

Historical Review of Canada's Timber Industry

by

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When the adventurous sailors from Europe first visited the part of North America now known as Canada they were not looking for timber. They were seeking a passage to India and China and, failing that, desired to carry back in their ships large value in small compass — gold, silver, precious stones, furs. But though they did not seek them the forests were there, covering the shores of bay and headland and the banks of rivers, — forests of pine, spruce, hemlock, oak, maple and birch. They stretched away as far as the eye could see from the most lofty lookout. They were dark and sombre and presented a maze which none but a native could thread and — worst of all — they effectually concealed those natives and their intentions, leaving the pioneers a prey at once to loneliness and fear.

Some writers have lamented that North America on the east side was found by the earliest settlers covered with these heavy forests which rendered life exceedingly difficult and precarious for the colonists, while the interior was a vast treeless plain or prairie whereon the settler might have secured abundant crops in one or two seasons. By the time that settlement had reached the prairies, the timber had largely been destroyed and part of the energy of several generations had been wasted in trying to make farms on certain areas of inhospitable non-agricultural land along the sea-coast. It is idle to speculate in this manner and, doubtless, had the forests been in the interior and the prairies on the shores of the continent the early settlers would have suffered as much from lack of fuel and building material as they actually did from lack of arable land in which to grow crops.