

A History of
the
Easton Volunteer Fire
Company No. 1, Inc.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to those who have served their neighbors,
the members of the Easton Volunteer Fire Co., No. 1, Inc.

Part I

The Company

1921-1996

Introduction

Today, in 1996, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company is a vital town service with a rock-solid reputation for fire fighting and fire prevention.

Today, the Company's men and women generate an average of 2000 responses to more than 200 alarms each year, and maintain their skills with over 100 hours of drills and training.

Today, three high-powered pumpers stand ready to burst from the Center Road fire house, carrying the most advanced equipment available and the most dedicated firefighters in the State of Connecticut.

Today, Easton sets aside approximately \$350,000 to meet the town's annual fire-fighting needs, and finances major capital expenditures such as the purchase of a new truck.

Seventy-five years ago, in 1921, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company did not have a fire engine. Or a firehouse. Or radios or sirens.

Seventy-five years ago, the fledgling Company had to pay its own way.

But then, as now, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company had an asset of immense value - its people. The men who met in 1921 to form the Easton Volunteer Fire Company combined knowledge, skill, diversity and devotion to build a rugged, long-lasting foundation. The men and women who meet in the Firehouse today strengthen that early foundation with their own mix of knowledge, skill, diversity and devotion.

Part I of this *History of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company* takes a close look at those first, formative steps. It then explores the Company's remarkable continuity of service over the past seventy-five years.

Beginnings

The closing decades of the 19th Century were hard on Easton.

During this period, many of the town's mills and shops closed down, beaten into bankruptcy by urban competitors in a thriving Bridgeport. Bridgeport's business and social environment caused other problems as well as Easton's young people hurried away, attracted by the city's opportunities and excitement. Farmers left, too, drawn to the deeper, richer soil of places like New Connecticut, Ohio. Lack of attendance closed schools and churches. In 1900, the population stood at 960 - a drop of 300 from 1870. Fifty Easton houses stood boarded up and abandoned.

The sole beneficiary of Easton's decline seemed to be the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company. To meet the needs of Bridgeport's exploding population, the "Water Company" (as it came to be known) began to buy Easton's farms and watersheds until it owned 43% of the town's acreage. The Water Company then dammed up the town's streams and flooded its valleys to form reservoirs that could supply Bridgeport.

Then, slowly, Easton started to revive. A group of skilled, hard-working Europeans moved in, with names like Ruman, Yamnicky, Trup, Slady and Svihra. As Bridgeport's influence expanded, private highway companies hired Easton residents to grade and pave the town's major roads so that automobiles could pass through. And Bridgeport turned to Easton for more than just water: in the days before refrigeration, its citizens needed a nearby source of milk and eggs. Easton's farms turned to an enterprise that was better suited to the town's rocky soil and hilly terrain, dairy products.

Easton in 1921

By the end of the Great War, the town was back on its feet, with a rapidly growing population of enthusiastic young families and 150 working farms.

In 1920, the town was just about ready for the "Gasoline Age." Thoroughfares like Jackson Highway had been paved and Easton's thirty cars could go back and forth to neighboring towns with little difficulty. By decree, new roads had to be at least fifty feet wide, paved, with a grade of no more than 10%.

But in 1920, most of the other roads in Easton were wagon trails studded with ruts and rocks, nearly impassable in rain or snow. As the map at the end of this book indicates, many were dead-end access roads. Few had formal names and not everybody agreed on a road's informal name.

During the best of times, fire fighting in Easton was a challenge. Because Easton had no volunteers, responsibility for the town's 27 square miles was divided among neighboring towns that were better equipped: Fairfield covered the southern portion of the town; Trumbull handled the east and Weston fought fires in the west; Monroe's Stepney volunteers did their best to protect the homes, farms and forests of the northern corner.

But the efforts of these out-of-towners were severely hampered by long distances, poor roads, and navigational difficulties: Easton's new roads had names but were not on most maps, and the old roads were known only by residents. In many cases, a responding fireman had as much trouble finding the right road as he did driving on it. As a result, fires in Easton took a considerable toll.

Faced with a similar situation in Stepney just a few years before, Charles Keller had recruited men from around his village to form the Stepney Volunteer Fire Company. The success of the Stepney brigade provided Keller with glowing credentials as he turned to the men of Easton to talk about their town.

November 30, 1921

The Town of Easton was founded on November 29, 1762. Samuel Staples took the minutes: "At a meeting of the Society of Northfairfield on the 29th day of Nov A D voted...and agreed that Lt. Bennit, John Fantin, Dan'll Silliman, Abel Hall and Sam'l Wakeman should be a committee to take Care of and manage the prudential affairs of this parish."

One hundred and fifty-nine years later on November 30, 1921, fifteen Easton citizens gathered at the home of Arthur Staples to found the Easton Volunteer Fire Company:

A meeting was called for the purpose of organizing a Volunteer Fire Company in this town of Easton.

The meeting appointed Charles Keller temporary Chairman and quickly passed its first motion:

Motion made that we organize a Volunteer Fire Company.

The Company then elected an officer slate to back Keller for the next three months. A Czech immigrant, storekeeper Aurel Ruman, agreed to serve as Chief. Samuel Staples' descendent, Arthur, was elected First Assistant Chief. Daniel Silliman's descendent, Charles, became Second Assistant. Arthur Wheeler was the Company's first Treasurer and Harry Escott assumed the Secretary's responsibilities.

Other founders of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company were:

Walter Andrews	John Cochrane
Robert Cochrane	Joseph Keller
John Logan	Kenneth Logan
Albert Ruman	Ezra Seeley
John Sohn	Arthur Wheeler

As one of its first Orders of Business, the Company set a short term goal of twenty members.

At their second meeting, on December 5, twenty-seven men gathered in the community hall over Aurel Ruman's store. They turned immediately to two subjects which would occupy the Company's attention for the next seventy-five years: money and membership. Chief Ruman appointed a Finance Committee to deal with the need for funds. The Company raised its membership goal to 50.

Chief Ruman then identified those sections of Easton which would be covered by the Easton Volunteer Fire Company and raised questions about alarm procedures.

A week later, on December 12, thirty-five men showed up. They approved a \$1 initiation fee and monthly dues of \$.10. Willard Gillette was appointed to chair the new Committee on Rules and By-laws.

On December 19, attendance hit 38 - a record that would stand until 1935. During this session, the Company agreed to convene on the second Monday of each month and Bob Maquat assured everybody that he would "supply wood for heating the hall."



Ruman/Osborne Store

The Company took a break for the Christmas season but convened on January 9, 1922 to discuss fire-fighting. The Committee on Fire Alarms was directed to "make arrangements with the Telephone Co to call certain members of Fire Company in case of any fires." The Company voted to buy pails for the members and chemical fire extinguishers that could be placed at convenient spots around town. But a concern for money interfered, stirred up second thoughts about the pails and reversed the vote. Before adjourning, the firemen asked that a map of the Fire District be drawn up.

By-Laws

Willard Gillette's committee moved swiftly and the Company adopted its first set of by-laws on January 9, 1922.

The by-laws addressed a number of important issues. Article I (1), for example, gave the Company its name:

This organization shall be known as the Easton Volunteer Fire Company No. 1.

Article III (1) stipulated that the Company was to be run by a Chief, First Assistant Chief, Second Assistant Chief,

Secretary and Treasurer. Officers would be elected annually at the regular meeting in March.

Article VI dealt with committees. Special committees could be appointed at any time but there were to be three standing committees. The three members of the Finance Committee would be "elected by ballot" and each serve a three-year term. Members of the Committee on Grievance and the Committee on Membership, on the other hand, were appointed by the Presiding Officer for one year terms.

Article VIII (2) identified the requirements for membership:

Any white person of good standing in the community over 18 years of age, and residing within the limits of the fire district of this company, as outlined on their official map, shall be eligible to membership provided the membership does not exceed fifty at the time application is received.

The seven sections of Article IX dealt with Fee and Dues. The initiation fee was set at \$1.00 and annual dues at \$1.20. A member could be expelled from the Company if he failed to pay his dues or fines by the end of a year. Unfortunately, the by-laws do not identify the infractions that could result in fines.

Charter Members

Charter Membership in the Easton Volunteer Fire Company closed on May 1, 1922.

In February, 1960, the Company declared all Charter Members to be Life Members including Charles Keller who was instrumental in organizing the company. These men were honored:

Alex Allen	Walter Andrews
Vincent Bartosik	Arthur Bush
Fred Candee	John Cochrane
Robert Cochrane	Michael Dennis
Chileon Dickerson	Erwin Edwards
Harry Escott	Ralph Gaito
Clifford Gillette	Willard Gillette
Walter Hall	James Hitchcock
Chester Hull	Walter Jennings
Albert Johnson	Joseph Keller
Frank Kendall	Raymond Kent
John Logan	Kenneth Logan
Robert Maquat	George Marsh
Ralph Marsh	Albert Nichols
Albert Ruman	Aurel Ruman
Ezra Seeley	Charles Silliman
Joseph Slady	Harold Smith
John Sohn	Arthur Staples
Martin Steucek	Benjamin Turney
Fred Turney	Arthur Wheeler

Edward Mills

1922-1946

The Easton Volunteer Fire Company elected its first full-term officers on March 6, 1922. Chileon Dickerson took over as Chief, with Chester Hull and Albert Ruman as his Assistant Chiefs. Ezra Seeley was elected Treasurer and Harry Escott continued as Secretary. At the April meeting, the Company asked Escott to take steps "to get the Adams St. school house for a place for the Fire Company to meet."

The Adams School was built in 1766 as a response to twin realities: an exploding population of young children, and legislation that moved public education beyond the influence and control of a town's churches. Officially designated "Schoolhouse Number Four," it was placed on Sport Hill Road (then Jackson's Highway) near a wagon trail that would eventually become Adams Street. Over the next 150 years, the school house would survive Easton's ups and downs but it was closed to school children in 1895. By 1922, it had become a relic without a role.



Adams Street School - 1920's

As a result, Escott had little difficulty persuading the town to let the Company use the Adams Street School. The firemen held their first meeting in the schoolhouse on May 1, 1922 and authorized funds for a part-time janitor: John Sohn would soon take up the job.

In June, the Company added an important ritual that would survive for years. During each monthly meeting, a "mite" box passed quietly from member to member, collecting dimes and quarters. The evening's contributions would then be used to cover the cost of the evening's refreshments. On its first trip around the school house, the mite box picked up \$9.50 and bought an American flag as well as coffee and cookies.

The Company held two meetings in August. On August 7, a motion was made and supported that the Fire Company hold a carnival and Chief Dickerson was authorized to talk to Bridgeport Hydraulic about the purchase of one of their

buildings. A special meeting on August 18 took up a number of fire-fighting issues, including a suggestion to Easton officials of a "combination Fire House and Town Hall."

During its autumn meetings, the Company voted to extend the official Fire District "to include the whole town of Easton." Charles and Edward Marsh joined, and Dr. Smith of Long Hill agreed to "take care of the Fire Company's business." Mite box contributions fell steadily from that first-time high but attendance remained steady at about 20 members.

The Company's first year sped by. In March, 1923 Chileon Dickerson was re-elected Chief, with Arthur Staples as First Assistant and Charlie Silliman as Second Assistant. Harry Escott and Ezra Seeley ran uncontested for Secretary and Treasurer.

The First Carnival

Fire Department carnivals were as valuable in 1921 as they are in 1996.

Capturing a town's attention for a week in July or August, a carnival typically begins with the Firemen's Parade and is a festival of fun, food and a noisy melee of lights, rides, hot dogs and hamburgers, cotton candy, kids and clowns.

And games. Games of skill and games of chance. Games that pay off. Some games pay off with prizes. The carnival's Grand Prize (usually a car or a boat or a check) goes to the man, woman or child who holds the winning raffle ticket. Other games pay off in cash. At the end of a good run, you can walk away with a nice piece of change. Or without any change at all.



1923 Carnival on Sport Hill Road at Yellow Bowl

Back Row (l to r): Jim Hitchcock, Arthur Bush and John Sohn; Middle Row (l to r): Chileon Dickerson, Jr., Myron Gilbert, Jr., Ezra Seeley, Bob Cockran and Arthur Staples; Front Row (l to r): Alex Miklus, Harry Escott, Chileon Dickerson, Sr., and Fred O'Hara.

If it is carefully planned and efficiently run, a carnival almost always brings in a nice piece of change to the sponsoring fire department. The department uses the net proceeds to defray a portion of the year's operating costs; for improvements to house and equipment; or for high-priority purchases of fire-fighting gear. Then, as now, many companies depended on a carnival's financial success to make it through the year.



The Yellow Bowl Tea Room

The Easton Volunteer Fire Company first discussed a carnival on August 7, 1922. A year later, the Company was prepared for more than just talk. Escott's minutes of August 6, 1923 contain this entry:

Motion made and supported that we hold a Carnival on the 6th, 7th, 8th of September.

In October, Escott could report that the:

Carnival was a great success, clearing the company about \$1000.

The First Fire Engine

For more than two years, Easton's firefighters responded to alarms in their own cars, bringing along the pails and fire extinguishers. But in early 1924, flush with the revenues from their first carnival, the Company took a careful look at a veteran fire engine in the town of Cheshire. Cheshire's truck began life as an Oldsmobile roadster with a removable top and no windshield. The Cheshire volunteers had placed a 35-gallon soda-and-acid tank on each side and used it to fight fires.

In March, Easton authorized the purchase. In the meeting of May 24, the Company voted to pay Cheshire for the apparatus and Charles Gilbert offered to house it in the barn of the Yellow Bowl (now a private residence on Sport Hill Road) until more suitable quarters could be found or built.

The First Fire House

Although the Adams Street school house was a fine place to meet, it had two serious drawbacks: 1.) the building belonged to the town and not to the Company ; and 2.) it had no room for a fire truck or for fire-fighting equipment. So the Company began to look around for something more spacious and more permanent.

At a special meeting held two days before Christmas in 1923:

Committee appointed to wait on Mr. C. B. Tammany on Company business.

The land at the juncture of Sport Hill Road and Banks Road was known as Tammany's Corner. Tammany was willing to cut off a small piece (323' x 50') and sell it to the Fire Company as the site for a new fire house.

During the meeting of May 24, 1924, the Company took three significant steps towards the reality of new quarters:

Motion made and supported that the company act in regards to the Lot offered by Mr. C.B. Tammany.

Motion made and supported that the Fire Company buy 323 ft by 50 ft of Mr. Tammany.

Motion made and supported that a Committee be appointed to canvas the town for funds to build a new fire house.

During the summer of 1924, Chief Dickerson graded the plot. In October, the Company appointed a committee to investigate the cost of a "fire house and hall" with a first-story base of cement blocks and a wood frame second story. On Christmas Eve, the committee reported that the building's foundation would cost \$384.80.

In April, the Company appointed a Building Committee to "finance and build the new Fire House for the Fire Company." The committee's members included Chief Dickerson, Charlie Silliman, Joe Slady, Edward Mills and Harry Escott, who began working on plans for the building.

The 1925 elections were postponed until May 25 and, for the first time, were hard fought. Ed Mills beat Chileon Dickerson for Chief. Albert Johnston was elected First Assistant, while Arthur Bush won the Second Assistant's post. Joe Slady took over as Treasurer. Only Harry Escott ran without a challenge.

After the elections were over:

Motion made and supported that a committee be appointed to borrow \$4000 as a mortgage to get the new Fire House built.

Escott submitted blueprints to the Company in June. The plans were approved with little discussion or debate (according to Escott) and sent out for bids. As a follow-up step, the Company approved a disbursement of \$60 "to get an electric light line built" and Escott entered his first financial statement:

Money in Bank	\$558.19
National Bank	57.67
from A. Bush	5.54
H. Escott	21.75
Mite Box	<u>3.56</u>
	672.76

Expenses	3.75
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In 1925, however, a light line was still a luxury. At the August meeting, the Fire Company had to "subscribe \$250 towards the building of the electric line to Easton Center."

Treasurer Joe Slady signed the \$4000 mortgage in October, 1925. Willard Gillette and the Tucker brothers, Henry and Arthur, wired the new building, and donations flowed in from all over Easton. To further defray their capital costs, the Company hired local orchestras to play Saturday night



Old Firehouse c. 1920's

dances in the Fire House Hall.

Within a short time, the Fire House had replaced Osborne Hall - that room over the Ruman Brothers' store - as the town's social center. In February, 1926, the Boy Scouts asked if they could use the Fire House to stage a play. On April 2, firefighters and their guests gathered for the Company's first Pinochle Party. The game's popularity spread like a plague and the men soon found themselves waging pinochle war with fire departments across the state. In August, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company's second carnival brought in a good deal more than the first, and paid for a heating system.

Five Years Old

In August, 1926, the New York Times ran an upbeat story that celebrated the Company's five years of service to the Town of Easton. But the novelty of the volunteer venture was wearing away. Attendance at meetings dropped to fourteen or fifteen, and with a cash balance often under \$100, money was again a problem. Ed Mills faced serious opposition in the 1927 elections, barely defeating Howard Keuhn in an election noteworthy for its scant turnout. Membership stood at about 40.

But those who remained formed the core that is the backbone of every volunteer organization. Their names were entered again and again in Harry Escott's minutes as they volunteered for tasks and committees: Mills and Bush and Trup, Sohn, Marsh, Slady, Wheeler, Johnston, Kolesar, Silliman.

Slowly, steadily, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company shed its wrapping of newness and glamour and replaced it with a thick coat of sober commitment and hard work.

The Great Depression

Stronger, perhaps, because of its adjustments to earlier economic trauma, Easton weathered the Depression well. The farms held on, supplying milk and eggs to the area's towns and cities. Schools and churches were full.

The Easton Volunteer Fire Company also fared well. Attendance at monthly meetings rose: in March, 1930, twenty men showed up. In May, twenty-four members came to the meeting. The weekly dances continued to be a reliable source of cash. Ed Mills continued on as Chief, assisted by Turb Bush and Joe Trup.

Certainly, there were signs of the troubled times. The 1929 Carnival brought in a meager \$562. Many of the meetings during this period offered a standard motion to "pay all bills if there be enough money to pay for same." In March, 1930, reflecting a more somber national spirit, the Company voted to "give up dances until after Lent."

But the Company voted to give itself a new fire engine. After six years of a roadster without a windshield, after six bitter winters of face-numbing cold, the firemen were ready for a truck with a water tank, a pump, hoses, lights and a siren.

In November, 1929, the Company asked Joe Slady and Ralph Marsh to investigate pumpers and prices. In January, they brought in a serious bid from the firm of Peter Pirsch. A brand new fire engine, with 1000 feet of hose and \$250 for the roadster, would cost the Company \$7400.

Where would the money come from?

The Easton Volunteer Fire Company still carried a hefty debt load in the form of monthly mortgage payments on the Tammany property. In September, 1930, the Company reluctantly voted to ask the Town to finance the apparatus. If Easton was unwilling to foot the whole bill, the Company would "throw ourselves at the mercy of the town and take what they feel able to give us." Easton came through, however, and a new Sanford fire engine arrived at the Fire House in December, 1931.

With a new truck, a new house, and a growing roster of hard-working volunteers, these were good times for the Easton Volunteer Fire Company. Attendance at meetings averaged twenty-five members. Pinochle parties and dances were a steady source of cash. Organizations ranging from the Dairymen's Association to the Socialist Party held meetings in the fire house and paid for the privilege. The Company thought of buying a second slice of land from Tammany. Three spittoons were placed around the fire house. Ed Mills added stone work to the foundation, a back stoop, and cellar doors. And on March 6, 1933, the Siren Aide took official form.

The Siren Aide Club

It was an idea borrowed from the Congregational Church and massaged enough to meet the needs of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company: an organization of women, wives mostly, who would meet regularly to talk about how they could support the Fire Department...and who would put their words into actions.

Of course, the firefighters' wives and girlfriends had been involved right from the start. When the men went off to conflagrations in the middle of a winter's night, the women brewed and brought hot coffee. The ladies of the Company cooked constantly and sold their cakes, cookies and pies at bake sales, carnivals, and Saturday Night Dances. They sewed and ironed. And they took on more subtle tasks. In the Spring of 1931, for example, the women earned \$50 from a bake sale and handed it over to the Company. The men returned the cash with a request that the ladies use the money to buy curtains for the fire house. Were curtains an unmanly concern in 1931? Or did the men lack confidence when it came to matters of taste?

Thirty-one volunteers attended the March meeting in 1933 and voted unanimously to "form a Ladies Auxiliary for the Fire Company."

Over the next few years, the Siren Aides assumed many roles. They were charwomen who scrubbed the fire house. They were chefs who planned, priced and cooked dinners for the Carnival. They were social directors who organized Christmas Parties and summer outings. They were decorators who used their own funds and the Company's money to purchase amenities such as chairs, screens, and a curtain for the meeting room stage, and who paid to have the interior of the fire house painted.

For years, the site of the Siren Aides' monthly meetings moved from one member's home to the next. Then, in July, 1941 a thunderstorm forced the ladies to gather at the fire house. Pleased with its convenient location and tolerant of its informal atmosphere, they decided to return for future meetings.

The Roads of Easton

The fortunes of the Fire Company may have improved during the Depression, but the roads around Easton were as primitive as ever. In the early 1930's, the Easton Grange launched a fierce, state-wide campaign to "Get Connecticut out of the Mud."

It wasn't just the condition of the roads that bothered Grange members. In 1933, most of the roads in Easton were still without a name. In October, the Company authorized John Kerrins to meet with representatives of the Grange to "name the streets of the town."

The process took a while. But the results were impressive - a map of over a hundred streets, studded with names like Wilson Road, Cat Hill Road, and Rock House Road. The old Jackson Highway became Sport Hill Road.

The New Organization

In 1931, Arthur "Turb" Bush unseated Ed Mills in a close contest for Chief.

The influence of the new Chief was felt almost immediately as Bush took steps to focus more of the Company's time and effort on training. To sharpen this focus, he recommended a bold, unsettling step. He asked the Company to adopt a new structure that would separate its fire-fighting activities from its business functions.

On March 6, 1933, with thirty-one members on hand, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company elected Harry Escott as its first President and Bill Bell as Vice-President. This critical change allowed the Company's line officers to concentrate exclusively on fire-protection in the Town of Easton, and defined a very different set of responsibilities for the administrative officers.

On the fire-fighting side, Turb Bush moved swiftly. Within months, a new siren was installed on the top of the fire house and the Town agreed to cough up \$300 to help maintain the fire truck. Formal training became a requirement for every member.

On the social side, Escott moved just as quickly. Within a few weeks of his election, the Company had purchased a pool table and had scheduled Pinochle Parties with Redding for the second Wednesday of every month. Escott appointed a committee to meet regularly with the Siren Aides. Ed Knight put together the Easton Volunteer Fire

Company's baseball team. Ed Wilkes donated a piano; Lee Dannenberg provided the Company with its first radio.

Escott outmaneuvered Bush by diverting \$300 that the Town had marked for truck maintenance: he used it to cover a mortgage payment. In response, perhaps, the Company appointed two internal auditors to investigate the company's record and set up "bound financial books."

On August 12, 1935, in the middle of the Great Depression, forty-four members attended the Company's monthly meeting. Eight months later, attendance hit fifty-two.

The Pre-War Years

The years leading up to World War II were quiet and comfortable - both for Easton and for its Fire Company.

Judge John McClain paid for the repair of Center Road and Sherwood Road, and offered \$6000 to help build town offices. Builder Gustave Pfeiffer backed McClane's offer with another \$5000. The Town took the money and added \$27,000 of its own: by the middle of 1938, Easton's Town Hall was firmly in place at the corner of Center and Morehouse Roads.

Membership levels were high enough in 1936 to allow the Company to consider a cap of 100 volunteers. Weekly dances remained a reliable source of cash for day-to-day expenses, while profits from the annual Carnival covered the cost of most major items. The Company held its first end-of-summer outing at Sawford's Grove in 1936. In 1937, Frank King formed a softball team and the Company sponsored a bowling team, 4-H Club and Boy Scout Troop 66. Pinochle parties evolved into pinochle tournaments that tested the skills and luck of men from all over the state.

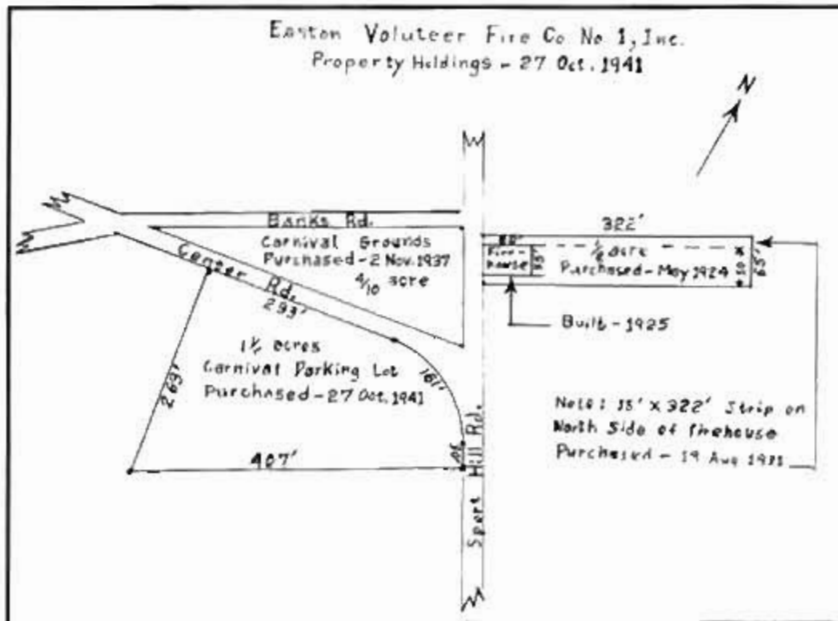
During this time, the Company installed a new furnace and hot water unit, and painted the apparatus room and exterior of the fire house. After considerable discussion, Ed Mills was awarded a contract to re-shingle the roof, and the Siren Aide purchased and installed new kitchen cabinets and a sink. As the 1930's came to a close, the Company owned three pianos, gifts from the generous citizens of Easton. In 1941, the Company donated one of the pianos to Sarah Tammany when her home organ failed.

There were problems, to be sure, but the problems seemed minor. Members were late with their dues. The janitor had to be empowered to "stop roughness in the house." And Easton's roads continued to be a challenge. In May, 1941, Chief Bush suggested that the Company place a large-scale map in the Fire House "as many firemen do not know the new roads and the new names of the roads."

The Easton Volunteer Fire Company faced the first loss of a member when Clarence Jennings died in 1937. Jennings'

death initiated discussions of a Death Benefit Fund, discussions that would continue for several years.

Talk of taking more land punctuated many of the meetings in 1936 and early 1937. In May, 1937, the original \$4000 mortgage was paid off and the documents were burned in a public ceremony. In June, a special committee met with Ed Tammany to talk about his land; in October, the Company paid the Tammany family \$3000 for half an acre. In 1941, the Company bought another 1.5 acres from Sarah Tammany for less than \$2000. By the time the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company's real estate holdings looked like this:



The War Years

In April, 1941, the Company met to elect its officers for the 1941-1942 year. Turb Bush barely beat George Marsh to retain the Chief's spot and Ellsworth Wilkes ran unopposed for President.

The members also took the first in a series of steps that would place the Easton Volunteer Fire Company at the center of Easton's war effort: a unanimous vote eliminated annual dues for the Company's draftees.

Two weeks after the Pearl Harbor bombing, the Company met to examine its role in the war with Japan and Germany. Early in 1942, all members were fingerprinted and the Fire House became a center of Easton's wartime activities. The Red Cross moved in and set up a bandage-making facility. Easton's families rummaged through barns, basements and garages for scrap metal to take to the collection center at the Fire House. They collected old newspapers, cooking grease, tin, anything for The Effort.

More than a dozen firefighters joined the Easton troop of the Connecticut State Guard. A mix of men and boys too young or old to serve in the regular forces, the troop held its meetings in the Fire House and its parades on the

grounds outside. Drills were held on land adjacent to the Water Company's reservoirs: sabotage was a constant concern and the troop posted a 24-hour guard at the Easton Dam.

In the spirit of the times, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company purchased War Bonds and enacted blackout rules. President Wilkes was installed "for the duration of the war" and a plaque honoring the boys in service was placed on a wall in the meeting room. The Company donated \$50 for Service Men's Baskets and rejected roast beef for a Fairfield County Chief's Dinner in favor of hot dogs and sauerkraut because "everybody agreed we would have to ask for too many red meat ration points." In November, 1944, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company paid tribute to its first wartime casualty: Paul Spellacy.

The Company's concerns, however, often extended beyond the arena of international crisis. A second early member, Clarence Foote, died in the winter of 1942 and the new Death Benefit Fund paid his widow \$100. Mary Mallette donated a pewter plate in her will.

Fantasies of a new pumper battled reality as members discussed engine specifications, manufacturers and financing alternatives. Part of the reality was the price tag of \$7500. In December, 1945, the Company decided to ask the Town for the money and appointed a committee to negotiate with the Town's Finance Committee.

Despite the earlier stipulation that the President hold office for the duration of the war, Howard Andrews replaced Wilkes as President in 1944. As time wore on, the relationship between the firemen and their Red Cross visitors wore a little thin. In October, 1945, the Company voted to "ask the Red Cross if they would vacate the upstairs by the 1st of November." The Red Cross moved most of its equipment but continued to hold monthly meetings in the fire house.

And, as the Company's first quarter closed, the Company continued its search for more land. Towards the end of 1944, President Andrews appointed a committee of Joe Trup, George Marsh and Erwin Edwards "to investigate the purchase of the barn on property adjacent to our property."

1946 - 1971

After the war, Easton settled back for a moment.

For a while, the farms seemed to thrive. Bridgeport and New Haven and Waterbury and the Water Company had plenty of jobs for the men who came back from Europe and Asia. But they weren't always the kinds of jobs that these men sought. The GI Bill had promised veterans a college education and a burgeoning UConn was making good on that promise.

Indeed, many of Easton's young men did not come back to stay. Like their predecessors seventy-five years before, they left town, lured by the excitement and opportunities of other places. Not Bridgeport this time, but places like Washington, Atlanta and Los Angeles. Houston and Dallas. San Francisco. Seattle. Before too long, the mills and manufacturers followed, lured by a similar set of opportunities.

Some of Connecticut's cities seemed to dry up overnight. Cities like Bridgeport.

Bridgeport's faltering finances in the early 1950's, along with technological advances in milk refrigeration and transportation, were factors that seriously threatened the health of Easton's dairy farms. There were other factors as well. National food store chains were buying milk and eggs from regional producers at prices well below those that a small, local farm could match. And Easton's land was becoming too valuable to hold.

After the War, members of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company were not the only people looking for land. Chilling relations between the United States and the Soviet Union brought new contracts to "defense" companies like Sikorsky, which employed a large professional class. A little further south, a trickle of international firms were moving their headquarters out of New York City and into the Stamford area. Shopping centers arose in the midst of spreading suburbs.

The developers needed land - land for houses and schools and offices. Easton's farmers had plenty of land on handsome sites and they faced a falling market for their produce. So they started to sell. In 1946, there were 50 farms in Easton. By the end of 1971, there were just a few, owned mostly by Easton's fire-fighting families: Slady, Snow, Keller, Candee, Matylak and Edwards.

After the War

In January, 1946, Chief Arthur "Turb" Bush brought an unusual request into the meeting: an Easton citizen, Tom Barnes, had approached him with an offer to buy the fire house for \$10,000. But the Company had no interest in selling the fire house. Indeed, its concerns were of a very different nature: the firemen needed a home for the new fire truck that might arrive any day.

In the February meeting, the members considered "an addition on the north side of our fire house to house the new engine." In July, Al Jaffe suggested that the Company begin to work on the addition. In September, however, there was a discussion of "the need for a legal officer" to draw up a construction contract. Work began shortly afterwards.



Firehouse with first addition - 1947

As winter approached, however, the oil burner was causing trouble: the repairman from Hoffman Fuel refused to light it because there was "not enough air in the room." In December, the Company bought a new burner.

On January 6, 1947, Chief Bush introduced a change that would have an immediate and profound impact on the Easton Volunteer Fire Company. The Bush plan called for 24-hours-a-day, on-site coverage of the fire house by members of the Company. The plan further stipulated that *volunteers* would "serve their turn as duty men when called on during the night period." Thus, each volunteer would be expected to spend about one night a month sleeping at the fire house. Daytime hours would be covered by a paid fireman. The plan outlined the hours and responsibilities of the paid firefighter.

The plan's third clause suggested that the Company ask the town for an appropriation to cover the salary of the paid fireman.

The Bush plan was discussed but never formally debated. In deference, perhaps, to the power and personality of Turb Bush, none of its components was presented in the form of a motion, and the Company had no opportunity to vote for or against the overall plan or for any of its clauses.

The plan's follow-up recommendations, however, were more formally framed:

Motion made and seconded to have the sleeping quarters where the present pool room is, and have the pool table upstairs.

Motion made and seconded to have the fire company furnish the paid fireman with his first uniform.

The Executive Committee then agreed to award Chief Bush an annual stipend of \$300 "to defray expenses" and the Siren Aide agreed to buy the beds for the night shift.

The 1947 elections featured a number of close contests. Bush ran alone for Chief, but Joe Trup edged out Bud Crossman in a battle for First Assistant Chief. Ernest Bratz took over as Second Assistant Chief. Winners on the business side included:

President..... George Marsh
Vice President Al Jaffe
Secretary Palmer Crumb
Treasurer..... Michael Kochiss

TV and Other Temptations

The Company first brought up the subject of television in October 1947, when Norris Wilkes initiated a long, at times unpleasant, discussion of the medium's pros and cons. President Marsh asked Wilkes and Sherwood Scott to delve further into the mysteries and manufacturers of television sets, and tabled further discussion for six months.

In April, he appointed a committee "to investigate and bring in prices on a Television set to be used in the Fire House." In May, the committee came back with its recommendation: an RCA set that would cost the Company \$1395 (about \$20,000 today.) The price included installation and a one-year warranty.

Although there is no mention of a motion to actually spend the money, the new television set was in place by August, when a number of members complained "about children and strangers who come in to look at the television pictures running up and down the stairs."

Nine months later, Vince Bartosik wondered aloud about the "large number of new applications now being received saying that in his opinion they were all joining to have the privilege of seeing the television or playing cards rather than to become firefighters."

Certainly, the membership rolls had never been stronger. Despite a 1948 attempt to cull the list to 100 active volunteers, there were 116 members in the Company a year later. Attendance at meetings during the late 40's and early 50's was unusually strong, averaging around 40.

The social side of the Company was just as strong. In 1947, the members talked to the Town about a swimming pool. The Company established the Easton Volunteer Fire Company Scout Scholarship Fund, and Bud Crossman headed a committee to put together an Easton Volunteer Fire Company Fife & Drum Corps. The Company added a volleyball court and a new shower stall, and Mary Mallett's pewter plate hung on a fire house wall.

Money

But money- more than television, cards or volleyball was the source of good spirits. When the Company's finances were sound, the officers relaxed and members enjoyed themselves. When the treasury was low, budgets tightened and spirits dropped.

Most of the Company's money came from its annual Carnival. In 1948, for example, the week-long gala provided the Easton Volunteer Fire Company with net operating funds of more than twelve thousand dollars.

Not everybody in Easton was happy with the Carnival. In March 1949, Sterling Gillette "spoke about the general criticism going on around town...to the effect that the Fire Company earned big money at their Carnivals and was not spending any of it." For a more vocal minority of Easton's citizens, the source of deepest displeasure was the Carnival's games of chance. These men and women, along with like-minded individuals throughout Connecticut, questioned the moral stance of the state's volunteer fire departments and vowed to put an end to their games.

Early in 1949, in response to new legislation, the state's District Attorney ruled that most of a Carnival's fund-raising activities were probably illegal. In June, the State Police closed down Ridgefield's Carnival because "they were using wheels and other forbidden gambling devices".

The scope of the gambling ban was wide and included the sale of chances on a Carnival's Grand Prize. Indeed, by the time of the District Attorney's ruling, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company had bought their Grand Prize for 1949 - a new car. But no one wanted to deal with the sort of public relations problems that Ridgefield had faced. Instead, the car was returned to a sympathetic dealer.

And the Carnival was canceled.

The loss was felt immediately. Candy and cigarette machines were installed to bring in money. The player piano was sold for \$25. The mite box was again passed around at monthly meetings to help pay for the evening's refreshments. In December, "it was suggested by several Firemen that we try to do something about our dwindling finances." In 1950, the Company put on a Minstrel Show that made \$500 and grossed \$1800 selling telephone "clips" printed with the Town's emergency numbers.

Morale sagged. Bud Crossman had a hard time holding his Fife & Drum Corps together. The heating system in the fire house failed. Member misbehavior resulted in a 12:00AM curfew. Attendance dropped and tension rose. In March, 1952, twelve members were dismissed because of non-attendance: those that remained were charged a \$1 Special Assessment.



March 8, 1950 - Installation of Officers

*Seated: Arthur Tucker, Secretary; Michael Kochiss, Treasurer; Arthur Bush, Chief.
Standing: George Marsh, President; Alexander Jaffe, Vice President; Joseph Trup,
First Engineer; William Crossman, Second Engineer.*

Without a reliable source of operating income, the Company had to turn to the Town for help. Bills were sorted into two piles: those to be paid by the Easton Volunteer Fire Company, and those to be paid (hopefully) by the Town of Easton. In June, 1952, the Company's officers met with the Town's Finance Committee. The meeting was considered a success because both sides were able to air their concerns. But the Company was not so happy when the Selectmen sent over its fire protection budget. A year later, President Al Jaffe offered to resign when the Town trimmed the budget even further.

Maybe international tensions added to the turmoil in Easton. To help the FBI battle spies, the members were fingerprinted again. As Russia grew more threatening, firefighters learned how to read a Geiger counter, evacuate Easton schools, and respond if the Bomb dropped on Bridgeport.

The Tucker Brothers

In the early months of 1953, Al Jaffe had more than money on his mind.

For several years, Henry and Arthur Tucker had been the Easton Volunteer Fire Company's paid drivers. Fifty-six years old, the twins' family line stretched back to the beginning of Easton. The men lived alone in a cottage on Rock House Road. Each took home \$42 a week for their fire department work, and drove a school bus on the side.

In July, 1952, Turb Bush, Al Jaffe and other officers met with the Tucker brothers. The meeting examined the twins' performance and gave the officers a chance to express their

concerns about the Tuckers' attitude towards the volunteers. A similar meeting took place in December.

Apparently, the meetings had little impact. On February 11, 1953, the Company fired them both. The action tore apart the Town.

According to Jaffe, the brothers were let go because of "continuous recurrence of behavior and the failure to carry out orders from officers of the department." Jaffe alleged a series of transgressions, including the Tuckers' refusal to let volunteers play cards at night in the recreation room; their failure to run the fire engines every day; and an unwillingness to keep the fire house clean.

The Tuckers countered with a formal protest to the Town, asserting that they were Town employees and "not subject to the whims of the Volunteer Fire Department." They also launched an informal press campaign to rebut Jaffe's charges. The League of Women Voters called for and initiated a study of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company to determine the possible need for greater supervision of the Company's affairs. Bill Bell's wife announced that she would lead the study.

Republican Andy LaCroix called the League's action "a means of causing dissension in the town." According to LaCroix, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company "will continue to be the responsible governing body, with the paid firemen being subject to their discipline, without the overlapping authority of any fire commission."

Within the Company, Skipper Toth sided with the Tuckers and called for a delay in their dismissal. Toth owned a transport company and the twins drove his school buses. He presented his case to the Company and to local reporters. One columnist, Ethel Beckwith, turned his words to bullets in a fierce article that she titled "50G Tag on Fire Dept Sets Easton on Fire." Beckwith began by noting citizen outrage over an estimate by the fire department's attorney, Gregory Willis, that the Company had assets of over \$50,000. According to Beckwith, this revelation "may cause a complete overhauling of the fire department. First results will be heard at the budget hearing April 23, when some Eastonites are prepared to ask 'Why give any more to a going corporation?'"

The turmoil continued through the Spring. The League of Women Voters completed its study and recommended the formation of a committee to evaluate the Fire Department. But the committee died in concept; at a special meeting, the League voted to support the Easton Volunteer Fire Company in its dispute with the Tucker twins. The rest of the Town seemed to agree. In June, the Bridgeport Post ran a brief article:

No Support for Tuckers

As far as can be learned, nobody will be making a pitch tomorrow night for the Tucker twins, Henry and Arthur, at the town hearing on their dismissal by the volunteer firemen.

The Siren Aide

Certainly, these were trying times for the Easton Volunteer Fire Company. But the times were made almost bearable by the support, enthusiasm, humor and hard work of the Siren Aides.

To bolster the Treasury, they increased their bake sales. In 1952, to bolster spirits, the women put on their first Easton Volunteer Fire Company Christmas Party.

Year after year, the Siren Aides cleaned and sewed and cooked. They bought curtains for the Fire House and hung them. They put up the shades that Civil Defense demanded. When the men gathered for a special dinner to honor one their own, the women gathered in the kitchen to cook the meal.

On January 5, 1953, the Company put on a different sort of dinner well away from the Fire House to honor the Siren Aide. This highly successful gala proved to be the first in a series of Ladies Nights that the Company has sponsored.

A Year of Change

1956 proved to be a pivotal year for the Easton Volunteer Fire Company.

The State of Connecticut repealed its ban on games of chance: for the first time in eight years, the Company would have a Carnival!

For the first time in 25 years, Turb Bush would not run for Chief. In April, William "Bud" Crossman took over as Chief, a post that he would hold for the next 18 years.

With help from the Town, the Company bought a new fire engine.

And on October 1, 1956, the membership adopted a completely new set of by-laws.

Printed and bound, the **BY-LAWS OF THE EASTON VOLUNTEER FIRE CO. NO. 1, INC.** opened with a clear statement of the Company's purpose:

The object of this organization shall be the preservation and protection of property in the Town of Easton.

After identifying the Officers of the Company and their responsibilities, the By-Laws name the Standing Committees:

(a) A Nominating Committee, to consist of three members, to recommend nominations for office.

(b) An Auditing Committee, to consist of two members, to make an annual audit of the books and records of the company and to report thereon in writing at the annual meeting.

(c) A Sick Committee, to consist of two members, to visit with and comfort members who may be sick, and their families.

(d) A Purchasing Committee, to consist of three members, who shall sanction all purchases and approve all bills.

(e) A Grievance Committee, to consist of seven members, who shall investigate complaints against any member or concerning the operation and functioning of the company, and who shall submit written signed reports in connection therewith. In the case of a complaint against a member, the member shall have an opportunity for a hearing before the Committee.

Article VII dealt with the sensitive subject of Membership. After years of defeat, those who favored a cap on the size of the Company were victorious:

Sec 1. The membership of the company, consisting of active members and paid-up life members, shall be limited to 125.

Section 2, on the other hand, suggested that just about anyone could apply as long as he or she met the following requirements:

Any person of good standing in the Town of Easton who shall be over 18 years of age and shall have resided in the Town of Easton for at least one year shall be eligible for active membership.

A candidate's written application would be considered "at the next regular meeting and, if approved by a majority vote, the candidate shall be so notified."

But if a candidate was rejected? Section 4 of Article VI covered that possibility along with a warning to members:

When a candidate has been rejected, it shall be the duty of the Secretary to notify him of his rejection or acceptance, and any member who shall disclose the fact of such rejection to any person not a member, shall be liable to discipline. This By-Law shall be read in open meeting immediately after the rejection of any candidate.

The initiation fee was set at \$1.00 and annual dues at \$2.00.

The first slate of officers elected under the new by-laws included these volunteers:

President.....Edward Bishop
Vice President Charles Raushkolb
Secretary Howard Nichols
Recording Secretary Adrian St. Pierre
Treasurer..... Robert Anton

Chief..... Bud Crossman
1st Assistant Victor Sondergaard
2nd Assistant Edward Selski

Better Times...More Land?

As the 1960's approached, both Easton and its Easton Volunteer Fire Company fared well. The Town's population stood at 3407: its schools bulged with war babies and its churches with their families. The old roads had been paved and named; new roads were laid as fast as new homes rose on pastures and fields.

With the Carnival back, internal pressures on the Company subsided and relations with the Town improved. Attendance at meetings returned to pre-ban levels. The Company purchased dress uniforms (red shirt, blue trousers) for members who marched in parades and twenty police-band radios for use at home. An \$18,000 LaFrance pumper arrived in February, 1957. There was talk of a bowling team.

And talk of more land. Or, at least, *different* land.

In December, 1958, the membership first entertained the idea of selling the Fire House and building a new one on land across Center Road. Several months later, President Bishop appointed two committees to research the social and fire fighting needs of the Company: the new Building Committee consisted of Bob Chamberlain, Al St. Pierre and Fred Candee; Chief Crossman headed the Planning Committee and was joined by Turb Bush and Charlie Raushkolb.

The committees conducted diligent, thorough investigations. In October, 19, the Company met to examine and discuss the architectural plans and blueprints of fire houses in neighboring towns and cities. During the ensuing months, the members considered a number of options as well as their costs.

Each option involved a lot of money- money that would not come from the Town. The funds would have to come, instead, from the coffers of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company or from a local bank. As the discussions continued, the size of the cost estimates and the threat of debt stirred the Yankee concern and conservatism of more

than a few members. In June, 1960, there was a "motion made and seconded to look into the amendment of the by-laws, election procedures and the sale of the Fire House." A revised set of by-laws appeared in October. The principal modification to the 1956 by-laws was the insertion of a tough Article X: Article Requiring Specific Authorization:

Sec 1. Lands, buildings or other real property of the Company may be sold, mortgaged or otherwise encumbered, and Company funds in excess of \$2500 for any single project may be committed or expended only upon the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the entire active and paid up membership, cast either personally or by written proxy specifically authorizing such vote, at two regular meetings held not more than six months apart. The foregoing limitations shall not apply to temporary expenditures made or incurred in connection with fund raising activities.

Sec 2. The provision of this Article X of these By-Laws may be amended only in the manner provided in Section 1 hereof.

Article X ruthlessly shielded the Company's assets from its core of active volunteers - those officers and others who shouldered the burden of the Company's operations. In the future, the desires and decisions of the men who regularly showed up at meetings and fires would not be enough to authorize an outlay or take out a loan of more \$2500. Nor would an affirmative vote from a simple majority of the Company suffice.

Instead, loans and capital outlays would require two votes of the entire Company at meetings at least a month apart and each meeting had to produce a two-thirds vote in favor of the transaction.

Today, thirty-six years later, Article X remains a powerful, formidable component of the Company's checks and balances. In 1960, its underlying insistence on rigorous review and open discussion killed the plans for a new Fire House. The talk turned instead to an addition that could house the ambulance and a new water tanker. The Company approved plans for an addition in January, 1962, and received a bid of \$6575 a month later. But Article X proved to be a formidable barrier and the proponents could not muster enough votes to finance the addition. Instead, the Company erected a 20' x 40' pre-fabricated garage behind the fire house.

A year later, when the Company talked about securing a little more land, just a couple of tiny parcels on either side of the fire house, 51 members showed up for the initial vote. And for the first time in the history of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company, land lost.

The Sixties

Despite these early real estate set backs, the Sixties was another good era.

Easton continued to change its economic base but change was gradual.

The Company changed gradually as well. In 1961, membership was 110. In 1963, the number was 118. In 1969, as the decade closed, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company had 130 members. And despite Al St. Pierre's warning in March, 1964, that "the Fire Company should make an all out effort to encourage better attendance at meetings," at least twenty-five firefighters showed up for most meetings. The Candee brothers, Fred and Harold, directed the Company's business affairs during these years, while Bud Crossman continued to oversee line activities as Chief.

As the tumultuous decade rolled along, the Company voted to send Christmas presents to members in the Armed Services. In 1969, Jack Johnston suggested that the Carnival feature a psychedelic booth as an appeal to the NOW generation. A little later, the Company purchased 100 American Flag patches for members' uniforms.

An active and enthusiastic Entertainment Committee added measurably to the social side of fire fighting. Working hand-in-hand with the Siren Aides, the committee sponsored a steady stream of events that included: pot luck dinners, family picnics, "smokers," St. Patrick's Day dances, Christmas parties, and pre-Carnival parties.

In 1968, a portion of the Company's administrative power was shifted from the members' monthly meetings to occasional Officers' Meetings. An Officers' Meeting was devoted to one or two important issues. Without the open give-and-take of a full meeting, discussion and debate were shorter and decision-making was more efficient.

However, a more momentous change was occurring that would affect both the Town and the Department. Jack Johnston's minutes of May 23, 1965 contained this entry:

Also, the Chief stated that the Town is going to appoint a five-man committee to establish a Fire Commission.

The topic of a Fire Commission first arose as an angry response to the Department's dismissal of the Tucker Brothers in 1953. But in 1965, the idea had more substance and bearing. After internal discussions of the possible role of a Fire Commission, the Company's June meeting voted to send a letter "to the First Selectman in regard to the Fire Commission that is being formed to inform him that we would like to submit two names from the Fire Department to serve on the Committee." The September meeting went a step further:

Motion made and seconded that a favorable report be sent by the officers to the Fire Commission Committee that the Easton Volunteer Fire Company approves and is much in favor of a Fire Commission.

As the year ended, the Company was hard at work examining proposed ordinances that would define and govern the new Commission. On December 17, members attended a Town Meeting convened to discuss and debate the responsibilities of the Fire Commissioners. By the middle of 1966, one of the Company's representatives on the Commission was confident enough to report that "the Commission is making progress in many ways to benefit the Company."

The end of 1965 brought about another change: for the first time, the Annual Meeting and election of officers took place in December instead of March. There were 135 active members on the Company roster, and many showed up to elect a powerful slate:

- President..... Fred Candee
- Vice President Bill Pekar
- Recording Secretary Jack Johnston
- Corresponding Secretary Skipper Toth
- Treasurer Lanny Kochiss
- Assistant Treasurer Al St. Pierre

- Chief Bud Crossman
- 1st Assistant Sarge Reppucci
- 2nd Assistant Victor Sondergaard

A new set of by-laws was published in August, 1969.

Efforts to acquire more land and a new fire house were steady, sometimes promising, but inevitably fruitless. Unforeseen right-of-way problems surfaced in 1964. In 1965, the Company transferred \$5000 from the Building Account to the Savings Account. The windows of the existing structure were repaired that year. In 1966, smoke and heat alarms were installed in the Fire House. A "rough sketch" of a new fire house that was reviewed in March, 1967 and sent on to the Fire Commission brought little more than talk.

Occasionally, talk turned to halting attempts at action. In August, 1968, the Department's attorney suggested that "our land and a cash donation be turned over to the Town after final acceptance and approval of the proposed new fire house." In December, President Johnston announced that architect John Castle had been selected to design a Public Safety Center that would house the Town of Easton's police and fire departments, and the ambulance squad.

But the years rolled by with little to show. In June, 1970, the Town declared that the latest cost estimate for the Public Safety Center was "excessive" and came up with alternatives to a new structure. At an Officers' Meeting in November, 1970, called to deal with issues involving

the Public Safety Center, the officers concluded that the Company should rescind its offer of cash and land if Easton pursued an alternate approach.

And so, as the 50th Anniversary of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company drew near, the new building remained a dream. To interject reality, the Company instead installed a plush Members' Lounge and made a strong attempt to turn over the cost of heating and electricity to the Town.

But immense satisfaction with a job well-done pervaded all of the Company's activities, giving each a special focus and flavor. In 1971, the membership could look to the past with pride and to the future with confidence.

50 Years



1971

l to r: Doug Turey, John Gordon, Gary Csanadi, John Chatfield, Jo Kusnierzak, John Marlin, Rose Gordon, Bud Crossman, Jack Johnston. On ladders: Joe Lusebrink and Les Eckert.



1971 Executive Officers

l to r: Joseph Silhavy, Corresponding Secretary; John C. Marlin, Vice President; Gary Csanadi, Recording Secretary; John Chatfield, President and Joseph Filakosky, Treasurer.



1971 Line Officers

Standing l to r: Wm. Borofsky, Gary Csanadi, Les Eckert, Hank Kowaleski, Bob Laskay. Sitting l to r: Sarge Reppucci, Chief Wm. "Bud" Crossman, John Gordon, Norman Haller.

1971 was a year-long celebration of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company's first fifty years. In January, the Company assembled a 50th Anniversary Committee headed by Bud Crossman. Crossman and his associates, along with representatives of the Siren Aide (Marlyn Marlin, Rose Gordon and Josephine Kusnierczak), published a *History of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company* and sponsored the Anniversary Ball in October.



Siren Aide Officers

l to r: Rose Gordon, Marilyn Marlin, Dee Dennis and Olga Crossman

1972-1996

At the beginning of its third quarter-century, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company stood strong indeed. Membership headed for 150 and applications were pouring in. An average of 35 members showed up for the monthly meetings. The new Century Room, with its green paneling and red bar, had become a warm and happy place where firemen could gather to trade stories, construct strategy, and politic. In July, 1973, Turb and Gladys Bush assembled family and friends in the Century Room to celebrate their own first fifty years.

In October, 1972, the Company allocated \$16,000 for additions and modifications to the fire house. Work began without delay but by the end of March, the cost of the renovations had reached \$21,000. When the paid firefighters took time to paint the engine bays, the Company thanked them by installing a color TV in their quarters.

As another sign of the Company's inner strength, officers' elections could no longer rely on the ritual of "one vote cast by the Secretary" to approve the slate - a slate that might or might not include a candidate for each position. Instead, there were often battles for a number of the positions. The 1973 election was particularly hard-fought. Faced with Dick Grieser's enthusiastic bid for the post of Assistant Treasurer, Al St. Pierre withdrew from the race. Captain Stuart Jaffe mounted a campaign to unseat First Assistant Chief Charlie Laskay. Laskay did not withdraw: Jaffe was beaten back handily.

To be sure, an occasional cloud drifted across the bright skies of the 1970's. In his 1973 Annual Report, Treasurer Peter Hallstrom worried about the Company's financial condition:

Financially, it was not our best year ever. Our carnival receipts were higher than ever before, by about 15%. But when one takes into account the havoc that inflation has raised with our economy, the resulting increase is negligible.

In March, 1974, after a series of disputes with the Fire Commission, Bud Crossman abruptly resigned as Chief. Charlie Laskay took over and came face-to-face with an ugly issue. All through March and into April, the Helen Keller Middle School had been the target of bomb scares that regularly emptied the school and summoned the Department's men and equipment. In June, Laskay made a difficult tactical decision: the Fire Department would no longer respond to the bomb scares. Instead, trucks and men would remain on alert at the fire house, a mile north of the school. Shortly, afterwards, the bomb scares ceased.

The By-Laws of '74

Even with a setback or two, these were good times for the Easton Volunteer Fire Company as new members swelled the ranks and new money filled the coffers.

Somewhat unexpectedly, however, growth was accompanied by complexity. The House Committee sounded an early alert in its 1973 report on the management of social events. The report noted the need for a more disciplined system of event planning that would include budgets and financial controls. A year later, Bud Crossman asked for an "accounting of the House Committee's finances."

New by-laws that were approved in September, 1974, took aggressive steps to help the Company deal with its growth. As a start, Article I clarified for the membership and for the citizens of Easton, the Company's financial structure and objective:

Sec 1: This organization shall be known as the Easton Volunteer Fire Company No. 1: A Non-Profit Organization.

Article IV (Duties of Officers) added significantly to the definition of the Treasurer's role:

Sec 4: It shall be the duty of the Treasurer to receive all moneys from the Secretary or other sources, to pay all bills approved by the finance committee, and to perform such other duties as pertains to the office of the Treasurer.

In addition, Section 4 of Article IV insisted that the Treasurer provide a monthly report of the Company's transactions during the previous month.

But Article V (Committees) codified the changes that would have the greatest impact on the Company. Section 1(b) set up an Audit Committee responsible for "the audit of the Treasurer's records by a qualified accountant during the month of December. This report is to be submitted at the January meeting." Section 1(d) upgraded the Purchasing Committee to a Finance Committee assigned to "sanction all reasonable purchases and approve all bills before payment by the Treasurer."

Section 1(f) of Article V stated that the House Committee would be responsible for the "operation of the Company's social facilities" and required that the Chairman "submit a written report of committee finances at three month intervals." In Section 1(g), a Building Committee was given responsibility for "the maintenance of the physical plant and real estate of the Company."

These sections of Article V were added or expanded to help the Company deal more effectively with its internal operations. Section 1(e) of Article V, on the other hand, addressed the challenges that members faced when they dealt with each other. It is the longest section of the 1974 by-laws:

Every member of the Company is expected to conduct his affairs in a manner which will not bring discredit upon the Company. Actions which jeopardize the reputation of the Company will result in investigation by the Grievance Committee, consisting of seven regular members. The member in question shall have an opportunity to be present at this hearing. By majority vote of the committee, disciplinary action may be recommended to the membership. If so recommended, the member will be brought up on charges at the next regular meeting. Majority vote of the membership present at

this meeting will apply as to disciplinary action, which may be a period of suspension or termination of membership.

Results of this action are not to be publicized outside the Company.



February 1975 - Line Officers

Chief, Charles Laskay; 1st Assistant Norman Haller and 2nd Assistant Stuart Jaffe.

Fire Marshal Pander

The fortitude of the Grievance Committee and the skills of its members received a tough test in May, 1976.

Ironically, memories of an earlier grievance were on the minds of many senior members: Art Tucker had just died and Henry Tucker was in the hospital. Twenty-three years before, the Tuckers had been confronted, disciplined and dismissed from the Company because they had misunderstood and abused their power. Twenty-three years later, Joseph Pander seemed prone to make the same mistakes.

Joe Pander had joined the Company in 1970. In 1975, the Town appointed him Fire Marshal. Pander took the job seriously. From the Company's perspective, far too seriously.

Certainly, no one questioned the validity of a function and position that had grown in scope and relevance. When Pander took over, the Fire Marshal was a key safety officer who studied, interpreted and enforced the Town's Fire Code. In this role, he conducted regular inspections of Easton's schools, shops and offices. If his inspection uncovered a problem, the Fire Marshal issued a citation.

The citation specified the nature of the offense and set a deadline for its remedy.

Appropriately, none of Easton's buildings was exempt from the process. But when roaming through the Fire House, Joe Pander's inquiring eye seemed to stop just about everywhere. The Company carefully considered his first notices and took corrective action. But as Pander issued citation after citation, the Company interpreted his attitude and actions as belligerence rather than diligence. In the monthly meeting of May, 1976, there was an attempt to drop Joe Pander from membership. Instead, President Joseph Filakowsky asked the Grievance Committee to deal with the matter.

Led by Chairman Al St. Pierre, the committee met with Pander on May 26 and again on June 2 to examine his motives and the Company's response. In the Company's June meeting, the Grievance Committee summarized its investigation:

We believe that Fireman Joseph Pander has conducted his affairs in a manner that has brought discredit and hardship upon the Company. We cannot find fault with the zeal and enthusiasm with which Mr. Pander has performed his duties as Fire Marshal, but also believe that as a member of the Company, he could have used more discretion in the performance of his duties as they relate to the Company.

We cannot and do not expect preferential treatment, but can and do expect to be treated in a reasonable manner.

The Committee recommended that Joe Pander "be restored to Associate membership and put on probationary status for a year."

The controversy had a secondary result. Today, twenty years later, the Town of Easton employs four Fire Marshals to enforce the code. They are all members of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company. But for a while, Fire Marshals did not inspect the Fire House. In June 1976, the Fire Commission took over the job. A few years later, they handed it back to the Fire Marshals.

A Firewhat?

At the beginning of 1977, nine men directed the affairs of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company:

President Joe Filakowsky
Vice President Bud Crossman
Treasurer Ira Friedman
Assistant Treasurer Dick Grieser
Recording Secretary Ron Kent
Corresponding Secretary Brainerd McGuire

Chief Charlie Laskay
First Assistant Stu Jaffe
Second Assistant Wayne Crossman

An average of 41 members showed up for meetings. The Company was in sound financial shape. The softball team had walked off with the league title; the bowling team was burning up the alleys. Once a quarter, the Siren Aide prepared a sit-down dinner for the men before their monthly meeting.

Then, suddenly, Rose Gordon intruded.

On June 5, 1977, Gordon applied for membership.

Not as a Siren Aide. Not to help cook and clean. Rose Gordon wanted to fight fires. She applied for membership with the Easton Volunteer Fire Company.

The Company would never be the same.

Article VII of the 1974 by-laws made no mention of gender in its requirements for membership:

Sec 1. Applicant shall be recommended by three or more regular members.

Sec 2. Any person of good standing in the town of Easton who shall be over 18 years of age and shall have resided in the town of Easton for at least one (1) year shall be eligible for membership.

Indeed, gender had never been a topic of the by-laws - even in 1922 - because gender had never been a consideration. Men put out the fires in Easton, and in Weston and Wilton, and in Bridgeport and Stamford and New York City.

A firewoman?

A month later, Jane Eckert submitted her application.

The threat of change rumbled through the Company, fueled by fear and passion, accompanied by rumor and debate. Firemen fought with each other. They fought with their wives, their daughters, their sisters.

Many battled themselves. A fireman could get up in the morning receptive and tolerant...ready to adjust to the new order. But by the end of the evening, after a couple of hours with friends in the Century Room, he'd realize again that a fire house was no place for a woman.

Rose Gordon was a forceful, committed individual who had served with the Siren Aide. But she suffered from chronic back troubles. After carrying around the weight of an air pack during a training exercise, she withdrew her application.

Jane Eckert stood firm. Backed by Chief Laskay, she was placed on probation for the six months required by the 1974 by-laws.

Article VII of the by-laws also specified voting procedures for new members:

Sec 3. At the regular meeting for the month following the completion of such probation, the Chief shall submit his report, and final action taken on the candidate. Rejection for membership shall be caused by three (3) or more negative votes.

Sec 4. When a candidate for active membership has been rejected by three (3) negative votes, it shall be the duty of the Secretary to notify him of his rejection, and any member who shall disclose the fact of such rejection to any person not a member, shall be liable to discipline. This by-law shall be read in open meeting immediately after the rejection of any candidate.

In the meeting of February 1978, Chief Laskay reported on the probation of two candidates: Dennis Swanson and Jane Eckert. The minutes of the meeting tell a tale that was being told in departments throughout the Northeast:

Chief Laskay informed the members that Dennis Swanson had moved out of town. He recommended Jane Eckert as a regular member. Tellers were appointed and the application was voted on. The vote being unfavorable, Jane Eckert's application for active membership was rejected.

The Secretary was instructed to inform her in writing of the rejection.

A Leader's Loss

On May 6, 1979 while driving on Stepney Road in Easton, Bud Crossman was killed when a van crossed into his lane and struck his car head-on. The tragedy battered the Easton Volunteer Fire Company with the force of a bleak winter storm.

At the time of his death, Crossman was a living Legend, a man who, for many in Easton, exemplified the spirit of the volunteer. During thirty-six years with the Company, he had served in just about every position and on almost every committee. His uninterrupted tenure of 18 years as Chief of the Department left a fire-fighting core composed of modern equipment, a rigorous training program and a formidable response record. When he resigned the Chief's post in 1974, he stayed out of the way of his successor. And turned his attention to other interests. In 1977, he became Vice President. A year later, Bud Crossman was elected President of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company.

In recognition of his contributions, the Company formed an honor guard for the wake and funeral; at the November meeting, the members stipulated that the Easton Volunteer Fire Company shall include in its annual budget money for the William Crossman Memorial Fund so that it will remain perpetually solvent. Shortly afterwards, the Crossman family approved the use of the fund's income for grave markers, plaques and name plates to honor the Company's deceased members.

The Long Road to Center Road

Easton was changing.

The children of the Sixties were adults now, husbands and wives looking for a house. Looking for a house in a town with good schools and churches, playgrounds for the kids, concerned police and firemen.

For a growing number of families, Easton fit the bill. Developers moved in, bought more of the farms, and built new homes - many in the North End of town. From 1965 to 1980, the size of Easton's Grand List of homes increased from 1505 to 2799.

Early on, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company had recognized the implications of Easton's changing demographics. In 1974, the Company began to explore



March 1978 - Siren Aide Installation of Officers

President, Louise (Mrs. Oliver) Smith; Vice-President Dee (Mrs. Cyril) Dennis; Treasurer, Toni (Mrs. Anthony) Grosso; Secretary, Natalie (Mrs. Ira) Friedman.



1978 Carnival - Siren Aides

l to r: Nancy Slady, Marilyn Marlin, Betty Bratz, Liza Bratz, Barbara Smith, Caren Laskay and Melba Laskay.

the need for a larger fleet of fire trucks. President Joe Filakowsky used the meeting of June 2, 1975 to announce that the Administrative Officers had started to devise a means to update the Company's role in Easton. In March, 1976, Chief Charlie Laskay first officially called for the construction of a new firehouse in the North End of town.

At the same time, there was growing concern about the condition of the existing quarters on Sport Hill Road. An inspection towards the end of 1976 indicated that the building "needs to be jacked up and repaired". Filakowsky appointed a New Addition Building Committee in May, 1978: the committee's objective was to look into the pros and cons of an addition to the fire house that would include bays for new trucks. Committee Chairman Bill Borofsky reported soon afterwards that the addition would cost about \$40,000. After considerable debate, the Company gave the Committee \$750 to cover the cost of an architect's rendering and blueprints. In deference to Article X, proxies were sent to the members, seeking their approval to spend \$40,000.



1981 Line Officers

l to r: Bill Borofsky, 1st Asst. Chief; Stuart Jaffe, Chief; Bradford Chandler, 2nd Asst. Chief.

The idea of a North End fire house was by no means a memory. When the members failed to authorize funds for the Sport Hill addition, the Fire Commission came out in favor of a new North End building to be built within two years. A few days later, however, Easton's First Selectman told the Company to proceed with the addition because there were no plans for a North End fire house before 1985.

Instead, the Company sided with the Fire Commission and formed a North End Building Committee to look for land north of Stepney Road. By May 1979, the Committee had an agreement with Vince Bartosik to buy some land, and was about to employ a local architect who had worked with the Company on its earlier dreams.

Bartosik changed his mind, so the committee opened negotiations with Bridgeport Hydraulic



1981 Executive Officers

l to r: Walter Reck, Secretary; Oliver Smith, Vice President; Paul Greiser, Corresponding Secretary; Mike Sharp, Treasurer; Peter Hallstrom, President.

Company for a tiny piece of its extensive holdings. Their talks continued through most of 1980 and 1981, but with no firm result.

In January, 1982, the Company formed yet another committee - the Feasibility Study Committee - to review the town's current and future needs and the Company's ability to meet those needs. In February, this Committee recommended an addition of two bays to the existing fire house and the development of a North End fire house. In October, Bridgeport Hydraulic said that they would lease three acres to the Company.

Perhaps exhausted by this tortuous path, a majority of the company's administrative officers stepped down at the end of 1982. The new slate included:

- President Ollie Smith
- Vice President Peter Hallstrom
- Corresponding Secretary Walter Reck
- Recording Secretary Peter Neary
- Treasurer Brainerd McGuire
- Assistant Treasurer Bob Anton

- Chief Stuart Jaffe
- First Assistant Bill Borofsky
- Second Assistant Jim Edwards

Shortly after taking over, President Smith initiated a series of discussions on the direction of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company and a formal survey of members' feelings about new facilities. The results of the survey showed that the membership strongly favored adding to their present facilities or constructing facilities on Company property across the street on Center Road. There was little support for a North End fire house.

The Fire Commission, however, felt differently. In September, Fire Commissioner George Beno met with the Company to go over the town's fire fighting needs. Beno noted that the Commission now favored the addition of an Equipment Storage facility on Bridgeport Hydraulic property in the North End. Chief Jaffe and President Smith responded by sharing the results of the membership survey

and the results of a separate study conducted by the Line Officers. The Officers' study estimated that Easton would need six fire trucks by the end of 1992 and the addition of four bays to the current fire house.

At about the same time, 1968 fantasies of a central Public Safety Center surfaced in meetings around town. To counter these proposals, President Smith formed The Committee on the Direction of the Easton Volunteer Fire Department. TCDEVFD was an instant success and the Public Safety Center disappeared from public consideration.

Gradually, the town and the Company moved towards a consensus: the Easton Volunteer Fire Company would sell its existing facility and build a new building across the street on the Company's Center Road property:

On February 7, 1983, First Assistant Chief Bill Borofsky was appointed Chairman of the New Building Committee and assigned to represent the Company in upcoming meetings with the Town. In May, a poll of the membership indicated nearly unanimous support for a building on Center Road, and the New Building Committee was directed to go ahead with their plans to sell the Sport Hill fire house. First, however, there was the problem of the bats.



1982 Carnival Finance Committee

l to r: Ollie Smith, Al St. Pierre, Paul Greiser and Bob Anton.

Bats had taken up residence in the Sport Hill attic some years before and had nests all over the building. In 1983, these bats were members of an endangered species and extermination was out of the question. After careful consideration, the Company hired an exterminator who boasted of up-to-date techniques that could drive the mammals from their habitats without harm.

In October, 1983, the New Building Committee announced that Sport Hill was for sale. Within hours, the Company had received a firm bid of \$300,000 accompanied by a binder. For the next nine months, the Company's representatives hammered out details of an agreement. In the meeting of August 6, 1984, the New Building

Committee announced that *"everything is signed, sealed and delivered. A meeting will be called to make up our draft that will go to the membership."*

Unfortunately, the Committee's confidence failed to anticipate the many ruts which remained in the road to Center Road.

In early September, proxies did go out to the membership and the approval was overwhelming. But there seemed to be little appreciation for the complexity of the larger task, and few answers to key questions. The Company had a serious offer on the old building but the building was in no condition to be transferred if only because the bats were back (after \$1200 to the exterminator) and the roof leaked. And if a sale did go through, what about the next steps?

After a sale, where would the Company go? The firemen might end up with a nice piece of land and a nice piece of change, but no home. Who was going to design the new fire house? Who would build it? How much would it cost? Where would the money come from? What about approvals from P&Z? How long would it all take?

The buyer backed out.

All through 1985 and well into 1986, the Company moved forward and back along this road, deepening the ruts but gaining little ground. Then, suddenly, New Building Committee Chairman Jack Johnston reported progress. In April, 1986, Johnston stated that the Committee was negotiating with the lawyers who would represent the Company. In July, the Committee met with Easton's Planning and Zoning Commission for a review of the Company's intentions. At the same time, an architect began work on the blueprints. In September, Johnston hired a professional estimator to derive cost guidelines. Using the estimator's data, the New Building Committee concluded that the Fire House would cost approximately \$800,000.

The Planning & Zoning Commission then asked for more details. In the meeting of January 1987, architect Phil Cerrone shared his renderings and blueprints with the Company while President Ed Kovacs noted the Town's interest in buying the fire house on Sport Hill. In February, Kovacs asked members to return the proxies that would authorize the Easton Volunteer Fire Company to pay \$800,000 for a new fire house.

The Company established a Memorial Construction Account in April and turned over P&Z's complaint about the height of the proposed building to the attorneys. In June, P&Z issued an approval qualified only by concern about the landscaping. Bill Borofsky, Jim Wright and Wayne Crossman then went to the New York State Fireman's Convention, looking for a compressor.

A record 62 firefighters attended the meeting of November 2, 1987. Late in the meeting, Johnston stunned his friends with news that the fire house might well cost \$1.5 million - almost twice his earlier estimate.

This nearly unimaginable number forced the Company to deal directly with one of the key questions: exactly where would all the money come from?

Treasurer Jim Lindquist stepped in with the answers.

Ever since 1921, the Treasurers of the Easton Volunteer Fire Company had worked hard to be sure the Company ended up with more money at the end of the year than at the beginning. Even during the first half of the 1950's, when the Company was without a Carnival, the books showed a net gain every year.

This non-profit organization's profits were no accident: Treasurers and Assistant Treasurers kept a close conservative watch over income, expenses and a growing portfolio of short-term investments. Nothing was taken for granted: the cost of every outing and event was scrupulously recorded. Almost nothing was free until a fireman attained Life Member status.

Most importantly, this sense of fiscal responsibility pervaded the management of the Carnivals. Each year, the Carnival Committee would sit down in April to consider an alternative supplier of rides and games - someone with a better price. Shortly afterwards, the Committee would come up with a budget that anticipated the costs and revenues of every event.

Each year, year after year, the Carnival showed a substantial return. Each year, year after year after year, the Carnival's net was banked.

By the end of 1987, the Company's liquid assets totaled nearly \$400,000. (Had she been around, Ethel Beckwith would have succumbed.) The Company could realistically expect to receive \$250,000 from the sale of the Sport Hill property after the bats were gone, the roof fixed and the walls steam-cleaned. But what about the rest of the money - where would the Company find another \$850,000?

In December, Johnston pointed out that the New Building Committee was reviewing the nature and cost of each item in the estimator's projection and hoped to shave the \$1.5 million estimate substantially. He then asked the members for permission to spend up to \$1 million on One Center Road - \$200,000 more than he had initially requested. The Company did not respond to his request until February, 1988 when President Kovac noted that the officers had decided to delay a second funding request until the general contractors' bids had been received and evaluated.

On March 2, low bidder Caldwell & Walsh of Ridgefield came in at \$1.3 million (\$1.146 million without a basement). Johnston, Lindquist and Kovac gave in. Proxies

were sent to the membership asking for permission to spend up to \$1.3 million on the new fire house and, again, the favorable response was almost unanimous. In April, 1988, the basement was dropped, the price dropped and the pace quickened.

On June 6, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company signed a contract with Caldwell & Walsh, and held ground-breaking a few days later. Throughout the ceremony, however, some of the participants shifted nervously as they wondered and worried. The back-hoes had arrived. But not the funds.

Weeks earlier, Jim Lindquist began talking to the Selectmen about the nature of Easton's financial support for its new fire-fighting center. For years, Easton had paid the Company an annual rental on the Sport Hill facility. This arrangement allowed the Easton Volunteer Fire Company to continue to own the property and generated a reliable flow of funds to cover some of its operating costs. Lindquist asked the Town to replace the rental agreement with a long-term lease and to prepay the first fifteen years of the lease with a check for \$500,000. The Selectmen promised to get back to him.

In the meeting of August 1, 1988 Lindquist announced that the Company had qualified for a mortgage of \$600,000.

In September, the Town did respond to Lindquist but with a far more generous plan. Easton would indeed sign a 99-year lease. The Town would also issue construction bonds worth \$500,000 and turn over the proceeds to the Company. The Company reacted to this unexpected windfall offer with skepticism:

A motion was made and seconded that the Easton Volunteer Fire Company not give the Town of Easton any ownership in the building.



Groundbreaking for New Building

l to r: Architect, Philip Cerone; Building Committee Chairman, Jack Johnston; President, Ed Kovac; Siren Aide President, Louise Smith; Chief, William Borofsky; Chairman Fire Commission, Robert Connell and Ted Meyer, First Selectman.

In November, the Town approved bonding of \$500,000. It then signed the long-term lease and prepared to turn over \$500,000 - no strings attached.

After payments to the architect and estimator, \$350,000 remained in the Cash accounts.

Efforts to sell the Sport Hill fire house were well underway and estimates of its contribution again ran as high as \$300,000.

The Company could turn to the bank for a mortgage on the property of up to \$600,000.



September, 1989 - First Open House in New Building

At the beginning of 1989, the funds available to build the Center Road Fire House totaled \$1.25 million.

In September, 1989 - more than a decade after the Company's first steps along the road to Center Road - the minutes of the meeting contained this Special Entry:

This page of the minutes is dedicated to the new building at One Center Road, Easton, and the members of the New Building Committee listed below. Their hard work made the building possible:

*John L. Johnston,
Chairman, New Building Committee*

*James Lindquist,
Treasurer, New Building Committee*

*Edward Kovac,
President, Easton Volunteer Fire Company*

*William Borofsky,
Chief, Easton Volunteer Fire Company*

*Peter Hallstrom
Anthony Grosso
Samuel Partridge
John Gordon
James Edwards*

*Wayne Crossman
Brainerd McGuire
Richard Grieser
Prentice Cookman
Michael Sabia*

Ronald Ochman

Firewomen

In January, 1985, almost seven years after the Company closed its doors on Jane Eckert, Lucy Crossman submitted an application. Her probationary period started a month later.

Lucy was the first woman to apply since Eckert. Unlike Jane Eckert, however, her challenge to the Company's male tradition was deeply rooted in tradition of a different sort: Lucy was a Crossman. At least, by marriage.

Lucy married Wayne Crossman in 1981.

Lucy had Wayne's full backing and the support of most of other firemen, including Chief Bill Borofsky. She was well-known throughout the Company as a tireless volunteer at countless Carnivals and as a wife who rarely complained about middle-of-the-night calls. Most of the men liked her.

Lucy Crossman's candidacy had several other advantages. One was time. In the years since Jane Eckert, fire departments all over the metropolitan area had accepted - or been forced to accept - women into their ranks. Every now and then, affirmative action's legal pall darkened the world of an older volunteer, but by 1985 most of the men of World War II had withdrawn. In 1985, a new generation was managing the affairs of the nation's volunteer fire departments.

While on probation, Crossman broke another barrier: she joined Bill Borofsky, Bruce Lewis and Mike Sabia to become the first Easton volunteers to receive Fire Fighter I certification.

And she was not yet a member.



*Easton's First Female Firefighter
Lucy Crossman*

Not everybody changed his mind, of course. A careful reading of the minutes of August 5, 1985 reveal a lingering level of discontent:

Lucy Crossman and James Jaffe have successfully completed their probationary period, both have favorable reports from Chief Bill

Borofsky. Lucy Crossman has been favorably voted in as a regular member and James Jaffe has been unanimously voted in as a regular member.

The vote for Crossman may not have been unanimous but she did receive the support of at least two-thirds of the members at the August meeting. And less than three blackballs. A month later, Samantha Cooper was not as fortunate:

"Samantha Cooper, Dan Bryant and Schuyler Sherwood have completed their probationary period, and have favorable reports from Chief Bill Borofsky. Dan Bryant and Schuyler Sherwood have been unanimously voted in as a regular member. Samantha Cooper received an unfavorable vote for membership."

Unlike Jane Eckert, however, Cooper was unwilling to back away. In the meeting of January, 1986, Chief Borofsky demanded another vote on Cooper's candidacy. Stu Jaffe strongly opposed Borofsky's request, insisting that it would set an unfortunate precedent. President Kovac put an end to the debate when he advised Borofsky (and Cooper) to re-submit the application in one year, in line with Article VII. Section 3 of the by-laws.

Cooper was rejected because, at this point, the men needed time. They had a firewoman in their midst. The men needed a chance to adjust their behavior, and maybe their language. The men needed a chance to deal with their fears.

Lucy Crossman helped at every turn. Armed with energy and humor, she fought fires, attended meetings, joined the By-laws Committee, organized an annual Open House at One Center Road for the citizens of Easton, quaffed beer at the bar, put together a fire-prevention course for the Town's baby-sitters, and planted flowers around the new fire house.

The fears diminished. Today, eight years later, five women fight fires in Easton.

The Nineties

It was a spirited and confident Easton Volunteer Fire Company that closed out 1989.

The men and women of the Company had a magnificent new building, fully equipped with the latest technology. Astonishingly, the cost of the building had come in right on target: \$1.2 million.

In 1989, the Company's trucks, hose, gear and tools were in about as good shape as the building at One Center Road.

In 1989, an average of forty-nine members attended the monthly meetings, an all-time record.

And in 1989, the Carnival set a record of its own, contributing nearly \$65,000 to replenish Company balances.

In October, the Company nominated these men to provide administrative and line leadership as it moved into the 20th Century's final decade:

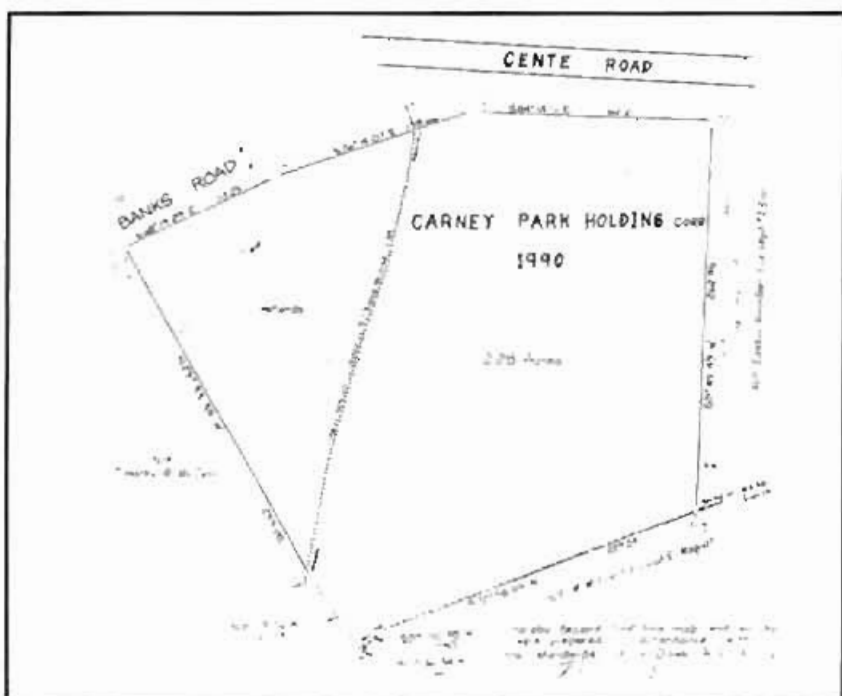
President Ed Kovac
Vice President Jim Lindquist
Corresponding Secretary Jeff LaCroix
Recording Secretary Steve Bittner
Treasurer Bill Ross
Assistant Treasurer Dick Greiser

Chief Bill Borofsky
First Assistant Rob Monda
Second Assistant Sam Partridge

Without a moment's rest, the new slate began to look for land.

Carny Park

Indeed, there was land right next to the fire house, a handsome lot of more than two acres. It was vacant, available and practical; the Department could use the property to park cars and equipment during Carnival.



Peoples Bank had title to the land but was actively looking for a buyer. In February, 1990, the Company offered \$140,000. Peoples accepted immediately.

But there were obstacles in the path towards consummation of the deal. One was money. The other was membership.

The by-laws still required membership approval of substantial expenditures. In March, ballots went out to the 118 members who were qualified to vote. During the May meeting, Vice President Lindquist reported that he had 81 votes in favor of the purchase and one vote against it.

Money was more of a problem.

Peoples was happy to sell the property but not as anxious to write the mortgage. After all, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company had just spent well over a million dollars on a new home. Could it really handle more debt? Peoples Bank was not willing to find out.

Fortunately, there were others in Easton with more faith. Bob Anton was one. When the bank backed off, firefighter Anton stepped up and personally structured a loan that overcame the hurdle.

The Company purchased the land in June, 1990. In July, title passed to the Carny Park Holding Company as the sole stockholder in the non-stock, non-profit corporation.

Settling In

At just about this time, the firefighters realized that all was not exactly right with One Center Road.

There were flaws in the construction. The minutes of September, 1990, reminded everybody that the Company still had \$65,000 in a Builder's Escrow Account. These funds would be withheld from the builder, Caldwell & Walsh, pending correction of problems such as the pitch of the floors in the bays downstairs.

During the next few months, other gaps and errors surfaced, including a serious oil leak around the oil tank, in the furnace room and deteriorating floors in the kitchen and dance area. In March, 1991, the Company estimated the cost of corrections at \$100,000.

Caldwell & Walsh had a very different view of the Company's difficulties: the problems resulted from normal wear-and-tear, or from Department abuses. They demanded their money. When the Company stood firm, Caldwell & Walsh threatened a suit.

The Easton Volunteer Fire Company sued instead. In August, 1991, after an early attempt at arbitration had failed, the Company filed suit citing specifically the damages from the oil spill. The builder filed a counter suit.

The case dragged on. In the meantime, the Company overhauled the furnace at One Center Road, removed mice from the generator and repaired leaks in the Men's Room.

Some of the settling-in problems were more complex and required more subtle solutions. To help ease the process, the House Committee devised a set of rules to guide the membership in its use of the new facilities.

But as time wore on, the novelty and excitement of One Center Road wore off. In his 1991 Annual Report, President Jim Lindquist commented wistfully that *"I would like to see some of the members and perhaps some of the wives get together with the House Committee and develop*

a coordinated plan to decorate the upstairs so we can re-create the comfortable and warm atmosphere that we enjoyed in the old Century Room across the street."

Lindquist then offered solutions to a festering sore within the fire-fighting community:

To those of us who consider themselves to be old timers I would say, learn to listen to the thoughts of the younger or newer members; and to the young bucks I would say, you must remember that the old timers have been there and that experience is still the best teacher, not just in fire-fighting but also in the interpersonal relationships required for an organization to meet its stated goals.

Late in 1992, Dave Buchanan warned that "our personnel situation has deteriorated...with fewer members attending drills and emergency situations. As existing members age and move, we need to seek active new members." When it came time to elect 1993's line officers, the Secretary cast one vote for a slate that had no Assistant Chiefs.

In April, 1993, the softball team was disbanded because of a lack of interest. In October, the Nominating Committee lacked candidates for the positions of President and Treasurer. At December's Annual Meeting, the Company invoked an Article of the by-laws which stipulates that old officers will remain until new ones can be found. Although there is no such Article, Jim Lindquist and Bill Ross did agree to serve another term.

Pushing Seventy-Five

Change seemed to be the source of the Company's difficulties.

Easton was still changing. The farming families, all except the Candeas, Edwards, Silvermans and Sladys had been replaced by smaller, more mobile, less stable professional families. Husbands and wives worked a nine or ten hour day, traveled frequently, and devoted what little time was left to their children. Not to the Fire Department.

And the Company was still struggling to adapt to the impact of earlier changes. Lucy Crossman had been elected a member of the Easton Volunteer Fire Department in 1985 but for years remained a solitary symbol of conflict within the Company.

The malfunctioning septic system at One Center Road was also something of a symbol of change which is odious and incomplete.

But, once again, the Company employed change as it rebounded from troublesome times.

In February, 1992, Lucy Crossman was installed as Deputy Fire Marshal. In December, the Company elected Amy

Borofsky as its third female firefighter.

In August, the Company voted to install an elevator at One Center Road and paid off its debt to Bob Anton.

A year later, on August 2, 1993, a workforce of younger members was appointed to an ad hoc By-Laws Committee. The newer names included Clint Salko, Jon Berger, Tony Grosso, Ed Kovac, Peter Hallstrom, Ira Friedman, and Lloyd Reisenberg.

Later that month, the Company's Open House for the citizens of Easton set a new attendance record and Carnival was an overwhelming success.

At the end of 1994, the Nominating Committee could once again present a complete slate of qualified candidates for the Company's administrative and line positions:

President	Bill Borofsky
Vice President	Schuyler Sherwood
Corresponding Secretary	Jeff LaCroix
Recording Secretary	Larry Baldyga
Treasurer	Bill Ross
Assistant Treasurer	Bill Firisin
Chief	Dave Buchanan
First Assistant	Ernie Ross
Second Assistant	Bruce Lewis

And the situation with Caldwell & Walsh crawled steadily towards a resolution. In February, 1993, Kevin Collins (a lawyer and firefighter) sent a letter to Connecticut's Assistant Attorney General requesting a report on the oil clean-up. In the Fall, Collins met with representatives of the Attorney General's office and Caldwell, Walsh. In January, 1996, the case was settled and payment to all parties are pending.

Today

Today, seventy-five years after our founders gathered at the home of Arthur Staples, the Easton Volunteer Fire Company is an organization as strong as any in the land.

After seventy-five years, our role remains worthy and our objectives clear.

After seventy-five years, our skills are sharp - our commitment is unswerving.

Today, we stand together on a rock-solid base and face a fine future.

Today, we look back with love, gratitude and admiration at the men and women who, over seventy-five years, built our base.

Chiefs



Charles Keller
Founder and Temporary Chairman
November 30, 1921



Aurel Ruman
November 21, 1921 - March, 1922



Chileon Dickerson
March, 1922 - May, 1925



Edward P. Mills
May, 1925 - March, 1931



Arthur "Turb" Bush
March, 1931 - March, 1956



William "Bud" Crossman
March, 1956 - April, 1974



Charles Laskay
1974 - 1978



Stuart Jaffe
1979 - 1983



William Borofsky
1984 - 1991



David H. Buchanan
1992 -

Presidents



Harry J. Escott
March, 1933 - January, 1935



Elsworth Wilkes
January, 1935 - March, 1944



Howard W. Andrews
March, 1944 - April, 1945



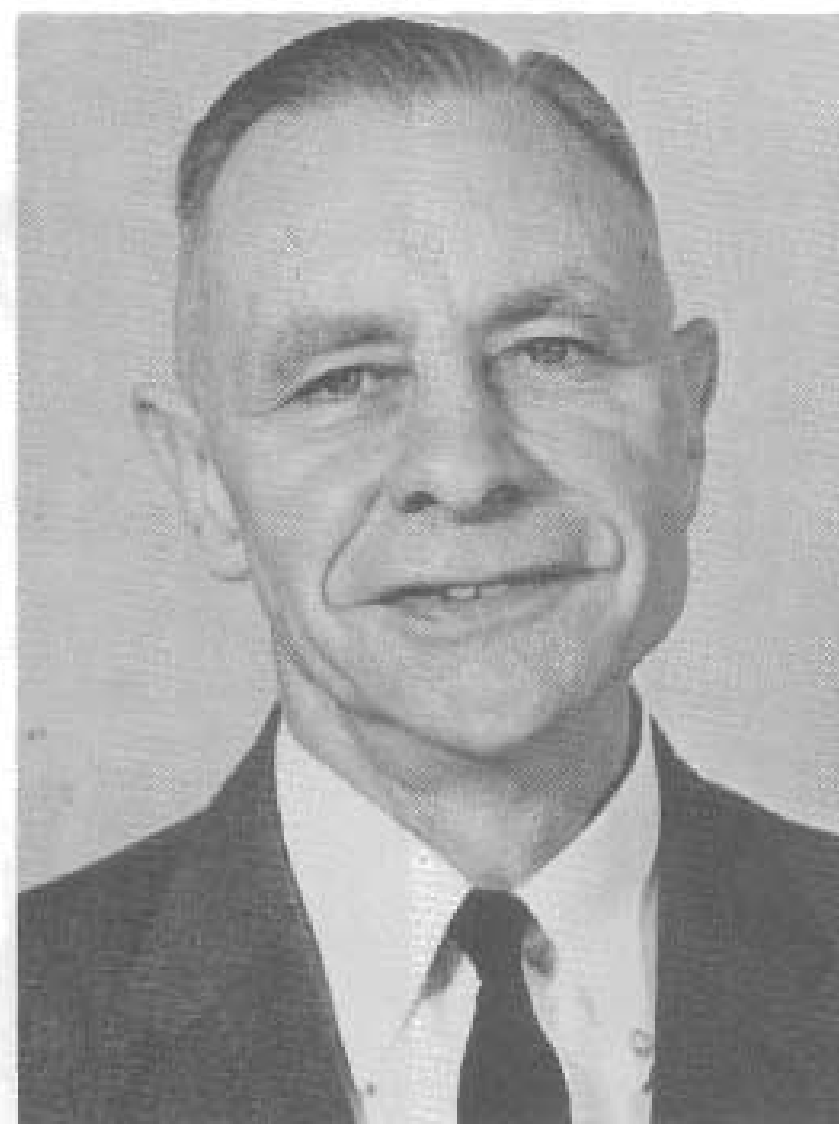
George A. Marsh
April, 1945 - April, 1950



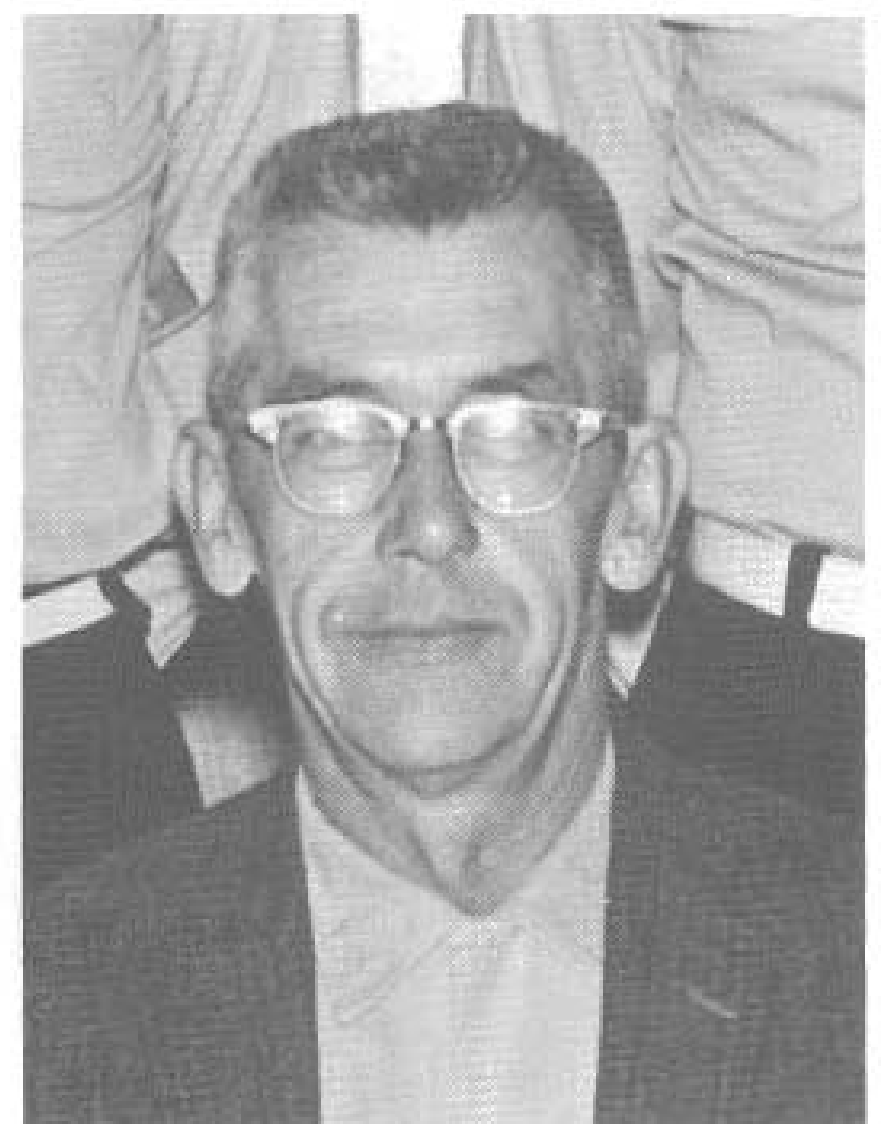
Alexander Jaffe
April, 1951 - March, 1954



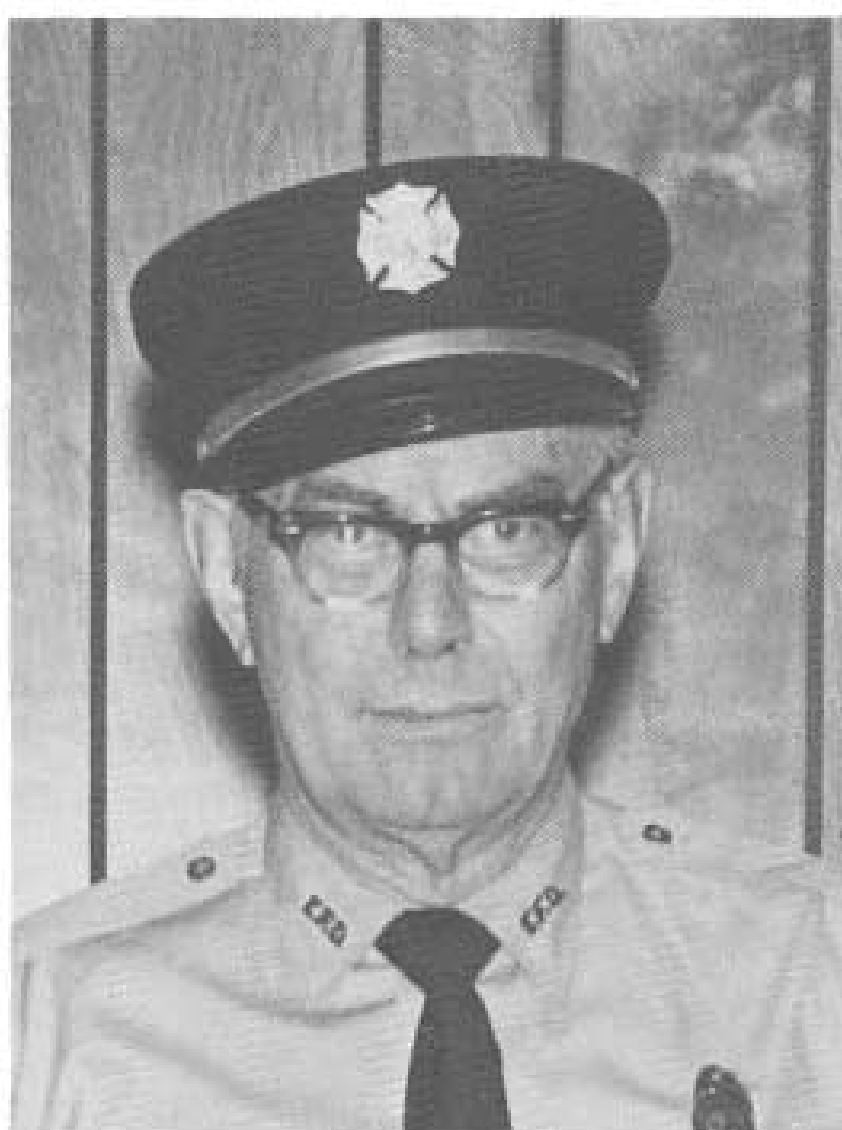
William C. Henry
March, 1954 - March, 1957



Edward H. Bishop
March, 1957 - March, 1960



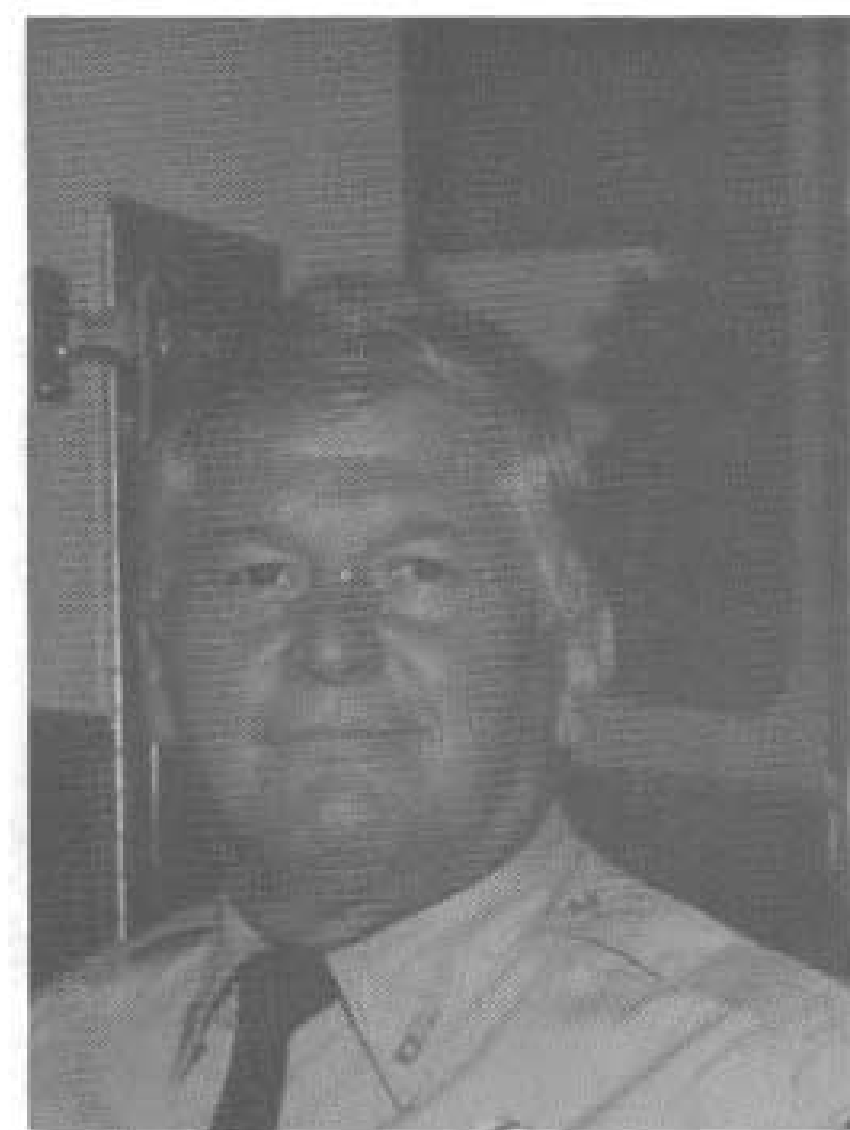
Frank Matthews
March, 1960 - March, 1962



G. Donald Potter
March, 1962 - March, 1965



Fred B. Candee, Jr.
March, 1965 - January, 1967

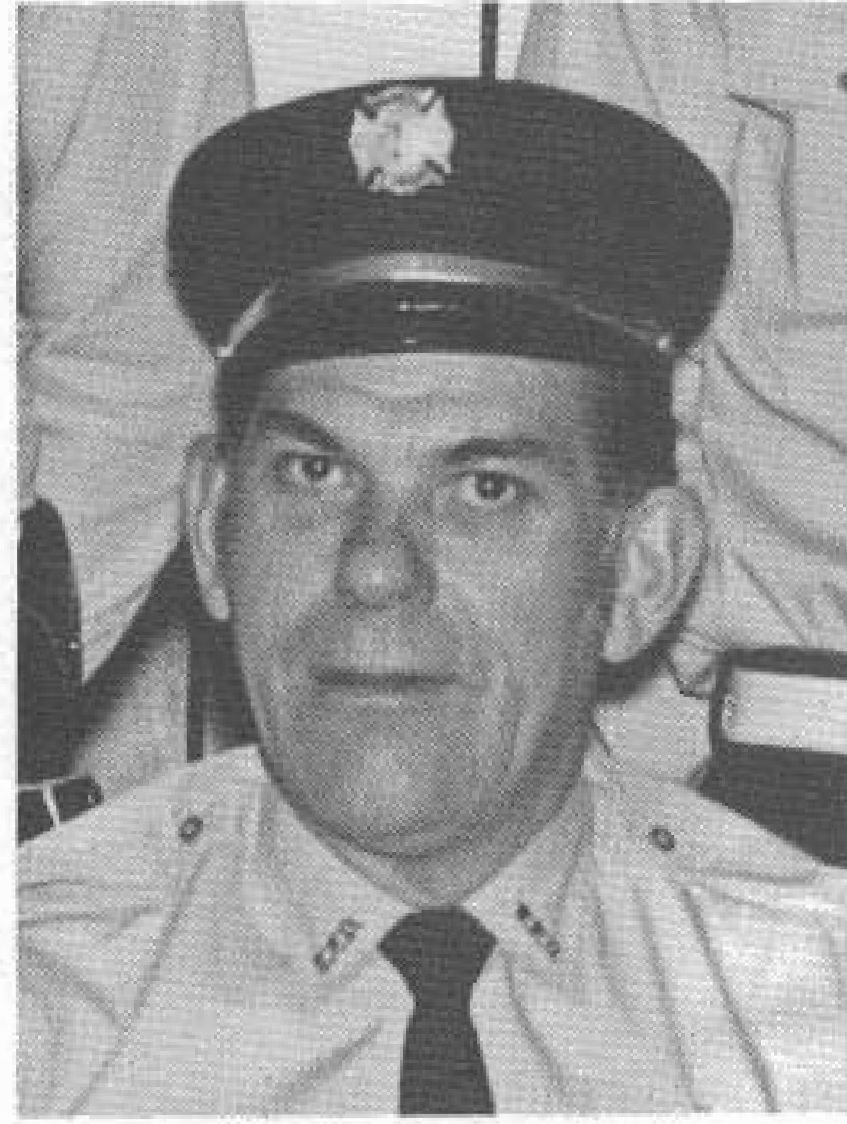


John L. "Jack" Johnston
1967 - 1968

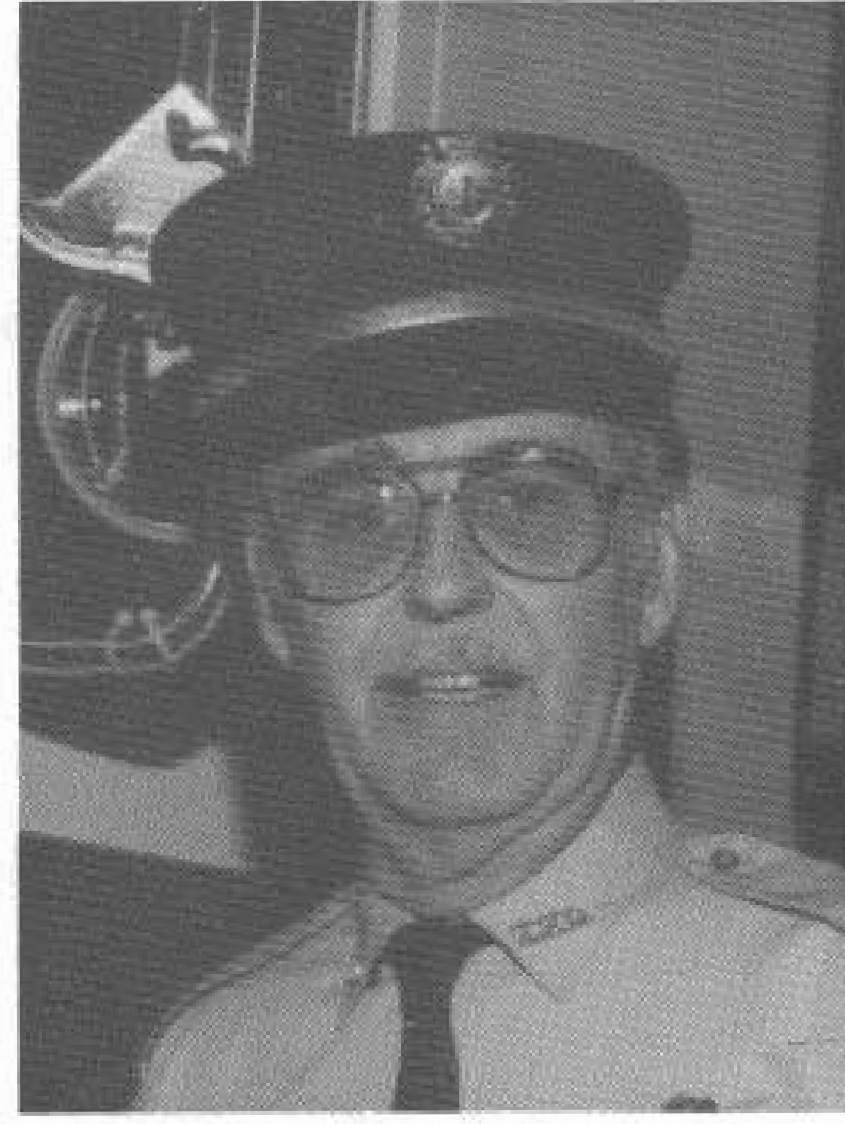
Presidents



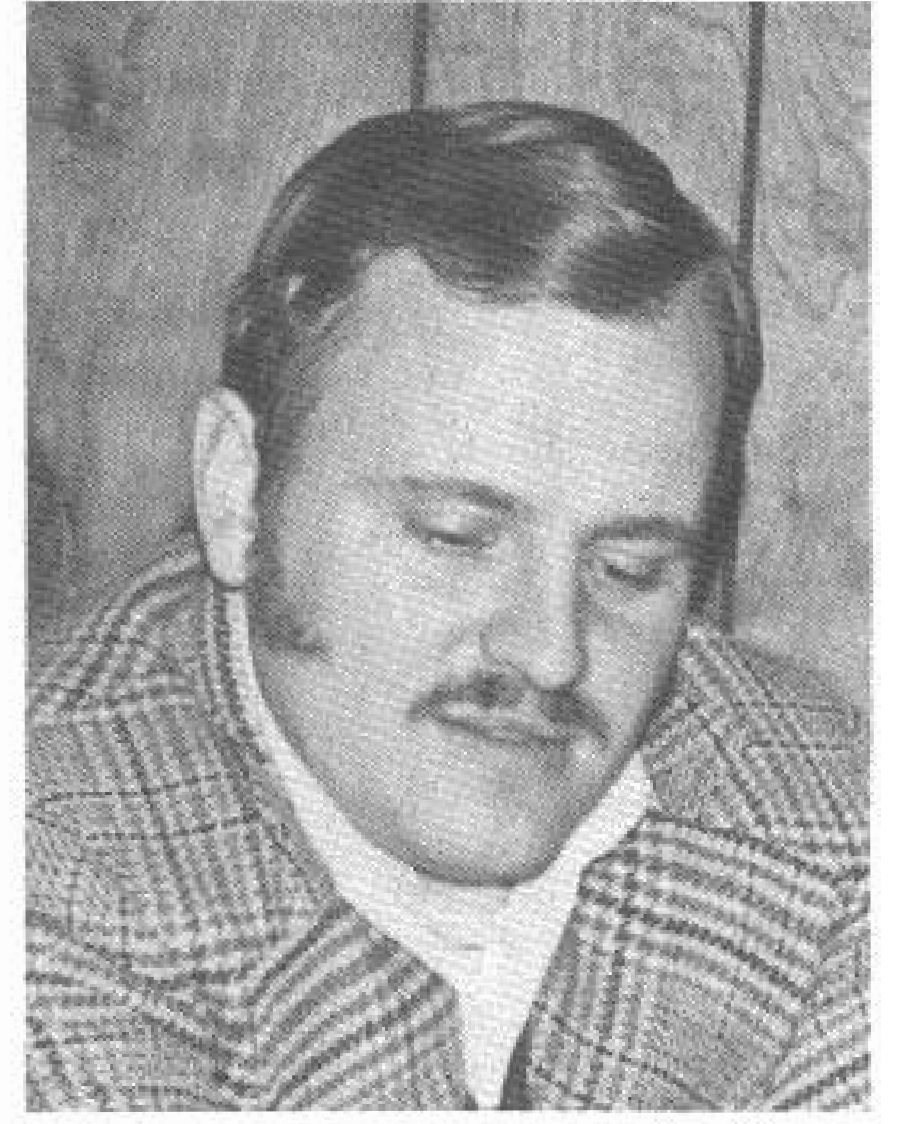
Harold R. "Scott" Candee
1969 - 1970



John Chatfield
1971 - 1972



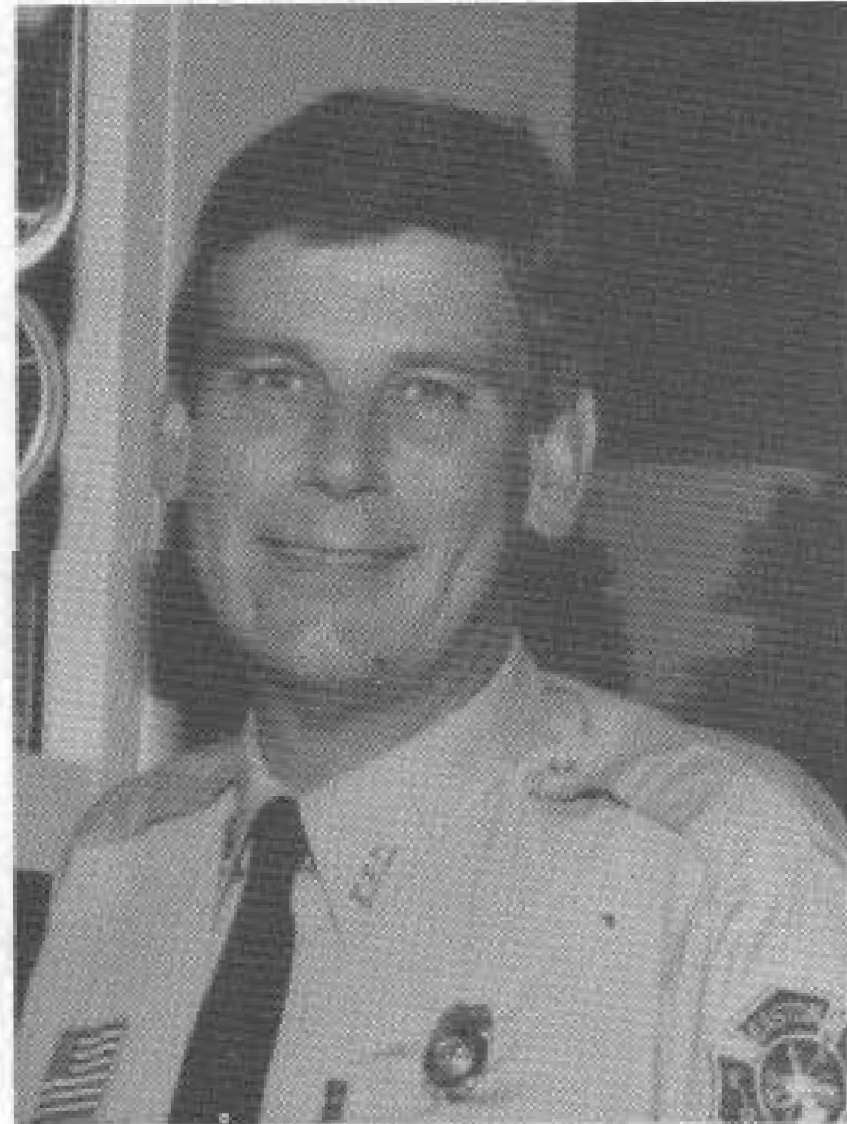
John C. Marlin
1973 - 1974



Joe Filakosky
1975 - 1977



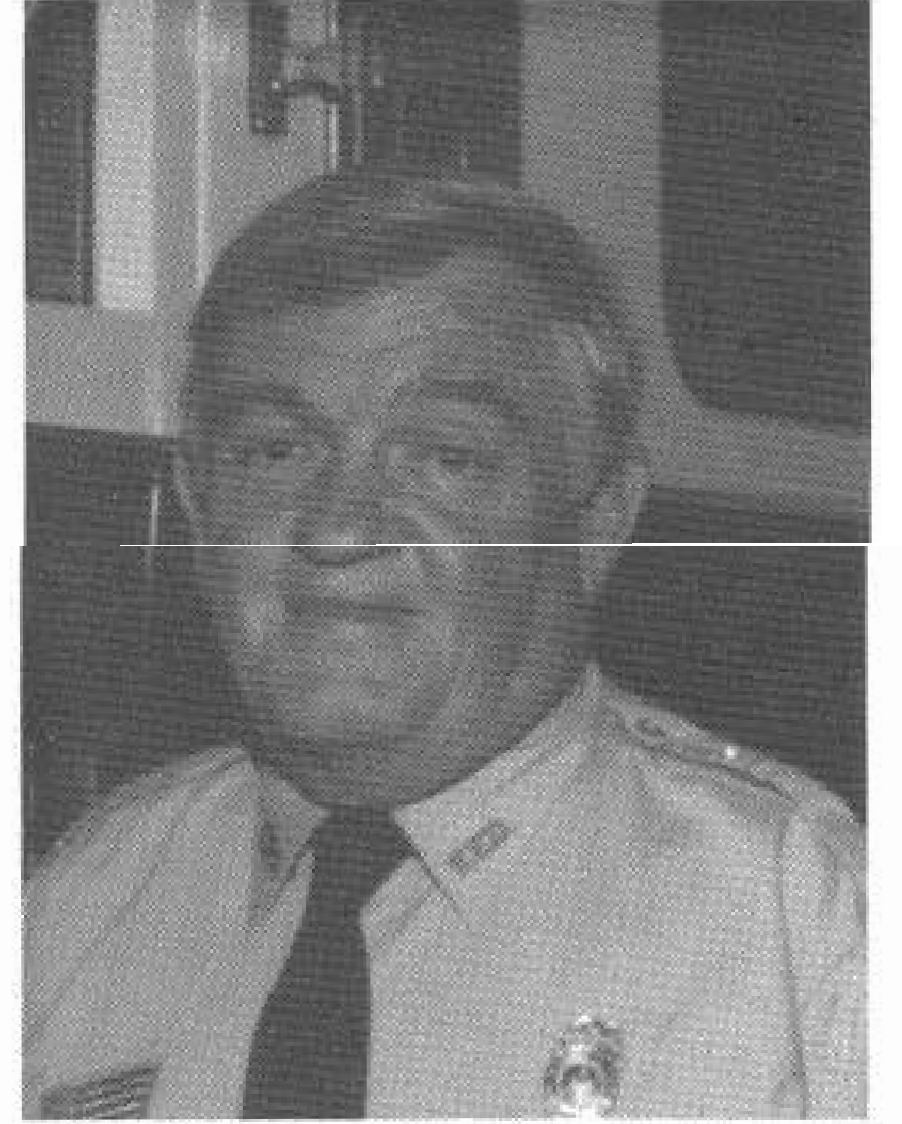
William A. Crossman
1978



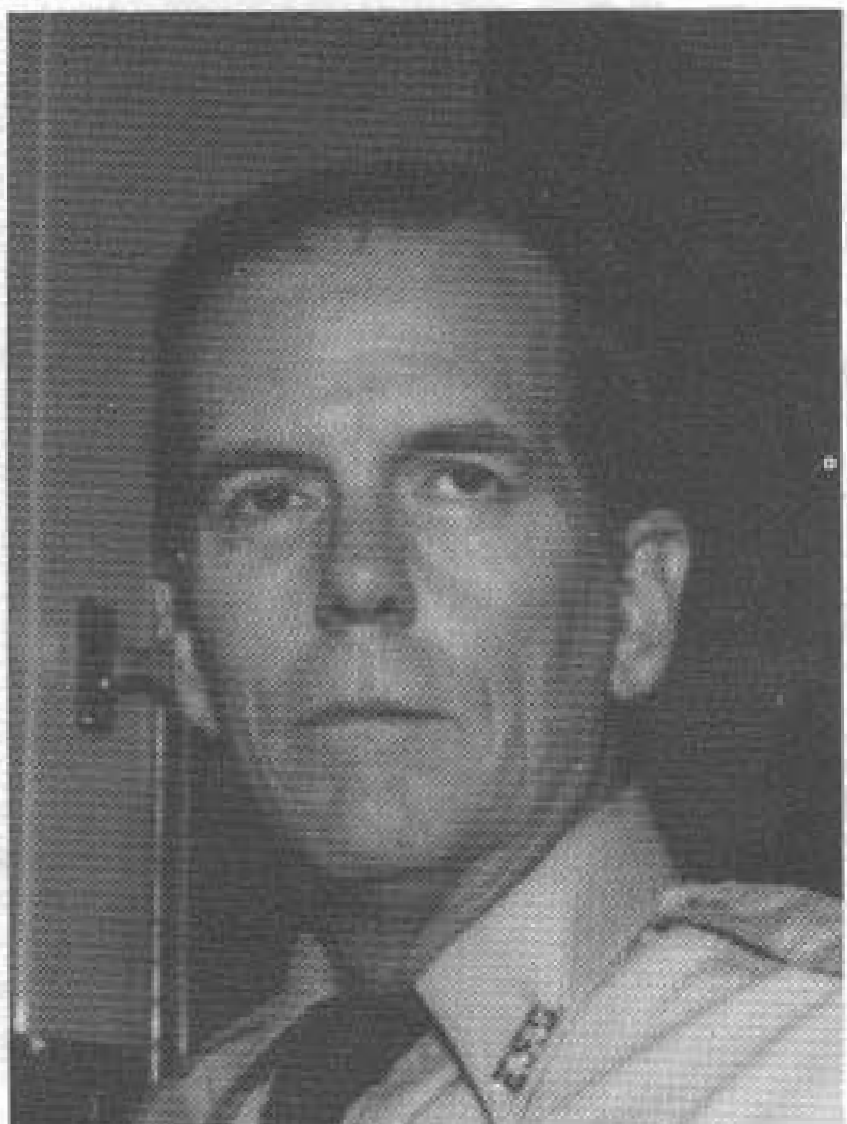
Peter G. Hallstrom
1979 - 1981



Oliver N. Smith
1982 - 1985



Edward Kovac
1986 - 1990



James L. Lindquist
1991 - 1994

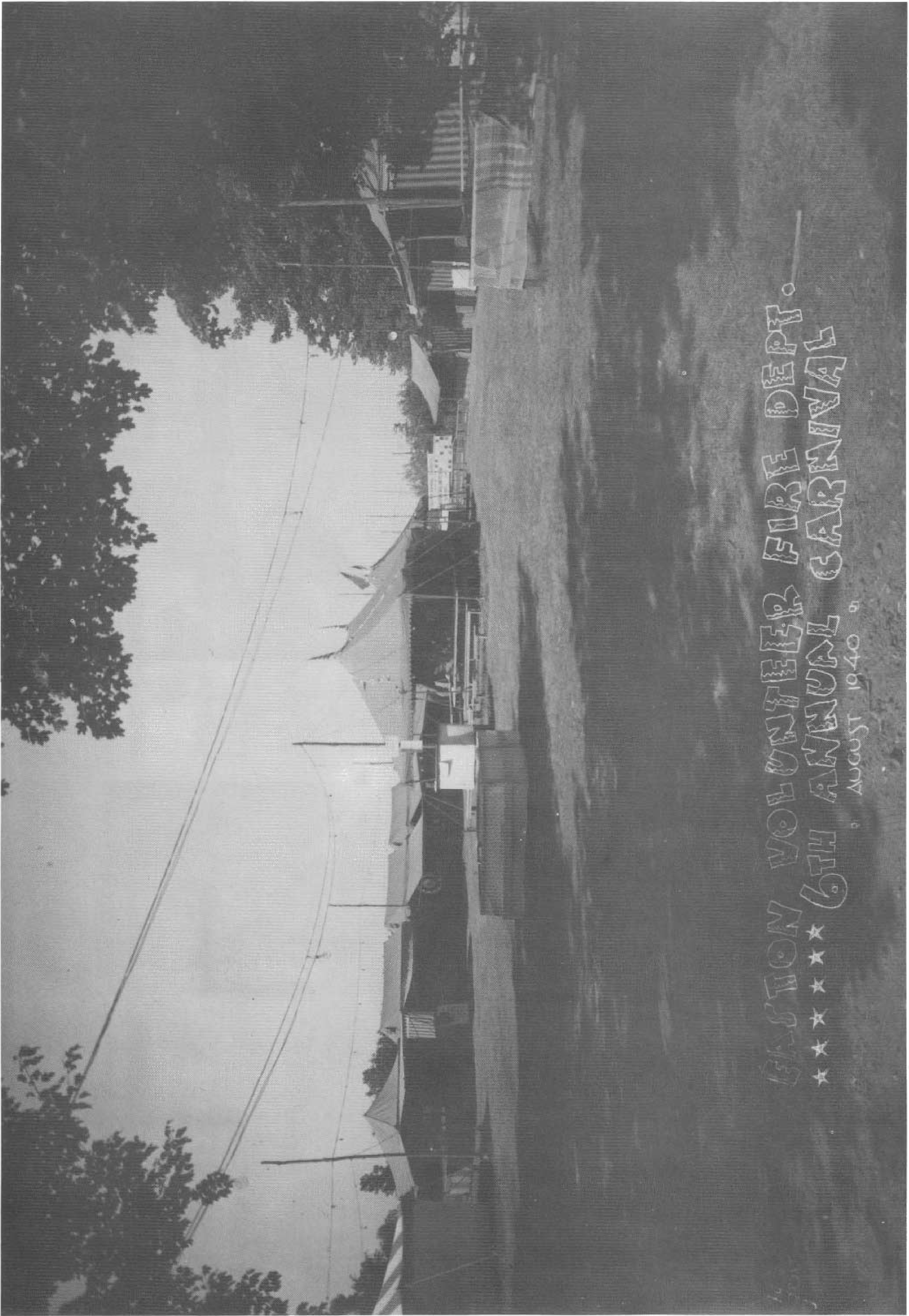


William Borofsky
1995 - 1996



Membership Carnival 1940

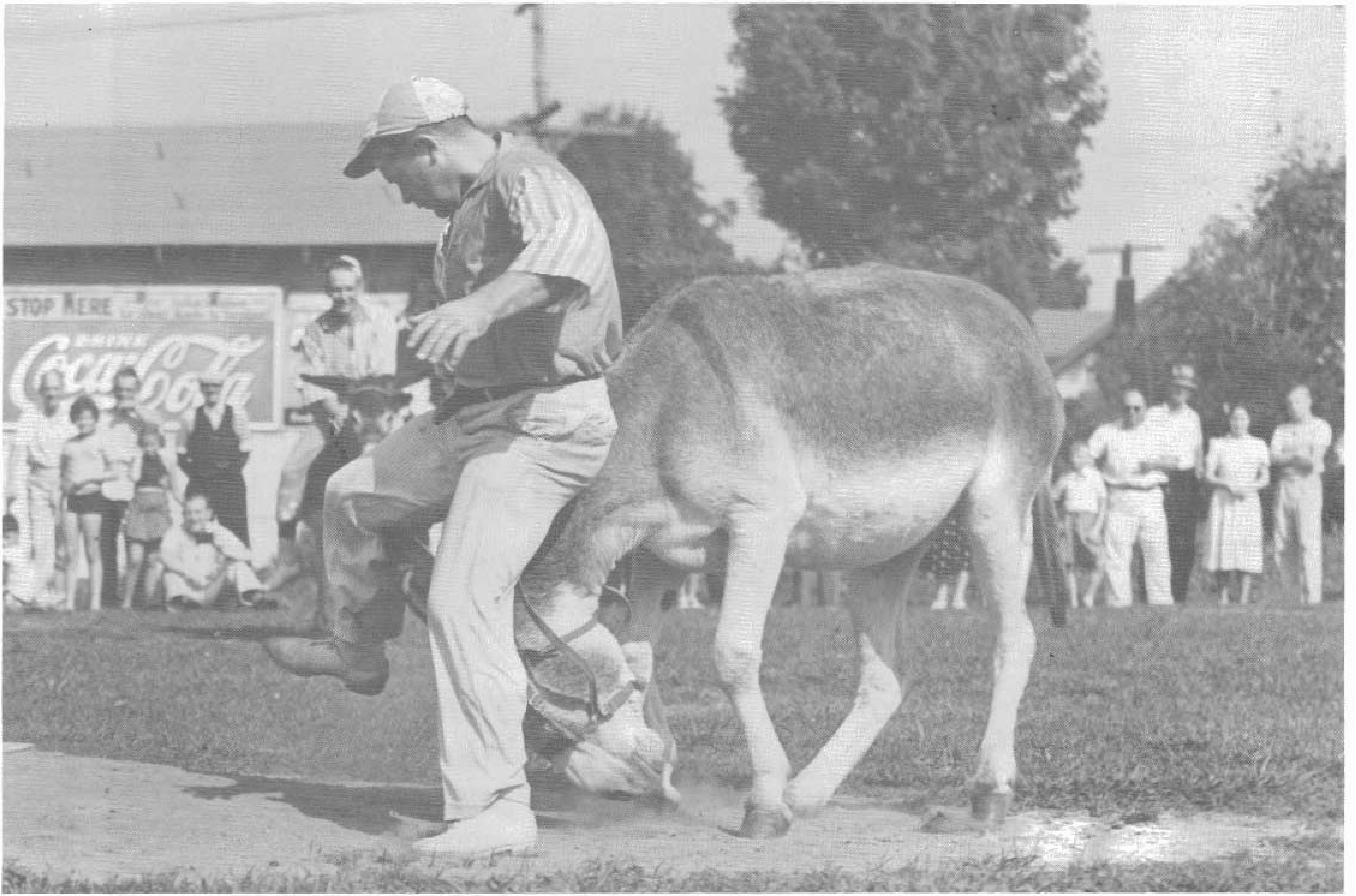
Top row (l to r): President Elsworth Wilkes, Asst. Chief George Marsh, Capt. Ralph Marsh, Asst. Chief Joe Trup, Chief Arthur Bush, Ed Knight, Jr., Paul Spellacy. Middle row (l to r): Ed Knight, Sr., W. Jennings, J. Svanda, R. Gaito, A. Krisko, M. Yamnicky, W. Gustafson, E. Bratz, H. Nichols, P. Crumb, A. Wilkes, C. Logan, A. Wheeler, W. Hall, H. Clark, M. Kochiss, F. Lacey, P. Sedlar, S. Kolesar. Bottom row (l to r): B. Bartosik, C. Foote, J. Kochiss, M. Ohradan, A. Nichols, A. Jaffe, V. Bartosik, J.A. Sherwood, E. Seeley, H. Andrews, E. Edwards, J. Slady, Sr., H. Silvernail, P. Kolesar, H. Bechtel, N. Wilkes, G. Hitchcock.



GASTON VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPT.

6TH ANNUAL CARNIVAL
AUGUST 1940

Carnival Grounds 1940



Donkey Baseball - 1938

Steve Kochiss

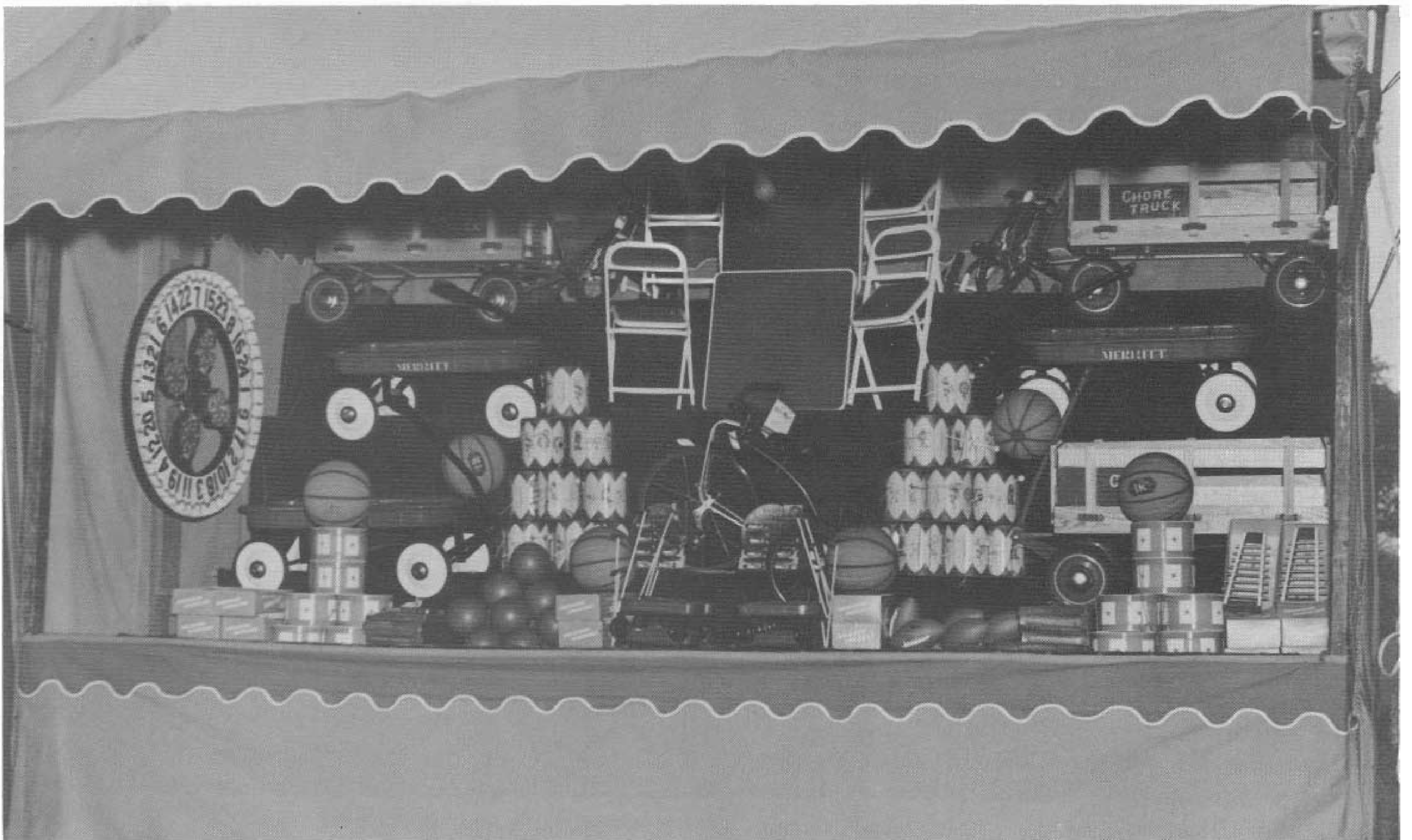


Donkey Baseball - 1947

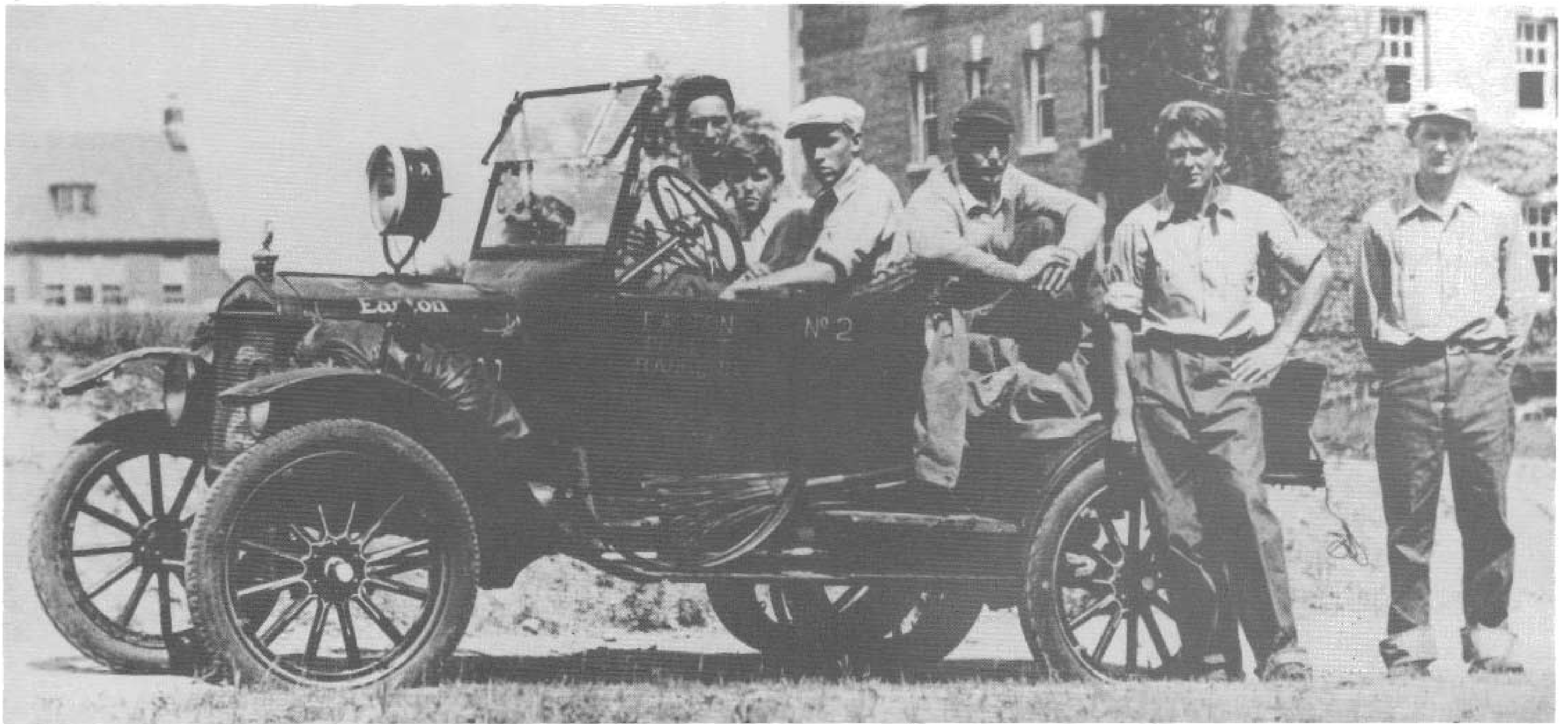
(l to r): Bill Ruman, Charles Logan, Bob Marlin, Charles Laskay, Bob Anton, Kenny Marsh, Clarence Crumb, ????. Kneeling: Bill James.



Carnival Booths - 1940's



Carnival Booths - 1940's



First Forest Ranger Group in Connecticut - July, 1933

(l to r): J. Sherwood Edwards, John King, Sterling Gillette, Edward Jamson, Albert Wilkes, Fred O'Hara



The Tents Go Up - Carnival July, 1957

(l to r): Anthony Gorlo (from tent company), Ed Bishop and Joe Silhavy (on sledgehammer).



50th Anniversary

(l to r): John Gordon, 2nd Asst. Chief; William Crossman, Chief and Charles Laskay, 1st Asst. Chief.



**50th Anniversary
Executive Officers**

(l to r): John Marlin, Vice President; John Chatfield, President; Al St. Pierre, Treasurer and Joe Filakosky, Secretary.



Siren Aide Past President - 1971

Standing (l to r): Louise Smith, Joy Haller. Sitting (l to r): Thelma Benz, Olga Crossman, Kay Wilkes.



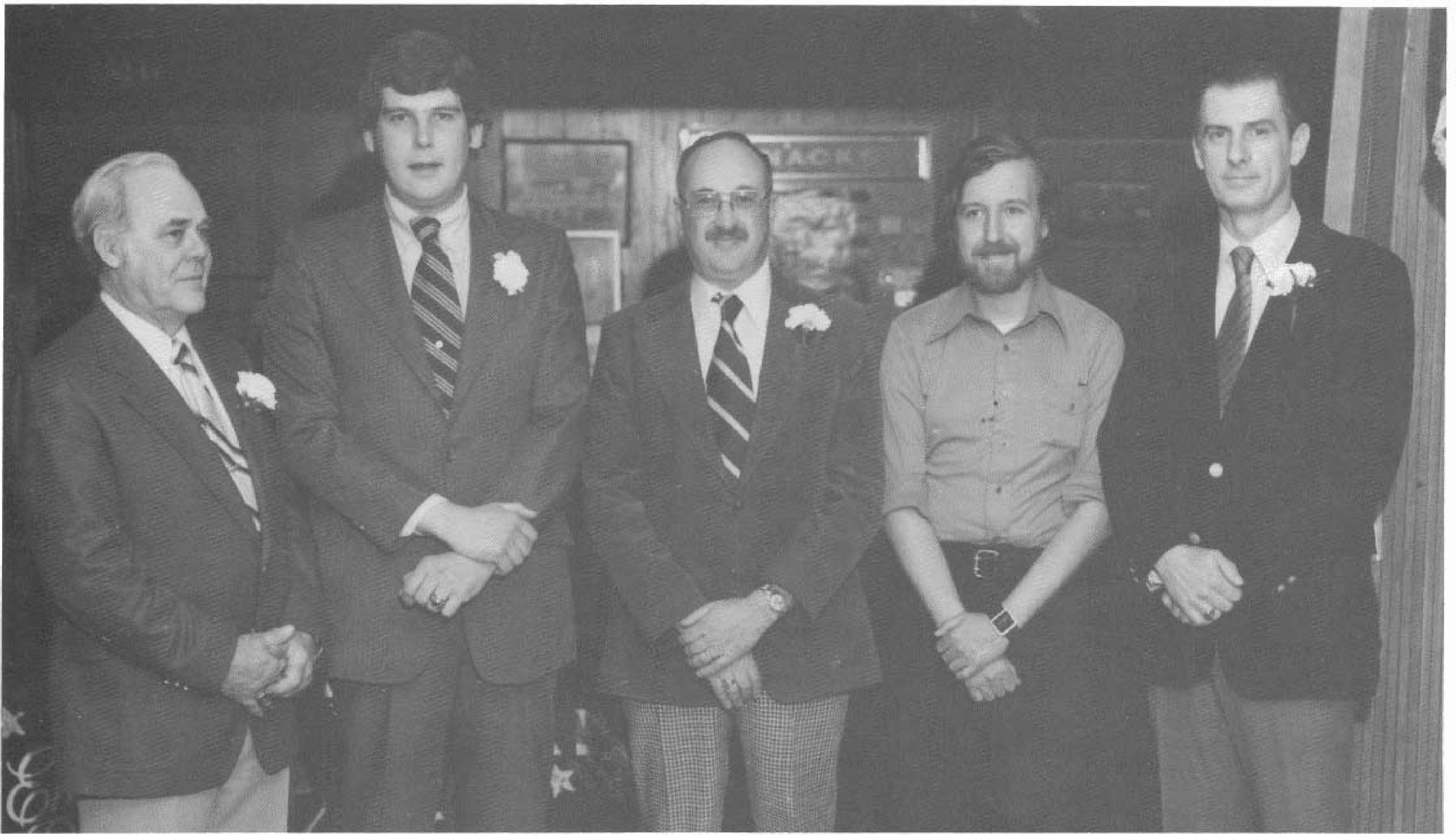
Carnival 1969

Bottom row (l to r): J. Johnston, H. Candee, E. Marshal, L. Kochiss, A. St. Pierre, D. Potter, S. Jaffe, R. Gaito, C. Laskay, B. Benz, N. Haller, J. Gordon, S. Reppucci, A. Bush and W. Crossman. Middle row (l to r): L. Kusnierczak, J. Stanczyk, P. Sondergaard, M. Reppucci, H. Kowaleski, S. Partridge, B. Laskay, J. Lusibrink, J. Yurcho, B. Lewis, W. Everett, S. Martin, R. Schwartz, H. Metcalf, E. Barbieri. Top row (l to r): D. Wright, A. Wheeler, G. Russell, J. Kochiss, R. Anton, J. Silhavy, J. Marlin, J. Slady, R. Bratz, P. Trup, F. Bratz and J. Bradley. Standing top left: J. Chatfield.



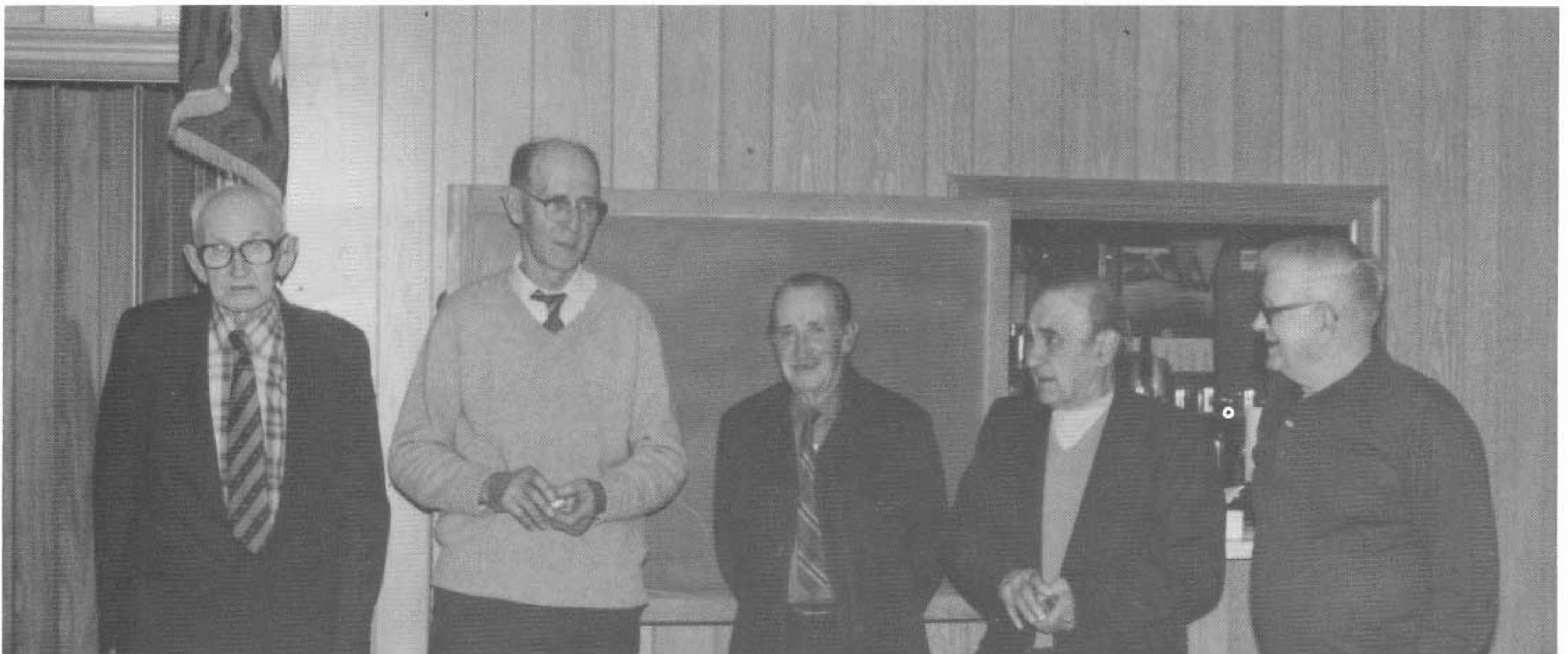
Carnival Cook Tent 1975

(l to r): Carol Sidelou, Nancy Slady, Harold (Scott) Candee, Marilyn Marlin and Gladys Stanczyk.



Installation of Officers - March, 1978

(l to r): President, William Crossman; Vice President, Peter Hallstrom; Treasurer, Ira Friedman; Recording Secretary, Ronald Kent and Corresponding Secretary, Brainerd McGuire.



**Oldtimers Night - March, 1985
50 Year Members**

(l to r): Ralph Marsh, Michael Beno, Ray Kent, Ralph Gaito and Pete Kolesar.



**Carnival Swim Team
July 31, 1983 - 2:30 a.m.**

Jeff & Sherry LaCroix, Bill & Betty Borofsky, Wayne & Lucy Crossman, Todd & Erin Bolmer, Betty & Helen Bratz, Gary & Joan Haines, John Broderick, Rob Monda, Amy Borofsky, Samantha Cooper, Kim Cooper, Mike Kocsis and Gayle Jaffe.



Carnival 1994

*Grab your partner - do-si-do
Annual Carnival Tent Dance. We do it so well!*

