

Manpower to diesel power long climb for firefighters

By LORI TAYLOR
Herald Staff Writer

The Georgetown Volunteer Fire Brigade has come a long way from the days when the fire department equipment consisted of a steam-powered pumper and a hook and ladder truck hauled by firefighters or horses, firefighter Larry Brassard told members of the Esquimes Historical Society Oct. 20 at the Area 2 firehall.

The historical society met at the firehall on Maple Avenue to listen to Mr. Brassard and other members of the Georgetown Volunteer Firefighters Association talk about the history of firefighting in Georgetown.

One of the first known fire brigades was formed by the ancient Romans, and was called the Corps of Vigils, Mr. Brassard said. Their job was to prevent the spread of fires to other buildings, rather than extinguishing the blaze, but they weren't too successful, judging by the fact that Rome burned down several times.

It wasn't until after the Great Fire of London in 1666 that any of the civilized countries established fire codes.

Insurance companies began insuring buildings against fires and set up their own fire brigades to protect the buildings they insured.

NOT INSURED

"If the brigade got to a building on fire and it wasn't insured by their company, they left," Mr. Brassard said. "Later on, it became popular to be the first one on a scene and put first water on the fire. If two companies arrived close together, they might fight for the privilege, and the building would burn down while they fought."

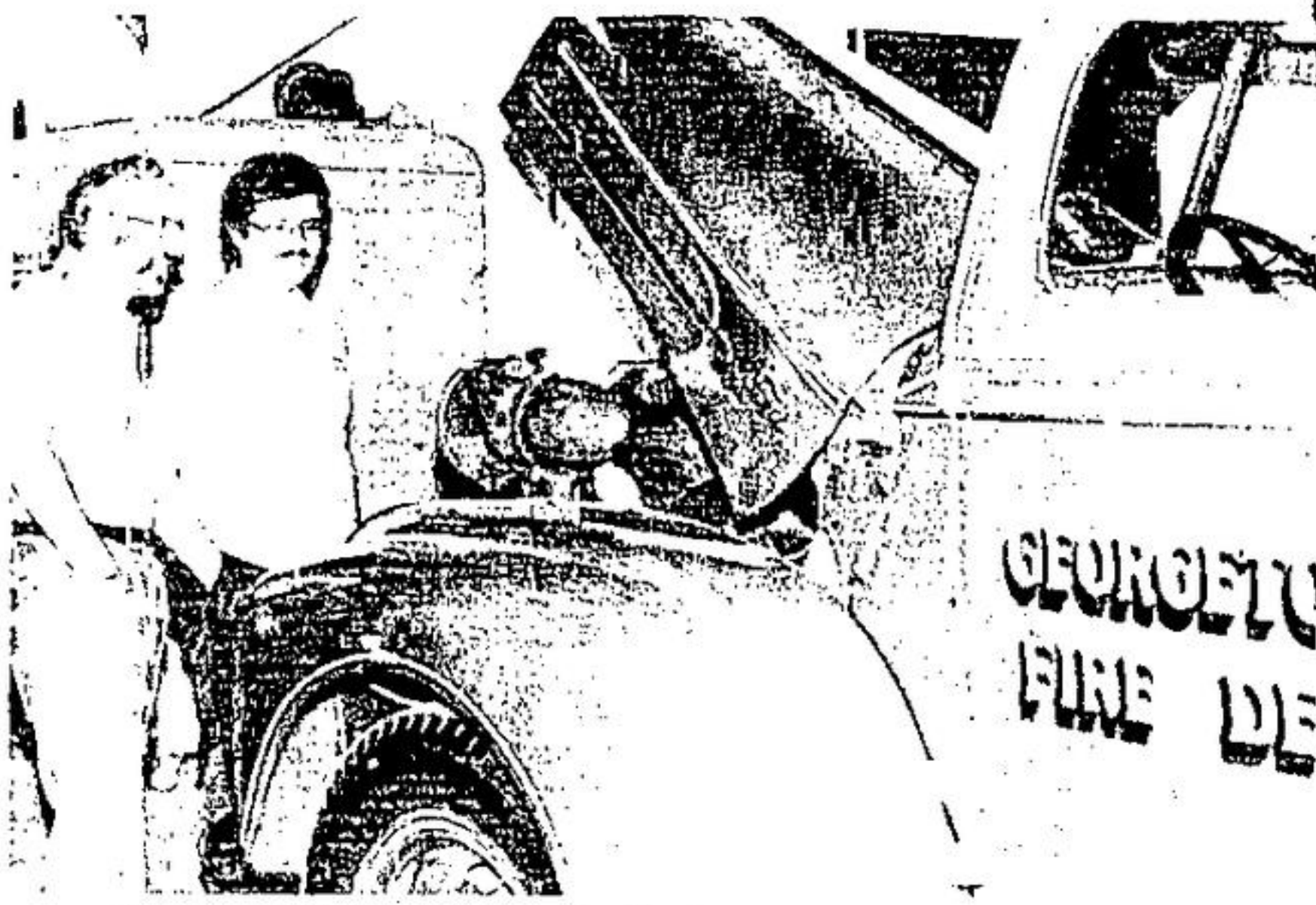
Buildings were identified with fire marks which told brigades which company insured the building, Mr. Brassard said. These fire marks were found even in Canada and the United States, and firefighter Tom Massena said anyone who finds a genuine Canadian fire mark "has a real find. You can expect it to cost you \$5,000."

The first fire engine in town was known as Old Gulliver, and was probably built by Joseph Barber Sr., Mr. Brassard said. It was a hand-pumped fire engine. A larger unit, known as The Rescue, was purchased later. It took 20 men to work The Rescue, which pumped water from cisterns spotted around town in convenient locations if there was no river or other water source handy.

HOOK AND LADDER
The town also bought a hook and ladder truck about the same time they purchased The Rescue, Mr. Brassard said. The truck was left at the town hall in later years, and vanished. The fire department still has one of the ladders from the truck.

Former firefighter Jim Valentine said when he joined the fire department in 1938, the fire truck would go out first and if the ladders were needed, someone would go back to haul the ladder truck out.

In 1890, the town put in the foundation for its present hydrant system, after a representative from a company selling steam-powered fire engines pointed out the town had a good water supply with Silver Creek. James Warren of Walkerton did the engineering and Joseph Barber Jr., who was a



The Esquimes Historical Society visited the Area 2 (Georgetown) fire hall Monday night for a talk on the history of fire-fighting in general, and of the Georgetown Volunteer Fire Brigade in particular. Firefighters Larry Brassard and Tom Massena, and retired firefighters Jim Valentine and Jack Cunningham talked about the early days of the town's volunteer department. Mr. Brassard, right, is shown here with an antique fire truck restored by the volunteers. (Herald photo)

councillor at the time, supervised the project.

It wasn't until 1893 that the Georgetown Volunteer Fire Brigade became official. The chief of the brigade at that time was a man named Mark Maw. The old town hall on Mill Street also doubled as a fire hall, and the bell in the tower was used to summon the volunteers to a fire.

SECOND TOWER

A second tower was built on the town hall which was used to hang the hose out to dry after a fire. Mr. Valentine said there was a winch in the tower and a rope which was used to haul the hose up to a hanger in the top of the tower. The tower was 50 to 60 feet high, and could hold 12 lengths of two-and-a-half inch hose, 50 feet in length.

"That was the toughest job in the fire department in those days, hanging the hose out to dry," Mr. Valentine said.

The town's first motorized fire truck was purchased in 1927. It was a chemical engine, Mr. Brassard said. When the truck arrived on the scene, the engineer started the chemical reaction by tipping a lead tank on the truck. Once the reaction was started, Mr. Valentine said, the whole container full had to be used.

Mr. Valentine said there was a convention of firefighters in Georgetown in the 1930's, and during the convention the firefighters received a call. He was standing on the corner as the truck went by, loaded with all 25 volunteers. The truck headed up over the White Bridge and stalled, and 12 of the men had to get off and push the truck up the hill. The fire turned out to be a false alarm.

RESTORED TRUCK

Mr. Brassard said the volunteer's association tried to find the truck when they were looking for a fire engine to restore, but the last time they heard, the truck had been partially dismantled to be used for hauling lumber in a lumber camp in northern Ontario.

The next truck purchased by the town for the fire department was in 1942. This truck is the one which the volunteers recently restored with help from a Wintario grant.

The fire department moved into a new hall built especially

for the department in 1953. The building, on the corner of Chapel Street and Guelph Street, now houses the Georgetown Volunteer Ambulance Service, but the fire department dispatcher is still upstairs.

The Ford truck figured prominently in what Mr. Valentine called, "the biggest fire, and the longest time on the scene, in the time I was on the department when the Berra-clough Mill in Glen Williams burned down. Jack Harlow was the fire chief at the time.

FORD TRUCK

The Ford truck pumped water continuously for ten hours with the addition of an occasional quart of oil to keep the engine from seizing up, Mr. Valentine said. They also had to keep the hood open to keep the truck from overheating.

The fire was started by two employees of the company which owned the mill at the time, who had been paid a total of \$500 to set the fire. However, the chief and Mr. Valentine became suspicious of their story of having had to run for their lives after they discovered suitcases hidden in the woods some distance from the mill.

The two men were eventually sentenced to a total of 22 years in jail for arson.

The volunteers have a high turn-out rate for answering fire calls, Mr. Brassard said, with about 70 per cent turn-out. But it wasn't always that way. Mr. Massena recalled a time in 1942 when Georgetown was

playing an important hockey game in Galt. A special train had been scheduled to take spectators to the game. When a fire call came in that night, there wasn't a single firefighter in town - they'd all gone to Galt. Brampton firefighters had to be called in.

VERY CAREFUL

Communities were very careful about their expenses, even when it came to fire protection. At one-time, the Georgetown brigade was not allowed to answer a fire call in Glen Williams without permission from the mayor.

Mr. Valentine remembered a time when a fire had started in the boiler house at the Berra-clough mill, and as first officer at the station, he called Mayor Joe Gibbons to ask permission for the Georgetown brigade to go to the fire.

"He said, 'Jim you know the rules and regulations as well as I do, and you know you can't go,'" Mr. Valentine said. "I told him that people who lived in Glen Williams were doing a lot of their shopping in Georgetown, and he said, 'Oh, in that case, I guess you'd better go.'"

The fire department answered 139 general alarm calls in 1979, and was well over that total by August this year. Mr. Brassard said the department is getting an increasing number of calls to free victims trapped in automobile accidents. The volunteers have launched a fund-raising drive to raise money to purchase some new rescue equipment which they intend to donate to the town.

Celebrity recipes

Epilepsy Ontario, the non-profit organization which provides services to Ontario epileptics, is hoping to raise funds for its programs through the sale of a unique cookbook featuring 400 "all-occasion" recipes, many supplied by top Canadian celebrities. Its 256 pages and eight colored photos are bound in a durable, washable cover. Copies are available by mail for \$9.95 plus \$1 per copy postage and handling from All-Occasion Cooking, Epilepsy Ontario, P. O. Box 369, Paris, Ontario, N3L 3G5.

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Letter to the Editor

Donations help blind to help selves

EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is an open letter to the citizens of Halton Hills submitted to The Herald for publication:

Dear Friend:
The annual Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) fund-raising drive in your community provides the majority of funds for the provision of services to blind people through your local CNIB office. In order that these services can continue

to meet the needs of visually impaired individuals and those who will need our services in the future, it is essential that the potential fund-raising capabilities of your area be realized.

Loss of sight is tragic, but living without sight need not be. The specialized training and support programs of the CNIB provide blind people with skills they need to take their place in the community - as wage earners, home-makers, students, parents,

as fellow citizens.

CNIB relies on public donations for funds needed to continue these programs, and I, as a member of our community, ask for your generous support during CNIB's annual campaign, taking place now through Nov. 21.

Here are just a few of the things your donation can help accomplish:
- A newly blinded man can support his family when he

returns to the job market following rehabilitation and job skill training.

- A blind mother can learn new techniques for running her home and raising her family.

- The bewildered parents of a blind child can be more confident of a bright future for their youngster.

- Prevention of blindness programs, such as glaucoma testing, can continue.
Money can't buy sight but

your donation will help blind people help themselves through the continuing CNIB services you help support.

Make sure CNIB is always there to help by contributing generously to the 1980 campaign goal of \$4,800.

Please mail your donations to: C-O Don Jarvie, 61 Lynden Circle, Georgetown, Ont., L7G 4Y7

Don Jarvie
CNIB Campaign Chairman
(416) 877-0288

Solo show

Ruth Gibson is having her second solo show, "Scenes from Cottage Country" at the Mississauga Central Library, 110 Dundas Street West, in Mississauga from November 3 to 29. This show will feature oil paintings of the Muskoka area and will also include scenery from the Maritimes and Alberta. Opening night, with the artist present, is November 5 from 7 to 9 p.m. Everyone is welcome. The gallery is not open when the room is in use for other purposes. Enquiries may be made at the audio-visual department at 279-7002.

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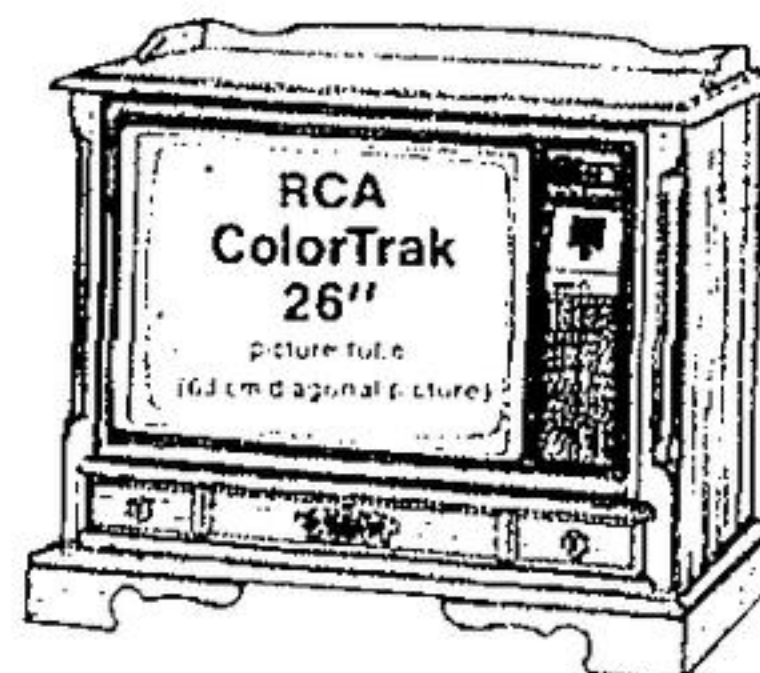
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