

# The Gerald S. Doyle Songsters and the Politics of Newfoundland Folksong

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Volume 13, Number 1, 1991

Frontières: interactions canado-américaines  
Bridges and Boundaries: Canadian/U.S. Interactions

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081698ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081698ar>

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## Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

## ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

## Cite this article

Rosenberg, N. V. (1991). The Gerald S. Doyle Songsters and the Politics of Newfoundland Folksong. *Ethnologies*, 13(1), 45–57.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1081698ar>

## Article abstract

The textual contents of the first two editions of St. John's businessman Doyle's widely distributed booklets are examined. The focus is upon their relation to political and social ideas and events. In each edition, Doyle printed songs from Newfoundland's past as a commentary on its present, choosing those which best represented his own perspective. Today a significant number of these songs are still recognized as central to the canon of Newfoundland folksong.

# THE GERALD S. DOYLE SONGSTERS AND THE POLITICS OF NEWFOUNDLAND FOLKSONG\*

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If we conceive of folksong scholarship as the product of a nascent awareness of a national character, culture or soul, then no figure has been more central to Newfoundland's folksong scholarship than the late Gerald S. Doyle. Born in 1892 in the coastal community ("outport") of King's Cove, Bonavista Bay, he moved to the capital city of St. John's where in the 1920s he built a national wholesale distributorship which specialized in patent medicines. By "national" I mean the island of Newfoundland and its continental territory, Labrador. From 1855 to 1934 they constituted first a separate self-governing colony and then a dominion of Britain.

Many significant events in the political and social history of the emergent nation were shaped by tensions between religious factions. This factionalism was often complex, involving sects and regions, but it always involved representatives from one or both of the two groups that together constituted a majority of the population—the Irish Catholics and the English Protestants. Doyle was one of the most prominent Catholic businessmen in Newfoundland during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

Like many people from the hinterlands who succeed in the urban centre of St. John's, Doyle felt nostalgic about the home he had left behind. His patriotism was grounded in this attachment, and throughout his life he kept in touch with outport culture. During yearly cruises on his yacht, the *Miss Newfoundland*, to communities on various sections of the coast, he did business with local merchants and socialized with those who shared his enthusiasm for the old-time

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\* An earlier version of this paper was read at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society, October, 1988. Thanks to: Pat Byrne, Colleen Lynch, Peter Narváez, Peter Neary, James Overton, Shannon Ryan, Larry Small and George Story for reading and commenting on various drafts.

1. For a sketch of Doyle's life, see Harold Paul Mercer, "A Bio-Bibliography of Newfoundland songs in Printed Sources" M. A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1978, p. 82-89; and Genevieve Lehr, "Doyle, Gerald S", in *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, (ed.) J. R. Smallwood et al, St. John's, Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1981, I, p. 641. Other sources concerning Doyle's enterprises include Genevieve Lehr, "Doyle News", in Smallwood, I, p. 641; and Eugene P. Kennedy, "Gerald S. Doyle Limited", in Smallwood, II, p. 515.

songs and recitations. Doyle's enthusiasm was personal and subjective; he enjoyed hearing and performing these songs and poems in his own home.

In November 1927 Doyle published *Old-Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland*. Subtitled "Songs of Folklore, Humour, Tragedy, and History, from the Days of Our Forefathers", its seventy-two pages carried the texts to forty-three songs and poems, with brief headnotes for each text. There was no music. Interspersed among the texts were advertisements for the products sold by Doyle, in the same manner as in the annual almanacs which the Chase Company, an American firm for whom Doyle was the Newfoundland agent, had been publishing for years. The commercial side of Doyle's motivation to produce the songbook was thus inspired at least in part by this example of American advertising.<sup>2</sup>

This songster was the first of five editions, three of which were published during Doyle's lifetime, of what is locally called the "Doyle songbook". All editions of the small center-stapled paperback were given away by Doyle's company, and were widely distributed throughout Newfoundland. In a place where little of value could be had for free, these books were prized possessions in many households, and remain so today. The Doyle songbooks presented "key texts," creating a popular canon for Newfoundland folksongs.<sup>3</sup> But folksong scholars have tended to ignore or discount their significance because of their popular nature.<sup>4</sup> The present study is part of my work in progress to develop

2. Earlier songsters published in Newfoundland also carried advertising, but it was not for the publisher's products. Nor were these songsters given away free—they were sold. See Paul Mercer, *Newfoundland Songs and Ballads in Print, 1842-1974*, St. John's, Memorial University, 1979, p. 63-66, 78-81.
3. In using the term "key text" I intend to connect it to previous usages by folklorists of Raymond Williams's idea of "key words" as set forth in his *Culture and Society*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1961, 13 ff. The idea was re-articulated as "key song" by Michael Pickering in "The Past as a Source of Aspiration: Popular Song and Social Change", p. 46, and Sam Richards in "Westcountry Gypsies: Key Songs and Community Identity", p. 126-127, both of which appear in *Everyday Culture: Popular Song and the Vernacular Milieu*, (eds.) Michael Pickering and Tony Green, Milton Keynes, Open Press, 1987. The term "canon" is informed by Philip V. Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 104-120. I have discussed the Doyle songbooks within the context of other Newfoundland folksong collections in Neil V. Rosenberg, "Folksong in Newfoundland: A Research History", in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Ballads and Folksongs*, (ed.) Conrad Laforte, Québec, Université Laval/CELAT, 1989, p. 45-52.
4. For examples of the earlier ethnographic perspective toward the Doyle songbooks, see Kenneth Peacock, "The Native Songs of Newfoundland", in *Contribution to Anthropology, 1960: Part II*, Ottawa, National Museum, Bulletin no. 190, Anthropological Series, no. 60, 1963, p. 213; George J. Casey, Neil V. Rosenberg and Wilfred W. Wareham, "Repertoire Categorization and Performer-Audience Relationships: Some Newfoundland Folksong Examples", *Ethnomusicology* 16, 1972, p. 398; and Gerald L. Pocius, "'The First Day that I Thought of it Since I Got Wed': Role Expectation and Singer Status in a Newfoundland Outport", *Western Folklore* 35, 1976, p. 116-117.

a Newfoundland-centered perspective toward Newfoundland folk poetry, song and music in order to correct the current misconceptions concerning this topic. My focus is upon the contents of the first two editions, and the ways in which, since their contents were different in every edition of the songbook, they project Doyle's values and opinions in the broad political context of the time of their publication. By politics I mean not just what goes on within parties, at elections and in the activities of elected and appointed officials, but all those activities by which individuals work to influence the creation, maintenance and modification of the social fabric.

It is quite clear that Doyle thought about songs in this way. He opens his introduction to the 1927 edition with a telling couplet: "Let me make the Songs of my Country/And I care not who makes the Laws" (p. 1). His introduction stressed the historical value of the songs, using terminology reflecting a mixture of local, Irish, and American intellectual trends of the time. He borrowed phraseology from the Irish literary revival ("racy of the soil") to convey his interest in preserving and perpetuating that which was purely local and therefore truly national.<sup>5</sup> The songs he included, all from and dealing with Newfoundland, were described not as "folk" but with the contemporary American word "old-time", which, as Simon Bronner has recently pointed out, came into use at the end of the nineteenth century "to represent rural values to an industrializing country".<sup>6</sup> Doyle was probably aware of the publicity Henry Ford had generated in 1925-1926 for the same kind of self-serving promotion of "old-time" dance music in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Like Ford, Doyle had strong views about what was important for a true understanding of his country's national heritage.

A substantial number of the texts in the first edition came from earlier broadsides and songsters published in St. John's. These reflected a lively tradition of local composition epitomized by the work of John Burke (d. 1930), who modeled his works, particularly the humorous ones, on the contemporary American and Irish "stage Irish" genre.<sup>8</sup> They also reflected the work of James

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5. The OED defines "racy of the soil" as "characteristic of a certain country or people (chiefly used with reference to Ireland)"; it was used in particular by Irish writers, including Douglas Hyde.
  6. Simon Bronner, *Old-Time Music Makers of New York State*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1987, p. 189.
  7. "Fiddling to Henry Ford", *Literary Digest* 2 Jan. 1926; Don Robertson, "Uncle Bunt Stephens: Champion Fiddler", *Old Time Music* 5, 1972, p. 4-6; Reynold M. Wik, *Henry Ford and Grass-roots America*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1973, p. 223-224; Charles K. Wolfe, *The Grand Ole Opry: The Early Years*, London, Old Time Music, 1975, p. 49, 65-66; Paul Wells, "Mellie Dunham: 'Maine's Champion Fiddler'", *JEMF Quarterly* 12, 1976, p. 117-118; Bronner, p. 33-38; and Debora Kodish, *Good Friends and Bad Enemies*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1986, p. 59.
  8. For a sampling of the material on Burke, see Paul Mercer (ed.), *The Ballads of Johnny Burke: A Short Anthology*, St. John's, Newfoundland Historical Society, 1974; W. J. Kirwin, *John White's*

Murphy (d. 1931), whom Mercer has described as “Newfoundland’s first folklorist”. Murphy had been collecting and publishing folksongs from Newfoundlanders since the 1890s.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, some of Doyle’s headnotes were taken verbatim from these earlier sources. While he did not identify his sources, he did attempt wherever possible to name authors, which stands in contrast to the stress many folksong scholars of the time placed on anonymity as a defining characteristic of folksongs. Instead, Doyle repeatedly described specific songs and poems as “popular” in the present, past or both. He showed an appreciation of the importance of context, saying he had heard these songs in their proper settings at “old fashioned festive events” (p. 1).

What were the songs in the 1927 edition about? For purposes of generalized content analysis I have grouped terms descriptive of content into four categories: settings, topics, texture, and stance.

Settings include (1) two seasonal migratory fisheries: the Labrador fishery and the seal fishery; (2) St. John’s and its neighboring outports; (3) outports in the region around Doyle’s native Bonavista Bay; (4) and the lumberwoods.

Among the topics are (1) courtship; (2) working-class life; (3) unfair or harsh authority figures: merchants, politicians and shippers; (4) drink, food and related festive excess; (5) male bravery and independence; (6) hazards of the seafaring life; (7) the historic past; (8) the present; (9) women and home; (10) outport life; (11) economic competition, and (12) social pretension.

Texture varies considerably, including (1) straightforward descriptive language, (2) flowery poetic styles, (3) self-conscious use of local dialect and (4) stage Irish.

Stances range from (1) comic to (2) nostalgic, (3) tragic and (4) reportorial.

The way in which Doyle’s texts combine various settings, topics, languages and stances can help us understand the values and ideas he embraced as native and popular; from song to song certain patterns emerge. For example, many songs set in St. John’s or nearby communities combine such topics as courtship; working class or outport life; drink, food and festive excess; and use dialect or Irish language with a comic stance.

When the songster is read consecutively, thematic connections between adjacent songs become evident. I do not know if Doyle was always conscious of such connections when editing, but some groupings do suggest such an awareness. For example, three songs about life in small communities near St. John’s appear together (p. 67-68). First there is a comic song about a riotous public

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*Collection of the Songs of Johnny Burke*, St. John’s, Cuff, 1982; Genevieve Lehr, “Burke, Johnny”, in *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, (ed.) J. R. Smallwood et al. St. John’s, Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1981, I, p. 295; Michael P. Murphy, *Pathways Through Yesterday*, St. John’s, Town Crier, 1976, p. 148-165; and Mercer, “Bio-Bibliography”, p. 73-81.

9. Mercer, “Bio-Bibliography”, p. 118-123; Murphy, *Pathways*, p. 148-152.

party in Kelligrews: "The Kelligrew's [sic] Soiree". It is followed by the sad tale set in nearby Logy Bay of a youthful courting couple separated forever by the girl's father: "The Star of Logy Bay". Finally there is the happy story from the neighboring Bell Isle of separated lovers reunited: "The Blooming Bright Star of Bell Isle".<sup>10</sup> A majority of the settings are either in, or near, St. John's; or in the vicinity of Doyle's own outpost birthplace. While outports are viewed with humor, sympathy and affection, St. John's is generally the centre from which they are viewed, arguing for the hegemony of St. John's, whose dominance of the country in 1927 was unquestioned.

In songs about hard and often dangerous outdoors work there is frequently a connection with masculinity and courtship. One commonly mentioned work setting is the Labrador fishery. Since the early years of the nineteenth century, fishermen from the Avalon Peninsula and Northeast coast of the island had prosecuted a seasonal fishery in Labrador. In addition to those who lived on the coast of Labrador, these Newfoundlanders fished in small schooners ("floaters") or travelled on such schooners and later on coastal steamers to harbours and islands where they maintained summer fishing premises and fished from the land ("stationers"). The annual move from home outports to "the Labrador" was an enterprise usually involving small crews of fishermen with female cooks, and often these crews comprised some combination of members of a family, people from the same community or residents of neighbouring communities. These Newfoundlanders viewed the lengthy trip to the Labrador fishery in part as an adventure; the entire event had aspects of a summer holiday. More importantly, however, it was the chief yearly employment for those involved, lasting from June to October. In this traditional seasonal migratory labour setting there was frequently courtship between young people who came from different parts of the coast and met only in Labrador.<sup>11</sup> The first edition of the songster contained four songs which touched on this topic. Two, both dating from the

10. That his song is about the island in Conception Bay is by no means agreed upon. See Michael Gray, "Grubbing for a Moderate Jewel: In Search of the Blooming Bright Star of Belle Isle", *Canadian Folklore Canadien* 8, 1986, p. 43-85. I believe that Doyle's inclusion of it with three other songs about Conception Bay communities strengthens the argument that Doyle thought of the song as being about the island in Conception Bay. This is reinforced by the fact that the only other "Bell Isle" reference in this edition of Doyle is "Concerning One Summer in Bonay I Spent", which catalogues home communities of Labrador fishery stationers. All the other communities listed in it (save St. John's) are from Conception Bay, a point not noted by Gray. Gray also misspells "Bell" as "Belle" in his reference to this song ("...Bonay") as it appeared in the 1927 edition.
11. Among the most useful of the many writings about the Labrador fishery are W. A. Black, "The Labrador Floater Cod Fishery". *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 50, 1960, p. 267-295; Greta Hussey, *Our Life on Lear's Room Labrador*, St. John's, Robinson-Blackmore, 1981; and Nicholas Smith, *Fifty-Two Years at the Labrador Fishery*, London, Arthur H. Stockwell, 1936.

nineteenth century, were about the entire summer event, one from a floater perspective ("Huntingdon Shore", p. 53), the other from a stationer point of view ("Concerning One Summer in Bonay I Spent", p. 57). A third song focused on courtship, depicting a fight between two young men, one from the Island and the other a Labrador resident or livyer (Fanny's Harbour Bawn", p. 3). The fourth related a disaster, the loss of a schooner on the often dangerous trip home in the fall ("Loss of the Schr. Susan on the Labrador", p. 51). Risk, danger, adventure, gain and loss are balanced in the songs on this topic.

On the same theme of hard and dangerous work are songs about the seasonal rite of passage of the spring seal fishery. Held every spring, it involved crowded ships of men who braved many dangers—storms, sometimes barely seaworthy ships and cold—to hunt seals on the ice. It was an opportunity to gain cash and a sign of manhood to have thus "gone to the ice". By 1927 this fishery had declined considerably from its peak in the early years of the century, but it was still thought of on the Northeast coast as a traditional part of the local economy.<sup>12</sup> Five songs about it dealt in various ways with the adventure, hard work, ritual and competition of the seal fishery: "Come All Ye Jolly Ice Hunters" (p. 15), "The John Martin" (p. 25), "Hunting Seals" (p. 39), "The Spring Morris Crotty Fought the Old Dog Hood" (p. 49) and "Captain Bill Ryan Left Terry Behind" (p. 65). All of these are set in, or were composed or published in, the 19th century. Although by 1927, a few large firms (mainly from St. John's) dominated the seal fishery, only one of the songs focused on these major figures in the industry. The greater emphasis was on sealing as one of the country's outport-based small-schooner traditions.

All fisheries were declining during the twenties, but Doyle chose songs about those fisheries of the past which emphasized individual high-risk economic enterprise, youthful romance and adventure. There is only passing reference to the banking schooner and inshore fisheries. The banking fishery, prosecuted mainly from the southernmost parts of the island by large schooners, may have been less familiar to him as a northern man, and probably also seemed more businesslike and less romantic than the Labrador and seal fisheries. The latter point may also have contributed to the relative lack of material on the inshore fishery. And we can guess that for him in 1927 the memory persisted of the battles in the early part of the century over the strong views of Coaker and his Fisherman's Protective Union (F.P.U.)—opposed by the Catholic Church—which had considerably influenced the thoughts and actions of inshore fish-

12. For information on this fishery, see Shannon Ryan, "The Seal Fishery in Newfoundland's Economy and Culture", in Shannon Ryan and Larry Small, *Haulin' Rope & Gaff*, St. John's, Breakwater, 1978, p. 1-11; John R. Scott, "The Function of Folklore in the Interrelationship of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery and the Home Communities of the Sealers", M. A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1975; and Guy David Wright, *Sons and Seals: A Voyage to the Ice*, St. John's, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1984.

ermen.<sup>13</sup> It seems likely that, given his background, Doyle would have not been a supporter of Coaker.

The 1927 songster treated many other topics—too many to give individual attention here. Leaders, from skippers to politicians to merchants, are portrayed in less than complimentary terms as quaintly harsh and untrustworthy. But they are also shown as being of the past rather than the present. Doyle's own recent move from bayman Catholic to St. John's merchant is reflected in his espousal, as a merchant, of the cause of the anti-merchant class. This sentiment can also be seen, however, as a rather typical populist stance, later used with success by J. R. Smallwood and other Newfoundland politicians. Industrial development is only focused upon in one song, a historical piece of newspaper doggerel from the 1870s advocating the construction of the railroad ("The Newfoundland Railway", p. 11). Irishness is seen in broad comic stereotype terms, generally set in the historical past, and associated with the urban working classes. Religion is rarely mentioned, but for Doyle's readers, the Irishness would be interpreted as Catholicism. In a number of the songs by St. John's composer John Burke, comic Irish characters are elevated to major roles in the early history of the country (for example, "Discovery of Newfoundland", p. 41, and "The Landfall of Cabot", p. 71). Doyle's uses of Irish and Catholic identity in this first edition of his songster appear to reflect a perception of a close fit between his Irish-Catholic identity and the Newfoundland identity he was advocating in compiling the songster. The lesser number of songs and poems on this topic in the next two editions suggest that he downplayed the Irish-Catholic aspect of Newfoundland identity—probably because he realized that it had the potential to engender conflict.

Violence occurs in two contexts—courtship and politics—but, like Irishness, is set in the past. In this way Doyle safely placed some of the most contentious issues of Newfoundland politics in the past, which was in keeping with the tenor of the times evident in the business-as-usual Tory administration of Walter Monroe which had successfully papered over, for the time, the various conflicts relating to these issues which had caused turmoil in the national political scene during the preceding decades.<sup>14</sup> Doyle's first edition thus offered a picture of Newfoundland which argued, from the viewpoint of 1927, that the difficult times were in the past, and which abstracted from those experiences the conclusion that adversity molds character and a unified nation.

Although the second edition of the songster was published in 1940, internal evidence suggests that Doyle had been preparing it for publication as early as

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13. See W. F. Coaker, *The History of the Fisherman's Protective Union of Newfoundland*, St. John's, Advocate Publishing, 1930; Ian D. H. McDonald and J. K. Hiller (eds), *To Each His Own*, St. John's, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1987.

14. Frederick W. Rowe, *A History of Newfoundland and Labrador*, Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1980, p. 381-382.

1938. The probable cause for delay was the time and cost involved in adding music—the most significant difference between this edition and that of 1927. Responding to the publication of other collections of folksongs from Newfoundland in the intervening years, he incorporated some twenty-five new texts along with fifteen of the original forty-three. A significant number of the new songs came from Elisabeth Greenleaf and Grace Mansfield's *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*, published by Harvard in 1933.<sup>15</sup>

In his introduction to the 1940 edition, Doyle spoke proudly of the impact of the first edition, which he held to be largely responsible for a new interest in local songs. He asserted that the songs were only properly heard and performed in the right contexts: "fishing schooner's forecabin, open motor boat, lumber camp, banks of a fishing stream on a summer night". All of these contexts were male ones, and he was thus promoting singing as a male art without recognizing the contradiction implied by the fact that a number of the songs he borrowed from Greenleaf had come from women singers, as a few of his headnotes indicated. He dedicated the book to John Steven Lewis, a singer from a Catholic outport on the Northeast coast and one of Greenleaf's informants, commending him for bringing the songs to life in the proper style. The book was for the purpose of keeping songs alive and assisting new singers to follow the "old guard". Here then was a new emphasis upon the importance of the individual singer as a role model for young Newfoundlanders (see p. 5).

There are some important differences in textual contents between the 1927 and 1940 editions. One striking change is the contrast between comic songs and songs of wrecks, near-wrecks and disasters. There are half as many comic songs in 1940 as in 1927, while the number of songs in the wreck/disaster category more than doubled from 1927 to 1940.

These changes suggest a shift in Doyle's perspective. In part this shift was caused by changes in his sources for songs. Far fewer of the 1940 songs came from the St. John's broadsides and songsters which had been the source of many of the comic songs in the first edition. In the 1927 book, nine such songs by St. John's composer John Burke were included; there was only one in 1940, "The Kelligrew's Soiree" (p. 16). As mentioned above, by omitting these songs Doyle downplayed the perception of Irishness (and therefore Catholicism) as an aspect of Newfoundland identity. In place of this urban stage-Irish-Catholic material came songs from rural Newfoundland. Greenleaf, as well as Doyle's other sources of new songs for the second edition, represented the oral traditions of outport singing to a large extent. Among these new songs were many about historical events. Not surprisingly, maritime wrecks, disasters and related adversities figure importantly in outport traditions of local composition, although not

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15. Elisabeth B. Greenleaf and Grace Y. Mansfield, *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*, Cambridge. Harvard University Press, 1933.

all are treated as tragedies. At least one disaster is given comic treatment: in "A Great Big Sea Hove in Long Beach" (p. 27), a tidal wave causes an old woman in an outpost to "lose her speech". This text, incidentally, is the only one in this edition that had not been previously published elsewhere. Another song, "The Nordfeld and the Raleigh" (p. 47), enviously depicts a pair of shipwrecks on the Labrador coast which bring providential rewards to the local residents in the form of salvage. However, most of the disasters described in the newly included songs were tragic, and on a scale that made them nationally significant.

But Doyle's decision to include many songs about wrecks, disasters and adversities cannot be explained only in terms of new and different sources—it also had a political dimension. The Newfoundland of the late thirties was a very different place from that of the twenties; it was a time of political and economic disaster. In 1932-1933, the Dominion's finances had failed and local political control was relinquished, returning to the Crown. A Commission of Government took over, ending self-government for fifteen years. This political disaster occurred in the context of world depression, which drove down the price of all basic resources so that the already uncompetitive fishery suffered even further from poor markets. On top of these problems came a series of years during the thirties when fish catches were disastrously small. Thus, the late thirties were not easy times for Newfoundlanders, even successful businessmen like Doyle. However, his business had now grown to include a weekly newspaper and very popular daily radio news broadcasts. Doyle's major St. John's competitor, F. M. O'Leary, also entered broadcasting, sponsoring "The Barrelman", an extremely popular program featuring J. R. Smallwood, who would later lead Newfoundland into Confederation with Canada and was the province's first premier.<sup>16</sup> The media link between commerce and politics, reflected in Doyle's 1927 book, had thus, by the late thirties, expanded to include radio, which was particularly significant in a country which had no way of expressing public opinion through the ballot box and political debates.

The new medium of radio by no means eclipsed the powerful older one of print, and the second edition of Doyle's songbook was widely circulated and had considerable impact. This edition's allusions to the disasters of the past can be seen in rhetorical terms: Doyle is reminding his songbook readers that Newfoundland's history has had many other disasters and is thus tacitly counseling acceptance of the political and economic disasters that had dominated

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16. See Peter Narváez, "Joseph R. Smallwood, 'The Barrelman': The Broadcaster as Folklorist", in Peter Narváez and Martin Laba, *Media Sense*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986, p. 47-64. Philip Hiscock discusses the impact of Doyle's radio program in "The Gerald S. Doyle News Bulletin and the Public Despatch. Two Early Newfoundland News Services". unpublished paper read at the 1988 annual meetings of the Association for the Study of Canadian Radio and Television.

life in the thirties. This point seems underscored by the inclusion of two non-tragic songs about disaster mentioned previously, which find humor and economic windfall in certain disasters.<sup>17</sup>

Similar changes occur in this edition's songs about the seal fishery. None of the 1927 songs on this topic appeared in the 1940 edition; instead there are four newer songs included: two about disasters involving big St. John's ships ("Greenland Disaster", p. 40, and "The Southern Cross", p. 57), another which is a crew-composed moniker song about a schooner travelling from an outport ("Sealing Cruise of the *Lone Flyer*", p. 14), and the fourth a poem which romantically portrays the deathbed memories of an impoverished old St. John's master sealer, prompted by his hearing of the sounds of the boats sailing out to the ice ("The Master Watch", p. 77). Doyle appears to be making a point about the moribund state of this part of the fishery. Always risky, by the thirties it was no longer the attractive investment it had been and fewer men were going to it.

While there were fewer seal fishery songs in the 1940 book, there were more songs referring to the Labrador fishery. Doyle included three of the four songs from 1927<sup>18</sup> on this topic and added four new ones. The total picture was one slightly more positive than in 1927; one new song depicted a voyage that was a failure, but did so in good humour ("Change Islands Song", p. 61). There was an additional song about courtship ("The Maid of Newfoundland", p. 21), and two new comic songs, one dealing with a tall-tale hero who caught a whale in Labrador ("Jack Was Every Inch a Sailor", p. 13), the other with two "jinkers" who raised second thoughts about fishing with a crew of fools ("Two Jinkers, or Jimmie Walsh and Stephen", p. 11). It was a mixed picture consistent with the Labrador fishery of the thirties, which was risky and economically marginal, but which the Commission of Government supported as it did all of the local fisheries, because it was a make-work safety-valve during a time when the standard safety-valve of migration to Canada and the United States for jobs was closed. Doyle's songs reflect the feeling that this fishery, unlike the seal fishery, was still viable.

Among the most interesting new songs in the 1940 edition were three compositions by an outport native from Change Islands, Art Scammell. The first and most famous piece by Scammell, "The Squid Jiggin' Ground", had been composed in 1928 when he was fifteen years old. The song was first performed in 1934 on a popular St. John's radio show, "The Irene B. Mellon",

17. For another example of how popular culture products responded to the depression see William G. Young, "The Serious Funnies: Adventure Comics During the Depression, 1929-1938", *Journal of Popular Culture* 3: 3, 1969, p. 404-427.

18. The three songs from the 1927 edition which were kept in the 1940 edition were: "Huntingdon Shore", p. 23, "Concerning One Summer in Bonay I Spent", p. 33, and "Fanny's Harbour Bawn", p. 34.

and was subsequently performed at least six times on the air before its first printing in 1937 by J. R. Smallwood in his *The Book of Newfoundland*.<sup>19</sup> At that time Scammell, who had completed a course in teacher training in St. John's, had been teaching for five years in various Newfoundland outports. By 1940 he was studying for his B.A. at McGill and in that year published his first literary effort, *Songs of a Newfoundlander*. Raised in the outport traditions of songmaking, Scammell acquired literary pretensions during his education. He was, in the words of Patrick O'Flaherty, "the first significant writer with deep roots in the traditional outport way of life to reflect on that way of life and try to recreate it in imaginative literature".<sup>20</sup>

In "The Squid Jiggin' Ground" (p. 66) Scammell described for the first time in song a pedestrian communal inshore fishery, that in which bait fish were caught. There was good humor, political debate and male friendship; here the fishery was not a romantic escape, but a romantic extension of the outport. In "The Six Horsepower Coaker" (p. 74), he described the way in which an outport lad was able to repair a small boat engine with virtually nothing more than will and ingenuity. In this song we find, for the first time, modern technology mastered by the outport fisherman; independence from merchants and governments was implicit in its story of a fishing boat that could keep pace with the government-subsidized coastal steamer. "The Shooting of the Bawks" (p. 79) also dealt with independence; first published in the Fisherman's Protective Union's *Fisherman's Advocate*, it was a protest against environmental legislation to protect seabirds, enacted by the Commission of Government.<sup>21</sup> Pointedly borrowing the tune of "The Wearin' of the Green", Scammell portrayed this act as forcing independent outport people to commit crime in order to feed themselves adequately.

Doyle's inclusion of Scammell's songs projected his own ideas of independence and outport strength. In addition, "The Shooting of the Bawks" communicated one side of his apparently ambivalent feelings towards a government which had been imposed on the country; the song was the only one he printed from the body of protest song and poetry written in Newfoundland during the thirties. The other side of his ambivalence can be seen in the inclusion of

19. For the radio broadcast information see Philip Hiscock, "Folklore and Popular Culture in Early Newfoundland Radio Broadcasting: An Analysis of Occupational Narrative, Oral History and Song Repertoire", M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1986, p. 187. The first printing of Scammell's verses was in the anonymous "Poetry and Ballads of Newfoundland", edited, according to St. John's historian and poet Michael Harrington, by Smallwood himself and published in J. R. Smallwood, *The Book of Newfoundland*, vol. I, St. John's, Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1937, p. 479.

20. Patrick O'Flaherty, *The Rock Observed*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1979, p. 153.

21. See James Overton, "Document: Art Scammell's 'The Shooting of the Bawks': Songs and Resources in Newfoundland", *Acadiensis* 13: 1, 1983, p. 126-132.

a song written by the Victoria Cove schoolchildren praising Cocomalt (p. 80), one of the nutritious drinks which the Commission of Government distributed free to children in schools, and for which Doyle seems to have had the distributorship.

Between 1940 and 1955 when the third edition of the book appeared, many changes occurred in Newfoundland. Wartime brought prosperity in the form of jobs such as building and maintaining the American and Canadian military bases. As well, in the postwar years came two referenda which led to Newfoundland becoming Canada's tenth province in 1949.

During these years Doyle's 1940 edition was widely distributed—not just to Newfoundlanders but also to servicemen and others visiting the island. There is ample evidence that it was used in a variety of contexts when group singing was called for. Doyle promoted his songster as the definitive source for Newfoundland songs by keeping the songs most widely sung (and reprinted by others) in subsequent editions, discarding songs that didn't "catch on", and seeking new songs that might. He saw to it that some songs were made available to the public on records, first through his support of Scammell's records, and later through his direct creation of recordings by the Commodore's Quartet, which, like the songbooks, were given away free. By the early fifties a number of Canadian classical musicians and singers of folk songs were arranging and performing Newfoundland material, most of which came from or would appear later in Doyle. Also in the early fifties, other folksong collectors, most notably Kenneth Peacock from the National Museum in Ottawa, were using newly-available tape recorders to collect folksongs in Newfoundland.

A discussion of the changes and continuities in the 1953, 1966 and 1978 editions, as interesting as they are, must be reserved for a later study. But several important principles which emerge when examining the changes from edition to edition of the songbook can be suggested here. First and foremost, it seems clear that in each edition songs and poems from and about the Newfoundland past, particularly in its relatively poor and often politically disadvantaged outports, were used to construct a vision of the nation which reflected contemporary political events. Second, my admittedly tentative analyses indicate that Doyle's vision was shaped by his own involvement in a number of overlapping spheres. He was by birth and sentiment a Bonavista Bay man, and consequently thought of the fisheries as the economic heart of the country. Conversely he did not display much enthusiasm for the industrial development that many of his business contemporaries saw as essential to a modern Newfoundland. Even his view of the fisheries was conservative, mediated we can guess by a suspicion of unions that was grounded in part in the local Catholic perspective. He was also suspicious of confederation with Canada, and believed that only things local and native could truly reflect the culture of the people. Independence was for him the central metaphor—not only because of his political and religious feel-

ings, but also because he, as a self-made entrepreneur whose market was almost an assured monopoly as long as he had a national distributorship, had much to fear from the entry of larger Canadian distributorships into Newfoundland.

Today Gerald S. Doyle Limited no longer exists, having recently been absorbed into another firm. Many of the distinctive features of the Newfoundland that Doyle sought to reaffirm through his songbooks remain, though others have been lost. Most importantly, though, the songs remain. Among them are the songs and poems like "The Badger Drive", "The Kelligrew's Soiree", "The Ryans and the Pittmans", "The Star of Logy Bay", "A Great Big Sea Hove in Long Beach", "Jack Was Every Inch a Sailor", "Lukey's Boat", "The Squid Jiggin' Ground", "Feller from Fortune", "Hard, Hard, Times", "I's The B'y", "Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's", and "The Smokeroom on the Kyle", which comprise a large proportion of the canon of Newfoundland's national songs and verses.