

Learning to play was the basically self-taught process of most Cape Breton fiddlers, by observing accomplished musicians whenever possible and spending hours of practice to master the intricacies of bowing and tuning. In these years, he especially admired the playing style of "**Big**" **Ronald MacLellan** and the knowledge of the music possessed by composer / violinist **Gordon MacQuarrie**.

Bill's style of playing is characterized by the infusion of strong feeling and a real understanding of the music in his performance, in combination with a highly developed traditional technique of controlling the fiddle and, especially, the bow. Having taught himself to read music, he delved into the "old master" composers of Scotland - **The Gows, The MacKintoshs, William Marshall, Simon Fraser, James Scott Skinner**, among others. By this searching, he developed the truly unique skill of selection of tunes. His recordings are classic, and are becoming standards for younger players with even the arrangement and combination of tunes still played the same way. Perhaps the best illustration of this is his recording with Joe MacLean of Sydney, Cape Breton, of **Dusky Meadow** (a strathspey which was misnamed **Dusty Miller** on the original 78 recording).

Bill Lamey played at the first **St. Ann's Gaelic Mod** in 1938. In a competition at St. Ann's in 1948, he was awarded the Premier of Nova Scotia Cup. There are those who still remember his Nelga Beach (Sydney) dances in the 40's, as well as his radio programs over CJCB, Sydney, and CJFX, Antigonish, and others heard coast to coast over the CBC. In 1953 he moved his family to Boston, Massachusetts where he still resides with his wife, **Sara Ann MacEachern** of Glendale, Cape Breton. In Boston too he had a radio program over WVOM and successfully managed and played for "down east" dances for almost 20 years, first at rose Croix and later at Orange Hall.

The Cape Breton Island Gaelic Foundation was formed in 1938 at St. Ann's, Cape Breton, and Bill Lamey is a charter member. He has been a member of the Boston Branch since 1953 and has been President of the Boston Branch for the past fifteen years. Through the dances and the Gaelic Club, he has sponsored and introduced to Boston such Cape Breton artists as "**Little Jack**" **MacDonald, Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald, Donald and Theresa MacLellan, Angus Chisolm, Buddy MacMaster, John Allan Cameron, Joe MacLean, Donald Angus Beaton, Jerry**

Holland, Cameron Chisolm, Dan J. Campbell, John Campbell and Mary (Alistair Roghnail) MacDonald.

In 1966 he made his first trip to Scotland, where it all began. His outstanding memory of that time was performing with **Fr. John Angus Rankin** of Glendale, Cape Breton, before a live audience of 3,000 plus the television and radio audience of the BBC at the **Gaelic Mod in Inverness**, Scotland, and receiving a standing ovation from the people who were thrilled to see and hear their Highland Scottish Music and language so faithfully preserved for over 200 years in a place far away from them called Cape Breton Island.

Herb MacLeod and Patricia Lamey

Side A

1. BOG AN LOCHAIN - Strathspey. One of the oldest printed strathspeys having appeared in **Bemmer's Collection** published between 1751 and 1761. Bog an Lochain (translated: the water-ouzel) suggests that this fine tune, like many others imitative of children's rhymes in Galic, was inspired by the cry of this wild bird. **John Shaw**, in his research of Cape Breton violin music, recorded

Ciamar a ni mi'n Dannsa Direach,
Ciamar a ne mi ruidhle boidheach
Ciamar a ni mi'n Dannsa Direach,
Ch-fhalby am prin' a bonn mo chota.

CLAN RANALD and NINE PINT COGGIE - both reels in E minor. Taken from the **Athole Collection**. Compiled and arranged by **James Stewart Robertson** (printer in Edinburgh) 1833.

2. NEIL GOW'S LAMENTATION FOR DR. MORAY by Neil Gow from the **Skye Collection**. JOHNNIE PRINGLE -Strathspey. **William Marshall's Collection**, 1781. THE LASSIE WI THE YELLOW COATIE - Reel. Found in the **Robert Bremmer Collection** (1759), but is no doubt a much older tune.

3. MACKENZIE HAY - strathspey. THE KERRIE KEBBUCK - Strathspey. THE SPEY IN SPATE - Reel. All from **J. Scott Skinner** manuscripts with piano arrangements by **Gavin Creig**, M.A.

4. HIGHLAND WATCHES FAREWELL TO IRELAND (in Gaelic: A Mhorag Am Beil Thu Ann) - Strathspey, with variations added in **Neil Stewart's Collection** (1759).

5. PRINCE CHARLIE'S WELCOME TO THE ISLE OF SKYE - Quick Step. Traditional tune from the Skye Collection (1887). Reminiscent of the 45's after the Battle of Culloden (1746) when **Prince Charles Stuart** fled to the Isle of Skye to be disguised as **Betty Burke** by "The Highland Heroine", **Flora MacDonald**.

6. MINSTRELS FANCY and UPPER DENTON - both traditional hornpipes taken from **Kerr's Scottish and Irish Melodies**.

Side B

1. LOVAT SOUT'S - Quick March. MARQUIS OF TULLYBARDINE - Reel. Compositions from J. Scott Skinner's Manuscripts with piano arrangement by Lila Hashem.

2. WHISTLE O'ER THE LAVE O'T - Sean Troubhas (Old Trousers) Strathspey. First appeared as written music in Robert Bremmer's Collection (1751) and later in **John Glen's Collection** (1895)., CROSS OF INVERNESS - Reel. MUSCHAT'S CAIRN - Reel. As written in the Skye Collection and compiled by **Dr. Keith Norman MacDonald**.

3. DR. SHAW - Strathspey from J. Scott Skinner, Harp and Claymore (1890). THE BREEM DOG - Reel from J. Scott Skinner, Harp & Claymore (1890) (A 'breem dog' is an obsolete instrument for removing roots.)

4. LIEUT. HOWARD DOUGLAS - Strathspey by **Robert (Red Robb) MacIntosh** (1796). Lieut. Douglas was a British artillery officer who was shipwrecked off the south coast of Newfoundland in 1795 while on his way with his men from Grayson, England to Quebec. The survival of the group was largely due to the efforts of Lieut. Douglas, according to the historical data shared with us by **Leo Sullivan** of Boston. Lieut. Douglas later became governor of New Brunswick (1823 - 1831) and was honored with knighthood by the British government. THE FOREST OF GARTH - Strathspey. MISS STEWART OF GARTH - Reel. Both from the Robert MacIntosh Collection (1783).

5. WARLOCK'S STRASHSPEY - in E minor, composed by **Robert Lowe**, from **Joseph Lowe's Collection of Scottish Strathspeys and Reels**. MISS FLORA MACDONALD - Reel. (Gaelic: Thearlaich Nan Tigeadh Tu). First appears as a written tune in Robert Bremmer's Collection (1751). This tune is of distinct highland Gaelic origin, containing only two parts. Two variations were added by **Donald (Iaian Tailleir) Beaton** of Mabou, Inverness County, Cape Breton.

6. GLEN GRANT - Strathspey. MISS ROBERTSON - Reel. Played in A major, from **Kerr's Merry Melodies**.

Margaret MacDonald plays piano on all tracks on Side A. Lila Hashem plays piano and Woody Woodman plays kettle drum on the first three tracks on Side B. Rev. John A. Rankin of Glendale, Cape Breton plays piano on the last three tracks on Side B. Joe MacLean plays fiddle together with Bill on Side B., Track 2.

Remastering: Richard Newvins -- Color photo and cover design by "**Bil**" (**William Palmer, Jr.** Arlington, Ma.). Many thanks for their help to Herb MacLeod, Kate and Leo Sullivan, and Pat Lamey.

From Cape Breton to Boston and Back: Classic House Sessions of Traditional Cape Breton Music 1956 – 1977, Rounder Records 82161-7032-2 – 2000

Bill Lamey, fiddle; **Mary Jessie MacDonald**, piano; **Eddie Irwin**, piano; **Mary (Gacie) Muise**, piano; **Joe MacLean**, 2nd Fiddle; **Lila Hashem**, piano; **Woody Woodman**, drums. Voice introductions by: **Doug MacMaster**, Norton, Mass; **Rev. John Angus Rankin**, Glendale, N.S.; **Herbie MacLeod**, Arlington, Mass.

Produced by **Mary Elizabeth Lamey** and **Paul M. MacDonald**

Tunes: The Duchess of Athole's Favourite / Dusky Meadow / Miss Proud / Major David Manson; Killiecrankie; Mrs. Crawford's Favourtie / O'er The Moor Among The Heather / Clach na Cudain / Miss Rattray / Uist Lasses Darling / Duncan on the Plainstones / Loch Glassie; Sandie Owner The Sea / Don Side / Heather Hill / The Mourne Mountains / Sheehan's Reel; The Forth Bridge / Mrs. MacPherson of Inveran / Jock Wilson's Ball / Sleepy Maggie / The Forfar Hunt; Farewell to the Tay / Walking the Floor; Bachelor's Jig / The Cossy Jig / Oh Dear What Can The

Matter Be?; Caledonia's Wail for Niel Gow Her Favourite Minstrel; Crossing the Minch; Introduction: Herbie MacLeod; Inverary Castle / The Corbey and the Pyett / Struan Robertson's Rant / Miss Flora MacDonald's / Mrs. Melville-Dysart; Dr. Alistair C. MacLearen / Kitchener's Army / Sandy Cameron, the Athlete / Devil in the Kitchen / Miss Proud / The Grey Old Lady of Raasay; Niel Gow's Lamentation for James Moray of Abercairney / Kilravock's / Munloch Bridge / Don Side / The Perrie Werrie / The Flagon / The Nine Pint Coggie; Gloomy Winter's Now Awa' / The Wauking of the Fauld / Calum Breugach / Miss Lyall / King George IV / The King's / Miss Lyall / Little Donald's Wife; Down the Burn, Davie Lad / Miss Gordon's - Fochabers / The Fir Tree / Sir Archibald Dunbar / Kiss the Lass Ye Like Best / Uist Lasses Darling / Loch glassie / Sir David Davidson of Cantray; Rev. John Rankin of Glendale / Introduction: Rev. John Angus Rankin; Dusky Meadow / Sandy Cameron

In 1953 Cape Breton fiddler William (Bill) Lamey emigrated from Sydney, N.S. to Boston, Mass., where for the next thirty years he was the primary force in the promotion of Cape Breton music. During that time Bill also made some of the most exciting and intimate 'house session' recordings of Cape Breton fiddling that today remain influential through the home tape network. Released commercially for the first time on this compilation are newly remastered recordings from the 'Golden Age' of Cape Breton fiddle music that bring to life those classic Boston house sessions.

Tune Notes

1. Waltz: The Duchess of Athole's Favourite (Niel Gow); Strathspey: Dusky Meadow (Donald MacLellan); Reel: Miss Proud; Reel: Major David Manson (Major Peter MacLeod)

Scotsman Niel Gow (1727 - 1807) was an acclaimed fiddler during his lifetime, a prolific composer in the traditional idiom, and along with his sons, an important music publisher. "The Duchess of Athole's Favourite" was written in 6/8 time and may not originally have been played as a waltz (which would more likely have a 3/4 time signature). Waltzes did become popular during Niel's son Nathaniel's lifetime, and Nathaniel composed a number of them. Cape Breton fiddler Dan R. MacDonald recorded "The Duchess of Athole's Favourite" on an early LP with Lila Hashem. "Miss Proud" appears in collections of bagpipe music, although it was originally set for the violin and published by Neil Stewart in 1761. Stewart printed it in the key of G,

but Bill and most Cape Breton fiddlers have played it in A. Winston Fitzgerald recorded the reel on a 78 rpm disk. "Major David Manson," a pipe reel from the Edcath Collection, was a favorite of Bill's.

2. March: Killiecrankie (Thomas O'Connell)

The Scottish march "Killiecrankie" (in the keys of D, C, or for pipes) is the same tune as the Irish long-dance "Planxty Davis" (in the key of D). According to 19th century Irish musicologists, the air was composed by Irish harper Thomas O'Connell in 1689, the year of the Battle of Killiecrankie and also the year of his death. The Pass of Killiecrankie is near Pitlochry in Perthshire. There the Jacobite Highlanders claimed victory over a larger army of Williamites (only to be defeated by the same general at Cromdale the next year). There is also a song about the battle of Killiecrankie, which is set to a different melody.

3. Air: Mrs. Crawford's Favourite (Robert Petrie, arr. by Gow); Air: O'er the Moor Among the Heather; Strathspey: Clach na Cudain; Reel: Miss Rattray; Reel: Uist Lasses Darling; Reel: Duncan on the Plainstones (J. Scott Skinner); Reel: Loch Glassie

We should, perhaps, call the first slow strathspey in this medley "Forneth House," as it is titled in Robert Petrie's third collection. Petrie claimed it as his own composition, although the Gows published it (with no attribution) as "Mrs. Crawford's Favourite" the same year (1800). However, the settings are slightly different and Bill clearly plays the Gows' version of the tune. "O'er The Moor Amongst the Heather" was an old song converted to a reel or country dance and finally turned into a strathspey around 1760. Singing the air/strathspey as it is presently known (with words by Jean Glover) is difficult because of its wide range which is better suited to the violin than the voice. The strathspey "Clach na Cudain" honours the key-stone (foundation-stone) of Inverness, near the cross. "Loch Glassie" sounds much like the more well known reel "Jenny Dang The Weaver;" perhaps it began life as a variation on that tune.

4. Air: Sandie Ower the Sea (J. Scott Skinner); Strathspey: Don Side; Reel: Heather Hill (Dan R. MacDonald); Reel: The Mourne Mountains; Reel: Sheehan's Reel

J. Scott Skinner first published "Sandie Ower the Sea" as a song (with words by W.M.) in The Logie Collection (1888). Although Skinner's instrumental compositions have been highly influential, his Victorian song arrangements may never have been very popular. Skinner made it clear that the poetry was "suggested by the music," not the other way around. He republished some of the airs, including this one, without their verses in The Scottish Violinist. Cape Breton fiddler Angus Allan Gillis recorded "Don Side" on a 78 rpm disc. Cape Breton fiddler Dan R. MacDonald composed "Heather Hill" in 1941 when he was in Scotland with the Canadian Army. He originally wrote it on a tree stump (he was in the forestry corps). The Heather Hill Collection is the name of the first volume of his compositions. "The Mourne Mountains" and "Sheehan's Reel" are both in O'Niell's Irish Music.

5. Reel: The Forth Bridge (Williamson Blyth); Reel: Mrs. MacPherson of Inveran (George S. MacLennan); Reel: Jock Wilson's Ball (William MacLennan); Reel: Sleepy Maggie; Reel: The Forfar Hunt (A. Allan)

The forth Bridge opened in 1890. Williamson Blyth (1821 - 1897), an Edinburgh violinist and prolific violin maker, composed a strathspey and reel set both named after the bridge. Published in J. Murdoch Henderson's Flowers of Scottish Melody, "The Forth Bridge Reel" is not to be confused with "The Forth Brig" hornpipe composed by J. Scott Skinner, also to commemorate the opening of the bridge. "Mrs. MacPerson of Inveran" and "Jock Wilson's Ball" are both pipe tunes. "Sleepy Maggie" can be found in Robert Bremner's collection (c. 1751 - 61) and many others, including pipe collections. There are many different variants of the reel, and it goes by several different names in Ireland.

6. Jig: Farewell to the Tay (Peter McDonald); Jig: Walking the Floor (John Chisholm)

"Farewell To The Tay" is a 6/8 pipe march converted to a fiddle jig; it can be found in David Glen's Highland Bagpipe Tutor (1876 - 1901). "Walking The Floor" is in the Master Method collection of bagpipe music (c. 1950).

7. Jig: Bachelor's Jig; Jig: The Cossy Jigg; Jig: Oh Dear What Can The Matter Be?

"Bachelor's Jig" was recorded by Bill's good friend Joe MacLean in the 1960s. Some say that the "bachelor" of the title was fiddler Duncan MacQuarrie. Paul Cranford transcribed the tune for Cape Breton's Magazine, Number 43 (1986); it may be a Cape Breton composition. All three parts of "The Cossy Jigg" can be found in Niel Gow's Second Collection (1788). "Oh Dear What Can The Matter Be?" was published in the British Lyre in 1792, although it was known to have been sung earlier. Variations on the tune were printed in Köhler's Violin Repository but Bill learned his variations from Alex Gillis, a Cape Breton fiddler who lived in Boston. Bill told pianist Doug MacPhee that Alex had composed them.

8. Air: Caledonia's Wail for Niel Gow Her Favourite Minstrel (Simon Fraser)

"Caledonia's Wail for Niel Gow Her Favourite Minstrel" goes by its Gaelic title, "Caoidh na h-Alb airson Neill Ghobha," in Simon Fraser's *Airs and Melodies Peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles* (1816/1874/1982).

9. Reel: Crossing The Minch (Pipe Major Donald MacLeod)

Winston Fitzgerald recorded "Crossing the Minch" on a 78 as "McNabb's Hornpipe" and that is the name it has gone by in Cape Breton until recently.

10. Introduction: Herbie MacLeod

11. Air: Inverary Castle; Strathspey: The Corbey and the Pyett; Strathspey: Straun Robertson's Rant; Reel: Miss Flora MacDonald's; Reel: Mrs. Melville - Dysart (J. Walker)

Bill must have taken "Inverary Castle" from the Skye Collection, where it is in the key of E dorian; it originally was published in F-sharp dorian in Simon Fraser's collection (1815). Bill's setting of "the Corbey and the Pyett" is 'tastier' than any of the book versions. The title comes from James Oswald's *Caledonian Pocket Companion* (1743 - 48), and means "the raven and the magpie." Robert Bremner printed it as "Bonnett Makers of Dundee" and it is known as "Sweet Molly" in Aird's *Selection of Airs and Kerr's Fourth Collection of Merry Melodies*. "Straun Robertson's Rant" can also be found in Bremner, but Bill played the four part setting from the Gows' *Complete*

Repository (1799) and the Skye Collection. "Miss Flora MacDonald's Reel" appears as a two-part reel in many of the collections, the earliest being Robert Bremner's (c. 1751 - 61), published not long after Flora MacDonald helped "Bonnie Prince Charlie" escape to safety after the battle of Culloden. Cape Breton fiddler Domhnull Iain an Tailliar Beaton (1856-1919) is supposed to have composed the additional two parts of the tune which Bill plays. However, the second part of "Thearlaich na'n Tigeadh Tu," a pipe tune in the Gesto Collection of Highland Music, is recognizable as the inspiration for the fourth part of Flora.

12. March: Dr. Alistair C. MacLaren (Rod Campbell); March: Kitchener's Army (George S. MacLennan); Strathspey: Sandy Cameron, the Athlete (J. Scott Skinner); Strathspey: Devil in the Kitchen; Reel: Miss Proud; Reel: The Grey Old Lady of Raasay (Iain Dall MacKay)

All of the tunes in this medley are pipe tunes or fiddle tunes which have a pipey sound. Bill introduced "Dr. Alistair C. MacLaren" to the Cape Breton fiddle repertoire from a pipe book. There are two tunes called "Kitchener's Army;" one is a 6/8 march, however, the one more familiar to Cape Breton musicians is a 2/4 march, composed by G.S. MacLennan, which also goes by the name "King George the V's Army." It can be found in the first volume of the Scots Guards. Cape Breton singer and musician John Allan Cameron popularized the tune. On his LP, *Get There By Dawn*, John Allan recorded "King George V's Army" on guitar along with Barry Ewen on pipes. Bill's version of "Devil In The Kitchen" is close to J. Scott Skinner's first setting of the strathspey. Skinner included the concurrent or "back-to-back" cuts or birls, often played in the first part of this tune by Cape Breton fiddlers, only in his second setting. However, Bill did put in some back-to-back cuts in the low octave. Notice the tremendous attack Bill had, especially on the first note. He sharply accented each beat of the strathspey. It is not clear who composed "Devil In The Kitchen," as Skinner's books and various pipe books credit different men. Look in the Gesto Collection (1895) or the DunGreen Collection (1996) for all three parts of "Cailleach Liath Rathersair" ("The Grey Old Lady of Raasay"). For a pipe tune, it does not appear in many pipe collections, although it can be found in Barry Shears' *Gathering of the Clans* Collection, published in Nova Scotia (1986).

13. Marching Air: Niel Gow's Lamentation for James Moray of Abercairney (Niel Gow); Strathspey: Kilravock's; Strathspey: Munloch Bridge; Strathspey: Don Slide; Reel: The Perrie Werrie; Reel: The Flagon; Reel: The Nine Pint Coggie

James Moray was a friend and benefactor of Niel Gow; Gow composed a lament for his death. Although Bill played the air in the key of G here, it is sometimes played in A in high-bass tuning. Bill's bowing of the strathspeys in this medley is notable; he 'cuts up' some of the notes by making triplets of them and also uses some looped bowstrokes (slurs with a re-emphasis of the second of two notes of the same pitch). Kelvarock and Kilrack's are spellings, found in various collections, of the strathspey following the air; but we shall go with Kilravock (pronounced 'kill-rake'), since that is the name of a castle in the Highlands near Inverness and Nairn. "Munloch Bridge" can be found in the Gesto Collection and also in numerous pipe collections. "I'll Hap Ye In My Plaidie" is a variant of it. Cape Breton fiddler Angus Allan Gillis recorded "Don Side" on a 78 rpm disc. Bill played "Perrie Werrie" with a completely major tonality, unlike the versions in the Scottish collections, which have a lowered seventh. His traditional Cape Breton setting is similar in mode to the Irish equivalent of the tune, "The Blackwater Reel," also known as "The Avonmore." "The Flagon" also has an Irish relative, "The Flogging Reel." A flagon is a metal or pottery vessel with a handle, spout, and often a cover, for holding wine or liquors. A coggie is a wooden dish. There are two different tunes by the name "Nine Pint Coggie;" Bill's is one in William Christie's collection (1820), Kerr's third collection, and J. Scott Skinner's Scottish Violinist.

14. Air: Gloomy Winter's Now Awa'; March/Strathspey: The Wauking of the Fauld; Strathspey: Calum Breugach; Strathspey: Miss Lyall; Strathspey: King George IV; Reel: King's; Reel: Miss Lyall; Reel: Little Donald's Wife

"Gloomy Winter" and "The Wauking of the Fauld" are both songs. Paisley weaver Robert Tannahil (1774 - 1810) composed his song "Gloomy Winter" to the tune "Lord Balgonie's Favourite" in Gow's Fourth Collection, where it is labeled "A Very Old Highland Tune." It is probably not of Highland origin however, because it strongly resembles "The Cordwainers' March," the tune of the shoemakers' guild; it was published by James Aird about thirty years before the

Gow's publication. To add to the confusion, Alexander Campbell (b. 1764), editor of Albyn's Anthology, claimed the tune as his own composition. He published Gaelic and English words to it: "Come, my Bride, haste, haste away ..." In more recent history, English composer Michael Nyman used the melody of "Gloomy Winter" as a theme in his score for the movie *The Piano Man*. "The Waaking / Wauking of the Fauld" was published as a song in the 1720s and 30s in Allan Ramsey's *Tea-table Miscellany* and in William Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius*. Its words refer to the night watch over the sheep fold; during the weaning time, the lambs had to be kept from running back to their mothers. This task provided the opportunity for camaraderie and romance. The tune appears as a strathspey in a number of fiddle tune collections. "Calum Breugach" means "Lying Malcolm." However, the strathspey is titled "Callam Brogach / Brougach" in some of the older collections; this could mean either "filthy" or "teasing" Malcolm. "Miss Lyall's" tunes and "King George's" tunes are much-played classics in Cape Breton. "Little Donald's Wife" goes by its Gaelic title, "An Gabh Thu Bean Dhoi'll Bhig?," in the ?Skye Collection.

15. Air: Down the Burn, Davie Lad; Strathspey: Miss Gordon's - Fochabers (William Marshall); Strathspey: The Fir Tree (Niel Gow); Strathspey: Sir Archibald Dunbar; Strathspey: Kiss the Lass Ye Like Best; Reel: Uist Lasses Darling; Reel: Loch Glassie; Reel: Sir David Davidson of Cantray (John Lowe)

There are two airs by the name "Down the Burn, Davie Lad." It was to the older air that Robert Crawford and Robert Burns wrote their verses. The melody that Bill plays comes from a Gow collection, where it is captioned "Modern set by particular desire," and was reprinted in the Skye collection. "Miss Gordon's of Fochabers" comes from Marshall's *Scottish Airs* (1822). William Marshall (1748 - 1833) was a prolific composer from Morayshire, and a lifelong employee of the Duke of Gordon. "Kiss The Lasses Ye Like Best" was first printed in Robert Bremner's collection (c. 1751 - 61). In the Athole Collection it is titled "Ruidhle na Maragan Dubh" ("Reel of the Black Puddings").

16. Marching Air: Rev. John Rankin of Glendale March (Bill Lamey); Introduction: Rev. John Angus Rankin

17. Strathspey: Dusky Meadow (Donald MacLellan); Reel: Sandy Cameron

Joe MacLellan and Bill's recording of "Dusky Meadow" and "Sandy Cameron" fairly bursts with energy. Not surprisingly, it was one of the most popular Cape Breton 78 rpm disks. Note pianist Lila Hashem's well timed glissandos at the end of phrases.

Introduction

Between 1942 and 1952 Cape Breton fiddler Bill Lamey recorded several double sided 78 rpm discs for the Apex and Celtic labels, reissued on LP during the seventies on the Shanachie label. These and other Cape Breton 78 rpm discs made an everlasting impact on the repertoire of Cape Breton fiddlers of all ages as they became immediate classics. However, as valuable as these audio sketches may be, the 78 rpm medium did not provide a complete picture of the Cape Breton fiddler.

The average length of a 78 rpm disc recording was only around three and one half minutes. This was a good duration for popular songs and short jazz selections of the day, but for Cape Breton fiddle music the duration was less than adequate. Unable to play their usual strings (medleys) of tunes, fiddlers would have to condense their settings into a three-minute setting of two or maybe three tunes. Usually, at home or at a dance, a Cape Breton fiddler would play for five to ten minutes straight through, performing several tunes in an extended medley.

Another difficulty for the fiddler in this recording situation was the isolation from the other players and the awkwardness of continuously starting and stopping. Overall, the conditions under which the Cape Breton fiddler recorded were less than ideal for fiddle music. The warm and congenial environment of a dance or house session seemed far away to these fiddlers.

"We were stuck in the sound-proof room and a fellow told us we had to be fifteen feet exactly from the piano! When the first light came on,

you were supposed to start playing! There was no talking or any damned thing!"

--Angus Allan Gillis, Fiddler

(From *The Cape Breton Fiddler*)

A few years later Bill Lamey recorded his 78 rpm discs in radio studios located in Antigonish (CJFX) and in Sydney (CJCB). He too found the recording process difficult and the environment foreign. He related his feelings about the early recording process in this 1984 interview at the University College of Cape Breton, Sydney:

"Well, the first crack I had at it was in Antigonish over forty years ago. They had no sophisticated recording equipment - there was no such thing as tapes. Just put it on another record. I recall starting - rehearsing. This is rehearsing for the engineers to get a balance between the piano and the violin. Watching the needle go back and forth from nine o'clock at night till one o'clock in the morning when he finally said go. I wasn't allowed to play but the tune I was going to record. Now if you play the same tune for three hours, wouldn't you be pretty sour, eh! And make no mistakes! Watching the clock! Couldn't go back. (The disc recordings were one-offs with no re-recording.) They were tough days at making recordings - and it's amazing how well they came out - some of them. If you made the least little mistake it talks right back to you! I played my own records back and I know the booboos I made! They are spelled out in capital letters. But, I always say (laughing) - blame the engineer!"

--Bill Lamey

Bill also became a favourite for the popular live radio shows broadcast out of the CJCB studios in Sydney. The radio show format gave Bill more of a chance to express himself at length, and the performances also had a wonderful live edge to the sound. Bill later played on the radio in Boston and, on a good night, these shows would be heard in Cape Breton. Many Cape Bretoners recall staying up late to hear Bill Lamey play on the radio. They thought that was something when they were kids, to be able to pick up Boston and hear Bill Lamey live on the radio - in Cape Breton!

In the early 1940s the wire and early tape recorders became available, and these were very much suited to recording traditional music. With

tape there was no time limit and because they could be used anywhere these machines enabled the engineer to record the music in the field.

At this time, the first folklorists began their pilgrimages to Cape Breton, looking for music and stories. Although the number of folklorists who came to Cape Breton was remarkable, for various reasons they all seemed to bypass the fiddle and pipe music, which during that time was certainly enjoying its own 'Golden Age.' Although these folklorists collected some great material, in particular Gaelic songs and stories, they seemed almost oblivious to the rich and abundant fiddle and pipe music surrounding them during their visits to Cape Breton.

By the late 1940s consumer model recording machines became more accessible and there emerged a group of amateur engineers and collectors from within the circle of Cape Breton fiddler. These engineers were close friends of the music and hosted countless sessions in their homes. Included, among many others, were fiddler **Johnnie Archie MacDonald**, Detroit; **Joe Beaton**, Boston; **Roddy "The Plumber" MacDonald**, Halifax; and **Hughie "Shorty" MacDonald**, from Inverness, Cape Breton.

Doug MacMaster and **Herbie MacLeod** of Boston compiled outstanding collections of traditional music on early reel-to-reel tape recorders, comprising some of the most exciting Cape Breton music ever to be recorded!

These fellows knew nothing about sound engineering, nor had they any training as folklorists or musicologists, but they loved the music and made tapes simply for the sake of sharing this music with their friends and other fiddlers. Eventually, many of the fiddlers and piano players themselves acquired tape recorders, and this contributed to the continued growth in the repertoire that we have seen in the past 50 years. Bill Lamey, **Johnny 'Washabuck' MacLean**, **Johnny Wilmot**, **Angus Chisholm**, **Elmer Briand**, **Mary Jessie MacDonald** - All these great players had reel-to-reel machines and freely shared their recordings.

They recorded the music on the early consumer recording machines (the Webcor being the most popular) and willingly distributed copies of tapes by mail or in person. The Cape Breton home tape network

spanned across Boston, Detroit, Toronto and Cape Breton. The favorite brand of tape was "Scotch" (of course); however a competing company produced tape with the "Irish" name brand. their tapes were very precious and valuable to them and usually well taken care of and stored in metal boxes.

The first five selections on this recording were recorded by Doug MacMaster at his home, 22 Iffley Road, Jamaica Plain, Mass., on Oct. 19th and 20th, 1956. Recently, I spent the afternoon with Doug (aged 90) and his family. As we listened to the newly remastered recording, Doug smiled and recalled in detail the session that went on to become legendary within the realm of Cape Breton fiddle music:

"Bill used to play every Saturday night, a dance you know. I worked all week and I always looked forward to this. This particular Saturday night, I don't know what was going on, but the hall was taken over by something else, so - we wouldn't be there. Bill said 'Doug, why don't we plan to have a session where we can make a good recording, with no noise and not a whole lot of people around.' Bill arranged it so there was nobody there but himself and his wife; myself and my wife; Mary Jessie MacDonald, and that was all. So there was no noise.

"The sound was good. The room was small, with hardwood floors and old plaster walls. The ceiling was strips of wood. Bill preferred to sit on the bass side of the piano. Oh - the atmosphere was very intimate. The first tape recorded I got was a Webcor. One microphone! I went by what Bill Lamey recommended. Bill Lamey was my tutor - I did whatever Bill said. He always helped me. I generally always held the mic in my hand. Bill would always tell me how far to be, how close to be - and, of course, then I would use that if I was recording somebody else.

"Somebody, one time at a party asked me why the hell didn't you learn to play something? Bill Lamey was close by, and he said 'he's doing the best damn job - he's listening! What the hell would we be doing if we didn't have any listeners? If the world was full of fiddlers and no listeners, what would we be doing!' So I always loved the music and am a good listener!

"In particular, I enjoyed the violin and the bagpipes. I made some tapes of the bagpipes too. Sandy Boyd would visit. My first wife Peg had a brother - a priest, Fr. Donald Rankin. He was a very good friend of Bill Lamey's, and when Bill Lamey moved to Boston, Fr. Rankin came up here. They were running a benefit dance for Fr. Donald Rankin's parish in Creignish, Cape Breton. Bill was very interested to meet me - I was Fr. Donald Rankin's brother-in-law, so - we got going that way, and Bill's wife and my first wife, Peg - they became very good friends. We were always together a lot - a lot of parties and, if we had a party we had to have Bill Lamey, and if he had a party he had to have us. Oh yes, there were a lot of parties!

" Fiddler Joe MacLean was visiting Boston one time, and he and Bill played at a dance. Afterwards, they went home to 24 Greenough Avenue at one or two o'clock in the morning. They had someone playing piano so they would play one tune, and one would say 'how about this tune to go along with it' and this went on until about five o'clock or six o'clock in the morning when most of the others had gone to bed. Bill said to Joe, 'Well, there is a six o'clock mass at St. Thomas - we could go to mass and come back and go to sleep.' So they went to mass and oh God they were just completely tired out and I guess they fell asleep. Anyway - Bill said, 'all of a sudden I woke up and Joe MacLean was asleep with his head on my shoulder!' So Bill finally looks around and he looked up and he said 'Oh God, that's not the priest that started the mass.' In other words, they slept through half of the second one and all the time in between you know - everybody coming in and going out - taking turns on each other's shoulder! Bill said 'you couldn't walk out then!'"

- Doug MacMaster, June 1998

The warmth and intimacy of the music described by Doug MacMaster is best felt at the end of track 3 when his wife Peg laughs and simply says *"Oh my God ... that's good."* The tape went on to be an immediate classic and was traded and copied by various friends in Boston and Cape Breton. At one time Bill and Doug considered putting it out as an LP record. However, they felt there was not enough material. I first heard the tape several years ago from fiddler **Jerry Holland** who learned "Miss Crawford" and "O'er the Moor" for his new recording. Jerry's tribute can be heard on "The Fiddlesticks Collection".

As well as recording at his own home, Doug often recorded at various house parties in and around the Boston area. Tracks 6 to 9 from this compilation were recorded at the home of Doug's good friend "**Toots**" **Gotovich** who also lived in Jamaica Plain. A harmonica player himself, "Toots" hosted regular house parties such as this one in 1956. As you can hear on the recording, the ambiance of this session, being a party, was a little different from the more serious session arranged by Bill and Doug later that year.

Another great friend of Bill Lamey was Herbie MacLeod of Arlington, Mass. Herbie established one of the most important collections of Cape Breton house session music on reel-to-reel tape. In his home he hosted frequent house sessions. Herbie's son Charlie went on to become a fine instrumentalist on the piano. Herbie recorded his sessions on a mono 3M Wollensak recording machine which he bought from a fiddler named **Jerry Toomey**. Originally from Sydney Mines, Cape Breton, Jerry fronted a popular Boston-based old-time band called "**Jerry and the Hayshakers.**"

Herbie was very close with many of the great musicians, and he recorded many of them including **Angus Chisholm, Winston Fitzgerald, Theresa MacLellan and Donald Angus Beaton**. His sessions were usually impromptu, such as a gathering after a dance. Other times, a fiddler such as **Dan R. MacDonald** would come to stay, so Herbie would have a session for him.

One of his best friends, though, was Bill Lamey, and Herbie loved his music dearly. Bill had also acquired a tape recorder, a Webcor stereo machine. They helped each other learn about recording and mic placement and traded tapes. Herbie's people were from River Denys, Cape Breton, something else he had in common with Bill:

"Margie, my late wife - the first time she saw Bill she says, 'See, that's my husband sitting over there. His people came from River Deny's and she said, 'You know, Bill, when we were down in Framboise in the summertime making the hay and you would be coming on at five o'clock - you had a radio program then on CJCB Sydney ... Herbie would be a half a mile away out in the field and his cousin Chrissy would yell, "HERBIE! BILL'S ON! Herbie would drop every damn thing and race to the house!"

- Herbie MacLeod, June 1998

Herbie's classic recording of Bill Lamey and **Eddie Irwin**, which you can hear on this CD, has already been in circulation amongst fiddlers for over 35 years. His deep-toned and elegantly spoken introductions are known to many. Herbie's tape not only made an impression on that room full of fiddlers at the Queen's Hotel in Aberdeen, it and many of Herbie's other fine recordings went on to influence the new generation of Cape Breton fiddlers, as he freely shared them with players young and old.

Several years ago I was playing with Jerry Holland in Boston, and I met Herbie for the first time. I was quite taken by his great love and respect for the musicians and also by his great knowledge of the music. The next day he gave Jerry and me our own copies of the recording you have here on this compilation. Jerry and I were driving down the road listening to it and, well, Jerry was in tears. He knew the tape well but had lost it or given it away and had not heard the tape in a very long time. yet, Jerry knew and sang along with every grace note on the tape as we drove around in circles! He also knew and pointed out to me every one of Eddie's magnificent bass lines!

Herbie MacLeod and Doug MacMaster didn't play any instrument. However, they have given us a great legacy of traditional music. Unlike the 78 rpms and subsequent studio recordings, these recordings were made in the ideal environment and atmosphere and set the standard for good house session music. By simply providing the proper setting, these humble men reduced the role of 'the engineer' to a very simple one. The music would take care of itself! They are to be considered amongst the true heroes of Cape Breton music!

--**Paul M. MacDonald**

Biographical Notes

Bill Lamey was born in 1914, the first of seven children of **Maggie** (MacLean) and **John Hugh Lamey**, in River Denys, Cape Breton, his mother's place of birth. When he was twelve years old the family moved to Sydney Mines, where John Hugh had taken a job as a railroad foreman.

The family on his mother's side were all Scottish and were among the many thousands of Catholic Scots sent off on 'coffin' ships during the Highland Clearances. Pictured here is a photo of one of Bill's original immigrant ancestors, **Catherine Stewart (Mrs. Alexander MacVarish)** at 100 years old.

She and her husband, **Alexander MacVarish**, came across from the town of Mingarie Ard, on the west coast of Scotland, when she was 30 years old and pregnant with her seventh child, Margaret, Bill's maternal grandmother. Bill is quoted in the book, *On The Crofters Trail: In Search of the Highland Clearances* (**David Craig**; Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1990) telling the following story, as he heard it from his mother, of Catherine and Alexander coming to Cape Breton from Scotland:

"They left there about 1834. And it had not been easy for them in that part. My grandmother told the story, how they had one or two cows, and no meat to butcher, so she used to bleed the cattle to make the pudding, the marag (black pudding). And there were two children buried there in infancy. But they were very sad leaving, when the boat started pulling away from Fort William - very broken up about it. And my great-grandmother was pregnant with my grandmother coming across. They landed here in the fall of 1834, at a place called Creignish down here. They didn't know where they were, just told to get off, that's all.

"My grandmother would be the seventh child, and she was born shortly after they arrived. But her mother told the story about them coming across in the boat, and in the bowels of the boat, you know. There was squalor, and filth and sickness, and dying and fighting - all crammed up in the boat. And they ran out of water, and they had very little food. They had some potatoes they dare not use (needed for planting), and a bag of oatmeal. So when their water ran out, he (Alexander) happened to have a bottle of whisky in his chest, or two.

He mixed the whisky with the oatmeal to moisten it up. And he said it was the happiest time on the way to Cape Breton!

"They were dumped right on the ocean - they had no shelter. Just told to get off, that's all. With their trunk and bedding. They had to go into the woods, to cut down a lean-to. And they stayed there for the winter. And my grandmother was born in that shack. And when he went into the woods with the axe on his shoulder he said to my great-grandmother, 'Don't let the children go out into the water and get drowned.' But, she said, she was so sick from the voyage, and being pregnant, there was nothing she could have done about it if they had. And she said, "About dusk when he arrived back out of the woods he was the happiest man I ever saw, to come back.' That spring they came across the mountain, which is probably ten or fifteen miles as the crow flies, and settled up here at a place called Maple Brook.

"My grandmother died February 11th, 1911, when her mother was aged one hundred years. And in those days they made the coffins themselves but they needed to get the shroud. So there was a merchant ten to twelve miles from there, and my uncle went there and the merchant said, 'Well sir, there are the two colours, black and tan,' and he didn't know which to choose, so he brought them both home, and when he got back she had died, an hour after my grandmother ..."

On the Lamey side of the family, ancestor, **James Lamey**, emigrated to Kingsville, Cape Breton from County Corke, Ireland, in about 1800, where he married **Janet MacPherson** of Askilton (near Princeville, Cape Breton), and they settled on a farm at River Inhabitants Forks, an area now called Kingsville in Inverness County.

Bill loved the almost mystical stories of the pain and heroism of his Scottish ancestors and the family history that came from his mother's side of the family. He also loved the sweet nature of his grandfather, Billy Lamey, not to mention the razor sharp wit and humor of some of his Lamey aunts and uncles.

He thought at a young age that he was to "be good at something" and decided on music. His family could not afford music lessons, but he had a cousin, **Alex MacDougald**, who did take lessons and he would ask Alex to repeat everything the teacher told him. It became a story in

the family that, although Alex did not pursue the music, his lessons did not go to waste.

As soon as he could, Bill joined the town band in Sydney Mines in order to learn to read music. The band gave him a trumpet which he says he never was able to get a note out of until one hot summer day he hit a high note that spooked all the cows in the town's community pasture into kicking down the fence and running away! He was 18 years old before he got a fiddle he could try to play.

At a testimonial dinner given for Bill in Boston in 1983, his sister Sadie was reminiscing wistfully about how she wished their mother, **Maggie MacLean Lamey**, were there to witness the wonderful events that evening. Maggie MacLean Lamey loved and knew the music well. She was probably the strongest influence and encouragement in Bill's persistence in learning the music, and she would often jig in puit a bail (mouth music) if he was having difficulty with a tune. When the younger children would ask her to get Bill to stop thumping his foot when he'd be upstairs practicing, Maggie would ask him to put a pillow under his foot to soften the noise. But after a time, Bill would get frustrated with the pillow and kick it away; then Maggie would tell the children to just have patience because she was sure that someday he'd be a good player and they'd be proud of him.

Besides spending hours practicing, Bill observed accomplished fiddlers of the day whenever possible. He especially admired the playing style of "**Big**" **Ronald MacLellan** and the knowledge of the music possessed by composer/violinist **Gordon MacQuarrie**. **Mary (Alasdair Raghnaill) MacDonald** from the Mabou Coal Mines was another of his great fiddle heroes.

After only a couple of years of performing, Bill earned his own weekly radio program on CJC-B, Sydney, Cape Breton. His group included fiddlers **Joe MacLean** and **Donald MacLellan** and pianist **Lila Hashem**. Bill and Joe formed a lifelong friendship, sharing not only a love for the music, but a passion for searching out whatever music was left behind in the old country. They both gathered wonderful treasures of books of music from Scotland. When either found a great new tune, there would be much excitement followed by impromptu phone conferences to play the tune and to discuss how it should be arranged.

Together, Bill and Joe not only played a busy schedule of Cape Breton square dances at Nalgah Beach, St. Theresa's Hall in Sydney, Big Pond and Christmas Island, but they also collaborated on a Celtic 78 recording in 1947. It was during this time that Bill and Joe spent many Sunday afternoons and evenings playing music at **Finlay Cameron's** house in Boisdale along with Dan R. MacDonald and Donald MacLellan. These are the sessions so fondly remembered by Bill's close friend, **Rev. John Angus Rankin**, on track 16 of this compilation. (The reproduction of Rev. Rankin's voice on track 16 is from the opening of the Glendale Hall, Cape Breton, 1962.)

In 1938 Bill played at the first Gaelic Mod at St. Ann's, and ten years later he won the Premier of Nova Scotia Cup in the fiddle competition there. In the '40s and early '50s Bill made a number of 78 rpm recordings for Apex and Celtic labels with pianists **Margaret MacDonald**, Lila Hashem, and Rev. John Angus Rankin; drummer **Woody Woodman**; and duets with fiddler Joe MacLean. These recordings are considered classic performances and arrangements, which are still much admired and imitated today. Bill had great respect for composers and always tried to play their compositions faithfully. Cape Breton fiddler and teacher Winnie Chafe advises her students to compare Bill's playing on his recordings to the written music because his playing was from the books and very correct in bowing and style - everything is there as the composer intended. The only evidence we have of Bill's own composing efforts is "Rev. John Angus Rankin of Glendale," a march he wrote for Rev. John Angus Rankin, which can be heard on track #16.

Parish picnics were annual church fund raisers and a staple of Cape Breton social life, held on the weekends in the summertime. Bill was in demand to play for these events. The job would start at 11 a.m. and sometimes go to 1 a.m. the following morning. The drive home would take at least an hour and then Bill would often have only enough time to change clothes and get to his day job at Eastern Bakeries in Sydney. He loved playing the fiddle so much that he didn't think a thing about lost sleep, and, besides, he was a young man of great physical endurance.

Piano player Lila Hashem says that in those days all the girls were after Bill. But it was Sarah Anne (Sally) MacEachern who had been away working in the 'Boston States' and had returned for a summer

vacation, who caught his eye. She was one of the 'Dougald Rob' MacEacherns from Maple Brook in Glendale Parish, and Bill, of course, knew her family but had not seen her since she went away to Boston. Now, here she was, beautiful and stylish. Bill loved to tell the story about how he was 'bowled over' when he first spotted her at the annual parish picnic in Mabou (1940). Bill and Sally were married in 1942, at St. Mary's Parish, Glendale.

In the early '50's, Bill went on a concert tour with **Rev. Hugh A. MacDonald** to Boston, New York and Detroit. After that trip, Bill and Sally decided to move to Boston. Bill went first in 1953 to find employment and a place to live, and Sally and the four children (**Patricia, Billy, Peggy** and **Lawrence**) followed in April 1954. Two more children (**Mary Elizabeth** and **Sarah**) were born in Boston. There were, of course, annual vacation trips back to Cape Breton.

Bill was a charter member of the **Cape Breton Island Gaelic Foundation** formed in 1938 at St. Ann's, Cape Breton, and he became a member of the Boston Branch after emigrating in 1953. He also served as president of the Boston Branch from approximately 1965 to 1980. In Boston, he enjoyed the company of fellow Cape Breton fiddlers **Alex Gillis, Alcide Aucoin, Big Dan Hugh MacEachern, Agnes Campbell, Dr. Ajax Campbell** and Angus Chisholm, who had also emigrated to Boston.

Bill hosted his own radio program over Boston's WVOM for several years, and successfully managed and played for Cape Breton square dances for almost 20 years, first at Rose Croix Hall, Roxbury and later at the Orange Hall, Brookline. His band of musicians included pianists Mary Jessie MacDonald, Eddie Irwin and **Sally Kelly**; guitarist **Frank Gillan**; drummer **Jimmy Corrigan**; and **Jimmy Kelly** on the banjo. These square sets were mainly prompted by **Jack MacCallum** or **Eddie Walsh**.

As both a performer and organizer, Bill was dedicated to promoting good Scottish traditional music in Canada and the eastern United States. Through the dances and the Gaelic Club, he sponsored and introduced to Boston audiences such great Cape Breton fiddlers and accompanists as "**Little**" **Jack MacDonald, Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald, Donald** and **Theresa MacLellan**, Angus Chisholm, **Buddy MacMaster, John Allan Cameron, Joe MacLean,**

Donald Angus and Elizabeth Beaton, Jerry Holland, **Cameron Chisholm, Dan J. Campbell**, John Campbell and **Mary (Alasdair Ragnail) MacDonald**. This practice of inviting special guest musicians to Boston from Cape Breton for a weekend event was wildly popular and added an extra dimension of celebration of the Boston/Cape Breton connection to long weekends such as Easter and Labor Day.

The square dances at the Rose Croix and Orange Hall were also very much the "family business." Sally Lamey was always the "gatekeeper," and, since the dances ran for almost 20 years, all of the children had a turn preparing advertisements, checking coats and selling soda, not to mention the Saturday morning chores of helping with the sound system, icing down the cooler, and making sandwiches to serve with coffee towards the end of the evening.

The music often continued back at the Lamey home after the dance, especially when there was a guest musician in town. In fact, Bill dubbed the big Victorian town house at 24 Greenough Avenue, Jamaica Plain where the family lived for almost 30 years the "Hotel Greenough" because of the many visitors welcomed there over the years. On Saturday mornings, Sally would bake a ham knowing there could be a house full of folks to "make tea" for later that night, or early the next morning as sessions often ran into the wee hours. All of Bill's family agree, if you love Cape Breton fiddling, it was a great house to grow up in!

In 1966, Bill went to Scotland for the first time with friends **Joe McNeil**, Angus Campbell, and Rev. John Angus Rankin where he and Father John Angus were invited to play at the prestigious Gaelic Mod concert in Inverness. The live audience was about 3,000 people plus the television and radio audience of the BBC, and the pair received a standing ovation. But Bill's outstanding memory of that grand event was when, after his performance, so many folks in the audience commented and marveled at how faithfully Cape Breton fiddlers had kept the tradition of the "cutting of the bow" and syncopation in their playing, while these techniques actually had been lost in Scotland.

By the late 1960s Bill began to be plagued by muscle and tendon problems in his shoulder and hands. In 1977 he made a second trip to Scotland with Sally. On the first leg of their trip in London, they were

invited to a house party with friends where Bill played long and well, but the next day his left arm had to be wrapped in a sling which is how he spent the rest of his trip. After that trip, he played very little; even surgery to relieve the extreme tendonitis in his left hand was not enough to allow him to play again as he would like to.

On October 7, 1983, a testimonial dinner celebrating Bill's enormous contributions to the Cape Breton music and culture in Boston was organized by **Peggy** and **Chris Morrison** and **John** and **Bea Campbell**. (Peggy Morrison is the current President of the Cape Breton Gaelic Club, Boston Branch, and John Campbell is the well known Cape Breton fiddler.) It was a great thank-you for Bill, with over 500 people in attendance at Florian Hall in Dorchester, Mass. In addition to his Boston area friends and relatives, many others traveled to Boston from Canada for the party, notably fiddler Donald MacLellan; fiddler and guitarist **David MacIsaac**; guitarist **John Allan Cameron**; and pianist Doug MacPhee. The tributes and the music were outstanding and memorable.

The next afternoon, musicians and family and friends began trickling into the house at 24 Greenough Avenue where there was a full-scale music session in progress with Donald MacLellan, David MacIsaac, John Allan Cameron, Doug MacPhee, John Campbell and Eddie Irwin playing wonderful music. It lasted through the evening and into the early hours of the next morning. As it happened, it was the last great music session at Greenough Avenue, before the house was sold.

After Bill's retirement from the **Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority**, he and Sally moved back to the same farmhouse in Kingsville, Glendale Parish, where his grandfather Billy Lamey had lived. Bill had now come full circle. Although there were semiannual trips back to Boston, he loved Cape Breton and was enormously proud and supportive of the new batch of young fiddlers coming along. After many years of so much activity, he enjoyed his quiet retirement and began to concentrate on planting flowers and keeping his lawn.

In May 1991, at the age of 77, Bill Lamey died of complications from diabetes. Of his six children, his daughter Peggy became a wonderful step-dancer; and his daughter Mary Elizabeth is active in the promotion and conservation of Cape Breton Scottish music, thus continuing the tradition established by her father of bringing the best

of Cape Breton culture and music to the Boston area. All of Bill and Sally's children are avid fans of the music, and it appears that grandson Doug Lamey is following in his grandfather's footsteps as a Cape Breton fiddler.

--Patricia Lamey Hart

Quotes

"I played for many years in different settings with Bill Lamey. We played all around at dances and on the radio. We played at all kinds of house sessions including the regular sessions, at Finlay Cameron's in Boisdale that Fr. Rankin speaks of. It was very common for us to play with two fiddles, together you know. Usually we would have my sister Marie on the piano or Mary (MacLellan) Gillis of North Sydney, Lila Hashem and other great players. They were wonderful sessions, and Bill Lamey still remains on the my favorite players today. In particular, I am fond of his "Air" playing and he sure knew how to arrange them. Bill was also a fine fellow and was always quick to share his knowledge of the music and teach someone a new tune. I will always remember the last session at 24 Greenough Avenue in 1983. I was really honored to be there with those other fellows to show tribute to an old friend and a great musician."

--Donald MacLellan, Toronto, Ont.

"Bill Lamey played with a passion that (in my opinion) was unequaled in the Celtic fiddling circles. "Gloomy Winter" was a concrete example of this passion; the bow across the strings, his eyes closed, portray the very essence of the tune to the listener. Bill took his unique Cape Breton style with him to the Boston area. The dances in Brookline were legendary and were simply the best dances the Boston area has ever had. Bill introduced, among others, the great Angus Chisolm and a young Jerry Holland to the packed halls. Bill Lamey came along at a

time where he became an integral link in the chain of events that has led to the present day worldwide popularity of Cape Breton fiddle music."

--John Allan Cameron, Toronto, Ont.

"The first time Bill Lamey invited me to his house was when I was around the age of 12. Not having any idea what was in store for me, the early afternoon drive from Brockton to Jamaica Plain seemed a little tense. As I got close to the door, you know how you picture things (in your mind), when the door opened at 24 Greenough Ave. all of what I had expected didn't exist.

"There was Bill in everyday clothes, just like my Dad at home. Not the way I knew the Bill at the dances with a nice suit and tie. Bill was a down to earth guy that was offering a young kid, with a want in his heart to play the fiddle, some pointers.

"We looked at old books that day and he picked a tune that neither of us knew and he taught me that tune. It was a hand written book that I think he said he had hard covered and bound to save it. He showed me pictures in the old book that were imprinted from wooden blocks. I don't remember the tune today, but I do remember that the tune was in the key of D minor.

"What I remember that day as well was that he surprised me in making a lunch for us before we left. The Bill I knew ate toast, cheese, jam and tea, just like we did at home ourselves. That day was a day never to be forgotten in my mind! I got the day out of school; I learned a great new tune; and I made a new friend in meeting the 'real' Bill at home. Our friendship grew from that day, and all through my tough teen years it was Bill that gave me the incentive to play my fiddle, 'no matter what!'"

--Jerry Holland, Cape Breton Island

"Listening to Bill Lamey's music on this CD gives me chills and brought a tear to my eye. Cool tunes, some I never heard before. I became very emotional, especially when listening to Father John's voice at the end of the CD. His description of those great house sessions brought a mental picture to my mind. Bill's playing is so great and the repertoire is rich. Mary Jessie and Eddie provide the perfect

accompaniment. This recording is very realistic and pure in sound. I'm sure Bill would be extremely proud."

--Natalie MacMaster, Troy, Cape Breton

"As a small boy I can remember enjoying the 78 rpm Celtic recording of Bill Lamey playing "Dr. Shaw's" Strathspey. I was mesmerized by the fire of his fiddle coming over our little RCA Victor record player's speaker. At a music session in 1980 at the home of Janet Cameron, in Boisdale, Cape Breton, I was fortunate to hear Bill and Mary Jessie MacDonald perform. A particular highlight was Bill's rendition of "Blue Bonnets of the Border." As you will hear in this compilation, Bill Lamey always had a great knack for putting medleys of tunes together. This CD is destined to become a favorite of all fans of the Cape Breton fiddle."

--Dave MacIsaac, Halifax, N.S.

"Bill was visiting our house in Toronto, about 1974. I was playing the pipes for him in the basement, and I came up. Later on, he was on his way out the door and he handed me an American ten dollar bill! For me that was the first money I ever made playing the pipes. I was ten feet off the ground! The only thing that worried me was he told me how hard I should practice! Of course, I realize today that this was musical encouragement."

--John MacLean, Dartmouth, N.S.

"I first heard Bill Lamey's music on a Shanachie album that was given to me back in the early eighties. I had never heard of him until then. I couldn't believe my ears ... his fiddle playing was full of heart, verve and brilliance. It also sounded half familiar to me ear, as this man could sit side by side with the old Donegal fiddlers that I had listened to and not sound out of place. The common bond between the two places was Scotland. Emigrants from Scotland and Ireland had settled on Cape Breton Island and brought with them their Gaelic language, music and song, just as the people of Co. Donegal went to Scotland to work and brought the fiddle tunes, songs and stories back home with them. Even until this day, there is a strong connection between Co. Donegal and Scotland. But, it was Bill Lamey's bowing techniques that really struck me... his use of double stops, drones, triplets and double

triplets, played at will to emphasize the dance rhythms. It was obvious that he played frequently for dancers as you could nearly visualize them. There are also echoes of Scottish piping in his fiddle playing and in his choice of tunes, marches, strathspeys, jigs, reels and airs. His tone is strong and honest and reflects a good heart. It is said that the fiddle is the nearest sound to the human voice and that the voice is the mirror to the soul. We are very lucky to have an opportunity to hear the honest and soulful music of Bill Lamey on this recording and get a hint of the great musician that he was."

--Mairéad Ni Mhaonaigh (Altan), Donegal, Ireland

"I first heard Bill Lamey's music in 1979 when I bought an album of his fiddle playing in Kiely's music shop in my hometown of Tralee in Co. Kerry, Ireland. This album was my first introduction to the music of Cape Breton Island. From the very first track on side one I was hooked!

"Up to then I had listened to the music of any Scottish fiddle players I could get recordings of, but this was different. Here, on this one album, I heard music that was full of drive and raw energy, yet also full of emotion and a depth of feeling for the music, not often heard. This, along with Bill's distinctive and dynamic bowhand as well as his controlled fingerwork, had me completely captivated, and I began my search to find more of his music.

"In 1990 I visited Cape Breton for the first time and had the great honour of meeting Bill Lamey at the annual fiddle festival in Glendale. It was truly a momentous occasion for me as I had admired his music for so long from afar. I knew Bill Lamey had been an influential fiddle player in Cape Breton music as I had heard him spoken of with great reverence many times, but it was while I was in Cape Breton that first year that I fully realized the extent of that influence when I heard many young musicians playing tunes in the same combinations and timeless arrangements.

"I am sure that this album will bring joy, not only to the legion of Bill Lamey fans around the world but to all those who are now given the opportunity to hear his peerless music for the first time, the music of the unique Cape Breton fiddle player, Bill Lamey."

--Máire O'Keeffe, Kinvara, Ireland

"I wish I could have known Bill Lamey. I feel a very strong kinship with the man and his music. I met him all too briefly on the field at Big Pond one year, and I regret we never had a 'tune' together. In this wonderful CD, put together so lovingly by his family, you can hear the sensitivity of his playing and his obvious knowledge and mastery of the great Scottish fiddle repertoire. An additional highlight of this Cd is the piano playing of Mary Jessie MacDonald as she 'accompanies' Bill Lamey so beautifully on the journey. Such fluency in the idiom from the two of them and such loving treatment of the tunes is a joy to behold and can only make the listener wish they had been present at the original sessions."

--Alisdair Fraser, No. San Juan, California

The Lamey Style

Bill's playing is characterized by snappy bowing with a strong attack. He had a way of keeping the sound going and building great momentum. There is a slight whip to each stroke of his bow. This contributes much to the extraordinary drive of his reels and the faster strathspeys. He also enlivened both his strathspeys and reels by subtly varying the rhythms of pairs of notes, all the while keeping a steady beat.

Bill's interpretation of airs has a rhythmic freedom which is seldom found in the playing of today's generation of fiddlers, but is akin to old-style Gaelic singing. It is all the more remarkable when one realizes that he would have learned most of these airs from books, where they are written very squarely and evenly.

There were not as many airs and slow strathspeys played in Cape Breton before World War II. During wartime, many Cape Breton

musicians were in Scotland and they took the opportunity to bring back books of music. Fiddler and composer Dan. R. MacDonald is especially known for having made it possible for many of his friends to obtain these collections.

Bill accumulated an extensive library of Scottish tune books, and this knowledge of the collections was highly respected. He had a great talent for sifting through them, picking tunes, and putting together classic medleys. Yet his playing never sounded "bookish," because he interpreted the tunes in traditional Cape Breton style.

There are a few tunes that appear more than once on this recording. The medley's are drawn from a number of sessions, and it is interesting to hear Bill utilize his repertoire in different ways. Like most Cape Breton fiddlers, Bill had some favourite combinations but varied his choice of tunes and the order in which he played them, allowing his music to spontaneously reflect his mood and situation.

A great many of the tunes in Bill's repertoire can be found in the Skye Collection (originally published 1887, reprinted by Cranford Publications 1980 etc.) and the Athole Collection (1884, 1960, republished by Balnain House 1996). Other sources are mentioned in the notes to each track.

--Kate Dunlay

Piano Styles

Mary Jessie MacDonald

Boston-based piano player Mary Jessie MacDonald is from New Waterford, Cape Breton. Her parents, Hughie and Mary (Alisdair Ragnair) MacDonald were originally from the Mabou Coal Mines and moved to New Waterford along with many other Scottish people

from Inverness County to work in the mines there. Mary Jessie's mother Mary (Alisdair Raghnaill) MacDonald was one of the classic fiddle players in the old "Gaelic" style and one of Bill Lamey's great fiddle heroes of all time. The "Scotch" music thrived in New Waterford, alongside what Doug MacPhee referred to as the "Lingan Irish Style." There were historic sessions on a regular basis at the MacDonald home and also at the home of Doug's mother Margaret MacPhee, who was also a fine piano player. Many of the great players made New Waterford a stopping point on the Cape Breton session network. Mary Jessie started out accompanying her mother on the pump organ and piano and quickly developed her own unique style through the experience of playing with all the old players that would drop in.

As a young woman, Mary Jessie emigrated to Boston. In Boston she became very active playing for the Cape Breton dances and house sessions. Mary Jessie played in Bill Lamey's dance band and also regularly accompanied him for house sessions. Mary Jessie also would play with Angus Chisholm and Winston Fitzgerald. Classic house session tapes exist of many of these great house sessions, such as Mary Jessie with Winston Fitzgerald at Joe MacPherson's Greenville Cafe in Dudley Square, Roxbury, Mass. These were exciting times for a young musician living in Boston. Along with all the great Scotch and Irish music, there was also a lot of jazz to be heard.

It was from jazz music that Mary Jessie incorporated many of the techniques that she still uses today in her eloquent piano accompaniments. Her style incorporates walking bass lines, rich with subtle passing tones and root substitutions, driven by an uplifting rhythm and the phrasing of a stand-up bass player. She supports this on the right hand with a combination of block chords and fragments of the melody. She weaves seamlessly between playing melody and chords on the right hand, using a subtle tension and dynamics. Mary Jessie is also a fine soloist and is perhaps most known for her classic piano rendition of the march "Johnny Cope."

Early on, Mary Jessie took an interest in reel-to-reel recording herself and purchased a 3M Wollensak recording machine. She eventually established an outstanding collection of her own, including treasured recordings of, among others, her mother Mary (Alisdair Raghnaill) MacDonald, Angus Chisholm, Joe MacLean and Tommy Basker.

Mary Jessie recorded commercially along with her mother; and with fiddler Joe MacLean for the Topic label albums of Cape Breton Scottish fiddle music. In 1988 Mary Jessie was invited to play with fiddler John Campbell at the Smithsonian Institute Festival of Folklife, Washington, D.C. This was for a special program of traditional music from the state of Massachusetts. Recordings of these performances are in the Smithsonian Folklife Archives in Washington.

In recent years, Mary Jessie has recorded, along with Dave MacIsaac, on Natalie MacMaster's latest album *My Roots Are Showing*. This year, Mary Jessie recorded with Dave MacIsaac on his new fiddle album titled *From the Archives*.

Eddie Irwin

Eddie Irwin was born in Cambridge, Mass. in 1940. He was the son of Mary and Alexander Irwin. Eddie's great grandfather, John Cash, emigrated to Cape Breton from Waterford, Ireland in the year 1826. His mother was born in Irish Cove, Cape Breton and was the daughter of Colin and Catherine (MacIsaac) Cash. Eddie's father Alexander was born in Cambridge, Mass., and his parents were both born in County Tyrone, Ireland.

Eddie first learned to play from his mother Mary, who was an excellent piano accompanist in Cape Breton and Irish styles. His brothers were also musical, including his brother Billy who played the accordion. Eddie played for many years at dances and house sessions in and around the Boston area. Although he is widely recognized for playing with Bill Lamey, he often accompanied John Campbell, Angus Chisholm, and Joe Cormier. Eddie also played at local Irish sessions and was a fluent player in the jazz style.

Eddie said that hearing Mary Jessie MacDonald for the first time changed his life. He often described himself as a protégé of Mary Jessie and worked hard at incorporating various aspects of her technique into his own playing. Eventually he developed a unique style all his own and for many years was a favorite accompanist of all the Cape Breton fiddlers who would visit Boston. Eddie was an active player his whole life and in recent years played at sessions with Raymond Ellis and his last session was with fiddler JP Cormier. Eddie

can also be heard on the Joe Cormier albums issued on the Rounder label. Eddie passed away in Boston in 1997.

Thanks to the following people for assistance with tune identifications and histories:

Doug MacPhee, **Barry Shears**, **Paul Cranford**, **David Greenberg**, **John Donald Cameron**, **Charlie Gore** - compiler of The Scottish Fiddle Music Index, **Andrew Kuntz** - compiler of The Fiddler's Companion index, **James Stewart** - compiler of The Tune Index.

Credits

William (Bill) Lamey, fiddle

with

Mary Jessie MacDonald, piano (tracks 1 - 9)

Eddie Irwin, piano (tracks 11 - 15)

Mary (Gracie) Muise, piano (track 16)

Joe MacLean, 2nd fiddle (track 17)

Lila Hashem, piano (track 17)

Woody Woodman, drums (track 17)

Voice Introductions by:

Doug MacMaster, Norton, Mass.

Herbie MacLeod, Arlington, Mass.

Rev. John Angus Rankin, Glendale, N.S.

Tracks 1-5 were recorded by Doug MacMaster at his home, 22 Iffley road, Jamaica Plain, Mass., October 19-20, 1956

Tracks 6-9 were recorded by Doug MacMaster at the home of Toots Gotovich, Jamaica Plain, Mass., March 1956

Tracks 10-15 were recorded by Herbie MacLeod at the home of Bill Lamey, Jamaica Plain, Mass., September 22, 1963

Track 16 "Rev. John Rankin of Glendale March," was recorded by Herbie MacLeod at his home, Arlington, Mass., 1977. The voice introduction by Rev. John A. Rankin was recorded by Bill Lamey at the opening of the Glendale Hall, Glendale, N.S. 1962

Track 17 was recorded by Robbie Robertson for the Celtic Label, at CJC studios in Sydney, N.S. 1947

Produced by Mary Elizabeth Lamey and Paul M. MacDonald.

Editing and mastering by **Toby Mountain** at Northeastern Digital, Southboro, Mass., with audio restoration by Toby Mountain and **Paul MacDonald**.

Notes by Patricia Lamey Hart, Paul MacDonald and Mary Elizabeth Lamey.

Notes on the repertoire were researched and compiled by Kate Dunlay, Toronto, Ontario. A more descriptive analysis of the techniques used by Bill and other Cape Breton fiddlers can be found in her book titled "The Dungreen Collection."

Photography courtesy of the Lamey family.

Rear card photo by **Sally Lamey**.

Design by **Nancy Given**

Acknowledgments

For the last two years this project has been a work of love for me. It has been an adventure from the very beginning, starting with locating the original recordings to the final remastering sessions to working with Rounder Records to get the CD into distribution. Have been blessed with a very supportive family and some special friends.

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Last but not least, very special thanks to Doug MacMaster and Herbie MacLeod. If it weren't for their love of the music, recording ability, and diligence in keeping their tapes in such good condition all these years, this recording would not be possible.

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--**Mary Elizabeth Lamey**

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