[Page 30 - New England's Role in the Underdevelopment of Cape Breton during the French Regime, 1713-58]
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facts of our continent's historical geo? graphy. When royal control was asserted in New France in I663, there can have been scarcely 2,500 people within its broad limits (no documentary source for this widely quoted figure is known to the wri? ter), and, despite the immigration of the next decade or two (the only period of significant inflow before the conquest), the total had reached few more than 15,000 by 1700. In all of the eighteenth centuy it is doubtful if as many Frenchmen came to Canada, Acadia, Isle Royale, or, indeed, all of New France, as there were immi? grants to the British colonies to the south in some individual years. There is no doubt that Canada, Acadia, and Cape Breton Island could have absorbed a French immigration of substantial proportions, as natural population growth in Canada and later immigration to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were to demonstrate clearly. The attractive forces of the new world for re? ligiously orthodox Frenchmen and the rea? sons that might have impelled them to leave la douce France simply were both much too weak. One of the reasons for little immigration to Quebec and Montreal has been seen in the relatively small amount of shipping required to support Canada's only impor? tant export enterprise • the fur trade. But this explanation hardly applied to Cape Breton Island: fishing ships and "sack" ships (supplying the fishery and transport? ing fish back to France) came to Cape Bret? on's coves and harbours each year in sub? stantial niMbers. Had the reasons for emi? gration been strong enough there was ade? quate transport to have effected it. More? over, the total number of French fishermen, traders, officials, soldiers, and naval ratings who visited the island in the 1713- 58 period, certainly in the tens of thou? sands, should have disseminated knowledge of Cape Breton Island widely through the homeland. Although winter sailing on the North Atlantic was always unpleasant and often hazardous, many of Cape Breton's eastern and southern harbours xemained o- pen during the winter when those on the Gulf and St. Lawrence River were frozen solid • cut off from seaward contact for half of each year. The lack of movement of people from the St. Lawrence valley to Cape Breton is un? derstandable. Agriculture and settlement presented problems enough in the valley, and the opportunities in Cape Breton did not compare favourably; moreover, if a habitant's attention strayed from the problems of making a living on his own roture, it most likely was directed west- ward to the continental fur trade much more strongly than eastward to the cod fishery. But the disinterest of the Acadi? ans who had spread out around the margins of nearly all the dykable, tidally flooded marshlands bordering the Bay of Fundy in the seventeenth century, is not so easily rationalized. After the conclusion of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713?? when, as a counterbalance to the British takeover of the present peninsula of Nova Scotia, France confirmed her earlier, rather sha? dowy claims to the islands of St.-Jean and Cape Breton, it easily was assumed that the roughly 2,000 Acadians would move to either island. Cape Breton was to be the naval and fishery headquarters; St.-Jean was also to have a fishery but, it was hoped, would serve especially as a source of surplus grain and livestock to supply

the larger island. The French exerted eve? ry kind of official and unofficial pres? sure upon and extended invitations to the Acadians in order to effect the move. Al? though the Acadians' attitude to their new i'i' k USJr The CBC in Cape Breton NATIONALLYREGIONALLYPROVINCIALLYLDCALLY CBITTELEVISION Channels 2,5,7,8,10,12, and 13 iTivars TO ZE CBI RADIO 1140 on your Dial INFORMATION ENTERTAINMENTENLIGHTENMENT