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Published by Ronald Caplan on 1977/8/1

Pirate Shipyard on the Mira River David Dowi Staring with known facts, we find that until the English and French arrived in force around 1720, all attempts at settlement in Cape Breton failed. First, there was Fagundes, a Portuguese explorer, around 1521-25 • some say he tried to settle at Ingonish, others at St. Ann's. It lasted 18 months and is the first recorded attempt at settlement in North America. John Rut tried in 1527?? and left. Jacques Cartier met fishermen between Newfoundland and Cape Breton and had an argument with them in 1534 • Humphrey Gilbert in 1583 visited the Island but was persuaded to go to Sable Island and not stay in Cape Breton. Stephen Bellanger in 1583 reported an unknown town of four score houses somewhere along the coast of Nova Scotia "upon a river side." In 1598 Sylvester Wyet visited, was impressed by the natural resources and left. But in 1597. two English ships, the Hopewell and the Chancewell, found that men were living on the Island who came out in shallops and pillaged the Chancewell after she had been slightly damaged by a rock. They came and "robbed and spoiled all they could lay hands on, pillaging the poor men even to their very shirts and using them in a savage manner." Only the timely arrival of the Hopewell saved the ship and crew. Later they put in at New Harbour on Scateri where they met the "Amiral of the shallops" and persuaded him to get some of their stolen goods returned. This caused so much anger amongst the crews of the shallops that the ship took an early opportunity to slip away undetected and head for home, counting themselves lucky to have escaped with their lives. New Harbour on Scateri is now Eastern Harbour. There are two very important notes in Nicholas Denys report on Cape Breton written in 1672 • nearly 100 years later. He writes that all the Indians had left the Island because all the moose had been shot and that he too had been burnt out of his well-established fort and settlement, some 50 years earlier. Lord Ochiltrees' Scottish settlement at Baleine in 1629 also failed as did Sieur de la Boularderie's farm. Now the chance of so many attempts failing from purely natural causes seems remote, even allowing for Cape Breton's long winter, so it seems that there was some sort of conspiracy to prevent permanent settlement. Bear in mind the unknown town of 80 houses which was never located and the base for shallops at New Harbour. Someone was living on Cape Breton during those 200 years and they could have driven the Indians away by usurping their hunting grounds. But, why the secrecy? In 1971. R. MacKinnon, a well-known scuba-diver from the Mira area, told me that he had located the Old French shipyard in the Mira and escorted me on a tour of it. I was so impressed with the workmanship that I immediately went to Louisbourg to find out more about it. To my astonishment, there was no record of the shipyard in the Archives and I was assured that it was not French. The shipyard must have cost a fortune to build (I will describe it later), so surely there must be a record of this expenditure somewhere, I thought. It took months of work but I found no mention of it anywhere; British, French, Dutch and Portuguese archives yielded nothing. Enquiries among local families proved frustrating. They knew about the shipyard which had ceased operation around 1810;



between 1810 and 1820 it had been briefly used as a sawmill, but abandoned because of ghosts! Then came the breakthrough. Talking with first one and then another of the older families along the Mira, it came out that their great-grandfather was the Mira Pirate. Hearing this so often I jokingly remarked that the Mira must have been a nest of pirates! About 15 miles from Mira Gut down the Mira there is a carved stone memorial to Captain Kidd, obviously carved by someone sympathetic to him since the inscription reads "Deprived of mercy 1701." He was executed in 1701. There was a Captain Roberts of the Mira who sailed into Trepassy Bay, Newfoundland, and looted 22 ships in one day according to the people of Trepassy. In 1801 special laws were enacted at Hal-