

Transcription of Interview with George Burton.

b.1892, 13 May. b.Springhill. present address 4 Victoria Street.

mother belonged to Brockley, just below Oxford. father belonged to Mabou, N.E.Margaree. worked on the railroad a lot.

came to Springhill around the 1880s.

small house on Junction Road. lived there until he was married, in 1929.

mother had 13 children, raised twelve.

he was the sixth youngest.

his father worked tracklaying and timbering in the mine. company hand.

member of the PWA.

'We come out on strike in August 1909, and the UMW came in then.'

[on the 1909-11 strike] 'Oh, that was the best time of my life....We used to go fishing, hunting, cutting wood in the woods in the wintertime...trap around the wood in the summer-time....'

got to grade nine. 'I didn't grade that year, so I went and applied for a job in the coal mine.'

Both parents opposed to his getting a job in the mine.

Q. What did they say to you? A. Oh, I got the job, and they couldn't say much more.

started work in the mine when he was 13. his first job was 'opening an old canvas door to let a horse and his driver go through.'

'Oh, all you had to do to open the canvas to let a horse to go through. He could go through himself.' Was paid 50c a day.

had to work two weeks steady--you got 11c of a bonus.

pretty dark in the mines.

pretty common practice--"there were lots of other boys the same."

pulling the rag, working in chutes, shoving down--"put a canvas around your bottom and shove the coal down with your feet."

--put canvas around your bottom to stop wearing out the arse of your pants.

"Pulling the rag, in one place in the old 3800, in the North Slope, we used to pull them long rags of canvas, about 25 feet long, hook it onto your belt and haul it up to the chute there, where the miners were digging and shovelling their coal back. And we load up them rags and ride them down--tip them all up like a sack of oats, only twice as long, and go down over them sheets...."

'Used to have a bar about 40 feet above the bottom, and when we hit that bar--we used to have a lamp hanging there--we'd grab that bar and let that thing go on without us.' --rolling pretty fast.

--pretty rough work. 'Our backs used to be skinned raw, hitting the timbers.'

--be around 15 or 16 years old then.

after the big strike, I got a job back and started driving a horse. In the West 3800 level...Used to run in the box then. Got his papers for mining, and went mining.

Became a miner in 1912.

19 years old when he's a second-class miner.

Oh, we had to do some awful scrounging, I tell you. We used to have a cow, a pig, hens....We had about an acre of land down there. We used to get a little hay off it. Father used to have quite a garden in, potatoes, everything like that. We get along all right.

family pretty good Presbyterians.

"Oh, they had a Presbyterian minister come here--he was against the strikers. People didn't care a hell of a lot about him."

"A lot of the strikers--the older fellows--they went down to the Joggins, and they were working down there. Other jobs--they built a dam down there at the Junction...."

"The old man went to the Joggins...."

father worked seven or eight months in the Joggins.

[on the scabs brought in by the company during the strike] "We used to have fun with them fellows at night. The scabs--we called them-- they had Cowans's horse barns where the park is now, where the mines park is? Way back there? Stable there....Them places was full with these here scabs...."

The scabs used to come up to the Royal Hotel to buy their liquor, and one thing and another, and the miners beat the hell out of them. Saturday night, they used to run a special train out to the Junction to take these fellows back to their homes for the weekend....They'd come back on the Sunday night and they used to have to walk back from the Junction. We used to catch them coming over the big dump down there and put the rocks to them."

--lot of fellows from all over the place, not just Italians or Europeans.

--one or two of the scabs stayed at work.

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broke his hip in the war.

back in May, 1919. spent a month fishing before he went back to work.

mines down the Junction Road then.

'Oh, it was a dandy place to work,' he says of No. 6-7. [NO. 6] --one of its biggest attractions was that you could walk out of it.

sometimes down there only five or six hours.

was on yardage basis for cutting coal--then they put them on output. cubic measurement, they called it. that's the way they started it in No. 6. Wasn't too long after they got into pretty good coal. They had to go through quite a few troubles--stone? first. Then got into pretty good coal--and then went on the tonnage. on cubic basis when the coal got troubled.

on longwall at the last of the No. 6 mine--didn't last long. worked bord-and-pillar quite a long while.

'Did you like longwall better than bord-and-pillar? A. Well, longwall was quite easy. You had too many men for what the coal used to produce.... They used to cut the longwall in them days, with the machine. And the coal was steep enough to run on sheets. When they were cutting the wall, we'd come behind them and clean the coal up and lay the sheet. We got 40c a sheet. It only took about five seconds to put one down.... Iron sheets. They were about 2½ feet wide and 7 and 9 feet long.... These were just flat, sheets. ...

'It was a dandy mine to work in. It wasn't deep.'

No. 6 didn't last too long.

--married 1929, stayed down there until 1930.

then rented. bought present house in 1947, 1948.

hockey league in Springhill. Thistles, Crescents. also played Halifax and Moncton a lot.--before the war, before the first war.

'There were bars everywhere....' [Bars in the hotels]. 'Prosecutor used to come around and you'd get an envelope handed out to you....'

George took a drink once in a while. 'Fourteen, fifteen years old, you were a man if you worked in the mine....' [implication is that you could drink then].

--two policemen on duty, one day, one night.

not too many making their own beer. 'Beer was cheap as dirt then. Bottle of whiskey only cost a dollar.'

40 over proof--it would take three bottles to make that now. he drank a little of that when he was 15--not to hurt me. his father never had a drink.

*Mrs. Burton.*

--wife's family born in England--came in 1926.

--mines were on strike in England--her brother wanted to go to Australia, Mom and Dad--could only afford passages to Canada. she was 13 when she came over.

--came right to Springhill. 'It was a mining town and Dad was always a miner.'

she always stayed home with her mother.

married 1929. 1929, the rest of her family went back to England. her father was getting hurt all the time in the mines here.

'Well, at first, it seemed small, and everything, and we were never used to the cook-stoves like they have here. Mom had an awful time to get used to it, and she would cry and I would cry--I cried, I think, every second day, for a long while. Then when I got married and came back to England when she died, I wanted to leave right away, after two weeks.'

--came from Durham. 'You know [in Durham] you could go just from here to the corner...if you wanted to go any place, the buses run every

*15-20 minutes.*

went back to England at start of depression--didn't want to stay, things not better over there.

--two days a week work in the 1930s.

had a hard time paying the board when he was batching it--\$10 a month.

brother that went out west.