

Adult Reflections on a Childhood Kissing Game: The Case of “King William was King George’s Son”¹

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Beyond simple nostalgia, how do the games we play as children affect us as adults? Which hidden rhyming lessons are ripe for mature understanding? Using McLeod and Wright’s “happy childhood narrative” this article examines singing game, “King William was King George’s Son” and its use by two adult sisters for nostalgia, memory recall, historical lessons, enculturation, connecting with others of their generation, and creating new art.

King William was King George’s son,
All of royal race he run,
And on his breast a star he wore,
Pointing to the governor’s door.

Come choose to the east,
Come choose to the west,
Choose the very one that you love best,
If she’s not there to take your part,
Choose another with all your heart.

Down on this carpet you must kneel,
As the grass grows in the field,
Kiss your partner, kiss her sweet,
Rise again upon your feet.
(Ficken 2004)

Unfettered by the worries of the world, Ficken’s hand-colored stone lithograph below envisions that special childhood feeling of carefree days spent playing favorite games in a safe rural setting with only mild, nurturing supervision. The picture recalls an idealized memory of the “happy childhood narrative” as proposed by education scholars Julie McLeod and Katie Wright (2012) which examines the tendency of adults to minimize the hardships of their younger years and become nostalgic of the good times.



Figure 1. This image depicts a circle of children playing the singing game, "King William was King George's Son" (Ficken ca. 1990).

Children's games are often thought to be left behind in childhood and forgotten until it is time to teach the next generation. This article explores the children's play culture in Princeton, Bonavista Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Canada in the 1950s and how the meaning and role of the games have changed in adulthood for sisters Louise Osborne (née Quinton, b. 1947) and Sylvia Ficken (née Quinton, b. 1948). Rather than simply treating Osborne and Ficken as repositories of historical information on children's games,² this article reflects upon their experiences as children, their developing interpretations of the rhyme and actions, regional and family connections to the subject matter, and how the game served as a common touchpoint for their generation's nostalgic memories of a simpler time.

FROM EVOLUTIONIST SURVIVAL TO CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT:

DIRECTIONS IN CHILDLORE AND "KING WILLIAM"

Approaches to studying children's culture have undergone significant shifts in the past 150 years (see overviews by folklorists and ethnomusicologists Grider 1999; Minks 2002; Tucker 2012; Zumwalt 1999). In the 19th century, scholars often focused on a general evolutionist and dispersion approach, which sought to interpret children's games as fragments of an earlier culture that had survived in an abbreviated form. In the mid-20th century, researchers began observing and collecting directly from children themselves and treated their games as their own culture. In the 21st century, there has been a shift towards seeing childhood games as a form of developmental play that prepares the child for adult life in age-appropriate steps.

The primary assumption of the 19th-century collectors was that children's games were the remnants of adult customs from decayed "pre-civilized" societies. These traditions were to be found in stunted, simplified forms and were, therefore only suitable for the un-developed minds of children (Coles 1998:15). Darwin's theories inspired a cultural evolutionary approach that saw the child as a "savage" (Tucker 2012: 392; Minks

2002: 381; Zumwalt 1999: 25). If children represented primitive cultures and retained ancient cultural survivals, then studying their games was an ideal opportunity to study the past and find the root source of the tradition (Grider 1999: 11). This Darwinian influence encouraged a linear concept of a “natural movement from simple to complex forms, from children’s rhymes to adult narratives,” while ignoring the complexity of children’s cultures, which shapes today’s scholarship (Bronner 1992: 48).

Folklorists William Wells Newell (1963), Alice Gomme (1964), Ralph Whitlock (1979) and Leslie Daiken (1949), all link the “King William” game to ancient wedding ceremonies and the themes of testing a potential spouse and marriage-by-capture. Whitlock suggests games involving disguise may be related to an “ancient betrothal or wedding ceremony in which the bridegroom was required to pick out his bride from a party of girls all similarly dressed and veiled” (1979: 172). In an Irish variant, a shawl is held over the head of the selected child. This enacts the story by Newell’s informant that King William “had gone to war and promised to marry her when he came back.... She wrapped a shawl around her head, to see if he would recognize her” (Newell 1963: 74). Although disguises are no longer common in the game, the idea of selecting one amongst many is still a primary element of the game.

While the evolutionary approach has fallen out of fashion with scholars, I believe the idea of a “true source” of traditional customs still holds sway with the public. In my folk music fieldwork, I find people readily accept that music travels widely and adapts to new places but are also concerned with discerning its original source and meaning. It is clear that “King William” had a wide diffusion as it has been documented in over forty printed sources from around the North Atlantic, and the Roud Index records 136 examples (2018).³ In Newfoundland and Labrador alone there are over 200 instances noted in Memorial University of Newfoundland’s Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA).⁴ Most of the printed sources date from the 19th to mid-20th centuries. This

game is not commonly noted after the 1960s. For example, folklorist Keith Coles, who studied games in Savage Cove, NL, found "King William" up to 1965 but not in the subsequent decades (1998: 93-4,150-151, 266).⁵ A wide-spread change in play activities occurred in the Western world after the 1970s that changed much of the common play repertoire. In this shift, children moved towards supervised, closer to home activities, which involved more branded toys than homemade inventions (Bishop and Marsh 2012: 11-12; Coles 1998: 273-280).

The post-World War II years signaled a methodological shift in childlore research. Scholars, such as Dorothy Howard in the United States (1938), Brian Sutton-Smith in New Zealand (1953), and most famously, Iona and Peter Opie in the United Kingdom (1959; 1969; 1985; 1997), moved towards collecting games directly from observing children at play (Grider 1999: 12). The Opies were able to collect thousands of games from around the UK (Oxford 2018).⁶ They noted "King William" in *The Singing Game* and discussed the genealogy of the royal family (1985: 122-125). Their discussion is reflective of my mother's approach to "King William" as she was interested in lining it up with a historical figure to whom she could relate.

The latest shift in scholarship has taken on an enculturation and childhood development slant (Tucker 2012: 405). Knapp and Knapp advocate for maintaining a definite split between childhood and adulthood, suggesting that the enculturation of children is a "secret education" learned outside of adult supervision (1976). Ethnomusicologist Amanda Minks suggests that the former childhood vs. adulthood divide began to dissolve following the ethnographic work of John Blacking (1967) and Richard Waterman (1956) who approached children's musical play as enculturation that flowed naturally into maturity (Minks 2002: 385-386). Similarly, folklorist June Factor bases her research on the assumption that "children's play is a transitional activity, and one that is essential for human development" (1989: 2). In *Folk Stories of Children* (1981),

folklorist Sutton-Smith examines the verbatim stories of children up to ten, and how their story telling and use of language changes as they mature. Through her self-examination of three generations of music in her own family, ethnomusicologist Marisol Berríos-Miranda found that some children's songs taught them age appropriate dance movements they would use as adult women (2013: 307). Berríos-Miranda states that, "in this way we were constantly encouraged to dance and to participate in the musical repertoires of adults as well as children. The musical skills and tastes we developed at this early age stayed with us for the rest of our lives" (Berríos-Miranda 2013: 307-308). Ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt discusses how New York African-American girl's skipping games are used as cultural identifiers in adulthood and how these games have influenced adult artistic forms, such as hip hop (2006).⁷ If childhood games are forms of enculturation, then gaming experiences will vary globally and yet have some common elements key to human development (See Campbell and Wiggins 2013).

This article follows the path of both reconstructing childhood memories, and examining their changing role throughout the life of the player. Christopher Roberts has pointed out that studying memories of childhood is "challenging" since the adult informants filter these through subsequent experiences (2013: 576), and yet, in my opinion, the reinterpretation of the games by their players in adulthood remains an important and underexamined area. I suggest that reinterpretation can be discussed in a variety of ways. In this article I examine how adults have personalized their understanding by using the "King William" game: to aid their identification with English heritage (as opposed to the current dominant American culture); as a historical document of the English monarchy; to create art which celebrates local, rural culture; and as a nostalgic memory aid of childhood friends and experiences. How adult players relate to childhood games is the main focus of this research, however, reinterpretation could also mean a critical re-examination of folklore scholars' explanation of games as linked back

to ancient survivals. The latter are certainly adult's mappings of meaning, rather than those of children, and one can ask the question, "What do the adults learn, or gain, from their mature interpretations?" I propose that, rather than seeing nostalgia, new readings, and possible selective memories as being inherently problematic, we should instead begin to view adult engagement with memories of childhood play as an integral role of these games in our maturing lives. As McLeod and Wright argue, "Nostalgia... is pivotal to how participants construct a critique of their present and navigate the shifting relations between past and present" (2012: 3).

INTERVIEWEES

The primary interviewees for this project were my aunt, Sylvia Ficken, and my mother, Louise Osborne, of Princeton, Bonavista Bay, Newfoundland. Their parents were Joliffe Lloyd Quinton (1910-1993) and Edith Quinton (née Hutchins, 1911-1981). There were five children in the family, Joliffe (b.1938), Frank (1945-1953), Louise, Sylvia, and Terry (b. 1949). Before moving to Princeton on the south side of Bonavista Bay in 1947, the family lived in Greenspond on the north side of the bay. Joliffe Lloyd was an Anglican minister but retired due to bad health following a shipwreck. He then worked for Browning-Harvey as a sales representative. Edith came from a musical family and taught piano and violin.

The sisters grew up in Princeton, in a typical two-story "salt-box"⁸ styled house with an added back pantry near the water. It was heated by a central, cooktop wood stove in a large kitchen where the majority of activity took place. There was also a front sitting room for formal entertaining and four bedrooms upstairs. There was no electricity or telephone service until the 1960s, and into the 1980s the outhouse was the primary toilet as there was no indoor plumbing. The family maintained a large flower and vegetable garden, as well as chickens. The children attended a one-room, school heated by a pot-bellied wood stove. They helped with chores around the house, tended the animals,

gardened, hauled water from the well, attended church, and had a typical, rural, Newfoundland outport⁹ upbringing for the time period.

Osborne graduated from high school early at age 15, and took a job at a bank until she could attend university. She enrolled at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) where she received her Bachelor of English and History degree (1969) and pursued a teaching career. Later she took a second degree in English and German (1994). In 1970, she married Jim Osborne (b. 1946), who became a marine biologist with the government. They settled in Chamberlains, Conception Bay South in 1980, and moved to Chelsea, Quebec permanently in 1993.

Ficken studied art through MUN Extension Services in St. John's and became a well-respected artist. Her primary mediums are watercolour and lithography, and her main subject areas are outport life and native flora watercolours. Ficken was also a medical illustrator with the MUN medical school. In 1969 she married photographer Roy Ficken (b.1944), of London, England. They settled in Topsail, Conception Bay South.

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR, CANADA

Newfoundland and Labrador is Canada's most eastern province. It joined Canada in 1949 after a close referendum. Prior to Confederation it had been a British colony, an independent Dominion of the Commonwealth, and then, due to economic collapse, was ruled by a Commission of Government headed by England.¹⁰ The province is comprised of an island, Newfoundland, and a larger continental portion, Labrador, to the north. The whole province covers an area of 405,720 square kilometers, with a 2016 population of just 519,716. Almost half of the population lives on the Avalon Peninsula in, or near, the capital city of St. John's, North America's most eastern city. There are two-time zones in the province with the island of Newfoundland and the southern shore of Labrador on Newfoundland Standard Time (UTC-3:30) while the majority of Labrador follows

Atlantic Time (UTC-4:00). This article deals with childlore in Newfoundland and does not discuss Labrador.

The island of Newfoundland has four major geographical sections: the east coast, the central island, the west coast, and the south coast. Each of these are divided further by peninsulas and bays. For example, on the east coast, the major area discussed is on the southern side of Bonavista Bay, about a three to four-hour car ride from St. John's. During the time period of continuous European colonization of NL, dated from the official discovery in 1497, the economy has been resource based. The primary resource until the 1990s was the cod fishery. In 1993, there was a moratorium declared on cod, the economy collapsed, and while other fisheries and diversification efforts were made, the economy did not recover until 2008 when offshore oil revenue hit a high. With the recent drop-in oil profits, the province has again hit a downturn, and labor-based outmigration is once again common.

PRINCETON, BONAVIDA BAY, NL

Princeton, formerly Seal Cove, is a small outport located on the south side of Bonavista Bay. It is situated around a shallow cove with a river, which runs from a large, nearby, fresh-water pond. The community began as a "winter house"¹¹ for people from the communities of Tickle Cove, Red Cliff, and Open Haul further up the bay to log and trap in the early 1800s (Prince 2006: np).

The arrival of the railway in 1911 changed this natural resource community into a small, bustling center. By 1913, the outport was described by the *McAlpine Gazetteer* as having a population of 130 people as well as a church, two stores, a post office, and the railway (Prince 2006: np). As the closest train station to the regional economic capital of Bonavista, 100 kilometers to the north, people often arrived to catch the train or ship goods (Osborne, E. 2003: 107).

Following the cod moratorium in the 1990s, industries have declined, and the community has experienced outmigration. The post office closed over a decade ago, and the general store was badly damaged by Hurricane Igor in 2010 and has only recently reopened. Today there is a golf course, a fish plant, and a government wharf, and the residents are either retired, employed in the fishery, or commute to other communities.

CHILDREN'S CULTURE AND GAMES IN PRINCETON IN THE 1950s

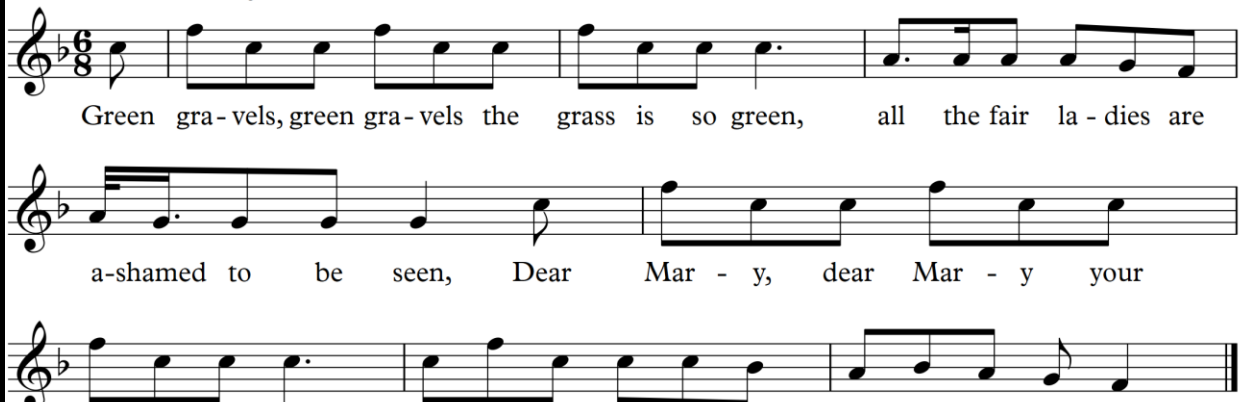
Children's game culture in 1950's Princeton was focused around the school yard, the church, and whenever children gathered in a garden. The repertoire appears to be based in the British language tradition found in the standard collections with some melodic differences. Singing games included "King William," "Here We Go Gathering Nuts in May," "Green Gravels," and "Ring Around the Rosie." "Red Rosie Apple" and "Engine, Engine Number Nine" were skipping games. There were also hopscotch and other types of games (Ficken, 2004; Osborne L. 2005).

The one-room school was the focus of daily activity for the children. It was designed with large doors that opened to reveal a stage for local concerts and dances (Quinton 2000). Heated by a wood stove, the older boys were expected to carry kindling to school daily. Eventually a two-room school opened to which students of all religious denominations attended (Ficken 2004).¹² Osborne explained that the demographics of play and social integration were strongly affected by the move. At the one-room school, older students were more likely to join in with various games, but at the new school, activities became more segregated by age, and gender (Osborne, L. 2005). Ficken remembers simply learning games from the other children and does not remember if there were any formal instruction from parents (2004). It is unclear if the lines of transmission were also affected when the age range grew smaller.

Below are a few examples of the songs and games played during Ficken and Osborne's childhood:

Green Gravels

Moderately Slow ♩ = 55



Green gra - vels, green gra - vels the grass is so green, all the fair la - dies are
a-shamed to be seen, Dear Mar - y, dear Mar - y your
true love is dead, they sent you a mess-age to turn back your head.

Sung by Sylvia Ficken, December 30, 2014.

Green Gravels, green gravels,

The grass is so green,

All the fair ladies are ashamed to be seen,

Oh (name), oh (name),

Your true love is dead,

(s)he sent you a message to turn back your head.

(Ficken personal communication, Jan. 13, 2006)

"Green Gravels" is a ring game, but instead of kissing, the chosen person turns around and faces the outside of the circle. The game is over when everyone has "turned back their heads."¹³

Nuts in May

Moderate ♩ = 60

Here we go gath-er-ing nuts and May, nuts and May, nuts and May,

Here we go gath-er-ing nuts and May on a cold and fro-sty morn-ing.

Sung by Sylvia Ficken, December 30, 2014.

Here we go gathering nuts and May,¹⁴
 Nuts and May, nuts and May,
 Here we go gathering nuts and May,
 On a cold and frosty morning.

Who will we have for nuts and May,
 Nuts and May, nuts and May,
 Who will we have for nuts and May,
 On a cold and frosty morning.

[pick someone from the line]

[name a girl]

Mary for nuts and May,
 Nuts and May, nuts and May,
 Mary for nuts and May,
 On a cold and frosty morning.

Who will we have to take her away?

Take her away, take her away,

Who will we have to take her away?

On a cold and frosty morning.

[Name a boy who comes into the middle]

Johnny to take her away,

Take her away, take her away,

Johnny to take her away,

On a cold and frosty morning.

(Ficken personal communication December 30, 2014)

Ficken's version of "Nuts in May" is almost identical to Daiken's collection (1949: 73). In this game, two lines face each other, and throughout the verse two participants are selected by the group. One "takes" or "pulls" the other away. Daiken, Gomme, and the Opies all note a tug of war between the pair to see who wins the other person for their line (Daiken 1949: 73; Gomme 1964: 428; Opie 1985:277).¹⁵ Ficken does not remember if there were a tug of war when she played or if the pair simply proceeded to the end of the lines, their part completed (personal communication Jan. 13, 2006).

Red Rosie Apple

♩ = 90

2/4

Red Ros - ie Ap - ple Gin - ger - bread and Tart

Tell me the name of your sweet-heart. A B C D E F G...

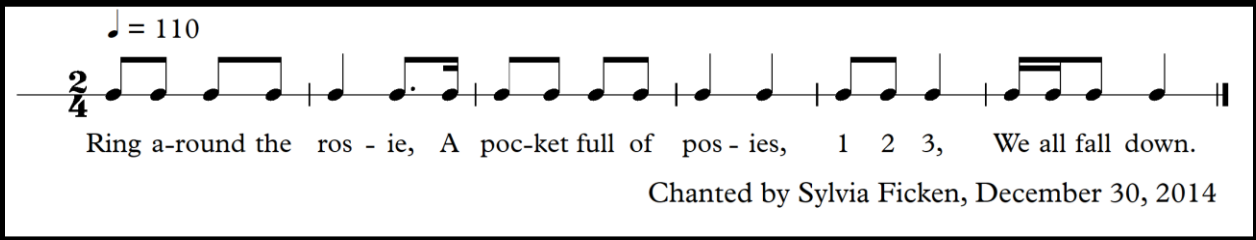
Chanted by Sylvia Ficken, December 30, 2014

Red Rosie Apple,
 Gingerbread and Tart,
 Tell me the name of your sweetheart.

A, B, C, D, E, F, (Ficken personal communication January 13, 2006)

"Red Rosie Apple" is a skipping game. The children spun the rope faster and faster until the skipper tripped and a "sweetheart" was picked based on the letter on which the rope stopped (Ficken 2004).¹⁶

Ring Around the Rosie



♩ = 110

2/4

Ring a-round the ros - ie, A poc-ket full of pos - ies, 1 2 3, We all fall down.

Chanted by Sylvia Ficken, December 30, 2014

"Ring Around the Rosie" was considered a very young child's ring game in Princeton. Gomme explains that the sneezing part of "Ring Around the Rosie" is almost universal and an important action that is usually thought to have supernatural consequences (1964: 111). However, there are variants, Ficken initially sang "1, 2, 3 we all fall down" but said they also sang "Achoo, achoo" and I grew up in Conception Bay singing "Ashes, ashes we all fall down."

Engine, Engine Number Nine

"Engine, Engine Number Nine" is a skipping game. I have left this rhyme until the end as Ficken separated it out from the others due to geographical content. She identified the above rhymes as British games stating they "... didn't really know anything much about the United States, not where we lived."¹⁷ She thought a classmate of hers must have known more about the United States because she knew another choosing game, which

Ficken considered to be "definitely American" (Ficken 2004). The directions were simply to point to children on Y-E-S or N-O, and the person chosen on the S or O had the next turn:

Engine, engine number nine,
 Going down Chicago line,
 If the train goes off the track,
 Do you want your money back?

[if the answer is no]
 N-O spells no,
 So out you must go,
 On your mother's big fat toe.

[if the answer is yes]
 Y-E-S spells yes,
 So out you must go,
 On your mother's big fat toe. (Ficken 2004)

"King William" as Played in Princeton

Moderate ♩ = 60

1. King Will-iam was King Geor-ge's son, All of roy - al race he run,
 2. Come choseto the east come chose to the west, Chose the ver-y one that you love best, If
 3. Down on this car - pet you must kneel, As the grass grows in the field,

On his breast a star he wore, Point - ing to the gover - nor's door,
 she's not there to take your part, Chose a - not her with all your heart,
 Kiss you part - ner, kiss her sweet, Rise a - gain up - on your feet.

Sung and played on accordion by Sylvia Ficken, October 24, 2014.

The basic form of “King William” is a circle game with a central figure who selects from the ring and acts out the lyrics. At the third verse, a sweetheart was chosen, and the couple knelt in the grass to kiss before rising to begin again. The “King” returns to the ring and joins back in the fun (Ficken 2004). In Princeton, “King William” was a co-ed game for children up to the approximate age of 10 or 12.¹⁸ For the choosing section, the girls were expected to pick boys to kiss and vice versa (Ficken 2004). However, at the new school, “King William” shifted to being played by girls ages 8-10 (Osborne, L. 2005).¹⁹ These and other games were played outdoors during recess, after school in the garden, or whenever there were at least five or six children. A large ring might include ten or twelve players (Ficken 2004). In Princeton it was strictly an outdoor game.²⁰ As Osborne pointed out, “You have a group of kids going around and round and round, shouting and laughing and singing out loud in a circle... it isn’t the sort of thing you can do indoors” (Osborne, L. 2005).

Rings, Directions and Choosing

In Princeton, Ficken stated that they formed a moving ring around a central person and followed the directions given in the verse of choosing, kneeling, kissing and rising. I was interested to know if they changed direction at “Come choose to the east, come choose to the west” as some adult Newfoundland dance forms use east and west as directional commands. Direction changes were not part of the game at the time that Ficken or Osborne played, but in other parts of the island the child in the role of King William did turn one way and then another before choosing a partner (Greene 1967; Kinden 1967; Legge 1967; Reid 1967). One game from St. John’s involved two rings, an outer circle of boys and an inner ring of girls (Browne 1967). This is very similar to the Paul Jones dance performed in Bonavista and Catalina to select dance partners at adult community events (Osborne, E. 2003: 59). The most suspenseful aspects of the game occurred during the choosing phase. Neither Osborne nor Ficken indicated any explicit

rules for choosing a partner. Another Newfoundland version allows the chosen girl to refuse, thus enacting the lines that read:

If she's not there to take your part,
Choose another with all your heart (Oram 1967).

Kneeling and Kissing

The kissing line was no doubt the most fun of all! In 1950s Newfoundland there were no indications of parental disapproval (an idea at which Osborne heartily laughed). There was, however, a strong element of this in the United States variants, particularly at supervised play-parties in the mid-west (Randolph 1949: 346).²¹ In Princeton, the kiss consisted of a "peck on the cheek" which could still cause a lot of commotion depending on who was kissing whom (Osborne, L. 2005). Ficken, noted that they really did kiss, "It was just what you did" (2004).²² Attitudes in NL have changed. In 2015, I taught "King William" to a class in St. John's, ages 5 to 8, and it was clear that kissing would not be approved of by the parents, so we substituted hand shaking.

In two Newfoundland variants, the middle children either closed their eyes or wore a blindfold. Unaware of faces, they must then reach out when the ring stops and kiss an unknown person in front of them (Browne 1967; Butler, A. 1967; Butler, S. 1967; Coles 1997: 150; Wilson 1967). Two St. John's versions did not involve kissing but rather simply turning around akin to "Green Gravels," the game ended when all players in the circle were facing outward (Smith 1967; Windsor 1967). Outside of Newfoundland, the interactive part of the song included rising, saluting, and asking the girl to follow the fife and drum.

Switching Central Player

The final part of the game involves changing the monarch in the middle. In several communities, "King William" was an elimination game in which the previous king

would leave the ring, and the game finished when there was no one left (Sansome 1967; Smith 1967; Snow 1967; Tilley 1967; Windsor 1967). Ficken stated that, in their games children simply rejoined the ring as:

There wasn't really enough children in the community so that we could leave the ring, there wouldn't be enough left to play... we just got back in the ring and then the game was over I guess when everybody had had a turn. (Ficken 2004)

In Princeton both girls and boys could be "King William" without any gender considerations. However, in a version from Montana, only the boys acted as king in the middle, once they had selected a girl and kissed her hand, they took the place of the boy beside her, who then became King William (Randolph 1949: 345).

KISSING DANCE-GAMES IN BONA VISTA BAY

Kissing games and dances for various ages are known throughout Newfoundland and have been documented in Bonavista Bay by Karpeles (1971: 256-257), Quigley (1985: 46-50), and my own work (2003: 55-57; 2005). While in Princeton, "King William" was a young child's game; in other areas it was played by teenagers or "marriageable young people" (Anthony 1967; Feltham 1967; Murray 1979: 68; Coles 1997: 93), and it was danced by adults in St. John's, Salmon Cove, and Clarke's Beach (Butler, A. 1967; Parsons 1967; Pinsent 1967; Riche 1967).

There appear to be two formats for kissing dances in Bonavista Bay, additive inclusive and exclusive variants in which people are kissed out of the game. On the other hand, in nearby Red Cliff, the inclusive version was danced as a sort of front-loading conga line. The person with the handkerchief would kiss someone; the kissed would then join in front and kiss another (Osborne, E. 2003: 55-57). As Capt. Russell of Tickle Cove explained, the dancers kissed through the cloth "or they thought they did!" He also pointed out that cultural expectations dictated that if a girl had a boyfriend he wouldn't

kiss her with a loud kissing sound (Russell 2002). This particular kissing dance was performed during or after the adult community dances. Gomme describes a similar line pattern for Cushion Dance from Northumberland, England (1964: 88).

On the other hand, the exclusive versions of the kissing dances are much closer to the form of "King William" as they include a ring of participants and kneeling to kiss. In Stock Cove, Karpeles danced a ring game in which the center person chose a girl to kiss behind a handkerchief. In an older form of the dance, they knelt upon a cushion (Karpeles 1971: 256-257). At other dances, including Keels and Plate Cove, there was a ring with a central figure, and the participants were kissed out until the ring was gone (Osborne, E. 2003: 54; Quigley 1985: 48). In St. Ryan's, Placentia Bay adults sang the verse for "King William" and knelt upon the handkerchief to kiss (Leonard 1967). In Pickering, UK, a version called "King Henry" was played after a wedding ceremony (Opie and Opie 1985: 124). In *The Singing Game*, the Opies link "King William" directly to the "Cushion Dance" as a "mating" game (1985: 123). Quigley also suggests that the "Kissing Dance" of Bonavista Bay developed from the "Cushion Dance" and that several dances such as "Spin the Bottle," "Musical Chairs," and "Sir Roger," used to be games (1985: 49). One can see easily "King William" as part of this enculturation progression of childhood to adult courtship with the social rules and norms taught through age appropriate dance-games.

ADULT REFLECTIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF "KING WILLIAM"

One of the most interesting aspects of this study was not only learning about my mother's childhood but discovering how the meaning of the rhyme has changed over time. Instead of dismissing it as a silly game, "King William" has arisen in conversations over the years, not just as a fond memory of childhood, but as a reflective exercise into its potential deeper meanings.

"King William was King George's Son": Rhyme as Historical Document

Who was King William? Was he King George's son or King James' son?²³ In preparation for her interview, my mother took this question very seriously and treated the lyrics as historical description.²⁴ Osborne explained that King William IV (1765-1837) was the third son of King George III, also known as "Mad George." According to Osborne, "of royal race he run," refers to William's pure royal bloodlines (Osborne, L. 2005). The Opies also note that "King William" is a game that acts as a memory aid for the royal succession (1985: 122).

William was known as the Sailor King and was not expected to gain the throne. However, he was coroneted at the age of 60, as his two eldest brothers, including King George IV, had died without any children recognized by the family. Despite many biological children, William also passed away without any legitimate heirs, and his niece Victoria succeeded him (Osborne, L. 2005).

Osborne is convinced that the rhyme is connected to this particular King William as he was the only William that was a son of a George, although she does recognize that the game or tune might be related back to an earlier game. Due to the British tendency to satirize their royalty, she believes that the rhyme would have surfaced around his coronation in 1830 (Osborne, L. 2005).²⁵

Prince William in Newfoundland

In 1786, William began a three-year tour dividing his time between Newfoundland, the West Indies, Nova Scotia and Jamaica. Sent out with his own ship, *The Pegasus*, a 28-gun frigate, William celebrated his 21st birthday in Placentia, Newfoundland, where he stayed for the summer to act as magistrate and to preside over the fishery. Reputedly, he was a fair and good magistrate; however, he was harsh on the Roman Catholic population, attempting to stop the construction of a church and banning

them from the hall they had been using to conduct mass. His birthday revelry was the subject of much talk as he became exceptionally inebriated aboard ship and carried on with the crew, who very nearly killed him with their antics. As well as Placentia, Prince William also visited Trepassey, St. Lawrence, and St. John's (Rollmann 1999: np).

During his time in Newfoundland, gossip started about William's temper and his "carousing." According to Osborne's father, William was known as an eccentric throughout his life. He was prone to drinking, associating with the "wrong" types of people, "spitting in public," "inviting people into his carriage," and "saying inappropriate things." Osborne told a tale that William had sent a serving girl outside during a storm and would not allow anyone to let her in, resulting in her death (Osborne, L. 2005). Surprisingly, she also related a story with a family connection! Apparently, her aunt's husband's first wife, who had "gone mad," was rumored to be descendent of one of William's early escapades.²⁶ In the family house in Trinity, Trinity Bay, there was a sword hanging in the front hall:

I recall a sword hanging in their hallway as you came in thru the front door, they had a large, not exactly a chair, I don't even know what it was called, but it was a seat with a high, high back it was over six feet high or more. And hanging on that was a very elaborate sword (Osborne, L. 2005).

Although she said that nothing was ever specifically stated about the sword, it was implied that it had belonged to King William (Osborne, L. 2005).²⁷

"Pointing to the Governor's/Arbour Door": Politics or Love?

Both Ficken and Osborne thought that there might be a political element to the rhyme. Osborne stated that the choosing section might refer to his tendency to choose whichever political party worked in his favor at the time. She thought that the "governor's door" was particularly political since as King, William would have to be

Careful to speak to the governors properly in order to have his laws enforced (personal communication, May 11, 2006).

Another version Osborne knows is “*arbour door*,” which she suggests might refer to his complex love life. She stated that the *arbour*, or garden door, might refer to his illicit love affair with actress Mrs. Jordon as the garden was a place where you might stroll with a young lady and “sneak a kiss.” Osborne thought that the lines “If she’s not there to take your part/Choose another with all your heart” also referred to his affair and subsequent marriage to a “suitable” wife, Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen (1792-1849) in 1820 (Osborne, L. 2005). Finally, she also suggested that many children may have said “*Labrador*” as it would have made the most sense to them (Osborne 2005). Going to “*The Labrador*” was a common seasonal labor activity in rural Newfoundland and referred to taking a berth on a large fishing vessel for a few months to fish off the coast of Labrador, the northern part of the province.

Art and Nostalgia

At a family gathering, Ficken pointed out a copy of her lithograph which depicts children playing “*King William*” in a garden. This artwork is indicative of her style and attention to local subjects and characters. On the back of her framed copy, she had penciled the words of the verse. Ficken said that she chose to depict “*King William*” as it was “one of the good games, one of the favorites.” Evidently others held the same opinion as, after she had finished the artwork, Ficken stated that strangers phoned her just to say, “‘We used to play that,’ anybody my age will know what you’re talking about if you said, ‘*King William* was *King George’s Son*,’ so I think it was played widely” (Ficken 2004).

Her art depicts five children in a ring with a younger child in the center. There is a dog trying to join the fun and a woman watching from a doorway. In the background

are hills, boats, a fishing stage, men on the wharf, and the garden. It shows a very pleasant and idealized childhood setting in outport Newfoundland.

This game seems to act as a sentimental trigger for some members of this generation. I have heard Osborne, Ficken and another family friend, Norma Pike (née Prince), sing and discuss "King William" at dinner parties, nostalgically in conversation with old childhood friends, and sometimes just when they happen to think of it. These occasions have often been in connection with a version on a CD by the Newfoundland musical group Bristol's Hope (1997). Reminiscing not only allows them to recall the game itself and people and experiences connected to it but acts as an "invitation to look back on their younger selves" (McLeod and Wright 2012: 15). In the case of "King William" the "invitation" to remember seems to be very welcome and appears to be more significant than other games.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has touched upon how "King William was King George's Son" lightly and playfully introduced children to the serious issues of courtship, love and loss, marriage, history, and politics. It also discussed issues of age related social integration, independence of play, and transmission by observation as well as how "King William" related to more mature kissing games.

Unlike the other games they had played as children, "King William" has stayed in the sisters' minds as a favourite and has occasioned their reflection on its meaning as adults. Osborne has primarily considered its historical context and how the life of the real King William can be read between the lines, while Ficken was moved to create art about the game to represent a happy childhood memory. Indeed, this game sits well in the hearts of many people as illustrated by the communications Ficken received from strangers regarding her art. "King William" provides a point of reference for old friends

to reminisce about their childhood, both on the games and on other people and related experiences.

How do childhood games influence us as adults? Are they simply left-over survivals from ancient rituals as suggested by the 19th-century writers, in this case? Is “King William” celebrating marriage-by-capture? Or are they rather age-appropriate and developmentally progressive exercises that act to enculturate the child into the expectations, norms, and behaviours of their society? Considering the various kissing games and dances on the southern Bonavista Peninsula, I’d suggest the latter for “King William” as it would seem that children progressed from “King William” to “Spin the Bottle” and onto adult kissing dances in the region.

We now understand that our childhood experiences can influence our adult lives; however, it is generally considered to be a simple one-way interaction. We teach children to learn skills, social norms, and emotional intelligence with a look forward to how it will help them become functioning and successful adults; but do we ever look back and consider how our childhood memories of play change and get reinterpreted throughout our lives and become enriched with new experiences and deeper understandings? Generally, the folklore we learn as children is considered a sort of foundation on which to grow, rather than as a text with continually evolving understandings. Bronner advocates for “no sharp break with our” younger lives as childhood “Lore, customs, and games have helped shape who we are, and the values and attitudes they foster take us through our lives” (1988: 34). However, I suggest that there is a subtle reinterpretation and deepening of our childhood experiences as we age, that we come to understand them in different ways. McLeod and Wright states that, “The happy school days narrative offers a ready-made formulation for capturing the complex experience and memory of growing up and of bringing those memories into the present” (2012: 16). This happy memory is integral to our feelings of connection throughout our lives; Berríos-Miranda

discusses how childhood musical experiences affect her as an adult, despite other difficulties in her life, when she thinks of them: "I dance, I remember, I survive, I belong, I am happy" (2013: 313). It clearly affects her daily life as an adult. Therefore, we need to not only understand how childhood games help us become adults but how the experiences and memories of those games function for us *as* adults, the role they continue to play in shaping how we think about our own childhood, our children's childhoods, and how we more deeply understand our current situations as adults through these memories.

It is easy to see the value of children's games during childhood as they encourage life skills, such as team work, taking turns, following a leader, following directions, and even basic courtship skills. However, the continuing influence of those skills and the pleasant memories of the games themselves should also be considered in the literature.²⁸ Many adults even forget their childhood games until they hear the next generation playing them however, "King William" is just one example of a game that has been well recalled, and has positively affected the adult lives of two sisters with evolving interpretations alongside pleasant nostalgia.

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¹ Earlier, and very different, versions of this article were presented at the Folklore Studies Association of Canada conference (2005) and a non-scholarly version was published online with the *Newfoundland Quarterly* (2008), but it is no longer available.

² McNeil notes that many collectors of childlore have treated their adult interviewees as simply uncritical holders of historical knowledge rather than someone who "reshapes a text" (McNeil 1988: 15).

³ Collections have covered various areas of England, Ireland, Canada, and the USA. For space considerations I have not included all of these in the bibliography, however, I can easily provide them upon request.

⁴ These are primarily found in the large Questionnaire 1967 (Q67), gathered by students of Herbert Halpert and G.M. Storey. All Q67 citations refer to NL variants and are available at MUNFLA. The original questionnaire is available for download at <https://www.mun.ca/folklore/research/munfla/Questionnaires.php> It generated 1,317 responses about Newfoundland folklore from student families. Under Section V "Singing Game, Rhymes, Chants and Riddles" the first point reads: "Singing Games: Ring games, line games, hiding games, such as: London

Bridge; Green Gravel(s); King ____ was King _____'s Son; Little Sally ____; Hoist your sails/tails and run; and any others. Please give the words, and describe how each game is played" (1967: 6). Individual cards are cited by collector.

⁵ One of the most influential childlore studies was conducted in Newfoundland by John Widdowson (1977). It examined adult speech patterns aimed at children regarding threatening figures.

⁶ The Opie Collection is currently being updated (Spring 2018) and can be found online at the Bodleian Library <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/opie-pi/opie-pi.html>. Examples of "King William" being sung for Iona Opie can be found at <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Opie-collection-of-children-s-games-and-songs-/021M-C0898X0014XX-0300V0> and <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Opie-collection-of-children-s-games-and-songs-/021M-C0898X0001XX-0100V0>

⁷ Gaunt published a short Ted Talk via YouTube in March in 2018 summarizing her research. The video can be viewed here: https://www.ted.com/talks/kyra_gaunt_how_the_jump_rope_got_its_rhythm

⁸ The "salt-box" is a typical vernacular architecture style house in rural Newfoundland. An explanation can be found here: <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/arts/newfoundland-folk-architecture.php>

⁹ Outport is the common parlance for small fishing village in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. It is defined in *The Dictionary of Newfoundland English* as "DC 1 Nfld (1820-). A coastal settlement other than the chief port of St John's; OUT-HARBOUR" (Storey, Kirwin, Widdowson 1982 s.v. "outport"). The Merriam-Webster defines "outport" as "a small fishing village especially in Newfoundland."

¹⁰ In 1933, a Royal Commission was struck to examine how to deal with Newfoundland's finances and it recommended dissolving the parliament and placing control in the hands of an unelected Commission of Government appointed by the British government (Bishop-Sterling and Webb 2008, 115-117; O'Flaherty 2005, 318-375; Rowe 1980, 403). This "holiday" from democracy lasted 15 years until confederation with Canada in 1949 (O'Flaherty 2005, 408).

¹¹ A "winter house" is a location to which men, and families, move in the winter which is more sheltered from winter storms, often inland, in order to cut timber and set trap lines for hunting. See the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* under "Winter" section 3, <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/dictionary/#5451> (Storey, Kirwin, Widdowson 1982, s.v. "winter")

¹² Previously there had been Anglican and Catholic schools depending on the majority demographic of a given community, Anglican in Princeton and Roman Catholic in nearby Southern Bay (Ficken 2004).

¹³ Gomme links the action to a funeral custom of turning your back during the dirge, and that the "green gravel" suggests a fresh grave (1964: 177, 182). Ficken's version is somewhat abbreviated compared to Gomme's variants, but appears to be a combination of Newell's "all the free masons are ashamed to be seen" and Gomme which use "fair ladies" (Ficken 2004; Gomme 1964: 170-183, Newell 1883 cited in Opie and Opie 1985: 241). The Opies classify "Green Gravels" as a "witch dance" (1985: 239-242).

¹⁴ Ficken realized when she sung the song for me that it "should" be "nuts *in* May" but as a child sang it as "nuts *and* may" as if May was type of plant to be collected (Ficken personal communication December 30, 2014).

¹⁵ The Opies discuss "Nuts in May" as being potentially related to the playful marriage by capture games celebrated throughout the world, noting that despite earlier folklorists claims of the game being a survival of "real marriage-by-capture" there is little evidence that is true, and it is generally a consensual kidnapping (1985: 278-279).

¹⁶ Daiken's version is extended and has a series of questions and answers concerning marriage and weddings (1949: 77).

¹⁷ The distinction between English and American games by Ficken is important to note as during her childhood Newfoundland was undergoing significant political and cultural change due to its recent confederation with Canada. During 1940s, the Commission of Government run by London, granted permission to Canada and the United States to establish military bases in NL. In fact, in the early to mid-1940s there were fifteen American soldiers stationed between Princeton and Southern Bay to protect a telephone line (Cook 1999: 99-100). In the 1950s, the influence of American culture was being felt all over the island. There was an American base in Bonavista, which influenced the dance musicians on the nearby towns through new repertoire and amplification technology (Osborne, E. 2003: 109). There was also music from the US broadcast over the radio, which introduced rock and roll, new Irish music and more (Osborne, E. 2007; 2013: 189-192; Webb 1994). Prior to Confederation with Canada in 1949, there had been significant labour ties along the eastern seaboard with many Newfoundlanders working in New York and Boston. While the word of "Chicago" may not indicate any more knowledge about the United States on behalf of her classmate it gave Ficken the childhood impression that it did. The noting of variant words may seem trivial, however, throughout this study both Ficken and Osborne discussed particular lyrics as having significant local, historical, or political meaning.

¹⁸ This age range was also noted in *Renews* and *St. John's* (Halpert and Story, MUNFLA Q67-611; Q67-675)

¹⁹ An informant of Iona Opie also noted an age group of 8 year old girls who played "King William" in the 1940s in England <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Opie-collection-of-children-s-games-and-songs-/021M-C0898X0014XX-0300V0>

²⁰ In *Savage Cove*, NL it was played indoors (Coles 1998: 93-94)

²¹ A respondent from Montana explained that, "The kissing part... was always optional. If you were in a frivolous mood, and the old folks were not frowning too darkly, we left out nothing, but it all depended." (Randolph 1949: 346). However, in *Little Rock*, Arkansas the couple shook hands rather than kiss (Randolph 1949: 347).

²² Osborne noted that the older children played "Spin the Bottle" outside of school (Osborne L, 2005).

²³ In the majority of non-Newfoundland sources the first line reads "King William was King James' Son." In NL the first line is consistently William and George with the exception of four variants using the names Richard, Arthur, Louis, Billy and Edward (Bartlett 1967; Bennett 1967; Beresford 1967; Wakeham 1967).

²⁴ With a background in history and an interest in the monarchy, Osborne's knowledge of the English Royal Family history is reasonably extensive.

²⁵ Osborne refers to rhymes such as "The Grand Old Duke of York" and "Mary, Mary Quite Contrary" as examples of satire of the royal family. "The Grand Old Duke" is noted by the Opies in *The Singing Game* calling it a "lampoon" of Frederick Duke of York (1985: 214-215)

²⁶ Osborne was unsure if it was her uncle by marriage or his first wife who was a descendent of King William, but she thought perhaps it was the wife due to her mental illness and the ancestral connection to Mad King George (Osborne, L. 2005).

²⁷ The sword disappeared from the house after a death in the family and before the belongings could be accounted for (Osborne, L. 2005).

²⁸ Of course, not all childhood memories are pleasant, however, McLeod and Wright found that the older people are more likely to remember their childhood positively even when hardship was evident (2012: 15). The scope of this paper did not allow for addressing unhappy childhood memories.