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ish. By 1830, she had established libraries in Middle River, Baddeck and Margaree, and collected between 7-800 volumes. Many communities in the colonies appealed to the Glasgow Colonial Society for clergy and although requests poured in, the Society seemed unequal to the demand. Isabella was exasperated at its sluggish pace...too little was being done too slowly. As she saw it, the Society was too dispersed, ineffectual and indirect. Isabella resolved to focus her energies and in 1832 she mobilized the Edinburgh Ladies' Association. The specific aim of this Association was to alleviate the spiritual and educational destitution of Cape Breton's scattered Scottish Presbyterian population. I have never been able to determine the exact line of jurisdiction between the Edinburgh Ladies' Association and the Glasgow Colonial Society. Suffice it to say, when it came to the Ladies' Association, Isabella "ran the show." She was animator, activist, publicist, and lobbyist. Isabella and the Association were synonymous. Although the vast army of 19th-century Victorian do-gooders were often "ill-led, ill-disciplined and purposeless," the Edinburgh Ladies' Association did not share these failings. Isabella was a driven and driving force. Her vision for Cape Breton was comprehensive, systematic and relevant. Her design consisted of an interlocking network of clergy and catechists, colporteurs and schoolteachers. Religion and education, claimed Isabella, were mutually fortifying elements, and together they would help chart a clear path for Cape Breton's Scottish Presbyterians. Isabella responded to the needs of the immigrants in a practical way. She despatched to Cape Breton tracts, bibles and school-books. Scissors, cloth, and needles also found their way into her shipments. She hand-picked to serve in the mission field men of piety and physical stamina. These qualities, she contended, were far more important than erudition. She also strived to recruit men fluent in Gaelic. It is interesting to note that Isabella, unlike many Scots of her social stratum, did not conspire to anglicize the Scots. She helped bring to Cape Breton a religion of hope not despair. And her legacy was an impressive one. Many of the leading figures in Cape Breton's early Presbyterian history • we know the names well • the Rev. Alexander Farquharson, John Stewart, James Fraser, Peter McLean, John Gunn, Murdoch Stewart, and Hugh McLeod • came to Cape Breton because of her sponsorship. The Boularderie School opened its doors in 1839 due in large measure to Isabella's fierce devotion and commitment. In sum, her efforts combatted illiteracy, instilled moral values and kindled a vibrant Presbyterianism in Cape Breton. In realizing her vision, Isabella was often thwarted by obstacles • reluctant missionaries, government indifference, and financial insecurities. But she was ever sensitive to the need to fill the vacant Cape Breton parishes and to prevent the Mission from stalling. She organized bazaars, drafted pamphlets and circulars, stormed Whitehall with petitions • she collected, advertised, canvassed and conscripted. She was a tireless correspondent, exploring every avenue to gain patronage and profile. She corresponded with the likes of Lord Aberdeen, Lord Gle-

nelg. Sir George Grey, Rev. Thomas Chalmers and the Hon. Mary Elizabeth Frederica MacKenzie, head of the clan MacKenzie, who agreed to serve as Patron of the Edinburgh Ladies' Association. She was irrepressible, and she refused to conceal under a ladylike demeanour, her enthusiasm, impatience, disappointment, and caustic candour. In her letters, she disparaged young ministers for their materialism, chided Thomas Chalmers for his apathy towards the Cape Breton mission, and harped She was irrepressible, and she refused to conceal under a ladylike demeanour, her enthusiasm, impatience, disappointment, and caustic candour. at the Rev. Robert Burns for trespassing on the activities of the Ladies. By the late 1840s, Isabella's interest in Cape Breton was eclipsed by concerns closer to home. The political crisis within the Church, and the wide-spread poverty in the Highlands and Islands captured her attention. In 1850, this enlightened and devoted Christian woman died. The lion's share of her wealth, approximately \$7,000, was bequeathed to the Free Church. From this sum, Free Church ministers stationed in various Sutherland County parishes were to receive an annual supplementary stipend of \$15.1 understand that the so-called "Rockfield Bequest" continues to operate to the present day. Both Isabella and her husband are buried in St. Cuthbert's churchyard in Edinburgh. The inscription on the monument reads: "In memory of John Mackay of Rockfield who departed this life on 8 April 1841 in the 80th year of his age. The friend of the friendless. And of Mrs Isabella Gordon his wife who died on 15 November 1850 in the 73rd year of her age, who devoted her time, talents and substance to the spiritual and temporal good of her fellow creatures." Today, we have gathered to give this woman • this pillar of the early Presbyterian church in Cape Breton • her due. But let us not think of her as a faded memory. Isabella Gordon Mackay still has enormous relevance today. Her life gives lie to the myth of female weakness. She offers to us an inspiring example of faith, vision and courage. She was a person truly made of "spirit, fire and dew." For a much more detailed telling of the work of Isabella Gordon Mackay, integrated into what we consider to be the best history of the Presbyterian Church that we have to date, see Laurie Stanley's marvelous book called The Well-Watered Garden: The Presbyterian Church in Cape Breton, 1798-1860. Published by the University College of Cape Breton Press, it is 250 pages and costs \$14.50 plus 7% GST and shipping. It is available in bookstores or direct from Breton Books and Music • see Order Form on page 65. You can also order via our website: <http://www.capebretonsmagazine.com> Brignolet / warm welcome awaits you at the Cape Breton's most popular gift shop, located in the centre of downtown Sydney. 'eaturn' arv ea'fe/hs/'oc -sc/ccfion of: