

Transcription of Interview with William Miller, Jan. 1 1897.

b. Jan 1 1897.
Springhill.

used to be a lot of Indians squatting at Springhill Jct. used to come here selling baskets and everything. old squaw came in after he was born, looked at him and said, 'Nice-looking little baby, born on New Year's Day. He'll never be rich, but he'll always be lucky.'

enlisted in Canadian army when he was 17 years old--1915--went overseas. in France, Fall 1915. there a year and a half. got through Vimy and the Somme. Vimy Ridge, got through that.

still has four pieces of shrapnell in his left leg yet.

father was born in Dunfermline, Scotland. emigrated to Canada, when he was a baby. They recruited a boatload of Scottish miners, landed in Mabou, Cape Breton. 'And when they landed there they found out that the coal mines were on strike.' And they said no way. built log cabins in the woods and stayed there in the winter. And then they got scattered around when the Spring came. Some of them came to Springhill, some came to Pictou Co. Grandfather came to the Joggins, he was quite a prospector. He prospected all the area.

Some English mining company--Minto, N.B.--he's the man that found the coal near Minto. He surveyed all that. When that was done, come back to Joggins. Came back to Pictou Co., then came back here. Killed in Springhill in the East Mine explosion in 1891.

three brothers went to Pennsylvania.

Millers are buried in the Hillside Cemetery.

father died when he was 86. mother died at 95.

father mined all his life. He mined at Springhill, in Pictou Co., Pennsylvania for a while. stayed in U.S. three years. 'Mother didn't like it in Pennsylvania.' moved to Pennsylvania, 1900 or so.

'Mining around here didn't pay no money...You had to work from daylight to dark.'

on J.R.Cowans. 'He was a millionaire.'

only got to grade 5 school. got education since then at night school. peddled milk before the strike and after the strike.

some of the miners wouldn't take his milk. 'I took milk to the company boarding house out there where they had the fellows that was working for the company during the strike....But they never bothered me.'

a lot of people wouldn't take his milk.

used to throw stones at the horses. strikebreakers from Pictou Co. and Cape Breton. notes Cape Breton went back to work before Springhill did.

--associates the UMW of 1909-11 with John L. Lewis.

--his uncle worked for J.L.Lewis--claims that the books of Cape Breton were tampered with. charges corruption of officials in Springhill, says one union man right after strike bought himself a brand new house.

'I wasn't really a strikebreaker, I was just peddling milk....'

--got \$20 a month--help for the family during the strike.

12 all together in his family--two died in infancy. (12 brothers and sisters).

he is second oldest.

'Some people think that a miner just goes down there and works away. But mining is a profession--or some word to that effect. Mining is like anything else--it's like carpentry work. You've got to know what to do, you've got to know how to do it. If you--or anybody, I don't care who it is--you take him and put him into the coal face in a coal mine, he wouldn't make ten cents. You've got to go in with a man that's had the experience and knows how to work that place and knows how to

best out of it....There is skill in it. A lot of people think, 'A dirty old miner, a dirty old miner,' you see? But it's a skillful job.'

Transcription of Interview with Billy Miller.

[started work shortly after the big strike. 'I started when they went from steam to air compressors....' Started as a boy, as an oiler. Make sure oil was filled in the compressors. Then they didn't have an oiling system as they do now--everything had to be done by hand. This was surface work. Then got tired of that job--it got monotonous--and he was offered more money running the pump under the ground. rate of \$1.52 a day for a ten-hour day. used to go to work at five...in the wintertime you never saw daylight. --miners left work at 3:30 but there were always cars left over that the company hands had to get to the surface. 'Company hands had to hoist all those boxes to bank.' sometimes get home at 7:00 o'clock at night.

[after the big strike: 'They [the miners] really had nothing to say, they really had nothing to say. The company told you what you was going to do, and that's what you had to do. That's what you were going to do, or you weren't going to be there.']

after that he went in the army--1915.
four years and a half away before he came back home again.

Some of the strikebreakers, or scabs, whatever you want to call them, they stayed on, too--you couldn't do anything about them. Some came here from Cape Breton....

[people more or less ignored them.] 'It never washed off, it never washed off. They were always reminded. If anybody ever said anything about them, they'd say, "He's only a scab, anyway.'

'That name will never leave you, never, as long as you live.'

'I know people right in town here today, they'd throw it up to them, sometimes.'
[having a grandfather who scabbed in 1909-11].

--some scabs came over from England--they'll even through a history of strikebreaking up to the children tday.

lfamily of twelve...

...[when started diamond drilling, they brought in a fellow from Pictou Co. He had to have. Liked the idea of boring holes deep down in the ground. 'He said to me one day, 'Look, I've got to have a helper.' And I said, "well, you're looking at one know.' And he learnt me the business.'

started drilling in the 1930s.

so he went on the official staff. 'I had charge of the main slope, from the surface to the 7800....If I wasn't ready, the mine didn't work.'

22 men working under him. two-thirds of this 7,800 was double tracked. keep it free of stone, keep the road guage, put new rails in when you need them.

take down heavy material on the 11 o'clock shift. [dead shift].

'All I had to do was make just one slip, and nobody worked.'

fifteen going up and fifteen coming down on the ropes.
all at No.2

the y tried to pump out No.3 but they got discouraged. didn't have the gear like they have today. with machinery today they could pump it out. they were relying on compressed air, but she'd freeze up on you. very vulnerable to winter air.

'Springhill got the name of being the best and the cleanest mining town in Canada. It was a really nice, clean town.'

water supply question--a lot of people laughed at him--water out there is only two feet higher, you can't make water run uphill. Old Scotsman came and argued for it.

Old fellow by the name of Jewkes run a store out the Herritt road. He said you can't run water uphill. he had taken all bets the water wouldn't run past his store. he got a nice shower of water because of a broken pipe.

gravity system is still working tdday.

strong Presbyterians in background.

father was a member of the Oddfellows.

Knights of Columbus lodge a relatively recent arrival.

Halifax Herald people nicknamed them the Fencebusters because everybody hit the ball and broke the fence. So Springhill adopted it.

one of their star players was an Italian--he hit the ball twice out of Wanderers' Park, and his name is to be found (with the balls) in the Sports Hall of Fame in Halifax. Name of Condi.

[Italians really accepted when they could hit home runs.]

rivalry pretty warm between Springhill and Westville.

nothing mine management could do about mine closures.

J.R.Cowans said to have shut for a whole week and had a whole week's raicing down here. Cinder track. First track opened in the Spring of the year. (Cinders from the mine). Brought in horses all across N.S. and N.B.

'He was a man that loved horses, you know....'

'He was a man that never mixed with anybody....He'd just go down to the office and back home.'

even sent their washing on the train--his wife didn't have to do her own washing, sent it down to Parrsboro.

'He was strong Presbyterian. There's one thing about the Presbyterian church in Springhill at that time. He was the mainstay behind the church. People thought that, 'Well, you belong to the Presbyterian Church, you'll get a good job from J.R.Cowans.'

'I can remember my grandfather--he was strong Presbyterian--they had private pews at that time, see?--and of course the pews were pretty long, and when we went to Church, we always went in my Grandfather's pew, you see, right out in the front. It was over on the side. And J.R.Cowans' pew was in the centre. And everybody was waiting for the collection plate to go around. We put in a cent at that time, or five cents--five cents was a lot of money at that time to put in the collection plate. J.R.Cowans put a dollar bill in. Everybody's eyes would stick right out.'

'I think they must have had a lot of money before they ever came here....'

people outside of town would talk of an 'old, dirty miner'--they didn't understand, but people in town here, they didn't do it.

'You might think you can go down there and go to the coal face and make a lot of money, but you wouldn't make five cents....You had to get somebody to learn you how to make it, you see.'

'You'd see a man coming home, he'd look like a nigger.' [in the days before the big strike with no wash house].

after the strike was settled, the government forced the company to put showers in the mine. after the bath houses installed, "You could walk up town respectable, see, with your good clothes on.'

'I never could see coming home and putting the big wash tub in the middle of the floor and getting your wife to wash your back....That's how they used to do it. Strip off in the middle of the kitchen floor, with all the kids around. I never could see that.'

worked in mine 43 years.

retired at time of the disaster.

All the official staff had an invitation to go to Cape Breton after the disaster.

has a daughter and a son.

'Politics was never mentioned in our house....But all my parents were strong, strong Liberals.'

went to a political meeting in Pioneer Hall. heard a lot of lies. I said,
"If that's politics, that's enough for me."

Archie Terris: "When they tried to put the old age pension through, he voted
it down."

when they criticised Terris for this, he claimed that the govt. couldn't
afford to do it. they got after him about it pretty hard.