

## BRITISH COLUMBIA.

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## British Columbia Business Review.

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## A RETROSPECT.

The year 1892 is ended and the holiday season is over, and the present is an appropriate time to review the business of B. C. for the past twelve months. In many respects the year just gone by is one of the most remarkable for a long period.

It has been a year in which the depression, following a long term of unexampled prosperity, fairly set in. It marked the end of the boom era on the Pacific coast. The Pacific boom started in California and gradually made its way north, until it reached Fort Simpson, the most northerly point on the B. C. coast. Like the storm which spends its fury after reaching a certain point in its course, so the "boom" was of a much gentler form in this province and consequently the reaction is not so marked as that which has been inflicted on the Sound country. The activity in real estate took the form here of a strong desire for the acquisition of lands, farm lands, timber lands, grazing lands, townsites and suburban property, and to such an extent was it carried that little of the accessible and at all valuable tracts has been left. As a concomitant of real estate speculation came the inevitable inflation of enterprise of one kind or another. Syndicates and joint stock companies galore were organized, which included in their scope railway charters, manufacturing enterprises, fishing and mining operations, reclamation schemes, shipping, monetary concerns, etc., etc.; a good many of which have been more or less successful. All of these activities for five or six years represented a really wonderful development; and a feature of especially the real estate transactions was that a large amount of cash changed hands, a fact which gave solidity to the progress and prevented "wild cat" and crazy speculation. But there was inflation all the same—too much business for the population, because B. C., owing to its peculiar physical conditions, has not been able to absorb population in proportion to its enterprise. As a result, the money invested in real estate and in the various ways indicated represents useful and necessary capital drawn out of circulation and beyond immediate control which while there has been no serious depreciation in values, has caused depression, not exceptional so far as the world at large is concerned, and much less marked than in most instances, but with its own specific causes apart. Speculation, however, has not by any means ceased, but it has been greatly moderated. As a matter of fact, this province, is on the eve of inaugurating several of the most important enterprises in its history, and its development has only really begun, a development only temporarily checked by over speculation in anticipation. Those who have stuck to the line of business and attended to it have made money. Those who have dabbled in too many schemes or over invested in real estate as a rule are hard up. The temptations in the line of the latter have been very great.

There have been other elements contributing to the depression for which conditions outside of B. C., are responsible. Reference to some of these will be made.

## THE LUMBER TRADE.

To start with there has been over production in view of the demands of local trade. There are about 54 saw mills in the province, all producing to a greater or less extent. For the past year most of them have been running on half time or less, with low prices and keen competition.

The foreign market has been very much disorganized and over fed, owing chiefly to the troubles in South America and the great depression in Australia. Owing to extremely low freight rates, considerably more lumber was shipped in 1892 than in 1891, but prices have been so low as to leave the operation of the mills without profit, simply enabling mill owners to turn over stock. Lumber is one of our most important industries, and the revival of the trade would mean more than anything else for the coast of B. C.

## CANNED SALMON.

The total pack of 1892 was 221,707 cases, as compared with 312,211 in 1891, both being poor years. It will be seen at a glance that such a diminution as this in a large and staple industry must have a serious effect on lines generally. The one redeeming feature of the salmon trade was that prices were good, but so far as the Fraser river was concerned, the catch, even at good prices, was not remunerative. This year, 1893, is looked forward to as the big year, and extensive preparations are being made for it.

## SEALING.

While some of the sealers made good catches, and London prices proved satisfactory, the season on the whole was, as all the world knows, an unprofitable, and in many instances, a disastrous one. With a fleet of over 60 schooners equipped and manned, and absent six months out of the year, the capital invested represents a large sum, and the interests at stake are weighty.

## COAL MINING.

In round numbers the coal output for 1891 was one million tons, nearly double that of any previous year. For the last year that figure will be greatly reduced. San Francisco, the principal point for export, was glutted with coal, and the market for the greater part of 1892 was depressed. The low rates of freight, and the number of vessels seeking charter brought foreign coal into competition more largely than usual, and as a result the coal trade has been dull. The effect of this on trade, more particularly in Nanaimo, has been most marked, and while recently an improvement has been noted, the outlook at present is not exceedingly hopeful.

## FISHERIES.

Outside of salmon canning there has been little advancement made in the development of our fisheries. A number of attempts have been made in the direction of deep sea fishing, but with the exception of establishing the existence of rich halibut and black cod banks nothing has got beyond the experimental stage. Spasmodic efforts to market halibut in large quantities have been made and the experiment is still going on, but nothing like a regular trade has been established. Several private companies are hopeful of success and of the crofter scheme is looked forward to confidently to place the fishing industry on a solid basis. Some attention is being devoted to the curing of herring, salmon and other fishes, while at Port Essington on the Skeena River an extensive freezing establishment has been erected having in view the export of frozen fresh fish. Owing to high rates of express on fresh fish comparatively little has been done in the way of shipping to the Northwest and eastern Canada.

The Commercial was roundly abused for making a few plain statements about the price of farm lands in this province. It accepted the censure as a matter of course, because those interested in keeping up lands to speculative heights very naturally have their opinions reflected in the columns of the local press. However, when it was announced that the reclaimed tract of land in the Pitt Meadows would be placed on the market and sold by auction, the Commercial remarked that the prices realized would be a very good criterion of what the best lands would fetch in open market.

Over 1100 acres in small lots were offered and some 620 acres sold, the average price under the hammer being \$45.30. The Pitt Meadows land is prairie, a rich alluvial deposit, ready

for the plough, and, therefore, for farming purposes the very best in British Columbia, as good as some of the land which a few years ago brought as high as \$150, \$200 and in some instances \$250 an acre. In view of the prices above realized for land that only requires turning over, and is capable of anything in the agricultural line, it is ridiculous to ask and expect what unimproved lands have been held for in the past and what has so seriously retarded actual settlement. As has been pointed out here frequently farming is a business like anything else, which will only pay a certain return on a certain investment and the settler who undertakes to bring land into cultivation wants to obtain it at a price whereby some of the "unearned increment" will fall to him as well as the speculator. It is understood by the way, that the dyking company will put under cultivation 200 acres during the coming summer in order to demonstrate the capabilities of a tract of which there are about 35,000 acres to be reclaimed. There are about 150,000 acres in the Westminster district alone of this character that can be brought into cultivation, and very considerable areas in other parts of the province that are capable of reclamation.

Notice of a bill to amend the act of incorporation of the Canada Western Railway Company has been published in the British Columbia Gazette as follows:

"So as to empower the Company to lay out, construct and equip the railway from a point on the main line of the railway herein named at or near the North Bend of the Fraser River in Cariboo, along Parsnip Valley to the junction with the Peace River; thence east along the Peace River Valley to the eastern boundary of British Columbia or an alternative route from such point through the Pine River Pass; thence along the Pine River to its junction with the Peace River; thence to the boundary of British Columbia. Also an additional line from the same point at or near the North Bend of the Fraser River in Cariboo westward along the telegraph trail through the Babine mountains to the head waters of the Skeena River, thence following generally said river to the coast at or near Fort Essington, and a line along the other branch of the Skeena River past Bear Lake, to the headwaters of the Omineca River; thence generally following said river to the junction of the line before described following the Parsnip River."

The Nanaimo Free Press takes this to mean that the Vancouver Island railway by way of Bute Inlet has been dropped and goes for the promoters in a rather rough shod way. However, the Colonist, of Victoria, and representatives of the Canada Western Railway Co. deny that this is the intention of the amendment in question, saying in reply that it is simply intended to increase the powers of the Railway Co., by admitting of a branch line if desirable. The name of the railway is also to be changed, and other alterations are also contemplated.

The sawmill of the Toronto and British Columbia Milling and Manufacturing Co., at Sydney, has been completed. Sydney is at the terminus of the Victoria and Sydney railways now under construction, and is about a year old. It contains a wharf, a store, a blacksmith shop, a post office, etc., and the sawmill in question. The sawmill has a capacity of 50,000 feet per day.

A proposition to establish a dry dock at Vancouver is still under consideration. Instead of, however, agreeing to accepting the offer of an English company to construct a dry dock and erect an arsenal for a bonus of \$200,000, it has been decided to receive proposals from as many persons as possible, after which the committee in charge will meet and consider them, making a recommendation to the city.

## B. C. Market Quotations.

MEATS.—The supply is plentiful, but prices are high owing to the market in the east. Bacon especially is high. Quotations are: Wiltshire cured hams, 16c; do backs, 15½c; eastern hams,