

# Festivals

*A History of Competitive Music  
Festivals in New Brunswick*

**1935 - 2007**

*by E. Gail Carleton*

*Carleton County*

# ***Festivals***

## ***A History of Competitive Music Festivals in New Brunswick 1935-2007***

E. Gail Carleton

*Gail Carleton*  
2007

# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	1
Introduction .....	3
Musical Antecedents in the French-speaking Community .....	5
Musical Antecedents in the English-speaking Community.....	9
The First Competitive Festivals	
<i>Moncton</i> .....	12
<i>Saint John</i> .....	15
<i>Miramichi</i> .....	19
<i>Fredericton</i> .....	23
<i>Restigouche</i> .....	27
<i>Southwestern</i> .....	31
1949: A Pivotal Year.....	35
More Local Festivals	
<i>Grand Manan</i> .....	38
<i>Bathurst</i> .....	41
<i>Kent County</i> .....	45
<i>Carleton County</i> .....	47
<i>Victoria County</i> .....	50
<i>McAdam</i> .....	52
<i>Sackville</i> .....	55
<i>Bas-Gloucester</i> .....	60
<i>Edmundston</i> .....	64
<i>Sussex</i> .....	67
<i>Harvey</i> .....	68
The Canadian Federation and National Music Festival .....	70
The New Brunswick Federation of Music Festivals.....	75



85 or more could participate in the Moncton festival later in the month.

In 1955, Kent County Music Festival included a day of piano and voice competitions and evening concert in Cocagne, making the festival a 3-day event.

During the 1950's, this festival was very popular throughout the county. The final concerts in each town (Bouctouche, Richibouctou, occasionally others) were always well-attended. Newspaper reports of the time tell of doors being closed when the hall was full, leaving some disappointed people unable to get in. In Richibouctou in 1958 "la salle était pleine à craquer pour cette soiree".<sup>87</sup>

With large convents such as l'Immaculée Conception de Bouctouche, le Collège Dominique-Savio de St.-Louis, plus schools from Richibouctou to Grand-Digue participating, the Kent County Music Festival flourished well on into the 1960's. It expanded to four days and eventually hired mostly French-speaking adjudicators. These came not only from l'Université St-Joseph but also from l'Université de Sacré-Coeur at Bathurst and l'Université de Saint-Louis at Edmundston.

In 1967, Canada's Centennial year, the festival included Centennial classes in its syllabus. A number of young musicians from the county were recommended to go on to the provincial level of competition leading to the National Finals of the Centenary Festival in Saint John, N.B. in July. It is interesting to note that the judge for Déclamation (recitation) in Bouctouche that year, was Sister Antonine Maillet, originally from Bouctouche, later (no longer a nun) to be known as a literary figure of international repute.

## **Carleton County**

In the autumn of 1951, the Carleton County Women's Institutes (W.I.) decided to organize a competitive music festival for their area. They may have been encouraged to take this action by community meetings with David Thomson, the New Brunswick Superintendent of School Music. They may also have gotten the idea from Restigouche chapters of W.I. who would have reported, at annual W.I. conferences, about their sponsorship of the Restigouche Music Festival which had started in 1948.

The first Carleton County Music Festival (CCMF) was a 2-day event, held in the Legion Memorial Hall in Woodstock, May 13 and 14, 1952. The

**FIRST ANNUAL  
Carleton County  
*MUSIC FESTIVAL***



**Legion Memorial Hall  
WOODSTOCK, N.B.**

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**May 13 and 14, 1952**

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**Sponsored by the  
Carleton County Women's Institutes**

**ADJUDICATOR  
Professor John Peterson**

**Official Program Price 10c**

adjudicator was Professor John Peterson, a graduate of the Teachers' College in Fredericton. He had been supervisor of music for the towns of Charlotte County, N.B., since 1935.

Professor Peterson heard 39 classes in the two days, which must have been quite demanding for him, considering that some classes, such as 10 and under Piano, had 22 entries. The number of classes was about equally divided among solo piano, solo voice and choirs (school, church, service clubs) with the addition of a few duets, and other instruments (trumpet, violin). Most competitors were children but there were adult choirs.

The festival was financed by the sale of tickets, programmes and entries plus local merchants who placed advertisements in the programme. In 1952, these receipts amounted to \$843.25 which was more than enough to cover the costs of the 2-day event.

Of course, the major expenditure of such an undertaking was the time and effort on the part of volunteers to organize the festival and see it through. This was a project of the Carleton County Women's Institutes and they provided all the volunteers. All officers and committee members were women, in contrast to many of the other early festivals where the executive positions were held by men, for the most part.

The people involved in the first Carleton County Music Festival were: Mrs. J.E.J. Patterson, President, Mrs. H.W. Bradley, Secretary, Mrs. Robert Watson, Treasurer. The first 2 of these, along with Mrs. George Orser, Mrs. Howard Thomas, Mrs. Roy Adams and Mrs. Roy Hunter formed the Festival Committee. Another key person at that time was Mrs. A.D. McCain (mother of Harrison and Wallace McCain) who was responsible for Advertising. She was apparently very successful in that position, as records show that income from advertising constituted about one-third of total revenues each year over the seventeen years that the W.I. organized this festival. Mrs Howard Thomas was Chair of the "House" committee in that first year and held other positions, including President, over the years until 1968, when she was presented with a gift in appreciation of 17 years' work with the Music Festival. At that time, after the 1968 Festival, the Carleton County W.I. passed a motion to discontinue the Festival as no one volunteered to chair the committee.

1967 was the year when the CCMF had its largest number of entries – 706. Participants came from many communities throughout the county. No doubt, the festival would be missed.



districts were renamed in the 1990's, the festival in Miramichi changed from District # 8 to District # 16 Music Festival. The personnel of the newly-named district continued the work of the annual music festival under the leadership of Rhéal Fournier. Of course, many other persons have also been active in the festival organization.

In 2002, the Newcastle and Chatham Rotary Clubs took over the organizing and operating of the renamed Miramichi Rotary Music Festival. We can presume from this that the Rotary Clubs are largely responsible for financing the festival with the Clubs' own finances coming from the benevolent activities they carry out and which are supported by people in all of the towns and villages of Greater Miramichi.

Representatives from District # 8, then District # 16, now Miramichi Rotary Festival have been faithful in attending the annual meetings of the NBFMF. They have provided a long-serving Treasurer to the federation in the person of Rhéal Fournier, originally of Lagacéville, later of Barryville. (Rhéal is a teacher in District # 16). After 13 years as Treasurer, and still in the position, Rhéal is certainly among the longest-serving executive officers of the NBFMF. As well, he is a solid figure in his own Local Festival, Miramichi Rotary, and has taken a lot of responsibility when that local hosted the Provincial Finals in 1996 and 2005.

## **Carleton County**

The Woodstock Arts Council, formed in 1978, engaged top performers of national and international calibre (eg. Angela Hewitt, The Canadian Brass) for the enjoyment of Carleton County music lovers. They also sponsored other projects in the region. In 1982, the Council spearheaded fundraising of \$40,000. to buy a grand piano which was housed in Woodstock High School for the use of the community.

In 1983, the Arts Council was responsible for the reorganization of the Carleton County Music Festival. It had been 14 years since the CCMF, sponsored by the Women's Institute, had last functioned. Don and Marg Beattie, among others, were people who gave their time and energy to both the Woodstock Arts Council and the Music Festival. For years, the Festival operated under the auspices of the council and used its tax number for charitable donations. Eventually, there became less overlap in membership of the two groups, the Arts Council becoming just one of many financial supporters of the Festival.

The Board of School Trustees of District 29 was also very important in the revival of the Festival. They supported it by making venues available as performance halls and by encouraging the participation of classroom choirs throughout the district. Actually, choirs came from some schools in Victoria County, too.

After a successful 5-day local festival in April, 1983, the 12<sup>th</sup> Provincial finals of the N.B. Federation of Music Festivals were held at Woodstock High School on May 28. Initially, the Woodstock Arts Council and Mrs. Annette MacInnis took responsibility for organizing the Finals. Unfortunately, Mrs. MacInnis lost her battle with cancer before the event took place. Marg Beattie and the Carleton County Music Festival carried on to see it through. Local participant, Sally Dibblee performed in the Solo Voice class at Provincials that year. All in all, it was a great beginning for the revived festival.

The Carleton County Music Festival takes in the region of Meductic, Debec, Woodstock, Jacksonville, Jacksontown, Lakeville, Hartland and Somerville. Occasionally, there are competitors from the upper part of the county (Florenceville, Bristol, Perth-Andover, Centreville) although their own festival has been revived, as well. In order to accommodate local students who go away to universities but want to participate in their "home" festival, the annual competition is usually held in early May each year. One such student, Jennifer Long, returned, not only to participate (and be recommended to the National Festival in piano), but also to revive a summer music camp which had originally been sponsored by the CCMF and the Woodstock Arts Council

Woodstock High School, Community College and United Baptist Church are the locations for various classes throughout the week. The composition of the festival has changed over time, with the changes in the educational system. Formerly, when there were more music specialists in schools, classroom singing and choirs were very popular, contributing a large proportion of the participants. During that time, Centennial Elementary School was the venue for most of the singing classes. Nowadays, there are classes in choral reading which still encourage participation by school groups. Generally speaking, though, solo piano elicits the most participation, with band and voice a distant second.

In recent years, participants may enter competitive or non-competitive classes with every participant receiving a certificate. No marks are announced publicly but marks are written on individual adjudication sheets and gold, silver or bronze seals are affixed to certain certificates as decided by the adjudicator. To be considered for final awards, competitive classes must be



entered. One final concert is held to showcase the best performances from the 4-day festival. Gold medals and cash prizes are presented to winners during the concert. Individuals, businesses and organizations from the participating communities continue to be generous in their financial support of the Carleton County Music Festival.

## **Victoria County**

In the early 1980's, a group of people got together to resurrect the Victoria County Music Festival which had been discontinued at the end of the 1960's. The (re)founding committee was made up of school principals of Perth, Andover and Aroostock areas plus local music teachers and members of the community interested in the Arts. Music programmes in School District 13 were revived with the hiring of music specialists in some schools. This sparked an interest in re-establishing a festival. Among others, Trudy Ranger, Don Dickson, Shawn O'Reagan (school principals), Gail Picket, Nancy McCauley, Gail Fellows-DeGrace and David Eagan were some of the organizers.

The schools of Perth-Andover, Plaster Rock, Grand Falls and the outlying areas were all eligible to participate. This implies a bilingual festival, given that Grand Falls/Grand-Sault is a bilingual town, essentially more French-speaking than English-speaking. However, the syllabi seem to be only in English and many of the adjudicators have been unilingual Anglophones, so it is not obvious that the festival is actually bilingual. A highly-respected musician from Drummond, Léola Dionne, directed award-winning choirs back in the 1960's when the first Victoria County Music Festival was operating. She is still sending students to the present-day festival and they continue to distinguish themselves. .

As with so many other local festivals, school group participation figured largely in the 1980's but dropped off due to the cutbacks of music specialists in the schools. In the 1990's and continuing presently, the festival mainly attracts solo performers in piano, voice and other instrumental categories with some appearances by school groups- classroom choirs, bands. School District # 14 (formerly # 13) still supports the Victoria County Music Festival by providing venues free of charge, paying for busing of school children to attend and paying for a supply teacher to cover for a teacher who takes a group to the festival. With the festival being hosted by a different community each year, rotating among Plaster Rock, Perth-Andover and Grand Falls, the busing of children from one town to another is not an insignificant cost.

Other financing comes from service groups, fundraising activities by the

CARLETON COUNTY  
COMPETITIVE FESTIVAL  
OF MUSIC



PRESIDENT — Mrs. J. E. J. Patterson

SECRETARY — Mrs. H. W. Bradley

TREASURER — Mrs. Robert Watson



FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

Mrs. J. E. J. Patterson  
Mrs. Howard Thomas  
Mrs. Roy Adams  
Mrs. George Orser *as at present*  
Mrs. Roy Hunter  
Mrs. H. W. Bradley

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Mrs. Fred Squires — Ticket  
Mrs. Douglas McBride — Program  
Mrs. A. D. McCain — Advertising  
Mrs. Howard Thomas — House  
Mrs. George Kilpatrick — Publicity



PROFESSOR JOHN PETERSON

*Adjudicator*

Professor Peterson received his training in music at Halifax. Later he was graduated by the Teachers' College, in Fredericton. He has been supervisor of music for the towns of Charlotte County since 1935 and has had wide experience with festival work during those years. During his training in Halifax, he was soloist at North Baptist Church and later at First Baptist Church. He directed a concert party of students that toured Newfoundland with great success. Professor Peterson's understanding of children and their special needs, musically, makes him one of New Brunswick's most efficient music teachers.



OFFICIAL ACCOMPANISTS

Mrs. Thelma MacEachron

Miss Marion Lindsay

Mrs. George True