

MARITIME FOLK MUSIC

It was a privilege and a pleasure for the capacity audience of CAML members, CLA members and Sackville residents to hear the eminent Canadian folklorist, Dr. Helen Creighton of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, speak on Maritime folk music.

Dr. Creighton began by acknowledging her long and cherished association with Mount Allison University, impressing on the audience especially the gold mine of material available in the Mount Allison folk lore archives.

She then unfolded the fascinating saga of her folkloristic adventures. Dr. Creighton stumbled onto her career as a folklorist while in search of pirate legends for a magazine assignment. She became aware of the folk songs and legends of old Nova Scotia, and realized that nothing was written down anywhere, and that the singers were carrying the oral tradition with them to their graves. And so, Dr. Creighton determined to remedy the situation.

She began collecting songs and legends from all over Nova Scotia. In the days before the tape recorder, the transcription of the material was a long and arduous task. The advent of the tape recorder marked a milestone in the development of this phase of activity. The reciters and singers were at first somewhat daunted by the "new-fangled machine", but later became oblivious of its presence.

Dr. Creighton then related various anecdotes of how she came to know the performers. She frequently found it expedient to approach the women first in order to become acquainted with the family and to explain the purpose of her visitation. She was then free to request the men to sing or tell stories. Frequently, the family history and the background of the local settlement were elucidated as well. It was interesting to learn that invariably the men kept alive the oral tradition and performed for Dr. Creighton. Over the years, she made many firm friendships with the people she encountered on her folklore journeys.

The playing of various tapes of musical examples of the folksongs which Dr. Creighton collected, including the famous "Farewell to Nova Scotia", and the presentation of many slides of the reciters and singers, their families, and their villages which followed added much to the audience's understanding of Dr. Creighton's work and their enjoyment of her talk. In the gathering gloom of dusk, Dr. Creighton concluded, appropriately, with a ghost story.

The afternoon was most interesting and illuminating. It was a first encounter with source material and with the tribulations and the rewards involved in the gathering of such data for many of the audience present. In addition, the tenuous hold which contemporary society has on its folkloristic heritage was amply demonstrated. Dr. Creighton has been honoured throughout the land for her magnificent contribution towards the preservation of this heritage; her talk in Sackville was a thoughtful and evocative portrait of this contribution.

Cheryl Osborn