

BRITISH AMERICA ASSURANCE COMPANY

For eighty-six years the British America Assurance Co., Toronto, has been a household phrase in a vast number of homes, where it has stood for protection, fair dealing and progress, and has fully justified its reputation in these respects. This old Canadian institution continues to have a most enviable hold upon public esteem and confidence. Amongst the factors in the development of Canada, the British America takes an honoured place, and in all the long period of 86 years, the Company has kept its honour untarnished, and its record free from ought that might have disparaged its eminent reputation. It may not be generally known, that the incorporation of Toronto as a city, occurred in the same year as the British America was established. The founders of the Company probably "built better than they knew," for, as there were no railways in Canada, when it commenced business, nor any electric telegraph in operation, the range of its operations must have been limited. But the foundations of the new enterprise were laid in strength, and with sagacious provision for the future.

Results for 1918.

Fire, hail and automobile business are linked together in the British America accounts, (fire being the predominant feature) the net premiums in these departments totalled for 1919, \$2,924,327 a substantial increase of over \$126,000 as compared with 1918, losses in these departments amounted to \$1,302,587 figuring a loss ratio of 44.54% as compared with 50.9% in the preceding year, after payment of expenses and taxes there is a credit balance of no less than \$465,955 as compared with \$248,196 in 1918.

Such favourable results are, however, somewhat offset by an unfavourable years experience in the marine department, which shows a debit balance on the years operations of \$188,163. Notwithstanding these results, however, the total years operations from all departments, shows the largest credit balance (with one exception) in the history of the Company, amounting to \$390,740, as compared with \$251,344 in the previous year.

Dividends due on preference stock up to 31st December, 1919 absorbed \$57,750. The special reserves were increased to \$200,000. The reserve for unearned premiums (fire) amounts to \$1,789,459 and marine department \$122,794. The surplus to policyholders was increased during the year by \$160,704 to \$1,259,269. Assets as at December 31st last totalled \$4,329,858, showing a substantial growth of \$288,159.

The strong financial position of the British America as the result of some years of prosperity,

must be a source of considerable gratification to the president Mr. W. B. Meikle and Mr. E. F. Garrow, his able lieutenant, in addition to all others interested in its welfare.

CONFLAGRATIONS.

In an interesting address, before the Insurance Institute, Toronto, last week on the well worn subject of conflagrations, Mr. John B. Laidlaw, enumerated as the chief contributing factors in the development of conflagrations: absence of, or inadequate fire protection; climatic conditions; inflammable contents of buildings; wooden buildings covered with shingle roofs, and narrow streets and lanes. Mr. Laidlaw further stated that beginning with the great fire of London in 1666 all notable fires the world over since that time were traceable to one of the five causes he had enumerated. As nearly all of the above contributing factors to conflagrations mentioned by Mr. Laidlaw are likely to remain always in the world, Mr. Laidlaw's statement must have conveyed small consolation to his audience. While some underwriters are prone to the habit of compiling and quoting statistics, and then concluding that so many fires occurred from this cause, and so many from that cause, the fact is sometimes lost sight of, that fifty or a hundred years ago, civilization was more simple than now, and the hazards were comparatively few. With the progress of civilization, however, machinery, factories, mechanical and chemical processes have developed; congested cities and towns have arisen; railroad street car and automobile risks have come in; in addition to electricity and all its attendant hazards. In other words hazards have developed with civilizations progress, and unless some constructive movement is made to keep pace with and safeguard those hazards, the destructive effect of the forces that civilization has loosed will be greater than the benefits to humanity, brought by such progress.

The principal known causes of fires are probably as follows:—incendiarism, defective flues, sparks, (miscellaneous and locomotive) matches, lamp explosions, stoves, spontaneous combustion, lightning, lamp and lantern accidents, gas jets, forest and prairie fires. The study of fire causes is very unsatisfactory, and however conscientiously performed contribute very little towards the enlightenment of the people with regard to the causes in the country at large. But in the meantime it is high testimony to the perfection of the fire insurance system that mammoth losses are so evenly distributed that they fall lightly on the many instead of onerously on the few.