

**A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE PRESENT  
STATE OF THE PROVINCE  
OF NOVA-SCOTIA: WITH A  
PROJECT OFFERED FOR ITS RELIEF**

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A Brief Sketch of the Present State of the Province of Nova-Scotia: with a project offered for its relief by John Homer

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**JOHN HOMER**

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OF NOVA-SCOTIA: WITH A  
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*Presented to*  
*H. R. Donald*  
*by W. M. S. [unclear]*  
*July 1917*  
*10<sup>00</sup>*

A BRIEF SKETCH

OF THE

Present State

OF

THE PROVINCE OF

# NOVA-SCOTIA,

WITH A PROJECT OFFERED FOR ITS RELIEF,

BY JOHN HOMER, ESQ.

M. P. FOR BARRINGTON.

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HALIFAX, N. S.

1834.

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TO

JOHN MORTON, Esq.

M. P. FOR CORNWALLIS.

SIR,

HAVING always felt a deep interest in the welfare of this our native country—and being under the firm conviction that its agricultural interests have been too much neglected, especially the growing of bread corn; and that a fatal dependance on other countries for that essential article would eventually draw from us all our monies, and bring the whole province to a state of penury, a melancholy event which every day's experience teaches us has now arrived. And being, with you, placed in a situation where it becomes our duty both to think and act, on any important subject which interests our country, I have determined not to remain an idle spectator and brood over our misfortunes, but have presumed to write my idea on the subject, and to offer a scheme for our relief, which I have taken the liberty to inscribe to you, though I confess it is written in a very bad style of composition; this may be attributed to the want of an academical education, and I must beg those who feel a disposition to criticise my work, to be a little charitable, and to take into consideration that I was born more than half a century ago, here among the woods, when we had neither schools, roads, horses nor carts, which must plead my excuse for inaccuracies in writing. Our population was then about five hundred, which is now increased to three thousand, and

being by their suffrages appointed to represent them in the General Assembly, perhaps a too ardent zeal for their interest and future welfare, as well as the future prosperity of the whole people of the province, may have caused me to write rather presumptuously.

Nearly eight years have elapsed since I first met you at the House of Assembly, where I always found you a warm friend to the agricultural interest, and on that subject we have acted in concert. It may be by some supposed a little singular, as my constituents are mostly engaged in the fisheries, that I should take an active part in behalf of agricultural pursuits. But I think every representative ought to take into consideration the well established maxim, that he is both interested with the interest of his constituents, and the general interest of his country; and where they clash, the local interest must give way to the general good. And feeling an anxiety to become instrumental in prevailing on the country, to adopt some well digested system, for the encouragement of growing our own bread, and thus reclaim ourselves from a state of dependance; I commenced writing on the present state of the province, and intended only a short epistle explanatory of my views; but as I proceeded I found so many different interests—causes and effects, to enquire into—that I could only give an abridged statement, and left the subject sufficiently prolific, to furnish both matter and importance, on which more able pens may write volumes.

I am, Sir, with the highest esteem and consideration,

Your most obedient and very humble servant,

JOHN HOMER.

BARRINGTON, 25th Oct. 1834.

## SKETCH, &c.

Sir,

Since the settlement of this province by the British, perhaps there never was a period when complaints of hard times, scarcity of money, stagnation of trade, bankruptcies, loss of confidence among merchants, and all the evils attendant on a general embarrassment, were so prevalent and universal as the present.

A melancholy gloom seems to pervade and hang over the whole country. The origin of these difficulties is by many attributed to Banking, and over-trading, by whom it is alledged that the Halifax Bank having been liberal in their issues of paper money, induced young men with little or no property to enter into trade, live extravagantly, pay high rents, and make extensive and wild speculations on their bank credit, which in many instances proved unsuccessful, whereby they were not able to make good their payments, and consequently ended in ruin.

Likewise those who were concerned in foreign trade, particularly that to the West Indies, may have been led to extend their business upon a larger scale than they otherwise would have done; and we see those who were managing with the strictest economy, and apparently doing well, could not withstand their misfortunes, and were obliged to surrender.

Where there is commerce, bankruptcies will occasionally occur, and perhaps the unprecedented number of failures which have taken place at Halifax within the last twelve months, may be partly attributed to the before mentioned causes, partly to the unfavourable state of the West India trade. But more especially to the want of a market for the home cargoes, originating from the great scarcity of money, or inability of the people to pay



for those necessary articles which heretofore made part of their family expenditure, and which taken collectively, was the great consumption of West India produce, purchased with fish cargoes, the product of the industry of this Province. When the outward cargoes had apparently sold well, and were invested in produce—say sugar, molasses, coffee, cocoa, and rum ; in consequence of the progressive and increasing scarcity of money, the country consumption gradually dwindled away—and the demand, so very limited, that the homeward cargoes were often attended with heavy loss.

Merchants entangled in trade often meet with partial and sometimes severe losses, having their property floating in different directions, still cherishing a hope that some of their speculations may prove fortunate and extricate them from their present difficulties, until they get so far involved, any severe check will cause them to give up to their creditors.

Hence those merchants whose interests were so firmly interwoven with the general interests of the country, and whose misfortunes have in a great measure proceeded from the same cause of prevailing distress, ought by every charitable and reflecting mind to be viewed with sympathy and commiseration, rather than censure. It is not only the merchants and those engaged in trade, who are embarrassed by the present state of affairs ; all classes of men, the farmer, the fisherman, the mechanic, the common labourer, are all severely distressed by the deplorable state of the times ; likewise landed property within five years has fallen in value perhaps nearly one half, and the tonnage belonging to the country, either merchant or fishery vessels, will sell for but little more than one half of their first cost. I am aware of its being a thankless office to depict the poverty and necessities of our country ; but before applying a specific remedy, we ought to probe the ulcer to the bottom. We have also a prevailing species of idle extravagance, which operates very much against the prosperity of the yeomanry of this province ; fathers have been too fond of making gentlemen of their sons, and those sons in return have been too apt to despise the vocation of their fathers ; engage in traffic or some other business which they suppose less laborious and more respectable, but with which perhaps they are unacquainted ; and not possessing capital, any bad speculation or untoward event involves them in difficulties, which perhaps terminate in their ruin, when all their golden dreams are turned into mortification ; and when too late, sincerely regret they had thought so lightly of the humble though honest and honorable pursuits of their fathers. Banking, over trading, pride and extravagance, are partial evils which will work their own cure.

But from the most demonstrative evidence I am firmly con-

vinced, and give it as my solemn opinion, that the first, greatest, and most galling evil, and grand cause of all our distress, arises from the unfortunate circumstance of having so long allowed ourselves to remain dependant on other countries for most of the bread we consume; to elucidate this fact I must go back to the first settlement of the country. While Nova-Scotia remained in possession of the French, the Acadians raised their own bread corn; in the interval of time which elapsed between the year seventeen hundred and forty nine, and the commencement of the American Revolution, while the now United States were then under the British government, and consequently a fine trade existed without duties or exactions of any description between this province and all parts of that country; the bread then consumed here was purchased with the productions of the province, such as dry and pickled fish, oil, furs, &c. There are here some of the oldest inhabitants, who well remember when it was a common practice for the fishing vessels of this place to load cargoes of dry and pickled fish, and go in the winter season up the rivers of Carolina and Virginia, there retail it in barter for indian corn, hams, pork, hog's lard, and other provisions the produce of that country, and return in the spring.

The first English settlers on the north coast of this province gave great attention to the growth of bread corn; they sowed their wheat in confidence, and their hopes were realized by plentiful crops; but the several circumstances which have heretofore operated against the culture of that most essential article, with the great competition it met with from the free introduction of the bread stuffs of the United States, has gradually had a tendency to dissuade the decendants of those first settlers from raising grain, until the thing is by some so far forgotten that they begin to doubt the capability of their lands to grow wheat. At Yarmouth, on the western extremity of the province, for many years wheat grew exceedingly well and seldom failed of a good crop; I have been told by some of the the old Acadians at Eel Brook, in the township of Argyle, that on a dyke which they made there about fifty years ago, they raised forty bushels per acre for several successive years; when the land became exhausted, the crop fell short until they were obliged to relinquish the pursuit altogether. During the American revolution the people in some parts of this province were at times much distressed for bread; at the termination of that war the great number of loyalists and disbanded soldiers who came to this country added much to its wealth and population, and put into circulation a great deal of money; hardly had they got themselves snugly settled when they found the province lamentably destitute of resources, and that they were dependant on the very country they had left for the bread they consumed; many of those loyalists

were men entirely unacquainted with a new country, some went to the West Indies, others to Canada, and others returned to the United States. The disbanded soldiers mostly remained, and their descendants are now incorporated with the respectable yeomanry of the country; during the peace which existed between the American and French revolution, the American government were content with a small duty on the productions of Nova-Scotia; but little inconvenience was felt in purchasing our bread from that country. But the continual drain on the small resources of the province to pay for the American flour, and other bread stuff, caused a gradual and increasing scarcity of money; and for a few years previous to the commencement of that war, the times in the province were very similar to and wore the same gloomy aspect as the present. In seventeen hundred and ninety three the population was about one-fifth of the present number, with no foreign commerce except a small West India trade; however, from that period to the year eighteen hundred and fifteen, the inhabitants were progressively increasing in wealth; the long war which Great Britain sustained against France and other European powers, made it requisite to keep a respectable force on the Nova-Scotia and West India stations.

The dock-yard here was placed on the war establishment, the expenditure of the army and navy, the many valuable prizes captured from the enemy and sold at Halifax; the ready market for our fish in the British West Indies, likewise for Plaister of Paris in the United States, the great demand and high prices for fresh beef, vegetables, hay, and every other kind of country produce, all seemed to co-operate in bringing wealth into the country. Thus the continual influx of money during a twenty years' war literally surcharged the province with the precious metals; every man's pocket was lined with cash. The farming class felt the happy effects of this state of things, and turned their attention to grazing, raising vegetables. At the time of the long embargo in the United States, which continued from the twenty second December eighteen hundred and seven, until April, eighteen hundred and nine, and the non-intercourse which followed, as well as during the war with that country, flour was at times extremely high, often at five and sometimes at six pounds per barrel, which is three times the present cost; yet the people here could then much easier pay for their bread than they can at the present day; and all with one accord made use of the American flour, when it became classed with the indispensable articles of import. The cultivation of the land was viewed as a degrading employment by the very men who depended on agricultural pursuits for a livelihood, and who lived solely from the produce of their farms. The contagion found its way into all parts of the province, and the fishermen of Cape