

HARBOUR GRACE—On September 5th, 1860, the first Harbour Grace Volunteer Fire Brigade was inaugurated and on August 31st, 1960, a dinner was held at Pike's Hotel under the auspices of the present Fire Brigade to commemorate this unique event.

The dinner was attended by members of the Fire Brigade and their wives. Fire Chief Vivian, Fire Marshall Ryan and Chief Mechanic Arthur Simmons of the St. John's Fire Dept., with their wives, the clergy of the town, Major C. S. Sheppard, M.H.A., Magistrate W. E. Mercer, Mayor A. D. Moores and Mrs. Moores, representatives of the press, etc.

Following the grace which was said by Rev. Fr. O'Brien, dinner was served in the usual good style of the Pike hostelry. After the toast to the Queen had been honoured, Mr. Charles Garland chairman of the evening, welcomed the guests and then introduced Fire Chief W. B. Kennedy of the Harbour Grace V.F.B., who in a most interesting and informative address reviewed the progress of this Brigade since its inception in 1860 to the present day.

Going back to the advent of John Guy to this town and the forming of his colony at Mosquito, now known as Bristol's Hope, Mr. Kennedy told of the foes of that day, the French and fire, the town having been burnt on three separate occasions by the enemy.

With the growth of the community, the hazard of fire increased. The system of warning was from mouth to mouth. Equipment was of the crudest kind and the destruction of life and property was on several occasions a major disaster.

The first fire that history records was in 1816, but many were to follow. In 1832 one of the most disastrous commenced

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on the Point of Beach and quickly spread its destruction over most of the town. There was no loss of life, but the loss of property was great. In 1844, which is the first fire to be recorded by the fire brigade, 27 houses and shops were destroyed with consequent distress.

Other fires were recorded in 1858, 1871, 1889, 1890, 1893, 1894, 1927 (hotel and two houses), and the most disastrous fire of all, that of 1944, when 88 houses, with the United Church, the new North Eastern Fisheries plant, offices, federal, public building, etc., were razed to the ground. In 1950 3 homes on Cochrane Street were destroyed.

On September 5th, 1860, citizens of the town met to form the first volunteer company. The first director was John Hayward. The company consisted of 3 directors, 3 lieutenants, nozzle men, branch men and 16 volunteers. They used wooded buckets which when filled with water from wells were passed from hand to hand by the firemen.

Next in the march of progress was the acquirement of a four-wheeled rig to which two rows of buckets and ladders were attached. The men were provided with helmets. This rig was drawn by the men and required much strength to bring the heavy load over the sometimes long distance to the scene of a fire.

In 1863, the old medlock was acquired and this was thought to be a great step forward. Many spectators came to watch its use and view it in operation.

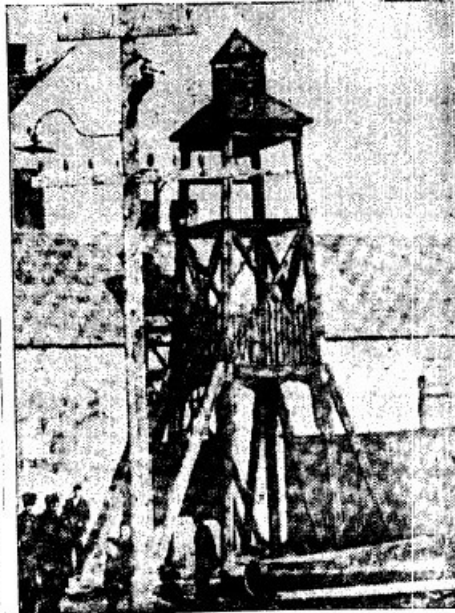
It held a pumping machine which pumped the water from the harbour or a well as needed.

With increased prosperity, resulting from the success of the cod and seal fisheries the citizens got together to form the Water Company and in June 1863, water pipes were laid from Bannerman Lake into the town as far as the Point of Beach. Tanks and hydrants were installed and these greatly facilitated the labour of the fire brigade who hauled lengths of hose from them to the scene of a conflagration. Later the water supply was extended to further parts of the town.

After a long period of eighty years it was noticed that the supply because of the circumference of the pipes, etc., was weakening and so in August, 1944, when a spark ignited the old Tannery west of the town, partly because of the low pressure of water, within the space of three hours seven eights of a mile of the town met destruction and the face of Water Street became almost unrecognizable. In the path of destruction there fell 88 houses and shops, the Federal Public Building, the United Church and the new North Eastern Fish plant which had commenced operation a few days previously.

After this disaster an advisory board was set up preparatory to the formulation of a Town Council which council has worked in close co-operation with the Harbour Grace Fire Brigade at all times since its inception.

The Fire Brigade had housed



HR GRACE—Old firebell which stood at the foot of Victoria Street was used up to 1912. Replaced by newer model.

its equipment in a wooden structure on Bannerman Street, but last year through the co-operation of the Dept. of Municipal Affairs and Supplies and as well of the representative of the Provincial Government for this district, Major C. Sheppard a new and modern concrete building has replaced the old one.

From time to time the equipment has been added to by more modern and efficient trucks, hose, etc., and Fire

Chief Kennedy concluded his most interesting and informative address with a strong appeal for a worthwhile response when the collectors call on householders this month.

The toast to the Harbour Grace V.F.B. was given by Major C. Sheppard, M.H.A., who brought greetings from the Minister of Affairs and Supplies and congratulations to the fine men of the Brigade for their willing service to their community in times of fires.

Assistant Chief Max Parsons responded to this toast with enthusiasm for the men of the Brigade and the progress being made. He recalled such former and deceased members of the past as John Tapp, Ephraim Parsons, both fire chiefs, and to Otto Grimm, still hale and hearty, and well over his eighty-sixth year. M. P. Stapleton present on this occasion as also were former fire chiefs Arthur Godden and Bill Parsons and the late Eugene Martin (Supt. Water Co.) and to Chris Pike, who sent his regrets that ill health prevented his attendance at this dinner but gave best

wishes to the Brigade.

Mr. M. P. Stapleton was the next speaker. He reminisced of deceased members with special reference to the first fire chief of 1860, John Hayward, and to John Tapp whose stentorian voice gave orders which none dared disobey and who continued as fire director for half a century. He recalled the late Ephraim Parsons who succeeded Mr. Tapp and whose gentle methods of persuasion in the handling of his men won for him the affection and esteem of all.

Mr. Stapleton told of Mr. R. T. Parsons, father of assistant



HR GRACE—Hose reel is part of original equipment dating back to 1863. Hydrants were installed in 1863.



HR GRACE—Assistant Fire Chief Max Parsons checking one of the two respirators.

chief Max, who some twenty years ago saved four houses from destruction by the application of wet blankets and ladders until the arrival of the firemen.

Rev. Dr. J. L. Reynolds said the prayer of commemoration and this was followed by an address from Mayor A. D. Moores, who brought a message of congratulation and

gratitude from the citizens for the services rendered by the Fire Brigade. He paid warm tribute to Asst. Fire Chief Max Parsons under whose able direction the fire equipment was always found in first class condition. Magistrate W. E. Mercer spoke of the value of the service which had been given over

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the century to the town and its property and made a strong plea for support of the financial appeal so that this deserving organization might be better equipped for better service.

Fire Marshall Ryan of the St. John's Dept. spoke of the fine lessons in civics and citizenship which are being given by the Harbour Grace Volunteer Fire Brigade whose work he had followed for the past seven years and which he felt was second to none.

Chief Mechanic of the St. John's Dept., Arthur Simmons, expressed the good wishes of Fire Chief Vivian and the department to the local fire brigade and gave assurance of his assistance at any time needed.

Corporal Kevin Lawlor who has recently returned to the town after an absence of two years and is now in charge of the Harbour Grace R.C.M.P. detachment said he had noted with satisfaction the improvements made in his absence especially of the addition of the new fire hall. He said that he and his men would be 100 per cent behind the fire brigade at all times.

Fire Chief Kennedy brought greetings from Mr. J. V. O'Dea, a long time friend of the Harbour Grace V.F.B. and said that his message to them had been the first one to be received over the long distance of the newly installed dial system. The fire chief also referred to the system of alarm which had been for a long time handled through

the Avalon Telephone operator on duty. This assistance had ceased with the establishment of the dial system. Corp. Lawlor offered any assistance that could be given in his department where there is always a man on duty.

Referring to the system of alarms it may be noted that the first fire-bell was installed in 1869. There were three bells one at the foot of Victoria Street, one at or near Cochrane Street and the third at the west end of Brown's Hill. These were done away with by the 1944 fire and the telephone system has proved a boon as the men of the brigade have been able to be assembled within four minutes from the time of the sounding of the siren.

The pronouncement of the benediction by Rev. L. A. J. Ludlow concluded a memorable evening in the annals of this historic town, whose story commenced in the early 1600s, and in the period of over 300 years has recorded many major fires from which the town has arisen Phoenix like to carry on amid years of prosperity intermingled with those of depression and fortitude.

The men of the Fire Brigades of the past century have played their part in the historic story and it is the wish of the citizens of Harbour Grace that the present Brigade and those who come after may carry on the work so nobly done by their forefathers for the advancement and well being of Harbour Grace.