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Bishop Plessis' Journey Continues, 1815 translated from his Journal by Robert Pichette, F.R.S.A. EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: This is wonderful reading and it should not be missed. Whether talking about mining, the work of Father Maillard, or the conditions under which Cape Breton pioneers lived and with which priests had to contend • Bishop Plessis is both informative and blunt. We don't usually get this clear a picture of the particular situation of that time. To repeat from our introduction to Part One of this Journal In Is? sue 55: In 1815 Bishop Plessis returned to Cape Breton to complete a visit he had started in 1812 • a visit that had been interrupted by the Napoleonic War. He travelled from Arichat to Louisbourg, stopped in Sydney, then went on through the Lakes via Christmas Island to St. Peters. Readers should note an oddity of Plessis' writing style: when the text refers to "the bishop" this is actually Bishop Plessis talking about himself in the third person. He never uses the first person. It should be remembered that this was 1815, when Cape Breton island was still a separate province. It would be another 5 years before it would be re-annexed to mainland Nova Scotia. The story of the non-development of Cape Breton during its 40 years of independence has been well told by Dr. Robert Morgan in Issue 27 of Cape Breton's Magazine. The criticism Plessis had for the government was criticism of the government of Cape Breton island. Readers will note that in 1815 he referred to potential competition between coal mines of Cape Breton and the mines of Pictou. This is Bishop Plessis speaking: After having crossed this lake (Magre Lake), there remains 7 leagues to do before reaching the end of Labrador or the inland sea of Cape Breton (the Bras d'Or Lakes). In this route, Red island, two leagues from the lake, is a well-known spot. Three leagues more to the south is the Indian mission of Labrador (probably present day Chapel Island), and two leagues further, is a place called St. Peter's, formerly Port Toulouse which, as has been observed earlier, separates this inland sea from the ocean which surrounds the Isles Madame. This is, as things stand, the most precise description which can be given of this extraordinary sea whose water is as salted as that of the Atlantic which feeds it, and where the tides are as regular as anywhere else. One finds in Labrador oysters, eels, lobsters and cod, and a species of small fish peculiar to it and whose name the author of this diary has forgotten. Nevertheless, the fishery is not abundant enough to attract foreign fishermen. It is even natural that the fish stock diminishes rather than grow because the two entrances (Great Bras d'Or and Little Bras d'Or) which communicate with the sea lose daily some of their depth due to the silt brought about by the winds from the open sea. In the past, large vessels could enter into Labrador; nowadays only schooners can go through. The Micmacs of the village of Labrador were the only Christians, whom the Bishop of Quebec (Plessis is speaking of himself) had initially planned to visit, after having visited the missions of Arichat, Justico (present-day Port Hood), Magre and Chetican in 1812. However, his correspondence with the missionaries had indicated to him that he had other sheep in other parts of this government and he did not hesitate to add them to the established list of those



he planned to visit Mgr. Joseph-Octave Plessis. That is why he went to Sidney by sea and decided to return to the Indian mission through the inland sea. Informed of this project, General Swayne obligingly offered to take him there at the government's expense. However, even before leaving Arichat, the prelate had been informed of an incident. This general, unhappy for whatever reason with the captain and the sailors of the government's schooner which brings messages and despatches, had just dismissed them all and replaced the captain with an officer of the troops and the sailors by soldiers. Watching this clumsy crew manoeuvre was not an inducement to test its ability on any sea whatsoever. That is the reason why the Bishop asked only for a small open rowboat to transport his baggage by sea, the following Monday, to the French village (in the present-day Little Bras d'Or area), to which he himself would travel by foot. June 26 - The rowboat was at the pre-arranged spot at sunrise on the appointed day. There were four soldiers aboard to row and a pilot, with provisions for four days. The Lively was anchored near the mine (Sudnev Mines area). We had to promptly choose the necessary insurance services. For All Your Insurance Needs • LIFE • HOME • AUTO • COMMERCIAL • FARM • TRAVEL Insure your life, home, automobile, business, farm or travel with the leading Canadian-owned, air-lines insurance company... The Co-operators. Our policies, many with exclusive features, provide you with some of the best, broadest insurance coverages available. Plus, you deal directly with the friendly, helpful people in our service offices around Cape Breton. Learn more about the complete protection and service we provide. Call or come in to The Co-operators today. CAPE BRETON OFFICES: CHETICAMP 224-3204 GLACE BAY 649-4547 LOUISDALE 345-2199 MABOU 945-2514 NEW WATERFORD 662-3350 NORTH SYDNEY 794-4766 PORT HAWKESBURY 625-0640 SYDNEY 539-6315 (toll free)