This is Myrtle Bergren interviewing Mr. Dick Fiddick for the Coal Tyee History Project on May 11, 1979.

MB: Well Mr. Fiddick, what year were you born?

DF: 1909.

MB: Were you born here in Nanaimo?

DF: Yes, South Wellington.

MB: Well your father, was he a miner?

DF: He worked in the mines and logging camps. Old Number Five.

MB: When did he come here?

DF: Well I don't know. First time, my grandfather come. And supposed to be on an English warship. And then he come back, overland, and nobody knows when he come.

MB: So what was he, a sailor?

DF: Well he was a sailor, a conscripted sailor, I think.

MB: So I wonder how he landed here?

DF: Well he come here, and then he come back overland. Nobody knows how he got here, whether he came from California or across Canada. Way back, yeh.

MB: So he'd be one of the originals settlers.

DF: Nobody knows what year he come. Ma

MB: Well he got married somewhere along the line.

DF: Well he got married in town. He met my grandmother in Nanaimo, she come around the Horn.

MB: Did she come over on the Princess --

DF: No, I think it was after that.

MB: Where did they settle?

DF: They settled up just off the Nanaimo river, up on the old homestead, in there.

MB: The old homestead. And that's where your dad grew up?

DF: Eh/there, and sometimes they'd be in Nanaimo. He was born in Nanaimo.

MB: How many brothers and sisters did he have?

DF: Wasn't it four boys, and three girls.

MB: What was your dad's first name?

DF: Richard Fiddick.

MB: And yours is Dick?

DF: Yes.

MB: What were the names of the other boys? Your uncles.

DF: Charlie, and Chris, Dick and Harry.

MB: How much land did they have?

DF: Well they had two blocks of land, 2 one hundred acre blocks. Alongside the Hudson Bay grant.
MB: That would be like the settlers --
DF: Yeh, they homesteaded there.
MB: Settlers' rights.
DF: Yes.
MB: So they'd get the coal rights.
DF: They had the coal rights. That's where the PCM was. It was on their block. And actually the E&N block the PCM started was on my grandmother's brothers property. He could have had 800 acres and he took the block above that.
MB: Did they know there was coal on there?
DF: Well not when they first took it. They never went back that far in the woods. Coal was on the other side of the E&N track.
MB: So wonder how they discovered it.
DF: Well there were prospectors all over. You can go anywhere up here, above South Wellington, above the E&N, and there's tunnels, prospect holes.
MB: So it must have been showing, eh?
DF: Oh it was right outside. See the coal come up right through Southfield, that was an early mine. And the PCM was next to it. It was an outcrop on the lower side of the E&N. Then they come down into Alexander mine.
MB: And after the coal mining industry was starting to go here, I guess that's when they got interested, because they could see they might be able to sell it?
DF: Well the PCM, the Pacific Coast Coal Mining, started that. They built the railroad to Boat Harbour. They shipped from Boat Harbour. Then they put the Morden mine in. During the first world war years, I think, somewhere about that.
MB: And did your dad work in the mine?
DF: Well he worked off and on, yes. In the mine. But he went logging too.
MB: So when he was working in the mine, he wasn't working for himself?
DF: Not before, he wasn't. I was trying to think of the time.
Well, we went out digging coal for our own use, that's how we got started on it. And then we was starting to sell it. Dug it by hand and wheeled it out in a wheelbarrow. Well it was just about six foot coverage. At the outcrop. We went along the outcrop. Outcrop come up above the railroad track and we went down through the caves. Other places it caved in so we went down through the caves. I worked a whole fault off. I was selling it for a few years.
MB: You had it all timbered and everything?
DF: Oh yes, I had it timbered.
MB: Did you make your own timbers?
DF: Yeh, well, took it off the ranch.

MB: This was real pioneering, wasn't it? Did you ever have any accidents?

DF: No. Nobody ever got hurt, and we had quite a few men one time.

MB: That's what I heard. How many men did you have?

DF: About 12 men or more. And we had three shifts. And we were shipping by railroad too. Loading cars.

MB: --But that wasn't a wheelbarrow operation?

DF: Oh some places you went in farther for the pillars, and we had tracks, we had tracks in there and everything. An old/car motor on a set of drums up top for hoisting.

MB: Who was them mechanic?

DF: Done your own!

MB: Where did you get your track from?

DF: I bought it off the junk yards, up in the old -- like Jingle Pot. Lights, we had our own lights, we bought our lights and charger and everything else off Jingle Pot mine.

MB: That Jingle Pot mine, I'm a little confused about that too you see, because he tells me about one, the original Jingle Pot,

DF: And the newer one, yeh.

MB: I don't know whether it was a different mine altogether.

DF: Longside of it one another. It was closer to town.

MB: But I was told the other day that some of the track used at the mines came all the way from England.

DF: The first track was, yes, they were hollow.

MB: I heard your dad was really good, there wer never any accidents, I heard.

DF: No.

MB: And that he was easy going on the men. --How many mules did you have?

DF: I had one mule and a Shetland pony. Shetland pony used to run away. Got it from Five Acres. Used to take over and fed in the truck and pick him up and back up to the bank and take him back to the mine.

MB: Where did you get your mule from?

DF: Oh I think we bought it off -- I don't know, could be the fox farm. (chuckle).
MB: When I was down to see Waino Torkko I thought that was where your mine was. But it's on the other side of the ridge?
DF: Yeh, way over on the other side.

MB: Well how old were you when you started working in your mine?
DF: Must have been about 17 or 18.

MB: Were you one of the youngest boys then?
DF: Oldest.

MB: Could you manage to get to school?
DF: Well when we moved to Cedar, we had five miles to walk to school there. Them days you didn't get no bus.

MB: That's right, I know. And someone was telling me an education didn't do you much good in those days anyway, you had to sweat to make any money. It wasn't like it is today.

DF: No, you worked before you done anything else. (laugh).

MB: Most boys started when they were about 14 or 15 though.
DF: Yes. I went to school when I was about 15. But I went in the woods.

MB: Oh, what was that like? In those days?
DF: Well, pretty rough.

MB: What did you do?
DF: We were makin poles then. On our own. But then we was up on the East Wellington side of the mountain. Westwood Lake, in behind there. New Ladysmith Lumber Company, they called it then. We were takin the poles out.

MB: What were the poles going to be used for?
DF: Telephone. Shipped away.

MB: That's what I was wondering, if they had phones here.
DF: Oh they had phones here, but then they shipped them away, railroad cars.

MB: They didn't load them on the boats, eh?
DF: Well, certain companies did.

MB: What kind of machinery did you have?
DF: We had a horse there for poles. (laugh) A hay burner! And you rode up on a loggin train. Not ordinary car. A skeleton car. With just the links on. And you sat on them and rode them up. And no roof over you! (laugh).

MB: Winter too?
DF: Yeh! Oh yeh, that didn't bother you.

MB: Did you ever get hurt?
DP: Oh the odd time.
MB: The timber would be pretty big those days.
DF: Well there was good size stuff there. Poles are small, but then --
MB: You just got the poles out, eh?
DF: Yeh/
MB: So then after that you decided to go to work in the mine?
DF: Well it was the hungry thirties. It wasn't the thirties, it was the
late twenties. And there was nothing doin. But you got a ton of coal out
and you could sell it. We got $5.50 a ton. See what the price is
today.
MB: I don't know what the price of coal is today.
DF: About that much a sack!
MB: And they're not using very much now.
DF: Lots of coal there.
MB: Oh yes. See all that news in the paper the other day about the new
interest in it. Well you got it out at first, you say, with a wheelbarrow.
Then you had this car engine. How did you get the thing pumped out?
DF: It was all gravity. It all run down. See that mine was the mine
where all the miners were drowned. And the water all run down. And when
Number Five was running, that's the mine above Alexander, and Alexander they
pumped them out. And they're all linked together. All the mines, right
from Southfield right through. It's all linked up. Number Five, when
they pump one mine out they pump 'em all out.
MB: What did they break into?
DF: PCW mine broke into Southfield. Blew a hole threw the barrier
(of coal).
MB: There was 19 men killed that time -- (same question re concert night
before).
DF: I can just remember the fire at South Wellington when the strike was on.
Cause we were up at the ranch there and you could see the smoke there, and
everybody come up there, they put em all up on Beck's field and the top
field at our place there. They come there and stayed there in tents all
summer.
I just seen the smoke. It started down where the scabs were livin.
MB: It started down there?
DF: Right. On the back side of the camp.
MB: South Wellington was evidently a big town, before that happened?
DF: Yes, it built up quite a bit afterwards. And then it died down.
MB: And somebody told me afterwards that the theatre burnt down too.
DF: Yeh, that's right at the corner. There's a log house there now.
MB: What happened, does anybody know?
DF: I don't know. That was a dance hall and a billiard hall for years. But that's a funny thing, that building never burnt down during the fire.

MB: Was there anything in the paper about arson?
DF: I don't know. I don't know where I was at that time.

MB: Some of them have said there were a lot of fires in those days because that was the way they could get the insurance. They didn't seem to be too broken hearted when their homes burnt down. How did they feel though?

Did their homes get all burnt down, one side of the street and then the other. That's really a big loss.
DF: Well, they were all out of work, no work or nothing. They had to go to Cumberland or somewhere else to work and it was one way to get money.

MB: The insurance companies would go broke! (laugh)

DF: People did that to go to the Klondike.

Conversation adding nothing to this interview. (In another tape.)

DF: I knew quite a few Chinamen. See the old man, he had Chinamen, splitting mine timber for the PCN mine. During the years.

MB: How far apart would you have to put your timbers?
DF: It was about two foot for the posts and stringers, but if you were in dirt. That a rock roof you had to put laggin up. If you were in a wood roof, you had to be boarded in. Split them about two inches thick.

MB: You had all that to do too when you were working in the mine.
DF: Yes. Well when we had the mine we went to the tie mills and take it out there.

MB: And the mills would be contracting for the railroad?
DF: Well, MacMillan had the tie mills years ago up in the Fork area?

MB: Before he began to get famous, eh?
DF: Yes. That's how he got to be famous, started! (chuckle)

MB: Did you ever see James Dunsmuir?
DF: No, I never saw him.

MB: Did you ever see the house he lived in? Keighley's place, he had a house up there.
DF: They had a house at Wellington. The way they say, they claim -- my grandfather had a piece of property at Wellington. Must be before he went to sea, or I don't know when. But they discovered coal in a post hole, diggin post holes, and he sold the coal to Dunsmuir. That piece. To -- enough to get a good drunk and to the Klondike, or the trail of '98, one of the two. (laugh). -- They used to play cards together then.

MB: And what was your grandfather's first name?
Well I hear that they had quite a dispute, the early settlers. Over the coal rights. Before 1883.

Well a fight to get then, like?

Yes. And Emblems got $36,000, because I guess they da sold theirs.

Yes, well my grandmother sold ours out on the old ranch there up on the --piece in South Wellington. There's another ranch we had where we still got the property, up there. On Thatcher Road, you Well that's another old place, in there. He must have bought it off of people called had it first, Raper, homesteader, and then she got the coal rights for that. And sold I guess, it to the Canadian Collieries. And they went right through that to Emble's place. Number 10 went down there.

Yes, Thatcher was telling me that the others tried to fight it, you know, -- now this is what I understand -- if you hadn't finished paying for your place by 1883 then they wanted to claim your coal rights. But the settlers fought it, and they went as far as the Privy Council, and the settlers won their coal rights. But they never got anything out of it. Because they didn't sell it. It's still xxxxxxxx there.

They've still got it, yes, some of them have still got their coal rights. Only coal rights really left is down in Yellow Point area, Cedar. From Cedar down. Cranby took a seam. All they took out that area is just the one seam. But there's three seams of coal there.

The government closed it down because of the gas?

Yes, well no, but there's three different seams of coal, there's what they ' worked here, what they called the Douglas seam, then there's another seam down lower, a pretty big gap between the two, about three, 3½ foot seam, the Newcastle seam. Then xxx there's the Wellington seam, back underneath that again. And they haven't touched that ...

Well Number One took out part of the Newcastle seam. But they never touched the Wellington seam yet.

I was wondering all the time too, how they surveyed. their own property, you know. Like how they knew where they were supposed to go.

Well you know where the Hudson Bay grant is?

No.

You know where John Deere is out on the highways? Well that's just off that's the Hudson Bay grant when you're towards town there, that's timber standing, you know, where they're fill? That's the Hudson Bay grant, it runs right to the spur of Mount Benson. Just xxx to the first little drop in it, right there. Right down over the mountain and past the -- just this side of where the brick house was.
...that's where the Hudson Bay run to Departure Bay.

MB: Did they sell it?

DF: They sold the coal and that to Weldwood of Canada, an American outfit. Canadian Collieries had it, what they called Canadian Colliery Logging and all the rest of it, then they sold all the mineral rights and everything to Weldwood. I think they run the E&N property at Campbell River too. Up by the Quinsam Lake.

MB: So then I understand that some of them went underneath and stole the coal from the next place, you know.

DF: Well that was at Granby, I think it was, somewhere in there, yes. And they crossed over.

MB: They got fined a million dollars, I understand. --So it's all be in the paper. I can look that one up. But they say they all did it, you know.

DF: Oh yeh! None of the mine plans are accurate. Very few. But yet they can survey, a surveyor can go -- like we took a map of one of the mines we had there. There's a drill hole showed so much coal. We drove a slope down, and he took it from the top, and he drove it dead centre on that drill hole, down underneath. You'd wonder how! (laugh).

MB: You had to have your own surveyor?

DF: Oh, we had a company surveyor. We used to pay him on the side. to come and do it.

MB: If you get it, what can you do with it? The CPR owns it. (talk about coal rights.) You'd have to go down and make a mine down yourself to find out.

DF: The coal we were mining on our property was good coal. We sold it to the Nanaimo Lumber Company for steam for the lokies hauling logs from Nanaimo Lake way. for a few years. Till they switched to oil. part of a ... We took a barrier pillar out of the Western Fuel Company, out of Southfield, (they offered so much a ton).

(Later) --Well, I remember when the cage went down. I don't know where I was at at the time, but we knew of it, you know.

(Re B fire in South Wellington) --When the fire took off and was really gettin' bad, and they figger it's gonna come right up through to there, it almost did, but they bundled us up and took us to my uncle's place up at Cassidy there. Haslam's.

Used to take farm stuff up to Ladysmith one day and up to Nanaimo next day, horse and wagon, sell it from door to door. So we come back out after that. I got married in 1930. Had a few cows, and grew a bunch of potatoes, but you couldn't sell 'em. No market for them. We grew celery there too. It was a good celery place there.
Well we took the celery because the guy we sold a bunch of coal to had a greenhouse and we took them plants to get some money off him.

ME: Does it take peat to grow celery?

DF: Oh yes, a lotta peat there. We used to *haul* our potatoes by five ton loads down to Victoria to sell 'em to the wholesalers. Couldn't sell 'em up here at all.

ME: Joe Neen worked in the first mine at Lantzville.

The property the Lantzville mine was on belonged to the Jacks, and they were related to the Vansickles that's there now. And Jacks they were part Indian. I tell you who could tell you all that (can't remember name) he's related to the Jacks too. I think he's living in the high rise.

You know where the old CCF hall is? That building -- and they've got her trowel I think it's still in the bastion.

Layed

ME: Your grandmother? *Hinksmam?* that cornerstone?

DF: Yes. Hinksmam! That's it! He can tell you about the Lantzville mine, and lots of mines. Jacks and Hinksmam and Vansickles are all linked together somehow, I don't know how, but --

*(end of tape interview)*