THE ONTARIO CONSERVATION AND REFORESTATION ASSOCIATION

By W. H. PORTER
Secretary, O.C.R.A.

CORNER-STONES tell us when churches, hospitals and many other institutions were erected. The date carved in stone is accepted as the birthday by historians and by those who pause to read the chiselled letters. However, a few do realize that long before the excavation was made, long before the masons, bricklayers and carpenters appeared on the scene the building was erected in the minds of a few people who first had the vision and then proceeded to make their dreams come true.

Mr. A. H. Richardson has asked me to record a few facts regarding the origin and the early developments of the Ontario Conservation and Reforestation Association, which, for convenience, we might term the O.C.R.A. This is not an easy task, for a great many people, scattered over the Province of Ontario, have contributed to the formation, as well as the development of this young and somewhat unique organization. So far as my knowledge permits I will attempt to weave cause and effect into this brief history of the O.C.R.A. and mention a few of the circumstances leading up to the ultimate organization of scores of genuine conservationists into an association during the winter of 1936-37.

Back in the early thirties, the late John Burton, father of Mrs. M. F. Hepburn, had several conversations with F. S. Thomas, Agricultural Representative in Elgin County, regarding the huge gullies in the shore line of Lake Erie and the severe erosion that was annually taking place. Mr. Burton suggested the planting of trees to prevent this erosion, particularly around township bridges where the banks were giving way and making it necessary to spend considerable sums of money for repairs. This thought was acted upon in the Township of Southwold and there one can now see Carolina poplars, 40 to 50 feet high, holding the slipping banks in place and in that way protecting the abutments of and the approaches to bridges.

To Mr. Thomas these discussions opened up the bigger field of stream improvement along with steps to prevent erosion which is so marked all along the Lake Erie shore line. In 1935, and again in 1936, he told me that he was trying to get something started in Elgin and we discussed the advisability of some kind of an organization in these western counties. The first plan considered was a modest one. We thought then that it would be well to attempt a survey of the streams on a watershed and endeavour to have the property owners plant the banks and ravines with suitable trees. We talked and thought in terms of Kettle Creek, which we hoped to improve all the way up through St. Thomas to Belmont.

Then came the exceedingly dry season of 1936 when hundreds of farm folk all along the front of Old Ontario were drawing water for domestic use and for their live stock. It was pitiful to see cattle milling around dried-up water holes and going daily to the stream bottoms where always previously there was water. Wells, that never failed before, went dry; springs dried

up. The situation indeed was serious and one could see that the ill effects of drought had been intensified by the needless slaughter of trees and the denudation of the countryside. It was obvious that something should be done.

Early in the autumn of 1936 the Rotary Club of Simcoe invited representatives from several surrounding counties and at a special dinner meeting stressed the need of some concerted action to halt the mad destruction of tree growth. Monroe Landon and the Norfolk County Chamber of Commerce had been sounding the warning bell for several years and the County Council was already embarked on a reforestation programme. The meeting agreed that time for action had come and that one County could not accomplish very much alone. It was pointed out that the wooded areas and swamps in one county feed the streams that flow through adjoining counties and real progress could be made only when municipalities all over the Province united in a forward-looking conservation policy actually put into effect.

An article entitled, "A New Reforestation Policy for Ontario," was published in *The Farmer's Advocate*, under date of September 10, 1936, and this brought forth considerable comment from many different quarters of the Province. It was becoming increasingly apparent that Southwestern Ontario, at any rate, was ready for some kind of a conservation programme but the problem was to get it organized. Individuals had been preaching reforestation and conservation for almost 50 years, but, as Mark Twain said about the weather, "nobody did anything about it." It was suggested to me on several occasions and by different parties, that I should attempt to unite all these people favourable to conservation into some kind of an organization. And it was agreed from the start that it must be a rural movement. If the farm people and the officers of rural municipalities would not put their shoulders to the wheel then it would not be worth while going any further. Consequently, an invitation was sent out to the nine counties in this southwestern peninsula to meet in the Agricultural Office, London, on December 17, 1936. The response was most gratifying. The wardens of six out of the nine counties were present and the other three sent representatives. All the agricultural representatives were in attendance; officers of the Forestry Branch and of the Ontario Department of Agriculture were there to serve in any capacity they could, as were also members of the press. The meeting bespoke a keen interest in conservation and the movement was launched.

In order to expedite business and keep the delegates together for the entire session, Ernest Weld, Manager of the William Weld Company, entertained them at luncheon. Then they broke up into half a dozen different committees and drafted the programme and policies that officers of the movement have since attempted to put into effect.

The meeting at London gave evidence of a genuine interest throughout the countryside and it was decided that other counties were no doubt just as ready to proceed along the same lines. Consequently, a meeting was called at the O.A.C., Guelph, on January 13, 1937, for the remaining thirteen counties west of Toronto and here again the response was highly favourable. A meeting at Bowmanville on January 15 and at Kemptville on April 6, 1937, completed the organization campaign. The recommendations of the committees at the London meeting were submitted to similar committees at

Guelph, Bowmanville and Kemptville with the result that more than 100 men, representing all portions of Old Ontario, had some part in shaping the policy and programme of what is now the O.C.R.A.

It was agreed that the Province should be divided into five zones with the county committees in each zone setting up an executive of their own. The three officers of each zone committee automatically became members of the Provincial Committee of fifteen, which is known as the Ontario Conservation and Reforestation Association.

Copies of the recommendations approved by the committees at London, Guelph and Bowmanville were sent to all the county councils in Old Ontario at their January session in 1937. The newly drafted programme was widely approved by these local governments and since that time their support has been one of the most pleasing features of the whole movement.

All those associated with the initial efforts will not forget the splendid assistance given by the Press of Ontario. From the start the Press has been consistent and most generous in its advocacy of conservation.

The suggested organization is now complete and I think it is significant that nowhere in the entire organization is there a salary job. All the officers and officials are serving without pay. They are giving freely of their time and their talent because they see a great work to do and wish to enlist others in this worthy cause.

The foregoing article will be of interest to the members of our society and particularly to those interested in southern Ontario. Here is an organization which is really "going places" in the field of popular forestry. Let me list some of its achievements since it was organized.

Each spring since 1937 a meeting has been held in each zone of the five zones in the province. In some cases these meetings were held to coincide with a forestry project under way in the zone. For example, in 1939, Zone 3 comprising the counties of York, Simcoe, Dufferin, Peel, Grey, and Bruce held its meeting near Barrie and participated in the planting of a 100 acre plot of land purchased by the county of Simcoe for planting by Boy Scouts. In the spring of 1940, Zone 5, which includes all the counties in eastern Ontario east of Lennox and Addington, held its meeting at the time of the planting of a new 1000 acre forest being established by the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville largely through the instrumentality of the Association. Also in the spring of 1940, Zone 1, which includes 6 counties in the extreme west end of the province held its meeting when Boy Scouts of western Ontario were engaged in planting a 75 acre plot for the county of Norfolk.

Many successful field days have also been sponsored by the association. In 1938 a field day was held in Norfolk county with an attendance of over 500 persons. This included an inspection of the St. Williams nursery and county planting in Norfolk. In the same year a similar field day was held in Simcoe county which included a trip through Midhurst nursery and work being done by Simcoe county. In the autumn a field day was held in eastern Ontario centering around the county forest of Prescott and Russell. Also in the same year a very successful field day was held by the counties of York

and Ontario and included an inspection of the forests owned by these counties.

In 1939, field days were held in the counties of Grey and Dufferin, Norfolk, Northumberland and Durham and, in the autumn of that year, the members of the association in eastern Ontario spent a day at the Petawawa Experimental Station.

In 1940 a field day and conservation picnic was held at the Bruce county forest when approximately 1500 school children and adults attended. In this year also, members from eastern Ontario conducted a tour and field day to the reclamation work being done at the Sand Banks, and just after the opening of school in York county a very successful conservation picnic was held at the county forest with an attendance of well over 1000 children and adults.

The association also publishes a quarterly leaflet, in which it reports the progress of the association and forestry items of interest. During November of this year it is sponsoring a series of conventions of representatives of Junior Farmer Clubs. These conventions will be representative of the whole province and will be held at Kemptville, Orono, Angus, Hamilton and St. Thomas. The purpose of these is to permit members of the Junior Farmer's organizations to discuss conservation problems and make plans for helping in this worthy cause.

The association is also sponsoring what it calls School Forestry Clubs. These are groups in the public schools throughout the province who are undertaking to study problems of conservation and make collections of forestry material. A pamphlet is being prepared for the guidance of these clubs and already over 15 have been organized in one inspectorate.

A. H. RICHARDSON.