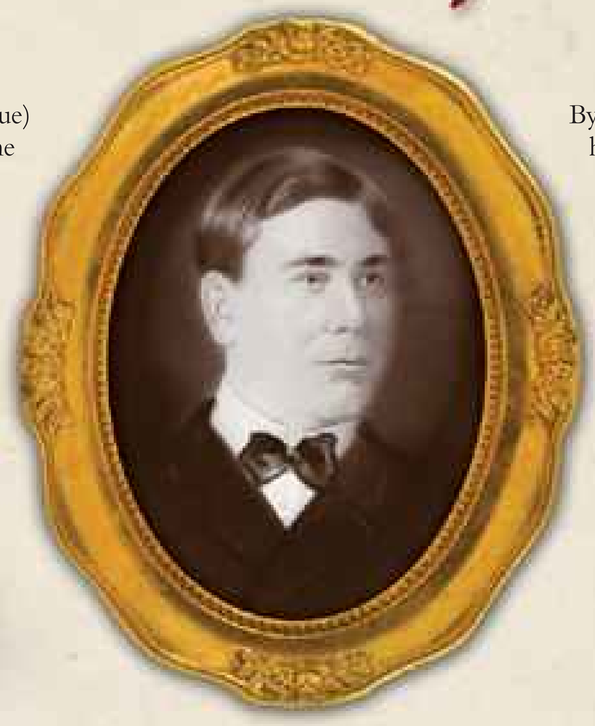
# Who Was Larry Gorman

Larry Gorman was the seventh child of Thomas and Annie (Donahue) Gorman. Born on July 10, 1846 at Trout River, less than a mile from Tyne Valley, he spent his boyhood on his father's farm.

*"The Valley"* was in its pioneer days and, as a child, Larry went to school and worked on the farm. He may have been initiated into *"man's work"* in the nearby shipyards at Bideford and Port Hill.

The death of Island shipbuilding meant that many a young man sought work off the Island. So it was that Larry, in the late 1860s or early '70s, took up the life of a migrating worker, following the seasons to the lumber woods of New Brunswick and the fishing coves of western PEI.



By the early 1880's he began travelling to the Maine woods and eventually he settled there. He married twice, in 1891 and 1897, and died in Bangor in 1917.

Wherever Larry Gorman travelled, he composed songs, some of them delightfully comic and insightful, some so bitterly satiric that his verses became a by-word for personal attack and invective. He was famous in his own time in the rural areas of the Northeast; and for two or three generations after his death, a culture which prided itself on remembering such things recited and sang his compositions.

## Is This "The Man Who Make the Songs"?

This portrait – which recently has come to light – bids fair to be the only picture of Larry Gorman. The original is in the possession of Shirley Williams of Elmsdale, who kindly allowed it to be copied. Shirley is the great-granddaughter of Annie Gorman, a favourite younger sister of Larry's. Annie married Samuel Sweet of Lot Seven and the picture was passed to her descendants. Family tradition indicates that Larry visited the Sweet home frequently when he fished in the area. The physical features – especially the dimpled chin and the hair – bear a strong family resemblance to a well-known portrait of Larry's brother Thomas. If the family traditions are as accurate as they appear to be, then this is indeed a picture of ***"Uncle Larry."***

# Gorman and Northeast Folklore Traditions

## The Northeast

In Larry Gorman's day and for decades afterwards, *"the Northeast"* – that is, the Maritime provinces of Canada and their closest American neighbours, the states of Maine and New Hampshire – was, in important ways, one cultural area. It was a predominantly rural region of forest, farmland, and fishing village where the people shared bitter winters and seasonal migration, particularly between fishery, farm, and lumber camp.

Four or five months of snow and biting wind, combined with the day-to-day drudgery of pioneer life, isolated individuals to an extent we cannot imagine today. And the man in the lumber camp was no more alone than the wife he left behind on the farm or in the fisherman's cottage, tending to the babies and livestock. In the end, the inexorable power of ocean, forest, and snow worked to create a *"northeastern culture"* in which powerful folk traditions such as storytelling and singing were held in common. A young man from a farm in Prince Edward Island who spent four or five snowbound months in a lumber camp heard the same old stories and songs as the New Brunswicker, the Bluenoser, or the State of Mainer.

## Driving Dull Care Away

Folklore and folksongs spread like soft butter. Any man bringing a new song from the woods would be welcome in his home community, just as a man *"from home"* bringing songs to a lonely schooner crew or lumber camp also was welcome. Indeed, a good songmaker was a very popular man in any village or lumber camp. The people of the Northeast, like people everywhere, found ways to escape the tedium of their daily toil and *"Drive Dull Care Away."*

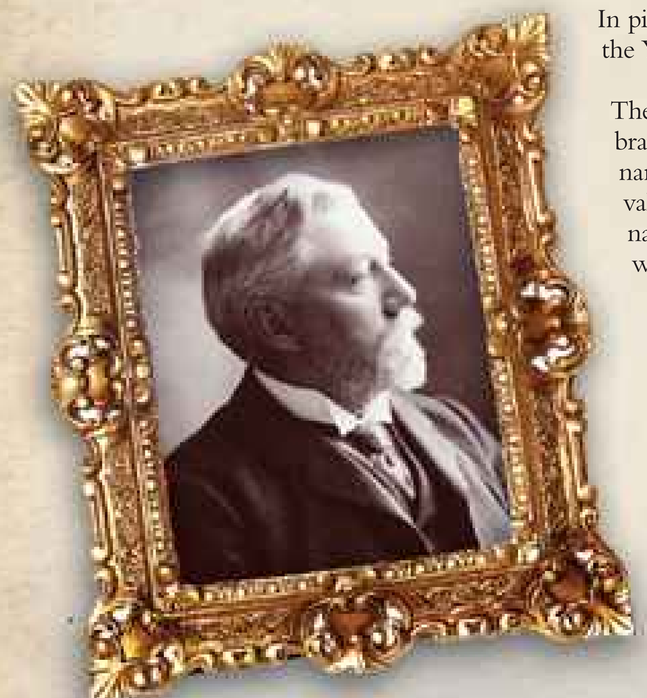
If you add Newfoundland to the Northeast, the living body of traditional song they owned had few if any parallels in the English-speaking world of the 19th and 20th centuries.

These creators of song were often anonymous, or known only to their rural neighbours. And, if they were famous to any extent, it was for one notable song, say John Calhoun's *"Peter Emberley"* or Joe Scott's *"The Plain Golden Band."*

But one man created song and verse which was sung and recited in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Maine. He was an Island man, from Trout River, just downstream from Tyne Valley. His name was Larry Gorman and he called himself *"The man who made the songs."*

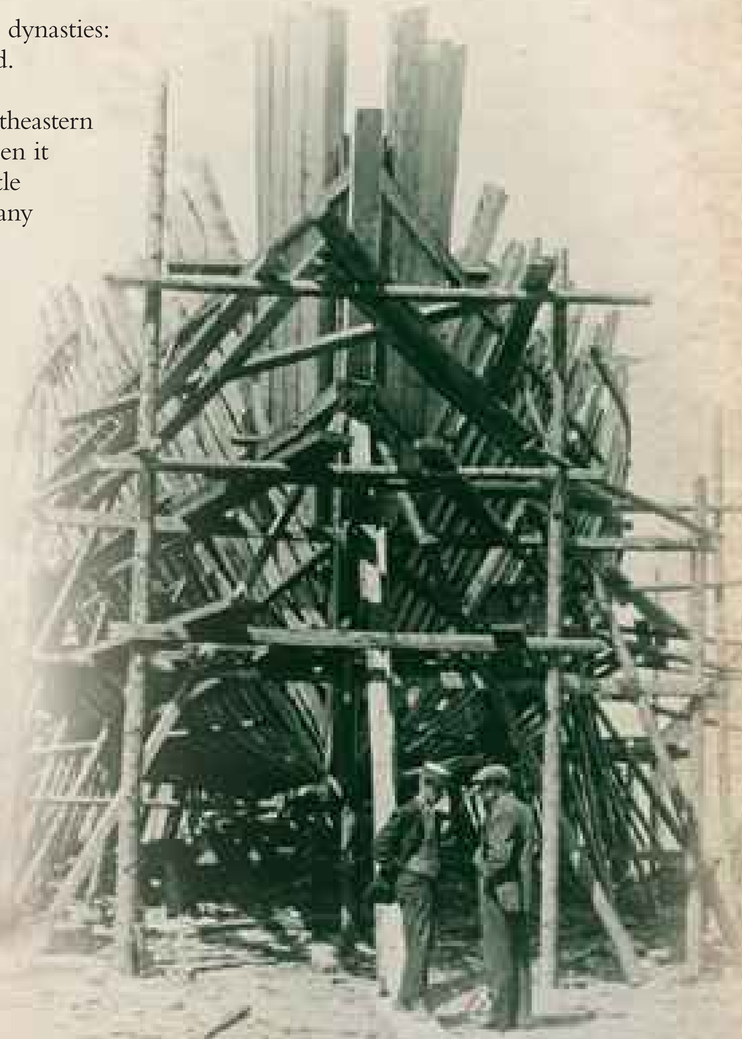
# Locale

On the Island's northern side, two-thirds of the way between East Point and North Cape, the Black Banks stand vigil against the gray northeasters. Behind them lie the protective bulks of Lennox Island and Bird Island. And inside these barriers are the safe havens of Malpeque and Richmond Bays. This is a broken coastline of tidal creeks and two rivers, the Grand and the Bideford.



In pioneer days, this shoreline became the headquarters of two shipbuilding and political dynasties: the Yeo and Richards families ruled from their command posts at Port Hill and Bideford.

The smaller of the two rivers, the Bideford, runs far inland and divides as it goes. The southeastern branch is called the Trout River, and as it winds through the countryside of Lot Thirteen it narrows at a place where it can be bridged. Here, where its banks rise, is a sheltered little valley. In this secluded place, a village grew up in the 1860s and '70s. It has gone by many names, *"Trout River"* and *"The Landing"* among them; but the prettiest name of all is what the people here call it: *"The Valley."*



# The Valley

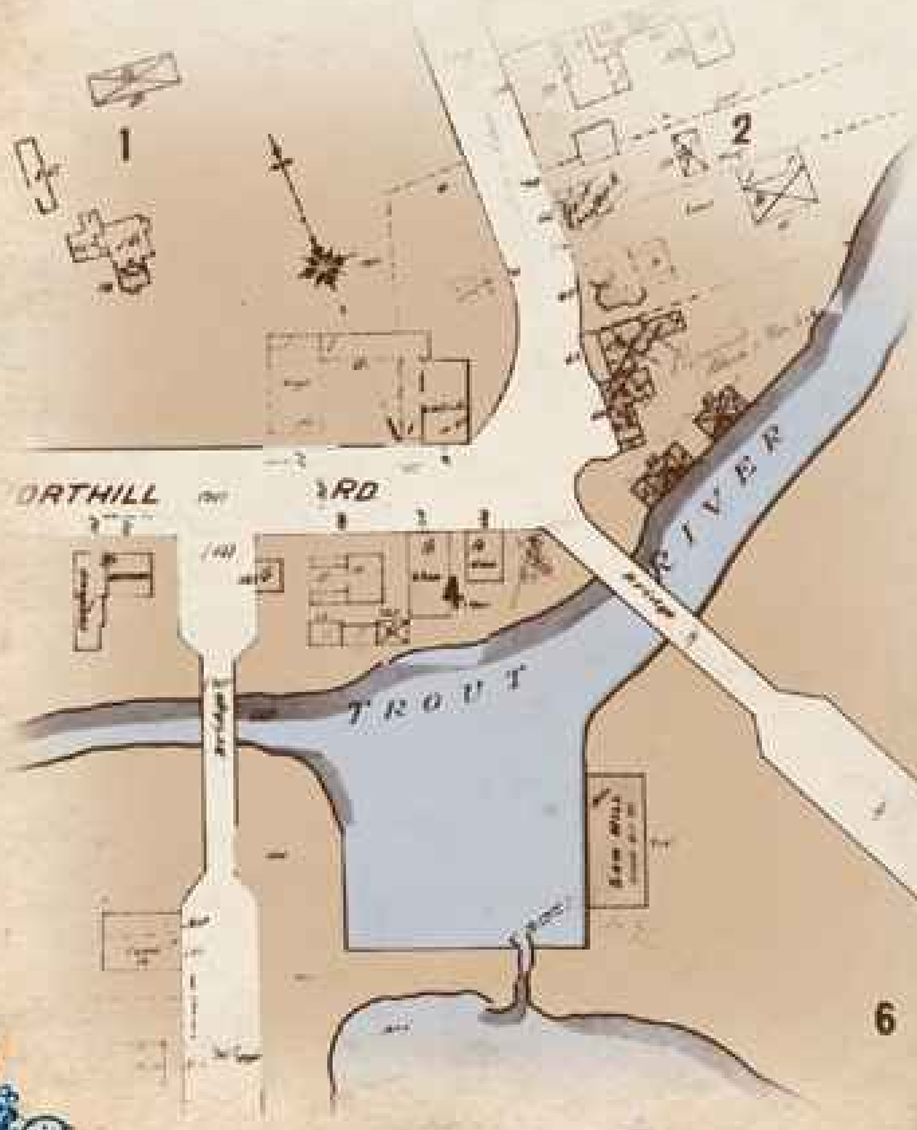
## Two Fiddles and No Plow

Long after the hamlets along the coast were humming and rattling with the building of ships, the little community at the head of Trout River struggled to become a village. Its two older sisters, Port Hill and Bideford, were shipbuilding centres and they drained energy from the countryside – energy to rob the forests, haul the logs, dig out the huge juniper knees, build the ships, then load them with lumber. All this power, once expended, could not be used to develop the farms. The shipyards offered quick money in those days of *"two fiddles and no plow."*

But it was farming that eventually gave life to *"The Valley."* By the mid-1840s, coastal settlement had moved inland, and farmers had bridged the Trout River. One of the early MacLean pioneers had built a mill there in the 1840s. By 1849 the little community had built Trout River School, situated on the Canada Road half a mile from the bridge.

Meanwhile, roads opening the area were being promoted by local politicians James Yeo and Thomas Gorman. By the early 1860s, a tangle of them came together at or near the bridge over Trout River. These roads – from Northam, from Lot Eleven, from Port Hill and Bideford, and the roads leading into them – channeled the wayfarer across the bridge in the little valley. By that time also, the Grants, Ellis's, MacLeans, MacAuslands, Griggs, and Ramsays were farming in the area. And just down the Trout River toward Bideford were the Gormans.

The farms which the village depended on were doing well in the 1860s, exporting oats, fish, and timber to Swansea and Bristol, and farm produce to ports all up and down the east coast.




# The Rising Village

## Tyne Valley

The swift rise of the village in the Valley was amazing.

Between 1865 and 1880, the community grew rapidly, surpassing its rivals Bideford and Port Hill. Perhaps the decline of shipbuilding diverted more energy to farming. The construction of the railroad helped. And certainly the continuing cross-ocean trade strengthened agriculture. As late as 1891, local farmers were still growing huge quantities of good black oats to feed English horses, and shipping it along with deal planks on locally-built ships.

*At Bideford Messrs. Richards new barkentine* **Genesta** *is nearly ready for sea with a fine cargo of about 35,000 bushels of oats for Europe and Hon. John Yeo is loading his new barkentine* **Cosmo** *with deals for the same place.*

In the early seventies, the villagers gave their community a new name – Tyne Valley, after the industrial area in the north of England. This is surprising, considering that most of the English in the area were Westcountry people who had already given west-of-England names to Bideford, West Devon, Northam and Port Hill.

## Tyne Valley Notes

*The Debating Club here is flourishing; most of its members have made wonderful progress in speaking power since it began. A pleasing feature in these debates is rigid respect for society rules and strict courtesy of members of each other even in the most animated discussions. A. Callaghan Esq. is to lecture under the auspices of the Club Wednesday evening next, on* ***"The farmer's true position."*** *No doubt a large number will come to hear him.*

Summerside *Pioneer,* April 1, 1884

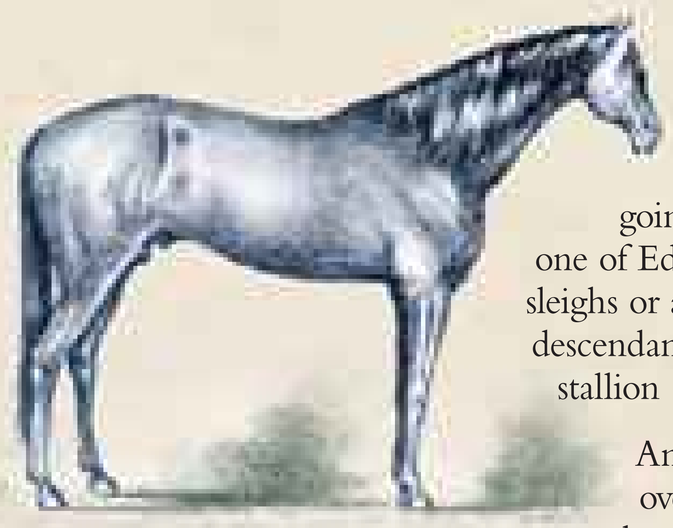
By the 1890s, Tyne Valley had taken the shape it still holds, nestled in the valley by the bridge, a little rural village which has not forgotten the days when a local man, blessed (some would say cursed) with the gift of words took aim at its citizens.

Larry Gorman still walks these tree-lined country roads.

## A Busy Little Place

Communities like individuals have lives of their own, and often we do not fully appreciate the wonderful diversity and self-sufficiency of village life in those times. The newspapers of the day give us a marvellous picture of Tyne Valley from the 1870s onward.

And what a busy little place it was – industrious, outward-looking, yet interested in its own doings and proud to talk about them to anyone who would listen. These local events received more than their share of attention in local newspapers like the Summerside *Progress,* whose editor was a Trout River boy, Larry Gorman's brother Tom.



Almost everything the average man or woman needed could be found here. The young man going courting could drive in one of Edmund Ramsay's famous sleighs or a light wagon pulled by a descendant of the famous trotting stallion *"All Right."*

And when the courting was over and the wedding neared, the young woman could go to *"Our Dressmakers (the Misses Carroll) … busy preparing suits for wives and daughters of 'these parts,'"* and buy a hat from *"Miss Grant [who] runs a millinery business"* in Mr. Forbes' store. For that matter, the groom could visit Mr. Philips and MacDonald, the village tailors.

Once married and settled on the farm, men and women needed commodities of all kinds. James Forbes was the leading dry goods merchant and he carried a seemingly inexhaustible supply of goods, from chamber pots to candle moulds. And he took in, besides money, everything from eggs to hides.

In 1880, a man who needed blacksmith work done had his choice of two shops. And there was a grist mill, saw mill, tannery, and two carriage makers. There was even *"McIntyre the licensed vendor"* whose house/store burned on an April night in 1884, after which the **Journal** correspondent breathed a sigh of relief, noting that *"the liquor and other goods were removed"* before the fire did its work.

For diversion there was the Orange Lodge, the many church groups, the Temperence Division, and what seemed like a never-ending round of teas, travelling speakers, and the like. Behind all this activity was a drive for self improvement.

# Mr. Forbes Builds a Business and House

## Forbes & Cole

James H. Forbes, the 24-year-old who opened a store in Tyne Valley in June, 1879 (together with James Cole), had a good eye for business. He knew, as everyone else did, that the village was booming. He was also pretty certain that money was to be made in imported *"dry goods."* On June 5, 1879, the two young businessmen announced their partnership in the Summerside Journal. Their ad appeared in the same edition, with a nod to the surrounding Westcountrymen who might want to buy merchandise from the *"old country."*

**New Store! New Goods!**
*Just opening at the Tyne Valley store. A large stock of British, American and Canadian dry goods, groceries, hardware, boots and shoes, etc. and having bought for cash only, we will be able to give our customers the very lowest price. Terms strictly cash! We call particular attention to our No #1 tea. The highest price paid for butter, eggs, and wool.*

Forbes and Cole were well liked, *"noted far and near for their honest and straightforward principles,"* according to the Tyne Valley Notes. And their business did well. By the spring of 1880 their store was *"overflowing with spring goods of every description."*

The partnership, however, lasted only a year. On June 9, 1880, James Forbes became sole owner, buying his partner's share of the business. Cole then opened his own store in the Valley, but fell on hard times. On an April night in 1884 he lost his store and stock of goods to a fire. Only the heroic efforts of the villagers saved the surrounding buildings.

## The House That Forbes Built

While Cole was unlucky, James H. Forbes prospered and became part-owner of another store, at O'Leary Station. His family grew to five children and in 1884 he built a new house, on the hillside overlooking the centre of the bustling village of Tyne Valley. This mansion was the talk of the community.

Summerside Pioneer, May 27, 1884

News about *"The Valley"* is very scarce. Mr. Jas M. Forbes is building a nice residence on the old MacLean homestead. The foundation, which is of stone and brick, is completed and the frame is almost ready for raising. It is to have a mansard roof and is to be finished with the new celebrated *"Actionlite Cement Roofing."*

In July of that year the house was still under construction, and the local correspondent gathering the news from the *"pleasantly situated village"* noted that *"Mr. Forbes is the only dry goods merchant here and is doing a good business. He is at present erecting a handsome residence a short distance from his store."*

A year later, when the faithful booster of the village listed its fine buildings, the Forbes house was still worthy of note.

For a village that has sprung up in the last few years, Tyne Valley has quite a number of fine buildings. Mr. E. Ramsay has just completed a carriage shop. Last summer he build a forge the equal of which is not in this country. J. M. Forbes's new residence is a beautiful building. The schoolhouse is a fine structure intended for a graded school. Mr. Montgomery the teacher should have an assistant as it is a pretty heavy school for one.

In the fall of 1884, James Forbes brought his brother Donald into the business – which became Forbes Brothers. Although the firm continued to do well, James had other interests and he left storekeeping to study for the Anglican priesthood. During the 1890s he directed St. Peter's Church in Alberton. His family grew up and left home, his wife died, and he eventually moved to the United States. He died there at age 95. The business he began was carried on by his brother into the 20th century.

James McMurdo Forbes played an active, prominent, and positive part in the life of Tyne Valley. By all accounts he was a good man, honest and straightforward in his dealings. Throughout those busy years in the 1880s, he lived here in this big rural merchant's house and went about his daily business.

And all the time, he must have known that people were laughing (as we still laugh today) at Larry Gorman's funny song about the poor old woman, the *"Shan Van Vogh,"* who set out to defraud him when he was a young merchant in the village.

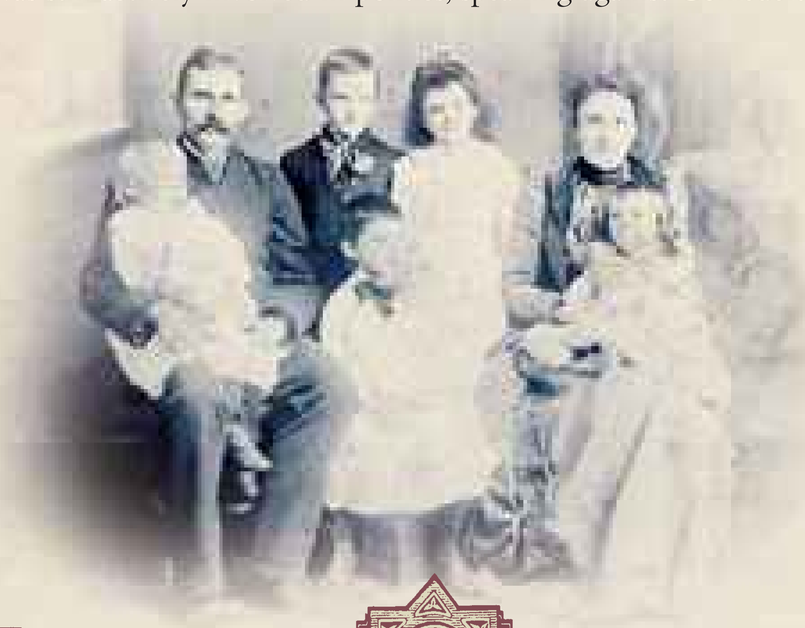
# The Gorman Family

## Thomas Gorman

The origins of the Gorman family are lost in the mists of Irish history.

Thomas Gorman, Larry's father, was born in Kilkenny, Ireland, around 1796. Judging from his later activities, we can assume that in his youth Thomas acquired some education. Ledger entries from the Bideford shipyard suggest he was on the Island by 1823 or earlier, working in a responsible capacity for Nathanial Edward Burnard, son of the Bideford (England) merchant Thomas Burnard. Evidence from the area suggests that he brought two brothers, James and Lawrence, with him when he came to the Island; these, also, were the names of his two oldest sons.

Later in life, Thomas Gorman entered politics. He was, with James Yeo, the first member of the colonial Legislature for the western part of the Island, serving from 1838 to 1842. As an old man, in the late 1860s and early '70s, he was still actively involved in politics, speaking against Confederation.



## Marriage

On Feb. 10, 1833, Thomas Gorman married Annie Donahue. She had been born in Ireland in 1816 and was no more than 16 years old when Thomas brought her from her Miramichi, New Brunswick, home to the Island in the fall of 1832. They had 13 children, ten of whom grew to maturity.


## Pioneer Days at Trout River

These were the pioneer days along the Trout River: brutal, crude work was the daily fare, on both the farm and in the shipyard. Though we think of it as a slower world, there was constant pressure on families to get the crops in and out on time, to clear the land, to care for the livestock, and to get ready for winter.

The demanding work, isolation, bad water, and lack of care took its toll on all, but children were the most vulnerable. There are many sad accounts of boys and girls dying young, of accident, neglect and disease, with few of the little ones having even the poor service a doctor could provide.

But even in a world of hardship and danger, the eyes and ears of children caught sights and sounds adults often miss. It was a world of blue/green and white, the hundred different shades of forest and the ragged bush-filled clearings combined with the blues of the rivers in summer, changing to overpowering white in winter. Then children saw the heavy three-day northeasters when outside the door was a wall of driven snow, and a blizzard so bad that men could hardly get to the barn to feed the animals. The cows, no matter how thirsty, would refuse the walk to the spring. And after the east wind came the bitter norwesters, flinging the drifts over forest and field, re-piling snow as the wind changed directions.

There were many other things, unnoticed by historians, which the Gorman children heard and saw around the house and farm. Personal accounts tell it best, and that left by James H. Fitzgerald, friend and teacher of the Gorman family, gives us a multi-hued picture of what the Gorman children experienced as the seasons came and went: the bitter weather, the sickness in the family, the calves dying of cold, the late spring, the goslings coming out of their eggs, the first spring herring, the growing of the wheat crops, the planting of apple trees, the thundershowers that flooded the newly sowed fields, the picking of raspberries and blueberries. And there were also the debts owed to the miller, the acrimony over religion, and always the community gossip.

*Heard that Martin Doyle and wife scalded and beat old Robinson Age about 70 who, it appears seduced and married their daughter Eliza, aged 22 years.*

The children also would have heard tales of the supernatural, frowned upon by minister and priest but real beyond dispute to parents and neighbours.

*[It is] reported that Blind William the piper who is 2 years dead appeared to Mrs. Johnny McLellan and conversed 2 hours with her and told her several things about himself and about a small trifle he owed James Isaac McDougald carpenter.*

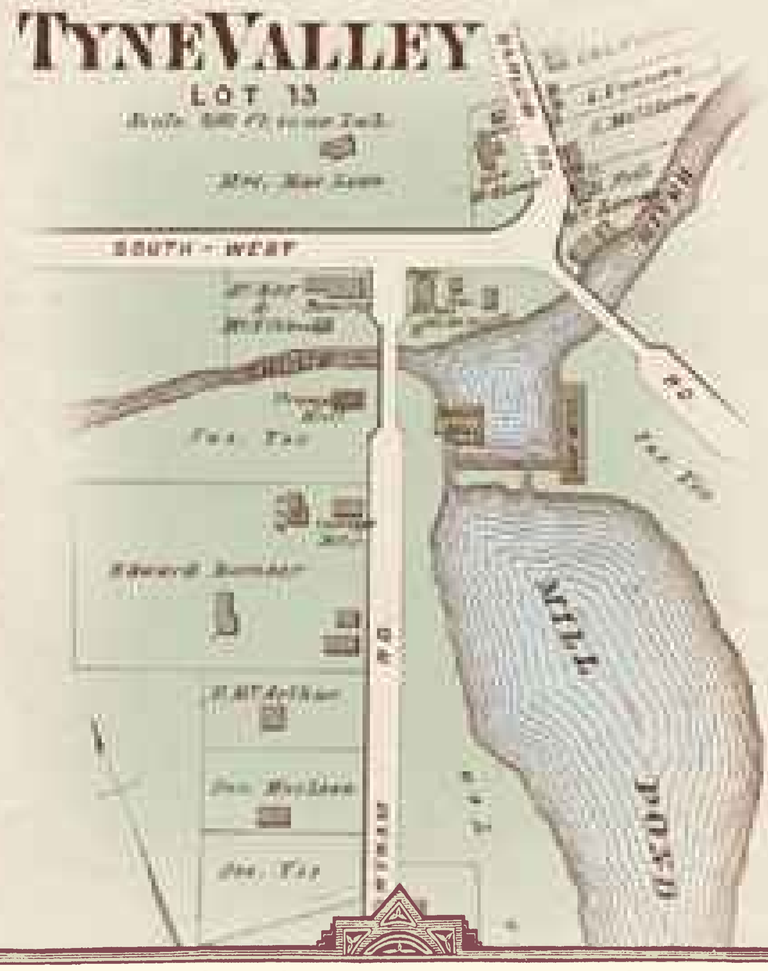
And if the Gorman children were old enough they might have been allowed to go to William Grant's frolic and see their teacher, old Fitzgerald, now almost 60, dance to "Kitty's Rambles to Yougall."

These can be no more than small glimpses. However, one cannot help thinking that when songmaker Fitzgerald noted that he had *"Composed a song about a mean action of Henry Plested,"* and sometime later *"Composed a song about a ram lamb of mine being sheared and [another] about Trout River,"* ten-year-old Larry Gorman might have been looking over his shoulder.

# Larry Gorman

## Trout River

Larry Gorman was born on July 10, 1846, the seventh child of Thomas and Annie Gorman. His childhood is obscure, like that of most children of the time and place. The family's home overlooked Trout River, and as a young boy he could walk to see the giant ships being built by the Richards family at Bideford. There too the children could hear the voices of the men at work, talking, shouting, and singing.




## Schoolmaster Fitzgerald

Larry likely started school in 1852 or '53, trudging with his older brother and sisters upriver to the bridge in the Valley, then climbing the hill on the Canada Road to the little schoolhouse.

At times, the children must have walked along with their teacher, James H. Fitzgerald, who sometimes "boarded" with the family in the pioneer custom. Fitzgerald was a public-spirited man, a poet, and a bit of a crank, quick to anger and just as quick to forget. The fact that he "left off boarding at Thomas Gormans after five days because of his [Gorman's] snarling disposition" tells us more about Fitzgerald than it does about Gorman, for the schoolteacher rowed with almost everyone in the district. Fitzgerald was good with words -- but Larry, the little Gorman boy he taught for three or four years in the fifties, would someday be better.

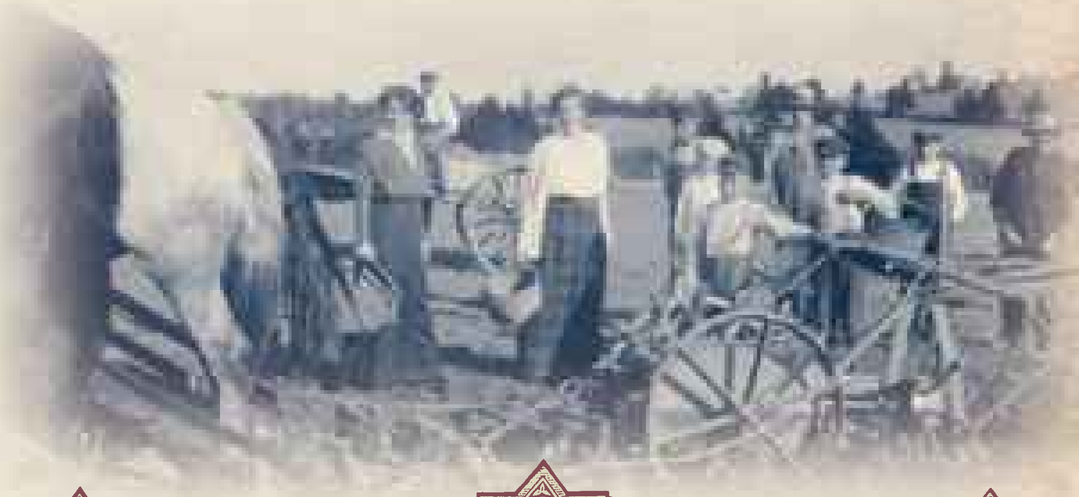
## Rough Times

The 1850s were not easy for the Gorman family. Materially there was little to choose between pioneer families even when the father, like Thomas, was a member of the Legislature.

Larry would not have forgotten the grieving in his house when, in early January of 1856, two precious horses died from eating frozen turnips and oats. In later years, horses would receive more sympathy in his songs than most humans.

When Larry was eleven, his father's farm was seized by the sheriff of Prince County and Thomas Gorman was ordered to jail in St. Eleanor's. All of this had begun in 1850 when Thomas had contracted a huge debt to Charlottetown merchant Peter MacGowan. In 1857 the Island Supreme Court finally acted.

Whether Thomas spent time in jail we do not know; however, the farm was sold. Over 30 years later, the oldest son James told how he had bought the farm at the sheriff's sale for a tenth of the bill against it, thus restoring it to the family.



## A Community of Songmakers and Songs

Larry grew up working at whatever was handy – on the farm, in the woods, and at the fishing coves. And he began, perhaps in his early 20s, his lifelong obsession with the creation of song and verse.

He would not have lacked for models: this was a culture where every village, big or small, had its songmaker. Of the hundreds on the Island at any one time we know of only a scattered few. Larry's schoolmaster "the venerable poet Fitzgerald" was a prolific composer. Larry's sister Julia married Luke Hughes, another good songmaker from Lot Eleven. Further afield there was Lawrence Doyle, the gentle man from the St. Peter's area, who composed the classics "When Johnny Went Plowing for Kearon" and "The Picnic at Groshaut." There was also Dan Riley and John Doyle from Campbellton. These men, with the exception of Lawrence Doyle, shared communities with Gorman and probably knew him. A list of songmakers from any other rural area in the Northeast region would be just as impressive.

Larry Gorman grew up in a community of songmakers and songs.

# Larry Gorman and the World of Island Folksong

## Ancient Popular Ballads

The songs that Larry Gorman grew up with were mostly ballads, sung without accompaniment in farm kitchen, fisherman's house, and logger's camp.

People throughout the Northeast sang three types of story-songs. There were, first, the Popular Ballads, some of them dating to the Middle Ages, songs like *"The Old Beggar Man", "Lord Lovel," "The Mermaid,"* and *"The Four Marys."* They existed in so many versions that the great ballad scholar Francis James Child gave them numbers rather than names. Most people know *"Child No. 2"* (dating from the 1600s) by its beautiful modern arrangement *"Scarborough Fair."*

## British Broadsides

We know from his own songs that Larry also was familiar with the more numerous British Broadside Ballads, so-called because from the 1600s many of them were printed on broadsheets and sold on the streets by their composers. Thousands of them went into oral tradition. They were long, detailed, sentimental, moralizing, lurid, and sensational. Like modern-day television, they were preoccupied with murder and tragedy. They were often called *"Come All Ye's"* because so many of them began that way.

If there is one classic Broadside it is *"The Flying Cloud,"* a lengthy account of piracy and murder on the Spanish Main. But there were hundreds of others in Prince Edward Island tradition, including *"The Dark Eyed Sailor," "The Boston Burglar,"* and *"The City of Baltimore."* Larry Gorman knew them, and eventually he parodied many or borrowed their tunes for his own use.

## Native North American Ballads

In this community of songs there were also the Native North American Ballads. They came from near and far. A good many are marked by the detail, the emotion and moralizing of British Broadsides. Thousands existed, and we know of hundreds. From Prince Edward Island we find good story-songs like *"The Millman and Tuplin Song," "John Ladner,"* and *"The Gracie M. Parker,"* sung along with imports such as *"The Burning Granite Mills"* (Massachusetts) and *"The Miramichi Fire"* (New Brunswick).

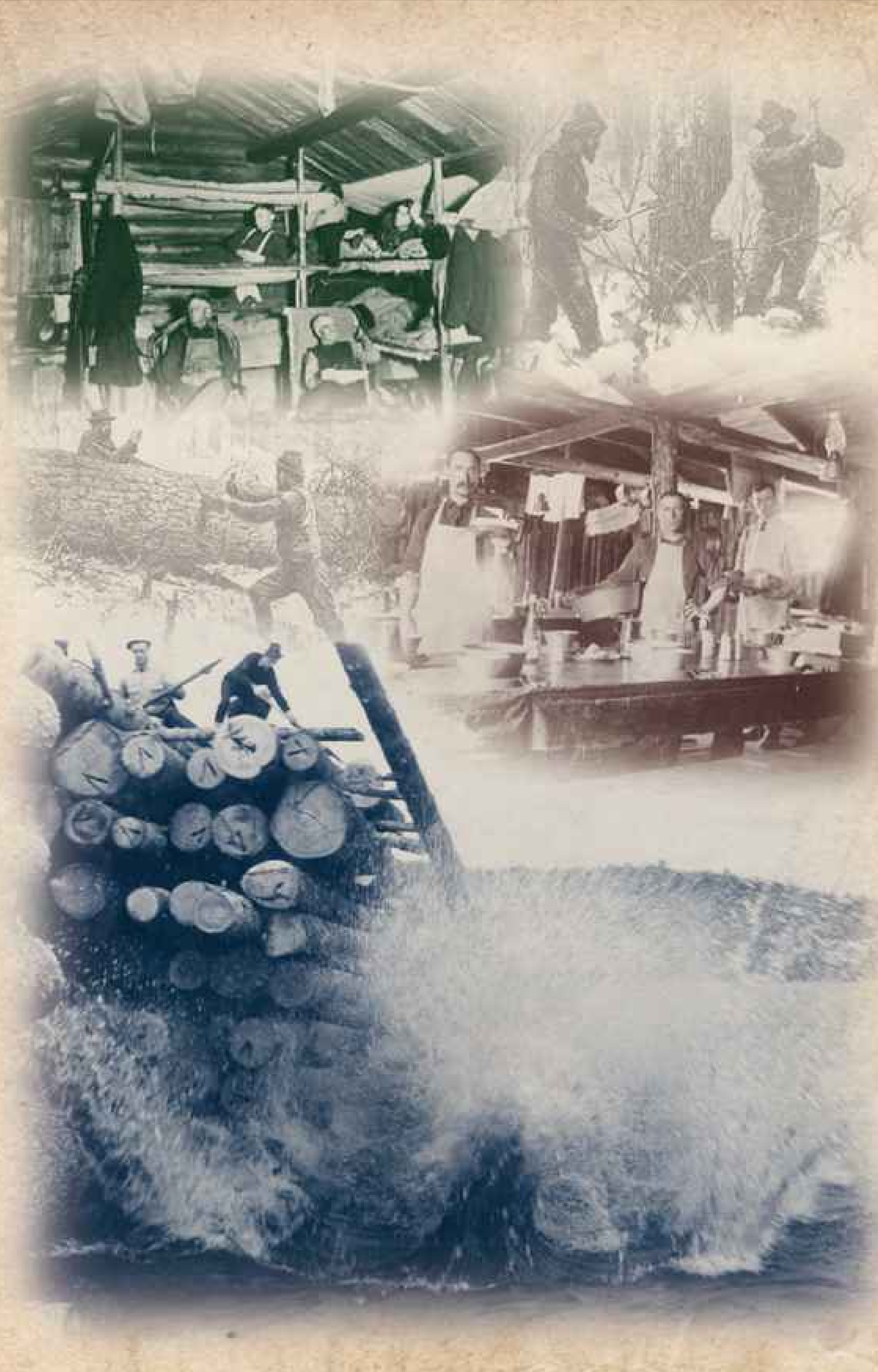
Thrown into this mix of ballads were other kinds of songs, the lyrically sentimental, and the joyfully comic, often without a strong storyline.

## Satirical Songs

And finally, in a class by itself, there was another category we know as satire.

In its mildest form, satiric song can be gentle, comic chiding. However, when it goes to the other extreme, when the fangs of irony, sarcasm and ridicule bite and scar, then the songmaker is a fearsome man. Throughout the entire Northeast, there was only one king, nay, emperor of satiric song.

His name was Larry Gorman.



# The Avenger

## A Different Kind of Songmaker

Most of the songmakers of Larry Gorman's day were local men who gave to their neighbours the stories-in-song they thirsted for – the histories of notable happenings, the stories of tragedy, betrayal and murder, the skits on local comic figures and events. Lawrence Doyle and Dan Riley, men of gentle spirit, composed in this way and there were hundreds of others like them. They wanted to be liked by the community and they took care not to give offense.

Larry Gorman chose a different path, from which he seldom strayed. His stock-in-trade, as his biographer Sandy Ives has noted, was ***"invective, ranging from satires on such general topics as riches or morals to vicious personal insults directed at those he felt had slighted him in some way."*** The foibles of an individual, a boy's behaviour at a party, a neighbour's misuse of a horse, or the meanness of a woods boss created in him a cold fury and released a diatribe in song which the individual and his descendants were forced to live with.

## Vexing the Neighbours

Gorman's songs were suppressed and hidden by a cloak of secrecy in fear of ***"vexing the neighbours."*** Even James, his older brother, forbade his family to sing them. So deadly skilful were they that some have outlasted their maker by a century.

As Sandy Ives has noted, ***"Larry Gorman started being Larry Gorman at an early age."*** One of the first songs attributed to him, ***"Were You Ever to Egmont Bay,"*** was an attack on James Yeo Senior, the Port Hill shipbuilder said to be the Island's richest man. It was probably written before Yeo died in 1868, when Larry was in his early 20s.

By that time, the pattern of much of his life was set – the Miramichi woods in winter; fishing at Cape Wolfe, Howards Cove, Campbellton, or Miminegash in summer; and a legacy of nasty songs in every lumber camp, farm house, and fishing village he passed through.

## Creating His Own Legend

Gorman raged at those who broke the unwritten laws of the community. And rather than being apologetic, he defied those he defamed, and gloried in the fear he engendered:

*I know that they could shoot me, criminate and prosecute me,*
*But they kindly salute me, round the Scow on Cowden Shore.*

Far from seeking anonymity, he proudly left his calling card announcing that he was ***"Gorman, the man who made the songs."***

Thus, he created his own legend. In his own day he was the best known maker of songs in Maine, the Miramichi, and western P.E.I. He was featured in ***King Spruce***, a novel by Holman Day (1908); and as late as the 1970s, old men and women in rural communities still proudly recited scraps of Gorman satires and the famous mealtime graces he was said to have composed.

They recounted tales of his legendary wit and told (with a certain awe) stories of the trance-like state he entered when he was composing a song. ***"If you met him on the road when he was making a song,"*** it was said, ***"he'd walk right by you and never see you."***


KING SPRUCE

CHAPTER I

OF THE "CASTLE FOR HIM"


CHAPTER XVIII

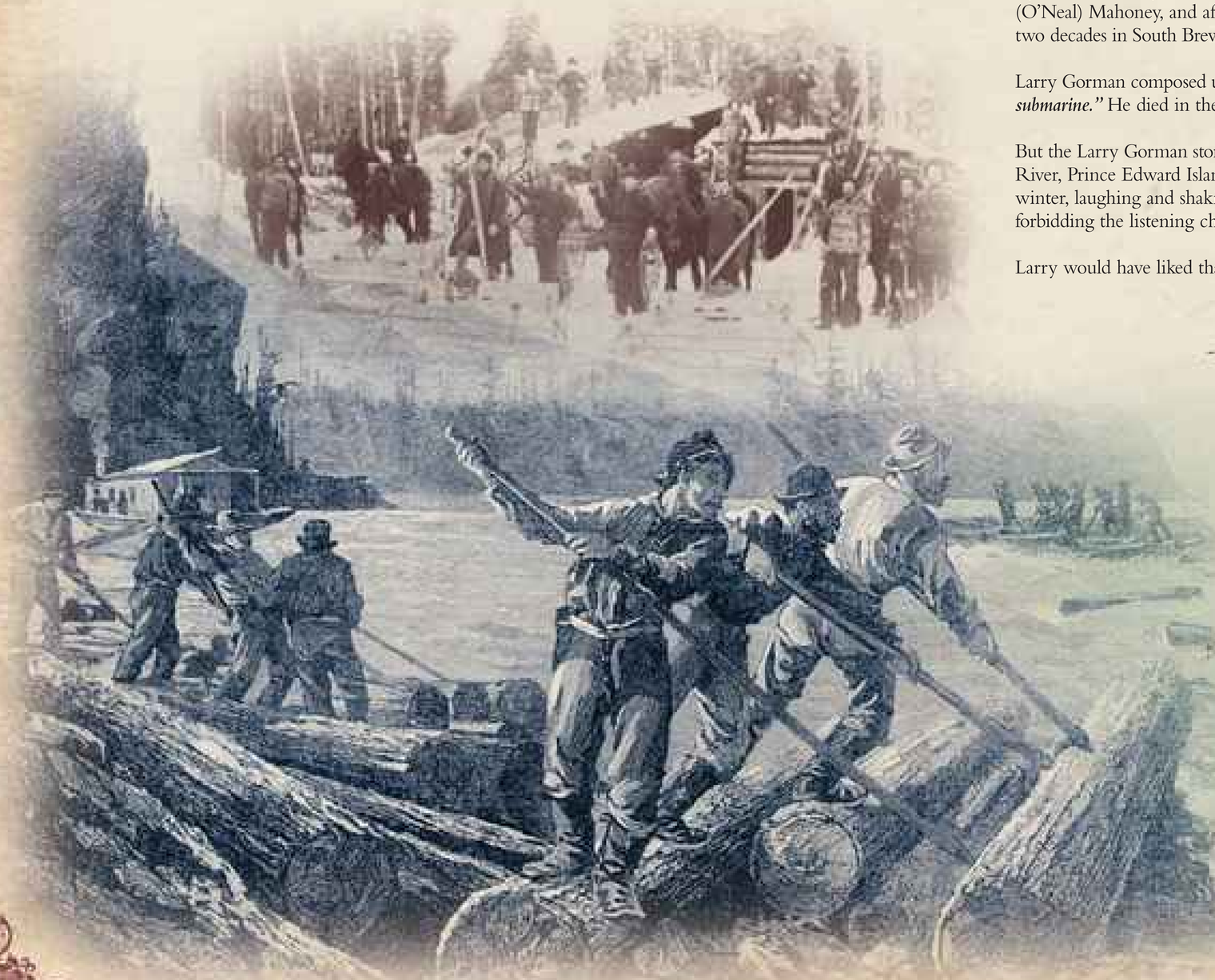
# Woodsmen and Fishermen

## The Spring Drive

Gorman's song *"The Winter of '73"* places him on the Miramichi River, the major lumbering area in northern New Brunswick. We can assume that by that time he was a seasoned woodsman, for he announced in the song's last lines that he intended to take part in the spring drive.

The drive was a not a job for new hands, especially inexperienced Island boys who were taunted by the cry of the old woods bosses, *"Green hands ashore, Island men up a tree."* If Larry was on the drive, he was a veteran. He spent winters in the woods and fished on the Island in the summer. And as his song *"The Shan Van Vögh"* attests, he was still visiting his home in Trout River in the 1870s. As late as the spring of 1881 he was living in Tyne Valley where his mother Annie, now aged 75, was running a store and sheltering the unmarried members of the family, among them *"Lawrence."*

But within a year he was on his way again. Gorman was 36 years old, his life half over, when he went to the United States for the first time.



## Last Leaves: The Maine Years of Larry Gorman

Like so many Maritimers who followed the woods, Larry found his way to Maine. He later gave the date of his leaving the Island as 1882; and though he may have returned to the island for visits, he spent the rest of his life in *"the States."* We know he was in Ellsworth on the Union River in the mid-1880s. He composed some of his greatest songs there, among them *"Roderick McDonald," "The Union River Drivers," "Bill Watts,"* and *"The Champion of Moose Hill."* And he also worked for the Henry Company in the Zealand Valley of New Hampshire.

Although Gorman still composed personal satires, time had matured his vision and dulled the cutting edge of his personal attacks. *"The Good Old State of Maine,"* directed at the Henry and Sons lumber company on behalf of oppressed woodsmen, is a classic song of protest, ranking with the great Woody Guthrie songs of the 1930s. Unlike his immoderate broadsides – such as the attack on McElroy the fish buyer in Miminegash on the Island -- this is a song that all workers could embrace.

By the 1890s Larry was well into middle age and felt the need to settle. He married twice, in 1891 to Mary (O'Neal) Mahoney, and after her death to Julia Lynch in 1897. Larry and Julia lived for most of the next two decades in South Brewer, Maine. Shortly before his death in 1917, the Gormans settled in Bangor proper.

Larry Gorman composed until the end of his life, his last song warning of the dangers of the *"cruel marauding submarine."* He died in the midst of the Great War – which ended so many old traditions.

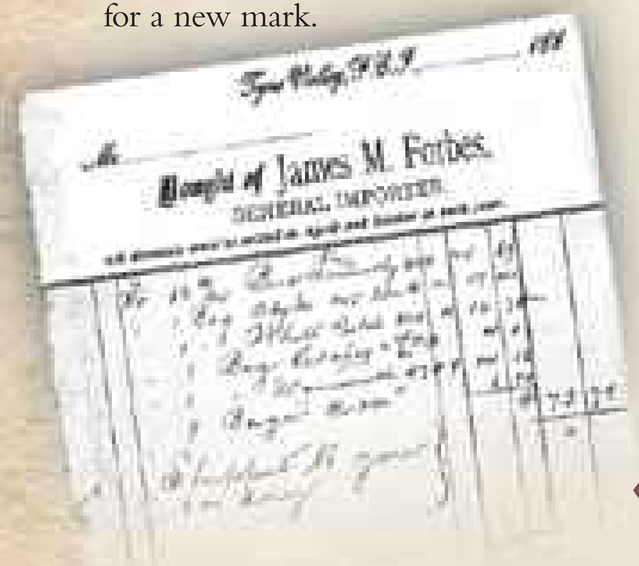
But the Larry Gorman story was not over. For generations afterwards folks in the rural northeast from Trout River, Prince Edward Island, to Maine, recited and sang his songs, sitting around woodstoves in the bitter winter, laughing and shaking their heads at the things he said about neighbours now safely dead, and forbidding the listening children to repeat the verses lest they insult someone's ancestors.

Larry would have liked that.

# Annie Gorman, James Forbes and the Shan Van Vogh: Larry At His Best

## Annie Gorman, Shopkeeper

Annie Gorman, Larry's mother, moved to Tyne Valley after her husband's death in 1874. Undaunted by the fact that she was nearly 60 years old, she set up as a ***"shop keeper."*** Here, according to tradition, she had dealings with an old woman from the community, poor but artful, who ***"got ahead of Annie,"*** promising pay but delivering nothing. But shopkeepers grow wise, and the old woman was soon compelled to look for a new mark.


Tyne Valley, P.E.I. 188

Mr.

Bought of James M. Forbes

GENERAL DEALER IN

## The Shan Van Vogh

***The Shan Van Vogh"*** is a kindly song, marvellously lilting in tune, gentle in nature, perceptive and understanding. It is missing the harsh and bitter edge of so many Gorman songs.

Here the old lady plots her approach to the new storekeeper:

*I'm getting very gaunt, said the Shan Van Vogh,*
*Of provisions I am scant, said the Shan Van Vogh,*
*When Forges will come here, it's the very place we'll steer,*
*We'll get everything we want, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I wonder when he'll start, said the Shan Van Vogh,*
*I wish he would be smart, said the Shan Van Vogh,*
*My provision's getting scarce, and with hunger I am fierce,*
*I am keen to make a start, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

It is one of the cleverest of Larry's songs, for he clearly reads the old woman like a book: Her knack with empty promises: ***"We will promise him a sleigh…and half a ton of hay…just before we run away, said the Shan Van Vogh"***; her deviousness in offering worthless goods: ***"I'll pay you with the hide of the little bull that died all full of warble holes, said the Shan Van Vogh"***; her vanity: ***"I am now in great distress, for I want a flashy dress to attend the Sacrament, said the Shan Van Vogh."***

## James Forbes and His Tyne Valley Store

She found it in young James Forbes, who together with his business partner James Cole was opening a new store in the Valley in the early summer of 1879. Larry, who had dealt with the old woman while helping his mother in her store, was well aware of her wiles. The result was one of his best songs, ***"The Shan Van Vogh,"*** Irish Gaelic for ***"poor old woman,"*** a parody of an Irish broadside about the Rebellion of 1798.

Forbes & Cole Store Image

But, in spite of her faults, Larry gives her a comic side – the purchase of the chamber pot, for instance: ***"I am troubled this last year, with one that's got no ear and it's awkward for to lug, said the Shan Van Vogh."*** And although she is old, she is not about to give up: ***"If I am only on my legs, I will bring you down some eggs when the hens begin to lay, said the Shan Van Vogh."***

Perhaps Larry's gentle treatment of the woman had something to do with his own family. His mother, Annie, was then an old woman. She had four children and a grandchild living in her house and she was still running a store.

And there is something else. As he often did, Larry spoke for the community in this song, a community which still had compassion for the old and weak. In rural Prince Edward Island, there was forgiveness and even admiration for a poor, old person who quite simply refused to give up!

In the battle of wits between the Shan Van Vogh and Forbes, the well-to-do village merchant, Larry and the community he spoke for were, for better or worse, on the side of the underdog.

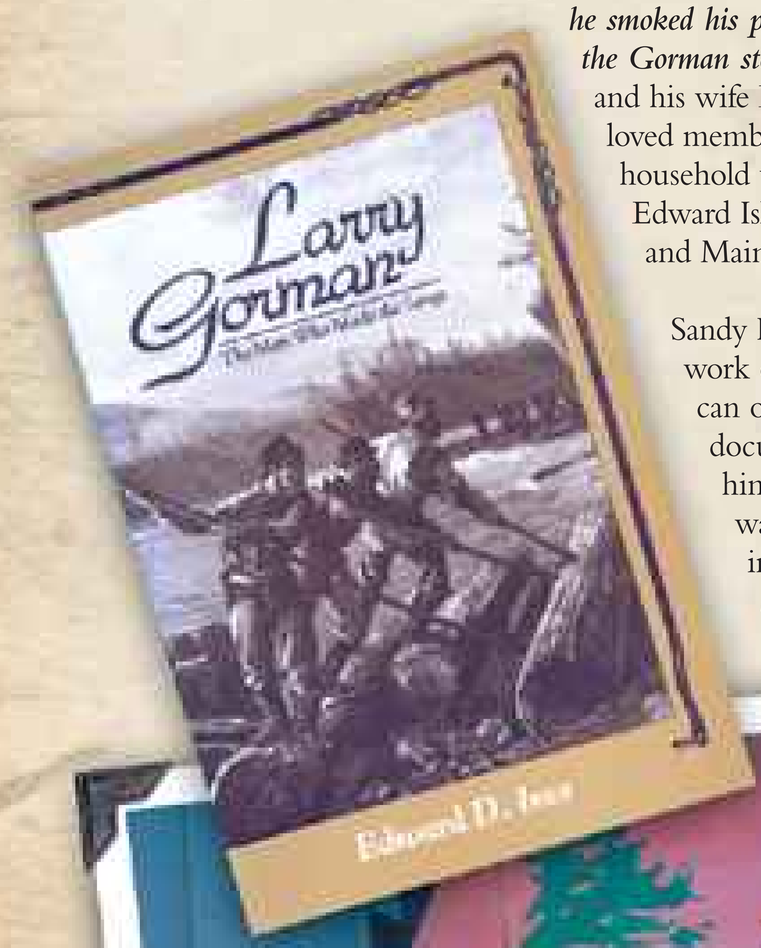
# The Gorman Legend

## The Groundbreaking Work of Sandy Ives

Dr. Sandy Ives was a young folklorist (Big Jim Pendergast referred to him as *"but a lad"*) when he first came to the Island, in 1957, to research the songs of Larry Gorman, a woods poet he had heard about in Maine. Ives set out to tell Gorman's story by gathering texts, documents, oral history, and legend from all over the Northeast. The result was a book of outstanding scholarship, ***Larry Gorman: The Man Who Made the Songs.***

Ives' book was larger that its subject for it came to grips with a number of problems about traditional song which had been debated by folklorists for decades. Two of these were especially important: How do folksongs originate, and what role does the individual artist play in their creation? Further, he ventured on paths avoided by other scholars, exploring the little-known field of local folksong – perhaps the most important category of all traditional song.

Written in classic style, Sandy Ives' book has been treasured both by scholars and by those who had inherited the Gorman verses as part of their birthright as rural people. (Folklorist John Cousins has noted that *"The most worn copy I ever say lay on a little stand by my father's chair where, his fishing years gone, he smoked his pipe and read and re-read the Gorman story."*) Eventually Sandy and his wife Bobby became much-loved members of a great, extended household which included Prince Edward Island, the Miramichi and Maine.



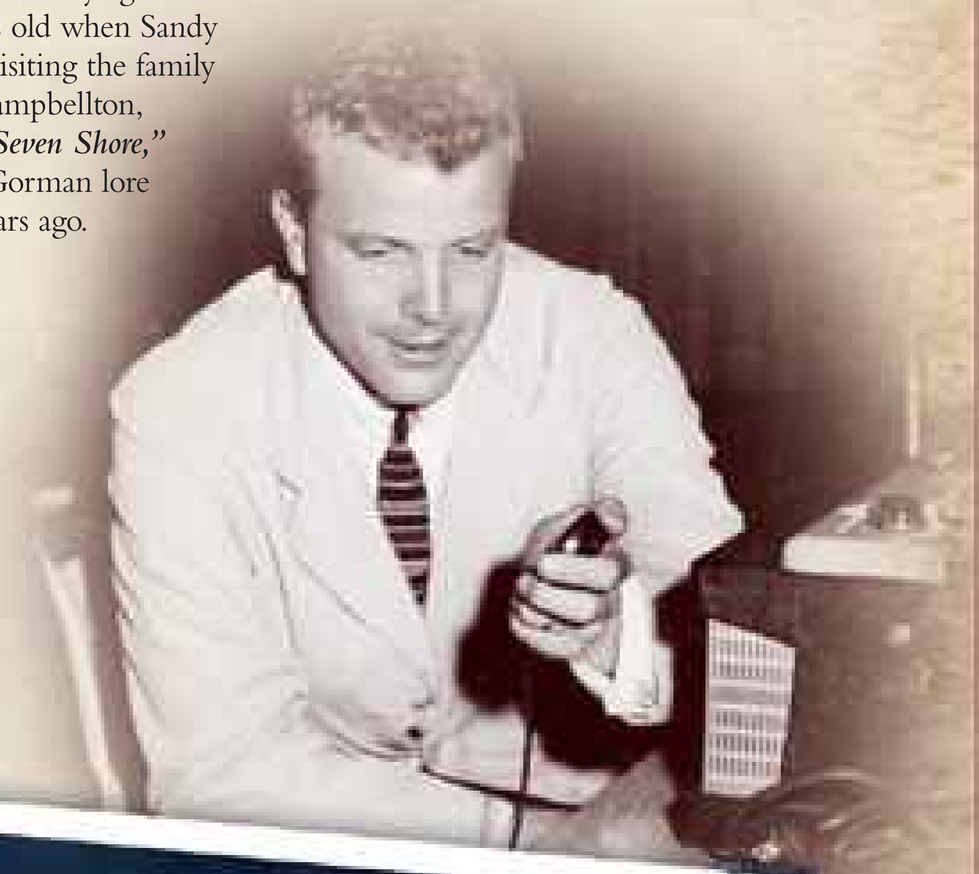

Sandy Ives wrote the definitive work on Larry Gorman. We can only add to it, exploring documents not available to him 50 years ago. In that way, we make small improvements to *"the house that Sandy built."*

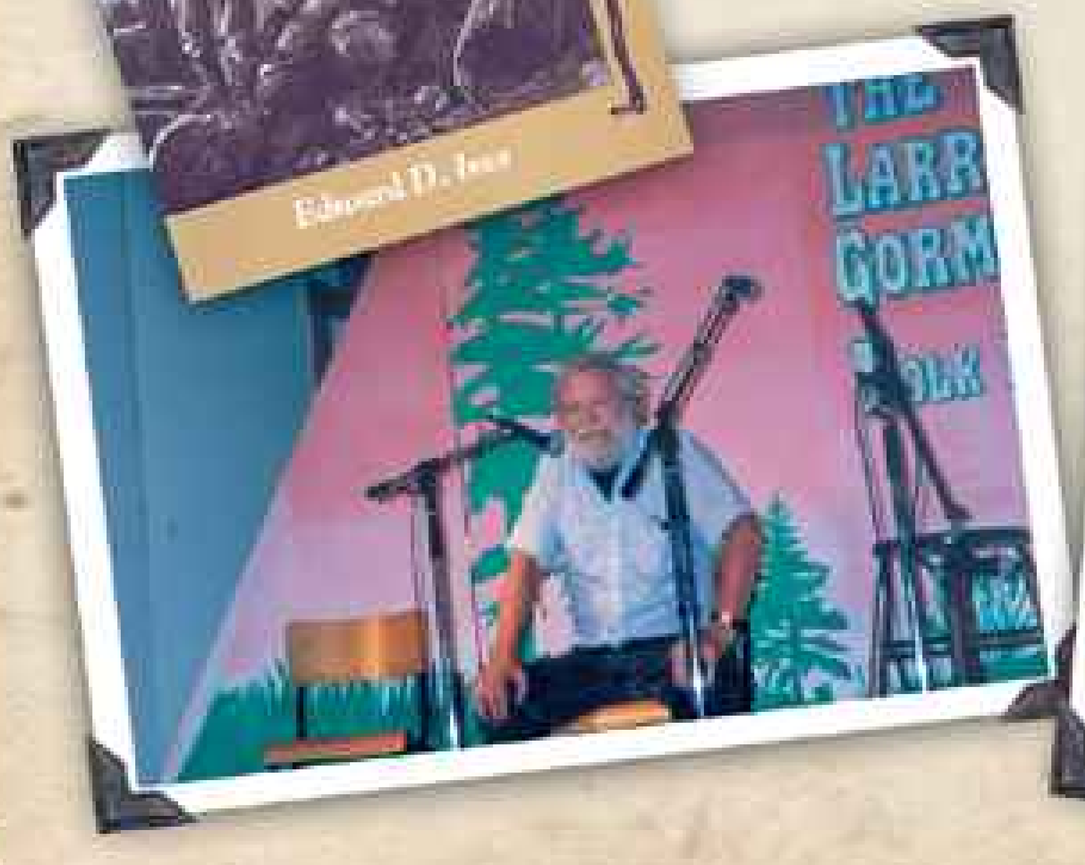
## The Larry Gorman Folk Festival

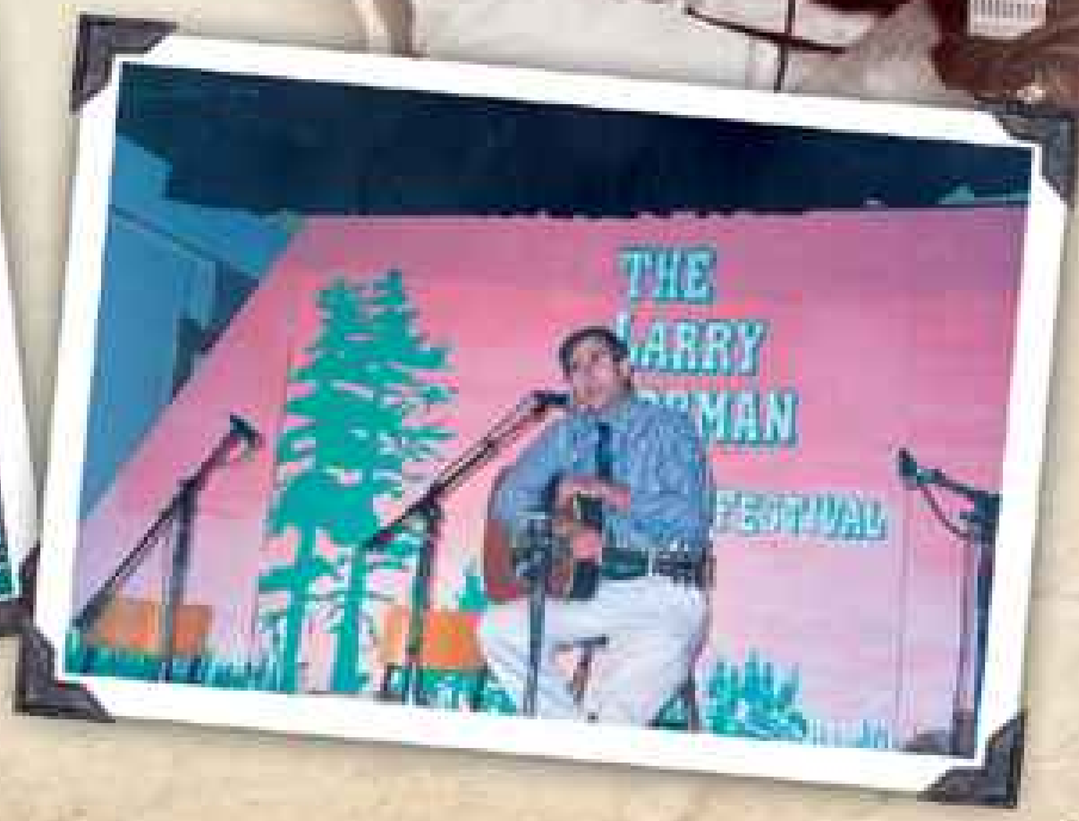
One lovely summer day in the early 1990s, Tyne Valley merchant Rod MacNeil stood on his front lawn in conversation with a *"stranger."* The visitor turned out to be someone quite familiar with the area – folklorist Sandy Ives. *"Wouldn't it be a grand idea,"* they eventually mused, *"to have a local folk festival dedicated to the memory and music of Larry Gorman?"*

With organizing support from the Institute of Island Studies at UPEI, the first Larry Gorman Folk Festival was held in the summer of 1993, in the historic Britannia Hall. Since then, the Folk Festival has become an annual mid-summer event in the Valley. Performers and audience members come from near and far to celebrate the folk music and folklore of the Northeast – and beyond – both traditional and contemporary. Maritimes folklore-researcher Clary Croft has dubbed the event *"a small jewel of a festival."*

Along with Sandy Ives, local Island folklorist and singer John Cousins has been a perennial favourite at the Festival. John realized his folklore vocation at an early age: he was but 12 years old when Sandy Ives came visiting the family home in Campbellton, *"along Lot Seven Shore,"* collecting Gorman lore some 50 years ago.







# The Songs of Larry Gorman

# The Horse's Confession

He came from a time and place where horses were beloved above all other animals. For without horses, a man in a rural culture had little rank: as someone noted, ***"there was great grieving in the household"*** when a horse died. The winter Larry was ten years old, the Gormans lost two precious horses, and he may never have forgotten it. Sandy Ives, Gorman's biographer, tells us that when Larry was an old man in Brewer, Maine, he would stop by the horse pasture to sing and talk to the horses there. Anyone who mistreated horses on the Island was judged by the community, and more than one song exists censuring men who misused these animals.

The story behind ***"The Horse's Confession"*** is as follows.

The local Presbyterian minister had a horse, a doted-upon, pet animal which he eventually sold to another man in the community. The new owner loaned the horse to several other people who drove it hard, left it out in the cold, and fed it poorly. These ***"goings on"*** were probably known to everyone in Trout River and Tyne Valley, and as we might expect Larry lashed out in song.

There's an amusing, rather ironic religious angle to this song. Although the Gormans were Catholics, this horse considered itself a thorough-going Protestant and much resented being driven to Mass at the Catholic church in Grand River.

*Come brother geldings, lend an ear*
*And listen to my story;*
*In these few verses you will hear*
*And it's for me you'll feel sorry.*

*Though I am all brown with sweat,*
*My skin was once as black as jet,*
*That time I was the Parson's pet,*
*'Twas then I was in my glory.*

*For seeing horses every day*
*That's fed so well on oats and hay*
*And sport about in harness gay*
*It makes me melancholy.*

*When I came to this country*
*I met with great disaster;*
*It was a fatal blow to me*
*The day I changed my master.*

*Though I dearly loved the first,*
*The second one I've oft-times cursed,*
*The third proved to be far the worst;*
*You can tell that by my pasture.*

*They take me down to Crapaud,*
*More times to Lot Eleven;*
*I'm driven in to Summerside*
*And back to Lot Seven.*

*This is the way that I am used,*
*Kicked and cuffed and badly bruised,*
*It's no great wonder I'd refuse*
*To grind bark for MacNevin.*

*Those brats of boys get on my back,*
*They really do provoke me;*
*They tie a rope around me neck,*
*It's tight enough to choke me.*

*I'm seldom driven by a man,*
*I'm always in a caravan;*
*It's Cooper's boy or Ed McCann*
*That's always sent to yoke me.*

*Another thing I've got to tell –*
*I'm subject to a colic;*
*And before I am right well*
*They lend me to White Alec.*

*Oh he is the boy to make me fly,*
*It's the truth I don't deny;*
*And he takes me to a place where I*
*Hear nothing spoke but Gaelic.*

*When he gets me it's his delight*
*To canter me and run me;*
*Instead of coming home that night*
*He keeps me over Sunday.*

*He is the boy to make me jump,*
*He leaves great welts upon my rump,*
*He keeps me tethered to a stump*
*From Saturday to Monday.*

*Another thing that grieved me sore*
*And broke my heart forever,*
*Instead of going to my own church*
*They take me to Grand River.*

*When many a hungry hour I've passed,*
*Not tasting either hay or grass,*
*I stand out there 'til after Mass –*
*Oh Lord, don't it make me shiver.*

*I see the crowd assemble there*
*Dressed in their silks and stin,*
*But what still comes worse to me*
*Is the Mass is sung in Latin.*

*There's many a thing I've left untold,*
*I'm oft-times wet and oft-times cold;*
*For all these reasons I've been told*
*I've good reason to complain, sir.*

# The Baptists

Although Larry Gorman liked to target individuals, he also seldom hesitated to attack groups when he felt the urge. Such was the case of ***"The Baptists,"*** one of the most famous songs from western Prince Edward Island.

The legend holds that Gorman took offence when his younger sister Annie, teaching school at Knutsford, fell in love with and married Samuel Sweet, a Baptist from the O'Leary Road.

The truth is a bit more complicated.

Annie Gorman did marry Samuel Sweet, a good man and respected farmer; however, Samuel was a Bible Christian and not a Baptist. Annie, on the other hand, remained true to her faith and is buried in St. Mark's Catholic Church cemetery, Lot Seven. Nevertheless, Larry did write the song, perhaps not making too fine a distinction between Bible Christians and Baptists.

In the days when such things mattered, the less demonstrative Catholics and Presbyterians saw the Baptists as just too enthusiastic, with Mr. Gordon, their zealous new minister; their outdoor baptisms in Ebenezer Crossman's mill pond at Cape Wolfe; and their unfettered singing. Gorman had a target – one about which both Catholics and a good many Protestants would sympathize with him. One suspects that he may have heard Baptist open-air singing, and watched them ***"stemming out the cold Navoo"*** to service. To add insult to injury, he put a good Baptist tune (***"In the Cross"***) to the song.

*There came to us a patron saint,*
*His name was Mr. Gordon;*
*Against him we'll make no complain,*
*For we must go accordin'.*

*He saw that we were all astray,*
*And he came here to guide us;*
*If we his rules should disobey*
*He tells us woe betide us.*

*To be dipped! To be dipped!*
*'Tis enough to kill one!*
*To think that we would all be dipped*
*In Ebenezer's mill pond.*

*Here comes this holy man of God,*
*Gathering up his lost ones,*
*Preaching to his famous squad,*
*The Morrills and the Crossmans.*

*The Baptists they are very thick,*
*They think they have the right time;*
*They raise from every bush you kick,*
*Especially in the night-time.*

*To be dipped! To be dipped!*
*'Tis enough to kill one!*
*To think that we would all be dipped*
*In Ebenezer's mill pond.*

*The Baptists they're a nervy crew*
*When they do get together,*
*Stemming out to cold Nauvoo*
*Despite cold wind and weather.*

*On Sunday evening [the girls] go to church*
*Escorted by their father,*
*But on the way returning home*
*A young man they would rather.*

*To be dipped! To be dipped!*
*'Tis enough to kill one!*
*To think that we would all be dipped*
*In Ebenezer's mill pond.*

# The Scow on Cowden's Shore

The great folksong scholar of the Northeast, Sandy Ives, once said that ***"The Scow on Cowden's Shore"*** was Larry Gorman's best song. It certainly is a great one and includes everything that is vintage Gorman: his knowledge that he could hurt people with verse, his awareness that people both hated and feared him, his own sense of being isolated from ***"the uncultivated rubbish"*** around him, and his habitual malice towards both the community and the individuals in it.

Cowden's Shore was on the Miramichi River, the center of Atlantic Canada's greatest lumbering region. Larry was working on the southern branch of the river, called the South-west Miramichi, on or near the ***"Boom"*** which held the logs to be driven down river. The working men, from every part of the Maritimes, lived in a great old scow anchored on the river. Larry observed them. He ***"took their measure"*** and composed this song, probably sometime during the 1870s.

The song begins innocently enough: ***"My name is Larry Gorman, to all hands I mean no harm."*** But his name, as you will discover, is the only true part of that statement.

*My name is Larry Gorman, to all hands I mean no harm;*
*You need not be alarmed for you've heard of me before;*
*I can make a song or sing 'un, I can fix it neat and bring it.*
*And the title that I'll give it is "The Scow on Cowden Shore."*

*I have got many's the foe and the same I do know,*
*So amongst them all I go, and it grieves their hearts full sore;*
*For I know that they could shoot me, cremenate [?] or prosecute me,*
*But they kindly salute me round the scow on Cowden shore.*

*There was men from many places, of many different races,*
*With pale and swarthy faces, I cannot name them o'er;*
*Island men and Restigouchers, there's Nashwaakers and Pugmooshers,*
*All assembled here together round the scow on Cowden shore.*

*There was men from Oromocta, some more from Rooshibucta,*
*From Fredericton town and Bathurst, and MacDonalds from Bras D'Or;*
*There's night ramps and gallivanters, there's swift runners and rafcanters [?]*
*All work for daily wages round the scow on Cowden shore.*

*There was the two young Joyces with their unhuman voices,*
*Kept making peculiar noises till their throats got quite sore;*
*Oh for Indian Devil, they would be far more civil*
*Than those uncultivated rubbage round the scow on Cowden shore.*

*There was the Widow Whinny, she sold ale and cokaninny,*
*To get the poor fool's penny she sold apples by the score;*
*She sold whiskey, gin and fly beer, some odd porter, ale, and cider,*
*Which made them whoop and stagger round the scow in Cowden shore.*

*Dan Brown and Bill Buggy, one night got very groggy,*
*The night being dark and foggy and we heard a teejus roar,*
*They were some intoxicated, and get somewhat agitated,*
*All hands they did upright it round the scow on Cowden shore.*

*Dan Brown, when he begins, he's a curious little man, oh,*
*He'll study and he'll plan 'till he gets to Whinny's door;*
*On he'll drink beer and whiskey, until he gets pretty frisky,*
*And then he'll turn quite sozzy to the scow on Cowden shore.*

*Dan Brown's a splendid singer and in dances he will swing her*
*He'll bring to her good tidings of a new bank bill or more;*
*Oh, she'll laugh and she'll be funny, when she knows he's got the money,*
*She'll call him her darling honey from the scow on Cowden shore.*

*"The True Lover's Discussion," is once more brought in fashion,*
*She'll keep quietly hugging, while he sings it o'er and o'er;*
*For his voice is so melodious, that the ladies they'll join in chorus*
*And their echoes all sing o'er us round the scow on Cowden shore.*

*Dan Brown and Johnny Leighton on the women they go a-waiting,*
*They go out on a Sunday with Miss Vickers and Kate Poor;*
*It's all to gain insight for all hands they mean to invite*
*You're welcome to a clean by [?] round the scow on Cowden shore.*

*Some of the biokes spend good few dollars in fine shirts and paper collars,*
*And in good whiskey wallers til they fight and get them tore;*
*Oh they'll fight and they will wrangle and each other they'll badly mangle,*
*They're called hard men to handle from the scow on Cowden shore.*

*Oh some they go a-courting while others they go a-sporting,*
*They go into a circus to view scenes of days gone o'er;*
*In the like I take no pleasure, so I sit down at my leisure,*
*And I daily take their measure from the scow on Cowden shore.*

*So now my song is ended and I hope no-one is offended*
*The like I never intended and your pardon I'll implore;*
*So you humble, mild, and witty, I pray on me take pity,*
*And join me humble ditty from the scow on Cowden shore.*

# The Winter of Seventy-Three

The winter of 1873 must have been a glum one for Larry Gorman. He may not have been in good humour that fall when he left the Island, where the previous months had been taken up by the acrimonious Confederation debates – in which his father Thomas Gorman had been on the side of the anti-Confederates. Financial depression had gripped the nearly bankrupt Island and Larry was on the move again, looking for work.

He found it, temporarily, in Snowball's Mill at Newcastle, New Brunswick. He worked throughout the winter of '73-74, all the time surveying his workmates. In the spring he made a song about camp life.

Gorman seems to have made an attempt to avoid hurting the feelings of his fellow workers, though he does take nasty swipes at Archie Woodman and a fellow Islander, big Jim Whalen. The song is valuable, moreover, for the picture it gives of Gorman, the solitary man, watching the goings-on, and ***"when the men have all gone out"*** being ***"left to watch the camp"*** in the peace and quiet of the woods clearing.

***"The Winter of Seventy-Three"*** presents a marvellously clear picture of a man who liked to be alone with his thoughts, to ruminate at leisure, and perhaps to recount the proceedings in verse.

*It being early in September in eighteen seventy-three,*
*'Twas the day I left my native isle and came to Miramichi;*
*I hired the day I landed for to work in Snowball's mill,*
*A large three-story building at the foot of Sawdust Hill.*

*I worked away for three long weeks with a discontented will,*
*But I soon made my acquaintance with the folks of Sawdust Hill;*
*On the tenth day of November when the mill it did shut down,*
*Which caused a general scatter and the men go walking 'round.*
*I heard of those who wanted men, and it put me in good cheer,*
*And I packed my kennebecker and for Indiantown did steer.*

*When I arrived at Indiantown being quite fatigued from tramp,*
*I fell in with two portage teams bound for McCullam camp;*
*They said that I might ride with them, that's if I did desire,*
*And that if I would come along, they thought I would get hired.*

*Oh I rode with Willy Derringham, a verse for him I'll make;*
*He drove a team of ro-uns [i.e. roans] that he brought from the Grand Lake.*
*The horse he weighed twelve hundred pounds, a noble beast to haul,*
*And the mare she was a beauty, although she was but small.*

*Now I being at my journey's end, and hungry, tired, and cold,*
*The face of Billy O'Brien was the first I did behold;*
*And so glad was I to see him, and I asked who was the boss;*
*He pointed to a little man whose name was Charlie Cross.*

*So I hired the next morning and concluded for to stop;*
*Along with Joseph Fullyerton they sent me for to chop.*
*Charlie Cross and Guy McCullam they both cruised the woods all round,*
*And thought they might do better down in MacIneary's Ground.*

*So we all packed up quite early and that place we did forsake,*
*And moved out to another camp situated by a lake;*
*Along with Archie Woodworth there, a silly young gaw-gaw,*
*They placed me on the landing for to haul a cross-cut saw.*

*There was one big Island man along among the rest,*
*Two feet across the shoulders, in proportion 'round the breast;*
*He was very big but not awful cute, Jim Whelan was his name;*
*On the second of March he cut his foot and he marched off downstream.*
*He took with him five pound of gum [i.e. spruce gum] their favors for to gain*
*But all the thanks he got for it, they said that he was green.*
*He blowed the roost upon me and he said I'd made a song,*
*And proved me out a traiteer [i.e. traitor] for which many the man was hung.*

*Now we being there and set to work, good lumber which we found.*
*The spruce they stood in bunches, they were handsome, stout, and sound;*
*But Guy not yet being satisfied, at Charlie Cross did say,*
*And he says, "We must forsake this place, there's no use for two-sleighs."*

*It being on our way a-going out past Barney Taylor's camp,*
*I fell in with Patrick McLaughlin and I hired for to swamp;*
*For to work for Patrick McLaughlin, 'tis very hard they say,*
*For there's only three men to a team and they drive ten turns a day.*

*So now the crowd has all gone out and I'm left to watch the camp,*
*And the martins and the lucifees [i.e. loup-cervier] go skipping o'er the swamp;*
*The cruel winter is over and thank God I'm still alive,*
*And if the weather proves favorable I mean to stay up and drive.*

*So now to conclude and finish as my ballad I must end,*
*I hope I have said nothing wrong to those shantyboys offend;*
*When those logs are in the Southwest Boom I hope youse all to see;*
*Some will go to Andy Conners' and have a glorious spree.*

# The Shan Van Vogh

Of all the songs composed by Larry Gorman, this one comes closest to being gentle. The story which comes to us carries the stamp of truth. An old woman had outwitted local storekeepers by promising much and delivering little. In fact, she had tricked Larry's mother Annie who, after Thomas Gorman's death, ran a ***"shop"*** in Tyne Valley.

The old lady's tricks were not lost on young Larry, who likely had personal dealings with her when he helped his mother in the store. In June of 1979, James H. Forbes was opening a large business in the village. He was also a young man, inexperienced, and, as the old woman believed, an easy mark.

Larry composed ***"The Shan Van Vogh"*** *(Irish Gaelic for* ***"poor old woman"****)* to relate this story of a cunning old woman and the local storekeeper. First, there are her plottings when she hears that Forbes is setting up shop; and second, her comic monologue in the store as she attempts to extract goods from Forbes and give him nothing in return.

There is little of Larry's usual vitriol in this song. Instead, he created a comic scene that merchant Forbes and possibly the old lady herself could have laughed at.

*I am getting very gaunt, said the Shan Van Vogh,*
*Of provision I am scant, said the Shan Van Vogh,*
*When Forbes will come here, it's the very place we'll steer,*
*We'll get everything we want, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I wonder when he'll start, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I wish he would be smart, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*My provision's getting scarce, and with hunger I am fierce,*
*I am keen to make a start, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*Such parties as we owe, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*We'll not pretend to know, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*We'll give them just a nod, when we meet them on the road*
*Whilst to Forbes we'll go, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*We must keep our secrets dark, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*If we want to make our mark, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*To handle our cards well, a good story we must tell*
*We'll promise hemlock bark, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*We'll promise him a sleigh, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*And half a ton of hay, said the Shan Von Vogh*
*We'll promise him some meat, some barley and some wheat*
*Just before we run away, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I've just come in to deal, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*Have you any Indian meal, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I mean to pay you soon by the latter end of June*
*With a carcass of fresh veal, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want some cotton spools, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*And a set of candle moulds, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I'll pay you with the hide of the little bull that died*
*All full of warble holes, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want a pair of boots, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*If the payment only suits, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*A pair both good and strong, I'll pay you before long*
*My husband's digging roots, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want to get a hood, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*Have you any very good, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I want a bunch of tape, and I'd like a bonnet shape*
*And some extract oflogwood, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want a yard of crepe, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*Some matches and a pipe, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*You'll have no need to fret, for your pay you're sure to get*
*When the berries will get ripe, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want some yellow dye, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*And some concentrated lye, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I have no money now, I give my solemn vow*
*But I'll pay you bye and bye, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want a new tea tray, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*If you'll trust me for the pay, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*If I am only on my legs, I will bring you down some eggs*
*When the hends begin to lay, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want to get a hat, said the Sahn Van Vogh*
*With the crown perfectly flat, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I want some kerosene, and a package of Roseien*
*To dye rags for a mat, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want to get a broom, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*And I want a fine tooth comb, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*With some manila rope, and a cake of toilet soap*
*And a bottle of perfume, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want some cotton tweed, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*And an ounce of turnip seed, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I want a lamp and flue, and I'd like a box of blue*
*And I think that's all I need, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want some cotton print, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*If you'll only give consent, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I am now in great distress, for I want a flashy dress*
*To attend the Sacrament, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want a pound of tea, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*If we only can agree, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I want two water pails, and a pound of shingle nails*
*And that will do for me, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want a mustard can, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*And I want a frying pan, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*Some sugar and some rice, some soda and some spice*
*Some pickles and cayenne, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*I want a water jug, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*And I want a chamber mug, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I am troubled this last year, with one that's got no ear*
*And it's awkward for to lug, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

*Now tell me what is due, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*I hope you will not sue, said the Shan Van Vogh*
*Just run up my account and tell me the amount*
*That's all I ask of you, said the Shan Van Vogh.*

# Bachelor's Hall

Larry Gorman had a grudge against bachelors, an odd attitude for a man who remained one himself until he was past 45. The rural communities he spoke for in his songs also had mixed views about unmarried men.

Sometimes, they were objects of humour, like the silly young (or old) fellow down the road who could not get a woman to marry him. On the other hand, a single man was something of a loose cannon in communities where married men often had to leave home to find work. Leaving the single men in charge was likened to putting foxes to watch the chickens.

Gorman aimed several songs, including a very nasty one, at bachelors. This song, called ***"Bachelor's Hall,"*** is more humorous. A man from Northam Station was on the hunt for a wife, having concluded that hiring a housekeeper was not a paying proposition. In a culture where material things were important to a girl, and more often to her parents, he advertised in a song.

***"Bachelor's Hall"*** is wonderful satire, and not so much bitter or harsh as mocking in its tone. There is no question, this bachelor is to be laughed at rather than feared.

*Young ladies all, both short, fat and tall,*
*On me you will surely take pity,*
*For a bachelor's hall is no place at all*
*And the same I'll explain in my ditty.*

*Folks boast of a life without any wife*
*They tell you it would be much cheaper*
*And you they'll persuade, the great riches they made*
*By hiring a frugal housekeeper.*

*But that's all a hoax, all those silly folk*
*Their outlays are much more extensive*
*And their story don't believe for they did me deceive*
*And I find that it's much more expensive.*

*If you'll listen to me or just come and see,*
*I'm well fitted out for housekeeping;*
*And the angels of love that flew as a dove*
*To my bedside they nightly come creeping.*

*So now, imps divine, if you'll only be mine,*
*Or just take a look at my welfare;*
*And if you say no, it's away I will go*
*In order to seek a wife elsewhere.*

*I've a comb and a glass, both mounted with brass*
*Some soap, a towel and two brushes;*
*My mirror will show from the top to the toe,*
*And a mattress made out of bulrushes.*

*I have two iron steads, I have two feather beds,*
*Some blankets, some quilts, and two pillows;*
*I have two hives of bees, I have many fruit trees*
*And for ornaments, two weeping willows.*

*I've a hen and a cock, I've a stove and a clock,*
*I have turkeys and geese by the dozen;*
*I've a cat and a dog and a two-hundred hog*
*That I purchased last spring from my cousin.*

*I have salt and fresh meats, I have cabbage and beets,*
*I've a large carving knife for the table;*
*Cups, saucers and bowls, and new candle molds,*
*I've a frying pan, saucepan and ladle.*

*And a box of white sand I keep always on hand,*
*All packed away safe for the winter;*
*I've a broom and a mop for to wipe every slop,*
*In your fingers you'll ne'er get a splinter.*

*My story don't doubt, I'm well fitted out,*
*My house is both papered and plastered;*
*I have knives, I have forks, I have bottles and corks,*
*I've a lamp and a new pepper caster.*

*But the best of all yet is my new chamber set,*
*My two sweet canaries in cages;*
*I've a bowl and a jug and another large mug*
*With the gilded flowers all round the edges.*

*In the summer so gay you can see every day*
*My lambkins so nimbly sporting;*
*And the fierce iron horse with its serpentine course*
*You will see it go by my door snorting.*

*I have a large farm, I've a house and a barn,*
*And a rich patch for rising tomatoes;*
*And I spared no expense in building a fence*
*For to keep the hogs from my potatoes.*

*And so now, imps divine, if you'll only be mine*
*Or just take a look at my welfare,*
*And if you say no, it's away I will go*
*In order to seek a wife elsewhere.*

*So now, ladies all, come each when I call,*
*Come Peggy, come Betsy, come Nancy;*
*When I see you all, both short, fall, and tall,*
*I will surely see one that I fancy.*

# The Boys of the Island

*The Boys of the Island"* is one of the most popular and widely-spread of all the songs attributed to Larry Gorman.

It is a tongue-in-cheek warning to green Island boys of the pitfalls and dangers awaiting them upon leaving their farms. And the gravest dangers are not in the woods themselves but in the lumber towns such as Bangor, Maine, where young man came to celebrate after their hard labour. There, they will be entrapped by the ***"bad rum"*** they have been deprived of in the camps. They will make a nuisance of themselves, in one way or another, and run the risk of being thrown in jail by ***"Tim Leary"*** or some other no-nonsense policeman.

The message is clear: ***"Stay home on the island and work on the farm."*** Sandy Ives collected fragments of this remarkable song from as far away as Alberta and British Columbia. It is truly a great woodsman's lyric, rollicking in tune, picture-clear in its comic effect, with a theme suggesting the composer was not taking either his warning or himself too seriously.

### *The Boys of the Island (I)*

*You sporting young heroes of Prince Edward Island,*
*Come a-listen to me and the tales I will tell;*
*Of a lumberman's life it is my intention*
*To advise all young men and the sensible youth.*
*A lumberman's life is a hard of duration,*
*It's mingled with sorrow, hard work, and bad rum;*
*And as the hereafter according to scripture,*
*The worst of his days are yet for to come.*

*It's true I'm a native of Prince Edward Island;*
*I left my old parents when eighteen years old.*
*I started out early all for to do better,*
*Return in the spring with two hands full of gold.*
*It's true my brave boys I have earned lots of money.*
*But the curse of all bushmen fell on me also;*
*My money it went like the snow in the June sun,*
*And back to the woods every fall I must go.*

*Oh the boys on the Island on the farms are not happy;*
*They'll say, "Let's go 'way, boys, we're doing no good."*
*Their mind is uneasy, continuously crazy*
*To go over to Bangor and work in the woods.*
*A new suit of clothes is prepared for the journey.*
*A long pair of boots made by Sherlock or Clark,*
*And a long kennebecker all packed up with homespun,*
*And then this fine young man's all ready to embark.*

*When he gets to Bangor he gets off at the station,*
*The bushmen look at him with a very keen eye;*
*Just look at the clothes that the youngster is wearing*
*And that will soon tell you he is a P.I.*
*In Bangor, they poison this youth with bad whiskey,*
*God, man, or the devil comes to him also;*
*All night he will drink; he'll get drunk and then sober;*
*He'll lay in the shade of a mulberry tree.*

### *The Boys of the Island (II)*

*You sporting young fellows of Prince Edward Island*
*Come listen to me and I'll tell you the truth;*
*From a lumberman's life it is my intention*
*To advise all young men and sensible youth.*

*Now the boys on the Island on the farms are not happy,*
*They say, "Let us go; we are doing no good!"*
*Their minds are uneasy, continually crazy,*
*For to get o'er to Bangor and work in the woods.*
*So a new suit of clothes is prepared for the journey,*
*A new pair of boots made by Sherlock or Clark,*
*A new Kennebecker well stuffed with good homespun,*
*And then the young Islander, he will embark.*

*He'll go o'er to Bangor and stand at the station –*
*The bushmen gaze on 'em all with a keen eye.*
*They look at the clothes that young fellow is wearing*
*And that will soon tell you he is a P.I.*
*Then up in the woods, happy and contented,*
*Where God, man, and devil come to them the same,*
*For rearing and tearing, cursing, and blaspheming,*
*For kicking and fighting is the down-river game.*

*In Bangor they'll poison the youth with bad whiskey*
*To the devil they banish all brandy and ale,*
*And then on the corner they find the youth tipsy,*
*They'll send for Tim Leary and march him to jail.*
*They may talk of the laws of the mother of Moses,*
*I've seen better laws among heathen chinee,*
*Where a man can get drunk and lay down and get sober*
*Beneath the deep shade of the mulberry tree.*

# The Good Old State of Maine

Larry Gorman spent most of his life working for other men, either in the woods or when he was fishing. There were many times when his resentment of bad bosses or poor working conditions boiled over into songs of protest.

One of his most vitriolic was directed toward Michael McElroy, for whom he fished at Miminegash, Prince Edward Island. In that song he spoke on behalf of the impoverished fishermen, warning them away from the clutches of a fish-buyer he hated. In Maine, his songs attacked the old woods boss Roderick MacDonald, described as ***"a parsimonious old slave driver."***

During his Maine years, Larry sometimes found employment in the lumber country of New Hampshire's Zealand Valley. Here too he found the wages, the working conditions, the behaviour of the woods bosses, indeed the whole kit-and-caboodle, not to his liking.

***"The Good Old State of Maine"*** contrasts the bad conditions in the New Hampshire woods with the much better situation to be found in Maine. It is a song of protest reminiscent of the great Depression era songs of Woodie Guthrie.

*Oh bushmen all, an ear I call, a tale I will relate,*
*My experience in the lumberwoods all in this Granite State;*
*Its snowclad hills, its winding rills, its mountains, rocks and plains,*
*You'll find it very different, boys, from the good old State of Maine.*

*The difference in the wages, boys, is scarcely worth a dime,*
*For every day you do not work you are forced to lose your time;*
*To pay your passage to and fro you'll find but little gain,*
*You would do as well to stay at home in that good old State of Maine.*

*And here in Zealand Valley you'll find seven feet of snow,*
*And work when the thermometer goes thirty-five below;*
*It averages three storms a week of snow and sleet or rain,*
*You seldom find such weather in that good old State of Maine.*

*They reckon things so neat and fine 'tis hard to save a stamp,*
*For every month they do take stock of things around the camp;*
*Stoves, pots, kettles, knives, and forks, a spokeshave or a plane,*
*Of those they take but small account in that good old State of Maine.*

*Then every night with pen and ink they figure up the cost,*
*The crew are held responsible for all things broke or lost;*
*An axe, a handle, or a spade, a bunk-hook or a chain –*
*The crew are never charged with tools in that good old State of Maine.*

*Those rules and regulations as I've mentioned here before,*
*They're in typewritten copies posted up on every door;*
*To lose your time and pay your board or work in snow or rain,*
*They'd call us fools to stand such rules in that good old State of Maine.*

*The boss he'll then address you in a loud commanding voice,*
*Saying, "You know the regulations, boys; therefore you have your choice.*
*We know he did not make them, and of him we don't complain,*
*For a better boss I never knew in that good old State of Maine.*

*If you don't like their style, my boys, you can go down the line,*
*But if you leave them in the lurch they'll figure with you fine;*
*They'll cut down your wages, charge you carfare on their train,*
*We never heard of such a thing in that good old State of Maine.*

*The aleners [i.e. aliens] and foreigners they flock in by the score,*
*The diversity of languages would equal Babbler's tower;*
*Italians, Russians, Poles, and Finns, a Dutchman or a Dane,*
*We never had such drones as those in that good old State of Maine.*

*And for those sub-contractors now I've got a word to say,*
*If you work for a jobber her you are apt to lose your pay;*
*For there is no lien law in this state, the logs you can't retain,*
*While the lumber's holding for your pay in that good old State of Maine.*

*Now for the grub, I'll give it a run, and that it does deserve,*
*The cooks become so lazy they'll allow the men to starve;*
*For it's bread and beans, then beans and bread, then bread and beans again,*
*Of grub we would sometimes have a change in that good old State of Maine.*

*Our meat and fish is poorly cooked the bread is sour and old;*
*The beans are dry and musty and doughnuts are hard and old;*
*To undertake to chew one, that would give your jaw a pain,*
*For they're not the kind we used to find in that good old State of Maine.*

*So now my song is concluded any my story's to an end,*
*If I have made a statement wrong, I'm willing to amend;*
*I like the foreman and the crew, of them I can't complain,*
*For a better crew I never knew in that good old State of Maine.*

*So here's adieu to camp and crew, to Henery and Sons;*
*Their names are great throughout this state, they're one of her largest funs;*
*I wish them all prosperity e'er I return again,*
*For I'll mend my ways and spend my days in that good old State of Maine.*

# Prince Edward Isle, Adieu

It is not surprising, given the nature of folksongs and folklore, that there is a debate about the actual creator of certain songs associated with Larry Gorman. This certainly is true of ***"Prince Edward Isle, Adieu"***, which has been attributed to at least three songmakers – Gorman, Lawrence Doyle, and James H. Fitzgerald, all of whose lives overlapped.

Unquestionably, it is a unique song, a political and historical document casting back over the Island's lamentable experience with the absentee landlords, and aiming a scathing broadside at the politicians who had, in 1873, ***"sold Prince Edward's Isle"*** into Confederation.

Circumstantial evidence can be used to make a case for either Doyle or Fitzgerald as the composer of this song; however, Gorman's candidacy is every bit as strong. In the song ***"The Winter of Seventy-Three,"*** Gorman says he left his ***"native Island"*** that divisive fall; and living at home, he would have seen his father Thomas attack the Confederation scheme at public meetings. There is also a hint from a version of another of his songs from the late 1870s – ***"The Gull Decoy"*** – in which he refers sarcastically to ***"those lofty speeches from Ottawa."***

Aside from its attacks on Confederation, ***"Prince Edward Isle Adieu's"*** main theme is found in the title. It is a woeful lamentation for the sons and daughters of Island pioneers who ***"in deep despair"*** were being forced to leave their home in order to find opportunity. Larry was one of them: beginning in 1873, he left Trout River each year to look for work in New Brunswick, Maine and New Hampshire.

*Come all y hardy sons of toil*
*Pray lend an ear to me*
*Whilst I relate the dismal state*
*Of this our country.*
*I will not pause to name the cause*
*But keep it close in view;*
*For comrades grieve when they leave*
*And bid this Isle adieu.*

*There is a band within this land*
*Who live in pomp and pride;*
*To swell their store they rob the poor;*
*On pleasures' wings they ride.*
*With dishes fine their tables shine,*
*They live in princely style.*
*Those are the knaves who made us slaves,*
*And sold Prince Edward Isle.*

*The Father's boy, his only joy,*
*Must bid a sad farewell;*
*They're parting here, no more to meet*
*On earth, for who can tell.*
*Far from this Isle, in prairies wild,*
*In countries now that's new,*
*Content they stay, and bless the day*
*They bid this Isle adieu.*

*Our daughters fair, in deep despair,*
*Must leave their native land;*
*To foreign shores they're swiftly borne,*
*As I do understand.*
*The tide it flows, they all must go*
*There's nothing else to do!*
*While parents grieve as they must leave*
*And bid this Isle adieu.*

*Through want and care and scanty fare,*
*The poor man drags along;*
*He hears a whistle loud and shrill,*
*The "Iron Horse" speeds on;*
*He throws his pack upon his back,*
*There's nothing left to do;*
*He boards the train for Bangor, Maine,*
*Prince Edward Isle adieu.*

*The reson why so many fly,*
*And leave their Island home;*
*Because 'tis clear, they can't stay here,*
*For work to do there's none;*
*In other climes there's better times,*
*There can't be worse 'tis true;*
*So weal or woe, away they go,*
*Prince Edward Isle adieu.*

*In days or yore, from Scotland's shores*
*Our fathers crossed the main;*
*Tho dark and drear, they settled here*
*To quit the "Tyrant's" chain;*
*With hearts so stout, they put to rout*
*The forest beasts so wild;*
*Rough logs they cut, to build their huts*
*Upon Prince Edward Isle.*

*With ax well ground, they leveled down*
*The forest far and wide;*
*With spade and hoe the seed they sowed,*
*The plow was left untried;*
*With sickle hooks they cut their stooks,*
*No "Buckeyes" were in style;*
*They spent their days – their ashes lay*
*Upon Prince Edward Isle.*

*The place was new, the roads were few,*
*The people lived content,*
*The landlords came, their fields to claim;*
*Each settler must pay rent.*
*So now you see, the turning tide*
*That drove us to exile,*
*Begin again to cross the main,*
*And leave Prince Edward Isle.*

*But changes great have come of late,*
*And brought some curious things;*
*Dominion men have brought us in,*
*The Isle with railways ring;*
*There's maps and charts, and towns apart,*
*And tramps of every style;*
*There's doctors mute and lawyers cute,*
*Upon Prince Edward Isle.*

*There's judges too, who find a clue*
*To all the merchants' bills;*
*There's school trustees, who want no fees*
*For using all their skill*
*There's law for dogs, for geese, for hogs,*
*At this pray do not smile.*
*For changes great have come of late,*
*Upon Prince Edward Isle.*

*So here's success to all who press*
*The question of Free Trade;*
*Join hand in hand, our cause is grand;*
*They're plainly in the shade.*
*The mainland route, the world throughout;*
*Take courage now, stand true,*
*My verse is run, my song is done,*
*Prince Edward Island adieu.*