

MEMORANDUM TO COMMISSION

The following is a copy of the memorandum presented to the Dominion's Royal Commission at their recent sitting in Calgary, by our president, H.W. Wood, on behalf of our Association:

In giving the conditions of agriculture in Alberta I will not attempt to give results of scientific or statistical investigations, but will speak as a practical farmer with eleven years experience and observation. Our soil as a rule is more or less sandy loam, underlain with boulder clay, but this varies greatly as all heavy glacial deposits do. In some places the sand predominates to the extent that production is reduced, and in other and more circumscribed areas there are heavy beds of gravel and small boulders to the extent that some limited areas are untillable. Some areas are so free from sand or gravel that the soil is so gummy as to be hard to plow, but very productive when brought under cultivation. As in all heavy glacial formations, the more level portions of Alberta abound in shallow lakes and swamps or muskegs. Many of the latter can be brought under tillage by drainage. In the higher portions near the mountains, where the flow of water is more rapid, the water beds are cut much deeper and the drainage is much better. Thus we can readily see that with the lakes, muskegs, sand areas and gravel beds, there is quite a percentage of Alberta not readily adapted to either profitable tillage or forestry. But the greater portions are readily adaptable to tillage and highly productive. I think I am safe in saying that as compared with the other Canadian provinces, east of the mountains, Alberta summers are cooler and her winters are not so rigorous. Lying close to the mountains as she does, the cold waves, especially those in the form of blizzards, pass more to the east. Again, lying so close to the mountains, the altitude is great enough to cool our summer weather, making extreme heat waves unknown in most parts of the province. But, under these general weather conditions there is quite a variety of local conditions. Beginning at the south, in the heart of the Chinook belt, there is more wind and the country is more inclined to be subject to drought in summer, and usually there is not so heavy a snow fall in the winter. Passing to the north out of the Chinook belt, the wind gradually decreases and the rain and snow increase. You also pass out of the prairie district into the brush and timber districts.

Splendid Cattle Country

Practically all parts of Alberta are more or less subject to early fall frosts and summer hail. Our soil and climate are well adapted to the production of pasture, hay, small grain and livestock. In the southern part the dry seasons make it necessary to practice the methods of dry farming in order to ensure fair crops, but the normal seasons bring enormous yields. Grass in this section is short, but very nutritious. In some sections irrigation is being developed and is proving very beneficial in the production of alfalfa and other fodders as well as grain. This is especially true of the Lethbridge irrigation district where great quantities of alfalfa and other fodder crops are grown. This section seems destined to become the feeding ground for a large number of beef cattle. Passing north from this section you strike a zone intermediate between the dry prairie and the brush country, which is, perhaps as good a cattle country as there is anywhere. Water is plentiful, grass grows luxuriously, and while grain does not always reach that degree of maturity which makes it a high grade for milling purposes, it always makes an abundance of excellent feed. In normal years the yield is good and the grade of the grain is high. Failures, so far as feed is concerned, are unknown. Cattle are wintered out of doors, and beef steers are fed out of doors. I do not know a country in the world in which a better type of beef breeds can be developed. This section is already attracting a large number of breeders of pure breeds, and I predict that in a few years it will be the greatest pure bred beef centre in Canada, if not on the continent.

Passing on to the north into the more brushy country, the soil is very fertile and the country not only adapted to grain, but to mixed farming as well. This section is coming under the plow more slowly, but is destined to support a great population. The Peace River country is not so well known, but enough

is known to warrant the assertion that it will be successful as a grain and stock country.

Unfavorable Crop Years

Alberta was settled at the time of the greatest popularity of Western Canada, consequently we have a class of farmers that is probably not surpassed by those of any country at the same stage of development. The early years of rapid development were good crop years. Grain was a fair price, and the cattle were very cheap and the price of hogs very uncertain, the farmers as a whole were fairly prosperous. The bankers were encouraging them and furnishing money liberally. The year 1910 was very dry and crops were light, prices low and prosperity was arrested; 1911 was very wet. There was a heavy growth of straw, but poor, frostbitten grain and no market for it. Much grain was threshed from under the snow and went out of condition. There were no provisions for taking care of out of condition grain in Western Canada, and the loss was very great. About this time there was a great revival in the price of beef and fine profits could have been made by feeding this immature grain to cattle as green feed, but this revival in beef prices came suddenly and unexpectedly; the value of this green feed in producing beef was unknown; the farmers were in a new country and were suddenly brought face to face with an entirely new set of conditions, and the loss on this crop was very heavy. If the same conditions

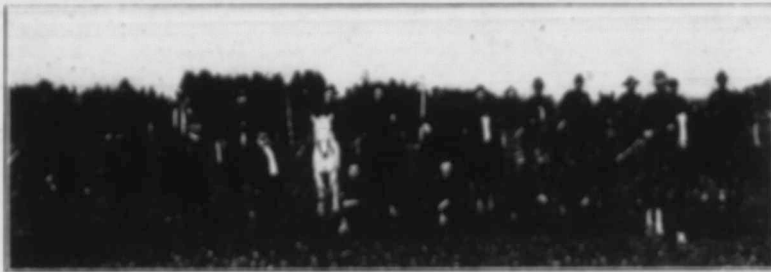
and many are stocked almost to their capacity.

The Damage From Speculation

Another thing that contributed with a prodigal hand to the distress of the farmers, was the unbalanced building inaugurated by speculation, booming and wild-cattling. The results were that the villages, towns and cities were filled with from perhaps two to three times as many people as were necessary to give any legitimate service required. This unbalanced condition could not be sustained without adding to the burdens of the basic industry of the country. But even this matter is making painful efforts to adjust itself. The large amount of high priced machinery necessary to operate Alberta farms, and the excessive high prices charged for same, added to the burdens during these trying years. Many farmers were allured into buying very expensive machinery that did not prove practical, and quite a few were financially ruined thereby. Sparseness of settlement caused largely by speculators withholding land from settlement, militated against the best development of schools as well as the most attractive social conditions. This in turn militated against the development of the country, as farmers are more and more demanding equal opportunity for their children with the towns and the cities.

The U.F.A. and the Future

During all these years the United Farmers of Alberta were increasing their membership and perfecting their organization,



Edmonton Unit, Legion of Frontiersmen.

Horse Shopped at extreme left of picture

should be reproduced with the knowledge the farmers now have; they could bring a satisfactory profit out of them. To add to the distress, the bankers about this time began a systematic effort to collect from the farmers. These were evil times; 1912 and 1913 brought unsatisfactory crops and unsatisfactory prices. The year 1914 brought a light crop, but the war brought high prices that put a profit in practically all Alberta farming, except in the southern part where there was no crop; 1915 brought a bumper crop in most sections, and the price too not so high as the year before, brought greater prosperity to the farming interests of the province, which will be greatly augmented by the present good crop and high prices.

The disaster to grain farming in 1911 and the sudden increase in cattle values made it plain that the farmers, especially those in the best stock growing districts, must stock their farms with cattle. Cattle growing had been so very unprofitable for so many years before this that many farmers had none, and most farmers had but few. The two exceedingly lean years of 1910 and 1911, the over amount of farm indebtedness, the withdrawing of credits and the persistent efforts of creditors to collect, made this undertaking so unattractive that few farmers would have attempted it if they could have sold their land. Many farms were abandoned altogether, others were rented. This condition contributed liberally to the tide of emigration which set in about this time from Alberta to the United States and which has not yet ceased. Many who saw nothing but ruin if they left their farms and their all, doggedly played the game and most of them have won. The removal of the duty by the United States in 1913 against Canadian cattle and hogs gave our farmers confidence in a stable market which greatly encouraged them in their efforts to stock their farms. In the stock districts most farms now have some cattle,

and have done much, and are still doing much in securing the value of their products, as well as in buying their supplies at more reasonable prices. This organization hopes by co-operative action to be able to do much in protecting the interests of its members not only in buying and selling, but in preventing legislation that enables other classes to prey on them. We also hope in time to establish more sympathetic relations with banking and mortgage interests. We realize especially the necessity of some system whereby we can arrange our mortgage credits on lower rates and easier terms. The immediate future of Alberta agriculture, with the good crops just harvested, the fair number of livestock now on hand and the good prices for all farm products, is very bright indeed. But these good prices are largely the result of war conditions. The war will end; what then? The prices of farm products will soon sag, especially on grain. Bad crop years will recur; taxes will increase. That the Alberta farmers will be able to produce enormous amounts of wealth in grain and livestock is assured, but it is just as apparent that a very liberal expense allowance must be made for that production. The climate is rigorous and the farmers must be well fed, well clothed and well housed. It requires much machinery to carry on farming here. All these things are very expensive. Our work seasons are short, and our harvest and threshing seasons are uncertain, which makes inconvenient and expensive conditions concerning wages. Farms are only partly improved, and carrying forward the necessary improvement is a continuous burden of expense. The long distance we are from the seaboard makes our internal freight rates very high, which figures largely in the final balance between profit and loss. All of these legitimate and unavoidable expenses can be met and farming in Alberta still

be made profitable enough to be attractive. In order to bring about this condition, farming must be recognized as the basic industry of Western Canada and as such, justly entitled to first consideration. Other classes must recognize the rights of the farmers and be ready to adjust class relationships on the basis of justice and equity. The government must recognize the rights of the farmers and use its power in protecting them in their relations with other classes. The east must recognize the rights of the West, and be ready to co-operate with the West in bringing together the sections as well as the classes of the Dominion in harmonious unity on an equitable basis, for therein lies the future strength and the future greatness of the Dominion.

Farmers Ask No Discrimination

The Alberta farmers do not want any artificial means employed to make farming profitable at the expense of any other class, or section. We are farmers farming in a country well adapted to agriculture, and we cannot be prevented from being prosperous except by the introduction of artificial and unjust arrangements. When farming in Alberta or any other part of the Dominion becomes unprofitable again, a commission of the wisest and fairest minded men should at once be appointed to investigate till they find what is the matter and who is to blame. In the meantime, we are trying to protect our security, to build up our credit, to make arrangements whereby we can secure both long and short term credits on the most advantageous terms and rates, to put all our buying and selling on a cash basis. Generally speaking, we are trying to keep the cost of production below the net returns we receive for our produce.

We would not recommend any efforts at encouraging future immigration till the people we have are put on a prosperous basis, as we believe prosperity is far more important and desirable than numbers. In the long run, the very best advertisement you can give an undeveloped country is the prosperity of the people already there. Being primarily an agricultural country, and producing more of some and less of other things than we consume, consequently forced to do much trading with other countries, we should industriously and intelligently cultivate the best markets in which to buy and sell and promote this buying and selling in the interests of the people.

Summing up, Alberta has climatic and soil conditions that will give large results in grain and livestock production. The cost of this production is unavoidably increased by long freight hauls of supplies and equipment as well as products. It is increased by the additional expense of living incidental to a cold climate. It is still further increased by the large amount of expensive machinery necessary to operation; by continued improvement in the way of buildings, fencing, clearing, breaking and seeding to tame grass. What we ask for as aids to agriculture in this province is the best markets in which to buy and sell; that no government aid be given to combinations of trading classes in forcing up the price of our supplies or forcing down the price of our products; that the customs duties be so arranged that no manufacturing or other interest will be enabled thereby to unduly raise the prices on our supplies or lower them on our products. Add to this the development of a satisfactory credit system, and I see nothing to prevent Alberta agriculture from supporting a great civilization.

INTERESTING DEBATE

H. Weston, secretary of Dorence Local, No. 132, reports a fair attendance at their second meeting, which was held on September 2. Four new members were enrolled. They had a debate on the question, "Resolved that the U.F.A. should keep out of party politics," and it was very strongly decided in the affirmative. The union hopes to do better as soon as the busy season is over, and think they will have good meetings this winter. They also hope to secure several new members.

ABERNETHY ORGANIZED

Abernethy Local Union, No. 120, was organized by Director A. A. Hall, of Crossfield, on September 9, starting off with ten members. Geo. Baxter, of Airdrie, was elected president and Thos. Bills, of Crossfield, secretary.

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