

Volumes 2820 to 2826 contain field journals, reports and copies of talks and lectures given by Helen, while volumes 2827 to 2829 contain scrapbooks assembled by Helen and others. Helen's diaries [MG1 Volume 2830] range from 1937 to 1988 and offer invaluable insights into her thoughts and opinions about her personal and professional life. Most of these (and several other files on the supernatural) were, at her request, closed to the public until 15 years after her death. The original restriction was lifted in 1999. Before that, the provincial archivist and I were the only ones permitted access to them. Fortunately, they are now open to everyone. Volumes 2831 to 2841 hold hundreds of individual file cards containing references from field research and biographical data on informants. Volume 2842 is a collection of published non-folk sheet music; volume 2843 consists of posters from Helen's professional career; and volumes 2844 and 2845 contain newspaper and magazine clippings relating to Helen's work.

**Recordings:** Readers of *Canadian Folk Music* will, perhaps, be most interested in Helen's sound and moving image collection. This consists of 4 wax cylinders, 307 discs [acetate and vinyl], 553 reel-to-reel tapes, 15 cassette tapes, 4 video-tapes, and 3 film reels. Helen's early folk song collecting was done by transcribing the words and noting the music as best she, and her collecting partner Doreen Senior, could by hand. Around 1932-33, she used wax cylinders, but they proved too fragile for field work and wore out quickly when trying to make transcriptions. In 1943 she began recording on acetate discs using a Presto Recording Machine, on loan from the Library of Congress. In 1949 she began using a tape recorder and told me she thought she had died and gone to heaven. The material from the acetate discs was transferred to reel-to-reel in 1958. Therefore, all of her recorded material, with the exception of the recordings made on the wax cylinders, was available for listening when I began my cataloguing. I sent the

four wax cylinders off to the National Museum to access the damage and copy them to tape; two were beyond repair. Today, almost all of the original material has been transferred to listening tapes for researchers.

The recorded material contains folk tales and lore, interviews, recordings of military and civic events [part of Helen's agreement with the Library of Congress was to record military and civilian life during WWII] and over 4000 individual song titles, many with several variants. Helen collected songs in English, French, Gaelic, Mi'kmaq, German and several other languages. She has some of the earliest recordings [1943] of African Canadians. Before she got the tape recorder, Helen had to be frugal with supplies. There is little on the discs except the actual song or story, except in a few instances where she recorded the informant's voice for its unique dialect. However, she could be more generous with her reel-to-reel tapes and these have more dialogue between the informants and herself. She collected from individuals, groups, adults and children – and even the odd oxen and occasional group of spring frogs. Her song collection is legendary so I will refer you to the listing on the Archive's web site. It was a joy to listen to these gems. In fact, it took me forty weeks of eight hour days just to listen and catalogue all the songs and stories. [Tough gig!]

I was privileged to have been archivist for this amazing collection. I gained new insights and appreciation for Helen the collector and a great sense of humble gratitude to the hundreds of informants who shared their gifts with her. While cataloguing Helen's collection, I conducted a series of interviews with her and asked what she felt her collection's legacy would be. She told me she had assembled it and now it was up to others to use it. Thankfully, it is now a very public and accessible collection and, I believe, a National Treasure.

### ***Songs of the Sea: Traditional Folk Songs and Narratives from the Dr. Helen Creighton Collection.***

Helen Creighton Folklore Society, 2003. PO Box 236, Dartmouth, NS, B2Y 3Y3.  
<http://www.corvuscorax.org:80800~gseto/creighton>

This is a two-CD compilation of recordings made by Helen Creighton between 1943 and 1954. The first CD comprises twenty-one performances of ballads and songs the subject matter of which is linked in one way or another with the sea; there are eighteen different songs (three items, "The Sailor's Alphabet",

"Golden Vanity" and "Nova Scotia Song" are included in two versions) sung by twelve informants. The second CD has twenty-six items, most of which are shanties, the remainder consisting of comments on the songs or accounts of the functions of shanty-singing in the days of sail.

Although little or nothing has been done to enhance the quality of the original recordings, they are, in the main, remarkably good for their time. Curiously, the disc recordings made by Helen in 1943 for the Library of Congress on a Presto machine loaned by Alan Lomax sound marginally better than the slightly muddy-sounding tape-recordings made for the National Museum between 1949 and 1954, except where the discs have obvious and irritating imperfections, such as the regularly repeated clunk that mars Catherine Gallagher's rendition of "Henry Martyn".



Obviously, for anyone interested in Helen Creighton's work as a collector or in Nova Scotia's heritage of traditional song, this pair of CDs is a welcome and important release. The more so, perhaps, because the accompanying booklet informs us that "Songs of the Sea" is only the first in a series of projected issues of field recordings from the *Creighton Fonds* at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. Plans are apparently underway for releasing "recordings from Mi'kmaq, Acadian, African Nova Scotian and Gaelic speaking informants as well as a series of Songs and Ballads and Instrumental Music". Great, I look forward to these eagerly. It would be particularly nice to see a CD devoted to each of Helen's most celebrated informants, including Ben Henneberry, Catherine Gallagher, Walter Roast, Richard Hartlan, Dennis Smith, Nathan Hatt, and Angelo Dornan. But I do hope subsequent issues will make careful and limited use of a digital editing program to compensate for damage incurred by the original discs and tapes. It seems surprising that the option of so doing was apparently rejected for this first compilation.

For me, the most valuable thing about this particular release is that we finally get to hear what a few of those famous source singers sounded like. Ben Henneberry is unfortunately missing, and so is his son Edmund. One wonders why, since they both knew plenty of maritime ballads and sea songs, and a few of the items that were included do not seem absolutely essential candidates for inclusion. Nor are Nathan Hatt or Angelo Dornan included, although perhaps their repertoires didn't fit the theme of this collection. On the other hand, Catherine Gallagher is featured prominently, singing (in addition to "Henry Martyn") "Golden Vanity", "The *Chesapeake* and *Shannon*", and the famous "Broken Ring Song", a distant relative of "The Dark Eyed Sailor". We get two examples of Walter Roast's excellent singing: a remarkable ballad of the supernatural titled "The Ghostly Sailors" about the aftermath of a collision between two ships that occurred in the 1860s, and his fine performance of "Nova Scotia Song" (aka "Farewell to Nova Scotia"). There is only one example of Richard Hartlan, perhaps not quite at his best, singing "The Banks of Newfoundland", in an accent that suggests an Irish, or perhaps Newfoundland, ancestry. Dennis Smith is missing, but Dennis Williams of Musquodoboit is represented by the better (and earlier) of the two accounts of "The Sailor's Alphabet".

The decision to feature sea-related material has led to the inclusion of various less well-known or less prolific informants. For example, Earl Smith of Lower Clark's Harbour was one of the first of many sailors or ex-seamen that Helen recorded with a National Museum tape-recorder, and here we have him singing "The Golden Vanity" and "The Mermaid" (a version identical in tune and words to the one I learned in elementary school in rural England in the early 1950s). John Obe Smith of Seabright was visited by Helen a year later, in July 1950, and he contributes "Quays of Belfast" as well as the other variant of "The Sailor's Alphabet". The very same month Helen also discovered Otis Hubley, and his account of "The Dreadful Ghost" is one of the highlights of the CD, as is Dan Livingstone's "The Wreck of the *Cariboo*", which dates from a year later. On the other hand, I was less than overwhelmed by Stillman Muise's two songs, performed to country & western style guitar accompaniment, about the loss of the *Vestris*, and Tom Cornealy was better at reciting his ballads than singing them. In short, as might be expected, the performances vary in quality, although the material is always interesting. Overall this is a fascinating CD that I am very glad to have available for repeated hearings.

Compared to the first, I have to confess that I found the second CD less enthralling. Not that it is poor; indeed it is a very valuable historical document. Perhaps it is just that the genre of the shanty is limited in variety, and the songs have to be performed really vigorously and tunefully to sustain extended listening. There are lots of shanties here, most of which are sung fairly effectively, although too often the informants end abruptly after a stanza or two with an apology that the remaining verses have slipped their memories. The result is that several of the items are fragments rather than complete songs. Many of the best performances date from 1943, and, luckily, there are quite a few of them: for example, Arthur Hilton, leading a group of Yarmouth Sea Captains in "Blow the Man Down", "Whiskey Johnny", "Robin Ranzo", "Shenandoah", "Homeward Bound" and "Poor Old Man". Other informants include William H. Smith, recorded in Liverpool in August 1948, and Sandy Stoddard of Lower Ship Harbour, recorded

four years later. Tom Cornealy, one of my least favourite performers on the first CD, reappears on this one too, with a similar mix of tentative singing and confident recitation. Perhaps the two best tracks are Paul Myra's version of "Blow My Bully Boys Blow", which includes an account of rigging the schooner *Bluenose* for the legendary skipper Angus Walters, and Leander Macumber's fragment of "Leave Her, Johnny, Leave Her", which is beautifully sung but all too brief. This CD has its moments, and it certainly does not lack interest, but musically it is inferior to its companion. Frankly, I would have preferred to have seen a second CD of ballad and other sea songs, with a few shanties mixed in. But perhaps the Creighton society has a specialized local market of Maritimes sailing buffs in mind with this one. My advice is to buy the set anyway, but primarily for the singing of Catherine Gallagher and Walter Roast on CD # 1.

*David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta*

### **Clary Croft, *Helen Creighton: Canada's First Lady of Folklore.***

Halifax, NS: Nimbus, 1999.

It is five years since Clary Croft's biography of Helen Creighton was published, and I've no idea why it has taken the magazine so long to get around to reviewing it, except, I guess, that there can be many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, and this one somehow did slip between the cracks. We owe Clary an apology, since this is an important work which will be of interest to anyone with a love of Canadian traditional song, and that presumably means just about all the readers of *Canadian Folk Music*. I suspect, in fact, that many of you will have already read the book, in which case, if you happen to disagree with anything I say, please write in and tell us why. To my shame I had not read it before, which is probably why I ended up with the reviewing assignment. On the other hand, I had heard a few comments about it, some of which led me to expect the worst. I was told (correctly) that Clary was Helen's personal friend and disciple and (incorrectly) that in consequence the book is hagiography. I was told that Clary provides a year-by-year account of Helen's public activities supplemented by as much detail on her personal life as her diaries afford, and that the reader quickly gets bored with all the minutiae. Well, this reader was not bored. Indeed, I had no difficulty in going through the book from cover to cover in the space of a couple of days. Admittedly I skimmed the first two chapters covering the early years of Creighton's life before she had so much as heard of folk music, and to be truthful my concentration began to wander a little after Helen had



stopped working for the National Museum and had effectively given up collecting. But the main body of the book, dealing with the four decades from 1928 to