

XI.—*Coal Mining in Pictou County.*

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(Read May 21, 1896.)

When the settlement of Halifax was decided on as the preliminary step to the pacification of Nova Scotia, and its future development by a race of settlers more congenial to English rule than those relinquished by the French Government, the home authorities seem to have been guided as to the ownership of the minerals by the conditions of those domains in England most directly vested in the Crown. This is noticeable in the short term leases at first granted for mining coal; and down to a few years ago in the granting of gold leases for a term of twenty-one years, equivalent to three of the customary leases of seven years each, and renewable, as was the practice in the Duchy of Cornwall.

It does not appear that the French engaged in any mining operations in Nova Scotia, except in coal mining along the outcrops of the seams in Cape Breton, and a reported washing of the sands of the Avon River for gold.

Owing to the natural exposures of the seams, the Cape Breton coal first attracted attention. From the Treaty of Paris in 1763 to 1784, several desultory leases were granted to mine coal, but were not sanctioned by the Lords of Trade. From this date until the annexation of Cape Breton to Nova Scotia in 1820, with the exception of a few short leases, the mines were worked on government account, and this state of affairs continued until the advent of the General Mining Association.

It is stated that coal was first detected on the branch of the Middle River in Pictou county in the year 1795. This would probably be one of the outcrops of the Albion seams on McCulloch's Brook. In 1801, coal was mined in small quantities from the McGregor seam. In the year 1807, John McKay mined coal from a three feet seam on his father's farm near New Glasgow; the sales in the year 1815 amounting to 650 chaldrons.

In this year a lease was granted him by Sir John Sherbrooke. Becoming indebted to Messrs. Hartshorn and Boggs, of Halifax, in the sum of three thousand pounds, they were obliged to take possession of his mine in 1817, and to seek an extension of his lease.

About this time coal was found at several points in this coal field, and applications made for leases. Mr. E. Mortimer, of Pictou, finally secured a lease for twenty-one years to work the main seam on each side