

Ontario's Forest Fires.

Great Conflagrations that have Cost the Province Many Millions.

(Part of a paper read before the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors by J. F. Whitson, O.L.S., at their Sixteenth Annual Meeting.)

The most valuable of our hardwood timber was burned by the early settlers when clearing off their land, or was used as fuel, and to-day there are no hardwood forests to compare in area or quality with the original forests of the Indian peninsula (Bruce County), the Huron tract or the older part of Ontario bordering on Lakes Erie and Ontario, as hardwood is found only in small sections north and west of Lake Huron; nor can we compare our present pine forests with those that have been cut or burned over in the last fifty years.

Trent and Ottawa Valleys.

It is to be regretted that careless operations in the past by lumbermen have done much to lessen the supply of timber in this province. On carefully examining the reports of surveys and explorations made prior to 1855, I find that nearly all of the Huron and Ottawa territory, including the districts of Muskoka, Haliburton and Parry Sound and the counties of Addington, Hastings and Renfrew were practically a virgin forest of mixed timber, pine predominating, with only parts of a few townships burned over.

Prior to 1860 a virgin forest covered the territory on the upper branches of the Trent waters. In that year, however, a fire broke out on the Burned river, in the townships of Snowdon and Glamorgan, in Haliburton, caused by a trapper's smudge.

In 1851 the first fire of any magnitude to visit the Ottawa valley commenced at the mouth of the

Bonnechere river and burned over what was locally known as the Big Pine country. This fire originated from the burning paper of a musket fired by a river-driver. In 1868 the Bissett's Creek country, from the Ottawa river to Lake Traverse, on the Petawawa, was devastated, and in 1870 the Skead limits on the Opeongo. In 1876 the country from the Petawawa to the Bonnechere met the same fate, the fire having arisen through the carelessness of a river-driver.

In these fires alone the province lost several billion feet of its finest white and red pine. To-day you will scarcely find a township in the white and red pine country that has not been burned over in whole or in part, and in many instances the fires have swept over them several times.

North Shore of Lake Huron.

A. P. Salter, who between 1855 and 1857 outlined the north shore of Lake Huron from Lake Nipissing to Sault Ste. Marie and explored the country to a distance of about forty miles inland, describes the country as a vast forest of green timber. Scarcely a burned area was met with. The country was not as heavily timbered with pine as the Ottawa valley; there were, however, large areas of excellent pine and other mixed timbers. Since that date a series of fires has reduced the pine area north of Lake Huron by almost one-half.

The fires began in 1864. The fire of 1864 was the first destructive fire to devastate the north shore. It began near Ottetail lake, on the