

NATIONAL MUSEUM  
OF MAN  
MERCURY SERIES

MUSÉE NATIONAL  
DE L'HOMME  
COLLECTION MERCURE

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR  
FOLK CULTURE STUDIES  
PAPER No. 52

CENTRE CANADIEN D'ÉTUDES SUR  
LA CULTURE TRADITIONNELLE  
DOSSIER No. 52

**FIDDLE MUSIC IN THE OTTAWA VALLEY:  
DAWSON GIRDWOOD**

**CARMELLE BEGIN**



National Museums  
of Canada

Musées nationaux  
du Canada

OTTAWA 1985

Canada

National Museum of Man  
National Museums of Canada

Musée national de l'Homme  
Musées nationaux du Canada

Board of Trustees

L'honorable Gérard Pelletier  
M. Léo Dorais  
Mr. Richard M.H. Alway  
Mrs. Geraldine Joan Goldfarb  
M. Roger B. Hamel  
Ms. Mira Spivak  
Mrs. Rosita L. Tovell  
M. Rodrigue Tremblay  
Dr. Larkin Kerwin  
Mr. Timothy Porteous

Conseil d'Administration

Président  
Vice-président  
Member  
Member  
Membre  
Member  
Member  
Membre  
Member (ex officio)  
Member (ex officio)

Secretary General

M. Léo Dorais

Secrétaire général

Director  
National Museum of Man

Dr. George F. MacDonald

Directeur  
Musée national de l'Homme

Chief  
Canadian Centre for Folk  
Culture Studies

Dr. Paul Carpentier

Chef  
Centre canadien d'études sur  
la culture traditionnelle

Editor

Dr. Pierre Crépeau

Rédacteur

NATIONAL MUSEUM  
OF MAN  
MERCURY SERIES

MUSÉE NATIONAL  
DE L'HOMME  
COLLECTION MERCURE

ISSN 0316-1854

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR  
FOLK CULTURE STUDIES  
PAPER No. 52

CENTRE CANADIEN D'ÉTUDES SUR  
LA CULTURE TRADITIONNELLE  
DOSSIER No. 52

ISSN 0316-1897

## FIDDLE MUSIC IN THE OTTAWA VALLEY: DAWSON GIRDWOOD

CARMELLE BEGIN



National Museums  
of Canada

Musées nationaux  
du Canada

OTTAWA 1985

Canada

#### OBJECT OF THE MERCURY SERIES

The Mercury Series is publication of the National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada, designed to permit the rapid dissemination of information pertaining to those disciplines for which the National Museum of Man is responsible.

In the interest of making information available quickly, normal production procedures have been abbreviated. As a result, editorial errors may occur. Should that be the case, your indulgence is requested, bearing in mind the object of the series.

#### BUT DE LA COLLECTION MERCURE

La collection Mercure, publiée par le Musée national de l'Homme, Musées nationaux du Canada, a pour but de diffuser rapidement les résultats de travaux qui ont rapport aux disciplines pour lesquelles le Musée national de l'Homme est responsable.

Pour assurer la prompte distribution de ces textes, on a abrégé les étapes de l'édition. En conséquence, certaines erreurs de rédaction peuvent subsister. Si cela se présentait dans les pages qui suivent, les rédacteurs réclament votre indulgence étant donné les objectifs de la collection.

## ABSTRACT

This book presents the music repertoire of an Ottawa Valley fiddler, Dawson Girdwood, as it was recorded by the author in 1977 and 1982. Its purpose is to further the knowledge of traditional folk music. In the Introduction, the reader will discover certain aspects of Girdwood's personality and interests from the very words of the musician himself. Full musical transcripts of Girdwood's repertoire are following, including the variations and embellishments used by the musician as well as his own bowing indications.

## RESUME

Ce dossier présente le répertoire d'un violonneux de la vallée de l'Outaouais, Dawson Girdwood, tel qu'enregistré par l'auteur en 1977 et 1982. Les propos du musicien rapportés dans l'Introduction traitent de ses goûts personnels face à la musique traditionnelle, de l'histoire de sa famille et de la vie sociale dans la région de Perth. Suivent les transcriptions musicales du répertoire de Dawson Girdwood comprenant les variations et tous les ornements utilisés par le musicien de même que ses propres indications des coups d'archet.

## FOREWORD

The fiddle music repertoire of Dawson Girdwood is eclectic. It presents a number of tunes which were very popular in Ontario and particularly in Lanark County during the last fifty years. At my request, Dawson recorded these tunes for the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies in 1977. The other part of his repertoire includes French Canadian pieces which he learned from Jean Carignan, Philippe Bruneau and Jos Bouchard, and Irish traditional tunes learned from Sean McGuire and other great interpreters. These tunes have been recorded in 1982.

In the Introduction written from his own narration<sup>1</sup>, Dawson Girdwood presents his family, the context in which the fiddle music was played in Perth's area, his involvement in musical activities and his own opinion about styles of traditional fiddle music.

The musical transcriptions of Dawson Girdwood's repertoire include the variations and embellishments used by the fiddler and his own bowing indications. They are presented in this book in the chronological order of their recording.

I wish to thank Dawson for his music which he recorded gracefully for the Centre, for his time and his friendship while we worked on this project. I want to thank Betty, his wife who greeted me so many times at their home in Perth. Thanks also to Michael Cass-Beggs for letting me use the recording of his radio program, for the calligraphy and for over-looking the transcriptions and the bowing.

---

(1) Beg-A-214

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ABSTRACT	iii
FOREWORD	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	1
EXPLANATION OF SYMBOLS	10
REPERTOIRE	13
NOTES	87
REFERENCES	98
INDEX OF TITLES	100

*This page intentionally left blank*





*This page intentionally left blank*

## INTRODUCTION

*This page intentionally left blank*

## INTRODUCTION

### Family Story

My grand-grand parents on my mother side of the family came from County Cavan in Ireland. My grand-father was born on the boat coming over, which was most of an interesting experience. They settled in this area. My grand-father worked in a grist mill as a miller at a place called Glen Tay, which is about three miles west of Perth. It became a powerhouse and they manufactured just a small amount of power that they did supply for Perth.

My grand-father Girdwood was a pharmacist trained at the University of Toronto. He later had a practice in Sterling in Ontario where he met my grand-mother who was a Spraijge. Her father, my grand-grand father Spraijge originally landed on the Isle of Grand Manan, New-Brunswick. They later came to Sterling after they had been in the States for a certain period of time. They were Empire Loyalists.

My grand-father Girdwood came to Perth in the later eighteen hundred and operated a drug store here; he was succeeded by my father who was also a pharmacist. I have three brothers and three sisters.

My family was a musical family. My father was quite active in his highschool days and at the University. He and several friends around Perth played violin. They played mainly music in school, semi-classical type of music, marches, fox-trots, some of the dance music of the nineteen-thirties. He had his TCM from the University of Toronto, a Teacher Certificate of Music.

We had our own family orchestra: a saxophonist, two trumpetists who also played the violin, two pianists and a drummer. We used to play for church, social event and different things like that. I was about ten years old when I first started to play with the family. We all sang in the church choir, we all played in the school orchestra and the boys played in the school band and in the town band. I played trumpet for a while, baritone and euphonium but I gave up the brass instruments after I got out of the Highschool.

I only played with the family orchestra for two years; the orchestra broke up when my oldest brother went to Toronto and my oldest sister was ill. I was about eleven years old at that time and I didn't have very much interest in the violin. I didn't like the kind of music we were playing so I just quit playing the violin and put it away.

Then, when I was about fourteen, I started to go to some country dances and I became interested in the fiddle music. So I started playing fiddle music and, because I had some classical training from a woman by the name of Miss Allan, I could read music. I had a copy of