

# Fire Department Is Vital Link to Past

The members were all volunteers, working without pay, but exempt from poll tax. Some idea of the social life of the firemen is gained in references compiled by Edwin Guillet, to quote:

"Once a year the brigade turned out in grand style for inspection by the Mayor and Council. After demonstrating the efficiency of their apparatus they were led in procession through the town by a band. A festival was held, usually in December, in Victoria Hall. At the festival of 1863 speeches were made by Mayor G. S. Daltry and Mr. D. E. Boulton to the firemen and their guests seated in the hall. Among those who sang were Misses Hattie Stephens, McKyes and McBean, and Messrs. George Roberts and James Jewell (both firemen) and Arthur Hawes. The band of the 6th Northumberland militia played during the evenings.

### Supper and Dancing

"At 10:30 p.m. the party adjourned to the third storey of the building, then called Sons of Temperance Hall. Mr. Pratt was the caterer, and turkeys, geese, chickens, etc., were carved up for the guests. After supper dancing began and lasted until 4 a.m. Mr. George Stephens lent a Steinway piano for the occasion, and Prof. Chalaupka's Quadrille Band supplied its usual faultless music. From the description of the event no doubt everyone had an enjoyable time and looked forward to the next year's festival.

### Picnic of Firemen and Mechanics' Institute

"Picnics were sometimes arranged by these societies. On one occasion the Mechanics' Institute and the Fire Brigade combined to hold a picnic at Rice Lake. Through the kindness of Mr. H. Covert they were given free use of the Cobourg and Peterboro Railway, and 12 cars containing 600 people proceeded merrily to Harwood. Here two steamers and scows conveyed the party to Spook Island. Chalaupka's Quadrille Band was in attendance and it was a happy crowd that returned to Cobourg at 8 p.m.

Believed to have been incendiary, a reward of \$500 was afterward offered by the town council for information as to the identity of the fire-bug, the Windsor Hotel fire was the worst in the history of the

town, three firemen losing their lives. The fire itself was not of so great a size but an unfortunate event near the close of the conflagration occurred which cost the lives of the three men and seriously injured three others. Only survivor at the present time of the three who were rescued is Fred Beebe of Toronto, who in a letter some years ago to The Sentinel-Star, related the details of the fire. The hotel was situated on the site of the present Dunham Hotel. Fire broke out there in April of 1878, the building being owned by William Battell and the proprietor being Thomas Connor. Fire chief was, incidentally the proprietor. Near the end of the fire, the wall on one side collapsed and buried beneath it, Charles Patterson of Grafton, George Stevenson of Port Hope, James Forrest, Walter Grievie, F. W. Beebe and G. W. Alexander, Cobourg. The first three were killed and the last three rescued, but badly injured.

### To quote Mr. Beebe:

"I was standing on the sidewalk, acting as branchman at the moment opposite the main front door and was the first man to be rescued, Mr. W. C. Jex pulling me out. The injured were laid on the sidewalk in front of the site later occupied by The Sentinel Star. Then they were taken up to the Buchanan Hotel, just north."

The entire fire brigade attended the funeral of each of the victims, Mr. Patterson being buried in Grafton, Mr. Stevenson at Port Hope, and Mr. Forrest in Cobourg Union Cemetery. At the local funeral were the faculty and student body of Victoria College, representatives from Rochester and Belleville fire departments, the mayor and council and a huge number of citizens. On the Sunday following, a memorial service was held in Victoria Hall conducted by the Rev. Donald Fletcher, and assisted by Rev. Hugh Pedley, Rev. Dr. S. S. Nelles, Dr. Bruwash, Rev. Dr. Ballentine, Rev. Dr. Jones, Mayor George Guillet, Sam Clarke and others. A resolution of sympathy on behalf of the community was moved by the late A. J. Hewson and seconded by the late Dan Rooney.

An inquest was subsequently held by C. E. Ewing at which time town clerk W. H. Floyd was present in his official capacity. John C. Ruse was the first young man of Cobourg to volunteer to fill the vacancy,

joining the Fountain Hose Company in October of 1878.

The frame structures of that time made them an easy prey to the flames and made very difficult the efforts of the firemen to extinguish them. It was commonly believed that when too few fires were occurring, the firemen would set some themselves. However, the firemen were very prompt; in fact so prompt that they would be at the scene of the fire before people nearby knew that there was a blaze, confirming suspicions that the firemen knew beforehand where the fires would occur.

In 1851 the Clarke Block on the northeast corner of King and Division streets was burned at night, extending to what is now Andrew's bakeshop on the east to Henley's repair shop on Division Street. John Whitelaw lost heavily in that fire.

The Hon. Sydney Smith erected a four-storey brick block on that site and W. Hitchens a three-storey building nearby of two stores with residences above. The Smith building was used as a barracks when British Regulars were quartered here during the Fenian Raids of 1866 to 1867. In 1878 both of these buildings burned and Mr. White-

law was again a heavy loser. It was during this fire that the late C. Field, M.P., nearly lost his life. Field fell through a staircase which had been weakened by fire, into water-filled basement. Besides nearly drowning in the sea, he was rescued by a heavy safe dropping on him and missed him by inches. Groans were heard by George Glet who rescued him.

In 1855 the Albion Hotel, located at that time than the present building, and Paddy Regan's Lifford Stables, went up in flames and at the same time the wooden buildings comprising the stores of York's to John's also were burned.

Authorities suspected in 1850 that the old wooden building extending from Rall's store to Wenn's would be set on fire. The building was old, the tenants had long leases, the owners wished to get rid of the structure and rebuild. However, watchmen were stationed but in the morning, just ten minutes after men had left their posts to go home at daybreak, the building caught on fire, oil helping the blaze to spread. During the seventies a fire broke out in the block extending from Taylor's store to Vivian's.





**GEORGE STEVENSON**  
Aug. 7th, 1876



**JAMES FOREST**  
Joined Sept. 3, 1877.

In connection with the history of Cobourg's fire brigades of years past, are shown above the men who were killed in the disastrous Windsor Hotel Fire.

They are—James Forrest of Cobourg, who joined up in Sept. of 1877; Charles Patterson, who was born in Grafton and who joined up in June of 1875 and George Stevenson of Port Hope, who joined in



**CHARLES PATTERSON**  
June 8th, 1875.

August of 1876. Also shown is Fred W. Beebe, one of the men who were rescued and at present the last survivor of the six who were trapped in the fire.



**F. W. BEEBE**

In 1864, one of the finest hotels between Toronto and Kingston, the Globe Hotel on the site of the Hocey home, corner King and McGill streets, incidently the town's first hotel, was burned to the ground. William Weller, of coach-line fame, was mainly responsible for its erection and used it as a coach stop.

More recent was the fire which destroyed the wooden buildings of the Cross in Car Works.

It is fitting to close with a reference to the fire which will go down in history as the funniest incident in the records of the town's fire department. It occurred in 1870 and is referred to as the Round House Fire. Actually it was the Cobourg and Peterboro Railway round house near the ferry dock. To that fire hustled Jack McIntosh, Jack Moffat and Jack Meehan. Jack McIntosh poked the hose through the

north window; Jack Moffat aided by Jack Meehan, slipped the nozzle through the south window. The hose line jerked, ebbing and falling as the water tore through the passage, forcing the air out ahead of it. There was a splutter at the nozzle ends and then the water gushed in a torrent, not into the fire, but one stream into McIntosh's face and the other into the face of Jack Moffat. The surprised men spluttered and choked in surprise but consternation gave way to mutual anger as each convinced that the other had deliberately directed the hose at him, dropped his hose and sallied into the other with fists and arms flying. The men went at it with all the vim and vigour their outraged dignities could muster. When the rest of the fire department arrived they found them still hard at it, with the fire blazing away merrily.

and the firemen were handicapped by the fact that it occurred at night while the mercury was twenty below zero. Another fire about ten years later was the one which destroyed the skating rink on James street, west of the public school. Embers from this huge frame building were carried by the wind as far as Tracey's.

One of the hottest fires which the department ever had occasion to battle was the one which broke out in the Covert Block, originating in Geo. Stephen's furniture store,

next door to what was the Field store at that time. Large quantities of varnish and turpentine made the fire a very fierce one. A near fatality occurred at the McConnel Building fire on the northwest corner of Division street and James, a three-storey carriage factory, once part of the barracks. North of it was a clapboard house once occupied by John Gullet. It was set on fire in 1878 by a cab driver. William Hitchens fell into a smoke-hole and was pulled out with a long pole and hook, just before it was too late,