

Winnipeg Board of Trade.

ANNUAL MEETING.

THE YEAR A DECIDED IMPROVEMENT OVER 1885.

The annual meeting of the Winnipeg Board of Trade was held on Tuesday, February 1st, at three o'clock p.m. in the new Board Room in the civic building, the chair being occupied at the opening by Mr. Kenneth Mackenzie, president.

The room had been comfortably although hurriedly furnished for the occasion, and presented quite an inviting appearance. By a few minutes past three o'clock it was well filled by a large number of the members.

The president called the meeting to order at a quarter past three o'clock, and asked the secretary to read the minutes of the last meeting, which were read and approved.

There being no business arising out of the minutes, the president called upon the secretary to read the annual report to be presented by the Council, which was read and is as follows:

Your Council take pleasure in presenting this their eighth annual report.

Freed from the troubles and interruptions of the regular flow of business affairs, which the rebellion of 1885 brought during that year, your Council felt from their election in the opening of 1886, that they were entering upon a year in which the trade progress of the city of Winnipeg and the whole Northwest, could be materially aided by the efforts of those interested therein. They laid out for themselves and your Board a year of activity and persevering effort, and results have shown that their calculations were properly based.

Scarcely were the necessary changes in the by-laws of your Board made, which the altered circumstances of affairs dictated at the last annual meeting, when your Council were called upon to look after the Board's interests and the interests of the importers of the city, in connection with an investigation ordered by the Minister of Customs, in response to a report adopted at a previous meeting of the Board, and forwarded to said Minister, in which the removal of the Collector and Surveyor of Customs at this port was asked for.

Your Council undertook the duty of substantiating the Board's charges against these officials, by employing counsel and bringing forward witnesses, in support of every charge made.

The investigation—a lengthy one—was conducted by your Council in a spirit of fairness to all concerned, and only with a desire to get clear of the friction which existed between the importers and the heads of the Department here, and were careful to bring forward only witnesses of undoubted integrity.

As yet the Department of Customs has furnished your Board with no report upon the investigation, and given no intimation of any decision arrived at on the subject, although your Secretary has several times by letter asked for such a report.

It is satisfactory to note, however, that changes are about to be made in the Winnipeg Customs House, which will, we hope, remove all cause for friction between the Board and that Department, and thus leave the Board as its

members desire it to be—working in harmony with every department of the Dominion Government.

Very early in the year your Board were brought face to face with the annoying question of discriminating freight rates against Winnipeg on the C.P.R. The Winnipeg City Council very considerably appointed a committee from their number to co-operate with the Council of the Board upon this question, and render any assistance within their power. The joint meetings of the two bodies resulted in the determination to send a deputation from both bodies to the C.P.R. authorities at Montreal, to press for a readjustment of freight rates, and to wait upon the Dominion Minister of Public Works, to press upon him the necessity for improvement of the Red River so as to give free navigation from Lake Winnipeg to the International boundary line.

In dealing with this question of discriminating rates on the C.P.R., your Council had to guard against what C.P.R. officials evidently wished to place upon the Winnipeg Board, namely, the odium of trying to secure better rates for this city at the expense of other cities and towns west of here. Every effort was therefore made against such a course being adopted, and a committee was appointed to draft a circular, explaining the position of the Board, a copy of which was mailed to every person or firm in trade west of this city.

The result of the Board's long-continued efforts in this direction was, that on June 1st the C.P.R. management conceded to this city and other leading points on their main line west of here, a reduction of fifteen per cent. off freight rates to all points in the west. This concession, while falling considerably short of anything like what was due to the wholesale trade of this city, was at least an acknowledgement of the justice of the claims so persistently maintained by your Board.

Your Council kept steadily in view the necessity of securing some amendments to the dishonest and mischievous legislation in connection with the relationship of debtor and creditor passed during the 1885 session of the Local Legislature, and appointed an efficient committee to wait upon the Local Government and press for such amendments. This committee, after using every endeavor in their power, secured only some empty promises from members of the Government, none of which were fulfilled, and it was made plain to all interested, that neither the Government nor the Legislature had any intention of removing any of the objectionable features of the laws complained of.

Another grievance which has been kept in agitation by your Board and Council, is the disallowance of Manitoba railway charters calculated to bring relief from the burden of railway monopoly under which the province suffers. During the year the Board have used every possible effort to get relief from this, and by resolution, appealed to the City Council of Winnipeg, asking that representative body to offer a liberal bonus to any company, independent of the C.P.R., which would furnish a line of railway connecting the city with other routes to eastern markets.

Your Board is desirous of impressing upon the people of the older provinces, that its efforts

to get free from railway monopoly are not dictated by any desire to make the markets of this province in the United States. On the contrary its sole aim is to secure railway competition between Manitoba and these older provinces, where the ties of Confederation and a system of national tariffs, point to us our natural markets. The Board adhere to the theory that transportation between the Northwest and the east, facilitated and cheapened, must necessarily increase the trade intercourse between the two.

Another point on which the position of your Board is too frequently misrepresented on this question, is that it is accused of demanding from the Dominion a concession, which would entail repudiation of a fair agreement between Canada and the C. P. R. Company, whereas the Board has at no time demanded anything beyond the right of Manitoba to charter railways to the southern boundary of the original province, a limit which is included in no agreement between the Dominion and the C. P. R. Company, but which is kept closed against railway construction by a Government policy which has a crushing effect upon the Northwest, is detrimental to the trade interests of the Dominion, and instead of being a guard to, is in reality a drag upon the prosperity of the C.P.R. Company.

Another important matter, which early in the year received attention from your Board, was the question of the drainage and colonization of the vacant lands around the city. Your Board, by resolution, expressed its decided opinion as to the duty of the Local Government, to undertake this work of drainage and colonization, and appointed a committee to wait upon the Provincial Premier and his colleagues to press the matter upon their notice—a work said committee attempted, but without success. In fact, your Council cannot but state their opinion, that their appeals during the past two years to the Local Government and the now defunct Local Legislature, have met with no favorable response and even scant courtesy. It is to be hoped, however, that with two members of the Board holding seats in the newly-elected house, our future claims will receive more consideration.

Later in the year, your Board made another effort in the direction of colonization, and appointed a committee to collect facts about the vacant lands around the city, and in other ways see what steps could be taken to accomplish such a work. This committee has been at work upon this difficult and intricate undertaking, and although they are not yet in a position to present a full report upon the subject, they have gathered sufficient information to satisfy themselves and your Council, that a colonization movement having the support of those concerned, and backed by the proper Legislative powers, cannot but be successful, and accomplish a great work for the city of Winnipeg and the whole province.

This committee have received offers of nearly one million acres of vacant lands within twenty-five miles of Winnipeg, which the owners are prepared to sell. In a few instances of land-owners living away out of the country, and unacquainted with the great changes in values, which have taken place since the "boom" of 1881, prices far too high are asked, while in the bulk of the others the figures quoted are moder-