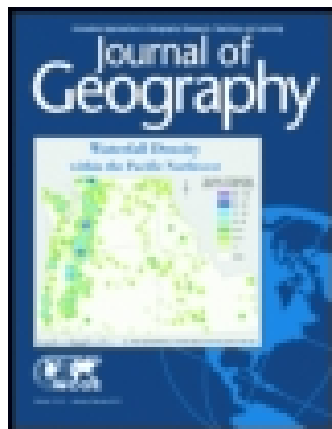


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Siberia

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SIBERIA

By Leonard O. Packard

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THE region to which the name Siberia is now applied extends from the Ural Mountains on the west to the Pacific Ocean on the east. The boundary on the north is the Arctic Ocean; and on the south it is a line running from the source of the Ural River to the Tarbagatai Mountains, thence along the Chinese frontier as far as the southeast corner of Transbaikalia, and then along the rivers Argun, Amur, and Ussuri to the Korean border. Siberia may be considered as consisting of two parts, Western Siberia which includes the basins of the Ob and Irtysh Rivers, and Eastern Siberia, the remainder of the region.

As one traces these boundaries one cannot fail to be impressed by the vast area included within them, and at once begins to wonder to what extent this great area is adapted to human activities. At the present time the region does not exert a great influence outside its own limits. In the past it has played an important part in the history of both Europe and Asia. In early times its boundless plains offered unequalled opportunities for nomadic tribes to push their way from several eastern centers into western Russia, and indeed into all Europe, thus determining in no small measure the racial and cultural characteristics which are found in the invaded regions at the present time. The same levelness of surface made it easy at a later period for Russian explorers to forge their way rapidly eastward to the Pacific Ocean, where need of open harbors brought the Russian people into conflict with China and Japan.

But the service which Siberia is to render in the future will be quite different from that of the past. Instead of serving merely as a highway for the passage of wandering peoples the country promises to become one of the most important food producing areas of the world. Before Siberia can gain such a rating among the civilized and industrial nations of the world she must show resources commensurate in some measure at least with her great size; and these resources must be efficiently developed.

That Siberia possesses these resources, and that they are to some extent appreciated, is shown by the increase in population in recent years. The population of the region in 1910 was 8,219,020. Since 1897 the population of the Russian Empire has increased 31 per cent, the population of Siberia in the same time having increased 40 per cent. This increase in population is due chiefly to immigration from European Russia. The larger land holdings which it is possible for the immigrant to secure offer great inducement. In European Russia the average peasant can obtain only about five acres of land which serves to occupy his time for only a portion of the year. In Siberia the holdings are sufficiently large to require his attention for the whole of the

year and thus to yield him a better living. In western Siberia the population is widely scattered, while in eastern Siberia it is confined mainly to the chief roads and rivers.

The chief occupation of the people is agriculture, an industry dependent upon surface, soil, and climate.

As to surface Siberia presents considerable diversity. In the north and west the country consists mainly of a vast plain, while in the east and south plateaus and mountain ranges occur. In some parts of the western plain the surface is so nearly level that the water drains into the headwaters of one stream when the wind is in a certain direction, and flows into another stream when the wind is from the opposite quarter. This condition prevails near the source of the Lena and the Yenesei. Because of this exceedingly level surface of the western plain and resulting poor drainage, much of the land in this portion of Siberia is swampy and unfit for agriculture.

The western portion of the Siberian plain passes toward the East into rolling prairie land similar to that of the Canadian Northwest. Some of the prairie lands are exceedingly fertile, those of the Upper Yenesei equalling in fertility the Red River Valley. Other portions are rocky and so unfit for farming. Because of the rocky lands, the swamps, and the thousands of acres yet to be cleared of forests, millions of acres cannot be cultivated. Then, too, it must be remembered that a large part of the country is still unexplored. The parts best known lie not far from the main streams and the railroads. Large areas well adapted to agriculture are as yet unsettled simply because of lack of adequate transportation facilities.

The climate of Siberia compares favorably with that of Canada. Since the rain-bearing westerly winds are here far from their source of supply the rainfall is more or less precarious. According as the rainfall is much or little the crops are heavy or light, in some seasons being three times as heavy as in others.

As in Canada under similar conditions of soil and climate the chief crop is wheat, though rye and oats are also grown to a considerable extent.

Poppy culture for the production of opium and oil has increased in importance for several years. The climate of the Ussuri district is particularly favorable to the cultivation of this plant. This industry is entirely in the hands of the Chinese who rent the land of Russian land holders. The area under cultivation in the eastern coast region rose from 826 acres in 1910 to 9,450 acres in 1912. Recently a bill to prohibit opium-poppy growing has been introduced into the Russian Duma. The injurious effects of the industry is felt not only because of the use of opium, but because continued cultivation of the poppy exhausts the soil, thus rendering the raising of food crops unprofitable.

One might expect that on the vast plains of Siberia cattle raising would be a very important occupation. This is not the case however, as the Russian

farmer has apparently failed to meet modern conditions. He cannot compete with Australian meat products even in his home markets.

Although cattle are not raised in large numbers for meat products the country produces large quantities of milk and butter. Milk is an important article of diet throughout the country. An interesting adaptation to the extreme cold of winter is shown in the method of handling milk during that season. The milk is allowed to freeze in shallow pans. After a hole is cut in the center of each cake they are threaded on strings and thus carried to market or to customers. According to the Russian Year Book, butter constitutes Siberia's chief export. Because of its quality, which is constantly improving, it is now competing successfully with products of Europe and Australia. In 1913 the shipment of butter amounted to 173 million pounds. The butter is purchased at centers in Siberia and exported through foreign firms. The new American tariff which reduced the duty on butter from six cents to two and a half cents per pound opens a new market. A number of firms in Siberia are already supplying the American trade.

Another important product of the country is lumber. The industry of lumbering is confined, however, almost wholly to supplying local needs. Very little inroad has been made upon the forests in Eastern Siberia except along the Ussuri and its immediate neighborhood. No well organized lumber industry exists in the Far East, largely because of the restrictions imposed by the Russian Government to whom practically all of the forest lands belong. Another handicap is the difficulty of communication and transportation in these regions. The small amount of lumber exported is sent to Japan, China, Australia and some even to western Europe. As the industry becomes organized it is believed that the forest of the Amur River Basin will be an important factor in the world's timber supply. Doubtless pulp mills will be established, as much of the wood is suitable for making pulp. As has been suggested already much of the forest land of Eastern Siberia has not yet been explored. It is estimated that altogether Siberia possesses about 217 million acres of timberland. There is no other country which equals the Russian Empire in the extent of such lands.

As might be expected these vast forests are inhabited by many animals which are valuable for their furs. As the lumber industry increases, however, the fur industry decreases because of the reduction in the size of forest areas. Another reason for the decrease in the number of fur bearing animals is the lack of restrictions on hunting. Amazing numbers of pelts are sold at the fairs held annually throughout Russia. Nearly all Siberian furs are sold at the Irbit fair. According to consular reports for 1911 there were sold at this fair, besides other furs, four and one-half million squirrel skins, a half million rabbit skins, twelve thousand sable, two hundred thousand brown bear, sixteen thousand five hundred fox, one hundred eighty thousand weasel, and sixteen thousand five hundred gray wolf skins. The Russian government

has become alarmed at the rapid decrease in the number of sable and has passed a law prohibiting the killing of the animal or the buying, selling or exporting of sable furs for three years. The best sable skins sell for more than \$200 each.

The only article of commercial value supplied by the cold tundras of the North is the ivory obtained from tusks of fossil Siberian mammoths. These fossil animals have furnished the Chinese with ivory for more than seven hundred years. At the present time from 500 to 650 hundredweight of mammoth tusks are found annually in the government of Yakoutska. Small quantities are used by the inhabitants for carving, the remainder goes to Moscow and the European markets.

Siberia is also rich in minerals. The larger part of the gold and silver of Russia is obtained from this part of the Empire. All gold must pass through the government laboratories and thence to the mints of St. Petersburg. The chief gold producing regions are in Transbaikalia and in the vicinity of the Amur and Olekma rivers. The important silver deposits are found in the Altai region.

Coal is found in many places in Siberia. The coal deposits are large and promise much in the way of the future development of the country. At the present time, however, owing to the lack of transportation facilities, what little coal is mined is used only for home consumption. Mines are worked to a considerable extent near Vladivostok but there it is of poor quality. The most promising source of coal is Sakhalin where rich deposits exist. The great obstacle to the development of these deposits is the absence of good harbors on the western shore of the island where the coal is found in greatest abundance. In the towns and cities of Siberia wood is still used extensively for fuel but is becoming dearer each year, in many places being more expensive than in St. Petersburg. Hence the demand for coal is steadily increasing. With improved methods of production and increased transportation facilities the prices would be reduced and the consumption thereby increased.

Fishing is an important industry in certain parts of Siberia. About one-half of the trade in fish is in herring. The fisheries of the Amur River region are the most important of the Far East. This importance is due not only to the size of the industry but also to the fact that fish is the staple article of food of the native and Russian population. The salmon stands first and the sturgeon second in importance.

In addition to the river fisheries an abundance of fish occurs off the Pacific coast. From May to October all kinds of fish, including salmon, cod and herring abound in the waters around the peninsula of Kamchatka. It is said they are present in such quantities that after a severe storm the shores are covered with fish to a depth of five or six feet. Fish going up river are an impediment to vessels. The fishing industry off Kamchatka is largely controlled by the Japanese. The growth of the industry in eastern

Siberia in recent years is due to the aggressiveness of the Japanese, and also to the fact that, as many of the European fish stations have become exhausted, the unexploited waters of the Far East have attracted fishermen from the White, Black, and Caspian Seas. There has been little in the way of export in the past, but the transportation of frozen fish from this region to European Russia seems now to be firmly established.

The industries of Siberia are chiefly agriculture, lumbering, mining, and fishing. Manufacturing is not carried on to any considerable extent although the milling of flour is an industry of some importance. Blagoweshtchensk in the Amur Province ranks third among the milling towns in the Russian Empire. The milling of lumber, the brewing of beer, and the making of brick and cement constitute the other more important manufacturing industries. These articles are used almost entirely for home consumption. The one thing needed above all others to improve conditions in all branches of industry in the country is improved transportation facilities. The Trans-Siberian Railroad helps greatly in this direction, but it must be realized that this road can reach but a very small fraction of Siberia. The great problem is of course the long distance which both imports and exports must be shipped. Transportation within the country itself assists in the support of transportation lines less than one would expect for the reason that uniformity of surface, climate, etc., gives similar products and so little need for exchange.

In spite of all obstacles, however, progress is being made in the way of improved transportation. A branch of the Trans-Siberian Railroad is being constructed along the north bank of the Amur River. This road will be extended to Nikolaiefsk on the Pacific coast, thus providing a railway across Asia lying entirely in Russian territory. In addition to extension of railways, plans are being considered whereby it may be possible to convey products by canals, lakes, and rivers entirely across the Russian Empire from the Pacific coast to St. Petersburg.

A country so greatly handicapped in all her other industries as is Siberia could hardly be expected to carry on an extensive foreign trade. Her chief exports are grains and dairy products. Some lumber, fish, and oil seeds are also sent to other countries. Imports consist in large measure of manufactured articles of many kinds. America sends large quantities of agricultural machinery, sewing machines, and articles used in railway construction.

On the whole, Siberia's resources are large; consequently her future possibilities are great. A most important need is wise and sympathetic governmental control. Thus, greater enlightenment on the part of the inhabitants themselves, aided by foreign capital and enterprise, will give to Siberia her full measure of prosperity.