

A CENTURY OF COAL.

At the end of the year 1884, the first century of the coal trade of Nova Scotia was completed, and in taking a retrospective glance at the rise and progress of the trade, many interesting facts are brought to view.

Coal was known to exist in the Island of Cape Breton so long ago as 1672, but no mining of a regular character was inaugurated till after the lapse of a century. During this long interval, however, a considerable quantity of coal was taken from the seams exposed in the cliffs, but very little was commercially disposed of, it being used principally by the troops then in garrison on the Island; consequently no records of work done have come down to us.

In 1784, the Island was placed under a separate government, and through the representations of its first governor, greater attention was attracted to the beds of coal. Work was at once commenced, and from this time down to the present day, we have a tolerably correct record of the trade done in coal.

Two important events mark the history of the trade in the century we write of, viz.: the monopoly of the mines and mineral rights of the whole Province by a body of English capitalists in 1827, and the surrender of this monopoly in 1857, by an arrangement with the Provincial Government.

During the forty-two years prior to the leasing of the mines by the English corporation, they had been operated partly by the Government and partly under the direction of private individuals, and, although carried on under adverse circumstances, they were not altogether unprofitable. The quantity of coal sold in this period amounted to 285,876 tons, equal to an average annual vend of 6,806 tons; the largest quantity sold in any one year being 12,600 tons in 1826,—an insignificant amount when compared with the figures which the trade was destined in a short time to attain. Probably the development of the trade was retarded, and many people debarred from embarking in the enterprise, by the heavy royalty—from 3s. to 4s. 3d. per ton—exactied by the government on all coal sold. The greater part of the above quantity was consumed in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, very little finding a sale in the United States, where English coal firmly held the market. Although the existence of valuable beds of coal in Pennsylvania had been known for fully a half century, the product of the coalfield had not then come into use. When the General Mining Association—the name adopted by the English company—obtained control of the mines and minerals of the Province (with certain reservations on the part of the Government, viz.: those areas which at that time were being worked), the most valuable tracts of the Sydney and Pictou coalfields were held by private individuals who carried on mining on a very small scale. The Association eventually became possessed of both of these areas, the latter by purchase from the lessees, and the former by grant from the Government,—it having become vacant from the unwillingness of the lessees to continue working under the high rate of royalty. Thus the Association practically secured exclusive right to all the mines and minerals of the Province.

Operations of a much more extensive character were shortly afterwards resumed at the Sydney Mines in Cape Breton, and the Albion Mines in Pictou. As the exigencies of trade demanded, four other openings were made in Cape Breton, and one in the Cumberland coalfield, and with the exception of one or two places of minor importance, these collieries have been continuously worked down to the present time. The United States were looked upon as the natural market for this coal, and, although at the outset, a considerable portion of the output found a market there, the trade was not destined to assume large dimensions, and suffered a gradual decline. The development of the American coal industry at this time, a heavy import duty, and other serious drawbacks, formed a combination of circumstances too powerful to allow the sale of Nova Scotia coal on a profitable basis.

We subjoin a statement of the sales from the Cape Breton Mines during the time covered by the General Mining Association's monopoly, from 1827 to 1857, in which the figures are grouped into the several periods marked by the changes in the American tariff.

Cape Breton coal sales from 1827 to 1857 inclusive:

	Home Consumption.	Neighboring Colonies.	United States.	Total.	U. S. Duty.
1827 to 1832	51,614	7,744	54,150	116,508	A. D.
1833 to 1841	163,778	94,355	248,182	504,295	6 9
1842 to 1846	137,321	119,533	14,843	352,237	5 6
1847 to 1854	237,311	228,932	141,267	627,510	7
1855 to 1857	127,585	135,742	67,676	331,003	3
	741,109	586,336	604,108	1,931,553	Free.

The most noticeable features which the figures present are included under the columns headed "Neighboring Colonies" and "United States;" for whilst in the former the sales shew a gradual and steady increase from 8 per cent. in the first five years to 42 per cent. of the whole vend in the last two years of the Association's monopoly, the sales to the United States have gradually declined, in the same time, from 46 per cent to 20 per cent. Indeed, as much as 75 per cent. of the whole quantity was sold in 1832—and this in the face of an import duty of 6s. 9d. per ton,—against 19 per cent. in 1857, when coal entered the United States free. The cause of this great falling off is solely attributable to the annually increasing demand for Pennsylvania coal. The sales to the home market, on the other hand, bore, with slight fluctuations, a constant ratio to the whole.

We are not in a position to give a detailed synopsis of the trade done during the same period with Pictou and Cumberland coal, but in order to arrive at the sales of the Province up to this time, the quantity from the above districts must be added. This we find from authentic sources to have

been 2,104,763 tons, which, added to the Cape Breton quantity, brings the coal sales of the Province from 1827 to 1857 inclusive, up to 4,036,317 tons.

The growth of the trade from the beginning of the century down to 1857, is given below in a summarized form, and we find the total sales of the Province during the seventy-two years amounted to 4,322,193 tons.

	Tons.		Tons.
1785 to 1790	14,349	1821 to 1830	140,820
1791 to 1800	51,048	1831 to 1840	839,981
1801 to 1810	70,452	1841 to 1850	1,534,798
1811 to 1820	91,627	1851 to 1857	1,580,218

We have now brought our account of the coal trade down to the year when the monopoly enjoyed for thirty years by the General Mining Association was set aside. It would require more time and space than we can afford, and be foreign to the spirit of our remarks, to enter into the details of the long story, of how the surrender was brought about, the terms and conditions stipulated for, and many other matters of less importance; but it is sufficient for us to note that, with the exception of certain reservations in the three coal fields of Cumberland, Pictou, and Sydney, granted by the Government to the Association, the remaining area of the Province was thrown open to any persons willing to embark in the adventure of mining. As might have been expected, the people of Nova Scotia were not slow to take advantage of the opportunity thus afforded them of further developing the coal industry, and we find that in the following seven or eight years the number of collieries had increased from four to twenty three. In 1865, many new companies, both Canadian and American, were formed, and the number of mines in operation was increased to thirty. During this period of activity, between four and five millions of dollars were invested in opening up coal mines.

Trade with New England States rapidly revived, Nova Scotia coal being in much demand for the manufacture of gas—and the competition for this market became keen and vigorous.

The following statement shows the distribution of the coal sales of the whole Province from 1865 to 1884 inclusive:—

	Home Consump'n.	Neighboring Colonies & Prov'ca.	Other Countries.	Total.
1865	80,840	71,234	485,110	647,184
1866	104,292	107,322	346,906	558,520
1867	102,216	105,473	263,496	471,185
1868	102,216	105,473	263,499	471,185
1869	117,629	102,815	233,180	453,624
1870	115,947	129,067	206,761	451,775
1871	130,180	172,978	265,147	568,295
1872	149,632	168,557	278,249	596,438
1873	199,886	285,433	300,655	785,974
1874	215,205	273,193	273,621	761,019
1875	214,963	386,598	147,564	749,127
1876	222,640	398,140	96,025	716,805
1877	225,658	335,814	72,735	634,207
1878	255,790	308,107	123,168	687,065
1879	289,172	327,727	92,612	699,511
1880	278,120	351,515	68,989	698,624
1881	372,913	465,496	136,230	974,639
1882	387,113	625,261	127,340	1,139,714
1883	458,952	688,892	102,385	1,250,229
1884	471,327	719,971	106,225	1,297,523
1885	493,550	701,412	67,188	1,262,150

From the above figures, we see at a glance how the channels of trade shifted, and in this respect it is curious to note how closely they follow the direction taken by the trade during the tenure of the mines by the General Mining Association. We have seen how, at the outset of the Association's operations, the principal sales were made in the American markets, how this trade was destroyed by the growth of Pennsylvania coal-mining and the imposition of duties, and finally how the trade nearer home was cultivated, and what results attended the change. History has repeated itself in the recent years of the trade, and the same ground has been gone over again for the second time.

In 1865, the year before the abrogation of the Reciprocity Treaty, the United States took 73 per cent of the entire sales. An import duty of \$1.25 was imposed on our coal in March, 1866. In 1868, the total sales only equalled the quantity taken by the United States in 1865, and of this quantity the Americans took 50 per cent.

The duty was reduced to 75 cents in 1872, and although the total sales had greatly increased, the United States only took about 20 per cent. In 1873—a memorable year from the extraordinary activities displayed in business circles—30 per cent of the total vend was exported to the United States; but from this time the sales have annually decreased, being about 18 per cent in 1874 and 12½ per cent in 1875, till in 1884, the last year of the century, only a little over 5 per cent was taken by the Americans.

On the other hand, during the twenty years covered by the statement the sales for home consumption have increased from 12½ per cent to 39 per cent; and the sales to neighboring Colonies and Provinces show a net gain of over 44 per cent, and we are inclined to think that our coal operations must look in this direction for any future extension of the trade. We confidently believe that any alteration affecting the entrance of Nova Scotia coal into the United States, will not bring about any noteworthy increase in the sales to that country. Indeed, it is highly probable that the trade with that country will cease in a few years.

The total sales of the Province, from 1858 to the end of 1884, amounted to 17,987,772 tons, and this quantity added to the sales prior to 1858, brings the aggregate quantity of coal sold in one hundred years, ending in 1884, up to 22,290,937 tons.

In bringing to a close this brief and imperfect account of the growth of the Nova Scotia coal trade in the first century of its existence, we cannot refrain from expressing a fervent hope that in the near future, the Province, by the development of her iron and copper deposits, may be in a position to cause the whole of her coal mines.