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Monthly Newsletter

2024 Fulbright Project

Toni Doman-Vandyke
Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada



A kitchen party winding down after a the Mabou School of Cape Breton Step dance ceilidh. Photo by David Greenwell.

An t-Iuchar [July]

Monthly Recap

This month I've completely rearranged my sleep schedule due to the many late night square dances starting at 9pm and regularly going past midnight…a true Cape Breton summer! A typical week has included a packed square dance schedule at the following dance halls near Mabou: Monday nights at Brook Village, Thursday nights at Glencoe Mills and Saturday nights at West Mabou. Of course, it's easy to find dances throughout the week around the island like at South West Margaree or an impromptu dance at Red Shoe Pub, or even during the afternoon at the Celtic Music Interpretive Center and many more locations (and these dances are just near Mabou!).

July started off with the 11th annual KitchenFest! [Féis a' Chidsin!] a yearly festival that offers visitors an immersive experience into the rich and vibrant Gaelic culture of Cape Breton Island through a kitchen-ceilidh atmosphere. KitchenFest! features a gathering of musicians from all across Cape Breton and beyond performing at dozens of participating venues throughout the island over the course of 9 days and ends with the big Glendale Concert highlighting musicians, fiddlers, dancers, pipers and more wrapping up the week.



Step dancers John and Bill Pellerin on stage at the annual Glendale Concert during KitchenFest! on July 6th, 2024.



A scene near Neils Harbour, NS onlooking the Atlantic ocean on the Eastern side of Cape Breton Island.

The festival intentionally uses this opportunity to promote and give space for local musicians to perform for both local and visiting audiences. KitchenFest! is the warm up to the larger Celtic Color International Festival happening in October that hosts a lineup of both internationally touring and local artists. The summer is chock full of many festivals and celebrations including the 68th annual Broad Cove Scottish Concert which is a yearly celebration of music, cultural and Scottish heritage that features dozens of musicians and dancers.





Scenes from events during KitchenFest! 2024. (Left) Cape Breton Fiddlers Association perform at the Gaelic College in St. Anns. (Right) A night at the Red Shoe Pub in Mabou, NS.

This month I had the opportunity to visit neighboring Prince Edward Island (PEI) to attend the annual Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival, now in its 48th year, which was created to preserve the traditional music of Prince Edward Island. PEI's traditional music is closely related to that of Cape Breton's yet features its own style and blending of Irish, Scottish and Acadian sounds. With a history that is similar to Cape Breton's and other parts of Atlantic Canada, PEI was once home to the indigenous Mi'kmaq for thousands of years, saw French, English, Scottish and Irish settlement throughout the 1700's and became a British North American colony in 1773. If you're anything like me, you've probably first heard of Prince Edward Island and have daydreamed of visiting ever since you were a teenager after discovering the imaginative world of Anne of Green Gables, the beloved series by L.M. Montgomery which is set against the picturesque backdrop of PEI. While I have yet to visit Anne's house, I will be back on PEI in late August to take in the Anne of Green Gables experience!







(Top Left) A square dance crowd at the Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival in PEI. (Top Right) View of the Wood Islands Lighthouse from the Northumberland Ferry. (Below) Late night jam at Rollo Bay Fiddle Fest.

In July I attended the Mabou School of Cape Breton School Step Dance, a week long class organized by Melody Cameron. Melody is a step dancer and fiddler with over 40 years of experience in tradition, and has created this course to educate attendees on the unique form of Cape Breton step dancing. The week featured instruction led classes for both beginner and intermediate step dancers along with special presentations and guests covering the topics of technique, form, connections between the Gaelic language and links to Scotland, and much more. I valued having the opportunity to dive deeper into this tradition through this instruction to learn more about the different types of square sets and history in Cape Breton. From the Inverness county square set to the French Cheticamp style, the dance week was a great way to appreciate the island's variety in dance forms. Of course the week ended with an old fashioned Cape Breton kitchen party!



All join hands! Square dancing during the Mabou School of Cape Breton Step Dance. Photo by David Greenwell







(Top) Monday night square dance scene at Brook Village. (Bottom Left) Kitchen ceilidh and jam session on a Summer evening. (Bottom Right) Waterfall at Victoria Park in Turo, NS. (Below) Group photo of the 2024 Mabou School of Cape Breton Step Dance dancers and instructors.



Fulbright Project Updates

To date I've spoken with 33 individuals for the project, and have wrapped up the formal interview recordings. I'll still be collecting supplementary audio and video field recordings through August and September during my remaining time in Cape Breton. As a reminder, the outcome of this project will involve analyzing the collected interviews to identify common themes that participants speak about to create a series of audio stories, featuring the voices and perspectives of participants, organized into thematic episodes. At this stage, I hope to create 6-8 podcast episodes with themes highlighting learning and technology use, technology and globalization, Gaelic language, dance traditions, genre authenticity, the future of Cape Breton traditional music, and more. Each episode will also have field recordings and music clips throughout the interview segments. The focus of the project is to capture how musicians in Cape Breton are currently engaging with contemporary technologies and to document feelings of how the use of technologies and an increase in globalization can play an impact on traditions.

This project has become quite large, and while my grant period ends at the end of October 2024, I plan to use my remaining time in Cape Breton to continue analyzing media materials and will spend time editing and post production through the end of 2024. I plan to release the audio series project along with a companion website by Spring 2025, and then move onto creating a short companion documentary which will act as a visual component to the podcast and audio stories project. The short companion documentary will act as the second phase of the project.

Here's who I've spoken with this month:



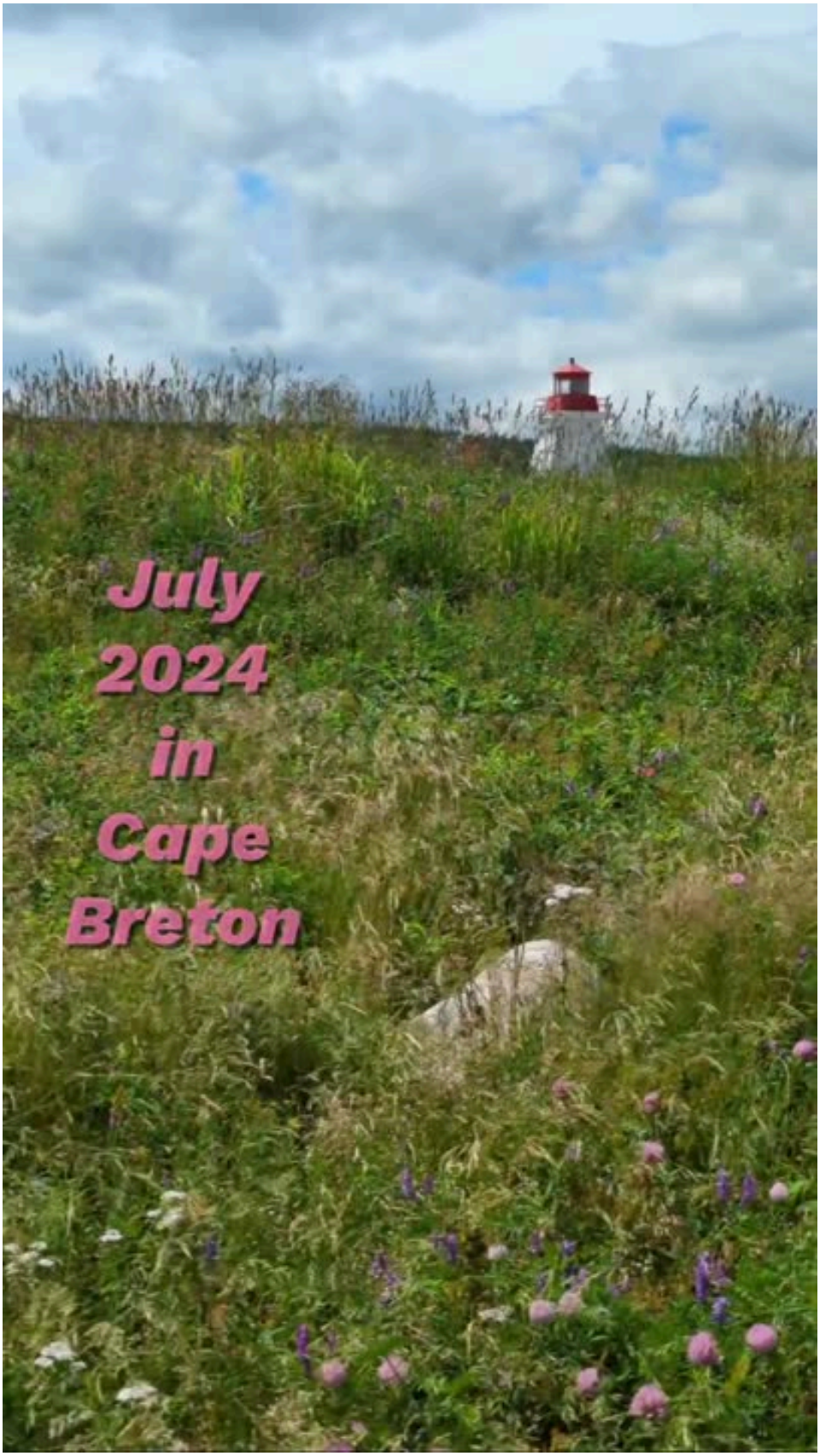
Robert Deveaux is an Acadian fiddler, pianist, and singer who grew up in St-Joseph-du-Moine, just south of Chéticamp on Cape Breton Island. His influences as a fiddler include Arthur Muise and Donnie LeBlanc. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree in French from St. Francis Xavier University and worked as a fiddler and guide at the Fortress of Louisbourg Historical Site. He has revived the unique style of playing fiddle and singing of Joseph Athanase Larade and is a respected researcher and collector of Acadian songs. He can be heard playing fiddle on the album Pure Celtic Hearts Volume 2 by Cape Breton pianist Maybelle Chisholm McQueen.



A scenic view of Mabou, NS

Check out the video below - or click here to access

too see what I've been up too during the month of July!











(Left) Red raspberries found along the walking trails at West Mabou beach. (Top Right) step dancing and fun at a ceilidh (Bottom Right) Rollo Bay Festival goers!

Looking Ahead

While many regular events and weekly square dances will continue taking place throughout the month of August, I'll be focusing on analyzing media and materials collected in the coming weeks and looking to the Beaton Institute to identify supplementary archival materials for the project. Cape Breton University's description of the Beaton Institute is described as "... a cultural heritage archive mandated to preserve the social, economic, political, and cultural history of Cape Breton Island. It is a centre for local, regional, national and global research and strives to promote inquiry through innovative academic and public programming initiatives."

An neach nach cìnn na chadal, cha chìnn e na dhuisg.
[He who will not prosper in his sleep, will not prosper when awake.]

-Toni

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