



The 1977 Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire Department, seen from left to right: Murray Emmerson, Ken Roberts, Bob MacAloney, Marvin Betz, Jim Rennie, Keith Malcolm, Lloyd Jennings, Ken Wagg, Grant Turner, Tom Brillinger, George Wilson, Chief Walter Smith, (back row) Bill Brown, Don Lewis, Don Doner and Charlie Jackson. Fred Castle not present.

THEN & NOW

Stouffville's all-volunteer fire department has changed drastically since the days when members of the Stouffville Fire Brigade responded to the fire bell on top of the clock tower by rushing to one of the two fire reels, grabbing hold of it and running to the hydrant nearest the fire.

Today the department utilizes air packs, two pumper trucks and an emergency utility truck equipped with oxygen tanks and other equipment. There is one strong similarity though, the 16 man force is still entirely constituted of volunteers.

The fire reels used in former days were nothing more than two wheels with the fire hose coiled between them and a long tongue for the volunteers to grab hold of or to harness horses to if a cooperative dray wagon driver happened to be nearby.

Air packs and resuscitators were unheard of and standard fire fighting equipment consisted of a rubber coat, helmet and axe.

"Just a strong back and weak mind was all you had to have then," joked former chief Del Jennings. Mr. Jennings, 82, joined the brigade in 1922 and served as chief for 20 years from 1934 to 1954. Although long retired he still has a connection with the department as his son-in-law, Walter Smith is now chief and his son Lloyd Jennings, is a member.

Mr. Jennings joined when the fire reels were in full use and part of the job consisted of hanging the hoses up in the 40 foot bell tower to dry. In winter a fire had to be built in a pot bellied stove at the foot of the tower to prevent the hoses from freezing. The tower was torn down about 1930 and was replaced with a brick structure which still stands today. The bell, which did service from 1876, is now mounted outside the new fire hall in the east end and a siren has been mounted on top of the tower. In addition many of the firemen have alarms in their homes.

Mr. Jennings remembers that practices were held once a month and the major exercise was hosing down Main St. In those days the rates for firemen were 25 cents an hour.

The brigade first began keeping

official records in 1903 and firemen, being men of few words retired the records book, only half full, in 1972. The book, which included records of payments and minutes of meetings, was retired out of respect for its great age.

The book was started after a 1903 dispute between council and brigade members which ended when the 40 volunteers all resigned. The new brigade consisted of only 14 men.

Three years later, in 1906, the entire brigade resigned, again as a result of a dispute with the council of the day.

In 1927 the brigade "went modern" with a flashy new 1927 Ford truck. This beauty came equipped with a crank start, would tear along flat out at about 25 mph and came with a box on the back to lay the hose in.

Around 1930 the first pumper came into use. This was a half ton truck equipped with a 100 gallon tank (pumpers today carry about 3,000 gallons). It carried two men and pressure was developed by dumping sulphuric acid and soda into the water. The two inch diameter hose didn't quite provide a torrent of water but the truck did allow firemen to tackle fires away from the village water hydrants.

"You get the damn thing (fire) pretty nearly out and you'd run out of water," was Mr. Jennings comment.

The Stouffville Fire Department has an enviable safety record as no fireman has ever been killed or even seriously injured.

One volunteer, in his haste to get down off a ladder after hearing the alarm, twisted his ankle and another overzealous fireman arrived at the station one day as the truck was pulling out and attempting to do a Hollywood style leap onto the back of the truck, dislocated his shoulder in the process.

The worst fire in recent memory was Nov. 11, 1971, when the Ratcliff Block, now the site of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, went on fire. It took 34 hours to get the fire out and the block was gutted.

This year there have been a record number of fire calls and the volunteers have been needed, and appreciated, more than ever.



Shown in this old photo is the old firehall and wooded clock tower. The firehall is long gone and the tower has been replaced with a

brick one. The old tower was taken down in 1930. Also noted is that the car is a 1926 Chev bought from Frank Baker for \$250.