

(January 18, 1909.)

The Resources of the Peace River District.

BY MR. FRED. S. LAWRENCE, F.R.G.S.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club on the foregoing subject Mr. Fred. S. Lawrence, F.R.G.S., said:

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Canadian Club of Toronto,—I fully appreciate the great honor you have conferred upon me in inviting me to address you to-day. I come to speak to you as a pioneer—one who has spent thirty years in the Peace River district. And this is largely responsible for the hesitant manner I have in speaking English. I speak, I say, as a pioneer, and as a young man; as one, too, who feels he has not spent his time in that district in vain. I want to tell you of that great country, and seek to dispel some of the illusions that seem to exist concerning that far-off and frozen region.

Thirty years ago the people of Eastern Canada believed that there was practically nothing west of the great lakes. But this mistaken idea has rapidly changed—and there is room for further expansion. Let me briefly mention the mineral resources in the district north of the Peace River, where it is supposed to be eternally frozen. Along all the streams from the Rocky Mountains, from the international boundary to the Arctic Ocean gold is found. It is said \$120,000,000 have been taken out of the Klondyke and the Yukon region. Who can predict the vast wealth that lies hidden in the northern part of British Columbia?

On the east coast of the Rockies and along the streams ever and anon there are outcroppings of coal, from 6 inches to 28 feet, and the largest single bed of coal in the world lies on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. Sir Alexander Mackenzie, who explored the Mackenzie River, found beds of coal on fire. Many of them are burning now. And they will burn for hundreds of years before the supply will be burned out. Besides this there are springs of crude petroleum. Canada will shortly look to her northwestern possessions for oil. You will not need to go to Texas. You will be able to

get soaked in oil in your own country. It has been estimated by the government official geologist that one bed of asphalt in the Athabaska region contains 6,400 million tons of pure bitumin. It could have supplied the United States and Canada for 30 years and still have plenty left. In addition there are indications of an enormous supply of natural gas. The largest well in the world was found not far from the asphalt deposits. It was sunk eleven years ago to a depth of 800 feet and left to exhaust. But the following year found the well flowing as freely as ever. Someone set fire to it and you could hear the roar for one mile, while the flames reached from 65 to 80 feet in the air. A great amount of all this product could well be used for cheap fuel. It would solve the problem for manufacturing industries to be opened up. Besides, there is an abundance of gypsum, mica and other kindred commodities.

The timber is plentiful. On the Mackenzie River spruce is growing to a diameter of 2 feet. I have seen some that exceeded 4 feet.

Opening a map Mr. Lawrence pointed out the various localities to which he had alluded. He prophesied a great future for the whole country indicated, saying it was a fact that north of the railway there was more choice agricultural land than in the whole of the land which was settled west of Winnipeg. In other words there were sixty-five million acres of choice agricultural lands north of the railway, and only sixty-three million acres settled west of Winnipeg. At present there was only a handful of white people in the Peace River and Mackenzie districts, yet business to the amount of over a million dollars was done annually.

Mr. Lawrence owns a flour mill some 700 miles north of Edmonton. It turns out flour by the roller process, is lighted by electricity and modern in every respect. On his farm he grows wheat which goes over seventy bushels to the acre. In his garden he has over twenty-five varieties of flowers, and every variety of vegetables, including tomatoes, squash etc. Wild fruits grow in abundance.

The district has the greatest inland fisheries in North America, lakes like Great Bear Lake and Great Slave Lake all teeming with fish. Of timber also there is plenty, one-half of the country north of the railway as far as the tree line being covered with poplar, spruce and birch.

Athabaska district had an asphalt deposit, estimated at six billion, four hundred million tons, and the country was rich in gold, coal and natural gas.

In concluding Mr. Lawrence urged the importance of the introduction of reindeer into the Peace River district, as an assistance in carrying the mails.

The railways, he stated, had already survey parties looking over the ground.