

# Market for Railway Ties in United Kingdom

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Another factor to be considered is the future cost of production of timber in European countries. Should the cost of living increase, and wages increase, as many authorities predict, the price of sleepers, of which labour forms seventy-five per cent of the total cost, cannot be reduced to the level ruling before the war, provided the demand remains constant.

There is every prospect that the demand for sleepers will remain constant. The commercial railroads of Europe are now on short commons. After the war it will be necessary to restore them to their previous condition, and the demand for sleepers will be greater than it has been at any time in recent years.

There should therefore be an excellent opportunity for Canada to compete. The competition must be based, for the present at least, upon the possibility of meeting American pitch pine in price. Should the next year or two confirm the opinion of several British railroad engineers that pitch pine is not eminently suitable for railway purposes, the railway companies may be convinced of the necessity for paying slightly higher prices for other timbers.

Under present conditions of shipping, it is difficult to estimate future prices for sleepers but for the guidance of those interested in the market the maximum price for sleepers containing 37½ board feet each may be fixed in the neighbourhood of \$1.80 each, uncreosoted, c.i.f. British port. At this price it should be possible for Eastern Canadian sleepers to compete in the British market with the American pitch pine sleepers. British railways have not used Eastern Canadian cedar or jack pine sleepers, but have broadened their specifications so during the past few months that they would probably accept such timbers.

British rolling stock is so much lighter than Canadian rolling stock and the tracks so well ballasted that any sleeper capable of being creosoted and hard enough to stand the wear in Canadian tracks will give the required service in Great Britain. British railways will also accept larch (tamarack), beech, maple and birch sleepers. At the present rate of freights from Eastern Canada the f.a.s. price of sleepers to the shipper would be 95 cents to \$1.15 each, a price much in advance of that now paid for the same class of timber in Canada.

Prices might decline very much in Great Britain and, with declining freight, still leave the Canadian shipper an excellent market for his timber, now that the possibility as well as the necessity of using timbers other than his favourite Swedish redwood has been forced upon the British railway engineer.

British railways are now using for the first time sleepers sawn and hewn from trees large enough for only one sleeper, the heart being near the centre of the sleeper. In the past sleepers have all been made from trees large enough to produce a log ten inches square; this log or "sleeper-block," as it is known in the trade, when split, produced two sleepers, each with the heart of the tree less than one inch from the surface of the sleeper. Insistence on this location of the heart has been an important point which would rule out any trade in sleepers from Eastern Canada where sleepers are nearly all manufactured from trees too small for the production of ten-inch blocks.

Now that necessity is resulting in the broadening of specifications, there is an excellent opportunity for Canadian shippers to induce British railways to accept jack pine, cedar, and tamarack sleepers, hewn or sawn to British sizes.

Such sleepers would be in no way inferior to the Swedish redwood now used in the United Kingdom. The quantities and prices of the above three species of sleepers purchased in Canada in 1914 given below—

	Number.	Value each.
Jackpine .....	8,379,064	43 cents.
White cedar .....	2,651,319	48 "
Tamarack .....	1,507,902	44 "

is an indication that there may be a supply available for export and that the price would be low enough to permit of a profitable export trade.

At the prices quoted above, which were the average paid by Canadian railroads in 1914, Canadian sleepers could, under existing freight rates, be delivered to British railroads for a lower price than is now being paid for American pitch pine.

There is no question but that the sleepers ordinarily used in Canadian railroads would give as good service on British railroads as the loblolly and shortleaf now being imported from the United States under the name of pitch pine.

The prospects for shipments of Douglas fir sleepers from Western Canada to Great Britain are not good for the immediate future because of the high freight rates. The British Government has under consideration the transportation to Great Britain of Douglas fir sleepers purchased by English railroads some months ago. But while tonnage is in as great demand as at present both the Government and the railway companies feel it advisable to purchase such supplies of sleepers as may be secured near at hand. Occasional cargoes may be purchased in Douglas fir when not needed for immediate delivery and when there is a prospect of a Government collier returning to Great Britain from the Pacific.

As shipping rates become more normal the prospects for Douglas fir sleepers will improve.

It is not expected that sleepers will sell for less than \$1 to \$1.20 each c.i.f. British port until one to two years after the war. Freights should decrease before that time to a point which will allow Douglas fir to compete with pitch pine.

Any person desirous of keeping in touch with the sleeper market in the United Kingdom should arrange to do business with one of the established firms of sleeper merchants, a list of whom is in the hands of the Commissioner of Commerce (refer File No. A-1764). These merchants not only supply British railroads but also do a large business with the railroads of Holland, France and other continental countries.

## Recent Fire Losses.

Recent fire losses reported to Superintendent of Insurance, Victoria, B. C.:—

Burnaby, August 20.—Harris Street, near Gilmour Avenue; owner and occupant, George Sells; wood dwelling; value of building \$1,750, insurance on same \$1,500; value of contents \$1,200, insurance on same \$500. Total loss, \$2,800. Cause unknown. N. B. Mercantile.

Burnaby, August 20.—Sussex Street; owner and occupant, Robt. M. Morgan; wood dwelling; value of building \$1,600, insurance on same \$1,250; value of contents \$450, insurance on same \$250. Total loss, \$2,050. Cause, sparks from bush fire. Scottish Union.

Chilliwack, August 23.—Wellington Street; owner, P. Birrell; occupant, A. McDonnell; wood store and poolroom; value of building \$2,500, insurance on same nil; value of contents \$2,500, insurance on same \$2,800. Total loss, \$293.50. Cause unknown. Liverpool L. & G., Fidelity, Phoenix.