



THE ALTON BICENTENNIAL ESSAY SERIES

16 June 1996

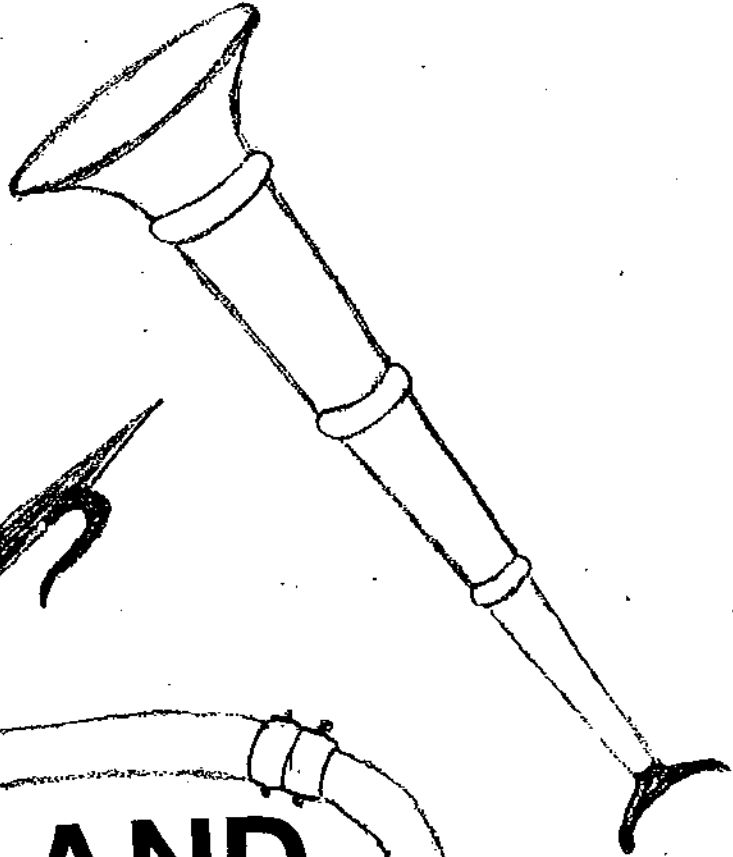
FOR REFERENCE

Do Not Take From This Room

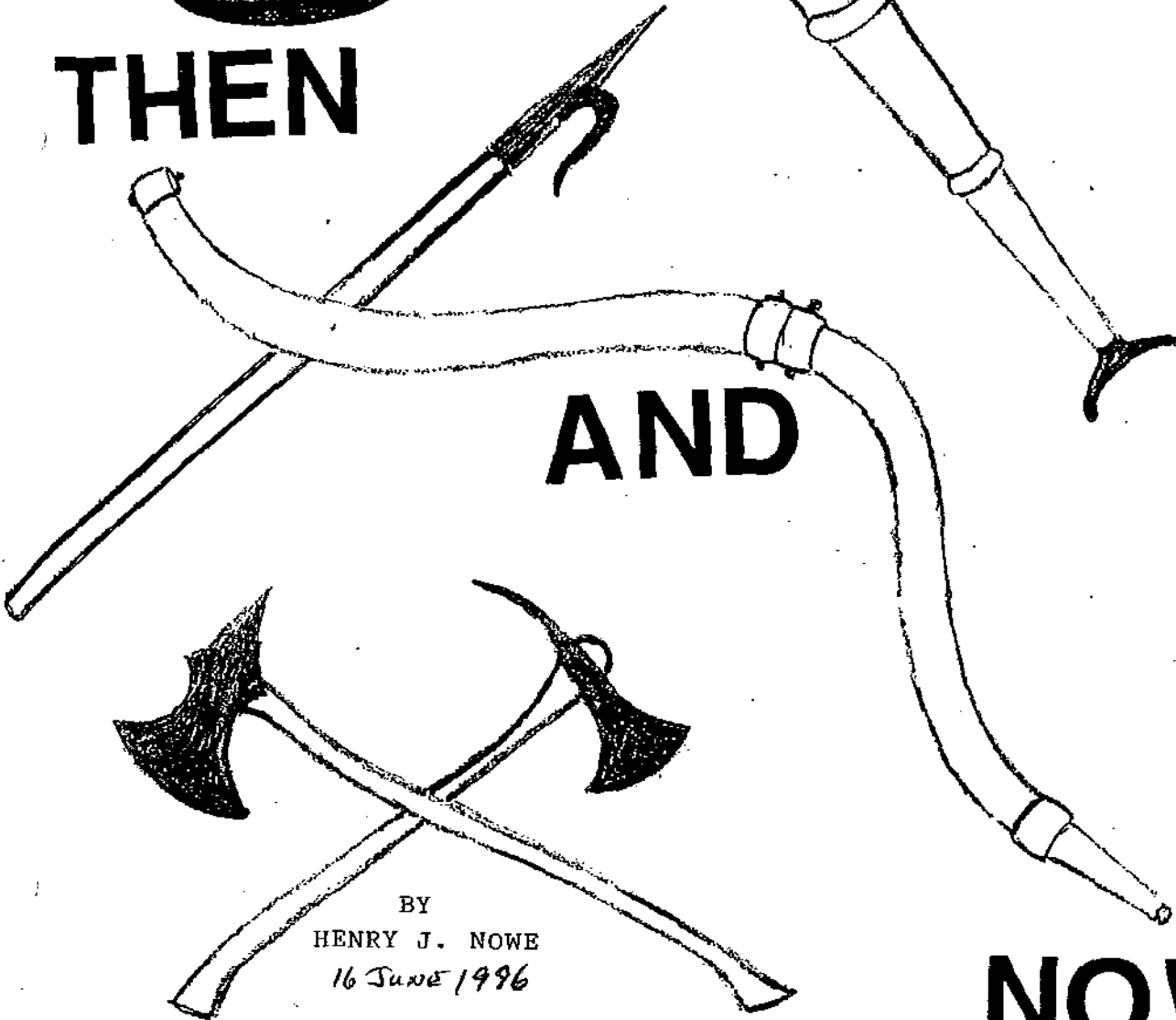
ALTON FIRE DEPARTMENT



THEN



AND



BY
HENRY J. NOWE
16 June 1996

NOW

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

THE ALTON FIRE DEPARTMENT THEN AND NOW

Your sitting in the parking lot at Alton Bay on a quiet sunny afternoon. Suddenly you hear the loud shrill of the siren at the Bay fire station. ONCE, TWICE, THREE times it sends its piercing cry across the town calling the firefighters to service. Shortly you hear the roar of heavy trucks carrying a thousand gallons of water or more, there sirens cutting the air like a sharp knife.

Common today but when this story starts these were unheard of activities. In the 1800's the siren would have been a call by the town cryer or a bell toiling in the church steeple. The trucks would be replaced by men women and even children running or riding in a wagon carrying leather buckets. Later years would see men pushing and pulling hand tubs and hose wagons to the fire, in some cases many miles away. Regardless of the year or the equipment used the Alton Fire Department consisted of neighbors helping neighbors in time of need.

Wether it is in Alton or a big city like Boston the firefighter's job is considered the most dangerous in the world. Today there are more than 1,200,000 firefighters in the U.S. with more than 300 fires every hour. One firefighter is killed on the average every three days. Almost half the nation's firefighters are injured every year.

In this report I will attempt to give you an account of the fire service in the town of Alton from the mid 1800's to the 1990's.

Alton's fire problems have changed a great deal in the past 100 years. A hundred years ago most fires were caused by sparks coming from chimneys and landing on wood shingled roofs. In Alton as in most communities each household was required to keep at least one leather fire bucket. Men, women, and even children were expected to help with fighting fires with their bucket. Each bucket was about three gallons in size and frequently were decorated with the owner's name, address, and in many cases the owner's type of business. Many times the owner's crest or coat of arms were put on the buckets. When the alarm sounded each family was to either take the bucket to the fire or toss it out in front of their house to be picked up and

taken to the fire by young men carrying a long pole on which the buckets were hung. In many towns large quantities of buckets were stored in central locations such as the Town Hall, general store, taverns, or eating establishments. In Alton the Rockwell Clough House had a large supply of buckets as late as 1930 when they were used at the Shoe Shop fire. At the scene of a fire two lines of people formed from the fire to the water source. Men comprised the line carrying the full buckets to the fire and women and children the line carrying the empties back to the water source. When first used the buckets were emptied on the fire and in later years they were dumped into the tanks on the hand tubs. After the fire the buckets were usually stacked in front of the Town Hall to be picked up by their owners. As buildings were growing in height and overall size and the hand tub and pump wagons were coming into use the good old leather bucket slowly found itself being used for other things or just sitting on the shelf. At this time many towns were putting in hydrante systems which were made out of wooden pipes.

The first recorded use of hydrants and hoses was found in the 1894 Alton town report. At that time it is recorded that the Town paid the American Fire Hose Mfg. Co, the sum of \$218.75 and later in 1895 another \$33.00 for a nozzle and brackets. At that time, and for many years to come, the Town paid the Alton/Alton Bay Water Co. up to \$780.00 a year for hydrants. Also in 1805 Joseph D. Wilder, a Fire WARD, was paid \$5.80 for repairs on the hose carriage. During the year the Fire Wards and others were paid for services. J. D. Wilder at one time was paid \$25.00 for as Fire Ward and another time \$6.30 for services on the hose house committee. Another man, L. G. Welch was paid \$10.00 for services as Fire Ward and hose house committee member. Different amounts were paid to the Hose Companies for services. Today \$3.90 would not be minimum wage for cleaning.



hydrants but in 1898 Paul Buckley was paid that amount to do all the hydrants.

In 1899 the Panalanskean Hose Co. No. 1 voted on a set of By-laws for the operation and conduct of the Company.

The officers consisted of a Foreman who ran the meetings, training and his Company at fires. He was aided by a first and second assistant Foreman who took charge in the Foremans absence. A clerk kept the minutes of regular and special meetings. He also kept the attendance record for meetings and fires. A treasurer who handled all finances. A Steward was elected to keep the hose carriage and any other Hose Co. apperatus in order and ready for imediate use. He was also in charge of any and all other Company property including the upkeep of the hose and carriage house. And last a three member Standing Committee was elected to receive ames of all men wishing to be in the Hose Co. They also audited the records of the clerk and treasurer.

If a member of the Hose Co. had to leave town for less than three weeks he had to pick a substitute to fill his place. He had to pick this man from three men elected by the Company to act as substitutes. The man then told his Foreman about the substitution.

There was no drinking at any time in any of the Hose Houses.

Several fines were levied for rules broken.

Absence from a fire-----	0.25
Absence from a meeting-----	0.13
Second absence from meeting-----	0.25
Drinking at Hose House-----	0.25
Leaving a fire without good reason	1.00

On October 4, 1899 by a vote of the Company the name was changed from Panalanskean Hose Co. No. 1 to Alton Hose Co. No. 1.

The alarm used to call the men for a fire at this time was located on the Opera House.

On May 9, 1901 the Fire Wards held a special meeting in which the old Hose Co. was disbanned and a new Co. formed. Ten days later another special meeting was called for hydrant training.

Some of the positions held in the Hose Co. at this time were first leading horseman, second leading horseman, first line of hose, second line of hose, first wrenchman, second wrenchman, first pipeman, and second pipeman.

In 1902 the first pumper, the Paugus, a 200 gallon horse drawn unit was purchased and used until 1915.

On May 10, 1905 the Winnepesaukee House burned.

Up until 1906 most fires were small house fires easily put out or brush fires. On November 3, 1906 at 8:30PM this all changed. A call to the Colbath Box Mill found three separate fires burning. These were put out in short order with little damage. All three were believed to have been set. For the protection of the Town a fire watch was set, but at 10PM the alarm again sounded. This time it was the S.C. Wentworth Mill. The men were not as lucky this time for the Mill was a total loss. As if this was not enough at 3AM the following morning the alarm again sounded. This time it was the Boston and Maine Railroad Station in Alton Bay. As with the S.C. Wentworth Mill the Station was a total loss. Soon after a man named Walter Green was arrested and quickly confessed to setting all three fires. He said he had no motive, he just wanted to see the fires.

The Alton Fire Department was sent a letter of commendation from the Boston and Maine Railroad. The letter thanked them for saving the Mount Washington which was docked at the B&M terminal.

The firefighters were paid for their service. On April 30, 1911 a brush fire at the Brook Hurst property paid the firefighters 30¢ an hour. They worked for three hours and made the huge sum of 90¢

This fire and many more over the years to come were small fires along the railroad tracks. The Town of Alton, and hundreds of other towns, would be plagued with these small nuisance fires. Sparks coming from the smoke stacks were the cause of most of these fires. Most of these fires were small and easy to put out.

Trains were not the only cause of brush fires. On July 6, 1911 a fire was reported on the John Walker property. This fire was not considered under control and out until July 20, two weeks later. The fire burned 300 acres in Alton and crossed the town line into New Durham, burning another 300 acres. Also lost were 600 cords of cut wood and 100 cords of hardwood slabs. The damage was estimated at \$2,000. After an investigation it was decided that the fire was probably started on the Walker property by wood cutters.

On January 27, 1912 in the early morning a fire was discovered in the boiler room of the village school building. Damage in the amount of \$950 was done mainly by smoke and water damage. Fortunetly

the fire was discovered in the morning before the pupils arrived at the school. This avoided undo excitement among the children and unnecerry alarm with the parents.

On July 8, 1912 a fire starting on the John Walker lot spread to several other lot eventually burning 1600 acres of which 100 acres were in heavy timber. The fire destroyed 1400 cords of cut hardwood and 7000 feet of pine planks. Damage to one lot was estimated at \$4000. The owners insurance company only covered the lot for \$1.00. Damage to the other lots totaled \$2600. This fire appeared to have been started by berry pickers.

In 1913 a fire in the Advent Christian Campground involved several cottages but was brought under control quickly. The fire of 1945 will be discussed later.

In 1917 the first piece of motorized fire equipment in the Town of Alton was purchased. It was a 1917 Model T Fire Truck, and was in use until 1928. This piece of equipment did not pump water. It had two tanks mounted horizontally side by side on the back. These were both soda acid extinguishers. When the firefighters arrived on the scene of a fire they would pull a pin on each tank and then rotate the tank one half turn to activate the chemicals with the water in the system. When taken out of service it was stored until 1969 when it was taken out of storage and restored. The Model T is now used for parades only.

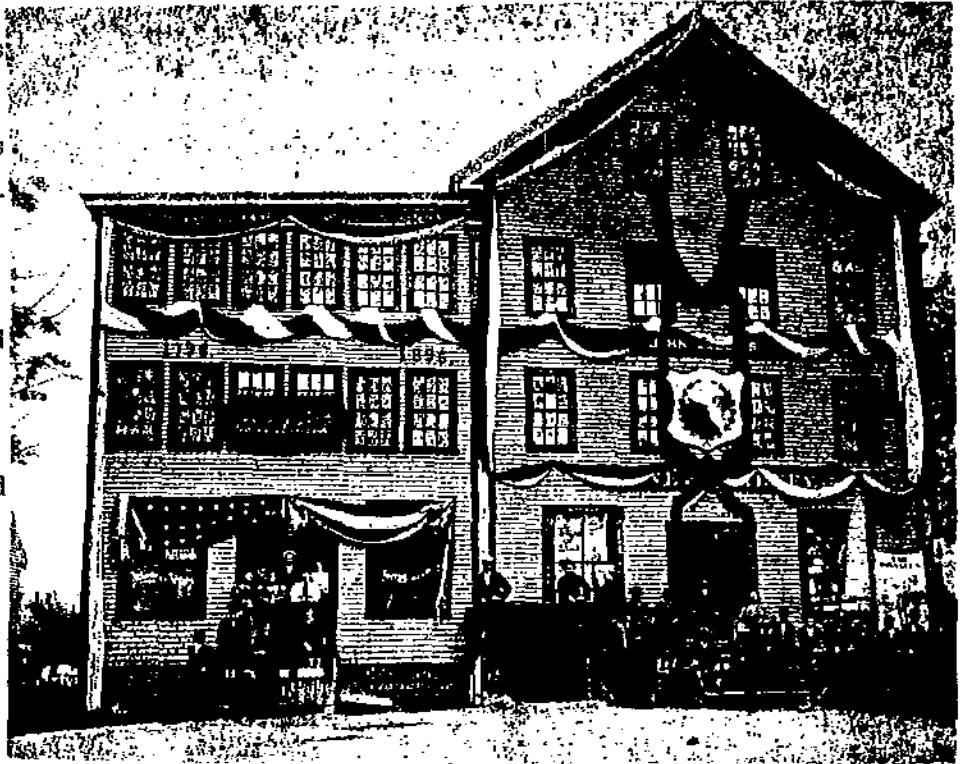
In 1930 a Maxim Fire Truck was purchased for \$7000.

On January 13, 1930 at about 11:00AM one of the biggest and most devastating fires to date occured in the Town of Alton. In three hours and thirty minutes a once thriving business, employing over one hundred, was reduced to a twisted pile of burnt wood, materials, and machinery.

The Alton Shoe factory was a four story building 80 feet wide by 150 feet long. It was located on the corner of main street and Rte. 140. The Gilman Museum now sits on the site. The shoe factory was built in 1883 by Charles Mooney and Alan Varney. Through the years it has had several owners, among them, John Collins, the Davis brothers, George Fuller, and John Curten, who owned it at the time of the fire.

The shoe factory section of the building had several large rooms

used for cutting hides, stitching and putting the soles on the shoes. Except for a meat market, Post Office, and the attached Noxall diner the whole ground floor was a finishing room. Large steam powered machinery used to cut soles and the linings filled the basement. In early years the Masonic Winnepesaukee Lodge used the fourth floor



for meetings. When operating the shoe factory produced 300,000 pairs of shoes annually. This was indeed a very great loss to the Town of Alton.

As stated earlier the fire began with a first alarm being struck at 11:00AM. Within minutes a second alarm was struck.

Initially the fire was fought using fire buckets from the Rockwell Clough House. Using fire buckets to fight a fire in a four story building was a brave but futile effort, but it was all they could do at the time.

By the time fire trucks from Dover, Rochester, and Laconia arrived the roof was completely engulfed. Fire soon spread to the Wheeler (now the Sullivan home) and Rockwell Clough (now the Alton House) homes and caused considerable damage. The fire also cracked windows in the American Legion building and the building next to it housing the barber shop and pizza shop. The fire also blistered the paint on the hardware store next to the Town Hall and Morells store (now Alton Fuel).

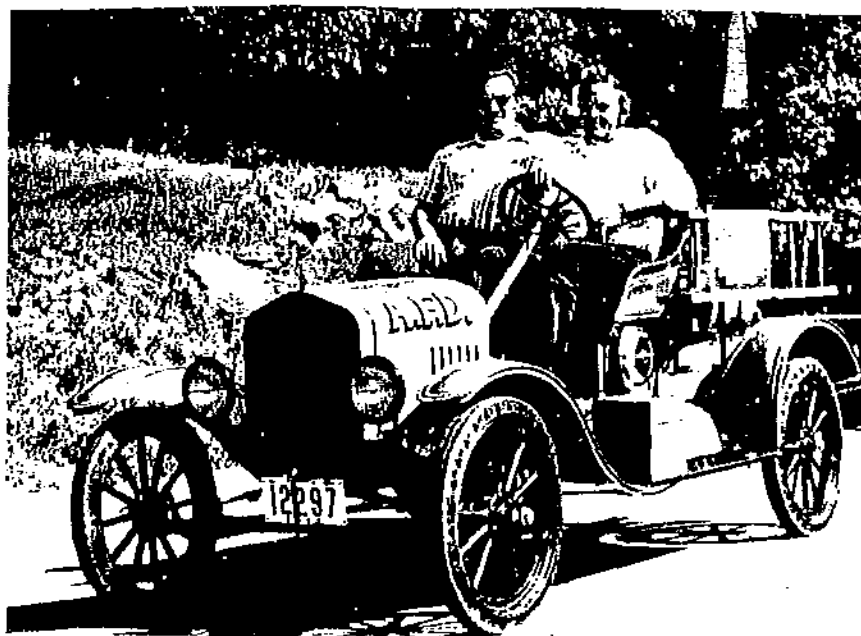
More devastating than the fire itself was the loss of life. Frank Young went back in to get some books and records and never came out. Edith Davis went back in to get her pocket book and also never came out. ONCE OUT NEVER NEVER GO BACK IN FOR ANYTHING

On March 2, 1930 a dance hall in the Bay area, built by Stephen

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Lynch, burned. The hall housed a restaurant, movie theater, and dance hall. The building was a total loss and the cause was never determined.

On February 3, 1931 a call came in for a fire at the school. It seems an overheated chimney ignited some woodwork that was too close to it. The partial loss was estimated to be around \$5000.



With Lake Winnepesaukee and many other small ponds in Alton ice houses were a common sight. On October 1, 1931 the Alton Fire Dept. was called to a fire involving a group of ice houses owned by Arthur Curtis. The buildings, valued at \$35,000, were a total loss. The insurance company paid Mr. Curtis only \$19,500.

After several years the next major incident was to be the worst in the history of Alton. You guessed it, the Advent Christian Campground fire in 1945.

On August 23, 1945 the worst resort disaster in New England history was to change the scene in Alton Bay forever. The destruction would be devastating but as with any disaster life must continue. And as seen today the area is again a thriving community of Christian programs and values.

The Campground saw its birth in 1863 when 1000 campers held their first meetings. In the years to come, from 1866-1880, forty cottages were built with wooden walls and canvas roofs. Along with these small cottages seventy-seven tents were erected. In 1872 the largest camp meeting was held. It is said that the attendance was between 35,000 and 50,000 campers.

Fire was always on the mind of the campers. In 1900 the campground was given 100 Monarch fire extinguishers. The insurance company for the campground had also received several letters from people who had cottages about the fire hazard. They were concerned about someone carelessly tossing a cigarette or cigar to the ground possible

causing a fire. The insurance company sent a letter to the campground board about this matter. The letter asked that the board have the leaves and brush in the area cleaned up on a regular schedual. This was a way to reduce the fire hazard.

In 1913 a fire involving several cottages was brought under control quickly.

To help control the fire hazard the board ruled that any new cottage and any existing cottage to be rebuilt would have to use fire retardent material for the roofs.

Christians and friends enjoyed many happy summer days making and renewing friendships. For the past 82 years good preaching was heard and good fellowship was had. After August 23, 1945 these memories would be mixed with the memory of fire and destruction.

At 11:45 AM in the cottage of Blossem Batchelder, on Manchester Ave., the stove exploded engulfing her cottage and quickly spreading to the cottage of H.L. Faulkingham next door. With strong winds from the lake the fire spread rapidly. Charles Coolman, whose cottage later burned, sounded the alarm.

When the Alton Fire Department arrived five cottages were burning and the fire was spreading. Initially the firefighters were hindered by weak water pressure. This problem was solved as soon as pumpers from other towns started to arrive. Soon trucks were coming in from Barnstead Parade, Gilmanton Iron Works, Farmington, Wolfeboro, Laconia, Gilford, Pittsfield, Rochester, and Dover. Five firefighters from Concord, in the area fishing, volunteered to help.

Many residents of Alton helped in any way they could. A local garage owner helped out in a very unusual way. One of the firefighters had a problem with his leg and went to the garage to get help instead of the hospital. It seems this firefighter lost a bolt in his, you guessed it, wooden leg and went to the garage for repairs.

Everyone helped during this disaster, even the children. Many of the roads and paths in the campground were to narrow for the fire trucks to operate on. Marks can still be found on cottages were fire engines tried to squeeze between them. The trucks would lay hose and move equipment as close to fire areas as possible and then the hose would be layed in the rest of the way by the children.

The Red Cross from Laconia and Wolfeboro set up to give help in any way they could. A doctor and several nurses from Huggins Hospital

came to help. They had three ambulances to be used if anyone had to be transported to the hospital.

The fire was soon jumping from tree to tree and cottage to cottage. The Tabernacle and the Grove were lost, along with the Lawrence, Lowell, and Portsmouth Chaples. Also lost was the secretaries building and about 300 cottages. The final figure for damages was set at about \$200,000.

In 1947 the Town of Alton proposed an ordinance providing for fire limits and construction standards of buildings. It would set fire regulations for the Town. The ordinance was voted in and set to go into effect on February 1, 1948.

The following list will give you an idea of what type and the number of calls your fire department responded to in 1950.

Building fires-----	5
Chimney fires-----	6
Car fires-----	2
Boat fires-----	2
Dump fires-----	2
Forest and Grass fires---	11
Still Alarms-----	4

In 1951 the Fire Wards asked for funds to pay the firefighters a set sum of \$25.00 a year instead of the \$3 and \$1 per hour they were now getting. The Fire Wards also asked for a pay increase for themselves due to the extra duties involved by the adoption of new laws and regulations.

In 1952 a Red Phone system was recommended for reporting fires in the Town. The present system was old and out dated. The Red Phones would be placed in several houses and businesses in Town. In most cases the phones were put in the fire officers homes or place of work. When a person called to report a fire all the phones would ring. In this way someone was usually around to answer. The big drawback of the Red Phone system was the nuisance calls. People started calling at all hours of the day or night for information and the location of a store where they could buy cigarettes or beer. This system was soon replaced.

In 1953 Article 18 in the Town report asked for \$2500 to buy and equip a tank truck.

Article 19 of the same report asked to change the procedure for electing the Fire Wards. In the past they were all elected at the

same time which could put three new men in the position of Fire Ward at the same time. This could cause a problem with the smooth running of the department with new Fire Wards coming in. The new election process would cure this problem. If passed the Article would take effect at the 1955 election. The new process for electing the Fire Wards would be as follows. One would be elected for three years, one for two years, and one for one year. After that one Fire Ward would be elected every year for a three year term. In this way the new man could work his way into the running of the department smoothly.

In 1956 \$1000 was put into a capital reserve fund for the purpose of buying a new fire truck and the same amount was placed in another capital reserve fund for a new fire station. These funds would be added to each year so that when the Town did decide to buy a truck or build a station this money would help defray the final cost.

In 1961 an Article was put in the Town Warrent to sell the Bay Fire Station and use the money to build a new station. Up until now much of the equipment was kept under the Town Hall. The Article was defeated.

An Article to spend \$29,000 for the purchase of two fire trucks was passed. One truck would replace the Maxim in the Bay Station and the other would go to West Alton. The actual amount expended was \$28,965.

In 1962 a sum of \$25,863.59 was spent to build the new station on Rte. 140.

In 1969 twelve firefighters went to a State sponsored training session. These training sessions and classes were held in the Laconia area and soon would see an attendance of over 1000 men and women from all over New England.

This year also saw the firefighters selling fire extinguishers. The money raised would be used to purchase fire boots. Each firefighter who sold at least three extinguishers would get a pair of boots for use on calls. Enough were sold to purchase 32 pairs of boots.

This year the Fire Department installed the first dry hydrant on Rte. 28. This is a system used in areas where no regular hydrant system exists. They are usually put into ponds and rivers. When not in use the water drains down below the frost line leaving the hydrant dry, which is why they are called dry hydrants. Being dry until in use they never freeze so they can be used any time of year.

In 1970 several Fire Departments got together to find a way to report fires and dispatch local fire departments to the incidents in a more efficient way. The results of these meetings was a County wide central dispatch system. Firefighters in the member Towns would have receivers in their homes. Each Town would be given a tone that would activate only their receivers. At this time 24 Alton firefighters have these receivers. Some of these were purchased by the firefighter and some were the result of fundraisers. Eventually firefighters would carry pagers so that they could be notified of an incident anytime and anyplace.

The department responded to 36 alarms involving structural and property value of \$360,000. The actual fire loss for these properties was estimated at \$60,000. This meant that the Alton Fire Department saved \$300,000 in taxable property. TRAINING PAYS OFF.

The year saw another Alton landmark destroyed. A fire of undetermined origin completely gutted and destroyed one of the oldest buildings in Alton. The Village Inn, built in 1850, located on the corner of Main and Depot Streets in the center of town. The Inn was owned by Mr. and Mrs. John Frost who moved to Alton from Concord five years earlier. While sleeping in a downstairs room their



own alarm system went off at about 3:30 AM. The Frosts, the only ones in the building at the time, escaped through a window.

After calling mutual aid the total number of firefighters involved reached 80. Also nineteen trucks and pumpers from twelve towns responded to Alton. In addition to the hydrant system, 43,500 gallons of water was trucked to the scene from the Merrymeeting river.

In 1971 we would see another Alton landmark destroyed.

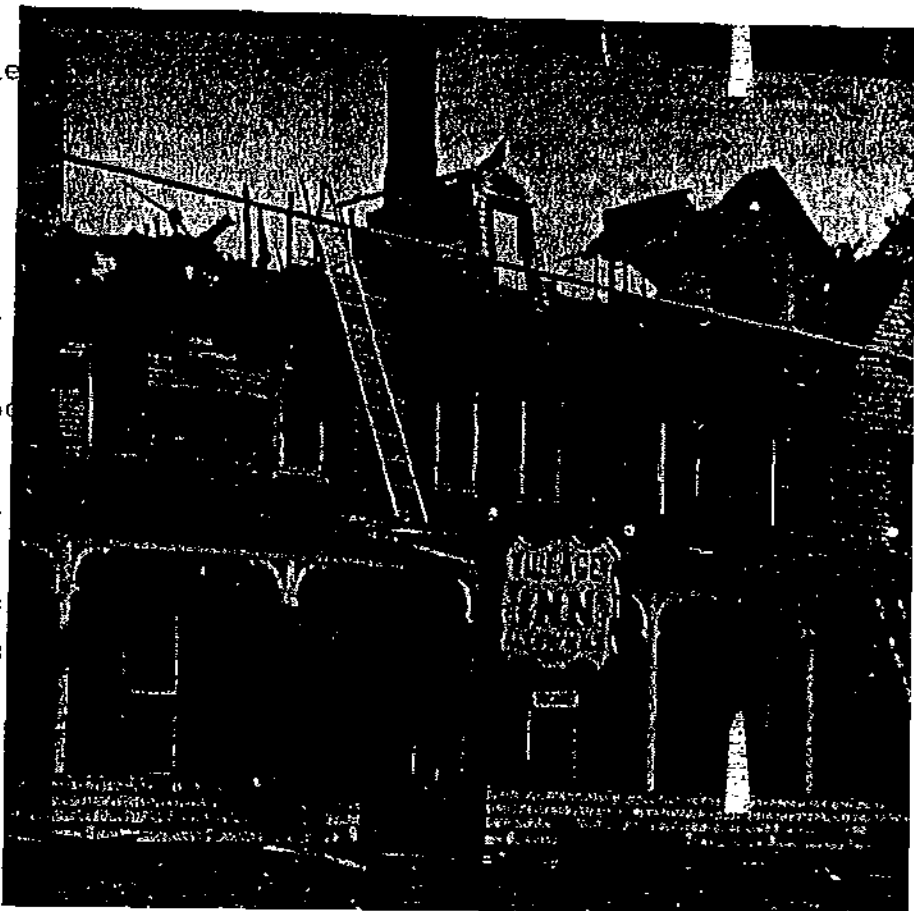
On February 27, 1971 McGrath's Store, a century-old landmark on the southern shore of Lake Winnepesaukee, was destroyed by fire

following a furnace explosion. The explosion came at 10:30 AM as store owner Peter McGrath was checking a bothersome furnace in the cellar of the store. The blast knocked him off his feet and ejected him from the cellar pinning under falling timbers. Rescued by firefighters and some neighbors Pete was rushed to Huggins Hospital where it was found that he had two fractured legs. Damage to the store, adjoining gift shop and four motel units was estimated at more than \$100,000. Firefighters and equipment from seven other Towns remained on the scene until 7PM.

In 1972 an Article to fund a full time department failed.

The highlite of 1973 was the 76th annual New Hampshire State Firemen's Convention. Held on September 7th and 8th more than 450 members attended. The convention is held in a different place every year. This was the first time Alton hosted the convention. The convention would be held in Alton again in later years and the Fire Department would be honored by being picked to host the 100th State Firemen's Convention in 1997.

In 1974 at the Town meeting the Fire Department asked the town for a new fire truck, costing \$48,850. After a long discussion the article was voted down by secret ballot. With another plan of attack in mind a firefighter moved to reconsider the article. After a second the motion was passed. An amendment to allow the members of the Fire Department to reimburse the Town over a five year period passed. The article as amended then passed. Over the next five years the firefighters held many fund-raisers to raise the money. The members did not have to raise the entire \$48,850. Some



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of the cost of the truck was taken from the capital reserve fund set up for the purchase of new trucks. The firefighters ended up paying about \$12,000 of the final cost of the new truck.

The Town also voted to lease the West Alton Station for \$1 a year. This allowed the Town to maintain the building and property.

The year saw a total of 4468 man hours of service to the Town. This included 1093 hours firefighting, 2065 training and drill hours, and 1310 hours for other volunteer projects.

In 1976 the Alton Fire Department joined Mutual Aid system.

On May 29, 1976 the Fire Department was called to an explosion and fire in the State Highway Departments storage building located behind the Town Hall. This was to be the first fire for the new Mack fire truck.

In November three unoccupied cottages in the Advent Christian Campground were destroyed by fire. This was another fire of undetermined origin to hit the area in the past several months. Several cottages have been lost in the Campgrounds during this time.

Again on December 4, 1978 four cottages in the Campground, across from the Mt. Washington dock, were destroyed by fire. As with the others this fire was of undetermined origin. The value of the cottages involved was estimated to be \$125,000. As the firefighters were fighting the Campground fire another cottage on Sunset Lake in Alton burned. This fire was unnoticed until someone reported a brush fire in the area the next morning.

In 1977 the year before the firefighters purchased a used ladder truck. The firefighters rebuilt and equipped the truck themselves and then put it in service.

After seeing how valuable the ladder truck was in fighting fires the members asked the Town, in 1981, to allow them to spend up to \$25,000 to purchase an aerial ladder truck. This would be a used truck. The article in the Town warrant for this money passed and the search was on.

A new fire boat was purchased and delivered in June. The boat is needed because of the number of cottages on the islands in Alton.

This was the year that the Fire Chief, Russ Jones, came to the members about sponsoring an Old Home Week in Alton. The members thought this was a good idea and on August 7, 1981 the first annual Alton Old Home Week was held.

Many organization in Town became involved in the weeks activities. Events were held in the Bay area every night. On the final Saturday a parade from the school in the center of Town to Alton Bay was an exciting time for young and old. Following the parade a block party took place. The first couple of block parties were held on main street in the center of Town. Eventuall due to the traffic problem the block was moved to the parking lot in the Bay. This was a fun time for all with food and game booths set up by many organizations in Alton. As time went on the firefighters decided to build a booth to sell our WORLD, no State, would you believe Alton famous sausage subs. We also sold fried dough and snow cones. You will find us at one end in our big RED booth on wheels. The money raised here and at our other fund raisers goes to buy special equipment for the Dept.

I guess this would be a good time to tell you of just what the money you spend at our many fund raisers is used for. Some of our fund raisers have been beano, annual auction, annual chicken bar ecue, and the booth during Old Home Week. The money raised bought and partial equipped the Rescue Truck. A Jaws-Of-Life, air bottles for our air trailer, portable lighting, TV and VCR used for training, and many tools. The members also paid the initial cost of the addition to the Central Fire Station. As you can see most of the money raised goes back to the Town. In a later section of this paper you will see how the money went into building and equipping a new station.

In 1982 the money voted last year to buy a pre-owned ladder truck was expended. A ladder truck was found in Bryer Cliff Manor, New York. It was a 1956 Mack in very good condition. Several other towns were bidding for the truck. The ladder came in a set, which had to be sold together. Alton was the only Town that would take both trucks, the ladder and its sister pumper. We ended up getting both for only \$22,000. The pumper was eventually sold and the ladder is still in use today.

The next several years saw some major fires including the large barn behind the old White Lodge which lost the top floor in a later fire. During this time one of the best known landmarks in Town was destroyed by fire. I think almost everyone in Alton, and hundreds of summer residents have fond memories of the Oak Birch Inn. This writer can remember many a good meal in the resturant or watching a movie in the theater. The fire started in the rear section of the Inn and

soon spread to the main building. Several area departments responded to Alton. Hose was laied all over the area and many thousands of water was poured into the building,



but to no avail. The fire was to hot and with all the old dry wood in the main building it burned very quickly. It was a fine old Inn and it will be missed.

In 1987 the Town voted to set up a pension plan for its retired firefighters. Any firefighter with 25 years of service in the Alton Fire Department would receive \$500 a year at age 65. At this time the firefighters are being paid \$5 an hour for firefighting , training and service time. They get paid once a year in December.

In 1990 the Town voted to pay the first payment of \$67,589 on a six year purchase lease contract for a new pumper. The amount of \$41,589 was taken from the capital reserve fund and \$26,000 came from genral taxation. The new 4900 International with a 1000 gallon tank and 1250 gallon pump was delivered in 1991. The new truck will be housed in the East Alton Station.

Also in 1991 the Town voted to spend \$50,000 to have Engine 5 rebuilt. This would be a considerable savings over buying a new truck. The truck was finished in 1992.

In 1992 the Alton Fire Department started the year with two trips up Mt. Major. On January 19th a call came in that two young hikers were lost on the mountain. After a search they were found and reunited with their parents.

The second call to the mountain was of a more serious nature. It seems that on the morning of January 30th two counselors employed by the Daniel Webster Council, Boy Scouts of America, and six Manchester

High School students were hiking on the ice covered trail leading to the top of the mountain. Shortly after noon time one of the councilors slipped on the ice and fell, striking the left side of head on a jagged rock. The Fire Department and Fish and Game were notified about 1:30PM. Rescue personnel and equipment were shuttled up the mountain to within an hours climb of the accident by ATV,s Rescue personnel eventually had to leave the treacherous ice covered trail and make their way through the woods to the victem.

After reaching the victem the rescuers worked to stabilize him. Because the victem started going in and out of consciousness he needed hospital care as soon as possible. To get the victem



AP Ph

down the ice covered trail and to the hospital would have

RESCUERS carry hiker Russell C. Capute of Concord from an Army National Guard helicopter Concord Hospital after he suffered head injuries in a fall on Mt. Major in Alton yesterday. Capute employed by the Daniel Webster Council of the Boy Scouts of America and was leading a group six Manchester Memorial High students on the hike. Story on Page 11.

taken two to three hours and many more people on the mountain. Putting more rescuers on the ice covered trail would increase the chance of more accidents so another option was considered. It was a straight shot to the top of the mountain, a ten minute trip, so it was decided to go this route. A helicopter from the 1159th Medivac unit, based in Concord, was on a training mission at the time and was diverted to the 1790 foot mountain where it picked up the victem and transported him to the Concord Hospital

Later the same day the Alton Fire Department responded with one truck and several men to Gilmanton Corners for a Mutual Aid structure fire.

On March 18th Alton firefighters responded to the vacant Alton Bay Inn for a structure fire. The alarm sounded at 9:55PM and a second alarm was souned five minutes later bringing 80 firefighters from six towns to the scene within twenty minutes. The right rear corner of the 40x100 foot building eventually burned to the ground.

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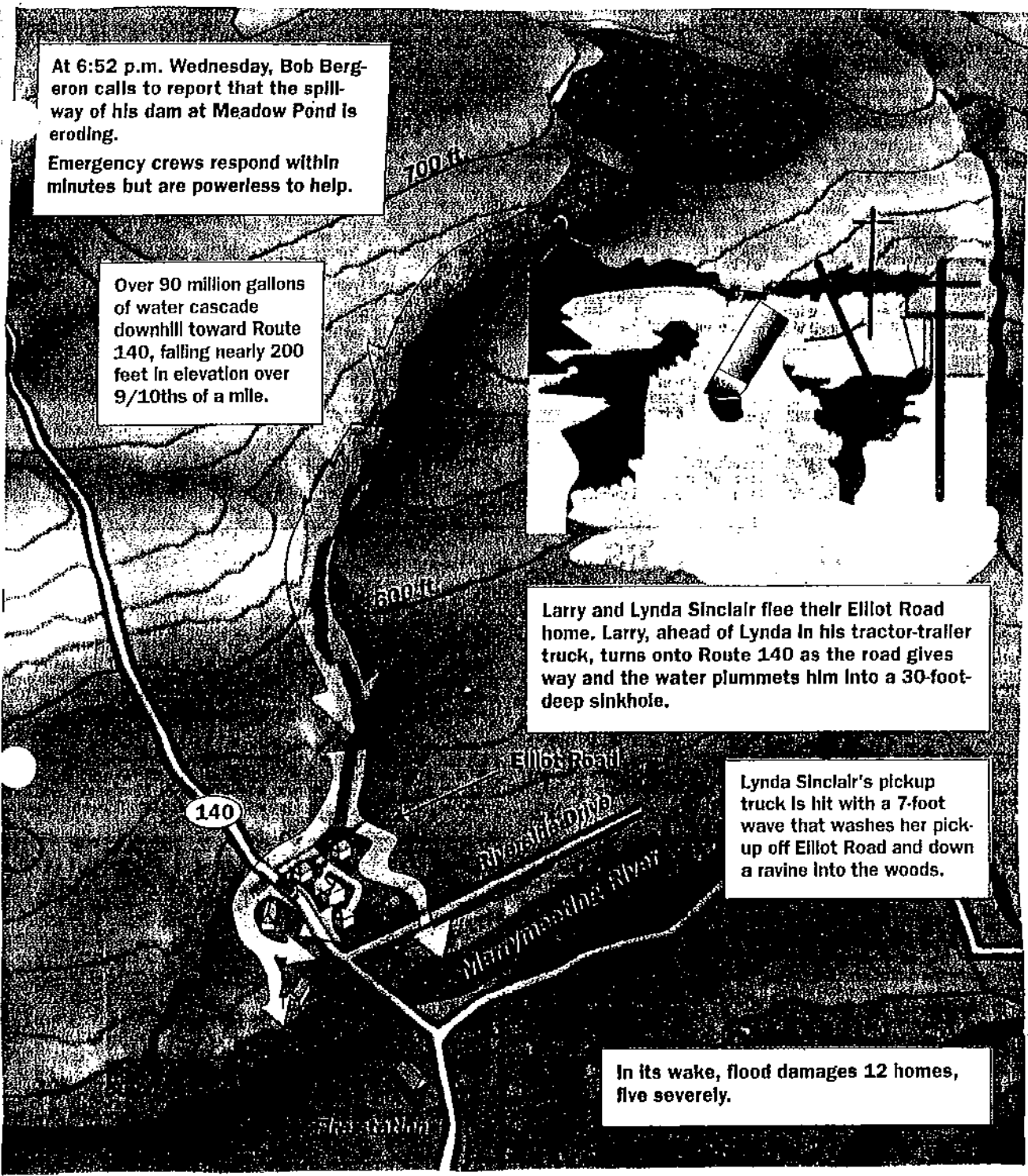
A good portion of the roof on the rest of the building was destroyed. Firefighters were able to knock down the flames in two hours thus saving the rest of the building and preventing the spread of fire to other homes and businesses. About one and a half hours into the fire one of the firefighters was taken to Huggins Hospital for smoke inhalation, treated and released. This fire is an example of what training and pre-planning can do. A plan of attack and drill, with other towns involved, was held at the Inn the previous spring. The Fire Chief credited the pre-plan and drill with saving most of the building.

In 1993 the Town voted to spend \$20,000 to rebuild Engine 2 and \$15,000 to buy air packs for the Department.

The next few years were filled with a wide range of incidents. These included rescues, motor vehicle accidents, medical emergencies, mutual aid, brush fires, building fires, boat fires, and several island fires. In our spare time we even got in some training.

I had hoped to end this paper on a pleasant note, but this was not the case.

On March 13, 1996 at 6:52 PM a call went into 911 that would change the Town of Alton forever. The earth dam on Meadow Dam Pond, about three quarters of a mile back in the woods above Merrymeeting River, gave way sending in excess of 92,000,000 gallons of water crashing downhill. In its path Rte. 140, Elliot Rd. and a dozen or more homes. After the water subsided one home was condemned and several others severely damaged. The area was littered with cars and trucks and every kind of debris imaginable. Standing on the bridge over RTE. 140 looking up the road you could see a tractor-trailer sitting in a twenty foot deep hole where the road used to be. If this was not bad enough the saddest and most heart breaking result of this disaster was the loss of life. Trying to escape the oncoming deluge, Larry and Lynda Sinclair, were making their way through the rising water on Elliot Road hoping to reach Rte. 140 and then to safety. Larry was in the lead driving his tractor-trailer with Lynda close behind in their pick-up. For reasons unknown Lynda apparently left the pick-up. As she tried to make her way to safety the rising water caught her and swept her away. The Fire Department, Fish and Game, and other volunteers searched the area many times in hopes of finding Lynda. Sadly she was finally found on Tuesday March 19th under the ice in the



At 6:52 p.m. Wednesday, Bob Bergeron calls to report that the spillway of his dam at Meadow Pond is eroding.

Emergency crews respond within minutes but are powerless to help.

Over 90 million gallons of water cascade downhill toward Route 140, falling nearly 200 feet in elevation over 9/10ths of a mile.

Larry and Lynda Sinclair flee their Elliot Road home. Larry, ahead of Lynda in his tractor-trailer truck, turns onto Route 140 as the road gives way and the water plummets him into a 30-foot-deep sinkhole.

Lynda Sinclair's pickup truck is hit with a 7-foot wave that washes her pickup off Elliot Road and down a ravine into the woods.

In its wake, flood damages 12 homes, five severely.

Merrymeeting River. My sympathy and that of the Town go out to Larry and his family for their loss.

The one positive aspect of this disaster is the way the Town came together to help. All day long people came into the Fire Station dropping off food of all kinds for the family and workers. The items left ranged from a plate of cookies to coldcuts to large pots of soups and chowders. The firefighters spent many days helping with rescue, search and clean up operations.

(20)



PHOTO BY JIM STADNYCK

LARRY SINCLAIR'S TRUCK HANGS cab down in a 30-foot sink-hole in front of George and Lula Thoroughgood's house. The Thoroughgoods narrowly escaped as the water level climbed in their house when 92 million gallons escaped from Meadow Dam last Wednesday evening. John Young pulled Sinclair to safety as water filled the cab.

The Fire Department Auxillary did a tremendous job preparing food and coffee for all those working at the scene. These ladies are always there when needed.

A final thanks has to go to Fire Chief Russell Jones. He spent more hours with this incident than anyone. Even during the few quiet times when he could have gone home for a little rest he was there. He could be seen everywhere checking on his firefighters and others. He was always there when needed.

This incident gives the title of this paper a new meaning, NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS.

HENRY J. NOWE

(21)

TRAINING

TRAINING

TRAINING

Training is a very important part of any job we have, whether it is full or part time. Full time job training helps us to do the work better and faster. Many times this training comes in the form of repetition. After a time these tasks will become second nature and we do them without even thinking about what we are doing. As a call or volunteer firefighter in Alton training takes on a very important

roll in the firefighter's life. Firefighting in the Town of Alton is not full time so many of the tasks we are called on to perform do not become second nature for many years because we do not fight fires or perform other emergency tasks every day. This is why we train all the time.

In the 1800's the training was simple compared to what we are called on to do today. Most structures at that time were made of wood so when a fire started the firefighter would stand outside and put water on the fire using fire buckets, or very simple hose evolutions. Even the women and children were used to pass the fire buckets.

Today with the materials being used in building construction the fire service has become very HIGH TECH. Many of the man made products being developed today may be more cost efficient but in many cases they make the job of a firefighter more hazardous. Many of the new materials, when burned, give off a very toxic vapor. The steel plates used in fabricating trusses will fail much quicker than the old time building methods. For this reason the roof or floor in a building on fire may collapse sooner creating a greater danger.

The use and transportation of a greater number of hazardous materials on our roads creates



a major problem in itself. These materials handled in the wrong way can be very dangerous, to the firefighter and anyone near the scene of an emergency involving these materials.

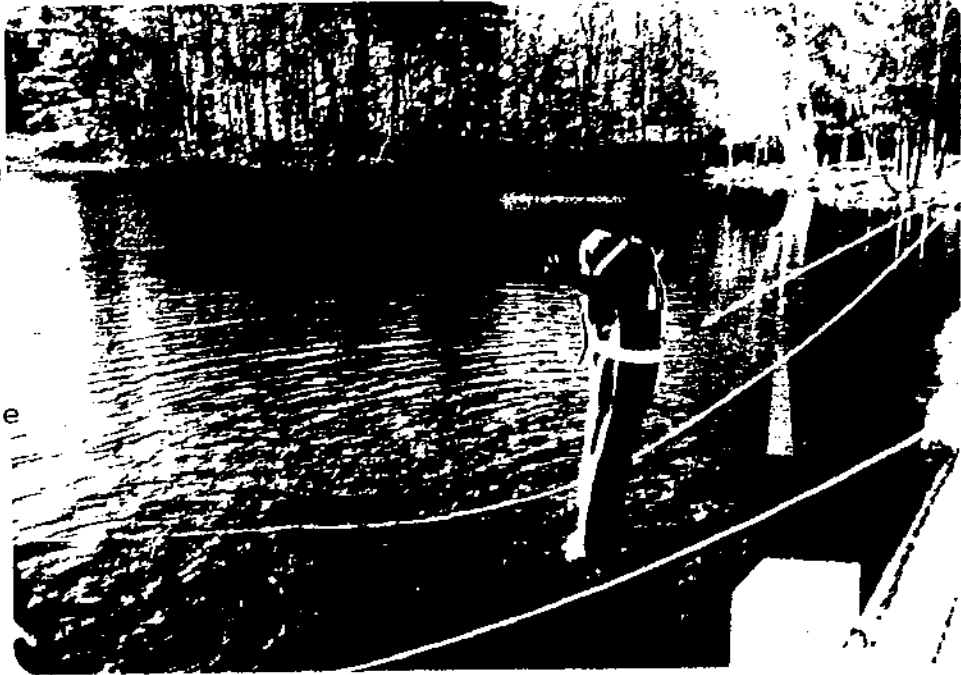
For this reason a firefighter can no longer be safe wearing the helmet, boots, and rubber coat of days gone by. The firefighter no longer stands outside a building spraying water on a fire. With the new large volume pumpers used today the firefighter now enters the building and attacks the fire at its source. For this reason the firefighter now wears fire retardent coat, pants, helmet, hood, boots, gloves, and some form of self contained breathing equipment. This gear allows the firefighter to enter hotter and more hazardous situations.

This is why the firefighters in the Town of Alton are told when they apply for membership in the Fire Department that they must put in a minimum of 25 hours of training every year. Today many of the firefighters put in, on average, 100 hours of training. Some even attain well over 100 hours much of this on their own time outside the regular sessions put on by the Alton Fire Department. The in-house training offered by the department consists of one night each week and several all day sessions during the year. Some of the out of house training include medical such as First Responder and EMT classes in which the firefighter becomes State and Nationally certified upon completion and passing the course. Many times the firefighter pays for these courses themselves. Many of the in-house classes are taught by State certified instructors.

Early training may have consisted of operating hand tubs and simple hose and ladder operations. Some training includes hooking up teams of horses to pull the hand tubs and other equipment.. Much of the training consisted of good natured contests between companies within the department and in some cases a department would challenge another town. To many this looked like fun and games, and in most cases the firefighters all enjoyed these contests. It was a time for neighbors to get together for a picnic and time of fellowship. In fact this was the beginning of more structured training sessions. The department or company that lost would get together and practice so they would have a better chance of winning the next time they were challenged. Everyone enjoyed the time spent together but more important they were getting the needed to perform as firefighters.

As the danger increased and the equipment improved the practice sessions became more formal and structured training periods.

One example of the need for more intense training might be the truck driver pump operator. In the past this firefighter was



charged with making sure the hand tub got to the fire and that the tank was being kept full of water. He probably also made sure that there was enough manpower available to pump the hand tub. Today this same firefighter has a pump panel in front of him with dozens of gauges, switches, and discharge handles on it. He has to know what each and every one of these parts controls and how to use them. He has to know what pump pressure to use for different size and lengths of hose to do the job intended for whatever situation he is in. He has to be well versed in such things as friction loss, drafting, fire load, hydraulics, hose lays, and many other aspects of pump operation. He has to know how to get the most out of what he has for water coming to him, and how to best use it. With much of our firefighting being done inside the building the pump operator literally has the lives of the firefighters on the end of the hose in the palm of his hand. This is why your firefighters train as much as they do, for their safety and that of anyone who calls for their assistance.

Another area in which the Alton Fire Department trains often is cold water and ice rescue. With a large portion of Lake Winnepesaukee and many small ponds, and a river within the Town limits this training becomes very important. Every firefighter is trained in the use of cold water rescue suits. Your driving by the Lake or other body of water and you see this person dressed in a big red suit with nothing but a pair of eyes peering out and a long length of yellow trailing behind him. What is it? Is it a Bigfoot with a

bad tan or maybe a big red Martian, NO it's probably a firefighter in a rescue suit with a rope tied on. The rope is used to pull both the rescuer and victim back to shore or to safe ice during a winter rescue. In winter the firefighter trains by walking out onto thin unsafe ice until the victim is reached or the rescuer falls through the ice. The rescuer then makes his way to the victim, approaching from the rear if possible, wraps his arms and legs around the victim and signals the crew on shore to start pulling them in. Among the other rescue equipment you expect the fire department to train with, such as fire engines, ladders, and hose lines, they also work and train on rescue boats, hover-crafts, and helicopters. In the 1980's the firefighters started getting \$5.00 an hour for training, fire fighting, and some service time. When you stop to think of the vast amount of knowledge the firefighter learns and the skills they acquire the Town of Alton is getting a tremendous amount of return on the \$5.00 spent for each hour of training.

In 1974 the firefighters trained 2065 hours, add to this 1093 hours firefighting time and 1310 hours of volunteer time for fund raisers, inspections, work on equipment, and etc. the firefighters put in 4468 hours of service for the Town. As the training hours increase and the class

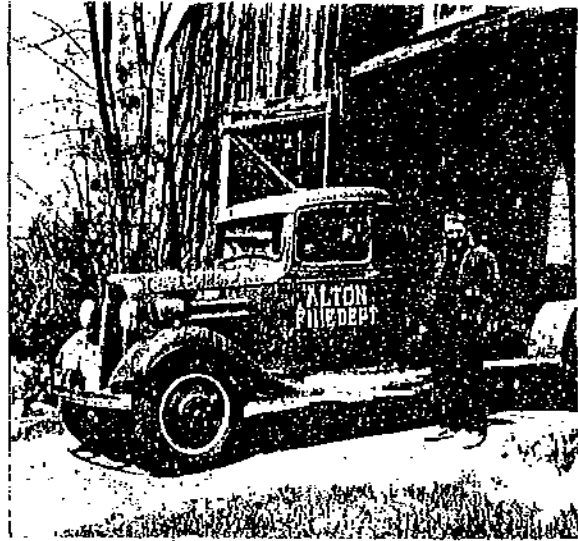


content and quality improve the fire loss in Town decreases.

As you can probably tell the members of the Alton Fire Department are not firefighters for the money. Some enjoy the excitement, some look at it as a way of starting a new career, others like working with the heavy equipment, but most like the idea of helping their neighbors. So when you see one of Alton's firefighters you might want walk up to him and say THANK YOU, I know he will be glad you did.

WEST ALTON
BUILDS A FIRE STATION

In 1956 several families in West Alton were worried about the lack of fire protection in their part of town. West Alton was eight miles from the towns central fire station. It took twenty minutes, in good weather, for fire equipment to reach this area of town. This time and distance also made the insurance rates in this section of town extremely high.



THIS 1934 CHEVROLET was the beginning of the West Alton fire department. Standing beside it is Harold Clough, who previously owned the truck who donated the land for the new fire station. The truck was kept in this for the first year of the department's existence. May 18 1963

Following is how the fire station, two of the trucks, the land and the equipment were made possible completely by voluntary labor and contributions.

In 1956 several West Alton residents met at the Glen Gable Inn and decided to do something about the lack of fire protection.

The growth of fire protection in West Alton began when Harold Clough donated land for a fire station. With no help from the town, and many of the residents being in the building trades, they decided to build the station themselves.

The first big problem to overcome was where the money needed to get the necessary supplies and equipment would come from.

The men and women of the area were to get together to solve the problem.

They held several chicken barbeques that summer and began an annual auction of items donated by local residents. The men earned money by doing odd jobs such as burning over fields for some local farmers. One resident wanted a 50-foot flag pole put up. If he hired someone to do the job it would cost him \$45. He paid the \$45, but to the fire department when eight firemen volunteered to do the job. The firemen had the job done in three hours.

The women got together and held food sales, rummage sales, plant sales, and dinners. They even made and sold a West Alton Recipe Book. They raised and donated several thousand dollars. They also made refreshments for the men whenever they were working for the fire department.

The men and women got together and ran whist parties every two weeks. These games were attended by local residents as well as 20 to 30 from Laconia. They also held novelty parties, that were opened to the public. These were held every Monday night.



WEST ALTON'S NEW FIRE TRUCK, along with two older companions, and the new fire station, built completely on donations, is the pride of that part of the town. Seven years ago, West Alton had no protection. Today, it has four trucks and one of the better stations in this area.

For the first year West Alton had one fire truck. This was a 1934 Chevrolet, with portable pump and Indian tanks, donated by the town. With no station to house the truck, it was kept in Harold Clough's barn.

With the limited funds available the men were only able to build a one story cement block building with a tar paper roof. When more money became available a second story was added which is now used as a community center. Groups meeting there were the Firemen, Woman's Auxiliary, Girl Scouts, 4-H Club, and the building was also used for Christmas and New Year's parties.

The kitchen was completely furnished, including a full complement of china and stainless steel cookware, by the Woman's Auxiliary. Paneling and a hardwood floor finished off the upstairs hall. Excluding the stove and refrigerator it cost over \$600 to furnish the kitchen. Water was supplied by a well dug by volunteers. Future improvements will consist of the building of a hose tower, boiler room, and thirty car parking lot.

The building is 30 feet by 52 feet with a second story meeting room measuring 30 feet by 40 feet. The town supplied the heating system and pays for the heat and electricity.

It became obvious, even in 1956, that the single 1934 fire truck was not enough to give them the fire protection they desired. It was decided to get more equipment. In June of 1957 a second-hand gas truck was bought and converted into a tanker. Two years later

another second-hand truck was purchased, this was a pumper-tanker.

Finally recognizing the tremendous effort being put into this project by the residents of West Alton the town, in 1962, voted to purchase a \$15,000 pumper for the West Alton Station. The 1934 Chevrolet was still in good running condition so it was kept, to be used if needed.

The fire trucks also carry necessary life saving equipment, including a chemox oxygen resuscitator, and a combination inhalator-respirator resuscitator.

As a result of the purchase of new equipment and the growth in available fire protection for the area the Fire Underwriters reduced insurance rates in the West Alton section of town by 33 per cent.

This shows what can be accomplished if people work together and want something bad enough. This was a story of hard work and devotion and complete cooperation from the 25 to 30 families living in the West Alton area.

Through their own efforts, and help from some summer residents, the area now has the fire protection it needed. It also has a great sense of pride that comes with all great accomplishments.

A DREAM IS REALIZED

Several years after the West Alton Station was completed residents of another section of town came together to solve the same problem in their part of town. Even with the big lake and several small ponds in the area East Alton has no hydrant system and, as West Alton, is several miles from the central station. Also any fire equipment responding to East Alton has to climb several long hills.

A small group of East Alton residents got together to promote the idea of building a sub-station. This idea remained a dream until the organization of a support Association. To show that they were serious about building a station they started to sell Fire-mark plaques and fire extinguishers to raise money for the project. On June 8, 1973 the East Alton Fire Association became incorporated. This tax exempt non-profit organization had four elected officers and four appointed directors.

The next step was building and equipping a Fire Station. It was felt that the Town should fund the major items such as the building and fire truck. The local residents would supply small items and maintain the equipment and grounds. On March 6, 1974 at the Town Meeting, about 200 voters approved setting aside \$25,000 for the East Alton Station. On March 22, 1974 the first E.A.F.A. officers were elected and August 24, 1974 brought us the first annual Chicken Barbecue. The barbecue was held behind the Eye Joy Cottages and served one hundred-ninety dinners. In later years this number would top four hundred.

On March 1, 1975 Robert and Dorothy Seavey and Roberts Cove Inc. donated, to the Town, the land for the new Fire Station. It was hoped that the station would be built and in use by the summer season.

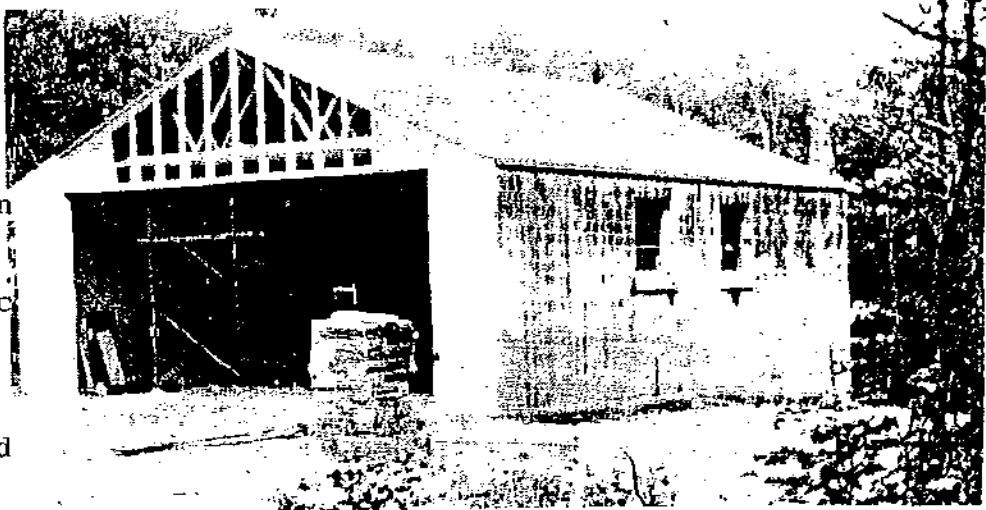
Well it seems they forgot a very well known law that everyone will come in contact with at one time or another. Yes you guessed it, MURPHY'S LAW, if it could go wrong it probably will. The cost of construction and materials went up and along with under-estimating the cost for site fill all the bids to do the job were running \$15,000 above the amount voted on by the Town. For this

reason the Selectmen decided to table the project.

It looked like the fire station would not be built. Having worked so hard for the project the Association decided to ask the Selectmen for \$10,000 more and offered to donate the extra fill needed for the lot. A special Town Meeting was needed to approve the extra money. The Selectmen turned down the idea of a special Town Meeting but fortunately the voters approved the \$10,000 at the next regular Town Meeting.

During the summer of 1975 the E.A.F.A. held many fund raisers to pay for the extra fill needed for the lot. The Garner pit on Drew Hill road was reopened to supply the fill. New bids were advertised in the fall of 1975. At a pot luck supper on February 21, 1976 the costs of different types of materials and the station itself were discussed. The membership voted to build a two-bay painted block building measuring 36'x36'.

On May 28, 1976 the contract for the construction of the new station was signed. Construction would be done by the Mooney Associates Inc from Laconia. The building, signs, and paving were completed by the fall of 1976.



An open house and dedication ceremony was held on Sunday, November 28, 1976. At this time the Station flagpole and plaque were dedicated to the memory of Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Barnes of East Alton who died tragically in an auto accident in February 1976. Money donated to the E.A.F.A. in memory of Wayne and Jean Barnes paid for a fire whistle and audible alarm installed at the Station.

After the completion and dedication of the Station many fund raising projects have helped to supply equipment for the firefighters and Station.

As with the West Alton Station the project in East Alton shows what true dedication and hard work can do.

East Alton Fire Association

Officers

1974-1975

President *Irving Roberts*
 Vice President *David Widerstrom*
 Secretary *Pauline Anderson*
 Treasurer *Wayne Barnes*

1975-1976

President *David Widerstrom*
 Vice President *Thomas Roberts*
 Secretary *Pauline Anderson*
 Treasurer *Pauline Thumm*

1976-1977

President *Thomas Roberts*
 Vice President *David Countway*
 Secretary *Dorothy Swaffield*
 Treasurer *Thomas Fry*

1977-1978

President *David Countway*
 Vice President *Thomas Roberts*
 Secretary *Dorothy Swaffield*
 Treasurer *Katherine Wright*

1978-1979

President *David Countway*
 Vice President *Judith Fry*
 Secretary *Dorothy Swaffield*
 Treasurer *Katherine Wright*

1979-1980

President *Judith Fry*
 Vice President *John Roberts*
 Secretary *Dorothy Swaffield*
 Treasurer *Katherine Wright*

1980-1981

President *George W. Stone, III*
 Vice President *Eldon Swim*
 Secretary *Janet Burton*
Frank Walker
 Treasurer *Ann Bodwell*

1981-1982

President *Eldon Swim*
 Vice President *James Newton*
 Secretary *Frank Walker*
 Treasurer *Ann Bodwell*

1982-1983

President *Eldon Swim*
 Vice President *James Newton*
 Secretary *Frank Walker*
 Treasurer *Ann Hoopes*

1983-1984

President *Gerald Row*
 Vice President *Thomas Fry*
 Secretary *Mary Lou Brown*
 Treasurer *Ann Hoopes*

1984-1985

President *Thomas Fry*
 Vice President *Gerald Row*
Jeff Putnam
 Secretary *Linda Gavill*
 Treasurer *Norman Spinney*

1985-1986

President *Jeff Putnam*
 Vice President *Warren Bodwell*
 Secretary *Rissa Kazan*
 Treasurer *Linda Gavill*

1986-1987-1988

President *Warren Bodwell*
 Vice President *Richard Brown*
 Secretary *Beverly Sheldon*
 Treasurer *Linda Gavill*

1988-1989-1990

President *Richard Brown*
 Vice President *Edmund Brown*
 Secretary *Denise Zirpolo*
 Treasurer *Linda Gavill*

Chairman of The Flea Market

Since 1975

Jean Roberts