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A Salute To Our Volunteer Fire Companies

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

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

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

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

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

So, in this issue, we salute the volunteer fire companies in our area, twenty two in number. We salute these men who, without compensation, answer the fireman's bell at night, or during the day, or in stormy weather, and respond to our call for help in a fire when minutes count and man's home and property are in jeopardy or when someone has suffered an accident or an illness which demands immediate attention.

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

**THE WATER WITCH** Greenville Fire Co.'s old horse-drawn pumpers, served many a landmark in our day.

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

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

Because of this location, so far from the other two Gloucester fire departments, a group of residents decided in 1965 to establish a fire company there. All the men in the neighborhood got together to build a fire station and all work on the building, save for one paid helper, a bricklayer, was volunteered. In order to raise money for building materials, the men sponsored a raffle and supper throughout the town. The proceeds were turned over to the Putnam Fire Co., and the West Gloucester men bought a 500-gallon pumper for the sum of one dollar and the new company was in business.

The West Gloucester volunteer firemen and they are members of the Northern R. L. Engineers League. Because they are geographically nearest the East Putnam Fire Co., they work closely with that organization occasionally assisting each other at fires.

According to the Chief, Chesley Sparkes, the only house fire call which the company has had in the past year was on May 16 when a summer home belonging to Walter Polka was struck by lightning. There has also been one forest fire. "Most of the calls recently have been minor accidents or emergencies," says Chief Sparkes.

Besides the Chief, other officers of the company are Joseph Pavao, deputy chief; Willard Place, captain; Jahn Glazmuid, lieutenant; Robert Montoya in driver.

New York Family

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

The Harmony GALS Bowling League scores Led Lynch and Connolly with both 162 singles, 131 and 133 for February 5th.

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Harmony Fire Department

Fire protection in Harmony is the operation of two separate companies, but clearly allied corporations. They are the Harmony Fire District and the Harmony Fire Department and are supported by Harmony's citizens. The Harmony Fire District owns the buildings, equipment, and the fire apparatus, and has the authority to tax the property owners for its support. The Harmony Fire Department and Improvement Association are the group of volunteers that operate the fire station, and have the equipment and radio equipment, and the furniture and equipment in the station, with funds derived principally from sponsoring social events, and from other sources.

This arrangement had its beginning in 1974, when a house located at what is now the corner of Putnam Pike and Edgewood Drive, a group of citizens met, and as a result of this and subsequent meetings, an agreement was entered to raise funds for the new fire department at the request of all of the officials of the district. This agreement was signed, and a new fire station was built on Harmony Road. It was a 4 cylinder 2-ton truck with a 500-gallon pump, plus hose, jacks, and other equipment. The new station was occupied on May 1, 1974. The new fire station was a welcome change to the town, and was a step towards protecting the town.

The new fire station was housed in a building that was purchased and expanded by the Harmony Fire Department. The station was equipped with the latest in firefighting equipment, including a water supply system and a water tank. The fire station was equipped with a water supply system and a water tank. The water supply system was connected to the town's water supply, and the water tank was used to store water for fire fighting.

The new fire station was the result of a community effort, and it was a significant step towards protecting the town.

The Harmony Volunteer Fire Department: Milford Aldrich, rescuer; Lieutenant Alvin Matthews, Assistant Captain, Matthew Roberts, Jesse Hare, Deputy Chief, James Veto, Captain, Eugene Price, Fire Chief, Roger Lopp, Assistant Chief, Bob Anderson, Deputy Chief, Scott Beaton, Deputy Chief. The Harmony Fire Department is proud of the work it has done throughout its 77 years, and particularly the work that has been achieved since 1946, in cooperation with the fire department in the district. They are proud of the equipment they now have and of their ability to operate it effectively, but since since progress and growth are the only goals of the department, they look forward to the future with confidence.

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Mr. Alva Olney, who is the only living charter member of Chepachet Fire Co.

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

The Chepachet Fire District was incorporated in March, 1912 with the following charter members: Walter Keach, Ernest E. Hopkins, Carlton Lynch, Jr., Alva Olney, Charles Carlson, William Sweet, John Lees and Delbert Dodge. Two months later they voted $5.00 for the purchase of their first fire apparatus, a 3-wheel hand drawn chemical wagon.

The hand drawn chemical wagon was a rather common sight in some rural areas in those days. The tank was equipped with a pump of the strong man type, the battery and hose reel containing the water and a tank into which was filled with a solution of water and baking soda, the soda with acid. When a valve was turned, the acid poured into the soda solution creating pressure, and the mixture was forced through a hose onto the blaze. Chepachet's chemical wagon (also known as a ladder)

The first fire to which any consequence of the arrival of the new equipment wasn't merely a fire, it was a great conflagration. It occurred in 1913 when the rear of the Tast Hotel, a great wooden structure, stood as the site of the present Chepachet grammar school. Caught fire. The new chemical wagon was triumphantly hauled to the scene, but alas! not one could get the ladder off the wagon, it stuck and the fire made such hayday while the men struggled with it that the fire was soon out of control. The best the men could do was to try to save as many adjacent buildings as possible. In the end, eight buildings burned to the ground.

Fremdally the problem of getting the ladder off the chemical wagon was solved eventually because the chemical wagon was used to fight fires for nearly twenty years after the hotel fire, and it took a big fire in 1926, to show that more up to date fire fighting equipment was needed. The "25 fire involved the big wooden house which had previously been Harris Sears's Li-viing Statio and was used as a stove house and used that same time to house Stephen Keach's ga-

The building was located on the site now occupied by the Mobil Gas station.

After this fire the company was reorganized with the first chief of the original company, Walter Keach, continuing to serve. Mr. Keach was chief of the Chepachet company for over forty years. Following Mr. Keach as chief were Lees Chase, during the late '20s and '30s.

Chepachet Volunteer Fire Company, like many other volunteer companies in the area participated in a number of activities not directly related to fire-fighting. As members of the Northern Proctor's League which includes Providence and North Smithfield as well as the southern part of Scituate, the men of the Chepachet company established their own baseball team and played against the other volunteer companies.

For three years they held the Northern R. I. Championship. Water battles were another activity in which the men participated. Rally was keen and many newcomers turned out to witness the battles, but since the activity is too violent and dangerous to be called a sport, water battles are rarely held these days by any of the volunteer companies.

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Today, in its fifth decade of service to the community, Chepachet Fire Company has progressed from a chemical wagon and quarters in George Clough's barn to an up to date building, built in 1939 having a 300 gallon pump, a rescue truck and a tank truck. The new Gloucester ambulance, owned by the Gloucester Ambulance Corp. Inc., is also housed at the fire station. It is manned by virtually the same men who serve on the fire company. The fleet consists of one engine, one ladder truck, and one squad.

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


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