

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD OF CANADA

Extract from the Minutes of the
Meeting of November 28, 29, and 30, 1976

Approved by the Minister
May 31, 1976.

ph file
Archibald Fraser

*that Archibald Fraser is of national
historic significance and should be
commemorated by plaque at Edmunston,
N.B.*

RECEIVED
RECU

24 08 87-

AREA OFFICE/BUREAU DU DISTRICT
HISTORIC SITES, NEW BRUNSWICK
LIEUX HISTORIQUES, NOUVEAU BRUNSWICK
SAINT JOHN/SAINT JEAN, N. B.

CATEGORY: SCPEENING NOTES -
RESTRICTED

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD OF CANADA

TITLE: Archibald Fraser (1869-1932)

SOURCE: Staff Report (William Russell)

20.1

Summary

Archibald Fraser came to prominence during an important period of transition in the forest product industry. The age of the lumber "king" was waning; that of the giant corporate enterprise was on the rise. Success in industry hinged, to a degree, upon one's capacity to adapt to the changing business environment of the first three decades of the twentieth century, an era which saw rapid economic expansion, a disruptive world war, recession, returned prosperity, and severe economic depression. The Fraser "empire" developed in the midst of this flux, guided by the "splendid executive ability"¹ of Archibald Fraser, and the "practical knowledge and skill" of his brother, Donald Jr.²

Narrative

Archibald, the eldest son of Donald Fraser, was born 22 April, 1869, in Aberdeen, Scotland.³ In 1873, the Fraser family emigrated to New Brunswick, taking up residence at the New Kincardine settlement in Victoria County.⁴ Donald Fraser attempted farming, but gave up and entered the employ of a lumberman, F.H. Hale.⁵ The lumber industry was not new to Fraser, as his father had been involved in the trade in Aberdeen.⁶

In 1877, the family moved to Liberty Chute (River de Chute) on the Saint John River approximately seventy miles from Fredericton, where Archibald's father entered the lumber business, manufacturing clapboard.⁷ It was here that Archibald received what "limited schooling" he was to acquire.⁸

In 1880, Donald Fraser enlarged his operation, buying a mill in conjunction with Alexander Patterson, and becoming the senior partner of Fraser and Patterson.⁹ He eventually purchased full interests of the company when Patterson died.¹⁰

In 1884, Archibald and his brother Donald Jr. were brought into the business with their father¹¹, but five years later, the Frasers sold their mill at River de Chute. In 1894 they moved to Fredericton, and there built the "Aberdeen" sawmill and established the company Donald Fraser and Sons.¹² When the "Aberdeen" Mill was later destroyed by fire, the Frasers purchased the Victoria Mill at Fredericton.¹³ By the turn of the century, the Fraser holdings were reported to employ between 125 and 130 men,¹⁴ and the Fraser name was on its way to a position of prominence in New Brunswick commercial circles.

In 1902, Archibald Fraser married Agnes Dunbar, of Woodstock, New Brunswick. Two sons and a daughter were born to the Frasers before the untimely death of Agnes on 29 July, 1911.

As stated earlier, the forest industries were in the process of change at the same time that Archibald Fraser rose to prominence. The period 1870-1900 was one of maximum exploitation, one in which a peak was reached and the beginnings of decline became evident.¹⁵ Coupled with this was a larger conscious government involvement in forest policy, greater concern for forest resources, and the beginnings of an interest in conservation. These years also experienced a "marked" growth of native companies,¹⁶ of which the Fraser holdings are an example.

Up to 1900, pine, particularly white pine, was the most important tree. However, the early years of the new century brought a shift to spruce, as the larger stands of pine became increasingly depleted. This change is of considerable importance in the success story of Archibald Fraser. The "sawmill economy"¹⁷ of necessity, required adaptation, and success would come to the entrepreneur who best understood this fact.

The 1900-1913 period was, generally, one of expansion in the New Brunswick lumber industry, a factor which hastened the depletion of remaining pine supplies. The province had been dominated by the British market rather than by the American¹⁸ but exports to Britain peaked in 1903, falling rapidly from that year until 1915.¹⁹ Those to the United States, on the other hand, increased substantially.²⁰ The outbreak of war in 1914 produced an immediate uncertainty in the forest product market which changed to increased production as the war progressed. The industry, like many others, experienced a post-war slump, but was well on the way to returned prosperity by the mid-1920's. However, the base for the new period of expansion during the 1920's was changed. The dramatic move away from lumber and into pulp and paper had begun in earnest. In 1900, pulpwood and wood-pulp exports were valued at \$3,150 and \$639,800 respectively. By 1925, these two commodities, along with newsprint, paper board and wrapping paper, were valued at \$6,401,494. This figure was almost doubled again by 1935.²¹ As a percentage, pulpwood, pulp, and paper products rose from approximately 9.5% of total forest product exports, to over 33% in 1925.²²

By 1921, (the year of the lowest lumber production on record) many lumbermen were disposing of their interests. "These moves marked the end of an era. Men of good judgement decided that the eastern lumber industry was through."²³ Such was not the case with Archibald Fraser, however. Where others did not or could not adapt to the changes of the twentieth century, Fraser did. "As the star of the old lumber kings waned ... [The Frasers] enlarged the scope of their operations until theirs became the leading lumber industry in [the Maritimes]..., and one of the great industrial developments of Eastern Canada."²⁴

The Frasers acquired controlling interests in other lumber companies, and finally merged their interests in 1917, not long after the death of Donald Fraser Sr., to form Fraser Companies Limited. This move is recognized as marking "the transition from a purely mercantile to an essentially capitalistic administration."²⁵ By the merger and the subsequent move into bleached chemical pulps, the Fraser Company is considered to be one of the pioneers in the Canadian pulp industry, an industry which has since increased tremendously in importance, and which promises still further growth in the future.²⁶

Archibald Fraser and his brother had begun the manufacture of pulp in 1915,²⁷ and following the merger, construction was begun on a sulphite mill at Edmundston. By 1919 this mill was in operation, and the following year the Fraser interests took over a pulp mill at Millbank on the Miramichi.²⁸ The Fraser empire had grown to a considerable size by the early 1920's. A 1923 Department of Trade and Commerce study, The Lumber Industry, listed Fraser interests as including sawmills at Magaguadavic and Summit, New Brunswick, in the 1,000,000 - 5,000,000 feet per annum production range; the 5,000,000 - 10,000,000 feet category included Fraser mills at Estcourt, Glendyne and Notre Dame du Lac, Québec; Fraser Companies Limited at Fredericton, and at Campbellton, produced 10,000,000 - 15,000,000 feet; the mills at Newcastle and Plaster Rock, New Brunswick, and Cabano, Québec, had an output of 20,000,000 feet or over.²⁹

By 1925, an easy bleaching sulphite pulp mill had been constructed at Chatham, bringing the physical assets of Fraser Companies Limited to twelve sawmills and two pulp mills. 859 square miles of timber land was being leased from Québec and 1120 square miles from New Brunswick. Over and above this, the Frasers had 210 square miles freehold timber land in Eastern Québec and the Lake Temiscouata district of New Brunswick plus 1200 square miles leased for cutting from private lands in the province.³⁰ It was estimated in 1930, that directly or indirectly, International Paper Company and Fraser Companies Limited held 70% of the leased timber land in New Brunswick.³¹

The first Fraser stock was issued in 1925, and in the same year, a second issue was made in order to buy the Stetson-Cutter Company Limited, with its mills at Saint John and Campbellton.³² 1925 also saw the organization of Fraser Papers Limited, and the start of construction of a paper mill at Madawaska, Maine, across the river from Edmundston. The Fraser interests branched out further, acquiring the Sinclair Lumber Company on the Miramichi in 1927,³³ and merging the Stetson-Cutter Company, Richards Manufacturing Company and Continental Lumber Company into a Fraser subsidiary, the Restigouche Company, in 1928.³⁴ The next year another bleached sulphite mill was opened at Campbellton.³⁵

The 1920's saw not only a radical change in the forest products industries, but also alterations in trading patterns. The British market declined significantly, while American sales rose. The American market dominated the pulp and paper industry of New Brunswick up to the onset of depression in 1929, after which exports to the United States fell and those to Britain increased once more.³⁶

The degree to which the depression affected Archibald Fraser and his burgeoning forest empire poses an interesting controversy. It has been argued that the depression actually destroyed the Frasers, that the financial obligations of the expansion projects of the 1920's caused the Fraser brothers to lose their entire interest in the companies.³⁷ Sources from the depression years fail to substantiate such a claim, however. The newspaper reports at the time of Archibald Fraser's death made no reference to financial problems. In fact, Fraser was eulogized for his contributions both to humanity,³⁸ and to the development of New Brunswick pulp and paper industry. From various reports, Archibald Fraser's last years were far removed from economic

distress. He died unexpectedly of a heart attack at the age of sixty-three, while on a hunting excursion at his lodge at Nictau, Victoria County, on 10 October, 1932.³⁹ Archibald Fraser was survived by his second wife (he was re-married, 25 June, 1930, to Evelyn Whyte of Edinburgh, Scotland),⁴⁰ two sons, a daughter, and his brother Donald.⁴¹

At the time of his death, Archibald Fraser held offices in various corporate interests. From 1928-32, he had been a Director of the Royal Bank of Canada.⁴² He was President of Fraser Companies Limited (described in the Saint John Telegraph-Journal 11 October, 1932, as "one of the largest and most far-flung lumber, pulp and paper firms on the North American continent"), Fraser Paper Limited, Restigouche Company Limited, and the Snowflake Lime Limited of Saint John. As well, Fraser was a Director of the New Brunswick Telephone Company, the Maritime Trust Company of Saint John and Rolland Paper Company.⁴³

The name of Fraser Companies Limited continued to figure in the forest industry long after Archibald's death. In 1957, for instance, the company was declared to be in a strong financial position, net earnings having more than doubled since 1949.⁴⁴ At that time the main mill was still located at Edmundston, while paper products were produced by the wholly-owned subsidiary in Madawaska, Maine.⁴⁵ At that time, Fraser Companies and subsidiaries owned or controlled approximately 5500 square miles of timberland in New Brunswick and Québec.⁴⁶

Archibald Fraser's advance has been described as "meteoric".⁴⁷ "He started on the bottom rung of the ladder, and by sheer zeal and ability forced himself to the top."⁴⁸ His career spanned years of rapid change, and it would seem that much of his success lay in the fact that he was flexible and adapted well in the transition from a sawmill to a pulpmill forest economy. Archibald Fraser pioneered in this swing away from the pine, grasping the significance of the black spruce as a raw material suited to and waiting for the manufacture of paper in New Brunswick.⁴⁹ His is the story of the successful native Canadian businessman.

Notes

1. Telegraph-Journal, Saint John, N. Br. - 12 October, 1932.
2. Ibid., 12 October, 1932.
3. Ibid., 5 April, 1937.
4. Biographical Review - Province of New Brunswick - (ed) I.J. Allen (Boston: Biographical Review Publishing Co., 1900), p. 462.
5. Ibid., p. 462.
6. Ibid., p. 462.
7. Telegraph-Journal, 5 April, 1937-
8. Ibid., 5 April, 1937.
9. Biographical Review, p. 462.
10. Ibid., p. 462.
11. Telegraph-Journal, 5 April, 1937.
12. Biographical Review, p. 462.
13. E. Wright, The Saint John River and Its Tributaries, (Wolfville, N.S., 1966), p. 178.
14. Biographical Review, p. 462.
15. A.R.M. Lower, W.A. Carrothers, S.A. Saunders, The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest. (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1938), p. 161.
16. Ibid., p. 161.
17. J.M. Gibson, in History of Forest Management in New Brunswick, claims that the "sawmill economy" in forest products existed from 1870 to the first World War.
18. Lower et al, Assault, p. 166
19. By 1915, they were only 60% of what they had been in 1903. Lower et al, Assault, p. 188.
20. Lower et al, Assault, p. 348.
21. Ibid., p. 349.
22. Ibid., p. 356.
23. Ibid., p. 194.
24. Telegraph-Journal, 12 October, 1932.
25. Ibid., 5 April., 1937.
26. 'Maximus' "Fraser Companies Limited," Atlantic Advocate. #7, April, 1957, p. 58.

27. Who's Who in Canada, 1923-24, p. 1361.
28. Telegraph-Journal, 5 April, 1937.
29. Canada. Dept. Trade & Commerce, The Lumber Industry, 1923, pp. 60-62.
30. Telegraph-Journal, 5 April, 1937.
31. Lower et al, Assault, p. 349.
32. Telegraph-Journal, 5 April, 1937.
33. Ibid., 5 April , 1937
34. Ibid., 5 April, 1937.
35. Ibid., 5 April, 1937.
36. Lower et al, Assault, p. 356.
37. Wright, Saint John River, p. 179.
38. Telegraph-Journal, 12 October, 1932.
39. Ibid., 11 October, 1932.
40. Who's Who In Canada, 1931-32, p. 211.
41. Telegraph-Journal, 11 October, 1932.
42. C. Ince, The Royal Bank of Canada, p. 129.
43. Telegraph-Journal, 11 October, 1932.
44. 'Maximus', Atlantic Advocate, 1957, p. 59.
45. Ibid., p. 59.
46. Ibid., p. 58.
47. Telegraph-Journal, 11 October, 1932.
48. Ibid., 11 October, 1932.
49. Ibid., 5 April, 1937.

Bibliography

- Biographical Review - Province of New Brunswick -
edited by 2. Allen Jack. Boston: Biographical Review
Publishing Co., 1900.
- Canada - Department of Trade and Commerce, The LUMBER
Industry in 1923.
- Gibson, J.M., History of Forest Management in New
Brunswick
- Hopkins, Castell, Canadian Annual Review, 1933 -
"Canadian Obituaries."
- Ince, C., The Royal Bank of Canada, - Appendix 2.
- Lower, A.R.M. et al., The North American Assault on
The Canadian Forest.
- 'Maximus', "Fraser Companies Limited," Atlantic
Advocate, #7, April, 1957, pp. 58-59.
- Prominent Men of Canada, 1931-32.
- Phillips, F.H. "New Brunswick Lumber Kings" - Saint
John Telegraph-Journal, 5April, 1937.
- Telegraph-Journal, Saint John, New Brunswick. 11
October, 1932, and 12 October, 1932
- Thomas, L.O., The Province of New Brunswick. Its
Natural Resources and Development. 1930.
- Who's Who In Canada, 1923-24 - p. 1361
1930-31 - p. 211.
- "The Wood Industries of New Brunswick in 1897" in
The Wood Industries of Canada, London, 1897.
- Wright, E., The Saint John River and Its Tributaries
Wolfville, N.S., 1966.