

BOARD OF TRADE BEGINNINGS

Mary Ball. 1721

In most years when the Board of Trade officers are installed the Museum is asked for details about the history of the organisation. It is therefore perhaps of interest to discuss its origin and early struggles.

When the City was incorporated in 1893 Kamloops began to develop a sense of civic responsibility. There were occasional lapses - as when Council meetings were repeatedly cancelled for lack of a quorum - but the advantages of organised corporate action were becoming obvious.

At that time - and indeed this has continued up to the present day - the majority of City Council were businessmen, and the promotion of trade and industry and of a growing market formed a considerable part of their agenda. But many felt that there was scope for a larger group to promote business growth, unhampered by the Council's need to deal with mundane essentials such as public utilities and assessment rolls.

The prime mover towards the formation of a Board of Trade was Martino Gaglietto. He had arrived at the end of 1888 to open a bakery with F. Scala, and soon added a large general store on Main Street (Victoria West), with a smaller branch in East Kamloops, as the new settlement spreading from the C.P.R. station was called.

He was an enterprising man; his advertisements had quite a modern flavor, and he seems to have been the first in Kamloops to introduce give-away gimmicks, including a house as prize in ~~the~~^{his} 1895 Christmas grocery lottery. Eventually his reach apparently exceeded his grasp; he was declared bankrupt in 1898 after many charges and recriminations, and left the district with his reputation sadly tarnished.

However, he was highly regarded in 1894, and called a meeting in the City Council Chamber which was attended by most of the notables in town. Mayor R. H. Lee (surveyor and engineer) was asked to preside; aldermen present were R. E. Smith (general store), J. J. Carment (commission agent), and Dr. Ed Furrer (C.P.R. and hospital practitioner), together with city clerk M. J. McIver and city solicitor W. H. Whittaker, who served as secretary.

Others present included ex-mayor Dr. Sibree Clark (coroner and

Druggist), James McIntosh (owner of Shuswap Mill, the waterworks, electricity plant, and most of the property in the "old town"), C. R. Slater (manager of the Bank of B.C.), J. M. Harper (general store), J. H. Morrison (butcher), Thomas Roadley (saddler and auctioneer), A. H. Bain (confectioner), J. O. Grahame (H.B.C. manager), J. E. Saucier (jeweller and electrician), Thomas Costley (liveryman), W. T. Slavin (bookstore and telephone exchange), J. S. Bennet (prospector and assayer), and J. H. Russell (hotel owner).

Gaglietto outlined his conviction that a properly organised body could improve trading facilities in Kamloops. The Dominion Act regarding Boards of Trade was read, as many were uncertain as to their functions and powers. Grahame and several others felt that pressure could be brought to bear on the C.P.R., whose high freight rates had incensed ranchers and city businessmen alike.

The only man to speak against forming a board was McIntosh, an ultraconservative, who felt that Boards in Vancouver, Victoria, and Calgary had accomplished little, and that the time was not yet ripe for one in Kamloops. This was almost word for word the speech he had made, successfully, against incorporation in 1888, when his own business interests ~~were his own business interests~~ were at stake.

This time too his influence was apparently felt. A committee was appointed to investigate further, but nothing further appeared in the Inland Sentinel until December 1895, when another meeting was held and another committee formed. Freight rates were still a running sore, but particular impetus was given by the C.P.R. store car, which was selling to employees and to ranchers on the line, to the chagrin of Kamloops merchants.

Enthusiasm now ran high. Another meeting was called in the following week, the committee reported favorably, and a charter was applied for. A constitution was drawn up, using that of the Vancouver Board as the basis with minor modifications, and a wheel hub, to designate the Hub City, was chosen as crest. The charter arrived in February 1896, and the B.C. Inland Board of Trade was duly formed.

The first annual meeting of the B.C. Inland Board of Trade was held in February 1896. In view of his earlier opposition it is perhaps odd that James McIntosh was elected president, but he well knew when to swim with the tide, and his nickname of King of Kamloops suggests that people had grown into the habit of giving him authority. He had already headed the Pioneer Benevolent Society, St. Andrews and Valedonian Society, the Hospital Board, the Fire Brigade, and was first City Magistrate.

R. E. Smith was vice-president, with secretary P. A. Jenns (an insurance agent), and councillors J. S. Smith (bakery and grocery), J. O. Grahame, A. S. McArthur (general store), M. P. Gordon (furniture store), James Vair (hardware merchant), J. R. Michell (E.G. Prior's manager), W. T. Slavin, and R. G. McPherson (druggist). Several of them were also serving as aldermen.

C. H. Strutt (insurance and real estate agent) was appointed delegate to an impending convention on western development held in Winnipeg, and various committee work was found for most of the other charter members.

The entrance fee for membership was \$2.50, with subscriptions \$4.00 per annum, payable quarterly in advance. Some of the income was spent on delegates' expenses, and some for office supplies, ^{for} printing the constitution, and for the seal.

Initial excitement engendered weekly meetings and high attendance, with new members like William Fortune of Tranquille and Michael Sullivan of the North Thompson joining their city brethren in ~~to~~ what quickly became an intermittent battle with the C.P.R.

The matter of the railway's travelling store was soon resolved, since the C.P.R. agreed to refrain from sales in Kamloops' trading area. They were firm, however, about freight rates, despite many examples cited by the Board of apparent discrimination. It seems, for instance, that freight from the east was often based on the rate to Vancouver; Kamloops merchants not only had to pay this but also the rate back from Vancouver to Kamloops.

Another favorite topic was the need for a bridge across the

Thompson and complaints about the ferry; letters were written to the local M.P.P. George B. Martin, who was also Minister of Lands and Works, but the Government apparently had no available money.

Sadly, the first burst of energy soon petered out. A meeting in mid-April was little more than a monologue by President McIntosh. Most of the correspondence had been lost in a fire, but the minutes and cash book had been saved.

Perhaps enthusiasm for the Board waned as wild excitement over Kamloops' first experience of party politics mounted. The young Liberal Hewitt Bostock was challenging the long-standing incumbent, J. A. Mara, and all energies were devoted to this battle royal, eventually won by the newcomer, to Mara's great surprise and disgust.

Kamloops at this time was very young, not only as a city but also in the average age of its population. This may account for the somewhat irresponsible shifting of interest from one focus to another before anything useful could be achieved. It is easy to be wise with middle-aged hindsight, but one gets the impression, particularly in reading of the Board of Trade proceedings, that Kamloops was running in every direction at once with the gay abandon of youth; it had yet to learn the virtues of steady concentration. New people, new organisations, and new ideas always drew crowds - until the next new fad took their fancy.

However, the Board survived. In February 1897 Dr. Sibree Clarke, who had been Kamloops' first mayor, was elected president, and it was agreed to hold general meetings only quarterly - a far cry from the initial weekly assemblies. The Council met erratically, but quite frequently, and perhaps handled business more efficiently than had been done by full meetings.

Most of the topics that year were those also dealt with by City Council - the needs for street improvements, a telegraph line to Nicola, a cold storage plant, and offices for other government departments in the proposed new Post Office. Even here there was no general agreement, since some members wanted it further east than the site finally used - now the Christian Hostel.

During 1897 the Board of Trade gave active help, at short notice, in organising the celebrations for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. W. T. Clavin prepared an attractive float carrying Miss Douglas as queen and four little girls as attendants; this display was perhaps in part the inspiration which led to inaugurating May Day festivities six years later.

Later that year the Klondike gold rush was the dominant theme; many Kamloops men went north to seek their fortunes - and some few never returned. Meantime merchants were very eager to capture the trade in outfitting miners, and the Board started a big campaign boosting the Overland route to Yukon up the North Thompson, by reviving the old Telegraph Trail.

As always, a committee was appointed; this time it was very busy, with F. J. Deane, editor of the Sentinel, one of the most active. They met with M.P.P. George B. Martin, who was very agreeable, but did nothing to improve the trail.

They also attacked the Dominion Government, and invited the Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, to visit and see for himself, which he did early in November, since he was coming to B.C. in any case. They gave him a banquet and plenty of advice concerning the advantages of Kamloops as gateway to the Yukon; again nothing was done. And indeed it is probably fortunate that governmental funds were not invested in a road at that time, since the gold rush soon petered out.

There was more agitation for a bridge across the Thompson, but this was not primarily a Board of Trade matter, since citizens' meetings, chaired by Mayor M. P. Gordon, were held, and a petition drawn up.

In 1898 Board activity was at a low ebb; the annual meeting was deferred until March, when Dr. Clarke was re-elected president. Several old members had moved away, and interest was minimal - perhaps because another election was pending and absorbing all attention. After a long and at times bitter campaign F.J.Deane narrowly defeated the incumbent Conservative G.B. Martin, Minister of Lands and Works, for the Provincial Parliament.

Deane was an earnest and conscientious young man; he was perhaps

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not a brilliant orator, but he did his duty by his constituents, even to the extent of persuading the government to build the Thompson bridge at last.

Early in 1899 Clarke moved to Ashcroft, and some kind of friction developed in the ^{Board of Trade.} ~~organisation~~. Details were not spelled out in the paper, but R.H.Lee (ex-Mayor), W.U.Homfray (Grande Prairie hotelier and rancher), and R.G.McPherson (druggist) all formally tendered their resignations. There was no quorum for the first attempt at an annual meeting, but next time thirty turned out, electing storekeeper J.M.Harper president, with E.T.W.Pearse continuing as secretary.

For the following two years N.J.Hopkins, another storekeeper, was president; occasional meetings were held with a number of desultory discussions. Freight rates remained the prime favorite, with a good deal of effort devoted to publicising the region to attract more settlers; Dr.M.S.Wade and John Fremont Smith wrote excellent articles to this end.

In February 1902 J.T.Robinson (insurance and real estate agent, and owner of the Standard newspaper) was elected president and J.F.Smith secretary; both served many years, and both were active and competent boosters of Kamloops and district. Their accession to power perhaps marks the beginning of the modern era, with slow steady progress - and some few failures.

One of the latter was the high-handed attempt in 1907 and again in 1913, and revived in the post-war years, to take over the Indian Reserve, after moving its inhabitants up the North Thompson - a cause of recurrent friction between the races. There was a drive for a smelter in 1911 and for a pulp mill next year, both fortunately unsuccessful. 1913 saw a pious resolution condemning the red light district, but nothing was done to abolish this business, so lucrative during C.N.R. construction.

In 1919 the name was changed to Chamber of Commerce, but this was apparently unpopular, since it reverted to Board of Trade two years later.

After last year's controversy it is perhaps pertinent to point out that the first swearing-in ceremony was held in February 1931, just after the annual meeting and election, and bore no relation whatsoever to the ceremony for civic officers held in the previous month.