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Most of these merchants spoke only English and came from outside Cape Breton. Peter Smyth was an Irishman who had immigrated to Nova Scotia in 1817; William McKeen had been born in Truro, and had made his money in lumbering before coming to Cape Breton; William Kidston was from Halifax; William Gammel, the chief merchant in North Sydney, was from Lowland Scotland, as was his partner, John Christie; at Grand Narrows, William Murray was from Halifax. Smyth was elected M.L.A. for Inverness in 1847, the same year that McKeen was appointed Inverness County's first member of the Legislative Council. These accomplishments not only indicated these men's popularity and influence, but also their control over food distribution and road work allocation. The famine re-enforced their economic power over the Gaelic-speaking Scot, and helped to make them his role-models. Those who lost their land, or who were destitute, were often forced to leave the island. Emigration had already begun around 1840, as the best land was settled and the young were lured away by the opportunities in Boston or the Canadas. One observer complained that the sons of our farmers, as soon as they are capable of entertaining three ideas, become restless and wish to leave the farm and paternal roof, and rush into some city or town, there, as they fondly imagine, to become rich and happy." The rate of emigration increased dramatically during the famine. Official records were not kept, but Abraham Gesner estimated that 1,000 young people left Nova Scotia in 1847; another 8,000 emigrated in 1848. A large number of these were Cape Bretoners; in 1851 alone, five hundred passengers left Sydney for Quebec City. Large numbers of emigrants vacated the hard-hit Broad Cove-Margaree area for the nearest vacant fertile land, in the Codroy Valley of Newfoundland. Cape Bretoners had begun moving there as early as 1841, but their numbers then were "almost negligible." However, several hundred people left as the famine's grip tightened; the numbers declined during the 1850s, as times improved. Far more dramatic was the famous emigration of nearly nine hundred people from the St. Ann's area of Cape Breton in the early 1850s, bound for Australia and New Zealand. In 1820, the Reverend Norman MacLeod had led a group of Scots to St. Ann's, where he organized a settlement which he ruled with an iron hand. His community flourished until the potato blight struck and struck again. His son Donald had previously left for Australia and wrote glowing accounts of that colony to his father. As the destitution increased, MacLeod's fellow settlers became restless to leave, perhaps for Upper Canada. MacLeod, as leader of his people, began to feel the pressure to emigrate from this now "desperate and dreary place" to be with his son in Australia, "a kind of comparative Paradise." The final blow came in 1850 when his potato crop was destroyed, "as black on the whole as any field could be during the worst years of that disease." MacLeod must have seen this as a sign from the Almighty, especially as one traveller claimed, "I examined other potatoe fields... and I could see no sign of the appearance of the disease...." The following year, MacLeod led the largest single migration to leave Cape Breton. The years of famine also marked the end of large-scale immigration



to Cape Breton. As the best land disappeared in the early 1840s, immigration had begun to slow, although in 1841 alone, 1500 of "these paupers from the Highlands" arrived on the island; in the fall of 1843, another "large group" went to Inverness County. There were signs, however, that the flow of immigrants from the Scottish Highlands and islands was beginning to dry up. Emigration from Scottish ports, which had averaged 6,258 in the decade from 1833 to 1843, suddenly fell to 2,939 in 1844, 3,399 in 1845, and to a low of 2,679 in 1846. There are indications that a combination of extensive emigration and reliance upon the potato as a source of food were finally leading to population stability there. The result was that large-scale emigration had ceased by 1844. However, in 1845, potato rot attacked the Scottish crop, and continued to do so until 1851, with disastrous results. Reliance upon the potato had "allowed the population to build up to the point at which the sheer weight of numbers finally broke the dam, releasing the flood-waters of renewed emigration." The number of those departing rose to 5320 in 1847, 19,474 by 1852, and continued to soar upwards.

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