

**THE AMHERSTBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT  
PAST AND PRESENT**

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CIRCA 1999 - 2000

THE AMHERSTBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT  
PAST AND PRESENT

OUTLINE

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- Officially recognized and organized
- Motions of Town Council
- New officers
- New name
- Brief history of constant re-organization

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- Trucks, then and now
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Chiefs of the Amherstburg Department

- Names
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THE AMHERSTBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT  
PAST AND PRESENT

Many people have wondered where the idea of starting a fire department in Amherstburg came from, when it first came into existence, why it has always been a volunteer unit, and what some of the long ago fire fighters looked like. Over the next few pages, all these, and other curiosities will be revealed.

DEPARTMENT FORMATION

Looking back in time to find information on this department was not an easy task. Though the Amherstburg Echo has been around for many years, often times the information written concerning the fire department was limited to a notation of who the fire fighters of the town were, or whose house burned down the night before. Specific facts are vague, yet plausible, when researched thoroughly. The earliest listing of names of people who were "members" of the No.1 Fire Company is dated February 14, 1841. The list read as follows: "George Bullock, Captain, Richard Hadwick, Lieutenant, Alexander Wagner, Secretary, George Thomson, Treasurer, Richard Watson, Branchman, Simon Bertrand, Branchman, James Findley, Branchman. Alexander Jones, Branchman, John Hamilton, Branchman, Antoine Meloche, Branchman, Thomas Horsman, Branchman, James Love, Branchman, George Watson, Branchman, Rowland Wingfield, Branchman, Antoine Racicot, Branchman, William L. Shultz, Branchman, Henry Middleditch, Branchman, John Turk, Branchman, Joseph Girardin, Branchman, Felix Drouillard, Branchman, Israel Beneteau, Branchman, James Brown, Branchman, Charles G. Fortier, Branchman, Thomas Nicholson, Branchman, Christopher Kenden, Branchman, George Baker, Branchman.

Back in 1841, Amherstburg did not have what one might call an "official" fire department. The members of the No.1 Fire Company were considered more to be members of a "social club". The purpose of this company was not only to put out fires, but to also arrange local functions, such as dances and charity bazaars. In 1870, the No.1 Fire Company, also referred to as the Fire Brigade, had a new set of members. A picture, taken of them in 1870 or 1871 (the exact year is up for debate), dressed in their new blue and white

uniforms, along with the list of names of the members, appears at the end of this history paper.

On March 14, 1879, the Amherstburg Echo wrote a 10 paragraph story on the official recognition of the Amherstburg Fire Company No.1. During a meeting, held in what was called the Firemen's Hall on Dalhousie Street, the officiating took place. Several citizens had signed a petition requesting the proper organization of "a fire company for better protection against fire". A Mr. Lauler was the chief advocate for this proposal, and with his twelve years of experience in Strathroy in connection with both hand and steam fire engines, serving a considerable portion of that time as Chief of the fire brigade there, he was made Captain of the new Amherstburg Fire Co. No.1, which, by the way, was an amendment of a Mr. J.H. Legget and a Mr. John Harriss to call it Lafayette No.1. A committee to draft by-laws for this new company was made, and date for practice sessions for all fire company members was established.

The fire department, even after official recognition, underwent many changes. Re-organization of officials within the department was constant. In 1882, the Echo, dated January 13, announced that a new fire company had been established. A list of names of the members can be found at the end of this history paper. On this date, it was also decided to call the steam fire engine the "Walter Lambert", in honor of the late Mayor Lambert. On March 28, 1919, another re-organization took place. At this time, a man by the name of John Hamilton was the Captain in charge, having replaced Samuel L. Lauler, the former Chief. The paragraph read as follows:

"The activities of Capt. John R. Hamilton has resulted in the re-organization of the local fire brigade, and the appointment of men who will no doubt take a more active interest in the fighting of the few fires that Amherstburg has, but whose work at these times is just as necessary as if fires were of a more serious nature. In addition to these new appointments, the brigade of 12 men is divided equally among the three wards, with a captain over each, whose duty it is to see that the hose carts are kept adequately supplied with efficient hose, and other fire fighting apparatus properly looked after. This ought to result in a greater efficiency all round, and give the people of the town more confidence in their fire department. A roll will be called after each fire, and absentees reported to the council."

There was a very good reason for this re-organization. At this time, there were a series of fires that had taken place in town. Another article from the Echo, bearing the same date reads that it seemed a "fire bug" was operating throughout the vacant houses in town. It continues that this was "the second fire of that nature, it being within 10 days of another...". The article ends, "It is plain to see that it is the work of an incendiary." At the same time, yet another article from the Echo bearing the exact same date reads as follows: "When submitting the report of the Fire and Light Committee, Mr. Denike explained that the Deslippe account for drying hose was contracted for the No.1 hose, which, when the R.C. School fire broke out, was unreeled at Wm. Finlay's, and was being used by him. He thought the account should be paid in full, and a portion charged back to Mr. Finlay."

The article continues, "Mr. Denike said that the Fire Brigade was at loose ends regarding the appointing of firemen. He said the firemen should be divided into three wards, with a captain over each, responsible for each hose reel.. Moved by Mr. Denike, seconded by Mr. Laramie, that none of the fire fighting apparatus be taken out of the hose houses except for fire purposes. On three different occasions lately, hose was taken for private purposes, and the town had to pay for drying and putting it back. Motion put, and carried."

So it seems, from the reading of these articles, that some of the towns people were taking it upon themselves to make use of the fire hoses whenever they pleased, and letting the town pick up the expense of having them dried and put back into their hose houses. Back then, the hoses were on three different streets, and the water was brought to the fire, unlike now, where the water supply is on the street and the hoses are brought to the fire. Due to the lack of "action" to correct this situation, a re-organization took place, with the hope that with the rules spelled out and trusted people put into positions of responsibility, the townspeople would come to rely on, and most importantly, respect their local fire department.

## EQUIPMENT

The equipment of olden days, prior to 1800, consisted mainly of a ladder and a bucket, which was the custom for houses to each own and keep on their premises. The ladder had to be long enough to reach the roof since chimney and roof fires were the most common at that time. It is said that as early as 1779 there was a two-handed pump in operation to protect the Fort Malden buildings. It was originally the property of the British government, and placed at the Old Fort Malden when Imperial Troops were garrisoned there. It was equipped with leather hoses and

brass nozzles. The soldiers were generally expected to assist in putting out any fires with the use of this pump. Early hand-pumped fire engines did not suction their own water. "Cisterns" were kept filled with water, which was taken from the river, by being passed in buckets from man to man, extending from the river to the scene of the fire, As the town grew, the "pass the bucket" idea changed to the idea of these cisterns being kept filled by rain water, or, during draughts, water-carts hauling water from the river to the cistern.

From 1840 on, the two fire companies, or "social clubs", as they really were, were equipped at their own expense with hats, and a hand-powered fire engine that required 12 men to operate it at full power.

In 1875, the municipality took charge of the company, and fitted it with a large, horse-drawn steam powered fire engine that could suction its own water and throw it over the buildings. This engine was kept filled by a steam pump located at the foot of Rankin Avenue. The engine was purchased second-hand from the city of Detroit.

The next recollection of a change in fire fighting equipment is a comment made by Chief Hamilton at his party for 25 years of service as the Fire Chief. He stated that when he joined the fire department 32 years ago (in 1910), "We had only a couple of hand reels, and they were not very much use as fire fighting equipment."

In 1939, it is recorded that the Amherstburg Fire Department was in ownership of a hook and ladder truck. However, they decided that a rescue truck might come in handy. So a group of fire fighters, knowing that there was no money in the town's budget to purchase a rescue truck, decided to build one from scratch. The men had to lift the rather ancient vintage sedan they had purchased, and with a lot of strenuous shifting, manoeuvred it through the fire station door. They tore the car apart, clipped the top off, and proceeded to construct the perfect rescue truck. They even sprayed it with three coats of vermillion paint with the use of vacuum cleaner attachments. Once finished, everything was set to roll the car out for all of Amherstburg to admire. Just one problem. There was an L shaped corner that was needed to get around. The fire hall door was too narrow to drive the truck out, and the truck was now too heavy to lift out. So there it was. A nice new truck, and no way to get it out of the fire hall. At the time the truck was built, it was presumed that the town council would vote them enough money to widen the door in time for the grand presentation. It is safe to presume that the door was eventually widened because a photo, taken approximately 1949-50, shows this hand-made rescue truck,

along with two other Fire Department vehicles, outside of the old Town Hall.

Currently, the Amherstburg Volunteer Fire Department is in possession of professionally made, up-to-date equipment and trucks to service not only the town's needs, but to also assist other townships when called upon.

## FIRES

There have been several fires in the town of Amherstburg over the years, but there are two that seem to stand out in the "minds" of the newspaper field. The first was what is now known as "The Great Conflagration of 1875". It took place on Murray Street, between Ramsey and Dalhousie Streets. At that time, the Amherstburg Echo reported that there was a total of \$25 000 worth of damage sustained, and only \$13 000 (1875 dollars) was covered by insurance.

It was about half past 2 o'clock on a Sunday morning when an alarm was sounded. A man by the name of J.H. Crawley was the first witness of the beginnings of this disaster, and sounded the alarm. A large two story building, occupied by a Mr. Gilbert Lafferty was engulfed in flames, and soon began to consume the neighboring buildings, which housed general stores. Next, it leapt across the street to the tailor shop. It also burned the News Store, owned by a Mr. John Brown. Next came the local barber shop, the Prince Albert Hotel, the butchers stalls, owned by a Mr. C. Kemp, the stores owned by Mr. Joseph Reaume, who was a harness-maker, and the grocery store, owned by Mr. Louis Cadaret. Bungey's Hotel caught fire, along with Smith's barber shop, two vacant stores, and two barns.

A building occupied by Conroy & Co. soon caught fire, and fell in, which then transferred the flames to a restaurant and fruit store, and on to a brick hardware store owned by Mr. J.G. Kolfage. The residence of John R. Park ,sr. was also severely damaged.

The other major fire took place on the afternoon of Tuesday, November 11, 1887, on the corners of Ramsey and Richmond Street, spreading to the north side of Murry Street. The fire began on the inside of the south-west corner of a store owned by a Mr. G.T. Florey. Before anyone could attempt to go in the store for the purpose of removing goods, it was in a blaze. The flames caught on to two small cans of gun powder, and exploded. It blew out the plate glass windows, and cut the heads of several people who were about to enter the building. The breeze spread the flames in all directions, catching the brick-lined building of Balfour & Auld, and the residence of James Hamilton, as well as the large roller rink. Flying cinders hit the roofs of a Mrs. Wendell's house, the Bruce Block, the Echo office,

Gasco's Grocery, Reaume's harness shop, as well as some houses as far as Dalhousie and Gore Streets. There was slight damage to Mr. C.M.S. Thomas' drug store. Other houses sustained water damage, peeled paint due to heat, and removal of doors, barns, fences and any outside objects that could feed the fire. The total loss in this fire was \$12 000, with insurance covering \$6 850 (1887 dollars).

#### REQUIREMENTS & TRAINING

The requirements to become a fire fighter in the early days were as follows: be fit and able in body and mind, be known to be of good spirit, and be willing to defend the town and neighbors' property from the threat of destruction by fire. Since the beginnings of the fire department consisted mostly of community work, such as fundraising, church bazaars and town festivals, it helped to be well known within the town.

It is recorded that during the late 1870's and 1880's the Mayor would call the fire brigade out for "practice runs", which usually took place at 7 p.m. The engine was pulled out, the fire lighted and the team of horses, owned by a Mr. W.K Wright, hooked to the steam engine and run down to the Gore Street dock. The Amherstburg Echo of March 5, 1886 reports, "45 lbs. of steam was raised in 9 minutes from the time the fire was lighted, and two streams of water were thrown through two lengths of hose in less than ten minutes. The engine did her part in good shape this time. Engineer Hunt had everything in good condition for a trial, and if everything would always work as well, there should be no fear of alarm by any insurance association."

By 1939, Fire Chief J.R. Hamilton had the department practicing 16 times a year. In the 80's the Amherstburg Echo, dated May 19, 1982 shows that the department had increased the practice drills to two times per month and that "all the men were expected to attend. There were only two reasons for missing a drill: a death in the family, or their own illness."

These days, the fire fighters practice once a week, on Thursday's and take courses on various life-saving methods such as CPR and basic first aid. They also train constantly with all the various pieces of equipment they may possibly use during a fire. In an interview with our current Chief, Mr. Murray, he stated that when a person first approaches the department with their desire to join the volunteer team, they must take an aptitude test, and be closely supervised and trained by a veteran fire fighter. They are put on probation for one year, and observed to see if there are any signs of claustrophobia, vertigo, inability to control the fire hoses, or carry a fellow fire fighter out of a dangerous situation, or an inability to think quickly and



clearly in a stressful situation. If after one year they still have the desire to be fire fighter and they've faired well in all areas, they become part of the Amherstburg Volunteer Fire Department.

### SPECIAL TRAINING

There is a school in Gravenhurst called the Ontario Fire College that many of the fire fighters attend. It enables them to become more knowledgeable and comfortable with the various aspects of their job. It is not, however, mandatory. For a fire fighter to become a Lieutenant, he must take a special three day course offered in Leamington. Both the Lieutenant and the Captains are responsible for the training of the fire fighters, especially the new ones.

### PAY

during a personal interview, Chief Murry stated, "80-90% of the fire departments in Ontario are run on a volunteer basis. Our municipality just cannot afford to pay for full time fire fighters." Fortunately, we always have willing volunteers. There is a set amount of money that is paid to each fire fighter, once a year, to cover the personal costs of damaged gear and replacement equipment. It is in no way a paying job. The breakdown of pay for the fire fighters is as follows: Deputy Chief- \$1900 per year, Captain (of which there are five at the time of this article)- \$1700 per year, Lieutenant- \$1600 per year, and last but definitely not least, the very dedicated crew- \$1500 per year, per man. All but \$500 of the "reimbursement" pay is taxable. The one person who is considered full time and on the books so to speak is the Chief. His pay was tactfully not inquired upon by this reporter. He is, however, the first full time Chief in the department's history.

### CHIEFS OF THE AMHERSTBURG DEPARTMENT

There have been at least three chiefs in the history of this department. However, with some digging, another one was found. At times, he is referred to as a Captain, but towards the end of his charge of the department, he is spoken of with the title "Chief". So, unofficially, the list reads: Chief Lauler, Chief Hamilton, Chief Mailloux, and Chief Murray. The exact number of years Mr. Lauler served a Chief is not quite clear. However, Mr. Hamilton served as Chief for 50 years, Mr. Mailloux for 24 years, and, so far, Mr. Murray for 6 years, and counting. "I don't plan on doing this past the age of 65," Chief Murray stated. "I do get a retirement pay!"

So, here it is. Just a few pages of Amherstburg's 200+ years of fire fighting history. This town has been the scene of some devastating fires. Yet through the hard work and dedication of volunteers, it has survived. A fire may take away the buildings and fixtures of many years of history, but it will never blaze as hot and be as all consuming as the fire that burns desire within the people who protect this town; the volunteer fire fighter.

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The Marsh Collection Society

The Park House Museum. Amherstburg Echo collection, 1875-1985.

# FIRE

The Amherstburg Echo  
September - 1875

## THE FIRE FIEND.

INCENDIARIES AT WORK—THOMAS' SAW-MILL DESTROYED—LOSS \$10,000—NO INSURANCE.

Shortly after four o'clock, on Wednesday morning, our townspeople were awakened by cries of "Fire!" a sound but seldom heard in our old town, and a large crowd was soon attracted to the locality of the fire, which was in Thomas' Saw Mill on Dalhousie Street. The fire must have broken out about four o'clock and some few minutes must have elapsed before it was observed and the alarm given on Twomey's and Park & Borrowman's bells, and by the steamer R. N. Rice which was passing up the river at that time. There was no wind blowing, but the fire had gained such head-way in the saw-mill, which was built of wood, that no attempt was made to save it, and attention was directed to saving the Grist Mill, adjoining, which is built of stone with a tiled roof. It was about half an hour before the engines got to work, when streams were thrown on the roof of the Grist Mill by both the Town Hall and Park & Borrowman's engines, the water being obtained from the river, from which the burning buildings were only a few feet distant. Meantime water was thrown on the flames with buckets, of which there was an unlimited supply, and attention was directed to the removal of about 6,000 bushels of wheat, barley and oats, which J. W. Borrowman had stored in the Grist Mill. Other valuable articles were also removed, and all Mr. Thomas' books and papers were got out safe. Although a large number of our citizens worked hard, it was for some time doubtful whether the Grist Mill would be saved, as once the flames got under the roof and ran along under the ridge nearly the whole length of the building, and it was only extinguished on Mr. Thomas directing the firemen to introduce the hose into the second story and pour a steady stream on the flames which were then wreathing the whole woodwork under the roof. The fire was finally got under control, shortly after five o'clock, when attention was directed to saving a pile of lumber near the saw-mill, one end of which was on fire, but this was put out before being badly damaged. The saw-mill was burned to the foundation, but as there a stone wall between it and the grist mill the roof and walls at one end of the latter, only, were seriously damaged.

During the progress of the fire R. McFate, C. M. S. Thomas, P. Navin and "Salty" Allen had a narrow escape for their lives. They were all on a ladder on the roof of the grist mill holding the hose, Mr. McFate being on the ridge and the others below him, when the parties holding the lower end of the ladder allowed it to slip and the four were precipitated on a pile of lumber in front of the mill. Although every one expected to see them killed or have their limbs broken, they fortunately escaped with slight bruises, C. Thomas being the worst shaken of the four. The ladder narrowly missed the heads of several standing below.

The origin of the fire is unknown, but in view of the fire on the following night, that there was no wood within few feet of the engine at the south-east corner where it caught, that the engine was not in use from Saturday and that the miller was all through the building at 11 o'clock it is believed to have been set on fire. Some parties living near by heard two men walking hastily past, on the sidewalk, about half an hour before the fire, when the one was heard to remark to the other "that he was walking devilishly heavy."

Mr. Thomas estimates his loss at about \$10,000 and he has no insurance. Both the engines, that for the saw-mill and that for the grist mill, were located under the saw-mill and both were badly damaged, the latter being in the worst state. Both engines can be repaired at considerable expense. The boilers are not supposed to be much damaged, as they were covered with masonry and sheet iron. The running gear of the Grist Mill was not badly damaged and the tall chimney is uninjured.

The carding machine, of Barton & Son which was in the Grist Mill, was hardly damaged at all.

J. W. Borrowman had policies amounting to \$1,500 in the Provincial Insurance Company, E. Anderson, Agent. His loss on damaged grain will not exceed \$300.

Park & Borrowman were enabled to save their planing mill near by, with water from the barrels, they always keep filled on the roof.

Universal regret is expressed at the misfortune of Mr. Thomas, as this is the third time he has been burned out. In October 1868, his mills on the same site were burned to the ground. He will not at present repair his saw-mill but intends if possible, to refit his grist mill. We hope to see the people of this locality extend to him and his partner, Mr. M. Rankin, a helping hand so that he may soon again commence operations.

## Another Fire.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

About two o'clock, on Thursday morning another alarm of fire was given, as you proceeding to the spot we found flames issuing from the roof of the kitchen in the rear of the old Bruce House, Ramsay Street, two doors from the Office. The erection is an old frame one but the roof burned slowly, there being hardly any wind, and the townspeople who had soon assembled, pouring buckets after bucket of water on the flames keeping them well under control. About five minutes past two the engine from the Town Hall was on the spot and hose was laid from the well of M. A. Morin a short distance down Ramsay Street where the engine was stationed to the roof of the building, and a stream of water being thrown on top and through the hole chopped in the roof the fire was soon extinguished. A stream of water was also thrown from the small engine from the Firemen's Hall, which was supplied with water by the water carriers. For some time after the flames were subdued Park & Borrowman's engine supplied the Town Hall engine with water from the river after the supply at Morin's was exhausted. The loss on the buildings will be about \$200, but as there is \$1000 insurance on them Mrs. Bruce, the owner will lose nothing. As the building was unoccupied for some time, the fire must have been the work of an incendiary. The fire when first observed was on the outside of the rear part of the building between the clapboards and the plastered wall. Had the fire once made headway it would have burned a large portion of the town.

Mrs. Bruce and Mr. J. G. Kolfage each offer a reward of \$25, for the discovery and conviction of the incendiaries.

# DEPARTMENT FIRST OFFICIALLY FORMED

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Amherstburg Echo  
March 14, 1879

### Organizing a Fire Brigade.

A meeting of citizens of this town was held in the Firemen's Hall, Dalhousie Street, on Tuesday evening last, in response to a numerously signed requisition, for the purpose of organizing a fire company for better protection against fire.

On motion of Messrs. G. Middleditch and S. L. Laufer, Samuel McGee was appointed chairman.

Mr. Laufer was then called upon to address the meeting, which he did at some length, referring to the necessity of a properly organized fire brigade. He had had an experience of over 12 years in the Town of Strathroy, in connection with working both hand and steam fire engines, and during a considerable portion of that time had been chief of the fire brigade there.

George Middleditch next addressed the meeting, urging the necessity of some sort of organization, and cited the position in which we had found ourselves at the late fire in Walker's Mill and Kollege's tannery, as an instance of where a proper organization would have done good service in saving valuable property.

It was then resolved to organize a fire company, and the following officers were elected:—S. L. Laufer, Captain; J. H. Leggatt, 1st Lieutenant; George Middleditch, 2nd Lieutenant; S. McGeo, Secretary; John Heard, sr., Treasurer; J. D. Botsford, 1st Branchman; Wm. Heard, 2nd Branchman; Thos. Lukes, 3rd Branchman; J. W. Harris, 4th Branchman; John Heard, jr., Foreman of Hose; C. H. Kemp, 1st Assistant do; James Templeton, 2nd Assistant do.

On motion of James Templeton, seconded by George Middleditch, it was decided to call the company "Amherstburg Fire Co. No. 1", an amendment of J. H. Leggatt and John Harris to call it "Lafayette No. 1" being lost.

On motion of Messrs. Harris and Leggatt, the captain was empowered to name a committee to draft by-laws, and the captain accordingly appointed S. McGee, G. Middleditch, J. Templeton and the captain as such committee.

On motion of Messrs. Laufer and J. Heard, sr., it was decided to have meetings of the company on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month for practice, at the hour of 7 p.m.

Moved by J. H. Leggatt, seconded by J. W. Harris—That S. McGee, S. L. Laufer, John Heard, sr., and George Middleditch be appointed a committee to wait on the council and ascertain from them, what they intend to do towards better fire protection, and also ask them to place fire engine No. 1 in our charge, for the present, or until a better engine can be placed in our hands.—Carried.

On motion the meeting adjourned till Monday evening, the 17th inst.

The Amherstburg Echo  
March 5, 1886

On Saturday evening last, the Mayor called the fire brigade out for another trial. The fire alarm was sounded at 7 o'clock, and the engine was pulled out, fire lighted and W. K. Wright's team hitched to it, and run down to Giro Street dock. 45 lbs. of steam was raised in 2 minutes from the time the fire was lighted, and two streams of water were thrown through two lengths of hose in less than ten minutes. The engine did her part in good shape this time. Engineer Hunt had everything in good condition for a trial, and if everthing would always work as well there should be no fear of alarm by any insurance association. About 15 of the firemen were promptly on hand, no doubt receiving a hint before-hand, and, as usual, had the hose laid before the engine had steam up. The members of the Town Council and officers of the fire company had been notified that the test would come off.

# FIRES

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Amherstburg Echo  
March 24, 1882

### FIRE WEDNESDAY MORNING.

SPLENDID WORK OF THE STEAMER—LOSS  
\$2,500—ACCIDENT TO THE ENGINE.

Shortly before 1 o'clock Wednesday morning, fire was discovered in the kitchen of the old Bruce House, on Ramsey street, two doors north of the Echo office by watchman Jermie. On his giving the alarm the inmates, 11 in number, got out of the house in a hurried manner, some of them in their night clothes, and none of them with too many clothes on. Mrs. Johnson, wife of Mablou Johnson, one of the proprietors, was got out by being helped to the sidewalk from the second story verandah, and the servant girl was also helped out. Both were barefooted, and with scarcely any clothes on. In a few minutes after the first alarm, the steam fire engine and hose were taken from the engine house to the Murray street dock, and in a short time two splendid streams of water were being poured on the building, which by this time was wrapped in flames. Although the house was entirely built of wood, and old and dry, the fire was soon got under control, and was completely extinguished before the building was half burned. Very little of the furniture and none of the bar-room stock or fixtures were saved. Most of the inmates lost more or less of their clothing. Mr. Paradine, Mr. Johnson and wife, the servant girl and George Roadhouse, a boarder, losing everything except one or two articles which were grabbed up in making their exit. W. Oliver lost a suit of clothes; James Cady, a boarder, who is in Kingsville at work, lost a quantity of clothing; Alfred West, another boarder, also lost part of his clothing, while Fred. Wright and son, and John Hurst, boarders, saved nearly all their effects. The loss on the building, which is owned by Mrs. S. Bruce, is placed at \$1,000, on which there is no insurance. Johnson & Paradine, on furniture, stock, &c., estimate their loss at \$1,500, on which there is an insurance of \$1,000 in the London & Lancashire Insurance Co. The fire originated in the kitchen, from the pipe of the cook stove, and when first discovered had gained such little headway that, for a time, those who were fighting it had hopes of extinguishing it before doing serious damage. Joseph Tomlinson, harness-maker, who occupies the adjoining building on the south side, had everything moved out of his shop and dwelling house, but the excellent work of the steam engine saved the building from even being scorched, and Mr. Tomlinson moved back that morning, but very little the worse for the fire, his loss by damage to goods and furniture being about \$25, caused by handling. The old Bruce House has been on fire on two or three previous occasions during the past few years, at one time narrowly escaping destruction. The premises have been occupied for hotel purposes for the last 30 years, the building having been put up that long ago by the late Robert Bruce, by whose family the business was carried on until about 8 years ago. During its better days it was known far and wide as one of the best hotels in the county, and has been the scene of many stirring events.

After the fire had been all extinguished and the engine got ready for removal to the hall, those in charge proceeded to back it off the Murray Street dock. A number of men outside of the brigade got hold of the ropes and began to hurry her off and refused to obey the orders to move slowly, and the consequence was that near the end of the gangway they ran her off and upset her in the mud on the bank. On Wednesday forenoon, all the loose parts were taken off and a contract given to Augustus Bastien to get her out for \$40. She was got up yesterday afternoon, and, so far as can be seen at present, the only injury is to the smoke-stack and other brass-work, which is only bruised and not broken, and the whole expense of making her as good as before will not be \$200 and may not be \$100.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Amherstburg Echo  
January 13, 1882

The New Fire Company.

A meeting of the proposed fire engine company in this town was held in the Town Hall, on Thursday evening of last week, when the organization was completed by the election of the following officers:—

Chief—Samuel L. Lafler.  
Captain—Wm. D. Balfour.  
1st. Lieutenant—W. T. Wilkinson.  
2nd Lieutenant—James Campeau.  
Secretary—Daniel Boufford.  
Assistant Sec.—P. C. Cadaret.  
Treasurer—Z. Morin.  
Foreman of Hose—Thomas Ashwell.  
Assistant do.—Michas. Girard E.  
1st Branchman—Andrew Bellecoore.  
2nd do.—Nicholas Stevens.  
3rd do.—Alexis Boufford.  
4th do.—Henry Bellecoore.  
Engineer—George Middleditch.  
1st Assistant do.—David M. Kemp.  
2nd Assistant do.—Geo. Rebidoux.

It was decided to call the steam fire engine the "Walter Lambert," in honor of the late Mayor Lambert.

The Secretary was instructed to file with the clerk of the Corporation a list of the officers and members of the company.

Another meeting was held on Wednesday evening of this week, when a constitution and by-laws were submitted and adopted.

F.F.G.H.770

The Amherstburg Echo  
May 19, 1939

Fire Brigade of 1870

A reproduction of a picture of the Amherstburg Fire Department appeared in the Detroit News recently. The picture, which was taken in 1870, was loaned to the News by W. C. Gasco, 1512 Howard Street, Detroit. The firemen had just received their new uniforms of blue and white and were a smart-looking squad. The members were as follows: Dave Brault, Henry Grondin, Dan Boufford, Jacques Bernard, Vital Lemay, Dan Pouget, William C. Gasco, Antoine Amlin, Andrew Bellecours, Etienne Barron, Louis Girardin, Dan Bertrand, John Gasco, Louis Lemay, Louis Dupuis, James Grondin, Alex Deneau, Louis Grenier, Bucky Renaud, James Sweetey, Bert Primeau, Henry Primeau, Alex Grondin, A. P. Primeau, Thomas Langlois, Henry Renaud, Thomas Graveline, Michael Girardin and Noah Deslippe.

X  
Photo taken by Canadian in 1871  
loaned by W.C. Gasco in 1929, who  
was one of 4 Barry members.  
Photo received by The Echo  
Nov. 28, 1929

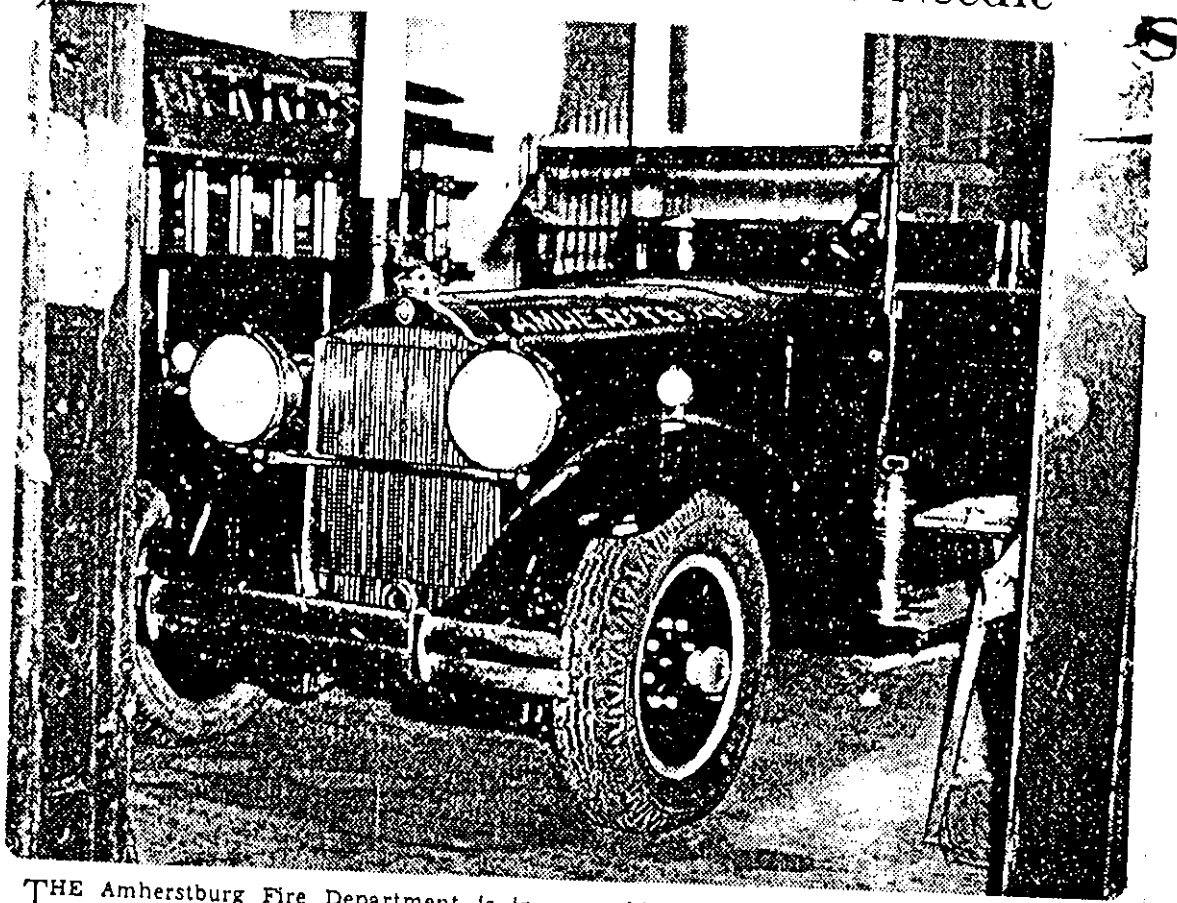
"The pump used by the brigade was one operated by hand power. It was purchased from Detroit when that municipality bloss out with a steam engine and it was later returned to Detroit and kept in their arc brought out yet on special occasions."



FIRE DEPARTMENT - AMHERSTBURG

The Windsor Daily Star  
August 3, 1939

## Just Like the Camel and the Needle



THE Amherstburg Fire Department is in somewhat of a dilemma. It has built itself a gleaming new rescue truck and now finds that it will be impossible to get it out of the fire hall unless the property committee of the town council comes through with enough money to make building of a larger door possible. The truck is shown above, its position with respect to the door,

which now is far too small, plainly visible. To the left of the truck are three stalwart iron posts which make it impossible to take the car out by the regular door to the left of the posts. The fire department anticipated, when the construction was begun, that it would have no trouble getting a larger door installed.

(By Staff Photographer.)

## Town's Rescue Truck In Need of Rescuing

Splendid Machine Built in Amherstburg  
Fire Hall Can't Be Removed Unless  
Larger Door Is Cut

By JOHN A. MARSH

VOL. 65, No. 7

Single Copy, 5 Cents

AMHERSTBUR

THE LITTLE TIME ago—Mrs. L. B. Gibbons of Leamington has a couple of newspaper clips about the social life in Amherst in 1878 . . . In her letters, Gibbons said in part— "I thought you and your readers would be interested in reading of a number of parties that were given in Amherstburg 60 years ago" . . . The parties referred to were given in the Park House—now the Lake View Hotel—and the principal figure in each was the late Mr. James Boyle—who was an uncle of Mrs. Gibbons' . . .

James

JAMES BOYLE—a colorful figure—was born in Amherst in 1801—as a young man of 18 left his old home town—a success of the world and 60 years later returned to the place of his birth to spend his declining years . . . Dr. Boyle was a very interesting man—who never gave up the Colonial style of dress—he wore long black silk stockings—high-heeled slippers with buckles inset with stones—crbockers . . . Those who remember him say that he never wore an overcoat but a cloak with the clasp at the neck . . . He clung to the cocked hat of the days . . .

James

THE FIRST PARTY staged in the Park House was one given to the Doctor for his many friends in Amherstburg and vicinity . . . Clipping from The Echo goes to say, "Choice selections of music delighted the company and were furnished by the following: Mrs. W. on the guitar—Miss Della on the harp—Angus Wigle on the violin—Lewis Haines on the cello—Professor Putman on the piano and violin and any who had knowledge of the musical skill of the parties named may well say that the music furnished was of a superior kind" . . . Continuing the Echo newsman said, "Old and young spent a large portion of the night in paying their devotions to the waltz—quadrilles—waltz—jigs—and in fact all the things in the long list of dances known at the present time received due consideration . . . Even the host of the night—notwithstanding his gathering years—viewed some of his youngest guests as leading the mazes of the misty night" . . . Great praise was given to the proprietors of the Park House for the fine supper which served at midnight—"Daylight came to make its appearance before all had departed for their homes—each one feeling—that it would be long before they would meet on a more merry and enjoyable occasion" . . . The Echo writer must have had a grand time at this social affair for he

# Amherstburg's Fire Loss Higher In 1938 Report Of Chief J. Hamilton Shows

## Brigade Answered 20 Calls In Year Regular Drills Were Benefit To Firemen

### Greatest Damage Was At Beneteau's

Amherstburg's fire loss during the year 1938 amounted to \$3,674.10, which was \$579.65 greater than in 1937 when the loss totalled \$2,094.45. The loss was divided between contents, \$1,118.44, and buildings, \$2,555.66. The biggest fire was at Fred Beneteau's house, Sandwich Street, where the damage was \$1,468. Other big fires were at B. Mulholland's house, \$1,150, and E. A. Parker's barn, \$700.

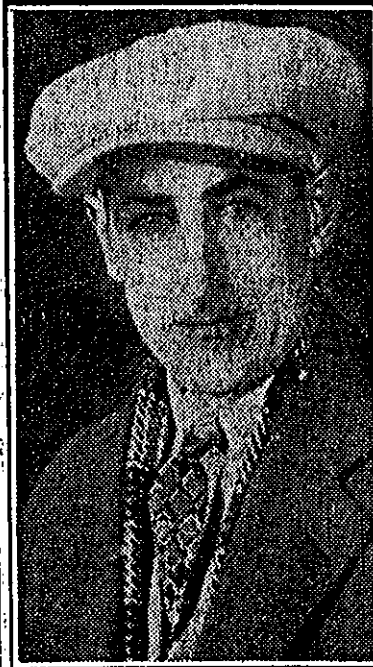
#### Calls Answered

The brigade answered 20 calls, according to Chief J. R. Hamilton's records. These were as follows: Sheds, 3; roofs, 4; homes, 2; and the others one each—chimney, barn, office, dock, dump, stove, woodpile, garage, boat house. Three calls were received from out of town but the department did not respond.

There were 16 fire drills held during the year and these have greatly increased the efficiency of the fire department, Chief Hamilton says. Through the practice they receive the men know just where to place themselves and what to do when on duty at a fire. The result is there is no overlapping and every man knows his job. The fire chief keeps a complete record of all the fires for a number of years past and finds that the highest annual loss was in 1933 when the damage amounted to \$15,940.01.

## Trustees to Ask for Additional Grants

The Amherstburg Echo was in conversation with George A. Hall a few days ago and received the



FIRE CHIEF J. R. HAMILTON, whose annual report shows Amherstburg's fire loss to be \$3,674.10.

## Essex Reeve Minds The Baby While Mama Votes

Gillet W. Doyle, reeve-elect of Essex, goes the candidates who kiss babies as part of their election campaign, one better by even "minding the babies." It seems that in the course of calling for his supporters to take them to the polls Gillet visited one woman who said she couldn't leave her baby. He gallantly offered to mind the baby while she was gone. The report doesn't say whether the infant started to cry or not, but if it did he could easily croon it a little lullaby for he is one of the famous songsters of the County Council.

## Essex Clerk Breaks Tie Vote for Mayor

## Ancient Ford Still For Henry Meloche

With its engine purring like a well-fed kitten, a Ford car of the vintage of 1914 pulled up to Peter Bratt's service station, Amherstburg, Monday morning to re-fuel. Its owner, Henry Meloche, rived the front, Anderdon, told the crowd that gathered around the ancient vehicle that it had been giving him continuous service for 26 years. It

## Voters Throng To Polls In Municipal Elections Monday A Surprise Result In Mersea Township

The outstanding feature of the municipal elections Monday was the large vote polled. There were fewer stay-at-homes than usual and this was in evidence from Toronto all down the line.

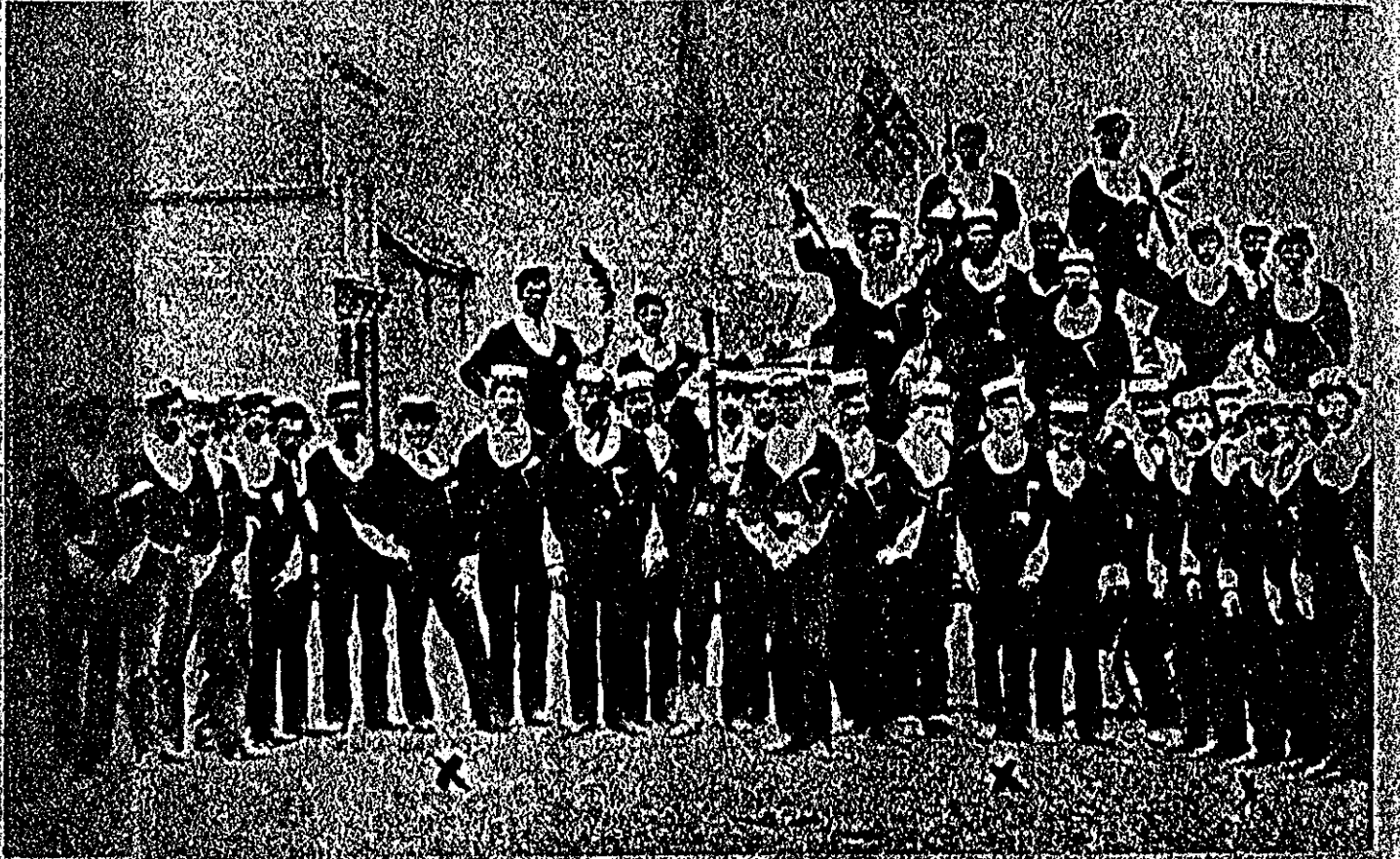
Essex County's one surprise was the defeat in Mersea of Austin Cates, reeve, and Sam McRae, deputy-reeve. They were replaced by L. B. Settingington and Jim Armstrong. This election has interesting angles as Mr. Settingington is no stranger to Essex County Council as he sat as deputy-reeve with Charles G. Baker, reeve for Mersea township in 1929 and 1930. Jim Armstrong is son of the late Adolphus Armstrong who was reeve of Mersea for several terms and later was elected M.P.P. for South Essex. Jim a few years ago sought to reach Provincial Parliament by the direct route, but went down to defeat before Charles G. Fletcher. He now will fill the seat in County Council once occupied by his revered father, and who knows but that history will repeat itself in the Armstrong family. Mayor Crawford and Reeve Voakes had easy picking in Kingsville, their majorities being very large. In Essex, Reeve Doyle swamped his opponent, showing that he retains his hold in that town.

The elections in Anderdon and Colchester North for one councillor each brought out large votes. It's of interest in Anderdon to see that Wallace Bellaire who at the nomination said that he didn't want office badly enough to cause an election was given the highest vote among five. A gale of wind probably caused the elec-

# Those were the days.....

Something new about something old. In an effort to recall some of Amherstburg's past The Echo is publishing a series of pictures some from Fort Malden, the Park House, and interested citizens.

*Amh Echo June 2, 1976*



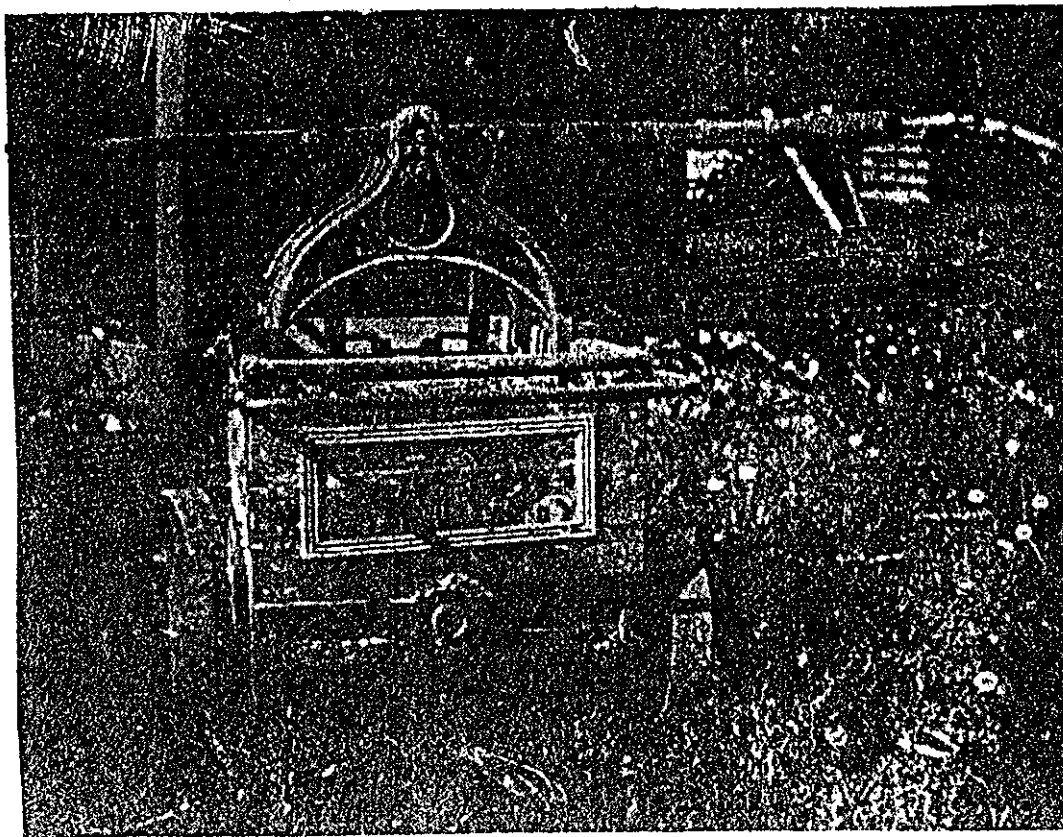
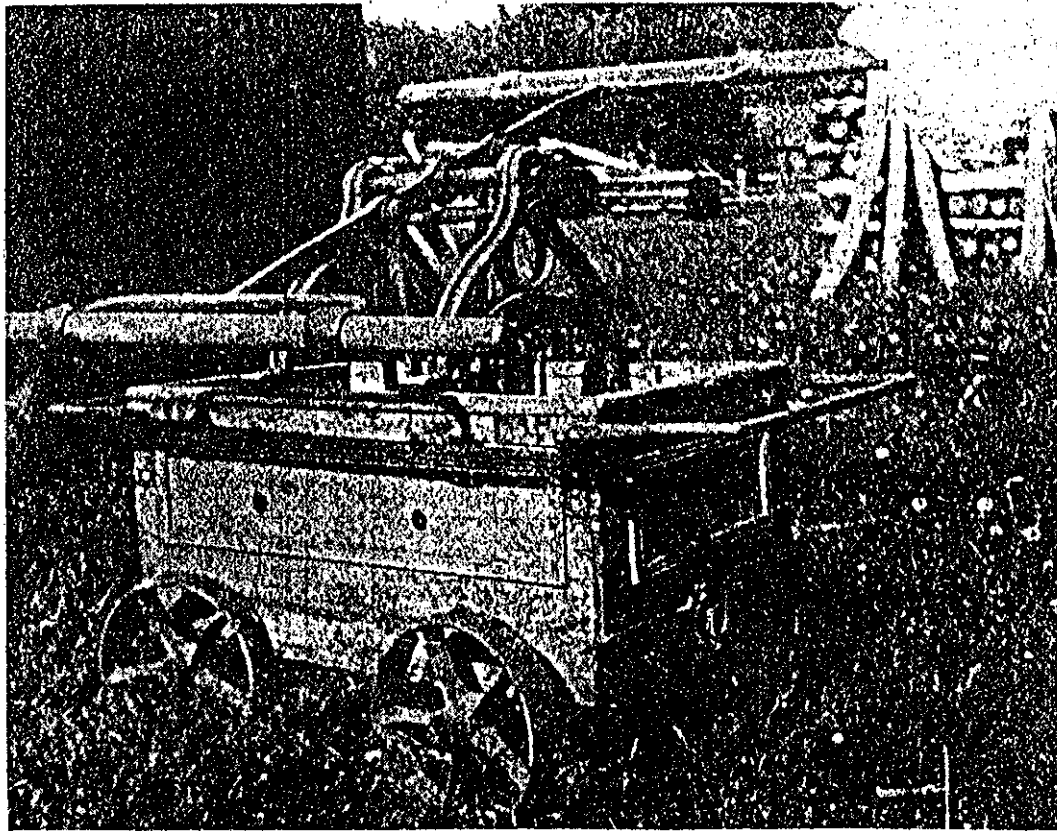
AMHERSTBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT OF 1870. Taken from a photogravure in the Detroit News, 1929. The original was taken in Amherstburg in 1870. The men in the rear are standing on a hand-operated pump which, after

proving inadequate during a fire, was discarded and sold to the Detroit Fire Department, who still had it as a curio in 1929.

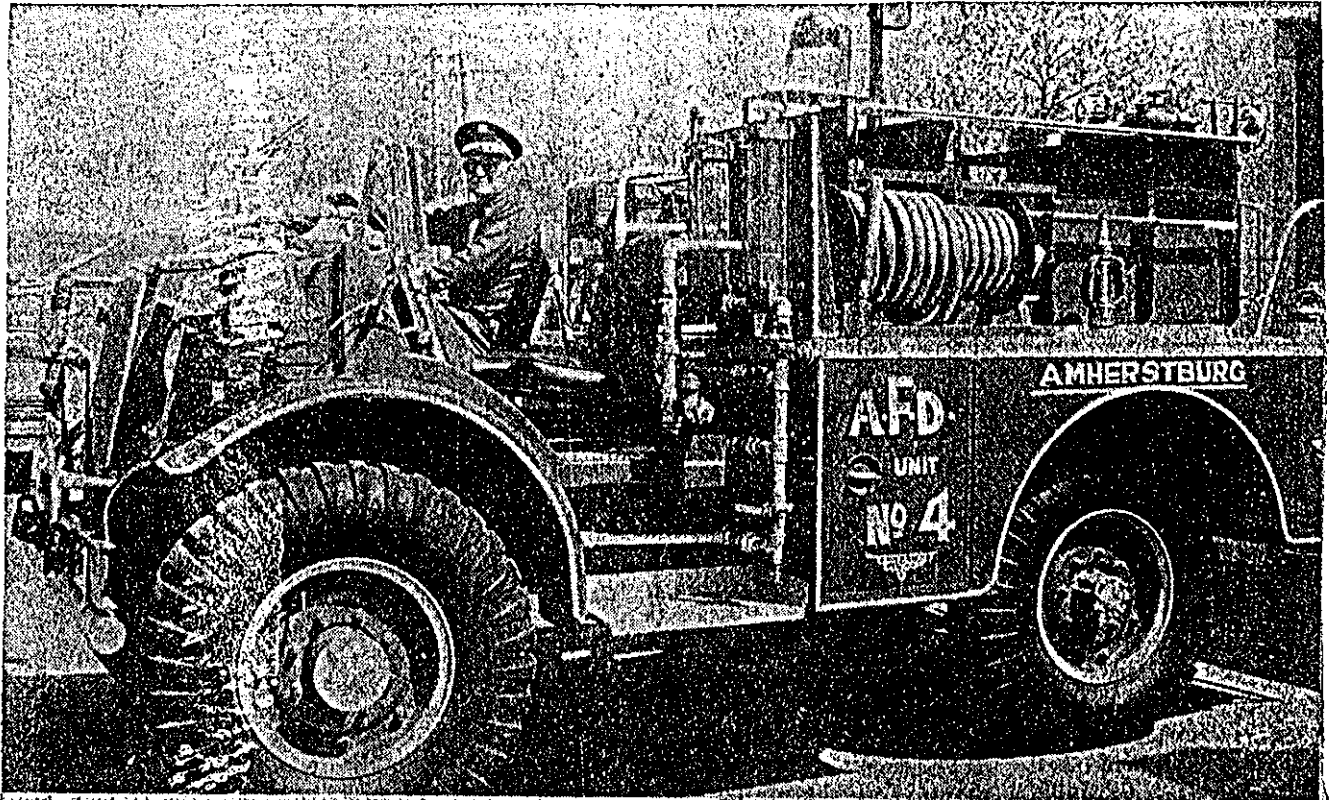
*Amherstburg Sch  
June 2, 1976*

Even when this hand-pumped fire engine was described as 'ancient'. Now, it is another forty years reputed to be one of the oldest and most reliable fire engines in the world. The circa 1840 engine is firefighting equipment in the collection of the Fort Malden Museum in Amherstburg, Ontario.

# those were the days....



EQUIPMENT



## Amherstburg displays firefighter

*It isn't the most powerful vehicle in the world, or the prettiest, and it certainly doesn't have a very romantic nickname, but Unit Four of the Amherstburg Volunteer Fire Department does have a lot of character, which will be evident in its participation in parades throughout the county this summer.*

*Unit Four, or "The Toad" as the local firefighters have christened it, is a 1942 Ford Canada vehicle. Chief Mel Mailloux (seated in the right-hand-drive truck) said the Toad was bought ten or twelve years ago for \$450 from the Canadian Armed Forces.*

*"It's got high ground clearance, 12-ply tires, and four-wheel drive (in fact, it's stuck in that condition). I thought it would be a handy thing for fighting grass and brush fires. I don't like taking one of the engines*

*into some of the places for those -- we'd rip the transmission out," said the chief.*

*In addition to the basic mechanical equipment, the Toad also carries a 500-gallon water tank, numerous-faucet outlets, a front-end-mounted sprayer ("Good for parades," Mailloux notes), and glass cylinders for mixing an extinguishing solution called "wet water". Amh Echo - May 18/83*

*"We don't use her much anymore, although she still runs pretty well. The only insurance we've got on her is as a parade vehicle, and people really seem to enjoy that aspect. Every department has to have a mascot of some sort, and this is ours," the chief explained.*

By ROSS MASON

THERE'S the perennial yarn about the amateur yachtman who built a sleek cruiser in his basement and then was forced to knock down the house to get his craft to the water. In real life, the story finds a parallel in the situation now facing the Amherstburg Fire Department. But in this real life story, unless Mayor Marra and the property committee become generous to the extent of approving enough money to knock a larger door in the fire hall, the "boat" will remain inside, useless.

## MACHINE TRANSFORMED

Some time ago, the fire department decided that a rescue truck might come in handy, and so a sedan of rather ancient vintage was purchased. The members of the volunteer fire department were able to get the sedan inside the hall, by lifting it bodily and doing a lot of strenuous shifting. Then they tore the car apart, neatly clipped off the top and rear section and mounted a body of steel, without any previous experience. The work was begun inside a small portion of the hall, separated from the hook and ladder truck by three stalwart posts whose duty is to hold up the roof.

The work continued, and the company finished the body, as expertly as any technicians from any firm of auto makers ever did, but the car was still inside those fateful three iron uprights, and was now so much heavier that moving by manual labor, even by the 12 members of the company, is impossible. Everything was set for the grand final thrill of wheeling the car out into the open so that the admiring populace might see and admire the handiwork of the Amherstburg laddies, who had labored so hard and so skillfully for two long months. They had even sprayed it with three coats of vermilion paint, with the aid of vacuum cleaner attachments, and had had it artistically lettered by Ed Kemp, a member of the volunteer department, who makes his living painting signs.

## TOO HEAVY TO LIFT

Then it was found that it was much too heavy to lift around and wheel out the front drive. They contemplated pushing a hole through the front of the hall, but the property committee of the town council had to be considered, and according to reports, it wasn't quite sure whether it ought to go ahead with the expense, or wait to see if the fire laddies could again hoist the car around the narrow, L-shaped corner.

And that's the situation. The fire department has, with its own hands, constructed a fire truck complete with everything from an oxygen tank to an inhalator, or resuscitator, or whatever they call it. It gleams and glitters with its three layers of vacuum-sprayed red paint. The lettering is in place. The chrome plate is shining, but they can't get the truck out of the fire hall.

If the property committee of the town council come through with a grant to make a larger door possible, the trouble will have ended and the truck will be able to zoom around town on its errands of mercy, the pride of all the townspeople who behold it.

But if the property committee continues to maintain its economy program, the resplendent rescue truck will be forced to waste its sweetness and its newness on the desert air of the fire hall.

## DOOR NEEDED, ANYWAY

At the time the truck was built, it is reported, the men in the fire department expected that the council would vote them enough money to make a new door possible. At the present time there is only one door, practically located, and the point of preferred position is held by the hook and ladder. Now, it is problematical if the door will be built.

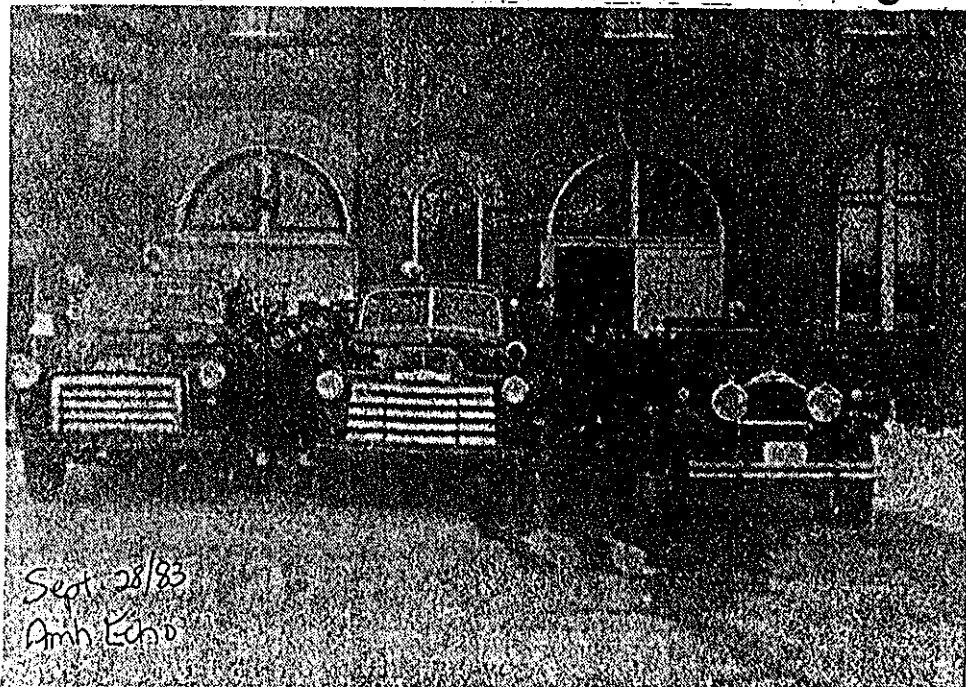
It has been suggested that some dark night that the rescue truck "accidentally" roll down into the brick wall and make a path for itself, but the fire laddies are awaiting the evidence of generosity on the part of that property committee.

Those who took a hand in the craftsmanship which made the new and apparently-now-useless acquisition possible are: Eddie Kemp, Chief Jack Hamilton, Irvin Berbard, Bud Lalonge, Harry Spearing, Jr., Louis Robillard (the latter two have practical training in rescue work in Windsor), Bill Wade, Ed Orndin, Jack Kennedy, John Belcoeur, Bill Fryer, and Julian Kopacz.

The truck is there, ready for use, and the fire department is still wondering if it has executed the equivalent of the sea captain who built his boat in the basement.

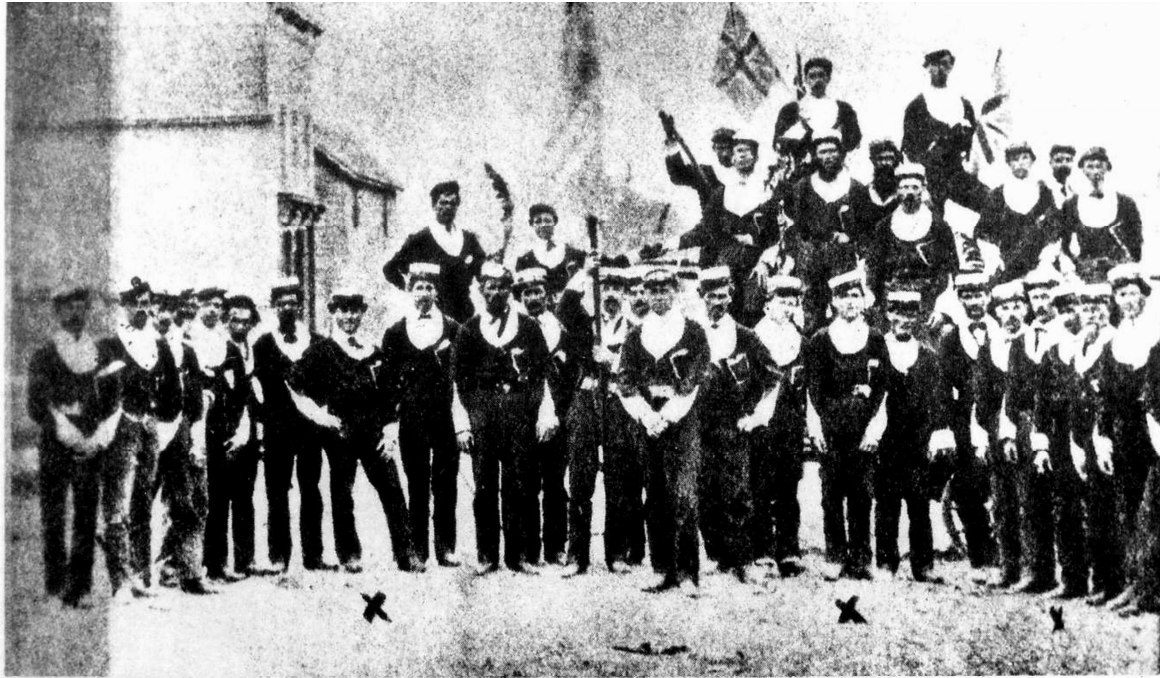
EQUIPMENT

# Those were the days



Sept. 28/83  
Amh Echo

The Amherstburg Fire Department vehicles, circa 1949-50, in front of the old Town Hall. (On site of the new Town Hall). Squad members, l-r: John Hamilton Jr., Bud LaLonge, and Harry Spearing. Submitted by Jeff Spearing, who also pointed out that his grandmother, Doris Spearing Walsh, ran the switchboard upstairs at the Echo office for Bell Telephone, and died by drowning in the Detroit River, just behind the Echo office.

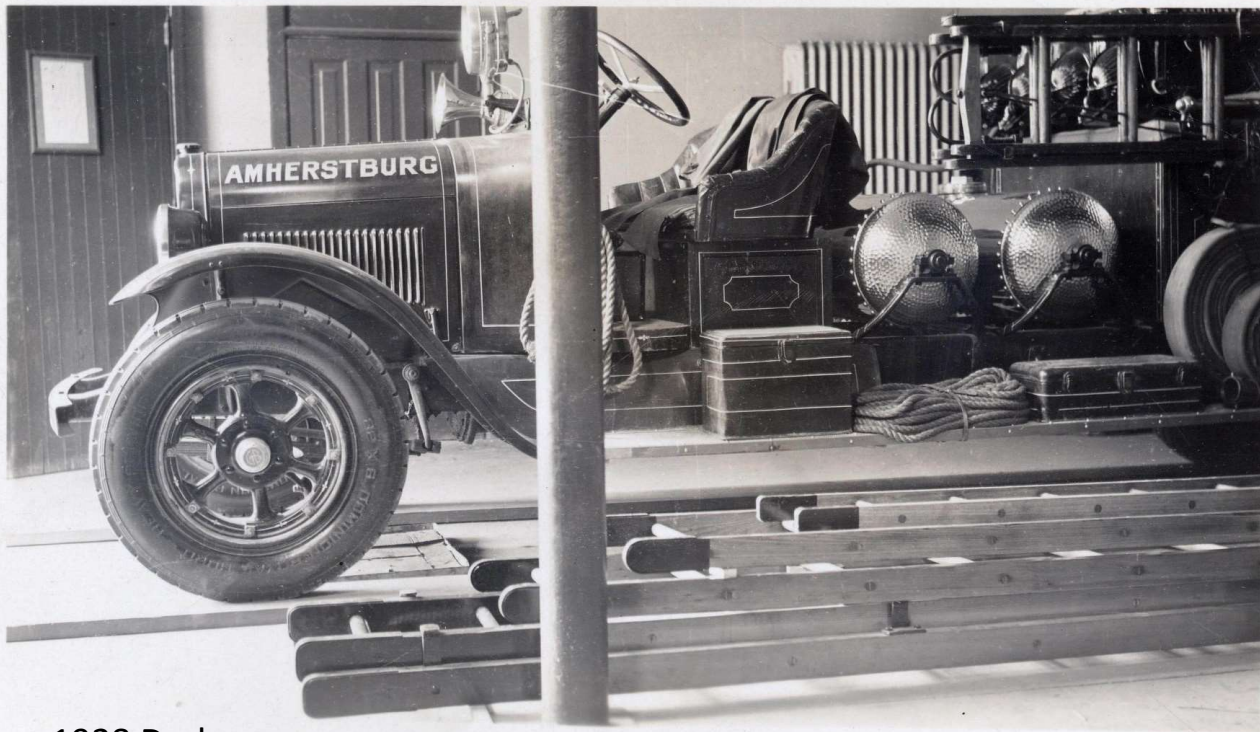


AMHERSTBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT OF 1870 . . .  
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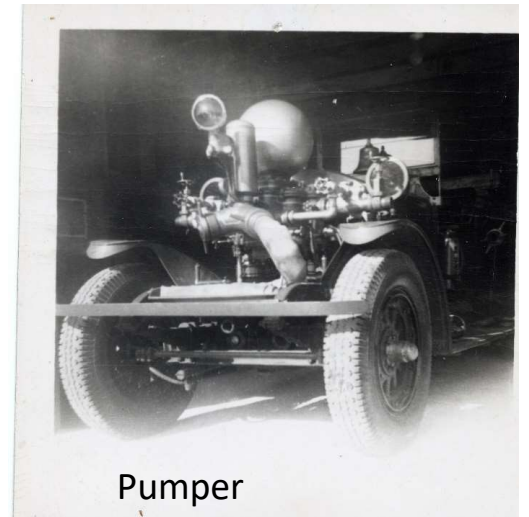
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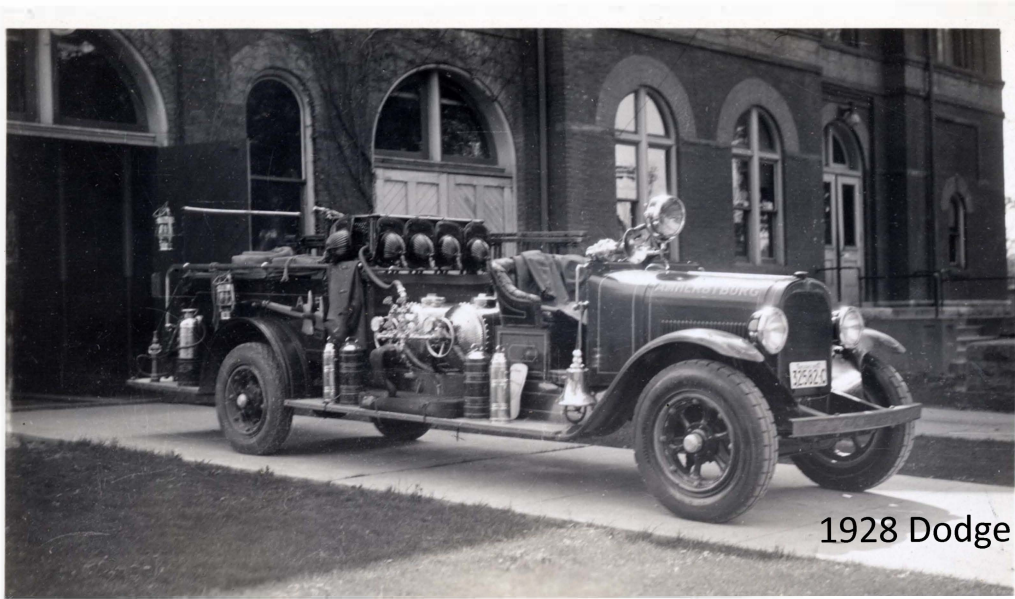
Fleet – Early 1900's



1928 Dodge



Pumper



1928 Dodge



1949 Chevy Ladder





SEPTEMBER 1960



1950 GMC Pumper



1950 GMC Pumper

COMPLIMENTS OF THE MICKLE FAMILY

