Old-time fiddling is a very important part of the heritage of New Brunswick having been brought here by the Scots, Irish, English and French.

In the early history of New Brunswick, the fiddler was often considered an important person in the community being called upon to play at weddings, house parties, dances and other functions. I can recall Earl Mitton, a great downeast fiddler from Fredericton, relating to me that he could remember travelling from village to village in his early days playing the fiddle. For payment the people would give him meals and a place to sleep.

The art of old-time fiddling is usually passed on through the family or through the community fiddler. In my own case, my dad, Curtis Hicks, was a fiddler and without his influence and encouragement I probably would not have given it a try.

In the early days, fiddling was confined to the home parlour, lumber camps and a few recordings. Today, although there is less opportunity to hear fiddling during regular programming on radio, there are more different sources. Besides some special old-time fiddling programs on radio, T.V., recordings, outdoor festivals, fiddle fests, contests, and workshops have all allowed for more opportunities to see and hear fiddling.

There is a strong interest in old-time fiddling in New Brunswick today. There are still more “home” fiddlers (reluctant to play in public) than public fiddlers. There are more note readers today than in the past although even today in New Brunswick tunes are basically learned and played by ear.

Two major influences on fiddling over the past 40 to 50 years have been Don Messer with his downeast style (incorporating Scottish, Irish, and French Canadian tunes) and the Cape Breton Scottish stylings. Many tunes have come from these sources. In N.B. Ned Landry (known for liveliness and good intonation) and Earl Mitton (liveliness and interesting composition) along with such fiddlers as Jerry Robichaud (originally from New Brunswick but now Waltham, Mass.), Ward Allen (Ontario), Quebec fiddlers
(such as Joseph Allard and Isidore Soucy) and American fiddlers like Tommy Jackson have greatly influenced fiddling over the past few decades. Recently an Acadian fiddler, Etienne Larocque, has become quite well known through a recording and his appearances on T.V. and at contests. Being a very smooth and accurate fiddler, he enjoys playing the downeast and Scottish stylings.

Although every fiddler has his/her own set of favourite tunes, there are many standard tunes including St. Anne’s Reel, Big John McNeil, Maple Sugar, Money Mush, Princess Reel. In my opinion, most fiddlers tend to play a tune the same way (with some variations such as grace notes and bowing techniques) probably because fiddlers today learn from tapes, records, and written music. Fiddlers of my father’s generation and before learned their tunes by ear from one another and not all fiddlers would “hear” the same tune in the same way.

Characteristics of good fiddling perceived by fiddlers:

— good bowing techniques
— smoothness
— good intonation
— warm and lively playing (shows enjoyment)
— danceable fiddling

Young people must be exposed more to old-time fiddling since it is they who will carry it on.

New Brunswick Discography

Ivan Hicks

× “Fiddling for Fun and Friends” ($9.00)
× “Friendly Fiddling the Maritime Way” ($9.00)
× “Purple Violet Fiddling” ($9.00)
× “It’s Bluegrass” ($9.00)
× “Fiddlingly Yours, Ivan” ($10.00)

Ivan Hicks, Bill Guest, Keith Ross
× “Swinging Fiddles” ($10.00)

Curtis Hicks
× “Portrait of an Old-Time Fiddler” ($9.00)

Etienne Larocque
× “O-Marcel-O” ($9.00)

Mac Brogan
× “Grand Lake Fiddling” ($10.00)

Elmo LeBlanc (Ste. Anne de Kent)
Has one album available (exact title unknown).

Winston Crawford (Sussex)
Has two albums (exact titles unknown).

Ned Landry (Sussex)
Has a number of albums out.

× above records can all be ordered as either albums or cassettes (except Etienne Larocque’s which is in album form only) from:

The Hicks’
157 Sussex Ave.
Riverview, New Brunswick
E1B 3A8

Add $2.00 for the first LP or tape and .50 for each additional item.