether we are of European background, Blacks, Natives, or of whatever origin. It is valuable to our progress in two ways: so that we can learn about and avoid the mistakes of the past; and so we can celebrate all the positive elements of who we are.

On one side of the barricade are textbook writers, curriculum planners, and teachers with ineffective methodology in teaching history. On the other side, is a great blank yawn of indifference by most students and their parents. To them the barricade is a non-issue.

There are, definitely, exceptional teachers who have the skill to sweep away the dross of imaginatively barren textbooks, and "dark ages" policies about curriculum. However, many history teachers are scarcely better informed than the students.

Part of the reason for this is that in Nova Scotia there is no integrity in teacher qualification in the various subjects. A teacher is supposed to be able to teach any subject with equal ability. So the teacher without the personal interest, appropriate methodology, and background of knowledge is naturally going to stick to the uninspired textbook "facts."

Of course, students doodle and squirm through classes, almost chloroformed with the tedium about an abstraction of "they" who did obscure, stupid things "back then." Neither textbook nor teacher has the power to ignite a spark between their minds and the history they inherit. An endless conglomeratic bag of facts is poured into their unwilling heads. These facts are forgotten the moment after the next test.

"Education which is simply intellectual taxidermy-- the scooping out of the mind and the stuffing in of facts is worthless," said William Donaghy, president of a Massachusetts University, "The human mind is not a deep freeze for storage, but a forge for production; it must be supplied with fuel, fired and properly shaped."

Not only are most textbooks boring; the printed "facts" in them frequently are highly biased in selection and emphasis. Textbook writers, either knowingly or in innocent error, often propose prejudice and call it fact. Worse, they leave whole pages of history conveniently blank if the issues and events are not flattering to the dominant culture.

It is healthy for students to know that the version of history they are reading in their text is the invention of a group of editors who are basing their selection of facts on the inventions of historians. In fact, as Henry Ford observed, much of textbook history is "bunk."

Textbooks, of course, are useful tools, and they must be abundantly available to students, far more abundantly than they currently are. Students should have many sources available to them so that they can see that facts in textbooks are more often ideas in conflict.

In his own view each student is the centre around which the world revolves, and it is in this centre that his perception of history must begin.

Methods must be used that teach students the intellectual *skills of history*, so that they can discern bias, and be able to observe and question. They should learn first about themselves: who they are, what their ideas and attitudes are, and why. Too few students are sent to their own families and communities to explore their own immediate history. Yet this is the most obvious place to start learning the skills of history. In his own view, each student is the centre around which the world revolves, and it is in this centre that his perception of history must begin, not with ancient Greeks, or even the Norse Voyages. From the centre of self, the mind grows slowly outward-- this is well-known by child psychologists. If this is true, we teach history backwards. It should be taught starting with the present.

While we have to avoid lies in history, a refusal to go beyond facts is a thwarting of the whole truth. When the facts are forgotten, and most of them will be, even among the well-educated, what remains of value to the student?

There are many worthwhile objectives in studying history. A habit of inquiry and perception; ability to understand the present; ability to think in terms of concepts and issues; developing personal and societal ethics; ability to see and identify with many points of view, and to have human compassion for the struggles of others. If the student is stultified with facts to the neglect of imagination, he will never understand, for instance, how a man could write "all men are created equal" with complete conviction and still own a slave.

"The past lies as much in the realm of the imagination as does the future." The words are those of German architect and author Paul Zucker, as found on a placard at Fortress Louisbourg.

If the student is not imaginatively involved, not harrowed and outraged by apartheid in South Africa, or the Acadian Expulsion, or the Highland Clearances and sees no connection with these to himself and his own thinking, what is the point of learning about them at all? Can this student, for instance, make the leap of recognition and see a similarity between these events and how Native people have been treated in Canada?

Not long ago, Natives were referred to in the textbooks as "pagan savages" in need of the salvation of Christianity. What the books still do not adequately deal with is that quite a large number of these "Christians," whether through misguided or uncharitable motives, undermined the quality of life for Natives, and systematically robbed them of their lands, their livelihoods, their identity and culture, their language, and their right to determine their own future.

They too lived through "Clearances" "Expulsions," "Apartheid," but all of this human suffering is given no room in the textbooks.

Textbooks do nothing to show issues like the Donald Marshall Case in the context of reality.

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Next deadline:
October 29

Partici-Paper

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Published by the Inverness County Department of Recreation/Tourism

Contributions of articles, photos, letters dealing with issues and opinions, information and promotion about community events are welcome.

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Printed by *The Pictou Advocate*