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Gobineau: Cape Breton's People, 1859 Translated by Robert Pichette from Gobineau's Voyage a Terre-Neuve INTRODUCTION: In Issue 53, we offered a Portrait of Sydney taken from Voyage d Terre-Neuve by I/l. Arthur de Gobineau. The following article comes from the same book. This description by an educated and well-travelled person is a rare insight into a poorly documented period in Cape Breton history. Gobineau discusses only briefly his theories about race, theories that were taken up years later by the Nazis to reinforce their own policies. This association with Fascism, in which the dead Gobineau had no choice, nonetheless contributed to the neglect of his work. Gobineau served as Executive Assistant to Alexis de Tocqueville, the author of Democracy in America, at the time when de Tocqueville was the French Foreign Minister. Gobineau came to Cape Breton as an imperial commissioner for Napoleon III, part of a joint French-English commission on the fisheries. It's NEW! It's GREAT M. Gobineau Begins in Sydney Mines: Although Sydney Mines, from a landscape point of view, is very similar to Sydney Town, from which it is separated by only a few leagues, it would appear to be destined to a more brilliant future as an inhabited area. The precious fuel which its ground yields with an extreme abundance, brings to it a great many ships who come here to take on loads destined to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Many small shopkeepers have settled in this busy area, and the exploitation of the mines has also brought a good number of workers with their families. This population, so evidently different from the maritime world, does not live precisely in Sydney Mines but constitutes by itself a sort of village near the excavations; therefore, if one

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sees a goodly number of tarred pants and woollen hats (of sailors), one also sees, not far away, quite a number of people dressed in poor black suits with ancient hats from which the miner's lamp is suspended. I did not go down in the galleries (mines). I was content to watch from high up the dirty, muddy, wooden boxes which a steam machine plunged alternately into the depths and out again, and from which emerged just above the ground and in the full light of day, sometimes enormous chunks of coal or sordid workers who wobble because of the brilliance of the light. Like the ignoramus that I am, I watched the rough work of enormous mechanical engines draw water which constantly threatens to submerge the galleries. I admired the impassive behaviour of the supervisors who monitor with a constantly alert eye the movement of certain pendulum which have as much thinking ability as those who watch them in perpetuity; I watched the wagons loaded with the



results of such work rise and fall on inclined planes equipped with rails, and I had had enough. The skillfulness of the engineers and all the best efforts could not prevent one of the shafts from being flooded. Such accidents cause huge losses and entail equally important expenses in order to open new galleries for exploitation. Such expenses are difficult to avoid since coal seams extend in all directions, even under the sea which finds, all too easily, means to infiltrate them. It has not quite decided to abandon this domain which she is losing. The sea has not definitely admitted the right for earth to co-exist with her. Marvellous geological debris come out of those mines along with the coal. One can admire particularly beautiful specimens of the primitive flora, and especially ferns preserved with an unsurpassed perfection and delicacy. Finally, I preferred to return to the companionship of Island Crafts The Talent of Cape Breton Knitters is but One Example of Excellence at Island Crafts Old-Fashioned Charm Is Our Trademark VISIT OUR STORE & SEE THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF TREASURES Handknit Fishermen's Sweaters - Kitchen Accessories Designer Mohair Sweaters - Hand Carved Clan Crests Hats & Scarves for Every Age Group - Cookbooks Intricate Designs in Pottery - Hand Appliqued Quilts Ruffled Cushions - Wide Selection of Baby Items The Mad Potters Collection - Boats in Bottles A Good Selection of Local Literature The list is endless! Treat yourself to ISLAND CRAFTS! Wholesale: full line of souvenirs The Focus of Your Visit to Cape Breton, in Downtown Sydney OPEN YEAR ROUND: MONDAY TO SATURDAY, 9 TO 5; FRIDAY, 9 TO 9 539-6474 329 Charlotte Street, Sydney 564-5527 A project of Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation Un projet de la Soci6t6 d'expansion du Cap-Breton