"THAT'S TWO MORE DOLLARS": JIMMY LINEGAR'S SUCCESS WITH COUNTRY MUSIC IN NEWFOUNDLAND

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The island of Newfoundland is separated from mainland North America by more than just water. Its unique culture acts as a barrier and a filter for all mainland influences, while, at the same time, inhibiting or distorting the cultural flow from the island to the mainland. For this reason significant cultural events on the island often make little or no impact on the rest of North America, nor are those who greatly shape and influence the island culture -- those whose names are recognized by all Newfoundlanders -- known off the island. The island's best known entertainers are recognized only on the island (unless they venture to the mainland); a singer or musician can, in fact, be a celebrity within the island's boundaries and a nonentity only 90 miles away on the mainland.

Perhaps this is not too different from the phenomenon of a small-town or local community entertainer who remains a celebrity within the area where he is known. But Newfoundland is not a small town -- it is a very large island (41,000 square miles) with a half-million population scattered in a handful of towns, hundreds of coastal villages (known as outports), and one city, St. John's. Therefore, the task of becoming a well-known entertainer in Newfoundland, and of maintaining that position, presents several problems which are unique to this area.

The performer's problem of establishing his name in the island community involves both a great deal of personal interaction with his audience (or potential audience) and the correct manipulation of the island's media. He must be aware of the influence of Newfoundland's traditional culture on the expectations of his audience and, at the same time, recognize the influence of mainland culture on the island's traditions. Keeping in mind the balance between island traditions and mainland cultural influences, the entertainer must have a repertoire which either takes advantage of this balance by being highly eclectic -- i.e., including everything from traditional jigs, reels, and ballads to rock and roll -- or which concentrates on a particular kind of music, either traditional or popular, that accentuates one aspect of the cultural conflict between the island and the mainland.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, it was country and western music which, in the minds of many Newfoundlanders, represented the incursion of mainland culture to the island. Any entertainer who sang country and western songs would, therefore, represent a symbol of change, upward mobility, progress -- i.e., mainland culture.

Jimmy Linegar, a country and western singer and musician, is one entertainer whose success stopped at the border of Newfoundland. Although he spent many years on the mainland, it is only in Newfoundland that he is still widely known.
The story of how he started out in country music and how he eventually became an island-wide celebrity illustrates some of the problems encountered in "making it" in Newfoundland country music.

Discovering Country Music

Jimmy Linegar was born on February 4, 1936, the third oldest in a family of seven boys and three girls, but it would be a mistake to think that he was born with a guitar in his hand or that he was steeped in country music from childhood. Both his parents and his older brother played traditional music on the button accordion and entertained at "times" (the Newfoundland name for house parties) but their repertoires did not include country music. In fact until the age of thirteen, Jimmy had little contact or interest in country and western music. Hank Snow, the Canadian country performer from Nova Scotia who was among the most popular country singers in North America in the 1940s and 1950s, toured Newfoundland in 1949, but his impact on Linegar at that time was minimal:

In 1949, what would I have been? I would have been thirteen. At that time, no I never had heard of Hank Snow. I do recall something about a big famous singer being in town, but at the time big famous singers meant nothing more to me than, uh, a game of ball in the park. 2

Although he was born and lived on the outskirts of St. John's, and therefore had the benefit of being near the cultural center of the island, he could not take full advantage of this because of his family's poor financial background. For example, most of the time Jimmy's family did not have possession of a working radio:

...we used to get cheap radios, $5 radios, second-hand. A tube would give out and it wouldn't be worthwhile to replace the tube. So for long periods of time, we'd have no radio.

For this reason, Jimmy could not have been greatly influenced by the music of St. John's four full-time radio stations (VOCM, CJON, CBC, and VOUS), and, of course, television was nonexistent in Newfoundland until a much later date. He was, in effect, more cut off from the influences of the media than many of those who lived in the small isolated outports far from the city.

However, around the year 1949, several events in Linegar's life led to the start of his interest and ultimately his career in country music. At this time his family acquired a wind-up gramophone:

...the sound came out through the arm or something. Um, there was a needle stuck down and a little voice box or something up above it. The sound seemed to come out through that, and she [Jimmy's mother] paid about $5 for
that and maybe half a dozen records.

Among these records was one by an obscure Canadian country performer called Alberta Slim. It was this record that sparked Jimmy's interest enough to make him want to sing:

I don't suppose many people would recall Alberta Slim, but he had a nice soft voice and, uh, I like the songs he did. I can't recall the opposite side, but the, the one I liked most of all was, uh, "Two Little Eyes That Shine." And I learned to sing it.

As if to reinforce Jimmy's interest, Alberta Slim came to St. John's in 1949, not to sing, but to exhibit his trained animals:

He was with the Bill Lynch Circus...and he had a horse named Kitten. He called it an educated horse. I remember seeing him. He used to ask Kitten to add up how much is two and three, and he'd slap Kitten five times and he'd say, "One, two, three, four, five." Well now each time he'd slap Kitten, Kitten was trained to lift his foot up paw the ground.

Despite his disappointment in not hearing Alberta Slim sing, this event was nevertheless important to Linegar, for it was the first time he had a chance to see a "famous" country singer in person.

Jimmy was fortunate in that Tom Hayward, a local semi-professional singer, was a friend of the family.4 When Hank Snow came to St. John's in 1949, Hayward met and talked with him backstage. Subsequently, it was Hayward who introduced Jimmy to the music of both Hank Snow and Wilf Carter -- another Canadian artist from Nova Scotia (known also as Montana Slim) who was popular throughout North America at that time:

...he happened to be the first person to ever come into our house with a guitar and sing some Hank Snow songs and Wilf Carter songs. And he actually let me hold the guitar. And uh, this is, uh, my first start at knowing that there was, uh, somebody by the name of Hank Snow and somebody by the name of Wilf Carter. Because this man sang their songs.

This was also Jimmy's first close contact with a local celebrity who represented mainland culture through the songs of Snow and Carter.

Linegar did not appreciate Carter at that time, but he was very impressed with Hank Snow's songs, and it was not long before he had found some Snow recordings to play on the gramophone. Once Jimmy actually heard Snow sing, Snow replaced Alberta Slim as his favorite artist. In all the years since that time, Snow has remained Jimmy's favorite singer, and he consciously patterns his singing after Snow's style.
The next step in Jimmy's progression was acquiring a guitar. After his "great awakening" to country music in 1949, it is not surprising that by early 1950 he had his first guitar:

It was a Palm Beach guitar with the trees, green trees, painted on the face of it. It was bought for a five dollar bill.

This guitar was not to last very long. His older brother took it apart to use the neck for a cigar-box banjo. However, a succession of guitars followed this -- a Hersel Minerva bought for $7.00, a May Bell for $12.00, an L-C Gibson (now considered a rare model) for $25.00, a J-45 Gibson for $60.00, a D-18 Martin for $140.00 -- until, on February 14, 1953, Jimmy was able to purchase a new D-28 Martin for $282.50. This was the same kind of guitar that Hank Snow used, and therefore it must be the ultimate instrument, as far as Linegar was concerned. Owning a D-28 also represented the mastery and knowledge of mainland technology, as opposed to the traditional island technology represented, perhaps, by his brother's cigar-box banjo.

However, even before he had mastered the guitar, Jimmy made his radio debut in 1949 on an "amateur-hour"-type show on the CBC called "The Children's Savings Programme." The originator and master of ceremonies on the program, Bob MacLeod (a well-known organist, pianist, and radio personality in Newfoundland), describes the show in this way:

The programme developed because of the war years, you see, and to get the kids interested in ... buying war savings certificates to help the war effort. And I, uh, they asked me to do this programme for the children. Well I couldn't see myself, you know, getting on as Uncle Bobby, you know, telling them bed-time stories and all this nonsense. So anyway, uh, I said to the Mrs. one night, I said, 'I've been asked to do this and I don't know what, how to go about it.' "Well," she said, "Have you heard of a thing called do-it-yourself?" And I said yeah I did. "Well that's what you should do with the children's programme. Get them to do it themselves." So on that idea I went ahead... Well they came from everywhere, you know.

The program lasted for several years after the war was over, and Jimmy was one of hundreds of local children who performed on it. He remembers the occasion well:

...I sang without a guitar. Bob MacLeod was the pianist and he accompanied me. There was a whole bunch of little girls there. I believe I was the only boy on the programme and, at the age of thirteen, I was petrified by all those little girls. And their mommies and daddies had dressed
them up so prettily and I went there like a little ragamuffin, and I felt so out of place.

The song he sang was the first song he had learned -- Alberta Slim's "Two Little Eyes That Shine." He appeared on the Children's Savings Programme twice more. Perhaps reflecting his switch of affections, the second time Jimmy went on the air he sang a Hank Snow song, "Little Buddy"; by the third show, sometime in 1950, Jimmy had learned to play five or six chords on the guitar." Jimmy Linegar was now a country and western singer and musician.

TURNING PROFESSIONAL
There can be no doubt that the year 1949 was the beginning of Linegar's career: the gramophone; Alberta Slim, Tom Hayward, Hank Snow, his first guitar, the Children's Savings Programme, all contributing to make Jimmy a performer. But without one more important event, he may well have remained a talented amateur. Until 1952, Jimmy had been a full-time student and, in fact, was at the top of his class in grades five to eight. But at the start of grade nine, he found it impossible to find enough money to buy books:

So I quit school after three weeks, because after three weeks anybody who didn't have his books had to hold out his hand and get slapped. And I didn't like that old leather strap. I thought this was ridiculous. Here I was, fifteen years old, a big boy at that time. I thought I was a little too big to get slapped and sit down at my desk and cry with the pain. And so I, I had to leave school because I, I was threatened with being strapped if I didn't have my books. Now, uh, my parents were on welfare, and there was no way they could buy books for me.

Here was the incentive, if not the necessity, for Jimmy to seek a professional career in music. At the age of fifteen, Linegar, along with two even younger boys, walked up and down Water Street, the main street in St. John's, looking for a sponsor for a radio program. Jimmy played guitar and the other two boys played button accordian and mouth organ. Their success was not immediate:

...we were completely unembarrassed, walking down Water Street with our instruments, walking into stores saying, "We want to see the manager." "What do you want to see him for?" "We want him to sponsor us on radio." And someone would come along and just quietly tell us, "No thank you. We've already got a programme on the radio now. We're sponsoring one; we don't, we're not interested in it." We didn't even get to see any managers.

However, they finally ended up at the Great Eastern Oil and Import Company, and although at first rejected, they were asked to play something. Their
"That little kid? Sounds good." Now well they like me: "Sounds that good and he's that young. It's hard to believe." And so they'd look at me, you know. Take a second look...Yeah they, they did uh, look at me and regard me a lot differently than they had, uh, just a kid going to school, and all of the sudden, here I am. -- uh, somebody to be reckoned with. And they could hardly reckon with me. They couldn't believe that: "That's not him! It can't be Jimmy singing on the, on the radio."

In one year he had gone from being a school boy to a celebrity, because of the island-wide media coverage he was getting. Jimmy himself says that "because of that program, I became possibly the best known Newfoundland singer at that time," and he is to a great extent right. There was no other singer or musician at that time who was so continuously on the radio, with the exception of those noncountry celebrities such as Bob MacLeod, whose specialty was popular, classical, and religious music. Jimmy Linegar was, at that time, virtually the only widely-known name in Newfoundland country music.

In the fall of 1952, the American country singer Doc Williams made his first tour of the island, and, as Tom Hayward had previously done with Hank Snow, Jimmy met and talked with Williams. In fact, Linegar made a guest appearance on Williams' stage show in St. John's. He was to appear with Williams again in Newfoundland, in New Brunswick, and in Wheeling, West Virginia, and they became friends. Doc Williams is certainly Jimmy's second favorite singer after Hank Snow.

But although Jimmy had fame, he was still making very little money. His $15.00 per week from the Bargain Hour plus another $15.00 per week from working at a taxi stand were barely enough. There was only one way to supplement his income — using his newly acquired fame to advantage by renting halls and giving concerts in the outports of Newfoundland.

This was not a simple task, since a tour of this sort required traveling several thousand miles of deeply indented coastline to reach the many small fishing villages. Access to most of these outports was by sea only. Even today there are wide stretches of coastline which, though populated, cannot be reached by road. Linegar had to rely on either the coastal steamers, which were the outports' only regular transportation link with St. John's, or local fishing boats that might be willing to give him a lift to the next community. Most of the outports had no electricity at that time. Self-reliance and inventiveness were key factors in a successful outport tour.

TOURING THE OUTPORTS
Jimmy's first venture on the road was modest. He and Mike McGraw, another young country singer and musician, and two others went to a small coastal village called Flat Rock, ten miles from St. John's. Jimmy rented a hall there in order to stage a dance, billing himself as the star of the show.
The admission was one dollar for adults and fifty cents for children. Jimmy remembers looking out of a window in the hall with Mike McGraw, waiting for someone to show up:

...it seemed like, oh, one heck of a long time when we saw a couple of people coming up the road. And Mike McGraw...and I were looking at each other and we were saying, "That's two dollars." And then a couple more people would come along: "That's two more dollars."

They kept a tally, hoping to at least cover expenses -- the rent of the hall and transportation. As it turned out they made a profit of about $75.00, of which Jimmy kept $50.00 since he was the star.

Although they played out at Flat Rock for several more dances, this was not the 'type' of entertainment Linegar specialized in. Playing for dances meant playing traditional jigs and reels, the lancers (a type of square dance), and waltzes, as well as country and western music. Although, as previously mentioned, both his parents and his older brother played traditional music on the button accordion, Jimmy never had a taste for the Newfoundland jigs, reels, and ballads:

The only Newfoundland songs I like are Newfoundland songs that could very easily be done by somebody in a Nashville studio, with all Nashville type, uh, music. I don't mean the latest rock-type Nashville music. I mean the real good country Nashville style -- like the "Star of Logy Bay." I think that, that somebody down there, possibly...Glen Campbell, with real good steel background and all this, could make the most tear-jerking song out of that.

Newfoundland's most widely recorded song, "Squid Jiggin' Ground" by A. R. Scammell, is not to Linegar's liking, even though Hank Snow himself has recorded the song.

Linegar's aesthetic reflects the feeling of many St. John's men that traditional music is music of the "baymen" -- a somewhat derogatory term for those people from the outports of Newfoundland. But his aesthetic also reflects the changes that took place in Newfoundland at that time. In 1949 the island relinquished its independence in favor of becoming a part of Canada. Although it is a standard joke on the island that, in fact, Canada joined Newfoundland, there can be no doubt that the incursion of Canadian culture had a greater impact and influence on the island culture after confederation in 1949 than ever before. Even in the most isolated outports, there was an increased awareness of the relationship, both politically and culturally, between mainland Canada and this newest province. Therefore, traditional music became associated with the bad old days, with poverty and failure, in the minds of those islanders who looked to the "future progress" of the island. On the other hand, country and western music
represented the mainland with its advanced technology and promise of wealth and success. It is ironic that now, twenty years after Linegar's start, the young Newfoundland rock musician sees country and western music as being unprogressive "baymen's music."

Sometimes later, when Jimmy was specifically asked to play for a dance, he refused:

In one place called Paradise, Placentia Bay, I played there on Saturday night and they said, "Stay for Sunday." It was all Catholics -- great for dancing. "Stay and play Sunday night and have a dance." I said, "I don't want to play for a dance." "You won't have to. You charge the admission and have a one-hour show." Which I did... I played the one-hour show, and then the fellow gets up with the button accordion -- played for the dance. I don't know if I gave him five dollars or not.

Another reason for his not playing dances was that he decided to perform without a back-up band soon after the Flat Rock engagements. It was far more profitable to play alone, without the expense of maintaining a group, but it was also more difficult to play for dances without a button accordion and an extra guitar.

In the fall of 1952 Jimmy made his first extended tour of the island. Again, he did not go alone. Mike McGraw accompanied him at the start, but when they became snowbound for five days in an outport, Mike became discouraged with the tour and headed back to St. John's. Perhaps one reason for Mike's discouragement was that even with just two performers, the tour was not profitable. They certainly discovered this in 1956 when they again tried to tour together, billing themselves as the Harmony Rangers. Again they had to split up. Jimmy would take one town and Mike the next, so that, in effect, they leap-frogged across the island. This turned out to be a more lucrative system for both of them.

When Jimmy would reach an outport, he would generally find that the villagers were already expecting him. Word that he was on his way would reach the outports by various means: Jimmy would announce on the Bargain Hour, perhaps three weeks before he left, where he was going to tour, so that those on his route would know he was going to be in the area sometime in the future. This means was of course quite effective, since even in the outports where there was no electricity, there were battery-run radios in abundance.

Winston Elms, a man from an isolated community on the tip of Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula -- a community which did not have any electricity until only a few years ago -- remembers the battery-run radios well:

Taft: Um, did you always have a radio up there?
Elms: Oh yes, as long as I can remember.
Taft: What, what stations did you get?
Elms: All stations. Reception was beautiful. Everyone had an out -- outdoor aerial, you see -- antenna, and you could pick up all the St. John's stations. In the winter you could get as far away as, uh, as Boston...

Posen: Were there battery-radios?

Elms: Great big battery-operated, oh yeah. You get twelve volt, great big twelve volt batteries. Sometimes bigger than the radios. Yeah, they used to make them special...you know, probably not and a half by maybe eight, six to eight inches high.

Posen: Did everyone have a radio when you were growing up?

Elms: Yeah, just about everyone I knew did.

But more direct means of communication were used too. When Jimmy would reach one outport, fishing and trading boats going to the next village would naturally pass the word, and even if there were no boats to relay the news, the telephone was always handy (for those outports that had the service):

...they've had word that I'm coming because, um, it's all a gossip-line, all across Newfoundland. All around... the outports where there is no road or anything else, the phone-line is the gossip-line.

Another means of advertising came about quite accidentally as the result of another problem -- keeping stocked with guitar strings. Although Jimmy usually carried six complete sets of strings (Mapes bronze-plated), he would occasionally run out during his long tours, so that it became necessary to send for more from St. John's:

I'd know the schedule of the boats, the coastal boats, and I could send a telegram for Roy O'Brien, knowing that he'd get it at least one day after I'd sent it. And I'd tell him, "Send me X-number of sets of strings." Probably six sets of strings...And so maybe the strings would be there three days before I'd get there, but the post office would hold them, even though I'm not living in that community. They'd know I'm on the way there, and this is another form of advertising...Well they wouldn't know what's in the package, but it would be marked "O'Brien's Music Store, Water Street, St. John's" and addressed to Jimmy Linegar. "Ha! Jimmy Linegar! O'Brien's Music Store! He must be coming here. Yes he sure is. He got to be here. There a parcel for him." /Laughs while speaking/ Well I'd be advertising before I'd get there...It was worth...paying twice the price for the strings for, for all the advertising.

With all this advanced notice, Jimmy could always be sure of a crowd at the wharf to meet him. This crowd was mostly composed of children, and they were
immediately useful to Jimmy. From them he could find out all he needed to
know about the village -- where the local hall was, who owned it, where the
best place was to get room and board for the night. They also would help
him carry his guitar or bags, and, in most cases, Jimmy would employ one of
them to place posters in certain strategic locations, such as the general
store:

NOTICE
(Day) at the (place)
There Will Be a Big
Western Stage-Show
featuring in person:
JIMMY LINEGAR
with all the latest western songs
and some old favourites
Show starts
Admission
Adults _______ Children _______

For putting up the posters and various other chores, the children would receive
a piece of paper on which Jimmy had written, "Free admission, Jimmy Linegar."

While the posters were being put up, the children would naturally spread the
word throughout the village that Linegar had arrived, and, in a short while,
there would be visible stirrings among the townsfolk:

Now this would all happen approximately between noon
and 1:00. And the people would make it a point to
come out of their houses and come down. They wouldn't
want to go to the store to buy anything or go to the
post office to mail a letter. They're just coming to
what's on the sign, that's all, and then go back to
their houses. They'd know what time it starts.

Of course, they wouldn't all go back to their houses. Some would naturally
want a preview, so they would go to the boarding house where Jimmy was
staying. This was an occasion, not only to see the singer from St. John's,
but to test his music and his sense of humor:

...they'd /the men/ come to where I was staying at the
boarding house, and a few women would drop in to see
the lady of the boarding house. Um, they actually
weren't dropping in to see her -- what they all intended
to do was to come over and get me to sing a few songs.
And, uh, I'd say, "Well you got to pay for that. I charge
admission at night. If you could hear me now, you
won't want to hear me tonight." "Oh yes we will.
Oh yes we certainly will. If you're any good, you won't
mind singing now. If you're no good, then you won't sing
for us, because, uh, if you're no good, then you won't want
us to know that until we pays our admission and goes in tonight. And then we'll know you're no good, but what can we do? We paid our money. We wants to know now, if you're worth paying for." So I'd get out the guitar and I'd sing three or four songs for them, and the women would say, "Oh, yes, we likes you, boy. We're going to see you tonight. We'll be there for sure." And the kids'll say, "Yes, I going to be there too, brother." And some of the fishermen, well I suppose with more, more a joke than anything else, but some of the fishermen would say, "Well, boy, I'm not going to be there." I say, "Why not?" "Well I heard you now. All you're going to be doing tonight is more of the same. So I heard you now. Why should I, why should I go down and hear you tonight? I already heard you. I'm not paying fifty cents to hear you again."

But of course they would show up. These mini-auditions served to make everyone feel more at ease. The city-slicker wasn't so high and mighty that he couldn't be persuaded to give a free sample, nor was he the type that couldn't take a bit of ribbing. Jimmy, on the other hand, could establish immediate rapport with his "examiners," who would thereafter send good reports back to the rest of the community.

But before the evening concert, Jimmy was also interested in establishing other kinds of rapport. He well knew that being a celebrity gave him an advantage over the local boys in flirting with the girls. Jimmy describes a typical instance of his interaction with the local girls:

...I might go out for a walk around, and sometimes there's be girls there, fourteen, years old. And oh they were real dolls to me. I was only sixteen or seventeen. Fourteen or fifteen was a big sexy girl to me. So they'd, they'd follow me. Sometimes I'd stop, and they'd stop. Then I'd walk on further, and they'd keep following me. And then when I'd stop, they'd stop again... They finally wouldn't come up...to me, and I, I'd look back at them and I'd, I'd just decide which one I would like the best. And I'd go right back and I'd say, "What's your name?" Oh the blushes out of her then and everything. And she probably wouldn't be able to speak for a minute, and I'd say to somebody else, "What's her name?" And naturally anybody else is willing to give information about somebody else, so they'd tell me her name. And I'd probably take her hand and hold it like that and say, "You're sweet." Or something like that. "You're nice." You know, "You're going to come to the show tonight?" She might nod her head and go tee hee—imitating girl's laugh—like that. So I'd say, "I'll see you there, OK?...And then I'd walk
...she was in the front row and everything, and I sang a George Formby number, believe it or not...called "I couldn't Let the Stable Down"...One verse is, uh, With Violet I went in the wood. The wood violets were all in bud. When I found out that Violet would, I couldn't let the stable down. So I changed it, uh, With Betty I went in the wood. The wood violets were all in bud. When I found out that Betty would, I couldn't let the stable down.

Well that, uh, just made the people, everybody, laugh, and Betty went red as a beet. I never did take her home or anything. She was gone home before I was packed up...

But there was also serious business to conduct before the show. Linegar had to find the man who was in charge of the local hall in order to rent it for that night. Jimmy never booked ahead for a concert and this sometimes led to problems, for he was not the only traveler who made use of the hall. Sometimes, Jimmy would reach an outport on a day when a movie was being shown in the hall. Although the outports did not have a regular movie house, there were men who traveled with projector and films in much the same way Linegar traveled with guitar and songs. Winston Elms remembers the type of movies that were shown:

...Hopalong Cassidy and stuff like that. Wild Bill Hickock, and every once in a while he's got treated to something nice like "Titanic" or something, you know. Probably worn out in all the theatres, but still it's good. You know, we thought it was great.

If the movieman was in town, he might cancel his show for Linegar, or Linegar might wait until the next night to put on his show. Even if there were two halls in town, there would be no use in splitting the profit by competition. No doubt, seeing a western movie (as the bulk of those films seem to have been) primed the audience for a country and western concert the next night. If there was a movie, Jimmy might get a chance to take one of the outport girls to it, so that one lost day was no real hardship.
Then again, Linegar was not the only traveling musician on the island either, and occasionally he would encounter one of these other performers already in town. If their types of music weren’t compatible, one of them would bow out. This was the case whenever Jimmy crossed paths with Wilf Doyle, who played traditional button accordion for dances. As Linegar puts it, they were "scared of each other," and they did not try to compete for the same audience. But if another country singer should arrive in the outport where Jimmy was having a concert, there was a good chance that they would join forces on stage:

...Hughie was working in Port Union then, and he’d show up a lot of places where I played...he’d walk in with the guitar strapped over his back...and you’d hear him at the back of the hall, "Jimmy, I came to sing a few songs for you."...hop on stage and we’d: tune up, and we’d tune up. Here I’d be with the guitar already tuned up and everything. Hughie would come up, ding-dong ding-dong, tuning up like that, "Aw that’s good enough," and then he’d start hollering out a few songs. And he wouldn’t ask for money for that.

Jimmy was always glad to have somebody else on stage with him, and of course it would be a special treat for the audience.

Once the hall was rented, things would happen in an unplanned, but orderly way. Quite often there were no chairs in the halls, so that one would see people walking towards the hall with their own chairs -- men carrying the chairs of the women as well as their own, and children with chairs set on top of their heads as they walked along. Linegar set the hour of the concert according to the convenience of the townspeople. If it was in the middle of a heavy fishing season, he would hold the concert early — perhaps 7:00 — so that the fishermen could attend and still get to bed early. Jimmy was, of course, always looking to attract as many of the townspeople as possible.

Jimmy would start to take admissions, but often he could get some man to volunteer to continue while he prepared the stage. There was no fear of dishonesty, and, in fact, the volunteer would usually take no pay for collecting the money. Meanwhile, Jimmy would be taking care of the lighting. If there was no electricity, as was often the case, he would take two kerosene lamps and place them on chairs to his left and his right. He would then place jackets over the backs of the chairs so that the light would reflect onto the stage and not into the eyes of the audience. There was very little preparation after that.

From 1955 on, Jimmy dressed in a cowboy suit on stage:

...the suit was made by Fay Ward, New York...the shirt was $59.95, the pants was $35.00...As a matter of fact, uh, Doc Williams had, uh, some country wear made by them...
It had fringe and it had flowers on the shirt, both front and back, and, uh, it had matching pants and each belt loop had a flower on it...the suit is basically a sort of a, what would you say, either a dark blue or a royal blue...the flowers are...red surrounded by yellow and yellow spots inside certain places in the flowers with green leaves, and the green leaves are surrounded by yellow...They looked like five-leaf clovers...I put rhinestones on it...I do like wearing that kind of stuff, because you can disappear into the audience with what I'm wearing now on stage.

The next year Jimmy added a pair of boots with yellow American eagles on them to his stage costume. Of course, in the early 1950s many country singers were dressing in this style, but Linegar, even today, is thinking about going back to wearing the cowboy suit on stage. He feels that it functions to keep the audience aware of him as a performer when he's off the stage, as well as when he is playing. He wants to be both recognizable and approachable between sets, so that people can ask him for requests or just talk with him about country music.

Jimmy would begin his shows by singing a verse which he borrowed from Stu Davis:

Hear my song
As I ride along,
I'm just a happy rovin' cowboy.
Herding the dark clouds
Out of the sky,
Keeping the heavens blue.15

However, after this set introduction, he followed no special pattern or format. He would readily sing any country song requested, if he knew it. Otherwise, he would stick to the songs of the few singers he knew and liked:

Posen: What kind of music would you be playing there on your own?
Linegar: At that time, Hank Snow songs, just a very very few Wilf Carter songs, and, as the years went by, a lot of, uh, Doc Williams songs...
Posen: Would people request songs during your performance?
Linegar: Yes, yes they would...I know that, uh, there was one request I was constantly getting was for "Little Buddy" by Hank Snow...I believe...the most requested song of all was "Rose Are Blooming" -- Doc Williams' biggest hit in Newfoundland.

His audience knew Snow, Carter, and Williams well, because all three had toured Newfoundland between 1949 and 1952. If one adds Eddy Arnold and Hank Williams to the list, one gets a good picture of whom Newfoundlanders were listening to and whose records they were buying in the early 1950s.
In between songs, Linegar would tell jokes that he had picked up in magazines and joke books, and this would sometimes lead to problems. If he told one that was considered off-color by the priest or minister (or by anybody else in authority), there could be repercussions later on in his tour. Jimmy remembers one such example:

I wasn't allowed to have the rent of the hall. The priest saw my show in Whitbourne and it was dirty. I told dirty jokes.

But Jimmy had a way of combatting this which, if anything, added to the humor of the show. He would allow the local priest or minister to act as censor:

...I asked the priest after each joke, and I did, I said, "Father was that one OK?" And he used to say, "Yeah, it's, uh, getting a little on the border-line, but that wa--, it was all right."

Posen: Did people laugh at that?
Linegar: Yeah. Everytime I ask the priest, "Is that OK?"
    "Now don't, don't get any worse than that."

There were other problems too. In many of the small outports, there had never been a live show before and people did not know how to react. Sometimes they would not know to applaud, so that even if they appreciated a song, they would remain silent, waiting for the next one. Jimmy had a solution to this problem also:

...I used to tell them that I like applause, and if they like what I'm doing, they can applaud after each song. And I'd say, "Remember applause to me" -- what was it? Golly I had an old saying like this, I said, "It's like a big wheel." Uh, what is it? Uh,
    The more you clap,
    The better I like it.
    The better I like it,
    The better I sing.
    The better I sing,
    The better you like it.
    The better you like it,
    The more you clap.
    The more you clap,
    The better I like it.
    The better I like it,
    The better I sing.
    The better I sing, /laughs /
    Just like a wheel...They got a laugh out of that. I could keep going around and around like this, you know, /laughs /
    constantly...they clapped after that.

Of course, in most outports the people applauded without prompting, especially
if it was the latest Hank Snow song that they had heard on the radio.

But Jimmy also had problems with too much noise. Often the children would gather in a circle around him as he performed, and the noise that they made would interfere with the show. As there were no microphones in these halls, Jimmy could not ignore or drown out this type of disturbance. He would stop the show and explain this to the children:

Well I had to ask a lot of times...the children in front, "Please don't talk while I'm singing, because the people in the back also paid money to get in and hear, and they can't hear, because my voice is way up here on the stage...Your voices are much closer to those people in the back, and they can hear you more than they can hear me. And so they can't hear me at all."

As often as not, reason did not prevail, so Linegar had a second, stronger line of defense:

...if that didn't work, then I'd, I'd ask some of the older people, I'd say, "I can't get them to stop talking. Is the school teacher here? Will the school teacher please ask them to stop?" Something like that. The school teacher, if the school teacher was there, she'd come up, or he'd come up, "If you don't stop, you'll hear from me tomorrow in school." Now that would stop them...laugh...If the priest just came up and looked at them and said, "Who's making the noise here?" Not a sound. "All right, that's better. Now keep it like that." Walked down...They'd be the most obedient children all night long.

He would end the show as he had begun it, singing his introductory verse. At the end of the night he might have netted twenty dollars, and at the end of his first tour, he had made approximately $800. He was never to make much more than this in his subsequent tours, so that even with his job on the radio and the long tours, he was not doing any better than the average Newfoundland fisherman -- and perhaps worse. Nor could he continue the tours forever. There was a good amount of physical wear from the constant traveling. In fact, there was a noticeable change in Jimmy's appearance, which could be detected in anyone who had been singing in the outports for any length of time -- a very thick neck:

...would you believe now, I can wear a size 14½ shirt. That's what this is, 14½, and it closes in i. e., the neck button buttons...Uh, I used to wear a size 17 shirt...because my neck was 16½ inches around. I had a neck that came down, it was about the same width as my head...This was from using my vocal chords to their fullest extent. I'd be
hoarse after a show, but I'd be, I'd recuperate by the next night. But Hughie Vallis was the same way. He had this throat that was, neck as big as his head.

THE END OF THE ROAD
In 1955 Jimmy made his last tour. When he came back to St. John's, the manager of Great Eastern Oil said that they didn't want him back on the radio station. They had started to play records on the air, and there was no adverse public reaction -- no one was asking for Jimmy's return. But Jimmy was not forgotten in the outports. Winston Elms still remembers when Jimmy came to his area:

Jimmy Linegar used to go up around. I remember when I was probably about, uh, oh twelve or fourteen. I walked about five miles to listen to Jimmy Linegar. Yeah...oh yeah, it was a big thing for us because we used to hear him on the radio, you see...he was a celebrity up around there...He was in Straitsview, a place called Straitsview, and that was, oh, more than five miles. It's close to ten miles from Quirpon, Elms' home community, and we walked there. Just to see Jimmy, you know...And we thought he was great. He used to sing all the western songs...and he told some pretty good jokes too.

But without the radio show, Linegar was in trouble. Even with the program, he could never make a decent living, though he was one of the top celebrities on the island. This was a dilemma which brought him, as it has with other Newfoundland performers, to the inevitable decision -- leave the island. He was quite naive about the world of music on the mainland, and becoming a celebrity on the island so quickly and at such an early age had given him a certain false sense of security:

I was going to go somewhere in Canada where I could possibly, uh, launch my career outside of Newfoundland. I, I figured that I had gone as far as I could in Newfoundland. I was the most popular country singer here, and what was I getting? -- $10.00 a night to play. And I thought that I could be a big star up around there, because down here I was number one. And I thought at least up there I'd probably be in the top ten, and if I was in the top ten, well I'd be making big money. When I got up there I was amazed...I was amazed at how many people could sing so much better than me, and how many guitar players could play so much better than me.

Linegar fell on hard times on the mainland, and he never even came close to the success he had hoped for. In 1967 he returned to Newfoundland, but although he still plays professionally, he has neither sought nor received the island-wide recognition he had in the early 1950s.

Jimmy could surmount all the problems of becoming a professional on the
island, and he could handle whatever trouble arose on his tours of the outports, but he could not solve the economic problem of trying to maintain a singing career within the boundaries of Newfoundland.

This is not to say that no one has ever been successful over a long period of time on the island. Wilf Doyle, who turned professional in the mid-forties, has been making a good living ever since without having to leave Newfoundland. But Doyle's music has always been more eclectic than Linegar's, and his specialty is dances rather than concerts. And though Doyle will play everything from jigs to rock and roll at his dances, his image has always been one of the "traditional" button accordion player, which has allowed him to retain a steady faithful listening public over the years. Trends in popular music change, but traditional music, despite any internal changes in its make-up, remains a constant reliable form of entertainment in Newfoundland. (Doyle's success may also lie in the fact that he has concentrated his efforts in the eastern half of the island, near St. John's, so that his travel expenses were less than Linegar's and his potential audiences larger there than in the other less populated areas of the island.)

Linegar's success was dependent very much on the cultural and political climate of the island in the early 1950s. As has been noted earlier, Newfoundland's confederation with Canada in 1949 heightened the islander's awareness of outside cultural influences, such as country music. The tours of Hank Snow, Wilf Carter, and Doc Williams between 1949 and 1952 indicate this awareness, as well as the attention Newfoundland was receiving from the mainland at this time. Linegar represented the new awareness in his music, his aesthetics, and his youthful independence. He was not the first to sing country music in Newfoundland, but he was the first to truly reflect mainland culture through that music. For example, his preoccupation with the best possible guitar, in contrast to Hughie Vallis, who barely bothered to tune up his instrument, reflects the mainland's preoccupation with technology.

But when mainland popular culture changed and Linegar remained the same, his future as a celebrity was doomed. It is important to note that Linegar's rise coincided with Hank Snow's most popular years on the mainland -- the late 1940s and early 1950s. By 1956, when Linegar was no longer wanted on radio, Elvis Presley was beginning to rise in popularity and country singers such as Hank Snow were on the wane. Newfoundland was still looking to the popular culture of the mainland in 1956, but Linegar was no longer representing that culture as he had four years before.

However, Linegar has left a lasting impression on Newfoundland culture. Not only is he still remembered by a good portion of the island population, but the songs that he sang have found their way into the traditional music of Newfoundland. There are many traditional singers who have country songs in their repertoires. This is not to say that traditional singers learned their country songs directly from Linegar, but that the same factors which made Linegar a celebrity -- i.e., the impact of mainland culture on the island -- added country music to the traditional music of the island. To understand Jimmy Linegar's success is to understand the influence of mainland culture on the island of Newfoundland.
NOTES

1. This article could not have been possible without the assistance of many people: first and foremost Jimmy Linegar; Winston Elms and Bob MacLeod; others to thank are my co-worker in the field, Shelley Posen, as well as George Casey, Lisa Feldman, and Neil Rosenberg. Thanks also to the Canadian Folk Music Society, whose grant allowed the research for this study, and the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) and the Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History (NAFOH) for their loans of equipment and facilities.

2. All quotes by Jimmy Linegar are taken from an interview done by I. Sheldon Posen on June 29, 1972, in Portugal Cove, Newfoundland (MUNFLA 73-45; NAFOH 761) and an interview done by I. Sheldon Posen and Michael Taft on June 29, 1973, in St. John's, Newfoundland (MUNFLA 73-45).

3. Alberta Slim, whose real name was E. C. Edwards, came to Canada from England at the age of ten. (It is reported that he sang with an English accent.) He was a working cowboy before becoming a performer. For more information see Billboard, Jan. 26, 1952, p. 77; May 31, 1952, p. 82; Jan. 3, 1953, p. 28.

4. Tom Hayward, twelve years Linegar's senior, started performing on radio as early as 1942. Although born in the outport of St. Vincent's (Oct. 3, 1923), he has been a long-time resident of St. John's.

5. All quotes from Bob MacLeod are taken from an interview done by I. Sheldon Posen and Michael Taft on Oct. 17, 1972, in St. John's, Newfoundland (MUNFLA 73-45).

6. Doc Williams' popularity in Newfoundland was due, in part, to his radio show on WWVA Wheeling, West Virginia, which could be received with clarity on radios throughout the island. For more information on his tour of Newfoundland, see Billboard, Oct. 4, 1952, p. 40.

7. Jimmy's dislike of jigs and reels is not total. He does perform certain fiddle tunes (most notably St. Anne's Reel) on guitar, both as part of his onstage repertoire and in jam-sessions.

8. Jimmy does not agree. Upon reading this part of the paper, he commented:

   This might appear to some as though I looked down my nose at the bay people. Actually, living on Blackhead Road was, to many St. John's men, even more degrading than being a bayman. I did not frown on Newfoundland music because it was baymen's music. I merely listened to it and country music, and chose the type that appealed to me.

Blackhead Road is one of the poorest sections of the city, so that Jimmy
is quite right is saying that people from that area would be looked down on as "worse than baymen" by some St. John's men. However, the problem of why he found country music more aesthetically pleasing than traditional music remains.

9. All quotes from Winston Elms are taken from an interview done by I. Sheldon Posen and Michael Taft on Jan. 10, 1973 in St. John's, Newfoundland (MUNFLA 73-45). Elms is originally from the outport of Quirpon and now owns a chicken take-out restaurant in St. John's. He was born in 1943.

10. Upon reading this, Jimmy adds:

I used to add the words "Not a movie" in some places, because people there assumed a show was a movie. I might have been the first or second person from outside the community to play a live concert there, and after a few people in a few places asked me what was the name of the show (thinking it was a movie), I thought it necessary to add these words.

11. The western affected the outports in several ways. Aside from being one source of country and western music (via the singing cowboys), it affected the types of games played by the children. A student from a small outport mentions this aspect in a paper entitled "A Report On My Growing Up, Particularly My School Life at [outport name withheld], 1939-1958."

The boys, as a separate group, played "cowboys" most of the time. I think this came about as a result of the western movie that we began to see almost every weekend around 1949-50. The movie was made possible by two brothers from Westport, who traveled around White Bay in a motor boat, with their gas-motor operated movie outfit. (MUNFLA 68-10-p.26)

12. Upon reading this part of the paper, Jimmy felt some further explanation was needed of what he meant by "scared of each other."

Only for this reason: The dance would draw most of the people of dancing age, cutting my audience to the point where it would not be profitable to play, and I would draw some people who would normally go to the dance if I wasn't playing. Wilf and I both knew this, so we did our best not to meet head-on. But otherwise we were friends.

13. This artist's full name is Hughie Vallis (also known as Smokey Vallis). He was originally from Grand Bank, Newfoundland and was approximately the same age as Tom Hayward. His present whereabouts is unknown.

14. Stu Davis was a popular Canadian country singer who was born in Regina,
Saskatchewan (1924) and was associated with radio station CJCA, Calgary, Alberta, in the early 1950s.

15. It is interesting to note that the popular singer and composer from Prince Edward Island, Stompin' Tom Connors, used this same verse as his theme when he gave a concert in St. John's on July 13, 1973. Jimmy had met Connors several times in the early 1960s when both were trying to make a living in the small clubs and bars of northern Ontario.

16. In traditional singing situations in Newfoundland there is no applause after the singer finishes. The live show was, of course, very different from the "time," which was the traditional form of local entertainment, and required different expectations and reactions from both the audience and the performer. For a discussion of the "time" and traditional singing and singers, see George J. Csey, Neil Rosenberg, and Wilfred W. Wareham, "Repertoire Categorization and Performer-Audience Relationships: Some Newfoundland Folksong Examples," Ethnomusicology 16 (1972): 397-403.

17. MacEdward Leach unknowingly included a song taken from a Hank Snow recording -- "The Blue Velvet Band" -- in Folk Ballads and Songs of the Lower Labrador Coast, Bulletin no. 201, Anthropological Series no. 68 (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1965), page 142. Snow recorded the song on November 8, 1937 (Blue Bird Bly635, reissued in "The Old and Great Songs" RCA/Camden CAL-836). The transcription in Leach's book errs from the original field recording (in possession of MUNFLA) in several places: line 5, "flush" should read "flash"; line 23, "colored" should read "country"; line 26, "Beneath the sweet flowers" should read "near the sweet summer flowers." With the proper corrections made, it seems likely that the singer, William Riley, derived the song, either directly or indirectly, from the Hank Snow recording.

Records have always been available to the people in the outports through mail-order. Herbert Halpert received a number of 78 rpm records from an informant from the isolated south coast of the island. Among them were the following:

Doc Williams, "Three Wishes"/"Wheeling Back to Wheeling, W. Va.," Quality 1086.
Kitty Wells, "There's Poison In Your Heart"/"I'm In Love With You," Decca 29577.

Myrna Lorrie is a popular Canadian country and western singer.