

Fires and fire protection vital part of Ingersoll life

By Kenneth Campbell
Retired Fire Chief

The history of the town of Ingersoll dates back to 1793. There are few towns or villages in Ontario that have not had some serious setbacks in their history and Ingersoll is no exception. During the war of 1812, Ingersoll was to feel the effects of this conflict. In the summer of 1812 marauding bands of Yankees destroyed many homes in Ingersoll, also the mill and anything they thought would be of use to the Canadian Forces. In 1832, another setback was to hit the village of Ingersoll. This time it took the form of the then dreaded yellow fever. This outbreak was to take a huge toll among our citizens.

On May 7, 1872, the greatest calamity of all took place in the form of a fire. Ingersoll was to fall prey to the largest fire in Canada to that date. The Ingersoll business section in those days stretched along King St. from Oxford to Hall Sts., and on Thames St. from the Thames River to King St. and on Oxford St. and Charles St. There were only two or three brick buildings in the whole town at that time. For the most part the buildings in the business section were made of wood, and many were no more than shacks, and built close together. There were also a few residences and vacant lots on all the streets in the business part of downtown.

GAS LAMPS

In those days the streets were gravel with plank sidewalks that were raised six or eight inches

above the gutters. The main streets were lit with gas lamps that hung from iron standards, and the village lamplighter had to make his rounds at dusk and again at daybreak. The streets in the business section were lined with hitching posts with iron rings for the hitching of horses. Many of these posts were fancy iron rods surmounted by a carved horse. There were also rails which were used for the tying of horses and teams.

In the year 1863, under by-law #78, the village of Ingersoll was to form its first fire brigade. This fire brigade was established for the prevention of fires, and the preservation of property.

The new fire brigade consisted of fire companies, hook and ladder companies, life saving companies and a committee for the governing of same.

The establishment of the fire brigade was made by the municipal council of the corporation of Ingersoll under and by virtue of the municipal institutions act of Upper Canada.

It was on April 6, 1863 that Reeve John Galliford and Town Clerk R. A. Woodcock signed the by-law to form the first and still going Ingersoll Fire Brigade.

R.H. Carroll was named the first chief engineer for the village of Ingersoll. The executive or governing body of the brigade consisted of the chief engineer, a number of assistant engineers, a captain, a first lieutenant and one member from each company. The chief engineer had sole and absolute control of all the fire engines and other apparatus belonging to the

fire brigade. He was also in command of all the officers and firemen on the brigade, and all the other persons working at a fire. The assistant engineer had this power in the absence of the chief engineer.

It was the duty of the officers and the members of the several companies of the fire brigade, whenever a fire should break out, to respond with their engines, hook and ladder carriages, hose carriages and hose reels, and all other apparatus belonging to the brigade.

HELP COMMANDEERED

When a fire broke out in the village, it was lawful for the chief engineer or the officer in command to ask the assistance of any male inhabitant between the age of 16 and 60 to assist in conveying any engine or any piece of apparatus to, or near any fire and to assist in the operating of same. If the male inhabitant refused to comply to the demand for assistance the guilty person on conviction before the reeve or magistrate could be fined the sum of not more than \$20. for each offence, or if in default of payment committed to the common jail in the county of Oxford for a period not to exceed 20 days.

The firemen depended on water in those days to extinguish their fires as we do today, but the first fire brigade had to get its water from wells, the river or reservoirs, that were placed about the village. The largest reservoir was located on Oxford St. just west of the old town hall. The populace in those days all had a bucket or two which they kept full of water or snow. It was also a common sight to see a

ladder at the side of a house and one on the roof near the chimney so a fire could be put out as soon as possible. Homeowners in those days used wood for both heating and cooking and a great number of chimney fires was the result.

NO LADDERS

The property saving company, consisted of 12 men. It was the duty of these men to see that such property was put into safe keeping, and to do all in their power to prevent such property from being stolen or damaged.

In order to promote attendance at fires, a premium was awarded to the fire company who were first at the greatest number of fires in a year. Each engine company carried 200 feet of hose. Any engine company going to a fire with a less amount was not entitled to credit as first arrival.

When the fire brigade was formed the firemen received 50 cents a month. When they arrived at a fire it was their duty to exert themselves with vigor in order to extinguish the fire. In the early days of the fire brigade the chief engineer, the assistant engineers and company officers carried trumpets that were used to direct the firemen while they fought the fire.

When the volunteer fire brigade was formed, the firemen were summoned by the ringing of a large bell. The bell would ring for a considerable length of time, then stop, then sound once if the fire was in ward one, sound twice if the fire was in ward two, and three times if fire was in ward three.

The village of Ingersoll in the

1860s and early 1870s had three fire stations. The first station was on King St. E. on the north-east corner of Water St. The second station was a small building just north of the Thames River on Thames St. N. It housed some small equipment for the protection of buildings on the north side of the river. The third station was on King St. W. at the corner of Benson St. and the C.P.R. tracks.

The fighting of fires was a serious business in the early days of Ingersoll, just as it is today. When the alarm sounded the firemen would respond, even if getting a haircut or shave, or if dressed in his best clothes. These were dedicated men and I would like to think that the present day fire fighter is equally dedicated.

DEVASTATING FIRE

On the evening of May 7th, 1872, a fire broke out in the stable of the Royal Exchange Hotel; this building was on the south east corner of Oxford and Charles Streets. The origin of this fire was never discovered as this building was supposed to be unoccupied. The fire travelled so fast and furiously that the residents were overcome by panic and confusion, as they watched the work of near a lifetime go up in flames. When the fire was finally extinguished, it had destroyed about 80 places of business. Both sides of Thames St. and most of the buildings on Oxford St. from Charles to King St. had also fallen prey to the flames.

During the course of this fire a

(Continued on Page 20)

(Continued from Page 18)

call for assistance was put out to the London and Woodstock fire brigades. Both communities did respond with help in the form of a fire fighting team. These teams consisted of a piece of fire apparatus, complete with men and horses to man same. The first team to arrive was from London. They came on a flat car on the Grand Trunk Railway. The team from Woodstock arrived a little later by the same method after having some difficulty making transportation arrangements.

The business section along King St. E. was saved by the strenuous efforts of the London Fire Brigade and the men of Ingersoll who were employed by the McIntyre Furniture Factory which was on King St. E. and escaped the fire.

During the holocaust the lives of two men were taken; C.C. Payne and John Omand. Both of these men died while assisting firemen fight the flames.

While fire burned on one side of the street, goods from stores had to be moved across the street, only to be moved again as the fire spread. Naturally goods were damaged in moving; and some removed by thieves, always ready to profit by the misfortunes of others. The stores with bottled goods seemed to be the favorites.

The firemen on the hand pumps and those who carried water buckets all night were so stiff and sore in the morning that they could not remove their clothing.

FRAME BUILDING

Why Ingersoll had not suffered a similar calamity before is hard to explain. Nearly all the buildings in the business section were of frame construction and in no way fire-proof. But from the blackened ruins of 1872 have risen bigger and better business places and homes, evidence of the courage of the people of Ingersoll. In November of 1873, Ingersoll purchased a Silsby Steam Engine from the Silsby Manufacturing Co., Seneca Falls, New York, U.S.A. at the cost of \$4,750., a modern piece of fire apparatus in those days. This engine was equipped with a rotary pump as are some pumps today. Along with the new steam engine came the introduction of horses to the Ingersoll Fire Brigade. Many of the old-timers fought their coming and in later years their going. They were of course housed in the fire station, and became special pets of the firemen. For the most part they were crosses between light and heavy draft horses. These horses were among the best kept, if not the best.

No sight was more thrilling than a team of galloping horses, sparks flying from the metal wheels and the horses' feet as they pulled a fire engine down the street. The smoke pouring from the steam engine, the clanging bell and the whistle, all united to make an impression never to be forgotten.

The two horse hitch was used in Ingersoll, but it was not uncommon to see three and four hitches, especially in the north where the win-

ters are more severe. In spite of the special attention the fire horses were given, their lives were not an easy one. From their warm stalls they could in the next few minutes be out pounding the icy streets in the worst kind of weather. Many a fire horse had to be destroyed after suffering a sever fall on the icy streets.

It would be a sad day at the fire station when one of the horses had to retire. Special attention was always given to see that a good owner was found for the horse.

The first team of horses the town purchased cost \$215.00. In the early 1900s a good team of fire horses cost the town \$425., and the last team of horses cost \$310.14 plus \$97.82 for freight because they were bought in the west. In April, 1927 this team was sold for \$300. because it was in this year the fire department went completely motorized with the purchase of a second piece of motorized equipment.

KING ST. SITE

In 1878, all the fire equipment was moved to the old town hall site on King St. W., an extension was built on the north east side to house all the equipment. Fire helmets and coats were first used by the members of the fire department in 1874; these helmets were made of leather as was the fire hose in those days. New helmets and belts were purchased again in 1931 and once more in 1986. It was also in 1931 that smoke masks were first introduced to the Ingersoll Fire Department.

In April of 1926, Ingersoll purchased its first piece of motorized stock. It was a Model "T", hook and ladder truck. This truck was purchased from the Jolly Motor Car Co. This truck was to see service 1946 when a new Ford ladder truck was purchased from the Bickle-Seagraves Co. of Woodstock, Ontario. In March 1927, a Stewart Fire Pumper with an Aherns-Fox Marine Motor was purchased from the Lorne Tractor Co., Tillsonburg, Ontario. Some of the parts of this truck were made in Ingersoll just across the street from the old fire hall on King St. W. This pumper saw service in Ingersoll until it was replaced in 1958 by an International Pumper which is still in reserve today. The 1958 pumper was purchased from the LA France Fire Engine and Folamite Co. Ltd., in Toronto, Ontario. The 1927 Stewart Pumper has been kept and can be seen in parades in the district or at the fire hall on Mutual St. N. In May 1975, Ingersoll purchased an International 50 foot Tele Squirt Truck from the King Seagraves Co. Ltd., Woodstock, Ontario. This unit replaced the 1946 ladder truck which was sold. The town of Ingersoll purchased a 1988 Triple Combination Ford Pumper from Hub Fire Truck Co. Inc. This truck was delivered in July of 1988. The department also has a 1986 Ford Van that carries the rescue tools and other emergency equipment.

BELL ALERT

The system of ringing the town

bell to alert the firemen of a fire was replaced by the telephone in 1927. You must realize that during the early years of the fire brigade over a hundred volunteer firemen were on call. It was also in 1927 that the first full-time chief was hired. When the telephone calling system started the number at the fire hall was 100. When the operator was asked for this number she would listen, and if it was to report a fire she would call all the firemen at their homes, as they had telephones. When the dial system was introduced to Ingersoll a new arrangement had to be found. This came in the form of two-way radios. This system came in 1963. Two-way radios were installed in the fire station and each fire fighter had a monitor set in his home. With this system all the staff was alerted at the same time. Many changes have taken place in the field of communication since the beginning of the two-way radio system.

Ingersoll is one of the 20 fire departments in Oxford County that work under the mutual aid system. In 1954, this system was organized under the leadership of Fire Chief Gordon Trip, who was then the chief of the Woodstock Fire Department. Chief Tripp was the county co-ordinator until his retirement from the fire service. This system has proved most helpful to all fire departments in Oxford County at one time or another. When a serious fire occurs in a community there is no limit to the number of

(Continued on Page 21)

Fire Protection

(Continued from Page 20)

men and pieces of equipment that can be called to assist.

The town of Ingersoll at the present time has three full-time officers and 16 volunteer fire fighters. The full-time staff is on duty during the day while the volunteer staff take turns staying at the fire hall nights. Therefore, the Ingersoll Fire Department is manned 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Great strides have taken place in the fire service in the past 30 years. In 1958, the Ontario Government opened a Fire College in Gravenhurst, Ontario for the schooling of both full-time and volunteer fire fighters. The Fire Marshal's office staff who work under the solicitor general are always on call to give assistance to a municipality or their fire department.

The office of the fire marshal also run regional schools in all sections of the province. These schools are for the training of full-time and volunteers who cannot attend the fire college.

Most, if not all fire departments have their own training program which is conducted by the fire chief or an instructor appointed by him. Ingersoll is no exception to this practice. This profession is like all others, new things can be learned every day, and as fire fighters it is our duty to keep up with the changes.

In May of 1983, the Ingersoll Fire Department was again on the



This magnificent residence at the corner of Oxford and Charles Streets was originally the home of John Thompson, the pioneer, after he and his wife, Nancy (Brown) Thompson, moved in from their farms in Dereham Township, County of Oxford, around 1882. This picture was taken much later, circa 1902. From the Shirley Law collection, this photo shows her great-grandfather, John Thompson, sitting at the left, while his second wife, Henrietta Monk Thompson, entertains a woman visitor. The visitor's little girl has moved to sit on the steps with John Thompson. (Photo courtesy of Shirley Thompson Law)

move, this time to 110 Mutual St. N.

In 1989, a training tower was constructed at the east end of the fire hall. This tower will be used for all types of training. What will

the future bring to the Ingersoll Fire Department?

In 1988, the Ingersoll Fire Department celebrated the 125th anniversary of its founding. A celebration with a large parade of fire vehicles

was one of the highlights of the weekend celebrations. The events that took place will not soon be forgotten by the members of the department.

That about brings us up-to-date,

but I should like to add that the present members of the Ingersoll Fire Department will continue to act in the spirit of the dedicated men and women who have served Ingersoll since its early days.

Former fire chief gives history of department

By YVONNE HOLMES MOTT
For The Ingersoll Times

The Ingersoll Fire Service has a long and proud history.

In 1988, when the fire department was observing its 125th anniversary, then Fire Chief Kenneth D. Campbell wrote an interesting fact-filled history of the department.

Campbell, who was chief from 1978-1990, was one 14 fire chiefs who have served the town since 1863. In his book, he relates one of the highlights of each chief's term: R. H. Carroll (1863-1871), first Chief Engineer for the Village of Ingersoll; James Brady, (1871-1883), Chief during the Great Fire of 1872, original member of the Brigade; Robert Vance (1883-1888) original Fire Brigade member; George Cragg (1888-1899), chemicals first used while he was Chief Engineer; Roderick Sutherland (1899-1920); served on the Fire Department 30 years, longest to that date; John Radford (1920-1927), first piece of motorized equipment purchased while he was Chief; John Williams (1927-1930), first full time Fire Chief, the second piece of motorized equipment purchased, the Stewart pumper truck, was purchased; A. B. Hanley (1930-1935), large fire at Wood's Mill on Mill Street had firemen working 12 hours; H. Gillespie (1935-1942), after serving as Chief went to war with the Commonwealth Air Training Wing; F. C. Ellis (1942-1955), served as fireman and Chief for 35 years, had three sons, Donald, William and Thomas, on the Department at the same time; A. H. Schaefer (1955-1960), prior to becoming Chief he was a volunteer, served Ingersoll a total of 30 years; Leslie G. Harlow (1960-1978), prior to becoming Chief was a volunteer, served the town for 30 years; Kenneth Campbell (1978-1990), became Captain full time in 1963, Chief in 1978. The current Chief is Darell Parker.

In 1863 Ingersoll's first Fire Brigade was formed to prevent fires and preserve property., under local bylaw 78 and the Municipal Institutions Act of Upper Canada. The new Brigade consisted of Fire Companies, hook and ladder companies, property saving companies and a committee to govern all these.

The first Fire Brigade had to get their water from wells, the river or reservoirs about the village. Campbell notes that in order to promote attendance at fires a premium was offered to the fire company who were first at the greatest number of fires in the year. Firemen received 50 cents per month and were summoned by the ringing of a large bell. The bell would ring for a considerable amount of time, stop then ring once, twice or three times to indicate which ward the fire was in.

In the 1860s and early 1870s there were three fire stations, on the corner of King and Water Street, just north of the Thames River on Thames Street; and on King Street West, at the corner of Benson Street.

Ingersoll's Great Fire of May 7, 1872 broke out in the stables of the Royal Exchange Hotel, corner of Oxford and Charles Street. When the fire was finally out it had destroyed about 80 businesses, both sides of Thames Street and most of the frame buildings on Oxford Street between Charles and King. Campbell says the King Street East business section was saved by a fire fighting team from London, which arrived on a flat car on the Grand Trunk Railway, and the men of the McIntyre Furniture Factory. Two men died

while fighting the fire. Campbell also notes that the firemen who carried water all night and those on the pumps were so stiff and sore in the morning they could not remove their clothing.

In November 1873 Ingersoll purchased a Silby Steam Engine for \$4,750. At the same time horses were introduced to the Fire Department.

(Source: Ingersoll and the Fire Department 1863-1988 by Fire Chief Kenneth D. Campbell)



Ingersoll Fire Service chief Darrel Parker, above, says his plans for the future of the department include a stronger emphasis on public education and fire prevention coupled with an aggressive training regimen for firefighters. (John Tapley photo)

Public education and aggressive training in future

By JOHN TAPLEY
The Ingersoll Times

An emphasis on public education and aggressive training is what lies in the future of Ingersoll's fire service says chief Darrel Parker.

In the process of developing a strategic plan for the department, Parker said part of that involves looking for trends in the types and frequency of situations Ingersoll firefighters respond to.

heart to try and establish a normal heart rhythm in patient suffering from certain cardiac conditions. At the moment, such technology is costly, said Parker, which can make it difficult to obtain through normal supply channels.

"It's one of those things that we'd almost have to look to the community to provide," he explained.

With newer vehicles and an up-to-date facility to house them in, Parker doesn't anticipate any major changes in infrastructure or equipment in the near future.

"We're not looking for any major changes," he said. "As far as equipment goes, we're pretty well healed."

Fires have taken toll in Ingersoll

By YVONNE HOLMES MOTT
For The Ingersoll Times

There is no doubt that fires have taken their toll in Ingersoll.

Historians have written about fire sweeping up what is now King Street, wiping out that business section. Perusing the papers of 100 years ago, one finds report after report of fires in town, of people injured and of the fire brigade doing good work. Every fire is a disaster for the persons involved and certainly there is always heartache over items lost. However, the two fires in the last half century, which must

stand out in the minds of most people, are the fires at the Ingersoll arena in December of 1955 and the downtown fire of June 1991. The old arena, situated on Charles Street East was discovered burning around 2:00 a.m. The fire trucks screamed to the site and the battle was on. It was a freezing cold morning. Photographers found that if they got close enough to the fire that they could thaw out their cameras, they were driven back by the intense heat from the flames - and then their cameras would seize up again. The Salvation Army

turned up with hot coffee and sandwiches for the fire fighters. Neighbours also made coffee and brought it out. Hundreds of people watched as Ingersoll's arena burned. The Tom and Doris Fleming family was evacuated from their home, a house adjoining the arena. Fortunately no one was seriously hurt and no lives were lost. In fact, when a committee met the next day to start plans to raise funds for the new arena, it was decided to name the facility the Ingersoll District Memorial Centre, in memory of the fire and in gratitude that there was no

loss of life. Retired Fire Chief Ken Campbell was a volunteer fire captain at the time of that fire. He remembers it today. "Dick Ellis was the Fire Chief and Les Harlow was the Deputy Chief. It was nearly retirement time for Dick" he recalls.

The former fire chief describes it as "one of those fire that you really could not do a heck of a lot about." Campbell continues, "If you recall there was a lot of tin and metal in that building, but there was also a lot of wood which burned very quickly. We couldn't get

steam and excited voices set the tone. Chief Parker was very happy about the way his fire fighters performed that night. He explains they had been studying and learning about "fire ground command" for the past year and it was that procedure he put into operation. "It all came together" he says. "We had been training for a year and because of that training we could absorb 100 fire fighters and put them to the best possible use." While not wanting to belittle the severity of the fire and the serious repercussion it had on many citizens, Parker adds that it

was a good learning experience. "The situation was new to this department. Not one of us had ever fought a fire of that magnitude before. It's something that goes into your memory bank. Once you have done it once, you will be prepared from then on." The fire chief says he probably fought that fire 10 times on a simulator at the Ontario Fire College. "It was just amazing how it all came together" he recalls. Darrel heads a fire department that is committed to life long learning and he feels this is an excellent example of why first rate training is so important. When it was over buildings were gone, five businesses were out of business and families living in apartments above the stores no longer had a home. Fortunately no one was killed and there were no serious inju-

Timely Quotes...

"Time is of the essence, but what is the essence of time?"

- Karan Varsheni

"I have seen the future and it's like the past, only longer."

- Dan Quisenberry

"Time is a great teacher, but unfortunately it kills all its pupils."

- Hector Berlioz

"I never think of the future, it comes soon enough."

- Albert Einstein

1918 1999

80th Anniversary

We still offer a Great Selection of
Safety Footwear and

right down into it because of all that metal." He notes, "The hydrants were right close by, but it just did not seem to matter how much water we poured onto it, we couldn't stop the fire."

It was eight years ago that the "Big Fire" of 1991 raged down town. Black smoke filled the air. It was so dark downtown one would have thought it was midnight rather than 6 p.m. when the fire started. Campbell had retired as Fire Chief and Fire Chief Darrel Parker was in charge. Fire fighters from all the surrounding communities came to battle to blaze. Ingersoll fire fighters were on duty for 12 straight hours, some of them staying even longer than 6 a.m. Chief Parker says the sheer size of the fire was amazing. Huge crowd gathered in the dark down town - smoke, water,

"a tragedy for the town, now part of the history of the fire department and a fire that did teach the department a lot."

department. Not one of us had ever fought a fire of that magnitude before. It's something that goes into your memory bank. Once you have done it once, you will be prepared from then on." The fire chief says he probably fought that fire 10 times on a simulator at the Ontario Fire College. "It was just amazing how it all came together" he recalls. Darrel heads a fire department that is committed to life long learning and he feels this is an excellent example of why first rate training is so important. When it was over buildings were gone, five businesses were out of business and families living in apartments above the stores no longer had a home. Fortunately no one was killed and there were no serious inju-



F. NOE



A.B. HANDLEY - CHIEF



K. HENDERSON



H. NOE - ASST CHIEF



B. HOLMES



R. RICHARDSON - CAPT.



F.C. ELLIS



W. McMILLAN



J. HOLMES



F. HOUGHTON



E. GRAY - CAPT.



W. WESTLAKE

INGERSOLL FIRE DEPT. 1934



The Fireman and Police Banquet, 26 February 1897, taken in the upstairs auditorium of the town hall. Photograph by Edgar Hugill.



INGERSOLL... Memories of Oxford on the Thames

INGERSOLL FIRE DEPT.



Fire fighters in Ingersoll have a lengthy and honourable history. This Centennial Year (1967) shows the regular and volunteer firefighter in front of their King St. West headquarters, who were an important part of the old town hall. Front Row (left to right) W.B. Ellis, D.L. McClay, J.E. Empey, L.G. Harlow, N.L. Blancher, H.D. Fugard. Back Row: M.I. Barker, K.D. Campbell, W.N. Empey, C.P. Crane, C.G. Millis, H.W. Harkes and J.C. Milne. (Photo courtesy Ken Campbell)



("SYNONYMS")

It was midnight on the ocean,
Not a street car was in sight.
The sun was shining brightly and
It rained all day that night.

'Twas a summer's day in winter,
The snowflakes fell like glass.
A barefoot boy, with shoes on
Stood sitting on the grass.

'Twas evening and the rising sun
Was setting in the west,
And the little fishes in the trees,
Were huddling in their nest.

The rain was pouring down,
The moon was shining bright;
And everything that you could see
Was hidder out of sight.

While the organ pealed potatoes
Lard was rendered by the choir,
As the sexton rang "The dishcloth"
Someone set the church on fire.

"Holy Smoke!" the preacher shouted
In the rain he lost his hair;
Now his head resembles heaven
For there is no parting there.

Rcy Pecks (Squirrel Fruit)



Ingersoll Chief of Police Walter Holmes attended the Canadian Police Chiefs' Conyention in British Columbia in 1922. Posed in front of a popular tourist attraction are Chief Holmes, his daughter Sybil and her (unidentified) friend, and his wife Hanna. (Photo courtesy of Doris (nee Burton) Fleming)

FROM

HEALY'S

GROCERIES, FRUITS, CONFECTIONERY
AND CAKES

NEAR POST OFFICE INGENSOLL, ONT.

PHONE 245

BY HECKS, NUT MERCHANT

Healy's Grocery Store is still talked about by long time Ingersoll residents. This business card will bring back many memories. Hopefully the back of the card will cause a gentle chuckle or two - it must have done 80 years ago.