

Maritime Mining Record

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—Industries of the Maritime Provinces.

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THE COAL TRADE 1904

It would be very far from the truth to say that the year 1904 was a poor one for the coal trade but it is no departure from the truth to say that the sales came far very far short of the anticipations indulged in when the year had begun. There were those, considered knowledgeable, who figured on an increase of eight hundred and fifty thousand tons. The RECORD was not quite so sanguine but thought it possible there might be an increase of three quarters of a million tons. And because one's hopes ran so high, is there keen disappointment at the discovery that there has been no change worthy of remark. There has been increased shipments to the St. Lawrence. There ought not to have been much diminution in local sales though there was some loss occasioned by the Sydney strike. Where then was there a falling off? Chiefly in exports to the United States. For the fiscal year ending Sept. 1903 the shipments to the United States were close on a million tons. For the fiscal year ending Sept. 1904 or for the calendar year 1904, the shipments are we should say a quarter of a million tons less. This more than offsets the gain in shipments to the St. Lawrence. The less shipments to the States in 04 are due solely to the fact that there were no strikes in the United States, no abnormal condition of affairs, and therefore no opportunity for shipments at a profit. Some people run away with the idea that because shipments of coal to the United States rose from 100,000 tons in 1893 to 900,000 tons in 1903, that we are securing a footing in the New England markets. This is scarcely the case. We are making no real progress in that respect in recent years. If there was an increase in shipments, 1902 over 1901, and 1903 over 1902, it was due to the abnormal conditions prevailing in the United States due to the strike of Anthracite Miners. The only market to be depended upon in the United States is Everett, and that is not a consumer of round coal but of slack. One or two of the big railways are occasional customers, but they are not to be depended upon and the price obtainable for coal furnished then is not tempting.

Not one of the large companies came up quite in shipments to expectations. The year opened very badly for them due in part to the severe weather. The first four months of the year showed decreases amounting to 350,000 against increases of only 80,000, or a deficiency as compared with the corresponding four months of 1903, of 342,000 tons. It began to look about this time as if business was going to the bad, but after May a recovery

set in, which made up in time for what had been lost.

Prices were fairly well maintained during the year, though there was a cut, to secure the trade, in an instance or two. The workmen at the collieries had no cause for complaint as they were given steady employment, at good rates.

The experiment of sending coal through the lakes was tried during the year by the Inverness Ry. and Coal Co. Several cargoes, or rather part cargoes, as the steamers had to discharge a portion at Montreal, were sent, and return cargoes of iron ore for the Steel works brought back. And yet, the RECORD regrets to learn, results do not justify, the Inverness Co., at any rate, in continuing shipments. We are informed that this company will not attempt to send coal through the lakes this year.

There is much talk these days of needed new markets for coal. 'New markets' is a question that will have to be faced at no distant date. Where are new markets to be found? Some say in New England; others say in the United States. A majority of the operators have not strong hopes of being able to establish a large market in New England even were there a reduction, or a repeal, of the duty. The only way in which Nova Scotia could compete would be by sending coal to the seaboard towns in steamers of large capacity, say with a capacity of 6000 tons. As there are not, at any of the ports, proper discharging plants or ample storage facilities, such shipments are precluded. Before the companies could be asked to build these they would have to be assured of the permanency of the market, and that there would be no tinkering with the duty, for a period of years. And, besides, means would have to be adopted to overcome the prejudice that exists in the New England states against provincial coal. There are only a few companies in a position to send coal in large carriers to the United States, and so far none of these seem to see enough profit in prospect to warrant the expenditures of large sums, on alien soil.

The Ontario market may be almost as hard to secure. The Canals are not deep enough to permit of the passage of ocean going steamers. If the market is to be secured then specially constructed steamers are required. These also involve heavy expenditure. Mr. Ross says he is going to make an attempt to discover if the game is worth the candle; we hope he will find that it is worth more, and that Ontario may be counted in, as a market, with the St. Lawrence.

PROSPECTS.

The present year should make a much better showing than did the past. In Cumberland County the Springhill collieries should do as much as during the past two years or perhaps a little better. The shipments from these collieries to the United States last year were 630,000 tons odd; the quantity this year should reach 700,000 tons. The J. J. G. has room for improvement. While the Maritime and Minudie Coal Companies did fairly well last year it is expected they will do better this.

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