

PETROLEUM.

THE OIL FIELDS OF CANADA WEST.

The Supposed Extent of the Oil-bearing Territory of Canada—The Township of Enniskillen—Oil Springs—The First Discovery of Oil there—The Gum Beds—An Interesting Record of Flowing Wells—Recent Developments.

Correspondence of the New-York Times.

DETROIT, Thursday, March 22, 1866.

There are very few readers of the NEW-YORK TIMES who have not within the past six months heard more or less concerning the celebrated oil fields of Canada West. And yet it is improbable that any considerable portion of them have a definite idea of their locality, extent, history, or productiveness.

THE SUPPOSED EXTENT OF THE OIL BEARING TERRITORY OF CANADA.

The supply of rock oil which for the last four or five years has entered so largely into the commerce of the British Provinces, has been obtained wholly in a territory situated on a belt of land extending from Lake Huron to Lake Erie, and chiefly embraced within the county of Lambton, bordering on Lake Huron and the River St. Clair. A more extended idea of the supposed oil-bearing territory, might be given, perhaps, by saying that it embraced all that region of Western Canada, which overlies that group of rocks which is known to geologists as the corniferous formation, consisting of fossiliferous and highly bituminous limestone, and embracing a very considerable portion of the southwestern peninsula.

TOWNSHIP OF ENNISKILLEN—OIL SPRINGS.

The Township of Enniskillen is centrally situated in Lambton County. The surface of the country is generally level, though in some sections slightly undulating. There are no remarkable geological indications that would lead one to suppose that there were any important elements of wealth concealed below.

Persons exploring the township for oil lands, will find it quite necessary to be fully posted in reference to the subdivisions of townships as they are designated in Canada. These subdivisions are called concessions, consisting of tiers of lots, which, in Enniskillen Township, number from the south township line running north, from one to fourteen, inclusive.

The village of Oil Springs is situated in the southern concession, embracing lots from Nos. 15 to 20 inclusive, and is intersected by Black Creek, a sluggish stream, crossing the main street about the centre of the village, and at another point about half a mile below. It is eighteen miles southeast from Sarnia, at the foot of Lake Huron, with which place it is connected by a durable and excellent plank-road.

HISTORY OF THE EARLY OIL DISCOVERIES—THE GUM BEDS.

The existence of rock oil has been known to the Indians of Canada from time immemorial, and was indicated by splittings of oil bubbling up through the streams and floating on the surface of the water. The Indians were accustomed to gather it by spreading their blankets over it, to which it would adhere, and thus they saved considerable quantities, which they used chiefly for medicinal purposes, and to which they attached great value as a remedy for external wounds and bruises.

bearing centre of Enniskillen. But of this there is no certainty, since excellent wells have been sunk at various points, and at such remote distances as to preclude the idea that the particular locality they occupy is more favored than others. Be that as it may, one thing is very certain, that nature has seldom afforded a more exuberant yield of petroleum than is there indicated. Recent explorations for miles north and south, east of this point, show that oil may be found in considerable quantities, as at Petrolia, Dawn and Bothwell.

THE FIRST MANUFACTURE OF REFINED OIL IN CANADA.

The first effort to manufacture petroleum as an illuminating substance in Canada, was made on the "gum beds" before alluded to. In 1856 a company was organized, which was known as the International Mining Company, its object being the development of the mineral resources of the Western Peninsula, including the working up of the gum taken from the beds before referred to.

But the great event in the history of the Canadian oil enterprise was yet to be disclosed. One JOHN SHAW, a Canadian by birth, conceived the idea of deeper drilling, and after a long and wearisome task, almost despairing of success, on the 16th of January, 1862, reached a very prolific vein, and found himself in possession of a flowing well of great capacity, but with limited means of securing the oil, a large portion of it escaped into the adjoining creek.

The history of these wells cannot but prove interesting, not only to practical oil operators, but to scientific men who are investigating the subject of petroleum. It is questionable whether any other part of the country has furnished a record of flowing wells of equal capacity. I am enabled to furnish you, on the authority of Prof. WINCHELL, of the Michigan University, who bestowed much careful investigation upon the subject, the following nearly complete list of the flowing wells of this period, with their location, according to the township divisions and subdivisions; the name of the well being preceded by its depth in the rock, and followed by its estimated yield per twenty-four hours.

LIST OF OLD FLOWING WELLS AT OIL SPRINGS.

Table with 3 columns: Depth, ft., Yield, bbls., and Well Name. Includes entries like 'Finn & Brown, (barely overflowed intermittently), L. 17, Con. 1' and 'Solis, Sub. 16, R. A. L. 18, Con. 2'.

It is believed by those who have bestowed careful attention upon this subject, that the quantity of oil that was suffered to flow off upon the water of Black Creek, exceeded 5,000,000 barrels during a single season! It is doubtful whether there is a similar record of such enormous quantities of petroleum escaping in so brief a period at any oil locality in the country.

THE FLUCTUATIONS IN THE PRICE OF OIL.

The question very naturally arises, why was not this enormous waste of oil prevented? This may be answered by saying that there were not tanks and barrels, enough in all Western Canada to secure it. Besides, oil then was comparatively a new article of trade, and its commercial value was hardly comprehended. During that season the price ranged from 10 cents to \$1 per barrel.

the oil was only worth 10 cents per barrel, and in the Fall of the same year, it advanced to 50 cents, and the ensuing January it reached \$2, declining the ensuing June to \$1, and advancing the following September to \$6. Early in 1864 it again declined to \$3, rallying the next Fall to \$5, where it remained steadily during the Fall and early Winter, declining again in the early months of 1865 to \$4.

THE RECENT OIL DEVELOPMENT.

Almost simultaneously with the discovery of the great flowing wells of Canada, borings were vigorously prosecuted in Venango County, Pennsylvania, and also in West Virginia. The enterprise was almost entirely abandoned in the latter district, however, on account of the guerrilla raids; but was followed up with great energy in Pennsylvania, and with a degree of success that has scarcely had a parallel in mining enterprises.

And yet, with all the disadvantages under which the business had been conducted, it appears that during the years 1861 to 1864 there were exported from the Province 2,292,758 gallons, at a customs valuation of \$363,855, or a trifle over fifteen cents per gallon. I have no accurate data at hand to state the actual production at the wells in the various districts, at the present time.

THE DURABILITY OF THE WELLS TESTED.

Many persons have entertained the idea that after the flowing wells have ceased, the supply of oil is chiefly exhausted. But this theory does not seem to be sustained by facts; and it will, doubtless, interest all persons giving their attention to oil phenomena, to be informed that there are many wells here, remarkable for their prolific yield in 1862, have been all along, and are still regarded as among the most valuable wells in this section.

A good well can be sunk here at an expense of about \$5,000 in gold. This includes the cost of an acre of ground in fee simple, and all the necessary outgoes attending such an enterprise.

The Murderer Durfee—Confession of the Crime. From the Grand Rapids Democrat. We learn, though not officially, that HOSEA N. DUREE, the man who has just been arrested and is now in close confinement in the county jail in this city, for the murder of one Mrs. BELDEN, in Courtland township, in October last, has substantially confessed that he committed the awful crime.

He said that, in coming to this city, he accidentally met a man on the cars with whom he entered into conversation, and finally became familiar with him; that he told the stranger he had a woman with him, pointing to Mrs. BELDEN, whom he wanted to get rid of. Upon this announcement the said stranger (whose name and residence is not given) acknowledged himself ready or a job of the like character in a certain play, rubbed his hands with joy at the prospect of so delightful a piece of work. They then made their arrangements for the accomplishment of the desired object.