

Transcription of Interview with Vincent Ward.

Q. Can you tell me about the jobs you did first in the mine? A. I shoved down coal. Two miners dug the coal and I shoved it down for four hundred feet. It was too flat--it wouldn't run. And I had to shove it, you know. 45c for a ten-hour day....

I started to work 1893....When I first got work it was in the park, they give me the horses, right, to make the horse for the race-track, and I dumped one load of ashes and I was so little I couldn't get up on the cart. And I took it to the barn and went in the pits.

Q. What did your father do? A. My father was police when I was born in Oxford. And he moved to Springhill Junction and went station master. Then he come up to Springhill and was station master. But a big box fell on his instep and broke it and he had no more work. Our family lived in them days was not too well off. You see more dinner times than dinners. Them were "the good old days." There was a family there--Chapman....They asked him how he was making out, "Oh fine," he says, "we've got bread and molasses for breakfast, bread and molasses for dinner, and we change for supper and have molasses and bread." Them were the good old days.

Q. Where was your mother born? A. My mother was born in Tatamagouche.

Q. Can you tell me all the jobs you did in the mine? A. I can tell you quite a few. I done all kinds of work except driving haulage engines. I drove horses in the mine and looked after them, I carried timber, I dug coal for many years, I loaded coal, I trapped doors, I drove horses, carried timber to the levels, last thirty-five years. I couldn't get no time off, they used to want me to work Sunday too. After the pit blew up, there was a fellow, he said, "Don't never take that man away from the timber, let him do the timber, because nobody will ride the trip if he don't timber the level." And they used to take me away, and I lost my in 1927-- they took me up the wall, the men in the long wall, when to get out--the place was coming in. And I couldn't hear sound or nothing. But I was there so long I knew what was going on.

Q. Were you ever injured? A. The only injury I ever had anything to do with, was when I was done working, I went to the waiting head, I was handed a door to go out, and I went to go out and my piece can went on my hand and caught the door-- and all this big bunch of men behind me give me a shove, and the piece can went in my ribs and took two ribs off my back bone. They put a great big plaster on me, the doctors. And I'd sooner have the broken ribs. When I'd recovered, they poured iodine in the cut....

Q. [Working as a trapper boy.]....there was nothing to do. No, I had no work to do, just sit there, and when the driver come out, I'd see him coming, his lamp, you know? And sometimes they wouldn't have no lamp, the driver, and he'd always be wanting to hand my lamp out. Driving a horse, while his horse would be on the run. Maybe he'd hanging onto his tail, going through the door....jump the horse at the bottom, horse would do the jumping himself after he gets acquainted. Don't have no trouble, after he gets acquainted, with a horse....

Q. It must have been very strange for a small boy to work in the dark. A. No, I was hardly ever in the dark...I was down under 16,000 feet. And it was nice down there. No sunshine, no rain, no snow--just dust flying. No. All the old fellows I used to work with have all gone away. Died off....

Q. Do you remember the lodge of the P.W.A. Were you in favour of the P.W.A.? ...A. I belonged to the United Mine Workers of America. 1910, there was a two-year strike. 1910 and 1909....Well, I left here, and I went up to Bathurst, New Brunswick, to work in the woods. They were getting iron ore up there and they wanted the railroad cut out to get the iron ore. And I worked there, cutting out. That was Bathurst, New Brunswick, 1909 and 1910.

...[Remembering the soldiers of 1909 and 1910]. They put me on the police force and I walked from Main Street to the Slope, back and forth, on the flat. They put me on the force. Other fellows--put the scabs inside, jumped the fence and go over. I didn't bother--I let them to and do what the hell they like.

[recounts a long story of a grievance involving someone asked to slew on two sheets. "You can scab as much as you like, but I'm U.M.W." "I put it in the Lodge and I got my shift."

[wonderful how relatively minor case of Vince Ward and his shift is retold, fifty years later, with great pride and feeling!]

Q. Do you remember J.R. Cowans? A. Yeah. He was head man when I started. Yes. They have a vocal [sic] school out there now where his home was. His place is all tore down. He done nothing, only drive racing horses, pleasuring around all the time. Oft times he would come to the West End and take my father for a drive to town or wherever he wanted to go. My father was acquainted with him. Yeah. J.R. Cowans. I think he went to Montreal or something. Yes, I remember him. I'll tell you something about J.R. Cowans and "the good old days." There was an old man, Donald McKay, he was lighting lamps and putting the checks on when the trip hauled over. And if your lamp was out, go to him and he'd light it. Donald McLeod was running a chain, 19, 26, 32, you understand? Then were main bottoms. 1900, Mr. McKay was working. He had a daughter and she was working at J.R. Cowans' home. Up come Donald McLeod, he hopped off the rake, he near got caught. You old man let out the jacks too far when he got up the slope, and he pretty near got caught with them. And he flew off, and talked to the old man: "What you let the boxes out so far for?" And the old fellow, old Donald, said, "Go to hell." He went home and he told his girl was working for J.R. Cowans, told him. He rung up J.R. Cowans-- J.R. Cowans rung up and he says, "Stop Donald McLeod's lamp. Stop it, don't give him the lamp. So when he wanted the lamp he couldn't get it." Three or four days went by, he went down to get an order for his lamp, and they give it to him. "Will you apologize to the old man, old Mr. McKay?" "Yes I will," he says. And the morning when he went down off a whole rake of men, you know, he went over and he says, "Mr. McKay?" "Yes, Donald, what is it?" "I told you to go to hell." "Yes you did, yes you did." "Well, you don't need to go." Them were the good old days, weren't they?

[tales of hunting rabbits in the woods with an "old chum", Jack Glover, who is now dead--deep emotion expressed about him.]
[his chum from Chignecto.]

Q. Did you play any sports? A. No, no, I never got into any sport. I never played ball or anything like that. When we was 18, we had to pay the town two dollars for taxes. I never could get two dollars. The hotel come first. And I went in there for rum. And it took my two dollars off--I didn't have anything to go over to the town hall. There wasn't enough left. Every Saturday night. So one Saturday night I didn't take no rum. I went up into the town hall and I paid the old man that was running it--it was Charlie Allbon's father--and old Charlie Allbon, I paid him my taxes. And he looked at me and he knew damn well I was drinking, all the time. And I went down and I held my head pretty high in the air--"all paid up"--Jesus, a policeman came down the road. "Hi Vint." "Hi Gord"--Gord Haveley was the policeman--he come down and he talked a little while, and he says, "Vint, I have to arrest you." I didn't say "What For?", I don't know what was going on. So he runs me in. Upstairs he goes in the town hall, "I just arrested Vincent Ward for his taxes." "Well, let him out, let him out, that man paid his taxes." And that's just the way things were run. Old Charlie says "Let him out, let him out." I didn't tell Gert Hetherley [?] that I'd paid them or nothing.

Q. Was J.R. Cowans well liked? A. I think he was, I think he was. There was nothing going agin' him that I know of. I wasn't too big at that time. I had a chum, Davey Cole, and his sister married Fred Boran. And one sister married Charlie Sygmund, and most of the time he worked for J.R. Cowans driving horses and looking after horses, stables. There was a big barn right back of the house. As far as I know he was pretty well liked. He would visit around the mines on the bankhead, mostly. Every second day, anyway. He'd make it a speciality for to visit these places.

Q. Two families... [Fourteen in all, seven boys and seven girls.] [Had a nice garden all the time in his house at the top of the hill.]

Q. Did all your children go into the mine? [A. Three boys went into the mine. that's all.]

[all the family married. Q. How many grandchildren? He can't count them! The fellow I worked for was my father-in-law. His grandfather. We went to Bathurst, New Brunswick--we stopped and got our supper, our supper cost 5c. ...

...

Q. Did you every go to school? A. Yes, I think so. I went to school.... I got grade 2. I wasn't a little angel. Most all the boys with bare feet, you know, them days. Some had boots. There was a couple come from the old country. They were going up Main Street from the West End. Boys washed themselves as best they could and combed their hair, girls dressed all in white with long paper hats. Painting the school called water red. When we got all ready for the body of the march. At recess I went out behind the school and two coloured girls come out.... I got them behind the school, and they painting the school cold water red, and there was a half a bar sawed off full of cold water paint, and I painted them red. And they cried. And when I went in school the teacher pulled me in and it was a foot long. Beat me and the blood run on the floor, took me into the master and he beat me and the blood run on the floor, he wrote a letter and I took it home to my father, Geez, he near killed me. And after the pain stopped, I sent word to them that if they killed me right now, I says, I'll never enter school again, and I never did. I never did. I used to jump the fence and get a big mouthful of gum. And I used to snap at the teacher. I used to snap at her all the time, I had her up a tree, snapping gum.

...Some of them horses in the pit used to be dangerous. You had to watch them. If you went in to put the collar on them and [], she'd come over and drive you in the timber you know, squeeze you. And fellows would think and sharpen a stick and put it ahead of them, when they went in and when they'd come over again, that sharp end, boy, she'd pile up against it....

[Much more interested in the hotel and his rum than politics.]

Q. Did many workers come to Sprinbhill from outside? A. There was quite a few come from the farms, country--yes. Smiths, Bosses, Gilroys. Mostly Gilroys, from outside. Around Rodney, Wyndham, them places....

Q. How about foreigners? A. The foreigners got the break. I went down to two pits, they called them 6 and 7. And I worked in No. 6. They give me work. "Vint, we wants you to build a turn-out for the trip, to haul in 45 boxes." "OK, I said, I'll give you a man, I'll give you Wyatt McPherson, he's timbering around here and there, he's getting \$4.15. I took the job and we worked hard, him and I, ...day and night. Art Phillips...he died the other day. He owned a great big place in the foreigner. He came in... [Complains about the price the two fellows got.]...

[the boss complained about the price of the contract. he didn't want to take the work. he wouldn't work it again like that.]

Q. Do you remember the Scott Act--The Law would arrest People for selling liquor? A.... I was after liquor a long time myself. At nights you'd go wake people up to [?], you know. I don't know if there's... Never had a taste since 1970.... Liquor ain't good today like it used to be. It was dandy one time. You'd get a quart of rum if you wanted to have a good time, and you'd get a quart of rum, you'd take a milk bottle and dunk it in the milk bottle and it comes out nice and fast. Three drinks to a quart. That was the way. ... [Someone] He went into Rory McDonald's, Rory's selling beer, he says, "Give us some beer," so old Rory flashed out the beer for him, and then old Rory went to the door and opened it and looked and out and he said, "It looks like rain." "Oh," the fellow said, "this goddam beer tastes like rain."

Q. When did they bring in the longwall system in the mine? Did you like that better than bord and pillar? A. I don't know what year they brought the longwall in.... About 1925.... Bord and pillar was good.... Sometimes with the longwall the miners wouldn't dig any. They'd just be there for to shovel it on. They had a machine, you know, that would cut in and they'd get that all cleaned out and then they'd put in wood packs, hard wood, all the way along the wall, for four hundred feet. Then this machine would go up again and these men would clean it all out and they didn't do much digging.... I thought it was pretty good. My butt and I had a place where we were going to draw a pillar, we drove in and there was no boxes, and he stood here, there was a boom that went out here, about three feet, and there was a prop here under the boom. And he was standing under this three-foot. "Alright, Vince, come and get your box." I went out, I left him and went out. I didn't get my box. On the road-- "boom", the whole thing come in. Covered him up. Great big stone. I went in on the run and I took a piece off and the boss said there was over half a ton in it. And I took that off. But it took six men with a big stick to raise the stone, and I pulled him out from under. He was a big man, I pulled him out from under. George G. Brown was his name. He has people here living.

[Son comments about his father: "He was broken up, really broken up."]

...the first one that got killed with the cutter, was [Melas?] Melanson...that's the top level, come to second level, McKay and Jewles was killed with that same cutter, and when we went down to the level where me and him was, it fell on him. He was driving a motor in the face they called them--heard tell of that? he had a cap with brass buttons on, I got his cap and I laid it on the running boom, and as far as I know that cap is laid there now. And that was 1926. Yes, he was killed 1926.

[George Brown was a mine official.]

He was a good fellow, we was together over ten years. He was a good fellow.

Son: "He was pretty well broken up."

A.[On the UMW and how he feels about it:]...[Cecil Colwell]...he knows that anything I can do for UMW, I'm right there with the bells on....That's pretty good, that union....I worked in Stellarton for a long time. I was there working when the Titanic went down. You heard tell of that? That's 67 years ago, last April. April 14th. They went down April 14th.

...I went from Bathurst to Springhill, then I went down through to Stellarton. His mother took sick and went in the hospital, and I come back...Springhill, 1913 or 1912.

[Wife died 1913].

Q.Did you stay in Springhill during the war? A.Oh, I was working handy to a fellow, he said, "I'm going to sign on," I said, "By Geez, I'll go with you. I'll sign on too. Peter Macdonald, Herritt Road. We come in to the army right down here....Peter went ahead of me and signed on. I was waiting for him to come out, to go in. I turned around, "Did you go in and sign on yet?" "NO, I'm going in now." "No, you're not, you're not going in." "Well," I said, "my buddy's just gone in," I said. "We're both going overseas." "Well, you're not going. They want you at the town hall. And I'm glad I got you in time." I went to the town hall and Peter come out, and I said, "They wouldn't let me sign on, Peter." "Wouldn't they?" "If I'd known better, I wouldn't have signed on either."--because we was together all the time. I went to town hall, they said, Vint, we stopped you from going overseas. You'll do a lot better and it will be better for everybody if you stay here and dig coal. And they need the coal. And it will be just like going overseas." So I didn't get a chance to go over....I didn't get over, anyhow.

Q.Did it take a long time to become a skilled miner? A.I don't think. If you had the beef on you--that was all that was necessary. [Long time men who loaded earned less than men who dug.]

Q.Do you remember any fights about "local stone"? A.No, two or three times they took me out of the mine for to watch the stone, people would get forty five cents a box--well, they'd dock that box, if they was so much going in it. Two or three times I was taken out of the mine to watch the pickings going in the screens. If they put wood and stuff in the box of coal, they was supposed to hold a ton of coal each box?

[duff bank is still burning: shows how much coal was thrown out with the stone.]

A woman was here one day--"Did you know my father?" "Oh, yes, I knew him." Doc Hayes. This woman's from Amherst. "Oh look, I'll tell you something about Billy "Doc" Hayes, her father. There was ten empty boxes in the East Turn. They wanted them boxes out of that turn and put them over west. They were going to repair the East Turn, chain her, hook onto them ten boxes and drop them in west....so he took them above the points and they stood there. When they were going up to the points, Somebody hollered, "Look out, everybody, there's a [] uncoupled along that rake. Anyway, the coupling didn't break. And the rake stood there for a second or so. Billy "Doc" Hayes, up he goes, put his back agin' the box and his foot agin' a prop in the rib. "Alright, chain runner, back that rake down and take that twisted coupling off." And he was holding ten boxes on 65 degrees. You know how much he could hold! It couldn't be done!...A man with a strong back and a weak mind"--that's all he got in the mine. They said, "Look at that man up there--an awful strong back and a weak mind, look!"

Q.Was this William Hayes of the UMW? A.That's right, UMW. They used to send him away. One time they was talking in the pit ...and they said, "You were in the pit an awful long time, Vint." Billy Hayes said, "He wasn't in the pit ahead of me!" "Was you in the pit ahead of me?" [Hayes] I said, "I don't know. So I told him when I started. I said, I don't know you was ever in the pit or you started her up." [?] and I knowed all about it, see, but I kept that under me hat. Billy Hayes, he was one of the UMWs, yes.

...he had pretty good learning [Hayes].

Q. Do you remember a strike in 1925? A. They was strikes just a lot, but just what year I don't remember. Yes, they stopped quite easy, you know. Didn't take much to turn them back home.

[Ward would get 25 cents per child. cut wood in the woods to burn.]

[does not recollect or know of J.B. McLachlan--has "heard tell" of him but nothing clear.]

Q. Were there any socialists in Springhill? A. [To son] What was the name of that bunch that went over here?....

[Son: remembers the marching of Harlan Pettigrew, "I was afraid."]

[Son remembers bumps:] "This bump, I would go out, just as a kid, to the fence and watch for him to come out out of the lamp cabin. I knew his walk. And soon as I would see him, I would run home. 'He's alright!'"

Q. Were you in any bumps? A. (Laughs) I was in quite a few. But I didn't get hurt. No, I didn't get hurt.

[Mrs. Ray made a tape of him too.]

[His son comments that he was quite the miner in being able to mine the coal. If you don't watch, there's faults in particular area of the mine--bumpy district. Bumps: "That throws the coal out and breaks it." You got a lot of loose coal.]

Q. When did you get married? A. First time, 1920...was it? I wastwenty years old.....

[Son speaks of his father's upbringing: "He had a hard time, he grew up in a hard way....But all through it, I think he was a good worker. He has a good reputation among the people...."]

[Notes supplied by son.

Vincent Ward's father was Thomas Ward, drill sergeant-major in Leicestershire. discharged and lived in Oxford, c. 1850.

He was a shoemaker in Springhill. Son born in Stellarton during a big trouble (I.E., Vincent Ward's son.)

Ward started his working life at driving a dump-cart for the race-track--too small--had to be lifted up onto it. He hauled ashes for the park.

One of 11 children.

Had had trouble with drink all his life but looked after his family well.

They owned their own house.

Started work in 1893 at nine years old.