

The Elisabeth Greenleaf Collection at MUNFLA: An Overview

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The Elisabeth Greenleaf collection at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore Archives is grouped under two different accession numbers: 82-261 and 82-189. The former comprises a single folder with four items, whereas the latter comprises ten folders. There are also six tapes of interviews with Elisabeth Greenleaf conducted by Carole Henderson-Carpenter, one of which has been transcribed.

Strictly speaking, 82-261 is not part of the *Fonds Elisabeth Greenleaf*, since this small batch of material was donated by Margaret E. Fitzpatrick and is listed under her name. However, all the contents of the folder relate to Greenleaf in one way or another. The two most important items are a copy of an article by journalist Rick Booth printed in a Rhode Island newspaper, *The Western Sun*, on October 4th, 1979, titled "Better Late than Never: Mrs. Greenleaf Finally Recognized for Her Book", and the typescript draft of an article by Margaret Fitzpatrick herself. This was apparently written soon after Greenleaf's death in early 1980, and it was probably intended as an obituary (a third item in this folder is a shorter obituary, published in *The Sun*, 10th February, 1980). It may serve as a useful introduction to Greenleaf and her activity as a folksong collector in Newfoundland for anyone unfamiliar with her work:

Greenleaf, Elisabeth (née) Bristol (1895-1980). Folklorist; educator. Born New York City, New York. Educated Vassar College, New York. Greenleaf arrived in Newfoundland in 1920 to serve as a volunteer teacher at the Grenfell Mission Summer School in Sally's Cove, where she was a guest of the Endacott family. She was introduced to Newfoundland folk music early in her stay as she was entertained her first night in Sally's Cove by a group of young men singing the ballad "Thomas and Nancy," and soon after by her host, who also performed "... a real folk song, one handed down by oral tradition" (E. B. Greenleaf: 1968, p. XIX). As she was already acquainted with folk-songs through lectures given at Vassar College, by noted folk song scholars such as John Lomax, Greenleaf's interest was aroused. She began to record, by hand, the texts and melodies of the

various songs and ballads of the area. Upon returning to Vassar in the autumn of that year, Greenleaf discussed her collection with H. N. MacCracken, President of the College, who with Dr. Martha Beckwith of the Vassar Folklore Foundation, encouraged her to return to Newfoundland in the summer of 1921. Subsequently, thirty songs, including the rare "Hind Horn," were added to her collection. Shortly after, Greenleaf married and retired from teaching. It was not until eight years later, in the summer of 1929, that she returned to Newfoundland to resume collecting. She was accompanied by Grace Yarrow Mansfield qv, a Vassar trained musician, who consented to record the often complicated melodies. Although Greenleaf herself had recorded on her earlier visits, she did not feel competent to provide truly accurate transcription. While the collections of 1920 and 1921 were centred in the Sally's Cove area, the 1929 Vassar College Folklore Expedition visited a number of areas on the Island, including St. John's and Conception Bay. The majority of collected materials came, however, from the northeast region and from the St. Barbe Coast, in the area of Sally's Cove and Sandy Cove. In 1933 the Greenleaf and Mansfield collection, *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*, was published, consisting of 185 songs and ballads, over eighty of them with music. In her introduction Greenleaf provides an invaluable profile of Newfoundland outport culture, tradition and dialect in the early part of the Twentieth Century. Although the original publication of the collection had a rather limited circulation, it did achieve some recognition. Thus, it was reprinted in facsimile in 1968. In his introduction to this reprint, MacEdward Leach qv, noted folk song scholar and one-time president of the American Folklore Society, praised the work: "... it was this book of two Vassar girls which pioneered the way [for the preservation of Newfoundland's folk culture] and did it so well" (Greenleaf: 1968, p. vi). In 1977 Greenleaf was the recipient of an Eisteddfod Award from Southeastern Massachusetts University, for her contribution to the preservation of Newfoundland folk song. She died February 7, 1980, at Westerly, Rhode Island. (sources: E. B. Greenleaf, 1968 ; J. R. Smallwood, 1975 ; *Westerly Sun*, 4th Oct,

1979 & 10th Feb, 1980). M.E.F. [MUNFLA Margaret E. Fitzpatrick papers, 82-261-1]

All the other manuscript and printed documents relating to Greenleaf are contained in Accession # 82-189, the *Fonds Elisabeth Greenleaf* properly so-called. The first of these ten folders is called the "Master file" and contains an inventory and detailed tables of contents for each of the other folders. There is also some correspondence between the donor, Robert D. Madison, of Westerly, Rhode Island, and Neil Rosenberg (Director, MUNFLA) and Philip Hiscock (Archivist, MUNFLA), 1982. This includes a letter from R. D. Madison (30th July 1982), in which he mentions that Edith Fowke recommended MUNFLA as the most suitable place to deposit the Greenleaf materials. He also writes: "I am frequently asked whether there was any more music (i.e. tunes) with Mrs. Greenleaf's papers. The answer is, unfortunately, 'no'." Another useful item in this first folder is a copy of a 21-page pamphlet written by Madison, titled *Newfoundland Summers: The Ballad Collecting of Elisabeth Bristol Greenleaf* (Mystic, Connecticut: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1982).

In the second folder (82-189-2) we find some primary sources that help us to understand better the context and nature of Greenleaf's first visit to Newfoundland in 1920. They are letters by Elisabeth Bristol (Greenleaf's maiden name), written to her parents during her journey to Newfoundland in mid June 1920, from Sally's Cove between 22nd and 30th June, from Sally's Cove between July 2nd and August 13th, from Rocky Harbor on August 20th, from Sally's Cove on Sept 3rd, from Bonne Bay on Sept 8th, and from Curling on Sept 12th. The third folder (82-189-3) casts light on Elisabeth's second visit to Newfoundland the next year. One item (a six-page manuscript, hand-written in pencil) is the beginning of the script for an oral presentation, about her experiences as a community teacher and her song-collecting during the summers of 1920 and 1921. This was almost certainly delivered at Vassar College circa 1925, and it suggests that Elisabeth gave several talks, illustrated by her own singing, on her initial collecting at Sally's Cove and nearby outports, before returning to Newfoundland in 1929. Another important item is the draft of an untitled article, comprising 19 typed pages, also about her 1920/21 experiences. In the fourth folder (82-189-4) we find more documents that are

clearly closely related to some of those in folder # 3. For example, there is a second handwritten manuscript in pencil, 4 pages in length but numbered 7-10, which appears to be the continuation of the six-page hand-written manuscript in folder # 3. The main subject is Elisabeth's collecting of old British ballads, and she mentions "Waterloo", "The Duke of Argyle", "Young Barbour", "Lord Bateman", "The Outlandish Knight" (the latter two are quoted but not named), "Lowland Sea" and "The Twelve Apostles". Another item is a 30-page handwritten manuscript on very brittle paper, apparently a first draft of the untitled article about the 1920/21 experiences, written in pencil with exception of the last page which is in ink. It is similar to but more extensive than the typescript in folder # 3; there are sections that were omitted from the typescript, as well as changes in wording. Some of the things only found in this version are quite interesting, for example Elisabeth's observation that Newfoundland dialect is like Shakespearean English, her musings on ballads in which the criminal is identified by a guilty reaction to a performance of the ballad, a mention of Carl Sandburg, and references to her own singing of Newfoundland ballads.

The material in folders 3 & 4 does not deal exclusively with the years 1920-21. Indeed the documents about Elisabeth's experiences as a volunteer teacher in Sally's Cove are mixed up with other documents dating from and about her return to Newfoundland with Grace Yarrow in 1929. Folder # 3, for example, which is known (a little misleadingly) as the Scribner's folder, contains carbon copies of two letters written by Elisabeth to *Scribner's Magazine* in November and December of 1929 about an article titled "Newfoundland Days" that she had evidently submitted for publication. *Scribner's* apparently never published the piece, but in folder # 7 (82-189-7) we find a copy, or at least a nearly finalized draft. There are actually two typed manuscripts in the folder, both incomplete, but by combining them one recreates a 23-page article consisting of 17 pages of typed text and six additional pages of tune transcriptions. The tunes are of "Haul on the Bo'line" (Capstan Chantey), "The *Greenland* Disaster" (Come-All-Ye Tune), "The Spanish Captain" (Come-All-Ye Tune), "Jolly Poker", "Sally Brown" (Chantey), and "Greedy Harbor". This is the most extensive account we have by Greenleaf of her collecting in Newfoundland, apart

Young Girls Take Warning

Anon
Elizabeth Greenleaf

original is in 2/4 time

Young gals take a warning, Take a warning from me, And don't

put your de - pend - ence on a green grow - ing tree, For the leaves [they will wither] and the

roots they will die, [like] cross-ties on the railroad...

In conclusion, here are several short or fairly short excerpts from various documents in the Greenleaf *Fonds* that will collectively provide a sense of Elisabeth's vivid memories of her time in Newfoundland, as well as some flavour of the contents of the archive. Because these extracts are taken from a variety of different sources there is sometimes some overlap between them, but it is often interesting to compare Elisabeth's first draft of her memoirs (as recorded in a pencil manuscript) with a later reworking in typescript. We can do this, for example, with her account of her initial discovery of Newfoundland folksong in the outport of Sally's Cove:

"In the summer of 1920...I found myself listening to a man lying on the floor of a tiny fisherman's house singing a ballad of shipwreck and rescue which is to be found only in the memories of those few men and women who know the song. ...I was a Grenfell teacher in one of the out-of-the-way fishing-hamlets of Northern Newfoundland and was in the midst of organizing a day school for children and a night school for working boys and girls....This evening I returned about half past ten, finding the Endacotts, with whom I made my home, waiting up for me. I was too excited to go to bed, and Aunt Fanny Jane begged Uncle Dan to sing me one of his songs. Of course, I seconded the motion but without any particular attention since my mind was still on the strangely interesting young fishermen (I was not married) and girls who that evening had crowded into the single room which was both Church of England and school-house for the village. Uncle Dan arose, removed his stubby pipe and spat into the little red-hot stove, protested that he "had the cold" and couldn't sing anyway, but finally began pitching his song and mumbling words, and soon

burst forth in a tune at once wild and monotonous, telling the story of two castaways from a Grand Banks fishing schooner, the *Jubilee*....I sat stunned as the meaning of it all came over me. This man could neither read nor write. He was recounting the history of an event in the only way he could be sure of remembering it, and I felt like a Saxon princess to whom her minstrel sung a new lay of Beowulf. Eagerly I applauded the song and asked for more and heard them – old stories some, from Merrie England, and newer ones of happenings around the wild Newfoundland coast. I tumbled into bed, weary with the press of novelty, and excited as if I had come upon a gold mine." [MUNFLA Greenleaf Papers 82-189-3 folder # 3, item 3 (draft typescript)]

"The village I landed in, in a small motor-boat, was called Sally's Cove [p. 3] after the first woman settler. It was merely a string of houses along the sea-shore with no harbor or dock. The boats landed thru the surf right on the cobblestone beach, the women were carried ashore in the men's arms and then the boat was hauled up above the water's edge by a rope and windlass...I found there were about 50 people in Sally's Cove, all of English or Irish descent. About 40% could neither read nor write, and there was not one who could reckon fractions – long division was their highest arithmetic. You must realize, in this connection, that England has never favored and never has had until the War compulsory education, or even public primary schools. These people, then, were intelligent tho illiterate. The men build their own houses and build their own boats and the women shear the sheep, card and spin and dye the wool and knit the most beautiful garments, as well as designing and making the quaint hooked mats which are such a fad here at present.

This then was the absolutely correct atmosphere for folk-lore and I was delighted beyond words to find myself there. I lived with a very fine family, the Endacotts, and Mr. Endacott, whom I called "Uncle Dan" was a noted singer of ballads. When urged to sing, he would arise, remove his stubby pipe, spit into the little glowing wood-stove, and protest that he 'had the cold' and couldn't sing anyway. This is the conventional way to begin. He would then try out his pitch and mumble a few lines, but finally break out in some tune at once wild and monotonous. He sang usually lying on the floor, with his eyes closed, head leaning to the wall. The ending was also conventional. His voice would rise with the action of the song, but suddenly he would break off, open his eyes and finish the last line in a speaking voice or mumble. This, I learned, was the signal for applause. I will sing you a few of the 17 verses of the first ballad I heard, called "The Fisherman of Nfld, or the Good Ship 'Jubilee'". You will notice that this is a song composed recently, and that the composer's aim was not to make beautiful poetry, but to present the facts so they could be remembered."

[MUNFLA Greenleaf Papers 82-189-3 folder # 3, item 5 (handwritten manuscript)]

The following excerpts reveal more about Elisabeth's discovery of the social differences within the community of Sally's Cove and the role of dance and song in village life:

"Another family in the village was very fond of singing and had a store of fine songs. They were John Charles Roberts, his wife, Aunt Polly, two boys and a girl, beside the baby and an eldest son away in Canada. They could all "turn a tune" and had fine clear voices and a streak of artistic genius, which was incongruous with their miserable house with worn out dirty floor and wretched plank bunks for beds. They were cousins to the Endacotts, but with entirely different standards of conduct, cleanliness and duty in life. The children, however, were full of talent and lovable and in a different home and environment would prove worthy additions to society. Maud Roberts, the 15 year old girl, sung me some of the most interesting songs I heard. Here is one which still gives me a thrill. It is called "Young Barbour", and contains references to "the west Counteree", lords, etc., which show that it has been carried orally from old England to this far-off Newfoundland village." [MUNFLA Greenleaf Papers 82-189-3 folder # 3, item 3 (draft typescript)]

"About this time, I stumbled into another rich field of folk-lore – the dance. A family was going to move to another village, and when they had taken away by boat the "furniture" (if one can so name the rude, poor things of their daily life) of

their largest room, they invited the neighbors to come and hold a dance on the floor. I was invited, too, and the evening could not have failed to stir the blood of the most bored and blasé pleasure seeker. The room was not very large, of roughly sawed boards, almost logs. It was lighted by two or three smoky lanterns hung on the wall, and was crowded with people. Many of the men had on rubber boots and everyone who wanted to smoked and spat on the floor! Until it was as slippery as the deck of a fishing schooner when cod are being dressed down. All their clothing is impregnated with salt and the smell of dried cod and wood smoke. The music is furnished by singing. The man who was to sing sat upon a keg and leaned back against the wall, decided what kind of dance it was to be, and started up. The couples were arranged into two hollow squares, sometimes four pairs, again eithat paris [sic] and finally at the height of the dance they had ten pairs in one set. The dances are called 'jigs' and are all square dances with the dancers calling out the figures. As either a 'set' or 'h'eight' takes nearly half an hour to execute, you can imagine the endurance required of the singer! I was too much excited and had to concentrate too much on the figures, to notice the music much. I did hear a tune like "Billy McGree, M'gaw", and the well-known "Killiekrankie", and a version of "Darling Nelly Gray" which had been "ragged" or rather "jigged" to give the desired rhythm. But tho I subsequently spent many hours listening to the two men who sang for the dances, they used such a variety of tunes and rhythms, that I lost myself in sheer enjoyment and never succeeded in isolating and writing down more than a very few and those the simplest." [MUNFLA Greenleaf Papers 82-189-3 folder # 3, item 3 (draft typescript)]

This next handwritten manuscript describes Elisabeth's return to Sally's Cove in 1921, her more systematic attempts to record the folksongs of the region that summer, and her reflections on the English roots of many of the traditional ballads that she found ("Young Barbour", incidentally, is a variant of Child # 100, "Willie o' Winsbury"):

"The next year, therefore, when I found I was going to be able to go again, I tried to train myself so I could write down the music as I heard it and not have to depend solely on memory which is a treacherous quicksand. It was very hard work and I would be the last to say I had mastered it, but I did succeed enough so that I could write in a few common keys – C, F, G, E flat, and two minors, E and A, (with a great deal of effort), and I believe that the music set down here accurately represents the rhythm and intervals of the tunes as sung in the vicinity of Bonne Bay, Newfoundland. I have reason to believe that in other localities of the coast folk-

songs of altogether different subjects. tempo. and origin are the ones commonly sung. Many travelers and even residents [p. 13] will tell you such songs are not to be found at all, but I know that is not so. No village in Newfoundland or Labrador, I confidently predict, will be found entirely lacking in distinctive oral folk-lore. The field is rich and has not been touched before. within my knowledge. The second summer. then. I held day-school and tried to have all those who wanted schooling come to that, and did not have an evening school, so I had more time and energy to devote to recording the folk-songs. The first [song] I got was "The Wreck of the S. S. Ethie", whose cheerful lilt is at variance with the struggles depicted. [p. 14] [here follows a description of the shipwreck and the heroic rescue of the passengers, which took place in December 1919]....The song was made up by the people of a village down the shore..."

[MUNFLA Greenleaf Papers 82-189-3 folder # 4, item 1 (handwritten manuscript)]

"We will turn from these modern songs which generally begin "Come-all-ye" and are a recognized Irish type called "com-all yes", and will drift back thru the years till we have heard songs which date to Chaucer's time or even earlier. One of them was called "Waterloo". another was of the wars between England and the Netherlands. I will sing a few verses of one called "The Duke of Argyle". Others tell a more happy and less heroic story "Young Barbour". One goes back to the Crusades and contains the folk-lore element which we read of in the Arabian Nights – a love token which will remain bright and beautiful as long as the fiancée is well and true to the absent lover. but which becomes pale and sickly in time of danger to the beloved. [p. 7] In these old songs you will notice that the verses are often in the form of a dialogue – a feature never found in modern ballads – and may have a refrain or chorus. Many of the ancient songs have passages of striking literary beauty, which have helped people to remember them these many generations – "He saw a youth on a milk-white steed, combing out his yellow hair" – a perfect English sentence whether prose or poetry. Another example showing dramatic phrasing: "Take off, take off your gay clothing and hand it on a tree, for six king's daughters I've drowned here. and you the seventh shall be." Another where words and music are poignantly expressive: "Lowland Sea". The oldest song I heard is called "The Twelve Apostles" and is to be sung by a solo singer and chorus – supposed to be the way most folk-singing arose. This song and tune is found all over the world wherever Englishmen have wandered. Robert Frost uses it in his book of poems "New Hampshire": "I will sing you One-O". [p. 8]" [MUNFLA Greenleaf

Papers 82-189-3 folder # 4, item 2 (handwritten manuscript)]

The last three excerpts relate to Elisabeth's return to Newfoundland in 1929 (accompanied by music student Grace Yarrow) with the express purpose of song-collecting along the northern coast of the island. They reveal more of her growing understanding of the attitudes, values and life patterns of the people living in the outports, as well as vividly portraying some of the singers and their repertoires:

"On my return I sang some of the songs to President MacCracken of Vassar College, and also discovered that no collection of the Newfoundland songs had been published. Dr. MacCracken and Professor Beckwith of the Vassar Folk-Lore Foundation were so much interested in the new folk-lore field that last summer I was able to go again to Newfoundland, this time an avowed collector. Miss Grace Yarrow, went with me to take down the music as I wrote down the words. Together we formed the Vassar College Folk-Lore Expedition to Newfoundland and succeeded in recording over two hundred and fifty folk-songs, including English and Scottish ballads, Irish and American folk-songs, and songs made up in Newfoundland about [corner of page torn off]... [p. 3]

Each time I go to Newfoundland I find a new fascination in its rugged shores and sea-life as well as its kindly, hospitable people....It seems strange to arrive in a place where the water supply is two buckets on a bench and be able to send and receive radio messages. A large part of their food (such as flour, molasses, sugar and most of their manufactured goods) come over the water to Newfoundland, and all intellectual contact with the world the same. Their ties with England are strong. Jewelers send the famous blue Labrador stones to England for cutting and polishing; dry goods merchants get their cotton and woolen goods there, and most books on the island have been printed in England. But boys and girls wishing a technical education – law, medicine, engineering, mining, etc. – usually take a steamer to Canada or the United States. [p.5]

More than half the people get their living directly from the sea – from their catches of seals, salmon, cod, herring and lobsters, or from commerce between Newfoundland and the rest of the world. Like their ancestors from the British Isles they are a hardy race of seamen, and furnish officers and crews for ocean traffic everywhere. There are some mining and lumbering towns in the interior of the island, but most people live within sight and sound of the sea and get their supplies and mail by boat.... We were always received with kindly hospitality by these descendants of English and Irish stock....North Newfoundland is distinctly a "man's country",

where the former Kaiser's three k's – 'Kirche, Kuchen und Kinder' – are pretty nearly the limits of woman's sphere. The elder member was eternally called on to explain why she was flitting about the world without her husband and son, while the younger member was always urged to take home a good Newfoundland husband. [p.8].... The first question ballad enthusiasts ask you when you return from a collecting trip is "How many Child ballads did you get?". I recorded 17 from Newfoundland. [p. 21] In addition I have collected a number of rousing English sea-songs about pirates and Turks and slave-traders, etc. – very jolly and much enjoyed by boys from the Irish settlements who love to roar them out at the top of their lungs. I have recorded many songs well known in old Ireland. Some are lovely and have the charm with which we are familiar: "Kathleen Mavourneen", "Eileen Aroon", etc. Others have the true Irish humour, such as the one describing Paddy's first sea-voyage to England when he was horribly seasick, fell overboard, was sure he was going to be swallowed by a whale... Then there is the large group of songs composed in Newfoundland about events there – a fascinating set of songs, each different and expressing quite unconsciously the personality of the composer. [p. 22] History is revealed in a ballad collection, too – not the history of generals and kings, but history as it affects the "man in the street". Thus we have emigrant songs showing how the New World was settled, Waterloo and Napoleonic songs of an astonishing variety but no more than you might expect from a series of wars lasting more than ten years. Also songs celebrating English victories in which Newfoundland men fought. One of the finest and most vivid is "Bold Wolfe" about the storming of Quebec by the English." [MUNFLA Greenleaf Papers 82-189-3 folder # 4, item 3 (handwritten manuscript)]

"In Fogo everyone said we should hear Charlie Willis sing, so we went to his little cottage, and found a delightful family. Mr. Willis was a man of about forty five, medium height, of English ancestry. He had sung in the Church of England choir for more than fifteen years. He had a son, Gordon, a fine youth, nineteen years old, who inherited the gift of song also. Our visit was evidently considered quite an event, for we could hear Gordon upstairs donning his good clothes and trying out snatches of songs and a few dance steps. When he came down, he shone with cleanliness, and we quite approved of his setting off his real attractiveness by the effort of dressing. Father and son, singing together and separately, gave us fine songs. One was the old English and Scottish cumulative song, known as "The Twelve Apostles", or "Come and I Will Sing You" or "Green Grow the Rushes, hoh". and known all over the world wherever Englishmen

or Scotchmen have wandered. Another we greatly enjoyed was "Pretty Jessie of the Railway Bar".

[MUNFLA Greenleaf Papers 82-189-3 folder # 7, item 1 (typescript titled "Newfoundland Days")]

"We collected wherever we went – in railroad trains, on the coastal steamers, and of course, in the villages. Along the line of the narrow-gauge railway in Newfoundland, are found the more sophisticated people, who follow world styles in dress, reading, etc., and who do not sing folk-songs for recreation. Most of them know a few, however. [p. 1] But as soon as you leave the railroad behind, you discover that people everywhere love to get together and tell each other riddles and stories and hear and sing ballads. It is their favorite amusement, and the man who can sing well is a marked individual. At Christmas, for instance, the English holiday spirit rules. The people of a tiny, isolated village will gather to sing and talk until the long nights are far-spent, while the younger set amuse themselves by dancing square dances, called 'sets', or 'reels', or 'eights'.... Our very first contact was inspiring, for Mr. Charles Hutton, distinguished musician and patriot of St. John's, entered into the spirit of our expedition at once. The conventional clerk in his music store on the main business street was a bit astonished to hear his employer burst lustily into the strains of
'Ve'll rant and we'll roar like true
Newfoundlanders,
We'll rant and we'll roar on deck and below,
Until we see bottom inside the two Sunkers,
When straight through the Channel to
Toslow we'll go.'

The words are about Newfoundland, composed by another distinguished Newfoundlander, Mr. H. W. LeMesurier, of the Newfoundland Customs. The tune is the good old English favourite, "Farewell and adieu to you, Spanish ladies," quoted by Kipling in "The Light that Failed". [MUNFLA Greenleaf Papers 82-189-3 folder # 7, item 1 (typescript titled "Newfoundland Days")]