

07/03/1914

D. A. Thomas, a Welsh coal operator, arrived for a conference with Seattle and Vancouver capitalists regarding a charter for the development of coal and mineral lands in the Peace River district. British Columbia. Mrs. Whitelaw Reid also arrived.

Stewart Instead of Nasoga Gulf.  
Maybe Terminus of the D. A. Thomas Line.  
10/04/1914

According to reports in railway construction circles, the route of the Nasoga-Groundhog line, promoted for the purpose of tapping the anthracite coal fields of Groundhog mountain, and headed by Mr. D. A. Thomas, the Welsh coal magnate, has been changed, and the line will not terminate on tidewater at Nasoga gulf on Portland canal, but at the head of the canal at Stewart. At the time of the mining boom in the Portland canal district more than three years ago, Sir Donald Mann, as a private enterprise, built a fourteen-mile railway from Stewart, the mining camp at the head of the canal up Bear river valley. This line is built on standard gauge, and, at that time, it was said to be the intention of the well-known builder to extend into Peace river district. But the line was closed down when the mining boom subsided, and during the past year or so a zealous citizen of the camp has used it and one of the small handcars and pair of dogs in transporting supplies along the valley. A large wharf and station headquarters were built in connection with the project.

It now is said that Mr. Thomas and his associates are negotiating for it, as it gives a good grade to the Groundhog district, though there is a tunnel of about 2,000 feet necessary to maintain a good grade through Bear river pass. The distance would be about 150 miles to the coal fields, against close to 150 by the original survey with Nasoga Gulf as the tidewater terminus. At Stewart at the head of the canal there is a perfect harbour and the distance from Nasoga is not considered too great to make the proposed change! in route an item of consideration from a stand- point of water transportation.

Big Development Project.  
28/06/1914

Mr. D. A. Thomas, in a Liverpool interview, outlines the vast possibilities of the northern country. The Liverpool Journal of Commerce, dated May 26<sup>th</sup>, published an interesting interview with the British coal baron, Mr. D. A. Thomas.

After discussing other projects in which Mr. Thomas is involved, the Journal included the following about his proposed Canadian enterprises:

“With regard to railway and other projects in Canada, my associates and I have completed several important and definite arrangements. We have secured a franchise charter for the Pacific, Peace River, and Athabasca Railway, and also for the Peace River Tramway and Navigating Company. The first will have a capital of £3,200,000, with bonding privileges of £10,000 per mile. The second will have a capital of £300,000, with bonding privileges of £7,000 per mile.

We have organised and equipped half a dozen parties of engineers and others, who are about to begin a reconnaissance and track-surveying tour to locate coal

lands, minerals, and so, on. This work will take them three or four months. Adequate financial provision has been made for the necessary work during the next twelve months. These projects will ultimately cost very, large sums. I expect to be able to proceed with the Peace River Tramway next year. I may add that this project also includes the construction of several shallow-draft river and lake steamers.

The railway will pass through a country richly endowed both agriculturally and mineral-wise — millions of acres growing the finest wheat in the world, with large areas of coal lands and minerals, and signs of various kinds of natural gas and oil. And since oil is going to be one of the chief requirements of the navy, the discovery of oil in Canada will be highly, important. It is possible, if not probable, that these projects will open up thousands of square miles and stimulate immigration.”

D. A. Thomas.

Plans to Develop Oil Fields.

Five Carloads of Drilling Machinery Have Been Sent to Peace River Crossing Plan to Start Boring Operations About First of Next Month.

23/07/1915

Vancouver, July 19<sup>th</sup>.

Important announcements regarding plans for the development of the oil and mineral resources of northern British Columbia and the provision of transportation facilities were made this morning by Mr. Charles F. Law, Canadian representative for Mr. D. A. Thomas, Welsh coal baron, and the British Government's special commissioner in America, who is now in New York.

Mr. Thomas and a number of his associates are heavily interested in extensive plans for the construction of a railway line from Kitamat Arm on the B. C. coast to Prince Albert via Hogem Pass, Fort St. John, Peace River Landing, and Fort Vermilion, the building of tramways in connection with a navigation system the Peace River, Slave River, Athabasca and Mackenzie rivers, and the Northern lakes; the development distance of the Ground Hog coal fields; the exploitation of oil properties on the Peace River and other points and kindred projects. The expenditure of \$75,000,000 is started to be ultimately involved in the big undertaking.

Already large sums have been spent in making reconnaissance survey of the new railways and in conducting explorations of the territory which will be served by the proposed transportation systems.

Mr. Law stated the five carloads of drilling machinery have been shipped to Peace River Crossing and boring operations on the syndicate's oil properties there will be started by August 1<sup>st</sup>. The plant was transported to Smokey River by the Edmonton & Dunraven railway and thence by water the rest of the way.

The Pacific Peace River and Athabasca railway, Mr. Law announced has acquired the character of the Athabasca & Vermilion Railway and is now surveying a route from Athabasca Landing to Vermilion and plans the construction of the line as a part of its main route to the coast.

This railway will form an important link in the proposed system and will open up one of the largest agricultural districts of the Peace River region as well as furnishing transportation facilities for the oil resources of the north.

The hull of a steamer which will be placed in service on the Peace River, between Vermilion Chutes and Hudson's Hope a distance of 500 miles is being framed by mills in Vancouver, Mr. Law stated. The vessel, which will be 175 feet long, will be assembled a Peace River Crossing. The plant, and boilers, will be taken in when the Edmonton & Dunvegan Railway reaches Peace River Crossing. The line is expected to reach that point within two months. Accommodation for 110 passengers and for 400 tons of freight will be provided on the boat.

The Thomas interests, Mr. Law conducting explorations of the said, have bonded a group of copper properties at Takla Lake in the Omineca district, and now have a staff of experts examining the holdings with a view to purchase and development on a large scale. Several promising gold prospects are also under investigation. The syndicate propose to provide tonnage and business for its transportation interests.

### Give D. A. Thomas a Chance to Deal With a Man His Own Size. 22/10/1915

Britain is indeed in bad hands if D. A. Thomas does not know more about distributing shell contracts than Sir Sam Hughes, K.C.B. knows about anything.

Canada's government is not absolutely destitute of men who are accustomed to the management of large business. Sir Robert Borden should assign one of his large-sized colleagues to meet D. A. Thomas and discuss the whole relationship of Canadian manufacturers to Britain's war contracts.

The career of D. A. Thomas proves that Lloyd George's appointee is at least a big negotiator and trained businessman. This country and this country's government owe D. A. Thomas the scant courtesy of an opportunity to negotiate with a Canadian nearer his own size and calibre than Major-General Sir Sam Hughes, K.C.B.

### Rhondda's Dream May be Realised. Canadian Representative of Baron's Interest. Pushing Wireless Installation. 20/07/1918

On his way to Ottawa to take up with the federal authorities the question of a wireless telegraph installation in the Peace River country, V. Lloyd-Owen, Vancouver, Canadian representative of the Baron Rhondda interests, is a visitor in the city and conferred yesterday with R. Creelman, general passenger agent. Canadian Northern railway. He leaves for the east today and will return in time to make the last up-river trip of the season on the steamer D. A. Thomas, leaving Peace River August 10<sup>th</sup>.

Wireless in the north is an innovation that now has really good chances of materialising it seems, and the Dominion department of public work which already has the matter under consideration, will be presented with additional facts, and figures showing why it should be installed. Among these to the proposed establishment of a colony of returned soldiers, at Fort Vermillion, for whom communication with the outside world will be desirable.

### Three Stations.

These wireless stations will be built, if the scheme goes through, connecting Peace River, Fort Vermillion, and Fort Smith. The total cost is estimated as \$45,000, which is said to be less than a land telegraph line could be built for between Peace River and Vermillion alone. full equipment for the

three stations is already in stock at Montreal, and the plant could be put in operation before the year is out.

The proposed wireless services would be of great benefit, Mr. Lloyd-Owen points out to the police the Indian agencies, and the park commission. In addition, would be invaluable to the fur traders.

### Soldier Colony for North.

Mr. Lloyd-Owen will address a meeting of the Great War Veterans in Toronto while on his eastern trip and will tell them of the possibilities of Northern Alberta for their own particular purposes. There is likelihood of a colony of 2,000 returned soldiers locating in the Vermilion district.

The Great War Veterans will send in three inspectors this autumn to investigate the Peace River country, from the standpoint of farming, ranching, and financing.

### Was Baron Rhondda's Scheme.

Mr. Lloyd-Owen says the proposed wireless was one of the late Baron Rhondda's favourite schemes for the north country, and it is hoped still to carry it through. The government is already interested, and there are good chances for a favourable answer.

### A Report on Peace River. 30/07/1918

The Peace River District has been for many years the subject of much interest and speculation. Alluring tales from adventurous pioneers, of its wonderful resources, charming climate and varying scenery, have long since lent to the district that charm of romance which distance and uncertainty blended with glowing promises.

Now, however, the land so long famed by legend and mystery is being proved a reality, modern transportation having, so to speak, brought it to our very doors. A journey from Edmonton to the town of Peace River for instance, which five years ago consumed nearly two weeks of toil and hardship may now be made in less than twenty-four hours, in comfort at all times of the year, trains to this latest settlers mecca which is nearly 1,000 miles north of the international boundary line, carrying both sleeping and dining ear accommodation.

The Department of the Interior, through its Natural Resources Intelligence Branch has prepared and is distributing a new illustrated report on the district based on investigations made by an official of that Branch during the season of 1917. The publication contains interesting information with regard to climate, soil, agriculture, minerals, game, water-powers, transportation, and education. A map of the district showing general topography also accompanies the report.

The recent reservation in the interest of soldier settlement of available Dominion lands has also necessitated the preparation of a map which would show the area in Northern Alberta that has been reserved for such purposes. This publication is now available for distribution and should prove of considerable value to the returned soldier who is considering the advisability of settlement in the Peace River Country, likewise, to the prospective homesteader as it shows the area within which homesteads may be procured, also the total number of quarter sections that are still available in each township within reasonable distance of a railway. A copy of the report or map or both may be procured free of charge upon application to the Natural Resources Intelligence Branch of the Department of the Interior, Ottawa.

Peace River Development.  
07/02/1919

To the Editor of the Derrick:

I have been informed that you are the leading oil paper of the United States, and you would send me a sample copy.

Here we are on the very eve of an oil production, having now seven oil drills at work, with four wells at pay oil at a depth of approximately 1,000 feet. At the above depth we have 70 feet of continuous producing sand and oil rises 500 feet in the well, and as an analysis of the product gives 15 per cent gasoline, 50 per cent kerosene, 30 per cent lubricating oil, with only 5 per cent residuum we think that from the asphalt base that that is not very bad, this is by the cracking process.

Our field is at the end of railway transportation on the line of E. D. & B. C. railway running north from Edmonton in the province of Alberta, Trains leave Edmonton on Monday and Thursday, arriving at destination next day.

We are to have 20 rigs in the next spring, but the field his improving so large it is not out of place to say that there is room for any number if they were to come in.

Lady Rhondda Visits Peace River Country  
Wife of Welsh Coal Magnate Takes Direct Interest in Late Husband's Projects  
27/11/1919

Of particular interest to the northern development of the province of British Columbia and to the settlers located there, was the visit of the coast recently of Lady Rhondda (wife of the late great Welsh magnate D. A. Thomas) and a party of shareholders in the Peace River Development Company.

Settlers in the north have been somewhat uneasy since the death of Lord Rhondda, as to what action the executors would take with regard to future development along the Peace River, but all fears are now allayed following the annual meetings of both companies which were held in Vancouver, with Lady Rhondda, the president in the chair.

In company with the entire party, she had visited the company's interests along the Peace River and at the meeting expressed herself greatly pleased with the north and the possibilities for extensions of the various interests there. The Development Company currently operates two boats the D. A. Thomas and the Lady Mackworth, and so heavy has grown the trade that it was practically decided to build a new steamer and improve the service. The Trading Company operates a chain of stores, and these too, have been very prosperous, the future being exceedingly bright.

It is probable that the new boat will be constructed next year. so significantly that plans are underway to build a new steamer and improve services.

The Trading Company also runs a chain of stores, which have been thriving, pointing to a promising future. According to one local director, construction of the new boat may begin next year, according to a statement at one of the directors.

## Sale of Equipment Recalls 1915 Peace River Oil Boom. 12/10/1929

### Oil Was Struck in All Wells Drilled But Water Problem Remained Unsolved-Derricks Floated Away as Soft Water Geysers Were Brought in - Area Believed to Have Interesting Oil Possibilities.

A few months ago, an Edmonton paper advertised for sale by tender certain items of oil equipment. The stuff could be inspected, so said the advertisement, at the Canadian Petroleum Co. well 11 miles below Peace River.

That pile of rusty oil-field junk, lying these many years in the wide valley of Peace, recalls the time, ten years ago, "Peace River oil-field" leapt to prominence for its glowing promise of the long-sought great Canadian oil-field. Though it is some years since the wide flats below Peace River have seen any serious drilling activity, there are still people, including practically every denizen of "the last great west," who firmly, believe that the oil is there in vast quantities merely waiting for the drill.

The Peace River oil adventure began with a Welshman not, unknown to fame. His name was D. A. Thomas. He became interested, about 1913 in the tracing prospects of the Peace River country, and formed a company which put a steamer, the "D. A. Thomas" and a gasoline launch the "Lady Mackworth," on the Peace River waterway. D. A. Thomas was also interested himself in oil prospects, and about 1915, at considerable expense, drilling equipment was transported up the Peace to Vermillion Chutes.

The Vermillion Chutes well, quit drilling at 850 feet, after striking sulphur water. War activities claimed Thomas, who later became Lord Rhondda, and the Peace River development had to wait.

Meanwhile however, J. D. McArthur of Winnipeg, famous in the west as a railroad builder, got into Peace River oil game. With a group of Winnipeg associates, he organised the Peace River Oil. Co. This company located its "McArthur No. 1" about 10 miles below the of Peace River.

### McArthur Strikes Oil.

Late in 1917, word was flashed far, and wide the McArthur No. 1 had struck oil had been found at the comparatively shallow depth of 905 feet.

Right then the Turner Valley field, after the spectacular boom of 1914, was experiencing an eclipse. It has become an exceedingly deep drilling proposition, how deep the oil operations even then could not guess. In comparison with the Turner Valley, where you drilled three-quarters of a mile and got nothing, the incipient oil metropolis of Peace River offered a field where you could reach the oil when you had barely scratched the surface.

McArthur No. 1 unquestionably did strike oil. It was asphaltic type of crude, far less valuable than the paraffin-base oil of southwestern Ontario; but if it could be got in real quantities the field would be worthwhile. The McArthur crew kept on drilling. They drilled so says tradition, through 68 feet of oil sand, all impregnated with this same sort of asphaltic crude. Then they struck salt water, and

below that a terrific gas pressure. McArthur No. 1 turned into a saltwater geyser and had to be abandoned.

A second well was started a little further downstream and again oil was struck, at shallow depth. From all accounts McArthur No. 2 had a possible pumping production of between 12 and 20 barrels a day, though there was talk of as much as 50 barrels. McArthur No. 2 really started the Peace River boom.

In the ensuing year or two, something like a dozen companies were organised, and as many tests were started. The Tar Island Oil and Gas Co. so Christened from an island in the Peace where oil and gas springs had been found, put down one well. The Peace River Oil Co. McArthur's venture drilled two more. H. L. Williams, a former California operator then resident at Edmonton organised the Three Creeks Oil, Co. Another venture was a community well for the Peace River folk devoutly believed in their field and backed their faith to the limit of their resources. The spirit of adventure that already carried them into Canada's last great west carried them still further into this alluring oil game.

Between 1918 and 1928, the course of the Peace for fifteen miles or more was punctuated with derricks. The procession started with the Victory Oil, companies' well on the jack pine flats just west of Canada Central bridge and continues at intervals to some distance below Tar Island.

Few sights are more impressive than this valley, in places two miles wide, with timber-clad banks rising to a height of 800 feet. Sound economic reasons apparently justified the operators in locating their wells on the flats. A well in higher ground would have been 800 feet more to drill.

### Oil Strike Oil Sand.

One after another, without exception, the wells got the oil sand. The Peace River field has the unique distinction that oil was encountered in every well put down, The statement, though astounding, is absolutely correct. From Peace River town to Tar Island, every well put down to the oil horizon of McArthur No. 1 got the same heavily impregnated sand. The drilling clearly proved that at the depth of 800 feet, more or less, the oil-sand must underlie a huge area.

But the commercial production. The outside world waited with increasing impatience for the much-advertised field to ship crude oil.

Several of the wells could have pumped 10 barrels a day or more. With that grade of oil, the operators, did not regard these wells as a paying proposition. Almost without exception they drilled deeper, hoping for a larger production of the same stuff or on equal production of higher-grade oil, and drilling deeper, they tapped the same tremendous saltwater flood that had ruined McArthur No.

Well after well, trying to read deeper horizon where more oil might be found, drilled into this underground ocean, and had to be abandoned. With or behind the water came, in most cases, huge flows of gas with tremendous pressure. The gas merely made matters worse. It could not be got under control, there was no market within reach large enough make it worthwhile. I asked geologist ten years ago what was, the matter with the Peace River field.

### Structural Faults.

"We structure." he said. "The oil sands are absolutely flat." He went on to explain that, to get oil in quantity you must have not merely the oil sand itself, but a folding of the formation that would enable the oil to collect in quantities sufficient to pay for drilling.

"There's an enormous amount of oil under those Peace River flats," said this geologist "If nature had collected this oil in a real anticline, it would be a big field. Peace River to my way of thinking, is an oil field that has been properly finished."

More hopeful geologists have since claimed that share a broad structure, not very pronounced, with its crest at Tar Island where the gas and saltwater springs were found. But according to the same authorities, the wells already drilled were as favourably located in regard to this structure as any that could have been put down. So that doesn't help to put Peace River on the oil map.

### Unsuccessful Attempts.

For a long time, efforts to get past saltwater, horizon were, futile. Water problems encountered in drilling were not so well understood ten years ago as they are today. The story of an eastern driller hired by a despairing Peace River company to solve this seemingly unsolvable problem.

"Shut of the water?" commented the eastern driller, cockily. "I've shut of water two dozen different fields. The trouble with you is, you've got a bunch of green drillers who don't know their business. Just wait till I get there."

The company did more than wait. They gave that driller a perfectly clean start with the best drilling available, an experienced crew and a totally, new well. Everything went swimmingly till the drill got through the shallow oil sand, and to the saltwater horizon.

Then things began to swim. Among other things, the derrick swam out of that hole, the drillers escaped by swimming, and the company swam to liquidation. The driller who was going to shut-off the water brought a new story back east with him.

"Water! I never saw the beat of oil, That danged well gushed 30,000 barrels a day of salt and sulphur water. No power on earth could control it."

In the long, run, however, two companies did actually drill into the Devonian lime. H. L. Williams had battled all sorts of water problems in the California fields. Among other things he had drilled, in 1895, the first well ever drilled in the Pacific Ocean, So water problems weren't new to him. His Three Creeks No. 2 eventually got into the lower lime. In the process the inevitable saltwater washed away the foundations of the derrick, which was almost precipitated into the resulting chasm. But Williams got things righted, got the water under control, and actually drilled to 2,810 feet, or perhaps more. The well encountered further shows of oil below the water, though is filled get commercial production.

### Deep Test Achieved.

Canadian Petroleum's No. 2 the well whose surviving debris was sold by tender recently, we ever deeper, to 3,008 feet. It too, failed to get commercial oil production in the Devonian.

For close to seven years the attempt persisted to develop as oil field in the Peace River flats. Arthur's company after drilling four wells, dropped out of the fight but newer ventures carried on. In the early years was hard to finance drilling, for the Calgary boom and the Great War between them

gave oil prospecting a black eye; and later, Fort Norman, Wainwright and ultimately the re-discovered Turner Valley field crowded Peace River out of the limelight.

### Still Optimistic.

Peace River folk, however, believe in their field. "Look Turner Valley," they argue.

"Not so long ago Turner Valley was down and out. Nobody but a few fool optimists believed any oil was there. Yet today Turner Valley is the one great oil field in the British Empire."

Nor is this hope unjustified. Deeper drilling, drilling on higher ground, or drilling at a distance from the river may ultimately vindicate the field. Meanwhile, it can honestly claim the unique distinction of being the only in the field in the world where every well countered all and not one of them developed commercial production.

### Canadians Have Much To Learn About Vast Empire.

29/05/1930

So vast is the Canadian heritage Britain Acclaims Canadian Wheat and so numerous are the points offering promise of great and continuous development, that it is difficult for the most assiduous of newspaper readers to keep, in touch even with his own province. For more distant information he is dependent on remoter sources and therefore has all the more reason to appreciate editorial and other articles outlining what is being done in districts that are only in process of being opened to the light of day.

Recently the Lethbridge Herald touched on the development of the Alberta Northland and remarked that as this is proceeding so British Columbia's great block of land east of the Rockies is coming in for a lot of attention. Speaking recently about the potentialities of this region it quoted Hon. F. P. Burden, Minister of Lands of that province, as saying that the section had one of the best bodies of coal on the continent, and according to coal authorities it was the only coal on the continent that would smelt without coking.

In close proximity, Mr. Burden said, was a great body of iron ore. His own research into the relative nutritive values of Canadian and competitive wheats have shown the Manitoba wheat produces a bigger and lighter loaf, which gives greater nourishment than bread made from any other flour, he says.

In years to come, he believed, a great Winnipeg Newspaper Union steel and iron industry would be developed and would create a big demand for the agricultural products of the district. There were also other minerals, the minister said, and possible hydro-development at low cost.

The Herald repeats its view previously expressed that in the vicinity of the head waters of the Peace River, and where they cut through the backbone of the continent on their way to the Arctic,

there is a veritable empire of wealth such as few Canadians even dream of. Here are to be found valuable commercial timber and pulpwood. The Groundhog coalfields in which the late Lord Rhondda was interested lie in that area. Close by there are said to be mountains of iron, while it is also stated that mines as rich as the Sullivan at Kimberley may be developed. With it all there is, in the Peace River Canyon, water power capable of developing within a 12-mile stretch something like 1,500,000 horsepower.

While there is so much talk of a coast outlet for the Peace River country, it is well to bear in mind that the development of the mining, lumbering, pulpwood and hydro power potentialities along the Peace River head waters, is practically certain to open up a route through the northern section of British Columbia. Somewhere along the course of that route will be a railway, and situated upon it, close to the Pacific, and closer to the Orient than any other British Columbia city, will be a modern city founded upon the wealth of resources in that area.

We really know truly little as yet, the Herald says truly, about the great northland which, in a few years, will be pouring its treasure into the world's markets and bringing back new wealth to Western Canada.