

- way ?
- 3.9. Do you prefer the teacher to use Irish or English?
- 3.10. What do you enjoy most about learning Irish ?
- 3.11. What do you enjoy least about learning Irish ?

Part 4: What was it like ?

- 4.1. When you try to learn vocabulary, what happens ?
- 4.2. When the teacher made comparisons with English, what happened ?
- 4.3. What did you become aware of about Irish this year ?
- 4.4. Once you knew about a similarity or difference between Irish/ English/ French, was Irish any easier ? How ?
- 4.5 Give an example of something you learned and how you learned it.

## Teaching Forum

### Teaching Irish at Antioch College

Ron Crow

Antioch College

Two years ago I had the opportunity to first teach Irish for credit at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Ivan Dihoff, director of the language program there, explained that I was to teach Irish without using any written material. I was even to refrain writing on the blackboard, if at all possible. Since he was describing the immersion sort of sessions I experienced in Ceathrú Rua, I was more than happy to give it a try.

Many of the students are used to the method to begin with, (although by no means all are familiar with it) and that helps tremendously. But the most important aspect to it is, I think, that we are focusing solely on communicating with each other, not on language learning. Through Irish, we build a little community, finding out what our names are, where we are from, what our parents do, what goes on in school, and so on.

The students quickly get used to the artificial conventions the immersion forces upon our conversations. They progress surprisingly quickly. It is a method, however, that makes the instructor (*cainteoir mór*, rather) think fast on his feet. I have a number of props that I use to help out. These mainly consist of a small toy cow and sheep, a couple of Avon glass decanters shaped like cars, a plastic boat or two, and a couple of Smurfs (one in a kilt blowing on bagpipes). You can imagine the laughter they engender.

About half way through the quarter, when they begin requesting it, we do begin to write a bit on the board. At first it is simply a *seanfocal* or two that they might have learned that day. Eventually, as they get more used to the spelling conventions, I'll show them the ins and outs of some verb or noun constructions, and then use those

constructions to widen the scope of our discussions. This board work never takes up much time, and I use it only toward the end of the class as a sort of review of the new words we met in class.

Because Antioch students are continually going to remote places on 'co-op,' we have a hard time with continuity. There have been no consecutive classes, and with budget cuts I suspect that the effort will not last much longer.

For what we do with it, however, immersion works. The teacher is a talker, storyteller, *bréagadóir*, *bithiúnach*, *ropaire*, etc., but the rewards are worth it.

3990 Havensport Road,  
Carroll, OH 43112-9711, USA  
E-mail: 71155.3260@compuserve.com

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CELTIC STUDIES, SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY, ANTIGONISH, NOVA SCOTIA

*Kenneth E. Nilsen*  
*Saint Francis Xavier University*

Saint Francis Xavier University (known locally as "Saint F.X.") was founded in 1853 largely by Highland Catholic Scots and their descendants in eastern Nova Scotia. Gaelic was first taught at StFX back in 1891 by D.A. MacAdam (later Father MacAdam), a great advocate of Gaelic, who was a contributor to the Scottish periodical *Guth na Bliadhna* and later to the Nova Scotia-based *Mosgladh*. At that time Gaelic was widely spoken, not only in Cape Breton, but also on the mainland of Nova Scotia in

the counties of Antigonish, Pictou and Guysborough. In the first decade of this century courses in Gaelic and Gaelic literature were taught by Reverend Dr. A. MacLean Sinclair, a Presbyterian minister and renowned Gaelic scholar, a native of Glenbard, Antigonish and grandson of the Bard John MacLean author of "A' Choille Ghruamach." In later decades Gaelic was taught by Fr. MacPherson and Monsignor P.J. Nicholson.

In the late 1950s Major C.I.N. MacLeod came to StFX and established the Department of Celtic Studies. Upon the death of Major MacLeod, Sr. Margaret MacDonell became Chair of the department. Sr. MacDonell was responsible for establishing the Cape Breton Gaelic Folklore Project in which Dr. John Shaw collected on tape examples of folklore from Gaelic speakers throughout Cape Breton. This collection is one of the largest archives of spoken Gaelic in North America. A copy of this collection is now housed at StFX in the Angus L. MacDonald Library where it may be consulted by the public. In 1983 with the aid of a grant from the Multiculturalism Directorate the Sister Saint Veronica Chair of Gaelic Studies was established at StFX. Kenneth E. Nilsen became the first holder of the Gaelic Chair in September, 1984. In May, 1992 StFX became the first university in Canada to host the annual conference of the Celtic Studies Association of North America. In September, 1993, Catriona NicIomhair Parsons, a native Gaelic speaker from the Isle of Lewis joined the department.

The StFX Celtic Department has a strong commitment to the teaching of Scottish Gaelic and StFX is the only university in North America to offer three levels of Scottish Gaelic. Other course offerings include: Celtic Literature, Modern Irish, Irish/Scottish Folklore, Irish/Scottish Bardic Poetry and the History of the Gaelic-speaking Scots: Old World and New. The department is actively involved in interviewing and recording the remaining Gaelic speakers of Nova Scotia and in the last

year has directed a major videotaping project of these speakers. The StFX Celtic Studies Department will be hosting the annual conference of the North American Association of Celtic Language Teachers on May 30-31, 1997.

During the year the department sponsors a number of extra-curricular activities including Gaelic Language days, milling frolics, lectures, and film series. The department also works in conjunction with Comunn Ceilteach StFX, an active student Celtic society which sponsors ceilidhs and other cultural events. In 1995 the Celtic Department established a scholarship to send a StFX student to Scotland each summer to study Gaelic.

#### Suggested Reading:

- Cameron, J.D. 1996. A Living Culture: Celtic studies and history at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia. *Celtic Heritage*, 10 (2), 20ff.
- Dunn, C. 1953. *Highland Settler*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

*Department of Celtic Studies,  
Antigonish, NS B2G 1C0, CANADA  
E-mail: knilsen@juliet.stfx.ca  
http://juliet.stfx.ca/~knilsen/*

## Review

COMHAR NA MÚINTEOIRÍ GAEILGE: *Who Said That?*  
Dublin: CMG, 1994.

US\$25, p+p inc. NTSC (North American) version available.

Available from  
Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge,  
7 Merrion Square, Dublin 2, Ireland.

*Who Said That?* is a two-hour video Irish course produced by Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge and Oideas Gael. The lessons are based on a "drama" centering on a "West of Ireland" family of five who hire a young Dublin woman as an au pair. The au pair and the family's teenage daughter win a trip to the Aran Islands in a radio-show contest. Romantic complications only temporarily threaten the teenagers' vacation on Inis Mór.

The very middle-class family are shown at a variety of everyday occupations, which are designed to teach basic conversational Irish. The targeted learners are apparently Irish teenagers, perhaps those preparing to attend a summer school. No information about the purpose or use of this course was supplied with the video, except for the table of contents (a book and audiocassettes are mentioned briefly during the introduction).

Listening comprehension and a functional approach to language learning are stressed; grammar is explained as the need arises. Key phrases and some grammatical inflections are illustrated by subtitles. The actors speak standardized Irish with Connemara accents, at normal conversational speed. Introductory material and translations are handled by a teacher/facilitator, who speaks more slowly with a Munster accent.

The drama is divided into three sections. "Learning segments" precede each section of the drama in Cuid 1 and Cuid 2. In Cuid 3 the procedure is reversed, and then followed by the entire drama, uninterrupted, for the final