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Shipwreck at Little Lorraine from an article by D.C. Harvey, late Provincial Archivist for Nova Scotia The wreck of the *Astraea* at Little Lorraine Head, Cape Breton, in 1834, was one of the most tragic of the many shipwrecks that took place in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when migration from the British Isles to the British North American colonies was in full swing, and unscrupulous ship-masters overcrowded their far-from-seaworthy craft to profiteer in human misery. For the first decade of this period there was not a lighthouse on the entire coast of Cape Breton Island, and during that decade, on an average five ships a year were stranded between Louisbourg and Cape North, to be pillaged of their cargo or scattered far and wide as a menace to navigation. St. Paul's Island, near Cape North, and Scatarie, near Cape Breton, were the two greatest danger spots for all who ventured through Cabot Strait, in nature's blackout, en route to the St. Lawrence, while the former was equally dangerous to those who were outward bound. It was through the bitter experience of those years that Lower Canada and the Maritime Provinces finally cooperated to maintain lighthouses and life-saving establishments on St. Paul's and Scatarie Islands, and the government of Nova Scotia appointed committees of local residents to watch out for shipwrecks on the east coast of Cape Breton, to supervise the work of rescue and salvage, and to protect lives and property of the unfortunate passengers and crews. (Through the spring, 1834, the toll continued to grow.) In April, the *James* of Newcastle, with 265 persons on board, struck a cake of ice, sprang a leak and sank. The captain and ten others escaped. On May 7th, the same night as the *Astraea* sank, the brig *Edward* struck a piece of ice near Cape Nova and sank immediately; but the captain and crew were saved. On the tenth the brig *Fidelity*, R. Clarke, master, with 183 emigrants from Dublin to Quebec, was driven ashore at Scatarie. All the passengers were landed on the island but, when taken off three days later, three were left behind. One of these, a woman, was discovered by a fisherman, nine days later, and taken to Main-a-Dieu, but died at landing. The other two, a woman and a girl, were rescued three weeks later, having found a deserted hut and lived on dead fish in the interval. It was these incidents, together with the tragic details of the wreck of the *Astraea*, which led the provincial government to appoint superintendents of shipwrecks for the northeastern and southeastern shores of Cape Breton, to keep constant lookout for such wrecks from Louisbourg to Scatarie and from Sydney to St. Paul's and to take prompt steps for their assistance. Though the actual loss of life in the wreck of the *Astraea* was not quite as heavy as the loss of life in the *James*, the tragedy was brought home to the inhabitants of Cape Breton more vividly, by the fact that it occurred close to land rather than in the open sea, and that many of the bodies were washed on shore as mute reminders of an unhappy fate. Moreover, the recovery and burial of these unfortunates evoked a lengthy official correspondence, from which the details of the tragedy can be reconstructed almost as fully as if it had happened before our eyes today. The following extract from the report of Mr. H.



W. Crawley to the Provincial Secretary of Nova Scotia, on May 24, 1834, sets in bold relief not only the necessary details of the wreck itself but also the whole probler of dealing with shipwrecks at that date. An Eyewitness Account, 1834 "I am just returned from the scene of a terrible shipwreck, that of the barque As? traea. W. Ridley raaster, with passengers from Liraerick for Quebec. She struck on rocks under Little Loran head (between Manadou and Louisbourg) close to the shore, in a very dark night, and went to pieces immediately, only 3 persons escaping out of 251. These 3 were the surgeon, by name O'Sullivan, the carpenter, and one seaman. They leaped into the sea as the ship was parting, and were washed by the tremendous surge on to the top of the precipice. All the rest went to the bottom, in about 18 feet water, tho', as before said, quite close to shore. The cabin passengers, beside the surgeon, were a Mr. O'Doherty, who it is reported was one of Lord Aimer's suite, on his way to Quebec; an old maiden lady, whose name I have not learned, going to her brother, in Canada; and a young woman named Moss, from Limerick. The rest were steerage passengers, and, as I understand, consisted of farmers and their families, from the vicinity of Liraerick. "This is by far the most disastrous wreck that has occurred on our coast this sea? son, and there have been 6 or 7 already. My reason for addressing you is to enquire what hopes there may be of obtaining remuneration for the people who are employed in the very necessary business of securing and interring the dead bodies. There are but few persons living in the immediate neighborhood, and they are poor fishermen who are now particularly hurried to get their potato seed into the ground, and to attend to their fishery, this being the principal season. The process at the wreck is so tedious that it seems probable the delay will be so great as to cause the loss of Cape Breton's Magazine/28