

Chocolates, Tattoos, Mayflowers : Mainstreet Memorabilia from Clary Croft. By Clary Croft. (Halifax : Nimbus Publishing, 1995. Pp. vi+ 106.)

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Chocolates, Tattoos, Mayflowers : Mainstreet Memorabilia from Clary Croft. By Clary Croft. (Halifax : Nimbus Publishing, 1995. Pp. vi + 106.)

Nimbus Books, or rather Kathy Koulbach, has designed an appealing book in *Chocolates, Tattoos and Mayflowers*. Glossy boards over sewn-in signatures of nearly square pages, all laid out stylishly, and with a want-to-eat-it photograph of chocolates (and a mayflower) on the cover — all this makes it a lovely book for a gift. And what's inside makes it an appealing bathroom or bedside book. No doubt that's where it will have been found this summer : a copy for each room in bed-and-breakfasts in Nova Scotia.

Clary Croft is described on the back cover as a “writer, folklorist and entertainer” and he attends to this book in all three roles. It grew out of a series of his radio items for the Nova Scotia CBC's regional network programme, “Mainstreet.”

Croft has been a singer and an investigator of Nova Scotian folksong for some twenty-five years. In that time he has lived not in the fat valleys of academic land but in the rather leaner “public sector” outcrops of gigs and grants. There are few jobs for folklorists in Canada, but for those people able to present folklore to the public, there are opportunities in the media. Early birds, and far flying ones, get the worms. Croft is such a bird. A folksinger, a sometime costumer, a media researcher, and a friend of Helen Creighton's in her last years: all these past lives have given him a variety of knowledge about the province that hints at the encyclopedic.

An awareness of the degree to which all cultural writers and presenters, academic or otherwise, dress up their material increasingly pervades academic folklorists' approach to “popularizers,” an approach that is more liberal in the 1990s than a generation ago. Croft is not an academically trained folklorist ; he took courses in the subject at university, and he worked closely with the Creighton collection at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. Nimbus claims in their press kit

(and it is repeated as the opinion of Croft's radio host in a foreword) that "he became [Creighton's] obvious successor as the preeminent folklorist of Nova Scotia." This is a little excessive : despite the difficulty of finding work, there are working academic folklorists in the province, teaching ; there are also fieldwork folklorists there, collecting. Helen Creighton's great contribution to the field of folklore, and to the field of Nova Scotian studies, was collection and compilation. Croft's book does not collect and compile folklore. It does present some folklore. It presents it in a way that no doubt will go down well in the bed-and-breakfasts : Nova Scotians' popular sense of cultural uniqueness has a fine bulwark here. This is so because parallel customs and terms from other places, provinces and states, are not mentioned. For instance, the discussions of colcannon and blueberry grunt (p. 12) seem to indicate they are peculiar to the province. Neither is.

But, in fact, there is not a high proportion of folklore in the book. There is however a lot of what might be called popular history, of the sort that pervades modern folklore of our past. In Nova Scotia, as in Newfoundland next door, there is a strong tradition of its own history, a kind of regional trivia. Croft's book rides on this wave of popular, popular history — both senses of "popular."

As a popular work, it is well put together and well written. Among the very readable chapters of popular history are ones on cabbage "stomping" (pp. 13-14), the uses of the mysteriously disappearing (in the early 1930s) eelgrass seaweed (pp. 24-26), and on the ice-cutting business (pp. 30-32). Now and again Croft's information is based on personal experience : he was taught to knit by his great-grandfather, and speaks with some magisterium on the topic of mittens, wristers, nippers and other homemade textiles.

There are plenty of reasons why someone interested in regional folklore in eastern Canada would want to read this book but, as a source book for academics, it is sadly poor in its apparatus. Croft's preface says his reason for not including sources for his information is space : "the bibliography alone would run into a second volume." This really is no excuse : a page filled with tiny print gives credit for every single image in the book. What, we might ask, is the difference between photo and image credits on the one hand, and source credits on the other ? No doubt it is the difference felt by the publisher : photographers sue for uncredited and unpermitted use of their work. Scholars and newspapers don't. And users don't.

This is very sad. It is sad, not because it cheats the sources, but because it cheats the users. Any folklorist, like any archaeologist, literary scholar, or trial lawyer, knows that context tells truths that the thing itself, the fact alone, cannot. We are cheated of these truths. Check out the coverage of barbershop history on pp. 33-35. It includes some interesting stuff ; I just wish I could tell what's folklore and what's history.

Yes, this will make a nice bathroom book, for visitors and Nova Scotia enthusiasts alike. And some chapters will be eye-opening regalement for the fact-

hungry. But it will anger you for not giving the tools to contextualize what is told you.

The book ends with an anecdote about one of Helen Creighton's informants, an important one — he was one of the people who sang "Farewell to Nova Scotia" for her in the 1930s. She went on to publish the song and in the 1960s it became an anthem of provincial pride. At age 90 this man was asked to sing it on a television programme. Rather than sing it as he had sung it for Creighton decades earlier, he sang it in the new-fangled Catherine McKinnon fashion. The mediated text had become the prestige text. If Catherine McKinnon sings it this way, he said, then it *must* be right ! This struck Creighton as puzzling. Croft passes the story on with no comment.

Such an experience is common to many folklorists, especially those of us who engage in exactly the kind of popularizing that is inevitable when your scholarly work becomes the object of popular interest. It's a feedback mechanism that a couple of generations ago was looked down on over Dorsonian noses, but which nowadays is seen as being part of the dynamic of folklore in every era.

We folklorists in the late 1990s know there is no "pure" folk tradition. *It's all been cut with stuff.* Every recording of folklore, written or electronic, every collection of folklore, published or archival, every compilation of folklore, by academic or enthusiast, is an intrusion into the tradition. In this way, this book is like all our works as folklorists. It is not so much a collection of folklore as an enterprising source of it, a miscellany of popular antiquities.

And as annoying as its lack of source information may be, I cannot help but admire its good looks, and its good conversation.

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Home Medicine : The Newfoundland Experience. By John K. Crellin. (Montreal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994. Pp. 280.)

Home Medicine is an interesting and engaging book that should appeal to popular and academic audiences. Crellin sets out to present both a comprehensive reference to folk cures and self-treatment and a social history of Canadian pharmaceutical practices in Newfoundland. The bulk of the book consists of an encyclopedic listing of ailments and treatments used during the first half of the 20th century in Newfoundland. For each entry (i.e., from abortion to Zam-Buk ointment), Crellin provides a brief description, in which data on the incidence and