

I was born on December 1st, 1878 at a time when there were two classes of people - the rich and the poor. I happened to be from a large family which had a small income. I went to work on a dairy farm when I was ten years of age. I had to milk cows morning and evening. I also learned to ride horseback, we had no saddles in those days. It was my duty to bring in the cattle from the fields.

When I arrived at Taylorton in December, 1904, the mines were only working part time. I didn't get a job for two months. I went to work at Roche Percee in February, 1905 for one month and that was the only work I got that winter. In April, 1905, I went to Taber, Alberta with Mr. W. L. Hamilton. He was opening up a new mine. There were no buildings in Taber at that time except an old box-car for a station house. I ~~worked~~^{ed} during the summer months and on until November. I made enough money to pay my fare back to England. I sailed from New York in a ship called the Campania and on the journey the seas were very rough, and two men were washed overboard. I worked in the mines in England that winter but was very dissatisfied and I came back to Canada in May, 1906. I sold my furniture from my home in England and brought my wife and daughter, Hildred with me.

In the years that followed I asked myself why I came back to this country.

In 1908 I got fired^d for belonging to a Labour Union and had a rough time for two years. I left school when I was in Grade 4. There was no free education in those days. We had to pay three pence per week for tuition every Monday morning and if you did not take the money the teacher would send you back home.

I started to work in the mines when I was thirteen years of age. My pay was one Shilling a day for an eight-hour day. The mines were working five days per week at that time.

copy of
document.
(8 pages) by
A. C. M. Wilson
in 1965
when he was
86 years of age.
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in the
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I got a lot of mining experience during the next twelve years. From 1891 to 1894 I was working around steam engines and steam boilers. I fire^d a large steam boiler at the bottom of the air shaft when I was sixteen years of age. I also learned to splice steel cable. About the same time I was strawboss over about eighteen Haulage teenagers when I was eighteen years old. After that I went to work at the coal face and mined coal for eight years. I also got some experience with mine fires.

In the year 1910 I purchased a course in Mining Engineering from the Internations Correspondence School in Scranton, Pensylvania, U.S.A. I got my Certificate and in the year 1913 I got my mine managers certificate. I got my education the hard way. I was working hard and studying at the same time.

Young people these days don't appreciate how lucky they are

PROSPECTING AND SEARCHING FOR COAL AND WATER

Through the years I have done a lot of prospecting and searching for coal and water in the Bienfait-Estevan district. When I was Mine Manager at the Old Crescent Mine, East of Bienfait we were continually running into faulty coal in the mine so we had to look for another location. The best coal is found from Pinto, Taylorton, Roche Percee, Estevan, North and South of the Souris for three or four miles. The coal seam lay in a North-west and South-east direction generally more cover in the South. There are many places to the North and West where the coal seams are split up very badly. Some sections the seam was split into four small seams and unworkable for mining purposes. Some day they may operate them as gas producers.

In the early years, there was very little drinking water to be found in the district. Most used shallow seepage wells, some river water. In those days there was more water flowing in the Souris River. I found the water in a deep well about 130 feet below ground.

At the Old Crescent Mine, one mile East of Bienfait, there was a good flow of water. It was very soft water and it had a little soda in it, otherwise good for drinking and house use. I found out later that this body of water extended from Coalfields, Taylorton to ten miles North of Lampman. This well was sunk in the year 1920. This was the first well that was dug in the Bienfait district.

When I went to work for the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Coal Co. in 1926, they were using water from the Souris River. In 1928 I put a deep well down for the locomotive and steam engines. Later they got wells sunk at the Western Dominion Coal Co. mine and Briquette plant. I was with the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Coal Co. when the Briquette Plant was sold to Mr. MacDonald of Winnipeg for scrap, then later operated again and it was the first time in 16 years that satisfactory Briquettes were made. The Saskatchewan Government, the Manitoba Government and the Federal Government shared the cost around the year

1920 to build the Plant. Later it was sold for \$1.00 to Western Dominion Coal Co. Ltd. and they too could not make a satisfactory Briquette. We held a banquet at the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Mine in the fall of 1936 for the Official Opening of the Briquette Plant with the new owners. We had very little equipment in the early years to work with. We did all our drilling with a chisel bit drill, forcing the cutting to the surface with water pressure. They can do more work in one hour now than we were able to do in thirty days. We had to do everything the slow hard way. However, we enjoyed it. I have always enjoyed Geology and Mathematics and particularly Mine Machinery.

I worked on the first Mining and Cutting Machine that was installed in Saskatchewan in 1908. At that time I was an operator on the cutting machines in the underground mine at the Western Dominion Coal Co. Ltd.

I have had the privilege in my lifetime of knowing both the operators and the workman's side of the story. I have known personally nearly all the operators in the district for the past fifty years and have had more men work for me during that time I think than any other person in the Coal Mining Industry. I am now 86 years of age - will be 87 December 1st. I still drive my own car and up until now, free of accidents. I have driven a car over fifty years and I think I can drive as good as ever.

I keep in touch with all the world affairs and can discuss what is happening in most countries. I am very familiar with our own political situation in Canada which isn't very good. I don't think any of our Politicians are qualified to give advice to other countries. They should be looking more closely around home. There is lots they could do here. They spend too much time running around trying to tell other people what they should do. Now I must apologize for the grammar as I am not a writer and have had little education but I do the best I can.

MINE FIRES IN UNDERGROUND MINES

I want to write about my experience with mine fires in lignite coal mines. Lignite coal is very susceptible to spontaneous combustion under certain conditions of ventilation.

At one time I was a member in the Organization of Mining and Metallurgy. In the early years about fifty years ago, we discussed mine fires on a number of occasions but seemed to have very few suggestions how to take care of these fires. Two or three of the large mines had a lot of trouble with mine fires. I can remember on three occasions when the fire got out of control and was burning like a large furnace down the main roadways of the mine.

Most of the time these fires started in the old workings of the mine and abandoned rooms from which the coal had been mined.

However, the way we took care of the problem in the main roadways was that we bypassed the air at the nearest cross-cut to the fires and boarded up the roadway and then followed up with water and fire extinguishers.

Mine fires are very expensive. They were continually breaking out at the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Coal Co. Ltd. before I went there as Mine Manager in the winter of 1926. They were spending thousands of dollars each year making cement stoppings and the fires would burn around them. When I went there, I immediately installed a large mine fan and changed the direction of the air. Instead of forcing the air into the mine, we had the air pulled from the mine workings to take the pressure away from the old working places in the mine and were soon able to control the fires with a minimum of expense.

There is very little explosive mine gas in lignite coal mines so there was very little danger from mine explosions. In later years the Electric Power Company found that by packing their stock piles of slag^{ck} coal they could prevent fire starting in the stock piles and thus were able to keep a larger amount of coal on hand.

MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES OF THE PAST 75 YEARS

I am going to write now about Organized Labour.

In the early years of 1890, Labour realized they must be organized in a body to get any recognition from the employers. Employees fought an uphill battle during the first forty years. Employers of Labour always blamed the employees for any labour troubles.

The first time labour got really dangerous was in the early 1930s when John L. Lewis got control in the United States of America of the United Mine Workers of America.

For the first twenty years of 1900 the mines in Saskatchewan were operated in a very primitive way. Wages were very poor and working conditions very bad in the mines in those days. The coal was blasted from the face with black powder and the mines were full of powder smoke all day long and the ventilation was very bad. There were few safety devices in the early years. It was not until the year 1924 that the Compensation Board came into existence. Some of the larger mines had some insurance for employees but most of the smaller mines did not carry any insurance. Some of the larger mines supplied low-rental houses and supplied coal to their employees at cost, which helped the employees with their cost-of-living.

My first experience with mine strikes was in the year 1893 at a coal mine in Lancashire, England, three miles from the Town of St. Helens. The mines were called Ashton Green Collieries Ltd.

The strike lasted seventeen weeks and ended in a riot with the police from St. Helens. An organizer for the United Mine Workers Union in Alberta came to the coal fields in Saskatchewan about the year 1920 and he was kidnapped and driven out of the district and told not to come back. The One Big Union tried to come into Saskatchewan about the time of the Winnipeg riot. The Communist party tried to organize the miners in Saskatchewan which ended up with a riot in Estevan in 1931 when three men were ^{killed}

and about twelve injured. We had lawsuits as a result of these riots which lasted many weeks. We also had a strike in 1939 which ended with many weeks of hearings at the Court House in Estevan before a Royal Commission.

I got fired in 1908 for being a member of a Union. I was working on a coal cutting machine at the time.

Compare the year 1965 with the early years of this century. Employ^{ers}~~ees~~ of labour are all organized; merchants are all organized; teachers are all organized; the medical profession is organized and so are nurses and nearly all professions starting at the Universities. Every day some of these groups are demanding, and most times getting something from the Governments and municipalities. Big business is all organized. Anywhere they have no Union or organization they get very little of the supplies of the present day. Governments ^{form}~~from~~ groups ^{of Countries}~~of combined~~. Politicians form groups and organizations.

Most people today believe in the maxim:

"United we stand, divided we fall."

PROBLEMS

Some problems I had while I was engaged as Mine Manager. At the Crescent Collieries Mine, east of Bienfait, a large slough of water broke into the mine and nearly trapped all the men and horses in the mine. The mine workings were sloping at about one per cent grade to the North and this gave the men time to escape as the water all ran to the north end of the mine. Approximately ten million gallons went into the mine and flooded all the mine workings. At the same time I was doing my own surveying and engineering. I had to dig a shaft a half mile away taking the measurement from the mine map. We sank a six foot shaft and put up a temporary head frame and hoisted ten million gallons of water out of the mine and had the mine in operation again inside of thirty days. When we completed the shaft at the workings of the mine, we were just one foot from the main Hailage entry in the mine. In the year 1926 Crescent Collieries ran out of coal at its then location and we moved th houses, buildings and equipment to a new location three miles West.