

Robert

Transcription of Interview with Job Melanson.

Robert Melanson.

lives on Minudie Rd., River Hebert.

b.1923, September.

his father spent close to 45 years in these mines.

his father born and brought up in Minudie.

family goes back to King Saaman days.

1632--first Melansons. Charles Melanson, all the rest come from him.

b.1892. came to River Hebert in 1900.

started out working at 13. he was stone coal and shovelling box cars. working for the Kimberley Coal Co. Kimberley seam--Victoria Coal Co. and Kimberley Mines.

'You could have a boss job in the coal mine and it would be all the same. You...No individual works in a coal mine. Your altogether down these.... There's no such a thing as a good job in a coal mine.'

sees the First World War--went up to \$100 a week after the First World War. cut back after that.

When mines were good--it was on contract.

the good mines were on contract. but switched over to datal in later years. switched over to all datal in the 1950s.

Young people today have no interest in doing work as the older men did.

'We produced as much or more coal per man than any place in this province.'

wages here never equal to Cape Breton or elsewhere.

'We were always the underdogs in this industry.'

--if it's on a small scale, you're never as heard as much.

--the most they ever employed at a time in a coal mine during his time was 200 men.

--'We didn't have the say, even in the union.'

eight in his father's family. five boys--only two went down the mine.

Q.Did your father have an opinion about you mining? A.Well, around here, there was no other work.

--company housing really is turn-of-the-century. company store. Joggins Coal Company. had company homes out here too (in R.Hebert).

--father worked for Victoria, Kimberley, Standard Coal Mine. That's it.

--mines around here ran around 20 years. 'That was their span of life.'

mines would often go down only 3000 feet. that was about their limit.

present mine went down 6000 feet. old Joggin mine had much thicker coal, but it didn't go down that much further either.

--a lot of coal left down in those mines--coal didn't run out, costs ran up.

--most of the time in these mines had more coal than could come up the hoist.

--most of the companies had good hoisting gear compared with the rest of their machinery. mines around here used to hoist, in eight hours, five-six ton of coal.

the last UMW in Cumberland County. about 75 union men in the mine.

biggest strike he had--in the 1930s. it happened at the Bright Light. (Victoria Coal Co.) This strike lasted for 11 months.

--that was the longest strike.

--only made around \$3.00 a day--that was their wages; for 11 months they went to the County--get 'sweet tickets'-- man and his wife would get \$2 a week, each child got \$.75.

--that's the longest strike. strike over wages at this time.

--were asking for something like an increase of .50 a day. didn't win the strike. never got what they asked for.

--his father was out in the strike.

--a lot of men couldn't stick this out.

--union was broke too--they paid the union heads and that was it.

--had to be a day-shift man to really participate in the UMW. night shift men couldn't participate near th the same extent.

--proud that there's never been an hour lost in dispute at the Marsh Mine.

--he got to Grade 10.

--his mother spoke French. never spoke it to the children, but could speak it and understand it. his mother was born in the Lower Cove.  
--his mother was a Brine.

'Always had a garden.'

always kept hens.

kept a couple of cows, horse, hens.

--the big man in politics he remembers is Percy Black. Everybody in this part was Tory. Dr. Dochrane was Tory.

'You never heard too much about politics because everybody was on the same side.'

'Our voice was never heard'--in the union.

--cites the case of the mine explosions in this district that nobody remembers at all.

--percentage of men killed in this district in the big explosions worse than in Springhill.

20 some men killed in the district.

first job: haulage driver. started 1940. father still worked in the mines until 1945--then moved away and lived in Amherst and lived on a farm.

--loader's pay \$3.25. his father was clearing \$10, \$11 a day.

--first mine he worked in was the Standard.

'Nobody locked their doors'--in River Hebert.--one of the quietest mining towns in the province--says he of the mining town.

--People's Store--before the co-op age. it ran on the same basis as the co-operatives today. --People's Store handled all the mine equipment--picks, shovels, cables, carbine lamps.

before the People's Store there was a co. store. big co. store in Joggins.

rivalry between R. Hebert and Joggins--fights between supporters of rival teams.

baked 100 lbs. of flour every ten-days.

'All she done was laugh and carry on.'

he weighed 200 lbs. at the age of 15--he thought himself a man.

it wasn't the age--it was the size of you.

going down the mine didn't bother him.

'I don't see no danger in coal mining.'

--he worked safely and never had an accident.

thinks majority of accidents were caused by carelessness.

--his father didn't go the limit in that 11-month strike--he struck out for another job, around here 'you weren't called a traitor.'

--"If you had eight of a family, there was no way you could hang in."