

(December 16th, 1912.)

The Port of Montreal.

BY MR. C. C. BALLANTYNE.*

AT a regular meeting of the Canadian Club held on the 16th Dec., 1912, Mr. C. C. Ballantyne said:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—I must thank you, sir, first of all for the very flattering manner in which you have been good enough to introduce me to so many of my friends, and also to the members of this flourishing Club.

I have chosen for my subject to-day, gentlemen, "The Port of Montreal," but that is really a misnomer, because it should be called "One of Canada's National Ports," inasmuch as the millions that have been spent for its development during the past fifteen or sixteen years are monies we got from the Dominion Government, and you, gentlemen, who live in the Queen City and those who live all over the Dominion of Canada naturally have as much interest in the port of Montreal as the commissioners themselves or those who happen to live there.

And I want to congratulate the people of Toronto, and especially the Harbor Commissioners, upon the very comprehensive scheme you have laid out for the development of your own harbor, at an outlay of nineteen million dollars. I think this work will be perfectly safe in the hands of the gentlemen you have so wisely chosen to be your Harbor Commissioners, and I look forward to seeing not only the port of Toronto but the whole city very greatly improved by the large development plan you are to undertake here.

I think, sir, that a brief sketch from the date of the organization of the Harbor Commission of Montreal to the present time, might be of interest to you. The Board at present consists of three Commissioners, Major George Washington Stephens, Mr. L. E. Geoffrion, and your humble servant. But I will go farther back than the time of the present Commission, more especially as at the close of the year we retire from

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office. The Harbor Commission is an old institution indeed, dating back to the year 1830. Strange to say, as far back as that the Governor in Council brought in an Act to carry on certain improvements wanted in the port of Montreal, and appointed a Harbor Commission composed of three men, Hon. George Moffat, Jules Quesnel, and Captain Robert S. Piper.

These gentlemen remained in office just six years, like the present Board, going out in 1836. The Board remained the same in number, three, until 1855, when it was increased to five. It remained of that size till 1873, when the Board was increased to nine. This was its number till 1894, when the Board was again increased to eleven members, six of whom were appointed by the Dominion Government. The Mayor of Montreal had a seat on the Board, and the other members were representatives of the Montreal Board of Trade, the Montreal Corn Exchange, the shipping interests, and the Chambre de Commerce.

Now, you see, gentlemen, that was a large and unwieldy Board of eleven members; and the Dominion Government was in control in effect, as six of the eleven received their appointment at the hands of the Dominion Government. The Mayor held office only during his term as Mayor, the same as the representatives from the commercial bodies. I have no reflection whatever to cast upon the able men who composed the Harbor Board of 1894 and following years to the day we assumed office on the 2nd of January, 1907, but that the meetings should all be in harmony could not be expected. You all know how everything dragged on in connection with the port of Montreal. I may say, sir, that things were in a deplorable state when we assumed office on the 2nd of January, 1907. The port of Montreal was literally steeped in politics, and the port lacked the facilities necessary, so that the country and the port lost a great deal of trade, owing to the fact that these men were hampered with politics and all that goes with it,—patronage, and so on.

Therefore the Dominion Government decided to abolish the old Board of eleven members, and appoint the present Harbor Commissioners, three in number, and to give the new Board a perfectly free hand to carry on the much needed improvements in the port of Montreal entirely free from political influences of any kind.

Myself and my colleagues did not seek office. We were all busy men, and while we appreciated the honor we were not anxious to add to our duties, because we rather shrank back from so heavy a task as was set before us, and to do our own

business as well. But anyway, the Hon. Mr. Brodeur stuck at us for six months, and we finally accepted office.

I can never forget the impression upon the minds of my colleagues and myself, as we entered that office of the Harbor Commission after our appointment. That building was more like a haunted house than any other kind; there had been no new furniture put there for twenty years; the carpet was worn out; the place was all dingy and dirty. One of the first things we did was to ask the caretaker, who had held that office for twenty years, to hand in his resignation, and we got a new one. Also we had a painter come in and fix up the place.

That week, when we came to look at the port itself, we found things in a most confused state. We found that a contract had been let in 1904 for the erection of fourteen double-deck steel sheds, but that at that time, three years later, only five had been partially completed. The Government of the day had a representative engineer, and the Harbor Commissioners had one also, and whatever the Government engineer would approve of the Harbor Commissioners' engineer would not agree with, and *vice versa*. The contractors were delayed so long, that they presented a bill of damages against the Commission, which they presented in our first week, for \$720,000, for loss of time, advance in the price of steel, etc. This claim was settled afterwards by the Board after a small committee of experts had looked thoroughly into the whole situation, for the sum of \$335,000, and from that date to this there has not been one dollar of extras in connection with the completion of these fourteen steel sheds and the new ones that have been erected since. We made up our minds that the first step we should have to take was to ask Mr. John Kennedy, who was also almost totally blind, to resign his position as engineer. Another thing was that the contractor for the steel sheds hated our former engineer so much that they would not meet under the same roof with him.

We paid the contractors \$5,000 per shed extra, and put in concrete floors so that when the vessels arrived in the spring their cargoes would not be unloaded in mud. We hastened on the work, and got the sheds finished; had the wharves paved, and much more done.

When we found it necessary to do our work on a comprehensive plan, the same as you are doing here, to make sure of the work being done rightly we sent over to England, and brought out one of the best harbor engineers we could get. He stayed with us for the season of navigation. We asked him

to furnish us with a twenty-five-year development plan. We also asked our own engineer, Mr. Cowie, to do the same. Our engineer did not see the plan of the English engineer, nor did the English engineer see our engineer's plan. So when these two big plans were ready the Harbor Commissioners thought it wise to get a Board of seven of the most capable engineers throughout the country to examine them. They took several weeks to look into the plans carefully, and finally made the unanimous decision, I am glad to tell you, recommending the plan of the Board's own Chief Engineer, Mr. Frederick W. Cowie. (Applause.)

As soon as we had this decision, we sent the plan to Ottawa, because all plans have to go to the Minister of Marine and Fisheries. And I want to say this, gentlemen, at this time: when the late Minister of Marine and Fisheries asked us to become Harbor Commissioners, we met Hon. Mr. Brodeur and Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and said that on one condition only would we accept office,—we must have an entirely free hand, we were not going to be hampered by political influences from Ottawa or from any other direction; and I am very happy indeed to tell you that during all the time the late Government was in power we were not interfered with in the slightest degree whatever. So, rightly or wrongly, the responsibility must rest on the shoulders of the Commissioners alone.

One of the first acts of the Commissioners on coming into office was to call the permanent staff together, and Major Stephens told them politics was a thing of the past, and that any man using his influence to get promotion or in any other direction would be immediately dismissed. The Commissioners confirmed this by a letter to the head of each department, such as this one to Mr. F. W. Cowie, the Chief Engineer:

Dear Sir,—Please issue an order to the heads of your different departments that any man using political influence to retain his position, or to aid in his promotion, will be asked at once for his resignation, and let it be distinctly understood from now on that positions on any of the staffs under the present Commission are held only as long as the holder performs efficiently his duties.

Now, I am not going to touch on anything political: that is tabooed at all these clubs; but I would just like to say this, with your kind permission: that the best people in the city of Montreal, in the transportation business and other lines, say that the work we have done has been carried on on broad national lines; entirely free from politics. And you also know

that the Public Service Commission gave us a clean bill of health a few days ago. It employed one of the best firms of auditors to report to the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, and I am very pleased to say they gave us a perfectly clean bill of health, and their report says that everything is carried on on proper business lines. (Applause.)

I also want to say that the present Minister of Marine, Mr. Hazen, has not interfered with us or our work. So we have received the most loyal support, both from the former Minister and from the present Minister of Marine and Fisheries.

Now, we found it necessary to organize. For example, before the present Board took office all the different railroads did all their own shunting at the wharves, with the result that there was great congestion and confusion. One railway would block the others, so the people in general and the steamship companies were not getting the service they ought to get. So we created a Traffic Department to do all the shunting on the wharves. Of course we charge the railway companies so much per car for every car going on the wharves. The Commission owns eight locomotives now, and handled this year 120,000 freight cars. So we found that a very good thing to have inaugurated.

We also organized a Purchasing Department, and such a thing as patronage is entirely unknown in the Harbor Commissioners' office. We have a Purchasing Department, just as you gentlemen have, and large things, such as steel, are generally called for by tender, and the contracts are let for the gross amount to the lowest bidder. We have had a telephone exchange put in, and a system of reports prepared, so we can keep closely in touch with all departments.

We found also that the port of Montreal was losing the heavy weights, because there was no facility for handling them, so that they went by Boston or New York. So we placed an order for a 75-ton floating crane. During the past season 633 heavy pieces were lifted by this crane, which would otherwise have been shipped by American ports.

We found it necessary to increase the Harbor Commissioners' equipment in other ways. I may say also with regard to revenue here, that the only charge is a rental which the steamship companies pay for the double-deck steel sheds, at only the actual rate of interest the Dominion Government charges the Harbor Commissioners. Sometimes you hear people say that the port of Montreal is a very dear port, that one is charged there more than at New York, Boston, and other ports. We know all about the rates at these others, and I can

truthfully say that I do not know of any port that gives as good facilities and as cheap as Montreal. (Applause.)

The big bulk of our revenue does not come from the steamship companies, only about one-eighth of it is from that source. The balance is from wharfages on out-bound and in-bound freight, charges for handling freight cars on the wharves, and rentals of sheds and spaces to coal companies, etc. The revenue this year has been about a million dollars.

The money we require to carry out large works, what we call capital expenditures, previously was raised by issuing debentures, but since 1896 the Harbor Commissioners have borrowed it from the Dominion Government, and paid interest on it right along. The interest amounts to a little over \$500,000 a year. I do not know whether my good friend, Mr. Gourlay, is going to pay interest on the \$6,000,000 he has borrowed from the Government; but no doubt he will. (Laughter.)

The Harbor Commissioners of Montreal have had advanced to them by the Dominion Government since 1896 the sum of seventeen million dollars, of which \$10,500,000 has been spent by the present Board during its term of office.

To show how we have increased business by installing modern plant and machinery, just as you gentlemen find in your own businesses, I am pleased to inform you that during the past six years the increased port facilities have induced the following new steamship lines to come to the port of Montreal: the White Star Line, that has in its fleet the two magnificent passenger liners, the "Laurentic" and "Megantic"; the Canada Line, between Montreal and Rotterdam and Hamburg; the Canadian Northern S.S. Co., between Montreal and Bristol; the Cunard Line, between Montreal, Southampton and London; the New Zealand Line, and also a French Line of direct service between Montreal and France that will inaugurate the opening of navigation in 1913.

But, gentlemen, we have not the facilities that we ought to have. We have fifteen double-deck steel sheds and four one-story concrete sheds. But that is not a sufficient number. If we had six more double-deck sheds they would all be in use now. We have had everything pushed forward as rapidly as possible, but you understand that with only seven months in our season, from the first of May, our time is short; but we have 2,400 to 3,000 men constantly working.

We have been able to get very large cold meat shipments from across the line, especially from Chicago. This is owing to the Harbor Commissioners' tracks being placed alongside

of each permanent freight shed. It takes only a minute to put the meat from the refrigerator car into the refrigerated compartment of the hold of the steamer, thus doing away with any liability to atmospheric or climatic interference. These meats command a higher price when they reach the other side, owing to better facilities provided in the port of Montreal, than when shipped by American ports.

Another product which comes largely to Montreal is nitrate, which comes from the west coast of Chili. Instead of being sent through the port of New Orleans, and transferred to the small Mississippi steamers, and afterwards put into box cars to be delivered to the DuPont Company in Illinois, it now comes via Montreal, being there transferred to the steamers of the Powder Company, and they find it very much better, notwithstanding the distance of 12,500 miles.

Now I just wanted to say a word about the grain facilities of the port of Montreal. When the Commissioners assumed office, there was just one elevator belonging to the Harbor Board, No. 1, but the grain conveyer system had not been installed, and less than 500,000 bushels of grain was handled in this elevator in 1907. In 1912 more than 16,000,000 bushels was handled in No. 1 elevator alone. We have grain conveyer galleries stretching from the elevator over the tops of those sheds; and in each are rubber belts, most of them produced by my friend, Mr. Candee, here, so I don't need to say anything about their superior quality. They have a capacity of 15,000 bushels per hour for each belt, and the grain is tripped off the belt into dock spouts and put into the steamer. There are seventeen ocean berths, so that each steamer may lie at her berth and be loaded and a steamer does not need to move while being loaded. I do not know any other harbor that can handle grain as quickly and cheaply.

A new concrete elevator, No. 2, has been erected, the most modern and best equipped on the continent, with a storage capacity of 2,600,000 bushels. And we have just had plans approved at Ottawa for adding to the capacity of No. 1 elevator a million and a half bushels. So by the end of next year the port of Montreal will have a total storage capacity, including the Grand Trunk Elevator "B," of six million bushels.

Our elevator No. 2 is fireproof, and so designed that it can take grain from two lake vessels at the same time, as there is a jetty, so a steamer can lie on each side. Also we can take in grain from railroad cars, and send it out by the grain conveyer system to the seventeen ocean vessels. The total handling capacity is three million bushels per day, in and out. So

you see the port of Montreal is not lacking so far as storage capacity is concerned for grain.

But we no sooner get over one difficulty than we are confronted with another! I suppose it will always be so in the transportation business. The terminal facilities on the Great Lakes and at Quebec, Halifax and St. John are entirely inadequate. The matter that concerns me most is this: The West produces something like 200,000,000 bushels of wheat alone, besides large quantities of oats, barley and flax, and I don't know how all that grain is going to follow Canadian routes and get to ocean ports. Take last season, for instance: our elevator was full of grain; the Grand Trunk elevator, with a capacity of a million bushels, was full also; the Harbor Commissioners' fleet of floating elevators was ready waiting to elevate the grain from the lake steamers, had there been ocean steamers there in sufficient numbers to take the grain away; but now they can get so much better rates for freight, that the great difficulty we find is to get ocean steamer space to take the grain away. Our floating elevators were free and lying alongside, but the lake boats were unable to discharge their cargo. The consequence is that several were withdrawn from the route, and that means so much greater difficulty for the rest.

I do not like to impose any more hard work upon my loyal friend and hard worker, Mr. Gourlay, but I would like if you would have your Association take up the question of marine insurance rates, which was taken up at Ottawa at the meeting of the Manufacturers' Association. You, gentlemen, are aware that no tramp vessels come to Montreal, only regular liners come there. One reason is that Lloyds charge higher rates on the hulls of tramp vessels than on those of regular liners; although the insurance rates also are higher than on regular liners going to New York and Boston. So I would like to see the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the Harbor Commissions, and Boards of Trade, put their heads together to see if they could not organize a Canadian Lloyds. The Government is willing to co-operate. And I would like to see tramp vessels get a rebate of the difference between the insurance rate now paid on regular liners and what they pay; because unless something is done to get more vessels I don't see much use spending millions and millions on terminal facilities. I hope before very long this difficulty will be overcome, so that our transportation routes will be able to carry not only all the grain grown in Canada, but also a great proportion of that grown in the United States.

I would like also to see the Dominion Government proceed as quickly as possible to deepen the Welland Canal to 24 feet. We have heard so much about this naval question lately that other things seem forgotten. I have not heard a single word about the deepening of the Welland Canal to 24 feet, or about the building of the Georgian Bay Canal. I would like to see those matters taken up. We cannot afford to lose any time. If Canada wants to hold her great carrying trade, she must provide as quickly as possible to build the Georgian Bay Canal and to deepen the Welland, rush her transcontinental railroads through, enlarge all her transportation facilities, and do all she can to provide facilities to take the grain away.

I have not any right to make suggestions to the Government at all, but I would like to see a Commission of three men appointed, one member to represent the grain men, one a transportation expert, and the third a business man. I would like the Dominion Government to say to these Commissioners: "Study the transportation routes of Canada carefully. We want you to go to the Pacific coast, and find out whether it is practicable for Vancouver to become a great export shipping city, whether the prairie grain can be carried across the two ranges of mountains to the Pacific; also whether it is practicable or feasible for us to ship by the Hudson Bay route." I am free to say, that it is all right to build a railroad there, but I have never met a transportation or steamship man who considers the Hudson Bay route practicable or feasible. I think it is a shame for any man to talk of spending millions of dollars on terminal facilities either at Fort Nelson or to Fort Churchill, until we make perfectly sure that grain boats can be sent by that route. These steamship men say you would need a special class of steamers, and that the route is so dangerous that no one could get steamers to take the grain away by that route. So this Commission that the Government would appoint, would also see what terminals are necessary at the head of the Great Lakes, on the Georgian Bay, and at the sea ports; also carefully investigate to ascertain how Canadian grain is carried at a lower rate from Fort William to Buffalo than from Fort William to Canadian ports. All these are only links in the transportation chain, but all these inquiries are necessary if the Government is to have concrete information before it spends millions on terminal facilities, which would be unwise unless we are sure they are going to be useful to carry our grain. There is more grain grown now in Canada, and will be grown, than all the ports of Canada can possibly handle, so if it can be shipped by Vancouver and Hudson Bay,

there, will be plenty of cargoes offering. All I would ask is that the Government should not spend millions of dollars on ports that will not help to carry our grain.

The Harbor Commissioners of Montreal made arrangements with the famous British firm of Vickers, Limited, to establish itself in the city of Montreal. The firm was formerly Vickers, Sons & Maxim, but was changed, and is now the Vickers, Limited. We have reclaimed from the bed of the river by dredging some thirty acres of land, and on this the Canadian Vickers, Ltd., is going to erect a large and modern shipbuilding plant. This firm is going to be able to build merchant marine vessels from the smallest to the greatest, and I may remark that it is going to be able to build also war vessels of all sorts and sizes, from a submarine up to a super-Dreadnought. (Applause.) I proceed no farther on that point, because I am on very delicate ground. (Laughter.) But I think I can safely say that the company is there and ready for this business.

We have also made arrangements with the Canadian Vickers, Ltd., to build a floating drydock. His Royal Highness recently unveiled the drydock "Duke of Connaught," which will have a lifting capacity of 27,500 tons. When a vessel requires repairs, it will go into the dock, and by compressed air the floating dock will be raised, bringing the ship with it. There are twenty vessels using the St. Lawrence to-day which are so large that the drydock at Point Levis could not accommodate them at all, so I am sure you are glad that the new floating drydock at Montreal will be big enough not only to take these large steamers, but also will have a capacity equal to lifting so large a tonnage as 27,500 tons.

Now I find my time is up. I have only referred, in a very brief manner, to the work carried out during our term of office. And I want to say that though very reluctant to accept office, I have spent six of the happiest years of my life in the work of the Harbor Commission in association with my two very able colleagues. During these six years we never had a cross word and never quarreled. And together with our loyal and efficient staff we have all pulled together as one man to do our duty to develop that national port of Canada with the country's money. (Applause.)