

Transcription of Interview with Merrill Johnston.

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b.1905. born at Salem, the other side of Maccan.

worked at Chignecto--father worked at there while he was born.

father was a coal miner all his life.

after he got married he was a steady miner.  
worked Joggin mine, Five-and-Ten.

--born at another Salem--down on the shore there.

his father lived to be 1895.

--at the age of 89 he was still using a power-saw out in the woods.

--family mostly into lumbering at the (first) Salem.

--only five or six miles for the mines.

--Maritime R. and C.Co.--first big mine was Chignecto.

'It was real gassy. It was a hard mine to work in.'--memories of Chignecto mines.

'It was the pitch of the seam, around....'

'Out there, it was almost like that there. (gestures) You had to  
--you take like your boxes, half-ton coal, they had to put a middle board  
in to stop the coal from rolling out, coming up the slope. It was that pitched.'

moved to Road End when he was five--and lived there until they got  
married.

'If you got a change for a better job, a higher pay job, they'd keep  
moving. I imagine there's times he'd work in three different mines  
in the run of a year, you know.'

--also worked in Cape Breton.

--quite a few of the fellows from Joggins went to Burchell's mine down in C.B.

--Merrill worked with his father, loading--he'd mine the coal out and  
Merrill would load the boxes and push it out the slope.

--they had to dig five tons a day and they got \$5 a day--when he was  
17 or 18--around about 1922 or 1923.

--working for his father: 'I imagine they fought a bit, I don't know.'--  
comment added by his wife!

wages for loaders \$3 a day--company paid the loader. but he would still  
be working with his father--not for him.

--he went to get his paper and then he and his father worked as butties.

--worked with his father for three or four years.

--had electricians papers and examiners papers and overmans papers.  
--went to night school.

on school on Joggins: "Oh, very rough."

--had to walk from Road End down to Joggins on the Pit Road--walk a mile  
and a half to school. there was no water--go to the neighbours to get  
a drink. 'And them outdoor toilets wasn't fit for a dog to go in.'

--one of the graduates of this school has risen to a high position in one  
of the Canadian banks--name of Coleman.

--even has a chauffeur.

'If you got one spelling wrong, you were up--you got the strap there.'

--12 or 15 children lined up in the front of the class--she'd go through the lot of them. one particular teacher.

--had Grade IX. (Merrill).

'If you didn't go to school, you went to work.'

--family owned his own house at Road End. Used to be a boarding house.

--Merrill had four children.

--her grandmother was German. settled up around Lower Cove. children were all over the place.

--went West once on the Harvest.

--he remembers that it was rough working on the Harvest, too.

--he went out on the Harvest two years--around 1918 and 1919.

--open drain on both sides of the street.

--remembers the strike.

--strike started 1939.

(might make mention of cherry cakes and coffee. the massive hospitality of these people! so many sounds of me drinking coffee and munching ~~coffee~~ <sup>cake</sup>.)

--estimates strike three or four months. Ox Fife running the mine.

--remembers the cutter bar. kept adding longer gibs on them until they had six foot something. Men wouldn't do it. Co. playing with the machinery. had 27 feet you had to clean up. Ox Fife said: "Oh, when they get hungry enough, they'll go to the end of the gib looking for a loaf of ~~bread~~." <sup>bread</sup>

--they did get a little more money, but he was right.

--seams here, 24 to 26 inches--height of coal. --in Cape Breton, they take six or seven feet.

--average in war-time 3. something tons per man; in Cape Breton 2½ was the most they could get.--proud about productivity of the local workers.

---carried three shiftmen for every productive worker.

--here only about a third of the men were on dead work.

--started working out at the Maple Leaf--near Beech Hill. Joggin Coal Co. ran this mine.

--N.T.Avard, lived in Amherst. (Should try and locate Avard descendants).

'You had six feet in...'

--handle all this work laying on your side and shovelled.

--man from outside said, "God gave me two feet and he didn't mean for me to work on my knees." --a story told by Merrill's wife.

--most of mines when they started used open lights--when they got down 1000 they had to shift to electric lamps.

--Merrill started out with a carbide lamp.

--sight of a flame in the mine--a fire ball--'most beautiful sight', just like a rainbow--the first year he was married. broke his finger ~~in~~ this.

--started out in a small mine called the Bush Mine. only 15 or 20 people in it. that's where he started to work. he'd be about 18 years old.

--Bush Mine was owned by the Victoria Coal Co. had a little upright steam boiler. he used to load for the miners. boiler used to leak. water guage would be down--start the fire and put the coal water in it. take the chance of an explosion every single miner.--insane way to have boilers!

--This mine was in River Hebert.

--Bush Mine was worked bord-and-pillar.

no horses down in the mine--no horses in Bush Mine. Boxes were hoisted up, empties on the high road and full boxes on the lower road.

--pushed boxes by hand.

--pushed boxes over 2000 feet by himself.

'You can do what you want, I don't care. I'm through--I'm going west.'  
--that's what he said when he quit pushing these boxes at the Bush Mine.

--worked at the Bush Mine about a year. \$2 something a day.

--then after the Harvest he went to the Maple Leaf. here he worked with his father. loading coal for his father.

--at the Victoria Mine--horse would start and the boxes would be loaded and ready to go. 'And you could hear--they had three-link chains between each box. And they were slack there and he'd start up. Clink, clink, clink. And if that went over six you couldn't make him move, he wouldn't haul them. But if he could hear those six, he'd haul those boxes out.'

--horse could ~~xxxx~~ count!

--about 2 years with his father in this mine.

then he went to the River and out to the Victoria--this is where the horses were. he was there a year or so.

--an "awful lot of gas" in that mine.

~~xxxx~~ most anyb0dy could do brattice work.--most everybody understood brattice work.

--he took one of the fellows jobs at the Five-and-Ten after the explosion.

about a mile from Road End to the Five-and-Ten.

up about 7 years in Ontario. with his brother.

Five-and-Ten was about the most dangerous mine in this district.

Five-and-Ten was about a mile down.

coal at that point had deteriorated. shale and stone in it.

seams here are at such a pitch that you have to take the machines down to the bottom of the wall and bar it in there and cut up.

most of his work in the Five-and-Ten was machine running.

--he theorizes the Five and Ten was called this because they were running it cheap to get it started--run without much capital.

--some people say it was \$10 spent for \$5 worth of coal brought up.

--no idea why the Green Crow was the Green Crow.

--year five-and-ten closed down was 1939.

p-Green Crow. water would freeze on the machines. you'd go down in your raincoat. you'd lie right in the water. you'd be cutting. water run right over you.

'You was wet...I had to sit home about half an hour before you get your shoelaces off--they were frozen right solid.'

--after awhile the mine dried out--these really bad wet conditions applied to the first lift. she got drier as she got down.

--had to work in these conditions because of the Depression. 'I think that took twenty years off my life....'

he was underground manager at the Green Crow.

lived with Marge's parents for a year. then rented.

Hottentot (Mitchell St.) and Black Track.

--they once had 1800 workers with the Maritime coal co.--counting everybody.

co. houses--both sides. 25 co. houses. four families per house.

'Nobody dared walk down those two streets there on a Saturday night.'

'Mostly our own, rather than the foreigners, that was causing the trouble.'

everybody paid into the church at the mine--this was still going on.

Bill Taylor's idea to add the church to the check-off.

--co. store was running when he was living here.

would give credit to the miners where nobody else would give it to them.

his father had five acres.

raised practically all their own vegetables; whole barrel of carrots.  
two pigs--kill one early. when cold weather came, kill the other one--you  
could keep it. always had a cow, one or two hens, and a horse.

her father was a sea captain.

vessels coming in in his time. used to come in from the Valley and unload  
a vessel full of apples, and take a load of coal back to the Valley.

--this was a hard-drinking town. used to have four bootleggers there.

--used to pay the teachers through donations from the bootleggers.

lot of them used to make it--"A real good brew, too." charged 25c a quart.

strong on baseball in this part. "We had one of the best teams around here  
at one time."

--priest here was a very strong sports fan.

--Belman0--she was a McGee, he was Spanish.

--quite a lot of distinction between managers and others. the wife of  
the manager: "She thought she was the queen bee."

there was a class distinction--manager of the big mine. but other people  
just ordinary.

miners would pay 25c a week --to Dr.Cochrane. that covered your family,  
all your medication too.

he wanted a raise, but they voted him down.

\$10 per child for delivering a baby.

--he came from Parrsboro way.

'We always felt we were a little better than the Jogginers.'

--rivalry just among the younger ones.

--not a big factor with the grown-up people.

--in River Hebert there are two or three cliques. Joggins is more friendly.

~~MR. JOHNSON~~

MR. JOHNSON

Bush Mine 15-20 people  
 Victoria Coal Co.  
 push box for miners.

18 years c. 1920  
 R.W. Hebert.  
 a year. \$2 a day.



Maple Leaf. loady coal.  
 Joggins Coal.

regular coal

c. 1922.



Victoria Coal Mine.  
 River Hebert.  
 gassy. about a year.

c. 1923.



Five and Ten.  
 Went to Ontario

c. 1924



BOSTON MINE (Strathcona) 1927 gassy.

c. 1931

Five and Ten



Green Crow.

c. 1939

a lot from Minto. dirty war.

different timbering. techniques very diff here.  
 every three feet - all way up + down wall.

productivity higher.

when Joggins Coal Co.