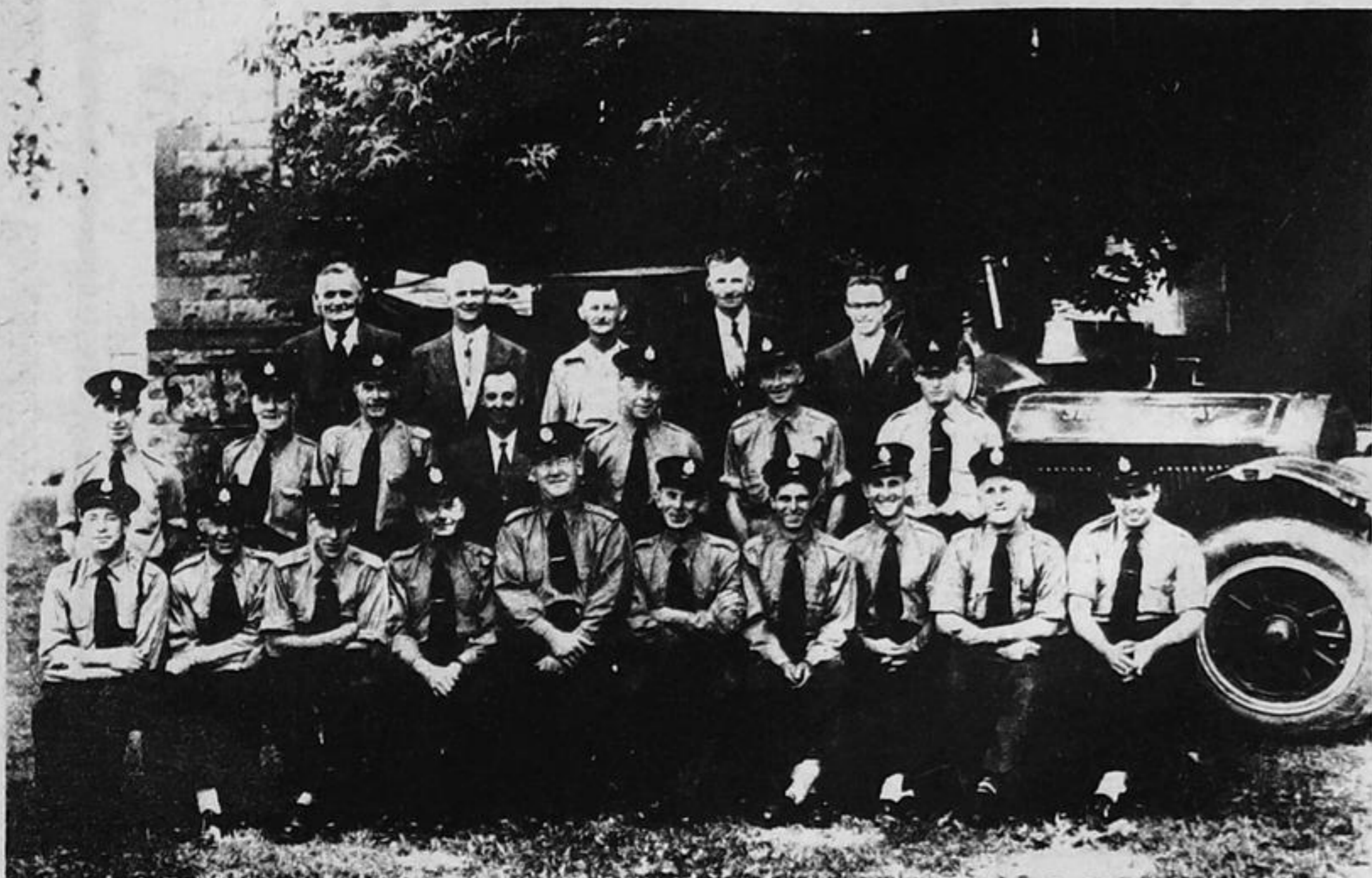


Focus On

SEELEYS BAY FIRE DEPARTMENT



ORIGINAL MEMBERS IN FIRE DEPARTMENT — 1951

Front Row (l. to r.): Ross Hartley, Ed Hill, Edgar Nash, Dept. Chief Ralph Sweet, Chief John Hartley, Pete Clark, Ralph Hartley, Ralph Stanton, Captain Martin Perry, Bob Simpson.
 Second Row: Herb Eaton, Hammy Swain, Alf Love, Hayden Stanton M.P., G. Down, Jack Cameron, Gord Leadbeater.
 Back Row: Alfred Kenny, Klon Johnson, Ken Stafford, Ern. Blackman, Dr. S. Webb.

Using the old adage 'you've got to fight fire with fire', Nellie Blackman and Valera Hartley turned on the 'fire' in their baking ovens way back in July of 1950 and put together enough cookies, pies and cakes to raise the first \$75 toward equipment for the then yet-to-be-formed Seeleys Bay Volunteer Fire Department.

Since then there has been no looking back.

Recently Fire Chief Ralph Webb talked with obvious pride of the spirit, dedication and efficiency of the 35 firefighters currently in the department.

He sat at his desk and looked through the open door at the shiny fire trucks in the garage adjacent to his office. Above the crackle of radio equipment in another adjoining room, he said, "You know, everything we buy or build today is paid for by the fire department."

Although a yearly allowance of \$11,000 worth of taxpayers' money is turned over to the department by township council, all of the rest of the money to run the department is raised by the firefighters themselves.

The department's most recent purchase is a mini-pumper, a four-wheel drive 'smaller' vehicle on a GM chassis that is used to get into hard-to-reach spots, prevalent in farm and cottage country. The firefighters paid cash for the vehicle.

"We built this office and the radio room last year," the chief continued. "When we needed a carpenter we found one within the department, when we needed a plumber we had a volunteer and so on. We didn't pay a cent for labor."

Chief Webb lingers on the volunteer aspect of the fire department.

"At a recent convention of firefighters from across Ontario - with perhaps 500 people in the convention hall - the speaker asked firefighters who volunteered their services without any compensation to stand up."

Chief Webb was one of two people to stand up.

"You would be hard put to find a man, woman or child in the Seeleys Bay area that hasn't in some way contributed to the fire department," he continued.

But don't let their volunteer status lead you to believe that the men of the Seeleys Bay Department are amateurs.

These full-time farmers, store keepers, mechanics, carpenters, etc., are dedicated firefighters.

Every Monday night is training night. The latest in firefighting theory and techniques are discussed, and if need be, practised.

Meetings are held with other fire departments throughout the district.

Training Officer Murray Thompson keeps abreast of the latest equipment and events in the world of firefighting.

What does all this mean to the homeowners in the Seeleys Bay area?

Well, dollar-wise, according to village insurance agent Peter Vogelzang, it means 50% off the cost of fire insurance.

"Fire departments are rated by insurance companies," Mr. Vogelzang explained, "and Seeleys Bay has a high rating."

As for peace-of-mind, it is comforting to know when you settle into bed on these cold winter nights that out there surrounding you are 35 able bodied men ready to jump out of their warm beds to come to your rescue in an emergency.

Chief Webb was joined in his office by another veteran firefighter, Stuart Willoughby, secretary-treasurer of the department.

The two men were asked what fires stood out in their memories.

Strangely they talked first of fires they 'lost', the Hartley Lumber Mill fire and the more-recent tragic Kumm fire.

I asked them about this.

"Well," said Chief Webb, "when you do a good job of putting a fire out - or preventing one - it becomes a non-event. No one remembers."

Mr. Willoughby recalled one such incident.

"It was on a farm along Highway 15 toward Kingston," he remembered, "The parents had gone off to work and one of the children had ironed a dress before going to school.

"She left the iron on and between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. the iron had burned through the ironing board onto the floor and then through the floor into the basement.

"No flames broke out but by afternoon the heat within the room had grown so intense that records melted and ivory peeled off the piano keys.

"When firefighters arrived at the scene, had they kicked down the door or flung it open the oxygen rushing into the room would have precipitated an explosion of flame."

Chief Webb took up the tale.

"We opened the door a crack and sprayed a layer of fog into the room. Only a pail or two of water was recou-



Front Row (l. to r.): Irene Hartley, Marsha Watson, Sandra Redmond, Jean Webb, Valera Hartley.

Back Row l. to r.): Ehtel Blackman, Kay Stafford, Irene Wheeler, Hilda Simpson, Peggy Webb, Donna Serson.

ired to bring the temperature down and as a result the mess was minimal. The family slept in the house that night.

As the two veteran firefighters continued to reflect on the early days of the department they remembered how a fire that destroyed a large part of the village was the spur that caused the villagers to begin discussions to form the nucleus of a fire department.

"Back in those early days," Chief Webb said almost apologetically, the volunteers had to ask township council to issue two debentures - one for the first truck and one for the first building.

That first truck was a 1923 model American LaFrance pumper, formerly owned by Ford City (now Windsor). It was purchased for \$3,500 and is still in use by the department.

After the second debenture for \$3,500 was issued the following year, the firefighters and other village volunteers dug into the charred ruins of the Ken Bolton Store on Main street - the site of the last major fire before the formation of the fire department - and in a few short weeks the new concrete block firehall rose, phoenix-like, out of the ashes.

John Hartley became the first chief in September, 1950, and remained as chief for 25 years. Then Ralph Webb was elected chief.

Other current officers are Deputy-chief Tony Noakes, Training Officer Murray Thompson, 1st Capt. Edward Webb, 2nd Capt. Stanley Hartley, 1st Lt. Ab Leadbeater and 2nd Lt. Roger Noakes.

The firemen continue to raise money when they are not fighting fires. Dances, bingos and other events are held in the hall above the fire station.

And although the ladies have contributed right from the beginning with bake sales, tea and sales and other numerous events, it wasn't until 1960 that a Ladies Auxiliary was formed.

In these days of rapidly rising inflation, the firefighters of Seeleys Bay are giving the people in their fire district excellent value.

Nellie Blackman and Valera Hartley can rest, fully assured, that the time they volunteered over their hot stoves was time well spent.