

# A Perfect Princess: The Twentieth-Century Legend of Sheila na Geira and Gilbert Pike

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# A Perfect Princess: The Twentieth-Century Legend of Sheila na Geira and Gilbert Pike

PHILIP HISCOCK

IN LATE WINTER 2001, the Newfoundland town of Pouch Cove was catapulted into the Canadian media by the sudden deaths of three teenaged boys who fell through harbour ice into the ocean. The bodies were not immediately located. Searching for the bodies in the days that followed, Pouch Cove fishermen used traditional and local knowledge of how the water moved things around, or did not. They also used a locally constructed tool, a “fish-glass.” With it, they were able to do what modern, professional, and hydrographically trained searchers were unable to do: find the bodies (Bennett 2001).

The *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* lists printed citations for the term “fish-glass” (and its parallel term “water-glass”) back to the end of the nineteenth century but no doubt the simple technique was used long before then (Story, Kirwin and Widdowson 1990). It is, after all, based on the even simpler idea of holding one’s hands to one’s face to stop reflections. A fish-glass looks a little like an early twentieth-century stereo viewer with a long tube attached (“like a length of stove-pipe,” one user said in 1964<sup>1</sup>). The tube enables a person to look through the normally reflective and refractive surface, and see down into the underwater world.

Local legends, which are among the threads woven into the fabric of local oral history, often seem to their users like fish-glasses.<sup>2</sup> A legend offers a way to cut through the reflection and refraction of our contemporary cultural surface, and to look back to another era. Thus we try to make transparent the intervening layers of perhaps generations of views, opinions, and re-creation. The legend is thus made useful as a historical tool — like a fish-glass. When we have only skeletal traces of a past, the oral legend or its fragments offer clues to augment the traces, interpret them, and flesh them out.

Folklore literature has many examples of legends used as historical documents (Brynjulf 1989; Buchan 1968; Dorson 1971a; Montell 1970; Wilson 1979). In Newfoundland, James Tuck heard from fragmentary legends in Ferryland that a well existed on the seventeenth-century site where he was digging (Tuck 1996). The well had been filled in 200 years before, and there was no longer any visible sign of it. But an old man told Tuck that he had “paid attention” when he was young, and could locate the well which had disappeared more than a century before he was born. Although he had no map, oral history and the community’s legends served Tuck in his search; he found the well just where the man had pointed.<sup>3</sup>

Thus legends can act as fish-glasses. There are hundreds of works of popular and academic history in Newfoundland and Labrador that rightly rely on legend and oral history as primary sources. It is nothing new — Judge Prowse’s history would be an inferior work without his reliance on local legends.<sup>4</sup> But legends are lenses, or series of lenses, which are not as true or transparent as fish-glasses. They are more like rose-coloured glasses. Each legend brings into apparently sharp focus a narrative that mimics the manufacture of the lens far better than the reality it apparently transmits. The fish-glass clarifies the view below by obscuring the immediate environment; a legend informs us about contemporary understandings of the past over time, “real worlds” as they appeared to successive generations. From the point of view of the scholar trying to find the history behind the folklore, every telling or understanding of the legend is a lens through which the past may be seen — if at all — only darkly.

For every Ferryland well, there are dozens of legends without any clear historical background. The folly of chasing the chimera of a legend was recognized by scholars of the contemporary (or “urban”) legend. Over the past half-century, folklorists such as Richard Dorson (1959: 250-252) and, later, Jan Brunvand (1963, 1981: 5-7) have tried to find the origins of specific texts. The events, rainbow-like, kept receding from them.<sup>5</sup> Such searches leave us with an appreciation that, although legends may render historical truth, they often represent instead what Mody Boatright (1958) called “social truth.” In other words, they tell us about the tellers. Legends are like any other kind of folklore; they respond to the changing, current needs of their tellers.<sup>6</sup> Legend texts vary in smaller or greater ways to reflect these changing needs. Indeed, meanings of relatively unvarying texts may vary due to changes of context; what a legend is in one time and place does not necessarily represent what it is in another.

The Newfoundland legend of Sheila na Geira lacks the clarity and directness of a fish-glass. But its social truth — its chain of superficial reflections — is clear. Each of Sheila’s lenses, each telling or generation of tellings, colours a story that has been passed along from previous generations with enthusiasm and an increasing attachment to its alleged historical accuracy. Each generation embellishes and develops the legend, projecting its own priorities and preoccupations. Although there are more writings every year on the legend, and despite “facts” and interpreta-

tions being added in the printed literature, the oral tradition continues to reproduce and mutate. From family blazon, through national foundation legend, and local tourist draw, to feminist role model, and no doubt others, the legend has been understood in a variety of ways.<sup>7</sup>

As told in the twentieth century, the legend speaks of family roots in Ireland and England, in Protestantism and Catholicism, and in common and aristocratic families, a fine set of semiological binaries. More recently the legend has fed on twentieth-century ideas of feminism and the utility of culture to regional economic development.

### THE PRINCESS SHEILA LEGEND, ITS MOTIFS AND ITS HISTORICITY

One hundred years ago, documentary evidence started to accumulate of an oral legend that an Irish princess had settled in Newfoundland 300 years earlier. There is no documentary trace of the legend and its principals before 1900 or, for that matter, some years later. In the early twenty-first century, the legend is part of the established oral, folk history of Conception Bay, indeed of eastern Newfoundland, and has achieved a popularity greater than at any other time. It is part of the cultural and economic infrastructure of these areas, and the legend of Sheila na Geira has shown itself to be a flexible and functional artifact, serving several ideological frames. But oral history should not be seen as anything necessarily more than an accretion, or the aggregate, of extant legends. The mere existence of oral history — no matter how widespread, nor how tantalizing its social truth — cannot be taken as proof of its historicity.

The gist of the Princess Sheila legend is that, 300 or 400 years ago, a young Irish woman from high aristocratic background — maybe royalty — was sailing from Ireland to, or from, a convent in France to be educated. On the way, the ship she was travelling on was waylaid by pirates and she was taken to Newfoundland. Smitten by her, one of the pirates, Gilbert Pike, left his calling; she, also smitten, married him. They remained in Newfoundland, and their progeny — the Pikes — became a well-known Newfoundland family.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a family of Carbonear Pikes was celebrated as the largest family in all of Newfoundland. For example, in his *Barrelman* programme of 25 May 1938, J.R. Smallwood referred to Mrs. Edward Pike as having died in 1880 with the greatest number of descendants (228).<sup>8</sup> It has remained a large family; by 1955, the Pike family, or that part of it that holds Pike as its surname, was the twenty-second most common name in Newfoundland, and about half as common as the most common family name, White (Seary 1998: 563). It is beyond me to quantify how many families with distaff Pikes count her among their ancestors.

The past two decades have seen the greatest development of the legend, with the reprinting of a novel based on the legend (Wakeham 1958, 1987) and the annual performance of a local pageant supported by the Carbonear town council.<sup>9</sup> The currency of the legend was also expressed through the interest of film-makers<sup>10</sup> and a book on Canadian piracy (Horwood and Butts 1984: 12-13; see also Coish 1982, and Dawe 1988). The annual summer festival at Carbonear is known as the Sheila NaGeira Theatre Festival. Her profile — without Gilbert — is incorporated in the Town of Carbonear's official (and provincially sanctioned) coat of arms and flag.<sup>11</sup> Not just Carbonear celebrates Sheila: a new housing development on the northern outskirts of St. John's contains a street called "Nageira Crescent" (Re/Max 2003).

Popular historians who have written on this subject have been unable to provide any documentation. The earliest text merely states that the information is derived from "tradition handed down by the Pike family, from whom there can be nothing more reliable."<sup>12</sup> That text is a 1934 article on the history of the neighbouring town of Harbour Grace, in the *Newfoundland Quarterly*, by the local writer William A. Munn. As this is the earliest known account, it is worth quoting in its entirety.

From tradition handed down by the Pike family, from whom there can be nothing more reliable [*sic*]. The mother of the first white child was called Sheila Nagira, a young Irish lady belonging to the aristocracy — who was being sent by her friends in Ireland to France to go into a Convent to finish her education under care of her Aunt, who was an Abbess. On her voyage this ship was captured by a Dutch warship. This Dutchman was in turn captured by three British warships, sailing under Letters of Marque with 1175 soldiers, besides their crews, commanded by no other than the redoubtable Peter Easton, who was then on a voyage to Newfoundland, and he landed his captives at Harbor Grace. Peter Easton was at that time sailing in the British service. His success with profit and spoils led him with so many others at that time into piracy and disobedience to the British Admiralty. The Lieutenant or second in command of this squadron was Gilbert Pike, who belonged to one of the best West of England families. He fell in love with this young lady, which was reciprocated, and they were married by the Chaplain of the Fleet. They decided to remain in Newfoundland rather than continue the voyage. They took up their residence in Mosquito, where the best houses were built, and there was born the first white child in Newfoundland. This was prior to Guy's arrival and settlement.<sup>13</sup> The traditions always say that Sheila Nagira was looked upon as an Irish Princess from Connaught, and every Irishman frequenting Newfoundland would make obeisance to her whenever they saw her. The Pikes claim descent from her. (Munn 1934: 6)

The place name Mosquito (often with other spellings better approximating the still-current local pronunciation of [mø 'skIt ə]) has been used since the 1620s or 1630s (Seary 1971: 63). The town was renamed Bristol's Hope in 1904 to commemorate a 1617 outpost of that name, an offshoot of the John Guy colony established at Cupids, ten miles away, in 1610 (Dale 1981a).

## Town of Carbonear



Carbonear Coat of Arms; Princess Sheila is represented at bottom centre. Reprinted by permission of the Town of Carbonear.

More families than Pikes claim an ancestry linked to Princess Sheila, since Pike women, changing their names upon marriage, have kept the tradition alive in their new families. In the area around Battle Harbour and Mary's Harbour on the south coast of Labrador, fishing people from the Conception Bay area brought the legend with them, establishing it by the late twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> The legend has also been current in my own family — my great-grandmother Hiscock, born a Carbonear Pike and who died in 1933, talked of the legend to my father when he was a child.

Of the published versions, Munn's seems closest to the oral tradition as it has been collected in the past 30 years. It is difficult to distinguish between literary and oral traditions, partly because all the published reports have been by men schooled in popular history, with its techniques of rationalization and romance. However, when more reportorial authors, particularly those collecting for folklorists, are separated from the most "romanced" published versions, recurrent motifs suggest the oral tradition. This is not to suggest that the oral tradition has been monolithic and unchanging. It has clearly been constantly reassessed and reformed over the twentieth century, with oral and literary traditions influencing each other.

There is little in the legend that can be corroborated by standard historical documentation. There was a pirate called Peter Easton who operated in Newfoundland in the early seventeenth century, a former captain in the English navy who came out to Newfoundland in 1602 to help guard the English fishing fleet (Cell 1969, 1982; Lehr 1981<sup>15</sup>). It is also known that the Pike family has been resident in Newfoundland longer than most families, concentrated in that part of western Conception Bay which includes Carbonear and Bristol's Hope.<sup>16</sup> The oral legend is sometimes accompanied by the assertion, "It's true; it's in Prowse,"<sup>17</sup> referring to D.W. Prowse's monumental *History*; in fact, Prowse did not mention Sheila at all, though he did point out that

in 1697 the inhabitants [of 'Bristolls Hope'] told Abbé Baudoïn that their harbour was the first place settled in the country by the English; that a man had died there in 1693 or 1694 aged 83. He might, possibly, be the son of one of Guy's settlers [who moved from the Cupids colony] but in all probability he was a descendant of one of the original planters long anterior to Guy's arrival — most likely a Davis, a Thistle, a Pike, a Pynn, a Crawley, or a Parsons — the oldest families in the Bay Metropolis. (1895: 137)

Little else is verifiable in the legend. Some people, especially those influenced by P.J. Wakeham's novel *Princess Sheila* (1958), claim that a local headstone once bore an inscription recording the death in 1753 of Sheila Na Geira, but this cannot stand as evidence. The stone, discussed below, states, if not clearly then legibly, that it is in memory of John and his wife Julian(a) Pike; John died at an unstated age in 1753.<sup>18</sup>

Mody Boatright (1958) points to certain repeated motifs in American family traditions, noting that they cannot all be true. Some core motifs of the Sheila legend are not peculiar to the Pike family. There is a tradition of having descended from English aristocracy in the Churchill family of Portugal Cove (Pumphrey and English [1955]), a tradition among the O'Briens of Freshwater Valley, St. John's, that they are descended from Brian Boru, the uniter of Ireland,<sup>19</sup> and a tradition in the Dawe family of Conception Bay of having been established there before John Guy arrived in 1610 (Lovelace 1980). There is also the perhaps jocular legend in the Placentia area of a bastard line of Prince William Henry, later King William IV.<sup>20</sup>

Other elements of the legend are shared more broadly with family traditions. Local legends are often constellations of such migratory motifs. As David Buchan (1984) pointed out with regard to the late-twentieth-century international traditions of contemporary legend, such floating motifs constitute a bank from which local withdrawals are made. Stanley Brandes (1975) has categorized "family misfortune" legends, among which are three pertinent categories: immigration stories, family misfortune, and claims to fame. Family misfortune is sub-categorized into lost fortune, forfeited fortune and family separation, each of which is relevant to an understanding of the Sheila legend. Many families develop such legends, or transform stories within their family, into legends congruent with these forms.

Throughout Newfoundland and eastern North America, there are many local legends of pirates, their hiding places, and their hidden treasures (Coldwell 1977). Despite the intimate association of Sheila with pirates, her name never appears in any of the Newfoundland treasure stories amassed by Joyce Coldwell.<sup>21</sup> This seems to indicate that, for most Sheila enthusiasts, treasure legends are an entirely different kind of "history" — not "real," but mere wishful thinking.

Nonetheless, were she in the historical record, there are many sources in which Sheila references should be expected to appear, but do not. Prowse's *History* (1895) has already been mentioned. There is no mention of Sheila in Rowe's *History of Newfoundland* (1980), nor in any of the six volumes of J.R. Smallwood's *Book[s] of Newfoundland* (1936-1974). She is absent in other standard works on Newfoundland settlement such as Cell (1969, 1982), Handcock (1989), Mannion (1977), Matthews (1988), and Pope (1992, 1997).<sup>22</sup>

Local serious histories of the area, academic or popular, almost never mention Sheila.<sup>23</sup> For example, P.K. Devine published a history of Mosquito (Bristol's Hope) in the St. John's *Daily News* in 1938, based on a handwritten history by Nicholas Peddle, who was born there in 1837 (Devine 1938). Devine does not mention Sheila, which implies that Peddle did not mention her either.

The most interesting omission is in a Newfoundland history school textbook by Leo E.F. English (1887-1971), published in 1930 (English 1930).<sup>24</sup> A teacher, school inspector, and eventually curator of the Newfoundland Museum (Janes 1981), English was later one of the main proponents of the Sheila legend. In 1930, he may have felt that only history of the sort corroborated by documents and the im-



primatur of historians should trouble children's minds, or that the legend was unsuitable for them — in his popular versions of the legend in the late 1950s, he sometimes used the phrase Sheila's "pirate lover" to refer to Gilbert Pike, perhaps implying that they had not (properly?) married.<sup>25</sup> Even though English was born and raised at Job's Cove, about 20 miles from Carbonear (Janes 1981), he may not have known the legend in 1930.<sup>26</sup> By the early 1950s, however, there was sufficient local interest in the Princess Sheila legend to encourage the search for corroboration, and English (1949a) was the first to note in print the near-coincidence of the title of the tune "Sheila na Geira" and the name "Sheila Nagira" to which Munn referred. The tune is glossed by the nineteenth-century Irish poet Thomas Moore (in his fifth book of *Irish Tunes*, published in 1813) for his poem "Oh! Had We Some Bright Little Isle of Our Own" (Tessier 1981).<sup>27</sup>

One Pike, neither Gilbert nor Sheila, does show up in standard historical documentation about Carbonear. Prowse mentions John Pike, a mid-eighteenth-century planter of Carbonear. Twice in 1749/50, complaints about him were made to Governor Rodney for mistreating local residents. He was found guilty of "cruelly whipping" two men and illegally seizing fish belonging to another man. His fines were substantial: £125 in total (Prowse 1895: 292). This Pike forebear's local notoriety, either by orally transmitted legend or from the Prowse *History*, may have had a bearing on the development of the legend.

Munn's version of the Sheila legend can stand as a convenient datum from which to make some measurements of subsequent versions. Motifs include the era in which Sheila is said to have lived; the number of her children; the relevance and inscription of the gravestone that still exists in Carbonear; the spelling, pronunciation, and meaning of her "surname"; the recent introduction of an occult surname, O'Connor; and the English family of her husband, Gilbert Pike.

The dynamics of belief and doubt — not the universally unquestioned belief in a legend — are often what drives the enthusiasm of legend believers (Butler 1980; Dégh 1976; Dégh and Vázsonyi 1978). The questions of Princess Sheila's historicity, the "truth" of the legend, have been asked for decades and, as with almost any legend cycle, there have been doubters. David Pike, an amateur enthusiast, wrote that "No evidence has yet been found to prove that the couple even existed" (Pike 1999). Likewise Dawe (1988) expressed doubt in the *Newfoundland Herald*, but by far the greatest number of reports of the legend are written by those who believe the legend (or want their readers to believe it).

As a folklorist, I am interested in why people tell a legend rather than in determining its historical accuracy.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, along the way, something about a legend's historicity, or its lack, seems to emerge. The Sheila legend's existence seems to be associated with rising middle-class values at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the loss of responsible government in 1934, and with the perception of a cultural inferiority complex of the type that Alan Dundes (1985) has discussed.



by P. J. Wakeham

Cover of the 1987 edition of P.J. Wakeham's *The Legend of Princess Sheila* (Creative Publishers, St. John's); artwork by Sheila Gillard Boone. Used by permission of the artist and publisher.

The Sheila legend, which offered some aristocratic pedigree to a significant number of Newfoundlanders, first appeared in print in 1934. Early in that year responsible government was removed and replaced by rule from London. This was a deep blow to the pride of many Newfoundlanders (Long 1999). A legend which pushed the institution of respectable settlement by respectable people to a very early date could only serve to buoy up national self-confidence. Significantly, three different versions of the legend were published in 1949, just a few months after another great constitutional change in Newfoundland's status, confederation with Canada.

Folklorists usefully distinguish historical and contemporary legends. The first are stories from the past that explain the cultural landscape, a place name, a family name, or a settlement pattern. The second are stories about the near-present that highlight the foibles of people and the dangers of contemporary life in humorous or horrific ways. Nonetheless, many actively circulating historical legends bear qualities of contemporary legends. The legend of Sheila has been a historical legend (in that it deals with a non-contemporary period) but it also has been a contemporary legend with a clear vernacularity.<sup>29</sup> The concept of vernacularity problematizes the powerful semiological value a piece of folklore can have for a region without employing muddy or divisive concepts like "folk," "pop," and "elite" or "high art." Through her clear vernacularity, Sheila has been a perfect princess for several generations, each with a slightly different reason for the role.

## THE ERA

One hallmark of folklore is variation in text; there is little agreement on Sheila's era among the reports of this legend. Some reports place her in the eighteenth century (Walsh 1974; Ten Historic Towns 1978), but most place her in the seventeenth century. If Munn's (and others') "first white child" claim is to be sustained, she must have been here before Guy's colony of 1610. Thus the earliest version (Munn 1934) supports the early date, arguing that the birth of Sheila's child occurred before Guy's colony. Moriarity (1970), the various English and Horwood versions, Coish (1982), and O'Neill (1975) likewise suggest that Sheila arrived early in the seventeenth century. Iva Harris (née Soper, 1917-2001), who grew up in the Pike house, and who considered herself one of Sheila's descendants, felt that the headstone that is said to mark Sheila's grave originally gave "sixteen-something" as the death date (Harris 1989). Nonetheless, she admitted that she was unable to disentangle what she knew from her family's stories from what she had read in P.J. Wakeham's novel.

Wakeham's *Princess Sheila: A Newfoundland Story* (1958) is a 338-page "romance" (Wakeham's term) of what he had heard over the previous 20 years. In this account, Sheila dies in 1753 at the age of 105. If so, Sheila could not possibly have

been a young adult in 1610 or any time soon after that. A tradition that Sheila lived to be old (and this may be nothing more than a conventional way of saying nothing disastrous happened to end her life early) does seem to have existed before Wakeham's time, but a definite date and age appeared for the first time in his novel. Subsequently, the age of 105, sometimes 102, appears with some frequency.

Wakeham's influence on the tradition was considerable. He travelled around the island during his holidays, selling the book door-to-door and to a few stores (Wakeham 1989). He sold 3,000 copies in 1958/59, and a second printing of 2,000 in 1959 also sold out.<sup>30</sup> Five thousand copies of any book sold in a province with a small population can be considered a great success. Wakeham had already published seven books, but it was the popularity of *Princess Sheila* that led him in 1960 to start *New-Land Magazine*, a magazine of popular history and fiction which he published for the next three decades.

## CHILDREN

Wakeham's novel states that Sheila had two children, a boy and a girl, before her husband was captured by pirates and taken away for 15 years. An archival report based on mid-twentieth-century oral tradition and minimally affected by Wakeham is that of Gary Maunder (1967), who says that there were three children, John, William and George. In the Cooper (1969) version, she had no children. One of Christina Pike's informants, Len Pike, said, "Presumably she had two children — two are buried there [in the Soper/Pike garden]. At least two — probably more than two" (1972: 23). Coish is not explicit about the number of children, but says that Sheila's union with Gilbert Pike "began one of the oldest and largest families of European descent in all of North America" (1982: 42). Horwood notes the same detail: "There they founded the oldest and one of the largest families in Canada" (1969: 105). Pike is normally listed as the father of the child or children, but in at least one version orally transmitted in late 1989, Peter Easton, the pirate, is the father (Yates 1989).<sup>31</sup>

It is often stated that Sheila was the mother of "the first white child" either in that part of the coast (Horwood 1959), in Newfoundland (Munn 1934; *Ten Historic Towns* 1978), in what is now Canada (O'Neill 1975), or "in Britain's overseas dominions" (English [1955]). Even though Munn does not cite any authority for most of his story, he must have felt that he needed some authority for his "first white child" claim, perhaps because several writers had already given this status to a child born in March 1613 at the Cupids plantation.<sup>32</sup> Munn wrote:

William Colston ... Deputy Governor [of the Cupids colony] during John Guy's absence gives the interesting fact in a letter, that Nicholas Gure's wife was delivered of a



Pike stone inscription. Photo by Philip Hiscock, 1989.



Marker for Sheila at site of John Pike gravestone. Photo by Pauline Cox, November 2003.

lustly boy March 27th. (It does not state that this was the first white child born in Newfoundland, such as the Pike tradition.)<sup>33</sup> (1934: 6)

Munn not only states the facts as he knows them but, by referring to the Colston letter, he states them in an evidential or even argumentative way; perhaps the legend had already given him cause for controversy when he wrote the article. The “fact” of the first white child has been repeated in many other works of popular history.<sup>34</sup> It turns up in about half of the printed versions of the legend, and somewhat less frequently in the oral versions.

## THE GRAVESTONE

A motif of “proof” often given in oral and printed versions of the legend is the gravestone that lies on a lawn at the bottom of Pike’s Lane, at The Beach in Carbonear. In the 1930s and 1940s, this was the lower garden of the old Pike house, occupied by the Soper family, the matriarch of which, Maisie Soper (ca. 1892-1965), was born a Pike (Harris 1989; Downton 1989). A drawing by Jean Ball of the house was featured in the book, *Ten Historic Towns* (1978).<sup>35</sup>

The Soper family acquired the old Pike house about 1920 when their own house in Carbonear was destroyed by fire (Downton 1989). Most of Maisie Pike Soper’s siblings had moved away and she was invited to bring her own family there. Maisie’s Aunt Liza Pike (her mother’s unmarried sister) remained in the house with them. Flora Downton and Iva Harris (the Soper sisters) grew up with their great-aunt Liza and remembered her telling them the story of Princess Sheila when they were children in the 1910s and early 1920s.

The Soper children were the last generation of children to grow up on the old Pike property. By the early 1950s only the unmarried son, Jim, remained with his parents; his mother, Maisie Pike Soper, died in 1965 and his father in 1972. Jim then moved to St. John’s to live with his sister Iva Harris (Downton 1989; Harris 1989). Derelict for some years by the mid-1980s, the house was purchased by the local Canadian Legion and, after being condemned by the town council, was torn down (Downton 1989). An old-age home was built on the site and the garden landscaped. The gravestone sits in the middle of a lawn adjacent to the parking lot. Much folklore attends the site. The caption accompanying Jean Ball’s drawing of the house includes the following:

The folk history of Carbonear associates this house with the legendary Irish princess, Sheila Na Geira who was captured by and fell in love with the pirate, Gilbert Pike. They later settled in Carbonear and many feel the old stone in the back garden of this house marks the graves of Pike and the princess. (*Ten Historic Towns* 1978: facing 23)

The Soper children were told that the house “was over a hundred years old” (Downton 1989). By their adulthood, members of the community were asserting an age much greater than that. The children played in the backyard and remembered more than just the one large stone which has survived. In the 1920s, there were some smaller ones, according to Flora Soper Downton.<sup>36</sup>

FD: There was two or three stones sticking up out of the [ground], no names or anything on them. They might have been [the graves of] children, or they might have been animals, or might have been anything. But in that yard there was not only the one flat stone, but there were two or three *little* stones, like they’d have a grave to someone or anything.

PH: Was the big stone, the one that says John Pike, standing up when you were young?

FD: No that was *never* standing up. And they did try to stand it. I remember Joey Smallwood when he was first [there]; he came over with a crew. I don’t know how many men; they tried to lift it, tried to get it up but they could never get it up.

PH: When did he come out?

FD: Well, ’twas when he was the Barrelman. (Downton 1989)

Smallwood (with his friend Nimshi Crewe, according to the Soper sisters) visited the Pike garden in the late 1930s, while he was still the Barrelman, the voice of a popular radio programme which he wrote and produced at VONF from 1937 to 1943.<sup>37</sup> On several occasions on this programme, Smallwood did mention travelling out of St. John’s through Conception Bay.<sup>38</sup> He and Crewe wanted to lift the stone to see what was under it, and to read the inscription on the other side (Downton 1989; Harris 1989).<sup>39</sup>

As the Barrelman, Smallwood used the Princess Sheila story several times (1937, 1938, 1942).<sup>40</sup> The first was in an extended piece in his newspaper column, “From the Masthead by the Barrelman,” in the St. John’s *Daily News*, 17 August 1937, when he devoted an entire column to what he called “the most romantic [story] in the long history of Newfoundland.” He duly reported his source as W.A. Munn, and Munn’s source as “an old man” he met at Cupids at the 1910 celebrations of the 300th anniversary of Guy’s colony.

Smallwood’s most developed version (25 May 1938) included the following:

... they settled at first in Bristol’s Hope, half-way between Harbor Grace and Carbonear, because it was there that the best houses were. Subsequently they moved to Carbonear. The earliest traditions in Carbonear always spoke of her as an Irish princess from Connaught, and all the Irishmen who visited Bristol’s Hope when she was there, or Carbonear when she moved, made obeisance to her and always showed her, and spoke of her, with the greatest respect. Gilbert Pyke, her husband, was reputed to belong to one of the best families in the West of England. Again according to tradition, it was their first child who proved to be the first white child ever born in Newfoundland, though cold history says otherwise. Gilbert Pyke was one of the biggest

land-owners in Conception Bay, and some of his land is still in the possession of the Pike family of Carbonear.

This extract illustrates several important facets of Smallwood's case that the Pike family were an important iconic founding family of the nation of Newfoundland. The family was well-to-do: they moved into the area with "the best houses" and became "one of the biggest land-owners." Not only that, they were respected by virtue of one being gentry, a scion of one of the "best families" of the West Country, and the others being royal, with Irishmen making "obeisance" to Sheila. They were the founding family; theirs was the first white child, although Smallwood must give a nod to "cold history" — presumably Prowse's assertion that Nicholas Guy/Gure's child had that status. Legends are usually told by enthusiasts who often code into their telling apparently downplayed but seeming proof or corroboration (Bennett 1988). So too here, Smallwood uses the variant spelling "Pyke" as if to suggest that the information derives from old documents with antiquated spelling. Although this spelling is invisible on the radio, he used exactly that spelling in his 1937 newspaper reports. Stephen Pike (1940) notes the spelling variance with what the family considers its correct spelling. Smallwood also pointed out that the Pike family still owned much of that extensive land holding of the previous centuries, as if to say, "Here is a contemporary sign of the story," a common performative structure of legend giving corroborative and nearly first-hand experience of it to the teller and listener (Dégh 2001: 76-78).

The stone is the corroborative point used by most tellers. Often the grave of Sheila, it is sometimes given as merely the marker of the "the ashes" of Sheila.<sup>41</sup> Some accounts, those untouched by Wakeham's, note that there are Pike family names on the stone, but do not mention Sheila herself. English (1949a) states the following:

In a private garden in the west end of Carbonear there is a large stone slab and engraved thereon are names of the Pike family. Tradition holds that beneath this slab lie the ashes of the Irish princess and her pirate lover.

This is the first published report to associate the stone directly with Sheila. The stone's inscription does mention John Pike<sup>42</sup> and his wife Julian(a) but no one else. As Karen Dawe (1988) points out, it is unlikely that almost the entire inscription to John and his wife would survive, while the entire inscription to Sheila and her husband was obliterated from the stone.

Several versions of the supposed inscription exist. Ed Swain (1986) gives the most conflated form:



here lies the body of John Pike who departed this life July 14th, 1756, also Julian his wife. Also Shelah Nageria, wife of Gilbert Pike and daughter of John Nageria, King of County Down, Ireland, died August 14th, 1753, at the age of 105 years [*sic*].

It is Wakeham's novel that first gives an inscription referring to Sheila's death, her age of 105, and her royal birth, including her father's name and title (see below). Wakeham's memory in 1989, more than 30 years after his book was published with that short inscription, was that in the late 1930s the stone had the entire conflated inscription as given by Swain (including her father's name and position).

Reports of the legend after the 1950s are mainly influenced by Wakeham. He could not have Sheila arriving before the Guy colony, because he had seen the gravestone around 1938 and knew that a date of 1753 was quite legible. In a 1989 interview, Wakeham said,

That old headstone? Yes, 'twas still readable at that time [in the late 1930s]. What we *thought* was on it. It was leaned over like that [motions with his hand about 40° up from the ground], so you had to get down to look up at it, you know, to see it. So we got down, we thought that, what I got there was "Sheila NaGaira Pike." That's what we made out on it to be. But there was other writing there about, about her son, John, and that on it. So I didn't take that off [note it down] because it was irrelevant; I just was concerned with her. So that was on that at that time, and that was around '38. Around there. (Wakeham 1989)<sup>43</sup>

The frontispiece of his 1958 novel is a line drawing of a headstone at a slight slant from the vertical (about 20°), with the inscription,

Here lies the remains  
of  
SHEILA  
wife of Gilbert Pike.

Daughter of John  
Na Geira, King  
of County Down,  
Ireland.

Died Aug 14th 1753  
at Carbonear  
Age 105 yrs.

In early 2004, a modern stone marks the "gravesite of legendary Princess Sheila NaGeira Pike aged 105 years" (see photo, p. 206). The original John Pike

stone is adjacent to it, somewhat less legible than it was 15 years ago. A storyboard placed there in the early 2000s by the Kiwanis Club of Carbonear and the Johnson Family Foundation states that the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) investigated the stone in 1982 and found the following inscription: "Here lieth the body of John Pike, Sen. who departed this life July 14, 1753, Aged 63. Also Julian his wife who died June 14, 174[?] Aged 69."

The two CCI technicians, Tom Stone and Janet Vuori, were in Carbonear in 1982 looking at several other artifacts. Tom Stone's memory two decades later was that, while there, they were asked to look at the stone.

At that time the gravestone was located behind the old Pike house in an overgrown thicket of lilac bushes. We went down one night when it was dark with Bert [Parsons] and one or two other members of the [Carbonear] Historical Society. We cleaned off the surface of [the] gravestone by sweeping it and shone a beam of light from a flashlight across the surface at a low angle. I seem to remember that while most of the inscription could be read in this way some of the letters or words caused some difficulty. But with the help of Bert and the others who knew the pertinent names and relationships the text was able to be deciphered. (Stone 2004)

Nothing was included in the CCI report about the gravestone's text; Tom Stone understands that the Historical Society recorded it at the time.

Oral accounts tend to follow the inscription given by Wakeham. One example is the version contributed by Mrs. Josephine Barnes to what is popularly known as the *Cream of the West* *Treasury of Newfoundland Stories* (Janes [1960?]). Another was provided to Christina Pike by one of her informants. While researching the legend in the summer of 1972, Pike was unable to read anything at all on the stone. She asked several people what had been there and no one could tell her. One of her informants later sent her a letter "stating what was supposed to have been on it." This appears to have been Wakeham's frontispiece version (Pike 1972: 39-40).

Paul O'Neill (1975) denies the relationship between the legend and the stone altogether:

It is said that when the Irish princess died her remains were buried in the garden of this [Pike] house. No monument marks the grave site but any visitor to Pike's Lane in Carbonear will be able to view the corner of the garden where Shelagh NeGeira ... is said to lie. (38)

The oral folk history of the Pike stone often mentions a visit made by some men from St. John's who, in an effort to clean dirt and lichen growth from the stone, poured acid on its surface. This had the unfortunate effect of obliterating all the writing that they were trying to highlight. The story turns up in Wakeham's oral account and in that of the Soper sisters. According to one of the Soper sisters, Iva Harris, sometime after she had left home and moved to St. John's (about 1950),

one person came over, wasted acid on it.... Whether they were trying to erase it, you know, [or] to try to get it clearer I don't know. (Harris 1989)

As Wakeham said:

No, you can't read it now. No, somebody knocked it down, see. And then they turned it over and they put acid on it and they burnt it. The last time I was there it was burnt up! Someone said they'd put sulphuric acid on it, you know, to bring out the lettering. They put it on and they burnt it. All, all burnt down ... burnt up. You can't make out. All you can make out now is just on the top, ... with the John Pike. (Wakeham 1989)

The actual reading on the stone is something very close to the following:

Here lieth the body  
Iohn Pike, Sen<sup>r</sup> who de  
parted this Lif. Iuly 14<sup>th</sup> 1753  
Aged  
Also Juliana his Wife Who  
died<sup>44</sup>

Clearly not all of what may have been written is still legible, but what is seen is fairly legible. This writing is in the top third of the stone's face. It appears that space may have been left on the lower parts of the stone for additional names, a common enough custom in many local areas.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Julianna (spelled Juliana) may have been such an addition and seemingly the only one.

## SHEILA'S SURNAME: FORM AND PRONUNCIATION

Sheila's surname takes many forms in the oral and written accounts of the tradition. Munn (1934) gives "Nagira." Horwood usually spells it this way, but once (1978) he uses "Nagaira," perhaps in an effort to achieve the pronunciation [nə 'gɛɪ ɪə] (in contrast to the most common pronunciation in the 1970s and since, [nə 'gɛɪ ə]). Wakeham spells it "Na Geira" throughout his accounts; his oral form was [nə 'gɛɪ ɪə]. O'Neill (1975) chooses NeGeira in addition to an "eye Gaelic" spelling of "Shelagh."<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the earliest attested traditional pronunciation in Carbonear was "Mageela" [mə 'gi: lə]. One of Christina Pike's informants, Flora Downton, noted it (Pike 1972: 32), and Mrs. Downton repeated the point to me in November 1989:

Olive Mews ... her name was Olive O'Geela. Well, we always called it Mageela. But now they call it MaGria. As far as I know, she was, I used to hear them say that Olive was called after her [Sheila]: her second name was Olive Mageela. (Downton 1989)<sup>47</sup>

Olive (Elliott) Mews died in 2001, aged 83.<sup>48</sup> Olive's mother was following a widespread onomastic tradition in Newfoundland by giving her daughter a middle name to represent a surname from her own side of the family (the Pikes). Olive's own account of how that name was chosen, instead of what she later believed to be the correct spelling and pronunciation of the name (NaGeira), was related in a 1989 interview.<sup>49</sup>

When Mother decided that she wanted to christen me that, they got —, there was a man here who started the *Daily News*, John Alexander Robinson. That was years and years and years ago. Well he went over [to Carbonear]. They were friends of my mother's family, and they went over and apparently they cleaned off what they could of the old gravestone. And as near as they could make of it, he said, it was M-A-G-E-I-L-A. And that's the way I spell my name. (Mews 1989)<sup>50</sup>

In 1989, Mrs. Mews did not pronounce it "Mageela"; she pronounced the middle syllable with an "isle" vowel. She had originally used the "ee" pronunciation, but as an adult she reanalyzed it as "isle."

[I] spoke to several Irish people who said, "Well your name is not [Mageela], your name is Ma-GUILE-ah [mə 'gʷi:lə].... I've heard it pronounced Nagira, and I could see that. And the Mageela. Well you see that's where perhaps they didn't use the Celtic E-I; the Mageela would be the result. Mummy always called me [mə 'gʷi:lə]. (Mews 1989)

When Sheila's surname has the form beginning with "N," it almost always is pronounced with a high or mid-front vowel before the "R": [i:r], [e:r] or [ɛ:r]. In the version of the name learned by my father from his maternal grandmother, the vowel is somewhat lower [ã], in order to rhyme with that in "Tara": "Sheila Nagara a princess of Tara" is the first line of his poem (Appendix B).<sup>51</sup>

There are two major spelling groups for Sheila's surname based on the use of initial M or N: "Mageela" [mə 'gi:lə] and "Mageila" [mə 'gʷi:lə] versus "Nageira" [nə 'gʷi:lə] and [nə 'gʷi:lə]. (One might just as easily distinguish between the names with L or R in the middle syllable.) The spelling groups represent at least four main pronunciations. As already noted, the earliest of these seems to be Mageela and three other (single-report) pronunciations may be derived from it: Olive Elliott's middle name Mageila; Eric Hiscock's memory of McGara as an early pronunciation; and that reported by Cooper (1969), MairGeira. Except for Olive Elliott's middle name, the initial-M variants seem to have almost disappeared after Munn's

1934 text appeared and subsequently Smallwood's subsequent on-air promulgation of the initial-N pronunciation in the following decade. No doubt a measure of urbane, bourgeois self-assurance led to Munn's assertion (and Smallwood's) of "Nagira," assuming that the traditional pronunciation in Carbonear was wrong.

Exactly which vowel is used for the middle syllable of NaGeira (to rhyme with the first syllable of either "ironic" or "errant") is variable. Today most people choose to use the "errant" vowel: [nə 'gɛɪ ə] but — based on for instance P.J. Wakeham's preferred pronunciation [nə 'gɛɪ ɪə] and the decision by Olive Elliott to start pronouncing her middle name as ma-GUILE-ah [mə 'gɛɪl ə] at the middle of the twentieth century — it seems likely that the "ironic" pronunciation was more popular. In turn, this is suggestive of a mid-century audience hungry for new information about the legend, including what was the received pronunciation of Sheila's name.

## A HIDDEN SURNAME

This leads to the discussion of the meaning of "Na Geira" and the theory that there was another, "correct," surname. Quite early, L.E.F. English discovered a poem by the Irish poet Thomas Moore which was given the air of "Sheila na Geira." He mentioned this in print in 1949, but Munn was likely aware of the Moore poem in 1934; otherwise it is difficult to reconcile his use of the name "Nagira" with the local oral tradition of "Mageela." English later mimicked the anapestic tetrameter of Moore's poem in his own poem (1955) about Sheila (Appendix B).

The gloss of "Nagira" or "na Gaira" as Irish for "the beautiful" appears quite late, and was first presented in print by Horwood in 1978.<sup>52</sup> It may be that English's and Wakeham's insistence that Sheila was beautiful came from the former's knowledge of this possible gloss, but there is no evidence for this conjecture. That she was a princess may have been evidence enough of her beauty.

In 1989, Wakeham stated that all the old people knew that Na Geira was a "false" name.

And then I met a man; I've forgot his name. I was down in hospital [in St. John's] and I had my appendix out. He wasn't from Carbonear, but he was from that area. He told me that the Pikes from the very beginning knew who Sheila was. And he said "For reasons best known to themselves," he said, "her true identity was never revealed." He said they knew. And I said to him, "Would it be on a religious basis?" Because, at that time, there was a lot of problems around 1650, and around there, at that time, religious disturbance in England and Ireland and that. And I said it could be that. "Well," he said, "I don't know, it could be," he said. But as far as he knew, he said, "I'll tell you, they knew, the Pikes knew right from the very beginning who she was, but, he said, "they made a great job of keeping her identity hidden," he said, "for reasons, probably, best known to themselves." So he knew, he knew then that NaGeira wasn't [her

real name]. Now this is before my daughter-in-law investigated this thing in Ireland. He knew her name [wasn't NaGeira], he had a feeling anyway, a pretty strong feeling that the name wasn't NaGeira. (Wakeham 1989)

Horwood (1978) introduced the name of O'Connor, the royal family of the kingdom of Connaught. When the existence of a royal family of that name was confirmed by Irish academics, this motif quickly became part of the received tradition; now "na geira" was seen as a family nickname, representing the true surname O'Connor. Wakeham incorporated the new motif in 1989, as did Dawe (1988), and Swain (1986). Wakeham (1989) attributed his new knowledge to research by his daughter-in-law in Ireland.

### GILBERT PIKE'S FAMILY

In most versions of the legend, Gilbert Pike's family background is not mentioned. But Munn (1934) stated that Pike was from "one of the best West of England families," and sometimes there occurs the extra detail that Pike's father was "the Right Hon. Major Morley Pike, Member of Parliament for Devon" (Maunder 1967). The name and title of Morley Pike also appears in a note found in a file on Sheila NaGeira at the Provincial Reference Library, St. John's,<sup>33</sup> attributed (without date or other citation) to Harold Horwood. As with so much of the Sheila legend, no actual documentary source is given and I have seen no documentary proof that Morley Pike ever existed. Yet this genealogical detail completes — for its "social truth" — the "first family" motif: both sides are made respectable, one by virtue of its aristocracy, the other with its assumed bourgeois (or even gentry) political standing.

### GENDER AND THE LEGEND

It is peculiar that this legend has always been brought into print by men from the St. John's educated middle class, while the oral tradition has been carried on by women. It is tempting to draw a parallel between the double tradition of this legend and those of song traditions (Ives 1977) and the folktale (Thomas 1983, 1993). Gerald Pocius has described a singing family in which the husband was noted for his performances, but the wife knew the words of more songs (Pocius 1976b). Male family history traditions tend to differ from female traditions in the type of detail and the depth of characterization.

Bengt Holbek, in his analysis (1987) of the thousands of tale texts collected in nineteenth-century Denmark by Evald Tang Kristensen, noted that there were meaningful gender differences. In particular, he found that female-told tales had fe-

male heroes about half the time (46%), while only one out of eight (12%) male-told tales had female heroes. "Male narrators," he said, "were not, apparently, much attracted by tales where heroines play the leading role" (Holbeck 1987: 168). In the case of Sheila, there is a stronger use of the Gilbert-Pike-the-pirate motif in male-told versions, but there is no question that Sheila is the heroine of both male- and female-told versions.

The Soper sisters were born before 1920 and learned the legend from their mother, Maisie (Pike) Soper, and her older sister, Liza. Their second cousin, Olive Mageila (Elliott) Mews, learned the story from her mother, Jessie (Pike) Elliott. Eric Hiscock got the story from his maternal grandmother. P.J. Wakeham had several sources, but the most important were Maisie (Pike) Soper and a Mrs. (Pike) Noseworthy of Whitbourne. Another of Wakeham's sources, Morris Penney, had heard the story from his mother (a Pike). The would-be film-makers of the 1980s were women. Two businesses with the princess's name opened in the 1990s: Nageira's Restaurant in St. John's, and NaGeira House, a bed and breakfast, in Carbonear (not at the site of the Pike/Soper home). Both businesses were owned by women.<sup>54</sup>

Almost all the *printed* versions are by men, a fact that reflects as much about the period as it does about the legend. In the 1930s, few women were members of, for instance, the Newfoundland Historical Society, if the list of its executive members reflects its activity.<sup>55</sup> William A. Munn was a member of a prosperous Harbour Grace mercantile family, but lived in St. John's (Cuff 1991). Maisie (Pike) Soper's father, Captain Jimmy Pike, was employed by the Munns. The role of John Alexander Robinson, of the *Daily News* of St. John's, is not fully known. He played some role in the choice of a name for Olive Elliott in 1917, but it is not clear if he helped develop the legend through his newspaper. English and Smallwood were educated men who spent much of their adult lives "making Newfoundland better known to Newfoundlanders."<sup>56</sup> Both published widely and frequently. P.J. Wakeham spent four years at a college in New York before returning to Newfoundland in the mid-1930s. He published a dozen novels and collections of stories, 49 editions of a magazine (*New-Land*) in which, he said, he wrote every word, as well as several short stories and articles in other magazines (Wakeham 1989). Harold Horwood came from the St. John's elite, both intellectually and politically; his father and grandfather were well-to-do captains and authors (Horwood 1997). As part of Smallwood's pre-Confederation circle, Horwood served in Smallwood's first elected government.<sup>57</sup> Paul O'Neill, historian and poet, was born in Bay de Verde but has been active in St. John's literary, art and drama circles since the 1960s.

## POEMS

At least one poem about Sheila's life (see Appendix B) has been published. In 1955 L.E.F. English submitted to the Newfoundland Arts and Letters Competition an ingenious poem metrically modelled on the anapestic tetrameter of Thomas Moore's poem "Oh! Had We Some Bright Little Isle of Our Own," using Moore's title as a line in its text. English's title is "The Ballad of Sheila Na Geira."<sup>58</sup> Its rollicking rhythm and the possibility of its being sung made it into a successful piece of seeming folk poetry. It won first prize in the "Ballad Section" of the Competition that year.

There are at least two unpublished poems (see Appendix B). One, by Terrence "Ted" White of Carbonear, was recited in the mid-1980s at the Carbonear Folk Festival. White had written it ten years earlier, and had given it to his daughter Marian Frances White. Ted White died at the age of 86 in 2003.<sup>59</sup>

Eric Hiscock was born in 1911 and died in 1999.<sup>60</sup> At the age of ten or twelve (about 1922), he composed a poem about Sheila. When I first asked him about it in 1989, he could only remember the first line, but over the course of several months he reconstituted what is given in Appendix B. The poem is unfinished: he was unable to remember the rest. How much of the poem actually dates to 1922 and how much to 1990, I do not know.

## EARLY TRACES

How old is the legend? Although no written examples appear from before Munn's article of 1934, oral testimony goes back to approximately 1922 (Hiscock's account), to 1917 (the naming of Olive Mageila Elliott), and even to 1908 (Cecil Reynolds). Reynolds (1903-1998) mentioned it tangentially in his memoir of growing up in the Carbonear area (Reynolds 1982). As a little boy, perhaps around the age of five, he took a liking to one of the Pike girls of his own age. He was warned off by his grandmother who intimated that the Pikes were not to be trusted as "[t]hey came from pirates." This seems to indicate that the legend existed in some form at the beginning of the twentieth century and perhaps before that.

Reynolds's account suggests that there was an esoteric-exoteric factor in the legend (Jansen 1959). Outside the family (exoterically), the folklore was that they had come from pirates; inside the family (esoterically), they were said to have descended from a princess. Later versions have synthesized the two traditions.

Where did the legend go from there? John Alexander Robinson was well placed to introduce it to the St. John's intelligentsia. In 1934 the legend was included in Munn's serialized history of Harbour Grace. This was a semi-scholarly, popular historical treatment of the legend, and was probably the source for the version published six years later by Smallwood and English for schoolteachers, as well



as informing Smallwood's *Barrelman* programme. Thus the story spread. A generation of Newfoundland schoolchildren growing up in the 1940s heard the legend from their teachers, taking the story literally into almost every home. Where the *Barrelman* may not have succeeded, the school text must have. Thus the folk tradition was reformed by the elite-mediated legend.

In 1949 Michael Harrington (the *Barrelman* at the time) reprinted the Munn article nearly verbatim in the widely distributed monthly newspaper *The Newfoundlander*, which would have gone to almost every home in the new province.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, by 1958, when Wakeham's novel appeared, a large number of Newfoundlanders had already been exposed to the legend. Enthusiasts would have been hungry for more information; the novel provided it. But even people who did not buy or read the novel were exposed to the legend by Wakeham's visit to their doors trying to sell his book. Perhaps in the Carbonear area some people might have paid enough attention to the earlier versions to be able to do some source criticism of the novel. Flora Downton told Christina Pike: "He just made up a story of it.... I think Mr Wakeham just romanced on a lot of it" (Pike 1972: 33, 37), using a term ("romanced") that Wakeham himself used.

But Wakeham's version, romance or not, in turn heavily influenced the popular tradition. Its 5,000 copies, as well as the "synopses" he printed and reprinted from time to time in his magazine, spread his version far and wide. And many of his "romanced" details became established in the oral tradition, including the age of Sheila, her date of death, and that the headstone was inscribed with her name.

Munn gave no source for his legend of Sheila except the rather inexplicit, "From tradition handed down by the Pike family, from whom there can be nothing more reliable." Nonetheless, Smallwood reported that Munn used to say his source was an old man he met at the 1910 tri-centenary celebrations at Cupids; this is the third pre-Munn trace of the legend.<sup>62</sup> Munn and Smallwood moved in the same intellectual circles in St. John's, and Munn was part of the merchant class of the Carbonear area.<sup>63</sup> Munn's family owned ships that the Pike family captained and insured; they were friends of the Pike family. But, it was as an adult, in a town 20 miles away, that Smallwood said Munn learned about the story. This — like English's early apparent unfamiliarity with the legend — suggests a lack of its spread in Munn's younger years. He was born in 1864 (Cuff 1991).

That the Pikes were a well-to-do family, involved in banking, insurance and shipping, and that the legend spread out through rather middle- or even upper-class channels, suggests a class-based reading. That the working-class Reynolds was warned away from a Pike friend by his grandmother may be significant. It is possible that the piracy motif of the legend at the beginning of the twentieth century actually served to mark the rather more comfortable Pike family as different from others in the community. The Pikes' business — private, mainly maritime, insurance — might have been viewed as a kind of piracy, making money from the maritime mis-

adventures of others, and the fear of future ones. As mentioned above, there may have been at the end of the nineteenth century a local memory — renewed perhaps by Prowse's recently published *History* — of the notoriety that John Pike had borne at the middle of the eighteenth century. The royalty motif may indeed have been an esoteric reaction by the Pikes to the exoteric slur of others economically less comfortable.

## SEMIOLOGICAL FRAMES

Through its history, the legend of Princess Sheila has had several readings and applications. This paper merely scratches the surface of the meanings, role and forms of the legend. Among them are its application to local economic and cultural development, use as a vernacular form of popular culture entertainments ("Cowboys and Indians"), politico-national aspirations, and perhaps small-minded slurs on neighbours, a kind of balanced slur and counter-slur. Thus it has served as *blason populaire*, family saga and agent of middle-class hegemony. Working back from current readings, I outline each of these applications and semiological transformations.

1. The legend of Sheila has been central to economic development in Carbonear. Ed Swain (1986) suggests that the public pageantry began in 1985; Horwood's and Butts's photograph (1984) indicates something of the sort in 1974. One of Christina Pike's informants (1972) said that someone had "dressed up as Sheila" at some time earlier in the twentieth century. In the past two decades in Newfoundland, there has been a gradual move from public displays in open places towards private and commercial displays in closed places. This closely parallels the ideological switch in the governments of Newfoundland and Labrador concerning cultural events and provincial parks (cf. Overton 2001: 82-85). More support is likely to be given today to private businesses operating within the enterprise culture of local areas than to non-profit associations. In turn this means a switch of support from formerly more traditional forms to more popular culture forms.

Non-profit groups, however, have continued to thrive, using the motifs central to the Sheila story. "Piracy Days" was an annual festival encouraged by the Carbonear Town Council from the early 1990s. Associated with the weekend-long festivities was a fund-raising activity by the Carbonear Volunteer Fire Department. Dressed as pirates, firemen wandered the streets looking for likely people to "kidnap" until a ransom was paid to the fire department's coffers.

In the mid-1990s Piracy Days was supplanted by an evolving attention to popular theatre. In the summer of 1997, the first production of a musical about Sheila na Geira was mounted. Over the course of the following seven years, a repertory theatre, Rebel Island Productions, grew up in the town using the legend of Sheila as its centrepiece (Rebel Island Theatre 2003). Plays are mounted in a half-dozen differ-

ent indoor and outdoor sites in the town each summer. Local history, including Sheila, plays a large role in this commercial enterprise based on oral and documented history and folklore. In the early 2000s, there was a shift to other pirate-oriented plays and unrelated local theatre, and Sheila has gradually been able to reduce her contribution. The musical play, or pop opera, of Sheila's life, has continued to be developed as a separate work.<sup>64</sup>

A bed and breakfast, NaGeira House, which opened in June 1999, was named explicitly to "make a connection to the community."<sup>65</sup> It used Sheila's surname as a drawing card. Its owners, Peggy Norman and Gerry Rogers, registered the name with the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Tourism the previous fall.

Through each of these examples of popular culture, commercial festivals, pop opera, and tourism development, Sheila plays a central role, transformed into an actor for economic development, and an example of exploitable "content" for various modern media.

2. Sheila has also been a feminist role model since at least the 1980s, as an example of earlier generations of Newfoundland women who held homes, families, and whole communities together. The 1987 edition of Wakeham's novel was prefaced by a short comment extolling Sheila as "an outstanding woman, a woman of courage, intelligence and dedication" (v). An explicit attempt was made by the author and the publishers to place the book in the provincial curriculum to give Newfoundland and Labrador schoolchildren, especially girls, an enterprising female role model.

3. In the 1950s, when Wakeham's novel was first published, American popular culture relied strongly on images of the American frontier. Cowboy music, popular on radio from the 1930s on, was still in its heyday; movies and television valorized historical "horse operas." Sheila's story was modified by Wakeham to fit that mould. More generally, he had used the models of American culture in a fairly successful manner to build on local culture in Newfoundland, including a song valorizing Bob Bartlett based on a current popular song about Davy Crockett.

Interviewed 30 years later, Wakeham called himself a romancer of pirate stories. In fact, the majority of his stories were neither pirate nor frontier stories. They were stories clearly designed to valorize Newfoundland and the lives of Newfoundlanders in the past and in his own era. They drew on popular culture themes from pirate films, cowboy serials, *film noir* detective movies and popular music for narrative frames, rhetorical style, and even content. His *Princess Sheila* transformed the legend from a fragmentary complex of mere threads, to a well-woven narrative fabric that could be placed in the current popular culture styles of the time. By giving it a new semiological vocabulary, Wakeham propelled the Sheila story across Newfoundland and to a new generation of interested Newfoundlanders.

4. Wakeham's distinctive enthusiasm notwithstanding, the generation before him was also interested in the legend. But its rhetorical vocabulary came from

another source and served a slightly different purpose. The poems of English and Hiscock, both of whom were roughly contemporary with Wakeham, are more influenced by the sea poetry of John Masefield and the nineteenth-century romantic poems of Thomas Moore than by American popular culture. English did not attempt to set his poem in the mould of American popular culture, but rather to place it in the "higher" paradigm of art poetry.

5. Before Wakeham, the most important mediator of the legend was Smallwood. Although his radio programme, *The Barrelman*, likely had an important short-term effect of widening knowledge of the legend, his and English's book, *Stories of Newfoundland*, was perhaps more effective. Published in 1940 by the Newfoundland government's Department of Education and distributed to every school as a *Source Book for Teachers* (its subtitle), this book was available to every teacher. The story of Sheila is, like the other 44 stories, about two pages long, short enough to be read to students, or given as a reading exercise.

That Smallwood was pivotal in the distribution of the legend is not surprising. As the Barrelman he transformed local lore into national lore (Hiscock 1995). But, interestingly, he ignored the legend in *The Book[s] of Newfoundland* (1936-1974). Perhaps, like English, he needed to distinguish between what he might have seen as "serious" or "real" history, and the light confections of local oral history.

Smallwood was not only pivotal in the distribution of the story of Sheila, but he was central to the community of legend promulgators. He appointed English to the position of curator of the Newfoundland Museum; was good friends with Munn, inscribing a kindly and sentimental obituary of him; and worked closely with Horwood during the political campaigns of 1948, appointing him to his cabinet following Confederation.<sup>66</sup>

6. Esoteric and exoteric folklore in the Carbonear area regarding the Pike family seems to have been at play. Cecil Reynolds's report that he was warned from playing with Pike children due to their having "come from pirates" is suggestive of an exoteric folklore. That an esoteric folklore was current at about the same time is suggested by the reports of the Soper girls' Aunt Liza's enthusiasm for the legend of her royal forebear, by Eric Hiscock's grandmother's role in passing along the story, and by Olive Elliott's middle name (Mageila) that honoured her legendary ancestor.

The dynamic of esoteric and exoteric folklore about the Pike family appears to have been strong 100 years ago. The one, within the family, may have developed in response to the other, outside the family. It is intriguing to note Wakeham's statements that the Pike family had kept the knowledge of the princess to themselves for generations, for "reasons known to themselves" (Wakeham 1989). This statement suggests a great deal more than it clarifies, and may point to the fact that even in the mid-1930s there was a sense of the emergent nature of the family folklore.

The legend of Sheila has reflected several different meanings in its life. In Dundes's term, national inferiority might be one; Smallwood, as Barrelman, used

similar terms in the late 1930s in his regular attempts to buoy up national confidence (Hiscock 1995: 285-303). Looked at another way, this is a need to invent a grand past for the country/nation and to participate in cultural nation-building, as Ranger and Hobsbawm (1983), and locally Peter Pope (1997: 91-125), have pointed out was common at the end of the nineteenth century. Smallwood's inclination was towards the reduction of inter-group stresses, towards the integration of ethnic and economic groups. As Holbek (1987) suggested in the Danish context and Gerald Thomas (1997) developed in the Franco-Newfoundland context, symbols do not need to be addressed explicitly in a story to carry cultural weight. Sheila and her husband represented a multiple set of symbolic social binaries: English versus Irish and thus Protestant versus Catholic; common versus royal; poor versus rich (and through the idea of the rich fallen on bad times, the idea of covert wealth, or wealth waiting to be claimed); male versus female; and even military versus quasi-military. These binaries have been weighty themes in the life of the Sheila legend.

We cannot hope to uncover, through some non-material archaeology, what the legend might have been before the impositions of literature, ideology, education, the mass media, and perhaps even wishful thinking. We might hope that a document recording the legend may turn up dating it to before the turn of the twentieth century. But until that happens, we must think of Sheila as a twentieth-century legend.

To return to the opening metaphor of the fish-glass, it is clear that legends do not strip away the reflections of contemporary life. Rather, legends — like any folklore — continue to live by virtue of contemporary meaning; in turn the legends are reanalyzed (or rejected) by each succeeding generation. The legend of Sheila tells us more about changing twentieth-century anxieties than about seventeen- or eighteenth-century life. Paul Smith says in "Contemporary Legend: A Legendary Genre?" that Robin Hood is no longer a subject for narrative genres, but rather has become a merely symbolic form attached to the formula, "rob the rich, give to the poor" (1989: 85). Sheila na Geira Pike is now most useful as something on which to hang mantles of tourism, education, and economic development. Thus we have a new metaphor: we can put aside the fish-glass and install a coat rack. Sheila has many cloaks.

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Terrence (Ted) White, Pius (Joe) Wakeham, Joyce Yates, and two anonymous readers for this journal.

## Appendix A: A Chronological List of References to Princess Sheila

The following list includes printed and archival references, plus references to early oral transmission. A short annotation for many items serves to explain the contents.

- [ca. 1908; written 1982]. Cecil Reynolds's memory of being warned that the Pikes "come from pirates." Contained in his 1982 ms "The Pike Legend and Me," MUNFLA ms 86-338, 7 pp. (pp. 081-087).
- July 1917. Olive Mageila Elliott baptized at Carbonear. Her middle name was meant to commemorate the Irish princess in her family tree. Originally pronounced "Ma-GEEL-a" (with the G of "gale," not of "gist"), Olive later came to pronounce it "Ma-GUILE-ah."
- [ca. 1922; noted 1990]. Eric Dixon-Cave Hiscock heard the legend from his grandmother, Dora (Pike) Dixon-Cave. He composed a verse based on the first line "Sheila Nay Gara princess of Tara." In 1989/90 he tried to bring the entire poem back into his memory (see Appendix B).
1934. William A. Munn. This is the first known published reference to the legend; her name is spelled Sheila Nagira.
1937. [J.R. Smallwood]. "From the Masthead by the Barrelman." St. John's *Daily News*, 12 August 1937. Mainly a recapitulation of William Munn's 1934 report, with additional information about Munn's source, "an old man" at the Cupids tri-centenary celebrations in 1910. Smallwood idiosyncratically spells "Pyke" for "Pike" (and continues in his radio scripts to use the Pyke spelling).
1937. [J.R. Smallwood?]. *Daily News* (year-end special edition), 31 December 1937. Unsigned article, probably written by Smallwood, on the history of Carbonear and includes the story of Sheila and Gilbert with phrases identical to some in the "Masthead" article of four months earlier.
1938. [J.R. Smallwood]. *The Barrelman* (radio programme, VONF, St. John's), 25 May 1938. Restatement of his two 1937 newspaper pieces but with more exegesis.
1940. Letter written by Stephen B. Pike, Pike's Lane, Carbonear, to his perhaps second cousin, Robert Pike, of Kirkland, Washington, 19 January, two pages typed. A copy was given to me in 1990 by Robert Pike's uncle, C.J. Pike, of Wilmore, Kentucky. In passing along information about his family history, he touches on the Sheila legend, implying he "got it from an article ... in one of our newspapers, the work of a member of our historic society, about two years ago," presumably referring to one of Smallwood's 1937 accounts. He continues by paraphrasing the Smallwood/Munn version. It is not clear from the letter if Stephen Pike knew the story before the newspaper account.

- [1940?]. J.R. Smallwood and Leo E.F. English. "The Carbonear 'Princess'." In *Stories of Newfoundland: Source Book for Teachers*. This version downplayed certain unverified parts of the legend ("she was not really a Princess"), but perpetuates others (the "first white child").
1949. L.E.F. English. "Legends of Newfoundland." Published in the *Newfoundland Quarterly*, this article is the first to mention Thomas Moore's poem, "Oh! Had We Some Bright Little Isle of Our Own" (Book V of Moore's *Irish Melodies*, 1813), for the air of which Moore gives a tune called "Sheila na Geira." English suggests that the "isle" referred to may be Newfoundland (a reading of Moore's poem makes it clear that it is not). The poem has as its ostensible meaning a man's wish to run away with his lover. It has long had the political reading of a plea for Irish independence. See English's 1955 poem.
1949. L.E.F. English. "The First Settlements." Published in the following edition of the *Newfoundland Quarterly*, this now includes the "first white child" reference. This is the first reference to the "stone slab" in the Pike garden, stating that certain names of the Pike family are engraved on it while the "ashes" of Sheila are interred beneath. A typescript containing text very similar to this and the previous entry is included in MUNFLA 84-570, the papers of Leo E.F. English, folder 10, pp. 224-225.
1949. [Michael Harrington?]. "John Guy's Diary." *Newfoundlander* 16.5 (November 1949): 20-21. Citing and quoting extensively from Munn's 1934 article, this varies little from the first published account.
1955. L.E.F. English. *Historic Newfoundland* (St. John's: Newfoundland Tourist Development Division of the Department of Economic Development, 1955). Reprinted many times in the following 30 years with few changes until 1984; additional sections were added that year and the title was amended to include *and Labrador*. Here English's account is like his 1949 accounts.
- [1955?]. L.E.F. English. "The Irish in Newfoundland," Chapter XV in his unpublished ms "Legends and Folk Lore of Newfoundland" (MUNFLA 84-570, folder 11, pp. 255 ff.).
1955. L.E.F. English. First prize award, Ballad Section, Newfoundland Government Arts and Letters Competition, for "The Ballad of Sheila Na Geira." Published in *Winning Entries in the Arts and Letters Competition of the Department of Education, 1955-56* ([St. John's: Government of Newfoundland], 1956), pp. 3031. Seventeen quatrains in amphibraic tetrameter, a rollicking meter. It begins, "All ye who love legends romantic and hoary / Of gay gallant pirates, fair maids and the like." Verse 15 uses the opening line (and title) of Thomas Moore's poem, "Oh! had we some bright little isle of our own" as the wish of Sheila and Gilbert before they set out for Newfoundland. English published it again (with small typos intruding) in 1961.
1958. P.J. Wakeham. *Princess Sheila: A Newfoundland Story*, 338 pp. The author's foreword begins, "From a careful analysis of facts and folklore ..." Wakeham's account is notable for several reasons. He publishes a line drawing of what he says is the headstone in the Pike garden. It is not flat on the ground, but stands nearly upright. It has the inscription: "here lies the remains / of / SHEILA / wife of Gilbert Pike / Daughter of John / Na Geira, King / of County Down, / Ireland. / Died Aug 14<sup>th</sup> 1753 / at Carbonear / Age 105 yrs." The final words of the novel give a slightly different version of the same text. The death date and her age place Sheila's life somewhat later than previous redactions of the legend. The likely reason for Wakeham's setting Sheila's life a

- half-century later than other versions is to reconcile the clearly read date on the gravestone (1753) with the assumption that it is Sheila's grave, and not that of someone else a generation or more later.
1959. Harold Horwood. "The Princess and the Pirates," *Weekend Magazine* 9.29 (18-25 July 1959): 8-11. This was Horwood's first publication on the topic of piracy in Newfoundland waters, a topic he continued to publish on for 30 years. Here, too, is his first mention of Sheila. Horwood follows the Munn account with the addition of several motifs, for instance the diminutive size of the "little Irish princess." All of Horwood's accounts play up the piracy side of the legend, and play down the role of Sheila.
1960. The Cream of the West flour contest on CJON radio. (See [1961?] below.) Mrs. N. Clarke of Carbonear wrote a ten-page letter, dated 23 November 1960, which was a synopsis of the Wakeham book. The manuscript is in the Bea Dingle/Treasury of Newfoundland Stories collection (MUNFLA 86-147, box 1, folder 2, item #A141). This manuscript collection also includes contributions by Mrs. Edward Barnes and Mrs. Josephine M. Barnes (probably the same woman) of Topsail Hill, Conception Bay: "Sheila Na Geira Pike" (#IV-4, see below) and "Carbonear Outstanding Characters" (#A313).
- [1961?]. [Mrs. Josephine Barnes, of Topsail]. "Sheila Na Geira Pike." In L.W. Janes, ed., *The Treasury of Newfoundland Stories* (St. John's: Maple Leaf Flour Mills, [1960?]), pp. 6-10. An apparently unselfconscious restatement of the main themes of Wakeham's 1958 novel (I do not know if he complained), this includes verbatim excerpts of conversation and the headstone inscription exactly as Wakeham had it.
1961. L.E.F. English. "A Romantic Ballad Based on an Old Legend, the Tale of a Bold Pirate and a Princess: Sheila Na Geira." A reprint (with about a dozen small changes and typos) of the poem for which English won first prize in the Arts & Letters Competition in 1955.
- [1966?]. Kiwanis Club of Carbonear "as a service to the Carbonear Come Home Year Committee." *Carbonear, the Hub of Conception Bay, Welcomes You*, pamphlet 11" x 17," folded into eight faces (St. John's: Morgan). Mentions Sheila twice (once spelled "Shiela na Geirra" and the other "Princess Sheila"). Notes the "first white child." No date, but I have assumed it is 1966 as this was the date of the Newfoundland Government-sponsored Come Home Year.
1967. Harold Horwood. "Pirates in Newfoundland in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries." Speech to the Newfoundland Historical Society, St. John's, 14 March 1967. 17 pp., typescript. Reports much of the "strong local tradition" as legend and restores the time period to that before Guy's colony. "Though there is no reasonable doubt that Sheila was a real person, and that she lived at Mosquito and Carbonear to an advanced age in the 17th century, we should be on very shaky grounds indeed if we were to accept the entire romantic story at face value." Like other popular historians and, as in his published account in 1959, Horwood gives no sources.
1967. R.L. Cole, MUNFLA Q67-210, pp. 03-04. In response to a questionnaire on family history and other topics distributed to university students, Cole discusses his mother's (Pike) side of the family. Pulling together the era of the legendary events from Wakeham (post-1670) along with other details from the novel, the "first white child" from Munn, and the exact site of the grave from local tradition, Cole gives a typical version of the post-Wakeham period.



1967. Gary Maunder, MUNFLA Q67-764, pp. 02-03, 12. Like Cole, Maunder gives information from his mother's (Pike) side of the family. Here is the first documented reference to Gilbert Pike's father being "the Rt. Hon. Major Morley Pike, Member of Parliament for Devon, England around 1600." This version differs significantly from the Cole version, as it appears to be based on a separate tradition which in turn seems to be unaffected by the Wakeham book. Here there are three sons, John, William, and George; in the novel there is a son (Gilbert John) and a daughter (Sheila Mary). Maunder gives an unbroken pedigree, through six generations, from Morley Pike down to his mother, Patsy Pike; at 30 years per generation, this allows for only 180 years between the births of Gilbert Pike (ca. 1600) and Patsy Pike (ca. 1900-1910).
1969. William J. Cooper. "Stories about ghosts, spirits, persons with extraordinary powers, historical characters and local characters, taken from all over Newfoundland." Memorial University English 340, April 1969, MUNFLA ms 69-008, pp. 224-240. Based on the oral reports of two young women from Carbonear, this report includes a variant spelling, Sheilagh Mairgeira (pp. 237-238), and the "first white child" reference. One of the two informants is a graduate of Memorial University who had done a history of the community of Bristol's Hope the previous year; she noted that the documents from Guy's colony suggested that a child was born there first, but Cooper says that Sheila arrived in the "1500's."
1969. E. Pauline Pike. "A Report on My Community — Carbonear." Memorial University English 340, April 1969, MUNFLA 69-022, pp. 001-020. Short basic version, with one Wakeham motif: Sheila died in 1753 at the age of 105. Pike says that no one in Carbonear is quite sure where Sheila is buried, but that the "most popular story" is that it is in Pike's Lane.
1969. Harold Horwood. "Pirate Government" in his *Newfoundland* (Toronto: Macmillan), pp. 103-112. A single paragraph dealing with the Sheila story is not as circumspect as Horwood's Historic Society speech two years previous. He uses a phrase from his first account in 1959, referring to the smallness of her body: "the little Irish princess."
1970. Florence Moriarity. A student research paper, title unknown, for Memorial University History 321, and indexed by one of E.R. Seary's indexers for his Family Names project (but unsaved in archival collections); the notes are in Seary's Name File at MUNFLA under the name "Pike." The "first white child" mothered by Sheila at Bristol's Hope is mentioned, and the period is explicitly pre-Guy.
1970. Walter Lawlor, MUNFLA Q70D-017. Based on an informal interview with a St. John's person, this account is placed in "the early 1800s" and explicitly states that the couple were not "blessed with any children."
- [ca. 1970]. "Sheila NaGeira," poem by Terrence White of Carbonear. In a telephone conversation in 1989, White told me he had "read the story" (probably Wakeham) and then wrote the poem because he was impressed by the woman. He had heard the story before reading the book but did not know much about it. The date, ca. 1970, is based on his daughter's memory of having heard it first in that year. According to Barbara Rieti (pers. comm., November 1989), White recited the poem at the Carbonear Folk Festival in the mid-1980s.

1972. Christina Pike. "The Princess Sheila Legend, As it is Told by the Natives of Carbonear." Memorial University Folklore 3400, summer 1972, MUNFLA 72-259. Pike talked with several members of Carbonear, including Flora Downton, "a direct descendant of Princess Sheila," as well as P.J. Wakeham. Hers is the only attempt to discuss the legend from a folkloristic point of view but, in the confines of an undergraduate research paper, she was essentially limited to questioning informants on whether they had read the Wakeham book. She made no tape recordings. She found considerable variety in the details of the legend. The detail that the old Pike house in Carbonear was built by Sheila first appears here. The inscription given is the same as that printed by Wakeham.
1974. John Michael Walsh. "Collection of Local Legends [from Carbonear]." Memorial University Folklore 3400, spring 1974, MUNFLA 74-191. This idiosyncratic version appears to be from Walsh's own memory. It includes the corroborative assertion that "The truth is unquestionable as it is referred to in history books and the like." Sheila was "of royal blood" and was captured in "the 17 or 18 hundreds" only to be "cruelly abandoned by the pirates and taken into the home of a Mr. and Mrs. Pike."
1974. Enactment by costumed schoolboys of the "landing of Peter Easton" in 1610 at the opening of the Conception Bay Museum in Harbour Grace. A photograph of the event is included in Horwood and Butts (1984).
1975. Paul O'Neill. "Princess Shelagh, First Lady of Canada." This fictionalized version of the legend, which does not seem to be influenced by Wakeham's, was published in Eastern Provincial Airway's magazine, *EPA Horizons*. Drawing on the details presented by Munn in 1934 (for instance, the motif of the pre-Guy era) along with details perhaps from the oral tradition, O'Neill extends the "first white child" detail: "This baby is said by some to be the first white child born in what is now Canada."
1975. P.J. Wakeham. "Sheila Na Geira, The Princess of Newfoundland," *New-Land Magazine* 27 (Spring-Summer 1975): 9-21. This is "but a synopsis, a brief summary of a novel which I wrote and published in the spring of 1958." Here Wakeham outlines in six pages of text the facts of Sheila's life as he sees them. She was born approximately 1648 (he does not give the birth date, but she dies in 1753 at 105), came to Newfoundland in 1672 with Gilbert Pike, had two children before her husband was carried away in June 1678 by the Dutch pirate De Ruyter, and coped on her own for many years building the community at Bristol's Hope.
1976. A nearly literatim repeat of Wakeham (1975); repeated again in *New-Land* numbers 41 (1982) and 45 (1985).
1976. Roberta Stanford. "Pius J. Wakeham: Master Storyteller and Storywriter of St John's, Newfoundland." Memorial University, Folklore 3420, fall 1976, MUNFLA 77-66. This interview surprisingly makes no mention of the Sheila legend or Wakeham's 1958 novel.
1978. Harold Horwood. *The Colonial Dream: 1497/1760*. Chapter 4, "The Pirates of Harbour Grace," opens with the story of Sheila. Here for the first time "Sheila Nagaira" is glossed as "a corruption of an Old Gaelic word for 'Sheila the Beautiful'." Her surname is given for the first time as O'Connor. The "first white child" motif is missing, replaced by "the first Irish girl known to have settled in Canada" and "the first married couple known to have settled after the time of the Norse."

1978. Newfoundland Historic Trust, *Ten Historic Towns*, with drawings by Jean M. Ball. (The book has no pagination.) Under "Bristol's Hope" is given the date of "Sheila Na Geira's" landing, 1603. Under "Carbonear" is given the "first white child" detail, here merely "believed" rather than asserted as true. A drawing (#23) is included of the Pike house which "the folk history of Carbonear associates with the legendary Irish princess.... Residents of the area feel the house is well over 200 years old and this could very well be the case."
- [Undated: ca 1980?]. Two-page photocopy of a single sheet of paper, typed and handwritten on one side, and handwritten on the other, attributed only to Harold Horwood, but undated. Covers much of Horwood's argument that Sheila's last name was actually O'Connor, and that she was part of the unseated royal family of Connaught, the O'Connors. Found in a Personal Name File, "Sheila NaGeira," at the Provincial Reference Library, St. John's. I first saw this in December 1989, but it was likely at least five years old then.
1982. Calvin Coish. "Newfoundland's Pirates: The Jolly Roger and Pieces of Eight." Published in the regional information and popular history magazine *Atlantic Advocate*, this article (except for the Sheila details at the beginning) is drawn substantially in detail and form from Horwood's 1967 NHS speech. The Sheila story here includes both the pre-Guy era details (derived from Munn and the oral tradition) and the Wakeham-derived detail of Sheila's death being at age 105 according to the gravestone.
1982. Cecil Reynolds's report of his childhood: see [ca. 1908].
1982. P.J. Wakeham. "Sheila Na Geira Pike, the Princess of Newfoundland," *New-Land Magazine* 41 (Spring-Summer 1982): 63-75. This is an almost literatim repeat of the story which appeared in *New-Land* in 1975. It is repeated again in 1985. It is significant that Wakeham has not yet incorporated the O'Connor name into his version; he does so in 1989 (no. 49).
1982. Jeanette Marie Lacey. "The Role of Tradition in the Personal Life History of P.J. Wakeham, Newfoundland Writer." Memorial University, Folklore 1000, winter 1982, MUNFLA 82-303. A tape-recorded interview was made with Wakeham, but the recording was not deposited in MUNFLA. The only mention of Sheila in the paper is a transcript of Wakeham's reading of the Foreword of the Sheila book.
1984. Harold Horwood and Edward Butts. "The Great Easton," Chapter 1 in *Pirates and Outlaws* (Toronto: Best, 1984). Here Horwood sheds his historian's doubt; there is no longer any attribution to "legend" or "tradition." Rather he states that in 1602 Easton

liberated from a Dutch privateer an Irish girl named Sheila O'Connor, known in Newfoundland ever since as 'the Irish Princess' or 'Sheila Nagira.' ('Nagira' is not a surname but a corruption of an old Gaelic word meaning 'The Beautiful.') Sheila had married one of Easton's lieutenants, a young man named Gilbert Pike. They became planters at the settlement of Mosquito, now called Bristol's Hope, and founded the very large family of Newfoundland Pikes. (12-13)

This book is also notable for a photograph (in an unpaginated photo section following p. 86) showing "Harbour Grace schoolboys at the opening of the Conception Bay Mu-

- seum reenact[ing] the landing of Peter Easton ... in 1610." According to the adjacent photograph, this Museum opened in 1974, placing the beginning of Carbonear-area historical pageantry back at least to that year.
1985. Carbonear Heritage Society sponsors the dressing up as Sheila of a young woman in Carbonear for the occasion of the Carbonear Folk Festival. See Ed Swain (1986). This has continued in various forms from 1986 to 2003.
1985. P.J. Wakeham. "Sheila Na Geira Pike, the Princess of Newfoundland," *New-Land Magazine* 45 (Spring-Summer 1985). This is an almost exact reprint of the story originally printed in *New-Land* 27 (1975), and again in 41 (1982).
1986. Ed Swain. "Shelah Nageira buried in Carbonear: Gravesite of Irish princess could be tourist attraction," *Evening Telegram* (10 May 1986), pp. A2-A3. Swain heard several varying accounts of the legend. He notes the discrepancy between those which say "Shelah" arrived in Newfoundland in 1602 and those which say she died at 105 in 1753. But he reconciles the different versions of the headstone inscription by collating them. He suggests that the full inscription includes the names and death dates of John Pike, his wife Julian [*sic*], and of Shelah Nageria [*sic*]. This story refers to a letter from University College, Belfield, Ireland, which supports parts of the legend.
1987. P.J. Wakeham. *The Legend of Princess Sheila* (St. John's: Creative, 1987). This second edition of the novel is reduced in size by light editing by the publisher. Excised are some overwritten bits as well as obvious anachronisms of the 1950s, including remarks about Indians which in the late 1980s might be construed as racist. It was reviewed by Chris Mousseau, *Newfoundland Herald* 42.20 (23 May 1987): 113; and Helen Peters, *Newfoundland Quarterly* 84.4 (Spring 1989): 48.
1988. Karen Dawe. "Love and Piracy: The Mysterious Story of Princess Sheila," *Newfoundland Herald* 43.33 (6 August 1988). Based on interviews with myself and Bert Parsons of the Carbonear Historic Society, Dawe presents an even-handed view of the various versions of the legend. She comes away with more than a little skepticism.
1988. P.J. Wakeham, Speech to Kiwanis Club, Newfoundland Hotel, St. John's, fall 1988. 10 leaves, typed. Essentially a synopsis of his novel, and a plea for more attention to be paid to Sheila, Wakeham has an introductory paragraph including the O'Connor theme which had been introduced by Horwood.
1989. P.J. Wakeham. "Red Roberts' [*sic*] the Swashbuckling, Pirate Captain," *New-Land Magazine* 49 (Spring-Summer 1989): 23-37. Wakeham again incorporates the Horwood versions which give Sheila's surname as O'Connor. Here it is said to be corroborated by a parallel family tradition from the United States. The Roberts family of Staten Island have carried the legend that they descend from "Red" Roberts, a pirate of the mid- to late-1600s. Roberts, according to Wakeham's account, worked under Easton, later against him, and in his testimony through the Roberts family, he tells of Sheila O'Connor.
1993. Art Rockwood. "The Irish Princess," in *Art Rockwood's Newfoundland and Labrador Trivia* (St. John's: Cuff, 1993): 33-34.
1995. Chuck Herriott approached the Town of Carbonear for support to write a musical play about the life of Sheila. The show was mounted in 1997 and again in 2001. Rebel Island Productions website <<http://www.rebelisland.com/festival2001/history.html>> and <<http://www.rebelisland.com/festival2001/legend.html>>.

1996. Dean Bessey's short fictionalized account, "Pirate and His Irish Princess Win Hearts and Immortality in Newfoundland Folklore." Originally available at <[www.interlog.com/~amunre/pike.html](http://www.interlog.com/~amunre/pike.html)>, it was no longer available in late 2003; a copy can be found at the MUN Centre for Newfoundland Studies: FF 1008.4 B37 1996 File.
1997. Funding of \$100,000 by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for the development of *Princess Sheila Na Geira: A Legend of Love and Larceny* by Chuck Herriott (book) and Richard and John Herriott (music). The show was performed through the summer of 1997 in Carbonear. Provincial government press release <<http://www.gov.nf.ca/releases/1997/drr/0312n01.htm>> 12 March 1997.
- [ca. 1998]. Opening of NaGeira House Bed and Breakfast Inn in Carbonear, owned by Gerry Rogers and Peggy Norman. In 2003 Norman told me they had been looking for a name that made a connection to the community and "NaGeira" seemed ideal. They sold the business in 2002. See <<http://www.nageirahouse.com/>>.
1999. Tom Badcock's comedic play, *Sheila Na Geira, The Pirate Princess*, produced in July 1999 in Carbonear by the Avalon Theatre Consultants. Sheila was played by Jenny Gear. See the contemporary advertising at <<http://avalontheatreconsultants.virtualave.net/onstage.htm>>. Viewed December 2003.
1999. David Pike's *Pike Family History* website includes a web page devoted to the legend of Sheila and Gilbert: <[http://www.math.mun.ca/~dapike/family\\_history/gilbert/](http://www.math.mun.ca/~dapike/family_history/gilbert/)>. The site was written in 1999 but updated in November 2002; most recently viewed in August 2003. David Pike is critical of the legend, noting a lack of documentary evidence. Pike includes the text of a poem by the Irish poet Ethna Carbery (Anna Johnston MacManus, 1866-1902) called "Shiela Ni Gara [*sic*]," apparently a metaphorical lament for Irish freedom.
2000. Opening of Nageira's, Duckworth Street, St. John's, an up-scale restaurant owned by Lynn Pike, formerly of Carbonear and "a direct descendant of Gilbert Pike," according to the employee who answered its telephone on 1 May 2003.
- 2002-2003. Commercial website <<http://www.newfoundland-labrador.com>> supportive of cultural tourism has two major pages devoted to the legend of Sheila: <<http://www.newfoundland-labrador.com/archives/arts/nageira01.asp>> and <<http://www.newfoundland-labrador.com/archives/arts/nageira02.asp>>. The site is owned and operated by AppleCore Communications: <<http://www.applecore.ca/company.asp>>.
2003. Re/Max Realty Specialists. Development of Middle Cove Estates, an up-scale neighbourhood about ten kilometers north of St. John's, including a street named "Nageira Crescent." See the advertisement by Re/Max Realty Specialists, Ltd., in the *Home Buyers Guide*, supplement to the St. John's *Telegram*, 8 November 2003, p. 37.

Appendix B: Poems of Princess Sheila

**The Ballad of Sheila Na Geira (1955)**

L.E.F. English

All ye who love legends entrancing and hoary  
Of gay gallant pirates, fair maids and the like,  
Come hearken awhile to the romantic story  
Of Sheila na Geira and bold Gilbert Pike.

Bold Pike was a sailor from seaport of Devon,  
With Easton the Rover he scoured the salt sea.  
Secure was their lair in the Ferryland haven  
Or Havre de Grace with a stout companie.

Oh! Sheila was lovely beyond all comparing,  
Jet black were her tresses, her eyes softest brown,  
Divine was the form of this daughter of Erin,  
A princess was she from the Valley of Down.

To school in gay Paris her father had brought her  
In hope that a count or an earl she would wed,  
But fawning of courtiers pleased not his daughter,  
For Sheila loved manhood and valour instead.

The green hills of Erin to her were far dearer  
Than follies of France and a stern tutor's frown,  
So back in staunch curragh sailed Sheila na Geira  
For home and true friends in the old County Down.

But Fate weaves strange patterns in vain human scheming.  
While swift sped the curragh by Brittany's shore  
'Twas little knew Sheila in all her fond dreaming  
The green hills of Erin she'd never see more.

Young Gilbert had quarrelled with Easton the Rover[.]  
He took a fine ship and strong companie  
And vowed a long corsair to roam the seas over,  
Then straight for the Channel of England sailed he.

They sighted the curragh one bright summer morning  
As gentle sou' wester did steadily blow.  
"A shot cross her bow, lads, to give her fair warning[.]  
We'll take her French wines and drink hearty, Heigh Ho!"

They grappled the curragh at gunpoint to board her  
As Sheila arose and appeared on the scene.  
"Avast there, ye pirates," Pike shouted his order[.]  
"I would have a word with yon beautiful queen."

"Good morning, fair ladye, your name and your nation?"  
"'Tis Sheila na Geira, from Erin I came."  
"And you, worthy master, and your occupation?"  
"A pirate am I. Gilbert Pike is my name."

"Fie! Shame on you, Gilbert, your good looks belie you.  
You war upon women who journey in peace.  
Now, list, 'tis a princess who dares to defy you  
And calls on your manhood to grant us release."

"Fair Princess of Erin, her loveliest daughter,  
My good sword will guard you upon the salt foam.  
Wouldst cruise with me, Sheila, across the blue water?  
Then curragh and men shall have safe passage home."

'Twas thus they agreed, and the curragh departed  
Less many good wine butts which sailors approve,  
And Sheila and Gilbert waxed ever fond hearted  
In sunshine and moonlight, in laughter and love.

The cruising was ended, and autumn was nearing  
As Gilbert's heart strangely with sadness did yearn.  
"I'll take you home, Sheila, to friends in green Erin,  
But back to old England I cannot return."

"Ah! Please do not leave me, my gay gallant lover.  
My life would be empty and broken and lone,  
And with you forever I'd sail the seas over.  
Oh, had we some bright little isle of our own!"

They wed and came west to go trading. What more is,  
Old Easton received them in right jolly mood.  
Full oft to their children he told pirate stories  
And gave them bright doubloons to use as they would.

And still kind folk show you in old Carbonera  
A stone in a garden where evening rays strike.  
Beneath lie the ashes of Sheila na Geira  
And her faithful lover, the bold Gilbert Pike.

**Sheila NaGeira [ca. 1970]**  
**Terrence White**

Our history tells of days gone by  
When roaring cannons lit up the sky  
And soldiers fought for their land so fair  
On that little island off Carbonear

But there's not much said of Sheila,  
That Irish Princess fair,  
Who through the bloody hands of Easton  
Was brought to Carbonear

When pirates roamed the western seas  
And Indians lurked around  
In a little cove called Bristol's Hope  
A sanctuary she found

When our land was young and beautiful  
And our water crystal clear  
She came to us through slavery  
Although a princess fair

But now she is lying peacefully,  
Where, not many know  
Where summer shines its brilliant rays  
And winter sends her snows.

Where birds of many species  
Chant their gay notes loud and shrill,  
On a peaceful summer evening  
When all is calm and still



And the sun that rose this morning  
On the land that gave her birth  
In Country Down, an Emerald Isle  
Of mist and turf and hearth.

Is setting in the west just now  
And shines its brilliant rays  
On a golden posied meadow  
That has become her grave.

Where little daisies join their hands  
And form a golden crown  
O'er the grave of Princess Sheila  
Where once they laid her down.

**Sheila Nageira** [unfinished, ca. 1922, 1989/90]  
Eric Dixon-Cave Hiscock

Sheila Nagara<sup>67</sup> a princess of Tara  
Was took<sup>68</sup> by her people to France  
To be a novice to her aunt the Abbess  
Of the sacred convent of Nantes.

But a Dutch man of war took them before  
And brought them as prisoners to Fayel,  
With the Lent load of herring from the faithful of Erin<sup>69</sup>  
Which there their captors would sell.<sup>70</sup>

But the Irish ship gave the Dutchmen<sup>71</sup> the slip  
And went to the Flemish Cap  
Where the herring as bait caught cod for the plate  
Of Capt Eason's Broad 'R' Rap.<sup>72</sup>

He took his prize to St. Peter's port  
Where Jersey men needed bait to fish  
While Lieutenant<sup>73</sup> Gil Pike supplied the salt  
To cure this catch on the beach.

There Sheila's Gil acquired the skill  
To go to Carbonear Bank<sup>74</sup>  
To manage Mosquito<sup>75</sup> ...

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Frank Hynes of Change Islands, Notre Dame Bay, interviewed by Fred Earle and John Widdowson: MUNFLA C83/64-3. Hynes said, "A fish glass is like a length of stove pipe ... about four inches [wide] on top for looking in. And he'd have a high piece soldered on the top part of en so that he'd fit around your face. The more flare [at the other end], the bigger the circumference you'd see over the [water's] bottom, see?, when you'd be looking down through en. Had a glass in the bottom [lower end] ... and you had to have he perfect, tight, cause if he let a'r drop [in], the water swishing around inside, you wouldn't see your object underneath."

<sup>2</sup>Students of folklore have developed a lexicon of technical terms to deal with traditional material; among them is "legend" which indicates a "story told as truth" (Bascom 1965). On the other hand, "tale" indicates a story told as fiction. Neither term relies for its technical meaning on the actual truth of the story — its historicity.

<sup>3</sup>Tuck's anecdote of the man who "paid attention" is from a public presentation in 1996, and personal communication, 4 May 2003.

<sup>4</sup>D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland From the English, Colonial and Foreign Records* (London: MacMillan, 1895; rpt. Belleville, Ontario: Mika Studio, 1972; rpt. Portugal Cove: Boulder, 2002). Reference is to the 2002 Boulder edition but its pagination follows earlier editions.

<sup>5</sup>See also the serious attempt by Louie W. Attebery (1970) to track down a popular legend's origin.

<sup>6</sup>I have investigated the processes of verisimilitude in the use of such stories by Joseph Smallwood for his crypto-political purposes (Hiscock 1995: 200-219).

<sup>7</sup>For a chronological and annotated list of references to the legend see Appendix A. In-text references (author-date or short-title-date) are to the article's main bibliography.

<sup>8</sup>The *Barrelman* scripts are housed at the MUN Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archives (COLL-025). H.M. Mosdell, in his *When Was That?* (1923, 1974), made reference to Mrs. Pike's death on 13 June 1880 at the age of 98 with a total of 243 descendants (at "Mrs. E. Pike" in the unpaginated 1923 edition; p. 96 in the 1972 edition). None of the pre-1934 references refer to Sheila na Geira or Gilbert Pike.

<sup>9</sup>The pageant has taken several forms over the past 25 years: see below.

<sup>10</sup>A pair of film-makers visited the MUN Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) in the summer of 1987. In the 1990s, another local film-maker investigated the possibility of a film based on the legend.

<sup>11</sup>Approved by Lieutenant Governor Hon. James L. McGrath, 8 July 1990. That Sheila was part of the received folk history of Carbonear 25 years earlier can be seen in Kiwanis ([1966?]). In mid-1992, the Carbonear Town Council identified an unmarked multiple grave unearthed during a sewer excavation as that of Peter Easton's crew of 47 pirates massacred by the French in the early seventeenth century: "Would-be Pirate Grave Link with the Past," *Evening Telegram* 4 June 1992, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup>The opening sentence of Munn's paragraph — see immediately below.

<sup>13</sup>A strong non-Sheila tradition exists in the Port de Grave area of Conception Bay that certain families were already settled there when the Guy colony arrived in 1610. See, for example, Lovelace (1980). Although summer settlement was possible at the time, it was unlikely there was much if any year-round settlement.

<sup>14</sup>On the establishment of the legend in the family histories of that coast, personal communication from Dorothy Pye Earle, February 1998. On the documentary history of the area, see Poole (1996: Preface), where the legend is not mentioned. Nor is it mentioned in the three Battle Harbour Region Literacy books published from 1998 to 2000.

<sup>15</sup>In turn, Lehr draws on Prowse's *History*, the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, and other sources.

<sup>16</sup>See citations of the name going back to 1681 in Seary (1998).

<sup>17</sup>Heard by me in the past 25 years from enthusiasts of the legend. See also Walsh (1974).

<sup>18</sup>See my transcription of the stone's inscription, below. The names Julia and Sheila are not normally considered the same. See Hanks and Hodges (1986: 155, 254-5; and 1990: 184, 300). But, to the contrary is Dinneen's short gloss of Sile as Julia (1927: 1027).

<sup>19</sup>Information from Anita Best, 14 December 1989.

<sup>20</sup>See for example the school website, "Expressions From The Cape Shore," <<http://www.k12.nf.ca/fatima/grassroots/traditions/expressions.htm>>, St. Bride's: Fatima Academy; last update May 2003; viewed August 2003. It contains the following: "it is rumored he [Prince William Henry] left behind a quite number [sic] of illegitimate children."

<sup>21</sup>Coldwell died in 1981; her papers are in MUNFLA, 81-029. Two examples of treasure stories from near Carbonear, associated with Peter Easton but not with Sheila, are in MUNFLA Q68-11, p. 02, and MUNFLA Q68-489, pp. 03-04.

<sup>22</sup>Handcock mentions the Pike family generally (e.g., pp. 52, 125, and 251), but neither Gilbert nor Sheila specifically. Rowe mentions what "may be" the "first English child" but he is referring to the Nicholas "Gure" child at Cupids; "Gure" is the spelling in the 1613 Colston letter: see Prowse's *History* (1895: 128). For a good collection of contemporary documents, see Cell (1982).

<sup>23</sup>Robert J. Connolly (1980) even contradicts (without mentioning) the detail sometimes found in the legend that Sheila operated the first school in Mosquito/Bristol's Hope. Connolly says the first school did not open until 1826 (p. 17). Kiwanis ([1966?]) reports the first Carbonear school even later, at 1843. J. Ralph Dale (1981a, b, c) makes no mention of her either. Dale includes in his Carbonear Island piece a petition from the residents of that place, dated 6 January 1709, to Queen Anne; included among the signatories are Thomas and John Pike, perhaps the same John Pike mentioned by Prowse, below.

<sup>24</sup>Revised and updated 25 years later (ca. 1955), the later edition likewise has no mention of the Sheila legend.



<sup>25</sup>For the use of “lover,” see, for example, the last line of his 1955 and 1961 poems (Appendix A). The only item of English’s writing in which he mentions marriage between the two, and does not use the word “lover,” is the piece he did in 1940 with J.R. Smallwood.

<sup>26</sup>Likewise, English ignored in his 1930 textbook and its reissue the tradition (popular at least since the 1950s and a hobby-horse of his) of the John Cabot-signed rock at Grates Cove. On that rock, see Davies (1955); “Grates Cove Stone” (1955); Horwood (1969: 161); “Did Cabot Leave His Mark at Grates Cove?” (2001); and Duggan (2003).

<sup>27</sup>Tessier notes that the tune (which she calls “Sheela na Guira”) is an eighteenth-century one in 3/4 time “with lightness and in moderate time.” It is likely the same tune that shows up in several collections of traditional Irish tunes and recent commercial recordings as “Sile ní Ghadra”: see for example the 1998 McNamara Family CD *Leitrim’s Hidden Treasure* (Drumlin Records LHTMC1) where the song is “a symbol of Ireland” (McNamara 2003: Track 5).

<sup>28</sup>Unlike Richard Dorson (1971b), I am not too concerned whether the legend is a “folk legend” or a bookish/elite/non-folk/literary legend (whatever that term would be) and how it might move back and forth between the two modes. In fact, I suspect that if Dorson’s two or three modes are indeed separate, it is impossible to distinguish them.

<sup>29</sup>Here I am referring to the useful term “vernacular” as applied by Peter Narváez to Newfoundland and Labrador song (1995).

<sup>30</sup>These figures are from Wakeham’s impressive memory (1989).

<sup>31</sup>Joyce Yates heard it from “a middle-aged resident of Carbonear” in St. John’s, 13 December 1989.

<sup>32</sup>For example, “First White Child: born in Nfld. to Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Gore [*sic*] at John Guy’s Plantation, Cupids, Mar. 27, 1613,” in Mosdell (1923; 1974: 42).

<sup>33</sup>The second parenthesis (“It does not state ...”) is Munn’s. The Colston letter to which Munn refers is synopsised in Prowse (1895: 128).

<sup>34</sup>For example, as a short space filler, “Notable Events,” in *Newfoundland Stories and Ballads* 1.2 (Winter 1954), p. 17. See also Kiwanis ([1966?]).

<sup>35</sup>Drawing #23. The house and the accuracy of the drawing are discussed by Flora Downton (1989).

<sup>36</sup>Transcribed excerpts from my interviews are lightly edited for clarity in reading.

<sup>37</sup>On Crewe, see Stockwood (1981). On the *Barrelman* radio series, see Hiscock (1995).

<sup>38</sup>For example 19 July 1938; 16, 19, and 20 September 1940.

<sup>39</sup>It is unlikely that the stone ever had anything written on the “other” side. It is of the type of grave marker known as a “recumbent slab” and was probably always meant to lie flat on the ground. On the Newfoundland historical distribution of slabs and other stones, see Pocius (1976a, 1981).

<sup>40</sup>The dates Smallwood used or made reference to the Sheila story are 31 December 1937, 25 May 1938, and 14 May 1942.

<sup>41</sup>In all of his writings (1949a and b, 1955, 1956, 1961; see also MUNFLA 84-570/225), English makes reference to Sheila’s “ashes” being there. In this age of cremains, we tend to interpret the word “ashes” denotatively, but I assume English used it metaphorically (as in the Book of Common Prayer’s “ashes to ashes, dust to dust”).

<sup>42</sup>Probably the same John Pike who signed the 1709 entreaty to Queen Anne and who, not long before he died, was found guilty of misusing his servants by whipping them excessively.

<sup>43</sup>I have spelled Sheila's last name NaGaira to reflect Wakeham's use of the "guy" vowel in the middle syllable: [nə 'gɛɪ jə].

<sup>44</sup>This is my own transcription made by inspection of the stone in November 1989.

<sup>45</sup>Pocius does not mention this practice of leaving space on stones in his 1975 MA thesis that surveyed grave markers in a large area of central Avalon Peninsula just south of Carbonear (but not including that town). On 27 April 2003 he emailed me his opinion that the practice was indeed common in the eighteenth century and that it was only an accident of fieldwork that it was not noted in his thesis.

<sup>46</sup>The phrase "eye Gaelic" refers to the linguistic term "eye dialect" for spellings that, in an effort to achieve a certain literary effect, deviate from Standard English spellings but which do not actually denote real dialect forms. The normal Irish way to spell the name is Sheila. Sheilagh and Shelagh are ahistorical forms that serve to enhance the appearance of Celtic ancestry (Hanks and Hodges 1986: 254-255).

<sup>47</sup>Mrs. Downton's O'Geela and MaGria may have been speech errors.

<sup>48</sup>Obituary in *Telegram*, 3 April 2001. She would have been 84 in July.

<sup>49</sup>13 December 1989.

<sup>50</sup>Before becoming a successful editor and publisher, Robinson taught at the Methodist Academy in Carbonear, 1882-1894 (Sheppard 1993).

<sup>51</sup>"Tara" here is pronounced "tar-ah," not with the more contemporary form "tare-ah."

<sup>52</sup>My own searches through Modern Irish dictionaries and those of older Irish have led to no corroboration of this gloss. Fr. Patrick Dinneen (Ó Duinnín)'s classic dictionary (1927: 1027) only gives the gloss of Sheila for a personification of Ireland. Discussions with several speakers of Modern Irish have come to no clear indication that "na geira" means "the beautiful" (or something like it). Nonetheless, Dr. Dorothy Milne has pointed out that "mo ghíle" [mə gil] can mean "my darling" (an intriguing possibility given the early "Mageila/Mageela" form in Carbonear) (2003).

<sup>53</sup>The staff at the Provincial Reference Library are unable to identify the piece of paper further than to say it is by Horwood. The note (Horwood ca. 1980) gives details of the asserted O'Connor connection with Sheila.

<sup>54</sup>Lynn Pike owns the restaurant. Gerry Rogers and Peggy Norman opened the bed and breakfast.

<sup>55</sup>See the lists of names published periodically in local newspapers; for example, "Historical Society Annual Meeting," *Evening Telegram* (28 January 1939), p. 4.

<sup>56</sup>This was the phrase used nightly by the Barrelman (Joseph Smallwood and later Michael Harrington) on the radio programme of that name (Narváez 1986; Hiscock 1995).

<sup>57</sup>Smallwood was an active politician in the early 1930s, and again from the mid-1940s until the mid-1970s. He organized Sir Richard Squires' district election in 1928, and ran unsuccessfully in 1932.

<sup>58</sup>Two versions of it were published (English 1955, 1961). The small differences between the two texts seem at least partly to be errors introduced by the misjudgment of handwriting.

<sup>59</sup>Obituary, *Telegram*, 4 July 2003, p. A8.

<sup>60</sup>Obituary, *Telegram*, 16 January 1999, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup>On this monthly newspaper, see Hiscock (1995).

<sup>62</sup>Smallwood noted Munn's attribution to "an old man" in 1910 in his daily "From the Masthead" column, *Daily News* (12 August 1937).

<sup>63</sup>See, for example, Smallwood's kind obituary for Munn on his *Barrelman* programme of 23 October 1940. Munn had died the previous day. Smallwood mentioned Munn's attachment to the Newfoundland Historical Society and his enthusiasm for the Newfoundland Museum (and subsequent bitterness at its dispersal by the Commission of Government in 1934). The two men always sat next to one another at the meetings, he pointed out.

<sup>64</sup>See the report on its evolution in Vaughan-Jackson (2000). The original opera, by Chuck Herriott, is called *Princess Sheila Na Geira: A Legend of Love and Larceny*. Another play called *Sheila Na Geira, The Pirate Princess*, by Tom Badcock, was produced in July 1999 (Avalon Theatre Consultants 1999).

<sup>65</sup>Personal communication, June 2003, from Peggy Norman.

<sup>66</sup>Horwood in turn wrote an admiring biography of Smallwood (Horwood 1989).

<sup>67</sup>Spelling of "Nagara" in my father's hand; he later said "E-I" was what it "should be." Nonetheless, his pronunciation was "Nagara" [nə 'gɛr ə]. Further, he said that he thought the original was McGara, pronounced [mə 'gɛr ə].

<sup>68</sup>My father had the word "took" in quotation marks in the handwritten copy. He later said he was not sure of it. After some thought, he decided it should indeed be "took" because "That's what the Irish would say."

<sup>69</sup>He explained that the Catholic Irish had sent a gift to the French people to celebrate the occasion of the Edict of Nantes, which gave certain rights to the French Protestants.

<sup>70</sup>The hijacked load of herring was to be sold by the Dutch in the Azores, at Fayel.

<sup>71</sup>In the handwritten copy the word is just "Dutch." I suggested "Dutchmen" and he agreed it scanned well. "There IS room for it in the scan," he said.

<sup>72</sup>The "Broad R Rap" is the arrow which signifies that a piece of military equipment, including all ships, belonged to the British Crown. The "arrow" came to be known, he said, as the Broad R, and it was placed on each ship by the rap of a branding iron.

<sup>73</sup>Pronounced by my father in the American way [lju:'tɛnənt].

<sup>74</sup>He said he was no longer sure what he had meant by this. "It couldn't be 'Carbonear Bank' — there's no bank."

<sup>75</sup>Pronounced Miskita: [mɪs'kɪt ə].