

From time to time pioneer residents of Lindsay introduce the subject of the fire of 1861 which almost wiped out the then growing Town of Lindsay and the following article from the pen of Mr. George Beall, Albert Street South will bring this memorable and historical event "back to life".

Where it Started

On July 5th about 11:30 a.m. smoke was noticed coming from a small frame building adjoining Jewitt's Hotel which was located on Ridout St. about where Lindsay Private Hospital is now. The weather had been extremely hot and dry at that time and the fire spread to the adjoining hotel and outbuildings with amazing rapidity. Crossing Lindsay St. to O'Leary's Hotel on the south-west corner of Kent and Lindsay Sts., it then spread very quickly west on Kent St. It also crossed Ridout St. from Jewett's Hotel to Mr. Britton's store (where Polito's store now is).

Breeze Speeds Spread

A favorable breeze spread the fire north of Britton's and west on both sides of Kent St., not stopping until it reached William St. where it turned north to Peel St. and then east consuming all the intervening properties including Squire McDonnell's newly built house (Canadian Legion now).

Spreading north on Lindsay St. it crossed the bridge burning grist and sawmills on the riverbank and all the other buildings including Fournier's Hotel on the block bounded by Lindsay, King and Queen Sts., also the Alma Hotel and the railway station.

Path of Destruction

Roughly speaking everything was destroyed from St. Lawrence to William St., both sides of Kent St. to Peel St., north on Lindsay St., across the river burning the bridge and all buildings including the Post Office and Customs Office — 91 buildings in all and rendering approximately 400 people homeless. And it all happened so quickly. By 3:30 the fire was all over leaving a scene of desolation never to be forgotten by those who saw it. People lost everything as fire insurance was in it's infancy and few had it.

Resources Taxed

The immediate question of

housing and feeding so many people taxed the resources and benevolence of the fortunate ones.

That night many people spent the night in the open air.

Relief parties were sent out collecting food and clothing from nearby farmers.

Loads of food and clothing were sent in next morning from Oakwood, Little Britain, and Omemee, and many people were taken home by the people who came in.

It Did Good Too

While the fire spelled disaster to many individuals, to the town as a whole it did much good.

With unbelieveable courage and hope, people began to rebuild — and with brick instead of lumber. It was the means of opening up McHugh's brickyard, as before all brick was imported.

Within a year saw the completion of many buildings — the Britton property, Fink's Hotel (now the New Royal) — the Keenan Block (now Walker's Department Store) and practically all the stores from York to William St. — all brick buildings placing Lindsay in the forefront of most towns of that period.