
This welcomed volume represents an unparalleled and formidable stòras (treasure-trove) of Scottish Gaelic written expression, both prose and poetry, gleaned from Canada’s sizeable yet subaltern body of knowledge created by members of its Highland and Hebridean diaspora. In terms of scope, from a functional perspective Seanchaidh na Coille deftly picks up where the earlier work of Sr. (Dr.) Margaret MacDonell’s Emigrant Experience (1982) left off, giving voice through an edition of texts accompanied by English translations of materials that capture the five or more generations of Gaelic experience in Canada beyond initial immigration and arrival. Newton’s presentation of materials thematically, rather than by geography as in MacDonell’s approach, also offers important contextual insights towards both the intersecting diachronic trajectories and synchronic experiences of Scottish Gaelic speakers throughout Canada, from the Maritimes to British Columbia and all provinces in between. It currently sits on my shelf next to his earlier work We’re Indians Sure Enough: The Legacy of Scottish Highlanders in the United States (2001) and together these volumes serve as valuable points of departure towards discovering the nearly three centuries of Scottish Gaelic literary expression in North America. In this sense Seanchaidh na Coille will serve as both an instrumental and perennial source to students and scholars in developing their knowledge of the vast literary corpus in Scottish Gaelic that greatly

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complements other anthologies of Scottish Gaelic literature (Black 1999; Black 2001; McLeod and Bateman 2007; Meek 2003; Ó Baoill and Bateman 1994).

Taken as a whole, the materials presented are a testament to Newton’s capabilities as both a diligent and conscientious researcher, presenting here an extensive and accessible survey of source materials that have long remained out of reach to both everyday readership and researchers in various disciplines lacking the necessary linguistic capabilities. It will also be of value to established scholars of Scottish Gaelic language, literature and culture, on either side of the Atlantic, who have yet to engage with the impressive corpus of materials extant, representing, as Newton puts it, “just the tip of the proverbial iceberg” (2015, 29). As a Canadian whose ancestors settled in Scottish Gaelic-speaking districts in Southwestern Ontario, I am grateful to Dr. Newton for opening up this valuable body of knowledge and giving voice to these all-too-often overlooked communities. In the context of my own family’s connections to both West Zorra, Oxford County and Kinloss, Bruce County, I am especially pleased by the way in which Seanchaidh na Coille has brought my own attention to sources that I had previously been unaware of concerning these predominantly Scottish Gaelic speaking communities. This includes, for example, an anecdote from Seumas MacCaluim of Tiverton, Ontario, just a few kilometers from my family’s homestead, relating his emigration from Kilmartin, Argyll to the Bruce as documented by the inaugural Ontario Provincial archivist Alexander Fraser (Alasdair Friseal, 1860-1936) and appearing in The Scottish Canadian (Newton 2015, 154-161).

Furthermore, as both a former colleague of Dr. Newton’s in the department of Celtic Studies at St. Francis Xavier University and as both being doctoral alumni of the same department at the University of Edinburgh, I greatly welcome and am
thankful to him for his continued efforts in establishing a foundational corpus of materials with the admirable intention of engaging in a collaborative dialogue that will result in a deeper and more nuanced understanding of these literary sources and their integral role in interpreting the Scottish Gaelic experience in Canada. For example, in my current home province of Prince Edward Island, I have recently been delving into both published works and extant field recordings of Scottish Gaelic linguistic materials produced within the province’s once widespread Gàidhealtachd communities, often overshadowed in terms of research and general public knowledge by Nova Scotia where mother-tongue speakers of the language are still found to this day. Newton presents an engaging memoir on emigration by one Murchadh Cam (Half-blind) of Baile an Tobair (correctly identified by Newton as Springton, PEI in the district of Sràth-Albainn or Strathalbyn) published in the Cape Breton-based Scottish Gaelic-language newspaper Mac-Talla (an important source for much of the material presented in Seanchaidh).

Prior to the appearance of this volume, I had presented a talk here in Prince Edward Island that explored the writings of Murchadh Cam, which through my research was identified as the penname for Isle of Skye-born Murdoch Lamont (Murchadh mac Aonghais ‘ic Iain ‘ic Mhurchaidh Bhuidhe, 1822-1902), as well as several of his relations. Both Murdoch and his younger Prince Edward Island-born cousin Rev. Murdoch Lamont (Murchadh mac Eòghain mac Caluim ‘ic Mhurchaidh Bhuidhe, 1865-1927) contributed regularly to Mac-Talla. It was Murchadh Cam who sent in to Mac-Talla the epic “Imrich nan Eileanach” (Emigration of the Islanders) (see MacDonell 1982, 105-113) composed by the Bard Buchanan (Calum Bàn) as a versification of his autobiographical experience emigrating from the Isle of Skye to Belfast, P.E.I. as retrieved from the oral recitation of an
anonymous octogenarian by Ewen Lamont (1817-1905), an elder in PEI’s MacDonalite Church, Murchadh Cam’s cousin, and the father of Rev. Murdoch. Rev. Murdoch Lamont, likely inspired by the work of his elder cousin and his father published an anthology of song-poems, including “Imrich nan Eileanach,” entitled An Cuimhneachan: Òrain Céilidh Gàidheal Cheap Breatuinn agus Eilean-an-Phrionnsa (The Memorial: Céilidh Songs of Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island Gaels) (1917) in Quincy, Massachusetts, which I am currently in the process of editing and translating, revealing the role of anthologizing literary expression and traditions as a long-standing endeavour among Canada’s Scottish Gaels. When taking this corpus, as this volume so aptly does through the expert presentation of Dr. Newton, we are given an engaging memorial to these contributors, each an emblematic seanchaidh na coille in their respective communities, documenting their narratives for those who followed. Gura sinne a tha fada nur comain airson an obair luachmhor seo, a Mhícheil (We are greatly in your debt for this fine work, Michael).

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