

Reconstruction of Devastated Halifax

Under the Leadership of Canadian Engineers and Contractors, Splendid Maritime Port Recovers Rapidly From the Terrible Effects of the Mont-Blanc Explosion—Description of Relief Organization and Methods

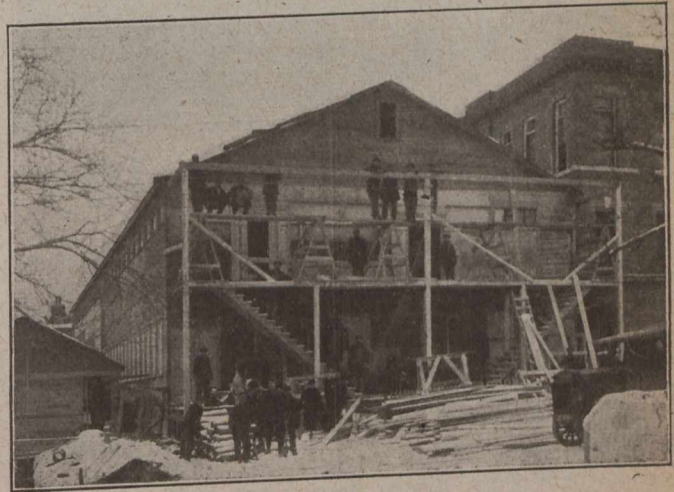
WHEN the Belgian Relief boat, "Imo," collided with the French munition ship, "Mont Blanc," in Halifax Harbor at 9 a.m., December 6th, 1917, setting on fire the Mont Blanc's deck load of benzine and resulting in the explosion of her cargo of 4,000 tons of trinitrotoluol, about 2,000 residents of Halifax were killed and 5,000 injured; 3,164 houses and factories were totally destroyed and over 6,000 houses were damaged, the total property loss being \$25,000,000.

That such enormous havoc could be wrought without creating vast engineering problems, seemed inconceivable; so after allowing plenty of time to elapse, in order not to interfere in the slightest degree with the all-important work of rehabilitation, Halifax Relief Commission officials were asked to co-operate in the preparation of an article covering the engineering features of the work of reconstruction.

"There is no engineering of any magnitude in this work," said Col. Robert S. Low, the manager of reconstruction. "It's merely a mess of details,—broken windows, fallen chimneys, tottering houses, debris to be carted away, temporary houses to be provided and a hundred and one other detailed jobs of that sort; but nothing of special engineering or contracting interest."

A thorough inspection of the city and surrounding district substantiated Col. Low's summing up of the situation in all but one particular: the splendidly organized system of handling this "mess of details" would interest any engineer or contractor whose average labor consists

organized a Relief Commission which later was permanently incorporated by the provincial House of Assembly. Should any member of the commission die or resign, the Governor-General is to appoint the successor. The act gives the commission power to expend as it sees fit all money donated for Halifax relief, and to "repair, rebuild



Model Labor Camp

or restore buildings or property damaged, destroyed or lost in the explosion; or compensate the owner to such an extent as the commission thinks fit." Portions of the money subscribed may be set aside for the maintenance, support and education of victims of the disaster, and for the aid of institutions or associations interested in the work of relief.

Regarding reconstruction, the act provides that the commission shall exclusively have such powers as has any city, town or municipality by virtue of the Town Planning Act of 1912. The commission is authorized to lay out and open any new street in the devastated area; to widen, straighten, alter or extend any existing street; to remove the whole or portion of any building, wall or fence; and to raise or lower the level of any street. No action may be maintained against the commission or its officers for any injury occasioned to any property. The commission is empowered to open the soil of any street in the devastated area for any purpose, notwithstanding anything contained in the Halifax City Charter. Any new street opened by the commission shall be considered a public street or road. This also applies to streets widened or otherwise improved.

While the act provides that the commission shall have power in the devastated area to divert any public or private sewers and to connect with the sewer system of any city and not be liable in any action therefor, the provision is made that in doing so the commission shall do the work in conformity with the sewerage system of the city. Power is given to the commission similarly with regard to water supply and hydrants.

Any land which the commission may think fit for its requirements, whether this land is in the devastated area or not, may be expropriated, and provision is made for the appointment of arbitrators.



The Foreground was Covered with Houses and Stores Before the Explosion, which Occurred at Almost the Exact Centre of this Photo. Beached Across the Narrows can be Seen the Belgian Ship "Imo"

not in the carrying out of extraordinary and unique jobs but in the successful and efficient organization of just such routine details.

Powers of Relief Commission

In view of the magnitude of the relief needed after the accident, and the rapidity with which it had to be afforded on account of the severity of the weather, there was