

Goodness gracious, great ball of fire

GROSE
Arthur

It could have been a scene from a movie, but it wasn't.

It happened here in Belleville, and it was witnessed by Arthur Grose, who was a preschooler at the time.

Grose watched — not from the safe comfort of a theatre seat, but from the window of his Belleville home — as a raging ball of fire hurtled towards him.

"I was just playing around the house at 184 James St. I was playing in the upstairs bedroom window which faced city hall."

Suddenly, a tremendous bolt of lightning struck the top of the Belleville city hall tower. A giant ball of fire — a bright light moving at lightning speed — bounced off the tower, flew across the Moira River, through the Springer Lock Company and toward the Groses' James Street house.

"The big flash of light came practically — I thought — in the window and scared the devil out of me, naturally.

"It was just like a big flash in front of my face. People say if you saw that you were blinded, but I wasn't."

A walloping clap of thunder followed. Hands were blown off the clock face and Grose looked on in shock as bricks fell from the tower to the street below.

"For years after that, if I heard thunder, I got sick to my stomach. But I got over it," he says with a chuckle.

The fire happened around 1909, before Grose was old enough to go to school. The city spent \$750 to repair the damage to the tower.

Where the ball of fire stopped, Grose is unsure. He believes it hit a tree near his James Street house.

Having grown up on James Street in the early 1900s, Grose knows something about the Wellbanks house (a Greek Revival style home at 190 James St.) many Belleville residents do not.

He remembers the house before the Wellbanks lived there.

A man named Captain Black, who lived at 184 James St., bought the house for his daughter, Mrs. Fred Wheeler who was caring for his first wife's mother, Mrs. Homans.

Captain Black was in the fishing business.

"They went down the bay and gathered up fish from fishermen, brought them up and they had a stone storage building on South Front Street where those condos are," Grose recalls.

Originally, the Captain had

a small steamer called The Dack. Later, he bought a larger steamer called The Wacouta. Twice a year Black took different friends on a boat tour and picnic. Grose says he usually managed to find a way onto both trips.

In 1922, Grose, his mother, Annie, father, Robert, and sister, Vivien, moved into a large brick home at 83 Cedar St. The house was built in the 1870s by the Dolan family. The Grose family rented the home for six years and in 1928, they bought

it. The house was far too large for the Grose family alone, so they rented rooms to nurses Vivien knew.

Vivien, who died at the age of 100 this past May, graduated as a nurse in 1919. Her first patient was a patient of Dr. Connor (who lived across from the Belleville Public Library).

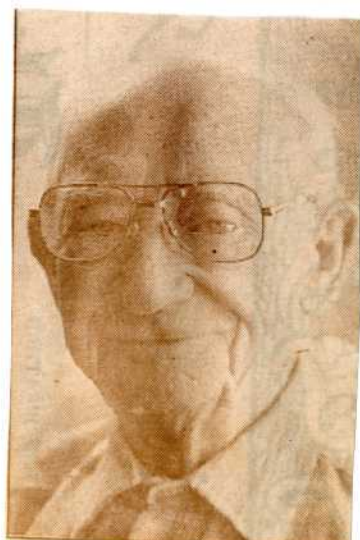
"The nurses were quite a bunch of characters at times. ...You'd never know what they were going to do next."

During the Second World War, the family rented rooms to Air Force members and their wives. At the time, Arthur was living in Ottawa, though he later returned to Belleville to live at 83 Cedar, the home of his teenage years.

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The Wellbanks home (right) was inhabited by 'Grandma' Homans and Mrs. Wheeler (left) before the Wellbanks moved in.



Arthur Grose.

Intell.
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