

Transcription of Interview with John Cameron Matthews.]

[83 years old.]

1909-11 strike. 'This strike took place because they wanted to get the union organized.'

Field full of soldiers.

there would be fights in the streets.

bull-pen: scabs kept at the racetrack.

some scabs from Cape Breton after the defeat of their strike.

'Everybody had a roaring good time...fights, parades....'

--sees the 1909-11 strike as one which organized the union and secured the checkoff

the shows were running just the same.

'You couldn't stand on Main Street in a crowd, like three or four people. The provincial police come on and dispersed you.'

--had a friend who was standing on his own doorstep--had a flat on Main Street--police came along and told him he'd better get inside.

'I went to court different times to hear the arguments.'

--his father was an official--manager. no.2.

He went out to the bull-pen with him one day. stables used as housing for scabs. house torn down for vocational school.

he remembers one incident in particular about the strike: Earl Paul's father-- after the strike ended, he came into his father's office and said, "Could I get a week off, a week off?" He wanted to go fishing! After 22 months!

'I used to roam around town. In fact, I started a strike in school because the strike was on. Somebody was going that wasn't supposed to be....Oh, they'd strike at anything....' ---he joined the strike against the scabs' children going to school!

it didn't last very long.

'But they were pretty rough times....But, as I said, at that time, there was more money in the town than there was when we were working. Because the union was pouring this money in to get organized.'

--impressions of J.R.Cowans: '...He was great friends of my father, but one of those with an attitude--you know what I mean?--'just so far'....You couldn't be cozy-cozy with him, or anything like that....'

next superintendent Malcolm Blue. then Maxwell. then Nicholson.

his father started when he was 12 years old, to work in the mine. got his manager's papers and shot-firers papers. born in Dominion, Cape Breton. 'The first time he came to Springhill,...he had to fight to get his pay. That's how rough it was....' [Had to fight in line].

--he started out as a machinist. he was 62 years old when he quit. knew Fred Hawker. Harold Mackinnon worked in machine shop and became mechanical engineer. [quite a phenomenon, the rise of the machine shop as the entré to better things.]

started work in 1903, when he was 18. but started before that, as an apprentice. then left for the west to make his fortune. on the Harvest Excursions. two or three months. 'I rooted around out there for two or three months, then I got a letter from my mother: 'You'd better come home.You've had enough fun.'

--had a lot of fun.

worked in Limerick, in Souther Saskatchewan.

made longwall machines in the machine shop. machine shop for both the railway and the coal mine.

spent \$1200 building a special longwall machine--then they closed the mine. quite a lot of autonomy and freedom to plan.

'Earl and I used to be great friends when we worked in the shop. We did some funny things together....Used to get into all kinds of pranks. I remember one time Frank O'Leary worked there--...he was a good machinist too. Well, we had all these axles, from the cars, great big axles, they'd weigh about 460 lbs. or so. They were all lined up there. And Frank goes to put them on the lathe. And I said to Frank, 'Get them all off the box...' I had two hammers in my hand. I said, 'I'll play the treble, you play the bass.' ---hitting them to make the noise of treble and bass with the hammers.

'We had quite a lot of freedom.' --machine shop.

--a very up-to-date machine shop. brick building still standing.

12 working in the machine shop, that's with helpers too.

never paid any attention to the union.

spent thirteen days down the mine repairing a hoist.

1891, East Slope blew up.

'The mine went down about three or four hundred feet. When I had the whooping cough, my father took me down there--the air seemed to cure the whooping cough. They used to take the kids down there that had the whooping cough.'

--it cured him of his whooping cough. People with asthma were alright while they worked down the mine.

father was mgr. of the mine while he was in the machine shop. then he got to be safety inspector after that.

--tricks pulled on new men in the machine shop: enticed into putting water on the wheel to "cool it off"--really the joke is that the water will fly all over the new man in the shop.

apprenticeship of--? worked as a mechanic and then worked as a mechanic. 90c a day. 10-hour day.

after the harvest excursions: "I come back with \$22 and a hole in my pants."

labour strife in the 1920s.

'It was kind of threatening, to see them fellows.'

all his old houses burned down.

married 1929.

after looking at conditions underground, I said, "That's not the life for me."

'I used to fight with the foreman a lot!... I was always in trouble anyway. I'd made a suggestion for him to do this and he'd counteract it with some other things....'

--he found his foreman asleep when the superintendent was coming around and pretended to be studying a blueprint--woke him up and saved him from a tongue-lashing. --you'd fight with the foreman, but you wouldn't let anyone else above him do anything to him.

both Baptists father was Methodist.

his father voted Liberal.