



## ***“Becoming Cold-hearted like the Gentiles Around Them”: Scottish Gaelic in the United States 1872-1912***

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### **Abstract**

Historians have occasionally recognized the presence of Scottish Gaelic-speaking immigrants in the United States, but no previous study has attempted to determine the relationship between the Gaelic-American community and their language in detail. This article makes use of evidence available in contemporary periodicals to examine the attitudes of Scottish Gaels resident in the United States towards their native language from 1872 to 1912, and attempts to assess the efforts made to maintain that language. The failure of Gaelic to thrive in the United States is evident in the lack of development of effective strategies to buttress the language. The evidence for several linguistic domains is examined, as well as the prevailing attitudes about Gaelic and how Gaelic-speakers responded to, and were influenced by, the representation of their native language.

### **Keywords**

Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic, Ethnolinguistics, American Immigration

### **1. Introduction**

Historians have occasionally recognized the presence of Scottish Gaelic-speaking immigrants in the United States, but no previous study has attempted to determine the relationship between the Gaelic-American community and their language in detail. This article makes use of evidence available in contemporary periodicals to examine the attitudes of Scottish Gaels resident in the United States towards their native language from 1872 to 1912, and will attempt to assess the efforts made to maintain that language.

Although we can only catch a glimmer of contemporary events, conditions, and perceptions from these texts, I hope that this evidence and analysis will provide a tentative framework for interpreting such information and encourage others to look for further sources.

Scottish Gaelic is closely related to, but distinct from, Irish Gaelic. In the early 1900s, native Gaelic speakers could be found throughout most of the bounds of the Scottish Highlands as defined in the early modern period, even in such marginal areas as Dumbartonshire, Sutherland, Easter Ross, Atholl, Argyll, the island of Bute, and Aberdeenshire. Thus, Gaelic was spoken by migrants to the United States from these areas, as well as the more strongly Gaelic-speaking areas of the Western Highlands and Hebrides. The earliest Scottish Gaelic immigrant communities in North America settled in Georgia, North Carolina and New York in the 1730s, and migration to these rural destinations continued for a couple of generations. By the second half of the 1800s, however, Gaelic had become extinct as a community language in all of these places (*c.f.* Newton 2001a; 2001b).

After the American Revolution, most direct migration was redirected to British North America (now Canada), which continued to attract the majority of Highland emigrants into the mid 1800s. By the late 1800s the majority of Gaelic-speaking immigrants to the United States either came from Scotland via Canada or were born in Gaelic-speaking Canadian communities (Dunn 1968: 123-135; Campbell 1990: 2, 26-7; Newton 2001a: 163-175). Given the prominence of Canadians in the Gaelic societies and literature of this time, they must have comprised a salient proportion of the Gaelic-speaking population in the United States (especially in urban areas).

There has never been a systematic analysis of the distribution of Scottish Gaelic speakers during this time period, not least because there is a dearth of data from which to work. The first census that recorded the mother tongue of citizens was taken in 1910. The purpose of this question on the census, however, was to gather statistics about racial and ethnic origins during the height of tensions about immigration. The language question was particularly poor in regard to Celtic languages, as it assumed a correlation between national origin and mother tongue. Nonetheless, by working with a sample of the 1910 census results, the number of Gaelic speakers in the United States has been estimated at 37,500 (Dembling n.d.). From empirical evidence in contemporary literature<sup>1</sup> and from research on the 1910 census (Dembling, personal communication), the bulk of the Scottish Gaelic population in the United States at this time seems to have been concentrated in the areas with the fastest growing economies, namely, New York City, Detroit, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco.

There are several reasons to focus on the years 1872 to 1912. First, Highlanders understood the Education Act of 1872, which legislated compulsory education through the medium of English in Scotland, as an attack on Gaelic. This precipitated a response from the Gaelic community, the stirrings of the first conscious Gaelic revitalization movement in Scotland, the campaign for a Chair of Celtic in the University of Edinburgh and the establishment of the influential Gaelic-medium periodical *An Gàidheal*. Second, more information about Gaelic immigrant communities during these years is available due to the increase in support for Gaelic in periodicals. Third, immigration into the United States was at its peak during this period, making it a focus for the study of ethnic relations. Finally, this is also the period in which Irish revitalization developed in the

United States, and there are clear links between Irish and Scottish Gaelic organizations and language movements.

Gaelic literature composed in North America demonstrates that Gaelic speakers were conscious of the process of assimilation into Anglo-American society and able to make comments on it. When they remark at all on language shift, poets typically disparaged those who chose to reject the language of their people in favor of English, and praised those who remained faithful to it. The degree of “alien-ness” is sometimes expressed in terms of temperature, so that those who have turned their backs on their Highland heritage are characterized as being “cold” (*fuar* in the original Gaelic texts). I have set all such terminology in bold type in order to highlight its appearance for the reader.<sup>2</sup>

Maintaining the vitality and purpose of an immigrant language requires spheres of activity that are best (or uniquely) served by that language, rather than by English. There are a number of common strategies: publishing periodicals and other forms of literature in the immigrant language, establishing religious institutions where worship is conducted in the language, forming organizations that provide a social domain for the language, and teaching the language and relevant aspects of culture and tradition in educational institutions. The failure of Gaelic to thrive in the United States is evident in the lack of development of such strategies to buttress the language. The evidence for each of these domains will be examined, as well as the prevailing attitudes about Gaelic and how Gaelic-speakers responded to, and were influenced by, the representation of their native language.

## 2. The Role of Gaelic Periodicals

Periodicals can play a significant role in the life of any culture. The distribution of affordable printed matter to subscribers at a geographical remove from one another can expand the size of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) literacy can facilitate long and complex arguments that may involve a number of participants; the use of print can impart gravity and authority to the issues it addresses; the accessibility of print facilitates the dissemination of ideas, values, tastes and perceptions. Periodicals can also act as springboards for the development of modern literature by facilitating linguistic renovation, providing the opportunity for low-cost, low-risk literary experimentation with literary forms, and testing readership interest in various subjects and genres. Periodicals document the contemporary Gaelic world and provide a valuable resource for determining the attitudes and activities of Gaels regarding their perceptions of language and identity.

The development of Gaelic periodicals began in earnest with *An Teachdaire Gaelach* in Scotland in 1829, and continued sporadically with periodicals that tended to be somewhat short-lived. From at least 1840 there appeared material which related to immigrant Gaelic communities in the United States, indicating that there was direct contact with immigrants and that some of these immigrants were readers of the periodicals (Newton 2001a: 202-6, 238-9; Newton 2001b: 8-9). I have not seen any direct contributions from residents of the United States in these periodicals, however. The first Scottish Gaelic periodical to engage in linguistic self-defense and revitalization in a conscious manner was *An Gàidheal / The Gael*. It was founded in Toronto by Angus Nicholson, although he moved operations to Glasgow (Scotland) shortly after the first

number was released (Dunn 1968: 79-80). The first words on the first page of the first issue (July 1871) make his agenda clear:

*Tha an Gàidheal òg so a cur failte chridheil air gach co-bhrathair Gaidhealach, air feadh an t-shaoghail fharsuing, a thuigeas an canain a tha e labhairt.*

This young Gael sends a heart-felt welcome to each fellow Gael throughout the wide world who understands the language that he speaks.

*Bha e na fhìor dhuilichinn linne, bho chionn fada, nach robh paipeir na leabhar sam bith de'n t-sheorsa so aig na Gaidheil nan cainnt mhaithreil (eadhon an Alba fhein) ni a tha na Goill gu minig le tair a cur an ceill, mar dhearbhadh nach 'eil an cainnt no na sgrìobhuidhean againn airidh air an cur a mach no 'n cumail air chuimhne ann an leabhraichean no paipeirean naigheachd agus nach robh anns na Gaidheil ach sluagh fiadhaich, borb, aig nach robh suim da leithid.*

We have considered it a true hardship, for a long time, that the Gaels did not have any newspaper or book of this kind in their mother tongue (even in Scotland itself), a situation that English-speakers frequently express with contempt as proof that our language and our literature are not worthy of putting out or recording in books or in newspapers, and that Gaels are merely a wild and barbarous people who placed no importance in such matters.

*An Gàidheal* continued to provide a forum for sharing traditional texts as well as discussing important contemporary issues relating to Gaelic, such as support for Gaelic education (e.g., 1872: 132; 1873: 296) and the drive to establish a Gaelic professorship in a Scottish university (e.g., 1872: 276; 1873: 87). Some of the contributors demonstrate knowledge of the contemporary parallel efforts of linguistic revitalization in Wales (e.g., 1872: 276; 1873: 85). *An Gàidheal* did have a readership in the United States, although the size of that readership is now difficult to determine. The publication was promoted by agents around North America, including Lake Linden (Michigan), Chicago (Illinois), and Lumberton (North Carolina) (Dunn 1968: 79). The only material submitted that was credited to a resident of the United States was written by the Reverend John C. Sinclair, some of which deals with the demise of Gaelic in North Carolina (*c.f.* Newton 2001b: 9-10).

*The Scottish-American Journal* was a weekly newspaper printed in New York from 1857-1925 for immigrant Scots in the United States. Its content was largely gleaned from other newspaper sources and reflects the multinationality of the contemporary Scot. It contained sections with short news items from Scotland (divided by shire), England, Ireland, and America. Poetry appeared in every issue, although most of it was in standard English. The Highland immigrant community in the United States was obviously seen as an important resource, both economically and ideologically. Professor Blackie wrote letters directly to the editor of *The Scottish-American Journal* when seeking support for endowing the Celtic Chair. Speeches given by Blackie, Sheriff Nicolson, and other influential figures about Gaelic were summarized in the paper. Not only were letters to the editor about Gaelic printed, but sometimes articles and letters from Scottish and English newspapers. Despite printing Gaelic materials and occasionally lending its weight to Blackie's campaign, anti-Gaelic statements were not uncommon, which is not surprising given the anti-Gaelic bias of contemporary Scotland and England (whence most of its sources came).

Readers of *The Scottish-American Journal* remarked on the lack of a Gaelic-medium newspaper in North America, and its importance to the development of the Gaelic language. Neil MacNeil Brodie, a Scottish minister resident in Halifax, interested in the widespread distribution of Gaels across Canada, compared their literary circumstances unfavorably with other immigrants (22 November 1883):

There is also a considerable admixture of French, Germans, and a few Indians, all of whom, to a certain extent, still retain the use of their own language. The Germans especially have their own papers printed in some of the towns, and circulated among themselves. But I am sorry to say there is no Gaelic publication in Canada, nor yet in America, not even a religious paper for the church or Sabbath school, although there are thousands of Gaelic-speaking people, and many congregations.

After wishing well to newly formed Gaelic associations in Toronto and Montreal, a reader in Jersey City wrote (*The Scottish-American Journal* 14 February 1884):

Would it not aid the cause also to have a *Paiper Niachd* [sic] come along once a week. I remember the pleasure enjoyed some fifty years ago in reading the *Teachdair Gaelach* of Dr. McLeod, with its many interesting stories, especially *Corath nan Crochd* [sic].

The Rev. Alexander MacLean Sinclair (obviously already a recognized authority on Gaelic literature and history) contributed a lengthy letter to *The Scottish-American Journal* (10 July 1884) to educate the North American public on the Gaelic resources available at the time:

The other day I had a letter from a gentleman in Brooklyn asking for information upon some points in connection with these matters. As he is not the only person who makes similar inquiries it may not be amiss to answer the questions which are commonly asked in the columns of a paper so generally read by Highland and Lowland Scotsmen as the *Scottish-American Journal*. [...] 3. Are there are newspapers published in the Gaelic language? The only newspaper which devotes special attention to Gaelic is the *Pictou News*. It has a Gaelic column every week. It is published in Pictou, Nova Scotia. 4. Have any Gaelic works been published in America? [...] If anything has been published in Gaelic in the United States, I have not seen it.

Most importantly for the purposes of this article, *The Scottish-American Journal* printed regular summaries of the meetings of the Scottish societies in New York and other places, including the Gaelic Societies of New York, London, Toronto, Montreal, Hamilton, and Guelph. This not only informed readers of who was active in these organizations but influenced expectations about what a Gaelic society was supposed to do. The stance of the paper on Gaelic cannot be said to have been unambiguous. The newspaper showed little interest in or support for Gaelic until the colorful Professor John Stuart Blackie championed the campaign (discussed in section 5.6 below) to gather the funds to establish the Chair of Celtic at the University of Edinburgh in 1875 and involved



the paper in his cause. While there may have been a number of factors behind the appearance of Gaelic texts in the *Journal*, the graph in Figure 1 (illustrating the number of Gaelic texts<sup>3</sup> appearing each 6 months between the summer of 1865 and the summer of 1886) demonstrates that Blackie's vocal activism had a considerable influence on the paper's Gaelic policy.

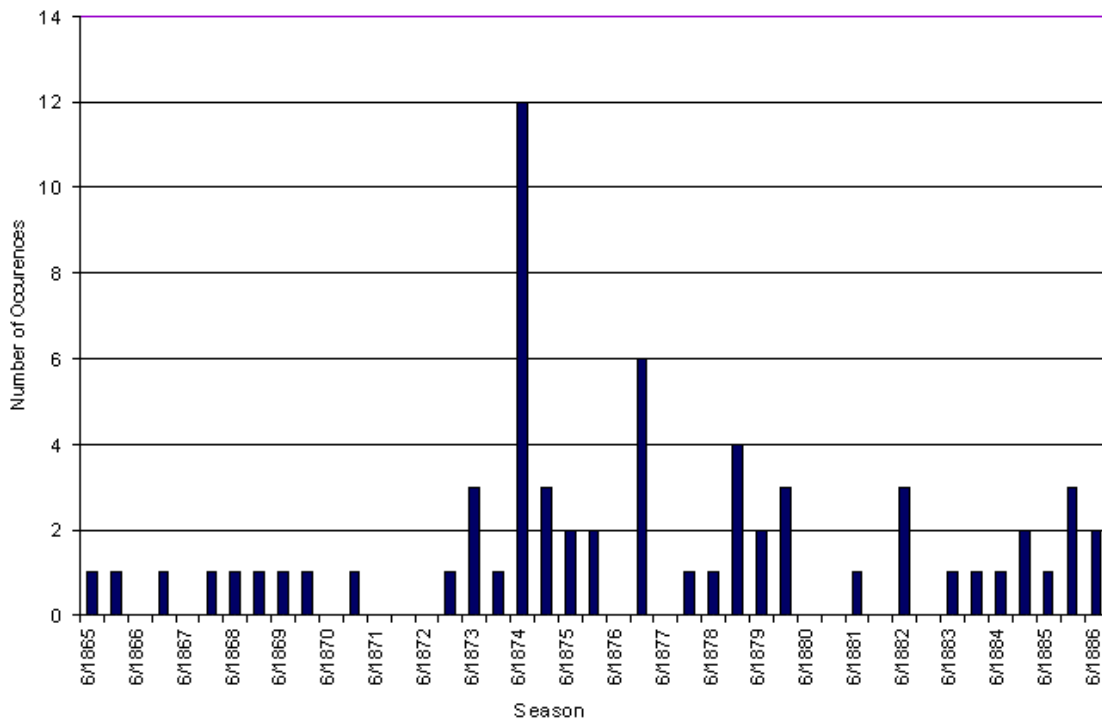


Figure 1. Frequency of Gaelic in the *Scottish-American Journal*

*The Scottish-American Journal* grew increasingly supportive of the Gaelic cause in general in the early 1900s, printing the speeches of Gaelic leaders attempting to convince the Scottish Department of Education to make provisions for Gaelic in Scottish education and notifying readers about significant new Gaelic books (such as the Gaelic dictionary by Edward Dwelly). However, actual Gaelic texts became increasingly rare on its pages: two Gaelic poems appeared in 1902, one in 1903, and none thereafter until 20 July 1910.

While no advertisement written in Gaelic ever appeared in the paper, Gaelic text was occasionally included in signs for social meetings. Edward Dwelly's press, which produced the most complete Gaelic dictionary to date and a line of Gaelic-only Christmas cards, took out advertising space for these items for over a year (Figure 2).

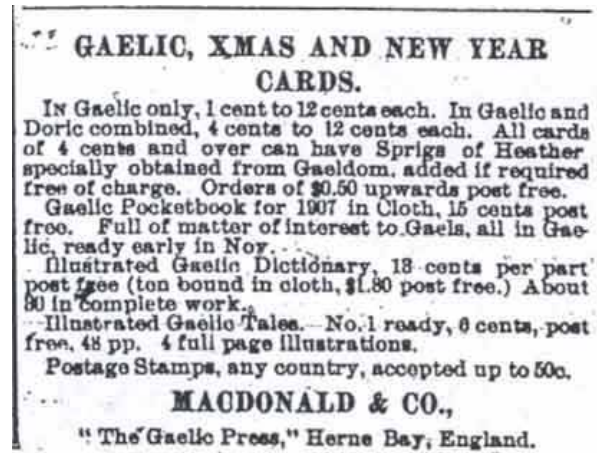


Figure 2. Advertisement for Gaelic Christmas cards in the *Scottish-American Journal*

Apart from the short lived *Cuairtear na Coille* and *An Cuairtear Òg Gaelach* (c.f. Nilsen 2002: 131, 133-5), the only all-Gaelic periodical published in North America was *Mac-Talla*, based in Cape Breton. It began in May 1892 and had a readership throughout Scotland, Canada and the western and northern United States. I have identified correspondents resident in the states of California, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington. *Mac-Talla* played a central role in the cultural life of Gaeldom in North America (Dunn 1968: 84-8). All materials, including letters, news, advertisements, fiction, or poetry, were written in the medium of Gaelic. *Mac-Talla* coined and broadcast Gaelic neologisms,<sup>4</sup> encouraged the collection of traditional folklore, voiced ideas about linguistic revitalization, and gave literate Gaels (particularly in Canada, which Scottish Gaels might have perceived as distant and provincial) a medium of expression they otherwise did not have.

The near absence of Gaelic publishing in the United States (Newton 2001a: 250-1) is poor even by Canadian standards, and Gaels in the United States were therefore

heavily dependent upon Canadian initiative. The failure to develop a Gaelic newspaper in the United States was not due merely to a lack of expertise. A letter contributed by Hamilton MacMillan to *Mac-Talla* about the immigrant Highland communities in North Carolina (Newton 2001b: 13) boasted of the number of people of Gaelic descent involved in the creation of newspapers, but there does not seem to be any evidence that these ever offered a place to Gaelic in their pages. Nor was it solely from a lack of financial resources - a number of immigrant Gaels became quite financially successful. No doubt the low rate of Gaelic literacy and the lack of precedent were major obstacles, but this failure is also indicative of the pull towards assimilation in Anglo-America (*c.f.* Newton 2001a: Chapter Six, Conclusions).

*The Maple Leaf* was a periodical intending to link Gaels who had moved to the west, especially those in California, with their native communities in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.<sup>5</sup> The periodical was started in 1907 in Oakland, California and was produced very professionally. We can infer, from the demographics of its readership and from occasional clues in its pages, that a significant proportion of its readers, probably a majority, were fluent Gaelic speakers (though the percentage of Gaelic literacy must have been much lower). Despite this, there is an astonishing absence of Gaelic text in the periodical, consisting mostly of nicknames, patronymics, and occasional exclamations. Take, for example, the following excerpts from a lengthy description of a trip to the west coast (2 February 1909):

On December 26<sup>th</sup> I had occasion to go to Carrolltown, or Carrols Point, a point down on the Columbia and nearly north of here in this State, and there I met a son of Cape Breton and his wife, a daughter of the same place. This man is Peter McKinnon of Big Pond, known in that place as *Mac Eachainn 'Ic Iain Oig* [...] John came towards the coast to see his friends and wish them a Merry Christmas, or, as he said himself, *Nollaig Chridheil*. We went at it then hammer and tongs in

Gaelic, in Cape Breton fashion. Whenever there was a lull in the conversation Mr. McKinnon sang a Gaelic song; the others helped and I — I listened.

Despite the obvious ability to write Gaelic, and the precedent offered by *Mac-Talla*, none of the Gaelic tradition that was obviously the subject of so much discussion and affection ever appeared in *The Maple Leaf*. There is, in fact, almost nothing in the magazine to indicate attitudes toward Gaelic. The material in *The Maple Leaf* does indicate that the readers were beginning to accept and adopt a kitschy, ersatz version of Scottish identity, as cultural reference points include Highland Games, Burns' Suppers, the Walter Scott cult, tartanism, and music hall comedian Harry Lauder, but very little in terms of Gaelic culture is in evidence.

### 3. Religious Institutions

Religion has been a crucial domain for the survival of many immigrant languages, in part because ethnically-specific religious institutions provide an isolated haven for people to perpetuate their traditions and sense of identity. Worship is an intimate form of address, and religious people are generally reluctant to change the language in which they speak to God. The role of the church(es) in Gaelic history is complex and varies according to time and context. On the one hand, the use of Gaelic for religious purposes helped to develop and sustain a high-register form of the language able to deal with complex, abstract concepts. On the other hand, no church has ever committed itself to the survival of Gaelic against the political expediency of a wholesale transition to English (*c.f.* Durkacz 1983; Kallen 1994: 34-5).

It would be interesting to know how many immigrant communities were able to continue worshipping through the medium of Gaelic in the United States. In an address to the Glasgow Highlanders, the Rev. Dr. Norman MacLeod stated (*The Scottish-American*

*Journal* 31 March 1866), “In the Southern States of America, amidst all the war and all the difficulties of late years, there are 16 congregations of Highlanders who have existed for 100 years without aid from emigration.” He does not list them, however, and we can only infer with caution that they were Gaelic-speaking.

The religious needs of Gaelic speakers in Boston led to the establishment of the United Presbyterian Church of Boston in 1846. It seems to have continued well into the second half of the twentieth century. Apart from the first and last minister (as of 1957), its ministers were drawn from Cape Breton (Dunn 1957). A notice about the establishment of the Scotch Presbyterian Church in Boston provides us with further evidence of the efforts to make provision for Gaelic in Boston:

The fact that there are between three and four thousand people in the city who speak the Gaelic language, and who have been struggling and waiting for a long series of years, have only recently been enabled to organize themselves into a church is surprising, because the results seen since the organization has [sic] been so encouraging that the wonder now is that the movement was not begun years ago (*The Scottish-American Journal* 21 December 1887; *c.f.* Nilsen 1988: 58).

There was also sufficient demand from Gaelic-speaking immigrants from Cape Breton and Quebec at the Presbyterian Church in Graniteville, Vermont to warrant morning church services in Gaelic. These are said to have been initiated in 1899 and co-existed with afternoon church services in English because of the loyalty of church-goers to their mother tongue (*Mac-Talla* 13 October 1899),<sup>6</sup> but it is not yet clear to me how long Gaelic was in use. The observations of some Gaels indicate poor support for Gaelic in most religious institutions in the United States. A Scottish minister who traveled widely wrote in 1872 that Gaelic was not preached anywhere “I could hear of in the United States, save in one church at Elmira, 100 miles west of Chicago” (Masson 1873: 28). This parish, served by Rev. Alexander McKay, consisted of about 50 families, a

third of which attended Sunday afternoon worship in the medium of Gaelic (*The Scottish-American Journal* 3 October 1868). It was noted of Chicago:

There are, it seems, between four and five thousand Scottish Highlanders in the city, all of whom, of course, speak the Gaelic tongue, yet, although the Swedes, Poles, Germans, and other nationalities existing in Chicago have their places of worship where services are conducted in their respective tongues, there is no church in the city where services are conducted in the Gaelic tongue... (*The Northern Chronicle* 27 February 1884).

Gaelic seems to have eventually enjoyed some support in Chicago, for the Scottish Highlanders of Chicago held a fund-raising concert in aid of the monthly Gaelic religious services that had been “carried on for some time” in the local Masonic Temple (*The Scottish-American Journal* 2 September 1896). When visiting the United States, Gaelic-speaking ministers sometimes took the opportunity to address church-goers and this seems to have been a pleasant experience for many Highland immigrants, as this anecdote from New York suggests:

On Sunday last the Rev. A. C. Macdonald, of Queen Street Free Church, Inverness, preached a sermon in Gaelic in the Fourth Presbyterian Church, West 34<sup>th</sup> street. There was a good gathering of the clans on the occasion, the church being well filled. Among those present were a number of enthusiastic Gaels from Paterson, Elizabeth, and other places round about. The meeting was not confined to the old people as might have been expected. A considerable number of young people of both sexes were also there [...] The service, by recalling sweet memories, proved a bright spot in the life of many a Highlander, and a general wish was expressed that before leaving these shores Mr. Macdonald would again address them in their mother tongue (*The Scottish-American Journal* 14 February 1894).

This may have whetted the appetite of the Gaels of New York, for L. MacLean of Chicago came to deliver a Gaelic sermon to them in April of that year (*The Scottish-American Journal* 11 April 1894). Announcements of other occasional Gaelic sermons in New York city churches appear from time to time in *The Scottish-American Journal* (e.g., 20 September 1899; 28 February 1900; 4 April 1900). The travel notes of William Fraser

on a trip to the west c. 1884 indicates that people did not always rely upon formal external institutions in order to worship through the medium of Gaelic:

I stayed some weeks with friends in Eugene City, 120 miles south of Portland. While there, I was informed that there was a man living in the place who conducted family worship in Gaelic. I was soon introduced to him, and carried on a conversation in my native tongue for a couple of hours, more than I had done for twenty years before (*The Celtic Magazine* 10: 244).

More research needs to be done regarding the use of Gaelic in religious institutions in the United States (*c.f.* Dunn 1985). On the one hand, there is evidence that some churches were able to maintain good will with the Gaelic community by taking pride in Gaelic secular culture. A correspondent to *Mac-Talla* (17 February 1894) describes how a Boston church employed Gaelic singers for a fund-raiser, including a demonstration of the old custom of waulking the tweed (*luadhadh* in Gaelic, commonly referred to as a “milling frolic” by Canadian Gaels, typically done by a group of women while singing work songs).

*Chualas air an oidhche sin ann an Eaglais nan Gaidheal, comhradh Gailig, Orain Ghailig agus piobaireachd, nithean a chuir mor aoibhneas air na chual' iad. Chunnacas aig an am cheudna, cireadh cloimhe, tacharas snatha, toinneamh le fearsaid, agus cardadh us sniomh, agus an sin frolic luaidh, ni nach fhacas riamh roimhe ann am baile Bhoston, fa chomhair moran sluagh [...] Chuireadh e subhachas air cridhe neach air bith fhaicinn an gairdeachas a bha 'n aodann gach aon 'n uair a bha iad ag eisdeachd ris a' phiobaire a' cluich a cheud phuirt, agus ri coisir cheolmhor de ghilleann 's de nigheanan a' seinn nan oran [...]*

On that night in the Highland church Gaelic conversation, Gaelic songs, and bagpipe music, were heard, things that gave great pleasure to all. At the same time the combing of wool, the winding of yarn, twisting yarn with a spindle, and carding and spinning were watched, and after that, a milling frolic, something that had never been seen before in the city of Boston, in the presence of a great crowd [...] It would put joy in every heart to see the pleasure that was in the face of each person when they were listening to the bagpiper playing his first tune, and to the talented singers, both boys and girls, singing the songs [...]

On the other hand, the predisposition of the excessively pious to dismiss the value of traditional forms of cultural expression was recognized in North America as detrimental

to the cause of Gaelic development. The most outspoken critic was Aonghas MacAoidh, resident in Providence, Rhode Island. He wrote, for example, to *Mac-Talla* (5 December 1896):

*Thàinig tonn sgriosail air a' Ghàidhlig le  
fuar-chràbhadh mòran nas mò na le fìor-  
chràbhadh. Tha cuid am barail gur  
peacadh a bhith leughadh nan òran a  
chithear anns a' Mhac-Talla. Theagamh  
gum feud iad a bhi cogaiseach gu leòr na'n  
dòigh fhéin.*

Gaelic has suffered a devastating blow,  
more by hypocrisy than by true-devotion.  
Some people think that it is a sin to be  
reading the songs that appear in *Mac-  
Talla*. Maybe they can be conscientious  
enough in their own way.

Another of his letters (21 October 1898) refers to the tales of the Arabian Nights that were translated into Gaelic and began appearing in *Mac-Talla*. MacAoidh castigates certain readers who had objected to them for their small-mindednesses and praises the newspaper for allowing readers the opportunity to gain familiarity with new ideas and writers:

*Tha mi faicinn Mac-Talla a' gearain nach  
eil cuid de luchd leughaidh a' creidsinn  
Sgeulachdan nan Arabach. Mur a bheil,  
co nach eil coma! Tha a' Ghàidhlig air a  
mort leis an dream sin nach eil an  
timchioll-ghearradh ach an clàr an  
eudainn; is e bhith tabhairt gèill da'n  
leithidibh sin a dh'fhàg a' Ghàidhlig cho  
gann na litreachas [...] 'S e cion  
litreachais agus gu sonraichte cion a'  
phàipeir-naidheachd, a dh'fhàg cho tearc  
an àireamh 's cho eutrom 's an sporran na  
Gàidheil. Mur b'e Mac-Talla ciamar a b'  
aithne dhomh Iain Rothach [is daoine eile  
'gan ainmeachadh]*

I see that *Mac-Talla* is complaining that  
some of its audience do not believe the  
stories of the *Arabian Nights*. Who cares  
if they don't! Gaelic has been killed off by  
those people whose only circumcision is  
in their foreheads; it is by giving in to  
those sorts of people that has left Gaelic  
so lacking in its literature [...] It is  
because of the lack of literature and  
especially the lack of a newspaper that the  
Gaels have become so small in number  
and so small in their wealth. If it weren't  
for *Mac-Talla*, how would I know of John  
Munro, ...[a list of persons follows]

In short, while many immigrant communities created religious institutions that continued to make use of their native language and afford it utility and prestige, Gaels were not generally effective in developing customary Gaelic-medium church services.



#### 4. Attitudes towards Gaelic

##### 4.1 Language and Identity

Like other peoples, Gaelic speakers perceived a strong correlation between mother tongue and ethnic identity (Davis 1993, *passim*; Newton 2001a: 225, 227-8, 241-252), although this perception was so taken for granted that it seldom warranted comment. Nonetheless, it will be useful to review what information is available from Gaelic-medium sources in North America. The earliest large-scale settlements of Gaels in North America were in Georgia, North Carolina, and New York State, and later generations demonstrated a continuing curiosity about the fate of their kinsmen, especially in the Carolinas (*c.f.* Newton 2001b). In response to a query from the editor of *An Gàidheal* about the Gaelic settlements in the Carolinas, the Rev. J. C. Sinclair wrote (June 1872, p. 97):

The old race is gone and their descendents have given up, in a great degree, the customs and manners of the old Gaels. The ancient Celtic language is nearly dead, except with the few families who arrived within the last thirty years. [...] There is no Gaelic preached in the Carolinas now, and not likely to be in the future.

Language is clearly foremost in his appraisal of the cultural survival of the Gaels. The editor of *Mac-Talla* expressed his failure to learn of the state of Gaels in the Carolinas and enquired of his readership whether anyone had any information (25 November 1893). A few letters followed, all of them making at least a mention of what they knew about the contemporary condition of Gaelic. This is a strong statement about the perceptions of the importance of language in maintaining the “ethnic integrity” of the community (which is not surprising given that the readership of *Mac-Talla* were themselves making a conscious choice to sustain their mother tongue, despite the

difficulties). The statements about language survival could be as short as this one from “Ailean an Ridge” about the Gaels of South Carolina (*Mac-Talla* 9 December 1893):

*Thachair Eirionnach ormsa anns na Stàitean 'sa bhliadhna 1851, a bha glè eolach 'sa chearna 'sa bheil sliochd nan Gàidheal ud a' comhnuidh. Bha iad aig an am sin ann an aite air leth leotha fhein, agus a cheart uiread Gailig aca 's bh'aig an athraichean ann am Baideanach.*

I met an Irishman in the States in the year 1851 who was very familiar with the region in which those descendents of Highlanders reside. They were, at that time, in a remote place all by themselves and they spoke just as much Gaelic as their forebears had in Badenoch.

While I doubt that this is anything more than hyperbolic folklore, it is at least a statement about the perceived integrity and continuity of the community. Statements could be as long as the anecdote contributed by “C.C.” of Strathalba, Prince Edward Island to *Mac-Talla* (30 December 1893):

*Bha e air aithris domh gu robh Gàidheal de mhuinntir Cheap Breatann air thuras tro phairt de'n dùthaich ud, o chionn ùine nach eil glè fhad air ais, agus air dha tadhal ann an taigh tuathanaich ri taobh an rathaid, dh'iarr e deoch ann am Beurla. Dh'èirich boireannach a bha a-staigh a thoirt da an nì a dh'iarr e. Bha sean-bhean 'na suidhe taobh thall an t-seòmair agus ars ise, “Faighnich dheth an gabh e deoch bhainne.” Nuair chuala an Gàidheal bochd a' Ghàidhlig 's e air aineoil, thug a chridhe leum le toileachadh 's air ball fhreagair e an Gàidhlig, “Gabhaidh, 's mi a ghabhas agus taing do'n tè a thairgeadh domh e.” Fhuair e sin is biadh is cuid na h-oidhche agus gach caoimhneas eile a b' urrainn iad a nochdadh dha a thaobh gum b' e Gàidheal e a thuigeadh 's a labhradh Gàidhlig.*

It has been told to me that a Gael from Cape Breton was travelling through part of that country not too long ago and after he had stopped in the house of a farmer at the side of the road he asked in English for a drink. The woman who was inside stood up to give him what he asked for. There was an old woman sitting down at the far end of the room and she said, “Ask him if he will take a drink of milk.” When this poor Gael, who was in lands unknown to him, heard Gaelic, his heart leapt with delight and he instantly answered in Gaelic, “I will, I will certainly take it and I will give a thanks to the woman who offered it to me.” He was given it, and food and lodgings and every other kindness that they could show him since he was a Gael who could speak and understand Gaelic.

This too appears to be hyperbolic folklore and cannot be taken as historical fact (Newton 2001b: 11-12). What is important, again, is the role that language plays in creating the sense of kinship (“since he was a Gael who could speak and understand Gaelic”), as well

as the symbolic equivalence of milk and language as the resources that sustain family and community in the tale.

The poverty of rural life and the economic opportunities available in other places caused many to leave their homes in Scotland and Canada to live and work in an English-speaking environment. The tendency of many of the youth to pick up a negative attitude about Gaelic at the same time that they acquired the English language was a common topic of discussion among the Gaels in Canada, as is clear in texts in *Mac-Talla* as well as songs recorded from oral tradition (Dunn 1968: 132-4; Bennett 1998: 280-4; Shaw 1996: 352-3). One of the numerous songs dispraising those who had abandoned their Gaelic was one composed c. 1880 by the bard MacDermid, a native of Cape Breton (Creighton and MacLeod 1979: Song Nine). According to an appearance of the song in *Mac-Talla* (May 1900), it was composed by a young man who was then in Boston.<sup>7</sup> The song has two titles: in Gaelic it was called *An Té a Chaill a' Ghàidhlig* (“The Girl Who Forgot Her Gaelic”); in English it was called *The Yankee Girl*. The text describes how the poet met an old female companion from Cape Breton on the street, addressing her in Gaelic. She, however, disowned any knowledge of him or Gaelic. The final stanza of the song reinforces the idea that she should now be considered a Yankee, rather than a Gael, on account of her exclusive embrace of English and her adoption of alien tastes:

*Tigh Iain Ghròta gu sìorruidh  
'S mìle mialaint is mallachd  
Dhuit fhéin 's dha do sheòrsa  
Dh'fhàs cho pròiseil 's cho spaideil  
'N uair a thig sibh an taobh so  
Bidh deis ùr oirbh is boineid  
Théid a' Ghàidhlig air chùl  
'S théid bhur cunntas mar “Yankaich”  
A chinn nan creach, a chinn nan creach.*

Off to John O' Groats with you for eternity,  
And a thousand curses and wishes for illness  
To you and your kind,  
Who have become so arrogant and so trendy  
When you come to this country;  
You will wear a new dress and bonnet  
And cast aside your Gaelic,  
You will be considered Yankees,  
You devastating generation.

This same situation was also the subject of a similar song of the same name by James Ferguson, a native of Cape Breton and president of the Boston Gaelic Society (Creighton and MacLeod 1979: 30), although I have not been able to obtain a copy of it.

In an “epic” poem about his migration from Scotland across the United States to Illinois, William Fraser contrasts his old life in the Highlands, and its social norms, with disappointment, that many of his fellow immigrants from Scotland have not been as resistant to Americanization as he has (Newton 2001a: 184):<sup>8</sup>

<i>Tha cuid de dh’Albannaich feadh na dùthcha seo</i>	Some of the Scots in this country
<i>Gu tur chuir cùl ris gach cleachdadh còir</i>	Have completely rejected every fine custom
<i>A lean ri’n sinnsearan air feadh nan linntean</i>	That followed their ancestors for generations
<i>Is chan eil suim ac’ dha’n cumail beò</i>	They have no interest in sustaining them
<i>Ach mar na Geint’lich tha mun cuairt orr’</i>	But like the Gentiles around them
<i>A’ fàs gu <b>fuar</b>-chridheach le’n cuid stòir</i>	Grow cold-hearted with their wealth
<i>’S cha chan iad Gàidhlig ach dèanamh tàir oirr’</i>	And refuse to speak Gaelic, disparaging it
<i>Ged ’s ann innt’ chaidh ’n àrach nuair bha iad òg.</i>	Even though they were sustained by it in their youth.

There is little reason to doubt that Gaelic speakers of this era viewed linguistic allegiance as closely related to ethnic allegiance, and that they accordingly saw a close correlation between language and ethnicity. This was made explicit in the constitutions of Gaelic societies of this era (see Section 5.2 below), and in the words of supporters of the Gaelic movement. C. J. Basil MacIver wrote an article entitled “The Gaelic Renaissance” for *The Scottish-American Journal* (12 February 1902), concluding:

Highlanders are often taunted with clinging to Gaelic as a matter of pride. We think their clinging might more accurately be described as a matter of love and appreciation. They do well to love it, for it has been the vehicle of their best thoughts and traditions through many long centuries, and it is inseparably intertwined with their innermost life as a people.

#### 4.2 An Ideology of Contempt

There were three dominant themes used to rationalize the demise of Gaelic during the nineteenth century: that it was inherently barbaric and worthy of scorn and contempt; that it was doomed to extinction due to natural, uncontrollable, pre-determined, Malthusian processes; that it could be potentially politically (or morally) subversive, and needed to be held in check for that reason. These themes correspond very closely to perceptions of the Highlanders themselves as a “race” during the nineteenth century, especially at the time of the Potato Blight (*c.f.* Fenyo 2000). Particularly before Blackie’s outspoken opinions about the past injustices done to Gaelic, the language was an easy target for disparagement. Consider the following “joke” from the columns of *The Scottish-American Journal* (11 April 1868):

AS EASY AS LEARNING GAELIC — A noted linguist says that the preliminary indispensables for acquiring Gaelic are, swallowing a neat assortment of nutmeal-graters, catching a chronic bronchitis, having one nostril hermetically sealed up, and submitting to a dislocation of the jaw.

Social Darwinism provided the framework for others who saw the dominance of Imperialist languages and the demise of minority languages in strictly utilitarian terms. An article in *The Scottish-American Journal* (19 October 1867), for example, predicted the inevitable triumph of English and French throughout the globe:

A change in the vernacular tongue of a country, even under the most favorable circumstances, is a slow process, as is evidenced by the tenacity with which the Celtic portion of the inhabitants of Scotland cling to their native Gaelic. [...] The insular position of Great Britain, and her scientific and literary wealth will secure the perpetuity of her vigorous Anglo-Saxon tongue within her own territory, and from the important relation in which Britain stands to the world at large as the emporium of commerce and the centre of political and social enlightenment, as well as the seat of the useful arts and manufactures, and as the favored abode of literature, philosophy and science, the English language will doubtless be cultivated by the educated and enlightened classes of all other countries.

Gaelic had less benign associations for some. In the wake of the Jacobite Risings, anything Highland was often associated with rebellion, barbarity, and primitiveness — in short, the opposite of the conformity, linguistic and otherwise, that the United Kingdom attempted to impose throughout its domain. By the nineteenth century, the Scottish Highlanders had heavily invested themselves in the Empire economically, militarily, culturally, and ideologically. Disaffection and the threat of political turmoil frequently erupted in Ireland, and although it clearly was a source of cognitive dissonance for many Highlanders, as a whole they tended to distance themselves from the Irish Gaels to minimize any unwanted associations. This distancing had obvious linguistic implications. A correspondent who signed himself “A Scotchman First and a Highlander Next” contributed the following revealing statements about language and politics to *The Scottish-American Journal* (30 May 1878):

Unfortunately, even at this advanced stage of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, about 200,000, a population equal to that of Edinburgh, are acquainted with the Gaelic tongue alone [...] The desire of every honest Highlander should be to reduce that number to zero, instead of taking part in any fictitious revival of Celtic zeal. In contrast with the Hibernian system of Home Rule, and occasional agrarian murders, the Celtic movement in Scotland is at present relatively harmless, because it contains more of the ludicrous than the serious. A fondness for Highland song and Highland music, a passionate clinging on festive occasions to the half-finished habiliments of the ancient mountaineers— these and similar displays of national feeling are excusable, if not praiseworthy eccentricities. But the agitation at present going on has its mischievous side, and may eventually be attended with evil consequences. [...] The continuance of Gaelic, however, as a conversational language, apart from a knowledge of English, is rightly considered by no less a man than William Chambers as a nuisance. Even nuisance is too light a word; it is cruelty.

Some people clearly saw in the politicization of Irish a dangerous precedent which could corrupt Highlanders with sedition. Such is one of the justifications against the teaching of Gaelic in schools voiced in a letter originally printed in the *London Times* but reprinted on the editorial page of *The Scottish-American Journal* (8 August 1906):

There is in our opinion a further, though somewhat more remote, objection to the movement for the revival of the Gaelic language. We are apprehensive that it may have ultimate political results, favourable to Home Rule and separatism, and unfavourable to national and Imperial unity. It has had that result to some extent in Wales, and conspicuously in Ireland. In Ireland the objects of the Gaelic League, nominally non-political, have now become almost synonymous with Nationalism, Home Rule and disloyalty. We hope and believe that in the Scottish Highlands no such unpatriotic and disloyal purpose or tendencies need be feared. But it is as well not to sow the seed.

The fact that Gaelic speakers were frequently ashamed of their mother tongue and did their best to abandon it in favor of English as soon as they could appears in many periodicals in the nineteenth century. One such example is the following excerpt from a letter by the renowned Gaelic scholar J. F. Campbell (*An Gàidheal* 1872, pp. 276-7):

Many Highlanders, on the contrary, even when residing in their own country, and amongst a Gaelic-speaking people, if they think themselves in any way better than their neighbours, seem (with the most contemptible snobbishness) to consider it quite beneath their dignity to allow their children to learn Gaelic, as if they considered the Gaelic people a conquered and subjugated race; and a most downtrodden and ill-used race they undoubtedly are in many respects.

These attitudes about Gaelic clearly accompanied Gaels on their voyage to the New World. A correspondent in San Francisco (signed “M.M.L.”) expressed his wishes for the success of *Mac-Talla* and for its part in bringing new pride to Gaelic (6 August 1892):

*Tha mi 'n dochas gu'm bi e na mheadhon  
air luchd na Gailig anns an duthaich sin a  
dhusgadh suas, oir tha mi smaoineachadh  
nach eil iad cho uailleil as an cainnt  
mhathaireil 's bu choltach dhaibh a bhi.  
Thogadh mi fein an Ceap Breatuinn, 's ged  
a dh'fhag mi e gle og, 's ged tha mi an so  
chionn corr 'us deich bliadhna, labhraidh  
mi a Ghailig cheart cho math no na's  
fhearr na labhrainn i mu'n d'fhag mi 'n  
tigh, agus tha mi gle bhosdoil an diugh gur  
h-urrainn domh Mac-Talla a leughadh.*

I hope that it will be a medium by which the Gaelic speakers in that land will be aroused, as I think that they are not as proud of their mother tongue as they appear to be. I myself was raised in Cape Breton, and although I left it when I was very young, and although I have been here for more than ten years, I speak Gaelic just as well, or even better, than I did before I left home, and I am very proud that today I am able to read *Mac-Talla*.

A man employed in a rope factory in Plymouth, Massachusetts (“ABML”), comments about the shame obviously felt by fellow Gaelic-speaking workers (*Mac-Talla* 11 May 1895):

*Cha’n eil fìor bheagan de Ghàidheal ’nam measg. Tha e duilich leamsa thuigsinn car son a bhiodh daoine ’g àicheadh gu bheil Gàilig aca; ’s ann a tha mi fhein glé phròiseil gu bheil i agam, an àite nàire bhi orm air a son [...] Dh’fhaodainn innse mu iomadh fear us té a tha mar sin a’ dèanamh tàire air an cainnt, ach cha bhi mi ’g ur sàrachadh le bhi toirt iomradh orra.*

There are numerous Gaels amongst them. It is difficult for me to understand why people would deny that they speak Gaelic. I myself am very proud that I speak it, rather than being ashamed of it [...] I could discuss many men and women like that who denigrate their language, but I won't bother you by mentioning them.

A letter from Alastair MacCitheagain, resident in Everett, Massachusetts, is one of the few surviving testimonials that some people did successfully raise Gaelic-speaking children in the United States. It ends with what is obviously a triadic proverb, albeit one whose need for self-conscious validation suggests a fairly recent coinage (*Mac-Talla* 27 March 1897):

*’S iomadh treis chèilidh a tha sinn a’ faotainn o ghilleann agus o nigheanan Cheap Breatainn aig a bheil a’ Ghàidhlig cho coileanta ’s a bha i riamh [...] ’S ann air a’ Ghàidhlig a thog mi mo theaghlach, agus ged a tha iad a-nis air fàs mòr, tha trì nithean air nach dèan a h-aon diu tàir — a’ Ghàidhlig, an lite, agus an sgadan.*

We get many brief visits from the lads and lasses from Cape Breton who speak Gaelic which is as perfect as it ever was [...] I raised my own children speaking Gaelic and although they have now grown up, there are three things that none of them sneer at — Gaelic, porridge, and herring.

Another resident of Massachusetts, however, M. MacLaomuinn of Quincy, laments that so few of the younger generation remained faithful to their language (*Mac-Talla*

December 1903):

*Tha mòran de chlann nan Gàidheal ’s an àite seo, ach chan eil spèis ro mhòr aig a’ chuid as motha dhiubh do’n Ghàidhlig. Chan eil iad a’ cumail suas an aon phàipeir a tha againn. Bha là eile ann — là*

The descendents of Gaels are plentiful in this place, but most of them don’t have any great love for the Gaelic language. They are not supporting the only newspaper that we have. Things were



*anns an robh na Gàidheil glè dhìleas da'n cànan agus da chèile.*      different once — there was a time when the Gaels were totally faithful to their language and to one another.

There can be no doubt that Highlanders who came to the United States (from Scotland or Canada) did not escape the stigmas that had already done untold damage to the prestige of the language in the minds of Gaelic speakers. Given that the “varying prestige of the ‘mother tongue,’ both among its own speakers and among ‘Americans in general’ “ (Fishman 1978: 40) was a significant factor in the survival of immigrant languages, this must have predisposed Gaelic to rapid decline. The evidence for Irish reflects exactly this (Kallen 1994: 32-3; Ní Ghabhann 1998 §15, 29).

#### 4.3 Developmental Shortcomings

A summary of a lecture given by Professor Blackie contains criticism about the lack of development of Gaelic, but also encouragement about the potential of the Celtic Chair at the University of Edinburgh to compensate for a history of neglect.

Coming to his special topic—the Gaelic tongue—the Professor came down with power on the Highlanders themselves for neglecting their own language. We have more than once adverted to this. If the Highlanders wish their tongue, their literature, and their traditions to perish, they can follow no better plan than that which many of them are now pursuing. By the educated among them the study of Gaelic is neglected, while no proper effort is made to teach those to read it who are ignorant of English. [...] The “associations” which are being formed to preserve the tales, traditions, poetry, and music of the Highlands, will do a little to revive interest in the Celtic tongue; but the establishment of a Gaelic professorship will do far more. [...] We are persuaded that this chair would serve more than a purely antiquarian purpose, and that it would be for the immediate and special benefit of the whole of our Gaelic-speaking population (*The Scottish-American Journal* 26 November 1874).

Gaels in the United States recognized that the lack of modernization efforts for Gaelic put it at a great disadvantage in the modern world. Few places in the United States were as concentrated with Highlanders as Detroit, Michigan (Newton 2001a: 101, 175), a city

whose booming industry epitomized the modern age. Dòmhnall MacLeòid, resident in Detroit, observed (*Mac-Talla* June 1902):

*Tha Mac-Talla ag ràdh 'san aireamh mu dheireadh, gu'n teid aig a Ghàilig air facail a ghabhal 'an iasad cho math ri canainean eile. Cha'n 'eil mi creidsinn gu'n gabh i iasad cho math ris a Bheurla [...]*

Mac-Talla says in the previous issue that Gaelic is as capable of assimilating loan-words as other languages. I don't believe that it can take in loan-words as well as English [...]

*Tha a' Ghàidhlig gann ann an ainmean gach ealain, gach innleachd is eòlas a fhuair daoine mach anns an linn a chaidh seachad; ach chan e coire na Gàidhlig a tha an sin ach coire nan Gàidheal fhèin. An uair a bhios sinn air son eòlas fhaotainn air na rudan ùra seo, 's ann 's a' Bheurla thèid sinn 'ga shireadh chionn nach eil e anns a' Ghàidhlig. Car son nach eil?*

Gaelic is lacking in the terminology of every craft, and in each field of study and engineering that people developed in the last century. But this is not the fault of Gaelic, but the fault of the Gaels themselves. When we want to learn about these new things, it is through English that we seek them out since they are not in Gaelic. And why not?

*Air son nach do chuir na Gàidheil innte e, chan ann air son nach gabh e cur innte. Nam b'i a' Ghàidhlig cànan Bhreatain gu h-iomlan bhiodh i an-diugh cho fada air a h-adhart 's a tha Beurla [...]*

Because the Gaels have not put them into Gaelic; it is not that they cannot be put into Gaelic. If Gaelic were the tongue of all of Britain, it would as advanced at the present as is English. [...]

*Nam biodh i air a teagasg anns na sgoilean, bhiodh dòchas agam gu'n tigeadh i air a h-aghart fhathast ann am briathran a bhiodh freagarrach air staid an t-saoghail mar tha e an diugh.*

If it were taught in the schools, I would have some hope that it could still develop terminology that would suit the modern world.

While I have not found a great deal of material that treats this issue specifically, the perception of Gaelic as a language ill-suited to the modern age due to a lack of development is implicit in many texts. This is, in fact, a deficit that Gaelic societies and the supporters of the Celtic Chair campaign wished to see addressed (see sections 5.2 and 5.6 below).

#### 4.4 Literacy and Linguistic Competence

Attempts to foster widespread Gaelic literacy in the Highlands were a development of Protestant missionary activity in the nineteenth century (Durkacz 1983: 104). Early Gaelic settlements in Canada did not benefit from this advance, and even in Scotland many people remained illiterate. Participants in the revival of Irish were discouraged by the constant criticism of their command of Irish, in just about every aspect of the spoken and written language, and we can similarly perceive that Gaels lacked confidence about their literacy skills. A resident of Plymouth, Massachusetts (“AB M L.”) wrote to *Mac-Talla* (11 May 1895):

*Cha’n eil annam ach an droch  
sgriobhadair Gàilig agus ged a bha toil  
agam litir a sgrìobhadh g’ad ionnsuigh,  
bha mi car fadalach uime. Ach theid agam  
air Gàilig a leughadh math gu leòr, ged  
nach téid agam air a sgrìobhadh ro mhath.*

I am but a poor writer of Gaelic, and  
although I was wanting to write a letter  
off to you, I am a little tardy in doing so.  
But I can read Gaelic well enough,  
although I cannot write Gaelic very well.

Some Gaels, nervous about their literacy skills, relied on the careful reference of Gaelic dictionaries from Scotland, as D. T. MacDhomhnuill in Calumet, Michigan, indicates (*Mac-Talla* 30 May 1896):

*Tha mi nise na’s fhearr air sgrìobhadh  
cànainean na Gearmailte agus na Suaine  
na tha mi air cainnt mo mhàthar. Ma  
dh’fheuchas mi ri beagan Gàilig a  
sgrìobhadh, feumaidh mi Foclair Mhic-  
Leòid us Dheòra bhi agam ri m’uillinn.*

I am now better at writing the languages  
of Germany and Sweden than I am at my  
mother tongue. If I try to write a little bit  
of Gaelic, I must have the MacLeod-  
Dewar Dictionary at my side.

A letter from *Iagain mac a’ mhaighstir sgoil mhòir* (Iagain son of the big school-master) in San Francisco attests to the fact that, despite being the son of an educator, he had no previous Gaelic literacy skills, and that he was quite self-conscious about this deficiency (*Mac-Talla* 18 March 1904):

*’S fhada o’n da latha anns an d’rinn mi  
suas m’inntinn gu sgrìobhainn ugrad uair*

It’s been a long time since I made up my  
mind to write something to you at some

*no uaireigin, ach, bho nach do leugh mi  
facal Gàilig riamh gus na thòisich mi ri  
gabhail do dheagh phàipeir, chan eil mi air  
an sgrìobhadh ach coltach ri bodach  
crùbach air na skates. Cha mhò tha mòran  
cothrom agam air Gàilig a bhruidhinn. An-  
drasta 's a-rithist tachraidh mi fhin is  
Domhnall Mac Phàrlain (mac Iain Mhòir o  
Bhaddec agus Gàidheal gu chùl) air a  
chèile, agus sin an uair a chluinneas luchd  
na Beurla a chànan cheòlmhor bhinn nach  
bàsaich gu latha luan; se sin, ma bhios  
sliochd ar sinnsear cho dìleas di is còir  
dhaibh.*

point, but since I had never read a word of Gaelic until I started to subscribe to your excellent newspaper, my writing is unfortunately like a disabled old man on skates. Neither do I have much of a chance to speak Gaelic. Now and then Donald MacFarlane (the son of Big John from Baddeck and a thorough Highlander) and I meet up and that's when the English-speakers hear the sweet musical language that will never ever die: that is to say, if the descendents of our ancestors are as loyal to it as they ought to be.

In the second of two letters to *The Celtic Monthly* (1907, p. 136), a correspondent in San Francisco (identified only as “Am B. A.”) writes:

*Bha sibh cho caoimhneil 's gu'n do dh'iarr  
sibh orm sgrìobhadh chugaibh a rithist. Tha  
mi an dòchas nach 'eil sibh a deanamh an  
iarrtas so gus cothrom a thoirt do Ghaidheil  
na h-Alba a bhi magadh air mo chuid  
Gaidhlig-sa. Canaidh mi aon fhacal ris na  
seòid sin, agus is e so e:— Ma bhios sibhse  
cho dìchiollach riumsa ann an cumail suas na  
Gaidhlig, cha téid i [gu] bàs gu latha luain.*

You were so kind as to ask me to write to you again. I hope that you did not make this request in order to give the Gaels in Scotland a chance to mock my command of Gaelic. I have one thing to say to those good folk, and this is it:— If you will be as earnest in your efforts to keep Gaelic alive as I am, it will never die.

The lack of competence and confidence in written Gaelic is, for the most part, a reflection of the lack of formal institutions to teach Gaelic literacy. Bucking this trend, however, was a reader of the *Scottish-American Journal*, J. MacFarlane of Philadelphia. He wrote a letter of considerable length (1 October 1890) correcting the spelling and grammatical errors that appeared in a very short Gaelic text given the week before:

DEAR SIR : It was with great pleasure that I read the Gaelic letter from Mr. Ross of Ontario, in the *Scottish-American* of September 24<sup>th</sup>. I tell you my heart warmed to it, and when I take upon myself to criticise it, it is not for the sake of finding fault, but rather that I myself may be edified thereby.

MacFarlane examines eight mistakes in the article, including the inconsistency of the formality of the pronouns used (i.e., *sibh* vs. *thu*). While this may smack of pendency, the letter does exhibit an unusual degree of self-confidence regarding Gaelic orthography and grammar.

## 5. Revitalization Efforts

### 5.1 Irish and Celtic Connections

The origins of a conscious pan-Celtic movement go no further back than the second half of the nineteenth century (*c.f.* Kidd 1999: Chapter Eight). The following poem from *The Scottish-American Journal* (16 April 1868) demonstrates early stirrings of pan-Celticism in America:

*The Gaels* by Mrs. M. C. Ferguson

Hail to our Celtic brethren, wherever they may be,  
In the far woods of Oregon, or o'er the Atlantic sea—  
Whether they guard the banner of St. George in Indian vales  
Or spread beneath the nightless North experimental sails  
    One in name and in fame  
    Are the sea-divided Gaels.

Tho' fallen the state of Erin, and changed the Scottish land  
Tho' small the power of Mona, tho' unwakened Llewellyn's band  
Tho' Ambrose Merlin's prophecies degenerate to tales  
And the cloisters of Iona are bemoaned by Northern gales,  
    One in name and in fame  
    Are the sea-divided Gaels.

In Northern Spain and Brittany our brethren also dwell  
Oh! brave are the traditions of their fathers that they tell;  
The eagle and crescent in the dawn of history pales  
Before their fire that seldom flags, and never wholly fails,  
    One in name and in fame  
    Are the sea-divided Gaels.

A greeting and a promise unto them all we send—  
Their character our charter is, their glory is our end—  
Their friend shall be our friend, our foe whoe'er assails

The past or future honors of the far-dispersed Gaels.  
 One in name and in fame  
 Are the sea-divided Gaels.

The poem is written in English and says nothing of language or culture. It instead appeals to racial essentialism for the definition of Gaels, or Celts. Nonetheless, savvy Scottish Gaels in the United States were aware of the linguistic and artistic activities of the American-Welsh community, such as in the following editorial from *The Scottish-American Journal* (July 1, 1880):

We have just had another display of their accomplishments in their annual Eisteddvod [sic], held during two days of last week in Scranton, Pa [...] These choirs numbered about 200 Welsh lads and lasses each [...] Upon a former occasion the attention of our Caledonian Societies was directed through our columns to this subject by our correspondent “Rutherglen,” who praised the musical accomplishments of the Welsh, and urged the Scottish people to follow their example as they had the same musical and poetical tastes.

Neil MacNeil Brodie remarked (*The Scottish-American Journal* 22 November 1883):

The Gaelic is indeed neglected from some cause unexplained and inexcusable. But perhaps any suppressed reason for this neglect may be answered by pointing to the high intellectual and moral standing of the Welsh, with their periodicals and eisteddfods, both in the old principality of Wales and on the other side of the American boundary line [i.e., the U.S.].<sup>9</sup>

American advocates of the revival of Irish were active in founding numerous linguistic organizations to teach and promote the language (*c.f.* Ó Dochartaigh 1979; Ní Bhroiméil 2001; Ní Ghabhann 1998:§16). These were especially to be found in the large towns: the Boston Philo-Celtic Association (1873), the Brooklyn Philo-Celtic Society (1874), the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language (New York, 1876), the Philadelphia Philo-Celtic Society (c. 1884), the New York Philo-Celtic Society (c. 1884), the San Francisco Philo-Celtic Society (c. 1884), and so on.

While it may merely be the coincidental common attraction to places of economic promise, it is notable that a number of Scottish Gaelic correspondents hail from the same cities that witnessed Irish Gaelic revival activity. At least one organization, the Gaelic Society of Boston (1891-1901), was explicitly inclusive of both Irish and Scottish Gaels (MacAonghusa 1979: 24). There can be little doubt that the development of Irish revitalization ideologies had an influence on Scottish Gaels. In fact, some Irish Gaels in the United States seem to have believed that their linguistic differences were minor, and that by creative linguistic harmonization the two groups could join and thus better survive. This is evidenced in a short article that appeared in *The Scottish-American Journal* (30 December 1891):

The Gaelic Society of New York, an Irish organization, has addressed an open letter to the Gaels of Scotland with a view to bringing about a unification of the Gaelic of the two countries. Upwards of a year ago the same body sent a letter of similar support to Mr. Donald McKinnon, professor of Gaelic in Edinburgh University, but he, while replying in amicable phrases, made no promise that he would take any steps towards purifying the Scotch Gaelic. The Irish Gaels now propose that a meeting of the best Gaelic scholars in Scotland and Ireland be called to consider how the Gaelic of the two countries can be brought to the same written standard [...] It will be impossible, they say, for Gaelic to continue to exist in either country unless something is done in this direction.

Irish-medium columns and periodicals had a fairly vigorous life in the late nineteenth-century United States (MacAonghusa 1979: 21-5). The most significant of these periodicals was *An Gaodhal*, established in 1881 for the Brooklyn Philo-Celtic Society (c.f. Ó Buachalla 1979). Early in its publication, *Mac-Talla* listed periodicals that its readers would find interesting. This list consisted of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*, *The Scottish Canadian*, *The Celtic Monthly*, and *An Gaodhal*. It is noteworthy that two of these four are Irish-medium publications, and the highest praise is reserved for *An Gaodhal* (22 July 1893):

*Tha 'n Gaodhal air a chuir a mach am  
Brooklyn, N.Y. uair 'sa mhios, agus tha e  
'togail a ghuth gu h-ard as leth Gàilig na h-  
Èirinn [...] Fhuair sinn litir chaoimhneil  
bho 'n fhear-deasachaidh o chionn ghoirid a  
guidhe soirbheachadh leis a' Mhac-Talla, 's  
ag radh gu robh esan a dol dheanamh na  
b'urrainn da gus a chuideachadh.*

*An Gaodhal* is put out in Brooklyn, N.Y.,  
once a month and it raises its voice  
loudly on behalf of the Gaelic of Ireland  
[...] We received a kind letter from the  
editor a short while ago wishing Mac-  
Talla success and saying that he was  
going to do all that he could in order to  
assist it.

Professor I. Dyneley Prince, a Welsh speaker resident in New York, was an enthusiastic Gaelic learner who was active in bringing together Irish and Scottish Gaels and educating them about their linguistic and historical connections. He explains (*Mac-Talla* 11 April 1896) how he invited three members each from the Irish Society of New York and the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York to a monthly educational discussion. His plan was that the outcomes of these discussions were to be taken back to their specific organizations. The forum was called the Gaelic Philological Club in English, and A' Chuideachd Ghàidhealach in Gaelic, and their monthly meetings, held at the university, featured bagpipe music and Gaelic song as well as scholarly discussions (*The Scottish-American Journal* 29 April 1896; 7 April 1897).<sup>10</sup> Professor Prince exhorted the Gaels, in a public speech to the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York, to follow the precedent set by the Welsh (printed in *Mac-Talla* 4 July 1896):

*'Nam beachdsa an nì a rinn [na  
Breathannaich] agus a tha iad a' dèanamh  
an-diugh air sgàth an càinain agus am  
beatha cinneadail, faodaidh sibhse mar  
Ghàidheil a cheart nì a dhèanamh as leth  
bhur cainnt, ceòl agus litreachas fèin. Tha  
mòran Ghàidheal anns an dùthaich  
fharsaing seo agus anns a' bhaile seo fèin  
àireamh mhath a dh'fhaodas an corr a  
dhèanamh as leth cleachdanan agus  
gnìomharan nan daoine còire on dàinig  
sibh. Cuimhnichibh mar an ceudna gu  
bheil sinn uile mar aon teaghlach a thaobh*

It is my opinion that the things that the  
Welsh have done and are doing in the  
present for the sake of their language and  
their culture, you as Gaels can do on  
behalf of your own language, music, and  
literature. There are many Gaels in this  
big country and in this very city there are  
a good number who can do more on  
behalf of the traditions and deeds of the  
good people from whom they are  
descended. Remember likewise that we  
are all like one big family regarding the  
things of which I have spoken. Do not



*nan nithean mun labhair mi, agus na leigibh leis a' Ghàidhlig bàs fhaotainn 'nur làmhhan.* allow Gaelic to die while it is in your own hands.

Other Scottish Gaelic Society of New York lectures raised the relevance of pan-Celtic connections, such as when Dr. Hamilton Williams explained the relationships between Scottish Gaelic, Irish and Manx, on the one hand, and Welsh, Breton and Cornish, on the other (*The Scottish-American Journal* 3 February 1897). It is also significant that Irish songs were sometimes sung at the meetings of the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York (*The Scottish-American Journal* 15 February 1899).

*Mac-Talla* appears to have supported the embryonic pan-Celtic movement. A series of weekly articles informing readers about the history of the Celts (and making frequent reference to the successes of the Irish, particularly in terms of language) began on 27 January 1899. *The Scottish-American Journal* (12 October 1899) reported with approval that representatives of the “Celtic Fringe” were to meet for the first Pan-Celtic Congress in Dublin in 1900. An article in *Mac-Talla* on 10 February 1899 mentioned the death of the editor of *An Gaodhal* (Mícheál Ó Lócháin), noting that he had great respect for *Mac-Talla* and its editor, Jonathon Mackinnon. Mackinnon also made use of Irish lexical material that appeared in *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* in *Mac-Talla*, such as when he reprinted a list of terms describing the parts of a bicycle (undated copy in my possession).

The Celtic Club of Los Angeles was founded in 1905 by Scottish Gael Malcolm Macleod and Irish Gael John McGroarty, and claimed to have been the first pan-Celtic organization in the world (*The Scottish-American Journal* 16 September 1908). They welcomed Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Cornish, Manx and Breton members, and one of their

first guests was Ireland's Douglas Hyde. The complexities of reconciliation between Celtic peoples were not denied, but they claim to have transcended divisive prejudices:

Scotch and Irish who met at the monthly social gathering of the Celtic Club came honestly determined to put aside all religious and political differences, and in this mood they very quickly found common ideals and aspirations [...] We claim for the Celt the recognition that is duly his and has too often been lost sight of in the past mainly through loss of unity, but we do this in the warmest feeling of comradeship for every other race that is helping to carry forward the banner of human progress.

Comparisons with other minority languages also were made occasionally. Aonghas MacAoidh, resident in Providence, Rhode Island, saw a relationship between England's imperial ambitions over Scotland and the Puritan's genocidal past. He connected this to racism in both America and Britain, thus demonstrating empathy with Native Americans (*Mac-Talla* 3 June 1893):

*Their cuid gu'r cruaidh a chainnt a bhi ag raituinn gur i Sasuinn rioghachd Chriosdail a's ciontaiche a tha air thalamh — tha e cruaidh ra luaidh gun ag — ach is firinn glan [sic] e. Nuair a rainig Puritans Shasuinn mor-thir America, lùb iad an glùn, a tairgse iobairt thaingealachd do'n Tì a thug iad sabhailte troimh thonnaibh na h-Atlantic; ach cha luaithe a chuir iad crioich air an iobairt bhuidheachais, na thog iad an claidheamh 'san spealt theine, 's thoisich iad air murt 's air marbhadh dhaoine neo-chiontach. [...] Dhoirt na Puritans Shasunnach do dh'fhuil neo-chiontach ann an New England, na chuireadh cabhlach beag air bhog.*

*Tilleamaid air ais gu ar tir fein. Co a bha dòrtadh fuil neo-chiontach Alba? Cha robh Albainn ach a dian a saorsa is a dùthchais, ach bha Sasuinn 'ga comhdach le fuil neo-chiontach gus 'n do dh'fhairetlich orra a ceannsachadh. [...]*

*Bho'n la a dh'fhuaraich fuil nan*

Some will say that it is harsh to claim that England is the most guilty of all Christian kingdoms in the world — it is certainly harsh to say — but it is the honest truth. When the Puritans of England reached the mainland of America, they bent their knee, making an offering of thanksgiving to the One who delivered them safely through the waves of the Atlantic; they were hardly concluded with their offering of thanks before they raised their swords in great violence [?] and they began to kill and murder innocent people [...] The English Puritans spilt enough innocent blood in New England to float a small fleet of ships.

Let us return to our own country. Who was spilling the innocent blood of Scotland? Scotland was only protecting its freedom and its culture, but England was covering it in innocent blood until they failed to conquer it. [...]

Since the day that the blood of the

*Domhnallach anns a' chuisle rioghail, ciod  
a bha na Gaidheil ach air an liodairt, air  
am foireigneadh is air an ruagadh, mar a  
chearc-fhraoich roimh 'n ghiomanach. Cha  
d'thug na Stiubhartaich Shasunnach-  
Fhrangach, is na Caimbeulaich  
Fhrangach, fois no tamh do na Gaidheil,  
gus 'n do fhàsaich iad gach gleann, is  
srath, is cluain, còsag àluinn, thorach,  
fhasgach, a b'fhiach a bhi sealbhachadh an  
Gàidhealtachd na h-Albainn.*

MacDonalds dried up in the veins of the nobility, what has happened to the Gaels but to be massacred, to be oppressed, and to be exiled, like the moor-hen before the hunter. The Anglo-French Stewarts, and the Frenchified Campbells, never gave the Gaels any rest or respite until they cleared out every glen, strath, field, and beautiful fertile sheltering spot that was worthy of being inhabited in the Scottish Highlands.

*Duimhne, co a b'e Duimhne? An e fàs suas  
a measg nan ceanna-phollan ann an Loch  
Odha a rinn e mar a dh'fhas Topsy aig  
Uncle Tom's Cabin, ann am boglaichean  
Savannah; theagamh gur e bhi de'n  
bheachd sin a thug air Diùc Iain a tha air  
mhaireann ann an Dun Ara fathast,  
creidsinn cho làidir 's an Darwin theory.  
[...]*

Campbell, who was this Campbell? Was it the experience of growing up amongst the tad-poles in Loch Awe that made him similar to Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in the swamps of Savannah; it was probably from being of that mindset that caused Duke John who still lives in Inverary to believe so strongly in Darwin's theory. [...]

*Tha sliochd nam Puritans an so a lan  
chreidsinn gur iad fein gràine mullaich a'  
chinnidh-daonna [...]*

The descendents of the Puritans here are convinced that they are the absolute pinnacle of the human race [...]

*Sin agaibh beagan air gné a' Gheangaich.*

There's a little about the nature of the Yankee for you.

A Gaelic song that was composed in Vancouver but which migrated to California gained an extra verse during its life in the Golden State, probably around the turn of the nineteenth century (Newton 2001a: 249). It is remarkable for its admiration of the Chinese, who were one of the most despised and persecuted ethnic groups in the American West.

*Nach seall thu air an t-Sineach  
Ged 's ìseal 'nad shealladh e  
Neach nach creid am Bìoball  
Na 'n Fhìrinn ged chanainn e.  
Tha e daingeann dìleas  
Do rìoghachd 's do sheanairean  
Gu cumail suas a chàinail*

Why don't you look at the Chinese man,  
Although you look down on him,  
A person who does not believe in the Bible,  
Or the Gospel, I must confess.  
He is steadfast and faithful  
To his nation and to his ancestors  
In maintaining his language

*Ged bhiodh càch uile fanaid air.*

Even though everyone else mocks him.

Given the pressures to assimilate to Anglophone norms, it is perhaps not surprising that such rhetoric did not save Gaelic from being lost within a generation or two. Perhaps what is more surprising is the similarity perceived, at least by a few Highlanders, between themselves and other ethnic minorities.

## 5.2 Gaelic Organizations

Ever since the establishment of the Gaelic Society of London in 1777, a number of organizations have been founded that were intended to promote Gaelic language and literature. The effectiveness of these societies, however, in achieving these aims has often been disappointing. They were often characterized as run by Anglicized élite and distracted by tartanism (Gillies 1989a: 8-10).<sup>11</sup> Despite these failures, Highlanders inevitably saw the need for organizations to serve social and cultural purposes. A reader in Philadelphia who asked the editor of *The Scottish-American Journal* (20 January 1881) “Can you inform me whether Gaelic is spoken exclusively in any part of the United States, and where?” was given the reply:

We are not aware that the language is spoken exclusively in any part of the United States. [...] There should be enough Scotsmen at least in Canada to form a Gaelic Association, and we see no good reason why the attempt should not be made in the United States.

The following comments in *Mac-Talla* (25 February 1898), contributed by “L.L.” in London, contrasted the missed opportunities of Gaelic societies with the achievements of contemporary Gaelic newspapers:

*Gun teagamh tha cor na Gàidhlig aig an àm so 'na chuis tàireil, mar aon do na Comunnan Gàidhlig agus do na Gaidheil anns gach cearn. Tha mòran Chomunnan Gàidhlig air an sgaoileadh air feadh an t-saoghail, agus*

Without a doubt, the current state of Gaelic is a cause for shame, and likewise for the Gaelic Societies and the Gaels everywhere. There are many Gaelic Societies distributed around the

*ma tha, ciod am feum a rinn iad riamh airson na Gàidhlig? Gu dearbh, is i an fhirinn gu'n do rinn iad mòran lochd di. Is ainmig a chluinneas neach fuaim ceòlmhor na Gàidhlig aig an coinneamhan, agus ma chuireas iad iomradh a mach, mu an gnothaichean, is i a' Bheurla anns am bi e air a chlo-bhualadh. Chan e sin an doigh airson a' Ghaidhlig a chumail suas. Is e dleasnas gach ball de Chumann Gàidhlig gach ni a tha 'na chomas a dheanamh gu eòlas air a' Ghaidhlig a sgaoileadh am fad agus am fagus, ach tha e coltach gu'm beil a chuid a's mò diubh cho deidheil air deanamh sodain ris na h-uaislean agus gur i a' Ghaidhlig bho chd an rud deireannach air an toir iad smuain. [...] Tha cuid de na Comunnan so a' deanamh an dichìoll a dh'fheuchainn am faigh iad na gilleann Gàidhealach a ghabhail anns an arm dheirg, ged nach eil e soilleir ciod a tha aig sin ri dheanamh ri Comunn Ghaidhlig. [...] Tha fear deasachaidh Mhic-Talla agus fear-deasachaidh "An Naigheachd Ghaidhealach," ann an Albainn, a' deanamh tuilleadh airson na Gàidhlig na rinn na Comunnan Gàidhlig uile a tha air thalamh.*

world, and yet, what use have they ever been to Gaelic? Indeed, it is the truth that they have done much damage to it. Seldom is the musical sound of Gaelic heard at their meetings, and if they issue any reports, they are printed in English. That is not the way to keep Gaelic healthy. It is the responsibility of every Gaelic Society member to do everything in his power in order to spread the knowledge of Gaelic far and wide, but it seems that the majority of people are so eager to fawn over the nobility that poor Gaelic is the last thing that they think about. [...] Some of these Societies are doing their very best to try to recruit the young Highland men into the British military, although it is not at all clear what this has to do with a Gaelic Society. [...] The editor of *Mac-Talla* and the editor of "The Highland News" in Scotland, are doing more for Gaelic than all of the Gaelic Societies combined on the planet.

These complaints from London were echoed in comments from correspondents in the United States. I have only located two examples of the teaching of Gaelic literacy in the United States, the first of these only accomplished after a great deal of conflict. The establishment of the Scottish Celtic Society of New York<sup>12</sup> in 1892 was described in the following manner:

*Bha ' cheud choinneimh mhiosail de'n chomunn so air a cumail air oidhche Dhichìadain sa chaidh, ann an Union Hall [...] Bha Comunn Gàidhealach New York air a steidheachadh air an t-Samhainn chaidh [...] Se miann a' chomuinn, oidheirp a thabhairt gu tuilleadh cairdeis is companais bhrosnachadh am measg Ghaidheal New York, agus meadhonan*

The first monthly meeting of this society was held on last Wednesday night in Union Hall [...] The Highland Society of New York was established last November [...] The purpose of the society is to make an effort to encourage further friendship and camaraderie amongst the Gaels of New York, and to provide a means by which the members of the society can

*ullachadh leis am faod buill a chomuinn  
iad fein a dheanadh eolach air an cainnt  
mhathrail a chum a labhairt gu pongail  
deas-bhriathrach agus mar an ceudna  
comhnadh 's comhairle a thabhairt cho fad  
's a cheadaicheas cuisean e do neach air  
bith do ar luchd duthcha a thig a dheanadh  
an dachaidh 's a chearn so do'n t-saoghal.*

become better acquainted with their  
mother tongue in order to speak it  
precisely and eloquently, and likewise, to  
provide help and advice, as far as matters  
allow us, to anyone of our fellow  
countrymen who come to make their  
home in this part of the world.<sup>13</sup>

From information appearing in the columns of *The Scottish-American Journal*, the monthly meetings featured Gaelic songs, bagpipe music, Highland dancing, and songs of the Scottish Lowlands. The society also announced its willingness to hold classes in Gaelic literacy, if there were enough interest from members (*The Scottish-American Journal* 4 July 1894). Despite these pioneering efforts, however, it seems as though there were some members of the society who felt that it lacked sufficient commitment towards its linguistic aims, for we see the following letter from *Americanach* in *Mac-Talla* (1 December 1894):

*Bidh ar luchd leughaidh toilichte a  
chluinntinn gu'm bheil Gàidheil New York a  
cur rompa nach faigh a' Ghàidhlig bàs 'sa  
chearna so do'n dùthaich. Dh'fhosgail iad  
Sgoil Shàbaid air a' mhios seo chaidh ann  
an aon de dh'eaglaisean mòr a' bhaile,  
Marble Collegiate [...] Tha dlùth air dà  
fhichead de sgoilearan aige cheana, buinidh  
roinn mhath diubh do Nova Scotia [...] Tha  
Comunn Gàidhealach New York a'  
coinneachadh uair 'sa mhios, ach tha  
mòran Ghall na'm measg [...] Tha Gàidheil  
thuingeach a tha eudmhor a thaobh math a  
Chomainn a bruidhinn air Comunn ùr  
Gàidhlig a chur air chois a chumas suas  
cànain, ceòl agus cleachdaidhean ar sinnsir  
anns an dòigh an cubhaidh do Ghàidheil.*

Your readership will be pleased to hear that the Gaels of New York have decided that Gaelic will not die in this part of the country. They opened a Sunday school last month in one of the large churches of the city, Marble Collegiate [...] There are already close to forty students in it, and a good number of them are natives of Nova Scotia [...] The Celtic Society of New York meets once a month, but there are many non-Gaels amongst them [...] The wise Gaels who are zealous about the good of the society are talking about establishing a new Gaelic Society that will maintain the language, music and customs of our ancestors in the manner befitting Gaels.

Domhnall Eachuinn wrote a month later to update readers on developments and provide an explanation for the schism (*Mac-Talla* 19 January 1895):

*Dh'fhosgail sinn Sgoil Shàbaid o chionn  
corr is trì mìosan, agus bidh sibh toilichte  
chluinntinn gu bheil nise barrachd air leth-  
cheud a' cruinneachadh [...] [Tha] an  
Comunn Ceilteach a' feuchainn o chionn  
corr agus bliadhna ris a' Ghàidhlig a  
chumail beò, ach mo chreach, an àit iad a  
bhith fàs làidir, 's ann tha iad a' fàs lag,  
seadh, lag lag [...] Agus gu cinnteach,  
chan eil iongantas ann, a chionn gu bheil  
neart de'n luchd riaghlaidh caoin-  
shuarach mu'n chainnt [...] Gu fortanach,  
tha Gàidheil cheanalta aig am beil spéis  
agus gràdh do chainnt am màthar fhathast  
ri'm faotainn anns a' bhaile so. Chunnaic  
iad nach robh ceòl, litreachas, agus pàirt  
de chleachdaidhean an sinnsir a' faotainn  
cothrom na Féinne a measg nan gall, agus  
chuir iad air bonn comunn ùr — Comunn  
Gàilig New York.*

We opened a Sunday school over three months ago and you will be pleased to hear that there are now more than fifty coming together [...] The Celtic Society has been trying for more than a year to maintain Gaelic, but alas! rather than staying strong, they are instead growing weak, yes, very weak [...] and indeed, it's no surprise, given that many of the leaders look down on the language [...] Fortunately, the excellent Gaels who have esteem and affection for their mother tongue are still to be found in this city. They have seen that the music, literature, and some of the customs of their ancestors were not getting a fair chance amongst the non-Gaels, and they have established a new society — The Scottish Gaelic Society of New York.

In a follow-up letter (*Mac-Talla* 16 February 1895) we learn that the organization was established on 24 November 1894, and that the president of the society was Niall Dòmhnallach. The Gaelic class organized by the society was said in May of 1895 to have 67 students on the roster, with an average weekly attendance of 28 students each week (*The Scottish-American Journal* 29 May 1895). The class, however, was meant to teach literacy (and in particular, the ability to read the Bible) to native Gaelic speakers rather than to teach the language to people who didn't already know it.

There are a few indications that people whose mother tongue was not Gaelic found some encouragement to learn it. When the Rev. J. F. Forbes of St. Andrews Church in Sydney (Cape Breton) addressed the society, he stated proudly that he only began learning Gaelic at the age of 30 in Illinois! Despite this, he delivered a Gaelic sermon at the Marble Collegiate Church (*The Scottish-American Journal* 20 September 1899) and seems to have done so regularly in his home church in Cape Breton. The early activism

of Gaelic supporters in New York, and the inspirational example of Professor Prince, must have made an impression. Scottish Gaelic Society member Domhnall Eachainn encouraged Gaels to stand firm against Gaelic's many enemies in the cities (*Mac-Talla* 4 July 1896):

*Ach 's mòr m' eagal gur iadsan a' chaill an Gaidhlig 's nach d'fhuair am Beurla nàmhaid is luaidhe ni tàir air a chanain lionmhor bhrìghmhor bhlasda bhinn. Dh'aindeoin co theireadh e, togaidh a Ghaidhlig a ceann aosda liath gu ciallach folaiseach agus gheibh i cairdean dileas gus a treòrachadh air adhart gun sgath gun eagal roimh Ghaill leibideach, no Gaidheal spagloinneach. Tha 'n seorsa so ri faotainn anns gach baile mòr 's treallain gu'n chridhe gun eanchainn. Mar tha fhios agaibh tha moran Gaidheal 'sa bhail' so, aireamh mhath dhiubh nach faca riamh duthaich an athairichean — "Gaidhealtachd na hAlba." Coma co dhiubh labhraidh iad gu fallain reidh Cànan Fhinn is Oisein agus seinnidh iad gu blasda binn orain "Tir an fhraoich." [...] Agus gu sonruichte bhi 'n earalas air fearas-chuideachd na muinntir tha feuchainn ri bhi 's an fhasan, agus a stri ri cleachdairean nam bailtean mora bhi 'ga sparadh air aobharan Comunn Gàidhealach sam bith.*

I greatly fear that the enemy who will be the quickest to disparage the extensive, substantive, delicious, melodious language are those who have forgotten their Gaelic and not mastered English. Despite who might say otherwise, Gaelic will raise its ancient grey head in a sensible and discernible way, and it will get loyal friends who will guide it forward without any fear or dread of contemptible non-Gaels or pretentious Gaels. These sorts are to be found in every large city, and they are thralls without hearts or minds. As you know, there are many Gaels in this city, a goodly number of them who have never seen the homeland of their forefathers — "the Scottish Highlands." Regardless of this, they speak the language of Fionn and Ossian vigorously and eloquently, and they sing the songs of the "Land of Heather" sweetly [...] Especially be on your guard against the ploys of those people who are trying to be trendy, and who are attempting to force the practices of big cities on the constitutions of Highland Societies.

This final remark implies that this is what had happened to the Scottish Celtic Society of New York— leaders had compromised the Gaelic substance of the society in order to seem more fashionable according to the norms of mainstream American metropolitan culture. This may be too harsh of a criticism, but there are signs that the organization was under pressure to abandon some of its ideals. A motion was made at the Thanksgiving 1902 meeting to "amend the constitution so that the presidency would be open to non-



Gaelic speaking members” but was defeated by a vote of 24 to 6 (*The Scottish-American Journal* 3 December 1902).

There was also a suggestion first raised at the Celtic Society that the two organizations amalgamate, but “after a great deal of discussion the project was abandoned, and the meeting decided that the Celtic Society would continue to receive members of the Gaelic Society as individuals” (*The Scottish-American Journal* 3 February 1904). This issue was raised again in 1912 at the Scottish Gaelic Society: “The meeting received a report of a special committee regarding an amalgamation of the Celtic and Gaelic societies. Considerable discussion took place. It was agreed, however, to allow the report to lie on the table indefinitely” (*The Scottish-American Journal* 19 June 1912). The reason for this proposed amalgamation is unclear to me, as both societies appear to have numerous members and a healthy attendance at their fund-raising concerts, balls, and céilidhs. It could be that some people perceived that their interests and goals overlapped too much to remain as separate societies. I would assume that the main issue that prevented an easy merger was the language usage policies, as well as lingering personal grudges from the initial schism.

The most traditional of public musical performances hosted by the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York was the milling frolic performed at Caledonian Hall. Although waulking the tweed was greatly enjoyed by participants in Gaelic communities, it is strongly associated with rural, peasant life and cannot be easily transformed into stage performance with pretensions of sophistication, which makes its appearance on the stage in New York music halls all the more surprising:

The platform was converted into a Highland cottage, in which was gathered a bevy of sonsie matrons and bonnie lassies, all dressed for the work of helping in the

“waulking,” accompanying themselves with Gaelic songs, “Orain Luadhaidh,” to the swing of the cloth as it was passed from one to another in unison with the song (*The Scottish-American Journal* 14 February 1906).

The event seems to have been well received, as they staged another performance in April of the same year (*The Scottish-American Journal* 17 April 1906). Nonetheless, even the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York was guilty of lapsing into Brigadoonery, especially when promoting their annual fund-raising concert and ball and trying to maximize public attendance. Cashing in on the popularity of the stage-Scotsman routine of Harry Lauder, they made him an honorary member and had him perform as their feature attraction in 1908, and several times thereafter. Although they seem to have offered some Gaelic material at many of

their public events, it seems to have been increasingly upstaged by songs in Scots and the standard formulae of Highlandism (Figure 3).

It is likely that the rivalry between Gaelic Society and the Celtic Society of New York had the effect of enhancing the overall support for Gaelic in New York. Given that most Gaels had only experienced Gaelic language and culture as a feature of rural life in impoverished areas, excluded from the institutions of wealth, power and prestige, any usage of Gaelic in New York must have seemed to them to be an advance over the sad state of the language in remote and neglected corners of the world. It is not surprising to



Figure 3. 1908 Scottish-Gaelic Society of New York Highland Games advertisement

find a sense of pride and hope in this new development, as Mrs. J. B. Campbell writes from New York in 1903:

In all the Highland societies in which I am personally interested and others of which I read (and they are numerous) I find that the great object is not only to have Gaelic-speaking presidents but as many Gaelic-speaking members as they can possibly get. In one society, of which I am a life member, the entire business is conducted in Gaelic, and any one speaking one word of English during business hours is fined one shilling. The president's annual address is always delivered in the purest Gaelic. In the Cape [Breton?] Highland Society, in which I have many friends, the rules are equally stringent, and the membership fee for one year is one guinea. It is in a most flourishing condition, and a member of the committee writing to me recently said that they had just voted £25 sterling to the Gaelic Society of London, England, to help the teaching of Gaelic in the Highlands of Scotland [...] All these, and many other instances, go to prove that the good old Gaelic is being revived, and appreciated more than it has been in nearly a century past (*The Scottish-American Journal* 21 January 1903).

There was clearly pressure to switch to English to accommodate non-Gaelic speakers, and what Gaelic was used by native speakers in ceremonial contexts was no doubt seen in a short time as having little lasting impact on language maintenance and intergenerational transmission. By overestimating the significance of their accomplishments, they underestimated the difficulties in the true work of language revitalization. This same correspondent, only two years later, laments:

As a Highlander of Highlanders, loving the old Celtic language with all my heart, I regret that so little of it is spoken in the Scottish societies of this city. Our energetic friends, the Irish Celts, are far ahead of us in the cultivation of their ancient language, and take great pride in it. Why should Highland Scots, who are generally in the front rank of every enterprise, be leagues behind in their mother tongue? The Gaelic language is the oldest of all our Scottish traditions, and should for that reason, if for no other, be cultivated (*The Scottish-American Journal* 18 January 1905).

Donald Currie, also of New York, similarly expresses his disappointment in the lack of dedication and involvement of New York societies in the work of Gaelic:

The contributions of Mr. [George] Black and other items pertaining to the Gaelic revival appearing in *The Scottish-American* should appeal to the members of the

Gaelic societies in this city, whose chief object is the preservation of the Gaelic language. Unfortunately, the good old Gaelic receives little consideration and encouragement. Not long ago *The Scottish-American*, in commenting upon the work done by the Gaelic Society of London, advised the New York Gaels and others to step lively and follow their sister societies in London, Glasgow, Inverness, and other places, where activity is the predominating feature of its officers and members [...] Let us, then, in New York be up and doing (*The Scottish-American Journal* 4 October 1905).

The teaching of Gaelic literacy in New York seems to have inspired the members of the Scottish Highlanders Society of Chicago. They began a class in Gaelic literacy, also using the Bible as their text (*The Scottish-American Journal* 15 May 1895). The organization seems to have held some of their meetings in Gaelic, for they invited the Rev. Mr. MacIves<sup>14</sup> of Colorado Springs to deliver a Gaelic lecture to them (*The Scottish-American Journal* 3 May 1893). Mr. Archibald MacDonald delivered a paper in Gaelic to the society after a Gaelic song by J. W. MacLean in 1903 (*The Scottish-American Journal* 30 December 1903).

Unlikely homes for Scottish Gaelic societies included Toledo, Ohio (*The Scottish-American Journal* 11 December 1907):

The recent "Celtic Mod" held at Glasgow invited the Gaels throughout the world to come together and organize associations. A number of Toledo Scottish Highlanders met on the 2d inst. and formed the "Highland Society." They will invite the Celts of Ireland and Wales to their meetings, thus uniting the Gaels under one banner. All sessions will be opened in Gaelic and resolutions introduced in the language of Eden.

Although I am unsure of its lifespan, there was a Gaelic society of Washington D. C. The one meeting summarized in *The Scottish-American Journal* (1 February 1911) mentions the Rev. Dr. Donald MacLeod (of the First Presbyterian Church) speaking in Gaelic, followed by the Rev. Daniel McDonald (a student at the Catholic University), also speaking in Gaelic. The surname of the president was Shahan, suggesting that the group

may have actually been pan-Gaelic. Other Gaelic societies were formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries around the United States, but they tended to be informal gatherings at which members exchanged songs, stories and news through the medium of Gaelic. They thus seem to have left very little documentary evidence, and much further research will be required to reconstruct their memberships and activities.

### 5.3 Coming to Gaelic's Defense

Those striving to defend Gaelic asserted that its decline was not a natural and inevitable result of the language's own supposed inferiority. The acclaimed Gaelic poet Evan MacColl contributed the following remarks to *The Scottish-American Journal* (13 January 1881) about the psychological terrorism inflicted on school children to alienate them from their mother tongue, techniques which were also well known in Ireland and Wales:

Another barbarous mode of forcing us to make English our sole vehicle of speech at school was to make all trespassers on that rule carry on their breasts, suspended by a *gad* made to go round the neck, the skull of some dead horse! and which he was by no means to get rid of until some other luckless fellow might be overheard whispering a word in the prohibited tongue. How Highland parents, with the least common sense, could approve of all this is to me inexplicable. Little wonder if, under such circumstances, we could often devoutly wish that the Saxon and his tongue had never existed! It is to be hoped that no such foul, short-sighted means of killing off my good mother-tongue are still allowed to exist in any part of the Highlands. If it must die — though I see no good reason why it should — let it have at least a little fair play in the fight for its life.

The shame previously associated with speaking Gaelic was reversed by Gaelic revivalists, transformed into shame on those who had abandoned their mother tongue. Gaelic was reframed as a moral and cultural virtue and those who feigned to have forgotten their Gaelic could be accused of an ethical transgression, trading in a superior virtue for mere materialistic gain.

In his inaugural speech for Comunn Gàilig New York, Niall Dòmhnallach claimed the moral high ground for Gaelic (*Mac-Talla* 16 February 1895):

*Cha'n e, arsa 'm filidh, gaol stòrais a mheudaich ar gràdh do'n Ghàidhlig na's aobhar dhuinn a bhi comhairleachadh dhuibh-se a h-ionnsachadh. Tha spéis againn di a chionn gur h-i ar cànan féin: an dìlib a dh'fhàg ar sinnsir againn [...] cànain bheò fhallain a' ceangal ar linn am beachd 's an smuain ris an tìom o chian [...] Deanamaid mata na's urrainn duinn a chum a' Ghàidhlig a chumail suas. Bidh sinn, ged nach cuir e bonn na'r sporan, ni's fear agus ni's glìce le bhi 'cur an cleachdadh ar cànain aosda, bhlasda. Mar is mò a gheibh sinn de dh'eòlas air ar cànain, 's ann is mò a ghràdhaicheas sinn ar luchd-dùthcha, ar'n eachdraidh 's an tìr a dh'fhàg sinn.*

It is not, said the poet, the love of wealth that intensified our love for Gaelic, that is not the reason that we are advising you to learn it. We esteem it simply because it is our own language: the heritage that our ancestors left us [...] the hardy living language that connects our generation in thought and mind with times long past [...] Let us do, therefore, all that we can do in order to keep Gaelic alive. Though it will not put coinage into our purses, we will be the better and wiser by putting our ancient, delicious language to use. The more that we learn about our language, the more that we will love our fellow countrymen, our history, and the land that we left behind.

The conclusion of this speech seems to me to allude to the psychological damage inflicted on the Gaels by linguistic oppression: embracing Gaelic is a means to heal those wounds. Such was also one of the implicit motivations behind founding the first Celtic Chair in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh (Gillies 1989a: 7-8). Rev. Archibald Farquharson (minister of Tiree) similarly concluded an earlier letter apparently written to the editor of *The Scottish-American Journal* (18 November 1869):

As a Christian, in the sincerity of my heart I would say to Highlanders, rally round your Gaelic, have it taught to your children, let it ever be the language of your firesides, of your devotions in surrounding the family altar, and never, never be ashamed of it while the pulse of life beats within. By so doing you will show yourselves men, and gain more respect from Englishmen and Lowlanders than by forsaking it.

Alasdair MacLean Sinclair believed, as did others, that calling Americans to develop serious scholarship about Gaelic would help to reclaim it from disparagement and denigration:

The world at large may not care very much how our forefathers looked at things and how they lived; but surely men with Highland blood in their veins should take some interest in such things. The Scottish Highlanders were not savages, but noble-hearted and intelligent men (*The Scottish-American Journal* 27 February 1889).

Less generous were those who scorned fellow Gaels that had abandoned Gaelic but whose competence in English as a second language was less than perfect. Tearlach, writing from Oakland, California, remarked with disapproval (*Mac-Talla* 19 October 1895):

*'S aithne dhomh gu leòr a chaill an cuid Gàilig  
ma's fìor dhaibh féin, ach ma chaill, cha  
d'fhuair iad a' Bheurla no cànan sam bith eile.*

I know plenty of people who claim to have forgotten their Gaelic, but if they did forget it, they have not learned English or any other language.

Harsh as this rhetoric is, it was clearly meant to goad Gaelic speakers into taking pride in their mother tongue — although it no doubt could have had the opposite effect. At worst, exhortations to the Highlanders to maintain their Gaelic could lead them to indulge in the noble savagery propagated by James Macpherson's *Ossian*. The importance of Gaelic, some argued, was that it was invested with virtues that were “dignified” or “sublime”:

It would be a matter for sincere regret to others besides scholars and philologists were this most ancient form of speech to become extinct as a spoken language. It breathes of mystery and the past as the monovalve shell does of the tides and sea, and remains now the one living link of speech which binds the present to a pre-historic past (*The Scottish-American Journal* 30 June 1909).

Apart from the false piety of this assertion, such claims appear to have been too backward looking for an audience living in an era of rapid change. This view of Gaelic reinforced the idea that the language was disconnected from and irrelevant in the modern world.

#### 5.4 Attacking Tartanism

Tartanism created a false image of the Highlanders (not to mention Scots as a whole) by exaggerating the importance of the kilt and tartan. The cult of Tartanism

sublimated the pride and energies that could potentially have been invested in more substantial cultural endeavors, including Gaelic. Although the wearing of the kilt and tartan served a useful purpose as a visible ethnic marker, and had a clear romantic appeal to many, it completely upstaged the fact that Highlanders had a unique language and literary heritage that should not be reduced to simple tokens. Gaelic activists therefore saw the need to criticize the misrepresentations of Highland heritage that threatened to marginalize their language and culture. *Americanach*, writing from New York, reminded readers (*Mac-Talla* 1 December 1894):

*Is bòidheach an sealladh Gàidheil [sic] sgeadaichte an èideadh a thìr, ach as eugmhais na Gàidhlig cha bhi ann an cosg bhreacan is bhiodagan ach adhbhar mhagaidh. Ma dhìobras sinn ar gràdh do'n Ghàidhlig, cha bhi fada 'na dhèidh sin gus am faic sinn deireadh eachdraidh ar sluaigh.*<sup>15</sup>

A Highlander arrayed in the garb of his country is a gorgeous sight, but without Gaelic wearing kilts and dirks makes him a laughing stock. If we abandon our love for Gaelic, it won't take long before we see the end of the history of our people.

A subscriber to *The Celtic Monthly* (1907, p. 38) in San Francisco (identified only as Am B.A.) subtly chided the periodical (notable for its indulgence in Celtic romanticism) for its lack of commitment to tangible support for Gaelic:

*Ged tha na h-urrad do bhrod na Gaidhlig agaibh 'n ar paipeir tha coire agam ri fhaighinn do dh'aon rud; agus is e sin nach 'eil ainm Gaidhlig agaibh air taobh-toisich, mar tha "Guth na Bliadhna" a comhairleachadh do na paipearan Gaidhealach. Gidheadh is dòcha gu'n tig sin ri ùine.*

Although you do have a quantity of excellent Gaelic in your paper, I do find fault with one thing: that is, that you do not have a Gaelic name appearing on your title-page, as "Guth na Bliadhna" has advised Highland newspapers. However, that may come with time.

*Guth na Bliadhna* was a Gaelic periodical espousing a number of radical ideas, including the politicizing of the Gaelic cause, and it is interesting to observe the range of its influence. *The Celtic Monthly* and *Guth na Bliadhna* could hardly have been more different in their political stances. Aonghas MacAoidh's first letter to *Mac-Talla* (24 June



1893) expresses the hope that the Gaels of America will create a new home where the Gaelic language will be protected, recalling the abode of Fionn MacCumhail and the Fianna. His letter begins with a panegyric in verse, followed by a prose exegesis.

*Biodh cach a seinn an cuid eallan  
Mu dheibhin nan gleann 's nam beannaibh  
Ach molaidh mise Mac-Talla  
Tha 'cur anam 'na mo chainnt.*

Let everyone else sing their songs  
About the glens and the mountains,  
But I choose to praise Mac-Talla  
That keeps my language alive.

*Gum a slan don Ghaidheal ghaisgeil  
S aoibhinn leam an sgeul a chlaistin  
Do thalla 'ga dheanamh farsuing  
Ged a thachdas e 'm fear galld*

Good health to the valiant Gael  
Hearing his tale brings me good cheer  
May you make your halls spacious  
Even if it chokes off the non-Gael.

*Deanta fada, farsuing ard e  
Biodh a bhallachan gun sgaineadh  
Gus an cinnich e le Gaidhil  
Cho laidir ri fardach Fhinn.*

Let it be long, expansive and lofty  
Let there be no breakage in its walls  
So that the Gaels may develop it  
To be as strong as Fionn's abode.

*Ma ni Gaidhil America an dleasanais daibh fein  
's do na bheil ag eirigh suas nan deigh, ni iad  
do thalla nas treise na fa[r]dach Fhinn [...]   
Smuainicheamid uime sin agus thoireamid aon  
ionnsaigh bheo air ar cainnt a chumail o  
ghearradh-mairbh a bhi 'ga dheanamh oirre leis  
na Goill.*

If the Gaels of America fulfill their obligations  
to themselves and to those who are growing up  
after them, they will make your hall stronger  
than Fionn's abode [...] Let us think on that and  
let us make a hardy unified effort to keep our  
language from the graveyard that has been  
prepared for it by the non-Gaels.

MacAoidh's letter was entitled by the editor *A DUTHICH IC AOIDH*, which, although it may display the editor's sense of humor, also reflects MacAoidh's desire to naturalize Gaelic in North America. MacAoidh seems to have been the strongest exponent of Gaelic nationalism in America to appear in *Mac-Talla*, and one of the most intellectually sophisticated voices for Gaelic linguistic revitalization, but there is no doubt that his sentiments were shared by others. It is unfortunate, in a sense, that these comments are uncommon outside of Gaelic periodicals, for it was the English-language periodicals that indulged so shamelessly in Tartanism. From the beginnings of *The Scottish-American Journal*, the cults of Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns, the tartan, and Highland Games are

already evident as well established “facts” in the representation and celebration of Scottish heritage in America. The pro-Gaelic material that appears in this periodical seems to have made little long-lasting impact on the popular imagination.

### 5.5 Development of Literature

One of the common arenas of activity in linguistic revitalization movements is the recovery of traditional literature, and Scottish Gaelic periodicals certainly show a great deal of interest in such materials. It is not clear if this effort to salvage the fading literary relics of Gaeldom in Scotland had a significant impact upon the readership resident in the United States. Alasdair MacLean Sinclair (giving himself American credentials as “An ex-officer of the Philadelphia Caledonian Club”) attempted to convince the readers of *The Scottish-American Journal* that such an effort was important in a long letter (27 February 1889). “There is a large number of old Gaelic poems in manuscript that ought to be published, and thus rendered accessible to Gaelic readers, and especially to Gaelic scholars.” These texts were important, he argued, for three reasons: their poetic merit, their philological resources, and their use as historical sources. These materials needed to be found among their North American inheritors:

It is possible that there are a few old Gaelic MSS. in North Carolina, Ontario, or some other parts of this new world. If there are it is exceedingly desirable that those in possession of them would give some information about them. I know that an excellent Gaelic poet, John Macrae, “Iain Mac Mhurchaidh,” emigrated to North Carolina in 1774. Sometimes old manuscripts of real value turn up where one would never think of looking for them.

I have located one “antiquarian” contribution from the United States to *Mac-Talla* (9 August 1901), a love song attributed to Domhnall Ruadh MacFhionghuin. It was transcribed by Donnchadh Mac an Leigh of Portsmouth, Ohio, from the recitation of Domhnall MacMhuirich in New York “*fear a bha glè eòlach air eachdraidh Mhic*

*Fhionghuin* [a man who was very knowledgeable about the history of the MacKinnons].”

As John Lorne Campbell observed about the Gaels of Nova Scotia on his 1932 trip, Highlanders had been deprived of the opportunities for the development of their mother tongue in Scotland. “Many settlers came completely ignorant of Gaelic literature and Gaelic scholarship and though not hostile never realised any aspect of their language could be cultivated” (Campbell 1990: 25).

Newspapers and organizations allowed for the possibility of such developments. The first issue to tackle was literacy itself. *Mac-Talla* included a few articles (beginning on 23 September 1893) by Alasdair MacLean Sinclair intended to teach Gaels how to read. It must be assumed that the articles were read aloud by literate Gaels (as was often the case with *Mac-Talla* in any event) to those wishing to learn these skills. A notable example of new literature for an American audience is a 12-stanza song composed by Aonghas MacAoidh (*Mac-Talla* 6 March 1897) praising the accomplishments of Gaelic scholars and supporters, including Norman MacLeod, William Livingston, Neil MacAlpine, John MacKenzie, James Stewart, Professor Blackie, and the periodical *Mac-Talla*. It is interesting that MacAoidh disparages James Macpherson, accusing him of creating false poetry because of a love of “mammon.” Another example of Gaelic literature composed in the United States is the anthem for the Boston Gaelic Society (Fergusson 1977: 123-4; Newton 2001a: 214-5).

There are occasional references to original literature composed by members of the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York, but it seems that only one such item, *Aisling an Fhògarraich* (“The Exile’s Dream”) by Neil MacDonald, was ever printed (*The Scottish-American Journal* 25 March 1896). The bard of the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York,

Angus MacLeod, is mentioned as reciting original Gaelic poetry at the society's annual céilidh, such as his ode to Robert Burns (*The Scottish-American Journal* 23 January 1901), but none of his work seems to have ever been published.

While most items that appeared in *The Scottish-American Journal* were reprinted from Scottish sources, there are a few items whose provenance is unknown to me (mostly Gaelic translations of English and Lowland songs).<sup>16</sup> It is possible that these were contributed by American immigrants, but these pieces are more indicative of external acculturation (namely, assimilating Balmorality) than of internal innovation. There is further evidence of poetic activity amongst Gaelic speakers resident in the United States (*c.f.* Newton 2001a), but most of the poetry seems to have remained oral in nature rather than making a general transition to a written medium of composition and transmission. Its impact, therefore, would have generally remained small and local.

### 5.6 The Celtic Chair Campaign and Other Fundraising

Professor John Stuart Blackie made heroic efforts to support the creation of the Chair of Celtic at the University of Edinburgh. He took over the Convenership of the Celtic Chair Committee after an initial appeal for public funds yielded lackluster results.

The campaign certainly had need of the flamboyant style, the wide-ranging interests, the humanitarian ideals and the crusading spirit of John Stuart Blackie. He threw his abundant energies and tireless eloquence into the task of raising the necessary cash — attending meetings and rallies, composing lectures and articles, and publishing a book on Gaelic language and literature in the by-going. (Gillies 1989a: 12-13)

Blackie attempted to tap the goodwill of the American immigrant community by writing to the editor of *The Scottish-American Journal* (13 May 1875) as soon as he stepped into the leadership of the campaign:

SIR — The accompanying papers will explain to you the nature of the movement made by this university for the academic representation of the Celtic languages. The amount already subscribed (£4,500) guarantees speedy success, if the Highlanders abroad are willing to give us the co-operation which their known patriotism naturally leads us to expect. There are large and numerous bodies of Scotsmen in Canada and the States who could most effectively aid us, if they would only take it up seriously. Perhaps you will be so kind as to use your influential position as editor of a widely circulated paper to make our doings known.

Blackie's appeal was indeed taken seriously by the paper, for a long column on the editorial page of the issue in which Blackie's letter appeared pledging support to the campaign:

Hitherto the Mother Country has mainly been appealed to; but now the worthy Professor asks the assistance of Scotsmen everywhere to aid, according to their means, in the patriotic work. The reason of his letter to us is to attract the attention of Scotsmen in the United States and the Dominion of Canada; and seldom has an appeal come from Scotland to her sons here for a purpose more deserving of speedy attention and liberality.

[...] Speak to an average reader about Ossian, and he will think of the tawdry caricatures of Macpherson, instead of recalling to mind those fine Highland ballads which for imagery, dramatic power, and force of language will rank equal, if not superior, to any similar productions of other nations. Ian [sic] Lom, Rob Don, Duncan Ban, and similar writers, are as good to general readers, as if they had never existed; [...] There are numerous manuscripts now in existence, whose proper collation or the translation would throw a flood of light over many pages of the early history of Scotland, and lead to a thorough knowledge of a period which is now slurred over by historians [...]

These then are a few of the practical advantages which will ensue from the establishment of a Celtic Chair in the University of Edinburgh. These reasons we recommend to the earnest attention of Scotsmen on this continent. But there is yet another reason. It will show the very reverse of a feeling of patriotism, if they allow the last remnants of the grand old Highland dialect to die out, "unwept, unhonoured, and unsung," when a small sum of money is all that is necessary to put its study, and so its promotion, and value on a sure and enduring basis. If Scotsmen, either abroad or at home, allow this movement to fall through, they will cause a grave stain and reproach to rest upon their country.

On 16 March 1876, a little less than a year later, another editorial piece (certainly informed by direct communications with Professor Blackie) rejoiced in the progress of

the campaign. Some £8,000 had been collected and they expected the Chair to be established in two years' time, given the rate of support. The editor mentions that the bulk of this amount had come from the United Kingdom itself, with further support from New Zealand and Canada. Additional pressure and shame needed to be applied to American pockets to squeeze out charitable contributions, however:

We refer to the Highland and Lowland settlers in Canada, in the United States, and at the Antipodes. To these Professor Blackie has now appealed, and they will not be worthy of their country, or its record, if the appeal is made in vain. [...]

The Scotsmen in the United States, however, have not been so ready, or, at least, as energetic, in this instance as have their brethren in Canada. No combined movement has been tried, no personal effort has been made, to gather together even a few dollars. This must not be longer a reproach. There is no need of Caledonian clubs and Scottish societies, and still less need of talking of preserving the "ancient literature and costume of Scotland," if an important scheme such as this is not to be aided by them. As yet they have stood aloof, possibly from carelessness; but we trust to hear before many weeks have passed over, that some of the larger clubs, such as those of New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco, have taken the matter in hand. [...]

Let our countrymen here rally, so that it may not be said in after years, that the Scotsmen in America failed in this all important instance to show their reverence and respect for the "Land of the Heather."

No further appeals appeared in *The Scottish-American Journal*, and I do not have information about subsequent donations from the United States to the campaign. The requisite sum for the endowment, however, continually climbed, making it more difficult to achieve. Professor Donald MacKinnon was the first holder of the Chair in 1882 (Gillies 1989a: 14). An editorial piece celebrating the achievement appeared in *The Scottish-American Journal* (11 January 1882), appealing for additional funds to award scholarships to worthy students:

The exceedingly versatile and genial Professor Blackie is now receiving profuse congratulations from the Scottish press upon his successful accomplishment of establishing a Celtic Chair in the University of Edinburgh, and to which a professor

has now been elected. [...] But the worthy professor is not content with successfully establishing the Chair, for he now makes an appeal to Scottish societies at home and abroad for funds for prizes and scholarships.

The successful establishment of the Celtic Chair must have resounded proudly through Gaeldom on both sides of the Atlantic, inspiring the Highland community towards further ambitions. A lengthy letter appeared in *The Scottish-American Journal* (13 July 1882) from N. B. Nicholson of Kingston, Ontario, appealing for funds to create a Celtic Chair for Canada clearly modeled on the Edinburgh position:

Knowing your valuable journal to serve as a medium of communication between Scotsmen everywhere on this continent, I avail myself of the privilege of using your column to inform you, and through you, the thousands of men of Highland origin in the United States of what we in the Dominion are striving to do for the Gaelic name and honour.

Like our brethren on your side of the line, we have our Highland gatherings, Caledonian games, St. Andrews, Gaelic, Ossianic and other societies, which serve in some measure to keep alive the sense of our common brotherhood. But some of us think this is not enough. The Greek sought as well intellectual as physical pre-eminence. The Highlander ought not to be known merely as the possessor of the thews and sinews of a son of Anak, but also as the inheritor of glorious traditions rooted deep in the past, one of the oldest living languages of Europe, and of a literature unrivalled among the like literature of the world for its sublimity. [...]

I, however, belong to a group of admirers of our ancient literature who think that higher ground should be taken in this matter. We believe that the time has fully come when the Gaelic language should find a recognized place in the circle of the learned studies of a university, and when, instead of lectureships established for shorter or longer periods with slender remuneration, giving no encouragement to thorough research, there should be [illegible] well-endowed, permanent professorships which would put the Celtic languages in a position to be investigated with the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of treatment accorded to other branches of world literature. We have the faith in our fellow Celts to believe that what the governments of Germany and France, and other lands, have done, and are doing, for Celtic, and what the Universities of England and the Highlanders of Scotland have recently done, the wealthy and generous Celts of this continent can and will do to run away the unmerited reproach attaching to the Gaelic of being a barbarous language.

[...] Our first contribution of a thousand dollars was without solicitation given by a noble Highlander residing in Wisconsin, who was of the opinion that many a Celt of

the Republic would consider it an honor, as he did, to have something to do with the lifting of the Celtic languages to a more elevated position than that at present occupied by them.

[...] Why should not the new and larger Scotland on this side of the Atlantic, whose children with their unmistakably Celtic names stand in the first ranks of scholarship, literature, commerce, and statesmanship, with their race-inherited faculty of pushing to the front, do for Gaelic, and do more generously, and with prompter action, what has already been done in the old land?

Among the trustees of the fund were bard Evan MacColl and Gaelic scholar Alexander MacLean Sinclair. Despite their powerful rhetoric, they do not seem to have succeeded, for no such chair was established.<sup>17</sup>

Despite these signs of support, *The Scottish-American Journal* also printed pieces criticizing Gaelic revitalization efforts. The *Glasgow Herald* was quick to chime in against the campaign, and an article from the paper was reprinted in *The Scottish-American Journal* (21 December 1876), representing Blackie as “erratic and eccentric,” trying illogically to preserve a language that “clear-headed and unsentimental” Celts no longer saw any value in teaching to their children:

They will be ready to allow — against the Professor — that the Darwinian law must in the case of the Celt, as in all social and political life, and indeed throughout the whole realm of nature, have full play — all sentiment and even legislation to the contrary notwithstanding. [...] It is possible the large, nay, almost total, disappearance of this [village life in the Highlands], the real essence of Highland life, that has already taken place, that leads not over-sentimental Celts to wish for, or at least disposes them to deplore less passionately than the Professor, the completion of the assimilation of Highland to Lowland life. The kernel gone, the mere shell is matter of small enough consequence. Not so, however, thinks the Professor, with the proverbial zeal of the new and late-born converts.

Although such condemnations as these at least made an appeal to reason, however much prejudice lay behind them, *The Scottish-American Journal* also printed satirical pieces that mocked the very idea of Gaelic as a subject worthy of study at university level. All of these altered the spelling of English words to exaggerate Highland



pronunciation, and are intentionally written with incorrect English grammar. The figures that appear in them — especially the “mock candidates” for the Chair itself — are caricatures of ill-educated Highlanders.

The first to appear was a summary (with excerpts) of a skit entitled *Our New Candidate, An Adventure in the Winter of '79*, by Andrew Lyell, schoolmaister in *Cawmeltoun* (4 March 1880): “The brochure is in broad Scotch — very broad — and is intended to poke fun at Professor Blackie and the Celtic Chair, with a side thrust now and then at certain notables and Edinburgh society.” In the skit, the Highland schoolmaster attempts to introduce Professor Blackie to Sergeant Duncan Mactavish, a retired soldier with a wooden leg, but cannot find Blackie at home in Edinburgh. Their search for the Professor allows them to encounter people (in satirized form) and to elaborate on the nature of the Celtic Chair. He is eventually found “in a dwam” amongst a number of obscure antiquities.

The second to appear (21 December 1882) was a testimonial in verse “in favour of Tugald McPhairshon, candidate for the Edinburgh Celtic Chair.” The poem highlights his love of the dram, his misguided pride in the antiquity of Gaelic, and his genealogical fictions.

The third (12 February 1885) was a poem about a Highland first-footing with the following introduction: “I hope tat you’ll be a fery happy New Year, tae some as hersel’, ant many forpye. I have write a few lines aboot me pairty tae Pressor Plackie, because ta public would like a change frae ‘Kelvin Grove’.” The poem enumerates the names of Highlanders present at the event, and their liquor inspired antics.

The alternating support and satire of the Celtic Chair campaign must have sent mixed messages to the public and demonstrated ambiguous feelings about Gaelic. While the development of Gaelic at an academic institution was clearly seen by proponents as an aspect of the restoration of the self-esteem of Highland crofters, the prejudice against Gaelic language and culture was so deeply rooted as to make the efforts look ridiculous to others. Scottish Gaelic revitalization efforts, however, continued to attempt to draw support, especially financial, from the Highlanders resident in the United States. A correspondent identified only as "W.M." wrote in to the *The Scottish-American Journal* (23 April 1902) from Hamilton,

Ontario, to suggest that a wealthy American citizen donate enough money to establish a Chair of Celtic for the study of Gaelic in the United States. The establishment of such a chair would have given Gaelic considerable prestige.

The Gaelic Society of London began in 1902 to appeal for donations to fund the production of Gaelic school materials and awards to give to students of high merit. In

**SCHEME FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT  
OF THE  
TEACHING OF GAELIC IN HIGHLAND  
SCHOOLS.**

This question has for a number of years been engaging the attention of the Gaelic Society of London, which has been sending from year to year text-books and prize-books to various schools.

In the early part of last year steps were taken to ascertain in how many schools throughout the Highlands Gaelic is being taught, with the result that applications for aid were received from no less than *fifty-eight*, the number of pupils studying the language being over one thousand five hundred.

To these schools about 200 text-books and 570 Gaelic prize books have been sent. It was hoped, in addition to this, to make a capitation grant to the schoolmasters for every child in one or more of the junior standards who should pass an examination in elementary Gaelic, in the same way as is done by the Governors of the Highland Trust in respect of Standard V., but the funds at disposal were not sufficient for that purpose.

With a view to furthering this object an appeal was made some months ago to the Gaelic, Highland, and Scottish Societies, at home and abroad, for their co-operation and support, with the result that several donations have been received. The contribution (£25) from the Cape Highland Society was accompanied by a copy of a resolution passed highly approving of the scheme.

The fund already established amounts to about £480, and as a beginning it is proposed to offer next year a capitation grant of 2s. 6d. in respect of pupils in Standard IV, who pass a prescribed examination in Gaelic, and a similar grant to classes in town-schools where the Standard IV. qualification would not apply; also to provide text-books and prize-books where in the opinion of the Council that may be necessary.

It has been decided to present annually a silver medal to the dux pupil (in Gaelic) in each of the following counties:—Aberdeen, Argyll, Arran and Bute, Caithness, Forfar, Inverness, Moray, Perth, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland.

It is the earnest hope of the Council that in their effort to preserve and hand down to future generations this great heritage—the Gaelic Language—they may receive the support not only of Scottish societies, but of patriotic Highlanders in all parts of the world.

Contributions sent to me will be acknowledged in the public press.

IAN MACKENZIE, Hon. Secretary.

Figure 4. Advertisement in the *Scottish-American Journal* for the teaching of Gaelic

order to appeal to Highlanders everywhere, they began running an advertisement in *The Scottish-American Journal*, part of which read:

It is the earnest hope of the Council that in their effort to preserve and hand down to future generations this great heritage — the Gaelic language — they may receive the support not only of Scottish societies, but of patriotic Highlanders in all parts of the world (Figure 4).

As in the case of the Celtic Chair campaign, an editorial appeared supporting the effort:

Our Gaelic readers — and they are many — will be glad to observe from our advertising columns that the Gaelic Society of London is promoting a scheme to foster and encourage the study of the Gaelic language in the Highlands and other parts of Scotland. It is a scheme which commends itself to Scotsmen everywhere, for even those of our countrymen who are not privileged to know the Gaelic would not like that grand national language to become another dead language, like Greek and Latin. The Gaelic is far from being so at present (*The Scottish-American Journal* 5 November 1902).

That some organizations did lend their support to such calls is demonstrated by a children's festival organized as a fundraiser by the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York expressly for the purpose of "teaching Gaelic in the schools throughout the Highlands, etc." (*The Scottish-American Journal* 15 May 1907). As the foregoing discussion has shown, however, such efforts seem to have been rare and exceptional.

### 5.7 The American Mòd Proposal

Perhaps the best illustration of the failure to establish any effective instrument for the promotion and development of Gaelic in the United States was the proposal to create an American *Mòd*. The Scottish Mòd is an annual festival held in Scotland, begun in 1892, where people compete for awards for the best singers, reciters, and authors of Gaelic poetry and prose. The patronage of the Queen and other Scottish elite helped to legitimize the Mòd (as well as introduce a non-Gaelic musical aesthetic). Although there does not seem to have been any report of the early Scottish Mòds in *The Scottish-*

*American Journal*, there must have been numerous direct links between Gaelic Scotland and New York along which the idea was transferred. The Scottish Celtic Society of New York seems to have been the first in the United States to hold competitions in Gaelic, only a year after the original Scottish Mòd. Three prizes for Gaelic song and three for Gaelic recitation (as well as bagpipe music and Highland dancing) were awarded in competitions held on Thanksgiving Eve, 1893 (*The Scottish-American Journal* 6 December 1893), in what was meant to be an annual event. “The hall was crowded, a fact which demonstrates that the language and music of the Gael holds a warm corner in the hearts of the sons and daughters of the *Tìr nam Beann* in this country.”

It may not be coincidental that the schism that created the Scottish Gaelic Society of New Year happened when the next annual competition should have been held. The Scottish Celtic Society does not seem to have ever held another, but the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York held competitions in 1897 that included Gaelic singing and recitation (*The Scottish-American Journal* 16 June 1897). As the Scottish Mòd grew in popularity and made more frequent appearance in periodicals such as *The Scottish-American Journal*, Gaelic activists in the United States seem to have felt compelled to imitate its example. This is clear in a letter from Mrs. J. B. Campbell, where she also mentions other “non-native” Gaelic-speakers who have taken the initiative to learn and use Gaelic:

An item in *The Scottish-American* of the 9<sup>th</sup> inst. stating that many of the Half Breeds in the North-West of Canada are able to speak “splendid Gaelic” should be very interesting news, not only to Highlanders on this side of the Atlantic, but to all Gaeldom. Equally interesting should be the fact that in the Chinese College at Amoy, China, there is a class of one hundred students who read and speak Gaelic fluently. They also have a Gaelic choir [...]

We all know what interest is being taken in, and how many efforts are being put forth at present by some of the most learned men in Scotland to have the good old Gaelic language perpetuated. There is a wave of Gaelic renaissance spreading over the entire country [...]

I need not refer to the great success of the Highland Mods held once a year in Scotland — that is matter of common history now. With all these encouraging and interesting facts it is a matter of surprise, and even regret, that the many clan societies in the State of New York alone fail to give the prominence to their good old mother tongue that it so richly deserves. We hear a great deal at annual Highland gatherings about “keeping up the traditions of our race,” &c. Is not the language of our fathers a part, and a very essential part, of our traditions? And yet with the exception of an occasional Gaelic song we find it utterly ignored. Is this as it should be? Why cannot the many Highlanders in this country, and those of Highland descent, “stand shoulder to shoulder,” as did their famous ancestors of old in every good and patriotic cause, and by their united efforts form a great society, to be known as “The American Highland Mod”? Meetings to be held yearly, and alternately in the principle cities of the Union; prizes to be offered for the best essays, songs, recitations, poems original, or translations of any Scottish subject—all Gaelic [...]

What with a “Scottish Children’s Day” and a “Highland Mod Day” the language and glorious traditions of grand old Scotland would never fade off this great western hemisphere, but would grow brighter and brighter as the ages roll on (*The Scottish-American Journal* 16 April 1902).

This proposal clearly struck a chord with many Highlanders around North America.

Donald MacVicar was one such who wrote in from Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, to support the idea:

It seems to me that there is no better method of conserving all that is noblest in Gaelic literature, or fostering the loving spirit of clanship, than by such an institution; and I trust that our Highland societies throughout the continent may give Mrs. Campbell’s proposal their early and earnest support, that we may soon welcome its accomplishment (*The Scottish-American Journal* 4 June 1902).

The proposal was mentioned at the June meeting of the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York, where president D. A. MacIntyre

drew attention to the letters which recently appeared in the *The Scottish-American Journal* for the inauguration of an ‘American-Highland Mod,’ which if carried into effect would bind them more closely as Highlanders, and revive the language,

music and song of *Tìr nam Beann* on this continent (*The Scottish-American Journal* 18 June 1902).

At the annual Scottish Celtic Society of New York picnic too the talk was of this

ambitious proposal:

The Gaelic tongue reigned supreme among Canadian Highlanders and the Gaels of “Tìr an fhraoich.” “Cimar [sic] tha sibh” could be heard throughout the field by those who take interest in the mother tongue, and who are desirous to cultivate its music and song, and support the suggestions of writers in *The Scottish-American Journal* for the inauguration of an American Mod. This and other topics were keenly discussed during the day (*The Scottish-American Journal* 9 July 1902).

Hugh Fraser in San Francisco claimed great support for the proposal in the west:

Little did she think that letter upon the dear old Gaelic would “set the heather on fire” away out among the Highlanders upon the Pacific Coast. But it has; and she has done it. She is the first person to suggest such an undertaking, a noble idea, and she deserves credit and all the honour for expressing her thoughts. The Highland Mods are doing great work in Scotland encouraging the Highlanders to teach their children the Gaelic.

The Highland Mod in America should be the institution where the members of the different Gaelic societies could visit and take part on festive occasions in songs and speeches in pure Gaelic. Then the question would not be asked “Shall Gaelic die?” The poet answered, “Gaelic shall never die.” In all large cities of this Union there are hundreds and thousands of Highlanders and their descendents who speak the Gaelic, and upon meeting at the Highland gatherings or games converse in their old mother tongue. It is a picture to look upon a group of Highlanders in a circle, with hands clasped, singing a Gaelic song [...]

In preparing for the American Highland Mod it would be well if a teacher of the Gaelic could be had to start a school in every city, to brighten up those who already can speak the language and to teach the new scholars. The Irish citizens of this city have in the past few years started a school for Irish Gaelic. [...]

Now, I hope our Highlanders will try their hands on an “American Highland Mod,” and see what can be done for the Gaelic of Bonnie Scotland. In starting this enterprise leading Scots of New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago, including San Francisco, may correspond and establish a headquarters where information can be obtained by members at a distance, so they can contribute their mite [sic] to help along. [...]

I believe that the time will come when the language of the Gael will find a recognized place in the circle of the learned studies of our universities, having a

well-endowed and permanent professorship. That would put the Celtic languages in a position to be taught with the thoroughness accorded other literature. This is a movement that concerns every one of the Gaelic-speaking people of these United States, and they should see to it that they stand “shoulder to shoulder” as did their ancestors before them in every good cause (*The Scottish-American Journal* 2 July 1902).

It is significant, in passing, that the above correspondents describe Gaelic as an urban language; no one is claiming that it is a rural preserve, nor imagining it stuck in a time warp. A more critical assessment of this proposal, however, came from Gaelic scholar Alexander Fraser in Toronto.

That the object is a laudable one goes without saying, and it is in order to encourage the promoters by a word from a Canadian Highlander that I venture this letter in your columns. As one who tried to organize a Celtic Federation in the smaller field of Canada, some years ago, and failed in the attempt, I am aware of the practical difficulties in the way, not of establishing a Highland Mod, but of establishing one which will fulfill its obvious purpose, viz.: the preservation of the Gaelic language and the conservation of what is best in the Highland character. Really, that is a big question: and I earnestly hope that, now it has been so enthusiastically raised, the situation will be fairly faced and an adequate plan formulated which may prove of practical value. As Mr. Hugh Fraser points out, the Irish are setting an example, and a feasible one, and what they are doing in London, England, where there are eighteen night schools for Gaelic; in Dublin, and in almost every large city in the United States, puts the Highlander to the blush. The Highlanders owe their great modern charter, the Crofter’s Act of 1886, to the Irish element in the House of Commons, and now it would seem as if, should the ancient tongue of the Gael live, it will be because of re-awakened Irish patriotism. Every word written by Mrs. Campbell and Mr. Hugh Fraser is true. On this continent there is still a great opportunity. Will it be taken advantage of? It were an ineffaceable shame should it now be allowed to pass by (*The Scottish-American Journal* 23 July 1902).

Sadly, no further discussion of the American-Highland Mod appeared. Fraser was correct in pointing out that periodic competitions would by themselves be insufficient to maintain Gaelic language and culture in America, and that the Irish scheme of establishing schools was a more effective strategy. One wonders, however, if his criticism didn’t quell initiative as people became aware of the true scale of the challenge and the requisite commitment. Or did they fear that it was necessary to imitate the Irish

so closely that they would once again viewed with suspicion and hostility by Anglophone British patriots? It is difficult to judge now, but the sudden silence about the entire enterprise suggests a failure of nerve and steadfastness to the Gaelic cause.

## 6. Conclusions

The number of Scottish Gaels – especially those who were literate in Gaelic and thus able to develop formal institutions to sustain the language – was relatively small in any particular location in the United States by the late nineteenth century. Observations about the maintenance of other immigrant languages may be relevant in this context:

The ability of America's non-English mother tongue groups to preserve their language may indeed depend to a very significant degree on the number of claimants involved. If the number of such individuals drops too low, then formal institutions of language maintenance (press, schools, organizations) cannot be maintained and creative potential must soon disappear (Fishman 1978: 47).

Nonetheless, most Scottish Gaels came to the United States already conscious that the Gaelic language was held in very low esteem, especially in comparison with English. This reinforced the pressure to devalue the mother tongue, which in turn weakened the will of Gaelic speakers to maintain their language and resist a wholesale switch to English.

It is clear that some Scottish Gaels were inspired by the example of the efforts of the Irish on behalf of their language in America, activities that did achieve significant accomplishments and public visibility. It appears, however, that due to a number of factors, Scottish Gaelic revitalization never reached critical mass in the United States. While it did contribute to the larger efforts on-going in Canada and Scotland, it is most accurately described as an activity on the periphery rather than as an independent development in itself. No Gaelic-medium periodical was ever produced in the United



States, although some Gaelic texts did appear in *The Scottish-American Journal* and Gaels resident in the United States did contribute to periodicals printed in Scotland and Canada. The lack of a literary medium for Gaels in the United States is one of a number of indicators that the immigrant community did not achieve the momentum it would have needed to develop and maintain its language.

There are numerous examples to attest that the first generation, at least, perceived a strong correlation between mother tongue and ethnic identity. Some Gaels did aspire to create media, events, and organizations in which Gaelic was a prominent feature, but they overrated the significance of what they did accomplish, as the previous absence of Gaelic in formal institutions made any usage appear momentous, and they underestimated the difficulties in creating the means to maintain Gaelic as a living language to be used by native-speaking immigrants and their American-born children.

Some activists saw the establishment of a Chair of Celtic Studies in the United States, with an emphasis on Scottish Gaelic, as a goal that would boost the prestige and visibility of the language. There were several churches where Gaelic speakers conducted their religious services through the medium of Gaelic for a number of years, or on a sporadic basis. There are also examples of associations which tried, usually for a short period of time, to make Gaelic the working language. Without further infrastructural support and formal domains where Gaelic was the dominant language, however, it became increasingly difficult for Highlanders to stay loyal to their mother tongue when the relative prestige of English was so much greater than Gaelic. While a few Gaelic societies were formed with the purpose of encouraging Gaelic language and tradition, the evidence from New York demonstrates that it was very difficult for organizations not to

become mere social clubs where the language was primarily a symbol of ethnic origins. This tokenization must have been increasingly common for successive generations born in America.

A full assessment of the relationship between Scottish Highlanders in the United States and Gaelic is difficult to produce given the scarcity of information. I have made an initial attempt at evaluating the attitudes of Scots in general and Gaels in particular in America toward Gaelic, and examining the revitalization efforts of some of these immigrants, by recourse to the texts that appear in periodicals, especially *The Scottish-American Journal* and *Mac-Talla*. The historical role and influence of periodicals — particularly *Mac-Talla* — is an important and underdeveloped topic of research in Scottish Gaelic Studies.

### Acknowledgements

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In this article and in Newton 2001a.

<sup>2</sup> I have generally retained the original orthography and punctuation of Gaelic texts, although this has sometimes been difficult to do with accuracy due to the poor quality of available reproductions (especially the early periodicals). This is particularly true of diacritics, which have sometimes disappeared due to the poor reproduction quality. While I have provided the exact dates of publication for most of my quotations, there are a few for which I can only provide a year or month.

<sup>3</sup> These are texts of any sort that are wholly in Gaelic. These were almost all poems, and, strangely, almost all of the early texts were Gaelic translations of Lowland songs.

<sup>4</sup> John L. Campbell considered *Mac-Talla* to have adopted and proliferated an enormous number of English words (Creighton and MacLeod 1979: 28).

<sup>5</sup> See Newton 2001a: 170-1, 189-194 for information on migration of Gaels to the west.

<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Catriona Parsons for this reference.

<sup>7</sup> The fact that it was written in Boston is given in *Mac-Talla* 8 (1900), p. 344.

<sup>8</sup> It may be relevant to understanding the “coldness” topos that in another stanza of the song he mocks the fact that Americans are so enamored of the snow that they go out of doors to play in it during the winter.

<sup>9</sup> Brodie later expressed his approval of the Celtic Society of Montreal in a poem entitled “Vivet Lingua Galliae” (*The Scottish-American Journal* 2 September 1885).

<sup>10</sup> See also *The Scottish-American Journal* 7 April 1897.

<sup>11</sup> See Robert Burn’s satirical poem “Address of Beelzebub to the President of the Highland Society.”

<sup>12</sup> There is some inconsistency in the name of the organization between the two languages, as it is called “The Scottish Celtic Society of New York” in English but “Comunn Gàidhealach New York” in Gaelic. The Gaelic name seems most appropriate, as Scottish Gaelic seems to have been the only Celtic language in use by the society. Also, it is sometimes called the Celtic Society of New York.

<sup>13</sup> This letter originally appeared in *The Scottish Canadian* but was reprinted in *Mac-Talla* (17 December 1892).

<sup>14</sup> It is likely that “MacIves” is a typo for either “MacIver” or “MacInnes.”

<sup>15</sup> A letter voicing the same complaints in even harsher language was printed in *Mac-Talla* 18 July 1896, but the correspondent was in Scotland.

<sup>16</sup> The obituary for the Gaelic poet Evan MacColl (*The Scottish-American Journal* 27 July 1898) mentions that he had lived briefly with his son in Brooklyn, that he was a close friend of the editor’s, and that he was a frequent contributor to the periodical. He is the most likely source for the Gaelic texts that they printed.

<sup>17</sup> Rob Dunbar has suggested to me that the money that was raised may have seeded the prize awarded by the university to Gaelic-speaking students.

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