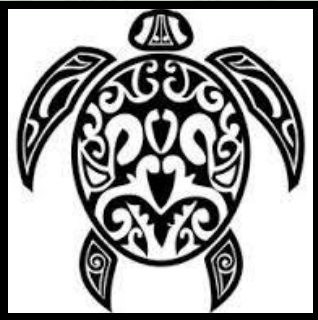


Canadian Folklore

Canada has a rich history of folklore. The Maritimes in particular has many stories that have been passed from generation to generation, with many origins based in the French and Gaelic cultures. In addition, the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet people of our region have ensured that their oral traditions and telling of their past, does not escape the knowledge of present day.

Gaelic folklore is found scattered throughout the Maritimes. Gaelic culture, which is a form of Scottish culture, is expressed through many forms, such as learning to speak the Gaelic language, taking highland dance lessons, attending schools for piping and drumming. Gaelic folklore can be found in various forms such as songs and paintings. Gaelic folklore can also take the form of mythological creatures. There are many paintings of various creatures such as fairies and half animals/half humans.

Aboriginal folklore is often told through stories and is more mythological than most types of folklore. These stories refer to the world before it evolved into its present state. Most of these stories are on how the world was created and who created the world. Some of the other stories are about how their ancestors watch over them and protect them. Our aboriginal people have their own beliefs as to how the world was formed and those beliefs are passed down through their many generations. One of these stories is that the world was made out of a turtles back. Turtles always play a positive role in aboriginal folklore.



The picture on the left is of a turtle. There are many stories that the world was formed on the back of a turtle.

Whether it be spoken in English, French, Gaelic or any of the other many languages that exist in the Maritimes, folklore is alive and well in the telling of stories, being sung to, through dance or with a thriving folk art sector of our economy. Our roots and heritage steeped in tradition are very much alive, and many old folklore legends and tales are seeing new life through the eyes and words of a new generation.

Folk Art, Folk Dance and Folk Music

Folk art was originally a type of art made by either peasants or laboring tradespeople. Folk art can be found in the form of paintings, sculptures and baskets. Folk art is also known for having a very decorative design with bright colours.

Folk dance is a mixture of various dances that have been compiled and shared between working class people. Most dances share one or more of the following aspects: performed at social functions with little training, designed to be preformed publically, dances are inherited, and the dances are taught informally by either observing and picking up motions or being taught by another dancer within the group.

Folk music is music that contains simple characteristics and anonymity that are shared orally. Most types of folk music are traditional, although some are also from the folk revival that took place in the 20th century. The folk revival was when many folk singers decided to branch out and begin composing their own music. There were many who believed that by doing this, the singers were taking away from the traditional aspect of folk music, but there was enough interest for the revival to be accepted. The fans who accepted the folk revival looked at it as an evolution of the genre. One of the more well known names who helped the folk revival was Bob Dylan (see picture below). By supporting the idea of a folk revival, it became more and more accepted throughout the world.



On the left is a picture of Bob Dylan, one of the people who helped the folk revival.

Most of the traditional folk music originated from western and eastern Europe. Unlike the newer versions of folk music, all traditional folk music is shared orally and the composers of the songs are unknown.

Folklore is...



The picture above is of a sketch that represents Australian Aboriginal folklore.

Folklore is passed through generations and shares the values of one's culture. Every culture has different historical backgrounds and traditions resulting in many versions of folklore. Since folklore is passed down orally, there is the possibility of having missing pieces of information. Also, as the generations change over the years, it is more likely that only the information that interests that generation will be shared with the next. It is believed that folklore can vary from region to region.

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What is Folklore?

British antiquarian and book editor William Thoms (1802-1885) coined the term folklore in 1846. At this point in time, his definition of the term was folklore – the lore of the people. Thoms edited books about old tales and romance. When Thoms first wrote to *The Athenaeum*, a journal company in England, he hid his identity. It is believed that Thoms may have felt some regret to hiding his identity because many people believed that the term had origins with either the German or the Dutch. Not long after, he disclosed his identity to *The Athenaeum*. After his death in 1885, many people stood up for Thoms and defended him over his discovery. Some of the first to accept the term **folklore** were the English, German, Austrian and Swiss people. He joked that his discovery of the term folklore made him more famous than his other work as an editor.

Folklore is the traditional beliefs, customs and stories that are passed down through generations by word of mouth. It is also another way to preserve a culture's oral history, which means that most of what is shared between two people is not documented on paper. This is because most folklore is shared in the company of friends and is purely for pleasure, not business. Also, when folklore is shared, it can be expressed differently than the original story, song, or idea. Therefore, since folklore is constantly changing, it is twice as difficult to find and even prove the origins of most folklore.

Folklore offers a meaning to life that cannot be attained any other way. It offers people the chance to learn more about themselves and their culture by showing certain aspects that are not common knowledge. Folklore also offers a broader perspective of other cultures that surround us.



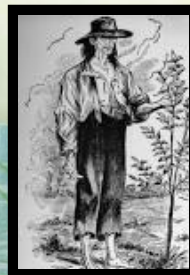
This picture above is of William Thoms, the man who coined the term folklore.

Roots of Folklore

Since folklore is shared by word of mouth, it is constantly evolving. One story can be transformed into multiple stories with minimal differences. A storyteller may forget certain details, embellish others, and could even add their own twist to better suit them. By doing this, the story may sound familiar to another story, but it is different because not every detail is remembered exactly and there is no other evidence to verify by.

In the past, folklore was generally focused on sharing traditional songs and stories, but as folklore has evolved, it now also includes art, legends, dances and proverbs and sayings. When placed in these modern day situations, folklore thrives. One of the main ways is by all the annual festivals that are held around the world. One festival that is held annually in Canso, Nova Scotia is the Stan Rogers Folk Festival. These festivals are dedicated to demonstrating various kinds of folklore.

All of these different types of folklore are shared around the world, but there are two types that originated from America: urban legends and tall tales. However, where tall tales have been around for a while now, for example, Johnny Appleseed who would spread apple seeds wherever he went, urban legends are the newest form of folklore. Urban legends can be found all around the world, but they are most popular in America. The difference between urban legends and legends is that legends were told to have a happy ending, a romantic tale or one with an evil villain and a great hero, whereas an urban legend is an oral account of a story that is told over and over again, however never with a first hand account. Urban legends are also filled with a lot of drama and end with a twist at the end of either irony or a supernatural account. The main difference though is that urban legends have been updated to suit the interest of today's society.



On the left is a sketch of Johnny Appleseed, a well-known tall tale in America.

A Legendary Atlantic Canadian Folklore Story

There is a tale told up in northern New Brunswick about the Dungarvon Whooper. Dungarvon is a river near Miramichi, New Brunswick. It was 1860 and the river roared silently. An Irish lumberjack was staying at a camp in the woods near the river. He was the camp's best hunter. Knowing that the camp cook carried all of his money in his belt, the greedy lumberjack coxed the cook from the camp with the promise of teaching him his hunting skills.

Once they were deep into the woods, the lumberjack turned on the cook and using his rifle, shot him. The lumberjack took the cook's belt full of money, buried it, and returned to the camp. He told the other loggers a tale of how a bear had attacked the two men. He told them a blow to the head knocked him out and when he came to, the cook's body was nowhere to be found.

The other lumberjacks set out quickly in hopes to find the cook while the logger who was with the cook left quietly. Later that evening, the campers heard these frightful screeches coming from the woods. Knowing that it was the cook's voice, they set out immediately to try to find him. Once again, the cook was nowhere to be found. Every night after that, around dusk, the campers would hear these awful screeches coming from the woods.

When spring came, the loggers packed up camp and never returned. It is said that even today, if you are near the river around dusk in northern New Brunswick, you can still hear the cook's screams as he howls in rage over his death.



Above is a photograph of the Dungarvon River located in New Brunswick.