

the South without government intervention, and at far less social cost. Barnes should have been explicit about this, if only to say it would not happen. Barnes' central thesis is that federal intervention was critical to transforming race relations in the South, and that federal action came only in response to black protest and pressure. (p. x) This thesis, at first glance, seems a little flat. Very few of us who remember the Warren Court or the Great Society will deny that the federal government has made a lasting imprint on the landscape of this nation. But what makes Barnes' thesis compelling is that she is writing in a political milieu where both the New Left and the New Right agree that most governmental initiatives have failed. It was not long ago when historians such as Barton Bernstein or Paul Conkin, reacting to America's actions in Southeast Asia or to the Welfare State, were far from sanguine about the power of Washington to effect social good. Barnes is also denying Eisenhower's announcement in 1956 that "you cannot change people's hearts by law." Further, it is fair to say that a national civil rights policy, at least in Ronald Reagan's tenure, does not exist.

The current state of political life will, I think, make young historians, those now writing their dissertations, reassess the gains of the Warren Court, the Great Society, and even the New Deal in a sympathetic light. Barnes' book may be the beginning of this reassessment. To argue successfully, as Catherine Barnes does in *Journey from Jim Crow*, that the federal government and the courts responded to black protests and changed the social order of the nation is to reassert an important lesson.

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Returning Oral History to the Community *A Review of Cape Breton's Magazine.*

One of the attractions of oral history is the opportunity it offers to make history available to a popular audience. The voices or transcriptions of those who have lived through historical experiences can often speak more directly to an interested audience than more traditional historical materials. And when those interviewed come from the audience's local community or social group, there is a pre-established basis for understanding and relating to them. But, notwithstanding important efforts at using oral history materials in popular formats, too few of the interviews

collected in the past few years have gotten beyond the limited access archive or the scholarly monograph.

Cape Breton's Magazine: Devoted to the History, Natural History and Future of Cape Breton Island, published in the beautiful and remote Cape Breton region at the northern tip of Nova Scotia, is an unusually successful effort at putting oral history back into a local community. Stacks of copies are for sale, usually under a poster showing the cover of the current issue, in virtually every general and variety store in Cape Breton. People we talked with on a recent visit to the Island, ranging from a young Christian proselytizer from a poor local family to a restaurant manager to a trade union militant, seemed to be aware of it. While some of the 5,000 copies of each issue go to tourists or to the mainland, the great majority are bought by the people of Cape Breton—particularly impressive since the Island's population is only about 150,000.

Most of the magazine consists of illustrated interviews. Their primary focus is typical oral history material, supplemented by storytelling, folklore, and an exploration of material culture along the lines of *The Foxfire Books*. Besides oral history, there are smatterings of imaginatively and tastefully selected historical documents, articles about and examples of Cape Breton folklore, interviews with historians and archaeologists, book reviews, and an occasional piece on flora and fauna.

A recent issue indicates the magazine's contents. The largest part is oral history, such as an interview with a railroad fireman on "Accidents Averted" and a series of interviews with "Women in the Steel Plant, World War II." The "Foxfire" element is represented in the interview "Water Divining: Angus J. Gillis, Mabou Harbor." "Dan MacNeil and the Devil, 1928" is a classic piece of storytelling, in which an elderly Cape Breton resident tells how the Devil tried to force him to return to a rowdy party he had left. Historical articles describe the political evolution of the Cape Breton coal towns "From 'Company Town' to 'Labour Town,'" and the travels of "Granny Ross," an eighteenth-century French resident of Cape Breton.

Editor and Publisher Ronald Caplan is an excellent interviewer, with deep respect and appreciation for those he interviews. He is not a professional historian and does not consciously operate out of a historian's concerns; his approach seems to be that each person has a story to tell and that his job is to get them to tell it. But he has as strong an interest in the history of the community as in the lives of individuals, and therefore elicits material of real historical depth and meaning. The interviews are well edited, with questions printed unobtrusively in parentheses, keeping the emphasis on the interviewee and his/her story.

Part of the success of *Cape Breton's Magazine* must result from its appearance. We have seen people of all ages and diverse interests sidle

up to copies lying around the living room, gaze at the covers, and begin browsing compulsively through the interiors. It is a very large format—almost the size of a tabloid newspaper. The cover is thick and glossy, with beautiful photos front and back and the contents of the issue in big type. The interior is typed on a typewriter and printed on newsprint, but the ample page size, excellent photographs, and imaginative layout make it inviting rather than dreary. The heavy covers help keep the newsprint from deteriorating over time.

Ronald Caplan was a young graphic artist from Pittsburgh when he first visited and fell in love with Cape Breton; he moved there to found *Cape Breton's Magazine* in 1972. It was initially a one-person operation. Caplan would go on the road with his tape recorder and camera, conducting interviews and selling ads. He would transcribe and edit his tapes, lay out the magazine, take it to the printer, and deliver the finished product to retail outlets around the Island. While Caplan remains the dominant force, the magazine is now published with the help of part-time associate Bonnie Thompson.

Caplan says that if people had not liked the first issue, the magazine could never have gotten off the ground. But the first issue broke even, and the magazine now supports Caplan and has allowed him to hire his assistant. It receives no grants or other outside financial assistance. Advertising forms its principal source of income. Initially, advertising was often placed almost as a good-will gesture, in the spirit that a local business might advertise in a theater program or a yearbook. Today, the 140 advertisers range from motels, restaurants, and tourist bureaus to clothing, furniture, and flower stores, to the power company, the economic development corporation, and the Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forests.

The magazine's success has been possible in part because the people of Cape Breton already have a strong sense of place and an identification with their own history. We found many local people could provide surprisingly rich information on the history of their communities and of the Island as a whole. Although Cape Breton consists mostly of rather isolated small towns and villages, long-term population stability has meant that family and social ties run to all parts of the Island, reinforcing a sense of Cape Breton as a unified entity. People from any part of the Island will regularly drive fifty miles or more to attend a dance, concert, or festival in another part of Cape Breton. On the other hand, leaving the Island is often experienced as "leaving home."

Cape Breton also has a very lively sense of and appreciation for its own culture. Festivals featuring local musicians and dancers will regularly draw audiences of 5,000, of whom only a handful are likely to be tourists from off the Island. Concerts and dances featuring local musicians

frequently fill small town parish halls. A folk music revival seems to flow into and out of the living folk traditions rather than forming a separate stream; we met young people, whose grandparents may have been traditional Cape Breton singers and fiddlers, who are learning Gaelic singing and studying with local fiddlers. A program featuring traditional Cape Breton fiddle music is one of the most popular on local radio. *Cape Breton's Magazine* both contributes to and draws strength from this valuing of the local culture and identification with it.

Scots form Cape Breton's largest ethnic group and its dominant cultural identification, but *Cape Breton's Magazine* conveys a strong sense of a multi-ethnic community and an appreciation for the varied cultural traditions present on the Island, including French, Mic-Mac Indian, and twentieth-century immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. It manages to support a sense of ethnic pride and identity while encouraging a non-chauvinist attitude of mutual appreciation among different groups. Perhaps certain aspects of Cape Breton culture facilitate this: a Mic-Mac Indian or an Irishman, we noted, can be widely admired as a first-class Scottish fiddler.

There are certain dilemmas that arise in putting oral history back into the community. Communities, after all, are not homogeneous groups with uniform values and beliefs. Those attempting to win and hold a community audience normally try to celebrate and appeal to what they consider its common values. But then what is to be done with material that puts individuals, groups, or the entire community in a negative light? Or with material which might tend to divide the community? The ethical, intellectual, and practical aspects of these issues are daily fare for those who try to present oral history to local communities.

These issues have arisen in two forms for *Cape Breton's Magazine*. First, they have had interviews which individuals agreed to have published, but parts of which the editors felt might prove embarrassing to the interviewees if their neighbors read them, as when an immigrant war bride described her social isolation when she had to live alone in her absent husband's small town where no one talked to her. Here they have simply drawn on their own best judgment and personal consciences, attempting to let the truth come through without harming the individuals involved.

Second, Cape Breton has seen at least its share of social conflict over the years. Its Protestant and Catholic communities were divided and mutually suspicious for much of its history. Its coal miners and steel workers have perhaps the most militant labor history in all of Canada. Ethnic and political divisions have also been sharp. Initially, *Cape Breton's Magazine* largely ignored such subjects, perhaps intuitively avoiding matters that might alienate part of the community. More recent issues, however, have dealt extensively with labor history, emphasized material

on women, and begun to address issues of politics. This shift seems to result both from an increasing editorial appreciation for the importance of these topics and from a sense that the magazine is now so secure in the hearts of its audience that it can deal with less celebratory matters without alienating their affections. The magazine has received few complaints about the more controversial material, suggesting that an appeal to the best in a community's values which moves on to deal with challenging material may be an effective approach for community history projects.

Subscriptions and back copies are available from *Cape Breton's Magazine*, Wreck Cove, Nova Scotia BOC 1H0, Canada. Free sample copies will be provided to those sending \$1.00 for postage and handling. "Collectors' Editions," which bind together five sequential issues, and *Down North*, a book of selections from the magazine emphasizing its "Foxfire" material culture aspects, are likewise available. *Cape Breton's Magazine* is also interested in corresponding with similar efforts elsewhere.

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