

be made is not stated, even if it has been ascertained, but it assuredly would represent a loss to the sellers, and the agreement contemplates a division *pro rata* of such loss among the various contributing mills.

#### MARITIME PROVINCE SHIPPING.

According to lists of shipping and their tonnage in the Halifax and St. John papers, it appears that the decline in the shipping of the Maritime Provinces of the Dominion continues. The aggregate of craft of all kinds registered as owned in the three Provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, at the close of 1896, amounted to 3,809 vessels, of 447,580 tons. This is a very creditable figure indeed, and only seems otherwise to the minds of residents by the sea, when compared with the still greater totals of former years. There was a decline of 35,320 tons during the twelve months, distributed thus: Nova Scotia declined 25,836 tons during the year, New Brunswick 6,701 tons, and P. E. Island 2,783 tons. The following is a summary by Provinces:

Province.	No. Vessels.		Tonnage.	
	1895.	1896.	1895.	1896.
Nova Scotia.....	2,667	2,661	341,161	315,325
New Brunswick .....	976	974	122,420	115,719
P. E. Island.....	190	174	19,323	16,540
Grand total .....	3,833	3,809	482,904	447,584
	3,809	....	447,584	....
Decrease .....	24	....	35,320	....

The principal ship-owning ports of the Maritime Provinces are Halifax, 803 vessels, 44,173 tons; Windsor, 143 vessels, 87,801 tons; Yarmouth, 262 vessels, 41,540 tons; Parrsboro, 140 vessels, 31,110 tons; Lunenburg, 336 vessels, 27,139 tons; Maitland, 22 vessels, 20,960 tons—nearly all large class; Pictou, 67 vessels, 13,144 tons; St. John, New Brunswick, 424 vessels, 91,271 tons; Chatham, 355 craft, 9,938 tons; St. Andrews, 145 craft, 4,565 tons; Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, 174 vessels, 16,540 tons. In New Brunswick the ship-building now going on is restricted to the construction of a few vessels. One of them is a steamer for the St. John River.

#### FIRE INSURANCE RATES.

Toronto merchants and manufacturers are at issue with the Board of Fire Underwriters over rates of fire insurance charged in the city. The first-named urge that Toronto is paying too much in premiums relatively with the remainder of the province, and argue that profit accumulations of city premiums in good years should be set aside by the insurance companies to pay city losses in conflagration years. To this the underwriters reply that such a localization of funds is impracticable; that profits and losses cannot be so averaged; and they show that fire insurance companies have not, in the twenty-five years last past, earned a fair profit, but, on the contrary, from \$2,000,000 to \$3,000,000 of capital put into ten or twelve companies to do underwriting more cheaply in Canada has been lost. Finally, they declare that the average rate of premiums charged over the whole country has not been excessive.

The insurance people aver that their rates on mercantile risks in Toronto were for years the lowest charged in Canada, and lower than those charged in leading American cities, and they cite the often-expressed opinion of the late chief of the fire brigade, that our water pressure alone afforded practically no protection to buildings over three stories in height. Persistent neglect to provide needed fire appliances forced them, they say, to advance rates in the business quarter. They quote, too, the reports of the city engineer showing the need of larger water mains, and point out that none of the defects of our waterworks system have yet been remedied. Notwithstanding this, the insurance authorities went so far, in a desire to accommodate the business men, as to remove the extra charge made for conflagration hazard upon all but the quarter containing modern high buildings.

Into the *tu quoque* argument indulged in by the underwriters in reply to the allegation that they are an arbitrary "combine," namely, that the Board of Trade itself is a combine or a series of combines, consisting of the various sections of the board, for fixing prices of necessities of life, we do not propose to enter. But we observe that the insurance men contend that the insurance regulations, so strongly objected to, are no more inimical to the public interest than the regulations of the sections of the Board of Trade.

The controversy has shown that there is a pronounced difference of opinion between the underwriters and their customers as to what constitutes adequate rates of premium. But there certainly is force in the contention that low rates with proper protection are more advantageous to the companies than high ones with a serious conflagration hazard. Toronto's fire protection is not what it should be; and we would counsel both insurers and insured to join hands and bring pressure to bear upon the city council to improve our mains rather than squabble over "regulations" and call one another names.

#### THE CITY OF ST. JOHN.

I am writing on Christmas Day, and should be aided in my task by the sweet chimes of the churches reverberating throughout what seems to be a happy and peaceful city. You know St. John, Mr. Editor, and so do many of your Western readers, and, of course, remember its fine situation and the scenery round about it. These things help to make a person's visit to it memorable, when added to the kindly welcome the citizens give to a traveller and a sojourner. This strikes me as one of the finest cities in this Dominion. I can trace many internal improvements, which have since I was here last considerably added to its importance. New docks, with large warehouses; emigrant quarters; cattle sheds, for the accommodation of five steamers, and also to accommodate the C.P.R. extension; railway sidings for convenience to handle the freight.

Some half dozen steamships now make St. John their winter port, which now has transatlantic traffic all the year. The regular lines are the Beaver to Liverpool, Donaldson to Glasgow, Furness to London and the Head Line to Belfast. Among other harbor improvements in progress are two additional berths for steamships on the west side of the harbor. These improvements alone will cost the corporation about a half million dollars. The saw-mill industry has long been of considerable importance to St. John. It is considerably changed and modernized to-day. Some 210 million feet of spruce, which is the principal product of this district, has been shipped to Great Britain, South America and United States, for which there has been a good demand, with fair prices, in the two first named countries mainly. The American market has been dull, but there has been a good demand for deals in South America, in fact better than in any previous year.

Fishing is an important industry here too, and much attention is now given in the cold storage system for handling the large quantities of fish which come into the market. The system will, doubtless, be perfected, and play an important part in the export trade. The building of warehouses for this purpose is in contemplation, as you have already noted. There is a complete electric system here, and a large building has been erected for the electric plant, and a new power-house is now being added which will double the present capacity.

A word as to the many manufacturers of St. John. First comes the well known cotton establishment of Wm Parks & Son; they have two large mills employing 500 hands. These have been working extra time for some three months, and are at present working about 70 hours weekly. The goods they produce are known all over the Dominion. All the nail factories are fully employed. There are now eight of them; four make nails, three wire, and one steel-cut nails. The Portland rolling mills have also extensive premises. McAvity & Co., brass founders and wholesale dealers in hardware, have purchased an extensive property, and are going to build new premises shortly, thereby to enlarge their business. A new biscuit factory has started on Clarence street.

A new park of some 200 acres is now in course of construction, to have fine roads around and through it, and a beautiful lake in the centre. The interests of education have not been neglected, for a fine grammar school, containing some five floors, has been erected on Union street.

Although the general business of the city is probably in volume not quite up to last year, yet upon the whole, it is in a very satisfactory and fairly prosperous condition. The future outlook is considered bright and cheering, for the St. John men are workers and are "bound to make things go." And you know how confidence begets confidence, and enterprise, enterprise.

T. G. O.

St. John, N.B., 25th Dec., 1896.

#### FOR GROCERS AND PROVISION DEALERS.

Dried fruits are not in large supply in Canada and holders are stiff in their views, outside markets being strong.

In the Montreal market canned lobsters are decidedly scarce and higher in price; salmon, too, are firm with advancing prices.

The supply of oranges in Jamaica is nearly exhausted, according to recent advices, and the shipments of grape fruit have practically ceased.

The prune crop of France for the season of 1896 is estimated to be one-sixth larger than the crop of 1895, which was estimated at about 20,000,000 pounds.

Manchester, England, has a grocer's exchange which is found to be a great convenience by the members of the trade. A similar institution has been talked of in Liverpool.

On one day last week Messrs. Ballantyne & Sons shipped seven cars of cheese from Listowel station, 3,200 boxes in all, valued at \$25,000. It was the product principally of Molesworth, Wallace, and Cleland's factories.