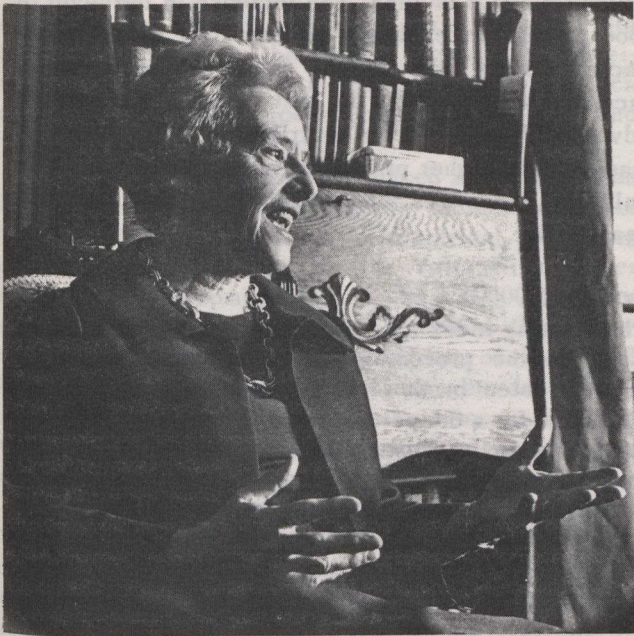


LADY OF THE LEGENDS



Miss Helen Creighton

In the deep bays and shingle coves of Nova Scotia's sparkling Atlantic coast, horny-handed fishermen and their families speak fondly of their Lady of the Legends.

They mean, of course, Helen Creighton, the nimble and scholarly little woman with the quizzical smile who, for 40 years, has toured the byways of this ancient province to record their songs and take down the hair-raising tales of our folklore.

Today, Miss Creighton is one of North America's leading folklorists. Her painstaking search through the unwritten folk history of one of the earliest settled parts of this continent, so far has brought her the material for eight books, and international recognition among the historians and anthropologists.

Though honorary degrees may not be as gratifying as the esteem of her long-time outport friends, Canadian universities have, nevertheless, given her three doctorates. In a small way Helen's work has even taken her into show business: occasionally she assembles troupes of Nova Scotia folksingers to produce public concerts or network broadcasts of ballads, sweet and wild, which she has collected.

MISS CREIGHTON'S CAREER

A graduate of the Universities of Indiana and Toronto, and a Royal Flying Corps ambulance driver in the First World War, she had a nice taste for extraordinary experience. That's what took her to see old Enos (Hartlan), the jaunty sailor of South East Passage. She wanted to write about Enos and his salty yams. But Enos wanted to sing instead. So did Ben Henneberry, coxswain of the Devil's Island lifeboat crew.

Ben didn't want to tell harrowing tales of shipwreck. Instead he sang a pleasing chorus of *Well Sold the Cow*:

"Fall de diddle dido, fall de doll de dey,
Fall de diddle dido, fall de doll de day."

It was exasperating, but the songs intrigued Helen. With her background in history, she knew their importance and when she discovered nobody had ever collected them, she decided to try it herself, and, gradually, collecting the folk songs and legends of Nova Scotia became for her a distinguished career. A staff member of the National Museum of Canada, today she is president of the Canadian Folk Music Society, a fellow of the American Folklore Society, and holds three fellowships from the Rockefeller Foundation.

THE SEARCH FOR MATERIAL

For Helen Creighton, dignified and dainty and now nearly 70, it's been a lifelong adventure: a mixture of exhilaration and discovery, drudgery and joy. Just finding the people for the first time was tough enough. Many of Nova Scotia's best storytellers and singers lived in remote, almost inaccessible places, and getting there was not always half the fun.

The offshore islands, of which there are hundreds strewn along the Nova Scotia coast, were always tricky. Huddled in an open boat, thrashed and drenched by the salty tail of a hurricane, has been all part of a day's work for the Lady of the Legends. And once ashore, chances were she'd have to push her recording machine along the stony footpaths in a wheelbarrow.



A native Nova Scotian records another item for Helen Creighton's collection of folklore.