Limestone

Limestones

The limestones of Northampton County, exclusive of the argillaceous variety described under cement, are widespread and have been quarried in scores of places. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that a quarry has been opened on every farm in the limestone areas. The different limestone formations—Tomstown, Allentown, Beekmantown, Jacksonburg (cement limestone) and Martinsburg—have been described in earlier chapters. In this place their utilization will be discussed.

The limestones of the county have been used for building purposes (described under Building Stones), for the manufacture of lime, for flux and for crushed stone. The earliest use was for building stone and for lime. The first settlers opened small quarries where they got stone for their own use to burn lime for mortar or for fertilizing the soil. Those farmers without limestone on their own property sometimes hauled the stone from their neighbors' farms and burned it in small kilns near their residences.

When the iron mines were opened in the region and furnaces erected there was a demand for fluxing stone, and several quarries of considerable size were operated for this purpose. With the advent of portland cement and the construction of concrete roads, bridges and buildings, the demand for crushed stone for aggregate developed. Each of these uses has followed more or less in the order named and at the present time crushed stone is the most important. Some quarries have at different times been worked for each of the uses mentioned but seldom for more than one at the same time.

Limestones for lime.—More limestone quarries in Northampton County have been opened to get stone for burning than for any other purpose. Most of them are small and are now filled with rubbish and the kilns nearby are in ruins. Almost every clump of trees in the fields conceals one of these abandoned quarries. Of course, many of the quarries were opened along the stream bluffs. It was the common practice for the farmers to quarry and burn the stone during seasons when there was little work to be done in the fields. The kilns were constructed of field stones, many of glacial origin, and wood was used for fuel. The burning was not very efficient and the limed fields now contain pieces of chalky-white, partially-burned stone that may have lain there for many decades. Students have been puzzled by these limestone fragments, so unlike the other limestones in appearance. The farmers felt that it was profitable to add lime to the soil every three to five years and by a definite program one-third to one-fifth of the farm would be limed each year.