

Transcription of Interview with George Sharpe. (Anheist)

b.1917. Lower Maccan. his father was a coal miner. still a coal miner till he retired, round about 1965.
 --had no pension at that time--had to wait till he got the old age pension.

--each fellow had a strip--each miner have a loader. paid by the box.

--his father's father born in Lower Maccan. great-grandfather-born in Lower Maccan. The house of his great-great-grandfather is still standing there, but he wasn't born there.

--one of the early settlers there. his father was the first coal miner of the lot. Raymond Sharpe.

--his father born 1884.

--three explosions: Bright Light, Victoria, and the Five-and-Ten.

--the Dog Nail pit.

--how the Bright Light got its name: sinking the slope for the mine, so someone brought in a great big arc light in the mine. This was called the 'Bright Light.'

--mine put outside the bankhead,

--same as you would name a ship or something like that.

--his father was mining before he was born.

Alexander Stewart, his grandfather, used to be underground manager at the mine. his step-grandfather.

--they used to have horses down in them days, to haul the boxes.

--there used to be lots of rats in the mine--on account of the feed for the horses. rats used to gnaw around the horses hoofs.

--strange occurrences associated with gas explosions: some men killed, others just injured by the same streak of gas.

afterdamp afterwards--the poison gas.

--his father had to go 7 miles from Lower Maccan. father used to get up in the morning, get on all horse. stable the horse in the barn, work in the barn. all the coal mines usually started around 6 a.m. father would come back home. aftern he used to walk. when he 'got prosperous' he drove a bicycle. In 1928, finally, he got a car.

--father carried on the farm at the same time. 'We didn't do farming as a livelihood. Farming was a pasttime...or a supplement.'

--just had a couple of cows, a horse, pigs, hens, things like that.

days when there wouldn't be any work in the coal mines, except by government order.

government order: coal for railroads, etc. govt. would put in one day's work into each mine and divide it up.

\$32 for seven days--1920s.

--35-acre farm. you'd raise your own food pretty much. 'About the only thing they bought'--100-lbs. brown sugar, big bag of oatmeal. always had beef he killed in the fall, and pork. Buy all kinds of barley--brought up on barley soup. Own apples, carrots, Mother didn't work on the farm. When mine was only working two, three days a week--when the work was most plentiful, your work was done. Slack time during the summer in the coal mines, good time for work on the farm.

--right after school there were farm chores to do.

--his family was protected against the hard times.

--you always had the one-day 'government order'.

--miners on relief during the Depression--had to go up to the Game Sanctuary up the Head of the River and cut trees and plant bushes and trees, etc. they gave vouchers at the store. if you didn't show up for work, you didn't get the voucher.

--his father worked at the Strathcona, Bright Light, Dog Nail--up in the woods in the left-hand side of Strathcona, Jubilee Mine.

got 5c an hour for working at a sawmill--this was George's first job.

mines five or six miles apart.

costs of bringing up the coal--you might as well go along and bring up another slope.

had to leave a pillar between the various mines.

'Nobody likes mining, but it's something you just have to do, and you get used to it.'

--starts to compare mining with a 'trade', then reconsiders!

'No guarantee whatsoever, you just worked from day to day.'

'They never knew if the company would pay up, or if the coal would run out.'

--steps in R.Hebert--ten foot gap in a seam--just looks as though it were sheared off. very abrupt end. you'd have to sink a new slope or else brush around it.

--brush around it: shaving it off. cut up to intersect with the seam.

every seam on a 45° angle.

--pillars 40 X 40. Jubilee. pillars for support. Fundy Mine--pulling pillars. worked one place in the Fundy--18". you laid on your shoulder.

coal cutting machine just like a giant chain saw. they'd undercut the coal this way.

--machine coal cutters came in around before the First World War.--his dad was machine coal cutter and he always had to work nights.

(this must mean World War 2?)

shot-firing had to be done at night when no men was in the mine.

--there would be no work if no shot didn't go off.

--careful counting of shots. if one didn't go off, one didn't go down.

three children in the family.

carbide lamp was "almost a manufacturing plant in itself."

--doesn't think the unions amounted to anything.

--company closed down a mine over 2c a box for coal.

small percentage of the miners had their own farms. six families out of twenty in around Lower Maccan. --in his school days.

never remembers coal mining at Maccan in his time.

--had a siding in to the Vicotira Mine.

two men left in the Kimberly still today. mine caught fire after explosion-- never reclaimed the bodies of these men.

'I heard my people talk about it.'--about these bodies still in the mines.

--his uncle killed by a fall of stone, in the Victoria.

--came into Amherst on a Saturday night--loved to shop there.
--bargains to be picked up at the "Two Barkers."

tea, sugar, flour--major things to be purchased. most of the rest of the food could be raised themselves.

--his mother was from River Hebert. from a coal-mining family.

--Victoria Coal Mine--remembers great big monstrous fan.

never too much rowdiness around River Hebert. his father neither smoked nor drank.

Rufus Gates. he used to have coal stoves, have copper hot water tank alongside of it. put beers in the tank.

--one man (a story fondly retold) kept his liquor in a chamber pot-- wife would put in cooked donuts and they would look like little turds.

mounted police never patrolled River Hebert at all.

--four churches in River Hebert.

--Fred Hennessey, the local horse trader.

--Duncan MacEachran, ran the hotel, theatre, and bowling alley.

Father Currie said to take that piece of land for a church in River Hebert.

--if father Curry died in that Church, he would have died 'Right between two thieves,' just like Christ. (Story told).

--Sharpe is a Baptist himself--went to Baptist church in Maccan.

--had a church at Lower Maccan--same Baptist minister made rounds at R.Hebert, Lower Maccan and Maccan.

Crown Prince of Ethiopia comes to Lower Maccan.

Albert Bowles the blacksmith; Harold Bowles ran the garage. R.Hebert's blacks

he worked about a year in the coal mine. 'You'd get down there and the coals are all wet and damp and clammy ...I've seen those miners come out of the coal mine, time and time again, and they'd walk two miles home. Their clothes would be all wet and their old overalls would be all froze.... They'd just be like stove pipes.' [Pants would be frozen.]

--there isn't a change house or a wash house to this day.

--his father come all the way clean from R.Hebert--in his clothes.

--water dripping in some places in the mine just like a leaky roof. 'It's really not a good life at all.'

--stone would have to come off the top when the seam got to be too low to get through.

burning duff banks in the River Hebert--Joggins area. a kind of sulphur smell.

Strathcona: in the space of 2 miles there would be four miles.

father died 1973. mother died few years before that--1968.

--miners loved to dress up after work--fancy dressers once they got their mining clothes off. hang around River Hebert.

--Sharpe *cites Boutlier on Spayhill - No.2 Bump Poem.*