



# OLD TROUT FUNNIES

## THE EXHIBITION



THIS ISSUE HAS IT ALL!!  
THE COMIC  
ORIGINS OF THE  
CAPE BRETON  
LIBERATION ARMY



## THE ARTIST

Paul 'Moose' MacKinnon was born in Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia, in 1949. Following time spent at NSCAD, the mines of Sudbury, and the Sydney Steel Plant, he attended Holland College in Prince Edward Island for their diploma in commercial art and design. As a final project for that course he created issue one of **Old Trout Funnies** featuring the exploits of the Cape Breton Liberation Army, a cadre of fierce Island nationalists based on his circle of friends.

MacKinnon thus found himself at the centre of the remarkably creative energy in industrial Cape Breton: the same drive that created the Steel City Players' **The Rise and Follies of Cape Breton Island** and gave urgency to the East Coast Blues scene, featuring such acts as Sam Moon, Matt Minglewood, Buddy and the Boys, and The Battery. It was also the time of a rediscovery of traditional arts, the emergence of the community economic development movement, and the birth of environmental activism. All were championed and lampooned in MacKinnon's comic creations.

Following three issues production ceased, but the characters lived on in a series of poster calendars starting in 1979 and ending with the 2000 offering. The calendars brought the Cape Breton Liberation Army, and MacKinnon's aging perspective, into many Cape Breton homes, both locally and in the diaspora.

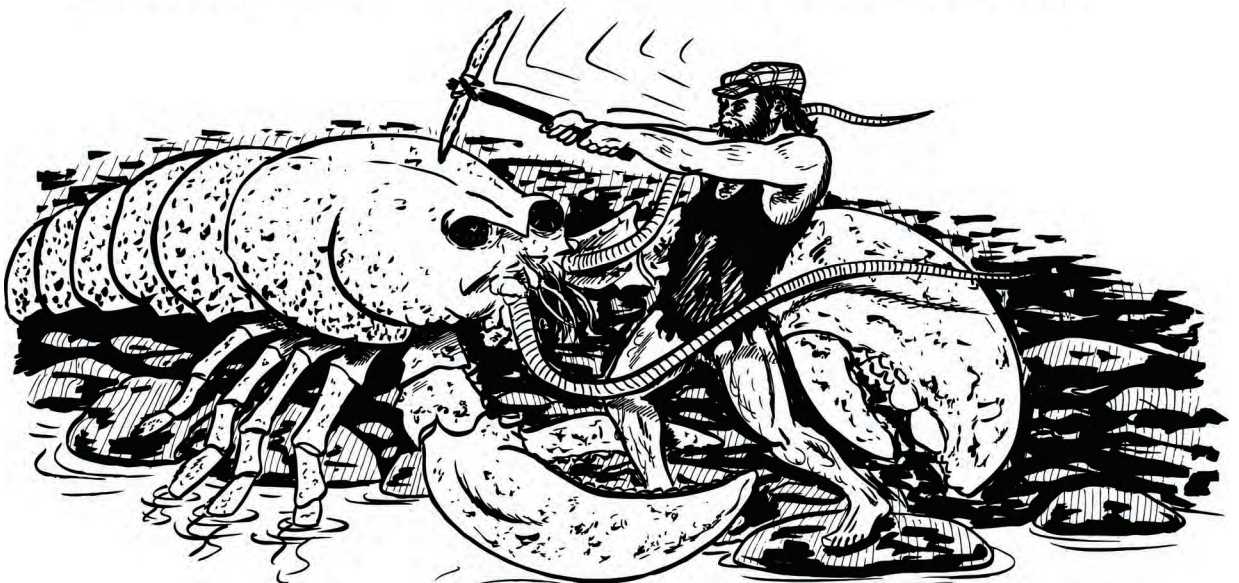
## THE EXHIBITION

The Cape Breton University Art Gallery presents the visual legacy of MacKinnon's **Old Trout Funnies**, showing original materials from the archives of the Beaton Institute for Cape Breton Studies, copies of the original comics, and the calendars as they were used in the home, alongside contextual information about the era that created it.

## THE BOOK

Cape Breton University Press is publishing **Old Trout Funnies: The Comic Origins of the Cape Breton Liberation Army**. Based on archival and ethnographic research, Ian Brodie places the comic and its legacy into the context of the birth of a post-industrial Cape Breton identity, and provides annotations for the intensely esoteric references that made the comic such a success with the original readership.

## 1 MILLION YEARS AGO... (WHEN BUTTER WAS FIFTEEN CENTS A POUND)



ARTIST'S RECONSTRUCTION DRAWING OF FOSSIL REMAINS OF PREHISTORIC CAPE BRETON MAN WITH GIANT PREHISTORIC LOBSTER [FOSSIL REMAINS FOUND AT FLORENCE BEACH]

# WHAT SORT OF PERSON READS...



LISSEN BUDDY, CAN YA HELP A FELLOW OUT? I ONLY NEED 39 MORE CENTS FOR A COPY OF OLD TROUT FUNNIES



## CAPE BRETON, 1975

At the risk of understatement, the 1970s was not a good time for Cape Breton, nor for Atlantic Canada in general. However much "the Island"—forever capitalised—saw itself as not so much isolated nor insular but apart from the rest of the world, the conceit was fractured as international tensions, whether political or economic, environmental or social, filtered through to a region increasingly integrated with global realities. The coal and steel industries that had fuelled whatever prosperity the Island once had were experiencing the initial throes of their eventual decline and disappearance, which dawned the realization that the exploitation of the

Island's natural resources had been mismanaged by their mainland owners. In Sydney, the administrative and population centre of industrial Cape Breton, people were still reeling from "Black Friday" when, on October 13, 1967, Hawker Siddeley Canada, the owners of the Sydney steel mill, announced the mill's closure for the following April, with over 3,000 jobs to be lost. This impelled the provincial government, especially in the wake of mass protests, to create a Crown corporation, the Sydney Steel Corporation (Sysco), to take control of the plant in January 1968. The economy was—and, to a lesser extent, still is—considered a failure. Even into the 21st century, the region has been referred to as a 'depleted community.'

The Cape Breton generation born after the Second World War was now reaching its mid-twenties, emerging college and university educated into a community increasingly unable to sustain what should have been a new middle class, promised for and earned by their parents. The uncertainty of employment—once practically a given—was hardly offset by the dangers inherent in the jobs that could be had. That generation was also informed by the popular culture of the day and the foment of American counterculture, with its ambivalence toward the cultural, economic, and ecological inheritance of the previous generation.



The arts provided one avenue for discussing this malaise. Donald Shebib's 1970 film *Goin' Down the Road* used the Cape Breton context as something people were escaping from more as an example of both Eastern Canadian and Canadian economic collapse in general than as a specific indictment of the Island. Margaret Atwood wrote soon after the film's release that the protagonists "are born losers, and their failure to do anything but keep alive has nothing to do with the Maritime Provinces or 'regionalism.' It's pure Canadian, from sea to sea." But this should not suggest that Cape Bretoners didn't see their own story on the screen.

The popular culture produced locally, however, was more specific of place. It was in keeping with the small cultural renaissance throughout the contemporary Maritimes, when

alternative theatre, creative fiction, and independent journalism were providing a counterpoint to the institutional viewpoints of industry and government, part of what John Reid has called the "sharpening of the sceptical edge" in Atlantic Canada, based in part on the new influences available to them through greater exposure to international media.

The most important and innovative general characteristic of changes in cultural production during the [1970s], therefore, was the widening of available knowledge of Atlantic Canada, past and present. Through education, creative arts, scholarly research, and independent journalism, hitherto unprobed areas of regional life were analysed, portrayed, and brought to the attention of the public.

Popular historian Robert J. Morgan framed this time as the beginnings of a Cape Breton identity encompassing, but not limited to (or obviating), other cultural identifiers like mining, Scots Gaelic, Acadian, and Mi'kmaq: "The hard times stimulated the blossoming of this [Cape Breton] culture in a burst of creativity that affected not only the arts, but learning and, eventually, the development of the economy."


In the mid-1970s, a group of "unemployed, young, mostly Xavier [Junior] College" graduates and attendees formed a theatre troupe called the Steel City Players that eventually gave rise to *The Rise and Follies of Cape Breton Island*, a revue (and eventual album) blending local history and politics with music and comedy. As Anna MacNeil puts it, "Providing an inside perspective of the Island's culture and its struggles, the Steel City Players drew upon a mix of humour and self-deprecation, local history and current affairs to contextualize their concern for the state of the area's future



# OLD TROUT FUNNIES presents .....

**OLD TROUT MINI FUNNIES** by Paul ROOSE

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PUFF PUFF

HERE'S A CLEARING WE CAN REST AT BEFORE TURNING BACK



YEAH, WE CAN REST HERE. BREAK OUT THE BEER AND SANDWICHES

NATALIE AND THELMA ARE UNAWARE THEY ARE BEING WATCHED.....



THAT'S HER! THE ONE ON THE RIGHT. CAPTURE HER FOR ME!

MOMENTS LATER NATALIE KINGCOALMAN AND THELMA THUNDERTHIGHS ARE ATTACKED BY THE RUGBY PEOPLE, A GROUP OF BLOODTHIRSTY, HALF CRAZED, SEMI-HUMAN BEASTIES, NAMED FOR THEIR LOVE AND DEVOTION TO THE GAME OF RUGBY.



SUFFERIN' STEEL!

LORD THUNDERING! IT'S THE RUGBIES!

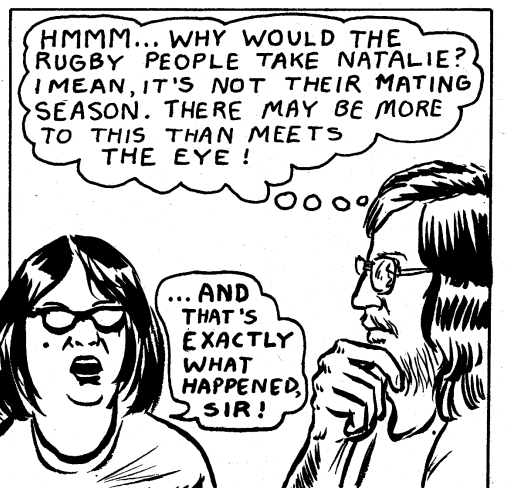
ARGGG



GROWLL

THELMA! GET PEYTON! HE'LL KNOW WHAT TO DO!

HMMM... WHY WOULD THE RUGBY PEOPLE TAKE NATALIE? I MEAN, IT'S NOT THEIR MATING SEASON. THERE MAY BE MORE TO THIS THAN MEETS THE EYE!



... AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED, SIR!

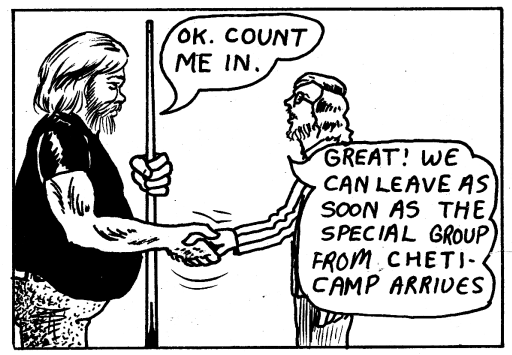
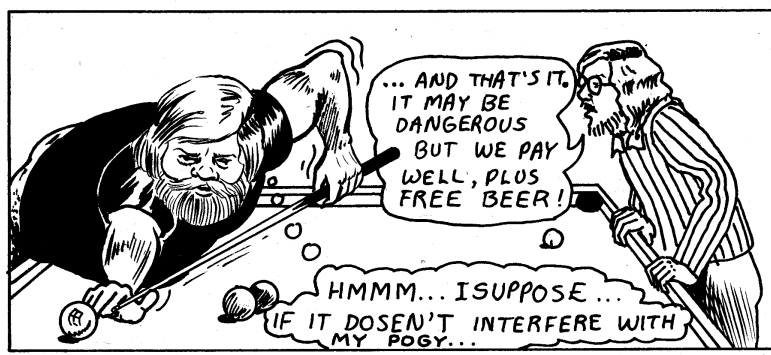
CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE

# OLD TROUT FUNNIES presents .....

**OLD TROUT MINI FUNNIES** by *Paul Moose*

## THE STORY SO FAR

WHILE OUT HIKING IN THE WOODS, NATALIE KINGCOALMAN IS CAPTURED BY THE RUGBY PEOPLE. HER COMPANION, THELMA THUNDERTHIGHS ESCAPES TO TELL GENERAL PEYTON OF THE INCIDENT. HE MAKES PLANS TO FIND AND FREE NATALIE .....



## MEANWHILE BACK AT THE RUGBY ENCAMPMENT.



ALL POWER TO THE NIFTY\* NOODLE BAND - CORRECTION - NEUTRAL NOODLE BAND



CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE...

**THE STORY SO FAR:** GENERAL JIM of the C.B.L.A. has turned traitor, or so it seems, and has taken control over the fierce but not too bright rugbys who have captured NATALIE KINGCOALMAN! Now, even as i write this, C.B.L.A. General PEYTON (alais the semi-barbarian) is on his way to the rugby camp to rescue her. With him are Stomper the FIERCE and, from Chéticamp, the one and only LE MARCEL. AND SO.....!

THEY TRAVEL TO THE LAND OF THE RUGBIES IN THE BACK OF A TRUCK COURTESY OF A LOCAL ROCK BAND.



THIS PANEL FOR JOHN GAMBRELL... I AM SHOPPING... LIKE SCOTCH...

On behalf of the C.B.L.A I would like to apologize for any mistakes in this hastily drawn and written page but the artist was so busy partying the last few weeks he left this to the last minute and had to do this with a terrible hangover.

... MERRY CHRISTMAS LAURIE NICOLE ...



... NO SOONER SAID THEN DRAWN!



AND LE MARCEL WHIPS OUT HIS FIDDLE AND PLAYS HIS CAPE BRETON SCOTTISH FRENCH ACADIAN TUNES WHICH THE RUGBIES ARE PARTICULARLY OPPOSED TO AS THEY'RE SENSITIVE EARS.

TO ALL MY FORMER ENGLISH TEACHERS - MY HEART FELT AND MISPELLED APOLOGIES ... Paul Mackinnon



... OLD TROUT SEMI-FUNNIES NEVER ENDING STORY WILL BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE... DON'T MISS IT... PLEASE!

**OLD TROUT MINI-FUNNIES...THE STORY SO FAR:** C.B.L.A. General Peyton, along with companions Stomper and LeMarcel are fighting the Rugbies in an attempt to rescue Natalie Kingcoalman from the hands of General Jim, a rogue C.B.L.A. member. Natalie has attempted to free herself and Gen. Jim has threatened to destroy all of Cape Breton's taverns by means of previously planted bombs. **RESTRICTED TO THOSE 18 AND OVER (CHILDREN UNDER 12 ADMITTED FREE)**

by Paul MOOSE

I've got to stop him before he carries out his fiendish scheme. If i rush him he'll pull the lever so i'll have to distract him... and i know the best way to do that. Besides i enjoy the look on men's faces whenever i do anything like this!



if you would like to see more of Natalie...forget it! it's not that kind of comic strip **GOOD TIMES & GOOD TRAVELLING SAM MOON BAND**



to whom it may concern: Jackie Powers has been barred from this strip. And so, with the departure of the Rugbies our story comes to a close. Every body lived happily ever after...or got run over by a truck...or moved to Alberta.



Hope you were able to follow and enjoy this story. THANKS TO SYDNEY RUGBY PLAYERS FOR NOT REACTING VIOLENTLY.



FIN ~ THE END



**ARRIVING AT CABOT HOUSE PEYTON IS GIVEN THE DETAILS OF THE SITUATION.**



**GIVING THE MATTER CAREFUL AND SERIOUS THOUGHT...**

HMM... WONDER IF I CAN MAKE THIS LAST LONG ENOUGH TO GET POGY?



**PEYTON DECIDES TO TAKE THE MISSION AND STEPS INTO A NEARBY CLOSET...**



well-being." Inspired in part by the upswing in labour activism in the wake of downsizing at both the Sydney steel mill and at many of the mines along the colliery route what could have been a disaffected generation was instead involved in a number of creative pursuits. "This combination of broader cultural influences and typical youthful attitudes led to a vibrant and engaged youth culture in industrial Cape Breton which helped to form the creative atmosphere in which the Steel City Players emerged."

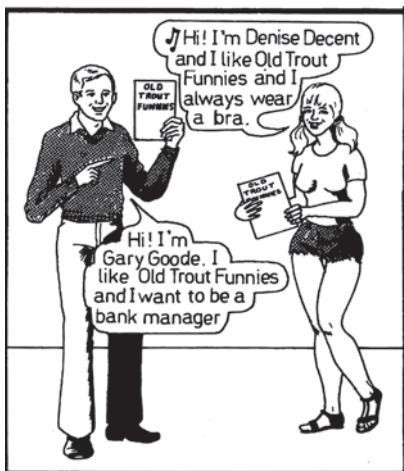
In the same few blocks of downtown Sydney clustered around Xavier Junior College, another group of twentysomethings had a different idea: they were going to become superheroes.

Paul "Moose" MacKinnon was born in Sydney Mines, the northernmost of the mining towns that today comprise the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM). Moose had been his nickname since grade school: he signed his artwork, comic and serious, as Paul Moose throughout his career. After high school he went to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, in Halifax, but soon left: "Once the bursary came in I was on the train to Ontario." He stayed with friends in Peterborough, returned to Cape Breton, spent a few months in Toronto, worked for a year as a hard-rock miner in Sudbury, before returning again to Sydney with a job at the Sysco steel plant.

people from a variety of backgrounds who would meet in the taverns of Sydney. This informal network extended into the friends' twenties. Many had moved away and come back, and over the years this process would repeat itself: "I moved away from Cape Breton for good at least four times."

According to Paul's friend Peyton Chisholm,

It was a time of lots of different projects that people were involved in, maybe part-time grants and things like that. ... Community projects or...whatever. Maybe social development projects or even technology or art projects. ... And the Follies was going on. So there was all that different energy around of people doing things. And people were coming and going all the time too, back and forth to Toronto or wherever, and starting to go out West.



Hi! I'm Denise Decent and I like Old Trout Funnies and I always wear a bra.

Hi! I'm Gary Goode. I like Old Trout Funnies and I want to be a bank manager

At this time, he started or rekindled friendships with a number of similarly minded

These projects and much of the cultural life of Sydney were integrated with the old



downtown campus of Xavier Junior College and, as in most college towns, activity was taking place as much in the taverns as it was on the campus proper. As friends do, especially among age groups where verbal play is highly prized, an esoteric "idioculture" was formed, replete with insider terms and argot.

I don't know exactly where it [the idea for the Cape Breton Liberation Army] came from: I can't say "This is it: this is how it started." Some of the things that were going on: as young people, as young friends, we liked to get together and have a few beers. At some point we'd refer to the empty beer bottles as "another dead soldier." And that got us thinking at some point, "We've got soldiers here: what are we?" We start at the top: we're generals. So collectively, loosely, we became...on our get-togethers we'd refer to ourselves as "the Generals." I'm not sure Generals of what at that point. And historically, at that time period,

there were [so-called] armies everywhere in the news: the Irish Republican Army, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Symbionese Liberation Army. So "army" was thrown around: you were hearing it on the TV and radio all the time. So at some point it became "Cape Breton Liberation Army"; exactly who said it first, I don't know.

MacKinnon is loath to identify "the Generals" as the sole originator of the Cape Breton Liberation Army (CBLA).

Dave Harley was a disc jockey at CJCB at the time, and he came up with a throwaway joke, and that mentioned the Cape Breton Liberation Army. Halifax political cartoonist Bob Chambers: he had a cartoon that I think also used the name Cape Breton Liberation Army.

Meanwhile, for MacKinnon, work at the plant was inconsistent. He kept himself involved in commercial art—mainly doing hand lettering on various award and

commendation certificates—but more time was spent looking for jobs than doing them. He wanted to go back to art training, this time in a program for commercial art and production at Holland College, in Prince Edward Island. While there, a lifelong love of comics and an early interest in the underground comix phenomenon of the late 1960s and early 1970s informed his decision to do his own comic.

It started as a school project: the course I was in you basically—it was very liberal but you basically come up with your own project that you want to do. .... I'm not even sure if I had the story as a fully-formed story when I started: it was "Hmm: what can I do? Yeah: CBLA. I can make something up along those lines."

His instructors supported the idea of the comic book. One teacher subsequently took him to Halifax to meet with Owen McCarron, an illustrator for the Halifax Chronicle Herald who had also worked as an inker and writer for Marvel Comics, the American comics-book giant. MacKinnon showed McCarron the work in progress and was given encouragement from "the real deal."

So the name was out there, and I think we all started to realise there was something here bigger than us. So Dave Harley with his General John Cabot Trail shtick, and myself with doing the comics, we certainly publicised the CBLA and gave it life. Raised it at least.

(So when you were coming up with the idea for the comic, you were sort of creating a mythology?)

Yes; we've got the CBLA, now what do we do with it?



Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Old Trout Funnies: The Comic Origins of the Cape Breton Liberation Army*, which was curated by Ian Brodie and presented at the Cape Breton University Art Gallery from October 30, 2015 - January 29, 2016

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## IF SO, WHY NOT QUIT?

THAT'S RIGHT, QUIT! DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU COULD RECEIVE MONEY FOR A WHOLE YEAR WHILE YOU LOOK FOR A BETTER JOB? JOIN THE THOUSANDS OF SATISFIED CLAIMANTS! ANSWER THE FOLLOWING SKILL TESTING QUESTIONS WITH A 'YES' OR 'NO' AND...

1	DID YOU WORK ? AVEZ-VOUS TRAVAILLÉ ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	DID YOU OR WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY MONEY ? AVEZ-VOUS REÇU, OU RECEVREZ-VOUS DE L'ARGENT ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	WERE YOU ATTENDING A SCHOOL OR OTHER COURSE ? FRÉQUENTIEZ-VOUS UNE ÉCOLE OU SUIVIEZ-VOUS UN COURS ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	WERE YOU READY, ABLE AND WILLING TO WORK EACH DAY ? ÉTIEZ-VOUS CAPABLE DE TRAVAILLER, AINSI QUE PRÊT ET DISPOSÉ À TRAVAILLER CHAQUE JOUR ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	IF CLAIMING DEPENDENCY RATE, DID YOU WHOLLY OR MAINLY MAINTAIN A DEPENDANT ? SI VOUS DEMANDEZ DES PRESTATIONS AU TAUX MAJORÉ, SOUTENIEZ-VOUS ENTIÈREMENT OU PRINCIPALEMENT UNE PERSONNE À CHARGE ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	HAVE YOU STARTED A FULL TIME JOB ? AVEZ-VOUS COMMENCÉ À TRAVAILLER À PLEIN TEMPS ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Winners will be notified every two weeks.

WHAT SORT OF MAN READS OLD TROUT FUNNIES?



## OLD TROUT FUNNIES

THE COMIC ORIGINS OF THE CAPE BRETON LIBERATION ARMY.

BY IAN BRODIE, ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL MACKINNON

A COMPLETE AND ANNOTATED EDITION OF THE OLD TROUT FUNNIES, THE CBLA CALENDARS AND RARELY SEEN FURTHER ADVENTURES OF THE CAPE BRETON LIBERATION ARMY.

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