

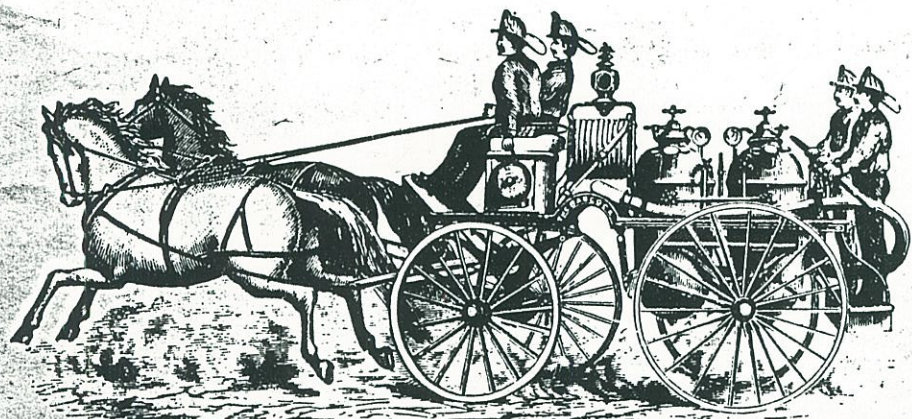
# The Observer

Independent Newspaper For No. Providence-Johnston-Scituate-Smithfield-Glocester-Foster

VOL. VI. NO. 49, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1962

GREENVILLE, RHODE ISLAND PRICE FIVE CENTS

## A Salute To Our Volunteer Fire Companies



One of the greatest continuing examples of democracy in the history of America is the volunteer fire company. Ever since the day of George Washington, who himself was a volunteer fireman, these companies have been composed of men from all walks of life banding together to give of their time, effort, thought and courage for the welfare of their communities without recompense and sometimes even without thanks.

To folk who live in metropolitan areas and are accustomed to calling upon paid professionals in the event of fire or emergency, the volunteer fire company may seem somewhat of an anachronism. In this day when attention is focussed on the race for control of outer space at a cost of millions upon millions of dollars, it may seem remarkable that there are still communities where protection of one's property and one's very life is dependent, indirectly, upon the proceeds from bean suppers, B-parties and firemen's carnivals, and where the men who answer our urgent, telephoned pleas for help are volunteers.

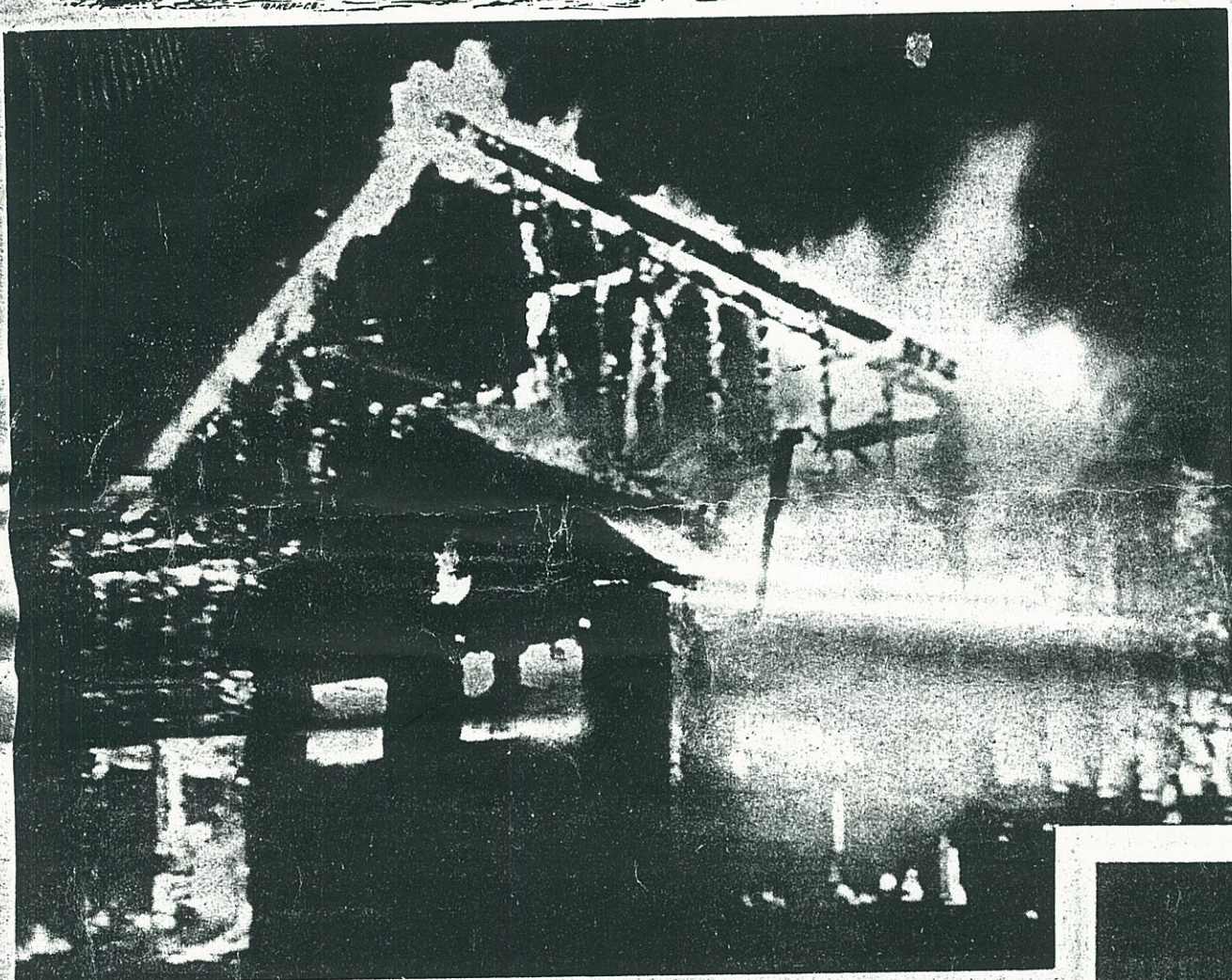
Though it may be a surprise to many of our new neighbors who have moved from nearby cities into this semi suburbia of small towns and rural areas, all of our protection against fire and our help in case of emergency comes from these volunteers.

The earliest volunteer fire companies in our area, Lymanville and Greenville were organized in the late 1800's but after the turn of the century, groups of men of the other towns began in rapid succession to form volunteer companies for the protection of their communities.

Rivalry among the companies has only partially mirrored the spirit of competition seen among companies in metropolitan areas. Though the local men in years past vied fiercely with one another in such events as water battles, these activities gradually gave way to baseball and softball teams especially during the years before the advent of organized sports. In the main, however, the men of our volunteer fire companies have devoted their energies to keeping abreast of newest techniques of firefighting and rescue and have worked hard to raise funds that they might continually improve their firefighting and rescue equipment.

So, in this issue, we salute the volunteer fire companies in our area, twenty two in number. We salute these men who, without recompense, answer the firesiren's wail night or day in freezing or in clement weather and respond to our call for help be it a fire when minutes count and one's home and property are in jeopardy or when someone has suffered an accident or an illness and needs immediate attention.

Contributions to their community are made by many people, either as individuals or as groups, and all of these efforts are laudable, but none can compare with the contribution made by the men of our volunteer fire companies, for they are the ones who are with us when the cards are really down.



"THE WATER WITCH" Greenville Fire Co.'s old hand pumper, saved many a landmark in her day.

-courtesy Elwood Kelley



Currier and Ives lithograph from their series "The American Fireman" in 1858.

-courtesy Nat'l. Board of Fire Underwriters

IN THIS ISSUE: PICTURES AND STORIES OF THE VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANIES • LOCAL NEWS • SPORTS

# GLOCESTER

Wilderness, Warren; Franny and Zooey, Salinger; and But Not In Shame, Toland.

EMILY GROSS, Editor  
Phone CE. 1-9327 or CE. 1-4680

**NEWS BRIEFS**  
THE GLOCESTER LITTLE BOOTS met with their leader, Mrs. Eunice Morris on February 2nd. Mrs. Margaret Potter, 4-H County Agent attended the meeting and showed the girls a film on Good Grooming.

NEW BOOKS AT THE Harmony Library are: Poor No More, Rurk; A Prologue to Love, Caldwell; Daughter of Silence, West;

THE HARMONY PTA Founders Day Supper will be held February 12th at 7 p.m. Congressman John E. Fogarty will be the guest speaker. He will give a talk on "Health and Education in our schools." Mr. George Moore, Jr. divisional supervisor for rehabilitation in Rhode Island, will be the toastmaster. All PTA members are urged to attend.

THE HARMONY GALS Bowling League scores: Lois Baguchinsky took both H1-single, 131 and H1-three, 336 for February 5th.

## Mary Ann Baker Engaged



MISS MARY ANN BAKER  
-photo by Loring Studios

Mr. and Mrs. Edward T. Baker of Hunting House Road, announce the engagement of their daughter, Mary Ann, to Mr. Raymond F. Blackmore, son of Mr. and Mrs. Normand H. Blackmore of Choptmist Hill Road, North Scituate.

Miss Baker is a senior at Ponaganset High School. Her fiance is a graduate of Scituate High School. Plans are being made for a summer 1962 wedding.

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# West Glocester Fire Department



MEMBERS OF THE WEST GLOCESTER VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT: William Cote, Willard Place, captain; Joseph Pavao, deputy chief; Chesley Sparkes, chief; Robert Montie, driver; Cyprajan Janczyk, Thomas Ryan, Frank Ryan, Majoric Leclerc, John MacDonald.

The West Glocester Volunteer Fire Department located on Route 44 near Bowditch is nearer the Connecticut state line and Putnam than it is to any of the more populous Rhode Island communities. It's district consists of approximately 45 square miles of woods and fields. Homes which it protects are scattered.

Because of this location, so far from the other two Glocester fire departments, a group of residents decided in 1953 to establish a fire company there.

All the men in the neighborhood got together to build a fire station and all work on the building, save for one paid helper, a bricklayer, was volunteered. In order to raise money for building materials, the men sponsored parties and suppers throughout the first year. The Chepachet Fire Co. sold the West Glocester men a 500 gallon pumper for the sum of one dollar and the new company was in business.

Later, the men acquired the old Putnam Hospital ambulance which they converted into an ambulance rescue truck.

With their \$13,000 fire station now completely paid for, the company is looking forward to acquiring a 750 gallon pumper. As soon as this additional equipment can be obtained, they plan to station the present pumper on the Mt. Hygela Road.

West Glocester Volunteer Fire Company now numbers 31 men

and they are members of the Northern R. I. Firemen's League. Because they are geographically nearest the East Putnam Fire Co., they work closely with that organization occasionally assisting each other at fires.

According to the Chief, Chesley Sparkes, the only house fire call which the company has had in the past year was on May 16 when a summer home belonging to Wal-

ter Polka was struck by lightning. There has also been one forest fire. "Most of the calls recently have been minor accidents or emergencies" says Chief Sparkes.

Besides the Chief, other officers of the company are Joseph Pavao, deputy chief; Willard Place, captain; John Bamford, lieutenant. Robert Montie is driver.

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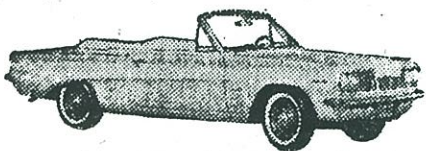
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# Harmony Fire Department

Fire protection in Harmony is the result of the operations of two entirely separate, but closely allied corporations. They are the Harmony Fire District and the Harmony Fire Department and Improvement Association.

The Harmony Fire District owns the fire station property and the fire apparatus, and has the authority to tax the property owners for its support.

The Harmony Fire Department and Improvement Association is the group of volunteers that operate the equipment owned by the fire district. In addition, they have provided all of the rescue and radio equipment, and the furniture and kitchen equipment in the station, with funds derived principally from sponsoring social events, and from donations.

This arrangement had its beginning in 1924, when fire destroyed a house located at what is now the corner of Putnam Pike and Edgewood Drive. A group of citizens met in the Harmony Chapel and as a result of this and subsequent meetings, the fire department was chartered. To raise funds for the new fire department a series of social events of all kinds was begun, and these events were to continue as the principal means of support for the organization until 1946.

The first fire equipment purchased by the new department comprised of six 2-1/2 gallon soda acid extinguishers which were distributed about the village in private homes. In the event of a fire the custodians of the extinguishers were to bring them to the fire. This was not as ineffectual as it might seem, because in those days, most of the fires were chimney fires, a byproduct of the almost universal use, in the country, of wood fires for heat and in cases, cooking also.

By 1926 enough money had been raised to make a down payment on a fire truck, and many of the town residents endorsed notes on the balance. It was a 4 cylinder Reo truck with a 300 g.p.m. pump, an 80 gallon booster tank, plus hose, ladders and other associated equipment. This does not meet today's standards, but in 1926 it was the latest thing.

The new truck was housed in a barn adjacent to what was then the Harmony Hotel. The barn also served as a hall in which to hold social events to pay for the truck. This was soon accomplished, and the firemen next directed their efforts toward better quarters. At about the same time the owner of the Harmony Hotel decided to sell his property, as the advent of the trolley car, and later the automobile, was bringing the era of the country hotel to a close. The fire department bought the hotel and converted it to a fire station. It stood in what now is the parking area on the west side of the present fire station.

For a few years in the early thirties, the department had the use of an old, open truck loaned by the R. I. Conservation Service and it was used to haul barrels of water into the woods at forest fires. The firemen nicknamed it the "centipede," but its life was cut short when a connecting rod pierced the block on the way to a forest fire in West Gloucester.

Following the death of the 'centipede,' the department bought a second hand 1933 Chevrolet truck, a used front end pump, a used 275 gallon domestic oil storage tank, and some planks, and the firemen assembled a crude,



HARMONY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT: Milton Aldrich, rescue lieutenant; Alvin Matthews, Albert Matthews, Robert Hawes, Jerome Planté, Thomas Tucker, Harrison Winsor, chief; Russell Lemieux, deputy chief; James Petersen, fire lieutenant; Charles Salisbury, engineer; Roger Liepf, Robert Aldrich, Bob Anderson, William Corbin, rescue captain; Kenneth Segee, fire captain; Charles Dunn, president-treasurer.

but effective tank truck. Not too long after, someone pumped the water from the tank without opening the vent and it collapsed. It was replaced with a section of tank from an old oil delivery truck and its capacity was increased to 515 gallons. This received a lot of good natured ridicule because of the appearance it presented, but it was the forerunner of the modern 500-2000 gallon pumper tankers of today.

The most important community service project of the department outside of its fire fighting activities, was the establishment of the Harmony Library. The Library was operated as a part of the department until 1942, at which time it was necessary for it to be incorporated separately to qualify for government aid. Under the present arrangement, fire department members may belong to the Library Association, dues free, and the dues for other members are \$1 per year. Library service is available to anyone without charge.

The coming of World War 2 brought many changes. It broke the continuity of membership of many of the firemen, and many new faces came forth to fill the gap. Food rationing ended the ham and bean suppers that had become an institution, and a civil defense trailer pumper drawn by a red 1928 Chrysler roadster soon moved in with the 1926 Reo and the 1933 Chevrolet.

During this period a very hard working group raised enough money to pay off the mortgage on the fire station property and start a fund toward a new station.

In 1946 the department bought a new pumper to replace the 1926 Reo. The new truck had a 600 gallon booster tank in addition to its underwriter equipment, and though it is still in use it is rapidly approaching retirement age.

The department had received a \$500 annual appropriation from the town of Gloucester since the mid thirties, but, as was previously mentioned, its principal source of income through 1946 was from social events and donations. It was realized both within and without the department that the success of this arrangement depended on a great deal of work by a few, and the financial

support of a larger, but far from unanimous group of the village residents. This was unfair, but its greatest disadvantage was that the department had no predictable income on which to plan for future improvement and growth.

The most equitable solution seemed to be a taxing authority that could compel all property owners to contribute their share. The legislature was petitioned to create such an authority subject to the approval of the property owners involved. The authority was granted, a referendum was held and the Harmony Fire District was born. Its officers are elected each year at an annual meeting by those taxpayers who reside in the district. The taxpayers also approve a budget and set the tax rate at this time.



The charter of the fire district gives it broad powers to provide fire and police protection, and water and electric service, but from a practical standpoint its present function is to provide the best fire equipment and quarters possible within its financial means, and to distribute equitably, this financial burden among the property owners of the district. When the Fire District was formed the Harmony Fire Department and Improvement Association decided to it the old fire station, all of the land where the new station now stands, and all of its fire equipment which included the new pumper, 1933 tank truck and the trailer pumper and 1928 roadster.

The newly formed district faced two large problems, the need to build a new fire station and the need to replace the 1933 tank truck. Planning began on the new station, and during the winter of 1947 the firemen installed a new engine in the 1933 truck, overhauled the pump, and rebuilt the body, all at a cost of only a few hundred dollars of district funds, thus adding five years to its useful life.

In the spring of 1948 construction began on the new fire station and the fire department donated \$4000 to the district, toward the \$19,000 cost, with the provision that it include a kitchen and facilities for the Harmony Library Association.

The next important advance by the fire department was the formation of a rescue squad, and the other organizations of the community joined in a campaign to help raise money for a rescuator and other first aid and rescue equipment. The equipment was carried in special compartments that the firemen built into

the back of a Navy surplus pickup truck that had recently replaced the Chrysler roadster.

In 1952 the Fire District, now more firmly established, was able to replace the 1933 fire truck with a new Seagrave tanker pumper. It was unique in that it had a special hi-pressure fog pump in addition to its conventional volume pump. Hi-pressure fog had previously been used almost exclusively for airplane crash fires. It was the first such combination unit in R. I.

The new rescue truck purchased in 1959 also has a booster tank and a hi-pressure fog pump. It carries all of the rescue and first aid equipment that has been purchased by the department. All together \$5500 worth of rescue and radio equipment has been bought without cost to the fire district; \$3500 coming from money earned by the fire department and \$2000 from civil defense matching funds. Rescue squad operating expense is paid by the department and much more money is needed for additional rescue and first aid equipment.

The greatest individual contributors of time and effort to the department were Chief Harry Staples, and treasurer Adah S. Hawkins, although Charles Dunn is now running a close third. Chief Staples was the first president of the department and served as chief from its founding until his death in August 1946. He was one of the early presidents of the Woonasquatucket Valley Firemen's League and was well known in fire fighting circles in Rhode Island and beyond.

Adah S. Hawkins was treasurer of the department from 1924 until her death in August 1960. She was the founder of the Harmony Library and served as librarian of it and later of the Harmony Library Association until her death.

The most famous member of the Harmony Fire Company is Congressman John E. Fogarty, who was captain of the department

at the time of his election to Congress. He also served as president of the W.V.F.L., and he still responds to alarms when he is at home in Harmony.

The current officers are: Charles Dunn, president; Raymond Badmington, vice president; Fred Inman, secretary and Charles Dunn, treasurer. Harrison Winsor is chief; Russell Lemieux, deputy chief; Kenneth Segee, captain; William Corbin, rescue captain; James Peterson, fire lieutenant; Milton Aldrich, rescue lieutenant. The president, Jerome Planté, Robert Hawes, Thomas Tucker and Roger Liepf are the executive board.

Before the formation of the fire district the department had many dues paying members, both men and women. In recent years a Ladies auxiliary was formed, and department membership is now limited to those who wish to actively fight fires. Any male resident over 16 years of age may apply for membership by expressing his desire to a member of the executive board.

The firemen, the equipment and even the nature of the fires have changed since 1924. In the early days 15 fires a year was average and half of them were chimney fires. There are now three times as many alarms a year and half are for rescue or first aid. Chimney fires now average less than one a year.

Harmony Fire Department is proud of the work that has been done throughout its 27 years, and particularly the great progress that has been made since 1946, in cooperation with the fire district. They are proud of the equipment they now have and of their ability to operate it effectively, but since pride and progress are the only pay of volunteers, they look hopefully forward to the replacement of the 1946 pumper, and to improvement of the station's facilities, including a meeting and recreation room separate from the apparatus room.

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# Chepachet Fire Company



MR. ALVA OLNEY who is the only living charter member of Chepachet Fire Co.

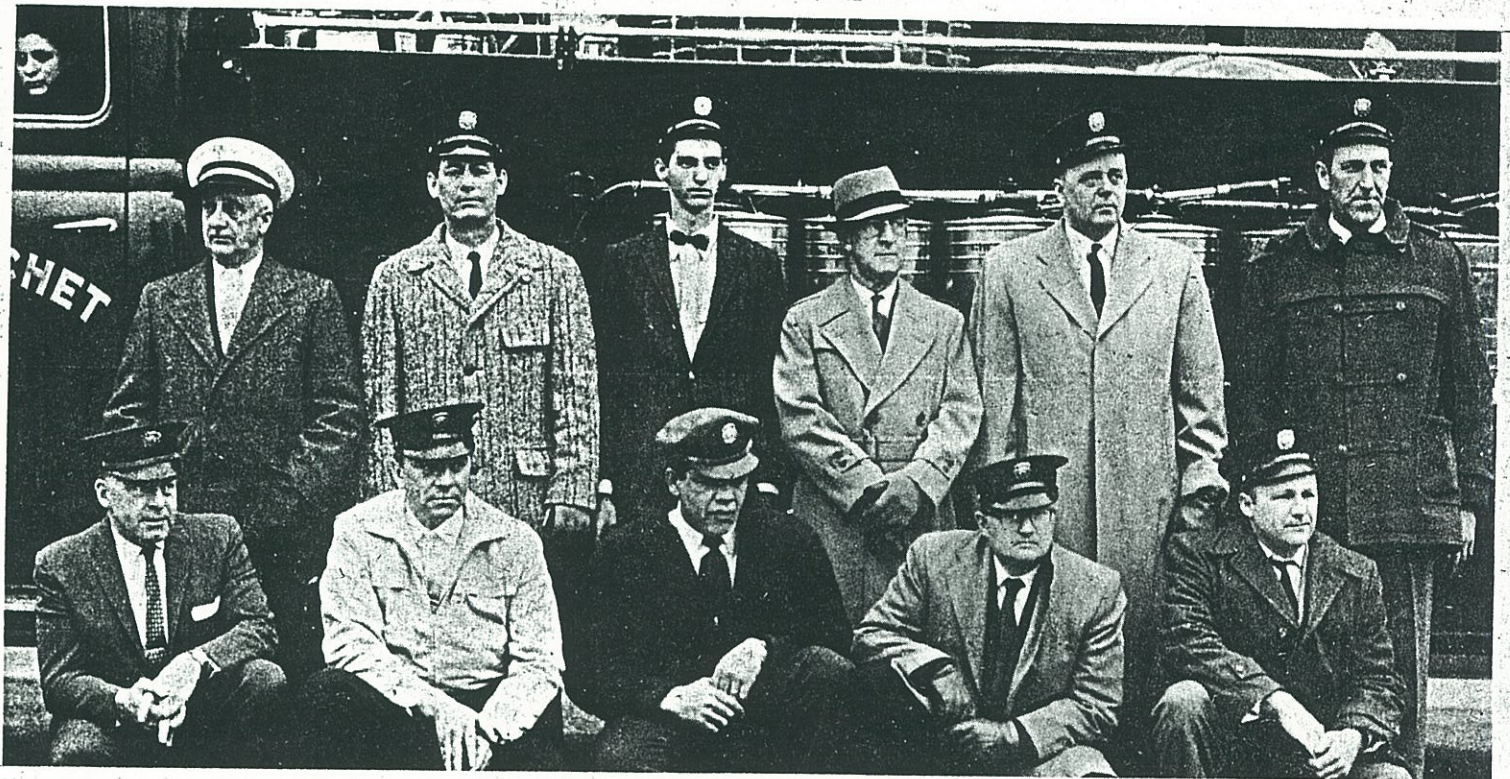
Before the organization of the Chepachet Fire District in 1912 there had been no way to fight fires save a 1,500 foot hose belonging to the woolen mill in the center of the village, or, if the fire was beyond that distance, with a bucket brigade. Using any available source of water, a stream, a cistern or even a well, the long row of men passed the fire buckets in an attempt not to save the burning building, but to wet down the surrounding buildings enough to prevent them from catching fire. The buckets, now highly prized by antique collectors, were made of leather less than a foot in diameter and about a foot and a half deep.

The Chepachet Fire District was incorporated in March, 1912 with the following charter members: Walter Keach, Ernest E. Hopkins, Carlis Lynch, Jr., Alva Olney, Charles Carlton, William Sweet, John Lees and Delbert Dodge. Two months later they voted \$800 for the purchase of their first fire apparatus, a 2 wheeled, hand drawn chemical wagon.

The hand drawn chemical wagon was a rather common sight in semi rural areas in those days. It worked on the principle of a giant fire extinguisher and held two tanks one of which was filled with a solution of water and baking soda, the other with acid. When a valve was turned, the acid poured into the soda solution creating pressure, and the mixture was forced through a hose onto the blaze. Chepachet's chemical wagon also boasted a ladder.

The first fire in town of any consequence after the arrival of the new equipment wasn't merely a fire, it was a giant conflagration. It occurred in 1913 when the roof of the Taft Hotel, a great wooden structure which stood on the site of the present Chepachet grammar school, caught fire. The new chemical wagon was triumphantly hauled to the scene, but alas! no one could get the ladder off the wagon. It stuck and the fire made such headway while the men struggled with it that the fire was soon out of control. The best the men could do was to try to save as many adjacent buildings as possible. In the end, eight buildings burned to the ground.

Presumably the problem of getting the ladder off the chemical wagon was solved eventually because the chemical wagon was used to fight fires for nearly fourteen years after the hotel fire, and it took another big blaze in 1926, to show that more up to date fire fighting equipment was needed. The '26 fire involved the big wooden barn which had previously been Harris Steere's Livery Stable and was used at that time to house Stephen Ide's garage. The building was located on the site now occupied by the



CHEPACHET VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY: William Yates, Walter Keach, Jr., James Chase, captain; William E. Henley, Philip Wilsey, Stephen Richmond, John Ventetuolo, Walter Glasko, lieutenant; William Brown, Henry Lewin, deputy chief; Leslie Davis, chief.

Mobil Gas station.

After this fire the company was reorganized with the first chief of the original company, Walter Keach, continuing to serve. Mr. Keach was chief of the Chepachet company for over forty years. Following Mr. Keach as chief was Leon Chase.

During the late '20's and '30's Chepachet Fire Company, like many other volunteer companies in the area participated in a number of activities not directly related to fire fighting. As members of the Northern Firemen's League which includes Burrillville and North Smithfield as well as the northern part of Glocester, the men of the Chepachet company established their own baseball team and played against the nine other teams in their league. For three years they held the Northern R. I. Championship.

Water battles were another activity in which the men participated. Rivalry was keen and many townspeople turned out to witness the battles, but since the activity is too violent and dangerous to be called a sport, water battles are rarely held these days by any of the volunteer companies. The last one in which the Chepachet company participated was at the Oakland Mapleville Co.'s carnival two years ago when some of the younger men in the company who had never had the experience of participating in a water battle decided to give it a try.

Today, in its fiftieth year of service to the community, Chepachet Fire Company has progressed from a chemical wagon and quarters in George Clough's barn to an up to date building, built in 1939 housing a 500 gallon pumper, a rescue truck and a tank truck. The new Glocester ambulance, owned by the Glocester Ambulance Corps Inc. is also housed at the fire station. It is manned by virtually the same men who serve on the fire company's Rescue squad.

The Chepachet company has 35 members and over a dozen inactive members all of whom have retired from active duty with the company but who have full membership privileges. The present officers are: Leslie E. Davis, chief; Henry Lewin, deputy chief; James Chase, captain; George Paquin, first lieutenant; and Walter Glasko, second lieutenant.



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