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Interview with Ronnie Haché

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Ronnie Haché, (born) in Waltham, Mass, 1967. Lives in Grand Etang since 1980.

015 - Started to step-dance

1978. (taught by) Shirley Maillet in the States about a year. She made us make a routine of our own so we could repeat it over to remember it by heart. We took it with a group, about 13. After we took private lessons. She would come to our house for half an hour, once a week.

036 - Occasions to dance in Grand-Etang

Any occasions where there was concerts, shows. The Scotch Concert in St-Joseph-du-Moine. Mostly at weddings. I go just to dance, but then they find me and I have to dance afterwards.

140 - Teaches

From October I had about forty people all together. Different months. For ten weeks each. Saint-Joseph-du-Moine School. What I do if they had step-danced before I let them alone. The ones that don't dance well I start from the beginning and then go up. I just show you the basic steps and then you go on from them to the hard ones. And I have sheets to follow so I am never lost. I made them up and I got them photocopied and I give them to each one of the students. (when he learned) Well the first one she'd teach us and then I would practise that one. When she taught us a second one, I'd remember that one, and then I'd go first, second, third, fourth, all the time. I practise for maybe about half an hour. Take breaks, and go back again. Sometimes I just put the music on and go on step-dancing.

083 - Qualities of a good dancer

Just to practise a little bit more. If the tune is good for me I'll do a good job. If its not good. (he doesn't know the names of the tunes he likes best)

095 - Fiddlers he likes best

Donnie Le Blanc in Cheticamp, Ephrem Bourgeois, and Arthur Muise, they are all from Cheticamp. They just play like, my speed of dance is like medium, its not too slow, its not too fast. Its like all Scottish music. Its not American violin players. They are all Acadains, and its the Scottish (muisc).

108 - Why he likes dancing

I just got in to the violin, I started dancing, and I never stopped.
I like it even better then going to a teen-agers' dances.

116 - Shoes

I have special tap shoes. Other times wear just regular shoes, if I'm all dressed up, I just wear those. The tap shoes are ok because they are light and the heels are not too high. Other shoes I just wear flat shoes.

122 - Dance surface

Usually wood or (Name of material?) floor, kitchen. (hardest) Cement if I dance too long.

130 - Ocassions to dance

Saturday afternoon at the tavern. You can dance there all year round once a week. After the Scottish concert we all end up at one house and he invites all the violin players so you can dance all night long. They all take their turns. Usually people from outside. I was there because I know some of the kids that live in the house. (houseparties during winter) None at all. (during summer) usually. (meal) Towards the end towards midnight. Sandwiches and tea and coffee. Or a big meal, salads and meat-balls. Or just snawiches, it all depends what the wife, the lady wants to do of the house. Bear or hard stuff, not too much, just to have a good time.

158 - Square-dancing

I do square dancing in Cheticamp. The original ones, ther's three popular ones. The three popular figures. I took modern square-dancing the last two months in May and June. it was couple from Margaree, Blanche and Paul Paulin. We had two sets. That's about sixteen people. They were all over thirty. I was the youngest one. (the younger people) Alot of them are not into the old folks dance. They are into the teen-agers and hard-rock-and-roll dances. They are not into Scottish dancing at all. They are into hard-rock.

181 - Step-dance repertoire

Sixty-five to seventy. I know about eighty or seventy-five but alot of them I took up are not the Scottish steps. There is mostly tap in it, mixed up. I took some of them out to have just the Scottiah steps. I remember them all.

191 - Clothes

(at a concert) The few first years I jsut wore a nice dress pants and a nice shirt. But now I have, I wear black slacks and my tap shoes, and I

have a white shirt, and I have a Nova Scotian tartan vest. (at a house-party) Just normal clothes. Once a year there was always a step-dancing contest so that gave us courage to practise, to get better to try to win. This was at the French-American Victory Club in Waltham, Mass. AND its still going on. They just had it last May. Anybody can come if they want. Also they have violin contests too. It takes mostly the whole day. Usually in May, maybe a different date, but usually May. We were about twelve sometimes, one year we were about thirteen. Another year fifteen. it all depends. It was one of my freinds, Mona Le Blanc (who won). She doesn't dance anymore. She took it, when she was younger, till about twenty years old. She took first place six years in a row. And now she is a judge. Her parents (Came from Cheticamp area).

222 - Square-dancing

The three figures, they usually have the three figures at a wedding. They usaully do them twice. So if I have a partner, I usaully do them. And the modern square dancing is very difficult cause we don't have a caller. And the callers live in Margaree and its pretty far. And they are suppose to start before Christmas, around March, April, May to teach us more. I like them all.

236- Lessons in Waltham and the Big Step

We did step-dancing. And through the middle we did square dancing, there was four boys and four girls and we did the square dance. AND we made our own. We step-danced through the whole square set and a little bit of walking. From there we did waltzing. We went into the Big Step, the big concert we did in 1979, in the play. We just had to go just when it was our part, we knew it all before going. The first figure at the Waltham Club and at the Cheticamp Club, they are mostly the same. Its mostly all French people so they do the same ones.

257 - Number of figures in Cheticamp

I think there's six or twelve. I'm not sure. The first one i think its a jig. The second one is a jig or a reel. The last one is a reel. Alot of them is pretty tiring because alot of them step-dance.

264 - Learning to Step-dance

Before I tokk step-dancing with Shirly Maillet, Mona Le Blanc that I mentioned taught us about eight steps a year before. So I was ahead of the other pens cause I knew it. And I didn't know, if I had started from the beginning I could have learned faster. Just in the house for fun. That's how she became so good and she learned so fast. I think she learned in about three monthes, all of it. And then she taught me the basic step and I asked if if this is the one like thei and she said ya. And since that step it just went really fast cause Mona taught me that before.

279 - How many steps in a concert

Maybe around thirty. The longest I stepped dance is about three minutes.

286 - Lessons in Cape Breton area

Ya, I took step-dancing from Mary Janet MacDonald from Port Hood to try and get more Scottish steps, five weeks. She came down once a week. She only came May and June. And there was alot of people around thirty. She only comes twice in the year so alot of people came. Last year she didn't come because she was very busy. She works, she has seven kids, its very hard and she teaches in Port Hood. So she dropped this in Cheticamp for a year. She might come back. James Cormier took lessons with her. Lucille LeFort. Remonde Doucet.

300 - Why are you interested in step-dancing

Well from the back-ground of my family, my grand-father is a square dance caller, Joe Delaney, my uncle is a fiddler, Chester Delaney from St-Joseph-du-Moine. My grand-father's sisters, they all step-danced. They are from New York. My grand-father's brother plays the violin along ago, he plays it a bit now. His other two brothers step-dance also and alot of them, of his brothers sing. Its all a background of music.

313 - Teaches in Pleasant Bay

I taught last summer for two weeks, it was through the recreation department. I got paid so much an hour, I'd leave here from Cheticamp at twelve thirty, I'd get ther at one-thiry, I start to teach at two, and three o'clock I'd come back home. Five days a week, so that made ten days. I had about fiftenn, from five to about fourteen years old.

Interview with Denise Olson
Margaree Harbour

Denis Olson and I was born in High Prairie, Alberta, on November 3, 1967. My mother is from Belle Cote, Yvonne & Danny & Mike Chaisson.

328 - Pipe playing and Highland dancing

Eight years ago and I got interested in that because I had been doing Highland dancing before. I started when I was in Alberta I had seen it on TV and I said Well I want to do that and there was nobody around in my area to teach me so when we moved down here for a little while before moving to Shubenackadi for about six months and there was a person teaching it here. I can't remember the teacher. Ya I was small. So I started here and when we moved to Shubenackadi I continued my dancing in Truro. From there I got interested in the piping cause of dancing to the music and cause of going also to the Scottish concerts during the summer

and listening to it. Dancing I was seven years old. I still (dance), not so much now. Just it was getting to be expensive, the cost of the lessons, the uniform, your outfit. Some of the music. At the time it was sort of financial.

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We first started out it was no music and she would take just one step of the dance and go over continually just pointing it out. And we learned different things on the floor. When we learned the sword dance, special spaces like, one corner was blocked A, B, C, D. And therefore she would say 1A would mean one part of the sword and that square. And so by learning all the different points on this, it was able to help us learning the steps. And also we had to know some of the theory of the dancing for our test when we got examined by examiners from Scotland once a year. They usually came in the Spring and they were flown from Scotland over starting in Nova Scotia. The examiners would start in Nova Scotia and go right across Canada testing all the girls. There's rules and regulations, everything from the dancing to the outfit. You know certain uniforms and you have to have so many buttons on a vest. Just regulation type things.

371 - History of dances

With the Highland Fling the story is that there was a boy and he was living with his grand-father and the boy wanted to impress the grand-father and the boy through a period of a week or so had seen this stag in the meadow and so when the grand-father came back he did a dance showing the different movements of the stag. And with the arm movement in the Highland Fling that is supposedly the antlers and the different leg movements, how he would move. For the sword dance that was mainly how he would dance, we were told before going to battle. And there was a superstition that if you touched the sword that would forshadow a bit of bad luck. And that was, ya, that was mainly a warrior's type of dance. Men did most of the dancing in the early parts of history. The Saun Trusssp?. You translate it and it means the shedding of the trousers. And that was at the time when the men were banned of wearing kilts and they and they had to wear trousers. 1700s I do believe, I'm not quite sure on the dates. They were told that they were only allowed to wear trousers and so when the statement or whatever came to say that that was uplifted, that they didn't have to wear trousers anymore the dance depicts of how the men getting of the trousers through the different movements. You would recognize it, mainly the very first part they dance in a circle with brushing strokes, and various kicks to the side. And kicks to the back and to the front. And at the very end of the dance split kick, and that would mean that we finally got rid of the trousers. There's the Irish washerwoman and the story behind that is the different movements is that this woman has just finished scrubbing her, the house, and cleaning it from top to bottom and her husband comes in with very muddy boots and dirty clothes and things like this and she is chasing him all around the

house telling him to get out. And this is the different hand movements especially a clenched fist, shaking him, and chasing him around. There is the, some of the reels, the stories are that they were used to keep themselves warm in the winter time, dancing. And just to, the different movements would be to keep themselves warm. Maybe before church or before a dance or something. The reels, the straspeys and reels. The Sailor's Hornpipe, the movements are ones imitating the ones of the sailor on a ship. The different arm movements and leg movements show everything from him realing in rope to him climbing up towards the mast and the crow's nest. Oh there's, whats called, more the feminine, like the Flora MacDonald and the lilt. And these two dances are the women would perform those only. The story is that they are more the kind for courting. The actions are to court the gentleman. Tease him a little bit. They have the boyant costumes, large skirts and gathered in. I think thats pretty much the dances. (women) I'm not too sure on that but I would say maybe the early 19 hundreds, but I'm not sure. (information) You'd either find out on your own or maybe the dance teacher would say well this dance this is the sort of history and it might help you learn the steps a little bit more knowing the history making it more interesting. I've pretty much stuck to this style of dancing.

444- Learned the Pipes

My first teacher was (?name), who has an outfit called L and M Outfitters, working out of Londonderry. That was, he was with the Truro Girls Pipe Band. I started there. And several summers I went up to St. Ann's Gaelic College. I took Highland Dancing, I took my piping, and also besides that the gaelic. Usually the sessions run two weeks a piece. And depending on what your level is they put you, the first week is usually for beginners. The second session is for intermediate type and the third one is more for the adults. And they find out what levels in dancing, how far you are up. And in typing how good you are. How long you've been taking piping and where your trouble spots are. When I went it was about \$200.00 for two weeks but it has gone up. Wake up in the morning, go down for breakfast, it was at a certain time. We had to, then we would go out on the field in front and we'd have sort of a mass pipe-band. That would be from 8:30 to 8:45. Then we would all go in to the main hall. We would say the Lord's Prayer in Gaelic. Then we would go off to our classes. We would find out what classes they would have the first day or so. They would have schedules put up there. And you'd get a break around 11:00 o'clock. And then dinner was around 12:30 to 1:30. And then classes went to about 4:00 or 3:30. Then you had time for recreation befor supper. Then after supper there was an hour long class. Whatever if it piping or dancing or gaelic. They just had the Highland dancing. They have students all across North America. When I was there I met kids from Ontario, from B.C., also some kids from Texas and California.

479 - Opportunities for dancing

Competition, variety concerts, Scottish concerts. If people ask me to

dance I'd say ok. (rock and roll) I'd go to some of the school dances. I'd enjoy those. Being exposed to Highland dance music and piping music, I was also in the School Band.

END OF SIDE A

SIDE B

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107 - Marie & Geogie. Did you ever get her wound up? She could keep a party going. Her and my father, they could keep a party going till about two or three o'clock in the morning. Easily. She would play probably the spoons. Or the cookie sheet. Dad would sing. And sometimes they with Archie Neil. Archie Neil use to play for dances. At that time the guitar was not very well known. I can only think of one or two guys around here who played the guitar. But anything else. That came in later.

122 - Jig tunes

For house parties. I think you missed a good one here the other night here. A wedding going on at Levers'. Well Musises' which your mother must know. Willie Pat and Josephine. Their daughter got married. There was a whole bunch of people from New Waterford down because all her relatives are in New Waterford. But jigging everybody did. We all did ourselves. Everybody sang. You had more music. There was more singing then there is now. (reasons Your radio. First of all TV is one influence.

- Houseparties

Often and that also involves your houseparties. But Cape Breton still has houseparties. More so then the mainland. An another thing is that you had good radio stations, you had good programs. CJFX was good at that time, it still for this type of music. For instance Scottish Strings which we hear every night. From 6:00 o'clock. You also had this Fun at 5:00 which was on at supper time. And everybody listened to that. (50s and 60s) You got all the gossip and these houseparties went on. You got a houseparty going for little or no reason. When we grew up, even after I had left home and I was going to college, my brothers and sisters were home, in the summer time, or even in the winter time, we used to have a party. We call this one up or tell this one. Or somebody would arrive at the house with a guitar. You never had any piano. A violin. Somebody from down the Moine would come up with a violin. Some relatives. The next thing you knew you had a housefull and that was it you had a party. Parties on the mainland are all together different. That Causeway still exists because your parties are formal. You need almost an introduction to go to a party. They will say come to a party we are having a party tonight. They will sit and talk and have a drink. They are much more conservative. Where we live you'd never hear of this kind of party unless its a bunch of Cape Bretoners that get together.. Now the other year, was it two

years ago, Arthur Muise came up and Didace and Stella. They were staying overnight. They were going to sleep at our place. The next thing I know I phoned Dartmouth and I had a carload of people coming from Dartmouth to Shubenackdi. Its the Cape Bretoners that are the focal point. The same thing in Halifax. Its not the native people.

161 - Halls

There use to be a hall right here. Now its gone. And then there is a hall at East Margaree. And one at the Southwest. The schools. They had alot of dances in schools. Round and square. You'd have three sets and one round dance.

176 - Box Socials

They use to have them up at East Margaree, box socials. That was to raise money for the Church. And the women would make lunches and decorate the boxes. They sometimes had it for Valentines Day. It wasn't that often during the year. Pie socials no, box socials I do remember. They would bid, nobody was suppose to know whose box it was. Whoever bid the highest got that box. I was too young then (to make them).

191 - The sets

The Cheticamp sets for example, one of the favorite is Lead your Lady over. We dont have that part in ours. The two couple goes up to each other, your right hand lady by the right, your left hand lady by the left, your opposite by the right, and your own by the left. And then right to your own. In Margaree you had, ok one of the sets was the two sides divide, inside, outside, the two head couples come up, inside, outside returning. Your head couple comes inside and returns outside. Swing with your corner partner. OK your Mabou and Inverness set you have for example, you have and they use to do it at the Southwest too. Your second figure where you all promenade, first of all all join hands, and then your women are in the centre and they all join hands (make a star). Then they turn around and they turn around and they swing with theri partner. (In Mabou) I tried to do it last year and they said that we don't do it anymore. Its too much. They didn't want to do it anymore. But it is still there, that was part of the Mabou set. (who could do this) Anybody who has been raised in the Mabou area or Southwest Margaree. (diffences b/w Southwest and Mabou) No not that much because they had face the music and face the hall. Their sets were alot alike if I remember right. See the organization of a good square set is a good prompter, but that is passed on. They use to have a gentleman up at the Southwest, when I use to go up there a number of years ago. You use to have four couples to a set, and if you had more than four couple he'd get off the stage and stop everything. Peter MacKay. Boy when he said four couples to a set he meant four couples to a set. Then there is nothing that can disrupt good dancing or good fun more than once you start getting up onto sets, in a dance in Mabou or something like that and they have eleven couples to a set. Well

first of you have an odd number which isn't going to work. Then you get a lot of confusion. The only way you can iron that out, well with six couples you can still have a good set. Cause it's still an even number. But if you have newcomers and you are trying to teach them or somebody from out of the area who doesn't know the set. They can get them confused and very discouraged and they sit down. The ones in Halifax we stay pretty well to the formation. We have our prompters, in Rockingham, the last Friday of each month. (who plays) All Cape Breton fiddlers. We had John Campbell down from Boston. Or Buddy MacMaster. (big crowd) Depending on who the fiddler is. For example Buddy MacMaster will pack the hall. He is good for dancing.

251 - Fiddling for dancing.

There are people who are violin players, it's like anything else I guess, violin players who are good to listen to and others who are good to listen to and to dance to. His timing. And the beat and the rhythm. And the type of tunes that you pick. If you got a lively tune, Howie MacDonald, you just can't keep your feet still.

262 - People who dance.

People around here, they all dance. You know a square set, like my father, mom and dad were beautiful dancers. But everybody was, it wasn't anything, nothing special. I recall a couple of years ago going to the firehall and some of the older couples from East Margaree and they were all on the floor. I'm not into rock music, that doesn't appeal to me.

170 - Younger people dancing

If the opportunity isn't there. I did a lot of this teaching, I did it out west, with no knowledge, never having done this before. It took the prize for the city of Edmonton, teaching them the Margaree Square Sets. I had them memorized. I put my kids in a lot of concerts in town and all over. In fact I had some in Iona the other year. Some of the kids, I suppose peer pressure or something like that oh I can't go or I don't feel well. Then I had to throw somebody in at the last minute. I was trying to do something like the little Mabou Dancers, but those kids had been together for a number of years. I would have my kids practise for a week and then put them on a stage. Practise with a record and then put a live violin player. Sometimes I had no choice. I took my kids to the Festival of the Strait a number of years ago, five or six years ago from Shubenacked, and they thought it was great. I'd like to continue.

288 - How to keep this type of dancing alive among the younger people

First of all if you started in school. Physical Education should have dancing. This is a bloody shame. Why isn't it that we are spending so much time and so much money on soccer, basketball, football, contact sports? And when it comes to dancing which is an old form of culture, heritage

that it seems that itswierd or you're queer. And it has to come from, you know right now we have a generation of people who are nondancers, the parents in that style of dancing. But that just flabbergast me to see that there is dancing at all. How romantic can you be when you are ten feet away from each other when you are dancing. And I don't see any improvement in it.

302 - Dance prohibition

I can't say, I know that dances on Saturday night had to end at midnight. Now I know a number of people that I imagine you've talked to some of them and that the priest use to talk, especially Cheticamp, or some of the Scottish priests too. But I know a friend of ours who was born and brought up in Cheticamp, she lives in Mabou, and she talks about having gone to the priest wouldn't give her communion, or a freind of hers, because she had danced after midnight.

END OF INTERVIEW

There is some tape left