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nist, and retired soldier from Wolfe's army at Louisbourg, encountered one group of convicts who related their plight. He brought them to Mainadieu at once, where, he later told the governor, the residents provided "what assistance they could without injuring their own families." Later that evening, Martin and Francis Dixon organized a search for the remaining convicts, finding another thirty or forty. At a December 15 Council meeting Dixon told the Lieutenant Governor that when they found the convicts "the greatest part of them [were] little better than naked." A great number of felons have been brought to Newgate within these few days past, to be transported to British America, for the taking away of whom the Right Hon. Lord Mayor has engaged the snow Providence, of North Yarmouth, Captain Debonham, burden 200 tons, on board which ship two hundred of these unhappy people are to be embarked about the 13th to be landed at the first port she can make in Nova Scotia. The fate of unfortunate convicts on former occasions...is too great a reflection on the humanity of the nation and so disgraceful an infringement of the Laws of the Nation as to need repetition. • Freeman's Journal, Dublin, October 2, 1788 Over the next three days, the villagers of Mainadieu cared for the convicts. On the 15th they loaded 40 convicts, all the females and those suffering frostbite, aboard Luke Keegan's fishing boat the Shilaly, bound for Sydney. The inauspicious arrival of destitute persons "warm welcome awaits you at the Cape Breton's most popular gift shop, located in the centre of downtown Sydney. • 'eaturin' an eaten&io • /&ecf40fi(' ' Maritime & Canadian Handcrafts " Quality Souvenirs & T-Shirts ' Folk Art & Country Gifts ' Seagull Pewter ' Scented Candles & Potpourri ' Imported Gifts & Collectibles ' Kitchen & Home Decor Accessories ' Year Round Christmas Shoppe Open Daily 9am-5pm Thurs & Fri 9am-9pm 303 Charlotte St., Sydney, NS B1P 106 " Telephone: (902) 539-7338 in Cape Breton that winter raised immediate alarm. Although the population of Sydney only doubled the convict number, Sydney's merchants had barely enough provisions to last until spring. In addition, the Lieutenant-Governor, William Macarmick, was unable to cover new expenses, having spent the contingency funds earlier during the visit of Prince William Henry, later King William IV. Furthermore, several merchants remained unpaid for excessive bills run up by J.F.W. DesBarres, the Island's previous administrator. Learning of the convicts' arrival, Macarmick ordered Keegan's ship to dock at the military wharf with a guard to prevent them from landing. He then called an emergency Council meeting, advising the senior merchant, Keith Stout, to feed and clothe the convicts. The next day, Council met with Sydney's merchants to determine the quantity of provisions on hand. Discovering that supplies hardly met local requirements. Council voted to ship some convicts to Halifax aboard the Treasury brig Relief-with the rest to follow in hired vessels. On December 19, Council informed Macarmick they could induce no vessel to risk a voyage and the Relief's captain refused to sail with more than ten or twelve convicts. Faced with quarantining the convicts until spring. Council advised Macarmick to learn what



supplies were available and to request instructions from the Secretary of State, Lord Sydney. Macarmick rented a large house at once, lodged the convicts and placed them under a military guard. Later that day he wrote to Lord Grenville, the Home Secretary: whatever their destination was, or whatever their crimes...may have been, they came to me in so miserable a state and by an Act so cruel, that were they not H.M.'s Subjects I could not resist the pressing Inducements to give them protection.'" The following day Macarmick soHcited advice from the Colonial Secretary and requested an immediate shipment of supplies from Governor Parr in Halifax. He shipped the letters aboard the brig Relief hut in a bizarre turn of events, a storm blew the ship off course, and the master, later claiming insanity, sailed to the West Indies where he remained until May." This incident prevented the delivery of Macarmick's letters, with the consequence that neither Hahfax nor London was aware of the precarious situation in Cape Breton. Without direction, Macarmick was forced to support the convicts from his own meager Treasury. References to the convicts over the next few months are scant. As winter continued, fifteen to sixteen convicts remained in the hospital recovering from frostbite received that first night in the woods. Several were permanently lamed and others died of the exposure. Rev. Ranna Cossit of St. George's Anglican Church notes in his Vestry Book the deaths of several: "Buried Wood-

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