

## IN MEMORIAM

### MARIUS BARBEAU

“OLD” MARIUS BARBEAU was born in 1883 (when Canada was not yet sixteen years old and the westward-pushing CPR was making its way across what twenty-two years later became Saskatchewan). He was eighty-five when he died this spring in Ottawa, the locale of his lifework.

But “old” is used here in the figurative, affectionate sense. For high among his many good qualities was his capacity to inspire affection, verging sometimes on devotion, among all sorts of people.

Official biographies there will be, and in due time someone will have to write a book. Here, among the particular group of his friends who constitute the International Folk Music Council, I want rather to gather a garland of memories: not sentimental, but such as may serve to show the diverse qualities of the man — his strengths, his weaknesses (we need not deny him those), his tirelessness, his versatility, his humility, his arrogance, his mailed fist, and his velvet glove.

He was born at Sainte Marie de Beauce, near the city of Québec, and studied at Laval University where he received the degrees of Baccalauréat ès Arts and Licencié ès Lois, the latter in 1907. In that same year he was *reçu avocat* and awarded a Rhodes scholarship — one of the earliest — from the Province of Québec. At Oxford he studied anthropology and archaeology, and when he completed his work there in 1910 his urge was to join the field force of archaeologists then just starting the excavations at Luxor which were to lead to

the tomb of Tutankhamen and other splendors. His Oxford tutor, whose name I would fain record but do not know, said to him, however, "Why should you go to Egypt? Why don't you go home and do the work that needs doing there?" So he came home, and we Canadians have reason to be grateful to the perceptive instructor.

He was at once appointed head of the newly formed Department of Anthropology at the National Museum of Canada, in which post he remained until his retirement.

In 1950 the Royal Society of Canada, of which he had been elected a fellow, awarded him the Lorne Pierce Medal for Literature. Two years later Oxford awarded him the degree of Doctor of Literature *honoris causa*; and in 1961 he was awarded the Canada Council Medal. Among other things — and importantly for us — he was a vice-president of the IFMC.

So much for some of the facts, a few among the many noteworthy ones of his life. The "garland of memories" I had hoped to cull from the recollections of his innumerable friends in folklore. But communication with folklorists in summer is a frustrating merry-go-round, and reluctantly I am forced to weave only my own. There is, though, some justification for what might seem self-advertisement in that my first association with him typified his remarkable humility, sweetness of character, and "innocence." It became my duty to review for his *Canadian Music Journal* the book *Music in Canada*, edited by his old friend Sir Ernest MacMillan in 1955. Mr. Barbeau had contributed a chapter on folk music, and I had had occasion to point out some errors of notation in its musical examples. Instead of wrapping himself in his unshakable reputation and ignoring this upstart comment as he might well have done, he wrote to me expressing his interest in it and adding, in effect: "Since you don't like my notation of these songs [they were Salish Indian from British Columbia], how about transcribing some [from Edison rolls!] yourself?" I did, and this started one of the unforgettable friendships of my experi-

ence, a peculiarly close one despite a generation gap of thirty years and our relatively infrequent meetings. That was part of his magic; for him there was no such thing as a generation gap, and his occasional notes, written in his beautiful microscopic hand, were full of warmth despite their brevity. I have used the word “innocence” of him — perhaps an unexpected word to be applied to a world-known figure in his field — just because it simply did not occur to him, then or ever, to take refuge in false dignity.

His strength of will had to be seen to be believed. After founding the Canadian Folk Music Society in 1957 (he remained its president until 1963), at the age of seventy-five or so, when he was already beginning to suffer a series of strokes, he was insistent that the infant society should act as host to an annual meeting of the International Folk Music Council. First planned for 1959, it took place, as all IFMC-ers know, at Laval University in the city of Québec in 1961. Some time during the course of these plans — I should think about 1960 — there was a meeting of the society’s council to be held at his unforgettable house on Ottawa’s MacLaren Street, full of the trophies of his life’s chase after folk music and folk artifacts. But some of us wondered whether his strength would be sufficient for the task he had begun. We engineered a pre-meeting meeting, to be kept secret from him, at which we discussed what we would do if that proved to be the case. There was even some suggestion that he ought perhaps to be relieved of command for his own good and for that of the conference. Some ten days before these meetings were to be held I had a long-distance call from him, saying that he looked forward to seeing me, that he understood there would be a pre-meeting meeting, and — deadpan — that there were many important things to be decided about the conference. So we had our “secret” meeting, and when we went along to MacLaren Street he met us at the door, his face ravaged by the latest of his strokes, his small body ramrod straight, his voice quiet — and for an hour and a half he dominated half

a dozen men in the prime of their lives, who had come prepared to dominate him!

We all know the end of that story. The IFMC *Journal* of 1962 remarked that all IFMC conferences are “special,” but that the Québec conference was special even among the specials. Mr. Barbeau had many good and willing helpers in that great endeavor (great? — remember that the society was only a tot of four years), but no one, I think, will deny that it was in truth “his” conference.

So much more could be said (that book *has* to be written). What I have put down here of my many warm memories of him will certainly awaken similar memories in those who knew him, and may, I hope, serve to suggest to those who did not, something of why we think of him with affection, with respect, with esteem, with admiration, with appreciative laughter, with all those attitudes that combine to make up a strong form of love.

*Graham George*