

RE:

INVESTIGATION OF DRINK HALLS  
IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO.

REPORT OF

R. A. PRINGLE, K.C.

COMMISSIONER.

DATED APRIL 10th, 1915.

The RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR ROBERT L. BORDEN,

Premier and President of Privy Council,

Ottawa, Ont.

The undersigned having been appointed by Order-in-Council, dated the 9th day of January, A.D. 1915, a Commissioner to inquire into and report upon charges of corruption and fraud in relation to contracts for the building of certain drill halls in the Province of Ontario, which charges were made by Messrs. Hansen and Munns of Meaford, Ontario, and brought to the attention of the Government in the following terms:--

"There are now being erected a number of drill halls through the country, and W.A. Tom, a livery stable keeper, of Collingwood, has secured his share of the contracts. He has built or is building drill halls at Meaford, Markdale, Orono, Blackstock, Brampton, Listowel, Barrie, and I think has secured others. He has formed a company called the W.A. Tom Construction Company, to handle this kind of Government work, and we have reason to believe that the said company is formed of men in the pay of the Government. At any rate the contractors, once the contracts are secured, can do as they like. If the inspectors should be a little strict on the start, they pay them to oversee part of the work, such as bricklaying or carpenter work. So once in their pay, they dare not open their mouths. There is considerable graft somewhere -- for instance, where reinforcing of concrete called for expanding metal a rusty old wire fence was thrown in. On another where 8 in. square timbers for purlines was specified 3.2 in. planks nailed together sufficed. Where weeping tile and tar was to be used none was used at all. The three coats of paint called for went on in two, and none of the furnaces would come up to the specifications. There should be a strict investigation into the whole of this work, and these parasites and grafters put down for good, and the Government inspectors that pass such graft should be made to answer for it. If an investigation was made we could prove that the above is true".

Immediately upon receiving my appointment, I made a thorough examination of the files pertaining to

contracts for drill halls in the Militia Department, and the Department of Public Works, and I ascertained that W.A. Tom, Esq., of Collingwood, Ontario, had been awarded contracts for the erection of drill halls at Orono, Meaford, Brampton, Blackstock, and Markdale, and that the W.A. Tom Construction Co., Limited, had been awarded contracts for the erection of drill halls at Hagarville, Listowel and Barrie -- the Listowel and Barrie drill halls being constructed under the Department of Public Works, and the others under the Militia Department.

In the course of my investigation I ascertained that tenders were called for all above contracts, and that in every case W. A. Tom, Esq., or the W.A. Tom Construction Co., Ltd., were awarded the contracts being the lowest tenderers and absolutely on their merits.

I do not think it necessary for me to deal with Listowel and Barrie otherwise than to say that according to the evidence which was adduced before me, the work has been done well. Messrs. Hanson and Munns have no charges to make in regard to these two contracts.

In regard to the six drill halls coming under the jurisdiction of the Militia Department, viz:-- Orono, Meaford, Brampton, Blackstock, Markdale and Hagarville, I find they came more particularly under the jurisdiction of Colonel Maunsell, Director General of Engineering Service. I find that the Militia Department exercised every precaution not only in the letting of the contracts but in seeing that the contracts were properly carried out.

In all cases a Superintendent of Works was appointed, who

watched the progress of the work daily, having full instructions from the Militia Department as to his duties. The District Engineer for the division in which the armory, or armories, were situated also visited the work from time to time. The Assistant Director of Works and Buildings in the Militia Department, Major A.F. Daroche, also exercised supervision, and no building was taken over from the contractors until the same was thoroughly examined and passed upon by a board of officers appointed for that purpose.

During the investigation Messrs. Hanson and Munns practically withdrew all charges made by them, except certain charges as to deviations from the specifications at Orono, Blackstock and Markdale, and I find that there were deviations from the specifications, and that it would have been wiser for the contractors -- in fact they should have adhered strictly to the specifications, yet on the evidence of two very competent architects I find that the deviations were trifling and caused no injury to the structures. Major Clyde Calwell in giving his evidence spoke most highly of the manner in which W.A. Tom, Esq., and the W.A. Tom Construction Co., Ltd., did their work.

I consider it unfortunate that Messrs. Hanson and Munns should have made any charge in regard to the inspectors as the evidence is abundantly clear that the inspectors were not in any way connected with the contractors. Hanson in his evidence refers only to two inspectors, whom he says were in the employ of or received money from the contractors. I find that this is absolutely unfounded. Joseph G. Sewall and Thomas Cooke, the inspectors referred to by Hanson, were the most competent inspectors employed. Joseph G. Sewall is a builder and contractor

of large experience, and a man who stands very high in the community in which he lives, and I find that he discharged his duties well. In fact, the building over which he was exercising superintendence is not complained of in any way. Thomas Cooke is also a man of large experience and thoroughly competent, and I find that he discharged his duties in a very creditable manner.

In regard to the other inspectors who gave evidence, I find that they were intelligent and honest men who had a general knowledge of building, at the same time were not builders, and I consider in future that it would be well to appoint only men of experience in building as inspectors.

I find absolutely no foundation for the different charges made by Messrs. Hanson and Munns. The W.A. Tom Construction Co., Limited, was not formed of men in the pay of the Government; the inspectors employed by the Government were not in any way in the employ of the contractors; there was no graft in any shape, manner or form; the furnaces placed in the buildings were entirely according to specifications; the work done by the contractors was done well, and no work was taken off their hands except after most careful examination by a Board of Officers; every precaution, apparently was taken by both the Department of Public Works and the Militia Department to see that the contracts were properly carried out.

The following witnesses gave evidence before me:--


Joseph Hanson.  
A.P. Deroche.  
Wm. Andrew Moore.  
Wm. A. Tom.  
John Jas. Marks.

John Caslake,  
Percy Hugh Jobb.  
Jos. G. Sewell.  
Phillip C. Palin.  
Cuthbert Munns.  
and Richard Cotsman Wright.

Frank King.  
James Morrow.  
Thos. Cooke.  
John D. Philip.  
Clyde Caldwell

All of which is respectfully submitted.

at Ottawa,  
April 10th, 1915.

  
.....

Commissioner.