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New Waterford's Explosion, 1917 • 2 Songs from "And Now the Fields Are Green"
The University College of Cape Breton Press has just published a songbook of coal mining songs in Canada, collected by John C. O'Donnell. Here are two songs from that book. Mr. O'Donnell writes, "The worst disaster in Cape Breton history occurred at No. 12 colliery in New Waterford on 25 July 1917. Two hundred and seventy men were in the mine when an explosion ripped through the working. Some hours later, ninety men were still missing and two surface workers had lost their lives in rescue attempts. The final death toll was sixty-five." (See "The Mine Explosion in New Waterford" in Issue 21 of Cape Breton's Magazine.)

The Omen
Words by Marie MacMillan
Music by John C. O'Donnell
Jack O'Donnell continues: "Marie MacMillan of New Waterford, Cape Breton, wrote this song from stories related by her aunt and mother. As the final verse indicates, the story of the strange phenomenon of roosters crowing in the evening is still talked about in Cape Breton • half a century after the tragic disaster."

The Omen
1 A tiny town, New Waterford, all nestled by the sea;
An omen dire, a shattering blow, this tale was told to me.
The black, black day in Waterford came early in history,
And folks who noticed ponder still this bit of nature's mystery.
At sunset on one summer eve, all in the after glow,
The roosters all around the town began to crow and crow.
A rooster near, a rooster far took up the cry in fright;
They crowed as if they'd never stop till dusk turned into night.
2 Next day at dusk it was the same, the next day, and the next,
"Infernal din!" "What can it mean!"
The town was sore perplexed. 'Twas never heard like this before!
They crow at dawn • not eve! Could common fowl • a rooster • know what man could not perceive?
Bad tidings from the war, some thought, and worried till the day
Brought tasks to overshadow fears for loved ones far away.
Nine days • and ten • eleven days, and still the fearsome din
Each day at sunset rose anew, and nerves were frayed quite thin.
3 One voiced the fears of many, listening with worried frown,
"What's coming is disastrous • will affect the entire town!"
Then one day brought the ghastly dread, the one all miners keep
Within their hearts, by day, by night • "Explosion in the deep!"
It happened down in No 12; the blast that shook the town
Saw sixty-five brave miners die, and many hearts bowed down.
Was this what all the crowing meant? This then the portent dire?
What could the lowly rooster know of black damp, death and fire?
4 That evening no loud din was heard to blight the summer eve;
Instead, indoors, the wailing cry, the sob of the bereaved,
And scarce the home in Waterford in which no tear fell down;
The words were true • the blow indeed had struck the entire town.
If hindsight could be foresight and the warning understood.
And if it had been heeded, as deadly warning should • Ah!
But brave men will always dare to risk their lives at work.
They laugh at danger, scorn to fear, will not be called 'a shirk.'
5 The rooster crows at dawning to greet the newborn day;
'Twas always thus: if heard at dusk, a warning will portray;
It's not mere superstition if you were to believe
The miners ALWAYS should beware when roosters crow at eve!
The tiny town, now grown quite large, as tiny towns will do.



Has older folks still living there who know this tale is true. That black day in New Waterford came many years ago. But some who listened wonder still: WHAT made the roosters crow? i'r r r r 1' ' ' ' if f" the town be ?? lrr ' ' ir r' - er near, a roost - er far took up the cry C b1> Am Gm FA? 'm r ir r '- p i' ' J J u. crowed as if they'd stop 'til dusk'turned in ?? OPEN MAY to SEPT. 12 mi. from Industrial Cape Breton: Hillside Rd. Seasonal: 727-2632 Pre-Season: 564-6530 Water Parks ' Cafe: Delicious Hot Meals Chicken Fingers * Hamburgers * Pizza Drinks * Light Groceries * Camp Supplies LOVELY BEACH & DOCK • CABINS FOR RENT TENTING & TRAILER SITES - REASONABLE RATES Special Rates ~ On the Beautiful Mira River ~ for Groups brake service drums & rotors resurfaced DISCO TIRE 2&4 wheel alignment including 1-ton trucks and motor homes SYDNEY LTD. 539-4070 computerized engine analysis and tune up (DISCO TIRE only) CANSO TIRE PORT HAWKESBURY LTD. 625-3125