

Let's Take a Look

By

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(Special to The Highland Park Press)

A Chat With Our Fire Chief

This column believes that there are lots of persons in Highland Park who do important work — but they're never justly recognized or rewarded. Let this, then, be the first of forthcoming columns concerning folks living here who are doing splendid jobs and deserve, at least, a written thanks . . .

Highland Park's alert fire chief is a kindly, graying, courteous man who is trying his best to prevent fires in our town.

Since 1922 when William J. Hennig became a fire-fighter, he has been educating townfolk on the importance of fire prevention. But, despite the diligent work of Chief Hennig and his staff of 13 fearless firemen, Highland Parkers are still careless.

ENJOY LOWEST RATE . . .

"Yet," the chief told the PRESS, "Highland Parkers have the lowest fire insurance rate along the North Shore. And we're proud of that fact."

And rightly so, we'd say. But Highland Parkers are still a long way from being firewise and cautious, Chief Hennig told the PRESS.

"When I joined the fire department back in 1922, we had only 60 fires a year. That was our peak."

"Of course Highland Park was much smaller then. Only 3 square miles. Now it's 12.5. But last year there were 330 fires. Indeed, during the last 10 years Highland Park has had an average of 300 fires a year. And I fear the number will continue to grow if we keep on ignoring simple precautions."

WHAT WE CAN DO . . .

What, we asked, can Highland Parkers do to stop these fires and thus save thousands of dollars yearly?

"There're many precautions we can take," Chief Hennig began.

"Carelessness causes most fires. Just about every home in town has a fireplace — and dry shingles on the roof. Most of the fires are caused by sparks from the fireplace igniting these highly inflammable shingles."

"Then, too, many chimneys are old and in bad repair. They might be worn through in an out-of-the-way spot in the attic. If so, sparks can get through these cracks and ignite the boards."

MANY CIGARETTE FIRES, TOO . . .

"There are lots of cigarette fires here also," the chief continued. Frequently ashes are dropped unconsciously on rugs, beds, chairs, davenport, and the like. And although one is unaware of it at the time, it doesn't take long for these sparks to set fire to the cotton and wool padding.

"Electrically-started fires are too numerous. We must be cautious about overloading electrical circuits," the chief went on.

"Highland Parkers are neat people," he continued. "Their lawns are always well kept; their homes done in exquisite taste. But they're always careless about their attics and basements. They are not kept clean. And old rags, papers, and other refuse are excellent breeding places for dangerous fires."

KEEP THEM CLEAN . . .

"I wish," the chief emphasized, "that you'd tell Highland Parkers to please keep their attics and basements clean. Many costly fires would never start if this were done."

When a fire does start, what is the proper method for us to notify the fire department, the PRESS queried.

"Call O," the chief said. "And when we answer, be certain you tell us exactly where the fire is. On what street near what other streets. Speak plainly for there are many Highland Park streets that have similar names. We must know exactly where to send our fire fighting equipment," the chief cautioned.

INSPECTS EQUIPMENT . . .

How is your fire-fighting equip-

ment, we asked?

"Let's go downstairs and I'll show you," Chief Hennig said.

Downstairs were two shiny, spotlessly-clean fire trucks, backed in, fully equipped, ready to speed to any fire in the Highland Park area.

Ravinia, Chief Hennig explained, has its own equipment. And if a fire isn't too serious, Ravinia's skilled fire fighters can put out the blaze without requiring the help of Highland Park's limited equipment.

OLD EQUIPMENT

How old is this, we asked, pointing to an ancient truck parked in the north stall.

"That was bought 33 years ago," Chief Hennig replied, shaking his head. "It's not much good any more. We desperately need new equipment. And we should get it just as soon as we can."

W agreed; the truck looked like it couldn't make it to another fire. "This is our best truck," Chief Hennig said, pointing to a big, highly-polished red job parked in the south stall.

"It was bought back in 1929—17 years ago. But it's still a fine piece of equipment. Ravinia's truck was bought 11 years ago. It's in pretty fair shape," he said.

PRESS PRAISES CHIEF . . .

We had to stop now and praise the chief and his men for the way they maintain the trucks, hoses, and fire station.

The trucks' bodies, engines, and equipment are so clean you can rest off of them. And the fire station is neat and bright — far neater, we might add, than our Army barracks ever were, even when a general was inspecting!

What is the schedule you and your men follow throughout the week? we asked.

RUGGED SCHEDULE . . .

"Well, all of us are on 24-hour-a-day call. Each shift works 24 hours and has 24 hours off — providing, of course, there are no fires, and the men aren't needed."

"Every Monday we thoroughly inspect the trucks: gas, oil, tires, batteries, and equipment. Tuesday we clean the station; change linen; do general house cleaning. Wednesday we wash and polish trucks and clean the apparatus room. Thursdays we wash windows and cut the lawns. Friday we clean our kitchens — firemen, when on duty, must eat all their meals here in the station. Saturday, we have a general cleanup. And Sunday, if there aren't any fires, we relax," the chief concluded.

HAS THIRTEEN ASSISTANTS

In addition, we learned, the firemen are always inspecting the local schools and business establishments, making certain they are safe from any fire hazard.

The 13 men who are doing a splendid job working with Chief Hennig are: Lts. Raymond Botker, Joseph Boylen, Lester Peterson; Firemen Raymond Sneed, Charles Robinson, John Sheik, Paul J. Marty, John M. Patten, J. W. Cameron, Frank Freberg, William Perry, John Perry, and Raymond J. Mann.

These men deserve much credit . . .

LET'S BE ALERT . . .

Last year Highland Parkers, through their own carelessness for the most part, lost thousands of dollars in fires.

From now on let's be alert to fire hazards; let's be fire-wise, cautious. And let's keep those attics, basements, chimneys, and fireplaces clean and in good repair.

Since 1922 two Highland Parkers have been burned to death.

Let's not have such a tragedy strike your home!

2/c, Frank X. Perico, S1/c, Clyde Sheldon, S1/c, Leroy Avants, S1/c, employed by the club, were housed and were sleeping there at the time.

From habit, I arose at 0635, on April 1, 1946, in order to take a swim in the ocean. While putting on my trunks preparatory to swimming, I looked at the sea thru my bathroom window. I noted that the sky was very heavily overcast; the sea was running rather high for usual ocean conditions. The ocean's surface momentarily gave me the impression of viewing a huge pot of boiling water. I dismissed this thought from my mind and decided to shave before entering the water. While still part through shaving I heard a roaring sound coming from the beach as if a group of trucks were madly driving up and down with wide open throttle. Looking out of the bathroom window, I saw sea water pouring over the boardwalk, which used to separate the beach from the lawn. Water was also pouring over the terrace onto the road and parking area. Furniture and chairs were swirling in the water back of the club where once had been the road.

Looking out to sea I saw, stretching in an unbroken line along the horizon, a huge, solid, dirty, yellowish-brown wall of water. A white crest, like seething soap bubbles, topped the advancing wave. In front of this wall of water, extending to the beach, the sea appeared calm but very sandy in color. Hastily putting on my pants and boots, I dashed down stairs, running towards the enlisted men's quarters. Yelling, I aroused the men, getting them outside of the building. Ordering the men to run for the alligator amphibian we had parked on the beach, I told them to "get going." We all started for the "alligator" on the double but we did not go far before we stopped as we saw that we would have difficulty getting it under way because it was half un-

der water.

Looking out to sea I noticed the wall of water was rushing towards the beach with what appeared like express-train speed. Accompanying the advancing wave and filling the air was a terrific bedlam of roaring sound, like a monster freight train tearing headlong through a tunnel. Looking around we saw large rats materialize out of the ground, run a few feet and seemingly fly through the air toward trunks and branches of nearby trees.

Yelling to the boys to come with me I ordered them to my quarters on the second deck of the club house. It was clear that if we attempted to reach higher ground up the road we would be trapped by the onrushing waters. Reaching the second deck I checked to see if all the men were present. Running into my quarters I dialed the duty telephone operator. Telling him who I was I ordered him to get trucks and help down to us immediately, that a tidal wave was rushing in towards the beach. In turn I phoned the officer of the day's office. Repeating the same order I had given to the duty telephone operator to the officer of the day's assistant, I hung up and looked at my watch. The time was 0650.

As I started to go on the porch with the men the wave hit the beach with a thunderous roar. From then on events happened fast and furiously.

Barely having time to yell at the men to hang onto the heavy porch railing surrounding the second deck, the wave hit the club. The deck heaved under our feet, toppling us around. Then the building started to disintegrate all around us. The second deck literally split in half, dropping all of us into the raging waters. Two of the men, Warren Blodgett and Robert Wilkes, were picked up by the torrent and swept toward the aircraft landing strip about a mile away. Landing in some trees at the edge of the field, they hung

onto these for security.

In the meantime the roof had slid down on top of us, pinning us in its wreckage. We struggled furiously to extricate ourselves. Clyde Sheldon, in the water next to me, had part of his right ear severed and his left ear at this time was also badly battered. Water pinned us with a mighty grip amid wreckage in a tree top while debris tore past us. One minute water poured over us; the next we had our heads clear of the debacle. A deluge poured over us, beating us down with relentless fury, sucking the very breath from our mouths.

Frank Perico, wedged in some wreckage a short distance away, called out, saying, "Mr. Daniels, I can't swim!"

Yelling to the boys to climb into the tree, Charles Smith, Leroy Avants, with the help of Marvin Somers, RM3/c, and Albert Smith, RM2/c, who had visited and stayed with the boys overnight, helped Perico into the tree, all the while fighting the ruthless, tumultuous waters.

After what seemed to be ages the water reversed its direction of flow. The force from the velocity of its return to the sea nearly tore us loose from our precarious hold on the tree. A snapping at the base warned us of the possibility of the tree being uprooted by the whim of the returning waters. Looking seaward I could see another wall of water building up.

Waiting long enough until the velocity and suction from the retreating waters had retarded, and the water receded enough, we let ourselves down until we could feel solid ground under our feet. Making the boys form a "hand chain" we stumbled through the water towards where once we knew had been a road. Reaching down I picked up a couple of fish swimming past us.

Hastily wading knee-deep in water, tearing at our feet and nearly in a state of complete exhaustion,

we gained higher ground.

Stopping to survey the scene where once had stood the officers' beach club, I looked to make sure that nobody had been left behind. A view of desolation and destruction was all I could see. Everything appeared to be in a state of complete collapse, excepting for the roof of the snack bar which was a former Quonset hut. Only seething, churning, muddy water, a little beyond from where I stood, to the advancing wall of water out to sea — advancing towards the beach like a relentless reptile after its prey — was all that could be seen. Later, I found out that the steel doors of our concrete liquor vault had been torn off as if made of paper.

Hastily turning, I started wading towards the men, who by this time were standing on the runway.

Ambulances started to arrive on the field. Hospital corps men removed us to safety before the third tidal wave hit the beach. Taken to the dispensary, we were immediately given treatment for our injuries by the doctors and nurses. All of us were confined to the sickbay for observation; fortunately, we had no fatalities.

MICHAEL J. DANIELS, Lt., USNR.

Kindergarten Tea at Oak Terrace School

Mothers of the Oak Terrace kindergarten in Highwood are inviting mothers of the children to enter kindergarten in September, 1946, to a tea, to be held in the kindergarten room Friday, May 17, at 2 p.m. At this time all new kindergartners will be registered for school (this includes children who will be five years old by January 1, 1947). Each mother registering for next year is asked to bring her child, with his or her birth certificate.

A short entertainment will be presented by the children of this year's kindergarten.

This company was glad to join with the Illinois Commerce Commission in removing the major restrictions on the use of electric energy which have been in force during this critical period.

We wish it known, however, that such relaxation could not have been accomplished in spite of the temporary coal-producing period agreed to May 10, had it not been for the savings in coal already made through the whole-hearted cooperation given by all industry, commercial business, residential and other customers.

We also wish to express our appreciation for the continued support by the Illinois Commerce Commission, Governor Green, all of the officials of the communities we serve, the press and radio.

We urge the continued voluntary effort of the public to keep the use of electricity at a reasonable minimum. If an early settlement of the coal controversy is reached, we believe the territory we serve can be supplied through the emergency without further restrictions.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS

Lt. M. J. (Art) Daniels Writes Eye Witness Account of Tidal Wave At Kahului

(Lt. Daniels will be remembered as "Art" Daniels, who attended the Highland Park high school.) Subject: Destruction of officers' beach club by tidal wave — eye-witness of.

The club was located on the ocean front, in the vicinity of run-

way No. 17, approximately 75 feet from the beach and 200 feet from the water's edge. Its elevation is about 15 feet above sea level.

As officer-in-charge of the officers beach club, my living quarters were located on the second deck of the club. At about 100 feet south of the club, in a single-decked, wooden frame structure, the enlisted men, Robert C. Wilkes, AOM2/c, Warren S. Blodgett, RDM3/c, Charles E. Smith, RM