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Fr. Rod MacSween's ~ Memories of Ironville IRONVILLE IS A DISTRICT OF BOISDALE PARISH. On the way from Sydney, you reach it before Boisdale proper. Why do I mention it at all? It was my home up to the age of five, at least I think so. My family moved from there when I was about that age, so all my memories of Ironville come from those early years. Our farm, I used to hear, was one hundred acres, cultivated only in the area near the road. Beyond the road was the railway, and beyond that, the Bras d'Or Lakes. When I think back to that early time, I am not conscious of myself as a human being, but as a camera. I seemed to walk around all alone. I was always watching and listening and men? tally recording. I seemed to do nothing on my own. I know this is far from the truth. Blacked out of my memories are the times when I cried, when I suffered, when I felt alone, when I knew I was helpless. Fortunately those moments are gone, never to be resurrected. The brain takes care of itself, and rejects what would be too much for a child to bear. I have no memories of myself speaking. It is always others who speak and who act and who dominate events. When I feel I am back in the past, I find myself on the edge of some group, generally that of my brothers; sometimes I gaze at my father and mother. I am never alone, although I must sometimes have been alone. But my mind demanded some other personality to awaken it to memorize. I have few memories of space beyond my immediate surroundings. I cannot recall looking as far as possible across land or water. I was always half conscious of Boularderie across the lake. Hills and humps of land were my other boundaries. It was the immediate that drew my attention. The world was very small around me, but it pulsed with life and interest.... One incident comes to my mind with the utmost clarity. It was bright midday in the summer. The boys were splashing water on each other around the well. By accident (I like to think) a bucket of water was thrown over my baby sister who was seated innocently to one side. She let out a scream of fear and alarm • and my mother appeared in the kitchen door, an anxious look on her face. At that moment there was a loud crackle of thunder just above us in the clear summer air. It was so loud that everyone froze in his/her position. Then my mother said, "No wonder it's thundering • you boys are so bad!" It is all so clear. I can see the corner of the house which held the kitchen door, my mother standing with her anxious face, my sister facing upward with her mouth open and her eyes closed, my brothers like guilty statues standing round, and I myself squinting through my eyes at the wonder of it all. CERTAINLY IN MY EARLY DAYS the world was a more mysterious place than it is now. There was something in the air that said that everything was suffused with the supernatural, the ghostly, the magical, and along with these, the fortuitous, the lucky, the unexpected. It was all one thing • this world threaded through with mystery of many kinds. It was not a matter of being watched by God; there were also the evil spirits and the guardian angels • and far away over the hills and the lakes, there were wizards and witches, and even closer in the houses of our neighbors, there was the occasional person who was said to have special gifts. I heard much later that my own grandfather had brought in



some medicine man to bless the cattle, to the rage of his wife, my grandmother. From my earliest days I heard the name of the "Gong." He was one of that motley group of near-incompetents who roamed the country areas, staying for short periods with those generous enough to accept them: When they felt that their company was becoming obnoxious to their hosts, they moved on, only to reappear later on in the year. The Gong differed from the others in that he was irritable and demanding. For example, he demanded that quietness reign around him. He seldom got his wish. Rascals would ring cow bells to annoy him: hence his name, "the Gong." The Gong was the only one of those wanderers who was spoken of with mockery. The reason was his own demanding nature. Ordinarily he would have aroused only pity. Often he aroused a kind of spite. One woman, when ordered to produce his dinner, served him a piece of leather drowned in gravy. He failed in his attempt to eat it and asked: "What kind of meat is this?" She answered, "Rhinoceros." He paused for a moment and said, "It must have been a very old rhinoceros." Not for him to admit that rhinoceros was outside his experience. On another occasion he arrived at my father's house and stayed the night. Next day, the older ones at work in the fields, he expressed the wish to be shaved. The young boys agreed to shave him. He settled in a big chair and closed his eyes, imagining himself some great man in a salon in a great city. The boys spread a white cloth around his neck, lathered his face with STOP AT DINO'S fresh baked goods * souvenirs magazines * film * cinarcoai gifts * novels * camp fuel * ice Ingonish One Stop Store & Deli STAY AT DING'S Trailer Park Laundromat * close to the National Park Ingonish