
Tompkinsville, Cape Breton Island: Co-operativism and Vernacular Architecture

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Résumé

Le paysage architectural de l'île du Cap-Breton comporte un pourcentage élevé de « logements de compagnies » construits pour abriter les mineurs de charbon et leurs familles au début du vingtième siècle. Dans les années 1930, certaines de ces habitations étaient en mauvais état. L'article porte sur un groupe de mineurs et leurs familles qui ont décidé de lancer leur propre coopérative d'habitations dans les années 1930, suivant la philosophie du Antigonish Co-operative Movement (mouvement coopératif d'Antigonish). L'auteur étudie comment, malgré sa motivation d'échapper aux mauvaises conditions des logements fournis par les entreprises, ce groupe a choisi de vivre dans des espaces qui lui étaient familiers, en respectant certaines structures spatiales fréquentes dans les « logements de compagnie ». Ce projet domiciliaire a eu une grande influence; il constituait la première coopérative d'habitation au Canada et a servi de modèle à d'autres ensembles de logements comparables dans l'est du pays.

Abstract

Cape Breton Island's architectural landscape has a high percentage of "company housing" built for coal miners and their families in the early years of the twentieth century. By the 1930s, some of these dwellings were in poor condition. This paper examines one group of miners and their families who decided to embark on their own co-operative housing project in the 1930s, following the philosophy of the Antigonish Co-operative Movement. It explores how this group, while being prompted by a motivation to escape from the poor conditions of the company houses, chose to live in spaces familiar to them, following some of the spatial patterns common in the company houses. This housing development was very influential; it was the first co-operative housing group in Canada and provided a template for other comparable housing developments in eastern Canada.

Joining together with one's neighbours to aid in a construction project or communal work activity was once an essential part of the fabric of Atlantic Canadian communities. Outside activities such as house raisings, barn buildings or chopping frolics to gather wood for a widowed member of the community or local clergy are frequently mentioned in the region's autobiographies and oral histories; interior activities such as spinning bees, quilting bees and milling frolics played essential roles in the passing on of work patterns and oral traditions inside homes.¹ Even though the issue of co-operativism is

important for understanding the way in which communities and neighbourhoods are formed and maintained, this process has been largely unexplored in much of the literature on vernacular architecture.² In this paper, I examine one neighbourhood of eleven homes in Tompkinsville, Cape Breton Island — a co-operative housing development begun in 1938 in the former coal mining town of Reserve Mines — to help unravel some of the complexities of this issue.

The term *vernacular* has been interchangeable in much scholarship with the terms *folk*,

common, native or non-academic architecture. It is usually placed at the other end of the spectrum from professionally designed architecture or what is most often termed *high style* architecture. Vernacular buildings are often owner built; that is, the owner takes an active hands-on role in the entire process of designing and constructing the building, from deciding upon the size and shape of interior spaces, to obtaining the materials. One scholar, Kingston Heath, uses the analogy of a "filter" to define the vernacular in architecture. He argues that a fixed locale or region, with its unique character, cultural mix, values, materials, climate and topography can filter the conventional ideas about architecture whether they be folk, popular or high style. What results from this filtering process is vernacular architecture — "product of a place, of a people, by a people."³

A region or neighbourhood's vernacular architecture is an expression of the community's personality. Studying "regional personality," while not common in Canada, is a familiar idea to European folklife scholars and regional ethnologists. J. Geraint Jenkins, a Welsh ethnologist and museum curator, describes the domain of this field: "in folklife studies we are concerned primarily with the recording and study of regional personality, and features which distinguish one community from the other whether they be social, oral or material should be our concern."⁴ A region's needs, tastes and cultural expressions are shown in the way people design, build and use their homes and outbuildings; these are fine expressions of regional personality. Some features which make a neighbourhood a distinct region include the public spaces, the religious buildings and the local culture, but the houses people choose to build are extremely important in the shaping of a distinct, vernacular district.

Vernacular architecture has been studied in Europe for many years, but only in the past twenty or thirty years have North American scholars viewed it as an acceptable field of research.⁵ Folklorists, geographers, architectural historians and archaeologists are interested in vernacular buildings because they are said to provide a more democratic view of the remote and recent past than do the kinds of buildings traditionally studied in architectural histories. As Henry Glassie says: "historians study not the past but the literary remains of the past. Nevertheless, most of the world's societies have been non-literate. They left no literary remains..."⁶ In contrast, "the landscape is the product of the divine average."⁷ Vernacular

buildings in the landscape are a rich source for those trying to understand the interaction of human beings and the built environment.

While few academic studies of Atlantic Canada's vernacular architecture exist, a number of popular studies of the region's buildings have recently been published. A few predominant themes appear in this academic and popular literature. Most popular studies, for example, are guided by the social history of a community; these publications are primarily pen and ink sketch books or photograph collections with a discussion of the history associated with the building owners. Historical societies, provincial government departments, municipalities and local museums are often responsible for these kinds of publications.⁸ One recent popular work deviates from this approach and attempts to survey the various types of Nova Scotia's working class housing from the eighteenth century to the present.⁹ While this is a valuable first attempt to examine the province's vernacular dwellings, the work suffers because the author possesses a nostalgic view that only building choices *in the past* were creative and intelligent, while more recent vernacular buildings are seen as uninspiring, government-sponsored imitations, lacking beauty and meaning.¹⁰

In the academic world, Atlantic Canadian vernacular architecture has been dominated by cultural geographers and folklorists. Geographers have addressed themes such as architectural transfer, adaptation and change and have been interested in the influence of ethnicity on buildings. For example, Peter Ennals and Deryck Holdsworth propose an overall typology of buildings for the region, outlining some of the major architectural forms evident in the Atlantic landscape.¹¹ Peter Ennals has also assessed Acadian architecture, documenting both the earliest known forms and the recent Acadian interest in replicating eighteenth-century Québécois buildings.¹² John Mannion has explored the persistence, modification and alteration of Irish architecture and material culture in the Atlantic Canadian region.¹³

Folklorists have provided vernacular architecture micro-studies of some specific sub-regions within Atlantic Canada exploring issues such as architectural transfer and change, the contrast between tradition and modernity, gender and spatial usage and the patterns of modification.¹⁴ One of the most important studies of Atlantic Canadian vernacular architecture and landscape is a recent analysis of the homes, outbuildings and spatial usage in the

Newfoundland outpost of Calvert.¹⁵ This work is the first of its kind in Atlantic Canada to employ current methodological and theoretical approaches from the fields of material culture and folklife to interpret the shaping of the built environment of a coastal community.

Architects, archaeologists and architectural historians have also been interested in the vernacular architecture of the region. Alan Penny, a professor at the Technical University of Nova Scotia, has recently published a style guide to Nova Scotia's architecture that includes many examples of the region's vernacular forms.¹⁶ André Crépeau and David Christianson, archaeologists at the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park, have been exploring pre-expulsion Acadian vernacular architecture in their recent fieldwork.¹⁷ H. M. Scott Smith's two recent works on Prince Edward Island architecture, one focussing on the region's churches, and the other on its domestic housing, likewise provide the reader with photographs, floorplans and fine descriptions of the island's many distinctive architectural features.¹⁸

This present study of Tompkinsville employs a methodological approach developed by vernacular architecture scholars that includes: the

recording of buildings through photographs, measured drawings and interviews with residents, and a reliance upon fieldwork and research to understand the architectural patterns in the landscape.¹⁹

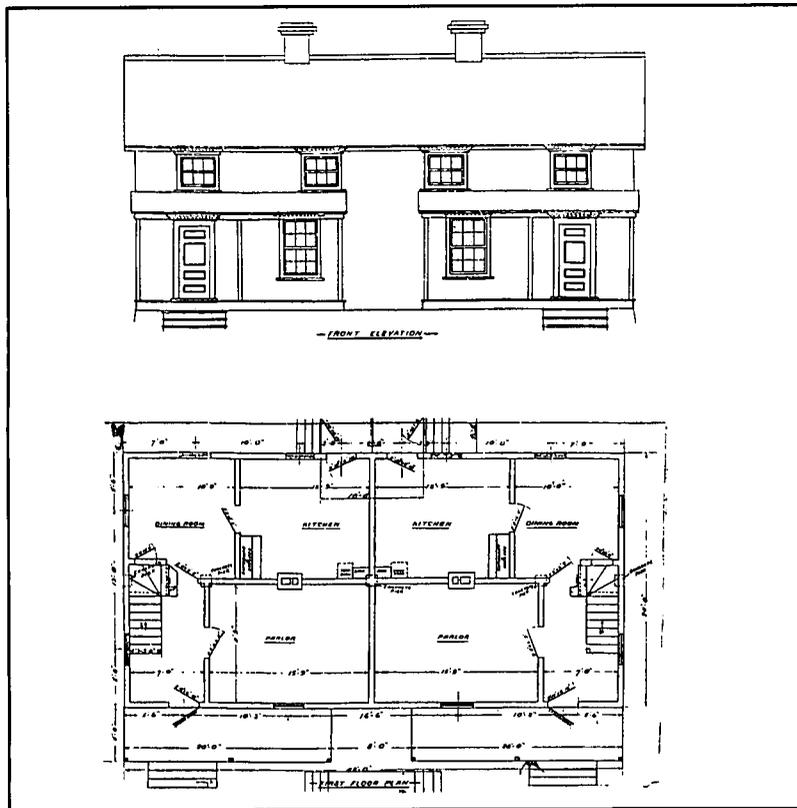
The Influence of the "Antigonish Movement" on the Tompkinsville Housing Development

In deciding to work co-operatively to build their homes, Tompkinsville pioneers were following the co-operative philosophy expounded by what is now known as the "Antigonish Movement." This movement was a social and economic reform movement begun by priests working at St Francis Xavier University in Antigonish. Two of the founders, Father Jimmy Tompkins and Father Moses M. Coady led the movement to local, regional, national and international significance. The founders and leaders believed that individuals could raise themselves from economic plight and become better physical, moral and spiritual beings through adult education and co-operation. They envisioned that individuals in small study clubs could solve their own difficult problems through co-operative study and work. Libraries, credit unions, grocery stores, gasoline stations and co-operative housing groups grew out of this movement in Atlantic Canada.²⁰

The Antigonish Movement attempted to promote education and co-operation in the early 1930s, a time of great hardship in Cape Breton Island. These feelings of discontent in the thirties were provoked by the struggles of the previous decade. The 1920s were hard, bitter years of great unrest amongst workers of Cape Breton Island. The decade saw numerous strikes in the coal industry and sharp class conflict; a culture of resistance amongst coal miners resulted from the workers' struggle with industrial capitalists.²¹ One scholar notes there were at least fifty-eight strikes in the Sydney coal field between 1920 and 1925, "most of them over not wage issues but such matters as work assignments, fines and suspensions, and the role of the pit committees and the union within the workplace."²²

Workers were also unhappy about their living conditions. Some of Cape Breton's coal miners and their families were housed in poorly maintained, dilapidated duplexes built by mining companies at the end of the nineteenth century. A Royal Commission on Coal in 1925 interviewed a number of Cape Breton miners about their homes and one mentions to the

Fig. 1
Plan of typical company house — a duplex — built at the turn of the twentieth century. This house is situated at Richmond Street, Sydney, next to the Sydney Steel Plant. (Courtesy Beaton Institute, UCCB)

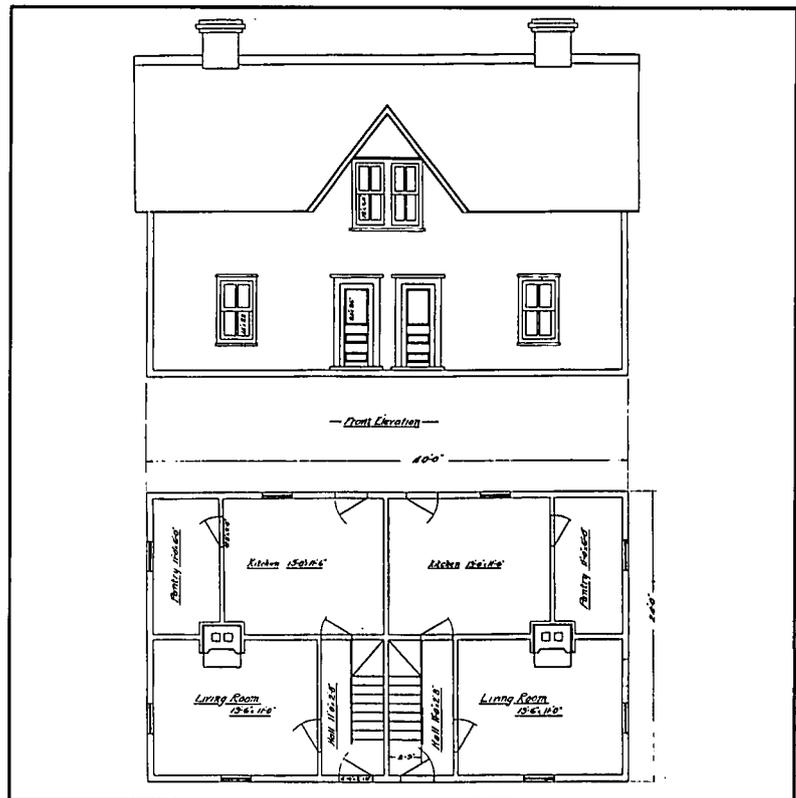


commissioner, "there was three rooms downstairs: kitchen, dining room and front room. Upstairs there was two bedrooms, but there is other two holes in the wall. I would not exactly like to call them bedrooms, they are too small, one you cannot get a bed in at all unless you saw it off."²³ Three room and two room plans were the norm for early twentieth-century company housing throughout the Cape Breton industrial region (Figs. 1 and 2). Mary Arnold, a New York housing reformer who played a significant role in the Tompkinsville housing development, outlines conditions in the 1930s: "It is difficult to tell one house from another. If you are a comparative stranger in Reserve and wish to visit a friend, you take the nearest telegraph pole and count down from it two, three or four houses as the case may be. All the houses are painted a dark green or brown..."²⁴ While similar in style, many houses were also in poor condition with no cellars, rotted sills and badly constructed windows and doors:

*It is hard to keep damp and dirt from seeping up through the cracks. As in all old houses, the wind finds an easy way inside around doors and windows. Planning fifty or sixty years ago took little account of the work which must be done by a miner's wife and the sink is often in a dark corner behind a door. The yards are small and only the braver spirits find a way to grass and flowers.*²⁵

These duplexes were over seventy-five years old with shingles painted dark green or with unpainted clapboards. There were no indoor toilets, and the front and back yards were dusty and dirty. The rent charged by the mining company in 1938 was ten dollars per month.²⁶

A survey of housing conditions in the early 1940s, done with the assistance of a representative of the United Mine Workers of America District 26 and the local municipality, verifies the poor conditions faced by miners and their families. The survey of 320 dwellings in Reserve Mines showed that 1 799 people lived in these houses and that eighty-eight per cent had no bathroom or indoor toilet, no sewer system was developed in the community and forty-seven per cent of the houses were over fifty years old.²⁷ Of the 320 houses, 159, or forty-nine per cent, were considered overcrowded and there were at least thirty "shacks," temporary houses found around mine sites which were deemed "uninhabitable."²⁸ The report concluded that 125 to 150 new housing units were required for the community, that a sewage system needed to be installed and that the com-



munity should provide for individual ownership, co-operative ownership or subsidized low rental limited dividend corporation projects.²⁹

Moreover, the report petitioned the Premier and Minister of Highways of Nova Scotia, Angus L. MacDonald, about the deplorable conditions of roads in the community. The worst conditions were said to be in the neighbourhood where many of the Tompkinsville pioneers originally lived:

*Bad as these conditions are, the greatest evils [are]...on the so-called Company Streets. These serve Belgium Town and Lorway, both very populous areas. These roads are low and soft and wholly lacking in adequate drainage...In the Belgium Town,...waste from the houses drains directly in the roadway. This adds up to a very nasty, unsanitary condition...*³⁰

This survey indicates that available housing and conditions, particularly in the company-built rows, were inadequate for miners and their families. The poor conditions helped to steel the resolve of the miners to search for solutions to their housing problems. The cooperative Tompkinsville experiment was one innovative approach to solving this fundamental problem.

Fig. 2
Plan of two room company house duplex built at the turn of the twentieth century. Examples of this type of duplex with a central dormer cutting the roof line are found in Sydney, New Waterford, Glace Bay and Inverness, Cape Breton Island. (Courtesy Beaton Institute, UCCB)

This was the social context the leaders of the co-operative movement faced when attempting to persuade coal miners and their families to work co-operatively. Father Jimmy Tompkins, born in Margaree, Cape Breton Island on 7 September 1870, is the foremost founder of the Antigonish Movement.³¹ Dr. Moses M. Coady, co-founder of the movement, was twelve years younger than Tompkins. He has been called “a devoted priest, a zealous apostle of the social order — a magnetic leader...who showed thousands of people throughout the world...how to become masters of their own destiny.”³² In Reserve Mines, Father Jimmy Tompkins was influential; he provided the idea for co-operative community enterprises and the innovative housing experiment of Tompkinsville now bears his name.

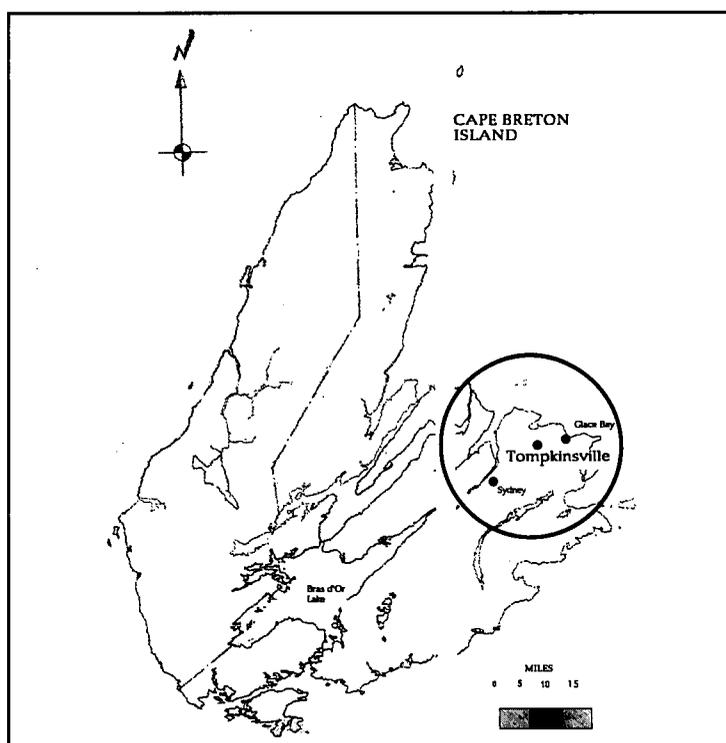
The Development of Tompkinsville, Cape Breton Island

The neighbourhood of Tompkinsville, in the heart of the Cape Breton mining district, exhibits some features of vernacular architecture (Fig. 3). This neighbourhood development was begun in 1938 by miners and their families who were dissatisfied with the inadequate housing provided by the resident mining companies. Following the co-operative philosophy expounded by

Father Jimmy Tompkins, their resident parish priest, the miners and their families formed study groups and taught themselves to build houses suited to their specific needs. This was the first co-operative housing group in Canada and was used as a model for the construction of numerous housing developments throughout eastern Nova Scotia from the late 1930s until the 1960s. Much of the architectural landscape of Cape Breton’s industrial communities in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s was shaped by co-operative housing groups following the pattern worked out by the early Tompkinsville residents.

While the Tompkinsville houses were built in 1938, preparation actually began a few years before. Establishing a Credit Union in the community was the first experience some of the miners had with the co-operative philosophy. A Credit Union study club was organized in October 1932, with Joe Laben taking a leadership role. After much reading, thinking and discussion, the first credit union was started on 2 March 1933 with forty-three members and a share capital of \$37.³³ It was difficult at first to get some miners interested in the study groups. As Mary Arnold says, “You couldn’t do anything with some fellows. They never read anything or seem to care. They don’t even know what Father Tompkins or Father Coady are talking about...”³⁴

Fig. 3
Map of Cape Breton Island showing Tompkinsville.



By the mid-thirties a number of Reserve Mines residents accepted the ideas being presented by Father Jimmy Tompkins. Mary Laben describes Father Tompkins' influence on the community:

So, Dr. Tompkins came to Reserve in 1935. And of course the first thing that he did, he gave one look around and saw everybody standing around the corners...and I guess he said, I guess I better start doing something. So he got a library organized with the help of the Carnegie foundation, you know. So...he'd pin-hole every boy or girl that he'd meet in the street to go to the library to read. So Joe went to the library with Father Jimmy and he'd start reading his books. And...we were after organizing the Credit Union, and there was talks of a store, and there was talks of fish plants and one thing or another.³⁵

In 1935, as Mary Laben points out, the first community library was established with the assistance of Dr. Jimmy Tompkins (Fig. 4). It was located in the front room of St. Joseph's Rectory, situated next to the Roman Catholic Church in the centre of the community.³⁶ As Tompkins said, "Read. Books are the university of the people. Ideas have hands and feet. Choose your ideas. They will work for you. You must study."³⁷ In this Reserve Mines library, the team of co-operators were introduced to many texts on co-operativism, self-worth and the industrial revolution. Mary Laben explains this process:

*So they, we...organized study clubs. In Reserve at that time they had organized twenty-three study clubs, meeting in people's houses. So every Sunday evening after Mass there'd be nine or ten or eleven arrive at my little house in Belgium town. And I'd go to another house where there was a bunch of women holding a meeting. And...Joe, in the library, had read Warbasse's book [J. P. Warbasse, *What is Co-operation* (New York: Vanguard Press, n.d.)]. They had a question box, and everybody was asked to put a question in the box...If they couldn't answer it among themselves they got Dr. Tompkins to answer it.³⁸*

By the fall of 1936, a small group were working on the establishment of a co-operative store. On 8 November 1937, the co-operative store, for miners and their families, was opened in the community of Reserve Mines and located across the street from the church and convent. It provided an alternative to the company stores which had dominated the mining communities until this time.³⁹

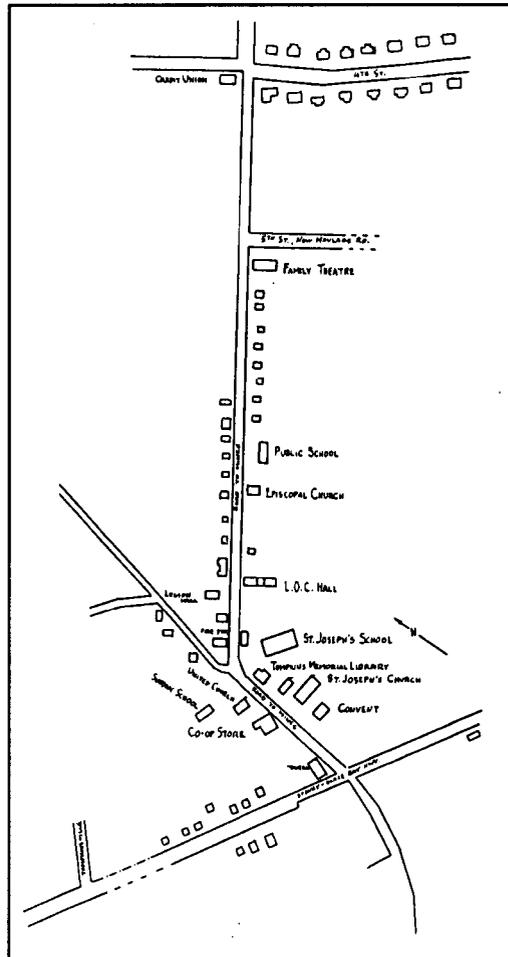


Fig. 4
Site Plan of Reserve Mines. (Drawn by Barry Gabriel, UCCB)

In the fall of 1936, a land study was started by a group of men who met every Sunday at Joe Laben's company house in a neighbourhood called Belgium Town, where many immigrant families resided (Figs. 5 and 6). Mary Laben describes her house in Belgium Town:

When we were married, sixty-one years ago we went to live in Belgium town. In a little house, two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs and an outdoor toilet...⁴⁰

The notes from the group's meeting says, "At first it was hard to get a crowd to stick."⁴¹ Five miners attended the first meeting: Joe Laben, the president; Ray McNabb, treasurer; Ed Kelly, secretary; and John Smith and Mick Gardner. This club studied pamphlets such as *The Industrial Revolution*, *Consumers Co-op*, *Why Workers Should Be Co-operators*, published by American co-operative agencies. Each member had to make a speech at an appointed time of each meeting. Their notes indicate that "the questions were very interesting and helpful to

Fig. 5 (right)

Joe Laben (Courtesy Mary Laben)

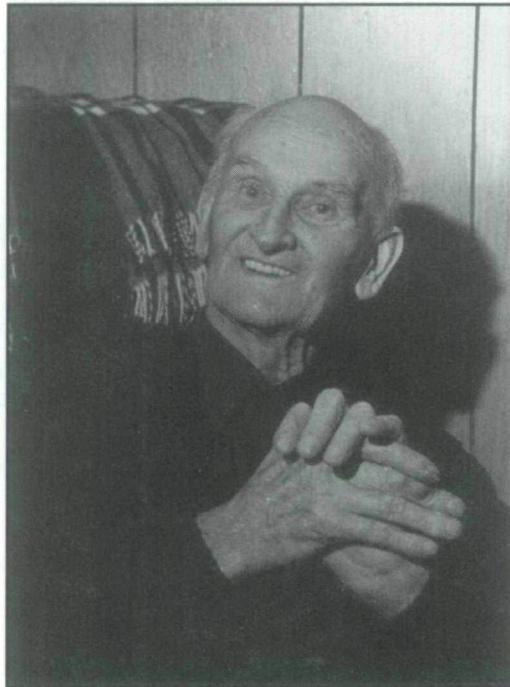
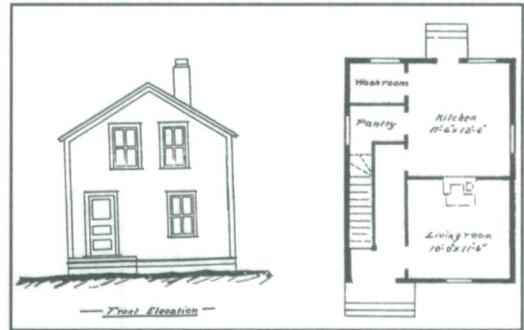


Fig. 6 (far right)

Plan of typical two-room company house built at the turn of the twentieth century. This was the kind of house built in the Belgium Town area of Reserve Mines. (Courtesy Beaton Institute, UCCB)



paid fifty dollars a piece, which was hard to get at that time.⁴³

One of their first tasks was to make a careful study of the Housing Act of Nova Scotia. At this stage of the project, two outsiders, Mary Arnold and Mabel Reid, co-operative organizers from the United States, came to assist them in their proposed endeavor. Connected to the St Francis Xavier Extension Department, these social reformers offered to help the group. The group accepted the two women as manager and assistant manager, respectively, because of their previous experience with co-operative housing developments. Mary Laben describes how Mary Arnold came to Tompkinsville:

They used to have seminars in Antigonish. And Joe went up to the seminar and he gave a talk on what they'd like to do. Build some homes for themselves and that...and this lady from New York happened to be at the seminar. Her name was Mary Arnold. So she went to Dr. Jimmy and she, after the meeting, and she said, I'd like to go to Reserve and help those men. I have just finished building a co-operative apartment in New York. So Dr. Jimmy invited her down. She had a place to stay.⁴⁴

keep crowd together” and that “speech making was well liked” by the assembled group. Books were being circulated from the community library and individuals enjoyed discussing their contents while learning much about co-operative principles and values.

It was not until the group had established a credit union, a co-operative store and a community library, that a housing project was first considered. A housing study club was organized in the spring of 1937 and, following the same format used with their previous co-operative successes, the club studied many issues relating to housing. Mary Laben explains what happened:

...And in Warbasse's book it said, that everybody that paid rent to a landlord donated the house back every twenty years to the person. So everybody was living in the Coal Company's house...So every twenty years it was donated back to the Coal Company. So somebody said, 'why can't we build houses?' They were all miners none of them ever had a hammer in their hand in their life. So they went to Dr. Jimmy with a proposition. And Dr. Jimmy was tickled to death talking about it. So then they decided, 'well, where could we get a piece of land?'...So Dr. Jimmy, all this land here belonged to a old fellow out the road. So he had turned around...he had died...he had willed the whole thing to our Parish... St. Joseph's Parish Reserve. So Dr. Jimmy said...use that land and instead of putting the dead on it, lets put the living on it. So we each

At once, they began to plan for their proposed homes and to bring their wives together with Mary Arnold and Mabel Reid to plan for the interior layouts.⁴⁵ Mary Arnold stayed in Reserve Mines for more than one year during construction and helped with planning, organizing, bookkeeping, and building cardboard models of the homes.⁴⁶ Reformer, builder, co-operator and manager of apartments, Mary Arnold assisted in numerous ways in the completion of this housing group. The group decided to use a contractor to build the first house, to allow them to observe the building process and to assess construction time, costs and materials. Mary Arnold says, “Let the contract for a budget house to a reliable builder, got

the total cost of such a house built under contract conditions, made it similar in every way to the houses which the men planned to build, and then cost accounted every joist and every sill of the budget house as well as every hour of work by skilled men... We could obtain accurate figures against which we could check labor and materials in the houses built by the men..."⁴⁷ This first house in the neighbourhood was where Mary Arnold lived during her stay in Reserve Mines.

Joe Laben, the president of the housing cooperative, took a leadership role in this housing development; he was smitten with the cooperative philosophy, especially after Father Jimmy Tompkins became the parish priest in St. Joseph's Parish, Reserve Mines on 10 March 1935.⁴⁸ After two years of weekly studies of carpentry, plumbing, electricity and general house construction, Joe, his wife Mary and each of the men and their families had completed a small, cardboard scale model of the houses to be built. As Mary Laben describes, the women played a key role in this whole process:

*The women...decided, they all built little...cardboard homes....Exactly the same, you know, and they even pictured in it, well...I could put it there, or I could put it here. Katie, uh, Misses McNabb she did her whole kitchen around because she had eight. And so she...had a window in the middle on both sides. She put the whole cupboards because she'd need them you know. And then...room for her table and room for her stove and that went in her kitchen.*⁴⁹

Men and women jointly helped to construct the houses. As Mary Laben says:

*Yes, the women...there's more shingles went on those houses with women then there were with men...Oh yes they helped put up the gyprock and everything. But...we also had women study clubs...The Government sent somebody down from Truro that taught us with a loom to weave, you know. We did quite a bit of that, and we did, we knit, and crocheted. And then...when it came, when it came the fall they sent down someone that helped us can. We all had a garden...We got settled...and they sent us down ah,...to show us what to do with canning and the canning machine, and what we had in the garden, and what to do with it and everything else...*⁵⁰

On 1 April 1938, group members started digging the first basements by hand and the cooperative housing experiment was becoming a physical reality (Fig. 7). The members aimed to



Fig. 7 Housing group members digging basements by hand, 1938. Mary Arnold is in the centre of the photograph with a pick in her hand. (Courtesy Catharine MacNeil, resident of Reserve Mines)

build their homes for \$500; at the time a comparable house, built by a private contractor, cost approximately \$10 000.

A travel writer, Clara Dennis, stumbled across the Tompkinsville housing group in her travels throughout Cape Breton Island in 1938. She met one of the Tompkinsville pioneers, George Clarke, at work on his home and she quotes him describing how the group was formed:

*'We're all coal miners — shooters, bottommers, loaders and so on,' he said. 'We work in the coal mines here in Reserve. If anyone had told me a year ago that I would build a house! — well, I wouldn't have believed him, that's all. When the co-operative movement struck Reserve, I joined one of the study groups that were formed. We studied different things in our group. One of our members found a law about housing on the Statute Books of Nova Scotia. He sprung it on our meeting. We found we could borrow from the government seventy-five percent of the cost of a house. We would only have to pay two and a half percent interest and would have twenty-five years to repay the loan. We decided to take advantage of the law and build homes for ourselves.'*⁵¹

After examining the law for almost two years, the group studied housing, planning and all aspects of building; in a sense, they taught themselves the whole process of planning, designing and building houses from making forms and concrete foundations to framing and roofing houses. As George Clarke says:

An expert showed us how to mix the cement for the first foundation and we went ahead and did the rest. We worked in gangs of three. Three would put up the frame, the next three would come along and board it in, three would lay the floors and so on. We went from house

to house, till all were finished — co-operation you see, co-operators.⁵²

Juggling the difficult shift work schedules, the miners proceeded to complete the project within one year.

To learn the intricacies of the Housing Act of Nova Scotia, Joe Laben attended a conference at St Francis Xavier University in Antigonish. There, he met Mary Arnold and her colleague, Mabel Reid, Americans who had been involved in housing co-operatives in New York City. The women offered to assist by lobbying politicians to change the legislation to better accommodate working people. Mary Arnold spent a year in Tompkinsville while the housing experiment was being built offering advice and assistance in whatever way she could.

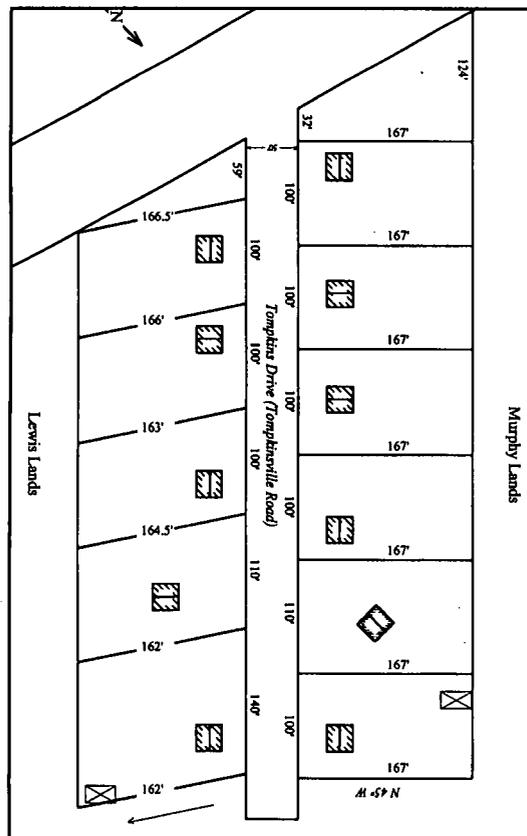
Finally, on 27 November 1938, the group's dreams were realized when the housing development was completed. The terms of the mortgage were quite simple; one quarter of the total project's value was needed for the down payment. The group used their donated land as collateral for this loan. The government loan was rated at 3.5 per cent per year and their local credit union put up the balance of 1 per cent. The initial term was for twenty-five years but

the group paid off their mortgage within twenty.⁵³

While the project was progressing and after its completion, Joe Laben was invited to assist other co-operative housing developments in communities throughout Nova Scotia.⁵⁴ For more than three years he travelled the province assisting in co-operative projects. Mary, his wife, worked at the Sydney airport managing the food services for Cara Enterprises while Joe continued to teach others about the benefits of co-operative housing. Because of his knowledge and wisdom, Joe was asked by St Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, to assist in their extension work and to lecture at the Coady International Institute on the issue of co-operative housing. Mary Laben discusses some of the groups Joe helped:

There's two in Dominion, that he built. There's two in Glace Bay that he built. One, one right by St. John's church, the hill. There's one over in Waterford [New Waterford], there's one in Sydney Mines. There's three in Newfoundland. He went over to Newfoundland... And in Sydney, in Sydney there must be, oh easy, there must be about two hundred... And New Glasgow and Springhill. Canso ah, he went right clean to PEI [Prince Edward Island]... He even... went to Ottawa to the House and, spoke to them in the House about what they were doing...⁵⁵

Fig. 8
Layout of land and houses on Tompkinsville Road. (Drawn by Barry Gabriel, UCCB)



There was much interest in Nova Scotia in this innovative project begun by this group of Reserve Mines coal miners. A survey of co-operative "housing groups," as they are known in Nova Scotia, indicates that between 11 March 1938, when the Tompkinsville experiment began, and 16 July 1952, there were thirty-five housing groups developed in the province.⁵⁶ Cape Breton communities such as Glace Bay, New Waterford, Inverness and Sydney built co-operative housing. On the mainland, communities such as Stellarton followed in the co-operative spirit.⁵⁷ From 1953 to 1973, there were 982 co-operative housing projects developed in Nova Scotia.⁵⁸ Joe and Mary Laben's house in Tompkinsville became a visiting site for Coady International students and for anyone interested in co-operative housing. Over the years, Joe received a number of awards for his contribution to the well-being of his community and of Canada, including the Centennial medal in recognition of valuable service to the nation in 1967; an Antigonish Movement service award in 1974; a visit from the Governor General of Canada, Ed Schreyer and his wife in 1982; and the Order of Canada in 1985.⁵⁹

The Houses

The eleven houses in this neighbourhood were laid out in a block of land originally designated for the parish graveyard and situated approximately three hundred yards from the centre of Reserve Mines where the church, convent, library, credit union, company houses and store are located (Fig. 8). Tompkinsville Road was driven in at a diagonal off the highway which runs between Reserve Mines and Sydney and the land was divided in a grid-iron fashion. Each house was situated on a piece of land on average 100 by 165 feet in size. Nine of the eleven houses were placed close to the road, leaving room behind for gardens; only one house, on the northwestern side, deviated from this arrangement — it was situated in the centre of the lot. Another house on the southeastern side of the neighbourhood was situated in a different manner from the rest — it was rotated forty-five degrees and placed closer to the centre of the lot. The co-operative group hired a contractor for this first house to be constructed, which allowed the residents to assess the length of time for building and to compare prices for materials and labour. Mary Arnold lived here when she was assisting residents of the neighbourhood with the construction of their homes.

Ten of the eleven builders chose to construct gable roofs; only one used a half-hipped form, known locally as the “Cheticamp Style,” because of its popularity in the rural Acadian community of Cheticamp on the western side

of the island.⁶⁰ Five of the eleven houses were built with the gable facing the Tompkinsville road; six were built with the long side of the houses facing the road. Each Tompkinsville house was two stories in height and had a bathroom and six rooms, including a kitchen, dining room and living room on the ground floor and three bedrooms upstairs (Figs. 9 and 10). Each house was unique with no two houses exactly alike in floorplan or decoration, although all chose the three-room ground floor plan for their living space. One of the pioneers succinctly summed up the minor variations:

One has no hall, another has an extra window, another has the bathroom downstairs, and so on. I liked a fireplace more than anything else, so I saved on my floors (they're not all hardwood) and put the money in the fireplace. One man put his extra money on a ceiling. He saw a fancy ceiling in a church and liked it. So, in one of his rooms he has a fancy diamond ceiling — very pretty — where I have only a plain ceiling.⁶¹

Although the process of construction was communal and the floorplans were similar, individual builders were innovative in their use of cosmetic details and interior arrangements.

The owners were proud of their accomplishments and allowed many visitors from Cape Breton Island and beyond to see the fruits of their labour. The interiors were brightly colored, causing one traveller in 1938 to focus on the cosmetic details of the visited house:



Fig. 9 (far left)
Father Jimmy Tompkins assessing the work while a house frame is being built, 1938. (Courtesy Catharine MacNeil, resident of Reserve Mines)

Fig. 10 (left)
Putting the rafters on a house, 1938. (Courtesy Catharine MacNeil, resident of Reserve Mines)

The floor of one room was a royal blue. The walls had light blue paper and the woodwork was white. In another room the floor was pink. White curtains at the windows had dainty frills of pink. 'This is our guest room,' said one housewife, as she opened the door of a most attractive room. Floor of a delicate yellow, mauve walls and a ceiling of pastel green blended together and gave a most pleasing effect. 'We got the color scheme from a magazine,' the housewife said. 'See the nice big clothes closet,' she continued. 'We never had such a thing as a closet in a room before. The last house we lived in had no bathtub or no hot water — very awkward that was.'⁶²

While both men and women helped construct the homes, women made the primary decisions on the cosmetic details of the house interiors. Travel writer, Clara Dennis, describes the spacious and well laid out kitchens:

There were most adorable little kitchens in the houses — kitchens that would delight the heart of any housewife. To the miner's wife they were a special joy for with different members of her family working perhaps different shifts in the mine, she might have to prepare as many as seven or eight different meals a day instead of the regulation three. One kitchen had a window built over the sink, and the miner's wife looked out on a beautiful view as she worked. A built-in flour bin and four closets with four closet doors, was an original idea in another kitchen. One kitchen was red and grey, with red and grey linoleum on the floor. Another had black linoleum and the chairs were Spanish red and Royal blue...⁶³

This passage points out the way in which the members of this housing group were able to alter their individual spatial layouts in this all important room — the kitchen — the place where much activity occurred.

On my first visit to Tompkinsville to visit Mary Laben, the last surviving pioneer of this neighbourhood, I was welcomed into her comfortable, sun-filled kitchen at the rear of the house (Figs. 11, 12 and 13). She said, "I love my kitchen" and she proudly showed me around pointing out its many features and details including a sunny kitchen nook with table and chairs, a large space for cooking and a wall of cupboards for storage.

While the rear kitchen is sunny and inviting, the "front room" or living room is where the many photographs of daughters, nieces, their

Fig. 11
Exterior, Joe and Mary Laben's house, 1993.



Fig. 12 (right)
Floorplan of first floor and front facade, Joe and Mary Laben's house.
(Drawn by Barry Gabriel, UCCB, 1993)

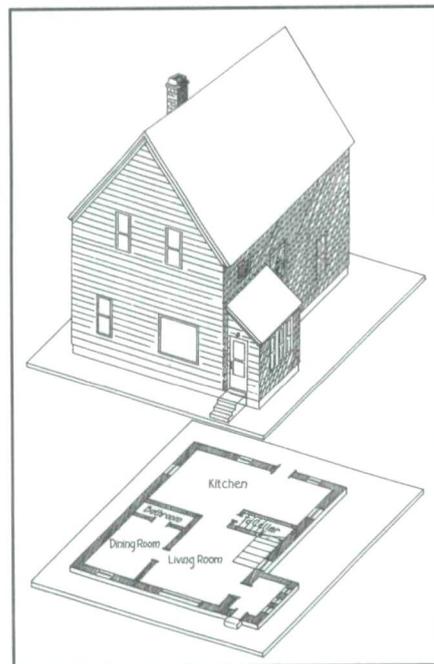


Fig. 13 (far right)
Floorplan of upper story and rear facade, Joe and Mary Laben's house, Tompkinsville.
(Drawn by Barry Gabriel, UCCB, 1993)

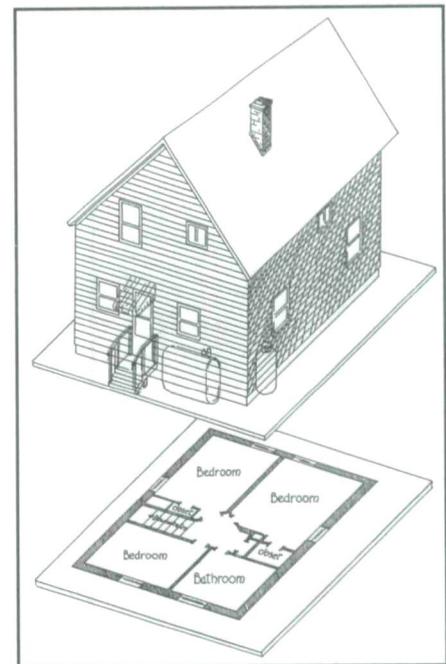




Fig. 14
 Living room or "front room," Joe and Mary Laben's house, 1993.

friends and acquaintances and Mary Laben's husband, Joe, are displayed. The photographs in this "personal museum" show the various rites of passage of family members and the awards offered to Joe Laben for his contribution to co-operativism and housing (Fig. 14). It is here where special guests are invited and where Mary Laben now spends much of her time. The influence of the Roman Catholic faith of Mary and her husband is also demonstrated by the large image of *The Last Supper* and a photograph of Christ overlooking the living room.

The Laben floorplan has a kitchen to the rear, a living room, or "front room" as it is most often called in Cape Breton, at the side of the house facing the road, and a small dining room which has been transformed into a small bedroom. The dining room now functions as a bedroom for it is difficult for Mary Laben to get up and down the stairway, which leads from the living room. A small bathroom was built off the dining room for Joe Laben when his illness in the last ten years made it increasingly difficult for him to climb the stairway. The upstairs contains three bedrooms with small closets along with a small bathroom.

While Joe and Mary Laben's house and those of their neighbours were built co-operatively as

a response to company domination of housing, it is ironic that residents chose familiar spatial patterns when deciding to construct their new houses. A variation on the gridiron plan was used to lay out their neighbourhood, a common town plan used in the many coal mining towns of Cape Breton and in other areas of North America.⁶⁴ Even though their motivation for building co-operatively was to move away from the company housing, owned and managed by the Dominion Steel and Coal Company, they chose a basic three room plan with a front room, dining room and rear kitchen when selecting suitable spaces for their new houses. This plan made its appearance on the island in the various company houses built as early as the 1830s by the British-owned General Mining Association. While two room plans of kitchen and front room were used in Cape Breton's company housing, particularly in the Belgium Town area of Reserve Mines where Joe and Mary Laben resided before moving to Tompkinsville, by 1900 the standard plan in company duplexes built by the Dominion Steel and Coal Company was the three-room form. Homes of this type can still be found in communities such as Dominion, Glace Bay, New Waterford, New Victoria, Sydney Mines and Inverness as well as in Reserve Mines. Even

though the company houses from where the residents originally lived were considered to be sub-standard, the builders of Tompkinsville demonstrated conservatism in selecting a familiar floorplan for their new homes.

Moreover, Mary and Joe Laben also chose to build a home with a gable facing the road. While many of the early and mid-nineteenth-century company houses were attached rows, copying British mining housing, the early twentieth-century single family company homes were gable-entry-to-the-road homes. The gable front house with a main entrance off to one side on an end gable, is said to have emerged in North America by the 1830s.⁶⁵ The house type grew largely from the late eighteenth-century interest in classical forms, which promoted the architectural style called *classical revival*, so popular in religious, public and domestic buildings from the 1820s until the 1860s.⁶⁶ Allen Noble point out that orienting the gable to the street allowed narrower and less expensive urban town lots to be used by builders. By locating the gable facing the street, more buildings could be placed in smaller geographic spaces.⁶⁷ Thomas Hubka points out that New England farmers readily accepted this form into their building repertoire after the 1830s, at a time when there was considerable reorganization of space on New England farms.⁶⁸ Moreover, he argues the primary appeal to Americans of the classical movement was nationalistic; this architectural style became a symbol of the new American republic which was attempting to build a nation based on classical ideals: "The image of Greece and Rome became a symbol of progress..."⁶⁹ This house type, without the classical details, appeared in Cape Breton mining communities at the turn of the twentieth century; it was this form that Joe and Mary Laben chose when deciding on a suitable home in their Tompkinsville neighbourhood.

While following a familiar local pattern of interior spatial usage, Tompkinsville residents also followed familiar land use patterns in their exterior yards. They planned for and planted gardens to help supply their families with fresh produce and root crops. The garden was not a hobby but a necessity for many, especially at times when the mines were reduced to one of two shifts a week, a common occurrence throughout the 1930s. Many of Tompkinsville's and industrial Cape Breton's residents have rural roots; some of their forefathers came from rural Inverness, Victoria and Richmond counties of Cape Breton in droves at the turn of the

twentieth century when coal mining was booming on the island. The Tompkinsville residents grew root crops and vegetables in the 1930s to help feed their families in difficult times. Mary Laben points out that in addition to beans, peas, carrots, squash, turnip and potatoes, their garden also contained a large patch of strawberries, which supplied more than twenty-five baskets each year.⁷⁰

Numerous changes have happened in this neighbourhood in the last fifty-six years. Many of the original residents have died and younger citizens have purchased the homes of the Tompkinsville pioneers. There are no longer coal mines in Reserve Mines; men from Reserve Mines work in the underground submarine Phalen colliery in the nearby town of New Waterford. Many of the houses have been repainted and changed over the years with the most common renovations being the applying of aluminum siding and the replacing of windows in the 1960s and 1970s in an attempt to cut heating costs and to lower maintenance costs for the aging residents.

These Tompkinsville houses tell a story of innovation and conservatism. The co-operative nature of the planning and construction of the neighbourhood was a response to domination of housing by a mining corporation in a company town. This group of Reserve Mines coal miners were the first to apply some of the co-operative ideas of Tompkins and Coady to the building of homes. While innovative, these builders were also conservative in choosing familiar spatial patterns for their homes and yards.

The Tompkinsville housing co-operative exhibits many features of vernacular architecture. For example, the builders controlled the entire building process in this neighbourhood. Despite the poor economic climate, the owners saw that by working together to construct homes they were able to afford suitable, comfortable homes. This whole co-operative enterprise allowed mining families to break away from the confines of the company-owned housing so prevalent in the community at the time, yet they were able to use the spatial patterns with which they had become accustomed. This co-operative building process is, in itself, an older, conventional vernacular pattern. Barns, out-buildings and houses were once "raised" in many communities in a communal fashion with entire neighbourhoods of men, women and children assisting in some way. While neighbourhood residents were limited by costs and size, they also adjusted and altered their

architecture to suit their own needs, modifying each unit to match the particular aesthetics of the family. The architecture of this neighbourhood is clearly "product of a place, of a people, by a people."⁷¹

It is inadequate to simply define *vernacular* in a negative way by calling it non-academic, non high-style, unsophisticated or non-professional, for vernacular architecture exists when a people or a community have some element of control over their physical environment. When individuals are able to build homes, barns or neighbourhoods following older, conventional patterns in a region; when they are able to adjust and alter their architecture to suit their own needs; or when they are able to express their wishes and desires in making a home or building, we are dealing with architecture at the vernacular level.

This does not mean that only old and rural architecture is vernacular, although many vernacular architecture studies to date focus on older rural forms. Many urban houses such as those in Tompkinsville also exhibit vernacular features. Only recently have scholars begun to explore the vernacular aspects of contemporary housing. As Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach state, "Clearly more investigation of contemporary buildings, including commercial as well as residential structures, is needed."⁷²

Joe Laben and his wife Mary played an integral role in the development of the Tompkinsville architectural experiment. They nurtured the idea of cooperative housing through many discussions and study clubs, through readings, conversations, arguments and debates. As Alex Laidlaw says, "Co-operation is not an easier way of doing things. It is a

harder way by reason of its democratic methods. It is worthwhile not on the grounds of ease, but because of its humanism and because it is fair and equitable."⁷³ These Tompkinsville residents moved from theory to practise as they constructed their own homes following cooperative ideals and their tenacious drive has transformed the many working class neighbourhoods in Atlantic Canada who have followed their example. Joe and Mary Laben's home remains a place to visit when one wants to find out about the development of cooperative housing in Atlantic Canada.

Architecturally, the Tompkinsville houses would not fare well if one evaluated them according to criteria developed by governments to assess the significant historical buildings in our communities. These houses are not extremely old, only fifty-six years. They are not designed by a well-known architect, they do not represent a unique architectural style and they are not directly associated with a prestigious merchant or industrialist. Moreover, they are sheathed in aluminum siding, a renovation made by many working class people throughout Nova Scotia in the 1960s.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the process of construction and the influence of this housing development at the local, regional, national, and indeed international levels, would suggest that the neighbourhood is a significant part of Nova Scotia's built heritage. Vernacular dwellings like those found in industrial communities throughout the country deserve to be represented more extensively in our historic building inventories and in our designated Canadian historic properties for they offer us a more realistic portrayal of the lives of working class Canadians.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much of the material for this paper derives from the Beaton Institute Archives, University College of Cape Breton (UCCB), and the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. The most important materials, however, came directly from Mrs Mary Laben, the last surviving pioneer of this neighbourhood. She thoughtfully and carefully answered my endless questions about the development of the neighbourhood and allowed me to take measured sketches and photographs of her home. Mary and her husband Joe, who died in 1992, were two of the prime

forces behind this housing development. Mary graciously offered her assistance throughout this entire project. I also wish to thank Kate Currie, Beaton Institute, UCCB, Ainslie White, Kim Stockley, Don Ward, Barry Gabriel, Bill Davey, Del Muisse and the Nova Scotia Department of Culture to whom an earlier draft was submitted for their heritage Unit. An earlier version of this paper was also presented at the Folklore Studies Association of Canada annual conference at Carleton University, Ottawa, 2-6 June 1993.

NOTES

1. See Margaret Bennett, *The Last Stronghold: Scottish Gaelic Traditions in Newfoundland*, Canada's Atlantic Folklore-Folklife Series no. 13 (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1989); Richard MacKinnon, "Vernacular Architecture in the Codroy Valley, Newfoundland: Local and External Influences on the Development of a Building Tradition" (Ph.D. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1991).
2. One exception is a fine study by Dolores Hayden which explores some of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century co-operative experiments in housing advocated by a group of women she calls "material feminists." These women argued that a "complete transformation of the spatial design and material culture of American homes, neighbourhoods and cities" was needed to change the exploitation of women in society. See: Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1981), 3.
3. Kingston William Heath, "Defining the Nature of Vernacular," *Material Culture* 20 (1988): 5. Alan Gowans mentions that the term *vernacular* was first applied to architecture by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1857. Gowans provides a definition of the term: "In essence, 'vernacular' means an unaffected, unselfconscious, unaccented way of building, comparable to the speech of someone who has never left a given region and speaks the local accent without affectation, without pretense of a better 'class' accent." Alan Gowans, *The Comfortable House* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1986), 41. See also: Dell Upton, "Ordinary Buildings: A Bibliographic Essay on American Vernacular Architecture," *American Studies International* 19, no. 2 (1981): 57-75; Camille Wells, ed., *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* (Annapolis, Maryland: Vernacular Architecture Forum, 1982); Camille Wells, ed., *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press for the Vernacular Architecture Forum, 1986).
4. J. Geraint Jenkins, "Fieldwork and Documentation in Folk-life Studies," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 90 (1960): 260. The lack of folklore and folk-life studies within our universities is one of the reasons why this area of study and research is underdeveloped in Canada.
5. See, for example: Sidney Oldall Addy, *The Evolution of the English House* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1898); Sir Cyril Fox, "Some South Pembrokeshire Cottages," *Antiquity* 16 (1942): 307-19; Sir Cyril Fox and Lord Raglan, *Monmouthshire Houses: A Study of Building Techniques and Smaller House Plans in the Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries*, 3 vols. (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1951-1954); Iowerth Peate, *The Welsh House: A Study in Folk Culture* (Liverpool: Brython Press, 1946). North American scholars such as Fred Kniffen, Henry Glassie and James Deetz have been extremely influential in the study of folk architecture and material culture. See: Fred Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (1965): 549-77; Fred Kniffen and Henry Glassie, "Building in Wood in the Eastern United States: A Time Place Perspective," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 159-81; Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*, University of Pennsylvania Monographs in Folklore and Folklife, no. 1 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968); Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975); James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1977); Michael Ann Williams, *Home Place: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Bernard L. Herman, *Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware, 1700-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987). One of the better bibliographic sources for North American vernacular architecture is the *Vernacular Architecture Forum*, a newsletter published by the society of this same name which includes notes, reviews and an extensive bibliography in each issue.
6. Henry Glassie, "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact's Place in American Studies," in *Prospects: An Annual of American Studies*, ed. Jack Salzman (New York: Burt Franklin, 1977), iii, 30.
7. *Ibid.*, 32.
8. See, for example: Terry Sunderland, *Still Standing: Cape Breton Buildings From Days Gone By* (Sydney: College of Cape Breton Press, 1980); Debra McNabb and Lewis Parker, *Old Sydney Town: Historic Buildings of the North End* (Sydney: Old Sydney Society, 1986); Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, *Seasoned Timbers: A Sampling of Historic Buildings Unique to Western Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, 1972); Jim St Clair and Mary Kay MacLeod, *No Place Like Home: The Life and Times of Cape Breton Heritage Buildings* (Sydney: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1992); Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, *Founded Upon a Rock: Historic Buildings of Halifax and Vicinity Standing in 1967* (Halifax: Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, 1967); Nova Scotia Association of Architects, *Exploring Halifax* (Toronto: Greey De Pencier, 1976); L. B. Jenson, *Wood and Stone* (Halifax: Petheric Press, 1972).
9. JoAnn Latremouille, *Pride of Home: The Working Class Housing Tradition in Nova Scotia 1749-1949* (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1986).
10. *Ibid.*, 83-90.
11. Peter Ennals and Deryck Holdsworth, "Vernacular Architecture and the Cultural Landscape of the Maritime Provinces: A Reconnaissance," *Acadiensis* 10 (1981): 86-102.

12. Peter Ennals, "The Folk Legacy in Acadian Domestic Architecture: A Study in Mislead Self-Images." in *Dimensions of Canadian Architecture*, Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada: Selected Papers, ed. Shane O'Dea and Gerald L. Pocius (Ottawa: Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, 1983), 8-12; Peter Ennals, "The Yankee Origins of Bluenose Vernacular Architecture," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 12, no. 2 (1982): 5-21; Peter Ennals, "Acadians in Maritime Canada," in *To Build in a New Land: Ethnic Landscapes in North America*, ed. Allen G. Noble (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 8-12.
13. John J. Mannion, *Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada: A Study of Cultural Transfer and Adaptation*, University of Toronto Geography Research Publications no. 12 (Toronto: Published for the Department of Geography by the University of Toronto Press, 1974), 138-64. See also the work of one of Mannion's former graduate students: David B. Mills, "The Development of Folk Architecture in Trinity Bay, Newfoundland," in *The Peopling of Newfoundland: Essays in Historical Geography*, ed. John J. Mannion, Social and Economic Papers no. 8 (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1977), 77-101.
14. See: Gerald L. Pocius, *A Place to Belong: Spatial Usage in Calvert, Newfoundland* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Gerald L. Pocius, "Architecture on Newfoundland's Southern Shore: Diversity and the Emergence of New World Forms," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Camille Wells (Annapolis: Vernacular Architecture Forum, 1982), 217-232; Gerald L. Pocius, "Raised Roofs and High Hopes: Rebuildings on Newfoundland's Southern Shore," *Material Culture* 19 (1987): 67-84; MacKinnon, "Vernacular Architecture in the Codroy Valley; Diane Tye, "The Housing of a Work Force: Workers' Housing in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1900-1914," *Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada Bulletin* 11 (1986): 14-16.
15. Pocius, *A Place To Belong*.
16. Alan Penny, *Houses of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Formac Press, 1989).
17. André Crépeau and David Christianson, "Home and Hearth: An Archaeological Perspective on Acadian Domestic Architecture" (Unpublished paper presented at the Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Conference, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1993).
18. H. M. Scott Smith, *The Historic Houses of Prince Edward Island* (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1990); H. M. Scott Smith, *The Historic Churches of Prince Edward Island* (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1989). In Newfoundland, some work has been completed but much remains to be done before a complete understanding of the island's vernacular building tradition can be understood. The academic study of Newfoundland's vernacular architecture has been dominated by four individuals — Gerald Pocius, Shane O'Dea, John Mannion and David Mills. For some of their studies not already cited see: Shane O'Dea, *The Domestic Architecture of Old St. John's* (St. John's: Newfoundland Historical Society, 1973); Shane O'Dea, "Simplicity and Survival: Vernacular Response in Newfoundland Architecture," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 13 (1982): 19-31; Shane O'Dea, "The Development of Cooking and Heating Technology in the Newfoundland House," *Material History Bulletin* 15 (1982): 11-18; For examples of popular works see: Newfoundland Historic Trust, *A Gift of Heritage* (St. John's: Newfoundland Historic Trust, 1975); Newfoundland Historic Trust, *Ten Historic Towns* (St. John's: Newfoundland Historic Trust, 1978); Shane O'Dea has completed a survey of some of the popular studies of Atlantic Canadian architecture: Shane O'Dea, "Architecture and Building History in Atlantic Canada," *Acadiensis* 10 (1980): 158-63.
19. For a discussion of fieldwork techniques in vernacular architecture study see: Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*, University of Pennsylvania Monographs in Folklore and Folklife no. 1 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968); Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).
20. This movement has many legacies throughout Atlantic Canada including a unique degree program at the University College of Cape Breton, the Bachelor of Arts in Community Studies, where students engage in small group research projects on issues of importance to their communities. As part of their degree requirements, students are required to complete voluntary work placements in agencies, businesses and institutions in their communities.
21. For a sense of the times see: Dawn Fraser, *Echoes from Labor's Wars* (Sydney: Breton Books, 1992); David Frank, "The Industrial Folksong in Cape Breton," *Canadian Folklore Canadien* 8, nos. 1-2 (1986): 21-42; David Frank, "Tradition and Culture in the Cape Breton Mining Community in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Cape Breton at 200*, ed. Ken Donovan (Sydney: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1985), 203-218; Don MacGillivray, "The Industrial Verse of Slim McInnis," *Labour Le Travail* 28 (1991): 271-83.
22. David Frank, "Class and Region, Resistance and Accommodation," in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, ed. Ernest R. Forbes and Del A. Muise (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993), 245.
23. Royal Commission on Coal, 1925, Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia, Micro N 93, 1925, p. 82.
24. Mary Arnold, "The Story of Tompkinsville" (typescript, Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton, n.d.), 10-11. In working on this project I uncovered a first draft of this book in the attic of a co-operative house in New Waterford. A copy of this typescript has been deposited in the Beaton Institute Archives, University College of Cape Breton. See a later version in the publication: Mary Arnold *The Story of Tompkinsville* (New York: The Co-operative League, 1940).
25. Arnold typescript, 11.
26. Edward Skillen Jr., "New Houses and New Men: Nova Scotia Miners Raise Themselves Nearer

- Security Through Co-operation," *Commonweal* (18 August 1939): 388.
27. Housing Survey of Reserve Mines, Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton, 1945 MG 14 184 E. B, 2-3.
 28. Housing Survey of Reserve Mines, 4. These kinds of temporary "shacks" were quite common surrounding mine sites in industrial Cape Breton and beyond.
 29. Housing Survey of Reserve Mines, 5-6.
 30. Housing Survey of Reserve Mines, 6.
 31. George Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia* (New York: P. T. Kennedy and Sons, 1953), first three chapters. Father Jimmy Tompkins attended Margaree Forks School, St Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, and in 1896 was invited to join the teaching staff at St Francis Xavier University where he taught Greek and math. He attended the Urbanville College in Rome, became a priest, and upon his return to Nova Scotia, again taught at St Francis Xavier University. He was a fine orator and writer, displayed an excellent knowledge of rhetoric and was asked to help conduct fundraising for St Francis Xavier University. He was successful in procuring funds from American businessmen to construct needed buildings on the campus. He agreed fully with the Sills-Learned Report calling for a Maritime Federation of Universities, published by the Carnegie foundation in 1922. Tompkins was a supporter of these views; as a result, he was at odds with the board of St Francis Xavier University and Bishop Morrison of Antigonish who were not in favour of federation. They wanted St. Francis Xavier University to remain a Roman Catholic Institution. As a result, Tompkins was ordered by his bishop to go to Canso, Nova Scotia in 1923. It was in Canso where he was able to see first hand the plight of Nova Scotia's working people and the need for adult education and more co-operative enterprises. In 1935 he moved to St Joseph's parish in the mining community of Reserve Mines where he began to inspire some to follow his co-operative ideals.
 32. R. McKean, *A Great Man Dies and Lives in the Antigonish Movement Abroad* (Antigonish: the Coady Institute, n.d.), n.p. Coady was born in Northeast Margaree on 3 January 1882, and worked on his family's farm as a young boy. As he says, "We were carpenters, coopers, woodsmen, fishermen, farmers all in one. I was doing a man's work when I was ten." In his biography he reveals that he did not go to school regularly until he was fifteen years old: "I went a few weeks after planting in the spring and a little longer time after digging in the fall. I was fortunate, however, that my parents taught me at home..." He attended school in Margaree, Cape Breton Island, Normal College in Truro and St Francis Xavier University in Antigonish. He was offered a position at St Francis Xavier University in 1910, and like his cousin, Jimmy Tompkins, he entered the Urbanville College in Rome where he obtained "the best in theological and philosophical training of the time." He did post-graduate studies in education in Washington, D.C. In the early 1920s, he helped to organize the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union and founded and edited their bulletin. When a leader was needed for the newly established Extension Department at St Francis Xavier in 1928, Coady was the logical choice. His first attempts at adult education brought him back to his home community of Margaree where, when considering offering courses in music and art, he developed the idea of forming small study clubs. One of his first tasks as the director of the Extension Department was to organize the many fishermen of the province into a union. By 1930, he brought together 208 delegates from the many Nova Scotia fishing villages to Halifax to form the United Maritime Fishermen. Coady continued to work with co-operative enterprises throughout his life. He died in 1959; Tompkins died in 1953. Tompkins was buried in Reserve Mines, St Joseph's Parish, not far from the present-day Tompkinsville housing development.
 33. History of Arnold Credit Union, People's Library, Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton, MG 14, 184, B.
 34. Arnold typescript, 6.
 35. Mary Laben, interview with author Richard MacKinnon, Tompkinsville, Nova Scotia, 7 January 1993. My audio-tapes have been deposited at the Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton.
 36. By 1945 more space for the facility was needed and a large room in the basement of the parish school was renovated for the Reserve People's Library. In 1951 the community established the Tompkins Memorial Library in a small building with classical revival features located next to the church and school.
 37. Arnold typescript, p. 8. The present-day Cape Breton Regional Library developed from this first Reserve Mines library; today there are thirteen branches and two bookmobiles to service the island of Cape Breton.
 38. Mary Laben interview, 7 January 1993.
 39. At this particular store, there was a manager, Alvin Holmes, a meat cutter, Jim MacKinnon and a teamster. "History of the Arnold Credit Union" (unpublished manuscript [a five-page handwritten notebook]). MG14, 184B, Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton. In Cape Breton Island company stores were referred to as "pluck-me's" because the stores were viewed by miners and their families as part of an exploitative system. The bill at the pluck-me store was taken directly off the pay cheque before the miner was able to collect his pay. During the bitter strikes in the 1920s, some pluck-me stores were burned because of their symbolic associations. See: Frank, "Tradition and Culture in the Cape Breton Mining Community," 203-218.
 40. Mary Laben interview, 7 January 1993.
 41. "History of the Arnold Credit Union," n.p.
 42. The following officers were appointed: Joe Laben, President; Jonathan Steele, Vice-President; Duncan Curry, Secretary; and Ray McNabb, Treasurer. Duncan Curry, Alex McIntyre and Jonathan Steele were taken into the club to replace Mick Gardner, Mick Young and Jonathan Aucoin who had resigned from the club for "good reason." "History of the Arnold Credit Union," n.p.

43. Mary Laben interview, 7 January 1993.
44. Ibid.
45. At this stage the housing group consisted of Mary Arnold, Manager; Joe Laben, President; Duncan Curry, Secretary; Ray McNabb, Treasurer; Allan McMullin, Director; Angus Curry, Director; Ed Kelly, Director; Jonathan Steele, Vice-President; A. S. McIntyre, Director; John Smith, Director; George Clark, Director and Mabel Reid, Assistant Manager. "History of the Arnold Credit Union," n.p.
46. See Mary Arnold's book, *The Story of Tompkinsville* (New York: The Co-operative League, 1940), for her discussion of how this neighbourhood came into being. Mary Arnold was involved in co-operative development in New York City where she was manager of a group called Consumer Co-operative Services. Dolores Hayden states that: Mary Arnold "built sixty-six units in 1930 at 433 West Twenty-first Street, with a dining room on the first floor. The group had begun with a chain called 'Our Co-operative Cafeterias' and cooked food shops in 1919, then expanded with a bakery, a laundry and circulating libraries. Their apartments rented for \$25 to \$30 per room per month." Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution*, 258. The liner notes in her book, *Father Jimmy of Nova Scotia* (Chicago: Cooperative League of the U.S.A., n.d.), state that she produced a film, *The Turn of The Tide*, about lobster fishermen along the coast of Maine and a book, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song* (New York: Vantage Press, 1957). There is a co-operative housing group in nearby Glace Bay, Cape Breton Island — Reidville — named after Mabel Reid, Mary Arnold's assistant. Mary Arnold left Cape Breton Island in the 1940s and spent time in Newfoundland where she was involved with other housing projects. For information on her Newfoundland work see: Mary Ellicott Arnold Papers, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Centre for Newfoundland Studies.
47. Arnold typescript, p. 23.
48. Joe Laben was born in Rhineland, Germany, 19 March 1907, came to Canada in 1910 and married Mary Steele of Reserve Mines, Cape Breton Island, in 1931. As a youth, Joe attended school until grade three and then began a life of work like many other Cape Breton youths of the time. In 1920, he began his career in the coal mines at the age of thirteen and continued to work in the deeps and on the surface until 1947.
49. Mary Laben interview, 7 January 1993.
50. Ibid.
51. Clara Dennis, *Cape Breton Over* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1942), 108.
52. Ibid., 109.
53. Songmaking is an important aspect of Cape Breton's oral culture. Important events in communities, whether humorous incidents, tragic mine accidents or happy occasions are recorded in many songs of local composition. In 1958 the Tompkinsville mortgage was burned at a ceremony at the Silver Rail, a popular Cape Breton Island dance club in the 1950s and 1960s. At this a time, a song was composed for the occasion by Agnes and Eldie Gallant to the tune of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. Thanks are offered to Elizabeth Beaton, Beaton Institute, UCCB for bringing this song to my attention.
- Hurrah to Tompkinsville!!**
- I** Mary Arnold came to town to see what she could do.
Along with Doctor Jimmy and Doctor Coady too.
They all got together, to help the working man
To build a home of his own.
- Chorus**
Come and let us sing together, come and let us
sing together
Come and let us sing together, Hurrah to
Tompkinsville!
- II** They called the men together to form a study group
They studied hard to get a plan the working man
to suit.
They called on Doctors, Priest and Prince to see that
they could do.
Among them all they worked a plan, to see their
dreams come true.
- Chorus**
- III** In nineteen hundred and thirty eight, we started to
turn the sod.
The work was hard, the money scarce. We were a
determined squad.
The blisters were big, our backs were sore,
foundations were dug by hand,
But the project went right along.
- Chorus**
- IV** Big Allie used to sing to us to get us all in trim
And Hooker used to join him which would make
it twice as grim.
John Allen watched while Kelly worked his garden
every day
But he never grew a dad-blamed thing!
- Chorus**
- V** Folks from all around the world, have travelled far
to see
The benefits of group action here in this community
We've got our homes, a Credit Union and a Co-op
Store
And a handsome Library.
- Chorus**
- VI** Tompkinsville is gathered here to sing and celebrate
The burning of the MORTGAGE, every cent is paid
to date.
We did it all together, to help each other out.
And it only took us twenty years!
- Chorus**
54. One recent study points out, "by late 1938, spokesmen for the Antigonish Movement claimed direct involvement by approximately 50 000 in activities including 42 cooperative stores, 17 cooperative lobster canneries, 10 fish-processing plants,

- 140 credit unions, and 2 390 study clubs — 1 500 in Nova Scotia, 500 in New Brunswick, and 390 in Prince Edward Island." Ernest R. Forbes, "The 1930s: Depression and Retrenchment," in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, ed. E. R. Forbes and D. A. Muise (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993), 294.
55. Mary Laben interview, 7 January 1993.
 56. *Co-op Housing Nova Scotia*, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, VF, V. 186, 3. 37.
 57. *Ibid.*
 58. *Ibid.*, 37–58.
 59. This material was obtained from Mary Laben. Much of this biographical material is found in an unpublished manuscript in her possession that was compiled by members of the community when Joe Laben was nominated for the Order of Canada.
 60. For a discussion of this roof type see Latremouille, *Pride of Home*, 37. Latremouille points out that the high winds in the Cheticamp area led to the choice of this roof form: "The builders around Cheticamp oriented their houses to face the hipped gables into the prevailing southeast winter wind." Even though the wind conditions were different in the industrial communities on the eastern end of the island, people from Cheticamp brought this roof style with them when they went to work in the mines.
 61. Dennis, 109–110.
 62. *Ibid.*, 110.
 63. *Ibid.*, 111.
 64. For an article examining the vernacular nature of gridiron plans see: Howard Wight Marshall, "A Good Grid-Iron: The Vernacular Design of a Western Cow Town," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, II, ed. Camille Wells (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 81–88. For a description of the layout of a Cape Breton coal mining town in 1928 see: Debra McNabb, "A Company Town, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia," in *Historical Atlas of Canada: Addressing the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald Kerr and Deryck Holdsworth (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), Plate 37.
 65. See Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture*, pp. 54, 56; Allen Noble, *Wood, Brick and Stone: The North American Settlement Landscape: Vol. 1, Houses* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 107–09.
 66. See Latremouille, *Pride of Home*, 30; Leslie Maitland, *Neoclassical Architecture in Canada*, Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Site Branches, Parks Canada, Environment Canada, 1984); Fredericton Heritage Trust, *Heritage Handbook* (Fredericton: Fredericton Heritage Trust, 1982), 10–11; Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (1944; reprint, New York: Dover, 1964).
 67. Noble, *Wood, Brick and Stone*, 107.
 68. Thomas Hubka, *Big House, Little House, Back House Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985), 38–39.
 69. *Ibid.*, 196.
 70. Mary Laben interview, 7 January 1993.
 71. Heath, "Defining the Nature of Vernacular," 5.
 72. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, "Introduction," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1986), xvi. For a study of housing built in industrial communities that have many vernacular influences see: Tom Carter, "Traditional Design in an Industrial Age: Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Victorian Utah," *Journal of American Folklore* 104 (1991): 419–442. For a popular novel which explores the vernacular influences on contemporary housing see: Tracy Kidder, *House* (New York: Avon Books, 1985).
 73. Quotation from Alex Laidlaw on poster: "Father of the Canadian Cooperative Movement: Alex Laidlaw," designed by Blair Kerrigan Glyphics for the Cooperative Housing Foundation Canada, 1988. B and G Horizontal file no. 8, Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton.
 74. Some of these criteria are derived from the Federal Heritage Building Review Office Evaluation Sheet.