

THOMAS MAKES SERIOUS CHARGES

The Ex-Railroad Commissioner Begins a Book of Revelations.

Charges of Incompetency and Rescality Against His Late Associates--The Governor Called on to Take a Hand.

Wedgfield, Dec 18, 1899.

Editor Item: Some months ago I read a communication in your paper signed "Sumter Farmer" extolling the railroad commission for the reduction of the cotton rate. I was surprised when I learned that the article was written by one of Sumter's most intelligent representatives. The argument used was a rebuke of what the commission had to say of themselves. It was also somewhat of a rebuke to me, for I have repeatedly declared that the Board of Railroad Commissioners are an utterly incompetent body, and I believe I can show this by the cotton rate which so delighted "Sumter Farmer" On page 42 railroad commissioners' report 1897, "Commissioner Thomas advocated and tried to reduce the cotton rate to which the majority would not agree." At that time the net income of all the railroads was \$2,238,579 72, and the price of cotton was about 5 cents. This same majority reduced the cotton rate in 1899 when the net income of all the railroads was \$2,162,718 04, and the price of cotton is 7 cents. Now, why refuse to reduce the rate on cotton when the railroads could better stand the reduction and the people were more in need of it? The answer is that one of the majority is now a candidate for reelection and desires to commend himself to the people. If this is a fact, is it not true, that the people have been swindled out of two years' reduced rate on cotton to suit the political convenience of the majority faction of the board? It is the duty of "Sumter Farmer" to find out the facts from the records sent to the legislature since he is the people's representative in that body.

The board fixed a standard cotton rate, that is, the same rate for every road. The law says, "The board shall make a just and reasonable rate for each road doing business in the State." The records of 1898 show that the S. C. & G. railroad made a net income of \$398,828 79, while another corporation, the Carolina Midland, made a net income of \$14,921 45. The S. C. & G. hauled 350,447 tons one mile, and the C. Midland hauled 8,580 tons one mile. Did the board execute the law when they fixed the same rate for this poor road as for the rich one? It would be indeed instructive to know how these widely different figures could be made to produce the same result or rate. What would "Sumter Farmer" think of the taxing power of this county if they were to tax every citizen of the county the same regardless of the different conditions? This is what the Board of Railroad Commissioners have done, for which assiduity a Sumter law maker praises them.

What is the result of this rate making? It forces the stronger to gobble up all the weaker roads. It destroys competition and forces combination to the detriment of every farmer and business man in the State.

Sometime ago Sumter felt the need of competition, and the citizens secured a connection with the S. C. & G. railroad, before its completion the Southern railway owned both of them, and the people who put in their time, rights of way, &c, are lost in the shuffle, and Sumter is without competition, for nobody is green enough to suppose that the Southern railway and the Atlantic Coast Line would fight for freights which they can pool.

All railroad intelligence agree that "competition is impossible where combination is possible." A standard cotton rate is illegal, injurious, absolutely foolish and proof of incompetency.

I have taken advantage of "Sumter Farmer's" communication for a personal privilege. He said: "It is said that the railroad commissioners do nothing but draw their salaries. I don't concur in this view." Neither do I, for I know they occasionally draw sober breaths. They did draw \$96 out of the treasury and pay the Alliance porter. They did draw \$100 and paid the expenses of two commissioners to Washington to attend a two days' convention when they had free passes to Washington. I went to Washington a few weeks afterwards. I went and returned in a sleeper, the trip cost me \$10. The commissioners signed my name to the report without authority or excuse and made me a party to what I believe are illegal charges. I wrote the following letter to the board and they made me no reply:

Wedgfield, March 3 1899. Hon W. D. Evans, Chairman Board of Railroad Commissioners.

Dear Sir: I received a copy of the railroad commissioners' report, 1898. My name was signed to the report

without authority or excuse, and I beg to enquire about some matters I have been made to approve. The State is made to pay for the porter full time when the alliance exchange has always paid half his wages. In 1893 under Secretary Bartlett the State paid porter \$29, in 1898 the State paid for the same service \$96. In 1893 the State paid for stamps \$29, in 1898 \$41. Two commissioners attended the convention in Washington and the State paid \$100 expenses. You have made me responsible and I beg you will explain the above and oblige, Yours truly, H R Thomas

"Sumter Farmer" is a State officer especially charged with the duty of protecting the interests of Sumter's citizens. The illegal cotton rate is detrimental to the interest of every citizen in that it destroys competition and makes people victims of a railroad trust. No trust, is the democratic slogan for 1900, and yet the South Carolina railroad commissioners, contrary to law, through pure ignorance, force a railroad trust on the people, and are commended by a Sumter democratic law maker. It is "Sumter Farmer's" duty to officially find out by what authority the Board of Railroad Commissioners ignore the law of the State to make a just rate for each road and instead fixes the same rate for every road, to the destruction of competition and to the injury of the people, and how it cost \$100 to go to Washington on free passes, and thus protect the taxpayers. To assist him in his duty I make the following affidavits and forward to the governor through him, our representative

H R Thomas

Wedgfield, Dec 18, 1899. Hon M B McSweeney, Governor of South Carolina

Sir: I forward you some affidavits and a letter which I wrote the Board of Railroad Commissioners last March in regard to what I believe was a misappropriation of public funds, to which they made me a party by signing my name to the report of 1898 without my consent. As they refused to answer a respectful letter asking for information, in duty to myself and the people whose servant I was, I send you several affidavits as is required in Sec 22, Art IV of the constitution of 1895. In the interest of the State, I beg you will recommend the legislature to investigate the fertilizer and cotton rates, both of which I believe are illegal and against the public interest

H R Thomas

No 1. MISAPPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC FUNDS

State of South Carolina--Sumter County.

Personally appeared before me, B P Kelley, a magistrate for and in said county and State, H R Thomas who, on oath, says he is informed and believes that on sundry times shown in office cash book and report for the fiscal year 1898 at the railroad commissioners' office in Columbia in Richland county in said State W. D. Evans, chairman, J. C. Wilborn and Secretary D P Duncan was guilty of signing my name to the railroad commissioners' report of 1898 sent in to the legislature without my authority or consent and without excuse, making me a party to the following misappropriation of public funds the property of the State of South Carolina:

Paid to alliance porter, \$96
Paid to Commissioners W. D. Evans and J. C. Wilborn \$100 for attendance on a two days' convention in Washington, to which city they had free transportation.

The board are charged with the safe keeping and disbursement of the contingent fund appropriated by the legislature and did then and there convert, divert and appropriate the greater portion of said sums to their own use. And further, that the said W. D. Evans, J. C. Wilborn and Secretary D. P. Duncan then and there the greater part of said sums, the property of said State, did take and appropriate to their own use.

H R Thomas. Sworn to before me this 18th day of December, 1899

B P Kelley, Magistrate

No 2. COTTON RATE.

State of South Carolina--Sumter County

Personally appeared before me, B P Kelley, a magistrate for and in said county and State, H R Thomas who, on oath, says that he is informed and believes that at the railroad commissioners' office in Columbia in Richland county in said State on the 1st day of September last that W. D. Evans, J. C. Wilborn and C. W. Garris, constituting the Board of Railroad Commissioners, did make and put in force an unlawful and hurtful cotton rate, being the same rate for every road, regardless of the different conditions, when the law requires a just and reasonable rate for each road doing business in the State. That the said W. D. Evans, J. C. Wilborn and C. W. Garris in disregard of the law as to rates are destroying competition and forcing on the people a railroad trust to the great detriment and loss of the people.

H R Thomas. Sworn to before me this 18th day of December, 1899

B P Kelley, Magistrate.

No 3. FERTILIZER RATE.

State of South Carolina--Sumter County.

Personally appeared before me, B. P. Kelley, a magistrate for and in said county in said State, H. R. Thomas who, on oath, says that on the 28th day of November, 1895, at the railroad commissioners' office in Columbia in Richland county in said State, W. D. Evans and J. C. Wilborn, a majority of the Board of Railroad Commissioners, against the protest of H. R. Thomas, the minority member of said board, did put in force a fertilizer rate based on errors of about 800,000 dollars in the net income of all the roads as shown on pages 177 and 186 report 1895, and that the majority of the board did not know whether the Southern railroad lost \$93,107 28 or made \$442,961 65 by the year's operations as shown on pages 177 and 185 report 1895. And further that said W. D. Evans and J. C. Wilborn did enter into a trade with the railroads of the State against which said H. R. Thomas protested as shown on page 50 report 1896, where said W. D. Evans and J. C. Wilborn agreed to raise rates on other commodities to induce the roads to work an illegal fertilizer rate. When the roads came for their pay and asked for a raise of rate under the trade or agreement said H. R. Thomas advocated a reduction of the cotton rate instead as shown on pages 31 to 42 report 1897. Said W. D. Evans and J. C. Wilborn voted against cotton reduction. At that time the net income of all the roads was \$2,238 579 72 and the price of cotton was about 5 cents. In 1899 said W. D. Evans and J. C. Wilborn did reduce the rate on cotton when the net income of all the roads was \$2,162,718 04, and the price of cotton is 7 cents. And further that the fertilizer rate put in force reduced the rate from the Columbia mills into the Piedmont section 25 per cent and from the Charleston mills 8 per cent in the same section. The Charleston mill fixed the price all over the State. This was an illegal discrimination in favor of the Columbia mills of 17 per cent, about 75 cents a ton on about 70,000 tons, equal to about \$50,000 a year. The fertilizer rate was made by Secretary D. P. Duncan, who was the agent for the Columbia mills and who was the beneficiary of his own act, supported by said W. D. Evans and J. C. Wilborn. The discriminative and illegal fertilizer rate based on errors of about \$800,000 has robbed the people in the Piedmont section alone out of some \$200,000 on the one commodity of fertilizer since 1895. Report 1895, pages 177 and 186, shows the impossible two incomes for nearly every road. It is impossible to figure a just rate as the law requires based on two incomes for each road or on \$800,000 errors.

H R Thomas

Sworn to before me this 18th day of December, 1899

B P Kelley, Magistrate

Pains in head, neck, shoulders, back, front, side tips, and limbs are readily cured by Simmons' Squaw Vine Wine or Tablets.

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Dec 6 x

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L. B. DURANT.

Sep 6--x

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TESTIMONIALS.

From one of our first graduates. He has a good position, and recommends our school as the best, as does all of our students.

Columbia, S. C., Jan. 8, 1897.

Prof. W. H. Newberry, President C. B. C.

My Dear Sir: During the month of January, 1885, was the time I began a business course in the Columbia Business College. Although a stranger in the city, I was welcomed by professors and students, which made me feel at home. Having completed my course, I accepted a position as book-keeper for one of the largest dry goods firms in the city, which position I held for one year, and then changed to the grocery firm of James M. Green, one of the leading grocery men in the city which position I still hold. Owing to the thorough training received at the Columbia Business College, have been able to master every business transaction that has come in my work. In future years will always look back to the time spent in the Columbia Business College with pleasure. I recommend this school to all who desire a business education.

From your friend and student

W. W. GREGG.

COMPLETED SHORTHAND IN THREE MONTHS.

Blackville, Barnwell Co., Feb. 30, 1899.

Mr. W. H. Newberry, President Columbia Business College, Columbia, S. C.

My Dear Sir: It affords me pleasure to testify to the merits of the Columbia Business College. I do not hesitate to say that I have received substantial and beneficial results. I cheerfully recommend it to any person desirous of securing a business education. During my course of study at the college there was uniform kind and courteous treatment and attention. Close attention was given the students by the instructors to insure accuracy and thoroughness in their studies, and my progress was rapid, and I presume, efficient, as I obtained a situation as soon as I reached home, and so far as I know, am giving satisfaction. I completed my Shorthand course in three months. I do not think the Columbia Business College can be excelled by any other in the State. Ever wishing your college grand success, I am

Your friend and old student,

(Miss) DAISY STOKES.