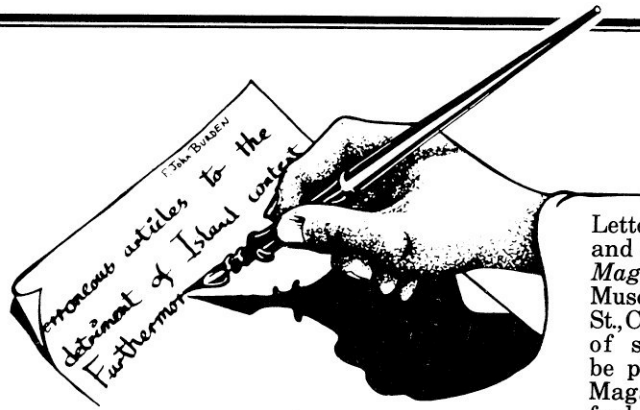

Letters To the Editor



Letters should be mailed, with your name and address, to The Editor, *The Island Magazine*, The Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation, 2 Kent St., Charlottetown, P.E.I., C1A 1M6. Because of space limitations, it may not be possible to publish all letters. The Magazine also reserves the right to edit for length and clarity.

Abegweit Upheld

I find myself in a rather awkward position. For several years I have complained that the book reviews in *The Island Magazine* have been too laudatory in nature, yet now I am writing to complain about the negative review given my book *Abegweit, Land of the Red Soil*.

The reviewer implies that *Abegweit* may have been written either for teachers or the publisher, not for students. This is simply not the case. I initially became interested in this project when my daughter was in Grade 6. Her social studies text, which was 20 years old, was boring, had few visuals, and concentrated on a recitation of endless facts. I wanted *Abegweit* to be lively, interesting, and informative, and to teach students appropriate learning skills for their age. The Department of Education devised a review process to ensure that these goals were achieved. Experts in various areas of Island history and geography read and commented on the first drafts of the book. A committee of experienced teachers provided feedback on the second draft as to methodology and language suitability. The next stage involved Island students. A representative sampling of five classrooms across the province (including Lennox Island) piloted the fourth draft. Each student completed a detailed questionnaire concerning interest and enjoyment level, readability, visuals, and content. The pilot teachers personally discussed with me what worked and what did not. In addition, I visited each classroom and discussed the book with the students. This input was added to the next draft, which then went to the teacher's committee, and to specialists in each content area. The final text thus represented the work and ideas of a large number of people. The students particularly enjoyed the

so-called "gloomy pictures", as Mr. Porter described them, the chapter on the Harris family which "saturates the text with paeans to members of the Harris family", and the sections containing the "odious and patronizing Mrs. MacDonald". Nor did either the students or my educational advisors concur with the reviewer's opinion of what was relevant to today's students.

Many of the reviewer's criticisms are a matter of personal preference. Was Robert Harris merely a "competent Academician"; should architects Isaac Smith or William Harris be featured; and should living persons be excluded from out history books?

Mr. Porter condemns the *Teachers' Guide* as "apparently hurriedly prepared (and inaccurate)", although its preface states that it "is intended only as a preliminary source of ideas and information", and urges teachers to contribute their own ideas for a subsequent edition. Indeed, I participated with the Department of Education in two teachers' workshops designed to explore the best ways to use *Abegweit* in the schools.

Since Mr. Porter is not an expert on Island history and geography, I hoped he would comment on the teaching methodology employed in *Abegweit*. I would also have thought that the reviewer might mention that the book traces Micmac and Acadian history throughout the text rather than following the traditional pattern of discussing their contributions up to 1763, and then ignoring Island history as it related to Micmac and Acadian life-ways. Nor did Mr. Porter mention that the book provides a broader coverage of post-Confederation Island history than any previous academic or school publication.

The true test of *Abegweit* is whether it promotes learning, and how enjoyable the students find it. The reports, after one year of classroom use, have

been overwhelmingly positive. Not only do children enjoy reading the book, but parents ask them to bring *Abegweit* home so that they too can peruse it. Ragweed Press printed an extra 1,000 softcover copies for private sale and the book stores are now almost sold out. Surely *Abegweit* must have some positive features.

Douglas Baldwin

Because of its length, Professor Baldwin's letter has, of necessity, been condensed for inclusion here.

The CHA Award

Congratulations on your certificate of commendation, an award well-deserved because of excellence. Yours is a magazine with "class", filling a need for Islanders and their descendants. Your staff, many unsung for their hours of labor, should have a deep inner sense of pride for work well done.

Norman L. Drew
Clinton, Connecticut

As a faithful member of the Foundation and reader of *The Island Magazine*, it was indeed a thrill to read in the last Museum newsletter of the Certificate of Merit awarded your fine publication. Congratulations to everyone who contributes. Our Island is unique in many ways and your magazine is clear evidence of the high calibre we are so fortunate to possess among its residents.

Marguerite Wheatley
Charlottetown

Thank you—everyone.