The Origins of the Nova Scotia Lumber Trade

By C. G. Hawkins

NOVA SCOTIA, almost an island, has always been strongly attracted to the sea, which has greatly influenced its economic life. Until recent times, and still to a very notable extent, it has been a ship builders', ship owners', sailors', and fishermen's province.

For its size, its timber wealth was originally great and forest exploitation to the present day has always been important.

The Mast Trade

A part cargo of pine masts was the first recorded export of forest products from Nova Scotia. In 1699, writes Diereville in *Voyage to Port Royal*, the ship Aremant arrived at Port Royal to take on board thirty or forty masts that the French inhabitants furnished for their King, Louis XIV. It is recorded elsewhere that cargoes of masts were thereafter regularly received by Louis XIV from Acadie, and this mast trade continued in a desultory way until the American revolution and the arrival of the Loyalists.

When the English came to the new world, they recognized its forest wealth at once, and while for the most part the trees were left to the mercies of whoever wished to fell them, the needs of the British Navy gradually brought about a species of forest policy. This was the famous expedient by which trees suitable for masts were actually marked with a "broad arrow" by a representative of the Imperial Government, the Surveyor General of Woods and Forests, and thus reserved to the Crown against all private persons. For many years prior to the Revolution this post (Surveyor General) was held in New England by Sir John Wentworth of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The fortunes of this family were built on the exploitation of the pine forests of New Hampshire. It is suspected that this gentleman's efforts to conserve pine timber in New England for naval use and possibly also for the Wentworth family constituted an important factor in the Revolution. When Wentworth arrived in Nova Scotia and became governor, he brought with him these ideas of reserving pine timber for the Crown. With his passing the efforts of the Admiralty to control the forest supplies of the colonies quickly lapsed, and whatever forest policy the province of Nova Scotia had afterwards was administered by the local authorities.

In its forest policy Nova Scotia has differed from all the other provinces of Canada in that it has never attempted to retain title to its timber lands in the hands of the Crown, but has allowed them to be alienated in the same way as agricultural lands. It has thus lost the control over forest lands which other provinces at least in theory possess. The results have been bad, the forests of the province have been mercilessly exploited, in great part by innumerable small owners whose methods and foresight have left much to be desired. The big owner or operating company has not been prominent in the forest history of the province, and while a big organization as an operator may have faults, it does tend to eliminate some of the worst tendencies of the very small operator; carelessness, waste and lack of progress. Nova Scotia's forest history when it is written will be, up to the present, a rather sad story of small proportions when compared to the other provinces of Canada. Our opportunity to make history in this industry is still before us.

EDITOR'S NOTE: C. G. Hawkins is one of Nova Scotia's leading lumber operators. He has for many years been a member of the Economic Council of Nova Scotia. Last year he was with a Maritime delegation in Great Britain to discuss with the British authorities possibilities for expanding the exports of Maritime lumber to the United Kingdom.

Square Timber or Ton-Timber Trade

A local forest policy did gradually take shape with the growth of the square timber trade with England. The production of this material was essentially an operation for individuals. The job was to find and select the best pine trees, square them on four sides with the broad axe, get them out to the river, usually with oxen and float them down to the seaport. It was comparatively easy for a settler to slip into the woods for the winter and make a few sticks of ton timber; there was little if any regulation and private persons did virtually as they liked with the timber on accessible Crown lands.

All square timber cut went to Great Britain where it was usually recut into boards.

In 1774 the Surveyor, General William Morris, reported that the pine timber was being destroyed by the lumber trade. In 1804 Sir John Wentworth wrote to the Secretary, Lord Hobart, that 70 or 80 cargoes of (ton) timber would be exported from Nova Scotia this year, and that 600 cargoes might be sent if encouragement were given.

Sawn Lumber

Water power sawmills were evidently an early feature of the English settlements; in 1750 Governor Cornwallis speaks of the manager of his sawmill at Mill Cove, and five sawmills were reported in 1754 as being in operation on several streams near Lunenburg and cutting enough lumber to load several vessels. In 1784 Edward Winslow wrote to Ward Chipman "sawmills are erected and other improvements making in places where old Nova Scotians never trod. A Captain Taylor has commenced operations at St. Mary's Bay and the Sissiboo River. New mills are being erected in the neighborhood of Annapolis and Granville and in almost every other considerable town."

West Indian Trade

The mast trade and the square timber trade were in general conducted from the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia while the early West Indian trade tended to center about the Bay of Fundy. This trade was in most respects a by-product of the American Revolution. While New England remained in the Empire, she virtually monopolized the supply trade of the British West Indies. Her locally built ships carried lumber, staves and fish to the islands, returning with sugar, rum, molasses and dollars. After the Revolution the new Englanders found this trade cut off. The Loyalists at once turned to lumber as the obvious commodity for trade with the West Indies and the capital and energy that they brought to Nova Scotia went far to develop this trade. It was some years before the province was productive enough in anything except lumber to make up the general cargoes that were the secret of success for the Yankee trader.

The West Indian trade has changed very little in nature over a long period of years. Cargoes consist largely of flour, fish, box shooks, lumber and shingles. These assorted cargoes of miscellaneous commodities were well suited to the nature of the business which was in effect a retail trade in the ports of the islands for which the small Nova Scotia schooners were well adapted. The salt fish and lumber sold readily for the uses of the plantations. A later development was the lumber schooner carrying 300 thousand to one million feet, many of which were built and owned at Parrsboro and other Bay of Fundy ports. The small coasting schooners or diesel powered coastal boats which work the Nova Scotia coast in summer find it convenient to run down to the West Indies in the winter and return with a cargo of salt or molasses. The lumber for most of these small cargoes came from small local mills. Many of these mills would be owned and managed by settlers who also owned and managed farms and had interests in shipping as well. The first steam mill was reported about 1825.

The West Indian trade was at first purely intercolonial but as restrictions

were gradually lifted and with the repeal of the Navigation Acts of 1849 it gradually expanded into a trade with the Caribbean and with South America. This South American trade flourished particularly during the period of the American Civil War when New England competitors were otherwise engaged. Return cargoes were not so easy to find from South America, our supplies of suitable lumber diminished and the rapidly expanding South American cities looked elsewhere for supplies. At the beginning of the present century the trade had almost disappeared.

Before 1850 Nova Scotian schooners were to be found in every port in the West Indian Islands, whatever its nationality. They were also making voyages to the Canaries, Madeira and Spain with the same kind of general cargo, always including lumber. The amount of lumber sold in the West Indies before 1830 depended on whether the ports or islands were open to commerce from the U. S. A.

Trade with U. S. A. and Britain

When New England cheap lumber became scarce, our exports started to rise. Nova Scotian producers apparently still preferred the West Indies and British market even during the period of the reciprocity treaty with the U. S. A. (1855-1866). In a speech in Detroit in 1865 Joseph Howe speaking in support of this treaty said, "the province I come from, is not largely interested in export of lumber to the U. S. A."

The British market at this time demanded deals of fairly high quality. A deal was carefully sawn three inches or more thick, either pine or spruce. It is probable that some of the mills cutting deal were built or financed by British capital and were therefore unlikely to be interested in the U. S. A. market.

Whatever the reasons, during the period of reciprocity with the U. S. A., Nova Scotia forest products to that country were negligible, the highest year being 1855 and the dollar value being only $281,000. The year 1862 saw the smallest export record for ten years. The southern ports of England were blockaded and the cotton trade (large users of our lumber) had almost ceased. By 1870 the trade had somewhat recovered and during the next thirty years exports increased from a total value of one million dollars to over two and one-half million. Deals, planks, boards and firewood made up 87% of the total in 1870 and 88% of the total in 1900. Within this group deals increased from 10% in 1870 to 50% in 1900, planks and boards declined and firewood dropped from 10% in 1870 to 1% of the total in 1900.

The U. S. A. was getting some planks, boards, scantling, laths and shingles, but deals were still the dominant export and went exclusively to Britain.

Before 1870 the British West Indies was the outstanding export market for Nova Scotia lumber, taking 36% of its production. The U. S. A. took 25% and Britain 18%. The products were for the West Indies chiefly pine boards, for the U. S. A. boards, planks and scantling spruce and pine, and large quantities of firewood, for Great Britain spruce and pine deals. By 1900, Nova Scotia's West Indies exports had declined to 4% of her production, while British exports had increased to 56%.

Pulpwood was first exported from Nova Scotia in the nineties and groundwood pulp in 1900. In 1925 groundwood pulp and pulpwood exports were valued at one and one-half million dollars. In 1935 newsprint, groundwood pulp and pulpwood totalled over six million dollars in value.

Conservation

The first suggestion of conservation in Canada was heard in 1854 when a parliamentary (Upper Canada) enquiry brought out the fact that the supply of pine lumber was not as had been thought previously inexhaustible. This enquiry also suggested that many settlers by attempting to clear and farm poor soil

did more harm to the country than good.

Nothing was heard about conservation in Nova Scotia, where pine had for all practical purposes disappeared. The lumber operators of the province had turned philosophically to spruce, taking it as a matter of course that the forest would some day vanish completely. Even though it was painfully apparent that the soil on which much of the forest stood was not fit for agriculture, few people seemed to regard lumbering as anything more than a transient industry. Nova Scotia's present position is one of an entirely decentralized industry with a portable sawmill going through the country gleaning the last sad fragments of smaller and smaller stands.

The future forest products industry of Nova Scotia must be an industry carefully managed and economically run, existing on the interest, not the capital of the forest. As such it will produce better lumber, more carefully manufactured, approaching more and more closely to the lumber industry of Northern Europe.

About Acadia

By Captain Abbe Arthur Maheux

EDITOR'S NOTE; Hon. Capt, Abbé Maheux is a prominent member of the faculty of History of Laval University and one of the best known French speaking historians. In recent years he has given special attention to the problems of Anglo-French relations in Canada and the means by which they may be improved. The situation of the Acadians which he treats in his article is, fortunately, no "problem" in Nova Scotia. In the educational field the demands ot the Acadians have been met in a satisfactory way by a program adopted by the Council, of Public Instruction on the recommendation of Acadian-French educators.

THE name Acadia sounded to my ears when I was very young. In my own family first, for one of my father's sisters was married to an Acadian and one of my cousins had married an Acadian woman. The language of those two Acadians was slightly different from ours, and some of their ways of thinking also. They were a sort of mystery to us.

That mystery was partially cleared up when we went to school and the teachers told us the story of the "Grand derangement" in 1755. We were not told to put the blame on this or that person or group, but to feel a pity for the poor people who had been dispersed in France, in the English colonies and also in New France. For many Acadians had fled to Quebec and the story went on telling that the reception at Quebec had not been the best. At that time the French Canadians had ther their own troubles with Bigot's exactions, with paper-money, with diseases, with war going on. New mouths to feed, new *S*.ds to provide were a real burden. The burden had been taken, though; the exiles went to various parts of New France, some of them to a newly opened district, Beauce; that was the place where my Acadian uncle had been born; as for my cousin she had been born in the United States. So we could, in our family, brush for ourselves a painting of the exiles scattered everywhere.

When I left the elementary School my idea was that the French Canadians had not done enough to relieve the exiles in their terrible condition. That was the feeling in my family. At the college, in Quebec City, the course in Canadian History was more intensive, taking into account many more details about the responsibility of the Dispersion, and about the return of the exiles to their native country and how they were overcoming their difficulties. Yet, my feeling was that we, the French Canadians, we owed much to the Acadians, because had done too little to help them at any time in our history. I may say that that feeling was general amongst the men and women of my generation.

Later on I read many books about the Acadians, written by Acadians, by French

Canadians, by English Canadians, by Americans, by Frenchmen, for the question has always stirred the interest of historians.

I will not discuss the question of the responsibility of the Dispersion: it seems quite clear that Lawrence has the main responsibility. But I am interested in the present situation, from the viewpoint of National unity.

The French Canadians have since long resolved to first achieve unity between all groups speaking the French language. The main difficulty was the Acadian question. The Acadians feel they are a distinct branch of the French tree and they want to be treated as such; the problem of entente between the Canadians and the Acadians of French language was as thorny, I may say, as the problem of entente between Quebec and Ontario. The attitude of the French Canadians was that of a kind of repentance. We have done too little for the Acadians, they thought, and we must now do as much as possible.

The first step was to recognize the fact that the Acadians constitute a group of their own in Canada, on the North American continent. This is done at the present time. We, the French Canadians, let the Acadians administer their own business, either religious, or educational or economic. They want bishops, teachers, aldermen, M.P.'s, M.L.A.'s from their own people, and we agree that they are right. We only want to help them, as much as we can and in only the measure they want our help. They are proud and sensitive; we do not want to offend their pride and their sensitiveness. Their greater need was in the educational field; As we had more facilities than they had, we have offered them scholarships in our Quebec institutions, mainly High Schools, Colleges and Universities. They have gladly accepted that form of help, and hundreds of young Acadians have studied in Quebec, Classics by Medicine, Divinity, Agriculture, and other branches of learning. We believe that by doing so we have partially atoned for our past neglect. Still, we think we have much more to do for the Acadians. The Quebec people have contributed large sums of money to help them have a French daily newspaper, which is coming now. We think that by doing so we have contributed to National unity.

* * *

What of the English-speaking community? How much are the Nova Scotians the New Brunswickers, the Prince Edward Islanders, conscious of their own responsibility in the matter? I do not know exactly. I have discussed the subject with many of the English-speaking Maritimers, I mean the educated ones. I feel that they are not far from my own views. The difficulty is rather with the small people. Some of them seem to be more protestant than the King and they look to the Catholic Acadians as a menace to Canada; it is a lower type of thinking, but it exists and it must be taken into account. Others fear the French language; they are fossilized in their belief that unity can be achieved only by the use of a single language, which of course should be the English language. Their idea of National unity is that of the melting-pot, which of course should apply to others, not to themselves. It is a recurrence of the already antiquated idea of British superiority in all and everything.

To few of the Maritimers comes the idea of a collective responsibility towards the Acadians, similar to the one I find in the French-Canadian community. Yet any educated Maritimer will hold, as I do, that the responsibility of the English-speaking community is far greater than that of the French Canadians, and that something must be done, by the English-speaking people, to offset the injustices of the past.

This idea should be taken by journalists and educationists, by preachers and teachers, by men of business and government; it should be instilled in the minds of younger and older; it should be realized in something concrete and practical.

I feel I am not going too far in making a suggestion. What is it that the Acadians want? They do not claim the land and property that have been taken from their ancestors. They do not ask for the punishment, even post-mortem, of the offenders. They would be willing to forget the past, if the present situation were settled.

Their main need and want is the right to enjoy their own French culture, as expressed by language and art. This natural and fundamental right cannot be longer denied. And where can they learn their language and their culture, if it is not in the schools? And what schools, if not theirs? And what teaching, if not the best?[1]

Someone may say here: As long as many Acadians are satisfied with the learning of the English language, why should we raise the issue?

I must say frankly that I cannot agree with that idea. It means adding much, too much, to a group's responsibility. No man of British blood or mind should assume the puilt of forcing a group to abandon its culture and its language, and above all the French tongue and civilization. That would be the might of "unbritishness".

1. The program for French-Canadian schools in Nova Scotia devisedby the Council of Public Instruction on the recommendation of a special committee of Acadian-French educators, provides for French language and literature from Grades 1 to 10. English is taught concurrently in all grades, orally in Grades 1 and 2, then gradually from the prescribed English readers. The remaining school subjects are taught through the medium of French to the end of Grade 4. From Grades 5 to 8 inclusive the medium of instruction may be either English or French. From Grade 9 on the medium of instruction is English.

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