

# THE ISLAND FIDDLER



## THE MacCORMACK FAMILY

Four Generations of Fiddlers

Left to Right

John J. (Jack) MacCormack, Souris, Kings County; Dan J. (Buddy) MacCormack, St. Eleanors, Prince County; Wilhelmina (Billie) Gallant, Sherwood, Queen's County; Shawn MacCormack, St. Eleanors, Prince County.

Newsletter of the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers' Society  
No. 9, December 1983

Summer 1983 was certainly a busy one for many of our fiddlers. They took part in several outdoor concerts, including what Roddy Chaisson says was the most successful Rollo Bay concert ever! A tip of the bow to the hard-working Eastern King's fiddlers who do an outstanding job every year.

Some of the other major concerts participated in included the Cape Breton Fiddlers Association Concert at St. Ann's, Cape Breton, during the Gathering of the Clans; the P.E.I. Highland Games Concert at Selkirk Park, Iona; and the 2nd Annual Scottish Concert put on by the MacKinnon Family of Richmond.

The P.E.I. Fiddlers' Society recently held their annual meeting at the Charlottetown Hotel. The new executive is: President, John Gauthier; 1st Vice-President, Cecil Trainor; 2nd Vice-President, Alvin Bernard; Secretary-Treasurer, Marie Muise. All enjoyed the fine meal and great music that followed the meeting.

The Prince County Chapter of the P.E.I. Fiddlers' Society recently held its annual meeting. Their new executive is: President, Dan MacCormack; Vice-President, Erving Miller; Secretary, Libbe Hubley; Treasurer, Wayne MacQuarrie. John Gauthier will be teaching the intermediate violin class, and Peter Doiron will be instructing the beginner's class.

Congratulations to CBCT TV for a much improved "Sounds of the Island" show. The swing to more traditional music is, no doubt, the major reason for this year's positive audience response. The extra care and thought put into the show by the staff this year is indeed evident.

Congratulations to Cecelia MacKinnon on her 10 week Scottish music show "Scots' Delight" (Mondays, CBCT FM, 4:35--4:55 p.m.).

On November 12, the P.E.I. Dance Association held its annual dance competition and, for the first time in several years, it was an "open" competition. Dancers from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick helped make the event very successful.

The P.E.I. Scottish Country Dancers sponsored a successful Scottish concert, November 13, at Holy Redeemer Parish Hall. It is hoped the concert will be an annual event.

Congratulations to Catherine dau Smidt and Chester Stewart who were recently married.

Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. George MacIntyre who recently celebrated their wedding anniversary.

John Muise passes along word that the P.E.I. Fiddlers will be making a return engagement to the Confederation Center on February 22, 1984.

# THE MacCORMACK FAMILY

The family unit plays a major part in the preservation of traditional music. A fine example of this is the MacCormack family Souris, Sherwood, and St. Eleanors, P.E.I.

The love of traditional fiddle music is strong in the MacCormack family, and today there are four generations (cover photo) actively playing the violin.

## John J. (Jack) MacCormack

Jack was born on Boughton Island, P.E.I., in 1886. Today, at 87 years young, he has been playing the violin for nearly 80 years.

Jack is basically self-taught. When he was eight years old, he would take his father's fiddle and practice alone in his room. He learned much from listening to older fiddlers in the area.

Jack says he would have liked to have had a chance to learn to read music. Then he would have been able to learn the tunes better and thus have had a much larger repertoire.

Jack started playing for dances when he was seventeen. The fiddlers in those days didn't get paid for playing at dances; but as Jack's wife Mary used to say, "You would get your supper and all the dust you could eat." He sometimes had piano or organ accompaniment if they were available; if not, he played alone. The popular dances back then were the lancers, quadrilles, and some waltzes.

When Jack was 20 years old, in 1906, he inherited his grandfather's (John Morrison) fiddle--a fiddle that has now been played by six generations of MacCormacks. Today, it is being played by Jack's son, Dan J. MacCormack.

Some of Jack's close fiddle friends back then were the late Jack Webster (Newsletter No. 5) and the late Hector MacDonald (Newsletter No. 6). Also, there were Wilfred Campbell and James Banks, who are still active today. Jack's favorite fiddler today is Joe MacLean of Cape Breton.

His father-in-law, the late Jerome MacLean, was a very fine fiddler and contributed much to Jack's sons and daughters being so musical.

Jack is a life member of the P.E.I. Fiddlers' Society, and he is very proud that there are four generations of his own family now playing violin.

#### Dan J. (Buddy) MacCormack

Dan J. learned to play violin from his father (John J. (Jack) MacCormack) when he was 5 years old. When he was six and a half, he played for a square set at a Christmas party. The first tune he learned was the "Cock O' The North."

When Dan J. was 15, his father bought him his first fiddle. He ordered it through Eaton's catalogue and paid \$4.95 for it. That particular fiddle is still being played today by Dan J.'s niece, Carrie Ann MacDonald. Dan J. recently learned to read music and has often wished he had had the opportunity when he was younger.

He has been very musically active over the years. Shortly after the war, Dan J. and his sisters Mary and Therese accompanying on piano and guitar, played for almost a year--three times a week over CFCY.

In the mid-fifties, when he moved to Moncton, Dan J. had his own band again and played a live show for 13 weeks over CKCW TV, Moncton.

Dan J. is a tireless worker on behalf of traditional music and is currently the president of the Prince County Chapter of the P.E.I. Fiddlers.

#### Wilhelmina (Billie) MacCormack Gallant

Billie is the daughter of Dan J. She first learned to play the guitar when she was very young and once accompanied her father on radio when she was five years old.

Billie has always had the desire to play the violin, and three years ago she began to realize that dream when she started to take lessons.

She enjoys every minute she devotes to the violin and is becoming quite accomplished.

Billie also plays piano and accompanies other members of the family when there is a get together.

### Shawn MacCormack

Shawn is the 13 year old grandson of Dan J. and the great-grandson of Jack. Shawn started taking fiddle lessons in 1981. He is progressing really well and already has several tunes in his repertoire.

Shawn is a very busy young man with school, hockey, and fiddle music; but with Shawn's love of music, the fiddling tradition of the MacCormack family is in good hands.

Thanks to Dan MacCormack for notes and cover picture and to Libbe Hubley for her assistance. J.W.

## Tunes To Try

# GEMMA'S JIG

by DAN J. MACCORMACK

The first jig is a recent composition of Dan J. MacCormack of St. Eleanors. Thanks to Bill MacDonald for transcription.

# KENMURE'S ON AN' AWA WILLIE

The second jig, George MacIntyre tells us, was very popular as a set tune years ago but is seldom heard at all on the Island now. It's an easily played, nice going tune; and the version here, according to George, is how it was played years ago in the "Northside Area."

# THE OLD VIOLIN

"T'was battered, scarred, and the auctioneer  
Thought it scarcely worth his while  
To waste his time on the old violin  
But held it up with a smile.

"What am I bidden, good people," he cried  
"Who'll start the bidding for me?  
A dollar, a dollar! Now two, only two  
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?

Three dollars once, three dollars twice  
Going for three? But no --  
From the room far back a gray haired man  
Came forward and picked up the bow

Then wiping the dust from the old violin  
And tightening up the strings  
He played a melody pure and sweet  
As sweet as an angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer  
With a voice that was quiet and low  
Said "What am I bid for the old violin?"  
And he held it up with the bow.

"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?  
Two thousand and, and who'll make it three?  
Three thousand once, three thousand twice  
And going and gone" said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried  
"We don't quite understand  
What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply  
"The touch of a master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune  
And battered and torn with sin  
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd  
Much like the old violin.

A mess of pottage, a glass of wine  
A game, and he travels on.  
He is going once, and going twice  
He's going and almost gone.

But the master comes, and the foolish crowd  
Never can quite understand  
The worth of a soul, and the change that's wrought  
By the touch of the Master's hand.

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### OBITUARIES

We extend our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Russell Warren, who passed away recently in the prime of life. Russell was a well known Summerside area fiddler who will be missed by all.

We extend our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Parnell Cosgrove of Summerside, who recently passed away at the age of 102 years. His fiddle music and fellowship touched many people over his long life, and he will be gravely missed.

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