Chapter Nine

Nova Scotian Gaelic: More than a Fossil

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Abstract

The first Gaelic speakers from the Scottish Highlands arrived in Nova Scotia in 1773, and over the next 80 years, many thousands followed. In 1901, it is estimated that there were at least 50,000 Gaelic speakers in the province, but due to a variety of forces, including, until recently, the lack of a supportive language policy, only a few hundred native speakers remain, although increasing numbers are learning the language. By virtue of the patterns of migration and settlement, as well as the physical isolation of these communities for most of their history, many dialectal features of the regions of emigration were maintained in the new world. Observers have frequently commented on the cultural conservatism of these communities, and the perceived retention of older forms of cultural and linguistic expression. However, contact with other cultures and language forms as well as the new environment, resulted in change and distinct new world patterns. In recent years, the language has begun to receive more significant support, particularly in relation to language acquisition, and the valorisation of distinctive local forms of Gaelic linguistic and cultural expression has been an important part of such efforts.

Keywords: Scottish Gaelic dialects, Nova Scotia, language contact, language shift, language revitalisation, language planning

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1 Introduction

Nova Scotian Gaelic is a complex and challenging topic. Relatively little research has been done on it, and the most propitious time for doing the requisite fieldwork has long since passed. The number of native speakers in the province is now exceptionally small. According to the 2021 Census of Canada, there are less than two hundred who claim Gaelic as their mother tongue,[1] and the large majority of them are elderly and have few opportunities to use the language. There are no communities left in which the language is the usual means of daily communication (McEwan-Fujita 2013: 168). Thus, any research that could now be done on native speakers of Nova Scotia varieties would not be representative of the range of Gaelic once spoken in the province.

At the same time, Nova Scotian Gaelic has attracted some scholarly interest. This is partly due to its apparent conservatism and distinctiveness – as we shall see, some features of some Nova Scotian dialects are quite exotic from a contemporary Scottish perspective, offering tantalising evidence of how the language may have been spoken in districts of Scotland and, in particular, in some districts on the mainland of the Scottish Highlands from which the language has now essentially disappeared, such as Lochaber and districts surrounding the Great Glen. Dr John Shaw, the most important collector of Gaelic oral tradition in Nova Scotia, has noted what he describes as 'the striking degree of cultural conservatism among Cape Breton Gaels', something he attributes in part to the geographical isolation of that island (MacNeil 1987: xix), which by the early nineteenth century became the most important destination for Highland emigration, where Gaelic settlement was

[1] Two categories are identified, mother tongue speakers of 'Scottish Gaelic', of whom there were 130, (out of a total provincial population of 958,990), and mother tongue speakers of 'Gaelic' (likely speakers of Scottish Gaelic, but possibly of Irish, as the sort of Gaelic spoken was not otherwise specified), of whom there were 40 (Statistics Canada 2022a).

most concentrated, and where Gaelic has survived the longest in the diaspora. Dr Shaw also notes that

> Cape Breton is the most recent and far-flung outpost of the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* (Gaelic-speaking region), and it is a well-documented phenomenon that archaic survivals of social and cultural institutions are most likely to be found at the periphery of a given cultural area. (MacNeil 1987: xix)

The potential for Gaelic culture in Nova Scotia to give insight into older aspects of Highland culture has long been recognised. In 1937, for example, John Lorne Campbell, one of the most important folklorists and Gaelic scholars of the twentieth century, went to Nova Scotia to see what traditions from the Isle of Barra, where he had been living earlier in the 1930s, and the neighbouring island of South Uist had survived amongst the descendants of emigrants who had left those islands a century or more beforehand (Campbell 1990).[2] More recently, the distinctive fiddling and step dance traditions of Cape Breton Island have attracted considerable interest in Scotland. These musical and dance traditions are now viewed by some Scottish musicians as forms of cultural expression which have been maintained loyally and authentically in Nova Scotia but which, due to cultural change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Gaelic Scotland, and in Scotland more generally, have been lost there, and which might give insights into older Highland, and Scottish, traditions. The noted Scottish piper and pipe-maker Hamish Moore has been in the vanguard in looking to Nova Scotia for such insights and indeed inspiration, and was instrumental in setting up in 1996 the Ceòlas Summer School in the island of South Uist, in the Outer Hebrides, which every July features musicians, step dancers and, occasionally, Gaelic singers from Cape Breton.[3] Even before this, another Scottish musician

[2] For a biography of Campbell, see Perman (2010).

[3] See https://www.ceolas.co.uk/.

interested in the Cape Breton tradition, the fiddler Alasdair Fraser, had played a part in bringing the outstanding traditional fiddler Buddy MacMaster and the fine step-dancer Harvey Beaton to teach summer courses at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic college in the Isle of Skye.[4]

In the liner notes to his 1994 recording *Dannsa' air an Drochaid / Stepping on the Bridge* (Moore 1994), recorded in Cape Breton with leading Cape Breton traditional musicians, Moore claimed that 'the style of some Cape Breton fiddlers is thought to be fairly authentically eighteenth century Highland' (Moore 1994: 2) – a view shared, to some extent, by some scholars (Doherty 1996; Feintuch 2004; Dembling 2005). He noted factors which, he believed, had contributed to this conservatism, including: that many of the early Scottish settlers lived and worked in small tight-knit communities; that, in many cases, musicians are only two or three generations removed from an early Scottish settler; and, that the learning of the tunes and style was in many cases by ear and example. He also credited step-dancing, a form of percussive dance which almost certainly originated in the Scottish Highlands and was brought to Cape Breton in the main period of emigration to the island, roughly covering the first forty years of the nineteenth century, and which had largely disappeared in Scotland, for contributing to the distinctiveness of the musical style. He went on to claim that '[t]he style of playing the reel, the jig, and in particular the strathspey in Cape Breton today, is basically the same as it was in Scotland in the eighteenth century and before', and concluded by saying that he was grateful 'that Cape Breton exists and has preserved and held our music and dance culture in trust' (Moore 1994: 6).

However, no living culture is a fossil; all respond to the environment in which they develop, even conservative ones, such as the Gaelic culture of Nova Scotia. In the course of his fieldwork in the late 1970s and early 1980s, John Shaw was able to record items of Fenian lore that have their roots in the

[4] See https://projects.handsupfortrad.scot/landmark/alasdair-frasers-skye-fiddle-camp-1986-2016-30-years-old/.

shared Gaelic culture of medieval Scotland and Ireland, as well as a version of a medieval satire, 'Tromdhámh Guaire' ('Guaire's Troublesome Guests'). However, he also notes the existence of a large number of tall tales whose origins, he hypothesised, may lie in the cross-cultural contacts which were part of the storytelling sessions in the lumber camps of Maine, Labrador and Ontario, where Cape Breton Gaels were employed from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth (Shaw 2007b: 58–59). Hamish Moore has noted that an important factor that makes Cape Breton music so distinctive is what he describes as its unique piano style used in the accompaniment to fiddling and, increasingly, to piping (Moore 1994). This, however, is a wholly North American innovation which followed from the introduction of pump organs to rural Cape Breton homes in the latter part of the nineteenth century and then of pianos, in the early twentieth century. Dr Chris McDonald, an ethnomusicologist at Cape Breton University, has recently suggested that the dynamic form which such accompaniment has taken owes much to styles of stride piano playing most commonly associated with Afro-American blues, which became popular in North American culture in the first half of the twentieth century (McDonald 2017). As with their Scottish cousins, Nova Scotian Gaels ventured far and wide on the new continent, and regardless of how isolated Cape Breton remained for a good part of the century, the school, the movie house, and radio and television ensured that such isolation was not complete. The Cape Breton fiddling tradition is itself a dynamic one which continues to evolve, thanks to a variety of social and cultural forces (Doherty 1996; Herdman 2008). This tendency of culture to be shaped by its environment and to evolve accordingly is, of course, also true of language.

The question of Nova Scotia dialects has also taken on increased importance in the province itself. In recent years, there have been renewed efforts to revitalise the Gaelic language, and there is some evidence that these efforts are having some impact. Language acquisition programming, both

within the school system and in higher education and adult education, has been central to these efforts. The issue of what forms of the language are being learned has not been explicitly addressed, but as we shall see, there is some evidence that the valorisation of what are perceived to be local forms is a desideratum for many involved in current revitalisation efforts. This raises the question, however, of what, precisely, are 'local forms'. The question of dialects is, therefore, of ongoing relevance in Nova Scotia.

2 Gaelic Emigration to Nova Scotia

To understand Nova Scotian Gaelic dialects, it is essential to understand something of the patterns of Gaelic emigration and settlement. The first significant Gaelic migration to Nova Scotia took place in 1773, when the ship *Hector* arrived in Pictou Harbour with almost 200 emigrants, mainly from Wester Ross in the Scottish Highlands, on board. Following the conclusion of the American War of Independence in 1783, Nova Scotia became the most important destination for Gaelic-speaking emigrants from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and it has been estimated that perhaps at least 50,000 settlers arrived between the 1780s and the 1840s (MacKinnon 2001: 20; Kennedy 2002: 20–21; Ó hlfearnáin 2002: 65).

For the purposes of our discussion, three particularly important aspects of Gaelic migration to Nova Scotia should be noted. First, group migration was typical of Gaelic migration: extended family groups and whole communities would emigrate together and tended to settle in close proximity to each other. Second, these new communities were supplemented by chain migration: once a group established themselves, they would be reinforced by subsequent waves of settlers originating in the same communities. Third, these new communities existed in relative isolation. The result was that they maintained distinct identities, and identities that were closely associated with those from which the migrants had originated (Dunn 1953: 141–142; Kennedy 2002: 129–130; Nilsen 2010a).

Over the course of the twentieth century, Gaelic declined relentlessly. Research on the 1901 census has indicated that there were at least 50,000 Gaelic-speakers in Nova Scotia (Dembling 2006). By 1931, the number in Nova Scotia had fallen to about 24,000 (MacKinnon 2001: 19). In the 1980s, Elizabeth Mertz conducted research in two distinct districts of the island and found that the language had reached a 'tipping point' in the 1930s, because parents had made the decision not to raise their children with Gaelic (Mertz 1989: 103–104). The reasons for this are not wholly clear, but the Great Depression may have led parents to conclude that English was essential to economic advancement, and that Gaelic was either irrelevant or a burden. Once this tipping point was reached, language shift from Gaelic to English accelerated, and it has been estimated that the number of Gaelic-speakers was halved with each passing decade, such that by 1971, the Canadian census recorded only 1,400 Gaelic-speakers in the province (Dunmore 2023: 56–57). The 2016 Canadian census revealed that there were only 910 Gaelic-speakers in the province, of whom only 145 people claimed it as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada 2017), and as noted earlier, the 2021 census presented a similar picture. Learners are now clearly essential to the future of the language in Nova Scotia. Thanks to recent initiatives, discussed near the end of this paper, there has been a significant growth in the number of people learning the language, with over 4,000 in the province participating in some form of language acquisition programming since 2017.[5]

3 Gaelic Dialects in Scotland

To appreciate more fully the discussion of Gaelic dialects of Nova Scotia, brief mention must be made of Gaelic dialects in Scotland. A considerable amount of research has been done over the years on Gaelic dialects of

[5] Personal communication with Lewis MacKinnon, Director of the Office of Gaelic Affairs, Nova Scotia, 21 December 2022.

Scotland. For example, we have a large number of detailed studies of particular dialects and dialect features, including: on the Gaelic of the Outer Hebrides as a whole (Borgstrøm 1940), as well as of individual islands in that archipelago, including Barra (Borgstrøm 1937), South Uist (Mac Gill-Fhinnein 1966), and the district of Leurbost, on the Isle of Lewis (Oftedal 1956); on the Gaelic of Skye and Ross-shire (Borgstrøm 1941), and within Ross-shire on the Gaelic of Gairloch (Wentworth 2003); on the Gaelic of Sutherland (Grannd 2013); on various aspects of the Gaelic of Argyll (Holmer 1938), as well as on particular areas in Argyll, including Islay (Grannd 2000) and Kintyre (Holmer 1962); on the Gaelic of Glengarry (Dieckhoff 1932); and on the Gaelic of various peripheral areas from which the language has now largely disappeared, such as East Sutherland (Dorian 1978), East and West Perthshire (Ó Murchú 1989 and 2021), and the Isle of Arran (Holmer 1957). As part of the Linguistic Survey of Scotland, a Survey of the Gaelic Dialects of Scotland was undertaken, which recorded dialect variation in Gaelic in the Scottish Highlands and Western Isles. The fieldwork was conducted mostly between 1950 and 1963, and data from 207 points, which included mainland districts where the language was extremely threatened, were finally published in five volumes in 1994–1997 (Ó Dochartaigh 1997: 68). Mention should also be made of the *Historical Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic* at the University of Glasgow, a project first established in 1966, under the auspices of which a huge amount of lexical data was gathered from a variety of informants in a large number of different locations; this valuable material has now been published in the fieldwork archive of the *Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic* (*DASG*) (https://dasg.ac.uk/fieldwork/).[6]

A proper treatment of Gaelic dialects is well beyond the scope of this paper. However, the following key points should be made. First, as Prof.

[6] For further detail on the relationship between the fieldwork project and DASG, see Ó Maolalaigh (2016), and for the follow-on inter-university project Faclair na Gàidhlig, see http://www.faclair.ac.uk).

Wilson McLeod has pointed out, compared to many minoritised languages, and most notably Irish, dialectal diversity has not been a matter of significant controversy in relation to Gaelic in Scotland, partly because Gaelic has, or at least has been perceived to have, relatively little dialectal variation (McLeod 2017: 183). Prof. Kenneth Jackson, who was director of the Survey of Gaelic dialects, drew a distinction, which has generally been accepted by later researchers, between 'central' dialects – essentially the Hebrides as far south as Mull, most of Ross-shire, Assynt, Inverness-shire, western Perthshire, and mainland Argyll north of Loch Awe – and 'peripheral' dialects – Caithness and Sutherland, Braemar, eastern Perthshire, the rest of mainland Argyll, Islay, Jura, Arran, as well as Moray-shire and Strathspey (Jackson 1968: 67–68). In spite of this, and the high degree of mutual intelligibility of all dialects, it has also been pointed out that Gaelic-speakers are acutely aware of dialectal distinctions at the local and wider levels, and certain lexical features, and 'blas', or what might be called 'accent', are picked up on (Gillies 2008: 231).

4 Sources of Evidence and Previous Research

One of the major obstacles to the development of a scientific understanding of Nova Scotian Gaelic dialects is that, unlike in Scotland, no comprehensive dialect survey was ever undertaken. Indeed, it is a shame that, unlike the University of Glasgow *Historical Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic* project, the Gaelic dialect survey was not extended to Nova Scotia, as there were still significant numbers of speakers, and a much wider range of local dialects existed then than do today. There has only been one in-depth survey of a dialect, Gordon MacLennan's doctoral dissertation, completed at University College Dublin in 1974, which described the Gaelic of an informant in Dunvegan, Inverness County, Cape Breton (Mac Gill-Fhinnein 1974). In 1946, Prof. Jackson had worked with two informants from near Port Hood, Inverness County, and he provided some useful notes on their dialect. Prof Seosamh Watson of University College Dublin did significant fieldwork in

the 1980s and 1990s with informants in a number of localities in Cape Breton and has published several very useful articles based on this fieldwork (Watson 1999; 2005; 2010a, b).[7] Dr Seumas Grannd, formerly of Aberdeen University, also conducted linguistic fieldwork in the early 1990s in six different locations in Cape Breton (Grannd 1998). And Prof. Kenneth Nilsen of St Francis Xavier University conducted significant fieldwork with both an Antigonish County informant and several in Cape Breton (Nilsen 1996 and 2010a). As part of the *Historical Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic* project, a fieldworker was sent to Cape Breton in the 1960s, and he was able to collect a significant amount of interesting lexical material, although that data awaits proper analysis (Ó Maolalaigh 2016: 256). Given the very small number of remaining speakers, any dialectal research that could now be conducted would give a very partial picture of the language in Nova Scotia. Large numbers of field recordings have, however, been made by folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and ethnologists,[8] and if work on this body of material were undertaken, the data contained in such recordings would provide very valuable primary sources for dialectal research.

Gaelic-speakers from elsewhere have offered very useful insights into the question of dialectal diversity within Cape Breton, but also the degree to which those dialects resemble those of the Old Country. On his first visit to Nova Scotia, in 1932, the outstanding Gaelic scholar and folklorist John Lorne Campbell of Scotland (1906–1996) noted that Jonathan MacKinnon, a native of Whycocomagh, Cape Breton, and editor of the long-running Gaelic periodical *Mac-Talla*, had reported that 'the descendants of the settlers had preserved the peculiarities of their original dialects, e.g., Lewis, Harris, Uist,

[7] Prof. Watson's Nova Scotia recordings have all been donated to DASG, and some of these have been digitised.

[8] Important collectors include John Lorne Campbell (Campbell 1990), Charles Dunn (Innes and Hillers 2011), and John Shaw (Campbell 1981; MacNeil 1987; MacLellan 2000; Shaw 2007a). For a brief description of such fieldwork, see MacNeil (1987: xviii-xix).

Barra and Skye'. Campbell was able to confirm this himself on a subsequent visit, in 1937 (Campbell 1990: 25). Of MacKinnon, whose parents were born in the Isle of Skye, Campbell said the following: 'Bha Blas Chanada air a Bheurla, 's blas an eilein Sgitheanaich air a' Ghàidhlig aige.' / 'In English, he had a Canadian accent, but in Gaelic, he had an Isle of Skye accent.' (Fear Chanaigh 1950: 3). Campbell prefaced his description of his 1937 visit to Nova Scotia with these comments:

> Today, Cape Breton appears to a Highland visitor as a land of strange incongruities; a country where one can hear the Gaelic of Lewis, Skye or Barra against a seemingly most inappropriate background of dense spruce forest; a Highland community where there are no lairds; where the descendants of settlers from Skye live beside Micmac Indians, the aboriginal inhabitants of the Maritime provinces; where the people still refer to themselves as 'Lewismen', 'Skyemen', Uistmen', 'Barramen', and so on, although none of them have ever seen these places; where many can describe perfectly, from their grandparents' reminiscing, places in the 'Old Country' which they have never seen. Where, in fact, an inherited nostalgia and old habits and customs have survived in a most astonishing way. (Campbell 1990: 38)

While attending a demonstration of waulking cloth – or a 'milling frolic', as these are called in Cape Breton – on the North Shore, an area settled primarily by Lewis and Harris folk, Campbell noted that before the waulking started, a humorous anecdote or two was told by a Mr Kenneth MacLeod 'in excellent Harris Gaelic' (Campbell 1990: 43).

Prof. Charles Dunn of Harvard University made several trips to Cape Breton in the 1940s, and made a number of field recordings, although his interests were primarily ethnographic and folkloric, rather than linguistic. His observations are strikingly similar to those of other informed observers:

> The Highland emigrants from each particular district of Scotland settled in groups together when they came to Cape Breton. Thus Barra men settled around

> Iona; Lewis men settled around St. Ann's Bay; North Uist people, around Mira Ferry; South Uist people, around Grand Mira; and so on. The people of these clannish settlements naturally preserved the particular dialect of Gaelic that the first settlers brought with them from their own individual region of the Highlands and Islands. Accordingly, today, more than a hundred years later, the offspring of these settlers still speak Gaelic with a Lewis or a Barra or a North Uist or a South Uist accent, depending on the locality in which they were reared. (Dunn 1953: 141–142)

John Alick MacPherson, a Gaelic-speaker from North Uist, first came to Cape Breton in 1972, and lived there for a considerable period of time thereafter. He noted the following in his 2011 autobiography, *Steall à Iomadh Lòn*:

> Tha dualchainntean Cheap Breatainn a rèir dè a' cheàrn den t-seann dùthaich às an tàinig na daoine a thuinich sna sgìrean an toseach. Air a' Chladach a Tuath tha blas Gàidhlig Leòdhais is na Hearadh air cainnt na coimhearsnachd, blas Uibhist air Gàidhlig Mira is Framboise, agus blas Mhòrair is Lochabair air Gàidhlig Mhàbou is Inbhir Nis. Chan eil duiligheadas sam bith aca a chèile a thuigsinn. Ach a dh'aindeoin sin cluinnidh tu feadhainn ag agairt gu bheil na dual-chainntean tur eadar-dhealaichte. Agus tha feadhainn eile a' cumail a-mach gu bheil Gàidhlig Alba agus Gàidhlig Cheap Breatainn cho diofraichte ri cailc is càise. Tha beachdan meallta mar sin a' dèanamh barrachd cron na feum. The e toirt tlachd do chuid a bhith creidsinn gur càise bàn a' ghealach. Cha dèan an glug Eigeach a-mhàin Gàidhlig Cheap Breatainn eadar-dhealaichte o Ghàidhlig na h-Alba.
>
> 'The dialects of Cape Breton accord with the part of the old country from which the people who first settled in those districts came. On the North Shore, the accent of Lewis and Harris Gaelic can be heard in the speech of the community, a Uist accent in the Gaelic of Mira and Framboise, and a Morar and Lochaber accent in the Gaelic of Mabou and Inverness. They have no trouble in understanding each other. But in spite of that you hear some claiming that the dialects are completely different. And others claim that the Gaelic of Scotland

> and of Cape Breton are as different as chalk and cheese. Misleading opinions such as that are doing more harm than good. It gives some pleasure to some to believe that the moon is made of white cheese. The 'Eigg Cluck' alone does not make Cape Breton Gaelic different from the Gaelic of Scotland.' (my translation) (Mac a' Phearsain 2011: 284)

I will have more to say on the 'Eigg Cluck', or the *glug Eigeach* as it is known in Gaelic, and the import of MacPherson's comment about it, below.

More recently, Prof. Seosamh Watson, of University College Dublin has noted this same phenomenon:

> […] in southern Cape Breton County, *Hearagaich* ('folk from Harris' in the Outer Isles) and *Aillsich* ('Lochalsh folk' from Wester Ross) are, in my experience, still so identified; there are both *Hearagaich* and *Leòdhasaich* ('Lewis folk') in one are of Victoria County, and *Barraich* ('Barra folk') in another. Elsewhere, in Cape Breton County, *Uibhistich* ('Uist folk') are discerned, and a distinction is made between members of communities referable to origins in one or other of the two islands, namely *Tuathaich* ('North Uist folk') and *Deasaich* ('South Uist folk'), and particular dialectal features are adduced to identify each group. (Watson 1999: 347)

Finally, Dr John Shaw has been recording Gaelic oral tradition in Cape Breton since 1963 and is the foremost expert on the Gaelic culture of the island. In a 1988 article, he noted the following:

> Community origins are still apparent in the Gaelic dialects spoken currently on the island: Lochaber dialect around Mabou, Lewis-Harris on the North Shore and Barra dialect in the Iona region. Precise traditions of geographical origins also persist in individual families down to the present. (Shaw 1988: 76).

The nature of emigration and settlement, discussed earlier, have certainly contributed to this pattern. But Shaw has noted that there are other factors at

play: Cape Breton's physical isolation from the rest of the province and indeed the rest of Canada (it was only connected to the Nova Scotia mainland by a causeway in the 1950s); poor island communications, due to the physical geography and the generally poor quality of country roads, at least until after the construction of the causeway; and a lack of desirable economic resources which would have attracted significant numbers of incomers (Shaw 1988: 77).

However, we also have some evidence of dialectal mixing which almost certainly occurred in the post-settlement period. In the early 1990s, Dr Seumas Grannd conducted linguistic research in six communities in Cape Breton (Grannd 1998). He chose them because he had also conducted research in communities in Scotland with which the Cape Breton communities had strong ancestral links. They were Mabou (western Inverness-shire, but particularly Glen Roy), Iona (Barra), Christmas Island (mainly Barra), Boisdale (South Uist), North River Bridge (Harris and Lewis), and Wreck Cove (Harris and Lewis). In some cases, there were clear lexical continuities, but not in all cases.

The word for 'hair of the head', for example, which was used amongst his Barra informants in Scotland was *gruag*. However, in the two Barra settlements in Cape Breton in which he collected data, Iona and Christmas Island, both *gruag* and *falt* were used, the latter word being word more commonly used in other districts, including western Inverness-shire in Scotland, and, unsurprisingly, given its ancestral links with western Inverness-shire, also in Mabou. In Scotland, his South Uist and Barra informants used *roth* for 'wheel', whereas in Cape Breton, those in the Barra and South Uist settlements of Iona, Christmas Island, and Boisdale all used *cuibheall*, the form usually used in other districts in Scotland and elsewhere in Cape Breton, as well.

The word for 'owl' used by Grannd's Hebridean informants was *cailleach-oidhche*, whereas amongst West Highland informants, *comhachag*

was used. In Mabou, populated mainly by Gaels of West Highland origins, *comhachag* was indeed used, but informants in the settlements of Barra and South Uist origin – Iona, Christmas Island, and Boisdale – also used *comhachag*. Grannd found a similar pattern with regard to the word for 'the blue of the sky'. In Scotland, his informants from Barra and South Uist used *liath*, whereas his West Highland informants used *gorm*. In Cape Breton, informants in Mabou also used *gorm*, unsurprisingly, given their West Highland origins, but in the Barra and South Uist settlements of Iona, Christmas Island, and Boisdale, *gorm* had also come to be used. Grannd hypothesised that the dialects of Inverness County, Cape Breton, as emblematically represented by the speech of Mabou, had effected some impact on those of the settlements along the Bras d'Or Lake of southern Hebridean origin. Grannd also detected some elements of dialectal mixing in the two North Shore, Cape Breton communities; this was less surprising, given that Lewis and Harris folk had settled together (Grannd 1998: 123).

Let us now return to the *glug Eigeach* mentioned by John Alick Macpherson, one of the most frequently remarked upon features of some – but certainly not all – Cape Breton dialects. In 1946, Professor Kenneth Jackson had carried out some linguistic fieldwork in Cape Breton. His main informants were a couple in their seventies from near Port Hood, Inverness County, an area heavily settled by Gaels from western Inverness-shire on the Scottish mainland, although the husband's father had been from South Uist and the wife's ancestors were from the inner Hebridean isle of Eigg. Jackson made the following comments:

> The most striking peculiarity of the dialect is the treatment of the broad *l*. This in all positions, whether originally lenited, non-lenited, or doubled, has developed into a voiced labio-velar spirant, in which the velarity is strong but the labial element is fairly slack, and the spirant element quite weak (Jackson 1947: 92; see also Watson 1999: 355)

This sound is the so-called *glug Eigeach*, the 'Eigg Cluck'. Prof. Kenneth Nilsen also noted this, which he described as 'the change of older non-palatal l, both lenited and unlenited, to w'. Thus, *clach*, 'stone', sounds like 'cwach', and *mullach a'chladaich*, 'the top of the beach', sounds like 'muwach a' chwadaich'. Nilsen argued that this change originated in Scotland, and has been well-attested in Eigg itself, as well as in Morar and Ardgour, in western Inverness-shire, and in Nilsen's own fieldwork around Loch Arkaig, Mallaig, and, again, Morar. It is certainly a West Highland feature, extending into Lochaber as well. Nilsen found that the *glug Eigeach* is present in Antigonish and Inverness Counties, areas in which it would be expected to be found, given that both were heavily settled by immigrants from Lochaber and other West Highland districts such as Morar, Knoydart, Moidart, and Eigg and the surrounding small inner Hebridean islands. However, both he, Grannd, Seosamh Watson, and others have observed that it is found in Iona and Christmas Island, neighbouring districts in the centre of the Bras d'Or Lake, and which were settled by Barra Gaels, an island in which this feature is not found. Nilsen also described the spread of this feature to neighbouring communities in Inverness County which had been settled by Mull, Tiree, and mainland Argyll-shire and Ross-shire (Nilsen 1996: 292; for a comment on the extent of this feature, see Ó Maolalaigh 2003: 314).

Grannd found that the Gaelic of Inverness County, Cape Breton, seemed to have had a very strong influence on the Gaelic of Iona, Christmas Island and even Boisdale, Cape Breton, an area settled largely by South Uist people. He speculated that inter-marriage between people of the two areas, both of which, while physically quite far from each other, are strongly Catholic, and perhaps the influence of the clergy, might be factors. He claimed, for example, that a majority of the Roman Catholic clergy in the Iona-Christmas Island-Boisdale area seem to have come from Inverness County (Grannd 1998: 125). Thus, while there is clearly a good deal of

conservatism in the Gaelic dialects of Cape Breton, they are not always fossilised or conservative relic forms.

5 Linguistic Contact

Although, as has already been noted, Gaelic communities in Cape Breton remained relatively isolated well into the twentieth century, contact with other languages, as well as with other dialects, was inevitable. First, there was contact with the indigenous people of Canada's Maritime provinces, the Mi'kmaq. Indeed, many traditions of early encounters with the Mi'kmaq from the period of Highland settlement have survived. The French had, of course, settled parts of the province before the arrival of the Gaels, and Acadian districts survive to the present. We also have frequent reference in a variety of sources, including song-poetry, to the French. Such contacts have, however, left relatively little mark on the Gaelic of Nova Scotia. The most notable Mi'kmaq influences are the adoption of Mi'kmaq place-names, and as Seosamh Watson has noted, sometimes these have been given a distinctively Gaelicised form: *Hogamà* ('Whycocomagh'), and *Eilean Macrì* ('Margaree Island'). Watson has also noted a few French loans which have crept into the Gaelic of Cape Breton: *a' ghrip* ('grippe'), as in reference to *cnatan mòr 1919*, the Spanish flu epidemic of 1919, *entrevale*, or 'intervale' in English, in reference to broad valleys, and, perhaps *mìnn(t)* for the more standard Gaelic *mèinn* 'mine' (Watson 2010a: 33).

As in Scotland, English has had a profound impact on the Gaelic spoken in Nova Scotia. We see the increasing appearance of English loan-words in Gaelic song-poetry from at least as early as the eighteenth century, and there is no question that the influence of English had been felt by the period of Gaelic emigration to Nova Scotia. Thus, it is not always possible to determine whether an English loan-word dates from the pre- or post-emigration period. However, there are certainly many examples of usages that clearly originate in the English of North America. On his 1932 visit, John

Lorne Campbell noted a number of examples of English borrowings, reported to him by the Rev. J.A. MacLellan:

> Well, tha deagh-**room** agam air an **t'ird storey**: tha e ochd **dollars** an seachdain [sic] **room and board.**
> Bidh sin **all right**.
> Bha i **ten o'clock at night** nuair a thàinig mi, agus bha mi **all in**: bha an t-uisge a' **pouradh**, agus bha a leithid de **bhare spots** air an rathad 's nach b' urrainn dhomh **headway** a dhèanamh.
> Tha e **smart** gu leòr.
>
> Well, I have a good room on the third storey: it's eight dollars a week room and board.
> That will be all right.
> It was ten o'clock at night when I came, and I was all in: the water was pouring, and there were sorts of bare spots on the road and I couldn't make any headway.
> He is smart enough. (my translation) (Campbell 1990: 28).

Some of these examples suggest a broader deterioration in Gaelic usage, and it is notable that Campbell's visit coincided with the crucial language 'tipping point' which Elizabeth Mertz had identified. Campbell listed a number of other borrowings he had come across on that visit:

> Fence—stove—stave—rubbers (rubbers = British 'galoshes')—store (store = British 'shops' (bùth))—yoke—mallet—cabin—corn (i.e. Indian corn, maize)—railway—train—drug-store—post-office—cinema—trace (or harness) (treas, pl. treasaichean).
> Loch not used, but lèig (lake) pl. lèigeachan. Lochan has survived.
> mogaisean—moccasin (snowshoe), fromh (frò) an implement for splitting wood. (Campbell 1990: 28)

Other borrowings noted by Campbell related to the physical environment (Campbell 1936: 132). The thick forests were commented upon by the emigrant bards, most famously by the Tiree poet John MacLean, who emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1819; his most famous song-poem is known by a reference in the opening line, *A' Choille Ghruamach*, 'The Gloomy Forest'. Campbell noted the use of *bruis* ('brush'), *clìrichean* ('clearings'), *loga* ('log') and *logaichean* ('logs'), as well as the adoption of English names for certain types of trees which were common in Nova Scotia but with which some settlers may not have been familiar, including *beech* ('beech'), *spruis* ('spruce'), and *seudair* ('cedar'). Seosamh Watson noted the use of English loan-words for certain topographical features. Thus, we have *ruidse* for a ridge of land – one famous family of poets and tradition-bearers, MacDonalds from Lochaber who settled first on Mabou Ridge, Inverness County, were known for several generations as 'Na Ruidsichean', the Ridges (see Rankin 2005). We see some of these loans associated with place-names. 'Beach' has been adopted as *bidse*, and so we have *A' Bhidse Mhòr*, 'Big Beach', and *A' Bhidse Bhàn*, 'White Beach'. Pond has also been adopted: we have *Am Pòn Mòr*, 'Big Pond', and *Pòn na Maiseadh*, which has two loans, 'Pòn', and 'maise', marsh, a loan attested to in Scotland, as well (Watson 2010a: 34). Interestingly, the English form of this place-name, Benacadie Glen, retains the Mi'kmaq element. While Cape Breton Gaels retained the Gaelic word for a cove or bay in some places, they have also adopted the English 'cove', *còbh*: *Còbh na Raice*, 'Wreck Cove', and *Còbh an Fheòir*, 'Hay Cove' (Watson 2010a: 34).

Hunting was certainly a familiar pursuit in the Scottish Highlands, but the conditions in Nova Scotia necessitated new techniques, including the use of traps, a term which Nova Scotia Gaels also adopted, as *trapaichean*. And, of course, the Gaels encountered unfamiliar fauna, and often simply adopted the term in common use in Nova Scotian English—musk ox and skunk are two examples given by Campbell (1936: 132).

In Seosamh Watson's fieldwork, a large number of English words have been happily adopted into the everyday speech of even highly competent older Gaelic-speakers, and many of these the author himself has heard, and provides examples of usage from his own experience. Thus, we have:

able: *'S e duine* ***able*** *a th' ann* 'He's an able man'

all right: *Uell, tha sin* ***all right*** 'Well, that's alright'

busy: *Tha e gu math* ***busy*** *an-diugh* 'He's quite busy today'

clear: *Tha sinn* ***clear*** *airson a' chòrr dhen latha* 'We're free for the rest of the day'

clever: *Dh'fhalbh iad gu math* ***clever*** 'They left very quickly' (used in Gaelic to mean 'quick')

crowd: *Bha* ***crowd*** *mhath aig an danns* 'There was a good crowd at the dance'

pile: *Bha* ***poidhle*** *de dhaoine ann* 'There was a lot/a pile of people' there; Ceann-bliadhna sona dhut agus *poidhle* dhiubh 'A happy birthday to you and many of them'

rough: *'S e duine gu math* ***rough*** *a tha sin* 'There's a rough fellow'

start: ***Start*** *sinn gu math tràth an-diugh* 'We started quite early today'[9]

As in some Gaelic dialects, Watson notes examples of the formation of a verbal noun (or infinitive) by the addition of the typical Gaelic ending, *-adh*, *-eadh*, or *-igeadh*, to an English verb: bother-*igeadh*, 'bothering'; cover-*igeadh*, 'covering'; clear-*igeadh*, 'clearing'; watch-*adh*, 'watching'; and roll-*adh*, 'rolling'. Similarly, past participles can be formed by the addition of the Gaelic ending, *-te*, to an English verb: fit-*te*, 'fitted'; split-*te*, 'split'; stretch-*te*, 'stretched'; and pave-*te*, 'paved' (Watson 2010a: 35).

The influence of North American English is particularly clear in certain loans. For example, we have (Watson 2010a: 34–35):

[9] All words from Watson (2010a: 34–35); examples based on author's personal experience.

slick 'nice':	*'S e duine* ***slick*** *a th' ann* 'He's a nice fellow'
slack 'ill':	*Tha i glè* ***slack*** *an-diugh* 'She's very sick today'
spry 'fit, healthy':	*Tha i gu math* ***spry*** *aig a h-aois* 'She's fit for her age'
bush 'moonshine':	*Bha iad trang a' dèanamh* ***bush*** 'The were busy making moonshine'

We also see this in certain commonly heard expressions, such as:

Bha an ***cuff*** *air* 'He was drunk'

Bha sinn a' toirt ***time*** *dha* 'We were making him laugh'

Bha e 'faighinn ***pull*** *bhon a' bhean* 'He was in trouble with the wife'[10]

Seumas Grannd noted that *stòr* 'store' was universally used for a shop, in contrast with *bùth*, which was used by his informants in the districts in Scotland from which the Cape Breton informants had come (Grannd 1998: 120–121). He noted that amongst his informants in Scotland, *càirt* was used for 'cart', whereas in Cape Breton, only *uagan*/*uacan*, which he interpreted as a borrowing from the North American English 'wagon', was used. Grannd also observed calques which, he argued, reflected North American English usage. He provided the example *Tha e tuilleadh is dona nach tàinig e* 'It's too bad he didn't come'; in Scotland, by contrast, there is *Is truagh nach tàinig e*, *Is bochd nach tàinig e*, or *Tha e searbh nach tàinig e*, all, he claimed, representing 'It's a pity he didn't come' (Grannd 1998: 121).

To conclude, both linguists and fluent speakers from outside of Cape Breton have noted some profound dialectal continuities and, indeed, considerable conservatism in aspects of the forms of Gaelic spoken in Cape Breton. The late survival of mainland dialects, and particularly the Gaelic of Lochaber, in Cape Breton, and especially in parts of Inverness County, have been of considerable interest because of the earlier demise of many such dialects in Scotland. However, we are not dealing with fossils. We see clear evidence of the influence of certain features associated with one area on

[10] All words from Watson (2010a: 34–35); examples based on author's personal experience.

dialects in other areas, and in many cases the processes by which this has taken place are not altogether clear. We also see the adoption of very significant numbers of loan-words, mainly, but not exclusively, from English, as well as calques and even in colloquial expressions. Some of these are clearly reflective of North American English usage, and although the influence of English was being felt in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland even before the main period of emigration, it is likely that many of these loans, calques and colloquialisms arose after emigration and settlement in the new world.

6 Current Policy and the Relevance of Dialects

A final issue that merits attention is the question of dialects in the context of contemporary efforts to revitalise Gaelic in Nova Scotia. In both Nova Scotia and Scotland, Gaelic has suffered historically from marginalisation and official policies that ranged from mere neglect to outright hostility.[11] In Scotland, however, the position has been changing over the last two generations (see McLeod 2020). Gaelic-medium education (GME) was first established in two primary schools in 1985 and has grown steadily since then at both the primary and secondary level. In 2021–22, there were 3,856 students at 60 primary schools in GME, and 1,616 students at 32 secondary schools studying at least part of their curriculum through the medium of Gaelic, with a further 3,599 at 32 secondary schools learning Gaelic as a subject (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2023). Since the early 1990s, there has been a steady expansion in Gaelic-medium television and radio. In 2008, a digital Gaelic television channel, BBC Alba, was created which broadcasts about seven hours a day of Gaelic television programming. A BBC radio service, Radio nan Gàidheal, broadcasts over ninety hours of Gaelic radio

[11] For Gaelic in Scotland, see Withers (1984 and 1988) and MacKinnon (1991); for Gaelic in Nova Scotia, see Kennedy (2002: 27–114) and Nilsen (2010a).

programming every week (MacPherson 1998–2000). As a result of the *Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005*, passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament, the language has a much greater presence in many public sector organisations in Scotland (see, generally, McLeod 2020).

In Nova Scotia, the context for development, and in particular the demographic context, is much different, and much more challenging. In Scotland, for example, the 2011 UK Census revealed that there were almost 58,000 Gaelic-speakers, and in many communities, mainly in the Outer Hebrides, Gaelic-speakers made up a majority of the local population (National Records of Scotland 2015a, b). In Nova Scotia, the 2021 Census of Canada revealed that there were only 635 people in Nova Scotia who claimed a knowledge of Gaelic (130 of whom were native speakers),[12] and as noted earlier, there are no communities in which Gaelic is used as a daily means of communication. Such small numbers of speakers make many of the sort of policy interventions that have been adopted in Scotland impossible.

Until Taigh Sgoile na Drochaide, an independent primary school based in Mabou, Cape Breton, was opened in September 2021 with nine pupils, there had never been GME in Nova Scotia.[13] There have, however, been developments with regard to the teaching of Gaelic as a subject in schools, which are discussed further, below, in the context of other recent developments in Gaelic language acquisition planning. Gaelic has been taught for some time at Nova Scotia universities. It was first taught at St Francis Xavier in Antigonish in 1891, albeit only intermittently until 1957, when a

[12] See, also, note 1, *supra*. There were a further 135 who claimed a knowledge of 'Celtic languages', and it is possible that some if not most of these were referring to Gaelic. See Statistics Canada (2022b). Note that this was based on an extrapolation of the responses of a 25 per cent sample of all census respondents, and therefore the actual numbers may be higher or lower.

[13] See https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-a-small-cape-breton-schoolhouse-offers-hope-for-the-future-of-gaelic/. For the website of the school itself, see: https://taighsgoile.ca/.

lectureship in Celtic was established, followed by the creation of the Sister Saint Veronica Chair in Gaelic Studies in 1983 (Kennedy 2002: 57, 91–93, 109–111). Gaelic has also been taught at Cape Breton University in Sydney, Cape Breton, since the 1970s, and St Mary's University in Halifax since the 1990s (Kennedy 2002: 107–114). The Nova Scotia Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts in St Ann's, Cape Breton – now known as *Colaisde na Gàidhlig* / *The Gaelic College* – was established in 1939, and has taught Gaelic, mainly via short courses offered in the summer, throughout most of its existence. As we shall also see, various new approaches to language acquisition have been developed since about 2004 for adult learners, particularly young adults.

With regard to media, there have in the past been small amounts of Gaelic language radio programming on the Cape Breton outlet of the state broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) (Kennedy 2002: 227–229), but very little at present, although some Gaelic is used on CBFM,[14] a Mabou-based online radio station which began in 2022. There has never been any Gaelic-medium broadcasting on television. There is no language legislation in support of Gaelic, and no public authorities have any Gaelic language policies. Gaelic is almost completely absent from the linguistic landscape,[15] although in 2006 the provincial Department of Transport and Public Works developed a policy which allowed local councils in communities in Cape Breton and surrounding areas on the eastern mainland of Nova Scotia to erect bilingual Gaelic-English road signs identifying the name of the community.[16]

[14] https://www.cbfm.ca/.

[15] The linguistic landscape can be understood as the language(s) displayed in particular spaces, such as advertisements, billboards, and other signs, and the study of the linguistic landscape is a relatively new and expanding area in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. See, generally, Carr (2019).

[16] https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20060512010.

In 2006, however, the Government of the Province of Nova Scotia established an Office of Gaelic Affairs, a division of the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. Although the office is small – there are currently only three staff members – and the budget is limited, its establishment was nonetheless an important milestone, as it marked the first attempt by the government to institutionalise in the provincial civil service coordinated language planning for Gaelic. Among the responsibilities of the Office are: raising awareness of Gaelic language, culture and history, and its contribution to communities throughout the province; working with government, community and international partners to help strengthen and preserve Nova Scotia's Gaelic language and culture; supporting community groups and Gaelic language and cultural programs, services and events; and developing partnerships within government to help make sure the Gaelic language and culture continue to contribute to the diversity of communities throughout the province.[17] The primary focus, however, has been on adult language acquisition, with a particular focus on young adults. The Office is part of a wider range of developments that began to emerge in the first decade of the new millennium.

With regard to the provincial school system, Gaelic had been taught as a non-credit course in a small number of Cape Breton schools in the 1970s and again in the 1990s (Kennedy 2002: 94–99). In 1999, however, the provincial Department of Education developed the first Gaelic Cultural Studies program, and made it available to Nova Scotia public school students in grade 11 (the second last year of secondary school) (Government of Nova Scotia 2019: 14), now known as Gaelic Studies 11.[18] In 2004, the department developed a curriculum for Gaelic language courses for grades 10, 11 and 12 (the final three years of secondary school), known as Gaelic 10, 11 and 12, as

[17] See https://beta.novascotia.ca/government/gaelic-affairs/about.

[18] The course lasts one term and involves 110 hours of in-class tuition (McEwan 2016).

well as a Gaelic Teachers' Resource Book.[19] In 2005 it supported the development of a Gaelic curriculum for grades 3 (year 3 of primary school) to 9 (Government of Nova Scotia 2019: 15). In 2014–15, there were 555 students doing Gaelic Studies 11 or Gaelic 10, 11 or 12 in ten schools, mainly in Cape Breton and Antigonish (McEwan 2016). As noted earlier, Taigh Sgoile na Drochaide opened in 2021, although it is a private school, rather than one funded by the province.

Of particular importance is a range of highly innovative adult language acquisition programs which have been developed since 2004, mainly with the support of the Office of Gaelic Affairs, and which differ considerably from any such language acquisition programming in Scotland. The first to be developed was *Gàidhlig aig Baile* ('Gaelic at Home'). In 2004, Finlay MacLeod, who in the early 1980s established the Gaelic pre-school movement in Scotland, came to Nova Scotia to raise awareness of 'Total Immersion Plus' (TIP), a language learning methodology he had developed based on the principles of Dr James Asher's Total Physical Response methodology and language acquisition programs in Hawai'i and New Zealand. The methodology aims to develop basic fluency through interactive, immersion-based approaches, conducted in homes and other similar environments rather than in formal classroom settings, and usually led by a native speaker, assisted by a fluent learner who acts as facilitator. Sessions involve engagement in daily activities through the medium of Gaelic only, in a stress-free, fun learning environment; reading, writing and grammar are generally not taught (MacEachen 2008: 8–9; Watson and Ivey 2016: 188–189). Of particular importance in the context of this paper is that the emphasis in the *Gàidhlig aig Baile* methodology is on local forms of Gaelic. This is implicit in the reliance placed on local native Gaelic-speakers, although the use by tutors of local Gaelic resources is an explicit aim of the program, as is

[19] Government of Nova Scotia (2019: 15). The courses are each offered for one school term and involve 100 hours of classroom tuition (McEwan 2016).

the goal of ensuring that the learning experiences are relevant to Nova Scotia Gaelic culture (Sloan and Office of Gaelic Affairs 2009: 41–42).

In 2009, a community-based mentorship program, *Bun is Bàrr* ('Root and Branch'), was developed.[20] The program was inspired by the master-apprentice programs developed by Dr Leanne Hinton of the University of California for highly threatened indigenous languages in that state. The program grew in part out of a desire of learners involved in *Gàidhlig aig Baile* to have more intensive immersion opportunities, leading to the creation of fluent speakers who could themselves be community instructors (MacEachen 2013: 4). Strongly based on social-learning theories, learners who have reached a more advanced conversational level work with mentors drawn from the remaining elderly native speaker population (although in more recent years, the mentors have been expanded to include learners who have reached high levels of fluency). The over-arching purpose is to develop both language and wider cultural knowledge and skills, drawn from local forms of spoken Gaelic and Nova Scotia Gaelic tradition (Watson and Ivey 2016: 189). The goals of the program are: to strengthen links between Gaelic learners in Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia's Gaelic elders; to provide elders with an opportunity to share their knowledge, cultural traditions and wisdom with another generation of Gaelic-speakers in Nova Scotia; to provide learners with an opportunity to be immersed in Gaelic language and culture and acquire, by spending time with an elder, the linguistic and cultural foundation of Gaelic Nova Scotia; and to help re-establish the *cèilidh* ('visiting') tradition in Nova Scotia (MacEachen 2013: 6).

A third program, *Stòras a' Bhaile*, was established by *Baile nan Gàidheal / An Clachan Gàidhealach* (the Nova Scotia Highland Village

[20] https://gaelic.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/inline/documents/mentoring-programs-letter-of-interest-en.pdf#:~:text=Bun%20is%20B%C3%A0rr%20%28Root%20and%20Branch%29%20is%20a,live%2C%20teach%2C%20share%20and%20champion%20Gaelic%20Nova%20Scotia.

Museum), an open-air interactive museum in Iona, Cape Breton, dedicated to the representation of Gaelic culture in the province, with the support of the Office of Gaelic Affairs. *Stòras a' Bhaile* is a week-long summer folk-life school which brings together Gaelic learners and local native speakers to work on songs, tales and other forms of Nova Scotia Gaelic oral tradition, drawn from both the native-speaking participants and sound recordings of Nova Scotia Gaelic tradition-bearers (Watson and Ivey 2016: 189). Its purpose is 'to build group identity while fostering language acquisition through experiences and representations of communal Nova Scotia Gaelic Culture'. The program is 'founded on the principle that Gaelic language development in Nova Scotia entails restoring a group identity based in shared cultural expressions' derived from Nova Scotia Gaelic Culture (Nova Scotia Highland Village 2013: 1–2).

All three of these programs draw heavily on digital resources based on sound recordings of Nova Scotia Gaelic-speakers, as well as on printed sources of songs, folklore and other oral traditions from the Nova Scotia Gaelic tradition. One such source of particular importance is the recordings made by Dr John Shaw during the Nova Scotia Gaelic Folklore Project (1977–1983), which was based at St Francis Xavier University under the direction of Dr Margaret MacDonell and was funded by the Multiculturalism Directorate of the Government of Canada. Almost 2,000 items of Gaelic oral tradition, including about 1,100 Gaelic songs, as well as folktales, oral history, folk belief and traditions of the supernatural, tall tales and other examples of humour, seasonal and weather lore, proverbs and other idiomatic expressions, were collected from 159 informants in a wide range of communities, mainly in Cape Breton Island (Shaw 2007b: 58–59). These recordings have now been digitised and are available through the *Sruth nan Gàidheal* ('Gaelstream') website hosted by St Francis Xavier.[21]

[21] The website is being updated, but the recordings can still be accessed via this link: https://stfx.cairnrepo.org/islandora/object/stfx%3Agaelstream.

In 2005, the board of directors of *Comhairle na Gàidhlig* ('The Gaelic Council of Nova Scotia'), a non-profit society dedicated to Gaelic language maintenance in the province, recognised the need for locally developed learning resources on which the new *Gàidhlig aig Baile* programs could be based. They outlined a long-term project that would supply instructors and students with a learning resource based on video recordings of fluent speakers using everyday idiomatic Nova Scotia Gaelic. Working with *Baile nan Gàidheal* and supported by funding from the Office of Gaelic Affairs, the recording project started in 2006. Extended recordings were made with 26 informants, drawn from the remaining districts in which highly competent native speakers could be found. Many of these recordings have now been made available on a dedicated website and are being used not only in *Gàidhlig aig Baile* programs, but in other language acquisition programs as well.[22]

Another important resource initiative is *An Drochaid Eadarainn* ('The Bridge Between Us'), a project initiated by *Baile nan Gàidheal*. Launched in 2012, *An Drochaid Eadarainn* is an interactive website on which can be found recorded expressions of Nova Scotia Gaelic culture, including songs, storytelling, music and dance, kinship traditions, folk belief, traditional foods, home remedies and cures, seasonal lore, and so forth, as well as examples of different Nova Scotia dialects.[23] As the website notes, *An Drochaid Eadarainn* is not intended as a language learning site, but it is a valuable tool for learning idiomatic Gaelic expression, and was created to be used to complement acquisition programs, particularly *Bun is Bàrr* and *Stòras a' Bhaile*.

With regard to more traditional Gaelic courses, printed course materials were developed by Dr. John Shaw, a Harvard-trained Celtic scholar from Ohio who had come to fluency in Cape Breton, for use on Gaelic language courses when he taught at University College of Cape Breton

[22] See http://www.cainntmomhathar.com/index.php.

[23] See http://www.androchaid.ca/.

(UCCB, now University of Cape Breton) in 1975–76. These drew heavily on Cape Breton forms but are no longer easily accessible (Kennedy 2002: 105). A course, *Gàidhlig Troimh Chòmhradh* ('Gaelic through Conversation'), with three course books and accompanying cassette tapes, developed by Catriona Parsons, a native Gaelic-speaker from Lewis who had relocated to Nova Scotia, was published by the Gaelic College between 1989 and 1994. It incorporated some local dialectal features and is still available for purchase from the Gaelic College (Parsons 1989–1994). However, formal learning materials such as these have not been developed since then, perhaps partly due to the emphasis in the more recently developed programs placed on oral interaction rather than more formal, traditional classroom-based approaches for which course books are essential.

From 2018 to 2021, Dr Heather Sparling of Cape Breton University led a three-year project, 'Language in Lyrics', in partnership with the *Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic* (*DASG*) at the University of Glasgow. The aim of the project was to create a comprehensive database of Gaelic songs in Nova Scotia, drawing on print media, archival recordings and private collections. The longer-term goal of the project is to lay the foundations for a corpus of Nova Scotia Gaelic, which is then intended to be used for a future dictionary of Nova Scotia Gaelic.[24] Under a follow-on project, *Cànain tro Òrain* ('Language through Songs'), local Gaelic language instructors were invited to help in the creation of lesson plans organised around Nova Scotia Gaelic songs. The aim is to integrate these songs into the community learning processes, and an open on-line learning resource was launched in March 2022 (MacDonell and Sparling 2022).

As we have seen, the acquisition and further dissemination of local Nova Scotian linguistic and cultural skills is a clear objective of all of the

[24] See https://languageinlyrics.com/about/. The database has been completed and is now available through the website of the Glasgow University-based *Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic* (*DASG*): https://dasg.ac.uk/LIL/.

programs which have been developed in recent years. This is also an important motivation for learners. Indeed, it appears that many of the current acquisition programs have helped to foster a deeply rooted distinctly Nova Scotian Gaelic identity (Dunmore 2020a; b; 2021). The creation of such identities is clearly part of an approach to language planning that is fundamentally social in orientation (Watson and Ivey 2016). From a language planning perspective, the links between corpus planning and status planning have been recognised for some time, and emphasising the distinctiveness of local varieties and valorising them in distinction to more prestigious varieties has been central to 'ausbau' approaches to corpus development, as part of wider efforts at status planning, in many jurisdictions (Fishman 2006: 90–91). As such, the emphasis which has been placed on employing local forms of Gaelic and local forms of Gaelic cultural expression makes considerable strategic sense.

This, however, raises the question of precisely what are the forms of Nova Scotia Gaelic that should be emphasised and validated. The linguistic anthropologist Dr Emily McEwan has observed that some Nova Scotian new speakers of Gaelic – that is, learners who are strongly committed to using Gaelic in their daily lives – have adopted the *glug Eigeach* and other forms of expression that are characteristic of Lochaber-derived dialects in parts of Inverness County Cape Breton and are teaching them to others. She concludes that the *glug* now serves as a shibboleth for some forms of Nova Scotia Gaelic (McEwan 2015). This may distort the historical reality of dialectal diversity in Nova Scotia, as such forms were certainly not universal. However, the valorisation of such forms, which are still current in Nova Scotia but moribund in Scotland, where they are often now perceived as distinctively Nova Scotian, makes some sense from a language planning perspective as part of an ausbau approach to corpus planning, as it also reinforces the unique nature of the Gaelic experience in Nova Scotia, enhancing for new speakers

their sense of pride in and attachment to both the language and a local Gaelic identity.

In conclusion, the Gaelic dialects of Nova Scotia, like other elements of Gaelic culture in Nova Scotia, display many conservative elements, and they can provide useful evidence as to how Gaelic might have been spoken in parts of the Scottish Highlands during the main period of emigration to Nova Scotia. However, they must be used cautiously because they are no mere fossils. Like other aspects of the culture, they have been shaped by the new world environment. They are dynamic, not static. Without question, the great dialectal diversity that once existed in Nova Scotia no longer exists, thanks to the steep decline in the language and the almost complete contraction of the Gaelic speech communities of the province. However, what remains is being used as the basis for the creation of a new generation of speakers, who will carry distinctly Nova Scotian forms of the language, and with them, distinctly Nova Scotian forms of Gaelic cultural expression, forward in the twenty-first century and perhaps beyond. They are not merely interesting specimens, but the cornerstone of a living language and culture of Canada.

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