

[Page 42 - Horses in the Coal Mines](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 32](#)

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Bert Gouthro: (Bert, were some men, like yourself, close to their horses?) Oh, very much so. Some of the drivers were, yeah. One particular case when I was driving, there was a bunch of new horses came down. And this old Mr. MacDonald--John Archie-- who was a good friend of mine--he said to me this day, he said, "Bert, why don't you take one of those new horses in your section?" He said, "That mare you're getting," he said, "is getting old. You need a new horse, a young horse." He said, "There's a bay mare there, a little gray horse," So I said, "All right, I'll take him and I'll try him," So I took him in, and my god, I got attached to that little horse. He could pull like a little tractor. And he must have been about--I guess he was about 5 or 6 years old. And I took him to another section. I was what they call "hauling off from a chain," I'd haul 3 or 4 boxes at a time. And the overman used to come along and he'd say, "I'm going to watch this fellow, Bert, to see him start those 4 boxes coupled together." He'd get right down, and you'd see him feeling with his feet to get footing, you know, I'd just stand alongside of him, and he'd straighten out to get those 4 boxes moving. And the only thing I ever hit him with in my life was my glove, I'd take my glove off and I'd stand alongside of him and I'd hit him with my glove. The overman used to say to me, "Look, I never saw a horse that small do that fellow's load." Shortly after that, I went--we were running out a chain, I think--and somebody came up one evening and they told me the young fellow that had him had started down the headway with no sprags in and he broke his back. He did go to the side, he turned off, because he went over the brow of the grade, and he found out that he couldn't hold the box. So instead of crashing and going ahead of it--he would have crashed anyway-- he turned sideways. And of course, he's hooked onto the box, see, and the box tipped him over, killed him. Even the loaders, the men that were loading for me, they felt bad about it. One man in particular, he met me the next day and he told me, "Boy," he said, "I came through the stable the other night," he said, "and I felt bad about your horse. He's in the stable there, and I don't think he's ever going to get better." Sure enough--he died the next day. Oh yes, some of the drivers were very attached to their horses. And then some more of them--like everything else--you get those devil-may-care fellows who didn't give a damn. Patrick McNeil: There was one time when they were losing a horse about every second day, the death rate was that high--4 or 5 a weeko They were buying about a carload of horses a month. At times, they were pushing for coal, great demand for coal, and the horse wasn't getting the attention in the mine. Like I said before about the tracks not ballasted, steep headways, and what not. And they were pushing a horse so much that he'd be gutted out-- the horse would just be tired out, he'd be leg weary and stumble, and the box would go on top of him and kill him. And sometimes they were killed outright with the miners in a fall of coal. But it was very rare, hardly worthwhile mentioning it. Mostly the miners that got killed in the mine would be the man at the coal, the roof come in on him. The horses are generally out on the landing, you know, waiting till there's enough boxes to haul. But it was back in the '40s that the company



started to mechanize the mines. That was great. New Waterford was the first district that went horseless. Then it gradually kept coming along, the different collieries. And then about around 1960 the last horse was out of the mine. And now there are none. They were weeding them down gradually. And it was a good thing, you know. Because it was a hard life for a horse. He was fed well and he was cared for, you might say. But when they hired a young fellow on for the pit, maybe he didn't know the front end of a horse from the back end. And that's the first job he got, was driving a horse. It was often said at the time, if they were as particular about the drivers as they were about the horses, the horses would have lasted longer and would have had a better life. A lot of accidents and maybe deaths were caused by inexperienced young fellows driving. There were lots of stories about brutality and that, but it was not much. It's a known fact--lots of times where a fellow didn't like the horse, then you'd pull the sprags out and let the box go on top of him, get clear of him.. But you could never prove those things. Nobody would tell on anyone, you know, they belonged to a union and they'd stand by their member. Which is logical, I guess. But it's cruel, when you look back onto it. Now, a good driver always looked for a horse that had some spunk about him, some temper, you know, that would be cranky and that. Because if he got a nice, pleasant, easygoing horse, when that driver'd put his horse in the end of the shift, maybe some driver would come out and take that horse out and work him by night. Well then. (42)