Preliminary Estimate of Mineral Production

W. F. Robertson, Provincial Mineralogist, Estimates a Reduction in Value in British Columbia for 1914 of $4,107,378 as Against 1913—If Prices Had Not Been Affected on Account of the War, Reduction Would Have Been Only $1,434,000 Less.

William Fleet Robertson, Provincial Mineralogist, has recently issued a bulletin giving a preliminary review and estimate of the mineral production in British Columbia for the year 1914. He states:—

This bulletin has been prepared before the receipt of the official reports for the year 1914 of the Gold Commissioners and Mining Recorders of the Province, and the customary returns of mineral production annually made by managers of mines and reduction-works; consequently, it must necessarily be regarded as being simply a preliminary review of the progress of the past year, together with an estimate of the quantities and value of the several mineral products of the Province, which it is believed will prove to be approximately correct.

The accompanying table shows an estimated mineral production during 1914 of a total value of $26,189,020. It will be seen that the total value of the production of 1914 as estimated is some $4,107,378 less than that of 1913, apparently a serious falling off, but in reality not as great as was expected in the face of the unprecedented conditions with which the mineral industry was confronted during the last half of the year. These conditions were brought about by the great European war, which so upset the metal markets of the world that quotations of prices for the more important metals were unobtainable for months. Such a condition was never before experienced, leaving no basis on which present sales of ores or metals could be transacted, or even the future values of these predicted.

Gold alone had a stable value, but the other metals that go to make up the mineral output of the Province are all such as America produces a large surplus of, which surplus had been disposed of in the European markets, and with these markets temporarily destroyed, the production of these metals was either stopped or materially curtailed.

Recently, however, since the eventual outcome of the struggle can be definitely predicted and Britain has obtained the undisputed command of the seas, the metal markets have been able to again resume business and to quote prices, these, however, being somewhat lower than previously prevailing.

It will be seen, therefore, that the conditions adversely affected the mining industry are but temporary and with their end within sight.

The production for 1914, although it is materially less than those for the years 1912 and 1913, is, nevertheless, about the same as for the year 1910, while it is considerably greater than that of any other year and is much greater than the average production for the last ten years.

The estimated decrease shown this year, while it is partially caused by a lesser quantity of the metals produced, is not entirely attributable to that cause, but is partially due to the lower average price of the metals prevailing in 1914 as compared with those of 1913.

For example, the average market value of silver in 1914 was about 4.9 cents an ounce lower than in 1913; copper was 2.27 cents a pound lower; lead, 0.5 cent a pound lower; zinc, 0.45 cent a pound lower.

If the metal prices of 1913 had been maintained during 1914 and applied to the output for that year, this output would have been valued at some $1,434,000 greater than it appears. The lower average prices for the metals prevailing in 1914 are partially attributable to the war, but to some extent were occasioned by the financial stringency which preceded the war and possibly foreshadowed it.

Conditions during the latter half of the year 1914 were unprecedented as regards their effect upon the production of minerals in British Columbia, which, however, as a result of the European war, was not alone in having experienced much difficulty in finding a market for its minerals.

It will be seen from the comparative table that follows, that, as compared with 1913, there is apparently an increase in the amount of placer gold recovered, but, as regards the lode minerals produced, with the exception only of zinc, there was a decrease in the quantity of each of the metals recovered, while even with zinc there is a decrease in value of the product, owing to the fact that the average market price of zinc was this year 10 per cent. lower than it was last year.

The total product of the collieries this year shows a decrease, which is found to have occurred entirely in the Crowsnest and Nicola fields—due to conditions brought about by the war—while the Vancouver Island collieries show an increase of nearly 10 per cent. over last year.

Owing to the fact that in most of the ores produced and treated in this Province several metals are associated, it follows, as a matter of course, that when curtailment of the production of such metals as lead and copper becomes imperative there must be a corresponding shortening in the production of the precious metals, since the greater proportion of the gold and silver produced under ordinary conditions is derived from such ores. For instance, fully two-thirds of the silver usually produced comes from the silver-lead ores of the Slocan District, so that when there is difficulty in marketing lead and its production decreases, it follows that the production of silver is adversely affected. Again, gold and silver occur with copper in the ores of the large mines of Boundary District, from which come rather more than two-thirds of the whole of the ore produced in the Province, so that here, too, the temporarily enforced curtailment of production of copper involves in degree a decrease in the output of gold and silver. There is reason, though, to look for early relief from these unfavorable conditions, and to hope for a return during 1915 to a normal state of the lode-mining industry.

The following table shows the quantities and value of the several minerals produced in the year 1913, and the estimated production in 1914. It may here be explained that the prices used in calculating the estimated value for 1914 of silver, lead, copper, and zinc are the average prices for the year, as published in The Engineering and Mining Journal, New York, less a deduction of 5 per cent. off silver, 10 per cent. off lead, and 15 per cent. off zinc.

	Production, 1913		Estimated Production, 1914		
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Decrease
Gold, placer	.....	$ 510,000	.....	$ 524,000	*$ 14,000
" lode.....oz.	272,254	5,627,490	246,936	5,104,126	523,364
Total gold	.....	$ 6,137,490	.....	$ 5,628,126	$ 509,364
Silver .....oz.	3,465,856	1,968,606	3,394,752	1,768,666	199,940
Lead .....lb.	55,364,677	2,175,832	52,424,732	1,834,866	340,966
Copper..... "	46,460,305	7,094,489	44,968,541	5,845,910	1,248,579
Zinc ..... "	6,758,768	324,421	7,029,276	309,288	15,133
T'l metalliferous	.....	$17,700,838	.....	$15,386,856	$2,313,982
Coal..tons, 2,240 lb	2,137,483	7,481,190	1,821,308	6,374,578	1,106,612
Coke.. "	286,045	1,716,270	237,931	1,427,586	288,684
Bld. materials, etc.	.....	3,398,100	.....	3,000,000	398,100
T'l value prod'n.	.....	$30,296,398	.....	$26,189,020	$4,107,378

*Increase.