GAELIC ORGANIZATIONS IN NINETEENTH-AND EARLY-TWENTIETH-CENTURY ONTARIO

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Kin-groups from the Scottish Highlands who eventually came to reside in Glengarry, Ontario, began emigrating as early as 1773, although they came directly, and in greater numbers, after the conclusion of the American Revolutionary War (1783). Less well known are the channels of migration from the Highlands that fed into other parts of Ontario, particularly between 1815 and the late 1840s. A full account of Gaelic immigrant groups in Ontario would also have to take secondary migration from Gaelic Canadian communities, whether those of Glengarry or Nova Scotia, to urban areas such as Toronto and Hamilton into consideration.

To date, however, no one has attempted such a demographic study, and Scottish ethnicity was seldom broken down into Gaelic and non-Gaelic components. As a result, it can be difficult to produce accurate estimates of the absolute or relative size of Gaelic-speaking communities at particular places and times. There are fragmentary snapshots of many such communities around Ontario that testify to the strength of the language and culture, particularly during the lifetimes of the emigrant generation itself. It is at least worth noting that the 1871 Census for Canada indicated that 20 percent of the population of Ontario had been born in Scotland and many of them, of course, would have had children or

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grandchildren born in Canada. We know that a significant number of those born in Canada were Gaelic speakers, but again, exact numbers are elusive.

As Scottish Gaelic communities became settled into their new locales in Canada, some individuals came together to create organizations to represent, maintain and develop their sense of ethnicity. The activity of these ethnic organizations offers us an opportunity to examine how they thought about themselves as a distinct group, what particular people considered to be valuable or disposable aspects of their ethnicity, how they negotiated between their ancestral inheritance and the expectations of Anglo-conformity, and how contemporary values and events conditioned internal and external perceptions. This brief survey examines Scottish Gaelic organizations in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Ontario, the kinds of sources that exist about their formation and operation, and how those materials might be most fruitfully deployed for the interpretation of Gaelic ethnic consciousness.

Surprisingly little research has been done about Scottish Gaelic organizations in Canada, let alone in Ontario, especially because too little of the necessary groundwork has been established. Very few relevant primary sources have been edited and analyzed, and there is a dearth of scholars in Canada who can work with Gaelic materials effectively. This has left many fields fallow, and most of the little that has been written is deficient in scope and depth, particularly where Gaelic perspectives are concerned. Texts written in Gaelic were aimed at a different audience from those in English and tend to employ different rhetorical strategies for differing social and cultural ends.

There is a variety of sources for Gaelic texts that can be utilized gainfully in this enterprise: manuscripts and unpublished texts in archives, most notably the Archives of Ontario; a small number of Gaelic books that were published in Ontario that contain materials created by individual immigrants and immigrant communities in the province; columns that were printed in local newspapers; texts that were sent to Gaelic newspapers printed in Scotland and other parts of Canada, especially Nova Scotia. This article contains a modest selection of texts from sources of these
An article by Janice Fairney has traced the establishment of branches of the Highland Society of London in Canada starting in 1818, particularly from its first franchise in Glengarry. She observes that all of the original members were Gaelic speakers and that its aims were to “preserve all aspects of Gaelic culture, and to rescue any remains of Gaelic literature transported to Canada.” It was charged with founding and providing materials for Gaelic-medium schools in Ontario and elsewhere. More than one Gaelic school seems to have been established in the Glengarry area at this time, and they were furnished with Gaelic dictionaries, grammars and reading materials. The composition of Gaelic literature was encouraged with prizes and some oral Gaelic literature seems to have been collected by literate society members, although these seem to have since been lost. Although the original society was disbanded in 1828, it was re-established in 1842 and within a year formed branches elsewhere in Canada, including in Toronto, Niagara, Hamilton, Goderich and Kingston. Fairney’s account does not, however, deal with Gaelic culture or literature per se.

Shannon O’Connor has written about Scots as an ethnic group in Toronto, looking at demographics, a selection of the organizations in the city, and the role of two Scottish-themed newspapers based there (the Scottish Canadian and the Canada Scotsman). She neither recognizes the distinctiveness of Gaelic ethnicity nor discusses the implications of these distinctions.

Very few accounts of Scottish settlement in Ontario, or in Canada in general, have given a satisfactory account of Gaelic immigrant communities or their literary remains. Some writers appear to be unaware of the existence of primary sources in Gaelic. Lucille Campey’s book The Scottish Pioneers of Upper Canada, 1784-1855 is a case in point. While she has amassed a prodigious amount of useful records in English that document migration and settlement in the province, she declares:

…when Gaelic began its decline in the late nineteenth century, Highland culture would soon
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fade away with it. Because Gaelic was primarily a spoken language, little has been recorded. So, although symbols of Highland culture live on in the province, they are vestiges of a Highland past which has been largely lost.8

This is not only a misrepresentation of the nature of Gaelic literary activity, especially in the longer view of history, but it seems to legitimate the tendency to ignore the evidence in Gaelic itself to tell the story of the Gaels in the province from their own point of view. The resulting lacunae are often filled in with the expectations and clichés of the Anglophone imagination.

Michael Vance’s 2005 article “A Brief History of Organized Scottishness in Canada” is probably the de facto authority on the topic of Scottish organizations in Canada to date. It offers a summary view of ethnic activity in the dominion and observes that “the earliest Scottish social organizations, while promoting interest in the study of the Scots in Canada were linked to class and ethnic relationships that were conditioned by Canada’s British imperial connection.”9 As a general observation, this is hard to deny, but despite his protests of the exploitation of the discourse of ethnicity to exclude and disenfranchise, Vance’s article itself lacks nuance about Gaelic subjects due to the exclusion of Gaelic sources and viewpoints.

First are the inter-related issues of ethnicity, race, and empire. Vance remarks that men like Alexander Fraser saw Scottish organizations as a “means of maintaining the Scottish influence” in Canada and that they asserted that this Scottish influence was racial in nature; in other words, that Scots belonged to a distinct (presumably singular) racial category with biologically-endowed virtues that needed to be safeguarded for the improvement of Canadian society.10 While there were indeed Scottish-Canadians who made claims about racialized identity from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, we should not mistake the rhetoric of élite culture brokers for popular perceptions that actually existed about race at the time. Scottish Gaels were not only considered to be racially distinct but inferior to other Scots for generations. Lowland Scots themselves made strenuous efforts to be accepted by the English as
fellow members of the same Teutonic racial category during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and in doing so they often distanced themselves from their Highland neighbours. When Scots in Canada like Fraser made grand pronouncements (in English) about racial character, they were attempting to ingratiate themselves with the Anglophone ascendancy by professing to share and glorify the same traits, values and standards. This was not necessarily an accurate portrayal of lived experience and had little if anything to do with Scottish Gaeldom as such.

Second, Vance asserts that Scottish organizations could serve to exclude and marginalize other peoples in Canada, particularly First Nations and racialized “Others,” and that such groups usually served conservative rather than liberal ends. Again, I would not argue with the general observation but would condition it with the caveat that during this time period Gaels had little to no social or political latitude for action independent of the British establishment and were attempting to counter their own marginalization by conspicuously demonstrating their service as loyal servants of empire, just as did the Mohawk and other subalterns. Furthermore, some of the activity of Gaelic organizations was indeed critical of the establishment and the attempt to bolster the Gaelic language was in itself an act of defiance of the exclusion and contempt that Gaels themselves experienced at the hands of Anglophones.

Third, in this and other articles Vance can hardly use the ethnic marker “Highland” without qualifying it with the term “enclave.” The dictionary definition of “enclave” indicates a smaller group contained by a larger one and the consciousness of a subordinate status to the majority group. This is not an entirely accurate characterization of numerous Highland immigrant communities in Canada where Gaels were the majority and could lead long and full lives interacting with others in their native language. Vance extends the notion of ethnic subordination to literature, disregarding the significance of Gaelic literary production in Canada and giving credit primarily to literature in Lowland Scots as an influence on “emerging Canadian literary culture,” presumably because he defines “Canadian” in narrowly Anglo-normative terms. In fact, Gaelic communities all across
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Canada not only shared a common literary heritage but were constantly cross-pollinating each other’s repertoires and creative developments for generations. Their literary productions certainly merit being regarded as a branch of Canadian literary culture, inclusively defined.

Finally, Vance seems to essentialize Gaelic as an inherently rural and culturally conservative phenomenon and hence implies that the work of Gaels and Gaelic organizations in Toronto to maintain and develop their native language in urban settings was futile and misconceived. His comments are worth quoting in full:

… Alexander Fraser was one of several turn-of-the-century Highland immigrants who sought to promote the interests of the Gaelic community in Canada by encouraging the use of their native tongue. Fraser’s promotion of the language was, however, conducted in Ontario’s largest urban centre rather than the rural enclaves where the majority of Gaelic-speakers were located. While it is certainly true that the Highlanders’ Gaelic legacy helped to foster an intense sense of community in places like Cape Breton, the language’s survival was largely a consequence of these communities’ relative isolation rather than its promotion by urban groups like Fraser’s Gaelic Society of Canada. Despite the advocacy of groups like Fraser’s, Gaelic-speaking was actively discouraged by educational authorities during the nineteenth century and came under increased threat in the twentieth century from intruding technologies such as radio and television. While Gaelic still survives in Nova Scotia and the language continues to have its advocates, the revival of Gaelic-speaking has recently been represented as a potential asset for the tourism industry of the province as a whole rather than solely as a benefit to the descendants of the Cape Breton enclave community (Kennedy 2002).
During the nineteenth century, Scots like Fraser, who organized in the urban centres, were more likely to be in a position to exert influence on Canadian society than the Gaelic-speakers in enclave communities who were isolated and largely removed from mainstream Canadian society.15

The desire to maintain language and culture through participation in ethnic organizations was shared by Scottish Gaels in Lowland Scotland and a host of ethnic groups in Canada. Some Toronto Gaels had spent time in the Scottish urban Gàidhealtachd and hoped to replicate the developments taking place there.16 As in Scottish cities, Toronto drew Gaels from many different communities of origin who were aware that in order to survive, Gaelic needed the creative energy and prestige conferred by the kinds of cultural production forged by urban intelligentsia.

Although it has proved very difficult to transmit minority languages in urban settings across generations, we need not retroactively chide such advocates for the long-term difficulties they encountered. The factors affecting success or failure are much more complex than geographical location/isolation and technology. Both print media and oral tradition demonstrate the fact that Gaelic communities across Canada and beyond maintained widespread networks of communication and cultural exchange. That Gaelic has survived best to the present in more isolated rural settings is not evidence that the language and culture was not capable of adaptation. Radio and television are not inherently aligned with or against any particular language or culture: it is a question of which speech community is able to control and harness such technologies. In fact, some early-twentieth-century Gaels were optimistic that these new tools would empower their own communities in new ways.

Vance implies that the Kennedy report is concerned with promoting Nova Scotia as an artificially Gaelicized province for the tourist market. Gaelic Nova Scotia is an inventory—historical, linguistic, cultural and artistic—produced as part of a strategy for the revitalization of Gaelic communities in Nova Scotia on their own terms. Language was and remains a defining feature of these
communities. As the report demonstrates, Gaelic culture makes important economic contributions to the region, especially in the tourist industry, but it is only possible to sustain such activity if the communities are themselves resilient, self-confident and self-sustaining. The report is primarily concerned with the internal resources and perspectives of Gaelic Nova Scotia and how community well-being and integrity can be supported, with tourism being an obvious economic spin-off of long-term cultural vitality. As is clear from contemporary texts and debates, Gaels in nineteenth-century Ontario were facing many of the same issues and misunderstandings.

**Glengarry Gaels**

Gaelic communities could be found in many parts of nineteenth-century Ontario, but the largest and most cohesive settlement was in Glengarry County, from whence the largest number of Gaelic sources survive. As has been mentioned previously, formal Gaelic organizations got their start in Canada with the establishment of a franchise of the Gaelic Society of London in 1818 in Glengarry. Iain MacGilleMhaoil, a third-generation Gaelic-speaking Canadian, remarked in 1904 that the inaugural meeting had been held at his granduncle’s home in St. Raphael’s and that the organization held an annual ball. A Gaelic song about the event was composed by request and performed at one of its dinners in that first generation. This at least confirms that the composition of new Gaelic odes was a prominent feature of this organization from the start.

The earliest surviving Gaelic text with a definite date that I have found explicitly celebrating Glengarry’s Highland identity was composed in 1870. It is stated to have been composed for a St. Andrew’s dinner in Alexandria, which was an important population centre in Glengarry at the time. The poet begins his ode by stating that he has been invited to a dinner in the “region’s great city” and enumerates the many Gaelic personal names and clans present. There is no suggestion that it was in any way unnatural or unusual for the Gaelic language or elements of Gaelic tradition to exist or be highlighted in such a context: in fact, the concluding verses of the poem chastise those who do not teach Gaelic to their children. On the other hand, there seems to be some
hint of the growing dominance of English in the environment given that Gaelic is praised as the most natural language for songs and entertainment (rather than more utilitarian purposes), several English loanwords appear in the song, and the society’s president is quoted as saying in English, “Come fill your glass.”

In 1894 the Gaels of Lochiel in Glengarry County commemorated the foundation of their township. A letter sent to the Mac-Talla newspaper (printed in Nova Scotia) described the celebrations which were large and well structured:

Papers have come to us from Glengarry discussing a great gathering that the Gaels of Lochiel have had this summer on Tuesday the 4th of the month [of September] in commemoration of their forefathers who came across the ocean and settled in the county a century ago.

No fewer than a thousand of the descendants of that goodly people gathered on that day at St. Columba’s Church at Kirk Hill and they spent a pleasant day together discussing the lives and fine repute of those people from whom they descend, and listening to eloquent addresses …
A Gaelic text delivered by the Rev. Dr. Niall Mac na h-Innse for this commemoration survives and was printed in 1896.²¹ It is not clear whether this text written by Mac na h-Innse was for the commemoration in 1894 and left unprinted for two years, or if his address was for an annual event at which he spoke two years later in 1896. In any case, while Mac na h-Innse argued for the importance of the Gaelic language and literary tradition, a close reading of his text indicates that he was also eager to bolster Gaelic self-worth by reference to Macpherson’s *Ossian* and the military tradition. From this and other texts, it is clear that Highlandism had a marked impact on the ways in which the Gaels of Ontario conceived of their collective identity, even if it did not entirely displace older elements.²²

The integration of Anglophone influences into Gaelic ethnic consciousness is also indicated in another text printed in 1896, this time a song-poem composed by Maolíleas MacGilleMhaoil of Finch, Ontario, to celebrate a St. Andrew’s Society dinner.²³ This song-poem is modeled on a set of poems and literary conventions established in the mid-eighteenth century by Gaelic literati asserting the title of clan bard for themselves.²⁴ What is interesting in this case, by contrast, is that MacGilleMhaoil is laying claim to the title of bard to a territory, presumably that of Glengarry County, rather than the obsolete clan entity. This illustrates how Gaelic Canadian poets were accommodating new socio-economic realities in a “New World” context. The poet focuses on a specifically Gaelic, rather than a pan-Scottish, ethnic consciousness (although he sometimes appropriates symbols that are not Gaelic in origin): while St. Andrew is the saint of all of Scotland, he is here associated exclusively with Gaels (line 24); the ancestral territory of his subjects is that of the Highlands (line 34); although mention is made of the “men of Scotland,” they are arrayed in Highland accoutrement and comprise military regiments (lines 49-52); the language of the people MacGilleMhaoil is addressing, and the language he sees fit to praise, is Gaelic (lines 57-60); the Lowlands and Lowlanders (as an ethnic group) are never explicitly mentioned or integrated into his discourse.

1  Ho lí bhò i a go lí bho hò
Ho li bho i a go li bho i
Ho li bho i a go li bho o
Smeàrach le mo dhùthaich mi.

5 Oidhche Fhéill Anndrais, rinn iad coinneamh
Buidheann gun ghiamh, gun ghniomh foilleill;
Nòs ar dùthcha ’ga thoir’ am follais,
’S ann leam bu sholasach r’a sealladh.

Nach bu sholasach ri fhaicinn
10 Suaicheantas a’ Ghàidheil ghasta:
Boineid, féileadh is osain bhreaca
Biodag chairgneach is lann ’chinn ainsich.

Buidheann fhialaigh fhìachail thaitneach,
Treu an gniomh is dian gu casgairt
15 ’N àm dol sios am blàr nam baiteal,
Nach do smuainich riamh air gealtachd.

Comann mòrdhalach ro loinneil
Suidhe sios an seòmar soilleir;
Cliath lùth-mheóir toirt ceòl gu sgoinneil
20 Mach tro dhos nam beòil tholl cruinne.

’S i seo tòsta buadhach àghmhhor:
Na bitheadh gruaim air fear ’ga tràghadh;
Cuimhnichibh car-son a tha i
Comunn Anndra naomh nan Gàidheal.

25 ’S na bitheadh di-chuimhn’ air ur càirdean
Air taobh thall an rubha-sàile;
’S ionnan iad am fuil ’s an nàdur;
’S ann bho Chluaidh a fhuaire iad Pàdraig.

Tòsta do uaisle na tire,
30 Lionaibh suas gu sguabaibh leibh i:
Is iocshlaint bhuan i ’s truail ’gar n-innsgin
Is adhbhar uaill dhuinn buaidh ar sinnsreadh.
Tòsta nan àrmunn glana
Bho thir nan Garbh-Chrioch is nan gleannaibh
An àm cruaidail, fuatha[í]s na deanna[í]l
Choisneadh buaidh le bualadh lannan.

’S ioma curaidh neartmhòr treubhach
Bha ri àireamh riabh ’nar treudaibh;
B’ ann diubh Fionn bho fheachd na Féinne,
Diarmad, Osgar, Conn is Treumnhòr.

Cha chòir dì-chuimhn’ bhith air Wallace,
B’ árd a chliù ’s gach dùthaich aineol.
Cha do sheas ri linn air thalamh
Fear a bhùinneadh buaidh dheth dh’aindeoin.

Latha Bannockburn a charmdaidh
Euchd nan Gàidheal treubhach cròdhach
Trìùir mu’n aon fhear, teachd ’nan comhdhaill
’S dh’fhàg iad marbh ceud mile air lòn diubh.

Cò dh’ an gèilleadh fir na h-Alba,
Luchd an éididh bhòidhich bhalla-bhric?
Waterloo bu mhath a dhearbh iad
Euchd a feachd ’s iad ceart fo’n armadh.

Tòsta do Bhreatainn ’s do Êirinn
Is do luchd àiteachaidh an réim seo
Iad bhith buan a’ cur le chêile
Dion a’ Chrùin bho dhûrachd bhéistean.

Tòsta na Gàidhlig ’am bhuilbh,
A’ chainnt chairdeil làdir mhùlis,
Math gu bàrdachd, dàn is filidh:
’S troich ni h-àicheadh ’s tràill nach sir i.

’S bhò nach miann leam dol nas fhaide
Seach mun cinn mo bhriathraian mabach
Gur e an t-iarrtas a th’ agam
Toil a’ Chruitheir dùrachd m’ aigne.

(1-4) … I am the maven of my territory.

(5-8) They had a meeting on the evening of St. Andrew’s Day, a group without fault or treacherous deed; the traditions of our country being displayed, I thought them wonderful to behold.

(9-12) Wasn’t it wonderful to behold the emblems of the great Gael? Bonnet, kilt and tartan hose, an engraved dagger and a basket-hilted sword.

(13-16) A generous, worthy, pleasant group, brave in deed and eager to fight; when it was time to rush down to the battlefield, cowardice never occurred to them.

(17-20) A majestic, handsome group seating themselves in a lighted room; a light-fingered band providing excellent music through drones with round-mouthed holes.

(21-24) Here is a toast of victory and prosperity; let there be no grimace on the man who drinks it; remember why it is St. Andrew’s Society of the Gaels.

(25-28) Let us not forget our relations on the far side of the salt-water; their blood and nature are the same; it was from Clydeside that they took [St.] Patrick.

(29-32) A toast to the nobles of the land, fill it up so that you may guzzle it down; it is a lasting medicine and loosening of our vigour; our ancestors’ victories [or virtues] are a reason for pride.
(33-36) A toast to the pure warriors from the mountains and glens who would win victory with the smiting of swords in the time of hardship, terror and rush.

(37-40) Many strong, valorous warriors have been counted among our people: these include Fionn [mac Cumail] of the Fian band, Diarmad, Osgar, Conn and Treumnhor.

(41-44) Wallace should not be forgotten, he was famous in every remote country; no other man stood on dry land during his era who could defeat him in combat.

(45-48) The Battle of Bannockburn proved the deeds of the valorous Gaels; for every one [Gael], three enemies came to meet him, and they left a hundred thousand of them dead on the field.

(49-52) To whom would the men of Scotland yield, the people of the beautiful, tartan plaids? Well did they prove at Waterloo the deed of [Scotland’s] troops, well equipped.

(53-56) A toast to Britain and to Ireland, and to the inhabitants of this dominion; may they live long, endeavouring together, defending the Crown from the whims of beasts.

(57-60) A toast to Gaelic on their lips, the kindly, strong, sweet language that is good for poetry, ballad and literati: only a troll would disavow it, only a slave would not seek it out.
(61-64) I do not wish to proceed any further, lest my words become faltering; the request that I have is that the will of the Creator be the wish of my mind.

Although he employs authentic Gaelic literary devices and traditional characters, such as the heroes of the Fian (lines 39-40), MacGilleMhaoil has also incorporated influences derived from nineteenth-century Anglophone literature, conjuring up the pan-Scottish hero William Wallace (line 41) and the Battle of Bannockburn (line 45) to underscore the conceit that Scots were indomitable warriors by nature. He makes a brief allusion to the importance of Gaels in the British triumph over French enemies at Waterloo (line 51). In short, this poem follows a common pattern apparent in many other contemporary texts in which Gaels parade their presumed military virtues, royalism and tartanistic symbols ostentatiously in order to legitimate their merit in an otherwise Anglocentric imperial order.26

A very similar set of tropes with the same import appears in another poem from Alexandria composed by Dr. Dòmhnall D. MacDhòmhnaill on the occasion of the “Scotch Gathering” of September 2, 1905.27 I have discussed this poem in detail elsewhere and will only add the observation that the poet and his friends plan a “heritage tour” described in terms very familiar today. The territory delineated by their itinerary neatly corresponds to concentric rings of origins and layers of identity for the people of Glengarry: they start with a focus on the Clan Donald “Rough Bounds” (Garbh-Chriochan), expand their catchment area to the Highlands as a whole, and then make brief but inclusive visits to Edinburgh, England and Ireland, in that order.

**Beyond Glengarry**

A letter that appeared in the newspaper *Mac-Talla* from correspondent Iain MacGilleEasbaig about a Gaelic social event in Priceville, Grey County, Ontario, in 1902 illustrates how Gaels across Canada and indeed Scotland were connected in social networks that were reinforced and renewed at public events. It suggests particularly strong links between Gaelic communities across Ontario:
Bha cruinneachadh mór aig Comunn nan Gàidheal o chionn beagan sheachdainean ‘s a’ bhaile bheag seò agus mar a bhios na Gàidheil daonnann, chaith iad an oidhche gu cridheil sunndach. Bha móran de luchd-seinn á baile Toronto ann. Bha Iain Dùghlach á Hamilton ann mar an ceudna, aon de na h-organizers aig a’ chomunn. ‘S e fior Ghàidheal a th’ ann, aig am bheil a’ Ghàidhlig gu math agus chan eil e mòr ás fhéin air son a bhith ‘ga bruidhinn nas mò. Fhuair e gu leòr dhi ann am Priceville. Tha sinn an dòchas nach bi an ùine fada gus an tig e a-rithist. … Tha sinn a’ cumail suas na Gàidhlig anns a’ bhaile bheag seo cho math ri àite sam bith.²⁸

The Gaelic Society had a large gathering a few weeks ago in this little settlement and they spent the evening happily and merrily, as Gaels always do. Many of the singers from Toronto were there. John MacDougall [?] from Hamilton, one of the organizers of the organization, was there likewise. He is a true Gael who speaks Gaelic fluently and he is not uppity about speaking it either. He got plenty of it [Gaelic] in Priceville. We hope it won’t be long before he comes again. … We are keeping Gaelic alive in this little town as well as anywhere.

There is no indication here that the presence of Gaelic in Toronto or Priceville or anywhere else in Ontario was unnatural or less viable than in Nova Scotia or Scotland. What we do see instead is that the visitation of Gaelic singers from Toronto and a Gaelic organizer from Hamilton invigorated the Gaelic activity of Priceville and that there was mutual enjoyment of a shared culture.

Toronto deserves a special place in the history of Ontario Gaeldom, although Gaelic and the capital city are seldom mentioned in tandem. Shannon O’Connor has recently concluded that Scots, broadly defined, were one of the three largest ethnic groups in Toronto in the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries. Eóin MacFhionghain (a well-respected authority on Canadian Gaeldom, known as “Jonathan G. MacKinnon” in English) estimated that there were about 20,000 Gaelic speakers in Toronto in 1935. This population would have been drawn in from many different parts of Scotland and Canada.

Eóghann MacColla composed a Gaelic ode to a Scottish society in Toronto in 1858. Although the Gaelic title obscures the identity of the group, I suspect that, given this early date, it was the St. Andrew’s Society (formed in 1836), given that Comunn Gàidhlig Thoronto (the Gaelic Society of Toronto) would not be formed until twenty-two years after the poem’s publication. While the second half of the song revels in the symbols of tartanism and the activities paraded at Highland Games, it begins with praise of the society leaders who demonstrate a commitment to sustain their ancestral culture and language, Gaelic in particular. MacColla was one of the most popular Gaelic poets of his era, and his poem emphasizes the importance of literary production in maintaining prestige for the language and the historical continuity of the Gaelic literary tradition. Again, there is no sense that his role, his language or Gaelic literature were in any sense abnormal or anomalous in Toronto, but rather that these were central features of the celebration of Gaelic identity and even “Scottishness” in an inclusive sense.

A number of Gaels living in Toronto decided in December of 1879 that they desired to form a Gaelic society, and a new organization, Comunn Gàidhlig Thoronto (the Gaelic Society of Toronto), had its first meeting in 1880 in the home of Dòmhnall MacEòghainn (Donald McEwan). The constitution as printed later states the three objects of the society to be:

- the cultivation of a closer and more intimate intercourse of social relations between the sons of the Gael in Toronto, and thus [to] promote and perpetuate a deeper reverence and love for the land of the “mountain and the flood,” its language and its literature;
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- to enable the members, by means of readings, conversation and discussions in the Gaelic language, to speak the mother tongue with ease, correctness and fluency;
- to give information and assistance, when required, to any one of our fellow-countrymen seeking a home in this western world.

It is noteworthy that this ethnic association was specifically Gaelic in orientation and had a strong linguistic and literary focus, even if it also allowed for assisting the financial needs of fellow immigrants. A decade later one of the original members reflected on the objectives of the group which demonstrate a remarkable degree of linguistic sophistication and consciousness:

It will be in the recollection of the older members that the society in Toronto was inaugurated with the very humble intention of reviving among themselves their early knowledge and use of the language; and by conversing together in the various Gaelic dialects which from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland had centered in Toronto, to endeavour to construct a standard colloquial Gaelic dialect which would be understood in the same manner that a classical Gaelic preacher is understood and appreciated in whatever quarter of the country the language is spoken.

The minutes of the organization were written in Gaelic by hand and have yet to be subjected to sustained scholarly attention. A preliminary perusal of them indicates, however, that monthly meetings consisted largely of discussing or debating contemporary issues relating to culture, politics, history, and so on, all through the medium of Gaelic. Participants were practicing what they had learned in Scottish university organizations, such as the University of Edinburgh’s Celtic Society, which had been holding debates in Gaelic by the mid-1800s.
The very first discussion of the group dealt with the difficulties in teaching or enhancing Gaelic literacy due to the lack of Gaelic reading material, including the Bible. Sustained support for and encouragement of literacy in Gaelic was made all the more difficult by the fact that Gaelic had no official status in national or provincial governments or educational institutions. Secular Gaelic materials were procured and read at the second meeting, however, and members offered talks about various subjects and translated reading material from English to Gaelic. Some discussions could be quite diverse and contentious. During the January 1881 meeting, the group formulated a strong condemnation of the Clearances which was sent to the **Highlander** newspaper in Scotland and printed on March 30, 1881. It includes the following assertions:

Gum bheil sinne, Comunn Gàidhealach Thoronto, fo dhoilgheas agus a’ togalg fhanuis an aghaidh na h-êucoir ’s an ainneart leis am bheil àireamh mhòr d’ar luchd-dùthcha (air nach tugadh barr riamh air son treunadais agus gaisge) air am fòirneadh às am fearann, agus air am fuadadh às a’ Ghàidhealtachd, do bhailtibh mòra Bhreatann is do thiribh cèin ...

… mar as motha a tha sinn a’ sealbhachadh saorsa is deagh chor fo laghaibh cothromach ’s an tir seo, ’s ann as motha a tha sinn a’ toirt finear mu h-êucoir is na geur-leanmhainn fo’m bheil móran de na Gàidheil a tha fhathast ’nan tir fhéin a’ fulang, agus na cunnartan a leanas an lorg nan laghanna eucorach ud mur tèid an atharrachadh an ùine ghearr.

Gum bheil luchd-fòineirt is geur-leanmhainn nan Gàidheal a ghnáth a’ cur casaidean tâireil breugach ri ainneart, le bhith cur an cèill gum bheil bochdàinn a’ chuid mhòr dhiubh ’s a’ Ghàidhealtachd ag éirigh bho’n coire fhéin, de thaobh is nach eil iad dicheallach na aghartach chum an leas fhéin. …
Gum bheil sinn duilich fhàicinn cho neo-shùimeil agus cho suarach is a tha mòran de luchd-riaghaidh Bhreatainn mu chor nan Gàidheal, de’m bheil miltean air an cuir sìos gu staid bochdainn nach eil idir nas fearr (mur eil nas miosa) na cor sluagh na h-Éireann, a tha tarraing a’ fearr cho mòr da’n iomnnsaigh, le’n árd-ghearain is an co-ghluasad, am feadh is a tha na Gàidheil bochd a’ fulang ainneart le foighdinn agus an sàmhchair …

We, the Gaelic Society of Toronto, are troubled and bear witness against the injustice and the oppression with which a large number of our compatriots (who have never been excelled for their bravery or heroism) are forced out of their lands and cleared out of the Highlands to the large cities of Britain and to foreign lands …

… the more that we enjoy freedom and well-being under equal laws in this country, the more that we are aware of the injustice and the persecution that still oppresses many Gaels in their own land, and the menaces that result from those unjust laws if they are not changed before too long.

The oppressors and persecutors of the Gaels are always condemning them with shameful, lying accusations that add to their subjection, claiming that the poverty of many of them in the Highlands is their own fault, due to their lack of industry or lack of progress to improve themselves. …

We are sorry to see that many of the politicians of Britain consider the condition of the Gaels to be of so little interest, and to be beneath their contempt, that thousands are reduced to a state of poverty that is no better at all (if it is no worse) than the condition of the population of Ireland, that does
draw their attention so strongly, with their great
protest and campaigning, while the poor [Scottish]
Gael suffers injustice with patience and silence …

Their statement ends by expressing solidarity with Gaelic societies
in Scotland in a larger struggle against these injustices. Evidence
such as this attests to the political role that Gaelic societies in
Canada could play in international networks and the verbal
sophistication that well-educated Gaels, often in urban settings,
could give to such statements. But it also suggests that Gaels were
conscious of their racialized inferiorization by Anglophones (as
frequently depicted in the Anglophone popular press)37 and that
they continued to flee the Highlands because conditions were still
so onerous. Members of Comunn Gàidhlig Thoronto continued to
grapple with these issues, as was noted, for example, during the
annual meeting in 1888: “as is the case with kindred societies the
Gaelic Society of Toronto has naturally taken an interest in the
crofter question which is now agitating British politics…”38

In 1887, the Gaelic Society of Toronto changed its official
constitution to reflect a different set of priorities and activities. An
organization with a broader set of activities, open to Anglophones,
could appeal to a bigger potential audience. The society’s
commitment to developing the Gaelic language in Toronto was
watered down in the larger group setting, even though subdivisions
of the Society continued to do important work. The society’s
official record states:

On January 12th, 1887, a meeting of Highlanders
was held under the auspices of the Gaelic Society of
Toronto, to celebrate New Year, old style. A
committee was appointed at that meeting, with Mr.
Alexander Fraser as Provisional Secretary, to revise
the Constitution, with the view of re-organizing the
Society. On January 24 the committee submitted
their report amending the Constitution, which report
was adopted. The chief amendment was one to the
effect that while the Gaelic language should have
preference in the conducting of the work of the
Society, the use of English would not be excluded, thus widening the basis of membership, which, under the original Constitution practically debarred the admission of non-Gaelic speaking nominees.

Despite this compromise, Gaelic continued to play an important role in aspects of the Society for at least the next couple of decades. A Gaelic Bible class was conducted every Sunday afternoon at three o’clock in the hall of Knox Church by David Spence, who also held a more general class in Gaelic literacy. In the Society’s official summary of their first year since its reformation, it is remarked that the organization had “in no small measure […] awakened an interest in Gaelic matters generally throughout the Province.” If this claim is accurate, it at least supports the notion that an organization of articulate and accomplished citizens in an urban city such as Toronto could provide crucial leadership and prestige to smaller, rural Gaelic immigrant communities scattered throughout Ontario and their efforts at cultural maintenance.

Members of the reformed Comunn Gàidhlig Thoronto sometimes indicated ambivalent attitudes, however, regarding the capacities and roles of Gaelic in relation to English. In his address as Society president in 1891, Spence implies that English is the language of modernity and Gaelic is the language of the sentimental past:

If antiquity be an advantage, it can be readily shown that Gaelic possesses that advantage; therefore it becomes a matter of considerable moment that it should continue to be preserved, not only as a written, but more especially as a pure, living spoken language. Its construction is peculiar, and its pronunciation is unique. It cannot be successfully harmonized with any other language of the present day. …

We claim our right and heritage in the English tongue as the grand main channel for the industry, the commerce and the literature of the modern
world, while at the same time we invite Highlanders and their descendants in Canada, who can cherish fond memories of the virtues and refinements of Gaelic-speaking families at home, to lend their sympathy and co-operation in promoting the objects of this society.39

This concession leaves the differential advantage to English over Gaelic, and thus reflects an undermined self-confidence in the viability of the language for the future. Regardless of such equivocation, Spence and some other Society members continued to state their allegiance to their mother tongue on other occasions, as when the Gaelic Societies of Toronto and Hamilton came together to celebrate in 1891:

A very pleasant event occurred on Saturday last at Oakville when the Gaelic societies of Hamilton and Toronto met for the first time to picnic and enjoy themselves together… Mr. Spence … urged that more attention be given to the Gaelic language and denounced those who sometimes were ashamed to speak their mother tongue, as unworthy of the name of Highlanders. (Cheers) and he closed with a short Gaelic speech.40

The image projected to the outside world about the Gaelic Society and its activities leaned heavily on tartanism and the stereotype of the brawny Highland warrior, as illustrated by a full-page article in Gaelic replete with illustrations in the January 15, 1891 issue of the Scottish Canadian newspaper. Although the Gaelic Society of Hamilton was in existence by 1891, probably by following the example of the Toronto group, it seems to have formulated its constitution only in 1894. What is notable, however, is that the constitution is written entirely in Gaelic, most likely modelled on a parallel institution in Scotland. This document evinces a strong commitment to Gaelic language and literature, perhaps in contrast to the more recreational turn that the Toronto group had taken.
Gaelic organizations in Ontario

A letter from the Gaelic Society of Bruce County in 1890, sent to Senator Tòmas MacAonghuis when he proposed in the Senate that Gaelic be an official language of Canada, demonstrates the existence of this society at that time. While in favour of his scheme, the text has a tangibly tentative and submissive tone, indicating the timidity of Gaels and their ethnic associations when confronting the dominance of the Anglocentric establishment. I do not know anything more about the Gaelic Society of Bruce County, but it is possible that local archival research could uncover important materials here and elsewhere in Ontario.

Such events as the Highland Land Agitation (of the 1880s) and the establishment of the Chair of Celtic Studies at the University of Edinburgh (1882) ushered in an era of renewed self-confidence for Gaels in Scotland and this further inspired Canadian Gaels to form associations to transfer such cultural benefits to their immigrant settings, including urban ones. Take, for example, this letter from a Gaelic correspondent in Toronto writing to a Scottish periodical in 1893:

The Gaelic societies of Canada are in the full swing of their winter’s work. The season for camanachd, a Highland sport not altogether lost to us over here, is about over, and the attention is turned to the evening céilidh indoors. The bent for organisation which characterises the Gael as a clansman, or as a member of the Comunn in the old land, has followed him to the new home beyond the sea, and clubs and societies abound. Among the more important are those of Toronto, Montreal, Kingston, Alexandria and Hamilton. … Down by the sea, in Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton, and Nova Scotia, where there are so many Gaelic-speaking people, descendants of Highlanders, the desire for organisation as a people is taking hold. There are many splendid Highlanders on the maritime territory, and there is every reason why the old language, and the old customs, and the old character, should live and flourish there. The newly formed
Attitudes among Ontario Gaels about the role of ethnic associations in sustaining and developing Gaelic identity, and what elements were worthy of such support, is also evident in discussions about the formation of An Comunn Gàidhealach in Scotland and its ambitions, especially on the pages of the Toronto-based Scottish Canadian newspaper. Wind of the establishment of the group spread to Toronto quickly, as evidenced in a Gaelic article printed in May of 1891:

> Faodaidh e bhith gum bheil cuid de luchd leughaidh Albannach Chanada nach cuala fhathast ionradh air a’ chuspair fhiachail seo no an t-adhbhar mu’m bheil iadsan a tha air a cheann a’ cur an cinn ri chèile. Bu mhiann leam, ma ta, ann am beagan bhriathran oidheirp a thoir gu cuid de rùntibh is riaghailtibh a’ chomainn a chaithd a chur air bhonn a dheanadh aithnichte do Ghàidheil na dùthcha seo. ’S a’ cheud àite: tha miann aca ceol is litreachas na Gàidhlig a bhrosnachadh … Tha mi a’ smaoinachadh gum bheil beachdan a’ chomainn seo ionmholta.44

It may be that some of the readers of the Scottish Canadian have not yet heard mention of this worthy matter, or about the reason why those who are behind it have put their heads together. I would like, then, to attempt to summarize a few of the objectives and directives of the organization that have been established to make them known to the Gaels of this country. In the first place: they wish to encourage Gaelic music and literature. … I think that the ideas of this organization are praiseworthy.

An editorial in the newspaper entitled “A Gaelic Renaissance” a couple of months later expressed even more optimism about
cultural developments in Scotland and their potential to support Gaelic revitalization at a time when key political breakthroughs seemed to herald a more equitable place for Gaelic in Scottish life and society. Diasporic Gaels were explicitly invited to share in these efforts:

Some time ago we brought before our Gaelic readers the movement which culminated at Oban, shortly before we then wrote, in the formation of a Gaelic Association designed to establish in the Highlands of Scotland an institution similar in its general features to the popular Eisteddfod of Wales which has done so much to preserve the national spirit in the little principality… They have now issued their first appeal to the Highland people at home and abroad… The native Highlanders, as fine a people as we have knowledge of in the annals of history, have been cruelly treated by landlords and Government. Little or nothing was done to infuse knowledge among them by the authorities… But they were neglected by the Government, persecuted and driven from the country by their natural protectors to make room for sheep and deer. Now, for the first time, the people having secured the first right of citizenship, an effort is being made to reach all of the people… Recognizing the value of the mother-tongue in this development, the Association wisely pays much attention to the schools… We need hardly say that we recommend this movement to our interested readers. Canada ought to give its strong support, materially and morally, to the undertaking, and we are authorized to state that communications for membership, or contributions to the funds will be attended to, forwarded and acknowledged by the secretary of the Gaelic Society of Toronto at the office at this newspaper.45
Gaelic continued to have a central place in specific activities or subgroups of Comunn Gàidhlig Thoronto, such as Gaelic literacy classes. In 1903, after meeting for some three or four years in home of Iain MacGilleMhaoil and his widowed sister Catriona Chaimbeul, third-generation Gaelic Canadians, students presented them with a small gift for their sustained support. The response of Mrs. Caimbeul is indicative of the attachment to and affection for her native language and culture felt by many Canadian Gaels who had few other outlets for these loyalties.

Mrs. Campbell had no idea at all that anything like this was afoot and she showed great surprise about it. She responded politely and joyfully that it was not in order to procure any benefit to themselves that she and her brother were so keen on holding the gatherings in their house but rather because they so passionately desired for Gaelic and everything associated with it should flourish and proliferate.

There were other aspects to, or spin-offs from, Comunn Gàidhlig Thoronto that had little to do with Gaelic or even competed with it for members’ attention, but these did not necessarily displace or contradict efforts to maintain and develop Gaelic language and culture, at least initially. One such example is a group formed to play the Highland game of camanachd (usually called “shinty” in English). Comunn Gàidhlig Thoronto members seem to have first expressed interest in organizing a group in August of 1891, when five people were assigned the task of formalizing game rules.
Players first met together in early September and matches seem to have been held by the end of the year.48

Dé bhurl barail air a’ chomunn ùr a th’againn a-nis—Cuideachd Camanachd Thoronto? An saoíl sibh féin nach math an smaointinn a thàinig an ceann luchd na Gàidhlig nuair a chuir iad rompa gum biodh an t-seann chleachdairn seo againn, cho math ri cluidheachdan eile?49

What do you all think about the new organization that we have now—the Toronto Camanachd Association? Don’t you all think that the idea that came into the heads of Gaelic speakers was a good one when they decided that we would keep this old custom, as well as other games?

While it was certainly the case that this aggressive sport, that bears more than a coincidental resemblance to modern hockey, dovetailed neatly into the image of the Highland warrior, it was also a genuine Highland tradition that was closely tied to old Gaelic calendar customs and still excites great passion among players and followers. It is far too simplistic to claim that the promotion of camanachd was consciously and exclusively a means “to tie Scottish games with the patriotic defence of empire.”50

The foundation of the Toronto Highland Regiment (The 48th Highlanders of Canada) in 1891—an initiative in which several members of Comunn Gàidhlig Thoronto were involved—is a much clearer case of an effort to connect Scottish ethnicity (in its broader manifestation) with militarism in a bid to win mainstream approval and “curry favour with establishment figures.”51 The relish of this public attention is clear in an editorial entitled “The Kilted Regiment” in the July 30, 1891 issue of the Scottish Canadian:

From our report in another column it will be seen that a strong deputation headed by the Mayor of Toronto interviewed the Dominion Government last
week in connection with the formation of a kilted regiment for Toronto. We have already expressed ourselves as favourable to this movement which has taken a deep hold on the community. A kilted regiment, the Royal Scots, has, for many years, existed in Montreal, and it is not too much to say has been the pride of Scotchmen, not only in the Lower Province but in Upper Canada also… What has been done in Montreal can be reproduced, if not indeed improved on, in Toronto, where there is a large Scotch element numbering thousands of young men of fine physique who would show to great advantage in Highland garb, and where there are many successful men of means whose enthusiasm in the proposed regiment has been fairly aroused… As no form of defense is better than the militia, so no uniform is more attractive or more suitable for soldiering than the ancient Highland garb. It gives distinctiveness to the regiment, and to do credit to the country and race from which they sprang. The national sentiment should be always encouraged, and nothing stirs it more than a sight of the dress which is associated with so much of the glory of Scotland at home and abroad. It is, then, a most fitting thing that a regiment representing Scotland should be formed in Toronto, the centre and capital of a province which owes so much to Scotchmen and their descendants.

While the notion of Scottishness is certainly evoked in this text, it is explicitly tartanistic in acknowledging the purely symbolic role of the uniform and its connection to the imaginary aspects of Scottishness which differed greatly from the lived experience of Gaels. This is not to deny the attention that such symbols drew in public circles and their role in bolstering the self-confidence of the Highland immigrant community and their claim to privilege within it, but we must distinguish carefully between varying audiences and agendas. The flexibility of tartanism even provided the possibility
for people of other ethnic origins to “assume Scottish identities through their participation in Scottish associational culture and, by extension, the formation of the regiments.”

A Gaelic article in the Scottish Canadian in 1892 also applauds the formation of the 48th Highlanders, explicitly naming the three main leaders of the troops and identifying them as Gaelic speakers. The article quotes approvingly from an eighteenth-century song-poem by Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (Duncan Ban Macintyre) praising “the Highland habit” and weaponry of the Captain of the Edinburgh City Guard (Duncan Campbell). The song-poem is thus exploited to legitimate the military enterprise via the precedent of Gaelic tradition, with clear echoes across space and time of the conspicuous display of tartan by military men in urban settings.

Senator Dòmhnall MacGilleMhaoil (Donald MacMillan) of Alexandria appeared at the annual meeting of Comunn Gàidhlig Thoronto in 1895, singing a Gaelic song and delivering a Gaelic speech to attendees. He apologized for not being present at previous events of the organization, even though he was personally involved in the formation of the Toronto Regiment. This, as much as the substance of his speech, reveals his priorities and cultural allegiances. While he commends the efforts of the organization in reinvigorating the Gaelic language in the region, he also held a dim view of Gaelic cultural achievement in the past, tacitly endorsing the theory of stadial progress and Anglo-Saxon-driven “civilization.”

Conclusions
This brief summary illustrates the valuable information contained in the texts produced by and about immigrant communities in Ontario. It shows that previous scholarship on this topic is incomplete and in many cases very misleading. By ignoring the fact that Scots were not a homogenous ethnic group and that Gaels were portrayed as a distinct and inferior race in the nineteenth century, the particular issues facing them and the means by which they negotiated their linguistic and cultural position in the Canadian hierarchy has been obscured. Gaelic and Scottish organizations chose to celebrate, or, conversely neglect, elements of their
ancestral tradition(s) according to varying criteria that depended on geographical, historical and political contexts. They deserve greater attention through recourse to the Gaelic texts produced by and for Canadian Gaels. There were numerous Gaelic organizations and activities scattered throughout Ontario in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries rooted in both rural and urban immigrant communities of various sizes and concentrations. These ethnic associations were connected through social networks and print media to one another in Canada as well as to others in Scotland oriented around the issues specific to the Gaelic language and culture. Urban groups in places like Toronto and Hamilton were conduits for the developments emanating from Scotland that could be translated into a Canadian context.

The surviving Gaelic texts produced by individuals and groups in Ontario from the mid-1800s onwards provide a great deal of information about the ethnic consciousness of Gaelic speakers and the means by which they expressed and negotiated their identity in the province for several generations. Gaels were conscious of their inferiorization by Anglophones and the exclusion of their language and culture from the formal organs of the British Empire and the Dominion of Canada. Many wished to act on their loyalty to Gaelic and sustain it in an immigrant context for future generations, but lacked substantial and sustainable means to do so. The recurring desire for validation evident in many texts indicates that Gaels in Canada and Scotland suffered from an underlying insecurity and inferiority complex, however, particularly in their relations with the dominant Anglophone hegemony. Gaels sought to overcompensate for perceived inferiorities by playing up the stereotypes of tartanism so romanticized in the Anglophone literary imagination and by reinforcing their role as military champions of British imperialism. Such a position left their language and culture in a vulnerable and marginalized position. The salient display of the cliché of the fierce, indomitable Highland warrior can also be read in light of what John MacInnes calls the “siege mentality” of Scottish Gaeldom. After centuries of marginalization and attack from the Anglophone forces of Lowland Scotland and England, Gaels sought to build group solidarity, defend themselves from offenses, and counter-balance accusations of inferiority by
hyperbolized machismo. This magnified masculinity, of course, was easily manipulated by the machinery of empire.

I am not claiming that leaders such as Alexander Fraser were necessarily Gaelic champions who need to be lionized, but their agendas were more complex and multivariate than previous scholars have detected by relying solely on Anglophone texts. While people like Fraser were well versed in their ancestral language, literature and traditions and often wished to celebrate and enshrine them, they were also aware that the dominant Anglophone establishment placed no inherent value in these aspects of their Gaelic inheritance. They sought validation from the Anglophone mainstream and forms of political and social capital via the mystique and exoticism of tartanism and the role of the brave and loyal Highland warrior fighting the cause of the empire. Even Fraser’s attitudes about Gaelic are frequently ambivalent in the face of hegemony and he himself expressed frustration and disillusionment about the tepid response of Canadian Gaels to his efforts given the overwhelming supremacy of English. But this too needs to be read in the context of imperialism and Anglocentric triumphalism.

NOTES

3 See, for example, M. Newton, Seanchaidh na Coille / Memory-Keeper of the Forest: Anthology of Scottish-Gaelic Literature of Canada (Sydney, Cape Breton: Cape Breton University Press, 2015), 373-74.
6 Fairney, “The Branch Societies,” 73.
7 O’Connor, “The Scottish-Canadian Community.”
8 L. Campey, The Scottish Pioneers of Upper Canada, 1784-1815: Glengarry and Beyond (Toronto: Natural Heritage, 2005), xvi.
10 Vance, “A Brief History,” 105.
12 Vance, “A Brief History,” 100, 105.
13 In Nova Scotia, for example, even as far west as Colchester Country Anglophone enclaves felt that they needed to take special steps to protect themselves from the dominance of neighbouring Gaelic-speaking communities. See M. Kennedy, Gaelic Nova Scotia: An Economic, Cultural, and Social Impact Study (Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, 2002), 26. Thanks to Michael Kennedy for this reference.
14 Vance, “A Brief History,” 103-104: “Gaelic songs continued to be produced in Highland enclave communities and began to be published in the later nineteenth century (MacDonell 1982), but it is with the Scots dialect poetry that the impact of the Scots on emerging Canadian literary culture was most marked.”
15 Vance, “A Brief History,” 98.
16 Alexander Fraser, for example, was a graduate of the University of Glasgow.
17 J. C. McMillan, “The First Settlers in Glengarry,” Scottish Canadian June 1904, 167-76 (at 170). I am not aware that the text of the song has survived.
18 Newton, Seanchaidh na Coille, 434-39.
19 It had a population of 800 in the 1871 census, while all of Glengarry County had a population of 20,524. See D. Rayside, Small Town in Modern Times: Alexandria, Ontario (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1991), 33.
21 Newton, Seanchaidh na Coille, 108-16.
22 “Highlandism” can be defined as the projection of stereotyped ethnic symbols of the Highlands – particular tartan patterns, kilts, and bagpipes – upon a subject regardless of whether it is historically accurate.
23 Glengarrian 3 January 1896. As this text has not been previously edited or translated, I give it in full here. I have emended the Gaelic orthography and corrected a number of mistakes in the text. The song was not printed with information about when it was composed and I am not entirely sure
yet as to the lifetime of its composer. A number of MacGilleMhaoil’s songs were printed in Mac-Talla and the Glengarrian newspapers, but they may or may not have been freshly composed. A song said to be made on his deathbed was printed in Mac-Talla 6.15 (8 October 1897): 120. It is worth noting that the poet’s surname was also that of the poet who composed an early ode to the Gaelic Society in St. Raphael’s and so it is possible that this may have been the song-poem mentioned previously.  


25 The original text reads “ainneal.” I have emended this to “aineol” (rather than “ainmeil,” as it provides a better rhyme and is no less logical).  

26 Newton, Seanchaidh na Coille, 70-78.  

27 Newton, Seanchaidh na Coille, 450-56. By this time the settlement had swelled to a population of about 2,000.  


31 Newton, Seanchaidh, 431-34.  

32 “Tartanism” can be defined as the salient display of tartan as a visual marker indicating Scottish ethnicity.  

33 From the Alexander Fraser papers in the Archives of Ontario, F1015 – MU1091.  

34 Scottish Canadian 9 April 1891. Written by David Spense.  


36 A text entitled “Thogainn Fonn air Lorg an Fheidh,” which is also the title of a popular Gaelic song about deer hunting. This may have been a letter written by Rev. Tormod MacLeoid (aka Norman MacLeod, “Caraid nan Gàidheal”) and originally printed by him with that title in one of his Gaelic periodicals.  

37 K. Fenyo, Contempt, Sympathy and Romance: Lowland Perceptions of the Highlands and the Clearances During the Famine Years, 1845–1855 (Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press, 2000).  

38 The Scottish Highlander 22 March 1888.  

39 Scottish Canadian 9 April 1891.
40 Scottish Canadian 2 July 1891.
41 Newton, Seanchaidh na Coille, 484-7.
43 The Celtic Monthly 5.1 (February 1893): 78.
44 Scottish Canadian 7 May 1891, 4. This same issue noted much interest in the Gaelic class offered by the Gaelic Society of Toronto.
45 Scottish Canadian 30 July 1891.
46 Canadian Scotsman May 1903.
47 Scottish Canadian 20 August 1891.
48 Scottish Canadian 3 September 1891.
49 Scottish Canadian 17 December 1891.
50 Vance, “A Brief History,” 103.
53 Scottish Canadian 28 April 1892.
54 The song is "Óran do Chaidtean Donnchadh Caimbeul an Geàrd Dhùn Èideann."
55 Glengarrian 11 October 1895.
56 For some further discussion with a Glengarry connection, see M. Newton, “Celtic Cousins or White Settlers? Scottish Highlanders and First Nations,” in Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 5 / Fifth Scottish Gaelic Research Conference, ed. K. Nilsen (Sydney, Cape Breton: Cape Breton University Press, 2010), 221-37 (at 225-26).
58 Newton, “‘Becoming Cold-hearted,’” 125.