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Yet Cape Breton failed to attract a substantial percentage of these people. The distress accompanying the potato rot, beginning in 1845 on the island, was a prime reason for this. When the extent of the destruction to the 1846 seed potatoes became known. Sir John Harvey, the lieutenant-governor, wrote to Earl Grey, the colonial secretary, outlining the failure of the potato and grain crops and pleading that "pauper emigration" from Scotland be discouraged, especially to Cape Breton, "where distress is greater than elsewhere"; Harvey also warned that if there were another bad harvest, the situation would be as "appalling as that which now prevails in Ireland." This warning had immediate effects. Grey quickly instructed the Colonial Law and Emigration Commissioners to have mass-produced copies of the despatch distributed to all emigrant agents at ports of emigration, and to customs officers where no emigrant agents were stationed. The despatch was also published in newspapers, while the Emigration Commissioners personally instructed their agents "to discourage any emigration of labouring people to Nova Scotia." In 1848, five boatloads of Scots arrived, but significantly avoided Cape Breton, heading instead for Pictou, where conditions caused some to re-embark for Prince Edward Island and the United States. A clear sign of Cape Breton's reputation as a place to be avoided can be seen in the fact that the contemporary Irish immigration stemming from the potato rot there totally avoided the island, though 1,200 Irish arrived in Halifax in 1847 alone. Cape Breton was to remain the home of the Scottish, not the Irish Celt. Though the blight continued through the early 1850s, its effects were lessened after 1850, largely because Cape Breton's almost total dependence on potatoes and wheat came to an end. As previously noted, the crisis of the famine years stemmed partially from the fact that new settlers had been ignorant of agricultural methods and the potential of crop diversification in Cape Breton. The Central Board of Agriculture had fostered the development of Agricultural Societies since the 1820s, the first beginning in Sydney, with others growing up. Suppliers of Commercial Recreational Fencing p. O. Box 98, King St., North Sydney, N. S. B2A 3M1 794-4773 nGEL 'Sufifiii' S',.' • cC' "HAVE OUR AUGER TRUCK DIG YOUR HOLES." g' Sydney Kitchen & Bath ?? Vast range of styles and options ?? Kitchens & Vanities ?? Corian dealer ?? Extensive showroom NEW HOMES AND REMODELS Come in and visit our showroom! AFTER HOURS 562-7268 562-0421 S3 JOHNSTONE ST., SYDNEY FAX# 562-2141 (off Pitt) by Master l'ats VINYL REPLACEMENT WINDOWS later in Mabou, Margaree, Baddeck and Middle River. These associations attempted to disseminate new agricultural methods, but before the blight, "not more than one farmer in ten has been induced to enrol himself"; instead, Abraham Gesner complained, "they choose to tread the old beaten track of their fathers, rather than avail themselves of modern discoveries." As a result, these societies had difficulties in becoming established: for example, groups formed in Mabou and Arichat in 1821, and in Judique and Port Hood in 1823, folded or became moribund until the 1840s when Mabou, Margaree, Broad Cove and Middle River began new societies. Once established, these groups



worked to enhance local growing conditions and techniques. In 1846, the Legislative Committee on Agriculture decided to encourage people to grow oats by granting up to \$15 per person to help with the erection of oat mills. This fitted in nicely with the desires of some immigrants who had grown oats in Scotland, and who were now seeking assistance in building such mills to supplement potato crops. The policy was successful, so in 1847, \$30 was given to each county to aid in the erection of oat kilns and mills. Though the potato crop was a complete failure in 1848, the Central Board of Agriculture reported that imported turnip seed had been distributed and that the crop was flourishing at Canso and Sydney, where barley was "half a crop." Other crops included carrots, man-gel-wurtzel, Indian corn, rye, buckwheat, beans and peas, which were slowly taking the place of wheat and potatoes. In 1849, rot was not as bad as previously, so in 1850 farmers once again planted large quantities of potatoes. Yet the crop was again attacked, and disaster was averted only by the unusual abundance of the island's oat harvest. Also on the positive side, the wheat fly's effects were finally mitigated by the late sowing of early wheat. Even though the potato was blighted in some places in 1851 and 1852, harvests then were the best since 1844. After 1852, crop diversification, better methods of planting, the use of machinery and chemical manures, the gradual decline of the blight, and the introduction of rutabaga or Swedish turnip as cattle and sheep feed to supplement uncertain hay crops, put agriculture on a more solid footing. By 1852, the Cape Breton News could finally report that though there was poverty on the island due to past crop failures, "there is...no probability of any suffering from want of food this winter even amongst the poorest of our farmers." The Presbytery of Cape Breton appointed 28 October as a day of thanksgiving for the abundant harvest at Sydney, Sydney Forks, Mira, Catalone and Port Morien. Though the famine had ended, it had deeply affected Cape Breton. It increased the wealth and power of the island's chief merchants, devastated the new settlers, impoverished established farmers, put a fifty-year halt to immigration to the island, hastened emigration • and forced the diversification of agriculture, which ensured that such a famine would never again occur on Cape Breton Island. This article was first published as "'Poverty, wretchedness, and misery': The Great Famine in Cape Breton, 1845-1851," in the Nova Scotia Historical Review, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1986), pp. 88-104, including 90 footnotes not included here. Our thanks to Dr. Morgan and to J. B. Cahill, Editor, Nova Scotia Historical Review, for their permission to reprint.

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