Page 1 - "Who do You Think You Are? Johnny Abbass"?
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Who do you think you are?- Johnny Abbass? Everyone who searches for images of life in Cape Breton for the last 50 years • particularly In industri? al Cape Breton • is Indebted to the work of Abbass Studio. Cape Breton's Magazme is certainly in their debt, often without knowing It. So many pictures come from family albums and local history collec? tions • and it is sometimes years later before we find out that that picture of boxers or a shipwreck or the building of the Canso Causeway • these were often photographed by Johnny Abbass, one of his broth? ers, or one of the photographers the studio hired. The following is from a recent conversation with Johnny Abbass, and includes a tiny sample of the va? riety of Abbass Studio work. In most cases we have not put names with the photos. Instead, we're having a contest • see the end of this article. Page 96. (Mr. Abbass, who first came to Cape Breton--your parents, or your par? ents' parents?) Johnny Abbass. Syd? ney: Well, a little bit of both. My mother's parents came here. They're both Lebanese. My father came here at the age of 13. My mother was born here. She's first generation. Her name was Khattar. (What year did they come?) I'm not sure. I'd say about 5 years before the First World War. They came to Cape Breton because some of their relatives came before them. And it was a growing area. There was work to be had here. Peo? ple could come here and start up a business. They were, I guess, under the impression that it was easy to make a living here. Somebody came here and they went back to the Old Country, might say to the parents of some young person, "Look. Let your son or daughter go to that country. They could make money there if they just sold newspapers...." And they were, you know--the heri? tage of the Lebanese people goes _ right back to the Phoenicians. And the Phoenicians were the first traders in the world. So, we're really descendants of the Phoenicians. That's why you find a lot of Lebanese people are business people. I'd say that they were attracted because of the boom of the steel plant, and the coal mines. It was a part of the country that was really a pretty rich part of Can? ada. You go back to in the 1920s, right up until the 1930s--and even before that-- Cape Breton was really one of the richest provinces in the country. I mean, you notice that yourself. If you pick up a magazine, say, when they're cel? ebrating the 100th anniversary or the 200th anniversary of the town. Like, there was a book put out by North Sydney. There was a shoe factory over there, where they had 40 or 50 people working there. They were making all kinds of shoes. There was a factory here making overalls. These jeans were made here before people ever thought they were worth wearing. That was the kind of things that were going on here. I guess (my people) came here with that idea.... Cape Breton's MAGAZINE • Number Fifty-Eight Wreck Cove, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia BOC IHO Publications Mail Registration Number 3014