

# A Century Of Fire Fighting In Charlottetown Reviewed

By Percy O. Cameron

The Firemen's Tournament in Charlottetown this week is a reminder of the great services performed by volunteer fire brigades throughout Canada, and of the record achieved by our local firemen over a long period of years.

From its earliest moments up to about 1856, Charlottetown was a garrison or fortified city, having as defenders of its bastions, troops of the British Imperial Army. It was to these regiments that the town looked for protection against the "red destroyer". It has been part of the "rules and regulations" of armed forces, since the time of Julius Caesar, to provide for the lighting of fire.

The records of early times in Charlottetown state that Fire Engine No. 1, the "Prince Edward", which had been imported from England by Governor Smith in 1816, was turned over to the Department on its establishment on December 3, 1855. Further in the early records, the acquisition by the Town, from the Ordnance in 1854, of Fire Engine No. 3 complete with leather hose held together by rivets, is noted. The price paid the Ordnance Department was £20 sterling.

From the foregoing it may be seen that the military forces played a very prominent part in fire fighting in Charlottetown in the long ago.

en construction. In fact the size of the fires during this period, around 1877, seems to have warranted the following organization, as shown by the first report of the Fire Chief to the Council in 1877:

Engine No. 1 (hand) located on Grafton Street, Alex F. Watson, Capt., and 32 men.

Engine No. 2 (hand) located on Pownall Street, Benj. Rogers, Capt., and 43 men.

Engine No. 3 (hand) located on Peake's Wharf, Ralph B. Peake, Capt., and Mr. Peake supplies the men.

Engine No. 4 (hand) located on Kent Street East, J. W. Fraser, Capt., and 51 men.

Engine No. 5 (steam) located on Grafton Street, A. W. Large, Capt., and 25 men.

Engine No. 6 (hand) located on Kent Street East, (held in reserve).

Engine No. 7 (steam) located on King Street, Chas. L. Strickland, Capt., and 26 men.

Hook and Ladder Company, No. 1, located on Grafton Street, with Engine No. 1, James M. Butcher, Capt., and 43 men.

The foregoing made up a force, including the Chief and his assistant, of 272 officers and men. Today by reason of improved construction, water supply, and fire apparatus, a Department of 45 officers and men, having only one Fire Station and four motor fire trucks, is able to protect Charlottetown almost double in area and population, and containing property of considerable value.

The year 1877 saw the completion of the acquisition of first phase equipment which consisted chiefly of engines which were fed, their water supply by hand, were drawn by hand, and pumped water by the efforts of a crew of firemen.

1923, a City Service Ladder Truck was supplied. The next truck to arrive in the Station was a 1,000 G.P.M. La-France Pumper on Nov. 22, 1931. The Department next received a Bickle-Seagrave trailer pump in October, 1945, a Bickle-Seagrave Motor Pumper in July, 1947, and in May 1946, a Pierre-Thibault Motor Pumper. A new La-France equipped ladder truck was supplied in 1949.

Out of the seven motor fire trucks supplied to the Fire Brigade since 1916, five are in service today, including the one of 1916 vintage, and in addition the trailer pump mentioned above.

The Motorized Department is a far cry from the days of hand operated apparatus using men and horses for its locomotive energy. During some winters the answering of fire alarms with horse-drawn hose and sleighs has been necessary, but these occasions are becoming rare.

The passing of the second phase equipment has taken some of the colourfulness from fire apparatus, particularly the horse drawn steam engines. However, the speed, power and efficiency of the motorized engines only keeps pace with the greatly increased fire risks of our time.

The combined efforts of Charlottetown's fire pumps can discharge about 4,000 gallons of water per minute on a fire. In other words, 20 tons of water per minute can be sent crashing into the heart of a conflagration.

on this date of St. Dunstan's Cathedral (Basilica) was a severe spiritual and monetary loss to the City.

Jan. 12, 1929: The Victoria Hotel, Charlottetown's largest hotel, was completely destroyed on this date.

Dec. 14, 1931: A major portion of Falconwood Mental Hospital was destroyed. The Fire Department fought this fire without the benefit of the City water supply. Fire hydrants and mains were later installed and connected with the Charlottetown water supply.

Feb. 6, 1932: Prince of Wales College destroyed. It was replaced by a fine new fire resistive building on the same site. Effective fire fighting equipment is provided in the College.

Nov. 5, 1941: Considerable loss was sustained by the destruction of the Agricultural Hall and School Supply.

Sept. 28, 1946 saw the Sterns Steam Laundry a victim of the flames. Severe damage was also suffered by the property next adjoining on the south and east. In this fire Gordon Poole, a former City Police officer, lost his life by electrocution while aiding the firemen. Loss \$250,000.

Oct. 10, 1946: The almost total destruction of Bruce Stewart and Company's plant, the destruction of the Island Fertilizer plant, and damage to a W.D. Gillis and Company coal warehouse by an early morning fire, gave the Department one of its hardest battles. The loss was estimated at \$250,000.

Nov. 29, 1946: The City and Province suffered another severe loss in the destruction of two-thirds of Davis and Fraser's meat processing plant and cold storage. On this occasion, Ivan Watters, an employee of the above firm, gave his life in a futile attempt to

close a fire door designed to retard the spread of fire. The loss was estimated at \$500,000.

Jan. 18, 1946: The lives of two teen-age girls were lost in a fire which destroyed the home of Mr. W. Larkin, 218 King Street.

Feb. 18, 1949: The Tweel Building, corner of Great George and Kent Street, was severely damaged by fire.

Feb. 15, 1950: Fire again claimed the life of a citizen in the person of Mrs. T. Keoughan when the Sporting Club on Grafton Street was destroyed in a raging night fire, which threatened at times to engulf a whole city block. The fire was confined mainly to the building of origin.

**Chief Officers**  
The following men headed the Department as Chief Officers during the periods shown:  
J. W. Pickard ..... 1879-1881  
A. N. Large ..... 1881-1900  
Charles Hermans ..... 1900-1902  
Thomas Ranahan ..... 1902-1931  
Angus McEachern ..... 1931-1945  
H. H. Jewell ..... 1945-

Associated with the above officers have been such well known Assistant Chiefs as A. N. Large (son of Chief Large above) and C. B. Murley, both active during Chief Ranahan's time; Frank McEachern, with the late Chief McEachern, also Herbert H. Jewell (now Chief), and Fred Pickard who served with the present Chief.

In closing this account of chief officers I wish to pay tribute to the memory of the following departed members, all of whom I had the privilege of serving with: Chief Thomas Ranahan, Chief Angus McEachern, Assistant Chief Frank Hennessey, Assistant Chief A. N. (Bert) Large, Capt. John Connolly, Hose Driver Matthew McCourt, Engineer Harry Math-

eson, and Hoseman James Bell. The latter died of injuries received while responding to a fire alarm. Harry Matheson who succeeded Matthew Murphy as caretaker and driver, guided the details of the Fire Hall for about a quarter of a century.

I regret that an honour roll of Department veterans cannot be included here, as their numbers are legion. However, I wish to take the liberty of mentioning some of the senior veterans who still have an interest in our department: Wm. S. Batt, John Martin, John Turner, Sr., Fred Large, Robert Wakelin, William Bradley, and Arthur Henry.

**Present Department**  
The present Fire Department consists of 45 officers and men divided into a Hose Company of 20 men, a Hook and Ladder Company of 10 men, and an Auxiliary Fire Corps of 10 men formed in 1947. The remaining five men are the Chief and his assistant, and the three permanent pumper engineers (drivers) and caretakers of the Fire Station.

The engineers work in eight-hour shifts, alternating on day and night duty. The night man has a small bedroom at the rear of the station with a telephone near at hand. I think it is opportune to state here, that the City has been fortunate in having the calibre of men who have been its guardians of the Fire Hall in the past and who serve in that capacity at this time.

As to the personnel of the Department past and present, I think a parallel may be drawn between them and the citizen soldiers of ancient Rome. For truly it must be said that they served, and continue to serve, for love of the

game and home, rather than for the relatively small return in gold.

A glance at the records of the past half century reveals that the men of the Brigade have been to the fore in war as in peace. A considerable number of firemen served in World War I, while twenty-two members of a departmental strength of thirty-five in 1939, were on active service in World War II.

Two members of the present Department, L. A. Stewart (former Captain, C.F.D.) and James Cudmore, served overseas with the Canadian Corps of Firemen. In this connection it is notable that L. A. Stewart above was the Company officer of the C. C. of F. who was commissioned to lead that Brigade in the invasion of France by the Allied forces.

Following is the personnel of the Department at present:  
Chief, H. H. Jewell; Assistant Chief, J. S. Walker; Engineer, A. Frizell; Assistant Engineer, E. Burke and F. Bradley.

No. 1 Hose Company: Captain, G. Stewart; Lieutenants, L. Bevins, L. Ranahan; Hosemen, G. Bell, F. Chandler, J. Cudmore, B. Doiron, R. Crockett, E. McCourt, D. McEachern, L. Moore, C. Orford, W. Perry, L. Larter, F. Ranahan, P. Ready, L. Stewart, G. Rogers, W. McDonald, L. Connolly.

Hook and Ladder Company: Captain, W. Connolly; Lieutenant, L. Gillespie; Laddermen, G. Abbott, W. Henry, W. Campbell, L. Llewellyn, G. Maddigan, S. Matheson, J. Turner, P. Senter.

Auxiliary Fire Department: O. C. Percy O. Cameron; men, J. McCourt, E. MacDonald, H. McKinnon, G. Hennessey, W. Worth, D. Jewell, O. Prunty, B. Peters.

**Vacation**  
(Dedicated to recreation)  
Across the Strait from Newby's coast  
And from the Novy shore  
There's nestled, in the bounding Gulf  
The Princely we adore;  
Where dwell the people that we love  
Mid scenes and friends and home  
Where Neptune's tang of ocean breeze  
Waft dew-kiss from the foam—  
Along its crescent sandy shore  
And in its sheltered coves  
While bathers bask in their delight  
And picnic in the groves—  
Of birches, beech and tamaracks  
In cabins and hotel  
And farmers' homes across the Isle  
Where friendly natives dwell.

The sunshine fills the summer sky  
And zephyrs waft the scent  
Of meadows filled with verdure  
Of stalks and grasses bent,  
In summer's winds across the sea  
And from the rolling main  
Humidified by Island dew  
And with its soothing rain.

We'll whisk away to the open road  
From the city's crowd and heat  
To loiter around for a week or so  
With those we like to meet—  
And enjoy the scenes of our childhood days  
Where our jangled nerves were  
With soothing and parents old and true  
On the Isle of our joyful youth.

—Peter A. Riley.  
June 21, 1951.

**Bucket Brigade Days**  
On the Town side of the fire fighting ledger, history records that Fire Engine No. 2, which had been imported from Scotland by David McGill in 1843, was turned over to the newly founded Charlottetown Fire Department in 1855. It may be noted that the three engines mentioned were operated by hand, the water being supplied to their tanks by bucket brigades formed by the citizens. It was not until 1866 that the first steam fire engine, drawn by a pair of horses and capable of draughting water and discharging it on a fire, was supplied to the Government.

**Water Supply**  
Water supply is to a Fire Department what ammunition is to an artillery unit. In 1877 there were seven large underground water tanks, and sixty-one pumps and wells in different parts of the City. Out of that number only two were capable of supplying sufficient water for suction by the steam engines; one source known as "Quirk's", on Prince Street, near St. Paul's Church, and the other on Easton Street near the dwelling of John Hertz. This supply often proved unsatisfactory and resort was had to the Hillsboro River.

About the time the acquisition of a Water Works system was being pressed for by Department officials, this need was filled in 1888 by the supply of a system which has developed into our modern system. Fire hydrants in use in 1888 numbered eighty-eight. Today 130 hydrants are in use in Charlottetown.

Today the City is served by a reservoir located two and one-half miles north of the City. This reservoir has a capacity of one and one-quarter million gallons storage. The reservoir is supplied by two pumping stations located on the Malpeque Road, the other on the Mount Edward Road. The two mains leading from the reservoir to the City are 12 and 14 inches, respectively, in diameter. This system is capable of supplying one million gallons of water daily for ordinary purposes, and an additional million gallons if fire fighting operations should require it. In striking contrast to the supply described above was the 105,000 gallons storage of water available prior to 1888.

The outstanding utility of the fire hydrant system in our water supply lies in its provision of an adequate source of water at approximately every city corner.

**Alarm Systems**  
Our City has depended for a hundred years, and still depends on a bell, to alarm the citizens and, to some extent, members of the Fire Department, when fire "breaks out".

The fire bell is located in the City Hall tower and is operated by members of the Police Department. On some occasions in the past, church bells were used as fire bells, particularly St. Paul's Church bell, in 1880. The Town Crier in earlier times also alarmed the citizens.

Members of the Brigade receive an alarm by alarm bells in their homes and places of business. This alarm system is operated from the Fire Hall by a magneto. The system was installed about 1898. The same year a street fire alarm box system having about 24 boxes was installed. This fire alarm system operated by switches from power line poles in different parts of the town. However, it proved unsatisfactory and was taken out of service. The telephone today is the method used to transmit alarms to the Fire Hall.

The installation of a modern street box alarm system has been considered for some time by the City authorities, and undoubtedly will be supplied when circumstances are favorable.

The passing of the fire bell when a new system replaces it, will recall to many the terror which its ominous tones inspired in their youthful hearts, when the bell sounded in the stillness of the night.

**Disastrous Fires**  
The number of fire calls received yearly has grown from 14 alarms in 1880 to over 200 in the year 1946. The following list of outstandingly destructive fires illustrates in some measure the fight against an enemy which never misses an opportunity to strike.

July 15, 1866: The "Great Fire of 1866," described above, was the most extensive in the history of the City.

Feb. 20, 1884: In the early morning of this day, all the buildings on the south side of Queen Street were destroyed, including the Cameron Block, Post Office, Patriot Office, and other mercantile buildings.

March 5, 1887: On this date, the Mack Wright Furniture Factory (now H.M.C.S. Queen Charlotte) on Kent Street, was destroyed along with all the adjoining buildings on Hillsboro Street.

July 6, 1887: A fire starting where the Tweel Restaurant now stands on the corner of Great George and Kent Streets, destroyed practically all the buildings in that block and finally stopped when it had burned the spire of the Baptist Church.

March 15, 1888: Fire destroyed all in its path from the Excelsior Skating Rink on Kent Street, along the east side of Prince Street, including the Baptist Church. This building, being of brick, enabled the Fire Brigade to gain control.

Nov. 17, 1888: The fire at P. J. Foran's tailoring shop is memorable for the fact that the new Water Works system was used for the first time.

Aug. 30, 1890: Lieutenant of Salvage Corps, Theo. J. Farquharson, died of injuries received whilst in action, fighting a fire in MacLeod's stable on Queen Street.

March 8, 1913: The destruction

of a fire door designed to retard the spread of fire. The loss was estimated at \$500,000.

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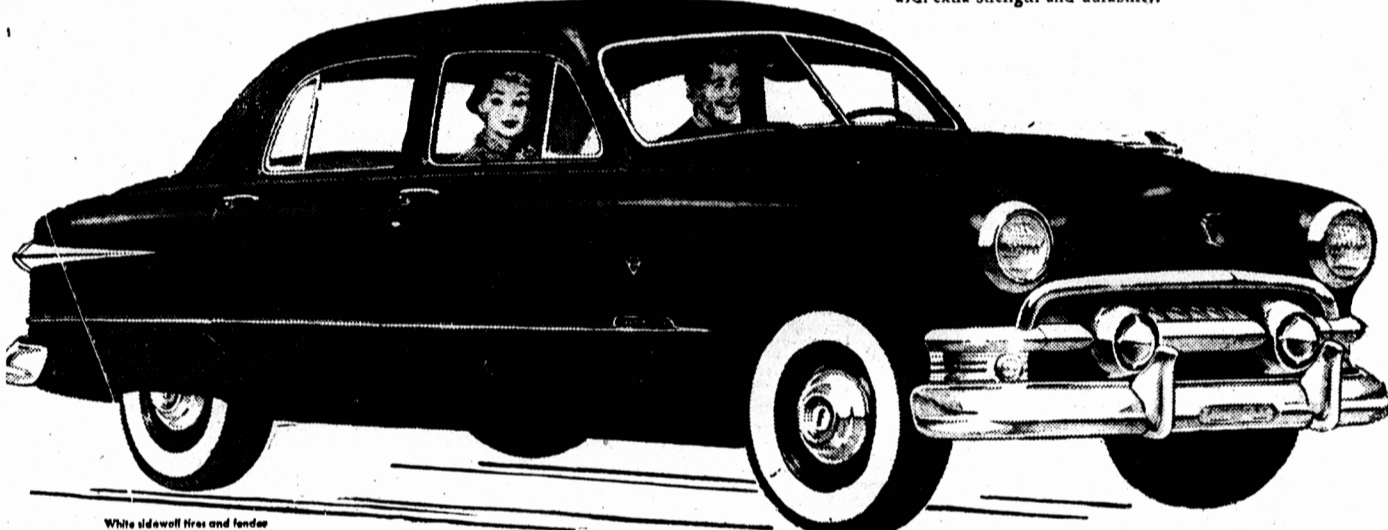
**Vacation**  
(Dedicated to recreation)  
Across the Strait from Newby's coast  
And from the Novy shore  
There's nestled, in the bounding Gulf  
The Princely we adore;  
Where dwell the people that we love  
Mid scenes and friends and home  
Where Neptune's tang of ocean breeze  
Waft dew-kiss from the foam—  
Along its crescent sandy shore  
And in its sheltered coves  
While bathers bask in their delight  
And picnic in the groves—  
Of birches, beech and tamaracks  
In cabins and hotel  
And farmers' homes across the Isle  
Where friendly natives dwell.

The sunshine fills the summer sky  
And zephyrs waft the scent  
Of meadows filled with verdure  
Of stalks and grasses bent,  
In summer's winds across the sea  
And from the rolling main  
Humidified by Island dew  
And with its soothing rain.

We'll whisk away to the open road  
From the city's crowd and heat  
To loiter around for a week or so  
With those we like to meet—  
And enjoy the scenes of our childhood days  
Where our jangled nerves were  
With soothing and parents old and true  
On the Isle of our joyful youth.

—Peter A. Riley.  
June 21, 1951.

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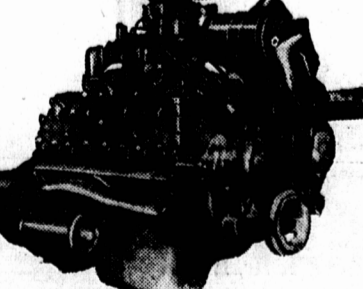
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One "Test-Drive" and you'll learn the silent, thrifty power of Ford's V-8 engine with Automatic Mileage Maker—the ease and dependability of its Key-Turn Starting—the smooth-riding comfort with Ford's Automatic Ride Control!

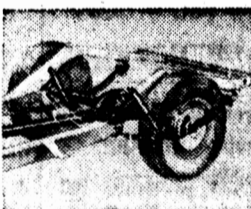
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**First Steam Engine**  
At a meeting of the citizens, following the fire, it was decided to purchase a steam fire engine and hose. Subscriptions were solicited and the result was that the Steam Fire Engine "Rollo" No. 5 was obtained from Merryweather and Sons, London, the cost being £1,089 10s. The Legislature granted £300 toward the cost. This was followed in 1873 by the purchase of Fire Engine No. 6 (hand) from the above firm for \$1,049.22, and the purchase of Fire Engine "Hillsboro" (steam) No. 7, in 1878; the cost including 1,000 feet of hose, was \$5,000 in gold.

Many of the fires which destroyed considerable parts of the City in early times were due to the almost complete use of wood-

**Second Phase Equipment**  
The completion of the water system and its acceptance for use in 1888, brought about a degree of change in fire apparatus in use by the Department, and resulted in hand pumped fire engines becoming obsolete.

From 1888 to 1916 the Department was supplied with horse and hand drawn hose reels, and ladder wagons. This equipment was backed up by the two Steam Fire Engines, each drawn by a pair of gray horses. One of these "steamers", the "Silaby", remained in use until 1930.

Many of the alarms from 1883 to 1916 were answered by the hand drawn hose reels as the first apparatus out of the station. It was a task requiring the superlative athletic qualities which the firemen possessed in those days. In fact, "old timers" about the Station sometimes sum up the comparison between the second and third phase periods with, "Once it was the day of wooden apparatus and iron men, now it is the day of iron apparatus and wooden men." However, I shall leave that for posterity to judge.

The construction and completion of the new City Hall in 1888 resulted in the apparatus from the eight original Stations, as set forth previously, being concentrated in the new Fire Station. This greatly reduced maintenance cost and increased efficiency. In concluding this brief account of second phase equipment we see the use of the new water system as the dominant characteristic of the time.

**Third Phase Equipment**  
The Department commenced motorizing in November, 1916, with the purchase of a combined Chemical Engine and Hose Truck. This was followed in December, 1917, by the supply of a Motor Hose Truck to trail the hand drawn Ladder Wagon, and on Oct. 11,

the number of fire calls received yearly has grown from 14 alarms in 1880 to over 200 in the year 1946. The following list of outstandingly destructive fires illustrates in some measure the fight against an enemy which never misses an opportunity to strike.

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No. 1 Hose Company: Captain, G. Stewart; Lieutenants, L. Bevins, L. Ranahan; Hosemen, G. Bell, F. Chandler, J. Cudmore, B. Doiron, R. Crockett, E. McCourt, D. McEachern, L. Moore, C. Orford, W. Perry, L. Larter, F. Ranahan, P. Ready, L. Stewart, G. Rogers, W. McDonald, L. Connolly.

Hook and Ladder Company: Captain, W. Connolly; Lieutenant, L. Gillespie; Laddermen, G. Abbott, W. Henry, W. Campbell, L. Llewellyn, G. Maddigan, S. Matheson, J. Turner, P. Senter.

Auxiliary Fire Department: O. C. Percy O. Cameron; men, J. McCourt, E. MacDonald, H. McKinnon, G. Hennessey, W. Worth, D. Jewell, O. Prunty, B. Peters.

**Vacation**  
(Dedicated to recreation)  
Across the Strait from Newby's coast  
And from the Novy shore  
There's nestled, in the bounding Gulf  
The Princely we adore;  
Where dwell the people that we love  
Mid scenes and friends and home  
Where Neptune's tang of ocean breeze  
Waft dew-kiss from the foam—  
Along its crescent sandy shore  
And in its sheltered coves  
While bathers bask in their delight  
And picnic in the groves—  
Of birches, beech and tamaracks  
In cabins and hotel  
And farmers' homes across the Isle  
Where friendly natives dwell.

The sunshine fills the summer sky  
And zephyrs waft the scent  
Of meadows filled with verdure  
Of stalks and grasses bent,  
In summer's winds across the sea  
And from the rolling main  
Humidified by Island dew  
And with its soothing rain.

We'll whisk away to the open road  
From the city's crowd and heat  
To loiter around for a week or so  
With those we like to meet—  
And enjoy the scenes of our childhood days  
Where our jangled nerves were  
With soothing and parents old and true  
On the Isle of our joyful youth.

—Peter A. Riley.  
June 21, 1951.