

## The Saving of Lukey's Boat: Part II

by Tony Stephenson

**Editor's Summary:** In Part I of this series, (CFMB, 1984, 18(2), 38-40) Tony Stephenson indicated that a Nova Scotia variant had somehow become placed as "the" Newfoundland version of "Lukey's Boat" in several important books of Canadian folk songs. Part II of this series chronicles Tony's efforts to develop a "Save Lukey's Boat" campaign. Tony is the Music Programme Coordinator for the Avalon North Integrated School District (Bay Roberts) Newfoundland.

Since the ascription of Newfoundland status to the Nova Scotia version of "Lukey's Boat" in Fowke and Johnston's Folk Songs of Canada the "false" version has appeared in three elementary school textbooks. These are: This is Music, MusiCanada and Canada is Music. All four of these books are widely used in Canadian schools today. Ironically, not only are mainland children going to grow up learning a "Newfoundland Song" that is a musical fraud in this respect, but Newfoundland children may be similarly affected as these books are also in use in Newfoundland. The end result could be that the true Newfoundland "Lukey's Boat" will be lost forever.

This problem is symptomatic of a much larger disease. Misrepresentation of the culture of an area, province or country, from a central authority that returns to its point of origin for educational purposes is nothing less than a serious crime; however unwitting the steps may have been that led to its perpetration. There are similar instances of this happening in relation to other educational areas, as well as in other examples of Newfoundland Folk Music. I was therefore determined to embark upon a course of action which would lead to the Newfoundland tune being restored to its rightful place in school music textbooks and songbooks.

The customary Newfoundland way to draw attention to any issue is to mount a campaign political-style. After all, politics is Newfoundland's favorite sport!

Five hundred lapel buttons, featuring the words "Save Lukey's Boat" and art work showing a green boat on the sea, and some musical notation were manufactured and sold for \$1.00 each while the cost (\$250.00) was met. The response to the campaign for other members of the general public in the Conception Bay and St. John's areas of Newfoundland was overwhelming, the local press and the CBC were informed and gave the issue suitable coverage. In addition I gave presentations to the meetings of two school boards.

It was intended that the main thrust of the campaign would take place at the annual C.M.E.A. Convention at Mount Allison University in May, 1983, when all the publishers

who had inserted only the Nova Scotia variant would be informed of the existence of the different Newfoundland tune. This did indeed happen. Three publishers were currently promoting new materials which included the Nova Scotia tune (Fowke and Johnston's version); GLC/Silver Burdett; "Musictime;" Holt Reinhardt; "MusiCanada;" and Gordon V. Thompson Ltd.; Each representative was presented with a resume of the facts and a lapel button. All agreed to include the Newfoundland tune or replace the Nova Scotia tune with it. Furthermore, lapel buttons and resumes were distributed to a great many of the delegates present. In addition I was asked to make a brief presentation on the campaign in two of the clinicians' sessions. The result of this was that, on the last day of the Convention, when one stood in a crowd, line-up, or among a small group of people, one could hear one out of every four people discussing the matter. I was informed later that one of the Assistant Music Consultants with the Toronto Board of Education had shown the resume to her superior back in Toronto; following which copies were ordered to be circulated to all the Toronto Schools!

It is hardly surprising that, when I returned to Newfoundland after the Convention, I felt a warm glow of satisfaction on having achieved my objective of "Saving Lukey's Boat." A second radio interview with the CBC confirmed this feeling to all who might have been listening at that hour; Lukey's Boat has indeed been saved!

Or so I thought!

Little did I realize that, when I went to open my office mail three weeks after the Convention; that the biggest battle was yet to come. A short letter from Gordon V. Thompson, Ltd., of Toronto informed me that their head man, John C. Bird, had sought the opinion of Helen Creighton, the renowned Nova Scotia folk-song collector on the matter. A transcript of her reply to Mr. Bird now follows:

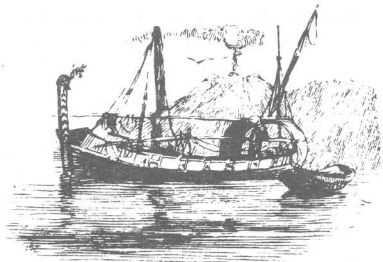
What a tempest in a teapot. Mr. Stephenson apparently doesn't realize that in the twenties songs were exchanged back and forth and many of them were never seen in print. They had wonderful

memories in those days and it was a proud boast that a man had to hear a song only once to remember it. And songs ran to many verses. However, everybody didn't have the same retentive memory or the same ear for music, and therefore there were bound to be changes. I have several books of Newfoundland songs, and the song he is so worried about is different in all the publications. Even the music is not always the same. So to suggest that I or anybody else would publish a false version or misrepresent their culture is ridiculous.

Now for my version. All of the songs in my first book, "Songs and Ballads from Nova Scotia," J. M. Dent, 1932, and reprinted by Dover Publications in 1966 were collected between June, 1929 and June, 1930. The title sounded like Loakie's Boat and that is what I called it. The singers were a man and wife who did not consider themselves singers, but they had heard this song and liked it. And so did I. They told me that it was made up about a man of that name who came from Lunenburg. If they had told me it was a Newfoundland song I would have noted the fact. So we have a puzzle. If the song was printed in 1929, or was it? The credit printed in the several books in my possession says, "Air from Mrs. Ira Yates, words from her, Mr. Andrew Young, Mr. Roberts and others, Twillingate, 1929." Apparently a number of people got together and you can imagine the fun they had working on it. But how did my singers get hold of it so quickly, and know it long enough to make any changes in the music? My guess is that some form of the song had been in the public domain for years. It had caught the fancy of the people mentioned, and perhaps Mrs. Yates wrote the tune down and may have improved on the original. They might also have composed some of the verses which vary in the different books. All of which is quite legitimate. When I hear the song now, it seems that singers combine the Newfoundland and Nova Scotia airs. Whichever one they do, it is a good song. My Dartmouth version has four verses and chorus. I

got the song from only one other singer but can't find it yet. It has five more verses.

My advice to Mr. Stephenson is to let well enough alone. After all these years everybody recognizes Lukey's Boat as a Newfoundland song. He might publish his Newfoundland version, but which one? And what good would that do? And please not to accuse honest collectors of publishing false versions or misrepresenting Newfoundland culture for which I have a high regard. Perhaps if you photocopied this letter and sent it to Mr. Stephenson he might have a better understanding of the matter. And advise him to ponder the fact of the song's circulation here at such an early date.



P. S. Would Lukey be a nickname for Luke, or would there have been a surname Lukey or Loakie? I must enquire in Lunenburg.

I've just been talking to Ed McCurdy who is living in Halifax now. You remember him as one of the continent's finest folk singers some thirty years ago, and still singing after a prolonged illness. He loves Newfoundland and has often sung the song we are discussing when visiting there. He says every time he sings it, somebody tells him he's got the wrong tune and they sing him their version. He himself sings a composite version of their tune and mine. He sand them both to me on the telephone and says they are structurally the same tune. The Newfoundland tune has embellished theirs, and that's all. But basically they are the same tune. And Ed certainly knows music.

Two weeks later I wrote this rebuttal of Dr. Creighton's letter to Mr. Bird:

Before I give you a point-by-point rebuttal of Helen Creighton's letter, I would like to make some general comments about it and the fact that you sought her views on the subject.

Dr. Creighton's views on the matter appear to be biased. Having seen "her" song (as she puts it) appear in 3 or 4 classroom music textbooks, she may not care for the idea of possible substitution by "my" version. Also, she is a Canadian folk-song collector and folklorist whose work never touched on Newfoundland (I wonder if she ever crossed the Gulf?). In any event, the folk-song aspect is not so much the crux of the matter here as is the aspect of indigenous culture in music education: it matters little whether Lukey's Boat is a folk song, or original piece, or a printed embellishment of something else, but that it is a *Newfoundland* song as far as the musical version "s d d d" goes.

The "Save Lukey Boat" campaign has the active support of Carol Harris, Music Consultant with the Newfoundland Department of Education; Professor Lois Choksy, the world-renowned Kodaly educator and author of "The Kodaly Method" and "The Kodaly Context;" and many other music teachers and academic teachers in both Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Two other publishers who used the Nova Scotia tune (s d r m) in their books, have already promised to add or substitute the Newfoundland (s d d d) music. Regardless of whether the Nova Scotia or Newfoundland music is the original, or a later variant, or neither, s d d d is the Newfoundland tune, being the one known throughout Newfoundland (as Dr. Creighton indicates on page 2 of her letter), and the s d r m, or Nova Scotia version, is not known in Newfoundland except to those who have heard it on the mainland or from Nova Scotia singers. On page 20 of your *Canada is Music 3-4*, you have printed the Nova Scotia tune and labelled it as a Newfoundland song. All we are

asking is that you substitute the Newfoundland tune. After all, the emphasis on that page is towards Newfoundland.

Now for the point-by-point rebuttal:

1. Paragraph 1, line 1: "What a tempest in a teapot" - It would be if it didn't have larger implications. Teachers in Newfoundland are sick and tired of receiving subsidized textbooks which show Newfoundland material wrongly captioned or described whereas all references to the mainland parts of Canada appear to be correct.

2. Paragraph 1, line 1: "Mr. Stephenson apparently doesn't realize .....in print." - I certainly do; this has little to do with the issue. Obviously such an exchange resulted in "Lukey's Boat" being known in Nova Scotia soon after Newfoundland, due in all probability to the active schooner trade of the time.

3. Paragraph 1, line 7: "I have seen ..... not always the same." - There are differences, but all within the framework of the Newfoundland tune. I have yet to see a hybrid version that has evolved into a folk variant, unless Dr. Creighton knows of such in some of the many books about which she has spoken.

4. Paragraph 1, line 9: "So to suggest ..... ridiculous." - If Dr. Creighton had read my explanatory not carefully, she would see that the word "false" was used only to refer to a publication that describes the Nova Scotia tune as being Newfoundland music, and then only in parentheses. The resulting inaccuracy was caused by a series of factors; namely Fowke and Johnston's belief in the Nova Scotia tune being the principal one and the text-book publishers presumably believing this to be authoritative enough. No blame or accusation is attached to any specific person, rather to the result of a series of events.

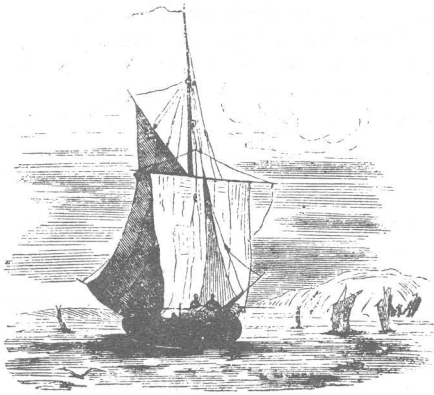
5. Paragraph 2, line 14: "My guess ..... for years." - On this one and only point will I concede that I may have erred. Although the Newfoundland tune could be the original, it is possible

that it existed in some form before that. However, this possibility does not alter the outcome, that s s d d whether evolved or original, became the Newfoundland tune or variant, and that s d r m to become the Nova Scotia tune or variant.

6. Paragraph 3, line 2: "After all ..... Newfoundland song." - Exactly, and here is the cause of the problem. How can it be a Newfoundland song if the tune is not a Newfoundland, but a Nova Scotia tune. Here Dr. Creighton appears to contradict, or destroy her own argument. If all school children are going to sing Lukey's Boat to a Nova Scotia tune, thinking that it is a Newfoundland tune; the s s d d real Newfoundland tune (incidentally voted aesthetically superior during the recent CMEA Convention by a secret ballot taken among the representatives of nine different publishers, result 5 to 4) could die through neglect, by not being known to Canada's youth.

7. Paragraph 3, line 3: "He might publish ..... that do?" - What applies in item 6 also applies here. As to which one, I'd like to see all those versions to which Dr. Creighton alludes. I suspect that, again, she is referring to differences within the framework of the same music. The versions of the Newfoundland tune that I have seen come from these sources: Gerald S. Doyle (1977), Mills (1958), Dominion Ale Songbook (1977) and Rumboldt (1969) - disc). With the exception of the pitch of the odd note, and the fitting of the words under the final r m f mm r d phrase, all these versions are definitely the same tune, known to most Newfoundlanders. Besides, why is Dr. Creighton so scornful of the idea of the Newfoundland tune being published in a textbook? This only endorses my suspicion that she regards the Nova Scotia tune as "her baby" and would feel personal loss at seeing it substituted.

8. Paragraph 3, line 4: "And please note .....Newfoundland culture." - What I stated in item 4 applies equally well to Dr. Creighton's remark here. Actually, I never accused any collec-



tor of publishing a false version. This is taking some of my remarks and misquoting them out of context.

9. Paragraph 3, line 8: "And advise ..... early date." - As I stated in item 5, I concede that the Newfoundland version may not be an original song, but this has, as I have already pointed out, little to do with the gist of my argument. 10. P.S. on page 2, line 7: "They are structurally ..... known music" - I am sure that any intelligent musician would disagree with this statement. How can a melody which has become well-known as: s/d d d r/ m f r t/ d . . 1/ s . . m/ s m f s/ f r s, f/ m m d r m/ d t s s/ d . . r/ m f m m r/ d . . be considered structurally the same as: s/ d r m s/ d r m l/ s . . . l/ s .

. . s/ d r m s/ d r m d/ r t d r/ m d s s/ d d d d r/ d . . ? If both were sung together they would make a dreadful cacophony - even the implied harmonies would clash violently. Rhythmically; the structure is similar, but that could be said of about 20% of all songs from West Country England! Even there the Newfoundland version has an extended ending.

Ed McCurdy may know music but I and many, many others who support me in this campaign probably know far more than he.

11. P.S. on page 2, line 8: "The Newfoundland tune ..... that's all." - Dr. Creighton seems to imply here that the original is the Nova Scotia tune and the Newfoundland variant merely embellished it. Obviously it could apply either way. In any event, Dr. Creighton is contradicting her earlier point about the song being in the public domain prior to 1929.

One final point: I have no objection to the inclusion of the Nova Scotia melody in the school texts, as long as: (a) it is *not* labeled or implied as being a Newfoundland tune, and (b) the very fine, and possibly finer Newfoundland tune is included in such textbooks.

I hope that this will convince you of the need to include or substitute the Newfoundland melody if you want a song that is a Newfoundland song *in all respects*, on page 20 of your textbook. Your accompanying remarks would suggest that you do.

Following this I did not receive a reply from Mr. Bird.

The scene of the action now switches to the University of Calgary which I attended in July 1983 to take summer courses in the Kodaly Concept of Music Education. The plot thickens as various notable personalities such as Dr. Tim Rogers, President of the Canadian Folk Music Society, Lois Choksy, Director of Kodaly Program, Richard Johnston, co-author of *Folk-songs of Canada* (1954), and Phil Thomas, B.C. Folklorist, become involved in the saga. To see how these heavyweights helped to bring about the final denouement of the Lukey's Boat drama, please read the next edition of the Canadian Folk Music Bulletin.