



Gaelic Traditions of Mabou

The various ethnic groups who first settled in Mabou all had one thing in common, their love of music. Whatever hardships these pioneers faced, their burdens were always lightened when they sang their own songs and ballads, played their musical instruments and danced their traditional dances, preserving fiddle tunes and Gaelic songs passed down orally for generations.

The majority of settlers were Gaels from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland who brought their music with them and ensured that it was continued and strengthened in the new homeland. The strength of the tradition is evident today in the remarkable number of young musicians who continue to cherish and develop this legacy. Dan J Campbell, Dan R MacDonald and Donald Angus Beaton were just a few of the fiddlers who carried on the musical tradition in Mabou from the late 1800's to most of the 1900's.

Visitors wishing to discover the best of both traditional and contemporary Celtic music are invited to join us at our annual music festivals and at Strathspey Place and The Red Shoe Pub as well as at West Mabou Hall, Brook Village Hall and Glencoe Hall.

The Rankin family at Mabou Mines
Album cover photo: Carol Kennedy 1992



"Milling frolic", painting by Peter Rankin



The Beatons of Mabou
Album cover photo: Warren Gordon, Sydney, NS 1977



A Milling Frolic, *An Luathadh* in Gaelic, was an occasion for friends and neighbors to gather and sing rhythmic Gaelic songs as they softened woolen cloth: "Fulling" or "Milling" by beating it on a large rough board table after it had been completed on the loom and stitched into a long piece.



Text: Mabou Rivers Trail Committee
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"Kitchen Racket", a Ceilidh in Mabou Mines, painting by Peter Rankin
John Morris Rankin is at the piano.

Reel THE RED SHOES By Dan R. MacDonald

A "Ceilidh", originally meaning a spontaneous gathering or kitchen party, is a term now also used to describe the many music festivals and dances held in Cape Breton and abroad.

"The Red Shoes", written in 1936, was the first of over 2,000 tunes, composed by Dan R. MacDonald. His many works are still part the repertoire of contemporary Cape Breton fiddlers.



Dan J Campbell,
Glenora Falls,
violinist 1895-1981



Dan R MacDonald,
1911-1976,
violinist, composer

