



The Island Fiddler

The Newsletter of the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers Society



Vol. 3, Issue 1

March 2005

Then ...



some PEI Fiddlers 1981

... and now



some Queens County Fiddlers at practice



some Prince County Fiddlers



some Eastern Kings Fiddlers at Class

The Island Fiddler

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Fiddle Practices Open To The Public

Prince County Fiddlers

Mondays 7:30 pm 'Community Connections' Summerside 836-3844

Queens County Fiddlers

Wednesdays 7:45-9:00 pm St. Pius X Hall Parkdale 569-4592

Eastern Kings Fiddlers

Mondays 7:00-8:00 pm Rollo Bay Consolidated School 687-1521

From the President

As the president of the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers Society, I am left wondering, what am I supposed to be thinking about? What is it that fiddlers want to be talking about Island-wide? What do fiddlers want from their newsletter?



Well, those are questions that are not easily answered. However, I think I may begin the discussion by attempting to recognize what we would all agree on. Then I will ask you, the reader, to share your thoughts in our next issue. This is your newsletter, we would love to share your thoughts and feelings about fiddle. So here we go, these are three main ideas that, I think, PEI fiddlers would agree on as a whole.

Firstly, there is more than one distinct style of fiddling on PEI. The four styles most common are: **Acadian** (e.g. Eddy Arsenault, Louise Arsenault); **Old-time** (e.g. Pete Doiron, Nathan Condon); **Scottish** (e.g. Peter Chaisson, Sheila MacKenzie); and **Irish**. The Irish fiddling tradition is perhaps the smallest of those four traditions but we do have one of the best (if not the very best) Irish fiddlers in North America living in Summerside, namely, Kim Vincent. There are also traces of Blue Grass and Country-style fiddlers on PEI, but in much fewer numbers. If I were to pretend that there was only one style, I may try to answer questions that concerned one discipline, which I would have to admit, I may or may not know anything about. However, if I express my opinion as one which appreciates the idiosyncrasies in each individual style, then, and only then, may I begin to express the ideas of PEI fiddling as a whole.

Secondly, fiddling, no matter what genre, shares a co-dependant relationship with dancing. The dancing and the fiddling go hand-in-hand. Great dancers depend on great fiddlers to truly express their talented feet, and fiddlers who want to be great fiddlers must enlighten the dancers. You can see an example of this by comparing Scottish fiddling on PEI with Scottish fiddling in Cape Breton. In Cape Breton, a solo step dancer will almost always begin with a strathspey step followed by reels. In PEI, it is most common to see step dancers dancing to only reels, leaving out the strathspey entirely. In Cape Breton the young fiddlers grow up knowing that they must perfect the strathspey in order to be a good fiddler. In PEI, the strathspey is completely overlooked by some players as it is not viewed as a requirement. This is of course not the only reason that strathspeys are less common in PEI, however, it is a major factor worth consideration.

Thirdly, fiddling on PEI is a solo tradition. Fiddling tradition is kept by a group of individual players that play within a

...page 3, the president...

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distinct and acknowledged style of "the way it should be played." Those individuals represent their regional style of playing and dancing. *Group* fiddling certainly has a strong purpose as well. This very Society stresses the benefits of playing together, sharing tunes, and forging musical friendships. This is a must. There is a power that is born out of a group of fiddles that cannot be found in a solo number. The only drawback to group playing is that the individual ornaments and bowing styles that define a tradition are usually lost in the blending of many fiddles. I draw this distinction because it is important that younger players aspire to develop their own sound,

full of ornamentation and rhythm, music that will be admired in a solo performance. Listening to group fiddling only will not allow the full development of a player. Whether it is the lively dance rhythms of Southern Kings fiddler Jimmy Hume or the uplifting dance beat of Acadian fiddler, Eddie Arseneault, the stylistic interpretations of their music is best appreciated in a solo performance, especially in the kitchen. I feel privileged to have experience some of the finest fiddling in each region of PEI.

So now I ask you, what would you like *The Island Fiddler* to discuss? We'd love to hear from you.

Ward MacDonald, President

Attention All Fiddlers

Mark your calendar now and plan to attend the general meeting of The P.E.I. Fiddlers Society to be held at 4:00 pm Saturday 28 May 2005 at the Carrefour Theatre, Charlottetown. All fiddlers welcome.

Where can I get Fiddle or Accompanist(+) Lessons?

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<u>Argyle Shore</u>		
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<u>Charlottetown</u>		
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Kendra MacGillivray	Fiddle	367-5606
Gail Matheson	Piano	628-1370
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Grace Law	Fiddle	436-0497
Kim Vincent	Fiddle	436-0497
<u>Rollo Bay</u>		
Kathryn Dau-Schmidt	Fiddle	672-2711

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He doesn't know a thing about fiddles!

A man goes into the local violin shop, walks up to the counter, and takes a violin out of the case. He says, "There's something wrong with my violin - just listen to the G string!", and plays it. A horrible grinding noise comes out: hhhrrroNNNNK! The guy behind the counter says, "You need to talk to the owner, he's out to lunch now but he'll be back shortly. It's a nice day, why don't you wait outside on the stoop?". So the guy goes outside and sits down on the stoop.

After a minute he decides to take the violin out and play a little, but there's that horrible sound again, hhhrrroNNNNK! He is about to put the violin back in the case when he hears a voice speaking softly into his ear "Check the bass bar." He looks around but there is no one there, only a chestnut horse with a white stripe on his forehead. So he plays another note on the violin, there's the hhhrrroNNNNK! Again, and again the voice says, a little louder, "Check the bass bar". He turns around and realizes that THE HORSE IS SPEAKING TO HIM!

Up he jumps, grabs the fiddle and case, runs into the shop and up to the counter, and starts shouting incoherently about the horse and the violin and the bass bar. At that moment the owner walks in and says "Calm down, and explain to me exactly what happened".

"I was sitting outside playing my violin, and this horrible sound is coming from the G string, and this horse walks up to me and tells me to check the bass bar!"

"Was it a chestnut horse?"

"Yes!"

"With a white stripe down his forehead?"

"Yes! Yes!!"

"Aw, don't listen to him, mister! He doesn't know a thing about fiddles!"

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Queens County Fiddlers

Carolyn Drake

It was all fiddling all the time as the Queens County Fiddlers successfully launched their debut CD, *Forty Fiddles Flat Out!*, in September with a weekend concert tour of P.E.I. For three successive evenings, Sept. 24-26, more than 35 musicians and a wide variety of talented special guests performed at the Kings Playhouse in Georgetown, Ecole sur Mer in Summerside and the Carrefour Theatre in Charlottetown. From the moment that audience members walked into each of the concert venues they were greeted with the sounds of what was about to come as Father Charlie Cheverie and several of the group's youngest players performed their favourite tunes before the concerts began. Then it was time to take their seats for two hours of group numbers, solos, step dancing and top-notch performances by special guests such as Peter Chaisson, Kevin Chaisson, Peter Arseneault, Albert Arseneault, Helene Bergeron and Richard Wood. With the master of ceremonies duties more-than-capably shared between Erskine Smith, Ward MacDonald and Marlene MacDonald, the concerts were packed with entertainment. The launch was the culmination of almost a full year of dedication by everyone in the Queens County Fiddlers. Music director Ward MacDonald arranged the music, and all the members put in hours and hours of individual and group practice, making sure that every tune would be perfect. The group went into the recording studio (Central Christian Church in Charlottetown) on Mother's Day for more than 10 hours, and the result is a CD of 12 sets of waltzes, haunting slow airs, strathspeys and lively jigs and reels that is guaranteed to be a hit with both Island fiddling fans and the many visitors to P.E.I. who become captivated by this music every year.



Forty Fiddles Flat Out!

The dedication on an inside page is to Father Charlie Cheverie, one of the group's longest serving and hard-working members. We thank Father Charlie for starting what turned out to be a magical musical journey and for inspiring us and staying with us every step of the way. And for twenty years of inspiration, we dedicate this recording to you.

The musicians featured on *Forty Fiddles Flat Out* represent the past, present and future of traditional Celtic music on P.E.I. Some of the older players, who are in their 80s, have been with the group since it formed in 1977. Other adult members have only begun to play within the past five to 10 years. The youngest players, who are still in elementary school, are newcomers, adding an element of youthful enthusiasm and the promise that the music will continue to be played. For some fiddlers, this project may be the only recording they ever do. For some of the younger players, this may be the beginning of bright futures.

The group would like to thank all the Islanders who came out to the shows and purchased the CD. Sales continue to go very well. Copies of the CD are available across the Island in a number of retail outlets. Proceeds from the CD sales have already gone toward the purchase of a new keyboard. Further proceeds will be used by the group in its ongoing efforts to promote fiddling on P.E.I. through various projects, such as its annual free open house and annual spring concert, providing fiddles to beginner fiddling students, hosting workshops and performing in various festivals, concerts, benefits and other events around the province.

The group would also like to establish a scholarship to be awarded to at least one P.E.I. fiddling student each year. The scholarship would allow the student to attend one week of fiddle and piano studies at the renowned Gaelic College of Celtic Performing Arts in St. Ann's, Cape Breton.

The group practises Wednesday nights, beginning at about 7:45 p.m., at St. Pius X Parish Hall in Charlottetown. Newcomers are encouraged to attend, and listeners are welcome.

Anyone who would like to hear the group live has a few opportunities

over the next couple of months. On Monday, March 7, the group will be live on the mainstage of Confederation Centre of the Arts for the annual Easter Seals Telethon. Drop into the theatre or enjoy the show live on CBC-TV. On March 13, the Queens County Fiddlers will be a special guest at a ceilidh in Orwell Corner. And later this spring in May, the group will hold its annual concert at the Carrefour Theatre in Charlottetown. Watch the local media for full details.

FIDDLE CARE

In my introductory column, I thought I would answer four questions that I am always asked.

1. "What is the difference between a fiddle and a 'violin'?"

"Fiddle" is just a violin's nickname. Some folks say: "It's how it's played". You can play all types of music on the same instrument.

"Type of strings steel or gut?". I know several fiddlers playing on "gut" strings, Nathan Condon, the Jeffery twins to name a few. Some classical violin players play on steel strings, Rossi Dubinski (past Chamber Professor for UI Alabama) played only on steel strings. "Value of the instrument" I've heard players with instruments worth thousands referring to their violins as "my fiddle" However, generally speaking fiddle players like steel strings and a low action on the bridge and classical violinists like some sort of synthetic gut strings and a different standard action for the bridge (approx 4.5 to 5.5 mm).

2. "What wood do you use?"

I use the traditional woods; for the (back, sides and neck/scroll), Maple, either, curly, quilted or birds eye. For the top, Sitka spruce. The fittings, (pegs, tailpiece, endpin and chin rest) either ebony, rosewood, boxwood or snake wood.

3. "How long does it take you to make a violin?"

I really don't know as I've never timed myself but I say 200 hours! (because a violin maker in Ireland once told me it took him 150 hours.....).

4. "Where do you get your wood?"

Often I'm tempted to say "from the trees" but I get my wood from Reid Hudson who lives on Vancouver Island, BC.

So that's it for my first column, hope you enjoy it, let me know if there are any questions you want answered, I'll try to answer them.

Richard Le Page, luthier, owns and operates The Fiddle Farm in Flat River P.E.I., where he makes and restores/repairs violins, violas and cellos.

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Eastern Kings Fiddlers

Anne M. McPhee

The Eastern Kings chapter of the PEI Fiddlers Society has not been meeting on a regular basis for quite some time and many of the old members have passed on. As a result there is not an accurate up to date membership list. There is a small group of fiddlers which meets every Monday night for a practice at the Rollo Bay Consolidated School at 7 pm and anyone is welcome to come and watch, listen or participate. Peter Chaisson has agreed to "Lead" the advanced group this year while I try to keep us organized and on track as to the tunes we have agreed to "work" on. Otherwise, we end up causing a certain amount of frustration to Peter by playing a whole pile of tunes fairly badly and not too many tunes really well. No matter what happens though, we all have a good time.

Kathryn Dau-Schmidt leads the beginners and the intermediates in the next room. Kathryn began teaching fiddle lessons in Charlottetown in 1979 and has been travelling from Brackley to Rollo Bay every Monday night since 1980. On more than one occasion she has been caught unawares by the weather, arriving in balmy conditions and travelling home in a virtual blizzard but she keeps coming back year after year. In Rollo Bay there are usually 15 - 20 students in each class but the beginners class has been known to have up to as many as 30 - 35 students in it because Kathryn is unable to turn anyone away. Some of her more prominent graduates from the Charlottetown class include Richard Wood, Cynthia MacLeod and Maria MacDougall.. Graduates from the Rollo Bay class include such household names as Sheila MacKenzie, Chad Mooney and of course all the Chaisson offspring including Melanie, Stephen, JJ, Bradley, Coady, and Timothy to name a few, many of which have CDs available for sale.

The Rollo Bay Group usually performs in 2 or 3 concerts per year. The final night of fiddle lessons before summer break is the Family Night Concert when students are invited to do a solo performance of their favourite tunes followed by the group performances. It is usually held sometime in May to show appreciation for all our family members who have been so supportive to the students throughout the year whether driving us back and forth to the lessons or just in listening to us painfully practicing the same tunes over and over. We are usually invited to perform at the Queen's County Fiddlers spring concert and we always perform on Sunday afternoon at 2 pm at the Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival following the moment of silence in remembrance of the fiddlers who have passed on before us.

There are numerous other fiddlers active in the area. Our oldest member is Hilda (MacPhee) MacDonald who recently entertained over 40 family and friends to commemorate her 101st

birthday at the Bayview Lodge in Souris. Her nephew George Mel frequently plays the old north side tunes to anyone who has a hankering to hear a tune or two. Her nieces Mary Warren and Teresa Wilson still play and can often be found at the St. Peter's Bay Circle Club on Friday nights.



Hilda MacDonald

Sheila MacKenzie reports that she has been active teaching Community school this past fall in Vernon River and currently in Morell on Tuesday nights. She and Lester Stubbert and Jon Matthews are playing every second Friday night at Myron's Happy Hour. She and Lester recently attended the ECMAs in Sydney and played at the 72-hour jam as well as the PEI Music Award Association showcase event.

I spoke to Francis McCormack who lives in Montague who reports that after being away for forty seven years, it just seems like he never left. He has been doing a lot of benefits and dances, also filling in for a lot of fiddlers when they are away. He has played on board the Northumberland Ferry every summer since he came back and really enjoys that. If he ever meets up with any of us he will have a tune ready.

Mark Haines is also very busy teaching and entertaining all over the place including Halifax, Ontario, and even Sweden. Closer to home, Chad Mooney, Jimmy Townshend and I joined Mark on our fiddles at the annual Christmas Story and Song night at the Souris Regional High School to help kick off the Santa Claus Parade Week events. A great evening of entertainment was enjoyed by all.

Winter weather slows things down a bit at this end of the Island but we make up for it once the weather turns. Preparations are well underway for another successful Fiddle Festival in Rollo Bay this summer, the biggest annual event that draws fiddlers together from far and wide. Hope to see everyone there.

Don't see what you're looking for? -- Tell us!

Queens County Fiddlers Annual Concert

Saturday 28 May 2005
Carrefour Theatre Charlottetown
8:00 pm (doors open at 7:15 pm)
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The Monticello Ceilidh



Jenny McQuaid "oversees" as J.J. Chaisson, Timothy Chaisson & Troy MacGillivray play at the Monticello Ceilidh

The Monticello Ceilidh, established in June 1991 is P.E.I.'s longest running ceilidh of its kind. Jenny McQuaid was assisted by Teresa Wilson in hosting the ceilidh for the first couple of years.

Born out of a desire to revive a form of socializing that had existed in the area for many generations but had disappeared by the 1960's (young and old participate; no alcoholic beverages sold).

Established primarily as a social event rather than a money-making venture, as is evident by the minimal cost of admission and of other amenities, as well as the continuation of the ceilidh beyond the tourist season.

A small but faithful group of people working behind the scenes who advise, keep the books, clean the hall on a regular basis, do large and small maintenance jobs, light the fire, purchase supplies, and work at the ceilidh itself are all responsible for the success of the ceilidh.

Also sharing in the reason for the success of the ceilidh are the patrons, many of whom have attended on a regular basis since the beginning and who have brought (unsolicited) food for the lunch, have shared their talents and their kind and generous attitudes as well as a sense of fun.

Thus, it is evident that the music and dancing alone do not make the ceilidh but rather a blending of many components.

(The Monticello ceilidh is held every Sunday starting at 8:00 pm. During the summer months, this is preceded by a special one-hour fiddling & stepdance concert. Phone 628-1254 for additional information)

Fiddler's Shop Talk



Roy Johnstone

The fiddle is not an easy instrument to learn but with practice and a degree of ability everybody can make music on it. It's easier if you learn a few basic principles when you're starting out rather than trying to correct things later, but it's never too late. Here's a few I've gleaned over the years playing and talking with other fiddlers.

Respect your instrument and take the best care of it you can. Make sure it's the appropriate size for you and that it's comfortable to hold and play. Have the fiddle set up properly: factors such as neck size, string spacing, bridge height, and the use of shoulder and chin rests all affect the playability. A well looked after instrument will give you a better sound and will provide more enjoyment. More on the specifics of setting up the instrument in later columns.

When playing you should try and sit with the spine erect and try to play with as little muscular tension as possible. No tension allows for smooth movement of the bowing arm and the left hand fingers. Play slowly when learning tunes and when warming up, this will help reduce tension. More about the details of bowing and fingering in upcoming talks.

Learning tunes by ear and by reading both have advantages and you should try to do both. A note representation of a tune is only a guide and it can never give you the real sounding of the tune but it will give you another way of looking at and hearing a tune. This is helpful in learning the keys in which tunes are played and in seeing the outline of the melody of the tune. Also, the notated music will help with understanding scales and keys and harmonies and chording accompaniment. However, tunes learned by ear will be better remembered than those learned from the music.

Learn to identify your own weaknesses and then develop an approach to your practice that corrects or improves these. A few minutes of focused practice can be much more beneficial than an hour of just mindless playing. Get into a routine of practicing so much per day, even if it's only 15 minutes. That's much better than practicing for hours only once per week.

Have fun, play with other musicians, enjoy the experience of playing and practicing!! Listen closely to all the different sounds you can make on the fiddle. What an amazing instrument!! Till next time, keep the bow rosined and the fiddle in tune!!!

(ECMA multi-nominee, performer and recording artist, Roy Johnstone, has a website at <http://www.royjohnstone.com/>)

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Prince County Fiddlers

Barry Thompson

Although somewhat few in number, the Prince County Fiddlers continue to assist in keeping the tradition alive primarily in the East Prince area. We have nine active fiddlers: Jim MacDougall, Robert Gallant, Patsy Bulger, Lottie Lock, Nathan Condon, Leith Thomson, Edgar Millar, Thelma Campbell and Barry Thompson. We are fortunate to have four fine accompanists: Darlene Harding on Piano, Austin Paynter Accordion, Ronnie Albert and Alan Crozier on Guitar.

Our annual meeting is held in the fall but we have many lively discussions throughout the year. Barry Thompson is the president, Leith Thomson is the vice president, and Edgar Millar is the secretary-treasurer.

In the past year we have performed Christmas concerts for Wedgewood and Summerset manors in Summerside; we had a very fun filled, energetic concert for our hosts at Community Connections; played on a float in the "Lobster Carnival Parade"; and were guest performers at the QCFs annual concert. We also played at several other seniors facilities; had a grand time at Rollo Bay; and provided entertainment at the opening of the Community Harvest Festival in Kensington.

Our plans for the upcoming season will be more of the same. Our highlight of the year was the restart of our own annual concert after a three year absence. The concert was held on the Second Saturday of

August at the Community Gardens Arena in Kensington. We were pleased to have the Queens County Fiddlers and Guest stepdancer Tracy Arsenault provide additional entertainment.

Last summer we were approached by the P.E.I. Department of tourism to do a photo shoot at Cabot Park, something the Prince County Fiddlers did in the early 90's that was quite successful. The envelope the department uses for mailing it's promotional packages now is now adorned with a very handsome picture of Leith Thomson, Patsy Bulger, and Libbe Hubley. The same picture is on the top of the front cover of the Tourism Guide. We also got a little article in the new "culture and heritage" section of the guide, which gives attention to the PCFs and the PEI Fiddler's Society.

We meet for practise every Monday night at 7:30 at Community Connections 701 Water Street west Summerside at 7:30 PM. New members always welcome.



Libbe, Patsy and Leith

Your comments are important to us.

Send your email to gerardcheverie@eastlink.ca or send your snail mail to The Island Fiddler PO Box 204 Cornwall PE C0A 1H0

Fiddle Related Events Forecast

12 Mar 2005	Fiddle Dance, Kendra MacGillivray	Charlottetown - St Pius X Hall	368-1832
12 Mar 2005	Fiddle Workshop, Kendra MacGillivray	Charlottetown - St Pius X Hall	367-5606
02 Apr 2005	Tartan Day Concert	Charlottetown - Holy Redeemer Parish Hall	566-2805
16 May 2005	Fiddle Lessons Family Night Concert	Rollo Bay Consolidated School	672-2711
28 May 2005	Queens County Fiddlers Ann. Concert	Charlottetown - Carrefour Theatre	569-4592
04 Jun 2005	A Fiddle Summit	Charlottetown - Carrefour Theatre	659-2932
15-17 Jul 2005	Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival	Rollo Bay Fiddle Field	687-2584
29-31 Jul 2005	Atlantic Fiddlers Jamboree	Abrams Village	854-3321
5-7 Aug 2005	Fiddlers & Followers Weekend	Cavendish PEI - Rainbow Valley	963-2221
13 Aug 2005	PEI Fiddlers in Concert	Kensington PEI - Community Gardens Arena	836-3844
Wednesdays	Ceilidh	Souris - Seniors Silver Threads	687-2396
Wednesdays	Square Dance	Old Lorne Valley School	687-2584
Thursdays	Ceilidh (starting 16 Jun)	Rollo Bay Fiddle Field Barn	687-2584
Fridays	Ceilidh & Dance	St. Peter's Bay Circle Club	961-2301
Sundays	Ceilidh & Dance	Monticello Log Hall	628-1254
Sundays	Kitchen Party 2-5 pm	St Teresa - Peaks Tee	583-2632
Sun/Mon/Wed	Scottish Music Concert (starts 14 May)	Richmond	854-2245



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Our thanks to Prince Edward Island's Richard Wood for permission to publish this beautiful waltz.

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Richard Wood

THE *Fiddle Doo* IN KENSINGTON

Mary Smith

Have you ever been to a Fiddle Doo and Pot Luck? Well, this is a very popular event during the winter months in New Brunswick and takes place almost every second week. A small group of Islanders has been attending some of these Fiddle Doo's and really enjoying them. I happened to be one of these Islanders who have travelled to N.B. a number of times to Fiddle Doo's. On one of my trips, in discussion with that famous fiddler Ivan Hicks, I mentioned that I was thinking of maybe organizing a Fiddle Doo on P.E.I. and asked Ivan if he thought a few N.B. fiddlers would be interested in coming over Ivan indicated if I had one they would love to come to P.E.I. with their fiddles. So, armed with great friends, posters, and mailouts, it all came together on Feb. 12 at the Murray Christian Centre in Kensington. The turnout was fantastic, and music rang from the rafters! A full house enjoyed an afternoon of super music, fellowship and, of course, great food. Some 40 fiddlers, including fiddle greats Ivan Hicks, Louise Arseneault, Ernie Depreau and Norman Roach who, by the way, is head of the Maritime Fiddle Association, and many, many more attended. There were also accompanists on guitars, pianos and drums, all to the delight of the packed house. The youngest performer was Ned Landry's seven-year-old granddaughter, and the oldest was Eddie Arseneault of N.B. who is some 80-plus years old. Ivan and Ernie arranged to charter a 47-passenger bus which filled so a larger 57-passenger bus was acquired. This still didn't accommodate all who wanted to come to P.E.I., so many came by car. The response we received from N.B. and P.E.I. was beyond expectation. We had so many great entertainers from our own P.E.I. people and from N.B. It was just fantastic. Everyone had a wonderful time and left and



Alexander & Allison Landry - Ned's great-grandchildren

wanting to have another Fiddle Doo and Pot Luck. So if all goes well, we will have another one in the fall. Thanks to all the people who worked so hard to help make this event such a great success.

Mary Smith brings fiddlers together every summer at Fiddlers & Followers weekend at Rainbow Valley in Cavendish P.E.I. (5-7 Aug in 2005)

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