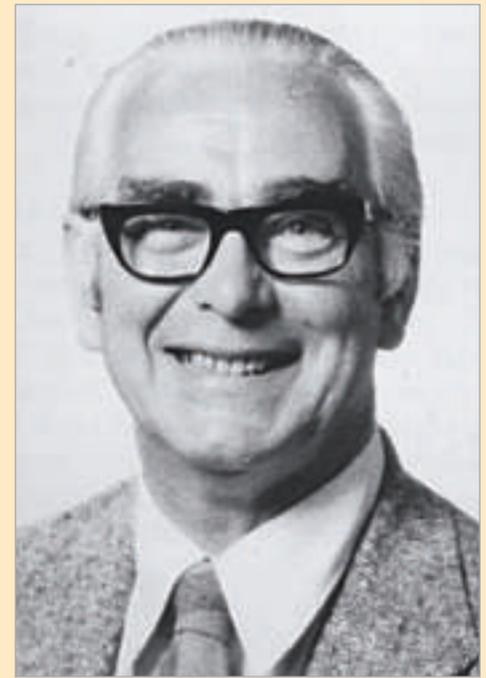


Gregg's Ulster-Scots speaking areas (dark grey)



The editors at the launch - Anne Smyth, Michael Montgomery and Philip Robinson



Professor Robert J. Gregg

Launching a Landmark in Ulster-Scots Scholarship

The Academic Study of Ulster-Scots: Essays for and by Robert J. Gregg

A brilliant sunny and unusually mild morning this past February 28 saw the launch of a foundational volume reviving and honoring the scholarship of a native of Larne, County Antrim, who is widely and rightfully regarded as “the Father of Ulster-Scots Studies.” Over a hundred in attendance, from high-ranking government and museum officials to local folk, gathered to celebrate and hear testimonials to Professor Robert J. Gregg (1912-88). His research and surveys of Ulster-Scots speech conducted from the 1950s through the late 1980s were responsible, literally and figuratively, for putting Ulster-Scots on the map, using a 600-item questionnaire to pinpoint the parts of Counties Donegal, Londonderry, Antrim, and Down where it is most strongly spoken. This research shows above all else that Ulster-Scots is a geographical phenomenon and a cross-community possession.

The book includes fourteen articles and essays by Gregg, who taught languages in Belfast and Newtownards grammar schools before emigrating to Vancouver in 1954 to found the Department of Linguistics at the University of British Columbia. He spent the remainder of his life there, though returning frequently to Northern Ireland for research and to see family and friends. Complementing his reprinted publications are fifteen contributions by eleven other scholars, eight of whom attended the launch, including one from Scotland and two from the United States.

The event, held in the Manor House of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra, in County Down, brought together the three editors, all officers of the Ulster-Scots Language Society: Anne Smyth (Chairman), Michael Montgomery (President), and Philip Robinson (Honorary Vice-President), who began work on the project in 1999. Funded largely by the

Ulster-Scots Agency, the hefty and sumptuously produced volume demonstrates the commitment of both the Language Society and the Agency to producing a permanent record documenting Ulster-Scots.

Among those giving testimonials on the occasion were two of the editors, along with Mr Dan Harvey, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Museums of Northern Ireland; Mr Paul Sweeney, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure; and Mr Mark Thompson, Chairman of the Ulster-Scots Agency.

Limitations of space preclude more than a few excerpts of statements made at the launch. A complete transcript of the event can be found at www.cas.sc.edu/engl/faculty/emeritus/montgomery/montgomery.html

Mr Harvey: It is my pleasure to welcome you to Cultra Manor for the publication launch of *The Academic Study of Ulster-Scots: Essays for and by Robert J. Gregg*. This landmark publication for the Ulster-Scots language is a culmination of many years of painstaking work on behalf of its editors, and its meticulous presentation of material from a range of contributors as well as that of Professor Gregg is a tribute to their rigorous scholarship. The National Museums of Northern Ireland are pleased to be associated with their endeavour, which is a fitting memorial to the late Robert Gregg. The volume fills a great need for those who are interested in studying Ulster-Scots by giving historical depth to the subject. It is a comprehensive treatment of the scholarly research to date on the Ulster-Scots language.

Mr Sweeney: As we read through this collection of essays, there is undoubtedly intellectual rigor in the pages, but it also required the authors to reach below the surface of the mind, the

intellectual mind, and dive into that deeper source that dwells within all of us. In Bob Gregg's case I imagine that the deepest source was the mother tongue learned in childhood that is always home in our consciousness. This morning I wish to commend all those who played a part in the production of this seminal work and therefore to the publication. Anne Smyth and Professor Michael Montgomery capture the importance of Gregg's work, and I quote, “the very conception of Ulster-Scots as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon on the modern scene is inconceivable without his scholarship and rests firmly upon it.” This publication coincides with an important stage in Government's commitment to the enhancement and the development of the Ulster-Scots linguistic heritage and culture. There's a real desire to make headway on the establishment of the proposed Ulster-Scots Academy, constituted on a strong community-base partnership with academia for the purposes of recording, collecting, conserving, studying and promoting Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture in its historical context. I believe that the policy and resource environment in terms of encouraging and supporting Ulster-Scots is evolving in a most encouraging manner, and it has the potential to enable Ulster-Scots heritage and culture to flourish for the future. In this regard there will be no greater memorial to the work of Bob Gregg.

Dr Montgomery: I look back at twenty years of research, when I first came to Ireland to begin to see how the language spoken here generations ago contributed to my part of the world, that is, southern Appalachia. However, before I did so in 1988, I made sure to seek Robert Gregg's advice. We met only once, at a conference in Wales in 1987, spending a long and memorable

day in conversation, but I came to know him more intimately through his scholarship. To him Ulster-Scots was as much a reality as the Ulster plantation of the 17th century. The two were completely inseparable. His map of speech shows almost exactly where the plantation took root with settlers from Scotland. In short, Ulster-Scots speech and literature have been around a long time.

Mrs Smyth: Robert Gregg has made a tremendous contribution, an incalculable contribution to the study of Ulster-Scots. When I'm asked to try to estimate exactly what he did for us, I have to put it in Ulster-Scots: *He larnt us whit wye tae dae it*. He showed us exactly what the life of language is about ... Bob Gregg got really down to it, and he studied the substantive language and passed down to us exactly what we should be about. We should be looking at this language for what it is, a really valuable part of the heritage of this part of the world, and be handling it with respect and looking at what it has contributed to the life of this province over the years and the generations. That I believe is what he has done for us

Mr Harvey: Thank you, Anne and all of our speakers... I'd like on behalf of the Trustees and the Museum to congratulate the co-editors for their very significant achievement. I think this book will illuminate the work for future generations of scholars in the subject, and I think it has been said today that you cannot emphasize enough what a foundation work this is... I don't know if you launch books the way you launch ships, but I think that this book will probably be sailing for much longer than most ships that have been launched. So thank you very much. It's been a pleasure to have you here today.

ORDERING:

“*The Academic Study of Ulster-Scots: Essays for and by Robert J. Gregg*” is a 300 page hardback volume, priced at £30 plus p&p. To order a copy, contact: Phyllis Mutch, Publications Department, Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, 153 Bangor Road, Cultra, Holywood, Co Down, BT18 OEU Telephone: 028 9042 8428 email: phyllis.mutch@nmni.com

