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The 'Astrea,' 1834: a Survivor's Report In issue Number 11 of Cape Breton's Magazine, we offered the story of the aftermath of the wreck of the Astrea at Little Lorraine, a story of the sacrifices poor fishermen made while attempting to give all the bodies that came ashore a decent burial. Mike Delaney* with encouragement from John Flannigan, both of Sydney, continued to search for information about the Astrea. They found a letter written by one of the three survivors, as well as a list of the names of every man, woman and child aboard that ill-fated vessel. We offer here the survivor's letter. The list of names we have deposited at the Beaton Institute archives at the College of Cape Breton. The Astrea, along with the Priscilla, Albion, and Thetis, emigrant vessels, laden with families and bound for Quebec, sailed from Limerick on the 15th of April, 1834. "Nothing of any moment occurred until about two o'clock in the morning of Thursday the 8th of May. It was extremely dark, and the vessel was going before the wind under a full press of sail, when the alarm was given," wrote Dr. Jerome O'Sullivan, ship's doctor, and one of the three survivors. "Orders were given immediately to put the ship about, but before this could be effected, she struck upon a rock, which stove in her bows. In less than two minutes she struck again with still greater violence, which threw her over on her side, with her deck seaward. During the interval, several of the passengers had got upon deck, of these hapless beings, some were seen on their knees engaged in prayer, holding on by whatever came within their grasp; others were swept off the moment they came on deck. The captain ordered the jolly boat to be lowered, but only a few had got into it when it was dashed to pieces." When daylight broke, not a vestige of the ship was to be seen, and of her passengers and crew, only three • the doctor, her mate Henderson, and the carpenter, George Fanning • survived. Shortly after. Dr. Jerome O'Sullivan sent the following letter: "I suppose you have seen by the papers the melancholy announcement of the loss of the barque Astrea, with all on board, with the exception of three • the carpenter, a sea-man, and myself. I will not detain you by detailing the horrors of a shipwreck, suffice to say we struck against a rock at two o'clock on Thursday morning. May 8th, and were dashed to pieces in less than twenty minutes. The boy came down to the cabin and shouted out, "There's land ahead!" The captain and I immediately jumped up on deck, half dressed, and were not there more than ten minutes when she struck; the captain at once ordered the boat to be lowered, and I was one of the first that jumped into it. The people on board made towards the boat with the determination that I did. On perceiving this I left it, and got on deck again, foreseeing that so many persons could not get into the boat without sinking it. I was scarcely on deck when the small boat was shattered to pieces. The vessel was now thrown on her beam ends, I then clung to the wheel, got my arms around it, determined to remain there until she struck or went down, I was dreadfully washed by the breakers, the sea was rolling over the entire ship, I now left the wheel, got on the ship's side, and was scarcely there when the wheel was torn off by the sea, and was dashed overboard on the other side, I then saw that the ship was irrevocably



lost, and determined to save my life if I could, I plunged off the wreck without further hesitation, and endeavoured to swim to the opposite rock, which I could discover pretty plainly by the foam of the breakers which dashed against it with fury, I gained the cliff unhurt when a beam of timber (torn from the ship) struck me on the back and drove me down the current about forty yards in an opposite direction. However, the returning wave brought me back again, and threw me on the rock on my hands and knees; the timber drifted me off again and dashed me against another rock, I was held under the timber and partly under water for about fifteen minutes, when the beam stuck in the nook of a rock and remained stationary, by which means I was enabled to disengage myself from it and finally, after many exertions, attained the cliff in a state of extreme exhaustion, "I suffered so much then from the cold, that I was going to precipitate myself again into the sea and drown myself at once; but God, in his infinite mercy, ordered otherwise. The two men who were also preserved from the wreck, picked me up in the morning and conducted me to a house, which we found, after about two hours walking, near a mile from the place where we were wrecked. The woman of the house behaved very kind to me • she put me to bed, gave me some hot tea, and also applied hot irons to my feet, which brought me to by degrees. I was next day conveyed to the house of a Mr. McAlpine, where I was kindly treated, and was subsequently brought to Captain Nesby, of the Britannia, to Charlotte's Town, my present residence, where the physicians behave very kind to me, having supplied me with money and with clothes. I am hardly able to hold a pen now, I am so weak. I am cut, hacked, and bruised all over, and am afraid you will not be able to read a word of this or make anything of it as I don't really know what I am saying. I should not have attempted to write at all, but to still your fears, by letting you know that I am still alive. "Ever yours, &c.,&c.,&c., Jerome R. O'Sullivan."