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# A Hundred Years from Home: Cape Breton Scots and the Establishment of Cultural Dominance, 1820–1920

Sandra Barney

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In Inverness County, we know everybody's great grandfather's name, and whether we stay or go to make a livelihood, we love each cove and mountain and turn in the road. This is home and we have a touchy pride about it.<sup>1</sup>

In a 1920 petition to the premier of Nova Scotia, a number of Cape Breton residents appealed to the provincial government to institute the teaching of Scots Gaelic in publicly-supported schools. Citing statistics from the 1911 census indicating that almost 30 per cent of Nova Scotia's population was of Scottish descent, they argued that Scottish language and tradition 'embody the highest ideals of honour, virtue and patriotism.'<sup>2</sup> As descendents of immigrants who came to Cape Breton Island a century earlier, these petitioners sought to secure for their mother tongue a status equal to that granted French. They justified their argument by asserting the intellectual merits of studying Gaelic, but they also celebrated the richness and strength of their Scottish heritage. A hundred years from home, they still proclaimed the glory of their patrimony and their identity as members of 'the Scottish race.'<sup>3</sup>

Scots who immigrated to the western reaches of Cape Breton in the nineteenth century experienced unique success in preserving their natal identity even as they struggled to avoid economic failure in this new land. Given the challenging environmental circumstances presented by the fierce North Atlantic weather and the inadequacy of most of the island's soil for agriculture, settlers found themselves facing daunting odds as they attempted to carve farmsteads out of a Maritime landscape described by geographer Stephen Hornsby as 'too steep [and] too wet.'<sup>4</sup> The poor land proved to be

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Anne Ducharme, 'How We Became a County,' [http://www.invernessco.com/history\\_county.html](http://www.invernessco.com/history_county.html) [accessed 14 June 2010)].

<sup>2</sup> Petition to the Hon. G.H. Murray, 1920, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (hereafter NSARM), Gaelic Resources, RG 5, Series P, Vol. 79, 1920, no.8

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Hornsby, 'Scottish Emigration and Settlement in Early Nineteenth-Century

fertile in its own way, however. As word spread of the difficulties faced by the island's residents, most notably during the potato famine of the 1840s, later immigrants were deterred from making this their destination and the Highlanders secured their position as the dominant population on the island. Free from extensive interaction with outsiders and under little pressure to assimilate, they, and their offspring, developed an understanding of themselves as Scots living in a Scottish land. The strength of that identity might vary by community, but Scottish language and heritage flourished across the island and was especially defining in the west in what was, after 1837, Inverness County. That cultural dominance was challenged, however, when railroads penetrated the region and entrepreneurs, both homegrown and from the outside, began to tout the possibilities presented by new methods of agriculture and mining. Faced with the arrival of immigrant miners from continental Europe, Cape Bretoners were disinclined to accommodate and integrate new populations.

Scottish immigration to Cape Breton was both part of a broader movement of Scots to the Maritimes in reaction to economic modernisation at home and a unique experience of chain migration as residents from a very specific region in the west of Scotland departed in immediate and extended family groupings. The story of Cape Breton's settlement is rooted in the Highland Clearances and the numbers, and the nature, of Scottish arrivals were determined by events at home as well as by circumstances in Nova Scotia.<sup>5</sup> W.C.A. Ross commented in 1934 that, 'Broadly speaking, in the eighteenth century people go from the Highlands, in the nineteenth they are sent.'<sup>6</sup> The Cape Breton example supports this claim that early emigrants left on their own initiative and later departures were driven by landlords seeking to increase profits by remaking agriculture. By the 1820s and 1830s thousands of economic refugees from the Highlands and Islands were setting out for Cape Breton every year. In the first

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Cape Breton' in Kenneth Donovan, (ed.), *The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton History, 1713–1990* (Fredericton and Sydney, 1990), 56.

<sup>5</sup> See Stephen Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography* (Montreal and Kingston, 1992); Lucille Campey, *After the Hector: The Scottish Pioneers of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, 1773–1852* (Toronto, 2004); D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto, 1974); Marjory Harper and Michael Vance(eds), *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scotia and Nova Scotia, 1700–1900* (Halifax and Edinburgh, 1999); J.M. Bumstead, *The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770–1815* (Edinburgh and Winnipeg, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Campbell and MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar*, 7. Original quote in W.C.A. Ross, 'Highland Emigration,' *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 50 (1934), 155–66.

decades of the nineteenth century, however, only a trickle of settlers moved to the island from Scotland while others came across from Prince Edward Island or the mainland of Nova Scotia. Cape Breton was not a primary destination for these earliest Scottish emigrants as they departed for British North America, but circumstances pushed some of them across the Strait of Canso and onto the island.

Rusty Bittermann's careful documentation of the settlement of Middle River presents an example of the process by which Scottish settlers were recruited to other Maritime destinations but abandoned those locations to move on to Cape Breton. Angus MacAulay, who petitioned for land along the Wagamatcook River in 1807, had served as an agent recruiting potential settlers for Lord Selkirk's emigration schemes in Upper Canada and on Prince Edward Island. Recognising the desperate circumstances faced by Highlanders who were being displaced as landlords consolidated their holdings to pursue more financially rewarding endeavours, Lord Selkirk proposed a series of resettlement programmes to move displaced Scots to Canada. After assisting in the establishment of the community of Belfast on Prince Edward Island, MacAulay grew dissatisfied with conditions there and attempted to organise a movement of Highland emigrants to Cape Breton. Although MacAulay's scheme to establish a community was not immediately successful, Bittermann notes that several of the earliest permanent settlers of Middle River had originally been recruited to the Maritimes by MacAulay and had been participants in Lord Selkirk's programme. As the first successful European claimants to this land, these early families were able to secure the more valuable plots, a situation that advantaged them when subsequent immigrants arrived in later decades.<sup>7</sup>

MacAulay's followers joined other Scots who were moving to Cape Breton from their initial settlements around Pictou and Antigonish, in eastern Nova Scotia, and from Prince Edward Island. Incomplete records suggest that, by 1801, more than a hundred families of Scottish origin resided on Cape Breton Island.<sup>8</sup> Lucille Campey asserts that, unlike most immigrants who preferred Upper Canada and its more agriculturally rich land, Scots coming from the Hebrides purposefully selected Cape Breton and Eastern Nova Scotia as their

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<sup>7</sup> Rusty Bittermann, 'Economic Stratification and Agrarian Settlement: Middle River in the Early Nineteenth Century' in Kenneth Donovan (ed.), *The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton History, 1773–1990* (Fredericton and Sydney, 1990), 73–5.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Kinkaid, 'Scottish Immigration to Cape Breton, 1758 to 1838' (MA thesis, Dalhousie University, 1964), 69.

preferred destination; in this early period ‘most emigrants paid their own way across the Atlantic and carefully chose where they would settle.’<sup>9</sup> In her view, they did so in order to take advantage of the economic opportunities presented by the timber trade and to benefit from the availability of inexpensive passage on empty timber ships returning to British America.

Campey joins Hornsby in claiming that Scots from the Highlands and Islands made these decisions about emigration based on their desire to maintain their families and communities in the new world. An agent in South Uist commented that ‘[t]he people from this country will all go to Cape Breton, and nowhere else if they can help it.’ While immigrants were driven by a longing to hold on to the familiar and to keep their immediate and extended families intact, subsequent waves of Scottish exiles had even more intense reasons to cling together and to clutch at portable symbols of home. These nineteenth-century immigrants, whose exodus was not so freely chosen, saw Cape Breton as a refuge ‘for the reassembly of Highland families and communities disrupted during the Clearances.’<sup>10</sup> Having been coerced or enticed from their old homes, they sought to recreate home on new terrain.

The significance of the Clearances, of the arrival of those who were ‘sent’ from their homes, on the history of British America has been well documented by historians.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century trickle, this wave of immigration constituted an undeniable flood and Scots by the thousands arrived in the Maritimes as the old clan system was finally laid to rest in the face of modern notions of efficiency and profit. Hornsby documents the increase in arrivals in Cape Breton and breaks this era of immigration into two periods: the era from 1815 to 1825 when passage was relatively expensive and settlers possessed more capital, and the mid-1820s through the 1840s, decades marked by the collapse of the kelp industry and a massive increase in the numbers, and the poverty, of Scottish immigrants.<sup>12</sup> Settlers who arrived in the first era were able to secure freehold grants but colonial regulators changed the requirements for the acquisition of Crown land in 1827 in the hopes of attracting wealthier arrivals.<sup>13</sup> The more affluent who immigrated in the first decade benefitted from this policy; those in the second wave with fewer material possessions or capital at their disposal were

<sup>9</sup> Campey, *After the Hector*, 12–13, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*, 46, 84.

<sup>11</sup> For a recent, and easily accessible, survey of the literature on the Clearances see Eric Richards, *Debating the Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*, 42–3.

<sup>13</sup> Campey, *After the Hector*, 109; Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*, 52.

further disadvantaged by these new regulations. Whether well poised to exploit the new land or vulnerable from the beginning, around 20,000 settlers had arrived on the island from the west of Scotland by 1845.<sup>14</sup>

In his consideration of the meaning of the Clearances for immigrants Bittermann notes the conflicting emotions of hopefulness and grief as Highland Scots abandoned their ancestral homes for new lands across the Empire.<sup>15</sup> His description of competing emotions is supported by Michael Kennedy's analysis of contradictory verses from the 1830s by cousins who had come out from Lochaber to resettle at Mabou Ridge, Cape Breton. John the Hunter MacDonald lamented the going, 'I left my heritage, my mirth remained over there,' while Allan the Ridge MacDonald celebrated this 'land of prosperity where [the immigrants] are now men of worth.'<sup>16</sup> Kennedy goes on to survey popular songs and verse, as well as early local histories, and finds that there was much enthusiasm for immigration, both in Scotland and in the Maritimes. Although sometimes stunned by the enormity of the challenges before them, the settlers spoke hopefully about the opportunities available to them and expressed a consistent memory of the difficulties that had prompted them to leave Scotland.<sup>17</sup> Highland arrivals were situated in a unique position; they understood that home as they knew it no longer existed in Scotland but they had brought with them so many of their cultural traditions, and so many of their family and friends, that they could reproduce and preserve many essential elements of home in this new land. As J.M. Bumstead wrote, 'the Highlander recognised full well that only by departing his native land could he hope to maintain his traditional way of life.'<sup>18</sup>

Carrying home on their backs and in their hearts and minds, the Scots were able to impose their identity on many of the communities of Cape Breton because they quickly outnumbered both those Native Americans who persisted on the land and other European settlers. The busy port of Sydney flourished and, given its proximity to Fortress Louisbourg, possessed a diverse population dominated by Loyalists and their descendents. Acadian settlements around

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<sup>14</sup> Hornsby, 'Scottish Emigration and Settlement', 50.

<sup>15</sup> Rusty Bittermann, 'On Remembering and Forgetting: Highland Memories within the Maritime Diaspora' in Harper and Vance (eds), *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory*, 255.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Kennedy, "'Lochaber no more": A Critical Examination of Highland Emigration Mythology' in Harper and Vance, (eds), *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory*, 268–9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 267–97.

<sup>18</sup> Bumstead, *The People's Clearance*, xvi.

Cheticamp, Isle Madame and River Bourgeois grew and Irish immigrants were to be found in a variety of communities across the Island. None of these immigrant groups, however, could challenge the dominance of the Scots; this was especially true in the rural, western, territory of the island. In Inverness and Victoria Counties Hornsby documents that Scots and their descendents comprised more than 75 per cent of the population by 1870.<sup>19</sup> Given the homogeneity of their communities, the Gaelic language—a key element of Highland culture—was well preserved in Cape Breton through the nineteenth century and Campey asserts that, at mid century, Cape Breton possessed the largest Gaelic-speaking population outside Scotland.<sup>20</sup>

Kennedy, in discussing the development of a Scottish migration myth, spends much time exploring the importance of Gaelic in comparison to English sources and the necessity of looking to the Gaelic record, both oral and written, in uncovering the legitimate reflection of the conditions and attitudes of the people.<sup>21</sup> If Kennedy's imperative to find the Scottish Gaelic history of Cape Breton rings true, it is a challenge reflective of the experiences of the people themselves in seeking acknowledgement of their language. Although the majority of citizens on the island, the Scots were disadvantaged in preserving their language as they were subjects of English rule from the administrative capital of Nova Scotia, Halifax. In an 1845 petition to the provincial general assembly, Jacob Kuhn, the editor of *The Spirit of the Times*, a Cape Breton newspaper based in Sydney, appealed for the publication of agricultural guides in Gaelic. In his petition, Kuhn noted that Cape Breton was 'peopled by a race of men, for the most part from the Hebrides of Scotland, and ignorant of the most simple modes of Colonial Agriculture.' He went on to state that the agricultural pamphlets printed in English were of no use to island residents since English is 'a language with which five-sixths of the population of Cape Breton are totally unacquainted, their mother tongue being the Gaelic and that, consequently, the opportunity of acquiring beneficial information is wholly lost to them.' Kuhn was quick to comment on his reservations about 'cherishing different languages,' but stated that their ignorance of any language except Gaelic should not be a 'crime' or 'furnish a plea for their proscription or for depriving them of those rights in which their English brethren are allowed to participate.'<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*, 121–2.

<sup>20</sup> Campey, *After the Hector*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, "Lochaber no more?", 275–7.

<sup>22</sup> Jacob D. Kuhn to Nova Scotia Provincial House of Assembly, 1845, NSARM, Nova

In seeking recognition of the dominance of Gaelic among the population of Cape Breton, Kuhn appealed to the assemblymen's sense of benevolence and justice. The provincial assembly did not share Kuhn's pragmatic view of the need to assist Cape Breton farmers, however. The Agricultural Committee affirmed that it would be beneficial 'that a large portion of our population might be enabled to read such works in their native language' but the expense of publication should not 'be borne upon the general fund of the Province.'<sup>23</sup> Reservations about the dominance of Gaelic in Cape Breton were demonstrated by others outside the provincial assembly. Reflecting on his 1844 visit to the Maritimes, the secretary of the Glasgow Colonial Society admitted 'I did not visit Cape Breton, partly from want of time and partly from want of Gaelic.'<sup>24</sup>

The importance of preserving Gaelic among the Cape Bretoners was magnified by the low status ascribed to the language in Scotland. Even as Highlanders were departing for North America, public as well as private educational institutions were moving towards English as the primary language of instruction and examination. Although some efforts were pursued to provide Gaelic instruction to young children, educational bodies, as well as Scottish citizens, were driven by the belief that 'English was the language of the future.'<sup>25</sup> This presumption was so strongly held that many Gaelic-speaking Highlanders advocated for English instruction, believing that 'the Highlander who reads only Gaelic [was] only half educated.'<sup>26</sup> J.L. Campbell wrote about the 'extreme political and economic unimportance to which the Gaelic-speaking population has been latterly reduced' in Scotland. Forced to function in English, native speakers in the homeland saw the mother tongue relegated to a 'patois.'<sup>27</sup> The Nova Scotia Provincial Assembly's refusal to fund publications in Gaelic demonstrated the unwillingness of the public sector to respond to the desire of Scottish immigrants to preserve the language of their home, but private enterprise was not so constrained. Gaelic

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Scotia House of Assembly Records, RG5, Series P, vol. 53, no. 32.

<sup>23</sup> 'Report of Agricultural Committee,' 1845, NSARM, Nova Scotia House of Assembly Records, RG5, Series P, vol. 53, no. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Burns, quoted in Kenneth Donovan "'May Learning Flourish": The Beginnings of a Cultural Awakening in Cape Breton During the 1840s' in Donovan (ed.), *The Island*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> Victor Durkacz, 'Gaelic Education in the Nineteenth Century', *Scottish Educational Studies*, 9 (1977), 23.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> J. L. Campbell, 'Scottish Gaelic in Canada', *American Speech*, 11 (1936), 130.

might not be recognised as an official language, but it thrived in this region of the province.

The influence of Gaelic as a language of daily commerce and communication in the nineteenth century was illustrated by the number of newspapers published in that language in Cape Breton or in nearby towns on the Nova Scotia mainland. As early as 1851 a Gaelic-language newspaper, *An Cuairtear Og Gaelach* or *The Young Highland Visitor*, was printed in Antigonish, just across the Canso Strait from Cape Breton. *The Casket*, which included a Gaelic-language column, began publishing in 1852 and lasted for several decades. *Mac Talla* (The Echo) was published from 1892 until 1904 in Sydney and a contemporary observed that it ‘was read by Gaelic speakers all over the world and could be considered the periodical of the whole Gaelic-speaking population throughout Scotland and the Empire.’<sup>28</sup>

Gaelic-language newspapers continued into the twentieth century. Published in Sydney from 1926 until 1933, *Teachdaire nan Gaidheal* (Gaelic Messenger) offered news in Gaelic but advertisements in English. Although written in English, many advertisements still specifically targeted a Scottish audience. ‘It is a well known fact’, touted one example, ‘that a man can talk the grand old Gaelic better in a nobby suit tailored by M.W. Ross.’ The Havelock Bottling Company proclaimed that ‘The Scots are noted for delicacy of taste. Havelock Ginger ALE just suits the Scots.’<sup>29</sup>

The Gaelic community’s ability to support these newspapers reflected the ubiquity of the language on the island in the nineteenth century. During the potato famine that so imperilled rural farming populations in the 1840s the relationship between Scottish agriculturalists and English-speaking merchants was revealed by an exchange in Mabou. William McKeen, of Scottish ancestry but born in Nova Scotia, was an English-speaking merchant who held a position of economic importance on the western side of the island. He was described by R.J. Morgan as ‘the chief merchant of Inverness County.’<sup>30</sup> When one of McKeen’s ships loaded with provisions arrived in Mabou desperate men showed up with ‘empty bags and no money.’ McKeen warned the people that he could not afford to distribute the food without compensation or his own business would be undermined. In response, after having McKeen’s comments

<sup>28</sup> John Lorne Campbell, quoted in D. Maclean Sinclair, ‘Gaelic in Nova Scotia’, *Dalhousie Review*, 30 (1950), 254.

<sup>29</sup> *Teachdaire nan Gaidheal* (Gaelic Messenger) 2 (1926), NSARM, Newspapers, Sydney, Cape Breton County.

<sup>30</sup> R. J. Morgan, “‘Poverty, wretchedness and misery’: The Great Famine in Cape Breton, 1845–1851”, *Nova Scotia Historical Review*, 6 (1986), 98–9.

translated, a 'Gaelic man' exclaimed in dismay in his mother tongue. After his plea was translated into English for McKeen, the merchant ordered his men to open the hatches and to parcel out the supplies.<sup>31</sup> This episode demonstrates both the persistence of the Gaelic vernacular and the economic advantages offered by embracing English. As Morgan argues in his essay on the potato famine in Cape Breton in the 1840s, the most successful merchants on the island were fluent in English and 'the famine re-enforced their economic power over the Gaelic-speaking Scot, and helped to make them his role models.'<sup>32</sup>

The determination of the Scots to abandon Gaelic for English can be debated for there is substantial evidence illustrating the persistence of the mother tongue in public institutions on the island throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Judge James MacDonald, who served as the chief justice of Nova Scotia from 1881 to 1904, oversaw a civil trial in Baddeck that was carried out entirely in Gaelic since neither of the parties involved spoke English. Along with the antagonists and the judge, the attorneys were also fluent in Gaelic. One of the advocates, Duncan Fraser, went on to serve as lieutenant governor of the province. Most revealing is the fact that the court could empanel a jury of Gaelic-speaking citizens, indicating the extensive use of the language among residents of Victoria County.<sup>33</sup>

Churches, both Roman Catholic and Presbyterian, played a critical role in preserving the traditional language of the people through this period. An article published in *Mac Talla* in 1902 documented the commonality of Gaelic as a language of worship. The author declared that thirty three of the thirty-nine Presbyterian churches on the Island held services in Gaelic. Twenty nine of the thirty-five Presbyterian ministers were fluent enough to present sermons in the language. There were thirty-seven Catholic parishes and 'all but six have Gaelic.' Thirty one of the forty-one priests on the island were competent in the language.<sup>34</sup>

J. L. Campbell, who presented the above information in his study of Gaelic in Cape Breton, queried the clergy in 1932 and found that, even at that late date, the language was still strong across the island, although less dominant in the more industrialised sections around Sydney and Glace Bay in the east and, unsurprisingly, in the Acadian communities. As is consistently reported,

<sup>31</sup> Donald MacDonald, *Cape North and Vicinity: Pioneer Families, History and Chronicles, including Pleasant Bay, Bay St Lawrence, Aspy Bay, White Point, New Haven and Neil's Harbour* (Port Hastings, N.S.: n.p., 1933), 21.

<sup>32</sup> Morgan, "Poverty, wretchedness, and misery", 99.

<sup>33</sup> D. Maclean Sinclair, 'Gaelic in Nova Scotia', 255–6.

<sup>34</sup> *Mac Talla*, XI (1902), 53 quoted in Campbell, 'Scottish Gaelic in Canada', 128–9.

he found that Inverness County, in the western part of the Island, ‘was most Gaelic of all the counties.’ There, he found that fifteen of the eighteen Roman Catholic parishes that responded reported that more than 40 per cent of their parishioners were Gaelic speakers.<sup>35</sup>

The use of Gaelic as a liturgical and devotional language reminds us that this was a vital, vibrant, tongue that Scottish Cape Bretoners used in the most routine, and the most significant, areas of their lives. In describing the service of a Scottish minister from the mainland of Nova Scotia who preached in Gaelic, D. Maclean Sinclair quoted a contemporary observer who said that, ‘when he addressed the Highlanders in their native tongue the effect was most striking. With breathless attention, and tears in their eyes’, they listened to a language that ‘awakened the most heart-stirring associations.’ In Gaelic, Sinclair concluded, ‘the preacher had at his command a very impressive and devotional language.’<sup>36</sup>

The experience of attending a Gaelic-language service in rural Cape Breton was described by Charles H. Farnham in his essay ‘Cape Breton Folk’. A local colour piece published by *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in 1886, the article described a canoeing and hiking excursion around the Island. Throughout the trip, Farnham commented on the frequency of Gaelic, lamenting in one case that, upon arriving at a rural homestead in search of accommodation, ‘Gaelic was given us instead of bread.’ In his description of a Presbyterian service conducted in the Highlanders’ native tongue, he claimed that ‘These Gaelic psalms often have an extraordinary effect’ on the people whose voices are united in a way that is ‘wonderfully touching.’ While Farnham may have celebrated the uniqueness of this open-air ceremony in order to sell his story to urban readers, it does appear that the Gaelic language did help maintain the identity of these immigrants from the Highlands and Islands beyond the first generation. As Farnham observed, in the 1880s Cape Bretoners consciously understood themselves to be Scots living in exile. As part of his travels he attended a festival, which he called a ‘Gathering of the Clans’, where residents united to raise money to assist in the construction of a house for a member of the community.<sup>37</sup> The name with which he labelled the event suggested a desire to romanticise Scottish identity, but the communal sharing of resources and work recalls the traditions of the Highland clan and supports Rosemary

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<sup>35</sup> Campbell, ‘Scottish Gaelic in Canada’, 129.

<sup>36</sup> D. Maclean Sinclair, ‘Gaelic in Nova Scotia’, 256.

<sup>37</sup> Charles H. Farnham, ‘Cape Breton Folk’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (1886) reprinted in *Acadiensis* 8 (1979), 92.

Ommer's claim that clan identity and organisation were transported to Cape Breton and persisted beyond the initial generation of immigration. Although the Highlanders had accepted Cape Breton as their new home, they retained many of the traditions and practices of their first home in Scotland.

Ommer argues in her essay that the clan system had been undermined for decades and was finally overwhelmed by the Clearances but that it did not entirely disappear as critical elements were purposefully transported to Cape Breton and, as described in her analysis, onward to Newfoundland as well. She argues that the challenges to clan ownership and identity were so great by the beginning of the nineteenth century that 'the choice for the tacksman and ordinary clansman alike, was to become marginal to the new *status quo* or, for those who could manage it, to emigrate.' The nature and process of that emigration, she asserts, reflected a purposeful desire to hold on to clan identity and traditions. To support her claims, she looked at settlement patterns in Broad Cove and on the Margaree, finding that the majority of settlers in this area were members of Clanranald. Most compelling was her discovery that 71 per cent of the adult males who initially settled the land were related to one another before they departed from the Highlands.<sup>38</sup>

Hornsby's more complete analysis of familial identity and land holding supports Ommer's claims. He found that, as at Broad Cove and on the Margaree, land further south in Inverness County between MacKinnon's Point and Judique was held by related families and 68 per cent of the landholding families in that area had one of seven surnames. These conditions reflected the nature of departure from Scotland. When the *St Lawrence* arrived in Port Hawkesbury on the Canso Strait in 1828, for example, 170 of the 208 passengers bore one of four last names.<sup>39</sup> Bittermann finds that similar connections tied together the men who pioneered the settlement of Middle River. Two of those families, the MacRaes and the Campbells, were from Applecross in Ross-shire and had immigrated together while a third, Roderick MacKenzie, was from nearby Lock Aish. MacKenzie was married to a daughter of Kenneth MacLeod, the fourth of these earliest settlers. According to Bittermann, by 1812 these four families controlled enormous pieces of land along Middle River. 'All subsequent settlers,' he writes, 'would ... have to contest the claims of these families.'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Rosemary Ommer, 'Primitive Accumulation and the Scottish "Clann" in the Old World and the New', *The Journal of Historical Geography*, 12 (1986), 131, 134.

<sup>39</sup> Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*, 76, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Bittermann, 'Economic Stratification and Agrarian Settlement' in Donovan (ed.), *The*

By the middle of the nineteenth century, then, much of Cape Breton was dominated by Scots who clung to their traditional language and practices even as they lived under an English-speaking government. Although the struggle to prosper, or to even survive as during the agricultural crisis of the 1840s, was daunting, 'the relative economic backwardness and isolation of the island allowed Gaelic culture to be established.'<sup>41</sup> The arrival of new economic institutions and challenges during the second half of the century created circumstances that threatened the dominance of the Gaelic language and Gaelic traditions. As railroads and steam ships carried many of the island's youth off to the United States or to other locations in Canada, families were left to occupy what Hornsby calls a 'meager rural niche in a rapidly industrialising world.'<sup>42</sup>

The industrial era did come to the western part of the island, however, as mining concerns grew interested in the Sydney coal seam in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Of lesser quality and quantity than the deposits on the eastern side of the island but still attractive to investors, the coal was accessed by mines at Port Hood, Mabou Harbor, Inverness, and between Chimney Corner and St Rose.<sup>43</sup> The most significant operations were established in Inverness, with initial, unsuccessful, attempts launched in 1865, 1872 and 1877.<sup>44</sup> Fully functional mining and transportation facilities were finally opened by the efforts of William Penn Hussey, who organised the Broad Cove Coal Company in 1888. A Boston native, Hussey was a charismatic and ebullient fellow; J.L. MacDougall, a contemporary observer, said that he 'loved to dance on difficulties.'<sup>45</sup> Hussey travelled across Europe drumming up support for his mining operation and, with funds from Swiss investors, he initiated the construction of the infrastructure necessary to mine and transport coal. This capital investment paid off and the mines employed 300 workers when Hussey dissolved his corporation in 1899. With his departure the mines came under the control of the Inverness Railway and Coal Company, which operated the

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*Island*, 73–6.

<sup>41</sup> Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*, 84.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 203–4.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Campbell, *Banking on Coal: Perspectives on a Cape Breton Community within an International Context* (Sydney, 1997), 29–34.

<sup>44</sup> C. M. O'Dell, 'Men and Methods of the Early Days of Mining in Cape Breton', *Transactions of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy*, 25 (1922), [www.mininghistory.ns.ca/cim/c1922001.htm](http://www.mininghistory.ns.ca/cim/c1922001.htm) [accessed 13 June 2010].

<sup>45</sup> J. L. MacDougall, 'History of Inverness County, Nova Scotia, 1922', <http://www.electricscotland.com/canada/inverness/index.htm> [accessed 15 June 2010].

mines through the prosperous first decade of the new century but was in receivership by 1917.<sup>46</sup>

The introduction of this new industrial opportunity had significant consequences for communities along the west coast. In Inverness the railroad, and the coal industry it served, influenced every community from Port Hawksbury through Inverness. In Inverness itself, which grew from a rural settlement known as Broad Cove into an industrial town incorporated in 1904, the mines produced new economic opportunity for farmers and their sons. A survey of the 1891 and 1901 census for the area that was incorporated as Inverness in 1904 reveals a region still almost exclusively populated by Scots. These census returns, in fact, are so consistent in some locations that the census takers did not bother to provide specific information for individual respondents; instead, the word 'Scotch' is scrawled across the column, indicating that everyone in the whole location surveyed possessed that 'racial or tribal' identity.<sup>47</sup> Religious identity, however, was recorded with care and there was a significant number of Presbyterian Scots in the area when both of the surveys were completed.<sup>48</sup> When the town was incorporated there were roughly 3,000 residents; Campbell indicates that approximately 70 per cent were Roman Catholic and 30 per cent were Protestants with a few Jewish families also living in the town. While Catholics outnumbered Protestants, he asserts that 'the class structure was strongly skewed in favour of the Protestants', who dominated merchant activity, held most of the local political appointments and managed the mine.<sup>49</sup>

Whether Presbyterian or Roman Catholic, the men who went to work in the colliery in these first decades were primarily local and Scottish. A few French and Irish miners were recorded in these census documents, but the vast majority of miners possessed familiar local surnames, lived in families, and were part of economic units that typically included members engaged in farming as well as wage labour. On the eve of incorporation, then, the new opportunities offered by mining were being enjoyed by established families with mining employment being taken up by sons who might have, in previous decades, had to leave the county for employment in the United States or elsewhere in Canada. Unlike Richmond and Victoria Counties, which lost

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<sup>46</sup> Campbell, *Banking on Coal*, 31–2; 40.

<sup>47</sup> Census of Canada, Nova Scotia, Inverness District 1891, 1901.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Campbell, *Banking on Coal*, 34–5.

population between 1881 and 1891, Inverness County's population increased by half a per cent as out migration slowed.<sup>50</sup>

The decade after incorporation was a period of economic prosperity for Inverness as the mines expanded and new opportunities developed. By 1913, the high water mark of the coal boom in Inverness, the mines employed 725 men.<sup>51</sup> For the first time since the Scottish migration of the early nineteenth century, Inverness County became an attractive destination for new immigrants. Cape Breton Scots, having established a new 'home away from home' now had to respond to this subsequent generation of immigrants seeking employment and economic opportunity. While the industrial heartland of the island around Sydney was accustomed to the influx of workers drawn to the mining and steel enterprises there, western Cape Breton experienced a challenge to its cultural and ethnic identity.

The 1901 and 1911 censuses for Inverness and the surrounding areas reveal how the region was being changed by immigration. The earlier census documents a trickle of miners who moved in from other areas of the Maritimes to work in the mines. By 1911, a more significant stream of new workers was coming to Inverness; among these were German immigrants. Unlike Belgian immigrants, who ultimately constituted a significant population in the town, the Germans were generally intermingled with the Scottish population and the location of their homes seems to have been defined by economic conditions and religious identity. For example, John Pettengel and his wife Mary, who arrived in Canada in 1910 from Germany with their four children, lived among Cape Breton Scots from long established families. On one side resided the widow Mary Gillis and her children and mother; on the other were a family of McDonalds. Both the McDonalds and Gillises had been present on the island since the earliest days of Scottish settlement. These particular families, however, were not as economically stable as some of their siblings or cousins might have been. Rather than relying on a mix of agriculture and wage labour, as many established households did, these economically marginal families were entirely dependent on employment in the coal mines or reported no means of support. Mary Gillis was a twenty-eight-year-old widow who lived with her three young children and mother and offered no information about employment to the census taker. Alexander McDonald, living on the other side of the Pettengels, was a twenty-eight-year-old miner who oversaw a house

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<sup>50</sup> Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton*, 189; Census of Canada, Nova Scotia, Inverness County, 1891, 1901.

<sup>51</sup> Campbell, *Banking on Coal*, 39.

occupied by three younger sisters, a brother and their widowed mother. All of these families were Roman Catholic.<sup>52</sup>

Along with these Germans and the Cape Bretoners of Irish and French heritage who had intermarried with the Scots and settled in Inverness, the presence of a Syrian miner and his family also illustrates how a new arrival might be integrated into the primarily Scottish community. Joseph Charles was a Syrian native who had immigrated into Canada. He was twenty six when the 1911 census was conducted and was employed in the mines. His wife Lucy, of Scottish heritage, was twenty four and they were the parents of four young children. The children's nationality was identified as Syrian based on their father's status, but each of them bore a common Scottish or Anglo name. Like the Pettengels, they lived alongside Scottish coal mining families who shared their religious identity as Roman Catholics.<sup>53</sup>

Inverness was unique in that the vast majority of immigrants who came in the first decade of the twentieth century were from Belgium. The 1911 census for the town documents the number of Belgian miners who had moved into the village to take up positions in the colliery. Like the Scots who had settled the Broad Cove region a hundred years earlier, the Belgians came in family units. Different from the Scots who had been able to access free or low cost land for agriculture, the Belgians faced a pre-existing population who controlled the resources and the political and social institutions. The Belgians were able to secure employment in the mines, but were limited in the other economic activities they could pursue and in the locations in which they could reside. The 1908 edition of *McAlpine's Nova Scotia Directory*, which provides information about residents and businesses in the various towns of the province, lists the earliest of these Belgian miners and their families as residents in the community, but illustrates the persistence of Scots as the dominant force in commerce.<sup>54</sup>

The Belgian immigrants were settled together in a section of Inverness commonly called 'Belgium Town', an area also home to a small population of German and French immigrants and, later, a refuge for the few Italian immigrants who settled in Inverness.<sup>55</sup> There were 190 Belgians residing here in 1911. While a few young men lived in boarding houses, the vast majority

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<sup>52</sup> Census of Canada, Nova Scotia, Inverness District, Inverness Subdistrict, 1911.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> *McAlpine's Nova Scotia Directory, 1907–1908* (Halifax, 1908), 1467–76.

<sup>55</sup> Sam Migliore and A. Evo DiPierro, *Italian Lives, Cape Breton Memories* (Sydney, 1989), 79.

of the recent immigrants were organised into thirty-eight families. There is no surprise to the discovery that the men were all employed as miners or labourers at the colliery. Like the population of Inverness as a whole, the Belgians were divided between Protestant and Catholic affiliation. Twenty two of the families were Roman Catholic while nine followed the Presbyterian faith. The rest were called 'free thinkers,' an affiliation not applied elsewhere in this district. The arrival of these Belgian miners was notable in the community. When the census was conducted they made up 12 per cent of the population of the sub-district in which they lived. They were 6 per cent of the entire population of the town of Inverness.<sup>56</sup>

The arrival of the Belgian miners and their families certainly shaped Inverness, but the number of recent immigrants in the county was insignificant when compared to changing conditions on the eastern side of the island. Around Sydney and Glace Bay, the industrial centre of Cape Breton, foreign workers were arriving by the thousands during the 1890s and early 1900s. As mentioned earlier, the coal deposits on the eastern side of the island dwarfed those in the west and the number of workers needed in the mines, and in the subsequent steel industry developed there, was much greater than was the case in Inverness County. As the mines were expanded in the 1890s, Sydney and Glace Bay grew exponentially. In 1901 Glace Bay ranked forty-sixth in the list of most populated cities in Canada; by 1911 it had leap-frogged to twenty-second. During the period of most rapid growth, Sydney and its close environs grew by 40 per cent in one two-year period. The vast majority of this expansion was due to new arrivals; some came from the hinterlands of Cape Breton and Nova Scotia and from Newfoundland and other territories in the Maritimes. The most significant population increase of the twentieth century, however, was created by newly-arrived immigrants. More than 50 per cent of the population of both Sydney and Glace Bay in 1910 had arrived in the previous decade. In some communities around the mines and the mills, more than 60 per cent of the residents were immigrants. While Inverness experienced the arrival of Belgian and German miners, their numbers paled in comparison to the thousands who were remaking the more developed areas of industrial Cape Breton.<sup>57</sup>

Port Hood, just thirty-five kilometres from Inverness, experienced the coal boom in a way that set it apart from both Inverness and Sydney. As

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<sup>56</sup> Census of Canada, Nova Scotia, Inverness County, Inverness, 1911.

<sup>57</sup> The History of Mining in Cape Breton. <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/coal/impact/tcomunit.html> [accessed 24 June 2010].

both the smallest of the commercially-significant mining regions and the most homogeneous before the boom, Port Hood was uniquely positioned to resist challenges to its Scottish traditions. Unlike Inverness, which was home to significant populations of both Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Scots, Port Hood was dominated by Roman Catholics, a dominance that was unchallenged through the coal boom and beyond. More than 80 per cent of the 1,489 residents enumerated in the 1881 census reported that they were Catholics; when the census was conducted in 1891, 89 per cent of the district responded that they attended the Roman church. By 1901, the population of the area had grown so large that the area around the collieries had been set apart as a new sub-district aptly called Port Hood Mines. In both this more rural area and in Port Hood proper, 86 per cent held that faith. Although the community would experience an influx of immigrants who came to work in the mines in the first decade of the twentieth century, 74 per cent of Port Hood residents still indicated their allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church in 1911.<sup>58</sup>

The population around Port Hood was defined by its Roman Catholic loyalty, but also by its primarily Scottish identity. Originally settled by New England Loyalists in the 1780s, Scottish Highlanders began moving into the area within a decade. Many came north from a Scottish settlement in Judique which had been created by immigrants from Prince Edward Island twenty years earlier. By 1818, when the first census was taken, the Scottish community was firmly established; the enumeration revealed that one half of the 170 local residents was Scottish.<sup>59</sup> The Scottish population grew throughout the nineteenth century and their numerical and cultural advantage continued to increase. By 1871, 70 per cent of the inhabitants of Port Hood were Scottish. As was the case from the beginning of the settlement, Irish immigrants and their descendents were the second most significant population, boosting the Roman Catholic identity of the region.<sup>60</sup>

As the numerically-dominant population, the Scots wielded enormous influence in this region of Cape Breton. By 1776 the English colonial government had officially named the village and its companion island Port Hood after Lord Admiral Samuel Hood. The Scots, however, called it Seastico, a Gaelic corruption of *Justaucorps*, the name given to the island by French

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<sup>58</sup> Census of Canada, Nova Scotia, Inverness County, Port Hood and Port Hood Mines, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911.

<sup>59</sup> 'A Brief History of Port Hood', <http://porthood.ca/history> [accessed 14 June 2010].

<sup>60</sup> Census of Canada, Nova Scotia, Inverness County, Port Hood, 1871.

soldiers when they quarried stone there in the 1740s and 1750s to build Fortress Louisbourg. This place name continued its evolution as English gained status on the island. After evolving from French to Gaelic it emerged in an Anglicised form—Chestico, which is still in common use today. The annual historical and cultural festival in Port Hood is called Chestico Days for instance.<sup>61</sup>

English settlers arrived in this region of Inverness County first and claimed some of the richest land in the area for themselves. They, and the descendents of Irish pioneers, prospered due to their early arrival and authority over developing economic and political institutions, but Scots were quickly able to compete and to influence local and provincial decisions. Cape Breton County, the administrative unit that had previously served the entire island, was broken up into three smaller counties by the provincial assembly in 1835. The western-most of these counties, which included the heavily Scottish areas from Judique up to Inverness and beyond, was originally called *Juste-au-Corps* County. In recognition of the dominant Scottish population and culture of the place, the name was changed to Inverness County in 1837.<sup>62</sup> The proposal to do so, according to a 1922 local history, was driven by William Young, the county's first representative to the provincial assembly and a 'cultured Scotsman to the backbone.'<sup>63</sup>

English and Irish men continued to have positions of significance in Port Hood, the administrative seat of Inverness County and an economic hub of western Cape Breton due to its exceptional harbour but Scots gained positions in the professions and in political life. Local histories and genealogies note the number of Scots who secured prominent places as merchants, politicians, physicians and attorneys. These included men like John H. Jamieson, born at Broad Cove, who served as clerk of the Municipal Council and in the House of Assembly in Halifax, and Donald Gillis, another attorney who was also a merchant in Port Hood and Judique. Sir Donald Cameron MacDonald, also a barrister, was treasurer of the Municipality of Inverness County and was made a knight of St Gregory the Great by Pope Pius XI. He married the wife of the postmaster of Port Hood and their children included a physician, a school principal and a son who eventually took on the position as postmaster himself. Physicians such as Duncan Campbell, born at Margaree Forks, practiced medicine but also engaged in politics; he was a clerk of the

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<sup>61</sup> 'A Brief History of Port Hood?.'

<sup>62</sup> Charles Bruce Ferguson (ed.), *Places-Names and Places of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1967), 307–8.

<sup>63</sup> MacDougall, 'History of Inverness County, Nova Scotia, 1922'.

county and served in the provincial assembly.<sup>64</sup> *McAlpine's Nova Scotia Directory, 1907–1908* documents a commercial landscape dominated by these Scottish merchants and professionals.<sup>65</sup>

The Scots were secure in their positions of authority and influence when the coal boom reached Port Hood. Exploitation of the local seam was pursued in erratic bursts in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. First attempted in 1865, there was much hope that the deep water harbour at Port Hood would make transport of the coal efficient and affordable. Internal financial troubles undermined that first effort and more than a decade passed before new development was pursued. In those intervening years, however, the port had silted up due to damage to the protective neck that connected Port Hood Island to the mainland and it was necessary for rail transport to be developed to make mining profitable. Efforts to complete the rail line were successful but attempts to open a mine were sporadic and it was only in 1906 that a company was established that enabled the village to experience a sustained period of productivity. That mine, which was worked from 1906 until 1911, created the greatest demand for labourers yet experienced—employing 250 in 1911.<sup>66</sup>

Like Inverness and Sydney and Glace Bay, then, Port Hood experienced a coal boom that created new opportunities for labourers seeking employment. Here, however, new immigrants found few opportunities and, instead, local men dominated the colliery. In the 1871 census of Port Hood no man reported that his employment was in mining; instead, most were farmers and a few were fishermen. In 1881, 237 of 1,489 residents stated that they were farmers and many of the young men responded that they were ‘farmer’s sons.’ Once again, no one was labelled as a miner. Even in 1891 no miners were noted. It was only in 1901 that mining began to be reported as a profession; in that year there were ninety-one miners. There were individual immigrants from Russia, Belgium and France included in this category, but the vast majority of the miners were Roman Catholic Scots born in Nova Scotia who were living in families. A number of households included a father who was reported to be a farmer, an elder son labelled a farmer’s son, and a younger son identified as a miner. There were more than twice as many farmers as there were miners and 123 young men identified as farmers’ sons.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> P. W. Smith, *The Smiths of Cape Breton: History of Port Hood and Hood Island With the Genealogy of the Smith Family 1610–1967* (privately published, 1967), 247–51.

<sup>65</sup> *McAlpine's Nova Scotia Directory, 1907–1908* (Halifax, 1908), 1477–80.

<sup>66</sup> Campbell, *Banking on Coal*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Census of Canada, Nova Scotia, Inverness County, Port Hood and Port Hood Mines, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911.

With the expansion of mining in the 1900s, personal identification and comprehension was transformed and the 1911 census reveals a profound change in the way the community, and especially the young men, understood work. In that enumeration, 252 miners were identified but only two farmer's sons. Young men who previously presumed their future to be a choice between the family farm or emigration to employment in the US or Upper Canada now comprehended themselves as wage workers in the local colliery. This transformation was possible for them, in part, because they did not have to compete with outsiders to secure these new positions. By 1911 the population had grown to 2,499 in Port Hood and Port Hood Mines. Of those residents, five were recent English immigrants, two had come from both Ireland and Belgium and solo immigrants had arrived from Spain, Germany and Denmark, respectively.<sup>68</sup>

The census is an imperfect record, however, and it does not preserve the memory of immigrants who arrived and departed in the ten-year period between enumerations. Other immigrant miners did come to Port Hood in the 1900s, but the welcome they received was mixed and, for some, the experience was tragic. The explosion that occurred in the Port Hood mine in 1908 was devastating to the local community as six men from the surrounding farms and settlements were killed. Four Bulgarian miners died along with these local men. The community's reaction to this loss illustrated the inability of new immigrants to be successfully integrated into the tightly knit Scottish society. When the local newspaper announced the explosion it proclaimed 'six men and four Bulgarians' had been killed.<sup>69</sup> The community did not actually deny these recent immigrants their humanity as the comment suggested, but their treatment in death spoke to the inability of this closely integrated and homogeneous community to incorporate outsiders.

When the coroner, a physician named R. St John MacDonald, prepared his report for the inquest he carefully described the injuries each victim had received. The six local men, a Beaton, a Campbell, a Gillis, a MacKenzie and two MacDonalds were each listed by their full names. The Bulgarians were identified by their employee numbers and their last names only. In his analysis of the cause of each man's death he referred to the Cape Bretoners by their names but to the immigrants as 'one of the Bulgarians' or 'Bulgarian

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<sup>68</sup> Census of Canada, Nova Scotia, Inverness County, Port Hood and Port Hood Mines, 1911.

<sup>69</sup> 'Port Hood 1908: Horrific Mine Explosion Kills 10: Coroner's Inquest brings Tragedy to our Hearts,' Chestico Museum and Historical Society, Port Hood, Nova Scotia.

no. 503.<sup>70</sup> Charles Stewart, the mine supervisor who was called to give an account of the rescue efforts, reported that they ‘found the body of a Bulgarian’ and subsequently found ‘another Bulgarian.’ His comments about the native Port Hood miners were different, however, and he identified each of them by name, even referring to Lauchlan Gillis by his nickname Lauchie.<sup>71</sup>

Stewart’s observations are particularly significant because he was not a local man himself. A Scottish native, he had immigrated to Nova Scotia after working for fourteen years in coal mines at home. He came to Port Hood after labouring an additional five years in other mines in Nova Scotia and had been in the community for just two years. Although not a native Cape Bretoner, his shared Scottish heritage connected him to the local community and he had become familiar enough with the resident miners to know their nicknames, suggesting he enjoyed a camaraderie not always experienced by mine overseers.<sup>72</sup> The Bulgarians, with whom he shared the immigrant experience, were much more foreign in this place than was he, a fellow Scot.<sup>73</sup>

The disconnect between the Bulgarian miners and the local miners, made so obvious in death, had been experienced in life as well. An elderly woman whose father had worked in the mine and assisted with the rescue effort reported in an interview in 1980 that the Bulgarian miners were regularly teased and tormented by the locals who hid their tools and belittled them for their language and customs. The Bulgarians protected their picks and other tools by hiding them in the mine and, according to her memory of the popular wisdom of the day, it was the flame from a Bulgarian miner’s lamp that caused the explosion. His lamp ignited a pocket of gas when he slipped into a side chamber to retrieve his gear. Distrust of the Bulgarians as outsiders continued after their deaths. A controversy over whether their bodies should be buried in the Roman Catholic or Protestant cemetery developed. There was doubt about their Catholic orthodoxy so some advocated burying them in the Protestant graveyard. Alexander Peterson, the father of the woman who recounted these events, insisted that the Bulgarians were Roman Catholic and should be buried in the church cemetery. Given uncertainty about their status, they were buried outside the boundaries of the graveyard and a message was

<sup>70</sup> ‘Port Hood 1908: Horrific Mine Explosion Kills 10: Coroner’s Inquest brings Tragedy to our Hearts’, Chestico Museum and Historical Society, Port Hood, Nova Scotia.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Davey William and Richard MacKinnon, ‘Nicknaming Patterns and Traditions among Cape Breton Coal Miners’, *Acadiensis*, 30 (2001), 79–81.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Port Hood 1908: Horrific Mine Explosion Kills 10’.

sent to Rome asking for guidance. In 1910, in response to directions from the Vatican, the fence around the cemetery was expanded to include the graves of the deceased miners, although no stone marker was established.<sup>74</sup>

The Bulgarians experienced the difficulties of integrating into a tightly bound society, but it has to be noted that, in death, they were also treated with respect and concern by members of the Port Hood community. When Charles Stewart and the other rescuers came upon an injured Bulgarian miner they worked desperately, if unsuccessfully, to revive him. Alexander Peterson was deeply distressed about the inability of the mine operators to contact the families of the deceased Bulgarian miners and compensate the widows and children for their loss. He was also an ardent crusader who insisted that the Bulgarians had to be buried in their faith. The Scots of Inverness County were not unwilling to treat outsiders with dignity, but they were more able to extend generosity in death than in life.

Although the challenge to Scottish identity in Inverness County was less significant than it was in the region around Sydney and Glace Bay, western residents joined others in advocating for the protection of their culture and patrimony in this era of industrial development. As early as 1879, when the mining boom was just beginning, John A. Morrison, a member of the provincial assembly from Victoria County, gave an impassioned speech in the house in Gaelic demanding that the language be offered in island schools.<sup>75</sup> When writing to a Gaelic scholar at St Francis Xavier College in Antigonish in 1901, Alexander MacDonald bemoaned the lack of interest the people demonstrated towards Gaelic language and culture and noted that ‘sufficient for the day is the evil thereof’, a dramatic lament for a past in which the Scottish vernacular and tradition were not challenged by new ideas and experiences.<sup>76</sup> As industrial and transportation changes brought the people of Cape Breton into greater and more intense contact with outsiders, a purposeful effort was initiated to preserve the Scottish tradition. In 1922, an organisation called the Scottish Catholic Society of Canada began to publish a journal called *Mosglaibh* or *The Awakening*. Founded in 1919, the magazine was printed in Sydney and offered essays such as ‘The Celtic Voice Not Waning’ and ‘Our Scottish Catholic Heritage’. It presented about half of its essays in Gaelic. In a survey of the history of Scottish Catholics in the old

<sup>74</sup> ‘Amelia Cook: The Port Hood Explosion’, *Cape Breton’s Magazine*, 26 (1980), 35–6.

<sup>75</sup> Maclean Sinclair, ‘Gaelic in Nova Scotia’, 255.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander MacDonald to MacLean Sinclair, 9 January 1901, NSARM, MG 1, vol. 2660, no.326.

world and the new, the Rev. J. W. McIsaac mourned the passing ‘of those grand old men and women, the sons and daughters of those who had to leave the Highlands.’ He continued on to write, ‘what a sturdy race of people they were who came to this country from the islands and glens of Scotland’ and celebrated their ‘vigorous nationality.’ His view of their descendents, however, was less enthusiastic:

We are fast degenerating into a race of imitators. That is one of the greatest faults of the youth of the present day. They are fast becoming imitators of the vicious habits and unchristian ways and manners of the votaries of wealth and luxury. They seem to have entirely forgotten the priceless heritage of faith and character left them by their grand old grandfathers and grandmothers.<sup>77</sup>

‘Faith and character,’ ‘honour, virtue and patriotism’, all were characteristics associated with Scottish identity by these descendents of the Highlanders who settled Cape Breton a century earlier. Refugees from a homeland that could no longer support them, the Scots succeeded in creating a New Scotland, as the name Nova Scotia recalls, in the Maritimes. In Cape Breton, especially, they found a land where they could establish their language, traditions and culture. When challenged by the arrival of outsiders during industrialisation, rural residents along the west coast of the island struggled to prevent their communities from being transformed by the arrival of newcomers. Advantaged, ironically, by the weakness of their coal reserves and the cost of underwater extraction and transport, the coalfields in Inverness County simply did not draw the numbers of immigrants who were attracted to the industrial region around Sydney. Many of those who did come as individuals were quickly entangled in the Scottish community and saw their own traditions and customs eroded. A Polish miner who lived in Port Hood in 1901, for example, married a Scottish Cape Bretoner and lived alongside her family. His children, although identified as Poles by the census taker, spoke Gaelic as their first language.<sup>78</sup> A significant population of Belgians did immigrate in families to Inverness but little evidence of their presence exists there today. The release of the 1921 census in 2012 will present the opportunity to determine how many of them stayed in the county after the boom went bust. It is possible that, like the Bulgarian

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<sup>77</sup> Rev. J. W. McIsaac, ‘Our Scottish Catholic Heritage’, *Mosgladh*, 1 (1922), 29.

<sup>78</sup> Census of Canada, Nova Scotia, Inverness County, Port Hood, 1901.

miners who rest in unmarked graves on the edge of St Peter's cemetery in Port Hood, their labour and their lives disappeared in the face of Scottish nativism, Cape Breton style.

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