

REPORT OF THE QUEBEC COLONIZATION COMMISSION

Relations Between the Lumbermen and Bona Fide Settlers Perfectly Harmonious. Startling Evidence Presented as to Wholesale Speculation in Timber on Pretence of Settlement.—Recommendations for Remedying the Evil.

The report of the Colonization Commission appointed by the Quebec Government has been presented to the Legislature and is a very important document. The duties assigned to the Commission were, in part, to make a critical study of the laws and regulations respecting public lands, woods and forests, and the protection of settlers; to enquire into the number and causes of the difficulties between settlers and holders of timber licenses, and to advise upon methods for their prevention and removal; to study the new proposal or systems which may be submitted to it, and, whilst taking into account the financial resources of the province, to recommend those which tend to amend the laws and regulations so as to foster colonization and the development of forest industries.

The final Commission was composed of Messrs. J. H. Legris, Chairman; J. C. Langelier, Secretary; John L. Brodie and P. N. Thivierge.

The report is divided into two parts, what has been ascertained and what is recommended. Extracts from the report are printed below.

The Commission found, practically speaking, no real grounds of complaint on the part of bona fide settlers. These settlers complain neither of the law nor of the regulations; neither do they complain of those who hold licenses for cutting timber, while the latter, far from complaining of the bona fide settlers, want them and even look upon them as valuable helpers, as faithful guardians and protectors of their domain against the ravages of fire. On this point we refer to the despositions of the limit-holders, especially those of Hon. Mr. Edwards, of Mr. J. R. Booth and of Mr. W. Price, the largest holders of timber limits. All have declared to us under oath that, instead of being the foes of the limit-holders, bona fide settlers are allies whom they need and who render them valuable services.

There is therefore no antagonism between the holders of timber licenses and real settlers or those who honestly take up public lands with the view of clearing them and not of speculating on the timber. On this point there can be no serious dispute based on facts occurring frequently enough to deserve being taken into consideration. Of course, there may be—we have even found some—isolated cases where the license-holders have been guilty of injustice towards bona fide settlers; but these are exceptions which only go to prove the rule.

It has been alleged that license-holders cut timber on settlers' lots even after the latter are taken out of their licenses. During the first inquiry held in Montreal, this charge was made by Mr. Carufel, secretary, and by Dr. Brisson, manager of the Colonization Society of that city. Nevertheless, when pressed by the commissioners to give facts in support of so serious an accusation, M. Carufel declared that he was unable to do so. Dr. Brisson cited a case in 1883 without specifying any details and could not give any more recent facts. The evasive replies of those two officers of the Colonization Society show clearly that they took for granted statements made wholly without foundation. The position they occupy gives to such stories a seriousness calculated to deter a great many who might otherwise be inclined to take up lands and settle on them. It is to be regretted that men, specially charged with the duty of furthering the colonization movement, should thus repeat, without being able to produce evidence of any weight, statements so calculated to impede the progress of that movement.

CUTTING TIMBER ON SETTLER'S LOTS.

The only serious case of cutting timber on lots under location tickets and taken out of the timber licenses is that in connection with lots 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 of the 8th range of Amqui in Metapedia. After advertising the cancelling of these lots, the Crown Lands Department, on two successive occasions, granted the holders of location tickets a delay to enable them to comply with the regulations. During the delay and while the location tickets were still in force, a jobber of the firm of Price Bros. and for the account of the said firm began lumbering there last fall. During last winter 15,000 logs were cut, and, as he himself says in his evidence (Enquete at Quebec, deposition of J. A. Theberge), he would have cut 40,000 more had not his operations been stopped by threats of judicial proceedings on the part of the holders of location tickets.

To justify this proceeding, the contractor, Theberge, says in his evidence that the firm of Price Bros. had cleared the river; that the lots were taken and held for the benefit of the owner of a saw-mill in the vicinity. All this is probably true but it is nevertheless a fact that the license-holder unlawfully caused timber to be cut on lots taken out of such license and in the possession of the holders of such tickets.

This is the only case that has come to the knowledge of the Commission, in the course of all its investigations, of a license-holder having unlawfully caused timber to be cut on lots held under location ticket and taken out of a license.

IS TIMBER CUT BELOW REGULATION DIAMETER.

Another alleged ground of complaint set forth in the evidence and elsewhere, is that the license holders hasten to strip the lots of timber as soon as the latter are put under location tickets; in other words they remove all the timber, even that which they are not allowed to cut under their licenses.

This assertion is neither founded on nor justified by facts. A few cases occur in which the license holders, or rather their jobbers, cut down spruce of smaller dimensions at the stump, that is, two and a half feet from the ground, than is allowed by the regulations; but these cases are quite exceptional. In the course of lumbering operations in the forest it sometimes happens that, in cutting down a large tree, it catches in a small one which must also be cut down to allow the large one to fall. The small tree so felled is cut into logs and used although not of the regulation diameter. It must be admitted that it is better to use it than allow it to be wasted in the bush. Small trees are also cut to make skids on which the logs are piled. Formerly those skids were left in the woods and were lost; at present the employees of the Crown Lands Department compel the lumbermen to use them and take them away: they figure amongst the logs. At first sight the presence of those small logs amongst the large ones seems an infringement of the regulations, but it is incontestable that this practice should be encouraged instead of being blamed, for it is to the advantage of the public revenue and makes the most of this small timber which would otherwise be lost.

The places where the cutting of spruce smaller than the regulation diameter most frequently occurs are the region of the St. Maurice, that of Mattawin and the country in rear of Joliette. On several occasions the woods and forests branch has caused inquiries to be held upon complaints being made to that effect and in four cases out of five it was found that such complaints had no real foundation.

TIMBER FOR SETTLERS.

The stories about stripping the lots of timber are almost invariably spread by speculators disappointed in their schemes by the vigilance of the Crown Lands Department and its officers. Unfortunately these speculators are to be found in large numbers even among the real settlers. A man takes up a lot, makes enough

improvements on it to protect himself against cancellation, but especially makes the lumber as quickly as possible or sells the cut, then abandons the lot to take up another elsewhere. If he fails to secure this other lot immediately, he cries out that he is ill-treated, that the Government is obstructing colonization by refusing to sell lots to settlers. There are even some who carry their spirit of enterprise to the length of changing districts, of moving from an agency, where they are too well known to further play this game successfully, to another where they are not known and where they can succeed more easily in carrying out their designs.

We are convinced that, by dint of repeating in every key that in the Province of Quebec only lots stripped by the lumber merchants are placed at the disposal of settlers, on which there does not even remain enough wood for the construction of farm buildings, considerable damage has been done to the progress of colonization. It is necessary to checkmate the deplorable campaign organized by speculators and represent things as they really are.

What we have ascertained in the course of our enquiries enables us to tell our fellow-countrymen in the United States and the people in the older parishes who are disposed to settle on Government lands, that they may be sure of finding thereon all the timber needed for building and even for sale to maintain their families during the first years, and such wood is annually increasing in value.

As regards the timber which remains for the settler, the most advantageous regions are unquestionably the valley of the Metapedia and the county of Bonaventure. The richness of the lots in this region, especially in cedar, is really extraordinary. Lots which yield 5,000 or 6,000 and even 10,000 logs of cedar and spruce, apart from birch and other wood, or 250,000, 300,000 and even 1,000,000 feet of merchantable timber, are not scarce.

SPECULATORS IN TIMBER.

The number of speculators in Government lots and in timber, already very considerable, is constantly on the increase. These interlopers are the scourge of colonization, a subject of continual trouble and an occasion of serious losses to the license-holders and the Government. The extraordinary increased value which all woods have attained within four or five years has caused this tribe to spring up in all parts of the province and their operations have assumed proportions which have become almost a menace to the legitimately conducted lumber industry.

The process adopted by these interlopers to create for themselves forest domains is of the simplest. Under the pretext of colonization, they get lots taken up by pretensions or fictitious settlers, to whom they furnish the money to procure the location tickets. Before even the issuing of the ticket, in many cases, they get the cut of timber on the lot transferred to them for a trifle and the game is played. If the Crown Lands Department hesitates to concede the lot applied for, the speculator sets to work all the influences he can command. When all these intrigues fail to overcome the resistance of the Government, the disappointed speculator sets up the outcry that the Crown Lands Department is impeding colonization by refusing delivery of the public lands to settlers.

This is the great, the sole cause—so to speak—of all the outcry that has been raised for some years past in regard to the pretended refusal by the Government to concede lots to settlers. And we regret to be under the painful necessity of stating that the ever increasing phalanx of these speculators is recruited even from among the leading classes of society.

THE LAW RESPECTING FATHERS OF TWELVE CHILDREN.

In passing the law which gives to each father of a family of twelve living children the right to a free grant of one hundred acres of Crown lands, the Legislature had in view to stimulate the progress of colonization. The speculators, however, have managed to convert this patriotic legislation into one of their most effective weapons. In the Eastern Townships, chiefly, there are people who make a trade of hunting out the fathers of twelve children in all parts of the province and purchasing their rights. They prepare the papers prescribed by the law, carry on the correspondence, etc. The lot is sold to them in advance, generally for \$30, and the