

FAMILIES IN THE SOURIS
COALFIELDS, 1925-1935

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study of families in the Souris coalfields in southeastern Saskatchewan in the 1920s and 1930s argues that women and children in the mine communities were active and enterprising individuals. In the absence of modern-day conveniences and comforts, families in the mine camps devised a variety of strategies and techniques for survival. Perseverance and hardiness marked these coal families, and a strong and able wife and mother was vital to a family's independence, empowerment, and survival. Such women were commonplace in the Souris coal camps, and mining families were characterized by an ability to adapt, respond, and adjust to demands and circumstances of the mining lifestyle.

Interviews with ex-coal camp residents provide much of the information in this study. While historians of deep-seam coal mines across Canada are quite correct in emphasizing the grueling, dangerous, and demanding working conditions of the underground miners, coal communities above-ground deserve recognition as dynamic and active entities as well. Traditional labour-focused examinations of the coal industry fail to acknowledge that male miners were members of a minority group in the Souris coal camps - women and children made up the bulk of the population, and played important roles in the communities. These camps were home to hundreds of hardworking and practical families, and this thesis recognizes the independence and tolerable lifestyles that these families strove to achieve.

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So many people have influenced this thesis that I would need a second volume to acknowledge them all. From conception to completion, the thesis has been a wonderful ride, made all the more special by friends and acquaintances met along the way.

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The generosity and kindness of Estevan and Bienfait residents during my two visits in the summers of 1995 and 1996 were overwhelming. Although the airplane-crash stories at 2000 feet were a bit unsettling, Greg Salmers, head librarian at the Estevan Public Library, has been a helpful and supportive ally of this thesis since Day One. Sallie Pierson, director of the Estevan National Exhibition Centre, has also passed along thoughtful and enlightening advice over the past two years. Thanks to the staffs at the Library and the Exhibition Centre for sharing their coffee and friendship, and special thanks to Sallie and Jerry Pierson for the accommodations and hospitality in May 1996.

Without the fifteen or so people who invited me into their homes and shared their memories of life in the coal camps, this thesis would never have happened. My depth of gratitude to these remarkable and inspiring people is immense, and I hope that this thesis has not abused their trust and kindness.

Back in Saskatoon, the thesis rode the highs and lows of everyday life for two years. Nonetheless, the good friends were there throughout, and I will not risk leaving anyone out by thanking people in particular. You all know who you are.

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Ron and Wendy Morier. Although hundreds of miles away, they have been with me, beside me, every step of the way.

Chris Morier

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INTRODUCTION - FAMILIES IN THE SOURIS COALFIELDS

One bedroom, two beds in there, dining room, no beds in there, kitchen, one bed, and eleven in the family....I think we need a bigger place than that. When it is raining the rain comes in the kitchen. There is only one ply of paper, cardboard paper nailed to about two-inch wood board....It is all coming down and cracked....When the weather is frosty, when you wake up in the morning you cannot walk on the floor because it is all full of snow, right around the room.¹

In past historical analyses of the Souris coalfields in the Estevan-Bienfait region, the above statement, given by sixteen-year old Annie Baryluk before a 1931 Royal Commission, appears as a keynote description of living conditions in the mine camps in the 1920s and 1930s.² Historians who study coal mining in southeastern Saskatchewan, few as they are, focus almost solely on the 1931 miners' strike and cataclysmic riot in Estevan on September 29th of that year. While duly noting that living conditions were among the major grievances of the striking miners, historians Stan Hanson and Glen Makahonuk do not delve deeply into the daily life of the mining camps, especially where women and children are concerned. Nonetheless, both historians provide fine accounts of coal mining in the Souris fields, and this study of family life in the mine camps is indebted to such previous scholarly material.

It is not surprising that Hanson and Makahonuk concentrate on the dramatic 1931 labour dispute in the Souris coalfields. The miners' strike began on September 7 and lasted one month. Newspapers across the country reported on the strike's

¹ Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Royal Commission on the Estevan-Bienfait Mining Dispute, 1931 (hereinafter referred to as Wylie Commission), *Proceedings*, vol. 3, pp. 77-78.

² See, for example: Stan Hanson, "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931," unpublished MA Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus, 1971, p. 66; "Estevan 1931," in Irving Abella, ed., *On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada, 1919-1929*. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1975, p. 38; Glen Makahonuk, "The Working and Living Conditions of the Saskatchewan Deep Seam Coal Mines, 1930-1939," *Saskatchewan History* 33, 2, Spring 1980, p. 50; and "Labour Relations in the Saskatchewan Deep Seam Coal Mines During the 1930s," unpublished MA Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1976, p. 53.

progress, and a Royal Commission was appointed by the Committee of the Privy Council to examine the state of Souris coal mining at the time.³ Both Stan Hanson and Glen Makahonuk rely heavily on such sources in their studies, and Hanson also utilizes transcripts of trials following the riot. Predictably, such sources centre on the key figures of the dispute - striking miners, union leaders, mine management, and prominent combatants in the September 29th battle in Estevan. The strike and riot are portrayed as primarily men's struggles - women and children appear sparingly in both the Hanson and Makahonuk studies. As a result, the history of the Souris coal-fields is incomplete: the miners have received thorough historiographical attention; their families, however, remain relatively unknown.

The historiography of the Souris coalfields reflects other historical studies of the Canadian coal-mining industry. David Frank, for example, has emerged as the leading historian of the coal mines of Cape Breton Island in the early 1900s. With the exception of one notable article, Frank concentrates largely on relations between coal miners and management.⁴ Union formation and strikes have long fascinated labour historians, but their work often reveals much of other aspects of working-class life. In Frank's case, his examination of the working and personal relationships between the coal miners of Cape Breton helps to expose the unique coal-mine culture which developed in the mining communities. Numerous bitter and bloody strikes plagued the coal industry in Canada during the first few decades of the twentieth century, and Frank argues that coal miners have been a historically militant group of workers. Both underground and on the surface, the miners were in constant communication with each other and took occasional steps to demonstrate their control. Frank discusses how coal miners employed work slowdowns, pit committees, and other tactics to showcase their solidarity.

³ Judge Edmund Richard Wylie of Estevan was appointed Royal Commissioner on September 18, 1931. The Commission's proceedings faced numerous delays and finally began on October 5. Judge Wylie adjourned the inquiry on November 17, 1931, and submitted his report on January 25, 1932.

⁴ David Frank, "Class Conflict in the Coal Industry: Cape Breton 1922," in Greg Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976, pp. 161-185; "Contested Terrain: Worker's Control in the Cape Breton Coal Mines in the 1920s," in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986, pp. 102-124.

One of David Frank's articles strays from his predominantly labour-focused history of east-coast coal mines. In "The Miner's Financier: Women in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1917," Frank writes a short introduction to two letters written by women in the mine camps.⁵ The letters were originally printed in the Canadian Labour Leader, and they describe in detail how the miners' meager wages were spent. The economic savvy of miners' wives is evident in the letters, as budgets were calculated to the penny; obviously, making every cent count was a vital necessity to these women. Frank offers little commentary on the letters, and he does not discuss the women's role in the mining towns in any detail. The letters themselves are fascinating, however, and are one of the few published records that women in the coal-mine camps have provided.

As well as David Frank, historian Ian McKay has studied the unique culture which developed in the Maritime coal mines.⁶ McKay takes issue with the common negative conception of mines as "dank, dark, and dangerous holes in the ground."⁷ Rather, close friendships were forged in the mines, McKay states, and miners were a distinct group of men. The miners worked as a collective whole, yet each miner also enjoyed a sense of independence while labouring underground. Intensely proud of their skills and of the dangerous nature of their work, coal miners' bravery and courage were cherished values. The mining lifestyle also spawned unique superstitions, vernacular, and community solidarity. McKay is perhaps overly romantic in his visions of the strong and free coal miner,⁸ but his analysis of the Cumberland miners is perceptive and revealing. Like David Frank, McKay is particularly interested in the control and autonomy that coal miners exercised in their workplace. In the underground tunnels and rooms of the Cumberland mines, a workplace culture and consciousness thrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, neither Frank nor McKay discuss in detail the family life of Maritime miners.

⁵ David Frank, "The Miner's Financier: Women in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1917," Atlantis 8, 2, 1983, pp. 137-145.

⁶ Ian McKay, "The Realm of Uncertainty: The Experience of Work in the Cumberland Coal Mines, 1873-1927," Acadiensis 16, 1, Autumn 1986, pp. 3-58.

⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

⁸ For example, McKay states in the conclusion of his article that the miners "civilized" their "most savage workplace." See p. 57.

As indicated above, coal miners and their union activity have generated much historical attention. In Miners and Steelworkers: Labour in Cape Breton, historian Paul MacEwan discusses the bitter strikes which wracked industries in Cape Breton to the 1970s.⁹ Besides a few convoluted and obscure references to the coal-mine camps,¹⁰ MacEwan offers little of value in regard to non-union issues. When women and children are mentioned, they are used to accentuate the perceived wretched conditions of the mining lifestyle. MacEwan takes a pro-union stance in his study, and emphasizes the struggles and obstacles which union organizers had to overcome while representing the mine workers. Draconian practices of mine management are listed often and in great detail, and Miners and Steelworkers reflects the fascination which many historians have held for union development and capital-labour confrontations.

Allan Seager, Simon Fraser University's leading labour historian, has provided a similar class-conflict analysis of Alberta and British Columbia coal miners.¹¹ Union organization, the Communist Party, and the miners' political leanings are Seager's main areas of interest. In regard to mining families, Seager's only references to the miners' wives and children are when they are widowed or orphaned through a mining accident or other disaster. Besides chronicling the coal miners' "historic militancy,"¹² Seager offers limited analysis of the daily lives of the miners and their families. In particular, Seager concentrates more upon the political inclinations of the miners than he does upon the miners themselves. The result is a very depersonalized and incomplete analysis of the coalfields of Alberta and British

⁹ Paul MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers: Labour in Cape Breton. Toronto: Samuel Stevens Hakkert and Company, 1976.

¹⁰ For example, in a reference to the camps, MacEwan states that "it would be hard to find a more eloquent indictment of the injustices, cruelty, and smothering of human potential that prevailed in the company houses and in the smoke, soot, and stagnant drains of the Nova Scotia coal towns." See p. 150.

¹¹ Allan Seager, "Miner's Struggles in Western Canada, 1890-1930," in Deian Hopkin and Greg Kealey, eds., Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada, 1850-1930. Oxford: Llafur/Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1989, pp. 160-199; "Class, Ethnicity, and Politics in the Alberta Coalfields, 1905-1945," in Dirk Hoerder, ed., Struggle a Hard Battle. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986, pp. 304-327; "Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Coal Miners," Labour/Le Travail 16, Fall 1985, pp. 23-61.

¹² Seager, "Class, Ethnicity, and Politics...", p. 316.

Columbia. Such pro-union labour history rarely attempts to present a balanced description of the family relations and domestic life of the working-class. References to family life are few; references to issues other than the oppression and hardships of working-class families are near non-existent in coal-mine labour history.

Popular accounts of the coal-mining industry by non-academic historians have tended to focus more upon the familial aspects of the lifestyle. Judith Hoegg Ryan's Coal in our Blood: 200 Years of Coal Mining in Nova Scotia's Pictou County is an admirable collection of miners' memories and photographs of mining coal in Pictou County, Nova Scotia.¹³ Ryan, whose father worked for twenty-two years on a mine rescue team, provides an effective montage of background detail, commentary, and first-person accounts of over 150 years of coal mining in Pictou County. Predictably, considering the nature of her father's work, stories of mine disasters and rescue operations dominate Ryan's book. Home and community life in the coal camps are discussed in the book, however, and by allowing the miners to tell many of their stories in their own words, Ryan provides a glimpse into the colorful world of the coal-mining community.

Western-Canadian coal miners are the focus of another popular historical account of the mining industry. Lynne Bowen's Boss Whistle: The Coal Miners of Vancouver Island Remember draws upon over 130 hours of interviews with ex-Island coal miners, and it covers both working and community relations of the miners and their families.¹⁴ With its dramatic prose and absence of citations, Bowen's book is designed primarily with a non-academic audience in mind. Its research is sound and comprehensive, however, and Bowen judiciously balances the oral and written sources. Much attention is given to the bloody and brutal conflicts and strikes which disabled the Vancouver Island coal-mining industry in the early 1900s. Accounts of explosions and mine accidents are also described in graphic detail. As sensational as these stories are, it is telling (and not a bit surprising) that such incidents are keenly

¹³ Judith Hoegg Ryan, Coal in our Blood: 200 Years of Coal Mining in Nova Scotia's Pictou County. Halifax: Formac Publishing Company, 1992.

¹⁴ Lynne Bowen, Boss Whistle: The Coal Miners of Vancouver Island Remember. Lantzville: Oolichan Books, 1982.

and readily remembered by the ex-miners. Like Judith Hoegg Ryan's Coal in our Blood, Boss Whistle succeeds in humanizing the coal-mine industry with its first-person dialogue. Ryan and Bowen also attempt to incorporate coal-mine families into their studies, a strategy which traditional labour historians tend to ignore.

Indeed, family history is currently carving itself a niche within the discipline. Increasingly, historians are challenging the traditional belief that a paucity of sources prevents detailed analysis of family life in the past. Sources in fact are plentiful, but information is scattered across a wide range of primary and secondary material. The family historian, therefore, must necessarily be a patient and enterprising person: patient in that scores of traditional sources (for example, documents, reports, and newspapers) must be examined; enterprising in that unconventional and controversial sources (for example, oral history, census data, and amateur local history) must also be utilized when expedient. The successful family historian will incorporate these various sources into a coherent whole - not an easy task, to be sure, but rewarding if properly executed.

This study of families in the Souris coalfields uses a wide variety of sources and draws upon other projects by family, gender, and women's historians. Bettina Bradbury, for instance, in her analysis of families in industrializing Montreal in the late nineteenth century, suggests some intriguing conclusions regarding the contributions of women and children to the family economy.¹⁵ Although the coalfields around Estevan and Bienfait are geographically far removed from the urban slums of Montreal, Bradbury's work is relevant in the questions that it asks and the observations that it makes based on tireless research. Census returns from Montreal's Sainte Anne and Sainte Jacques wards, court and legal records, and even municipal bylaws and city council minutes are thoroughly scrutinized by Bradbury in her attempt to explicate the dynamics of working-class families in Montreal.

¹⁵ Bettina Bradbury, Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993; "The Family Economy and Work in an Industrializing City: Montreal in the 1870s," Canadian Historical Association (CHA) Historical Papers, 1979, pp. 71-97; "Pigs, Cows, and Boarders: Non-Wage Forms of Survival Among Montreal Families, 1861-91," Labour/Le Travail 14, Fall 1984, pp. 4-49.

Bradbury's work is strongest in its demonstration that working-class women contributed to their families' daily survival in fundamental and self-sacrificing ways. Waged labour for women was available in Montreal, and many women found it necessary to toil in the factories or do stitching or sewing work at home to help support their families. The extent of women's waged work is indicated in the census and other records, making it relatively easy to pinpoint. Where Bradbury excels, however, is in her examination of the unpaid, and usually unrecognized, labour which women performed. Keeping livestock and gardens were means of providing food while not taxing the breadwinner's wages. Housing boarders was another method of stretching the family budget, although a boarder, like livestock or gardens, inevitably meant an increased workload for the wife and mother. As Bradbury points out, however, for many Montreal families, such cash-saving enterprises were necessary for the family's survival.

Bettina Bradbury devotes a chapter of her book to children, and other historians have also studied how youngsters contributed to their families' economy. The work of historian John Bullen, for example, is strongest in its evaluations of the jobs and duties commonly performed by working-class Canadian children in the late nineteenth century.¹⁶ Obviously, children still nursing or still in diapers were a drain on the family's time and resources. For many working-class children, household tasks or looking after younger siblings fell upon their shoulders before they reached the age of ten. Bullen's study focuses on urban Canada, and like Bradbury, he is largely concerned with demonstrating that the phenomena of urbanization and industrialization exerted great pressure on Canadian families. When the families' needs quickly outstripped wages, wives and children were pressed into service with a new sense of urgency.

Again, the sources that Bullen utilizes are notable. Royal Commissions dealing with labour, reports from factory inspectors, and Board of Education records are

¹⁶ John Bullen, "Children of the Industrial Age: Children, Work, and Welfare in Late Nineteenth-Century Ontario," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Ottawa, 1989; "Hidden Workers: Child Labour and the Family Economy in Late Nineteenth-Century Urban Ontario," *Labour/Le Travail* 18, Fall 1986, pp. 163-189.

examined by Bullen and gleaned for information. Newspaper reports and government sessional papers also provide correlative details and evidence for Bullen's arguments. Only after consulting a myriad of material and sources is Bullen able to construct his thesis and reinforce his contentions. The patient and meticulous historian will discover stories which were never thought to exist. Bradbury and Bullen add new insight into Canada's urbanization and industrialization by analyzing how families and children dealt with their developments and consequences. All family members were affected by the growth of cities and industry, and the work of Bradbury and Bullen illuminates some lesser-known, though no less important, figures in late nineteenth-century Canada.

As the studies of Bradbury and Bullen indicate, family historians are increasingly turning to less conventional sources and techniques of gathering information. Oral history, for example, is slowly gaining legitimacy in the field of professional history. Historians studying families or children of the past are often able to utilize oral history if members of the study group are still alive and willing to talk of their experiences. Although nostalgia and sentimentalism will inevitably seep into oral accounts of the past, the wary historian will discover a wealth of information stored in people's memories.

Mark Rosenfeld's study of families in an Ontario railway town is a fine example of how oral history can form the backbone of an historical project.¹⁷ Rosenfeld interviewed fifty-three people (twenty-one women and thirty-two men) in preparation for his analysis of the gender divisions in the railway ward of Allandale in Barrie, Ontario from 1920 to 1950. The railway industry during those years, much like the coal-mining industry, was exclusively a male domain. Housekeeping, child rearing, food preparation and preservation, and family budgeting were tasks delegated to the railway wives. Rosenfeld's interviews with two generations of railway workers and their spouses reveal quite clearly that men and women in Allandale worked within their separate spheres. The husband-wife relationship was a

¹⁷ Mark Rosenfeld, "'It was a hard life': Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920-1950," *CHA Historical Papers*, 1988, pp. 237-279.

partnership, however, and these spheres, though rarely overlapping, were complementary. Many women expressed a succinct appreciation of their role, and many took great pride in being a "good" wife and mother. Only through oral history were these sentiments allowed to be expressed and recorded.

Another notable historical study which utilizes oral history is Meg Luxton's More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home.¹⁸ Luxton focuses her study on one particular group of Canadian women - the housewives of Flin Flon, Manitoba. The Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company essentially created what is now the city of Flin Flon in the mid-1920s, when ore was discovered deep within the Canadian shield.¹⁹ As a company town, the patterns of life in Flin Flon revolve solely around the rhythms of the mine and its offshoot industries. Similar to Rosenfeld's railway town, the roles of men and women in Flin Flon are clearly divided, with the majority of wives as full-time domestic labourers. Throughout the years in the city, as the men went to work in the mines, the women were actively involved in a different crucial activity - that of establishing their homes and, in turn, building a community.

Using personal interviews with dozens of Flin Flon women from three generations, Luxton's study is impressive in its effective balance of oral history and traditional written sources. Flin Flon housewives tell their own stories in the book, and they share experiences ranging from child rearing to family budgeting to domestic violence. Moments of frustration, pride, joy, and pain are recalled and recounted by Luxton's interviewees. It is striking that many of the women expressed surprise or excitement when asked about their lives or thoughts. Some women were aware and appreciative of their place in the community, while others had not considered their importance to the town. Domestic labour involves much more than simply "keeping house," and Luxton sensitively explores the trials and tribulations which Flin Flon housewives have faced over the years. As the book's title indicates, women in Flin

¹⁸ Meg Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home. Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1980.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

Flon should not be categorized or cast; their responsibilities and accomplishments are too varied and complex for them to be simply dismissed as “miners’ wives.”

Working-class women are similarly analyzed in historian Franca Iacovetta’s Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto.²⁰ Particularly, Iacovetta credits Italian women for the success of Canada’s Italian immigrant families:

Performing demanding roles as immigrants, workers, wives, and mothers, women played a critical role in the immigration of southern Italian families to postwar Toronto. Their active commitment to the family helped bridge the move from Old World to New as women’s labour, both paid and unpaid, contributed towards the material well-being of their families.²¹

As well as exploring the contributions of women to the family economy, Iacovetta also evaluates Italian women’s demanding and stressful family responsibilities. The nativism and prejudice of native-born Torontonians often intimidated Italian women, and Canadian social workers and doctors caused anxiety among immigrant women “that they might not be considered adequate mothers...”²² Overall, Such Hardworking People provides an effective balance of women’s “active agency” and also their everyday pressures and fears.

This study of women and children in the Souris coalfields owes much to the insightful and dynamic work of Iacovetta, Bradbury, Bullen, Luxton, and Rosenfeld. Existing literature on coal mining across the country has also provided direction and inspiration. It is interesting that politics in the coalfields have been the main interest of professional historians, while non-academic historians have concentrated upon the human aspects of mining coal. Oral history has proven to be particularly helpful in this latter respect. Nonetheless, a gap exists in Canadian coal-mining and family history: the role of women and children in the mine camps has not yet been properly and fully determined. This study has as its objective to fill this gap, and to discover the experiences and lifestyles of families in the Souris coalfields.

²⁰ Franca Iacovetta, Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992.

²¹ Ibid., p. 77.

²² Ibid., p. 91.

Throughout the following seven chapters, over one hundred Souris miners, their wives, and their children will help to reconstruct coal-camp life in the 1920s and early 1930s. Oral history is the lifeblood of this project. Testimony and interviews with camp residents occurred over a period of almost seventy years; the 1931 Wylie Commission featured 103 witnesses taking the stand to outline the struggles of Souris coal mining at the time. In the 1970s, two studies commissioned by the Saskatchewan Archives Board involved interviews with former coal-camp residents, long-time Estevan citizens, and ex-Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers who battled with striking miners and their families on September 29, 1931.²³ Finally, interviews conducted by myself over the summers of 1995 and 1996 focused on the daily lives of children, women, and families in the coal camps.²⁴

Most of my fifteen interviewees are people who grew up in the coal communities in the Souris fields. Eight of my informants are women, and seven are men; two married couples were interviewed together. Eight of these people were interviewed twice, and all together, my sources provided over thirty hours of testimony and memories. Roughly half of these men and women are Canadian- or British-born - the other half are of Ukrainian, Polish, German, and Lithuanian descent. In regard to family size, one interviewee was an only child while another had eight siblings; everyone else falls somewhere in between, and two of my sources are sister and brother. For health reasons or scheduling problems, perhaps a dozen additional ex-camp residents in Estevan and Bienfait turned down my requests for interviews. Nonetheless, my fifteen sources, with a variety of backgrounds and circumstances, represent a healthy cross-section of coalfield residents and families during the 1920s and 1930s.²⁵

²³ In 1973, Larry Johnston and Ron Adams conducted interviews for an SAB project entitled "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931." In 1979, Michelle Rohatyn completed "Sounds and Stories of Stripmining Soft Coal in Southern Saskatchewan," another oral history project for the SAB. The Johnston-Adams interviews were later incorporated into Toil and Trouble: An Oral History of Industrial Unrest in the Estevan-Bienfait Coalfields. Ken Cochrane, ed. Government of Saskatchewan: Department of Culture and Youth, 1975.

²⁴ I carried out these interviews in June-July 1995 and May 1996.

²⁵ See Table 1.2, p. 21, for a breakdown of the coalfield's population by sex and birthplace. In regard to family size in the coal communities, see Table 2.2, p. 38.

It is the memories of these former coal community residents which drive this thesis. Memory itself is a highly complex phenomenon which may never be fully understood. People remember different moments for different reasons, and the passage of time weathers and influences memories of bygone days. Sentimentalism and nostalgia may also creep into people's memories, and bad times and negative events may be softened or diluted when recalled over a period of time. Despite these limitations of oral history, however, the careful historian can be well rewarded by utilizing the reminiscences of sources or subjects.²⁶ By collecting as many memories as possible, and by noting similarities or inconsistencies among these memories, the historian can make suggestions about past events or lives. As well, details acquired through oral history are often supplemented or qualified by other sources such as period newspapers, photographs, or other primary documents.

Indeed, while the testimony and statements of ex-Souris miners and their families are heavily relied upon in this study, a variety of written records and other sources are employed as well. Some of the larger coal camps in the Souris region were given regular columns in the Estevan Mercury to report on community news and events. The activities and circumstances of non-interviewed camp residents are chronicled in these newspaper reports. Other Canadian newspapers, most notably the Leader Post of Regina, are useful, particularly editions in the fall of 1931, when the miners' strike and riot prompted large and dramatic headlines. The RCMP Annual Report for 1931 also describes the miners and their families through the eyes of the law. The provincial censuses of 1926 and 1936, and the federal censuses of 1921 and 1931 as well provide demographic, occupational, and financial data on Souris coal-field residents. Altogether, the written and oral sources in this study are complementary, and a clearer picture of family life in the coal camps is the result.

²⁶ For a fine collection of essays concerning the value and potential pitfalls of oral history, see Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History. New York: Routledge, 1991. Historians of rural women and families are increasingly turning to oral history to discover and explore the domestic and work lives of their subjects. For example, see Julie Dorsch, "'You Just Did What Had To Be Done': Life Histories of Four Saskatchewan 'Farmers' Wives,'" in David De Brou and Aileen Moffatt, eds., "Other" Voices: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995, pp. 116-131. In her notes, Dorsch discusses the various strengths and weaknesses of memory as an historical source.

On June 30, 1995, Hilda Carlson, a former coal-camp resident who now resides in Bienfait, sat at her kitchen table and related that the 1931 coal-miners' strike "was only a few months in a lifetime. And there were a lot of other times when there was no strikes, and no conflicts between unions and management. And I think you have to think of the happier times, too."²⁷ Five days later, on July 5, eighty-eight year old Peter Gemby, an ex-Souris miner, sat at his kitchen table in Bienfait and stated that "I tell you, at that time, woman [sic]. There was a history written so much about miners, how hard they worked....But woman [sic] actually worked harder."²⁸ These two sentiments lie at the heart of this study; the 1931 strike and riot is not the only notable event in Souris coal-mine history, and miners' wives and families also played crucial roles in the coal communities.

Life in the coal camps was not always easy, not always comfortable. Most families struggled to maintain a tolerable standard of living for themselves, and most families succeeded in doing that. Every family member was called upon to contribute to the family's survival, and coal-camp women, who remained above ground while the miners probed the coal seams below, kept family life and community life in the camps functioning. On any given day in the camps, women were wives, mothers, doctors, cooks, washers, accountants, and workers. This study will demonstrate that miners' wives and families were practical, conscious, and empowered - in circumstances far from ideal, families in the coal communities developed strategies and tactics to respond and adjust to life conditions.

²⁷ Chris Morier Private Collection (CMPC), Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

²⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

CHAPTER ONE - A SHORT HISTORY OF THE SOURIS COALFIELDS

One autumn day in 1887, homesteader Robert J. Hassard swung his pick at an outcropping of coal in the Souris valley in southeastern Saskatchewan. From such inauspicious beginnings, the Souris coal industry was born. Hassard's mine, which in 1895 had become the Souris Valley Coal Company Mine, did a booming business providing coal for southern Saskatchewan farmers and settlers. In 1905, a Winnipeg family, the Taylors, purchased the Souris Valley Coal Company and renamed it Western Dominion Collieries, Limited. Over the next twenty years, numerous competing mine companies were formed, and the Souris coalfields by 1932 were producing over 650,000 tons of lignite annually.¹ This coal, of course, was extracted from the bedrock by miners; 530 men in Saskatchewan in 1931 reported themselves as coal miners.² The entire population of the Coalfields Municipality in Saskatchewan in 1931 was 1974, 1107 males and 867 females.³ For many of these people, the mining of coal was a way of life.

Until 1930, coal mines in the Souris fields most commonly employed the deep-seam or room-and-pillar method of extracting coal. The richest seams of coal in the Souris fields were often about one hundred feet below the earth's surface; the deep-seam method mined the coal "by excavating a series of chambers, rooms, or stalls, leaving pillars of coal in between to support the roof."⁴ Sections of coal were blasted from the seam, loaded by hand into carts, and then hoisted above ground into the mine's tippie, where the coal was weighed, separated, and loaded into railway boxcars. Obviously, deep-seam coal mines were burdened by high overhead costs - employees, supplies, and machinery bore heavily on mines' account books. As well, deep-seam mining was a dirty and dangerous job, as blasting powder, heavy coal

¹ Hanson, "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931," p. 21.

² Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, vol. 6, pp. 184-85.

³ Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, vol. 2, p. 223.

⁴ P.M.B. Walker, ed., Chambers Earth Sciences Dictionary. Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Limited, 1991, p. 229.

carts, and powerful equipment were quite unforgiving to miners' mistakes or accidents.

Although there were several Souris deep-seam mines of various sizes by 1930, six mines in particular stood out. Bienfait Mines, Limited; Manitoba and Saskatchewan Coal Company; National Mines, Limited; Eastern Collieries, Limited; Crescent Collieries, Limited; and Western Dominion Collieries, Limited were regarded as the "Big Six" mines in the area. (Map 1.1, p. 16 indicates the locations of the "Big Six" deep-seam mines, as well as the Truax-Traer strip mine and some smaller underground collieries.) The Manitoba and Saskatchewan (M & S) Mine was the most productive of the six, extracting over 100,000 tons of lignite annually by 1931. Western Dominion and the Bienfait Mine produced over 50,000 tons annually, while Crescent, National, and Eastern Collieries' output was between 10,000 and 50,000 tons annually.⁵ Production figures for the smaller deep-seam mines such as Shand, Prospect, Poage, Hawkinson, and Jenish are unknown. These more modest companies commonly employed only a couple of dozen men and were slight contributors to the Souris coal output. All deep-seam mines employed similar methods, however, and no matter the scale of production, mine workers worked equally hard under common conditions.

The quality of Souris coal, the accessibility of markets, and cut-throat competition within the Souris field itself combined to challenge the industry throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. Stan Hanson explains that coal "consists of altered vegetal matter together with such impurities as water and minerals. The longer its period of alteration by heat, pressure, and chemical agencies, the greater its percentage of fixed carbon and the higher its heat value per ton."⁶ Compared to anthracite and bituminous coal, Souris lignite is a "cheap low grade fuel," which tends to crumble and deteriorate quickly when exposed to sun and air.⁷ Such tendencies made Souris lignite impossible to stockpile. Consequently, Souris coal mining was a seasonal

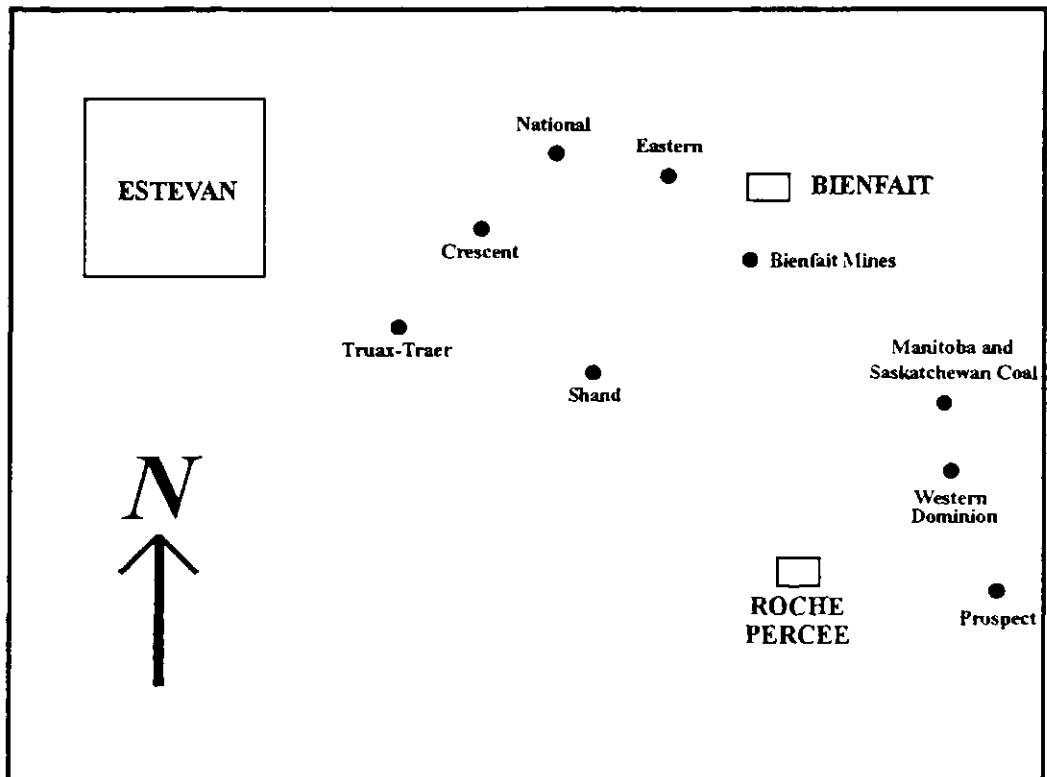
⁵ Hanson, "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931," p. 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7, 18; Makahonuk, "The Saskatchewan Coal Strikes of 1932: A Study in Class Relations," *Prairie Forum* 9, 1, Spring 1984, p. 80.

occupation. Over the cold winter months, when demand for fuel and heat was high in Estevan and the surrounding area, the Souris mines were in full operation. In the late spring, summer, and early winter months, however, demand for coal fell sharply and layoffs followed.

Map 1.1 - Locations of the "Big Six" Souris Deep-Seam Mines, Truax-Traer Strip Mine, and Smaller Collieries



Source: Estevan Tourism Committee

Laid-off or underemployed miners during the early and late summer months sometimes found seeding or harvesting work on area farms. Ex-Souris miner Tony Baniulis recalls traveling from farm to farm in the summer, picking up work for a

dollar a day.⁸ At age fourteen, Archie Holley, who grew up in the Western Dominion coal camp, helped area farmers with the fall harvest.⁹ Ann Kolenz, who lived in the Prospect Mine camp, relates that her entire family looked for farm work when the mine slowed operations: "Fall or early fall we'd go stooking for farmers that were close around....Even the women would go and help out at, well there's Hall's that lived on the hill. We went and stooked to help. Didn't get much wages but got dinner, I guess." Mrs. Kolenz also remembers that her mother cooked for stooking and thrashing crews in the fall.¹⁰ Other mining families simply spent their summers tending their gardens and livestock.¹¹ Of course, by the early 1930s, the prairie Depression severely dampened agricultural opportunities for miners and families looking for summer employment.

During the slack months, Souris mine managers often attempted to distribute the work in the mine to keep their employees on the payroll. Such "skeleton crew" strategies were beneficial to neither miners nor mines, however.¹² A couple of hours of work per week in the summer were negligible to the miners' overall financial situation, and mine managers believed that total shutdowns of the mines over the summer would ease pressure on company books.¹³ Compared to Alberta anthracite coal miners, the Souris miners' earnings were grim, indeed. According to the census of 1931, the average yearly earnings of Saskatchewan coal miners were one-third less than those of Alberta miners (see Table 1.1, p.18).

Souris miners fared so badly in terms of earnings in the late 1920s and early 1930s because of wage reductions, which in turn were necessitated by falling returns on lignite sales. At the Western Dominion Collieries, for example, the average

⁸ SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis by Larry Johnston and Ron Adams, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹¹ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series (Alice Pawson); SAB, R-A1966, Interview with Thomas Hesketh by Michelle Rohatyn, Bienfait, July 10, 1979.

¹² The September 9, 1931 Regina Leader Post (p. 16) stated that "less than 25 percent of the men whose names appeared on the [mines'] payroll [were] employed steadily the year round." John Robinson, a digger at the Bienfait Mine, testified in 1931 that a common complaint of the miners was the shortened summer hours. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 29.

¹³ See testimony of J.R. Brodie, vice president of the Bienfait Mine, and W.L. Hamilton, manager of Crescent Collieries. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 55; vol. 10, p. 148.

realization per ton of coal dropped from \$2.10 in 1926 to \$1.41 in 1931.¹⁴ After overhead costs, Saskatchewan lignite averaged a net profit of a meager six cents per ton in 1931.¹⁵ Miners' wages reflected the decline in lignite realization; in 1929, for example, miners averaged \$4.21 per day worked, in 1932, daily wages had dropped to \$3.20.¹⁶ Alberta miners averaged \$23.71 per week in 1931; Saskatchewan coal miners averaged \$14.12.¹⁷

Table 1.1 - Saskatchewan and Alberta Coal Miners' Yearly Earnings and Number of Weeks Worked, June 1, 1930 to June 1, 1931

	<u>Saskatchewan</u>	<u>Alberta</u>
Coal Miners' Average Earnings	\$477.00	\$733.00
Miners' Average Weeks Worked	31.74	29.12

Source: Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, Volume 5, pp. 30-31.

The cost of transporting lignite to market dramatically hampered the Souris mines' productivity and profits in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Beyond the Estevan area, Souris coal reached markets in Brandon and Winnipeg, Manitoba, although only 25 per cent of Souris lignite was destined for non-domestic markets.¹⁸ Coal subventions, or subsidized freight rates from the federal government, also hindered Souris lignite exports. Hanson provides a full analysis of the crippling effects of coal subventions on Saskatchewan lignite; suffice here to say that British Columbia and Alberta coal moving east benefited greatly from the cut rates while Saskatchewan coal companies felt justifiably short-changed by the agreement.¹⁹ Saskatchewan lignite, already a tough sell in comparison to the higher quality anthracite from Alberta, was certainly encumbered by disproportionate subventions.

¹⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 8, pp. 288-90.

¹⁵ Hanson, *The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931*, p. 21.

¹⁶ Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Coal Statistics for Canada, 1929-1932*. Cited in Makahonuk, "The Saskatchewan Coal Strikes...", p. 83.

¹⁷ Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, vol. 5, pp. 44-45.

¹⁸ Wylie Commission, *Report*, p. 85.

¹⁹ See testimony of Harry Freeman, managing director of the National Mine; William Hamilton, manager of the Crescent Collieries; and J.R. Brodie, vice-president of the Bienfait Mine. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 8, pp. 438-40; vol. 10, p. 166; vol. 2, pp. 38-39.

Circumstances within the Souris field itself also plagued deep-seam operators by the early 1930s. In 1930, the American-owned Truax-Traer Coal Company moved its huge mechanical beasts into the Souris fields and began strip mining. The stripping method of mining coal, rather than sinking shafts down to the coal seam, simply uses power shovels to scrape the earth until the seam is reached. As Hanson explains, stripping is a much more efficient and productive method of mining lignite: "This mining method assures a recovery factor of 85 per cent, considerably higher than that of the room and pillar method."²⁰ Along with this higher recovery rate, Truax-Traer was spared many of the overhead costs which smothered the profits of the deep-seam mines. As well as requiring less manpower, Truax was not burdened by the costs of running ventilation equipment, timbering underground rooms, or draining water from the coal face. Relieved of such expenses, Truax-Traer was able to lower the price of its lignite - a form of economic warfare in which the deep-seam mines could barely compete.²¹

As well as the chaos that Truax-Traer created in the coal markets, competition between the deep-seam mines themselves further aggravated the situation. Operators of the larger mines were especially frustrated by the selling practices of smaller underground mines. Historian Glen Makahonuk points out that by 1932, close to 150 small, independent deep-seam mines were active in the Souris fields:

These small mines were usually started by a miner and his helpers who purchased a license to mine a seam or by a farmer who found a seam of coal on his land and wanted to supplement his income during the winter. Concerned only with meeting the local demand, these owners required little capital to start.²²

Because these small "gopher hole" mines were modest in scale, they were financially secure enough to grant "overages" on the tons of coal sold to local customers. Area farmers and settlers flocked to these smaller mines, which sold "heavy tons" for the

²⁰ Hanson, "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931," p. 14.

²¹ See testimony of M & S Mine manager A.C. Wilson; Western Dominion consulting engineer C.C. Morfit; Bienfait Mine vice-president J.R. Brodie; and Eastern Collieries' president and managing director Herbert Wallace. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 7, p. 31; vol. 8, pp. 293-94; vol. 2, p. 13; vol. 5, p. 311. Morfit stated that "unless this practice [that is, price cuts] is stopped, it is my humble opinion that we are all headed for bankruptcy."

²² Makahonuk, "The Saskatchewan Coal Strikes..." p. 81.

same price as a ton of coal from a larger mine.²³ Altogether, the Souris deep-seam mines, divided amongst themselves yet facing a common enemy in the form of Truax-Traer, were in dire financial straights in the early 1930s.²⁴

Regardless of the mines' dismal account books, hundreds of men relied upon jobs in the collieries during the busy season. To ensure themselves a ready and reliable labour force each year, most of the larger deep-seam mines established mine camps or communities over the coal seams. Company-owned houses were occupied year-round by mine families,²⁵ and a few mine camps also featured a company store, a community hall, a boarding house, and perhaps a church. Some of these camps were thriving little communities; Western Dominion's camp, for instance, named Taylorton in honour of the Collieries' second owners, was home to 321 residents in the fall of 1931. The M & S camp was also large, with a population of 231 in the same year.²⁶ The Bienfait Mine, Crescent Collieries, Shand Mine, and Prospect Mine also developed vibrant communities around their tipples. These mine camps were largely self-reliant and independent communities, with a distinct and hardy spirit and character.

A characteristic common to all of the Souris coal communities was an ethnically mixed population. The census of 1931 describes half of the Coalfields Municipality population as Canadian-born, one-eighth as British-born, and the remaining three-eighths as "foreign-born" (see Table 1.2, p. 21). The majority of European-born residents in the Souris coalfields were immigrants from the Ukraine,

²³ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 8, p. 456; vol. 12, p. 58; *Report*, p. 89.

²⁴ J.C. Thompson, secretary-treasurer and shareholder of the M & S Mine, summed up the situation in 1931: "I have made the statement that unless there is stabilization of a fair price schedule, the deep-seam industry will discontinue and the town of Bienfait will be nothing but a CPR station and the town of Estevan will be half its size." Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 9, p. 36.

²⁵ Year-round camp residents were given preference when employment opened up in the mines. The National Mine camp was unique in that it waived rent for camp residents during the slack summer months. See testimony of Bienfait Mine digger J.H. Harris and National miner Thomas Kirkbride. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 1, p. 78; vol. 8, p. 418.

²⁶ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26. In November 1931, Shand camp had 42 residents; Crescent, 91; National, 37; Eastern, 24; Bienfait Mine, 132.

**Table 1.2 - Population of the Souris Coalfields Municipality, 1931,
by Sex and Birthplace**

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>		<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Canadian-Born Male	529	47.8	Canadian-Born Female	488	56.3
British-Born Male	166	15.0	British-Born Female	106	12.2
Foreign-Born Male	412	37.2	Foreign-Born Female	273	31.5
Total	1107	100.0	Total	867	100.0

Source: Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, Volume 2, p. 223.

Germany, or Scandinavia, although the 1931 census indicates substantial numbers of Polish, Russian, and Austrian residents as well.²⁷ Occupational data from the census indicates that central Europeans were dramatically under-represented on the higher rungs of the mines' occupational ladders. While Continental European-born men made up almost half of the mines' employees, for example, only one-quarter of the mines' owners and managers were Continental European-born (see Table 1.3, p. 21). In addition, all thirty-seven mine owners, managers, and foremen had British citizenship papers.²⁸ Clearly, a miner's ethnic background helped to shape his and his family's experiences in the Souris mines.

**Table 1.3 - Birthplaces and Occupations of Saskatchewan
Coal Miners, 1931**

Occupation	Canada		British Isles		United States		Continental Europe		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Owners/ Managers	6	25.0	9	37.5	3	12.5	6	25.0	24	100.0
Foremen/ Overseers	0	0.0	10	76.9	3	23.1	0	0.0	13	100.0
Haulage Workers	15	40.5	7	19.0	0	0.0	15	40.5	37	100.0
Miners	44	14.9	88	29.8	14	4.8	149	50.5	295	100.0
Labourers	17	23.3	19	26.0	6	8.2	31	42.5	73	100.0
Total	82	18.5	133	30.1	26	5.9	201	45.5	422	100.0

Source: Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, Volume 7, p. 347.

²⁷ Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, vol. 2, pp. 438-39.

²⁸ Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, vol. 7, p. 611.

By the early 1930s, deep-seam coal mining in the Estevan-Bienfait area had almost fifty years of history behind it. From modest beginnings, the Souris coal industry in 1931 supported hundreds of men, women, and children. As the following chapters will demonstrate, coal did not provide an easy lifestyle for Souris mining families. Just as the coal companies were struggling, miners and their families worked very hard to make ends meet. Of course, while many families shared common concerns and struggles, each family as well was unique. This project hopes to strike a careful balance between the general and the specific, and to illuminate some shadowy corners in the history of the Souris coalfields.

CHAPTER 2 - WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND THE FAMILY ECONOMY

“Everybody chipped in,” ex-Prospect Mine camp resident Edith Panteluk remembers of her family. “We didn’t sit around doing nothing, everybody has to chip in....You had to do something. You didn’t eat for nothing, you had to do something.”¹ Indeed, for most families in the Souris coalfields, survival depended upon the contributions and cooperation of all family members. Camp women and children developed a variety of strategies and techniques to stretch the miners’ wages and to maintain a reasonable standard of living. These tasks were most often unpaid duties within the home, but miners’ wives and children also had opportunities to earn money themselves and thereby contribute directly to the family purse. A Souris miner’s wages alone were insufficient in meeting his family’s needs of food and clothing; family survival depended upon the “family economy,” a household support network which augmented the miner’s earnings.²

The Souris coalfields in the 1920s and 1930s provide a natural glimpse of the family economy in operation. The seasonal nature of coal mining in southeastern Saskatchewan affected every family in the field, as the miners’ earnings in the busy winter months were often five times those of the summer or slack months. For example, miner S. Baryluk’s paycheques at the Bienfait Mine ranged from an October 1930 payment of \$114.65 to a June 1931 payment of \$15.90.³ Leslie Kingdon, another digger at the Bienfait Mine, fared much the same: his October 1930 paycheque was for \$104.15; his June 1931 cheque was for \$18.75.⁴ Families in the Souris fields were forced to adjust and to devise strategies to cope with the cyclical tendencies of the coal industry.

¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

²For a discussion of the “family economy” in nineteenth-century Montreal, see Bradbury, *Working Families*, p. 3.

³Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. O-4.

⁴Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. O-5.

Company stores in the larger Souris mine camps extended a line of credit to camp residents to tide them through the slack season.⁵ The store also stocked the equipment and supplies used by the underground miners - carbide lamps, rubber boots, long underwear, overalls, and other necessities. By running a bill at the store, the miner could pay his charges over the busy months. This credit was a mixed blessing, however, as store dues were automatically deducted from the miners' earnings. Small pay packets and little spending money at the end of each month were realities for many mine families. From April 1929 to March 1930, for example, Peter Boruk, a miner at the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Mine, received only five paycheques. The other seven pay stubs show store debits.⁶ Fred Booth, also of M & S, earned \$107.20 in October 1931, yet still owed the company \$10.05 at the end of the month.⁷ Clearly, deep-seam coal mining offered a family mere subsistence and little else.

Residents in the M & S camp had an added complication to the already arduous job of stretching the budget. Although vehemently denied by mine manager Alex "Happy" Wilson, some residents at M & S were forced to shop exclusively at the M & S store.⁸ Miner Steve Lazue testified in 1931 that Wilson had threatened to fire him if he dealt at other stores, presumably stores in nearby Bienfait or

⁵ Coal-company stores were often a bone of contention between miners and employers. Allegations of overpricing and gouging at the company stores were rife in the Souris fields in the 1920s and 1930s. The line of credit issued by the store was regarded by some as a chain which kept miners shackled to the company. Always in debt to the store, the miner was vulnerable and powerless in regard to the wages paid by the company and the conditions of work.

The presumed overpricing and monopolizing of coal-company stores were not unique to the Souris fields. In the violent coal-mine strikes in Cape Breton in 1925, the mine stores were targeted in particular by strikers and looters. See John Mellor, The Company Store: J.B. McLachlan and the Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1900-1925. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1983, pp. 302-08.

⁶ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. O-15.

⁷ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. O-10.

⁸ "Happy" Wilson placed an advertisement in the November 5, 1931 Estevan Mercury (p. 8) which denied the allegations that he forced workers to buy only at the M & S store. See also Wilson's testimony at the Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 7, p. 6. J.C. Thompson, secretary-treasurer of the M & S Mine, seconded Wilson's contention that mine employees were not forced or coerced into purchasing only at the M & S store. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 9, p. 6. The fact that term 6 of the eventual agreement that ended the 1931 strike regarded no "discrimination or intimidation" of employees who shopped in private stores indicates that the store issue was a concern at the time. Estevan Mercury, November 26, 1931, p. 9.

Taylorlton.⁹ Similarly, William Powlowitch was fired after his wife bought eggs from a source other than the M & S store.¹⁰ Fred Booth claimed that he was struck by Wilson after he had bought milk from a peddler,¹¹ and Mrs. Francis Grey testified at the Wylie Commission that an Eaton's parcel was tampered with at the M & S post office: "I went over to the store to get my parcel and the parcel string was broken and the management said if you are going to get stuff from Eaton's, you will have to leave the camp."¹² Clearly, "Happy" Wilson was an intimidating figure to many M & S residents, and many felt compelled to buy only at the M & S store.

The M & S miners and their wives were not simply victims, however. Despite Wilson's threats and the large fence erected around the camp, enterprising men and women found ways to foil the company's policy. At the Wylie Commission, for instance, Madeline Thompson described smuggling pork into the camp:

I used to buy it in the daytime and leave it with friends at the briquette plant and get it at night. We were scared of being fired....Mr. Wilson would not be able to see us when we bring it in around twelve o'clock at night; it is pretty dark.¹³

Miners William Bonchal and Peter Boruk also testified that they smuggled shorts (a mixture of bran and coarse meal), meat, and other goods into M & S at night.¹⁴ As well, Howard Babcock's sisters-in-law and mother-in-law would tie contraband under their skirts and walk past the watchman into the M & S camp.¹⁵ Miners and their wives, rather than bowing before the company's restrictions, often developed techniques and routines to maximize the value of their dollars.

Purchasing supplies from peddlers, rather than from the company store, was another money-saving tactic utilized by the mining families. Ex-miner Peter Gemby of Taylorlton remembers the traveling salespeople:

⁹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, pp. 242-48.

¹⁰ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 360. Powlowitch was subsequently rehired after his wife promised that she would buy goods only from the M & S store.

¹¹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 114.

¹² Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 237. M & S miner Peter Boruk also claimed in 1931 that an Eaton's parcel of his was opened by Erick Woodhead, office clerk at M & S. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, pp. 207-09.

¹³ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 231.

¹⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, pp. 163-167, 185.

¹⁵ SAB, R-A326, Interview with Howard Babcock by Larry Johnston, Regina, June 19, 1973.

And there used to be Jews...and they used to come around with wagons...and they used to come to the camps and sell stuff...[and] bring the miners something different. Taylorton never stopped those peddlers to come there, but [at] M & S, "Happy" Wilson did stop them. He fenced where the road is, with a fence, with a lock on there, and that's it.¹⁶

Notices were posted at the M & S camp which forbade peddlers from entering the community.¹⁷ A Mrs. Molyneaux, who peddled milk in the area, was especially an antagonist to "Happy" Wilson, who considered her an agitator and a trouble maker. By gossiping with all of the miners' wives, "Happy" claimed in a 1931 letter, "[Molyneaux] has the camp on fire continually with her tattling and telling lies at all times."¹⁸ Management in other Souris mine camps tolerated the peddlers, and many mine families benefited from the service.¹⁹ Steve Panteluk, who grew up in Taylorton, and Edith Panteluk, who lived in the Prospect camp, remember farmers from nearby Hirsch bringing meat and fish by horse and sleigh and selling their wares door to door.²⁰ Families in the various camps had other sources beside the company store from which to purchase goods and supplies.

Stores in nearby Estevan, Bienfait, and Portal were also accessible to most mining families. Of course, unlike the company stores, the town stores were cash-only, so a lack of cash money limited some families' shopping opportunities outside

¹⁶ SAB, R-A325.1, Interview with Peter Gemby by Larry Johnston and Ron Adams, Bienfait, July 18, 1973. M & S camp residents Joe Elioff and Madeline Thompson testified in 1931 that "Jews from Bienfait" were the principle peddlers in the coalfields. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 158, 230. A watchman was stationed at the gate to prevent peddlers from entering the M & S camp, and also to check residents for contraband. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 96; *Exhibits*, no. O-90; SAB, S-C94, Interview with Frank J. Smart by Stan Hanson, Estevan, June 20, 1973.

¹⁷ For an example of such a notice, see Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. M-8. Management at M & S did not deny that peddlers were not allowed in the camp. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 7, p. 53; vol. 9, p. 7.

¹⁸ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. O-33.

¹⁹ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series. Archie Holley of Taylorton comments on the farmers and peddlers who would sell meat, milk, and other produce in the camps. For a parallel example of peddlers and the "informal economy" in Ontario communities, see Joy Parr, The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990, p. 192.

²⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995. Clara Ziehl, who grew up in the Souris valley, recalls that her mother would butcher cows and peddle the beef throughout the area. Olga Klimko and Michael Taft, "Them Days": Memories of a Prairie Valley. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1993, p. 69.

of the camp.²¹ Women who shopped in stores in town often found better selection and bargains, but at the price of a long journey.²² Hilda Carlson remembers her mother walking seven miles from Taylorton to Roche Percee, and then catching a train into Estevan. Hours later, the train would drop her off at Roche Percee for the long trek home. "I can't see any of us doing that now," Mrs. Carlson states. "She must have been made of better stuff than we are."²³ Margaret Kingdon of the Bienfait Mine remembers the cold half-mile walk into Bienfait for groceries.²⁴ Ann Kolenz also recalls the cold winter trips into Bienfait, Estevan, or Portal.²⁵ For many camp women, the "luxury" of shopping trips to Estevan or Bienfait was tempered by the long walk or trip involved.

Of course, purchasing food from camp stores or peddlers strained a family's budget. Consequently, livestock and gardens were common fixtures in every mine camp, and many camp residents were highly self-sufficient in regard to food. While Archie Holley and Norah Mather recall that their fathers enjoyed working in the garden,²⁶ most of the chores and duties associated with raising livestock or tending gardens fell upon the camp women, especially during the mines' busy season. Joe Prysnyk, who grew up in the Taylorton valley, remembers his mother's busy days: "Mother always looked after the [animals]....We had two or three or four head of cattle, cows, and two or three pigs, and a bunch of chickens and geese and all that. Mother did all that work, milking the cows."²⁷ Steve Panteluk's parents in Taylorton also raised livestock: "Well, my folks had three cows, chickens; they'd buy two pigs in the spring, and then they'd raise them through the summer, then butcher one in the fall."²⁸ Ann Kolenz, who grew up at Prospect, remembers her mother handling all of

²¹ SAB, R-A325.1, Interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973.

²² Some families in the mine camps owned cars, but it is impossible to say how many automobiles there were in the community, and who had access to them. SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973; SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz by Larry Johnston, Hitchcock, July [n.d.], 1973.

²³ SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson by Michelle Rohatyn, Bienfait, July 19, 1979.

²⁴ SAB, R-A1968, Interview with Margaret Kingdon by Michelle Rohatyn, Bienfait, July 11, 1979.

²⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

²⁶ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995, and Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

²⁷ SAB, R-A1957, Interview with Joe Prysnyk by Michelle Rohatyn, Bienfait, July 24, 1979.

²⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

the animal chores, including having to climb valley hills to herd the cows home.²⁹ Some women were creative in finding feed for the animals. Grain could be swept from the cracks in empty grain cars on a nearby railway - Stella Baniulis of Taylorton remembers her mother making two trips a day to the boxcars for grain.³⁰

At the M & S camp, management caused additional grief for those miners who chose to raise livestock. Miners paid a fee of 75 cents per month for pasturing their cattle on company property.³¹ One miner, Joe Sleuka, claimed at the Wylie Commission that "Happy" Wilson threatened to fire him if he did not purchase his hay exclusively from the company. Farmers nearby charged \$5 for a load of hay; the company charged \$6 for a load of "old rotten hay."³² Sleuka also testified that he was fined \$5 by the company after his wife herded their cow to the house to water the animal.³³ Another miner was fined \$7 when his cow was found running at large after having escaped through a hole in the M & S pasture fence.³⁴

Gardening was another important source of food for many mining families.³⁵ It is interesting that, although gardening was certainly not an ethnically exclusive activity, many people remember the Ukrainian and other central-European camp residents as superior gardeners and tenders of livestock. One camp resident, who grew up in Taylorton, remembers the people in "Ukrainian Bay":

And then the people that lived in the valley that had the cows used to send, sell the milk to the people that lived on top....They had the barns and stuff were all down below in the valley. And it seemed like the people that were of European descent seemed to go in more for the

²⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995. Bradbury comments on the importance of cows to many Montreal families, especially those with young children "in need of a steady, reliable, clean supply of milk." See "Pigs, Cows, and Boarders:...", p. 17.

³⁰ SAB, R-A433, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973. Howard Babcock and Thomas Hesketh also remember women sweeping grain out of empty boxcars. SAB, R-A326 and R-A1966, Interviews with Howard Babcock, Regina, June 19, 1973, and Thomas Hesketh, Bienfait, July 10, 1979.

³¹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 206. Miners keeping cattle at M & S had to adhere to a series of conditions set out by the company. For example, see Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. O-29.

³² Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 211. In defending his actions, Wilson explained that "noxious weeds" came into the camp with outside hay. He also insisted that the company tried to keep its hay at a fair price. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 7, p. 2.

³³ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 209.

³⁴ Wylie Commission, *Report*, p. 56.

³⁵ The M & S Mine charged the miners for plowing the garden every spring. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 110.

cows and that than the English people that were living on top....They were more familiar with animals.³⁶

Another person who grew up in Taylorton concurs with this analysis, saying that “for those British people, there weren’t many of them good gardeners. Ukrainians, [were] wonderful. But the British, ah, they were a kind of lackadaisical type of people. That class [was].”³⁷ The Ukrainian women in the valley are remembered as especially hard workers with the animals and in their gardens. “Most of the Europeans,” Sarah Ann Prescott recalls, “they worked hard in the garden. They had beautiful gardens...lovely....They really did work hard in their gardens, the women did.”³⁸ Freda Evans agrees: “And those women they worked so hard. They would have a cow, chickens, and a big garden....They worked very hard. They worked very hard.”³⁹

Food preservation and baking were other chores that all camp women had to master. Meat, vegetables, jams, and other foodstuffs were canned by many women; with no refrigeration, canning food was an important preservation technique. A day of canning, however, was not without its consequences. Elaine Murray, who grew up in Taylorton, describes the heat which resulted from a day of canning:

Now the fire always had to be going in the kitchen because of course the jars had to be sterilized and then when the food was put in they had to be boiled for a certain number of minutes....And so sometimes, even at night when it was time to go to bed, the house was still too hot to stand.⁴⁰

Similarly, Mary Harris testified in 1931 that her house in the Bienfait camp was “most unbearable” when it was “stifled with the heat of the stove and the weather.”⁴¹ Canning meat and other food for the winter was a critical job for women in the camps. Yet it was also an arduous job that few women would have enjoyed.

³⁶ CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Another ex-Taylorton resident states bluntly that “English women...were a little lazier than the, than the others [that is, European women].”

³⁸ SAB, R-A1962, Interview with Sarah Ann Prescott by Michelle Rohatyn, Bienfait, July 9, 1979.

³⁹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁴⁰ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, “The Way We Were” Videotape Series.

⁴¹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 83.

Baking and cooking were other important duties that camp women performed every day. Many former camp residents especially remember the huge job of baking bread. Jean Moroz, who settled with her parents in Taylorton in 1922, remembers that "there wasn't such a thing as electrical plugs or anything. You just put coal and let them cook and just have ordinary pots and pans....[I used] elbow grease, very much so....I baked all my bread, baked my buns."⁴² Norah Mather relates that her mother baked bread three times a week, ten loaves at a time for her husband and nine children.⁴³ Likewise, Alice Pawson, who grew up at the Shand Mine, recalls her mother's hours of baking: "This making bread. Goodness sakes, if you've got three hungry kids, a loaf of bread doesn't go very far. So you were forever baking bread."⁴⁴ A few enterprising women managed to avoid stifling their houses with the heat from baking bread. Norah Mather remembers that Ukrainian women would cut an oven into the hillside, and use hot bricks to bake their bread.⁴⁵ Steve Panteluk's mother in Taylorton had a stove outside of the house in which to do her baking.⁴⁶ Despite some women's reprieve from the heat, baking bread and other dishes was a time-consuming, monotonous, and demanding job - but one that was necessary for their family's survival.

Just as baking was often an all-day chore for camp women, laundry was another work intensive and strenuous task.⁴⁷ Hilda Carlson remembers her mother as "very fussy with her washing. We had to have the whites...real white, and we hung the clothes out in the winter and summer, 'cause the frost made them whiter."⁴⁸ The

⁴² SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

⁴³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁴⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995. Another person interviewed, who asked to remain anonymous, also remembers the Ukrainians' ovens cut into the hill. He refers to these ovens as "Dutch ovens."

⁴⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴⁷ In her impressive study of women in the mining town of Flin Flon, Manitoba, historian Meg Luxton describes the toil of "wash day": "The woman stood for most of the day in a hot room working unprotected with fires, boiling water, and wet clothes. She had to lift and carry heavy hot wet clothes, hang them on the line, and clean up the kitchen. After the clothes were dry, they were taken off the line, folded to prevent creasing, ironed, folded again and put away." Wash day was referred to by one Flin Flon woman as "blue Monday." See Luxton, p. 153. In her study of Montreal families, Bradbury also comments on the "heavy, hot, and hated task" of washing clothes. See Working Families, p. 158.

⁴⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

frozen clothes would then be hung on lines in the kitchen, and one can imagine the congestion and humidity in the house when clothes were “thawing.” While Steve and Edith Panteluk and Hilda Carlson recall their mothers using washing basins with a crank handle set-up,⁴⁹ Jean Moroz remembers her washboard:

By hand on a washboard. You wash by hand. Take you all day....The white clothes, the towels, they were pretty dirty because you had to wipe most of the dirt in the towels. You didn't take a bath and wash it all off. You washed in the basin....You'd have to scrub them towels....[It was] lots of hard work.⁵⁰

Most of the children's clothes that a mother would wash would be clothes made by herself. Although children's clothes were available in the camp stores and in the Eaton's catalogue, the household budget called for many women to make clothes for their children by hand. Norah Mather remembers her mother making clothes for all of her nine children. Cotton flour sacks were bleached and transformed into underwear and other clothing.⁵¹ Margaret Kingdon, who lived in the Bienfait camp, recalls sewing clothes for her children: “And it was quite a job keeping them clothed....I had to sit and sew half the night....Oh, but I didn't mind it. I liked sewing.”⁵² Alice Pawson of Shand also relates that her mother made all of her children's clothing, and that youngsters were not fussy or careless about their clothes: “You didn't discard your stuff because it was out of style, I'll tell you,...And you looked after your stuff, you didn't just lose it.”⁵³ Former camp residents do not mention feeling shame or embarrassment when wearing homemade clothing or hand-me-downs; other camp children were no better off.⁵⁴

House cleaning in a coal-mining community was also a daunting chore. Coal and prairie dust, along with ashes from the stove and other forms of grit, combined to become the housekeeper's greatest nemesis. Alice Robinson of the Bienfait Mine

⁴⁹ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁵⁰ SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

⁵¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁵² SAB, R-A1968, Interview with Margaret Kingdon, Bienfait, July 11, 1979.

⁵³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995. Bradbury also comments on homemade and second-hand clothing of Montreal families. See *Working Families*, p. 98.

⁵⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

camp, in her testimony at the 1931 Wylie Commission, described her efforts at house cleaning:

There is dust of the whole prairie coming into our house and you could write your name on it. I have swept up the house a dozen times a day and no wife wants to do that. You cannot keep it clean. I do not think you would want to have to do that and I am not going to have it even.⁵⁵

Elaine Murray remembers her mother in Taylorton laying down newspaper in the kitchen to catch the coal dust that fell from her father when he came home for supper.⁵⁶ Prairie women across western Canada all had to deal with the dust; women in coal-mining communities were especially frustrated and burdened in their house-cleaning efforts.⁵⁷

Gardens, livestock, sewing, food preservation - these were the ways in which women helped to stretch the earnings of their husbands. As busy as many women were with these unpaid tasks, a miner's wife often found ways to supplement directly the family's purse by earning cash on her own. Although the extra money was always needed, waged labour intensified and extended a woman's daily duties.⁵⁸ By taking in a boarder or two, or by doing laundry or baking for the camp's single men, a woman could earn cash but would also increase her chores. Many camp women, especially those with large families, did not have the time to perform the extra duties that a boarder or another's laundry would demand. But for many other women, these paying jobs were often critical for their families' survival.

Boarding a single miner or miners was a common strategy for many residents in the Souris coal camps.⁵⁹ Sanitation reports on the various mine camps in

⁵⁵ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 76.

⁵⁶ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series.

⁵⁷ House cleaning and housing conditions in the Souris camps will be discussed further in the next chapter.

⁵⁸ Bradbury, *Working Families*, p. 167. Some camp women could not balance waged work and domestic labour. In house "#24" at the M & S camp, for example, Sanitary Inspector Thomas Douglas wrote in 1931 that "everything in the house is dirty. Mother works at the Briquetting Plant and neglects her house. She claims this is necessary in order to provide for family." Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

⁵⁹ One or two authors have claimed that boarders were not allowed by mine management in the Souris fields. For example, see Louise Watson, *She Never Was Afraid: The Biography of Annie Buller*. Toronto: Progress Books, 1976, p. 35. Evidence does not bear these allegations out. Management at the M & S and Bienfait Mine camps charged some families keeping boarders \$1/month more on their

November 1931 frequently noted the presence of boarders in homes.⁶⁰ The sanitation reports indicate that smaller families, with one or two children, most often opened their homes to a boarder or two.⁶¹ Of course, there were exceptions: house “#55” in the Taylorton valley contained a miner, his wife, seven children, and a boarder. Another house in Taylorton proper (“#31”) had six family residents and a boarder. Married couples without children sometimes took in boarders. In houses “#4” and “#11” at the M & S camp, for example, lived a married couple and three boarders. Conversely, “#40” at M & S contained a miner, his wife, one child, and six boarders.⁶² These cases were not typical, however; the sanitation reports indicate that two-thirds of boarders in the Souris camps roomed with three- or four-member families (see Table 2.1, p. 34).

While the extra income that a boarder or two would inject into the family’s income was very welcomed in some households, keeping a boarder inevitably meant more work and inconvenience for the woman who ran the house. Cooking, laundry, and housekeeping chores increased in proportion to the size of the household.⁶³ Furthermore, the presence of boarders in a family’s home could lead to overcrowding, family tensions, and awkward living arrangements. For example, four family members and three boarders crowded into M & S miner William Stalene’s two-roomed house, as he testified in 1931:

A: The men were sleeping; three men were sleeping in one room and we had to take the other room, the four of us.

Q: What, again, are the ages of the children?

rent to encourage single men to board at company bunkhouses and not to overcrowd the small houses. See testimony of Bienfait Mine digger J.H. Harris and Bienfait Mine accountant Ken John. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 1, p. 80; vol. 4, p. 13. See also M & S miner William Stalene’s statement of wages for October 1929. Three dollars were added to his monthly house rental for keeping three boarders. Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. M-7. In contrast, M & S digger Fred Booth stated that he was not charged for keeping a boarder over the winter of 1930-31. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 111. Edward Pierce, manager of the Eastern Mine, testified that families in the Eastern camp were not charged extra for boarders. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 5, p. 303.

⁶⁰ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

⁶¹ These findings are similar to trends discovered by Bradbury in her Montreal studies. See “Pigs, Cows, and Boarders:....,” pp. 44-45.

⁶² Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

⁶³ See Iacovetta, p. 90; and Bradbury, “Pigs, Cows, and Boarders:....,” p. 33; *Working Families*, pp. 178-79.

A: The boy is eight years old and the girl is eighteen or nineteen.⁶⁴

William Bonchal, also of M & S, reported that at one time, he, his wife, and two children shared their two-roomed house with six boarders.⁶⁵

Table 2.1 - Single Family Households with Boarders in the Souris Coalfields, 1931

Number of Children in Family	Boarder(s) Reported	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
0	4	12.5
1	11	34.3
2	10	31.3
3	3	9.4
4	3	9.4
+4	<u>1</u>	<u>3.1</u>
Total	32	100.0

Source: Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

Not surprisingly, single men or women who needed to board in the coal camps sought out families of the same ethnic origin and background.⁶⁶ Steve Panteluk remembers that in the Taylorton valley, "a few families had the odd boarder that stayed there. They come probably from the same town in the Old Country over there. So they worked together, they boarded there."⁶⁷ Amelia Budris, who lived with her parents in Taylorton, recalls that boarders from the "Old Country" were quite common in her home: "I guess we always had a couple [of] boarders, yet....Lithuanian men, they would like to stay with Lithuanian people."⁶⁸ Similarly, Hilda Carlson of Taylorton and Hanna Lee of Shand, both of British extraction, report that the village schoolteacher had boarded in their parents' house.⁶⁹ It was

⁶⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, pp. 217-18.

⁶⁵ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 183.

⁶⁶ This trend is similar to that found by Bradbury. See "Pigs, Cows, and Boarders:...", p. 36.

⁶⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁶⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Amelia Budris, Bienfait, May 15, 1996.

⁶⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995. Hanna Lee's statement from Alice Pawson, Memories of Shand: History of a Saskatchewan Coal Mining Community. Canada: Canadian Catalogue in Publication Data, 1992, p. 10.

only natural that families who took in boarders often took in people of similar background and experience.

There were other ways that a woman could earn money in the camps and contribute directly to the family purse. Once again, it was the single men in the camps who often required goods or services rendered. Taking in extra washing was a common strategy employed by women who needed to supplement the family income. Stella Baniulis remembers her mother washing for some single men in Taylorton:

Like, my mother she used to wash for a lot of boys. They used to bring their laundry...[and] then she'd wash and charge a little....They'd wear an underwear for a whole month and then bring it in; it'd be coal black and then you'd try to get it white. You really scrubbed on that washboard to get that underwear clean.⁷⁰

Steve Panteluk recalls that his mother charged the boarding house men at Taylorton washing rates of 10 cents per shirt and 25 cents per pair of long underwear.⁷¹ A Taylorton resident regarded the Ukrainian women in the Taylorton valley as "the world's greatest washers," often taking in the laundry of boarding house men.⁷² By increasing her own workload, a woman could bring in needed dollars.⁷³

Many women in the camps also baked for the single miners. Peter Gemby, who lived in the Taylorton valley, remembers buying flour and having bread baked for him by neighbouring Ukrainian women.⁷⁴ Similarly, Stella Baniulis remembers her mother collecting a bag of flour and three dollars from the single miners. She would then use the flour to bake loaves of bread to return to the men. In addition, Mrs. Baniulis's mother earned another two dollars a month for cooking meals for a single miner.⁷⁵ Kathleen Mackovitchuk in the Crescent camp cooked for four single miners, until mine management, desiring that the single men patronize the camp's

⁷⁰ SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

⁷¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁷² CMPC, confidential interview with ex-Taylorton resident.

⁷³ Luxton discovered a similar trend in her study of Flin Flon women, as did historian Mark Rosenfeld in his analysis of railway families in Ontario. As Rosenfeld states, some women were quite accustomed to "putting the needs of other family members ahead of [their] own...when family resources were limited." See Luxton, p. 17; Rosenfeld, p. 253.

⁷⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

⁷⁵ SAB, R-A433, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

boarding house, stopped her business.⁷⁶ Alice Pawson's grandmother baked and cooked on a much larger scale - she ran the boarding house at Shand and fed forty to fifty men, three times a day.⁷⁷ By spending extra hours over a hot stove, a woman could earn additional dollars to supplement her husband's seasonal and insufficient income.

Not only did women in coal-mine communities have a variety of chores and tasks, paid and unpaid, they also had to plan their activities around the schedules of husbands and children. The rhythms of the household invariably affected the wife and mother's daily routine.⁷⁸ Peter Gemby, a former Taylorton valley resident, remembers the women's busy schedule:

Now, woman [sic] had to get up at four o'clock in the morning to start the fire up. There was no such thing as a thermostat; they had to shake the stove, and get a little bit of kindling wood to start burning to heat the water and heat up the, for coffee, to drink...and also breakfast fixed up....She had to wake [her husband] up about quarter to six, so he'd get dressed, have breakfast, and then go to the mine. Now, at seven o'clock, six o'clock he goes to work. And she cleans up and things like that; the kids will get up. Now prepare the kids for school....She had to go and start feeding the pigs, milk the cow, clean the manure, and feed that, and then she'd have to start washing, bake, and all day long....Woman [sic] worked harder than man did.⁷⁹

Many miners testified at the 1931 Wylie Commission that their hours in the mine were often inconvenient and awkward. Some miners' days began as early as 4:00 a.m., and many men went underground after supper and on Sundays.⁸⁰ Of course, camp women adjusted their own schedules to accommodate their husbands' and families' requirements; "My mom never got enough sleep," an ex-Taylorton resident

⁷⁶ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, p. 110.

⁷⁷ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series.

⁷⁸ See similar conclusions in Rosenfeld, p. 252, and Bradbury, *Working Families*, pp. 37-38.

⁷⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995. Historian Ian McKay, in his study of the Cumberland coal mines, also comments on the women's demanding daily routine. See "The Realm of Uncertainty:...", p. 24.

⁸⁰ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, John Robinson (Bienfait Mine), vol. 3, pp. 12-13; Dan Moar (Crescent Collieries), vol. 10, p. 26; Dimetro Uhryn (Crescent Collieries), vol. 10, p. 109. John Billis of the Eastern Mine testified that rush orders of coal often meant after-supper returns underground. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 5, p. 99.

recalls.⁸¹ Clearly, many women's schedules were demanding and disciplined, and their work day longer than their husbands'.

When District Sanitary Officer Thomas Douglas toured and reported on the coal camps in the Souris field in November 1931, he conducted a rough census for his records. According to his reports, he inspected a total of 344 miners' homes, in which lived 1052 persons. Of those camp residents, 459 (44 per cent) were classified as "minors" in Douglas's books.⁸² Considering that all mining communities had a significant portion of single men, Douglas's numbers indicate that married couples in the camps often had large families; of 147 married couples with children, over half (54.5 per cent) had three children or more (see Table 2.2, p. 38). Clearly, children were a mainstay in the Souris fields. As members of families, children simultaneously contributed to the family economy while ultimately demanding much of their mother's labour.

Alice Pawson, who lived at Shand, was four years old when her sister was born. "I remember thinking that little sister was a horrible nuisance," she recalls with a laugh.⁸³ The birth of a child upset the schedules of all family members, most obviously the mother's.⁸⁴ A very young child, for instance, exerts a constant drain on its mother's time and labour. Newborns require constant supervision, clean diapers, and regular breastfeeding sessions, and a newborn's daily schedule is often at odds with the schedules of other family members. As a child grows older, however, it becomes less dependent and can even begin to complete small tasks around the house. In coldly economic terms, a newborn is a liability to its family's resources until it becomes older and more independent. At that point, the child can begin to

⁸¹CMPC, confidential interview with ex-Taylorlton resident.

⁸²Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

⁸³CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, May 17, 1996.

⁸⁴Many historians, social scientists, and even political economists have examined life cycles and family flexibility, and how children play an influential role in a family's lifestyle. For example, see: Luxton, pp. 100-01; Bradbury, *Working Families*, p. 119; Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980, p. 16; John Bullen, "Children of the Industrial Age:...", p. 160; Theodore W. Schultz, "The Value of Children: An Economic Perspective," *Journal of Political Economy* 81, 2, March/April 1973, p. s9; and Pat and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and their Segregated Work*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978, p. 56.

return some of its parents' investment by contributing to the family economy. Of course, parents in the coalfields may not have regarded their children in such an un-emotional and calculating manner, but young children did have various duties and jobs in the coal-mine communities.

Table 2.2 - Family Size in the Souris Coalfields, 1931

Number of Children	Married Couples	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
1	39	26.5
2	28	19.0
3	34	23.1
4	21	14.3
5	12	8.2
6	7	4.8
7	3	2.0
8	0	0.0
9	2	1.4
10	<u>1</u>	<u>0.7</u>
Total	147	100.0

Source: Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

Historian John Bullen, in his study of child labour and the family economy in late nineteenth-century Ontario, found that children in working-class families were usually performing household chores by the age of eight.⁸⁵ Likewise, many eight-year olds in the coal camps had begun to assist their mothers around the house. Alice Pawson remembers how quickly she was taught to cook: "Both my sister and I could cook at a pretty darn early age. Oh, yes. We could make a meal, no problem, by the time we were eight or so, 'cause my mother did chores as well."⁸⁶ Similarly, Jean Moroz of Taylorton remembers sewing at a very early age: "I never was a sewer then; I was just a little girl. But my mother made me sew and, I'm telling you, it was

⁸⁵ John Bullen, "Hidden Workers:....," p. 166. Another fine study of children's contributions to the family economy is historian Neil Sutherland's "'We always had things to do': The Paid and Unpaid Work of Anglophone Children Between the 1920s and the 1960s," *Labour/Le Travail* 25, Spring 1990, pp. 105-143.

⁸⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

nothing fancy."⁸⁷ Norah Mather relates that one of her weekly chores was to clean the kitchen cupboards, a job she hated.⁸⁸ Other household tasks such as baby-sitting younger siblings or helping out in the kitchen often fell upon young shoulders. Edith Panteluk and Hilda Carlson remember helping their mothers with the laundry, from cranking the washer handle to placing and removing clothes from the line.⁸⁹ As soon as they were able, young children began to help their mothers with household chores.⁹⁰

Hauling duties were often performed by children as well. Many people who grew up in the camps remember the onerous job of hauling water and coal to their houses. Freda Evans of Taylorton relates that "a lot of children had to haul water - that was one of their chores. And there was, in old Taylorton,...a well. A good well. And hauling water from that ruddy place....Everybody was doing it."⁹¹ John and Ann Kolenz of the Prospect Mine recall hauling water from community pumps and springs, and John and other children would scavenge for coal around the mine's tipple.⁹² Hilda Carlson of Taylorton remembers her hauling chores: "Well, we used to haul water and shovel snow. We used to bring snow in and melt snow for water so we wouldn't have to haul as much. So you'd bring snow in and bring the coal in, fill the coal pails at night."⁹³ Filling the coal pails was an arduous task for some camp children - Freda Evans remembers her half-brother strenuously complaining while he filled the coal pails in the winter.⁹⁴ Complaining may have been allowed, but as Edith Panteluk states, "nobody ever argued if you didn't want to do it. You done it and that was it."⁹⁵

⁸⁷ SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973. Sarah Ann Prescott recalls that teachers in the Taylorton school taught children how to knit and sew. SAB, R-A1962, Interview with Sarah Ann Prescott, Bienfait, July 9, 1979.

⁸⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁸⁹ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁹⁰ For parallel examples, see: Bullen, "Hidden Workers:....," pp. 166-68; "Children of the Industrial Age:....," p. 122; Bradbury, *Working Families*, p. 142; and Sutherland, p. 112.

⁹¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁹² CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁹³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁹⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁹⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

When asked whether there were certain jobs designated especially for boys and certain jobs for girls, people responded in an interesting way. There is a general consensus that children did what they were told, but a few people recall a sexual division of labour among children in the camps.⁹⁶ Alice Pawson of the Shand camp, for instance, relates that “everybody helped out pretty much. Um, the girls, of course, were in the house. You know what I mean.”⁹⁷ Similarly, Freda Evans, who grew up in Taylorton, also remembers differing duties for boys and girls: “For boys, for instance, you’d have all these coal pails....So the boys, they, they were, you sort of looked on it that they hauled the water and they looked after the coal. Girls, [did] dishes, and ironing; you know, those sorts of things.”⁹⁸ Nonetheless, there are indications that children’s duties varied with family size and circumstances, and that not all families could designate “boy” jobs and “girl” jobs. Hilda Carlson, for example, explains that in the case of her family, “everybody just sort of pitched in. My brother and sister were five years younger than I was, so I guess I was supposed to do more than they did.”⁹⁹ Norah Mather remembers her brothers doing dishes and sweeping floors alongside their sisters.¹⁰⁰ Some mining families may have assigned gender-specific tasks to children more than other families. Overall, however, most boys and girls in the camps performed a wide range of household chores and duties.

Working in the garden, assisting with livestock, and picking berries were other common jobs for children of both sexes. Joe Prysnyk, who grew up in the Taylorton valley, remembers the garden work:

Well, our first [job]...like in the spring there when mother always had the big garden, my sister and I, we were the youngest, we always got the job of watering the cabbage plants when they were first put in. Mother used to put up as high as 2000 cabbage plants and that was quite a job, watering them.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ “Boy jobs” and “girl jobs” are also discussed in Bullen, “Hidden Workers:....,” p. 169; Parr, *Labouring Children*, pp. 17-18; and Sutherland, pp. 110-12.

⁹⁷ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁹⁸ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁹⁹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

¹⁰⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹⁰¹ SAB, R-A1957, Interview with Joe Prysnyk, Bienfait, July 24, 1979.

The many hours of planting, hoeing, weeding, watering, and picking in the family garden are recalled by many former camp residents.¹⁰² Feeding and tending the family's cows, pigs, and chickens was also partially handled by children. Steve Panteluk recalls feeding and watering cows, unloading hay, and cleaning the barn,¹⁰³ while Alice Pawson at age eight helped her mother milk cows. Alice also herded the cows to a water hole, and would bring a book to read while she watched them on the pasture.¹⁰⁴ Raspberries, saskatoons, and other berries thrived throughout the Souris valley, and Hilda Carlson remembers the Taylorton children naming the various bushes in the valley for easy reference: "When you went picking berries, they'd say 'Well, where did you get your saskatoons?' or 'Where did you get your gooseberries?' 'Oh, in first bush or second bush,' or wherever. And all the kids knew where that was."¹⁰⁵ Clearly, if children wished to enjoy the food that their mothers prepared for them, they were expected to contribute to the food gathering and preparation in various ways.

Running errands around the camp also kept many children busy. Alice Pawson, whose family lived slightly outside of Shand and kept about twenty cows, describes her delivery duties:

Us [sic] kids too delivered milk down to the village. That was a chore every night. There was quarts and pint bottles, the glass bottles like they used to have, and we'd have half a dozen or a dozen customers, and this milk had to be carried down. So we had little baskets, and trotted down with that.¹⁰⁶

Ann Kolenz of the Prospect Mine camp also recalls delivering milk around the camp.¹⁰⁷ Running for the mail and groceries were other jobs occasionally passed on to young children.¹⁰⁸ Undoubtedly, busy mothers took full advantage of their

¹⁰² CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995; Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series (Elaine Murray). For a parallel example of children's garden work, see Sutherland, pp. 118-19.

¹⁰³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹⁰⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 30, 1995.

¹⁰⁵ SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979. Also, see Klimko and Taft, pp. 76-79. A number of ex-Souris valley residents comment on berries in the valley.

¹⁰⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹⁰⁸ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series (Alice Pawson and Elaine Murray).

children's errand-running capabilities. The labour of children benefited their families' economy in many ways. Within the house or outside of it, children were expected to contribute to their family's survival at a very young age.

In the mine camps, young children also had opportunities to sell their labour for cash. A few former camp residents remember hauling a 45-gallon barrel of water to someone's house for a quarter.¹⁰⁹ Freda Evans describes a buggy-like contraption, complete with harness, that kids would use to haul barrels of water to paying customers.¹¹⁰ It is interesting that both boys and girls would haul water to make a few cents. Clearly, the allure of earning a quarter or two was equally strong for both sexes.

As children grew older, other paying jobs became open to them. Freda Evans recalls baby-sitting for camp women and sometimes receiving a quarter or 50 cents for her efforts.¹¹¹ Archie Holley, who also grew up in Taylorton, did custodial work such as sweeping and hauling coal, at the camp's Black Diamond school.¹¹² Steve Panteluk also remembers firing the furnace at the school, as well as doing odd jobs for the Taylorton store: "And I chopped blocks of ice off the river. And hauled it on a sleigh all the way up to old Taylorton to the store for him to put in his freezer thing, icebox. And you'd make a quarter."¹¹³ Young women sometimes found work at the mine's boarding house. Jean Moroz recalls hours of scrubbing coal dust off of the boarding house's wooden floors,¹¹⁴ Edith Panteluk tells of piles of dishes,¹¹⁵ and Ann Kolenz describes the meal chores:

A: Oh gosh, [I] peeled pails and pails of potatoes and vegetables, and dishes, dishes, dishes, for over a hundred men.

Q: What time did you get home?

¹⁰⁹ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995; Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995; and Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹¹⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹¹³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan. Steve would also pick rotten potatoes out of the store's stock to earn a quarter.

¹¹⁴ SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

¹¹⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

A: Oh, usually eight or nine o'clock. And you're usually tired, and you want to go somewhere?¹¹⁶

Occasionally, a young woman also found work as a housekeeper or cook for camp or area residents.¹¹⁷ Such wage-earning strategies of young camp residents eased the tension on the family's budget, as children earning their own money would be less dependent on their parents' wages.

In the Souris coalfields, a family's continuance clearly required the contributions of all family members. The women in the mining communities shouldered a disproportionate amount of the household labour and management. A woman's duties in and out of the home were varied and demanding, especially if she engaged in wage-earning endeavours such as extra baking or washing. Once children were old enough to lend a helping hand, they contributed to the family's economy in many ways as well. There were limited opportunities for children to earn some money of their own, and many did. To understand properly the lifestyles and living conditions in the coalfields, the roles and responsibilities of all family members must be considered. The family economy was exactly that - it involved all family members and a complex web of strategies and techniques to supplement the wages of the breadwinner, and to assure the family's survival.

¹¹⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995. Ann would sometimes spend the night at the boarding house rather than go home, because "it was such a hassle to get up and going in the mornings. But I didn't like staying there." Jean Moroz also describes getting up at four o'clock a.m. and getting home at ten or eleven o'clock after a long day of work in the boarding house. SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

¹¹⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995; Hanna Lee, in Pawson, p. 14.

CHAPTER 3 - FOOD ON TABLES, ROOFS OVER HEADS

When District Sanitary Officer Thomas Douglas inspected the M & S camp on November 5, 1931, he was clearly taken aback by house "#39." "This place is so dirty and dilapidated that it is not fit to live in," Douglas wrote. "Vermin everywhere. It is not worth repairing. Should be destroyed."¹ Indeed, Douglas's sanitation reports, if taken out of context, paint a grim picture of living conditions in the mine camps. Historians who study the mines' labour troubles of 1931 often refer to Douglas's reports to indicate the dire poverty in which the miners and their families lived. Similarly, messages on banners unfurled by the miners during their ill-fated parade into Estevan are also noted by strike historians. "We will not work for starvation wages," and "We want houses, not piano boxes," two of the banners proclaimed, and these slogans seem to indicate the mining families' "deplorable," "sordid," and "appalling" conditions.² A closer examination of the living and housing conditions in the camps, however, indicates that miners and their families did not meekly accept poor conditions - they improved matters as much as they could. Mining families were not simply victims of their circumstances; strategies were devised in the camps to improve, however slightly, housing, diet, sanitation, and general living conditions.

Douglas's sanitation reports provide a wealth of information on Souris coal-camp lifestyles, yet they also indicate Douglas's condescension of many mine families. Some of the homes that he inspected clearly shocked him. In "#21" at M & S, for example, lived a

Man, wife, and ten children. Two boys of which are working, and one of these is living here with his wife. Have a young baby with a face in a mess of scabs. They claim they have Dr. Millions attending. Bed bugs. House dirty. Altogether too many people living here. Having

¹ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

² Hanson, "Estevan 1931," p. 38; Makahonuk, "The Working and Living...," p. 53; "Labour Relations...," p. 55.

measured the house, they would still be short of room after moving the married son and his wife out.³

Occasionally, Douglas peppered his report with personal judgments of the mine families. The family of six who lived in “#17” at M & S, for example, had “apparently no idea of cleanliness.”⁴ The houses and residents in Taylorton valley upset Douglas as well, as he proclaimed that they “should not be allowed to continue as they are.”⁵ A stretch of houses in the M & S camp, “#17” to “#24,” also elicited a response from Douglas. The poor sanitation in these houses, he wrote, was “due largely to the occupants themselves, being careless. While it may be true that they are poor people yet [sic] there does not appear to be any excuse for such dirty homes at this camp...”⁶

While it is impossible to dispute what Douglas actually saw, his “outsider” status may have affected some of his value judgments. Testimony and reminiscences from ex-camp residents themselves provide a clearer picture of camp conditions, and also allow a context of coal-community life. Most of the mine-owned houses consisted of two or three small rooms, which made for congestion and cramped sleeping arrangements. Alice Pawson of Shand remembers herself, her parents, and two siblings sleeping in a two-roomed house: “Me and my sister slept in one bed. It was a pull-out davenport-type thing, like a sofa bed. And my brother had a cot in the kitchen. That was what he slept on.”⁷ Stella Baniulis of Taylorton remembers she and her siblings sleeping “crossways” in a big bed “to pack them all in there.”⁸ Similarly, Alice Robinson of the Bienfait Mine testified in 1931:

We have a grown-up girl seventeen years and the next one is twelve and the next one is seven and my husband and myself in the same bedroom. Three girls in two beds, and the boy he is in the dining room. The boy is fourteen years of age. He sleeps on a kind of davenport. Just one bedroom to the house.⁹

³ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.* In regard to the dirty homes in the Bienfait camp, Douglas also fingered the camp residents: “No one but the occupants themselves can be held to blame for the premises being in a dirty or unsanitary condition.”

⁷ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁸ SAB, R-A433, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

⁹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 68.

It is interesting that families' sleeping arrangements were often noted by Inspector Douglas, who seemed particularly concerned when teen-aged children were in the house. In house "#29" at M & S, for example, lived a "man, wife, and four children. Two rooms. Children aged from 5 to 17. Two of these are girls, 16 and 17. Sleeping arrangements not satisfactory."¹⁰ Obviously, privacy was an option unavailable to many camp families.

Of course, there were a few extreme cases of overcrowded houses in the Souris coal camps. The testimony of sixteen-year old Annie Baryluk at the 1931 Wylie Commission is cited in every historical study of the labour troubles of that year.¹¹ Miss Baryluk, whose father worked in the Bienfait Mine, described how she, her parents, and eight brothers and sisters lived in a ramshackle three-roomed house with room for only three beds.¹² Inspector Douglas also saved his most dramatic prose for describing particularly crowded homes. In "#40" at M & S, for example, lived a

Man, wife, and one child. Six roomers. Three of these are FLOATERS. 3 rooms. One bedroom with two double beds with air space for two adults, only. Very bad odor [sic]. Very dirty. Large pantry contains almost everything from groceries to the bed chamber, which was found half-full. Very unsanitary condition.¹³

Mary Harris of the Bienfait Mine camp described a much more common scenario. She, her husband, her seventeen-year old daughter, and ten-year old son slept on two beds in their house's one bedroom; "in the other room we live, eat, cook, wash and everything."¹⁴ Although strike historians emphasize drastic instances of overcrowding and uncleanness in Souris coal-camp houses, such conditions were not

¹⁰ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26. Houses "#33" and "#34" at M & S also elicited comment from Douglas regarding necessary "rearrangements" of sleeping space.

¹¹ For example, see: Hanson, "Estevan 1931," p. 38; "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931," p. 66; Watson, pp. 34-35; Makahonuk, "The Working and Living..." p. 50; and "Labour Relations..." p. 53.

¹² Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 77. There seems to be a discrepancy on historical record regarding how many rooms that the Baryluk house had. Annie Baryluk stated that the house had three rooms, the October 15, 1931, Estevan Mercury (p. 8) indicated that the Baryluk's lived in a "two-roomed cottage," while Inspector Douglas considered the Baryluk house to have four rooms. Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

¹³ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

¹⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, pp. 82-83.

"quite general."¹⁵ Even Douglas's sanitation reports indicate varying housing conditions in the camps - dozens of homes were regarded by the inspector as clean, tidy, and suitable for the families who lived in them.¹⁶

Like many prairie houses at the time, the small houses in the mine camps were very chilly in the wintertime. In his testimony at the Wylie Commission, Inspector Thomas Douglas half-heartedly blamed mine company policy for the cold homes: "Generally throughout the field it has not been the policy of the mining companies to include storm doors and storm windows and such like. Possibly that is the reason why some of these places are cold."¹⁷ Indeed, storm doors would have made a noticeable difference in many homes, as snow often blew into houses under poorly fitted doors. Alice Robinson of the Bienfait camp testified in 1931 that bedrooms in her former house were unbearably cold in the wintertime: "We could not use [the bedrooms] in the wintertime; they were too cold. The snow came through where we slept and it didn't matter what kind of fire you kept on; you couldn't heat them."¹⁸ One of the problems at the Baryluk house, sixteen-year old Annie testified, was that "the doors in the other rooms are not long enough to the door step because the snow comes in under the door."¹⁹ Edith Panteluk of the Prospect Mine and Margaret Kingdon of the Bienfait Mine also remember poorly insulated, frosty houses in the wintertime.²⁰ Steve Panteluk recalls another winter-related dilemma at his Taylorton house. Water which ran continuously from a spring would freeze and build up ice in front of his home's door: "You couldn't get out. You'd crawl out the window and chop the ice from the door to get out."²¹

¹⁵ Hanson, "Estevan 1931," p. 38.

¹⁶ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26. Inspector Douglas remarked upon 186 shacks and houses in his tour of the Souris camps. He made distinctions between "clean" or "fairly clean" and "dirty" homes in 172 cases. Fifty-four houses were regarded as "dirty," and 118 were regarded as "clean."

¹⁷ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 11, p. 409.

¹⁸ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 71.

¹⁹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, pp. 78-79.

²⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995; SAB, R-A1968, Interview with Margaret Kingdon, Bienfait, July 11, 1979.

²¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

The shoddy construction and maintenance of many camp houses were constant concerns to camp residents. Leaky roofs were a common problem in many of the houses, as J. H. Harris of the Bienfait Mine explained in 1931:

The roofs are in bad condition. There are lots of houses where in a rain storm they have got to move their beds and put pans and pails to catch the water coming through the roof. When we went to ask for repairs, the answer came back that the company [had done] enough, that they were broke.²²

Annie Baryluk and Alice Robinson of the Bienfait camp also reported that their homes were drafty and leaky.²³ The foundations of some camp houses were also poor. Alex Peattie of the Crescent camp, for example, testified in 1931 that in his house, "when you put your feet on the floor in the morning, you would swear there were five or six men in the other room walking around. These houses have been moved from one part of the country to another and they do not seem to be level, sitting right."²⁴ Fred Booth of the M & S camp and Madeline Thompson of the Bienfait camp also remarked at the Wylie Commission about their houses' bad floors.²⁵ Although not all houses in the camps were in such a run-down condition, many families in the mine communities were forced to deal with challenging living conditions.

For the families who were not willing to tolerate such housing shortfalls, there were a number of home-improvement techniques common to camp residents. Patching and reinforcing roofs, walls, and doors were not uncommon practices for mine families. John Harris and his wife Mary of the Bienfait camp explained in 1931 that since the company would not provide storm windows, screens, and doors, they simply found their own.²⁶ Madeline Thompson also testified that her Bienfait camp home was patched up on her and her husband's own initiative:

A: We had to fix the house up. Before, there was quite a few holes in it, and we had to buy paper to fix it up. We pay \$20 to do that.

²² Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 1, pp. 76-77. A lack of money for repairs was a common explanation given by mine officials when their tenants lodged complaints. See Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 5, p. 211.

²³ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 70, 78.

²⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, p. 80.

²⁵ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 110, 234.

²⁶ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 1, pp. 75-76; vol. 3, p. 84.

Q: Where were the holes?

A: Holes in the ceilings and in the walls, too.²⁷

John Robinson at the Bienfait Mine installed new plywood on the bottom of his outside doors to keep the cats out of his house.²⁸ Similarly, Charles Smart, fireman at Western Dominion Collieries, testified in 1931 that he was always busy with home repairs: "And personally, I have put in dozens and dozens of hours trying to fix the house better and keep some of the wind out."²⁹ As these houses were company-owned, tenants justifiably believed that the companies should have provided materials and maintenance. When assistance from the companies was not forthcoming, however, camp residents took matters into their own hands and worked to improve their situation. Some camp residents, such as Edward Knight, weighman at Crescent, even enjoyed home repair: "I don't mind doing myself a little repairs [sic] that has to be done."³⁰ Clearly, many mine families refused to accept the *status quo*, and did not hesitate to look for ways to further themselves and their homes.

The residents of the Taylorton valley are especially remembered as industrious and resourceful in establishing their homes. Rather than renting houses from the company, the Ukrainians and other Europeans often built their own homes - many of which were dug horizontally into the valley's hills.³¹ Archie Holley remembers that the outside visible walls of these valley dwellings would be reinforced further with packed clay and branches.³² Apparently, these unique homes in the Taylorton valley bred unique consequences. According to ex-valley resident Peter Gemby, hibernating garter snakes burrowed into the valley hills were attracted to the heat cast by the houses.³³ The snakes and other inconveniences may have been a small price to pay

²⁷ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 234.

²⁸ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 24.

²⁹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 8, p. 178.

³⁰ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, p. 60.

³¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995; Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series (Lily Waddington). Archie Holley of Taylorton remembers that the valley houses were similar in condition to the mine houses on top. The valley homes, however, had no electricity. CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

³² Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series.

³³ SAB, R-A325, Interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973. Mr. Gemby was not bothered by the snakes - he would simply "get a pair of pliers" and dispose of them. One wonders, however, how many valley residents were startled by unwelcome house guests.

for many valley families. After all, homes in the valley were privately owned, and despite Inspector Thomas Douglas's abhorration of the valley homes, they belonged to the families who lived in them. An ex-Taylorton resident puts it best: "And then, the central Europeans, they came and they were more resourceful....They would make a home for themselves....They would salvage stuff from around, you know, the mine. They were wonderful. And, um, and the place was theirs."³⁴

Inspector Douglas was particularly offended by the odour in many of the camp houses, and his reports frequently remarked upon the bad smell in mine homes. That many of the houses would have smelled poorly to Douglas is not surprising - after all, washing, cooking, sleeping, eating, and other everyday events were carried on in the small, crowded homes. Furthermore, Douglas toured the mine camps in the early winter, when the mines were in operation. The smell of miners' work clothes would have been very strong, as Peter Gemby remembers:

And clothes, every miner they had, especially in the winter. In the summertime when they [had] weather like this [warm and sunny], they had the clothes and they'd hang it out on the line...and air it out and dry it. But in the wintertime,...they had a big heater in the middle of the room...and they'd all them clothes in there. And just imagine, one was enough, but if there was two or three people...what a smell they'd give.³⁵

In the Bienfait camp, smoke created an odour problem in the Baryluk house. According to Annie Baryluk, the house's chimney was too low, and "when you start a fire in there the house gets full of smoke. We told Harry Wilkinson if he would fix it up and he [said he] would fix it tomorrow. There is more than one tomorrow. He hasn't fixed it yet."³⁶ Douglas's statements about the bad odour in many camp

³⁴ CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author. Peter Gemby relates that valley families would gather discarded railway ties and boxcar doors for wood to build their homes. Empty powder cans, as well, were cut open and flattened for shingles. CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, May 14, 1996.

³⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995. In her study of the mining town of Flin Flon, Meg Luxton addresses the issue of bad odours in homes. "Wood stoves and oil lamps," Luxton states, "gave off greasy smoke which adhered to walls and ceilings. Chamber pots retained the smell of urine which permeated bedroom furnishings and was hard to eliminate." See Luxton, p. 147.

³⁶ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 79. George Brown's house in Taylorton also had a short stove pipe. He remarked in 1931 that "you are scared to put a fire on for fear of fire [i.e. roof catching fire]." Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 8, p. 105.

houses must be taken within context. In a coal-mining community, strong odours were a natural consequence of a hardworking lifestyle.³⁷ Such a mosaic of smells would have especially offended the senses of a government employee such as Thomas Douglas.

It is interesting that in regard to the general standard of living in the mine communities, people who grew up in the camps are quick to defend their old homes. Hilda Carlson, who was raised in Taylorton, compares mine life and life on an area farm: "And the people that were not miners, they weren't any better off, I wouldn't say. The farmers weren't any better off. In the [19]30s, everybody was in the same boat."³⁸ Freda Evans, also of Taylorton, agrees:

On the other hand, the same business was going on in farms, and in small villages, was just the same way of living. That's the way it was. And living out at the mine actually wasn't any different than living in Hirsch or Bienfait, or wherever. It was all the same. It was the way it was.³⁹

Similarly, Alice Pawson of Shand does not consider that coal-mining community as unique or different than any other town: "I would say it was as good as any other little place of that size, you know."⁴⁰ Living conditions in the camps, while certainly uncomfortable and inconvenient for some, must be considered within the context of the times.⁴¹

As for personal cleanliness, miners and their families in the mine communities developed bathing and washing procedures which were as sufficient as the circumstances allowed. Only at the M & S Mine and the National Mine were shower

³⁷ In the fictional novel *Each Man's Son*, author Hugh MacLennan describes the smells common to coal miners' homes: "Even in the cold night air, Anslie felt he could almost smell their dusty, dark interiors, the rooms where they lived and crowded together, the kitchens steamy from dishwater and the perpetually boiling kettle, the diapers of the babies and the sweaty underwear of the men, the high odor [sic] given off by heavy muscles." Hugh MacLennan, *Each Man's Son*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1951, p. 87.

³⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

³⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁴⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴¹ Housing and living conditions in the mine camps were certainly not unique in the 1920s and 1930s. Conditions among non-mine families in the Souris valley and surrounding area were similar to those in the coal communities. For an interesting collection of photographs and oral accounts of ranchers, farmers, and trappers who lived in the Souris valley from approximately 1900 to 1950, see Klimko and Taft, *Them Days*.

facilities provided for the men,⁴² so for most miners, washing up after work was done at home. Ann Kolenz remembers her father cleaning himself at a washstand just inside the door.⁴³ Alice Pawson also recalls her father coming home very dirty; he would wash up in the porch and change clothes before entering the house.⁴⁴ Of course, the miner's wife or children had hot water, soap, and towels ready for him before he arrived home from work. Many miners would have the luxury of a full bath once a week. Edith Panteluk relates that her Prospect parents "used to bring in a big tub on the weekend and have a bath, and then the kids would have to go out."⁴⁵ Peter Gemby recalls that a miner's wife would often roll up her sleeves to scrub her husband's back while he was in the tub.⁴⁶ In the summertime, however, men in the Souris fields often simply swam in the river in lieu of a bath.⁴⁷ Although they lacked the conveniences of today, men in the coalfields were able to wash and bathe regularly.⁴⁸

Similarly, women and children in the coal-mine communities also had their weekly baths. Edith Panteluk remembers that Saturday was bath day in her Prospect house, and Hilda Carlson of Taylorton also recalls Saturday night baths.⁴⁹ Steve Panteluk melted buckets of snow to fill the family's tub, and many ex-camp residents

⁴² As of November 1931, the M & S camp was the only community which had a wash house; the National facility was yet under construction. Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26. M & S Mine manager "Happy" Wilson was justifiably proud of the wash house in his camp, as he testified in 1931: "I think everyone uses it, and in many instances, I think their wives go there also. At least that is what I understand." Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 7, p. 47. The M & S wash house, incidentally, burned to the ground on October 23, 1932. It was rebuilt and back in operation fourteen months later. Estevan *Mercury*, October 27, 1932, p. 4; December 28, 1933, p. 6.

⁴³ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995. In her study of Montreal families, Bradbury also comments on techniques of washing and bathing. See *Working Families*, pp. 157-58.

⁴⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995. Novelist Hugh MacLennan also comments on women helping to wash their husbands. See MacLennan, p. 8.

⁴⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

⁴⁸ There are indications that the single men in the Souris camps were less concerned about keeping themselves clean. Edward Pierce, manager of the Eastern Collieries, testified in 1931 that cleanliness was unknown to some of the camp's bachelors: "I think some of them would get a terrible shock if they got a shower bath." Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 5, p. 300. Inspector Douglas's reports also were quite disparaging of single men and their shacks in the coal camps. Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

⁴⁹ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

recall that fresh water was a luxury that only the first bather enjoyed.⁵⁰ Hilda Carlson, for example, describes bath night for her and her two siblings: “And we all [bathed], and not fresh water for everybody. The first one got the fresh water and everybody else followed.”⁵¹ For women and older children, a bit of privacy was preferred while bathing. As Alice Pawson states, “you just chose your times when the house wasn’t full of people, you know.”⁵² Of course, the Souris river also served as a big bathtub for children during the summer months.⁵³ Maintaining a decent level of personal hygiene was a priority for many camp families,⁵⁴ and procedures were devised to keep family members as clean as possible.

In her biography of labour organizer and communist Annie Buller, author Louise Watson describes the lives of Souris miners and their families as lives of “grinding poverty.”⁵⁵ As Bettina Bradbury points out in Working Families, however, poverty is a relative concept, and determining a family’s standard of living must take into account that family’s strategies to stretch a dollar.⁵⁶ In the Souris coalfields, most families were extremely self-sufficient in the area of food preparation and preservation. There is very little consistent evidence to suggest that families went hungry in the mine camps.⁵⁷ The authors who claim that the Souris miners lived in “grinding” or “absolute” poverty do a great injustice to the miners and their families. These authors, besides simplifying and misusing the concept of “poverty,” make no effort to examine and uncover mine families’ ingenuity and talents for putting food on tables.

⁵⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁵¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁵² CMPC, Morier’s interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁵³ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁵⁴ Alice Pawson, who grew up in the Shand camp, recalls health classes in school, which “emphasized cleanliness, and, you know, eating properly and this type of thing.” She agrees that children may have been able to teach their parents about such issues. CMPC, Morier’s interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁵⁵ Watson, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Bradbury, Working Families, p. 89.

⁵⁷ Of the over one hundred witnesses called at the 1931 Wylie Commission, only two miners mention hunger in the coal camps. See testimony of Harry Hesketh and Wilburt Enmark of the Bienfait camp. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 113, 148. While their statements cannot be dismissed, the paucity of comments in regard to starvation in the camps indicates that it was not chronic.

“The mild weather is not altogether good for those of us interested in the output of coal,” the Taylorton correspondent for the Estevan Mercury wrote on January 24, 1929, “but we still manage to make our three square meals a day.”⁵⁸ The meat and vegetables and bread and milk which made up these “three square meals” were largely self-produced in the camps. Again, the Ukrainians in the Taylorton valley are remembered as having superior gardening and livestock skills. “The [valley] families were pretty self-supportive,” ex-Taylorton resident Archie Holley remembers. “You know, they’d have gardens, and some of them...would have a barn with a couple of cows. And there wasn’t too much other than the necessities to buy at the store. They did a lot for themselves.”⁵⁹

The preservation of meats, vegetables, and other foods was a vital necessity for camp residents. In the days before electric refrigeration, vegetables and meat were often canned, salted, or smoked. Peter Gemby of the Taylorton valley recalls the food preservation techniques of mine families, and again it is interesting that European people are mentioned in particular:

Well, they grew everything themselves and they preserve everything....Those Old Country people they knew how to do it. Meat, well, they’d go to a farmer, and buy pork or something like that and they knew how to cure it themselves and everything.⁶⁰

Ann Kolenz remembers her mother canning chicken, beef, and vegetables from the garden.⁶¹ Alice Pawson of Shand relates that her family had a smokehouse, so smoked ham was a mainstay in the Pawson family’s diet.⁶² Joe Prysnyk also recalls his parents as very resourceful in regard to food: “They made their own sauerkraut and cottage cheese and head cheese and bacon and hams and everything. Everything was all cured, so we never had to buy any meat or anything or cheese.”⁶³ Mine families employed a variety of techniques and strategies to ensure a year-round supply of healthy food.

⁵⁸ Estevan Mercury, January 24, 1929, p. 5.

⁵⁹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁶⁰ SAB, R-A325, Interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973.

⁶¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁶² CMPC, Morier’s interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁶³ SAB, R-A1957, Interview with Joe Prysnyk, Bienfait, July 24, 1979.

Despite the lack of refrigeration, many families in the camps kept various foods and milk cool in root cellars dug under the camp houses. Bienfait miner J. H. Harris testified in 1931 that many camp residents dug holes under houses to serve as cellars.⁶⁴ Archie Holley of Taylorton describes how some families would construct a “dumb waiter” to keep food chilled. A “dumb waiter” was a two-and-a-half by two-and-a-half foot box which was lowered by rope and pulley five or six feet into the ground under a house. Milk and butter and meat would be placed in the box and stored underground. Obviously, as Holley points out, “necessity [was] the mother of invention.”⁶⁵

Neither were root cellars or “dumb waiters” the only food preservation strategies. Ex-Prospect resident Edith Panteluk remembers placing eggs in glasses of water to keep, a tactic which worked remarkably well until the water froze and the eggs had to be “dug out.”⁶⁶ Likewise, Alice Pawson of Shand describes an unconventional method of storing meat:

I remember the meat getting smoked, and once it was done,...you buried it; it was all wrapped up in newspapers and sacking and whatever. It was put in the grain bin, in an oat bin. I don't know why oats, but that's where it was put. But it kept wonderfully, well, for months. Yeah, even though it would be so hot. But it kept.⁶⁷

The ingenuity and cleverness of many coal-mine families are quite evident in such techniques of storing and preserving food.

The cooking prowess of camp women is often remarked upon by ex-residents. Indeed, most miners in the Souris fields sat down to a very fulfilling dinner every night; after twelve hours of working hard underground, the men needed a large healthy meal. Alice Pawson's comments on her mother's cooking ability were echoed by other camp residents: “No, [the meals were] very simple. But very good meals, though, nourishing meals. Mother baked her own bread, Um, she was

⁶⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 1, p. 76. Such cellar construction was not unique to the mine camps. Farmers and settlers in the area also employed homemade root cellars. See Klimko and Taft, p. 76.

⁶⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁶⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁶⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

an excellent, an excellent cook.”⁶⁸ Ann Kolenz, who grew up in the Prospect camp, remembers having good meals, especially on Sundays, when her mother would prepare a chicken dinner.⁶⁹ Norah Mather’s mother at Shand would put a pot of porridge on the stove to simmer overnight and be ready for breakfast the next morning.⁷⁰ Steve Panteluk recalls that his Taylorton family always had “lots” of good food, but he states that mine residents who did not raise livestock likely had a more difficult time putting food on tables.⁷¹ Starvation was not a threat in the mine camps, however, and there are many indications that most camp residents enjoyed a nutritious and sufficient diet.⁷²

Living conditions of the Souris coal miners and their families have received much historical attention, almost exclusively from strike historians. While these historians are correct in stressing that some camp houses were shoddy and dilapidated, they fail to recognize that camp residents often took the initiative to patch up and repair their homes. Cleanliness of the houses and the persons within was also a constant concern to most camp residents. Under adverse conditions, most families kept their homes as tidy as they could and scheduled regular washings and baths for themselves. Also, most families had plenty of food and ate well, with camp women playing a major role in food acquisition, preparation, and preservation. Living conditions in the mine camps must be considered within the context of the times and circumstances. Many mine families worked hard to improve their situation, and hunger and extreme privation were definitely not commonplace in the Souris camps.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁷⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁷¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁷² Klimko and Taft in *“Them Days”* also conclude that all valley residents had sufficient food, and that “no one went hungry.” See p. 80.

CHAPTER 4 - FAMILY HEALTH AND CHILD CARE

On October 29, 1931, the Shand correspondent for the Estevan Mercury shared some community news: "Born Tuesday, October 22 to Mr. and Mrs. Karl Gustafson, a son."¹ Months later, a more somber announcement appeared in the Mercury:

The death of James Godfrey Gustafson, infant son of Mr. and Mrs. Karl Gustafson, occurred on Thursday, February 18, at the age of three and a half months. The funeral was held on Saturday from the home of the parents, internment being made in the Estevan cemetery. The sympathy of the community goes out to the bereaved parents.²

As these Mercury notices indicate, new life and death were not strangers in the Souris coal camps. With no corner drug stores and speedy ambulances, and with the nearest doctor miles away in Estevan or Bienfait, residents in the coal-mine communities were largely self-sufficient in regard to family health and child care. And although accidents, serious illnesses, and other tragedies occasionally occurred in the mine camps, most families were very conscious of, and successful in achieving, a reasonable standard of health for themselves.

A system was in place in the late 1920s which provided a doctor's services in the larger mine camps, but this system was shrouded in controversy. A monthly fee, ranging from \$1.25 to \$1.75, was deducted from each miner's earnings and paid directly to Dr. James Creighton of Estevan.³ Creighton then offered his services and

¹ Estevan Mercury, October 29, 1931, p. 6.

² Estevan Mercury, February 25, 1932, p. 4. For a parallel tragedy of a young child's birth and death in the Shand camp, see Estevan Mercury, June 5, 1930, p. 7; October 23, 1930, p. 5. Mr. And Mrs. John McLean lost their daughter Dorothy Ida.

³ The amount of the monthly payment paid by the miners seems to have varied between mines. A fee of \$1.25 per miner per month appears to have been the standard rate, but there are confusing inconsistencies in miners' testimony. George Beattie, blacksmith at the Bienfait Mine, for example, paid \$1.25 per month (Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 44). His co-worker John Robinson testified that he paid \$1.40 per month (Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 38). At the M & S Mine, meanwhile, miners' pay stubs show a \$1.75 per month deduction for doctor's fees (Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-10). At the Crescent Collieries, Dan Moar testified that he paid \$1.25 per month to the doctor and another \$0.25 per month to a "sick fund." Whatever became of the

treatment to the camp residents in regular visits to each mine. Many miners and their wives, however, expressed dissatisfaction with Creighton's punctuality and reliability. George Beattie of the Bienfait Mine testified in 1931 about Creighton's spotty visits:

Q: The doctor comes to your place and looks after you all right?

A: Yes. But you have got to call every time you want him. I was sick one time with pneumonia and he called to see me when I called him but he never came to see me anymore. He has got to be called every time you want him.

Q: Did he say you were seriously ill?

A: Yes, he said I was pretty sick.⁴

Fred Booth of the M & S Mine asserted that Creighton simply skipped his weekly or twice-weekly trips to the M & S camp: "He does not come, that is all there is to it. That is the complaint of the men."⁵ Dan Moar of the Crescent Collieries also testified that a one- or two-day delay was common when Dr. Creighton was called.⁶ Sarah Ann Prescott of Taylorton remembers Creighton visiting the community only once a month: "No, I don't think it was expensive but it wasn't convenient, you know what I mean."⁷

Dr. James Creighton took the stand to defend himself at the 1931 Wylie Commission. His testimony was revealing - it contained indications of the frustrations of a 1920s rural doctor as well as a thinly veiled contempt of mine-camp residents. In response to the accusations that he was not readily available to treat injured or ill camp residents, Creighton explained that each mine office had a book in which residents were to specify their medical problems or needs. On his regular trips to the camps, Creighton would consult the book and pay a visit to the families in need. According to the doctor, the miners' failure to record their names and house numbers

moneys in this "sick fund" is apparently a mystery; Moar stated that he inquired in vain as to allocation and purpose of "sick fund" money (Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, p. 52).

⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 45.

⁵ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 136. Mike Kreske, a digger at the M & S Mine, claimed in 1931 that he hurt his back in the mine and coughed up blood for a week before Creighton paid him a visit. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 203.

⁶ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, p. 37.

⁷ SAB, R-A1962, Interview with Sarah Ann Prescott, Bienfait, July 9, 1979.

in the book was often to blame for his perceived inconsistency and unreliability.⁸

Creighton also expressed frustration with dealing with camp residents in general:

We have gone down there and due to ignorance, it occurs in the farming community, it occurs in Estevan, - you will find a child in extremis due to the fact that [parents] didn't know the trouble. The miner generally gives us the benefit of the doubt due to the neglect of his own child. We have a great many unnecessary calls....I have been called down to these mines where the individual couldn't speak very good English when I have to come right back to Estevan to get my instruments. You have got to get the information....It might occur in any home; they do not recognize the serious condition always.⁹

While Creighton obviously believed that his complaints were valid, he failed to mention in his testimony that over the years, the miners in the Souris fields had paid thousands of dollars for his services.¹⁰

There are other, more telling indications that Dr. Creighton was not particularly fond of miners or of treating a sick or injured miner or his family. Ex-Taylorton miner Peter Gemby remembers two separate incidents when an injured or ill miner was roughly treated by Creighton. In one case, Gemby took a miner with a smashed fingernail to Creighton: "And that fingernail was partly on yet and when I took him in there and doctor without doing anything he just took those tin-snips...and just yanked it out in there. [Creighton] yanked it up and [said] 'Go back to work!'"¹¹ In the other incident, Gemby recalls Creighton demanding \$150 up front before removing the appendix of a suffering miner.¹² In his own testimony Creighton inadvertently revealed a callous nature by proclaiming that a "toe off doesn't hurt anybody. I don't say that is a serious injury; well, yes it is, but I wouldn't say it is a thing that is going to kill a man and do him any particular damage to wait a week for

⁸ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, pp. 201-02.

⁹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, pp. 210-212. For an interesting discussion of early twentieth-century doctors and their tendencies to blame working-class parents for "ignorance" or "indifference" towards their children's health, see Cynthia R. Comacchio, "Nations Are Built of Babies": Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children, 1900-1940. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993, pp. 31-32.

¹⁰ Miners at the M & S Mine, for example, paid doctor's fees of \$1912.50 in 1926; \$2130.50 in 1927; \$1911.00 in 1928; \$1803.50 in 1929; and \$1643.75 in 1930. Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. O-16.

¹¹ SAB, R-A325.1, Interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973.

¹² CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

that matter.”¹³ Creighton’s attitude was in stark contrast to that of William Peattie of the Crescent Mine, who paid \$1.50 per month for Creighton’s services:

Well, he should come when he has been phoned for. If he is being phoned, it is not for nothing he is getting phoned for. And besides, he is getting paid for that. And it is not only serious cases that he should attend; if he gets a small case it is his place to see that that does not develop into a serious case. That is my idea anyway.¹⁴

Creighton and the miners also had conflicting opinions of what goods and services that the monthly doctor’s fee purchased. Creighton testified that medical attendance and drugs were supplied to the miner and his family for the fee, but treatment of venereal disease, maternity care, and operations were not entirely covered by the monthly charge.¹⁵ George Beattie of the Bienfait Mine, on the other hand, assumed that the fee only covered medical attention and advice. Beattie claimed that he had to buy most of his own medicine, and that a hospital visit by him or a member of his family required a down-payment in advance.¹⁶ Harry Hesketh, hoistman at the Bienfait Mine, also testified that he was unsure of the coverage provided for his \$1.25 per month doctor’s fees; Hesketh paid for an x-ray of his head after he “had a rap with a handle.”¹⁷ Fred Booth of the M & S Mine was also unaware of the medical coverage purchased by his \$1.75 per month.¹⁸ The entire health care system in the Souris mine camps was characterized by obscurity and inconsistency, and the system’s faults created bitterness and confusion among many miners and their families.

For all of Dr. Creighton’s shortcomings, he is most notoriously remembered for his dismissal of wounded miners during the riot in Estevan in late September

¹³ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, pp. 212-213.

¹⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, p. 102.

¹⁵ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, p. 197. Maternity cases were charged \$15 per case, operations were covered 50% by the miners’ monthly payments, and treatment for venereal disease had to be paid in full. The incidence of venereal disease in the coal camps concerned the miners and their families. In a November 10, 1931 letter from Bienfait miner and union secretary Harry Hesketh to the Wylie Commission, a recommendation was made for a provision in the Mines Act “that all men before being employed must have a thorough examination by medical doctor so that there be no venereal [sic] disease brought into camp or any other disease or sickness.” Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-23.

¹⁶ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, pp. 44-45.

¹⁷ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 90.

¹⁸ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 136.

1931. There are various versions of the story,¹⁹ but it is certain that Creighton refused to treat injured strikers when they were brought to his hospital in Estevan. Apparently, Creighton demanded that money be paid up front for his medical attention.²⁰ Injured miner Peter Markunas was turned away by Creighton, and Markunas died two days later in the Weyburn Hospital. Julian Gryshko, a M & S Mine digger, died en route to Weyburn. An ex-resident of Taylorton, who wishes to remain anonymous, believes that Creighton's actions on that September day were "the beginning of the end" of Creighton's career in the coalfields.²¹ This assertion is accurate, as after the 1931 strike, a Dr. Scott was established in Bienfait to service the coal camps. Scott was very well liked in the mine communities, and medical service improved after the strike.²² But for many years before 1931, mine families dealt with Creighton, whose attention and demeanour were at best brief and rough to many patients.²³

Even had Dr. Creighton been a more agreeable man, the coal-camp residents would only have sought his services for the direst of emergencies. In terms of medical treatment and medicines, the people in the Souris coalfields largely looked after themselves. Numerous home remedies and concoctions were well known and

¹⁹ Creighton's actions on the day of the riot are well known and remain infamous in the Estevan area today. There are embellishments to the story. For example, Harry Nicholson, who was an Estevan city councillor in 1931, claims that Creighton kicked a woman in the stomach when she pleaded with him to attend a wounded miner (SAB, S-C95, Interview with Harry Nicholson by Stan Hanson, Estevan, June 21, 1973). Alex Konapaki remembers bringing a shot miner to the Estevan hospital, where Creighton refused to treat the man (SAB, R-A1956, Interview with Alex Konapaki by Michelle Rohatyn, Estevan, July 19, 1979). Peter Gemby recalls Creighton using very foul language and the term "Reds" when injured strikers appeared in his office (CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995). For other references to Creighton's shameful actions, see: Watson, pp. 41-42; Hanson, "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931," p. 127; and Pierre Berton, The Great Depression, 1929-1939. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990, pp. 117-118.

²⁰ In his testimony at the Wylie Commission, Creighton did not deny that he demanded a week's hospital payment in advance before he would treat injured miners. He gave immediate care to wounded R.C.M.P. and Estevan police officers, however, "because the government pays the medical expenses of their [sic] own people." Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, p. 217.

²¹ CMPC, confidential interview with ex-Taylorton resident.

²² SAB, R-A1968, Interview with Margaret Kingdon, Bienfait, July 11, 1979; CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

²³ Contrastingly, two diggers at the Bienfait Mine, John Robinson and Leslie Kingdon, testified in 1931 that they had no complaints about Creighton's services. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 38, 106.

commonly utilized in the camps. Mustard plasters treated chest colds,²⁴ poultices of flax, onion, or bread drew out infections,²⁵ and a broad leaf placed over an open sore prevented blood poisoning.²⁶ Tony Baniulis, who worked for Western Dominion Collieries, remembers his wife Stella as quite ingenious in regard to minor emergencies:

Well, we talk about remedy. Now, I tell one question, I bet you wouldn't know. What do you like I cut my finger, how you stop the blood without a doctor? I didn't know either. Well, she saw that and you know,...take a bread, cut in half, and she soaked...and put 'em on [like gloves], and not even big bread. Stopped the blood, you believe that? I didn't know that.²⁷

Archie Holley, who grew up in Taylorton, recalls his mother making hand lotion with lemon and honey,²⁸ while Ann Kolenz relates that her mother at Prospect would "boil up" a certain "purple flower" to treat poison ivy.²⁹ Clearly, it was the women in the camps who prepared most of the medicines and cure-alls; Hilda Carlson, an ex-resident of Taylorton, states that her mother "was a pretty good doctor herself. I think everybody had to be in those days. And you used the home remedies, and sometimes they worked better."³⁰

Many of the home remedies and self-made medications were imported into the Souris field by immigrants from the "Old Country." Stella Baniulis recalls that the central-European people in the Taylorton valley were quite familiar with prairie herbs. A specific weed was ground up and made into tea to treat indigestion, and a new baby would get its "insides cleaned" by swallowing a certain dried plant mixed with sugar.³¹ Archie Holley also remembers an unappetizing concoction used to "clean you out":

Then [there were] a lot of the old fashioned remedies that they brought from the Old Country. I remember you'd have to take

²⁴ SAB, R-A1962, Interview with Sarah Ann Prescott, Bienfait, July 9, 1979; CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

²⁵ SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

²⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

³⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

³¹ SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

molasses and what the heck was it first thing in the spring to clean you out. They figured you'd be all plugged up with winter. It was sulfur and molasses. Every spring you'd get a shot of that. Get you pumped up for the summer.³²

That Mr. Holley's mother utilized an "Old Country" medicine suggests that the British and Canadian families freely borrowed European tactics and strategies in the camps. Home remedies were shared and very common in the Souris coal communities.

These remedies were not always foolproof, however, and sickness occasionally struck children and families. Although conditions in the coal camps were not receptive to the spread of serious epidemics, waves of sickness did roll over the mine camps on an irregular basis.³³ Children were especially vulnerable, and their close contact with each other at school and at play allowed germs to travel freely. Consequently, quarantine was often established when a child came down with a communicable illness. Norah Mather, who spent years in Shand, remembers red placards on doors of houses in which a child lay suffering from the measles or chicken pox.³⁴ Freda Evans of Taylorton was quarantined for six weeks while afflicted with scarlet fever; her father and brother had to live with a grandmother while she recovered.³⁵ John Kolenz also recalls that he and his father had to stay at the Prospect boarding house when some of his siblings caught scarlet fever. A red sign was posted on the Kolenz's door, and John and his father refrained from taking any articles with them out of the house.³⁶ Whooping cough, diphtheria, and pneumonia were other serious sicknesses known in the camps.³⁷ Freda Evans comments on the sometimes deadly nature of pneumonia: "In those days, you know, pneumonia was a terrible thing, too. Uh, to get pneumonia. Double pneumonia was almost fatal....But that's the way it

³² CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

³³ Inspector Thomas Douglas was quite concerned about the wells from which many Taylorton valley residents drew their water. Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26. See also Bettina Bradbury's evaluation of epidemics in late nineteenth-century Montreal. Bradbury, *Working Families*, p. 219.

³⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

³⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

³⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

³⁷ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

used to be."³⁸ Appendicitis was another serious affliction, and appendix operations were not uncommon among camp children.³⁹

Mothers were most often the sole doctor and nurse for their sick children, and the women in the camps also had to care for sick or injured husbands as well. It is interesting that few ex-camp residents recall their father ever falling ill. Alice Pawson remembers the general health of her father and family, and comments on how sickness was regarded at the time:

No, no, I don't remember [father getting sick] at all. He must have been amazingly healthy. Yeah, I just don't remember dad getting sick at all. Well, nobody really in the family, you know. It was just a case of, and if you were sick, you doctored yourself a little bit, and you got over it.⁴⁰

Edith Panteluk also does not recall her father ever sick, but she does remember rubbing his injured shoulder with liniment.⁴¹ Mine accidents could keep an injured miner at home for days or weeks.⁴² Steve Panteluk states that the only time his father could not go to work was after his leg was impaled by a pick in a mine accident.⁴³ Such accidents underground varied in severity - some lives were lost,⁴⁴ and more often, bones were broken.⁴⁵

³⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

³⁹ See Estevan *Mercury*, September 3, 1931, p. 6. The Taylorton correspondent reported that "John Edwardson Junior was operated on last Wednesday for appendicitis. We are glad to hear he is making good progress...We regret to learn that one of the Gracie children had to be taken to hospital on Tuesday, also suffering from appendicitis."

⁴⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴² The 1931 census indicates that from June 1, 1930 to June 1, 1931, thirty-three Saskatchewan coal miners lost a total of 174 weeks of work due to accidents. Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, vol. 6, pp. 450-51. At the Wylie Commission, Dr. James Creighton commented that in his twenty-year tenure in Estevan, 1931 was the worst year for mine accidents. "The whole year seems to have been one year of bad accidents," he stated. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 11, p. 371.

⁴³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴⁴ Joe Doujin (Crescent), John Hamilton (M & S), James Wray (Bienfait Mine), and Hans Anderson (Bienfait Mine) were a few of the Souris miners killed in mine accidents in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Doujin was survived by a wife and two children, and Hamilton had only been married for one month before he was killed. See Estevan *Mercury*, October 11, 1928, p. 1; March 3, 1932, p. 1; November 17, 1932, p. 1; January 5, 1933, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Pete Pitchinsky broke ribs at the Bienfait Mine; Wilburt Enmark broke his leg at the Eastern Collieries; Thomas Bowman broke his foot at Western Dominion; Adam Kanutka broke his finger at Western Dominion. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 2, pp. 88-89, 153-55; vol. 8, pp. 78-80, 122. For a discussion of the dangerous nature of coal mining, see Frank, "Contested Terrain:....," pp. 104-05.

Although serious accidents were relatively uncommon in the Souris field,⁴⁶ painful moments and nagging health maladies were constants for the underground miners. Steve Panteluk recalls how water and bare electrical wires did not mix well underground: “And I used to get jolts from 220 [volts]. I’m telling you, I could taste it in my mouth, the coppery [taste]....Wouldn’t kill you, but when you’re wet, you know,...[I] really used to get jolts, I’m telling you.”⁴⁷ Bienfait miner J.H. Harris and Crescent digger Martin Day also testified in 1931 that they were shocked by uninsulated wires in the mines.⁴⁸ At the Bienfait Mine and Shand Mine, slippery steps at the entrance caused many a tumble, one of which was nearly fatal, as Bienfait miner Harry Hesketh relates: “A man fell down and dropped a can of powder, the powder was spilled, his lamp came off and ignited the powder and his clothes were burned off his back....His name is Mike Kugat. That happened at Shand.”⁴⁹

One of the most common health concerns in the Souris mines was the bad air or “black damp” in the underground chambers. As historian Stan Hanson explains, “black damp” “is a term used to indicate the presence of foul air caused by an excess of carbon dioxide and a shortage of oxygen.”⁵⁰ Often, the combination of “black damp” and smoke from blasting coal made a miner very ill. “The smoke is thick and strong,” stated Bienfait miner William Klymyk in 1931. “There is a queer smell to it and if you stay in it any time, you will have a weak head. You will come out [of] there half-drunk.”⁵¹ Splitting headaches resulted from breathing powder smoke, and three miners, Pat Mercilli and Dan Taylor of the Bienfait Mine, and Mike Mikac of

⁴⁶ Compared to other deep-seam coal mines across North America at the time, the Souris mines were remarkably free from serious mine explosions or cave-ins. Coal mines on the east and west coast of Canada have witnessed several very tragic mine accidents and explosions. For example, see the Ryan, Bowen, and Mellor studies already cited. One of the main reasons why the Souris mines were free from massive explosions was that the soft lignite coal of the Souris region contained less gas pockets than the harder anthracite coal of the east and west coast.

⁴⁷ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴⁸ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 1, p. 55; vol. 10, pp. 93-94. The August 8, 1935 Estevan *Mercury* (p. 1) reported that Andrew Orishuck, 27, of the Crescent Collieries was electrocuted and killed by a bare wire underground. Orishuck was survived by his wife and two-month old daughter.

⁴⁹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 80. As for the dangerous and slippery slope at the Bienfait Mine, see testimony of J. H. Harris. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 1, p. 57.

⁵⁰ Hanson, “The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931,” p. 55.

⁵¹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 54.

M & S, were once rendered unconscious from ingesting too much "black damp."⁵² Western Dominion entryman Lachlan McQuarry stated simply in 1931 that "headaches are common with miners."⁵³ Poor underground ventilation, "black damp," and powder smoke were daily realities for Souris miners, and their health surely suffered as a result.

Of course, a miner's wife would inevitably be the caregiver for her husband when he was feeling ill. As ex-Taylorton resident Steve Panteluk explains, however, miners often worked through their sickness: "And that smoke - your head felt like it was like a balloon. You'd get a headache so bad. But you stuck it out. What else you gonna do?"⁵⁴ Few miners could afford to get sick and not go to work; nagging pains were tolerated.⁵⁵ One wonders, however, how many miners went home after work feeling sick, worn-down, and physically and mentally exhausted. Although ex-camp residents do not recall their fathers complaining of sickness, the wives in the coal camps likely knew better the health problems of their husbands.

If references to men in the camps suffering from illness are few, memories of camp women falling sick are even rarer. Edith Panteluk, who grew up at Prospect, remembers her mother suffering from "open big sores" on her legs: "She had sugar diabetes and never knew it....I don't know how she done it, when I look back now. She must have been in pain her whole life. She used to sit there and sit there and rub her legs and rub her legs. She said she had that since she was sixteen."⁵⁶ Two miners who testified at the 1931 Wylie Commission, George Beattie of the Bienfait Mine and Alex Peattie of the Crescent Mine, mentioned that their wives had recently

⁵² See testimony at Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, J.H. Harris (Bienfait Mine), vol. 1, pp. 49-50; Harry Hesketh (Bienfait Mine), vol. 1, p. 107, 120; Wilburt Enmark (Bienfait Mine), vol. 2, p. 141; Mike Mikac (M & S Mine), vol. 6, pp. 147-49; Dan Moar (Crescent Collieries), vol. 10, p. 34; and Alex Peattie (Crescent Collieries), vol. 10, p. 69.

⁵³ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 8, p. 187.

⁵⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁵⁵ At the 1931 Wylie Commission, Dr. Creighton commented on common health problems of miners: "Very frequently you will find these people are subject to pains in the backs and general rheumatic pains. Others have some systematic poison which a little strain or a little cold or wet will bring out..." Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 11, p. 378.

⁵⁶ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and May 17, 1996.

been ill - Peattie's wife, in fact, was admitted to Estevan hospital in October 1930.⁵⁷ Camp correspondents for the Estevan Mercury from time to time indicated that sickness and accidents sometimes struck camp women. The case of a Mrs. H. Potter of Taylorton is particularly tragic. The October 22, 1925 Mercury reported that Mrs. Potter had suffered a "nasty fall"; she is reported sick on January 28 and March 11, 1926; the February 3, 1927 Mercury listed her as "very ill"; and the March 24, 1927 edition informed readers of Mrs. Potter's death.⁵⁸ On November 28, 1929, the Shand correspondent related that "friends of Mrs. William Ashenhurst will regret to learn that she is seriously ill."⁵⁹ While the "serious" illness which plagued Mrs. Ashenhurst is not specified, Stella Baniulis of Taylorton describes a serious, if rare, health problem in the camps:

There was the odd one that went - they say - "went berserk" or something like that. It's a nervous condition, but at that time, I guess you didn't realize, you know, as much as you would today. But it depends on what kind of life they had. Now some of them had it rough from the time they came from the Old Country. They weren't really well when they came into this country.⁶⁰

Like her husband, a camp woman could not long neglect her duties every time she felt ill.⁶¹ As few people remember their mother falling sick, it is safe to assume that women, like their husbands, simply worked through most of their health problems. There were few other options.

Household accidents also occurred in the mine communities. Various editions of the Mercury inform that Mrs. C. Smart suffered from a sprained ankle in Taylorton; Mrs. A. Kurtusak fell and wrenched her knee at Shand; Mrs. D. McLean

⁵⁷ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 44; vol. 10, p. 79. Neither Beattie nor Peattie elaborate on the particulars or duration of their wives' illnesses.

⁵⁸ Estevan Mercury, October 22, 1925, p. 7; January 28, 1926, p. 3; March 11, 1926, p. 6; February 3, 1927, p. 5; March 24, 1927, p. 3. The Mercury also reported the deaths of Mrs. Eliza Ann Philp, 39, of Taylorton, and Mrs. Laura Neilson, 45, of Shand. Estevan Mercury, April 28, 1927, p. 1; December 15, 1932, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Estevan Mercury, November 28, 1929, p. 4.

⁶⁰ SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

⁶¹ Sometimes, a woman's sickness would prevent certain chores from getting done. In house "#31" at the M & S camp, for example, Sanitary Inspector Thomas Douglas noted in November 1931 that "the woman has been in poor health which is probably the reason for the house having been neglected." Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-26.

injured her foot in the M & S camp; and Mrs. Leslie Graham fell down the stairs in her Taylorton home.⁶² Hot water was ever dangerous, to women and children alike. The Mercury's Shand correspondent, for example, reported on October 24, 1929 that "Mrs. Hugh McLean is suffering with a badly scalded arm, having tripped when carrying a pail of hot water."⁶³ In Taylorton, the Christmas cheer in 1925 was dampened for the Ocketunas family by little hands and boiling water:

The year old son of Mr. and Mrs. Ocketunas was the victim of a nasty scalding accident on Wednesday. He got his hands into boiling water when his mother's back was turned. He was scalded on the arms and hands so badly that he was admitted to Estevan Hospital on Thursday.⁶⁴

Clearly, accidents, illness, and injury were always close at hand in the small crowded houses in the mine communities.

Another health condition that certainly would disrupt a woman's routine, if only for a few days, was childbirth. Pregnant women and new babies were common features in the mine camps, and according to some camp residents, pregnancy and childbirth were regarded quite differently than today. Archie Holley remembers in particular one woman in the Taylorton valley:

But she used to say "Nothing to having babies." She says "Just like being constipated." She'd have a baby in the morning and be out in the garden in the afternoon, no fooling. God, she was a big strong woman. But she was good, you know, a good living woman and [she] worked hard and raised her family.⁶⁵

Another ex-Taylorton resident, Tony Baniulis, recalls that women would not let months of pregnancy slow them down: "[A pregnant woman] was working, and she'll work all the time, and everything's work. Muscles and everything. Easier for her to born [sic] baby. But not like now, they just sit like statues, afraid to lift a hand. That's worse. They think it's better but it's not."⁶⁶ John Kolenz reports that his mother in the Prospect Mine camp did not let pregnancy slow her down: "Not

⁶² Estevan Mercury, January 8, 1925, p. 5; February 25, 1926, p. 3; April 7, 1927, p. 3; September 5, 1935, p. 7.

⁶³ Estevan Mercury, October 24, 1929, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Estevan Mercury, December 24, 1925, p. 11.

⁶⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁶⁶ SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

really, no....Yeah, she didn't seem to complain any."⁶⁷ These sentiments regarding pregnant women are revealing, and they indicate that many women worked through their condition not because they chose to, but because the gardens and housework did not go away when a woman became pregnant.

Camp children were most commonly born in the camp houses with the assistance of a midwife. Although Dr. Creighton and Dr. Scott often attended pregnant women, many stories are told about the doctor arriving at the house after the baby was born. Norah Mather, for example, explains that she "was always in a hurry. I arrived before the doctor got there....But [mother] had a midwife with her."⁶⁸ Sarah Ann Prescott gave birth to twins in the dead of winter in Taylorton in 1927. "Oh, I had lots of help," Mrs. Prescott remembers. "I had lots of women coming. But Dr. Creighton was my doctor...and he came out after."⁶⁹ There was no shortage of midwives in the Souris coalfields. Martha MacQuarrie remembers that her mother was a midwife for many pregnant women at Shand;⁷⁰ Margaret Kingdon had a Mrs. Gent help her at the Bienfait Mine;⁷¹ and Stella Baniulis's aunt in the Taylorton area "brought many kids in[to] this world, down at the mines."⁷² Mrs. Baniulis also explains that for European women, the assistance of a midwife was nothing new: "And this [midwifery] is from the Old Country. I mean the people in the Old Country were brought up the same way. They were born the same way - they don't have doctors out there. They come to this country - the same thing."⁷³ A midwife was considered a professional, as "she'd tell you if the baby's gonna be born normal or not normal. So then if she figured the baby's not coming normal, well, you better get a doctor."⁷⁴

⁶⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, May 15, 1996.

⁶⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁶⁹ SAB, R-A1962, Interview with Sarah Ann Prescott, Bienfait, July 9, 1979. Another story told of the insensitivity of Dr. Creighton concerns his trips to the camps to visit new mothers. Apparently, he would be called out to the mine to deliver a baby, arrive late, and find mother and child resting comfortably; yet he would still demand \$15 for the trip. CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

⁷⁰ Pawson, p. 15.

⁷¹ SAB, R-A1968, Interview with Margaret Kingdon, Bienfait, July 11, 1979.

⁷² SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

A couple of ex-camp residents vividly remember the birth of a younger brother or sister. It is not surprising that the children were commonly sent out of the house before the baby's birth. Hannah Lee recalls her brother's arrival in Shand:

We girls were sent to our neighbour's next door that evening. We didn't have a clue why. Mrs. Scobie was midwife and when she came home about 10:00 p.m. she said we could go home. What a surprise we got when we saw our mother in bed with a new baby boy....Kids didn't know then what they know nowadays.⁷⁵

Hilda Carlson tells a similar story - she was sent to her great-aunt's house while her mother gave birth to twins in her Taylorton home. Mrs. Carlson's recollections regarding new babies in the camps are akin to Hannah Lee's. "I was sent away," Mrs. Carlson remembers, "and I didn't know what was going on. We weren't as wise as young people are nowadays."⁷⁶

Children were born in the camps with little fanfare or celebration. It was not that new babies were unwelcomed, they were simply unextraordinary. The brief birth announcement cited at the beginning of this chapter was representative of a community's reaction to a new baby. Life went on as usual in the coal camps - new babies were common and unremarkable, as Freda Evans, who grew up in Taylorton, explains:

Q: How did the community react to a new baby?

A: "So and so had a baby." That was it. There weren't baby showers and things like that. There were [sic] maybe the odd one. There maybe was the odd one, but "Okay, so and so had a baby," "Oh, did you hear...." It was just a matter of fact thing.⁷⁷

Archie Holley of Taylorton concurs with Mrs. Evans. A newborn did not create a stir in the community, Holley states. A birth was "just an ordinary...event. They didn't make such a big fuss about it, a newborn as they do now, really."⁷⁸ At least some children in the camp were excited about a new baby; Hilda Carlson remembers that Taylorton children would compete with each other to be the first to see a newborn.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Pawson, p. 10.

⁷⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁷⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁷⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁷⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

Clearly, however, the news of a new baby in the community did not generate much comment in the camp.

Just as new life was common in the Souris mine communities, death was never far away either. In the absence of modern medicines and equipment, the coal camps reacted to death much as they reacted to new life. The old Taylorton cemetery, recently restored,⁸⁰ contains numerous headstones and markers which indicate death at a very young age. Freda Evans remembers death in the Taylorton valley: "Well, things were different then. And if a baby passed away in the valley, they would just do their own thing. And they would walk from the valley and through the valley to that cemetery. And bury the baby. That would be about it."⁸¹ Archie Holley remembers a young girl dying from appendicitis, and John Kolenz lost his sister Ellie to the same affliction.⁸² Whooping cough and a case of wintertime pneumonia could also be fatal. Edith Panteluk's youngest sister Joyce was six-months old when the baby caught pneumonia and passed away in February 1935.⁸³ Premature babies had little chance of survival, as ex-Taylorton resident Stella Baniulis recalls:

The child is born, like a seven-month premature, they didn't have an incubator. Like my mother lost one that was born in seven months. It was born at home. They never had anything. It was born, it lived exactly just about two weeks. Well, they kept it covered and everything else but it isn't like an incubator. So this one died.⁸⁴

In a place and time far removed from today, life and death in the coal camps were regarded as matters of course.

As indicated above, most young children in the camps were unaware of, and perhaps even shielded by their parents, from issues like sex, pregnancy, and childbirth. As a girl grew older, however, her mother or another female relative

⁸⁰ The history of the Taylorton cemetery is a story in itself. In early 1985, a group of concerned citizens and ex-Taylorton residents (including Hilda Carlson) launched a project to restore the cemetery nestled in the Souris valley. For years, cows had been pasturing on the cemetery grounds and many graves had lost their markers. Today, the cemetery is in a much-improved state, and while 29 graves are still unmarked, 73 graves are marked with headstones or plaques.

⁸¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁸² CMPC, Morier's interviews with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995, and John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁸³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, May 15, 1996.

⁸⁴ SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973. For another account of the death of a "blue baby" in the Souris valley, see Klimko and Taft, p. 109.

eventually would have had a “woman-to-woman” talk with her.⁸⁵ “And, of course, the children in school enlightened you [about sex] somewhat, always,” Alice Pawson remarks with a laugh.⁸⁶ Wherever young women in the coal camps received their education, the consequences of sex were made very clear. As Peter Gemby remembers of his early girlfriends, “they were afraid of getting pregnant. Oh, I guess mother been pumping into them what the consequences could be.”⁸⁷ Freda Evans, who grew up in Taylorton, likely speaks for many young women (including Peter Gemby’s girlfriends!) when she states that “it was no fear to me. There’s one way you don’t become pregnant. And that’s all there is to it....It was never a concern of mine because you just didn’t take a chance.”⁸⁸ Women in the coal communities obviously communicated and counseled between themselves on certain medical issues.⁸⁹

Medical practices and procedures in the camps were vastly different from what exist today. Dr. Creighton and Dr. Scott, for example, could be dentists if the need arose. Ann Kolenz remembers Dr. Creighton visiting the school near Prospect to check the children’s teeth.⁹⁰ Peter Gemby describes a painful tooth extraction performed by Dr. Scott: “Anyway, he come down to the valley and I told him about [my toothache], then he look, ‘Oh, yeah.’ He had two women. I was sitting on a chair, two women hang on to me like that, and it was a back tooth, you know. And he had to twist,...”⁹¹ Gemby’s father Dmytro, incidentally, was an amateur dentist in his own right, and the story is told of a miner who declined the elder Gemby’s services in favor of Dr. Creighton’s. Creighton, however, apparently pulled the wrong tooth, so the miner ended up being treated by Gemby senior after all. “Oh, they made

⁸⁵ CMPC, Morier’s interviews with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, May 14, 1996, and Freda Evans, Estevan, May 17, 1996.

⁸⁶ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, May 17, 1996.

⁸⁷ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

⁸⁸ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁸⁹ In her study of Toronto’s postwar Italians, Iacovetta reaches similar conclusions in regard to women’s communication on sexual or sensitive issues. See Iacovetta, pp. 84-85.

⁹⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interviews with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995, and May 15, 1996. Mrs. Kolenz relates that, on one occasion, she “nearly bled to death” on the long walk home from Taylorton school after having a tooth pulled.

⁹¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

quite a joke out of it," Peter Gemby remembers.⁹² Professional medical service in the coal camps was rare, inconsistent, and as the above story indicates, sometimes harmful.

Families in the Souris coal communities were remarkably self-sufficient in many ways, one of which was health and child care. Traditional cures, home remedies, and unique treatments were widely and commonly used in the camps to treat various ills and wounds. Midwives and amateur dentists appeared when professional medical assistance was inconvenient and grudgingly given. A death in the camp was a tragedy, but it was an event handled quietly and internally. Camp residents could ill-afford to neglect everyday activities in the event of a death or new birth. Despite the circumstances which arose, the patterns of life in the camps rarely wavered. Dealing with medical problems and emergencies as they arose was an inescapable fact of life for most Souris families. A camp family had little control over such events, but it was always prepared to respond and to utilize various strategies to deal with health or child-care issues.

⁹² Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE - FAMILY RELATIONS

“Like dad, he’d leave home and we’d never see him in the morning,” ex-Taylorlton valley resident Joe Prysnyk relates. “And then he’d come home after dark....He left home it was dark, and he worked underground, and it was dark when he came home. We never spent too much time with dad like....”¹ Hilda Carlson, who grew up in Taylorlton, remembers her mother’s moments of isolation: “I think that my mother was more lonesome than my dad. I think the first few years she was out in Canada, I think she was quite lonesome.”² While on the surface these two memories seem unrelated and incidental, they serve as reminders that families are made up of individual members. Relations between family members in the Souris coal camps were complex and varied from home to home. While it is difficult to reconstruct the dynamics and relations within coal-camp families, it is certain that camp residents harboured hopes, fears, dreams, doubts, and values. Mining families had moments of happiness and togetherness, moments of tension and isolation. The coal-mining lifestyle invariably affected all family members, yet memories of ex-camp residents allow few generalizations regarding family life and familial relations in the Souris coalfields.

Many central European or British-born men commonly preceded their families to the Souris mines.³ “Their fathers would come first,” Freda Evans of Taylorlton recalls, “and they would make enough money to bring their families out.”⁴ Steve

¹ SAB, R-A1957, Interview with Joe Prysnyk, Bienfait, July 24, 1979.

² CMPC, Morier’s interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

³ Two of the miners who testified at the 1931 Wylie Commission, Alex Hominuk of the Eastern Mine and Alec Makorny of Crescent, mentioned that they had wives and families in the “Old Country.” Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 5, p. 207; vol. 10, p. 114. Camp correspondents for the Estevan Mercury occasionally welcomed women and families from the “Old Country” who were reunited with their husbands and fathers in the camps. For example, see Estevan Mercury November 15, 1928, p. 4; August 15, 1929, p. 4; October 30, 1930, p. 5.

⁴ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995. Historian Franca Iacovetta discovered similar immigration trends in her study of Italian immigrants in Toronto. See Iacovetta, pp. xxii-xxiii. Two excellent studies of migration and its effects on both the sending and receiving societies are Tamara Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship Between the

Panteluk's father arrived in Canada from the Ukraine in 1913; it was not until 1921 that his wife could join him in Taylorton.⁵ Jean Moroz arrived in Taylorton in 1922, when she was twelve years old. Her father had emigrated from Poland years earlier, and Jean clearly remembers her mother's first impression of her new home in Taylorton:

When we came here...my mother stopped and says, "You didn't get me from Europe to this place?" And [father] said "What's wrong with that?" And it was a shack...I sure wouldn't call it a house but we did at that time....It was horrible....It was very bad and my mother cried lots of times that she had to live in a shack like that.⁶

Hannah Lee, who grew up in Shand, recalls a similar reaction from her mother. Hannah's father arrived in Shand from Britain in 1910, and sent for his family in 1912: "When mother saw the place she was very disappointed and said, 'To think I left a nice place in England to come to this.'"⁷ Some newcomers to Canada expected the coal communities to be larger than they were. Peter Gemby remembers that when he arrived in Canada in 1922 from the Ukraine, he was sorely let down at the size of Taylorton: "I was hoping [Taylorton] would be a big city....Then when they took me down to old Taylorton,...and the shack...was a hole dug in the hill,...I was very disappointed that day when I got there."⁸ Sarah Ann Prescott, who arrived in Taylorton from England in 1920, was also caught unaware by the camp's size: "I didn't think I was coming to such a little place, you know what I mean."⁹

Despite many women's initial disappointment and despair in the coal camps, life went on and they were forced to adapt quickly to their new surroundings. Sarah Ann Prescott, who admits that she "was lonesome at times," quickly "forgot it anyway."¹⁰ Hannah Lee's mother, who was disappointed with first glimpses of

Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; and Bruno Ramirez, *On the Move: French-Canadian and Italian Migrants in the North Atlantic Economy, 1860-1914*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991.

⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁶ SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

⁷ Pawson, p. 9.

⁸ SAB, R-A325, Interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973.

⁹ SAB, R-A1962, Interview with Sarah Ann Prescott, Bienfait, July 9, 1979.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Shand, "settled down and made the best of it."¹¹ Similarly, Freda Evans, who grew up in Taylorton, believes that camp women were flexible and practical: "Oh, I suppose. If your expectations aren't too high. Well, kind of go with the flow, eh....It's pretty hard to describe life then against what it's like now."¹² Quite simply, a Souris miner's wife had no other options; she had no choice but to tolerate and try to improve her and her family's lot. Steve Panteluk, who was raised in Taylorton, and Edith Panteluk, who lived in the Prospect camp, do not recall their mothers showing distress. "[Mother] never ever complained," Edith relates. "Mom would never complain of anything. Yeah." Steve agrees that mothers accepted their situation: "Well, that's just the way life was over there. They never complained that much. You done [sic] what had to be done. That's all there was to it."¹³ Loneliness aside, some camp women may have found solace where they could. Alice Pawson, who grew up in Shand, for example, relates that her mother "got very attached to the animals she looked after. She really did. She liked the animals, yeah. Even though they were a lot of work."¹⁴

Some miners and their wives regarded their lives in the coalfields as temporary. Before the 1930s devastated prairie farms, land-ownership and a family farm were objectives of many young miners and their wives. Stella Baniulis, who lived in Taylorton, relates that her father "never planned to stay in the mines. He always planned to go farming. All he was sitting there for was to make a few dollars so he could afford to buy some machinery, horses, and get out and start farming. This is what he had in his head."¹⁵ Some miners succeeded in purchasing a farm - Paul Rohatyn recalls that his father worked in various Souris mines until he saved enough money to buy a small farm near Hirsch.¹⁶ Ex-Taylorton miner Peter Gemby also remembers some families scrimping in the hopes of buying a farm.¹⁷ A few miners, such as Paul Rohatyn's father, achieved their dream. Rohatyn, however,

¹¹ Pawson, p. 9.

¹² CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹⁵ SAB, R-A433, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

¹⁶ SAB, R-A1961.1, Interview with Paul Rohatyn by Michelle Rohatyn, Bienfait, July 23, 1979.

¹⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

inopportunistically acquired his farm in 1929, and within a couple of years had returned to the mines.¹⁸

For every mining family that had dreams of leaving the mines, there was a family hopelessly entangled in debt to the company. Wilbert Enmark, a digger at the Bienfait Mine, testified in 1931 that he relied on "other work" in the summer to pay his bills. What little money he managed to save did not last through the winter, when house rent drove him into debt.¹⁹ Fred Booth of the M & S Mine testified simply in 1931 that he was "always in the hole to the company. I was always in debt to the company,..."²⁰ "Well, we used to run store bills and work all winter to pay the summer bills off," ex-Bienfait camp resident Margaret Kingdon states.²¹ Peter Gemby, who lived in the Taylorton valley, recalls the bleak prospects of some mine-camp residents: "And some of them, they just work from, practically all their lives, and they had nothing, and [when] they died they had nothing."²² Mr. Gemby's point is well taken, if slightly dramatic. Clearly, however, with credit issued at the company stores and debits deducted from pay packets, cash money was limited in the coal camps. And a family's savings could quickly vanish, as ex-Taylorton resident Jean Moroz recalls:

If you had \$150, \$200, you were a millionaire. And I'm not kidding, because I remember my sister had to have an operation and my dad never quit talking about it. "I paid \$150 for her operation?" You know. It was something out of this world.²³

For many coal miners and their families, the ties that bound them to the mines were strong. The opportunities outside of the collieries were scarce, and the money to "break out" of the mining lifestyle was even more limited.

"I am not in the habit of using bad words," Henry Kushnerus, pit boss at Eastern Collieries, testified in 1931, "but sometimes I have to be pretty thick."²⁴ Coal miners are often portrayed as a rough and ready lot, and families in the

¹⁸ SAB, R-A1961.1, Interview with Paul Rohatyn, Bienfait, July 23, 1979.

¹⁹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 150.

²⁰ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 112.

²¹ SAB, R-A1968, Interview with Margaret Kingdon, Bienfait, July 11, 1979.

²² CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

²³ SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

²⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 23.

coalfields were influenced by the miners' lifestyles.²⁵ Many ex-camp residents vividly recall the colorful vernacular of the men, and the mixture of languages spoken in the camps ensured a wide variety of profanity. Freda Evans, who grew up in Taylorton, remembers that in the camp, Ukrainian curse words mixed freely with their English counterparts.²⁶ Norah Mather also recalls that the miners' "language wasn't the choicest, a lot of them."²⁷ Archie Holley agrees that coal miners were tough and independent:

Well, they looked after themselves, there's no question about that. You couldn't step on their feet very much. You know, start taking over. They looked after themselves. They [had] come up the hard way - I guess that's what happens....So they got toughened along the road.²⁸

Historians have just begun to examine how a person's work environment affects their familial relationships at home.²⁹ For example, if underground miners were sworn at all day by their pit bosses, what frame of mind would the miners be in when they went home in the evenings?³⁰ Many ex-camp residents comment on the mine's steam whistle, which literally ruled the lives of miners and their families. Steve Panteluk, for instance, remembers that "if they blew a long steam whistle, that means you worked the next day. And if they blew a short one, there was no work."³¹

²⁵ Some writers have made much of coal miners' perceived rough and tumble lifestyle. In this regard, it is often difficult to separate myth from reality. For a good example of stereotyping at its worst, see Chapter Nine ("Bienfait") in Heather Robinson, *Grass Roots*. Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1973.

²⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

²⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

²⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

²⁹ Rosenfeld, for example, addresses the question of how the work and non-work lives of railway men and women meshed and gelled. He asserts that the irregular and uncertain rhythms of railway labour had "profound implications" on families. See Rosenfeld, p. 248.

³⁰ At the 1931 Wylie Commission, a few miners reported that their bosses' foul language was upsetting. John Billis and Charles Brooks of the Eastern Collieries mentioned pit boss Henry Kushnerus's swearing, and John Lochlin of the M & S Mine commented on mine manager "Happy" Wilson's excessive cursing. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 5, p. 101, 150; vol. 6, p. 257.

³¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995. In his Forward to John Mellor's history of the Cape Breton coal miners' union struggles, journalist Bill McNeil comments on how coal companies controlled every aspect of the miners' lives. "The company had total power over the people it employed, telling them who would work, where they would work, when they would work, how much they would be paid, where they would live, and, through the company store, how well they would live." See Mellor, p. vi. Historian Lynne Bowen, in her study of Vancouver Island coal miners, also recognizes the miners' powerlessness in the title of her book *Boss Whistle: The Coal Miners of Vancouver Island Remember*.

Historian Elizabeth Pleck suggests that “pessimism, insecurity, physical fatigue were often the consequences of menial work,...” but it is difficult to determine how the nature of coal mining negatively influenced coal-mining families.³²

There is no doubt that there were instances of domestic violence in the coal communities, although ex-camp residents have few specific memories. “A woman got beaten up in those days, she kept quiet,” one former camp resident recalls, “which wasn’t right, but I mean that’s just the way it was.”³³ Not surprisingly, alcohol lay behind most incidents of family violence, as one person explains: “No, he beat the hell out of her. Every time he got, he went to town he got drunk, came home. Rest of the night, you walk back and forth, and [hear] hollerin’ and swearin’,...”³⁴ A couple of former camp residents remark that women may sometimes have fought back: “Yeah, [men] were rough,...and some women were rough with their men,” one person relates.³⁵ Again, liquor was often involved in physical disputes: “If the man alone or woman and a man, they get half-pissed, and then some little thing will come, and then they keep banging into each other and then finally blow up.”³⁶ A tragic murder-suicide in the Bienfait Mine camp in December 1930 stunned area residents. Mrs. William Newton, 41, who ran the mine’s boarding house, was viciously murdered by her husband of fourteen years, who committed suicide shortly thereafter. William Newton, 44, had a history of mental troubles and suspected his wife of infidelity.³⁷ Needless to say, such a horrific and isolated crime cannot be used as a barometer, but it does indicate that the Souris coalfields were not immune to acts of senseless violence and rage.

³² Elizabeth H. Pleck, “Two Worlds in One: Work and Family,” *Journal of Social History* 10, 2, Winter 1976, p. 187. Pleck recognizes that it is a difficult chore for historians to link home and work lives of manual labourers. For an interesting study of family dysfunction in a coal-mining community, see Herman R. Lantz, *People of Coal Town*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958. Lantz’s findings are quite at odds with the conclusions that this thesis suggests in regard to family relations in the Souris coal region. Lantz, for example, states that cynicism and despair reigned supreme among his coal-camp families. See Lantz, p. 269.

³³ CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Estevan *Mercury*, December 4, 1930, p. 1,7.

A specific case of child abuse is recalled by only one ex-camp resident. "Well, his dad was so strict," this person remembers.

Oh, he used to beat them kids for nothing, too, lots of times. If one got into trouble, he'd give him a good licking over there, and then turn around and give the other boy a licking for nothing. Just to show him that "You better not do the same thing."...He'd pound them in the back or, didn't matter where. He picked up a rope, broom, or whatever.³⁸

Many former coal-camp residents comment that if such incidents of abuse occurred, they were not common knowledge. While it is impossible to ascertain the extent of domestic violence in the Souris camps, it is safe to assume that coal communities shared social problems common to all communities, then and now. Mining families' demanding lifestyles, their economic standing, their powerlessness in regard to the rhythms of the mine - these factors certainly created challenges and necessitated responses from Souris coal-camp families.

Despite the various hardships of mine life, however, ex-camp residents remember their parents adopting a "grin and bear it" attitude. Indeed, many people who grew up in the camps do not recall their parents fighting or arguing in any way. Edith Panteluk, who was raised at the Prospect Mine, states that she "never heard [her] mother and dad argue. I always said that. They always got along good."³⁹ Alex Konapaki, who arrived in Taylorton in 1913 with his parents and later worked in the mine himself, remembers his parents' relationship as well as his own marriage:

I never heard them have an argument between them two - my mother and my dad. Me and my wife, we never had an argument between us, too. We'd talk about it, you know. If she was right, she's right. If I'm wrong, I'm wrong. And so on. But we never had an argument forever [sic].⁴⁰

For miners and their wives with children, it may have been that they simply avoided discussing testy issues in front of the children. Hilda Carlson, whose father worked at the Western Dominion Mine, indicates that her parents were conscious of "little ears": "I was too young, and I never heard my mother and dad discussing, you know,

³⁸ CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author.

³⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴⁰ SAB, R-A1956, Interview with Alex Konapaki, Estevan, July 19, 1979.

that we weren't getting any money or anything like that. That was their business - it wasn't discussed in front of us kids."⁴¹ It appears that many parents in the Souris fields took care to shelter their children from real or potential parental arguments and disputes.

Most interviewed ex-camp residents remember warm familial relations and open communication between family members. Ann Kolenz's father often played cards with his wife at Prospect.⁴² Norah Mather, whose father worked in a few different Souris mines, recalls that her parents "talked a lot." Mr. Mather would have spelling bees for his nine children, and when Norah and her siblings were spelling particularly well, "he'd get out his Bible and use some of those Bible words. We told him that wasn't fair."⁴³ Norah also relates that her mother was equally proud of her children: "Oh, mother was a very cheerful, happy person. Especially if the kids did something exceptionally well. She would just, that would make her whole year, I think."⁴⁴ Sarah Ann Prescott, who raised a family in Taylorton, expresses similar sentiments regarding her three children:

The school used to put a concert on, like the grades or anything like that. Well, I think you would like to go to let the children see it. And then after that, when they got older, they'd be in different things like different concerts or different things, school singing and that. So we always went then. We never missed anything where the children was [sic] in anything. And I don't think a mother or a family should.⁴⁵

Hilda Carlson, who is Mrs. Prescott's eldest daughter, also remembers birthday parties and Sunday car rides with the family.⁴⁶ Alice Pawson of Shand relates that her family's communication was easy, especially at dinner, when the day's events and the next day's chores were discussed.⁴⁷ "[Dad] was a talker and a joker and he liked to talk," Amelia Budris remembers of her father in Taylorton.⁴⁸ While certainly

⁴¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁴² CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁴³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ SAB, R-A1962, Interview with Sarah Ann Prescott, Bienfait, July 9, 1979.

⁴⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁴⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁴⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Amelia Budris, Bienfait, May 15, 1996.

not every family in the coalfields enjoyed such close contact, testimony suggests that the camps were not characterized by dysfunctional family relations.

The nature of underground coal mining in the Souris field directly affected family dynamics.⁴⁹ Over the winter months, when the mines were in operation, the men worked ten or more hours per day. Mothers remained at home with the children, and consequently, many people who grew up in the camps recall that their mothers played a larger role in child-rearing.⁵⁰ “Well, the men were never home all day,” Ann Kolenz remembers. “They were gone early in the morning and some maybe took their own lunch,...so [the women] practically raised the kids, I’d say.”⁵¹ Alice Pawson, who grew up in Shand, concurs: “Dad was busy working, and busy outside and doing different things, but it was mother that saw all our clothes were clean, and the kids got to school, and the meals got made.”⁵² Hilda Carlson and Archie Holley, who were raised in Taylorton, also assert that women had more time with the children than did the fathers. “In those days,” Mrs. Carlson points out, “there were no working mothers. They were all at home with the children, so they had far more time with the children than the men had.”⁵³ Another ex-Taylorton resident, Freda Evans, feels very strongly about women’s roles within their families. “I

⁴⁹ Women’s and gender historians in the last twenty years have shed much light on working-class families, and on the creation and approbation of gender roles and assumptions within families and within society. For example, see: Joy Parr, The Gender of Breadwinners; Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love; Rosenfeld, “It Was a Hard Life:...”; Bradbury, Working Families; and Iacovetta, Such Hardworking People. Rosenfeld, in his study of railway families in the early 1900s, points out that “it is commonly assumed that, within the working class, men have occupied a position of subordination at work and superordination at home.” See Rosenfeld, p. 241. From this assumption has risen the concept of the male head of the household as the “breadwinner”; that is, the wages of the husband and father are responsible for keeping himself and his family alive. As has been indicated, however, in the Souris coalfields, the wages of the “breadwinner” were but a portion of a family’s strategies for survival.

⁵⁰ Recently, historians have begun to examine the contributions of the husband and father to child-rearing and domestic chores. Joy Parr and Ruth Frager, for example, have both discovered that fathers often avoided duties such as assisting with laundry, changing babies, bathing children, etc. These tasks were regarded as part of the “woman’s domain.” See Parr, The Gender of Breadwinners, p. 91; Ruth Frager, Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, p. 110.

⁵¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁵² CMPC, Morier’s interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁵³ CMPC, Morier’s interviews with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995, and Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

believe that the mother was the pillar," she states. "It was the mothers that bear, you know, the burden fell on the mother."⁵⁴

Curiously, two persons interviewed made specific mention of central-European women as especially dominant in their households. "Oh yeah, yeah," one person relates, "the women pretty well, especially in the European, pert [sic] near looked after the house, and kids, and a lot of the garden, too. They were the main factor, the main force."⁵⁵ Another person, who grew up in a different camp, expresses similar sentiments: "Some of the, uh, now how will I put it? I don't mean it to sound negatively, but some of the foreign women can be very aggressive, in a way. Very, what they say goes, type of thing, you know. Very assertive, and especially in the house I mean."⁵⁶ While there is not enough evidence to suggest confidently familial trends based on ethnic background, these two incidental references are intriguing.

If mothers were more involved in the day-to-day lives of their children, fathers more often dealt out discipline. Nonetheless, women were not total strangers to the rod, as Edith Panteluk relates: "Yeah, whatever [mother] said went. I can remember her giving [my brother] a licking for getting all wet and muddy, drinking....His first drinking spree he got a good licking...'cause she had to wash all his clothes - he fell in the slough [laughs]."⁵⁷ It seems that fathers, though, were the ultimate authority in most families, and some mothers would remind their children of that fact. Archie Holley, who was raised in Taylorton, remembers that mothers would dole out punishment, but "if they said 'I'll tell dad on you,' then you'd behave a hell of a lot quicker. But that was sort of a last resort - 'If you don't behave I'll tell dad,' and then you'd get two strappings then."⁵⁸ Hilda Carlson, also of Taylorton, relates a similar memory:

My mother was no more of the boss than my dad was. In fact, if we were having a fight, among the three of us or something, my mother

⁵⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995. Another ex-Taylorton resident, who wishes to remain anonymous, states that his mother was the "domineering factor" in his home.

⁵⁵ CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁵⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

could yell and we didn't stop right away. But if my dad looked up at us, we knew we'd better stop. So I don't know who you'd say was the boss. And yet my dad never hit any one of us. But we knew that when he looked we better stop.⁵⁹

Again, while all families and all households were different, evidence suggests that mothers in the Souris camps were the primary child-rearers in families; fathers, however, were not invisible, and were often regarded by their children as a "higher power," especially where discipline was concerned.⁶⁰

The distribution of power in the camp households varied from family to family. Some ex-camp residents, such as Edith Panteluk, relate that their mothers were more authoritative than their fathers: "Whatever my mother said, my dad did."⁶¹ Alex Konapaki, who worked at Western Dominion, states that he did not drink or gamble because his wife disapproved of such activities.⁶² Alice Pawson, as well, remembers that her "dad was a quiet person, he wasn't terribly assertive. So somebody has to set their foot down."⁶³ An interesting contrast is presented by another person who grew up in the camps: "That was also in a time when the man was sort of lord and master. Like that. And of course, the men worked very hard, in the mines, very hard. But they did not do anything else when they came home. They were the top dog."⁶⁴ Meg Luxton's analysis of Flin Flon households, then, may be at least partially relevant in regard to some Souris families:

At work men are powerless, so in their leisure time they want to have a feeling that they control their own lives. Because they are responsible for the household's subsistence, men often feel that they have the right to control the arrangements of the household and the people who live there.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁶⁰ In her study of Toronto's working-class Italians, Iacovetta states that mothers were in a position to spare their children a punishment from the father. By acting as a mediator, or by concealing the mischief that a child had done, mothers could influence or dampen the fathers' reaction. See Iacovetta, p. 85.

⁶¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁶² SAB, R-A1956, Interview with Alex Konapaki, Estevan, July 19, 1979.

⁶³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁶⁴ CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author. Another former camp resident also recalls that her father "did not do any work at home, nothing.... That was women's work in the house."

⁶⁵ Luxton, p. 65. Power relationships within the home have been the focus of fascinating historical debate over the last two decades. Luxton points out earlier in her study that women in Flin Flon "are not employed - they work for their husbands and children. Their work is unpaid and performed within

As has been indicated, however, most women in the Souris coal camps also contributed to “the household’s subsistence,” so this partnership may explain some miners’ acceptance of their wives’ authority.⁶⁶

Indeed, a capable wife was an invaluable partner to a Souris coal miner, and many miners appreciated their wives’ efforts. Ann Kolenz, whose father worked in the Prospect Mine, remembers that her mother looked after the family’s animals herself because “[dad] worked all day. It was usually long hours. Come home and he would have supper and go to bed ‘cause he was so tired. I guess all the men did.”⁶⁷ Alice Pawson’s mother at Shand “did outside chores, so dad had the time to go into the mine and work.”⁶⁸ Away from the house all day, miners relied on their spouses to perform a variety of household and other chores. A “good” wife, then, was a woman who had mastered these tasks, as miner Alex Konapaki affectionately recalls:

I had a good wife. She was a hell of a good woman. Good cook, good housekeeper, good garden[er]. When I used to be at the mine I never worked in the garden at all. She used to work on the garden herself....She used to be a good kid. She was eight years younger than I was yet. She died 1973, out of cancer.⁶⁹

Freda Evans, who grew up in Taylorton and became a miner’s wife herself, also feels strongly about the women’s role in the camps. “I’ll say this,” she asserts, “a man is only as good as the woman he’s married to. And I still say that. And, if the woman was a poor manager, then things were poor. If she was a good manager, things were a lot better.”⁷⁰

their family home. It is therefore both private and unseen.” (p. 11) Sociologists Pat and Hugh Armstrong in *The Double Ghetto* take a similar stance. See p. 63. Recently, however, historians are rethinking the extent of women’s influence in family dynamics. Iacovetta, for instance, in her study of postwar Toronto Italian families, outlines how wives utilized certain strategies to influence their husbands, and suggests that decision-making was often a collaboration between husband and wife. See Iacovetta, pp. 54-83.

⁶⁶ Lantz suggests that the occupational hazards of coal mining made the mother a figure of “stability and predictability” in the family home. See Lantz, p. 155.

⁶⁷ CMPC, Morier’s interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁶⁸ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, May 17, 1996.

⁶⁹ SAB, R-A1956, interview with Alex Konapaki, Estevan, July 19, 1979.

⁷⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

A good manager of what? In many camp households, economic management fell exclusively on the women.⁷¹ Again, with the men working underground all day in the busy season, the camp women handled most of the shopping and budgeting. Some ex-camp residents, such as Edith Panteluk, Hilda Carlson, and John Kolenz, recall their fathers simply handing his pay packet to their mothers.⁷² Others, such as Steve Panteluk, Ann Kolenz, and Norah Mather, relate that their fathers would split their pay with their wives.⁷³ George Brown, a digger at Western Dominion, testified in 1931 that his mother "does all the buying and I don't interfere with it."⁷⁴ Of course, with the credit system at the company stores, the women shoppers were often solely responsible for keeping the monthly bills manageable. While some of the miners often accompanied their wives on shopping trips,⁷⁵ the women would have been more sensitive to prices and bargains. Women, furthermore, knew what was needed to run the household. As Hilda Carlson states, camp women "had to look after the food and the clothing and see that there was sufficient [supplies] for the family. So they more or less knew what was needed more than the father, I guess."⁷⁶ In many mine households, the women were the primary shoppers and therefore controlled the economic destiny of the family. Ex-Taylorlton resident Freda Evans recalls that for newly arrived central-European women in the camp, learning the value and spending power of the Canadian dollar was a top priority.⁷⁷ Even if some miners

⁷¹ Historians Rosenfeld and Iacovetta discover similar trends in their family studies. Many women took their economic management duties very seriously. See Rosenfeld, p. 253; Iacovetta, pp. 90-91.

⁷² CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995; Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995; and John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁷³ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995; John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995; and Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁷⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 8, p. 105. Brown's mother lived with he and his wife in Taylorlton.

⁷⁵ Steve Panteluk, who lived in Taylorlton, and Edith Panteluk, who grew up at the Prospect Mine, recall that their parents would go on shopping trips together (presumably, in the winter, when the mines were in operation, their mothers shopped alone). Hilda Carlson and Archie Holley, on the other hand, recall that shopping was primarily a woman's chore. Since Mr. Holley worked in the Taylorlton store as a lad, he would have certainly been familiar with the clientele. CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995; Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995; and Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁷⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁷⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

stopped short of giving their entire pay envelope to their wives, women were responsible for keeping the store bill as low as possible.⁷⁸

If a miner and his family fell too far behind in their store payments, the company management would take the drastic course of cutting a family's credit. At the 1931 Wylie Commission, George Wilkerson, bookkeeper at the Western Dominion Collieries, testified that store credit was routinely cut during the summer months.⁷⁹ Freda Evans, who grew up in Taylorton and also lived in the M & S camp, recalls that only certain families would lose their credit over the summer:

Well, in the summertime, if there wasn't any money coming in, [it] was pretty tough. And the company, right or wrong, they [sic] used some judgment. Some people had their credit stopped, others never had their credit stopped....Well, you were just careful. You lived within your means. I must say that in my own particular case, I've never, ever felt, I was never in want. And whether I was blessed with good management or what,...⁸⁰

Fred Booth of the M & S Mine testified in 1931 that his credit was cut for "a little while" the last summer, and he had to find relief work to make ends meet.⁸¹ The possibility of losing their credit at the company store was added incentive for camp women to be conscientious and thrifty shoppers.

Another management duty that women performed in the coal camps was less tangible but equally important. Historian Meg Luxton, as well as sociologists Pat and Hugh Armstrong, refer to this responsibility as "stress management," whereby a wife and mother would run the household as well as adjust and respond to the emotional and social needs of her husband. Similarly, miners' wives were forced to react

⁷⁸ In his study of Cape Breton coal miners, Mellor comments on coal-camp wives and company stores: "Large double windows at the front entrance [of the company store] displayed good quality furniture, toys, and clothing to tempt miner's wives to buy them on credit. Inevitably, during hard times, many miners' wives used up their full amount of credit on non-essential items only to run out of staple foodstuffs before the week was out, forcing their families to go hungry." See Mellor, p. 11. Mellor bases his generalization about "many miners' wives" on a comment made by one miner during an interview, and the author is content to present an image of miners' wives as a greedy, undisciplined lot of spendthrifts. Mellor's statement is unfortunate, and it reflects a sexist stereotype of irresponsible women burning up their husbands' hard-earned money.

⁷⁹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 8, p. 43.

⁸⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁸¹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 112.

to their husbands' moods and habits.⁸² "It was really a rough life for miners at that time," Norah Mather remembers. "They didn't get much money and they worked awfully hard."⁸³ After a long day's work, some miners faced a cold walk home. Rueben Jahn, who worked in a few Souris mines, recalls the long walk between Bienfait and the Eastern Mine: "I walked three miles, back and forth. Wasn't too bad going to work, but wasn't too good going home, after slinging a shovel all day. Snow got pretty deep. But there was a lot of people [who] did that."⁸⁴ Most ex-camp residents do not recall their fathers complaining or speaking of work very often, at least in front of the children. "No, he never used to bring [work stress] home," Edith Panteluk recalls. "I don't remember him ever bringing it home, anyway."⁸⁵ Miners' wives, however, would have been more sensitive to the pressures and burdens of their husbands.

Coal-camp women were also fully aware of the stress and danger of mining coal. Alice Pawson relates that while children were sheltered from accounts of mine accidents or deaths by their parents, women knew well the hazards of deep-seam coal mining.⁸⁶ "Well, definitely there'd be some [worry]," ex-Taylorlton resident Archie Holley states. "You know, if there was a cave-in or something like that [wives would] be worried. And there was the odd injury, and the odd person killed."⁸⁷ Ex-camp residents Edith Panteluk and Alice Pawson feel that their mothers "took it for

⁸² Luxton points out that the wives in Flin Flon had to adjust to their husbands' patterns and tensions when the men returned home from work. See Luxton, p. 49. For Pat and Hugh Armstrong's analysis of "stress management," see *The Double Ghetto*, p. 56. It is interesting that in the play *Black Powder*, created by Rex Deverell and Geoffry Ursell to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Estevan strike and riot, Act I, Scene IV portrays a miner's wife acting as "tension manager" for her husband. Rex Deverell, *Black Powder*. Moose Jaw: Coteau Books, 1981.

⁸³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁸⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Rueben Jahn, Estevan, July 3, 1995. Alice Pawson also remembers her father's long walks to work one winter when the Shand Mine was closed. Her father found work at the Crescent Mine, 2.5 miles from the Shand camp. CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995. Steve Panteluk recalls that after a long day of working and sweating underground, miners' clothing froze to their skin on the walk home. CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁸⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995. Steve agrees that his father did not "say very much" about his work, and Alice Pawson, who grew up in Shand, also relates that her father did not speak about work in front of his children. CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁸⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁸⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

granted" that their husbands were employed in such dangerous work.⁸⁸ Norah Mather, on the other hand, reports that her mother was quite worried about her husband when he went underground at Shand to blast coal alone on Sunday mornings.⁸⁹ All miners' wives would have been aware of the job's dangers, and would have acted as tension managers in some way, even if some camp women appeared less bothered than others.

Despite the dangers and hardships of mining coal, many ex-camp residents report that their parents enjoyed life in the mine camps. It is interesting, however, that the more specialized mine workers seemed to favour the lifestyle more than did the mine diggers or labourers. Freda Evans's father was the steam engineer at Western Dominion, and Freda feels that her father liked his work: "Oh, I think so. Because it wasn't just an ordinary job, you know. And he was trained in that way. I think he did, yeah."⁹⁰ Similarly, Hilda Carlson, whose father was the blacksmith in Taylorton, believes that her father became quite attached to the community.⁹¹ Miners who worked underground may have held different feelings about their life and work, as Alice Pawson explains:

It was a job. That would be about the size of it. It was some way to keep body and soul together. I would think with most people at that time, that's what it would be. It wasn't a case of liking - you just did it. You had a job. Maybe you were lucky, you know.⁹²

Peter Gemby, who mined coal for Western Dominion, recalls that for himself and many other central-European immigrants, mining meant food and little else.⁹³ Ann Kolenz, whose father worked at the Prospect Mine, concurs, and states that "well,...it was a living to earn money, I guess."⁹⁴ Rueben Jahn, who worked in a handful of

⁸⁸ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995. Both Mrs. Panteluk and Mrs. Pawson use the phrase "took it for granted."

⁸⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995. Mr. Mather had lost family members in a mine explosion in England, so this unfortunate event may have weighed heavily on his wife's mind.

⁹⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁹¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁹² CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁹³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Pete Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

⁹⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

Souris mines in the 1920s and 1930s, explains that many diggers were ambivalent toward their work: "You were just a piece of machinery. You played the banjo and that was it...I think a lot of [men] just done it. You just grabbed that shovel and swung it."⁹⁵ Again, it is worth remembering that in the 1920s and 1930s, jobs were precious commodities. Some miners and their families enjoyed the lifestyles forged by the mines; many others simply had no other options.

Despite the hard, heavy work of the miners, and the equally demanding and long days of their wives, many ex-camp residents describe cheerful and loving parents. Due to the miners' long days underground, most children's contact with their fathers was limited. Joe Prysnyk, who grew up in the Taylorton valley and is cited at the beginning of this chapter, recalls his father's long absences from home.⁹⁶ Perhaps, the fathers' lack of daily contact with their children explains why some former camp residents have very fond memories of time spent with their fathers. Alice Pawson, for example, recalls dancing with her dad in Shand: "I can remember as I got older dancing with my father or some of the other fathers, and it was a wonderful way for a teenager to learn and gain self-confidence as you went along."⁹⁷ Similarly, Ann Kolenz, who grew up at Prospect, affectionately remembers her father reading *Little Orphan Annie* comics to her.⁹⁸ Ann's mother, significantly, could not hear or speak, so Ann could only converse with her father. Elaine Murray, whose father worked for Western Dominion, has an unusual and touching memory of her father. Mr. Murray would often come home for dinner with his face blackened from coal dust, Elaine explains: "But I used to love to see him come home all dirty like that because I could just never get over how white his eyes looked in his face, and how shiny and pearly-like his teeth looked if he gave us a smile or when he talked. I loved to see him dirty."⁹⁹ Hilda Carlson's father "was never a cranky man. He

⁹⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Rueben Jahn, Estevan, July 3, 1995.

⁹⁶ SAB, R-A1957, Interview with Joe Prysnyk, Bienfait, July 24, 1979.

⁹⁷ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series.

⁹⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁹⁹ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series.

enjoyed singing and get-togethers with people and he always enjoyed people coming to our house.”¹⁰⁰

Camp women, meanwhile, are often remembered as spirited and independent. A woman’s long day of work, her varied and demanding tasks, her responsibilities of raising her children - all of these aspects of a camp-woman’s life gave her identity and pride.¹⁰¹ “I cut hair,” Jean Moroz, who was a young wife and mother in Taylorton in the late 1920s, states. “I had to. I had to do everything, to learn....I had to learn to cut [my husband’s] hair, the kids’ hair. And I think I done a good job, considering.”¹⁰² Some women used sarcasm to make their point, especially when their abilities or skills were questioned. Norah Mather, for instance, remembers one such incident at Shand:

I remember one time...our mother was busy. She had been doing something, washing I think. And dinner wasn’t quite cooked. The potatoes weren’t quite finished, I think. And, um, dad said “Humph, dinner not ready.” So the next day he come home and mother met him at the gate with his dinner on a plate.¹⁰³

Hannah Lee tells a similar story. Apparently, a “minister from Estevan” once came out to Shand and asked Hannah’s mother for some vegetables.

Mother said, “Well, we don’t have much this year as it’s been so dry.” He said, “Maybe you didn’t pray to the Lord enough or you might have got rain.” Mother said, “Well, if you had prayed a bit more maybe you wouldn’t have to come begging vegetables from me.” Mother always had an answer ready.¹⁰⁴

Some camp women were as earthy as they were proud. Archie Holley, who grew up in Taylorton, remembers a “homebrewer” in the Taylorton valley:

I remember one time old Sergeant Molyneaux was down. He was trying to find the still, eh. And she was scrubbing clothes. So he was going to scare her, I guess. He shot his damned revolver at the floor.

¹⁰⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

¹⁰¹ Many historians have commented upon how wives and mothers would take great pride in doing their jobs well. See, for example: Veronica Strong-Boag, “Keeping House in God’s Country: Canadian Women at Work in the Home,” in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1986, p. 143; Rosenfeld, p. 260; and Seena Kohl, Working Together: Women and Family in Southwestern Saskatchewan. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰² SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

¹⁰³ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹⁰⁴ Pawson, p. 13.

And she flipped up her skirt and she said "How you like to take a shot at that, Mr. John?" She wasn't scared of anything.¹⁰⁵

For many women in the Souris coalfields, hard work and practicality became engrained in their personalities, and women took great pride in doing their jobs well.

Several people who were raised in the coal camps recall that they were impressed upon by their parents to be independent, unselfish, and tolerant. Hilda Carlson, for example, who grew up in Taylorton, remembers the philosophy that her parents instilled in her: "I was equal. That I, um, there was nobody any better than I was, but I was as good as everybody else. And that was the way that my mother and dad always taught me. Your nationality didn't make you any different."¹⁰⁶ Jean Moroz recalls that her mother would not "fuss" over her children; if lunch was not ready when the children got home from school, "[mother] just said 'Go ahead and just help yourself, take a piece of bread and jam or something and milk and go to school.' There wasn't such a thing as babying."¹⁰⁷ Morals and ideas of kindness were also passed on by many parents. Norah Mather, who lived at Shand, remembers that her "very strong Methodist" father would not allow liquor or cards in the house. Norah's mother, as well, taught her children well:

Well, you often went, if somebody was sick, mother would say "Go over and see if they want their mail brought or if they want something from the store." But she would never let us take money for it. Said "Nope, you do that for people,..." Oh, you were never to take money for doing something like that.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, Hilda Carlson states that it was fine to take money from people for hauling them water, but running errands or baby-sitting was *gratis*: "You were paid with a cookie or something. But my mother always told us that we weren't to take money from anybody, that we should help our neighbours."¹⁰⁹ Many parents in the Souris coalfields were very conscious about passing on proper values and standards to their children.

¹⁰⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹⁰⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

¹⁰⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹⁰⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

The importance of religion to camp families varied from home to home, and religious instruction was not readily available in many of the smaller mine communities. The Prospect camp did not have a church, but approximately ten children attended a form of Sunday school held in a private house.¹¹⁰ At the Shand camp, Alice Pawson recalls that traveling ministers held mass at the school on an irregular basis. School teachers instructed Sunday school regularly, however, and many camp children, regardless of religious affiliation, participated in the lessons.¹¹¹ Taylorton had its own church, which was made available to all religious denominations, and as Hilda Carlson relates, her mother did not differentiate between religions:

But in the church that we had, they had Anglican services, and the Free Methodists came down, and the Salvation Army came down. So whoever came down, my mother went to church or sent me to church if she wasn't able to go. She always said, "They'll never teach you any wrong," so I went to whichever was around.¹¹²

Local women assisted with Sunday school at the M & S camp,¹¹³ and while it is impossible to determine the importance of religion to mine families, camp residents had opportunities to express their faith if they so chose.

Did camp children have aspirations of leaving the camps or "breaking out" of the mining lifestyle? Did parents struggle to provide their children with opportunities and chances for a less-demanding life? Evidence suggests that most young camp residents followed in the footsteps of their parents. The family economy demanded that once a young woman or a young man was old enough to perform regular waged labour, she or he often left school to begin earning money for themselves or their families. Indeed, only a minority of camp children received the opportunity to attend school past grade eight. As Alice Pawson explains, the small schools in the coal-fields were not able to accommodate senior students:

We could go to school till grade eight. The next two years, under teacher supervision, you could take correspondence courses, which I did, until the end of grade ten. After that, I was fortunate enough to

¹¹⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, May 15, 1996.

¹¹¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, May 17, 1996.

¹¹² CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, May 14, 1996.

¹¹³ See Estevan Mercury, October 20, 1927, p. 4.

be able to come to Estevan. I stayed with my grandmother and took the last two years in Estevan Collegiate.¹¹⁴

Archie Holley, whose father was the mine manager at Western Dominion, also attended school past grade eight in Bienfait and Estevan.¹¹⁵ Most camp children, however, had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to continue their schooling. Andrew Haselhan, who taught school in Shand for five years, recalls that "most of the children left school at age fourteen, the boys usually getting jobs in the coal mines."¹¹⁶ Once a young adult, at age fourteen or fifteen, most camp children were expected to turn from the school books and begin to contribute directly to their and their family's survival.¹¹⁷

For most young men in the Souris camps, following their fathers underground was the only option.¹¹⁸ Money earned by these young miners was often partially turned over to their parents for room and board. Steve Panteluk, for example, went underground with his father at age sixteen and paid rent while still living at home in Taylorton.¹¹⁹ Many young men actually anticipated working in the mines, as Alice Pawson remembers:

A: If a boy got to be fourteen, and there was a job in the mine, he took it. Um-huh. As soon as you were old enough to go,...

Q: Did boys look forward to this?

A: Probably,... You know, they would have a little money of their own. Things were very tight, you know.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series.

¹¹⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹¹⁶ Pawson, p. 17.

¹¹⁷ Many historians and social scientists have analyzed the phenomenon of children leaving school to begin waged labour. Working-class families often saw their standard of living improve slightly once older children began to work. For example, see: Bradbury, *Working Families*, p. 118, 217; Schultz, "The Value of Children:...", p. s3; Bullen, "Children of the Industrial Age:...", p. 381; Parr, *Labouring Children*, p. 83; and Pleck, "Two Worlds in One:...", p. 183.

¹¹⁸ Historians of the coal mines in early twentieth-century Canada have often commented on coal miners' sons entering "manhood" by entering the mines. See: McKay, pp. 24-26; Ryan, p. 8; Robert McIntosh, "The Boys in the Nova Scotia Coal Mines: 1873-1923," *Acadiensis* 16, 2, Spring 1987, pp. 35-51; and "Canada's Boy Miners," *The Beaver* 67, 6, December 1987/January 1988, pp. 34-39. Joy Parr discusses issues of "manhood" and occupation in *The Gender of Breadwinners*, pp. 169-170. Also, see Seena Kohl, p. 54.

¹¹⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹²⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

Hilda Carlson, an ex-Taylorlton resident, echoes Mrs. Pawson's sentiments, and states that "a lot of [boys] seemed to think that that was what they wanted to do. They used to start down in the mines as a trapper and I think it was about twenty-five cents an hour. And they thought that was great."¹²¹ Archie Holley agrees that many young men in the camps cheerfully accepted their fate: "But a lot of them seemed to be satisfied when they got their grade eight, and they seemed to be satisfied that they'd be coal miners."¹²² Thomas Hesketh was fifteen years old in 1929 when he went underground at the Bienfait Mine,¹²³ and John Kolenz was fourteen when he began working at Prospect: "I went down first to help my dad. That didn't last maybe a week, and then the boss got me driving."¹²⁴ For many Souris families, coal was indeed in their blood, and sons followed the footsteps of their fathers, as Edith Panteluk relates: "I think my dad liked [mining]. He talked about it all the time. But that's all he ever done. [Edith's brothers were all miners]...They all stuck with mining."¹²⁵

For young women in the coal camps, choices were also very limited. "When I quit school I was in grade seven,..." Hannah Lee of Shand recalls. "I took over the housework then and baked bread, churned butter, etc."¹²⁶ Amelia Budris was fifteen years old in 1929 when she married and moved with her husband from Taylorlton to the M & S camp. "We all married pretty young," she states. "'Cause that's all [we] had to do. Never went to school anywhere higher than grade eight."¹²⁷ Some young women left the coal camps, at least for awhile. Ann Kolenz at age fifteen quit school

¹²¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995. A "trapper" was the man in charge of opening and closing the various entrances and exits of the underground mine's shafts. For proper ventilation, the tunnels and crosscuts of the deep-seam mine needed a steady flow of fresh air. "Trappers," then, ensured that the mine's swinging doors remained in place. "Trapper lads" were most often young men just out of school. See testimony of Bienfait miner J.H. Harris, Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 1, p. 42.

¹²² CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹²³ SAB, R-A1966, Interview with Thomas Hesketh, Bienfait, July 10, 1979.

¹²⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995. A "driver" was the man who drove the horses, which hauled the coal cars to and from the coal face. "Driving" was a more specialized duty than "trapping," as the driver had to keep pace with the coal diggers as well as to maintain a peaceful relationship with the horses.

¹²⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹²⁶ Pawson, p. 13.

¹²⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Amelia Budris, Bienfait, May 15, 1996.

and "went out working. Worked at the boarding house, and Kingsford at a farm, came to town,..." Eventually, however, Ann and her girlfriends returned to the coalfields: "Mary went to Manitoba. Edie went to Winnipeg and worked, came back, and we all got married. What else was there to do?"¹²⁸ Some young women were made aware of their destiny very early by their mothers, as Stella Baniulis recalls: "Like my mother said, 'Well, if you can read and write and you can count the dollars, what else do you need? You don't need schooling to raise a family, wash dishes.'"¹²⁹ Indeed, marrying "the boy next door" was often all that a camp woman could aspire to, and one ex-camp resident recalls that not all marriages were happy occasions:

I remember one girl, she was married at fifteen. It was a Hungarian family. But she was married, and didn't want to. And the man was forty-ish, I suppose. You know, what chance did she have? She was at home, and they thought he was a good prospect, so she had to do as her folks told her...Kids didn't run away like they do now...Her feelings were not taken into account at all....It was kinda shushed up at the time, I know.¹³⁰

Alice Pawson, who grew up at the Shand Mine, remembers that some young wives faced lean years ahead: "And, uh, I don't know, you felt sorry for some of them too because they sure were starting out pretty poorly."¹³¹ Clearly, for many camp children, the mines became a way of life. Just as their parents before them, young adults regarded their destiny with varied levels of anticipation or trepidation.

Not surprisingly, family relations in the Souris coalfields refute generalizations and definitive conclusions. Miners, their wives, and their children faced daily challenges for survival, and each family member had roles to play and duties to fulfill. Coal-camp families were required to be practical and realistic, and wives and mothers were especially key to functional and stable families. Undoubtedly, many women, as well as their husbands, worked through loneliness and fatigue. It is apparent, however, that many men and women in the camps prided themselves as

¹²⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹²⁹ SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973. In *The Gender of Breadwinners*, Joy Parr also comments on a young woman's destiny in male-dominated industry towns. "A girl who married in her late teens would not have long to bide her time at home before she had a household of her own to run." See Parr, p. 183.

¹³⁰ CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author.

¹³¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

“good” parents. Strong family ties and positive parental influences are repeatedly recalled by ex-camp residents, and while children’s destinies were often predetermined, many parents strove to raise their children according to upright moral beliefs and values. Family life in the Souris coalfields was marked by nuances and complexities, and the relations between family members were heavily influenced by individual personalities, philosophies, and backgrounds.

CHAPTER SIX - COMMUNITY LIFE AND ENTERTAINMENT

“Nothing bright or beautiful to be seen in the whole place,” author Louise Watson states of the Souris coal camps, “only the drab face of the grinding poverty of the people. A study of the working and living conditions of the mines here in the late twenties and early thirties is like something out of a horror movie.”¹ Archie Holley, who grew up in Taylorton, tells a different story: “I seemed to have a happy life growing up there....I look back with a lot of pleasure at the times that we had there and the fun. Working didn’t seem to bother anybody then, so, we had a lot of that, too [laughs].”² Many other ex-camp residents recall their lives being anything but a “horror movie,” and a sensationalized comment such as Watson’s does a great injustice to miners and their families.³ The Souris camps are remembered by many as tightly-knit and self-sufficient communities, with a variety of entertainment and social options for their residents. Again, miners and their families were too practical, too resourceful, too cognizant to simply wallow in “grinding poverty.” Souris mine camps, if not the Arcadias or paradises of the prairies, were at least unique and lively communities, with liberal quantities of verve and vigour.

Louise Watson’s comment on the general conditions of Souris mine-families’ lives is representative of the image that labour historians have created of the coal industry. Watson’s contribution to the historiography of the Souris coalfields is a celebratory biography of communist organizer Annie Buller, and the author’s analysis of mine families is hardly surprising. Labour historian Glen Makahonuk, in his study of the union activities of the Souris miners, also makes no attempt to uncover the complexities of day-to-day coal-camp life. Such narrowly focused and ideologically charged evaluations of miners and their families fail to recognize the strategies and

¹ Watson, p. 33.

² CMPC, Morier’s interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

³ In her study of Montreal families, Bettina Bradbury also comments on how history can be distorted by writers who concentrate only on the negative aspects of people’s lives. See *Working Families*, p. 107.

flexibility of mine-camp residents. Stan Hanson, whose 1971 thesis remains the most balanced study of Souris miners, nonetheless also falls prey to generalizations about "sordid" conditions in the Souris camps.⁴ Recently, historians have been objecting to such attempts to whitewash classes or groups of people,⁵ and indeed, the coal camps in the Souris field defy simplistic and uncomplicated evaluations.

Many scholarly studies of coal-mining communities have commented on the distinctness and spirit of solidarity in the mine camps.⁶ The common experiences and shared lifestyles of miners and their families created, on many levels, a sense of egalitarianism and equality in the communities. Peter Gemby, who worked at the Western Dominion Mine and lived in the Taylorton valley in the 1920s and 1930s, recalls the mutuality amongst valley residents: "At that time, I don't know, people were poorer. But they seemed to [be], well they were all on the same level, you know. And maybe you have a little more money than I did,...but that was unseen, so therefore we're on the same level."⁷ Alice Pawson, who grew up in the Shand camp, speaks for many ex-Shand residents when she recalls the "great warmth in the community - a great sense of caring and sharing. There was a feeling of closeness, as though we were all one family."⁸ As well, people who lived in the mine camps are quick to point out that mining communities were no less advantaged than other towns at the time. Hilda Carlson, who grew up in Taylorton, is quite emphatic in defending her childhood home:

⁴ For example, in regard to the social life of the camps, Hanson states that "although little can be said conclusively regarding recreational facilities, it can only be assumed that they, like many other amenities of life, were unavailable to these people." See "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931," p. 78.

⁵ In his fascinating study of cultural creation and approbation, historian Ian McKay comments on the inclinations and practices of "class-conflict" historians: "To rewrite the history of subaltern classes and groups in ways that ostensibly pay them homage, all the while draining their history of specificity, is one subtle and effective method of preserving their inferior position." See McKay, The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994, p. xvi.

⁶ See, for example: Bowen, p. 210; Ryan, p. 17; and McKay, "The Realm of Uncertainty:....," p. 47, 54-57.

⁷ SAB, R-A325, Interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973. Similarly, Hilda Carlson of Taylorton and Alice Pawson of Shand recall that parents kept their children "in scope" with other camp children. Everybody was in the "same category." CMPC, Morier's interviews with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁸ Pawson, p. 1. Archie Holley, who grew up in Taylorton, also refers to that community as a "big family." Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series.

Well, I don't know. I have never talked to anybody that, um, was raised in Taylorton that is ashamed of the fact that they were raised there. And I've never talked to anybody that doesn't think that they had a really good time as children....In those days, you didn't have very much money, but neither did anybody else....Times weren't that good for anybody.⁹

The comfortable social atmosphere within the camps is recalled by many ex-camp residents. Jean Moroz, who grew up in Taylorton and also raised a family in the camp, remembers the closeness of the community:

People lived there and they enjoyed living and they were all close together. What I mean, they were all together, laughing, talking, enjoying. Not like now. Everybody now is for themselves, I would say. They don't seem to care for the next person and I don't agree there. I've always said that, because we should all feel for the next person. Which now is just a different story.¹⁰

"Yeah, everybody got along with everybody," Edith Panteluk remembers of Prospect. "I never ever seen anybody fight down there. [It] was always friendly. It was nice. I liked it down there."¹¹ As for life in the Bienfait Mine camp, Margaret Kingdon replies simply, "it was pleasant living there. I enjoyed it."¹² Accepting that memory is a highly selective phenomenon and process, it is nonetheless striking that so many reports of mine-camp life are positive. Clearly, Souris mining communities were anything but impersonal and hostile environments for many children and adults.¹³

Relations between the various ethnic groups in the Souris mine camps is a much more complicated issue. "Well, it wasn't all very good," remembers Paul Rohatyn, who worked at Western Dominion. "They looked down at the Slavic people...and they called 'em either Galicians or bohunks. Well, anything pretty well went, but those were the two most often, sort of, what I figure degrading names."¹⁴

⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

¹⁰ SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

¹¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹² SAB, R-A1968, Interview with Margaret Kingdon, Bienfait, July 11, 1979.

¹³ Here, again, my findings are in startling contradiction to Lantz's conclusions in People of Coal Town. See, for example, p. 247, where Lantz notes that "for the vast majority of residents life has been characterized by a quality of marked impersonality...[and] relationships...devoid of warmth, empathy, or respect."

¹⁴ SAB, R-A1961.1, Interview with Paul Rohatyn, Bienfait, July 23, 1979. Such derogatory names for various ethnic groups seem to have been a characteristic of life in the coal mines. Popular literature and the previously noted Black Powder casually use such terms when referring to central Europeans in

Conversely, Hilda Carlson recalls that her parents were very close to the non-English-speaking residents in Taylorton:

My folks were [friendly]. You were welcome in our house; it didn't matter what nationality you were. And my dad, I think he was...very helpful with a lot of the men that come out from the Old Country, like Ukrainian people or Polish, in helping them get their nationalization papers and everything. And they always seemed to come to my dad for help for a lot of that stuff. And he signed for a lot of them.¹⁵

Another ex-Taylorton resident states that there was "resentment, the Ukrainians against the British people, or Canadians, or whatever you want to call them. I'm sure that, um, in some cases they were put upon."¹⁶ Archie Holley, on the other hand, remembers that some of his "best chums" in Taylorton were Ukrainian or Lithuanian children: "Everybody mixed and got along."¹⁷

In light of such contradictory evidence, it would be unwise and impossible to generalize about ethnic relations in the Souris coal camps. Clearly, however, ethnicity influenced experiences in the communities. The Taylorton valley, for instance, where many central-European families lived, is described by one ex-Taylorton resident as "kind of like a ghetto."¹⁸ Freda Evans remembers that "Ukrainian Bay" "was a community of its own, really. We didn't see much of the women, or the men. It was mostly the kids coming to school or to the store."¹⁹ Similarly, Hilda Carlson recalls that the central-European women in the valley were especially aloof in the general community: "I think they pretty well kept to themselves. Um, like the children all mixed with everybody, and of course the men all mixed with everybody because they

the Souris fields. See Robertson, p. 243; Deverell, p. 8, 22, 29, 31. For an interesting discussion of the lack of mean-spiritedness associated with ethnic labels in coal camps, see Bowen, p. 79.

¹⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995. Also SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979.

¹⁶ CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author. Other persons interviewed stated that Europeans were often seen as "second-class people" by those of British or Canadian descent. Interestingly, these ethnocentric attitudes were perceived as more prevalent amongst older generations. A couple of ex-Taylorton residents remark that "the younger people" were "more civil" to "foreigners."

¹⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹⁸ CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author.

¹⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

worked with the men. Uh, the women were more or less, uh, kept to themselves.”²⁰ While Mrs. Evans and Mrs. Carlson agree that the central-European residents in Taylorton “preferred to live in the valley with their own type of people,”²¹ an ex-valley resident has a less conciliatory explanation: “[Ukrainians] knew the English people didn’t like ‘em, anyway. So, that’s what I said, they were kind of bunched up together. And they know that they, they’re not welcome.”²² William Hamilton, owner of the Crescent Collieries, testified in 1931 that the single miners in his camp “didn’t seem to mix well” ethnically, and that a second bunkhouse was utilized to separate the men.²³ The extent of any tension between ethnic groups in the Souris camps varies with the experiences and memory of the storyteller, which makes it very difficult to speculate about ethnic relations in the communities.

The schoolyards in the coal camps were not immune to occasional confrontations, both between and among the communities’ ethnic groups. Camp children could be quite cruel to perceived outsiders, and some non-English-speaking children were taunted at school.²⁴ Jean Moroz, for example, who arrived in Taylorton from Poland in 1922, remembers her early years in her new home and school:

I went to school, and I was a bit bigger than the rest of the children because I took school in the Old Country. But it was hard because other children sort of looked down on me. I couldn’t speak English, and whenever they had recess I had to go behind the school to hide because they were rough with me.²⁵

²⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995. Also SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979.

²¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

²² CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author. Ex-camp residents often responded vaguely when asked to elaborate on ethnic relations within the camps. One ex-miner, for example, relates that the non-English people in the camps “were, at one time, they were very leery. They were hard people to deal with. But, uh, they made a lot of good citizens.”

²³ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 10, p. 184. An ex-Taylorton valley resident recalls that Ukrainian and English families sat separately at Christmas concerts as well. CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author.

²⁴ CMPC, Morier’s interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

²⁵ SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973. Alice Pawson explains that the seasonal nature of coal mining made for a “very changeable school population.” New families would arrive in Shand in the fall, and would drift away in the spring. Estevan National Exhibition Centre, “The Way We Were” Videotape Series.

Alice Pawson has a similar memory of an immigrant boy at Shand: "I can remember one poor little chap that couldn't speak English very well, and oh, the kids used to ride him something awful. You know, pick on him, you know how kids do."²⁶ Fights often occurred in the Souris camps' schoolyards, but interviewees are frustratingly vague on details regarding causes. Steve Panteluk, for example, does not elaborate on playground scraps in Taylorton:

Q: Did kids get along okay?

A: Ah, there was lots, lots of fights.

Q: Were the fights just for fun?

A: No way.

Q: There were some bad fights, eh?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Who would be fighting?

A: Boys.²⁷

It is impossible to determine whether children's fights were based on ethnic or other factors. One ex-Taylorton resident, however, indicates that bullies often verbally assaulted non-British children.²⁸

An inability to speak English was a child's greatest liability in the schoolyard, but according to Hilda Carlson, the central European-born children in Taylorton learned quickly: "Well, just talking with other kids and talking with teachers. Wasn't very long before they could talk English, too. If they wanted anything they had to say it in English. There was no, nobody [who] understood the other language."²⁹ Archie Holley, however, who also went to school in Taylorton, recalls that he learned choice words in other languages which allowed him to communicate with his friends.³⁰ What words were learned? Another ex-Taylorton resident, who has asked to remain anonymous, proclaims that he was quite fluent in Ukrainian curses as a boy! While some non-English-speaking children were harassed by schoolmates, the resiliency of youth was obvious in the coalfields. Jean Moroz, for instance, who hid during recess

²⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

²⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

²⁸ CMPC, confidential interview with ex-Taylorton resident.

²⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

³⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995. Freda Evans, who also grew up in Taylorton, recalls how she could not differentiate between the various non-English languages in the camp. CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

at school in Taylorton, quickly learned English, married in 1929, and raised a family in the camp.

Not only central European-born children in the coal communities desired to learn English. In the February 23, 1928 edition of the *Estevan Mercury*, the Shand correspondent reported that “a number of our foreign born adult population are now improving their knowledge of the English language in a night class conducted by Miss Dilys Morgan.”³¹ Although such formal instruction was exceptional, central-European newcomers to the Souris camps assisted each other with the language, as Peter Gemby recalls:

There was another Ukrainian boy. He was Ukrainian but he came here young. He was two years older than I am, and he come here and he went to school and he could read and write. And I, he used to tell me the lettering and everything....I started reading and writing.³²

Amelia Budris's father in Taylorton often assisted newly arrived Lithuanian immigrants with the English language.³³ Edith Panteluk, who grew up in the Prospect camp, remembers that her parents could not assist her with school homework, “because they were trying to learn English.”³⁴ As children learned English at school, some may have been able to help their parents with the language.³⁵ As well, informal English lessons among adults could be social events; Peter Gemby relates that adept readers in the Taylorton valley would read aloud to a circle of listeners, and then a discussion would follow.³⁶ Just as central-European parents encouraged their children to learn to read and write English, they themselves struggled to acquire the language as quickly as possible.

³¹ *Estevan Mercury*, February 23, 1928, p. 4.

³² CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

³³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Amelia Budris, Bienfait, May 15, 1996.

³⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995. At the 1931 Wylie Commission, M & S miner Steve Lazue testified through an interpreter. “I would like to speak it,” Lazue stated, “but I do not know English very good.” Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 246.

³⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995. Non-English-speaking newcomers to the Souris coalfields were often quite anxious for themselves and their children to learn the English language quickly. For a parallel instance of children teaching their parents English in the Souris valley, see Klimko and Taft, p. 7. Ruth Frager, in her study of Jewish immigrants in Toronto, also comments on the difficulties of learning English in a new land. See Frager, p. 78.

³⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

"Yeah, she had a lot of friends there," ex-Taylorlton resident Archie Holley remembers of his mother. "She enjoyed it there. And the women seemed to be busy all the time. Everybody helped everybody else out."³⁷ Within the Souris coal camps, women established informal "support networks" as important social and benevolent activities.³⁸ Sarah Ann Prescott, for example, who raised a family in Taylorlton, remembers how she looked out for other women in the camp: "If anybody across town was sick I'd go and see them, and ask 'em if there's anything I could do, and take their washing sometimes. Or else, Hilda [Carlson, daughter] would come and sweep up....She'd come and clean their kitchen or something."³⁹ A new baby in the community presented camp women another opportunity to lend a hand. Norah Mather remembers that women in Shand often made diapers, clothes, or knitted goods for a newborn.⁴⁰ Hilda Carlson recalls that Taylorlton women would "send soup or stew or something" to women who had recently given birth.⁴¹ As well as a birth, death also pulled the communities together. When Peter Gemby's father passed away in 1923, Ukrainian men and women in the Taylorlton valley took charge:

In fact, they were awfully friendly. When dad died, oh, they were looking after me quite well. And when dad died, all the miners got together and there was a march and it was awfully cold, and they went and dug a grave by themselves....It was hard work to dig in March....So the neighbours were very good to me, and also to dad, what they done.⁴²

³⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

³⁸ For examples of similar "support networks" among other segments of the Canadian working-class population, see: Rosenfeld, pp. 254-56; Bradbury, *Working Families*, p. 14; Iacovetta, p. 85; and Bullen, "Children of the Industrial Age:...", p. 123. As Rosenfeld states of railway wives, they "looked upon friends and neighbors as a source of help and comfort, especially in emergencies. They would visit one another with their children, thereby creating an informal arrangement of collective child care. Visiting with other wives was a way of combating loneliness and a form of entertainment." See Rosenfeld, p. 256.

³⁹ SAB, R-A1962, Interview with Sarah Ann Prescott, Bienfait, July 9, 1979. Mrs. Prescott's kindness was returned after she had given birth to twins in Taylorlton in December 1927. According to her daughter, Hilda Carlson, Mrs. Prescott had a young woman help her out around the house for a couple of months after the twins were born. CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, May 14, 1996.

⁴⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁴¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁴² CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

Close community relations and a strong sense of mutuality are remembered by all interviewed ex-camp residents. Clearly, when misfortune could strike at any time, a camp's "support network" offered peace of mind and relief to many families.

Social clubs, sing-songs, whist drives, quilting bees - women had plenty of social activities available to them in the coal camps. And although a woman's work day was long and arduous, most camp women did make time to partake in various entertainments.⁴³ Sometimes, work and social functions were combined, as Norah Mather recalls of Shand women: "Oh, mother always sewed and knitted, and I think a lot of the women used to get together and quilt quilts."⁴⁴ Women's organizations were also quite active in Taylorton. "Just listen to this:" the Taylorton correspondent for the Estevan Mercury stated on November 5, 1931, "the lassies of the flapper class have got together and are going to try and make the town a little livelier."⁴⁵ One week later, the Mercury reported that the Taylorton women were ready to throw a party:

A well attended meeting of the junior and senior Social Club headed by the misses Klymyk, Redfern, Nichol, and Mrs. S. Sloan bring the good news of a real snappy concert being held in the Hall at a later date. These girls are go-getters and mean to show the men just how it should be done.⁴⁶

Sing-songs and whist drives were popular in the camps, and Taylorton women often catered for boxing matches and other events in the community hall.⁴⁷ Taylorton even had its own "Dramatic Society," which staged plays in Taylorton, the M & S camp, and Bienfait in April 1927.⁴⁸ Such community socials were an important aspect of camp residents' lives; "We can't all do everything, but all can do something," the

⁴³ Only one interviewed ex-camp resident intimated that her mother avoided social activities in the camp: "No, my mother was always busy. She didn't have time for fun....She never went to no dances, nothing....She was not a visitor." The interviewee, however, goes on to say that Sunday visitors were very common in her house. CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author.

⁴⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁴⁵ Estevan Mercury, November 5, 1931, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Estevan Mercury, November 12, 1931, p. 8.

⁴⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995; SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979. Also see Estevan Mercury, April 27, 1933, p. 4; October 26, 1933, p. 5.

⁴⁸ See Estevan Mercury, March 10, 1927, p. 5; April 7, 1927, p. 2; April 14, 1927, p. 5.

Taylorlton Social Club's motto ran.⁴⁹ "People did join in because there was so little to join into at [Shand]," Alice Pawson relates. "Yeah, I think they just liked the association, yeah."⁵⁰

The most fondly remembered social events in the Souris camps are unquestionably the community dances and concerts. Freda Evans recalls how the two largest camps in the coalfields scheduled their dances:

But the M & S and old Taylorlton, they were a mile apart. Two mining camps. So this week, they'd have a dance. And next week, the other camp would have a dance. And you walked. And then, two o'clock in the morning, you're walking home. Colder than, you know. But you had fun. Yeah.⁵¹

Over at Shand, Hannah Lee recalls that the school would be the scene of Friday night dances during the winter months.⁵² The M & S and Taylorlton correspondents for the Estevan Mercury commonly reported on the success of past dances and the anticipation of future events. The mine-camp dance announcement in the January 29, 1931 Mercury was typical: "Just a reminder, folks, about the W.A. [Women's Auxiliary] dance at Taylorlton on Friday evening, the 30th. A good time is assured to all and some person is going to be fortunate enough to take home the splendid Hudson Bay Blanket, so come along, it may be you!"⁵³ Mine management, as well, would get into the act. Hilda Carlson remembers that the Western Dominion management would offer a dance as incentive for miners to break coal-output records: "And the management or the company, if they beat their record, well they always put on a big dance and a lunch and everything on - a free do."⁵⁴

Local talent supplied the music at the camp dances, and skits and concerts often supplemented the dancing. Around midnight, community women served supper and coffee, and the night's festivities continued until one or two in the morning.⁵⁵ In

⁴⁹ Estevan Mercury, October 27, 1927, p. 1.

⁵⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁵¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁵² Pawson, p. 10.

⁵³ Estevan Mercury, January 29, 1931, p. 6. This notice was placed by the M & S correspondent; obviously, a dance's success depended on families from other mining communities in the area.

⁵⁴ SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979.

⁵⁵ Pawson, p. 21. Also, see Estevan Mercury, January 8, 1931, p. 6.

Taylorlton, the "Tops" and the "Bottoms," or the above-ground mine workers and the underground miners, developed a friendly rivalry to arrange the best concert or dance. Simple, clean entertainment marked the camp dances, as this report in the Estevan Mercury indicated:

The Top and Bottom Concert was pulled off as usual. Big crowd, real star turns, good music, and of course, good supper. Bill Young, dolled up as Harry Lauder [a famous Scottish entertainer], in kilts (mind you) was the main attraction. Bill Stocks, the one man band, was good; other turns, by other stars were also good.⁵⁶

Alice Lynch, who grew up in Shand, recalls that local men and women would sing at the dances,⁵⁷ and Archie Holley "tried to" play violin for a year at Taylorlton dances.⁵⁸

Camp residents of all ages attended the dances and concerts. "I can remember dancing with my father," Alice Pawson relates of Shand dances, "and I wouldn't have been very old. But the older men did. They danced with the younger people."⁵⁹ Ann Kolenz recalls traveling to various mine-camp dances while in her early teens.⁶⁰ Younger children also accompanied their parents to the dances, and Rueben Jahn remembers the children who fell asleep from all of the excitement:

Most of the schools [where dances were held] had little, what they call them again, cupboards, like along the wall. Where your stuff was put in there around in the school. And that would be full of kids, the little ones would be sleeping, sleeping in there.⁶¹

Hilda Carlson and Alice Lynch describe similar arrangements at Taylorlton and Shand dances.⁶² Weekend dances and socials were cherished events to Souris camp

⁵⁶ Estevan Mercury, April 6, 1933, p. 7. Also see Estevan Mercury, February 28, 1929, p. 4; March 28, 1929, p. 20.

⁵⁷ Pawson, p. 21. Amelia Budris remembers that her father would sing at "Top and Bottom" concerts in Taylorlton. CMPC, Morier's interview with Amelia Budris, Bienfait, May 15, 1996.

⁵⁸ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series. The M & S correspondent for the Estevan Mercury reported that other local musicians, such as "The Brothers Frazier," and "Ken and his Merrymakers," often supplied the music for dances and concerts. See Estevan Mercury, January 8, 1931, p. 6; April 16, 1931, p. 6.

⁵⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁶⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁶¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Rueben Jahn, Estevan, July 3, 1995.

⁶² CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995; SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979; Pawson, p. 21.

residents; such activities reinforced community ties and were an important “stress-relief” for hardworking mine families.

Birthdays and other holidays were also occasions for get-togethers, especially among the children in the mine camps. When Douglas Cuddingham of the M & S camp celebrated his ninth birthday on October 12, 1932, his party generated a comment from the M & S correspondent for the Mercury, who related that “a real jolly time was spent by the young folks in games, dancing, etc. Douglas was the recipient of a number of nice presents.”⁶³ Halloween at Shand meant a masquerade dance in the school, where Hannah Lee recalls square dances, midnight lunches, and prizes for the best costumes.⁶⁴ Children at Taylorton celebrated Easter in an entirely unique fashion, as Hilda Carlson describes:

Easter Monday we all went down there and rolled our Easter eggs down the hill. I don't know why, this was just a tradition...We'd walk up to the top of this big hill, get to the top and we'd roll an egg down, and then we'd go and grab it at the bottom. And if it broke we ate it. Well naturally, it was always broke, and then we'd go all the way up the top again, roll another egg down,...⁶⁵

Ukrainian families in the Taylorton valley are remembered as having exceptional talents for painting Easter eggs; Archie Holley recalls that his parents often received painted eggs as gifts from Ukrainians at Easter time.⁶⁶

As lively as Easter and Halloween celebrations were, the mine communities were particularly proud of their Christmas festivities. “Shand school Christmas concert was something that had to be seen to be believed,” Alice Lynch relates, “for every child, from the tiniest beginner to the oldest student was given a part to play.”⁶⁷ After the children had finished their carols, skits, and plays, Santa himself would drop in and distribute bags of candy and nuts to all of the children.⁶⁸ “I always had a

⁶³ Estevan Mercury, October 20, 1932, p. 4. Children's birthday parties at Shand were sometimes noted by the Shand correspondent as well. See Estevan Mercury, November 12, 1925, p. 3; March 31, 1927, p. 2; July 24, 1930, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Pawson, p. 14.

⁶⁵ SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979.

⁶⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995. Also Estevan National Exhibition Centre, “The Way We Were” Videotape Series.

⁶⁷ Pawson, p. 22.

⁶⁸ See Estevan Mercury, January 1, 1925, p. 1; December 30, 1926, p. 2; December 29, 1927, p. 1; January 1, 1931, p. 6; December 26, 1935, p. 2.

very good Santa Claus,” Andrew Haselhan, Shand school teacher and Christmas concert organizer, remembers. “He was Joe Wrigley, an Irishman who could really entertain the crowd.”⁶⁹ Steve Panteluk explains that one dollar was collected from each miner for presents and candy for Taylorton’s annual Christmas concerts, and mine management would cover any shortfall.⁷⁰ Edith Panteluk, who grew up in the Prospect camp, recalls that her family would travel to the various communities for the Christmas celebrations: “Even though we were that far apart from them [Taylorton], and they were a different mine, [parents] always took us kids up to that place for Christmas.”⁷¹ While camp parents obviously reveled in the Christmas cheer, it is clear that Christmas events in the Souris mine communities were tailored for the children to partake in and enjoy.

Christmas, of course, led to New Year’s Eve and yet another dance. And on January 7, the mines closed once again for Ukrainian Christmas.⁷² Mine camps took great pride in throwing a party to ring in the New Year, as the M & S correspondent for the Mercury indicated:

The New Year’s Eve dance was one of the jolliest affairs ever held in the Hall. Despite the severity of the weather, there was a nice crowd on hand to enjoy themselves. The ticket dance caused all kinds of fun and then streamers, balloons, etc. added to the merriment.⁷³

Peter Gemby recalls that in the Taylorton valley, New Year’s celebrations continued after the dance and right through New Year’s day.⁷⁴ Ukrainian Christmas was another joyous day in the valley, and Hilda Carlson recalls how her family of British background respected the Ukrainians’ religious holiday:

I can remember my mother and a cousin of my dad’s, and trailing all through the valley one time for the seventh of January for Christmas and me trailing with them. And they were going down to wish all the Ukrainian people a Merry Christmas. I can remember going through all the deep snow and everything with them.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Pawson, p. 18.

⁷⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² CMPC, Morier’s interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁷³ Estevan Mercury, January 5, 1927, p. 3.

⁷⁴ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

⁷⁵ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995. Peter Gemby, who lived in the valley, recalls the Christmas carolers who traveled from house to house collecting for the church

Dances, concerts, parties, holidays - families in the Souris coalfields created their own entertainment. Obviously, the many fond memories of social activities in the camps indicate that there was plenty of good cheer in the coal communities.

Weddings and anniversaries were also cause for celebration in the camps. Not uncommon in the Estevan Mercury throughout the 1920s and 1930s were notices and announcements of weddings, showers, and anniversary parties in the coal camps.⁷⁶ The centuries-old tradition of the charivari also occasionally occurred in the Souris communities.⁷⁷ Hilda Carlson, whose parents were charivariated themselves years earlier in Taylorton, recalls the community's reaction to a marriage without "proper" ceremony:

[The married couple] would have a small reception and then they wouldn't put a wedding dance on. So they would have gathered all the people and the kids thought that was great and we would charivari them....And then you would get these big tubs and pots and pans and everything and sticks and go and bang outside their house until they finally came out and said they'd have a wedding dance on Saturday night.⁷⁸

Nor was Taylorton the only community to organize charivaris. Norah Mather, who grew up in Shand, also remarks that Shand newlyweds were not immune to a possible charivari: "I remember hearing one, one night. I was too small then to realize.

and enjoying the Christmas cheer. CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Estevan Mercury, March 3, 1927, p. 5; February 26, 1931, p. 6; July 21, 1932, p. 4; October 13, 1932, p. 4. Hilda Carlson explains that weddings in Taylorton were such notable community events because a lack of transportation often prevented distant relatives from attending the camp weddings. Formal wedding invitations were a rarity: "Well, it was pretty well wide open," she asserts. CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

⁷⁷ A charivari was a tactic designed to indicate a community's censure or disapproval of an individual's actions. It usually took the form of a rowdy procession, which surrounded the offender's abode, and did not leave until an agreement or recompense was struck with the person. For an excellent overview of the charivari and its importance to working-class culture in North America and around the world, see Bryan Palmer, "Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-Century North America," Labour/Le Travailleur, volume 3, 1978, pp. 5-63.

⁷⁸ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995. Newly married Metro Bortniak was the victim of a charivari in Taylorton in March 1926, and another night of "tin can music" occurred in Taylorton in June 1926. See Estevan Mercury, March 18, 1926, p. 2; June 3, 1926, p. 2.

But they certainly made a lot of noise.”⁷⁹ Weddings and charivaris in the Souris camps indicate the tightly knit character of the communities; the entire camp often celebrated personal or family events.

Ukrainian weddings are particularly remembered as boisterous and enduring festivities. Through such highly organized and anticipated celebrations, Ukrainian families nurtured and strengthened their culture and community association.⁸⁰ As Freda Evans remembers of Ukrainian weddings in the Taylorton valley, such events were gala affairs:

Oh well, the Ukrainian weddings, they were great. And you know, those people would be considered hard up. But when it came to a wedding - oh boy! Yeah, the English-speaking people, they didn't have weddings like the Ukrainians. Ukrainians would have a three-day affair.⁸¹

“They'd build a dance floor,” Archie Holley recalls of Taylorton valley residents, “and put tree boughs around, had a band, dancing, and food galore. They're a great people for cooking - the European people....It was a big deal, a wedding.”⁸² Rueben Jahn remembers attending Ukrainian weddings in the coal camps and being amazed at some of the Ukrainian dances.⁸³ As important as weddings were to the social life of the entire camp community, Ukrainian weddings were cherished ethnic and cultural celebrations as well. Far away from the “Old Country,” Ukrainians in the

⁷⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995. Newlyweds Mr. and Mrs. Eric Johnson were victims of a Shand charivari in August 1926. See Estevan *Mercury*, August 5, 1926, p. 6.

⁸⁰ In her study of Italian immigrants in postwar Toronto, Franca Iacovetta notes how cherished Italian festivals and celebrations, such as the festa, revealed “the way in which the immigrants nurtured and created their own sense of culture and community in the New World.” See Iacovetta, p. 141, 201. Lantz also comments on the important cultural tradition of immigrant weddings. See Lantz, p. 178. Also, see Bradbury, *Working Families*, p. 214.

⁸¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁸² CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995. The “tree boughs” are also remembered by Freda Evans, who explains that by weaving fine trees and branches, valley residents created a sort of shelter or “covering” over the outdoor dance floor. CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995. As for the types of food commonly prepared for the Ukrainians' weddings, Stella Baniulis recalls that they would “make a bunch of cabbage rolls, roast a bunch of chickens, even a whole little pig.” SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

⁸³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Rueben Jahn, Estevan, July 3, 1995.

Souris coal camps adapted to their new lives while preserving certain values and traditions.

Many of the weddings and dances in the Souris coalfields were liberally lubricated with homebrew.⁸⁴ "They made homebrew, they made beer, they made wine," ex-Taylorlton resident Stella Baniulis remembers with a laugh:

Potato champagne is what really was the big [drink] at the mines. Potato champagne, I think every house had it. My mother made champagne, too - lots of it. From potatoes, I don't know how she did it. I asked her, she said she doesn't know. She used to buy raisins and potatoes.⁸⁵

Mrs. Baniulis even recalls a Mountie searching her house on one occasion; her mother, however, had hidden two bottles of homebrew in the stovepipe of the chimney, as well as handed two bottles to Stella to smuggle out of the house and stash in her uncle's rain barrel.⁸⁶ Some women were not so fortunate. Archie Holley relates how a homebrewer in the Taylorlton valley passed on: "And damned if [the Mounties] didn't keep coming down there, so they put her in jail. They finally put her in jail so many times she died of pneumonia."⁸⁷ Some women homebrewers may have added to the family purse by selling their "champagne" to other camp residents.⁸⁸ It is clear, however, that every camp in the Souris coalfields had its homebrewers and bootleggers. "But, like I say," Peter Gemby states of Taylorlton valley residents, "they were making a lot of homebrew. Everybody was making homebrew."⁸⁹

Alcohol abuse occasionally caused trouble in the communities. Peter Gemby recalls one such incident in Taylorlton:

⁸⁴ Rueben Jahn, who worked in a number of Souris mines, recalls that "white mule" was the colloquial term for homebrew in the camps. CMPC, Morier's interview with Rueben Jahn, Estevan, July 3, 1995. "Dandelion wine" was also a popular concoction in the Souris valley. See Klimko and Taft, p. 80. For a discussion of homebrew operations in the Cape Breton coal mines, see Mellor, p. 285.

⁸⁵ SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Peter Gemby recalls that bottles of homebrew were often hidden from the Mounties in coal piles in the Taylorlton valley. CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

⁸⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁸⁸ SAB, R-A326, Interview with Howard Babcock, Regina, June 19, 1973.

⁸⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995. According to testimony at the 1931 Wylie Commission, M & S Mine manager Alex "Happy" Wilson was a winemaker as well. John Salamanshek and Steve Lazue commented that they had bought jugs of wine from Wilson around Christmas of 1929. True to form, "Happy" charged the men \$4.50 per jug; government liquor stores charged only \$2.50 per jug. See Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 243, 249.

There was lots of Ukrainians that worked in there that, just seasonal. And they stayed in the boarding house. There was a, and some of them were drunkards and young guy at boarding house; the people there had some young girls. And they were trying to bother them, and they reported them out. They got fired that way.⁹⁰

Ex-Taylornton resident Freda Evans agrees that it was the single, transient workers who constituted the “rough” element of the community: “In those days the company provided what they call a boarding house...and [boarding house men] were kind of to themselves, you know. And, uh, between them and the bootleggers, that would be their life.”⁹¹ Rueben Jahn, who worked in a few of the Souris mines in the 1930s, recalls a drunk miner firing a pistol at a dance and receiving two months in jail for his actions.⁹² John and Ann Kolenz, who grew up in the Prospect camp, relate that booze, thievery, and dances went hand-in-hand; bottles were hidden behind the tires of cars, and the thieves knew it: “Everybody’d go in dancing, and you could look out and see them sneaking around the cars, looking for booze.”⁹³ Fights between men at dances usually involved liquor, women, or both, but such conflicts were not commonplace; ex-camp residents refer to fights as isolated and abnormal events.⁹⁴ That

⁹⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995. At the 1931 Wylie Commission, M & S miner Joe Elioff and mine manager “Happy” Wilson told two versions of the same story. Elioff claimed that Wilson had fired him for being ill. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, pp. 152-53. Wilson, on the other hand, specified Elioff’s illness: “When payday came he naturally could not resist the temptation of having two or three days off. He would get tight and stay that way for three or four days, sometimes a week at a time.” Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 7, p. 7.

⁹¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995. Tony Baniulis, who worked in the Western Dominion Mine, also points out that the camp’s boarding house was famous for its homebrew, beer, and poker games. SAB, R-A434, Interview with Tony and Stella Baniulis, Estevan, July 16, 1973. John Kolenz recalls that his father would play “nickel poker” with Prospect boarding house men on paydays. CMPC, Morier’s interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁹² CMPC, Morier’s interview with Rueben Jahn, Estevan, July 3, 1995. In his testimony at the Wylie Commission, Dr. James Creighton mentioned a Taylornton miner and a firearm accident: “His elbow [was] shot away with a shotgun.” Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 11, p. 377. Guns were apparently fairly common in the camps. John Kolenz, who grew up at Prospect, recalls shooting deer in the Souris valley as a boy. CMPC, Morier’s interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

⁹³ CMPC, Morier’s interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995. A former Souris valley resident, Margaret Pick, remembers that booze was quietly consumed outside of the dance hall: “You’d go outside, if you drank and had a drink, and back in and dance....” See Klimko and Taft, p. 94.

⁹⁴ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995. See also Estevan *Mercury*, January 30, 1930, p. 4.

children of all ages attended dances indicates that these functions, while perhaps not totally “dry,” were not uncontrollably “wet” either.

Of the criminal activity which occurred in the coal communities, petty theft seems to have been the most prevalent, although such cases were rare. The Taylorton correspondent for the Estevan Mercury chastised the individual responsible for stealing a coat, cap, scarf, and mitts during a January 1926 dance.⁹⁵ Linen stolen from Mrs. Priekshot Senior’s house in Shand in the spring of 1927 elicited comment in the Mercury as well.⁹⁶ The Mercury also reported on January 26, 1928 that M & S miner Norman English pleaded guilty and was fined for two counts of theft from the mine store.⁹⁷ Other M & S camp residents were under suspicion as well, but subsequent editions of the Mercury did not report on further developments. In December 1932, Shand miner Mike Deligswski’s watch was stolen by co-worker Sabri Gabor. Gabor was eventually apprehended in Lethbridge, Alberta in the spring of 1933 and sentenced to two months in jail.⁹⁸ In regard to the general safety in the camps, Mary Harris of the Bienfait camp complained in 1931 about the community’s poor lighting. A few lights, she stated, “would improve that place very much because it is awful [sic] dangerous.” Mrs. Harris did not specify if “dangerous” referred to possible criminal activity, accidents, or other factors, but she mentioned that she had poor eyesight.⁹⁹ While minor crimes and misdemeanors were not unknown in the Souris camps, serious criminal cases were rarely indicated in the Mercury, and are not part of ex-residents’ memories.

On April 4, 1929, the Estevan Mercury printed a curious notice from a Taylorton resident:

WARNING

If I hear any more false statements concerning my name after this date further proceedings will be taken.

(Signed) Beatrice Wilkinson¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Estevan Mercury, January 21, 1926, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Estevan Mercury, April 28, 1927, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Estevan Mercury, January 26, 1928, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Estevan Mercury, March 30, 1933, p. 5.

⁹⁹ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 86.

¹⁰⁰ Estevan Mercury, April 4, 1929, p. 4.

The July 14, 1932 Mercury reported on another, unrelated dispute at the Manitoba and Saskatchewan camp:

“A draw” was the decision handed down by H.N. Freeman, Bienfait justice of the peace, after hearing a vivid account of the battle royal which took place at the M & S Mines last Friday night between two young married women....Mrs. Wm. Sherritt laid a charge of assault against Mrs. Wm. Davis, and produced before the court a handful of hair which she claimed her alleged assailant had pulled from her head.¹⁰¹

While it is impossible to ascertain the circumstances surrounding Mrs. Wilkinson's “warning” at Taylorton and the fight at M & S, these newspaper accounts indicate that disputes between women sometimes arose in the coal camps. Significantly, Hilda Carlson and Peter Gemby, both ex-Taylorton residents, suggest that most arguments between women concerned their children. “Until, well, later on when the woman [sic] start arguing about kids,” Mr. Gemby relates. “Cause if there was a fight [between children], then the woman [sic] start arguing. Then there was more friction, just the neighbours. But not men. Just the woman [sic] amongst themselves over the child.”¹⁰² Mrs. Carlson agrees that camp children were often behind women's disputes: “If they had a fight, well, it was just like they are now over kids or something. They never went around with a chip on their shoulder.”¹⁰³ At the Wylie Commission, M & S Mine manager “Happy” Wilson explained another cause of conflict in his mine's camp. Apparently, stray cows often wandered into gardens, “and there was a war between the ones who did not have cows and the ones who did.”¹⁰⁴ While “war” may have been a slight exaggeration, it is clear that mine camps, like all communities, occasionally harboured gossip, arguments, and the rare altercation.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Estevan Mercury, July 14, 1932, p. 1.

¹⁰² CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

¹⁰³ SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979.

¹⁰⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 383. Wilson also placed an ad in the November 5, 1931 Estevan Mercury (p. 8) which addressed the “cow problem” in his camp. “Now, I sincerely request all employees owning cows to keep them under control and carry out the regulations set forth by the company,” the notice read.

¹⁰⁵ Iacovetta makes a similar point in her study of Toronto's Italians: “While doing laundry, shelling beans, or making cheese outdoors, women talked endlessly and, very often, they forged close bonds. Of course, not all women were natural allies; rivals could be suspicious of, and cruel to, each other.” See Iacovetta, p. 85.

Emotions ran high in the camps for other reasons. Archie Holley recalls one of the “rabid fans” at a Taylorton soccer match:

One time she grabbed a referee, and we thought she was going to choke him. Her husband played fullback; he was a big man. She could get riled up. She was waving her arms one time...[and] she threw up her arms about something and knocked [a linesman] ass over teakettle [laughs].¹⁰⁶

Soccer was a very popular summertime activity in the coalfields, especially in Taylorton, where the Western Dominion team was one of the best in the province.¹⁰⁷ Archie Holley recalls that the Taylorton soccer team was in a league with other squads from M & S, Bienfait, Estevan, and Britannia.¹⁰⁸ In the early summer of 1932, Taylorton even hosted an exhibition match against a “highly touted” touring Drumheller, Alberta team. Taylorton won the game 1-0, and the Mercury reports on the post-game festivities:

Later, both teams were entertained to a potato pie supper served by the social club. The Drumheller boys freely admitted it was the best feed they’d had since they left Calgary. They also goodnaturedly explained that the reason the game was so tight was because they had fifteen Scotchmen on their lineup.¹⁰⁹

Softball was another much anticipated summer sport in the Souris camps, with both women’s and men’s teams active. Hilda Carlson’s mother played on the Taylorton women’s softball team, which most often faced the women’s team from the M & S camp.¹¹⁰ Archie Holley recalls visiting men’s and women’s teams playing

¹⁰⁶ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ SAB, R-A325 and R-A1977, Interviews with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973, and Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979. In 1928, the Coalfields United soccer team, which was well stocked with Taylorton players, fell 4-0 to a Prince Albert team in the provincial championship. See Estevan Mercury, September 6, 1928, p. 1. The popularity of soccer in coal camps was not unique to the Souris fields. In her study of coal-mine communities on Vancouver Island, Lynne Bowen notes that “football was more important than almost anything else. Any coal camp with more than two or three hundred inhabitants had a team. Soccer football was serious business....The game provided such a release for player and spectator alike, its exuberant physical freedom such a contrast to the physical restrictions of the mine.” See Bowen, pp. 224-25.

¹⁰⁸ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, “The Way We Were” Videotape Series.

¹⁰⁹ Estevan Mercury, May 12, 1932, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995. The Taylorton correspondent for the Mercury consistently kept readers up to date on the men’s and women’s softball teams. The recreational and social value of the summertime sport is evident in this report, which appeared in the May 23, 1929 edition of the Mercury (p. 10): “On Friday evening the Taylorton boys and girls ball teams went to Roche Percee to answer a challenge at Soft Ball. The girls team showed themselves up

double-headers against the Taylorton clubs.¹¹¹ Once again, Taylorton's unique geography played a role in the softball season. As Hilda Carlson explains, "The men down [in] the valley used to have a ball team and the men on top used to have a ball team and they used to play opposite each other....And that was great for entertainment - everybody went out to that."¹¹² Indeed, the Estevan Mercury reported that two hundred fans watched the Valley and the Top teams vie for the "Smyth trophy" in April 1933: "In the end the Top men had to bow their heads to the Valley boys and take a good razzing with a score of 18-11."¹¹³ Other common team divisions in the camps were between the married and single men, as well as between the coal diggers and above-ground workers.¹¹⁴ Clearly, summer sports were important recreational and social outlets for coal-mine families in the Souris camps.

There were various forms of other entertainment for camp men, women, and children. Peter Gemby recalls that those few camp families fortunate enough to own a gramophone always had plenty of company.¹¹⁵ Archie Holley remembers the famous "long count" Dempsey-Tunney boxing match in the summer of 1927; a radio's speaker was rigged so that all in Taylorton could picnic and listen to the fight.¹¹⁶ Alice Pawson of Shand and Ann Kolenz of the Prospect camp often accompanied their families and many other camp residents on day and night trips to Estevan or

fine and brought back a victory of 17-11. The boys lost by a score of 14-13. However, cheer up! boys, we hope for better luck next Tuesday night at the return game. The teams wish to thank those who so kindly placed cars at their disposal."

¹¹¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995. Apparently, the women moved their ball games indoors when the weather demanded. The May 20, 1926 Estevan Mercury (p. 6) mentioned an "indoor baseball" game between the Taylorton and M & S women. While the correspondent did not mention the venue, the game presumably took place in the community hall.

¹¹² SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979.

¹¹³ Estevan Mercury, April 27, 1933, p. 2. Considering that the majority of valley residents were of central-European background, it is notable that the Valley team enjoyed a friendly rivalry with the Top team. Obviously, softball in Taylorton was not exclusive to any particular ethnic group.

¹¹⁴ See Estevan Mercury, April 22, 1926, p. 1; June 24, 1926, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ SAB, R-A325, Interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973.

¹¹⁶ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series. The fight was controversial because former champion Jack Dempsey knocked champion Gene Tunney down in the seventh round. Dempsey's managers claimed that Tunney was down for at least fifteen seconds, but the referee's "long count" allowed Tunney to get up before the ten-count. Tunney went on to retain his title on points. See Regina Leader Post, September 23, 1927, p. 1.

Portal.¹¹⁷ Hockey games in Bienfait, Estevan, or Weyburn also drew mine-community residents, both as players and spectators.¹¹⁸ Silent pictures reached the coal-fields in the late 1920s, and community halls became movie theaters for one night a week.¹¹⁹ Charlie Chaplin and Rin Tin Tin flicks were popular, and as Hilda Carlson recalls, action on the movie screen was often accompanied by excitement in the seats: “Course we didn’t have very cushy seats either. They’d have planks and powder kegs, you know for the planks to sit on. Usually the planks would fall down during the show. Nobody ever got hurt.”¹²⁰

Children in particular developed a multitude of amusements in the coal communities, although some had more spare time than others. “I never had a lot of time to go and just play with kids,” Alice Pawson, whose father worked at the Shand Mine, recalls. “I had to [work]; there was always something. You had to get home and deliver the milk or you had to do something, and I didn’t have a lot of spare time either, you know.”¹²¹ Hilda Carlson, who grew up in Taylorton, tells a contrasting story: “Oh yeah, we were never overworked. It was never that much work that had to be done by the kids.”¹²² It seems that some families expected or needed more work from their children than others. Nonetheless, even the busiest children found time to socialize and play with friends. Mrs. Pawson, for instance, fondly remembers the annual Shand school picnic with sack races, three-legged races, and wheelbarrow races for the kids, pipe-lighting races for the men, and needle-and-thread races for the women.¹²³ Jean Moroz, who raised children in Taylorton, recalls that picnics in the

¹¹⁷ CMPC, Morier’s interviews with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995. According to Mrs. Pawson, “almost the entire population” of Shand would commute on the train to Estevan on Saturday nights. While in Estevan, miners and their families would commonly “have supper, take in the show, do some shopping, visit friends, and have a cup of coffee at a nearby cafe, before catching the [midnight] train homeward.” See Pawson, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, “The Way We Were” Videotape Series (Archie Holley). Also see Estevan *Mercury*, February 21, 1929, p. 4; January 29, 1931, p. 6; January 21, 1932, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995; SAB, R-A1962 and R-A1977, Interviews with Sarah Ann Prescott, Bienfait, July 9, 1979, and Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979. Also see Estevan *Mercury*, January 8, 1925, p. 5; November 24, 1932, p. 4.

¹²⁰ SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979.

¹²¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹²² CMPC, Morier’s interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

¹²³ Pawson, p. 18, 22.

valley were treats for children and adults alike: "I couldn't say there was a heck of a lot doing, but it was a picnic and everybody enjoyed every bit of it [laughs]."¹²⁴

During the summer, soccer, softball, and especially swimming were popular pastimes for camp children. Indeed, the Souris valley was a natural playground, with the river as its central attraction. "I think we all learned to swim in the Souris river," Norah Mather states of Shand children.¹²⁵ Edith Panteluk, who grew up in the Prospect camp, agrees:

And you had to learn to swim if you lived down in the mines, 'cause you lived too close to the water. They taught you how to swim from real tiny kids. Tie a rope around ya [laughs]. I can remember them times, too. Good. But we used to play and play and play. We had rafts there and we played on that river.¹²⁶

"They'd be there from daylight to dark," Sarah Ann Prescott recalls of her children's hours of swimming, "take their lunch with them....They all learned to swim in the river down there....They enjoyed their summertime."¹²⁷ While Archie Holley remembers that his mother or other camp women would supervise the children while they swam,¹²⁸ Hilda Carlson does not recall constant parental lifeguards: "They didn't seem to worry about us like they do now, and I never ever remember anyone ever drowning."¹²⁹

The Souris valley also allowed for plenty of winter fun for camp children, with skiing, skating, and sledding as the most common activities. Steve Panteluk, who grew up in Taylorton, recalls using cardboard and flattened powder cans for sleds, and wooden barrel slats for skis.¹³⁰ The distinctly shaped "Sugarloaf" hill, just south of Taylorton, was a common meeting place for children during the winter, as Archie Holley relates: "And you could [slide] down that hill and you could go for a mile. Take you right down to the river almost. Then coming back was another

¹²⁴ SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

¹²⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹²⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹²⁷ SAB, R-A1962, Interview with Sarah Ann Prescott, Bienfait, July 9, 1979.

¹²⁸ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series.

¹²⁹ SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979.

¹³⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

story.”¹³¹ Joe Prysnyk, who grew up in the Taylorton valley, has many fond memories of winter in the hills:

[I remember] the winter. Snow in the wintertime in the [19]30s. There was all kinds of snow and the fun we had with, you know, sliding down the hills and...it was wonderful, you know. That's the one thing I'll never forget. All the fun we had just with a piece of cardboard, you know. We'd sit and go scooting down the valley hills. It was really nice.¹³²

Ann Kolenz recalls the children at Prospect clearing a pond or stretch of ice along the river to skate,¹³³ and Edith Panteluk, who also grew up at Prospect, remembers playing hockey alongside the boys: “We skated and skated [laughs]. It was lots of fun. They'd even come from Taylorton and the other mines and everything. We used to skate and play hockey and everything out there. On the river.”¹³⁴ Children in the coal camps enjoyed a wide variety of amusements in all seasons.

Occasionally, children's “fun” turned into mischief and pranks. Norah Mather remembers a group of boys rolling empty carbide cans down the mine slope at Shand, presumably to try to trip up ascending miners. The game did not last long: “But I think they did it one night and thought they had a wonderful time. And the next night somebody was waiting and grabbed them. So that finished that.”¹³⁵ Joe Prysnyk recalls how Taylorton children would get the day off school:

Well, mostly I remember the old school there. Every spring the basement, the concrete was cracked and while it was thawing we used to dig ditches toward the cracks so it would flood out the furnace and then they'd send us home. The basement would be flooded out.¹³⁶

¹³¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995. The Taylorton correspondent for the Estevan Mercury, perhaps short on community news, occasionally commented on everyday camp activities: “The old Sugar Loaf Hill was a scene of activity last Sunday, when a number of boys took advantage of mild weather, grabbed the big toboggan and skis, and made whoopee. No casualties reported.” (Estevan Mercury, January 28, 1932, p. 6) It is interesting that the correspondent specifically mentioned “boys” in the report. Ex-camp residents, however, recall that boys and girls, and “top” and “bottom” children all played together in the valley. CMPC, Morier's interviews with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995; Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995; and John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹³² SAB, R-A1957, Interview with Joe Prysnyk, Bienfait, July 24, 1979.

¹³³ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹³⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995. Norah Mather, who grew up in Shand, also skated in the wintertime. CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹³⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹³⁶ SAB, R-A1957, Interview with Joe Prysnyk, Bienfait, July 24, 1979.

Vandalism by youths in the camps rarely went beyond an odd raided garden or tipped outhouse on Halloween night.¹³⁷ Slightly more serious at the M & S camp was missing mail, which caused mine manager "Happy" Wilson to suspect "small boys" reaching through the mail slot to appropriate letters.¹³⁸ Children could also send a genuine scare through camp residents; in May 1932, four youngsters from the Crescent Collieries "set out to see the world" and were found only after a two-hour search by "anxious parents and friends."¹³⁹ As childhood and trouble have often always gone hand-in-hand, it is not surprising that coal-camp children sometimes stretched the boundaries of proper behaviour.

Boys and girls grew up alongside each other in the mine communities, and many of them married childhood sweethearts. For a couple of years, however, relations between the sexes were anything but close. Edith Panteluk and Ann Kolenz both recall Prospect boys chasing them with valley snakes, and both women report a fear of snakes to this day!¹⁴⁰ It is little wonder that pre-teen girls in the camps often preferred spending their time with their own kind. "I hate to say this but I almost have to," Jean Moroz recalls of her girlfriend in Taylorton. "We used to go up on top of a hill,...us two girls used to go on top of this and we used to sing to our hearts' content [laughs]."¹⁴¹ Ann Kolenz and her friends would take long walks in the valley and pick flowers.¹⁴² Eventually, though, young men and women would mend fences and get back together. "I started going with him when I was sixteen," Edith Panteluk relates of her husband Steve. "He used to come down [to Prospect from Taylorton] on his bicycle, 'cause he never had no cars. And we would walk around and sit on the bridge. That's where we used to spend a lot of time, playing on the bridge. Sitting there yapping."¹⁴³ Freda Evans, who was a young woman in Taylorton,

¹³⁷ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995, and Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹³⁸ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. 8.

¹³⁹ Estevan *Mercury*, May 19, 1932, p. 4.

¹⁴⁰ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995, and John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹⁴¹ SAB, R-A327, Interview with Jean Moroz, Hitchcock, July 1973.

¹⁴² CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹⁴³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

remembers the options that a young couple had for a date: "Well, you could go for a walk to the river. Or you might get a ride into town, you know, to a show. Or you would get a date to go to a dance. You know, things like that."¹⁴⁴ George Symons, who worked at the Taylorton store, recalls an occasional carload of teens filling up at the store's gas pump.¹⁴⁵ As discussed earlier, camp weddings were much celebrated events, thanks in part to the fact that many marriages involved young men and women who grew up together in the communities.

With little money to devote to entertainment, camp children found pleasure in free and simple pursuits. Alice Pawson remembers borrowing books from a "traveling library" at Shand;¹⁴⁶ Ann Kolenz at the Prospect camp regularly corresponded with a pen pal in Australia;¹⁴⁷ Joe Prysnyk and his friends in the Taylorton valley played "Cowboys and Indians" in the hills and hunted rabbits with dogs;¹⁴⁸ Steve Panteluk and his chums used a sack to catch fish in the Souris river;¹⁴⁹ Freda Evans recalls long Sunday afternoon walks in the valley;¹⁵⁰ Hilda Carlson visited friends every Saturday night in Taylorton and listened to Saturday Night Barn Dance on the radio.¹⁵¹ Camp children occasionally staged impromptu concerts for appreciative parents and other adults, and Taylorton had a boy scout troop which hosted concerts and dances to raise funds for camping trips.¹⁵² Take-home school projects, such as minor cooking assignments, were not unheard of.¹⁵³ Common children's games,

¹⁴⁴ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹⁴⁵ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Also, see Pawson, p. 2, and Estevan Mercury January 21, 1926, p. 3. The M & S camp was quite proud of the library that it established in October 1933. By 1935, the library shelved over 800 titles, with Zane Grey, Thackeray, and Dickens novels as the most popular. Apparently, non-English-speaking children (and adults, presumably) especially appreciated the library, as the English language was learned through simple story books. See Estevan Mercury, October 24, 1935, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ CMPC, Morier's interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹⁴⁸ SAB, R-A1957, Interview with Joe Prysnyk, Bienfait, July 24, 1979. Dogs and cats were common pets among families in the coalfields. Edith Panteluk's father in the Prospect camp even once tried to tame a coyote. CMPC, Morier's interviews with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, May 15, 1996, and Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, May 15, 1996.

¹⁴⁹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹⁵⁰ CMPC, Morier's interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

¹⁵¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

¹⁵² See, for example, Estevan Mercury, February 26, 1931, p. 6; August 10, 1933, p. 7. One ex-Taylorton resident, who wishes to remain anonymous, was a member of the camp's boy scouts. He recalls camping trips to Carlyle, Saskatchewan.

¹⁵³ CMPC, Morier's interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

such as Fox and Goose, Crack the Whip, and Run Sheep Run were well known in the camps. Hilda Carlson recalls that the streetlights in front of the Taylorton store were a meeting place for camp children, and games were played under the lights on the community's main street.¹⁵⁴ Alice Pawson relates that all ages of children were involved in the fun, but "you had to watch for the different age groups, that the little ones didn't get hurt."¹⁵⁵ And, of course, the Eaton's and Simpson's catalogues provided camp children with both dreams and incentive to save their dimes and quarters for small items or gifts.¹⁵⁶ Children in the Souris coal communities clearly lived different lives than do children today; it is clear, however, that the coal camps were exciting and lively places in which to grow up. In the absence of plentiful recreational facilities and expensive entertainment, camp children "made their own fun" and enjoyed plenty of good times in the communities.

In the case of the Souris coal camps, oral history allows for a more honest evaluation of day-to-day camp life. Strike historians create an image of mining communities as oppressed and cheerless hovels; such an image falters before testimony from ex-camp residents. While mining coal in the Souris fields in the 1920s and 1930s was certainly not a lucrative occupation, mine families had a variety of inexpensive and innovative entertainments on hand. The mine camps were self-supportive and close communities, with a vibrant and active social atmosphere. While the ethnic divisions in the camps may have been undeniable, division did not indicate hatred, and the communities were not unfriendly or hostile places. Coal-camp residents, regardless of ethnic background, shared too many similar challenges to be mortally divided. Social activities in the camps were enjoyed by all and denied to none. Indeed, such hardworking people went to great lengths to establish a thriving community spirit and sense of solidarity.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Also SAB, R-A1977, Interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, July 19, 1979.

¹⁵⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

¹⁵⁶ CMPC, Morier's interviews with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995, and Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995. Also Estevan National Exhibition Centre, "The Way We Were" Videotape Series (Elaine Murray).

CHAPTER 7 - UNION, STRIKE, RIOT: AUTUMN 1931

Well, [miners with families] wasn't [sic] safe. When they were organizing [the union] or one thing or another, they were for it, but in a way they wanted you to improve their working conditions. But in another way, when they start thinking about losing the job and the home, and they wish you wouldn't. You know,...which some of them expressed their opinion that way, but I imagine everybody was thinking the same way.¹

The above statement, provided by Peter Gemby, who lived in the Taylorton valley and played a prominent role in organizing the valley miners in the labour dispute of 1931, indicates the dilemma which faced mine families throughout the summer and fall of that year. While the chronology of the 1931 miners' strike and riot has been well documented elsewhere,² families receive only brief attention in these accounts. Women and children, if they appear at all, are portrayed as suffering victims of coal companies' greed, or as passive helpmates standing behind the striking miners. The labour dispute recorded in the historiography is primarily a man's fight, a breadwinner's fight. For miners with families, however, the strike dramatically tested and affected all family members. Neither passive helpmates nor suffering victims, coal-camp women played significant, if largely ignored, roles in the troubled year of 1931.

Asked whether Souris miners discussed forming a union in the spring of 1931, ex-Taylorton valley resident Peter Gemby replies affirmatively. "Yes, most of us, quite openly," he states. "[But] those guys who talked about unions, [the company] laid us off....A lot of them they were family men and they couldn't stay, and they had little money, so they just moved out."³ Not only were miners fired for

¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

² See: Hanson, "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931"; "Estevan 1931"; Makahonuk, "The Working and Living..."; "Labour Relations..."; Watson, She Never Was Afraid; and Berton, The Great Depression, 1929-1939.

³ SAB, R-A325, Interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973.

speaking openly about forming a union, blacklisting was also a possibility, which was especially devastating for men with families. "If a man started to make a complaint," Bienfait miner Harry Hesketh testified in 1931, "he was kicked out and sometimes blacklisted....If he was an old man he knew to keep his mouth shut."⁴ Archie MacQuarrie, who was a horseman in the Western Dominion Mine in 1931, concurs: "If you didn't like the job, you just took your tools out. But a miner with a family couldn't do that, so you had to put up with it."⁵

Throughout July and August 1931, however, miners from the various Souris mines met secretly to discuss organization of the area's miners.⁶ Rejected or ignored by established provincial labour leaders and Saskatchewan Premier Anderson's government, the Souris miners, as a last resort, forwarded a letter to the communist-led Workers' Unity League (WUL) of Canada asking for assistance.⁷ On August 23, Sam Scarlett of the WUL spoke to over twelve hundred miners and their wives at a Taylorton picnic. Two days later, the president of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada (MWUC), James Sloan, addressed over one thousand people in Bienfait.⁸ The MWUC, Sloan informed his listeners at this meeting, had signed up one hundred per cent of the Souris miners, then numbering over six hundred men.⁹ By the end of August 1931, a showdown between the miners and the coal companies was imminent.

What were the miners' main grievances? Briefly, wages, working conditions, and living conditions had deteriorated throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. Historian Stan Hanson has carefully analyzed the unenviable position of the miners in 1931, and points out that "average annual earnings declined almost twenty-one per

⁴ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 103. Hesketh claimed that he knew personally two miners, Isha Kuna and Bill Vaughn, who were blacklisted from the Souris mines. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 1, p. 96.

⁵ SAB, R-A319, Interview with Archibald MacQuarrie by Larry Johnston, Bienfait, August 23, 1973. In her study of Flin Flon families, Meg Luxton comments that the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company management preferred "a workforce composed primarily of married men with families." Such arrangements assured "a stable workforce." See Luxton, p. 26.

⁶ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-28, written statement by Crescent miner Dan Moar.

⁷ Hanson, "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931," p. 87.

⁸ Estevan *Mercury*, August 27, 1931, p. 1; Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-28; Hanson, "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931," p. 90.

⁹ Estevan *Mercury*, August 27, 1931, p. 1; Hanson, "Estevan 1931," p. 43.

cent from 1929 to 1931. The cost-of-living index meanwhile fell by only ten points, from one hundred to ninety.”¹⁰ A common complaint of the miners was the amount of unremunerated labour that they performed. Draining water from the coal face or erecting timbers to stabilize the roof cost the men time and money, as they were paid primarily for the amount of coal loaded.¹¹ Working conditions underground were dirty, smoky, and wet, and “black damp” resulted from improper ventilation.¹² Living conditions were also a concern of the Souris miners and their families; many houses in the coal communities were small, crowded, cold, and leaky. Such circumstances precipitated the establishment of the Mine Workers’ Union of Canada in the Souris fields in August 1931.

As determined as the miners and their families were to better their situation, they risked a great deal by supporting the new union. The central European-born miners and their families were in an especially precarious position. Archie Holley, who grew up in Taylorton, remarks on the conditions from which many “Old Country” people fled, and believes that central-European mining families “were so grateful to be in a free country, free expression, and have a job, earning money and making their own way.”¹³ Peter Gemby partially agrees; families in the Taylorton valley, he states, “[had] nothing but they’re not hungry, and the kids not hungry either. And that’s the main thing.”¹⁴ Freda Evans, also of Taylorton, concurs with Archie Holley’s assertion, stating that “those [central-European] people, they wanted to be here,...and they didn’t want anything to interfere with their being here.”¹⁵ Obviously, a central-European family’s decision to support the union was extremely

¹⁰ Hanson, “Estevan 1931,” p. 36.

¹¹ See testimony at the 1931 Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, J.H. Harris (Bienfait Mine), vol. 1, pp. 19-39; Harry Hesketh (Bienfait Mine), vol. 1, p. 100,113; Wilburt Enmark (Bienfait Mine), vol. 2, p. 147; John Robinson (Bienfait Mine), vol. 3, pp. 3-11; John Billis (Eastern Collieries), vol. 5, p. 89; Fred Booth (M & S Mine), vol. 6, p. 116; Dan Moar (Crescent Collieries), vol. 10, p. 26; Dimetro Uhryn (Crescent Collieries), vol. 10, p. 109. John R. Brodie, shareholder and vice-president of the Bienfait Mine, responded defensively at the Wylie Commission that timbering was factored into the miners’ per ton earnings. Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 11.

¹² See discussion of “black damp” and powder smoke in chapter four.

¹³ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

¹⁴ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

¹⁵ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

hampered by fears and doubts.¹⁶ But support the union they did, despite the potential repercussions.

There are scattered indications that central-European miners were more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in the mines. While one of the main grievances of the miners in the union was the “short” weights that they received for the amount of coal loaded, central-European miners may have been victimized more often in this regard.¹⁷ Rueben Jahn, who worked in a few Souris mines, believes that non-English-speaking miners were regularly “shorted” in their weights: “I think they took quite a lot of abuse. From managers, and wages, and uh, the scale. Scale man robbed you blind.”¹⁸ “It was tough, not understanding [English],” ex-Taylornton resident Steve Panteluk agrees, “a lot of people will tell you that. When they come from [the “Old Country”] they didn’t know English...[and] the other people took advantage of them.”¹⁹ Again, the scales were a concern for all of the Souris miners, but central-European miners and their families may have been exploited disproportionately.

The relations between mine managers and camp families varied from mine to mine. Madeline Thompson, who lived in the M & S camp, testified in 1931 that she did not dare complain to mine management about anything. “I was scared all the time,” she confessed.²⁰ When asked if Shand families were intimidated by the mine bosses, Alice Pawson replies affirmatively: “Oh, I think so. I think so. You didn’t cross the manager very much....You didn’t overstep your boundaries.”²¹ “Yes, lots

¹⁶ Estevan strike historian Glen Makahonuk also points out that central-European miners’ and families’ lives in the “Old Country” made their new situation in the Souris fields seem “in comparison, a great improvement.” See Makahonuk, “Labour Relations...,” p. 66. Hanson also comments on the sacrifices made and risks taken by mine families who supported the MWUC. See Hanson, “The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931,” p. 214.

¹⁷ Quite simply, a miner received a “short” weight if the tons of loaded coal which he was credited for was “short” of the actual weight of the coal. One of the key demands of the union was for a miner-appointed check weighman, who would monitor the scales to ensure that proper weights were taken and recorded. See testimony at 1931 Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, J.H. Harris (Bienfait Mine), vol. 1, pp. 64-68; Harry Hesketh (Bienfait Mine), vol. 1, p. 90; Pete Marcilli (Bienfait Mine), vol. 2, pp. 131-32; Charles Brooks (Eastern Collieries), vol. 5, p. 134; George Wilkinson (Western Dominion), vol. 8, pp. 2-10; Dan Moar (Crescent Collieries), vol. 10, pp. 15-22.

¹⁸ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Rueben Jahn, Estevan, July 3, 1995.

¹⁹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

²⁰ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 232. Eastern miner Charles Brooks also testified that miners “were afraid to speak.” Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 5, p. 135.

²¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Alice Pawson, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

of them were [scared],” Norah Mather, also from Shand, agrees. “I think because you could get fired so easily.”²² At the Prospect camp, John Kolenz recalls that bosses were fairly friendly to camp residents, except for one Drennan: “You had to watch him, if they [sic] say something wrong he’d fire you.”²³ Steve Panteluk, who lived in Taylorton, explains that miners who complained were labeled “Reds” and quickly dismissed, and they “had a heck of a time getting [their] job back.”²⁴ Sam Holley, who managed the Western Dominion Mine, is consistently remembered as a decent man. “He was civil,” Peter Gemby recalls of Holley,

although sometime when I do something wrong when he was around, just by mistake, he would get angry, which is just a natural [reaction]. And he would say “Goddamned blockhead” or something to that effect. But one thing he never said, “You Galician or bohunk,”...He was civil to me....He wouldn’t call me bohunk or anything.²⁵

Hilda Carlson remembers Sam Holley playing football alongside his workers on the Taylorton squad,²⁶ and another ex-Taylorton resident refers to Holley as a “fine fellow” and a “forerunner.”²⁷ Obviously, a boss’s personality and temper were determining factors in his relations with other camp residents.²⁸

Of all the Souris mine managers through the 1920s and 1930s, Alex “Happy” Wilson is most vividly remembered, for all the wrong reasons. “No, I never worked for ‘Happy’ Wilson,” ex-miner Rueben Jahn relates. “Yeah, he was quite a character. I think he was anything but happy.”²⁹ “Alex Wilson,” ex-Taylorton resident Freda Evans recalls, “he was a bad man. He really was....He had a violent temper.”³⁰ Mrs. Evans’s father and husband both worked for “Happy,” and she describes how Wilson intimidated many miners and their wives:

²² CMPC, Morier’s interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

²³ CMPC, Morier’s interview with John and Ann Kolenz, Estevan, July 4, 1995.

²⁴ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

²⁵ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

²⁶ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Hilda Carlson, Bienfait, June 30, 1995.

²⁷ CMPC, confidential interview with ex-Taylorton resident..

²⁸ In his study of the Cape Breton coal mines, David Frank notes that “a wise mine manager knew that the best approach to a coal miner was a deferential one.” Underground miners had “a powerful sense of independence,” and good managers knew better than to antagonize their men. See Frank, “Contested Terrain:....,” p. 104.

²⁹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Rueben Jahn, Estevan, July 3, 1995.

³⁰ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

When we were first married, we had nothing. But Doug was working there [at the M & S Mine]. And I would see Wilson, he'd wear a helmet to go down in the mines. See him with that helmet on, going over to the mine. And I would just be in agony, until Doug came home from work, and he still had a job.³¹

"Happy" may have had a bit of a heart; or, he may have simply enjoyed a woman's tears. In 1931, Wilson removed eight dollars from miner William Stalene's pay packet as a fine.³² When Stalene's wife "went to the office crying," Wilson gave her five dollars of the fine back.³³ Other mine managers beside Wilson were also rough with mine families. Thomas Hesketh, whose father worked at the Bienfait Mine, relates the following: "And you got seven children to raise. Ah, sure a lot of people say, 'What the sam hell did you have so many kids for, eh?' That's not for anybody to say. But that's what these mine bosses would say."³⁴ Archie Holley, whose father was the "civil" mine boss at Western Dominion, explains why managers such as "Happy" Wilson were hated in the camps. "Because they were so damned arrogant," Holley concludes. "They treated [miners] like they were dirt. There's no problem at all if you treat them like a human being."³⁵

³¹ *Ibid.* Mrs. Evans explains that Wilson was "a self-made man, so he expected that of everybody. He had been a hard worker in his day."

³² In his final report, Judge Wylie suggested that M & S Mine management end its practice of opening miners' pay packets to remove "special deductions such as fines, ploughing garden, pasture, and advances." These deductions should be made at Head Office in Winnipeg, Wylie believed, and should be indicated exactly on the envelope itself. Wylie Commission, *Report*, p. 54.

³³ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 6, p. 215. The story is recounted in Hanson, "The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931," p. 47. Wilson's genuine disdain of some of his workers was evident in his testimony at the 1931 Wylie Commission. Commenting on the possibilities of negotiating grievances with miners, "Happy" stated that "some of them do not know what an understanding means. They do not know what an agreement means. They do not know what it is to tell the truth." Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 7, p. 59.

³⁴ SAB, R-A1966, Interview with Thomas Hesketh, Bienfait, July 10, 1979.

³⁵ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 4, 1995. Alex Konapaki, who managed his own small mine in the Souris field after being blacklisted after the 1931 strike, describes his relations with his workers: "If you're going to be tough on them, they're going to be tough on you. You gotta be good with them. Easy with them and then they be [sic] easy on you." SAB, R-A1956, Interview with Alex Konapaki, Estevan, July 19, 1979. Peter Gemby recalls that "Happy" Wilson was toughest on people whom he perceived as "yellow." "When you talked to him and kind of fight for your own rights, he gives you credit." CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

When the WUL and the MWUC organizers entered the Souris fields in late-summer 1931, they were well received by mine families.³⁶ Union speeches and presentations took place at picnics and rallies organized by the MWUC for all family members to enjoy.³⁷ And the message that the union leaders passed along struck chords with many mine families. Harry Nicholson was an Estevan town councilor in 1931, and he vividly remembers Sam Scarlett's orations to the mining families:

Not only at the meeting but in other places, Sam pretty well stressed the plight that the miners were in and what they were making and how they had to live and so on. And well, anybody listening to it that wasn't too biased could quite agree with him. I never heard him make any, pushing communist [propaganda].³⁸

Harvey Blair, who was an RCMP officer in Estevan during the strike, has a differing impression of Scarlett: "He screamed and went through all kinds of postures and arm waving....[Some of the listeners] were laughing and he was supposed to be making them cry. But then I'd see a lot more that were being sucked in by it."³⁹ Blair, who was not from the Estevan area and who was completely out of touch with the miners' plight, had little sympathy for the strikers and their leaders at the time.

The Souris coal strike began officially on September 7, and if many families harboured grave doubts about initially supporting the union, by the middle of September, a couple of small victories provided hope and reassurance. The September 17, 1931 Estevan Mercury reported on an important breakthrough for the union: "Preparing for a 'fight to the finish,' union officials have arranged for an extension of credit with Bienfait merchants, in order that the strikers may not suffer from the pinch of suspended pay-cheques."⁴⁰ Support in the form of funds and food

³⁶ It is notable that the Souris miners' strike activity began even before WUL organizers had entered the field. On August 21, miners at the Crescent Collieries struck for two and a half days after John Adams was fired. Adams was a Crescent miner who was dismissed for organizing non-English-speaking miners. The Crescent men returned to work after Adams was reinstated. Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. C-28; Regina Leader Post, August 28, 1931, p. 15.

³⁷ The August 27, 1931, Estevan Mercury (p. 1) reported on the WUL's August 23 picnic at Taylorton: "More than 1200 people and over 250 cars were reported in attendance at a picnic held by the Union at Taylorton bridge on Sunday. Booths were erected and races were held for the kiddies." "Vocal solos" and a "Lithuanian quartet" also provided entertainment at the meeting. See Regina Leader Post, August 28, 1931, p. 15.

³⁸ SAB, S-C95, Interview with Harry Nicholson, Estevan, June 21, 1973.

³⁹ SAB, R-A318, Interview with Harvey Blair by Larry Johnston, Saskatoon, August 2, 1973.

⁴⁰ Estevan Mercury, September 17, 1931, p. 4.

also came from various organizations such as the Farmers' Unity League of Saskatoon, the United Farmers of Canada, and unions in Fort William and Port Arthur.⁴¹ This external support must have been very welcomed, particularly among the camp women who still had to feed their families, strike or no strike.⁴² September 16 was an especially proud day for the union. On that day, three of the Souris mines - Eastern Collieries, Western Dominion, and M & S - attempted to reopen by using local farmers as strikebreakers. At Western Dominion, the intended scabs ducked into the Taylorton boarding house. "When miners found that out," Peter Gemby recalls, "like all the miners, all their wives and kids and everybody, marched toward the boarding house."⁴³ The strikebreakers, not wanting trouble and unaware of the miners' situation, quietly departed.⁴⁴ On Friday, September 18, a young socialist politician from Weyburn's Independent Labour Party, T.C. Douglas, addressed the miners and their families from an open-air platform in Bienfait.⁴⁵ On September 24, a few hundred strikers and their wives paraded to the Truax-Traer strip mine in a show of solidarity.⁴⁶ Camp women and children were far from invisible throughout the labour dispute.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Regina *Leader Post*, September 15, 1931, p. 16; September 19, 1931, p. 16.

⁴² Franca Iacovetta also recognizes the increased pressure felt by Italian wives and mothers during labour disputes. In addition, she suggests that "for many men, the decision to go on strike had been made in consultation with their wives." See Iacovetta, pp. 188-89.

⁴³ SAB, R-A325.1, Interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973.

⁴⁴ R.C.M.P. *Report*, 1931, p. 42. Taylorton's boarding house keeper, Mrs. Urich, indicated her loyalty to the union by refusing to cook for the strikebreakers. The miners' and their families' expulsion of the strikebreakers on September 16 is romantically portrayed in Deverell, *Black Powder*, scene eight.

⁴⁵ Regina *Leader Post*, September 19, 1931, p. 16. Also, see Thomas H. McLeod and Ian McLeod, *Tommy Douglas: The Road to Jerusalem*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987, pp. 34-35; Doris French Shackleton, *Tommy Douglas*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975, pp. 53-55. In 1944, Tommy Douglas led the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) to victory in the provincial election. Douglas remained Premier of Saskatchewan until 1961.

⁴⁶ Regina *Leader Post*, September 24, 1931, p. 1, 14.

⁴⁷ Of course, women with pressing domestic responsibilities would not have taken part in union meetings or demonstrations. Amelia Budris, who lived in the M & S camp and had a two-month old son in September 1931, explains that she was not involved in the union activities: "I was young and I wasn't interested in anything that the miners did, really. And I had to look after my baby, and that was more important to me than what was going on." CMPC, Morier's interview with Amelia Budris, Bienfait, May 15, 1996.

On Sunday, September 27, WUL speaker Annie Buller arrived in Bienfait from Winnipeg and addressed a large crowd.⁴⁸ Buller was a dedicated communist and an outspoken admirer of Soviet Russia. Ken John, who was the bookkeeper at the Bienfait Mine in 1931, remembers Buller's speech in Bienfait:

I can remember exactly what she said, but I can remember quite distinctly one fellow standing alongside me - he wasn't a miner, he was a railway worker - and he was a Ukrainian, I believe. And he said, "You wait now, you wait," he said. "Russia will come into this pretty soon." And definitely it did; she talked about conditions and the mine managers and all this sort of stuff and then started to talk about Russia.⁴⁹

Buller's biographer describes her as a tireless organizer and inspirational speaker. While in Bienfait, Buller "was with the women making up lunches and fixing the children's clothing, at the same time encouraging them to be strong and stand firmly with their menfolk in whatever struggles might come."⁵⁰ It is doubtful that miners' wives needed encouragement to be strong, and struggles were nothing new to camp women. While Buller may have impressed some miners and their wives with her speeches, she certainly did not lead them like complacent sheep. Strikers and their wives did not need Anne Buller to inform them about the issues of the dispute.

Nor was the strike the beginning of a planned communist revolution. As Peter Gemby explains of the Taylorton valley strikers and their wives, politics had no role to play in the walkout: "Actually, most of the Ukrainians, they didn't know the difference between a communist, Liberal, Conservative, or anything. Because they weren't educated at all." Gemby goes on to explain that central European-born

⁴⁸ Anne Buller eventually served a year in jail for her part in the Souris labour dispute. Although officially charged with rioting, much of the testimony at her two trials in March 1932 and March 1933 concerned her speech to the miners and their families on September 27, 1931. The December 17, 1931 Estevan Mercury (p. 1) reported that Buller "spoke at a mass meeting in Bienfait on Sunday afternoon, Sept. 27, and is said to have made several startling statements, such as telling the miners to go into the stores and help themselves if they were short of food and clothing." Buller also allegedly stated that the miners could easily overrun the Mounted Police. Saskatchewan Court of Appeal (SCA), Case #52, King v. Anne Buller, p. 64. Whether Buller made these statements, Estevan residents were certainly apprehensive of the miners' planned parade on September 29. SAB, S-C95, Interview with Harry Nicholson, Estevan, June 21, 1973. Buller's entrance into the Souris dispute clearly did not help the miners' cause. Annie Buller and Sam Scarlett, incidentally, were also involved in Cape Breton coal strikes in the early 1920s. See Mellor, p. 155.

⁴⁹ SAB, S-C119, Interview with Ken John by Stan Hanson, Estevan, June 21, 1973.

⁵⁰ Watson, p. 41.

miners were automatically labeled “Reds” by the authorities in an attempt to stall the union’s momentum: “And all those people down the valley were all for the union. Then they called it Red valley....Communitistic, they called it, anyways. At that time to frighten the people from the union.”⁵¹ Bienfait Mine bookkeeper Ken John also asserts that the miners and their families were fighting for nothing more than “improvement in the conditions.” A communist union, the WUL, was the only union willing to organize the miners.⁵² Because the strikers were organized by a communist union, however, it was virtually ensured that the “red scare” would prohibit any meaningful communication and expression of the miners’ and their families’ circumstances. In a chillingly prophetic editorial, the September 24, 1931 Estevan Mercury summarized the community’s concern over the dispute:

It is possible that conciliatory efforts may effect an amicable settlement of differences, and it is just as possible that inflammatory [sic] influences will precipitate a physical clash that will stain the good name of the district and leave unhappy memories.⁵³

How the citizens of Estevan regarded the striking miners is not clear. The mine camps were largely autonomous and self-sufficient communities, and according to one ex-camp resident, Estevan did not warmly favour the mine families: “As for the Estevan people in those days, all they wanted from these miners was their money. And they didn’t want to have anything more to do with them. Just come and leave your money and keep going, you know.”⁵⁴ An Estevan resident, while stating that Estevan citizens respected the miners in the early 1930s, indicates an economic interest in the relationship between Souris miners and the town: “The mines created a good business for the merchants in Estevan. So you know,...[merchants] were glad to see [miners] when they came in. They were spending some money.”⁵⁵ “During the strike, if you were from Taylorton or Bienfait, you were ‘communist,’” a former

⁵¹ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

⁵² SAB, S-C119, Interview with Ken John, Estevan, June 21, 1973. For a parallel “red scare” in the Alberta coalfields in the early 1930s, see Seager, “Class, Ethnicity, and Politics...,” pp. 304-327.

⁵³ Estevan Mercury, September 24, 1931, p. 3. The 1931 R.C.M.P. Report also blamed “outside agitators” for the strike and violence in Estevan. See p. 43.

⁵⁴ CMPC, source kept confidential at discretion of author..

⁵⁵ Ibid.

miner relates of Estevan citizens' attitudes.⁵⁶ Certain incidents throughout the strike and the press coverage that they received did not cast a good light on the miners. Beside the anti-communist tones of the Mercury, the Regina Leader Post reported on September 12 that Estevan police were "investigating anonymous letters received by non-union labourors [sic] promising bodily injury if they continued to work."⁵⁷ Clearly, tension ruled in Estevan and area throughout September 1931; miners did not enjoy overwhelming support from Estevan residents in their struggle.

The "physical clash" feared by the Mercury occurred on Tuesday, September 29.⁵⁸ At 3:00 p.m., thirty or forty vehicles filled with miners, their wives, and children entered Estevan and moved west along Fourth Street. An hour earlier, the motor cavalcade had left Bienfait and had picked up mine families along the way.⁵⁹ The purpose of the parade was to draw attention to the miners' situation and to spread word of a planned meeting in the Estevan community hall that evening. "They didn't go out there for a fight," ex-Western Dominion miner Paul Rohatyn states. "They went to Estevan for a demonstration."⁶⁰ Amelia Budris, whose husband was fatally wounded in the riot, was not apprehensive when the parade left Bienfait: "No, I wasn't scared before they left....They were going...to a meeting. Everybody was going."⁶¹ Steve Panteluk, whose father was struck by a police billy-club during the melee, also asserts that the strikers were non-violent: "'Cause them guys went up there as peaceful. They never had weapons or anything. But they got shot, three of them. I remember it, too, because my dad come home with blood running down his neck."⁶² Peter Gemby recalls that women and children accompanied

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Regina Leader Post, September 12, 1931, p. 8.

⁵⁸ Of the three miners who were fatally wounded on "Bloody Tuesday," two were survived by families. Amelia Budris, who was interviewed for this study, was the seventeen-year old wife of Peter Markunas. She had a two-month old son when her husband was killed. Julian Gryshko also had a wife and young son in the M & S camp. Nick Nargan, who lived in Taylorton, was a single man. CMPC, Morier's interview with Amelia Budris, Bienfait, May 15, 1996. Also, see Estevan Mercury, October 1, 1931, p. 4; Regina Leader Post, October 2, 1931, p. 15.

⁵⁹ Hanson, "Estevan 1931," p. 50.

⁶⁰ SAB, R-A1961.1, Interview with Paul Rohatyn, Bienfait, July 23, 1979.

⁶¹ CMPC, Morier's interview with Amelia Budris, Bienfait, May 15, 1996.

⁶² CMPC, Morier's interview with Steve and Edith Panteluk, Estevan, June 29, 1995.

the parade because its sole purpose was to explain “to the people of Estevan, that there’s no such a thing as the operators claim to be.”⁶³

If some parade participants expected no trouble when they reached Estevan, other camp residents and Estevan citizens had uneasy feelings. Archie Holley recalls that one of his Taylorton chums was eager to join the parade:

So I said, “Maybe you better not, Frank.” But he went anyway and when he came back, he had his shirt sleeves rolled up...[and] when he come back, I’ve never seen a sixteen-year old scared in my life and he rolled down his shirt. He had eight bullet holes in it, where the bullet had gone through the folds of the shirt.⁶⁴

Just as Archie Holley feared trouble from the parade, Norah Mather felt the same. Miss Mather, who grew up in the Shand camp, was actually working as a clerk in the Estevan town hall when the riot broke out just outside of the building. “I know that some of [the miners] must have expected [a fight]. I think some of them came looking for trouble, that’s the thing,” she states.⁶⁵ Ida Petterson, who was the cook at the Poage Mine boarding house in 1931, recalls that the Poage miners believed that the parade was to be peaceful, but “some of [the other miners] came with clubs. Some of them came with clubs. So they came actually to do damage.”⁶⁶ Others place the blame on the strike leaders. Freda Evans, who grew up in Taylorton, states that “the leaders had been told that they couldn’t have that parade. And they didn’t inform those people that they couldn’t parade. So they came, and paraded. And it was a disaster. It really was.”⁶⁷ RCMP officer Harvey Blair also fingers the strike leaders. “They didn’t care about those miners,” he asserts.⁶⁸

⁶³ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995.

⁶⁴ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, “The Way We Were” Videotape Series.

⁶⁵ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Norah Mather, Estevan, July 6, 1995.

⁶⁶ Estevan National Exhibition Centre, “The Way We Were” Videotape Series.

⁶⁷ CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, July 6, 1995. Mrs. Evans was living in the M & S camp in the fall of 1931. She recalls the night of September 29: “I remember how quiet it was that night, you know, after they came back, poor souls.” CMPC, Morier’s interview with Freda Evans, Estevan, May 17, 1996.

⁶⁸ SAB, R-A318, Interview with Harvey Blair, Saskatoon, August 2, 1973. Certain strike leaders were informed on the morning of September 29 that the Estevan town council had banned the parade. Whether they withheld this information from the paraders is an issue still debated in Estevan today. Stan Hanson examines very closely the tragic sequence of events on “Bloody Tuesday” in “The Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931,” but the circumstances remain unclear. Such an emotional event carries with it a variety of interpretations, opinions, explanations, and myths. The Regina Leader Post,

“We arrested three women that afternoon,” testified Walter Mortimer, Estevan Detective and Staff Sergeant, at Annie Buller’s trial in 1932. “A woman named Mrs. Boruk and Stella Boruk and Mrs. Prysruk from Taylorton. These three were right in the front making use of the most vile language.”⁶⁹ Whether the camp women and children expected a battle in Estevan when they joined the parade, they found themselves in a riot that Tuesday afternoon. Peter Gemby recalls a Mrs. Davis during the riot:

She was an English woman and when that riot started she was just walking around like that all over, and she was hollering at [the police], “Shoot, shoot if you want.”...People get excited in commotion like that....She was at M & S. Her husband used to work at M & S.⁷⁰

At the Buller trial, RCMP Constable Alex Lockwood reported that “several women” were “very prominent” in attacking the fire engine that tried, unsuccessfully, to hose down the strikers.⁷¹ L. Davidson, who was chief of the fire brigade, testified at an earlier trial “that a woman had hit him with a stick while he and his men were attempting to turn the fire hose on the strikers.”⁷² Another witness of the battle, Alfred Mathieson, also stated that women and children threw sticks and stones at police and fire officials.⁷³ Certainly not all of the women in the parade took part in the riot. Constable Horace Taylor of the RCMP testified that a group of women balked at joining the fray, despite the wishes of another woman who tried to urge them on.⁷⁴ Why did some women and children join the parade while others did not? And why did some women and children partake in the violence while others resisted? These

for its part, was content to blame the strike leaders: “The leaders apparently took no steps to stop the parade. It would appear that most of the men and women did not know that it was forbidden.” Regina Leader Post, October 5, 1931, p. 18.

⁶⁹ SCA, Case #52, King v. Anne Buller. The September 30, 1931 Regina Leader Post (p. 1) reported that Stella Boruk, Mrs. Alec Boruk, and Nellie Pryznyk were the three women arrested, but later released.

⁷⁰ SAB, R-A325.1, Interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 18, 1973.

⁷¹ SCA, Case #52, King v. Anne Buller, p. 104.

⁷² Estevan Mercury, December 24, 1931, p. 7.

⁷³ SCA, Case #52, King v. Anne Buller, p. 153. For other accounts of the riot and women’s participation in the melee, see Regina Leader Post, September 29, 1931, p. 1; September 30, 1931, p. 1, 11, 14.

⁷⁴ SCA, Case #52, King v. Anne Buller, p. 170.

are impossible questions to answer, as individual characters and circumstances dictated actions and responses.

Apprehension and bitterness poisoned the air over Estevan and Bienfait in the days after the riot. On October 4, the three miners who had been killed in the battle were buried, as the Mercury reported:

In flower-covered caskets, borne shoulder-high by 18 of their comrades, and followed by a solemn procession of 600 men, women, and children, the three miners who were victims of police bullets in the strike riot here Sept. 29th., went to their last resting place Sunday afternoon in the little cemetery half a mile north of Bienfait.⁷⁵

Archie Holley and a couple of his friends from Taylorton wanted to attend the funeral, but emotions in Bienfait were running dangerously high. "Oh yeah, we left," he relates. "They were throwing rocks and smashing the cars. Got pretty hostile right in Bienfait....There was a little bad feeling for quite a while in Bienfait."⁷⁶ On October 8, the strike ended and the mines reopened. Despite assurances from mine management that there would be no blacklisting, Joe Prysnyk's father and eldest brother were blacklisted at Western Dominion and the other large mines in the area, and Peter Gemby and Alex Konapaki were also on the list.⁷⁷ Western Dominion machine man Pete Dzuba testified in 1931 that four Taylorton valley men, Pete Gemdib (Gemby?), John Presenyek (Prysnyk?), Pete Yonik, and Tony Moken, were fired after the strike, because "the management says they were Bolsheviks."⁷⁸ The Estevan Mercury, which throughout the fall of 1931 was decidedly unsympathetic to the plight of the miners, offered a final analysis of the turmoil on October 15, 1931. "When resorting to strike methods,..." an editorial entitled "Settling Down"

⁷⁵ Estevan Mercury, October 8, 1931, p. 1.

⁷⁶ CMPC, Morier's interview with Archie Holley, Estevan, July 5, 1995.

⁷⁷ SAB, R-A1956 and R-A1957, Interviews with Alex Konapaki, Estevan, July 19, 1979, and Joe Prysnyk, Bienfait, July 24, 1979. CMPC, Morier's interview with Peter Gemby, Bienfait, July 5, 1995. Prysnyk's father apparently transported one of the wanted union leaders, John Stokaluk, out of the area after the riot. Peter Gemby was a union spokesman among the Ukrainian miners in the Taylorton valley. Alex Konapaki's role in the dispute is unclear. His brother Fred was shot and wounded during the riot, and Alex helped to get one of the fatally wounded miners to the hospital.

⁷⁸ Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, vol. 8, p. 126.

lamented, "the miners might have handled the situation without leadership of Communist agitators."⁷⁹

Just as camp women and children were active and visible throughout the month-long strike, they were also involved in the legal proceedings in its aftermath. The Wylie Commission ran for six weeks in October and November 1931, and of the sixty-six witnesses called on behalf of the miners, six were miners' wives or children. One exhibit filed at the Commission was a seven-page petition. "We, the undersigned:" the petition read, "miners and miners' wives of the Souris valley coalfields and vicinity do hereby put in a plea to have the Royal Commission recommend [sic] a law to be passed whereby we can have our pay every two weeks."⁸⁰ Coalfields women also testified at Annie Buller's trials in 1932 and 1933.⁸¹ The participation of camp women and children in these deliberations indicates their involvement in the labour dispute and its aftershocks in the early 1930s.

While opinions of why and how the strike and resulting riot occurred vary, it is important to remember that the dispute was not only a miners' struggle. Camp women attended the union picnics and speeches, kept their families fed and clothed throughout the walkout, and no doubt shared the anxiety and frustration of the strike. In marching to the Taylorton boarding house to expel strikebreakers, and in parading into Estevan and a clash with police, some camp women indicated their desire and fortitude to win the conflict. After all, the main grievances of the miners - wages and working and living conditions - were factors most keenly affecting camp women as well. The strike of 1931 involved much more than a struggle between worker and employer; camp women and families were strained, tested, and challenged in that

⁷⁹ Estevan Mercury, October 15, 1931, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Wylie Commission, *Exhibits*, no. M-12. Monthly pay packets were a constant grievance among mine families. The consensus was that bi-weekly payday would better facilitate bargain-shopping, and would help to keep store credit in check. As women were the primary shoppers in the coal camps, it is not surprising to see so many female names on such a petition. See testimony at Wylie Commission, *Proceedings*, George Brown (Western Dominion), vol. 8, pp. 98-99; Pete Dzuba (Western Dominion), vol. 8, p. 136; Dan Moar (Crescent Collieries), vol. 10, p. 38; Alex Peattie (Crescent Collieries), vol. 10, p. 82.

⁸¹ The March 24, 1932 Estevan Mercury (p. 1,6) reported that a Mrs. Adler from Bienfait and a Mrs. Fuller testified at Buller's trial.

troubled autumn. Far from helpmates or victims, families of the striking miners were quite visible and active in the midst of the dramatic struggle in 1931.

CONCLUSION

Women and children are gradually gaining their due recognition among Canadian historians. Students and writers of history, who for many years concentrated on the great men and dramatic events of the past, are becoming more cognizant of history's lesser-known players. This study of families in the Souris coalfields argues that women and children in the mine communities were active and enterprising individuals. In the absence of modern-day conveniences and comforts, families in the mine camps devised a variety of strategies and techniques for survival. Even within the restrictions of the times and the rhythms of the coal industry, camp families had options, and women and children in the Souris coal communities were called upon to be practical, resourceful, and thrifty. Obviously, some camp women and children were more accomplished in these endeavours than others, but most camp families were successful in maintaining a tolerable and acceptable standard of living.

The contributions of women and children were vital to their families' continuance. The wages of the breadwinner were simply one facet of a family's well-being; coal-camp women and children had a myriad of responsibilities and duties as well. For miners' wives, domestic management and careful budgeting were crucial activities. Gardens and livestock were important sources of food for many camp families, and the miners' long hours of work in the busy season shifted many animal and garden chores to their wives and children. Camp women were also exceptionally talented at food preparation and preservation, and if time and energy allowed, women baked or cooked for single miners to earn a few dollars. Taking in extra washing was another way for women to earn money for their families' purses, although laundry was a work-intensive and exhausting task. Boarders also increased women's chores, but some families needed the extra dollars that a boarder or two would provide. Children assisted their mothers around the house as soon as they were able, and camp women likely welcomed the day when their youngsters could handle small

housekeeping duties, baby-sitting responsibilities, and trips to the store. Enterprising children in the camps earned pocket money by running errands and doing odd jobs in the community. Clearly, in a time when a family's survival depended upon more than the breadwinner's wages, the family economy involved all of a household's members and a variety of techniques to stretch and save the dollars.

Frugality, innovation, and determination were necessary qualities for a family to live with any level of comfort. Living conditions in the camps, while certainly far from luxurious, were not as uniformly distressing as labour historians portray. Many camp homes were built, renovated, and patched up largely on the initiative of their inhabitants. While some camp houses were crowded, cold, and dilapidated, it is important to not lose sight of the context of the times - prairie homes in the 1920s and 1930s were not the prairie homes of today. Household and personal cleanliness in the Souris coal camps were as effective as the circumstances allowed. Similarly, the food on mining families' tables was sufficient and hearty, and much of it was home-made or home-raised or home grown. Financially unable to rely on store-bought goods, many mine families were self-sufficient in regard to food, and camp women, especially, were able bakers, cooks, and food preservers. Souris coal-community families faced daily challenges to maintain an endurable standard of living, but instances of extreme privation in the coal camps were the exception, rather than the rule.

Just as camp families were largely self-reliant in terms of housing conditions and food, many medical dilemmas were also handled internally. While doctors' advice and hospitals were not categorically denied to coal-camp residents, economic and transportation factors demanded that coal families look after themselves as much as possible. Numerous home remedies, "Old Country" concoctions, and traditional medical techniques were utilized in the mine camps, and the communities are remembered as relatively healthy locales. Medical advice and assistance were readily shared throughout the coalfields, with midwifery the most obvious example. Sickness and death occasionally visited the camps, but such calamities were marked by quiet acceptance. While the entire community would share the grief of a recently

bereaved person or family, the rhythms of life and work in the camp could not long be neglected. Hardworking men and women could ill-afford long periods of inactivity, and complaining was of no use either. For these reasons, it is impossible to ascertain the extent of fatigue and sickness in the coal camps. It is clear, however, that family health and child care were concerns in the coal communities, and families used various techniques and practices to respond to medical contingencies or conditions.

The personal relations and nuances among and between individual family members are much more difficult to examine. Obviously, the dynamics and complexities within Souris coal families varied from home to home, and generalizations would be unwise. Nonetheless, it is not surprising that former coal-camp residents remark on camp women's capabilities and influence in their families. Often solely in charge of family budgeting and domestic duties, camp women were key to families' financial and emotional well-being. Some women may have relished their role, others may have despised it; many parents in the camps, however, prided themselves as good parents, who strove to pass along positive values to their children. Family life in the Souris coal camps was not distinguished by dysfunction and isolation. Indeed, when survival depended upon the efforts of all family members, domestic breakdowns would have had drastic consequences. Camp children were raised to be independent and versatile, and many became coal miners and coal miners' wives themselves. In a time of job scarcity and limited options, young men and women knew the coal-mining lifestyle and usually remained in the business. Family relations are always personal and delicate areas of analysis, and in the case of Souris mine families in this study, sixty years of time have also weathered memories and sentiments. Coal-camp families were required to be realistic and practical, however, and most former camp residents remember close and comfortable familial relations.

Community life within the camps was also lively and vigorous. Again, the labour and strike historians paint a one-dimensional picture of Souris coal-mining communities - a picture of despair and wretchedness. While camp residents were certainly hardworking and busy people, they created in the camps a variety of social

and entertainment options. From soccer games to community dances to wedding festivities, camp residents took their fun very seriously. Souris miners and their wives pulled together in the event of a family or cultural celebration or tragedy, and camp women established “support networks” to aid each other in times of need. Of course, community life was not always harmonious, but bitterness and poor relations were not endemic in the camps. Most ex-camp residents remember plenty of good cheer in the communities. Camp children, when finished their chores, had plenty of free and exciting games and activities available to them. The beautiful Souris valley, with its hills, trails, and river was a natural playground for coal-camp children in all seasons. With a couple of companions and a touch of imagination, camp children were never burdened by boredom. Many of these children married childhood sweet-hearts and raised families of their own in the camps. A sense of solidarity and community spirit enveloped the Souris coal communities - a characteristic which elicits many fond memories from former residents.

This solidarity was urgently tested in the autumn of 1931, when the now-famous miners’ strike and riot in Estevan reverberated throughout the coalfields. Coal-camp families were also strained and challenged during the strike, and women and children did not disappear from the scene when labour strife struck the mines. Some women and children played more prominent roles in the dispute than did others, and clearly, some families had more to gain than others. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the miners’ strike involved more than the male breadwinners. Camp women were very aware of the key issues and grievances which led to the walkout. The futures of many families hung in the balance, and the labour dispute was as much a family and community endeavour as a miner-employer confrontation.

The 1931 labour struggle is deliberately placed as the last chapter of this thesis. By shifting the spotlight away from the strike and riot, this study fills a void in Souris coal-mine and Saskatchewan history. It is understandable that historians are attracted to the dramatic and violent events of August and September 1931; but by concentrating on that distressing autumn, labour and strike historians create

images of the Souris mine camps which require re-evaluation. The strike and riot were shocking and negative occurrences, and historians who study how such events happened naturally focus on the disaffection and unhappiness of the miners and their families. An alternate analysis of the coal communities can be achieved by recognizing that the strike and riot were tragic, yet brief, anomalies in the lives of Souris coal-camp residents. Life in the mine camps was not easy, but the 1931 strike and riot should not be regarded as representative or indicative of coal-families' lives.

Oral history allows for this new look at the Souris camps and the families within the communities. A few stone foundations are all that remain of the coal camps today, yet they still exist in the memories of former residents. Increasingly, historians are turning to oral history when traditional or conventional sources falter or present limitations. Historians of the family especially realize that certain nuances and complexities of their subject can only be accessed through oral history and the memories and stories of everyday people. Such "living sources," however, are not permanent; ex-Souris miner Peter Gemby, for example, who is often cited in this study, will celebrate his ninetieth birthday next year. Only the sentiments and reminiscences of ex-coal camp residents present an opportunity to offer a re-creation of camp and family life in the Souris coalfields.

Male miners were members of a minority group in the Souris coal camps - women and children made up the bulk of the population, and played important roles in the communities. Particularly, many ex-Souris camp residents cited throughout this thesis confidently assert that it was the mothers and wives in the coal communities who kept families functioning. While historians of the deep-seam coal mines across Canada are quite correct in emphasizing the grueling, dangerous, and demanding working conditions of the underground miners, coal communities above-ground deserve recognition as dynamic and active entities as well. In the Souris coalfields, these camps were home for hundreds of families, each one unique yet all facing similar challenges and pressures. Perseverance and hardiness marked these coal families, and a strong and able wife and mother was vital to a family's independence, empowerment, and survival. Such women were commonplace in the Souris coal

camps, and mining families were characterized by an ability to adapt, respond, and adjust to demands and circumstances of the mining lifestyle.

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