

Transcription of Interview with Walter O'Rourke.

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--nickname "Pick"

--got the name because, as a young lad, he got into the pickles at the Miners' Picnic.

b.Feb.13 1903.

father was a coal miner too. originally from Cape Breton. Down around Lingan. his whole family moved down here.

he would have moved here early on.

--came from down around Donkin.

'They used to call them razor backs years ago.'--from Lingan area.

--father worked in the mine 63 years.

started carrying lights for the miners, at the age of 9 years old.

father was dead, had a brother and sister. no other income.

'If you could write your name, you were all right--you had enough education.' [getting job as a youngster in the mine].

--made 45c a day for a ten-hour day.

--he would be 103 the 24th of May. 1876. b.1876. would have started work in 1895.

--lived 23 years ago--at the age of 75.

--some O'Rourkes settled down Joggins away. Walter had four brothers and four sisters.

--Walter is suffering from miners' lung.

--remembers about the PMA and Moffatt. 'It didn't matter who it was, as long as it was a union.'

--strong belief in unions in this family.

1909-11 strike. Remembers scabs. Fellow on horseback--provincial police.

--policeman hit with a salmon can, with ice in it--hit the policeman and knocked him right into the ditch.

--coloured people: "We thought they were second-class people...."

--not especially strong feeling around Springhill.

--children would holler at the strikebreakers.

during the strike his father went out to work at a plaster quarry--down here --Nanpan way somewhere.

had a quarry there. --j y mother was 'just a worker.'

--asked about his mother--what she did--when he registered for looking for work. 'Look, I don't know [what you'd call her]. She cuts my hair, she used to half sew my shoes, she used to make my clothes. I don't know if she's a tailor, a shoemaker, or what she was--or a breadmaker. You had a big family and that's what you had to do in them days.'

--got cut up a few times--you don't call them injuries here. --'They'd cut you up, and that's it.'

--'You get after a while so you're case-hardened to it and you don't mind it.'

--had 100 chickens.

--they got rather tired of chickens--were fed up with them.

--big long shed full of chickens--raised by her mother.

--gave a lot of them away to friends and relatives.

--sell eggs--10c a dozen. didn't charge wilows for the eggs.

after work at nights, 25 or 30 gather round the house. his father was happy ha a lark when he had a bunch of people around him.

they had a little house--it looked like a country store in the basement.

--huge volume of preserves, strawberries, blueberries. His dad would have jugs full of eggs. get deer and moose in the woods--loved to hunt. (and a good source of meat).

--kids love' to go out picking berries up in the fields.

Joseph O'Rourke--was his father's name.

his nickname was Peacock. used to walk like a peacock--walked so straight. 6 ft. 5 3/4 tall.

--not a hard time to work in No.2--good height in that mine.

--he went down to Cape Breton when they were building the coke ovens--used to carry so many bricks for the ovens.

--made them carry only four bricks.

--some relatives from Cape Breton, some came to Springhill.

--was in the mines at the age of 14.

--carried lights and turned the fans (his first jobs)

--there was no stopping turning the fan. --if you stopped for a minute and changed hands they'd yell "Turn on that fan." and they didn't call you 'sweatheart,' neither.'

--boys would organize themselves so they'd trade off one job for another.

--boys in a lift would trade off. they'd alternate to avoid monotony on the job.

'I could go to any job in the mines and do it.'

--tried to say a little fellow who was killed wasn't on the job--McNeil from Cape Breton said that any job that helped production was their job. job classifications among the young boys not that rigid!

boys go on strike on their own. 'Well,yes.'

--miners were getting tired of boys going on strike all the time. so they planned a sneak 'strike' to get back at the boys--but the boys caught on and went on out with them!

--this happened in No.1 seam--about 20-25 years ago.

'Everybody was the same, you know....Nobody tried to take your job.' (Attractions of the mine). (Aids that there were no good jobs to take).

--reflects on factory work: "Everybody was pulling again' each other."

--all these Springhill fellows who came out of the mine came back as superintendents--superintendents of buildings.

--he went to the States one time during the 1920s strikes--worked at a summer resort.

'We thought it was a Communist thing. He had quite a row here with them.'--on the A.I.I.

--charged with fighting at the AWM headquarters. 'Threw one fellow out a window.'

--O'Rourke a singlerer in the march out of town.

--attack on the AWM Hall--one fellow attacked him with a shovel--one fellow told him afterwards that he hid in the AWM.

--'They was getting bigger and bigger....It was really Communist.'

'We weren't having no Communists in it. We were having a hard enough time getting a living.'

--O'Rourke was always a Labour. he was USP, Reconstruction.

--he's been everything but not the old-line parties.

'Archie Ferris was a neighbour.'

--still vote his way even after he switched.

--after that he voted in all the labour parties.

--young Scumble had quite a job in New Zealand--he has a government job in New Zealand.

--doesn't know where Jack Scumble went to.

all his brothers went down the mine.

stay at home until 25--got married and got out.

--bake pies for to be ready by the time you got back from Mass. 'Well this morning, Alen Campbell--he got killed in that explosion in No. 1--he come in and Anna had baked two pies and put them in the oven. And she said, 'You watch them and take them out at a certain time.' And Alen just came in the house when I was taking the pies out. 'What are you doing? Where's Anna? 'In Church.' 'What are you doing?' 'Oh, well, I thought that since Anna's in church I'd make a couple of pies.' He went down the mines and told everybody, he said, 'Oh, Pic up there, he's an awful hon-packed son-of-a-bitch, he said, he's up there baking pies.' 'Yep, poor Alen thought I was baking pies.'

Father Doody christened him and married him.

'Did he wallop us kids. He come on to us.'

--doesn't recall him taking a side in labour disputes. 'When I was grown up, I give him a wide berth.'

'I used to sneak in church, and sneak out, so I wouldn't have to go near him.'

--miners themselves cut the rock for the Catholic Church--it's all hand-cut rock.

belonged to Knights of Columbus.

never miss Church.

'Drink--that's all we done. That's all we learnt. It was one of our pastimes.'

--A.A. group started here by O'Rourke and his brother.

--have quite a hall on Pioneer Street.

--Doc Hayes was his mother's brother.

--"He was a great labour man."

--got hitting the booze. booze has "ruined" a lot of good men."

--no mining in and around the mine.

--heard his father talk of J.R. Cowans.

--remembers his wide-horses.

Alec McLeod.

--miners would load coal and put stone on top of it--that would go to the stone dump. people who lived in that district would go and pick a ton of coal there in 15 minutes. Deliberately set it up this way.

--got caught with the coal. he got reported to Alec McLeod.

'Every one of them gets ten, twelve, fourteen ton of coal every year....'

--McLeod knew all the people who were living off the coal from the lump--and accepted this! just shrugged his ~~shoulders~~ shoulders when company police brought up offenders who had been at the lump.

--bootleg affair--mounties going to come and arrest everyone.

--scare of the Mounties. --a lot of people were "aid" when the mounties were due to come.

--Mounties didn't come that day at all.

--long description of bootleg mining.

'I can't understand....I'll tell them, I'll say, 'This is the scabbiest town in the world', imagine a bunch of miners putting these fellows in there.'

--huge crowd--only seven raised their hands when asked, 'Who'd go back in a mine?'

'If you're a fighter, you lose out sometimes.'

--Doc was a strong CTF man.

--one of Doc's sons is a janitor in the Post Office.