

Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011



To honour the 100th anniversary of the Tavistock Fire Department, the Tavistock and District Historical Society has undertaken a project to publish a history of the Tavistock Fire Department gleaned from the archives of the Tavistock Gazette, supplemented by articles from area newspapers including the Stratford Beacon Herald, Woodstock Sentinel Review and Kitchener-Waterloo Record and early photographs from the Lemp Studio Collection.



Birth of the Fire Department

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

Now would be a good time to open up the question of fire protection for the village. There are many advantages to be gained in having the village protected, and one of them is a lower rate of insurance. There is not a ratepayer in the village but who will admit that fire protection, with a properly organized fire brigade, is one of the institutions which every up-to-date and enterprising place should have.

Is Tavistock satisfied to sit in the background and look on while other places of less importance are forging ahead? We hope not.

Someday this village will awake from its lethargy to find itself fire-swept. Would it not be a good idea to call a meeting and discuss this all-important question? Then, if necessary, look over the systems adopted by some of our neighbours.

Yes. that would be the proper course, and then go at it as though we meant it. If the council would take the matter up they would doubtless have the support of nearly every rate-payer in the village.

Tavistock Gazette November 10, 1910

The reeve and Councillor Zimmerman were appointed a committee to see about the purchase of a hose reel. Some discussion then took place about the organization of a fire brigade in the village. It was finally decided to call a public meeting, to be held on Monday evening next in Society hall.

Tavistock Gazette November 16, 1911

At a largely attended meeting in Society hall on Monday evening the organization of a fire brigade for the village was discussed. Reeve Appel was in the chair and after stating the object for which the meeting was called, he asked for suggestions for the appointment of a Fire Chief. After some delay Mr. Peter Steinman's name was mentioned and, by a standing vote, Mr. Steinman was elected to the office.

Volunteers were then asked for, and before the meeting closed nearly twenty names were enrolled, it was then decided that the embryo fire fighters, would meet at a later date and appoint a set of officers from among themselves. Some excellent material is available among those whose names were placed on the list and, with strict attention to their duties, we see no reason why a very efficient fire brigade cannot be obtained in Tavistock. We have a plentiful supply of water, good machinery for forcing the water through the mains, and in a very short time the apparatus will be on hand for the men to work with.

With conscientious practice on the part of the members and a little encouragement on the part of villagers, our brigade should soon be in a position to cope with almost any fire that is likely to break out in the village.

Tavistock Gazette November 23, 1911

Firefighters

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

The Tavistock Gazette of November 30, 1911 reported the election of the first officers of the newly formed fire brigade.

- Chief—P. Steinman
- Captain—Ed Sherk
- Lieutenant—F. Eckstein
- Secretary—Geo. Shibley
- Treasurer—A. Mansz

In a January 3, 1913 meeting of the fire brigade the following officers were elected (as reported in the Tavistock Gazette January 9, 1913).

- Captain— F. Eckstein
- Lieutenant— C. Schwalm
- Secretary—Geo. Shibley.
- Treasurer—A. Mansz.
- Foreman, No. 1 — H. Appel
- Foreman, No. 2 — C. Ratz
- Brakesmen, No. 1 — A. Heinbuch, L. Klein
- Brakesmen, No. 2 — G. Quehl, F. Schmidt

The fire brigade reportedly (Tavistock Gazette February 26, 1914) reorganized in 1914.

- Captain— F. Eckstein
- Lieutenant— C. Schwalm
- Secretary—Geo. Shibley.
- Treasurer—A. Mansz.
- Branchmen — H. Appel, F. Reidt, F. McDermott, L. Klein
- Foremen, No. 1 — A. Heinbuch, George. Quehl

In January 1916 the decision was made to increase the size of the fire brigade from 10 to 15 members.

After the J. G. Field Woollen Mill fire in May of 1921, J. G. Field and son donated \$1.50 to every member of the fire brigade who assisted in fighting the fire.

In the January 11, 1922 edition of the Tavistock Gazette it was noted that Chief Peter Steinman would receive a salary of \$10 and the brigade members \$0.50 for each practice and \$1 for each fire. In "Fact & Fantasy" it was noted that in 1918 the rate was set at \$0.50 for each practice and \$1 for each fire.

After the Tavistock Milling Company Limited fire in October 1922 council granted each member of the fire brigade \$4 for the all day and night effort to quell the fire.

Firefighters

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

In January 1926 the village council was addressed by Mr. E. A. Kalbfleisch regarding insuring members of the fire brigade against accident, loss of limbs and death. It was moved that each member of the fire brigade be insured to the extent of \$1000 life insurance and a monthly indemnity of \$40 in case of disability through injuries received during a practice, drill or fire.

On January 11, 1926, at their first meeting of the year, with twelve members present, the fire brigade elected their officers for the coming year.

- Chief - P. E. Steinman
- Assistant Chief – Peter Woelfle
- Secretary-Treasurer – Norman Baechler
- Foreman - Joe Baechler .and Theodore Neeb
- Nozzlemen, 1st – Fred Heinbuch and Carl.Eifert
- Nozzlemen 2nd – Henry Eckstein- and .Alfred Steinman
- Fire truck driver - Wilfred Strahn

All other firemen are appointed as linemen. The brigade is made up of three different squads of men, each squad having five men. These squads will take turns keeping the truck clean and ready for immediate use at all times.

In January of 1931 (Tavistock Gazette January 15, 1931) council purchased insurance for each brigade member that provided \$10 per week indemnity and \$2000 accidental death benefit. The cost of insurance for the 16 member brigade was \$55.36.

In July 1931 the Tavistock Fire Brigade competed at the annual Ontario West Firemen's Association meet in Clinton where they won the hose reel and rescue races. The 1931 meet was the first reference to this annual competition that we found during our research of the Gazette

The January 4, 1934 edition of the Tavistock Gazette had a small article noting the resignation of Chief Peter Steinman and the appointment of K. Clarke Hopkinson as chief. Mr. Steinman would be honoured by the community for his 22 years of service as the first Fire Chief of the Tavistock Fire Brigade.

The first reference to Norman Baechler as Fire Chief appeared in the Tavistock Gazette on May 10, 1934. The circumstances pertaining to the transition of the Chief's position from Mr. Hopkinson to Mr. Baechler are not known.

In March of 1936 Norm Baechler and his family moved to Stratford, at the behest of his employer, where he worked as a salesman. In July of the same year Henry Mohr was appointed Chief.

The Fire Brigade sent a request to the village council in December 1936 asking that each member of the brigade be paid \$25 per year. The Tavistock Gazette of December 10th reported that council was surprised by the request and the feeling expressed that the brigade request was somewhat unfair as

Firefighters

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

brigade members were covered by insurance, transportation was paid to annual convention, fees are paid for each practice and fire and in the event the request was granted it would mean an additional mill to the tax rate.

At the inaugural session of council in January 1937, in response to the request from the fire brigade for an annual salary for its members, council approved a motion to pay members of the fire brigade \$1 per practice, \$1 for the first hour of a fire call and \$0.50 per hour for every hour thereafter. This was an increase of 100% over the previous rate. Council also noted that the brigade shall not exceed 13 men, including the Chief. The brigade had been 16 members strong until the resignation of three members at the end of 1936.

The Tavistock Gazette of January 15, 1941 reported that P. W. Morgenroth appeared before Council in regard to the insurance for members of the Fire Brigade. Mr. Morgenroth presented a plan which would cover accidental death, payment -for time off from regular work as the result of an accident, part payment for hospitalization, nursing costs, surgeon fees, operating room, x-ray costs, anaesthetist's fees, at a premium of \$65.90 for 13 men. The policy at present held by council covers but the first two named. Council .briefly discussed the matter, and on motion the policy was accepted and the premium ordered paid.

In January 1947, acting on suggestions received by Council members from members of the volunteer Fire Brigade, the amount of indemnity in the event of an accident suffered by a fire brigade member while attending a fire was increased from \$40 per month to \$60 per month.

Fire Chief Wilfred Strahm and Harry Zimmerman, secretary-treasurer of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, presented a letter from the organization to council requesting a revision in remuneration as follows: \$12 per man for year's service; \$1 for fire call and practices, and \$1 per hour for fire-fighting duty. The request was granted and later incorporated in the civic appointment bylaw.

On May 21, 1956 Tavistock Council received and accepted Fire Chief Wilfred Strahm's resignation. Henry Eckstein was appointed Fire Chief.

The Tavistock Gazette reported on January 9, 1957 that Tavistock Council had decided to increase personal liability coverage for members of the volunteer fire brigade, with the Workmen's Compensation Board, from \$3000 to \$5000 per member.

At the Council meeting of August 2, 1966 the salary of fire brigade members was increased from \$3 per fire call and a \$1.50 for each hour thereafter to \$4 per call and \$2 for each hour thereafter.

In July 1969 a bylaw was passed raising the pay to members of the volunteer fire brigade to \$5 per call and \$5 for each hour or part thereafter.

Firefighters

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

Chief Henry Eckstein and assistant chief Clarence Neeb received the Fire Services Long Service Medals in July 1971. Mr. Eckstein had been a member of the fire brigade for 51 years, 15 of those as Chief. Mr. Neeb had served for 37 years and in addition to his role as assistant he is the secretary-treasurer of the brigade. He is also president of the Oxford County Mutual Aid System.

In early 1972 Clarence Neeb was appointed Fire Chief.

In December 1972 a tribute was paid to Henry Eckstein who was promoted to Honorary Fire Chief having served as Chief from 1955 – 1971 and in recognition of his long years of service with the fire brigade.

The July 23, 1975 edition of the Tavistock Gazette reported the East Zorra-Tavistock fire chiefs (Tavistock, Hickson and Innerkip) demanded salary increases consistent with the increases in the salaries provided to other members of the fire department. The chiefs threatened to resign en masse unless their demands were met. The East Zorra-Tavistock council eventually agreed to the chiefs' demands.

The Tavistock Gazette of February 15, 1978 reported East Zorra-Tavistock council had accepted the recommendation of the fire department that Mahlon Leis become the new Tavistock fire chief and Jack Wettlaufer be named as deputy chief

In September 1984 Mahlon Leis was appointed Fire Chief of the newly formed East Zorra-Tavistock Fire Department and Jack Wettlaufer, deputy chief of the Tavistock Fire Department, was appointed District Chief of the Tavistock Fire Department.

The Tavistock Gazette April 10, 1985 reported that all Tavistock volunteers have recently completed their CPR Heartsaver course and several men will be attending the Ontario Fire College this year. Volunteers Paul Roth and Brett Schultz were welcomed to the force.

The Township of East Zorra-Tavistock honoured the district's volunteer firefighters on February 6, 1988 with a special dinner, dance and awards ceremony to recognize twenty-two volunteers who have devoted more than 20 years of exemplary service to the local fire departments. Recipients from Tavistock were: Mahlon Leis, Martin Blikman, Robert Rudy, Heinz Riedel, Jack Wettlaufer and Bill Wettlaufer. – Tavistock Gazette February 10, 1988

On Wednesday July 3, 1991 Mahlon Leis was honoured at a dinner held in his honour, retiring after forty-one years dedicated to the fire service. Mr. Leis joined the Tavistock volunteer force in 1950 and was its chief from 1980-1984. He became the first township fire chief when the position was created in 1984 to have one person act as liaison between the three township volunteer fire departments and its district chiefs including the Tavistock, Innerkip and Hickson firefighters. –Tavistock Gazette July 10, 1991

Tavistock District Fire Chief Jack Wettlaufer and retired Deputy District Fire Chief Martin Blikman received the 25-year "Fire Service Long Service Medal" at an investiture and reception held on Thursday,

Firefighters

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

October 17, 1991. As well, the spouses of volunteers received a special pin in the shape of a trillium with the firefighter crest in the centre “in recognition of sacrifices” over unusual hours and trying conditions. –Tavistock Gazette October 23, 1991

At their annual Christmas party held on December 5, 1992 the Volunteer Firefighters of Tavistock took the opportunity to honour some of their long service volunteers. Medals were presented to Harold Woelfle, who served from 1955 to 1980, Ben Weston who served from 1955 to 1981, and Clare Brenner, who began with the Tavistock volunteer brigade in 1972 and is presently a Captain and treasurer of the Tavistock Department. – Tavistock Gazette December 9, 1992

On May 26, 1995 members of the East Zorra-Tavistock Fire department, Don Gregory, Bob Vince, Bruce Holst, George Junker and Paul Roth received the Ontario Fire College/Fire Protection Technology Diplomas. –Tavistock Gazette June 14, 1995

Two long-service awards were presented to Tavistock Firefighters on November 8, 1997. Clare Brenner received an award and medal for twenty-five years of service while Don Gregory was honoured for twenty years in the fire service. Mr. Brenner joined the Tavistock Fire Department in 1972 and is presently Deputy Chief. Mr. Gregory, presently Chief of the Tavistock Fire Service, began his career with five years in Uniondale before joining the Tavistock Fire Service in 1981. – Tavistock Gazette November 12, 1997

At a ceremony to honour fifty-eight Fire Chiefs in Waterloo on April 2, 1998 Fire Chief Bruce Holst was presented with the Provincial Fire Services 25 year Long Service Medal by the Ontario Fire Marshall, Mr. Bernard Moyle. As each Fire Chief received his medal, he introduced his spouse who received the Spouses’ award in recognition of the sacrifices made by spouses of fire fighters who frequently watch them respond to fires at unusual hours and under trying conditions. – Tavistock Gazette April 8, 1998

Clare Brenner, Tavistock District Fire Chief, received his 30 year Federal and Provincial Service Bars on September 6, 2002 from Township Fire Chief Bruce Holst. –Tavistock Gazette September 25, 2002

Tavistock Station Fire Prevention Officer Don Junker was presented with his 20 year medal by Fire Chief Bruce Holst on behalf of the Governor General of Canada at the Tavistock Firefighters Christmas dinner on December 4, 2004. –Tavistock Gazette December 15, 2004

Bruce Holst was honoured at a barbeque on July 5, 2006 for his thirty-three years in the fire service, twenty-nine in East Zorra-Tavistock. Mr. Holst retired having held the Township Chief position for the past fifteen years. –Tavistock Gazette July 26, 2006

On October 16, 2006 Scott Alexander takes over the position of East Zorra-Tavistock Fire Chief from retiring Chief Bruce Holst. Mr. Alexander, a member of the Hickson Department for the past 14 years, places high value on having the firefighters trained, prepared and equipped. –Tavistock Gazette October 11, 2006

Firefighters

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

The Volunteers

Appel, Henry	Hahn, Hanas	McDermott, Harold	Shibley, George
Atwell, James	Hall, Victor	McDermott, Scotty	Smith, Ken
Atwell, Murray	Hanlon, Tom	McKay, Mike	Smythe, Dale
Baechler, Joe	Heinbuch, Adam	Merkel, Tim	Sommers, Ken
Baechler, Norm	Heinbuch, Fred	Mohr, Adam	Steinman, Alfred
Barber, Frank	Heinbuch, Ross	Mohr, Henry	Steinman, Hap
Bartlett, Jeremy	Helmuth, Lorne	Neeb, Clarence	Steinman, John
Bender, Greg	Hemmerich, Wilfred	Neeb, Theodore	Steinman, Paul
Berg, Terry	Hilcox, Joe	Orr, Richard	Steinman, Peter
Binkle, Ward	Hilcox, Joseph	Pletsch, Doug	Strahm, Earl
Blikman, Martin	Hitzeroth, Wilfred	Quehl, Charles	Strahm, Wilfred (Gus)
Blum, Brian	Holst, Bruce	Quehl, George	Sullivan, Jamie
Bowman, Phil	Hubert, Norman	Quehl, Henry (Finn)	Weicker, George
Brenneman, Dan	Jantzi, Roy	Ramseyer, Rodney	Weitzel, Carl
Brenneman, Darrell	Junker, Don	Raymer, Andrew	Weston, Ben
Brenneman, Paul	Kaufman, Charles	Riedel, Heinz	Wettlaufer, Jack
Brenner, Clare	Kaufman, Mike	Riehl, Perry	Wettlaufer, Jacob
Bricker, Floyd	Kaufman, William	Roth, Chris	Wettlaufer, William
Brodrecht, Dave	Keutsch, John	Roth, Murray	Wiffen, Dave
Cortes, Richard	Klein, James	Roth, Paul	Wiffen, Rob
Currah, Jim	Klein, Lloyd	Roth, William	Woelfle, Harold
Denstedt, Lavern	Klein, Mayne	Rothernell, John	Woelfle, Keith
Dunbar, Scott	Klein, Stuart	Rozendale, Lyle	Woelfle, Martin
Eckstien, Donald	Lange, Brent	Rudy, Bob	Woelfle, Peter
Eckstien, Fred	Leis, Jerry	Sauder, Maury	Wright, Fred
Eckstien, Henry	Leis, Mahlon	Schaefer, William	Zehr, Harley
Eifert, Carl	Lingelbach, Ross	Schultz, Brett	Zehr, Scott
Ford, Arthur	Mansz, Adam	Schumm, Bill	Zimmerman, Harry
Gascho, John	Matthies, William	Schwartzentruber, Jim	
George, Arthur	McCutchen, Blain	Seltzer, Ronald	
Gladding, Bill	McDermott, Frank	Shewchuck, Chris	
Gregory, Don			

Fire Equipment

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

The Tavistock Gazette March 14, 1912 reported that newly appointed Fire Chief Peter Steinman approached the village council with a request for supplies, for the newly formed fire brigade, which included rubber coats and boots. During this same meeting the question of a fire hall came up for discussion and a committee consisting of councillors Kalbfleisch and Roth were assigned the task of making a report to council.

In March 1915 a communication was presented to council from businessmen on Woodstock Street south asking that two fire hydrants be placed on that street. Alderman Krug pointed out this was the most congested part of the city and should fire break out in this section, the fire brigade would be hampered by the distance of the hydrants and small supply of hose. A resolution was made to install two hydrants on Woodstock Street south and to purchase another 1000 feet of hose.

Because of an existing bylaw at the time which stipulated that water mains could only be laid where revenue will show at least 10% of the cost of installation, a new bylaw was drafted by council to allow for mains to be installed for fire protection only. – Tavistock Gazette March 5, 1914

The October 29, 1925 Tavistock Gazette reported a discussion at council regarding the purchase of a fire truck. Chief Steinman presented descriptions and prices on several trucks from the Bickle Fire Engine Company of Woodstock. The council was favourable to the purchase of a fire truck but not see their way to clear to purchase a truck at this time due to the cost estimate. Council did authorize Chief Steinman to purchase a dozen pair of rubber gloves to be used for fighting fires in the winter time and three smoke masks.

At a village council meeting in October 1926 it was decided to purchase a fire truck from Lorne Tractors of Ingersoll. This decision was made after a delegation from council had the opportunity to look at products from both Lorne Tractors and the Bickle Company. The two trucks which seemed suitable for the village were both Ford ton trucks, one of which was equipped with a Ruxtell (2-speed) axle and large tires. It was felt the Ruxtell axle-equipped truck would be the most suitable. The truck equipped with lanterns, chemical tanks, siren, ladders and hose cost \$1400.

In early 1934 the fire brigade requested council authorize the purchase of equipment which would enable the fire brigade to tackle gasoline and oil fires. The brigade also requested replacement canisters for their gas masks, coats and boots. According to the report in the Tavistock Gazette of February 15, 1934 there were not coats and only three or four pairs of rubber boots. Council did receive quotes but according to the Gazette of March 15th, the decision to purchase the requested equipment was deferred for a week or so. Reading between the lines of this report we might guess that the difficult financial climate of the 1930's was reflected in this report.

On August 16, 1950 Tavistock took delivery of its second fire truck. The new truck which cost \$7000 replaced the old truck which would be stripped of its equipment and sold at auction. The new truck is a Chevrolet 2-ton equipped with a 200 gallon booster tank, 150 feet of ¾ inch hose, aluminum safety

Fire Equipment

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

ladders, fog nozzle, coat racks, flasher light and siren, four spot lights and has a regular three-inch hose capacity of 1500 feet.

In the January 30, 1963 issue of the Tavistock Gazette it was reported that in keeping with the policy of having the Tavistock Volunteer Fire Brigade adequately equipped council decided to order 4 new coats and 2 new pair of boots. It was also decided to order sufficient "hard hats" for every member of the brigade. At the time there were four "hard hats" for the 17 brigade members.

The village council approved the purchase of a smoke ejector in March 1969. – Tavistock Gazette March 5, 1969

The November 17, 1971 Tavistock Gazette reported the 28 village fire hydrants had been numbered and a map of their location will be provided to the Fire Brigade.

In March 1972 council placed an order with King-Seagrave Ltd., of Woodstock for a new fire truck at a cost of \$26,641. The new truck will be equipped with a 45-foot ladder, two Scott air paks, a 600-gallon (tank?), 625 gallon per minute pump, an electronic siren, seven side compartments, six new firemen's coats, 500 feet of 2 ½ inch hose and 200 feet of 1 ½ inch hose, two flash lanterns, hose reels, axes and a small roof ladder.

The Tavistock Gazette of January 21, 1976 reported there were 32 fire hydrants in the village.

On December 10, 1979 at a meeting of East Zorra-Tavistock fire department, new rescue equipment was demonstrated to members of the Tavistock and Hickson departments. The new equipment, owned by the Tavistock crew, would assist the crew in dealing with calls involving silos, liquid manure pits, sewers and other confined spaces where the air is lethal. The local Agricultural Society initiated the purchase with East Zorra Junior farmers contributing. The fire department will raise the balance of funds required.

In May 1981 the Tavistock contingent of the East Zorra-Tavistock Volunteer Fire Department added an equipment van to their force. The 1975 Ford delivery van, a former ice cream truck, will accompany the fire-fighting units on all fire calls and will be referred to as Tavistock Unit 4. It will house the Scott air paks, firemen's equipment and life-saving gear. The truck will also be used when firemen are called out with the silo – manure tank units.

In February 1982 a county-wide pager system was implemented in Oxford County. A central dispatch located in Woodstock will transmit the fire alert which is received by pagers carried by the volunteers.

The October 7, 1987 Tavistock Gazette reported the Tavistock Volunteer Firefighters took delivery on Saturday morning of the new tanker/pumper truck from Hub Fire Trucks. The new 1200 gallon Ford F800 is equipped with a single mid-ship mounted CS1000 Waterous pump rated at 625 gallons per minute and a 1200 gallon tank. The truck, known as Unit 31, replaces the 1956 red pumper which was adopted from the Hickson Department several years ago.

Fire Equipment

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

In November 1989 members of the Tavistock Volunteer Firefighters purchased a portable radio with the proceeds from their annual fish fry and pork barbecue. The new portable radio will be used in rescue situations where the safety of victims as well as firefighters is enhanced through improved communications. – Tavistock Gazette November 22, 1989

On August 30, 1990 Tavistock's original, fully restored 1926 Model T Ford Fire Truck was unveiled at a ceremony at the South Easthope Insurance Company head office in Tavistock. This marvellous piece of history was purchased by the insurance company in 1989 and, through the dedicated efforts of local craftsmen over a period of eleven months, restored to its original condition. The restored vehicle is used by firefighters and South Easthope for parades and celebrations.

In April 1992 the Tavistock Volunteer Firefighters unveiled a new emergency response unit which the volunteers themselves created from a used rental vehicle. A new vehicle of this type costs approximately \$100,000. The volunteers, with a budget of \$20,000, were able to create a state-of-the-art emergency response vehicle thanks to over 1,000 hours of dedicated labour. The unit has a command centre with desk, radio and maps. There is storage for smoke ejectors, generator, jacks, silo gas equipment and safety ropes as well as auto extrication gear. –Tavistock Gazette April 22, 1992

In May 1994 the Optimist Club of Tavistock donated two Personal Alert Safety Systems (PASS) to the fire department. The Rampant Surpass 88 units are designed to be used by firefighters who use breathing apparatus within a burning structure. The alarm sounds a high-pitched beep the subject is motionless for more than 30 seconds, then, if not moved let off a continuous wail until help arrives. At \$200 each, two additional safety alerts were purchased by the firefighters themselves. –Tavistock Gazette June 1, 1994

During the 1800s and early 1900s a hose reel was a common way for fire fighters to put out neighbourhood fires. The village of Tavistock purchased a hose reel to fight fires in 1912. The hose reel was a two wheel cart, pulled by the firefighters, equipped with hose on a reel. Hose reels were developed as early as 1819 when David J. Hubbs of the Eagle Engine Company No. 13 in New York City built a fire cart with two wheels to carry hose, often referred to as "Hubbs Baby". The Tavistock hose reel was in use to 1926 when the purchase of the village's first fire truck made its use extinct. Robert Rudy Sr. placed the hose reel in storage in 1967 to prevent further deterioration as it had been left outdoors for 30 years as it sat at the Tavistock Public Library. Almost 30 years later his son, Robert Rudy Jr. asked council to donate the reel to South Easthope Mutual Insurance Co. for preservation and display. –Stratford Beacon Herald April 2, 1997

March 1998 saw a marked change in the role of the fire fighter in East Zorra-Tavistock as they may now respond to a scene of a life threatening medical emergency as well as their regular firefighting duties. All fifty-one volunteers in the East Zorra-Tavistock fire services (17 in each district) have been trained for this duty. Issued as a Code 4 under the "911" system, it will be an effective method of co-ordinating

Fire Equipment

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

ambulance, police, fire and other emergency services to provide rapid first response assistance to the public. –Tavistock Gazette March 4, 1998

The Tavistock Firefighters took possession of a new pumper on July 28, 1998. The International 4900 was built by Fort Garry Fire Trucks of Indiana. It features a full enclosed pump control panel with seating for five passengers. There is a 900 gallon booster tank with an integrated Class A & B foam system. The Hale pump produces 1050 psi from 4” hydrant feeder hoses. –Tavistock Gazette September 30, 1998

After years of fundraising, the Tavistock Fire Department has taken delivery of their new hydraulic rescue equipment which they had an opportunity to tryout during a training session on December 6, 2003. The department started fund raising about three years ago, said Deputy Chief Paul Roth, and each time they could have used the equipment at an accident scene, they became more serious about acquiring their own equipment. The equipment includes a variable speed cutter, combination grabber and spreader jaw, two rams with extension, plus a lightweight, compact 4-cycle Honda 6.5HP engine powering a two-stage radial piston pump with diverter valve. The rams are capable of producing 32,000 lb of push and 16,000 lb of pull. –Tavistock Gazette December 10, 2003

Rapid communications are critical to emergency response on all fronts. Now East Zorra-Tavistock fire services have broadband communications capabilities linking all three of their fire stations. The EZT fire department was one of the first organizations in Oxford County to get connected to the ROC network. Rural Oxford Connections (ROC) is Oxford County’s version of a program of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). Rural Oxford Connections (ROC) has a mandate to bring broadband wireless Internet to un-served and underserved rural Oxford County. “In the future, we will probably rely upon the Internet to access and transmit data about emergency situations and locations,” said Chief Alexander. “So we need a broadband system capable of transmitting video for training to a group of firefighters at the same time another group is running a mapping application, with no degradation in either application’s performance.” –Tavistock Gazette August 10, 2011

Fire Hall

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

In early 1912 the Tavistock council was in search of suitable building in which to house the hose reel and other equipment of the newly formed Fire Brigade. Over the next few years the hose reel was housed in various locations including Mr. Jacob Lingner's barn at 33 Hope Street E. For this Mr. Lingner received \$24 in rent as reported in "Fact & Fantasy".

In August 1920 the new fire hall at 37 Maria Street was formally opened. The fire hall was equipped with a drying tower in which to dry the hoses after use and a bell which sounded the fire call. This fire hall would serve the community until 1972.

The fire department moved from the fire hall on Maria Street to new quarters on Decew Street in early 1972. The new building was formerly the Junker Building and had been a turnip waxing factory. The new fire hall was considerably larger with two bays to facilitate the additional equipment required by the growing community. Council chambers and the Police office would be incorporated into the north end of the building. A new fire siren would be mounted as the old one had a tendency to freeze up. This facility housed the fire department until November of 2004 when the fire department moved to its current location at 260 Woodstock Street S.

Tavistock's new Fire/Police station opened at 260 Woodstock Street S on November 21, 2004. The 5,500 sq. ft. facility was built on a 2.9 acre triangular portion of land located between the Tavistock Optimist Park and Tavistock Dairy Sales Ltd. The new facility incorporates a meeting/classroom area, kitchen and offices for the Police Service. The new hall has been equipped with a high-speed internet connection with a capacity for up to 100 phone lines should the facility need to be used as a command centre in case of a large scale emergency. The cost of the project was \$856,000. – Tavistock Gazette November 24, 2004

Major Fires

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

The Tavistock Milling Company Limited October 1, 1922

The first inkling of fire was noticed by Mr. Norman Baechler about three o'clock a.m. when he noticed smoke issuing from the garage adjoining the office building and upon investigation his worst fears were aroused and he accordingly rang the alarm.

The local fire brigade responded very promptly but inability to discover the vital point of the blaze, owing to the huge columns of smoke, somewhat hampered them from saving the building.

The ladders used by the brigade were not long enough to reach the top of the building so they were obliged to fight the fire from the ground. Then too the water supply ran out and this completely paralyzed their efforts to fight the fire in the way it should be fought.

Tavistock Gazette October 5, 1922

The Tavistock Cheese and Butter Company Limited July 2, 1938

Fire of an unknown origin completely destroyed the factory building. The loss, estimated at \$15,000 was the most serious suffered in Tavistock since the fire which destroyed the Tavistock Milling Company Limited sixteen years ago.

On the arrival of the fire brigade it was realized that very little could be done to save the structure as the flames were spreading exceptionally fast, being fanned by strong north wind. The nearest fire hydrant is about a quarter mile distant from the factory and it is understood there is insufficient hose to reach that distance.

The fire brigade focussed its attention on the roof of the factory manager's house drawing water from the house well and cistern, a bucket brigade being formed by members of the brigade and willing helpers.

It was estimated that a crowd of at least 2,000 persons were present at the scene.

Tavistock Gazette July 7, 1938

C. L. Erb and Sons Planing Mill February 16, 1941

A stubborn blaze at the planing mill at the corner of William and Hope streets was brought under control after two hours of strenuous work on the part of the Fire Brigade and members of the Civil Guard. The loss is estimated at close to \$7000 by Mr. Erb.

The origin of the fire was not definitely determined but it seemed to start in the north end of the building which was the former Evangelical Church building, moved to that location a good many years ago.

Tavistock Gazette February 19, 1941

Major Fires

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

J. G. Field and Son October 29, 1944

Fire of undetermined origin caused extensive damages to finished materials and to the west section of the plant of J. G. Field and Son, woollen sock manufacturers, at the extreme east end of the village early Monday morning.

The fire was the third at the plant in recent years, one in 1925 and the other in 1934. The alarm was turned in by Mr. Edward Wilker who realized that what he thought was steam issuing from several windows along the front of the building as smoke. Turning his car about he raced to the main fire alarm switch in the centre of the village and turned in the alarm.

The flames seemed to be centered in a huge pile of finished socks and knocked-down cardboard cartons alongside the freight elevator at the west end of the building. A thick fire wall separates the west section from the east section and undoubtedly saved the entire building from being gutted. The local fire brigade was considerably hampered in their work by the dense, choking smoke but in less than a half-hour had the fire under control. Mr. Field, when queried, said "the loss will be quite extensive".

Tavistock Gazette November 1, 1944

Machine Shop of Aaron B. Roth March 21, 1948

A spectacular fire, fanned by strong wind, totally destroys the machine shop in the north east section of town. The loss is estimated at \$18,000.

Mr. And Mrs. A. B. Roth of Elizabeth street discovered that Mr. Roth's machine and welding shop across the roadway north from their home was a blazing mass of flames. Almost at the same time a dull explosion roused the neighbours, who, on rushing to windows to ascertain the cause, saw the sky brilliantly lighted with vivid flames shooting from the steel-roofed structure of one and a half storey, and about 34 by 48 feet.

Mr. Roth turned in the alarm to the telephone operator but for some unexplained reason the fire siren did not sound forth with its eerie wail and the telephone operator then telephoned members of the brigade.

Upon arrival of the fire brigade it deemed advisable to direct the water hoses on the roof of the Roth home and also that of Mr. And Mrs. John Stere, just east of the blazing structure as a strong north wind was blowing the flames toward the homes.

Tavistock Gazette March 24, 1948

Zimmerman Brothers Limited December 11, 1956

One of Tavistock's oldest manufacturing plants, that of Zimmerman Brothers, Ltd. Was totally destroyed by wind-whipped flames last Tuesday night in a spectacular and disastrous fire causing loss and damage believed to exceed \$100,000.

Major Fires

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

Within minutes of the alarm being turned in the Tavistock fire brigade members had hoses turned on the blazing structure. There are conflicting reports as to the origin of the blaze. By 7.15 the building was a raging inferno, but the flames were kept under control with three lines of hose, directed by Fire Chief Henry Eckstein.

At 7.20 a section of the front wall collapsed and the hydro transformer on the pole immediately in front of the blazing structure blew out at 7.30 plunging the entire community into darkness. The entire north end of the village was without power until 11.30. At 8.30 the main front wall collapsed onto Woodstock Street north. Four hydrants were in use and at no time were the fire fighters hampered by a lack of water. However, shortly after seven o'clock Wednesday morning the auxiliary engine pump had to be shut off as the was so low in the reservoir that air had got into the intake supply pipe to the pumping station.

Under the mutual aid plan, members from Woodstock, Stratford and the Innerkip-Hickson Fire Departments responded to an urgent request for assistance.

The plant normally employed 30 to 40 men.

Tavistock Gazette December 12, 1956

Woelfle Block March 11, 1962

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Mason and family, and Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Broomfield were made homeless Sunday afternoon when fire destroyed the apartments and interior of the former Woelfle Block in the centre of town on Woodstock Street South. The two families resided on the second floor of the building, which has two business establishments and a vacant store on the ground floor. The fire siren first sounded at 1.45 p.m. when Mr. Mason, who operated the grocery store on the first floor, was met with a billow of dense smoke as he opened a door leading from the dining room to the living room.

Thirty fire fighters fought the stubborn fire through a dense pall of smoke as the 18-man Tavistock volunteer fire brigade was assisted by Oxford Mutual Aid firefighters and equipment from Woodstock and Hickson. At 2.45, one hour after the siren sounded the flames finally broke through the roof. The capping across the front of the building caved out and down into the street at 3.20 and at four o'clock one wall and part of the front of the building collapsed. It was estimated 150,00 gallons of water were used to fight the fire with the maximum rate estimated to be 600 gallons per minute.

Tavistock Gazette March 7, 1962

Arlington Hotel September 20, 1965

A Tavistock landmark, the Arlington Hotel, is a burned-out smouldering shambles of a building. Located on the main street, just north of the centre of the village, the three-storey white brick building believed to be about 80 years old was totally destroyed by fire in the early hours Monday morning.

Major Fires

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

By the time the local brigade arrived entrance could not be gained and all the firefighters could do was fight the fire from the outside. Shortly after two o'clock a mutual aid call was placed with the Hickson fire brigade. It appeared the fire started in either the ladies beverage room or the kitchen. Both are located on the south side of the hotel.

At 2.25 the roof of the hotel caved in, and at 2.45 the south wall caved out. The tower at the top of the building caved into the burning building at three o'clock, and shortly after, part of the rear wall caved in.

Tavistock Gazette September 22, 1965

Sippel Block February 19, 1985

The sky was a brilliant orange early Tuesday morning when firemen arrived at the scene of a devastating blaze at Sippel Motor Sales on Woodstock street north in Tavistock. The garage was totally engulfed in flame with the ceiling and back wall collapsed by the time Tavistock volunteers were alerted at 2:25 a.m. on a call from a night nurse at the Bonnie Brae nursing home just across the street. A prevailing westerly wind kept flames to the back of the structure which also caused the Sippel home to become involved. At the Sippel residence, firemen doused the flames which had spread into the family's dining room as well as to parts of the attic space. The home had to be monitored continually as the base of the fire was only yards away from the home.

Upon arriving at the scene and realizing the extent of the fire, Tavistock volunteers called Hickson for assistance.

To the north, the adjoining apartments and ground floor office of the Ontario Swine Breeders Association had to be evacuated then cleared of all worthy contents. The flames spread along the roofline to the apartment area. The rear half of the second storey was totally lost as firemen were hampered by false ceilings and limited access to the attic space. However, a combined effort from the Hickson and Tavistock boys saved the building from total destruction.

Tavistock Gazette February 20, 1985

Tavistock Cheese Factory November 7, 2003

Cheese factory officials are praising the work of the Tavistock Fire Department for keeping damage to a minimum in a fire at the plant on Friday. Construction workers scrambled to safety after what was thought to be a welding spark ignited materials at the site where tradesmen were putting the finishing touches on a multi-storey addition.

Downtown Tavistock was blanketed by heavy smoke and the school and nursing homes were warned to keep windows closed due to possible hazardous material burning.

Fire fighters had difficulty accessing the blaze due to construction vehicles and equipment but were able to employ the department's deluge deck gun to knock down the flames. Ground crews used every

Major Fires

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

available hose to fight the fire externally while other firefighters monitored the building from the inside. After 1 ½ hours the fire was under control. Most of the damage appeared to be to the insulated paneling covering the building. Areas of the plant not affected by the fire were back to work on Monday.

Tavistock Gazette November 12, 2003

New-life Mills Limited October 19, 2007

With a watering ban on in the village and the water tower out of commission for repainting, what is the worst that could happen? How about a fire at the feed mill.

The Tavistock fire department's worst nightmare *almost* turned to reality on Friday when the alarm came out of a fire at the feed mill shared by Martins and New-life Mills on Maria Street.

Just around 12:30 p.m. workers smelled something hot in the second floor extruder area of the mill. Upon investigation, it was found that material in the venting system had heated considerably and flames were sighted between the first and second floors. The quick action of manager Carl Weitzel, a former Tavistock fire department volunteer, surely saved the structure. Mr. Weitzel and other employees had doused the flames with fire extinguishers before being forced out by heavy smoke. Tavistock, Hickson and Innerkip fire fighters set up holding tanks for water on the street while others with breathing apparatus entered the building to ensure that the fire was under control. Still other fire fighters mounted ladders to the second storey roof to gain access to the extruder area.

High winds and the threat of a thunderstorm had firefighters and employees scrambling to close all doors and windows in the mill to prevent the wind from feeding the super-heated area. All of the burning material was taken out of the building. By 2 p.m. the first of the volunteers were leaving and by 3 p.m. all firefighters were back at their own stations.

Tavistock Gazette October 24, 2007

Wettlaufer Hobby Shop/Storage Barn January 29, 2009

A fire that gutted a hobby shop on Elizabeth Street in Tavistock is thought to be electrical related. Township Fire Chief Scott Alexander said the Fire Marshall's office determined the blaze broke out near an electrical panel in the front of the wooden structure around 12:15 p.m.

"It was a stubborn fire to fight", Chief Alexander said. Tavistock fire fighters responded to the call and were assisted by members of the Hickson and Innerkip departments as well as some backup and relief personnel from the Shakespeare station. The blaze burned for about three hours in -10°C temperatures.

The loss is estimated at \$150,000 for the building and \$50,000 for contents.

Tavistock Gazette February 4, 2009

The Politics of Fire Protection

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

The Fire Department is a public service of the community which is funded by citizens and businesses that pay taxes.

The successful fire department must maintain a nonpartisan constituency, among the elected officials and in the public, to ensure support for the department in order to provide the services mandated by law and citizen expectations.

One of the earliest examples of this aspect of Fire Department operation was found in the February 14, 1912 edition of the Tavistock Gazette. A deputation from the Fire Brigade met with Council and requested an increase of men and for better accommodation for the equipment. In a subsequent Council meeting a committee was established to procure plans to address these issues. *(In the earliest days of the Fire Department space was rented to store the equipment and supplies.)*

In November of 1920 the Schindler butcher shop west of town was destroyed by fire. The Tavistock Fire Brigade responded to the call for help even though the fire was outside the village boundary. The Tavistock Gazette of December 16, 1920 reported a deputation from the fire brigade, lead by Chief Steinman, approached council regarding compensating the members of the brigade who reported to the Schindler fire. After a lengthy discussion it was decided the council was not responsible for the call and the firemen would not be compensated. The fire brigade was informed that only when the bell was rung denoting the number of a local hydrant were they supposed to respond.

An editorial published in the Tavistock Gazette October 28, 1926 indicates that the decision to purchase the village's first fire truck was not without controversy. There was some debate as to the usefulness of a fire truck during winter months.

A headline in the Tavistock Gazette of September 16, 1942 read **“Council Decrees Fire Brigade and Equipment to Remain in Village”**. This motion on the part of council also included the provision that anyone turning in an alarm for a fire outside the corporation limits shall be responsible for the costs incurred. The council was unanimous on the matter, taking the view that when the Brigade as a unit attends a fire outside the corporation limits the village taxpayers pay the cost. It was also argued that in the event the Brigade was attending a fire outside the corporation limits little fire protection would be available within the village should the need arise.

In contrast to the headline of twelve years earlier it was reported by the Tavistock Gazette of May 12, 1954 that council had decided to enter the Oxford County Fire Departments' Mutual Aid System as outlined and approved by the Ontario Fire Marshals Department. It is not clear if council was fully aware of the implications of this decision but in February 1955, following representation from members of the volunteer fire brigade, council agreed to allow the fire truck to leave the village under the mutual aid plan.

In July 1956 council granted the fire brigade's request for affiliation with the Fireman's Association of Ontario which is now known as the Fire Fighter's Association of Ontario whose mission is to promote

The Politics of Fire Protection

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

and protect the interests and welfare of all fire fighters while promoting the safety and quality of life for all residents of the Province of Ontario.

In September 1964, at a meeting of Oxford County fire brigade representatives, a decision was made that there be a charge of \$100 for a fire call to a provincial highway in which a car or truck is involved. There would be no charge for residents of the county, however.

The Tavistock Gazette of April 1, 1970 reported that the Volunteer Fire Department requested council to have a survey of the town's facilities made by the Ontario Fire Marshal's department. In the report to council it was pointed out the fire truck was 20 years old and that it will only hold one roof ladder and two extension ladders and can only carry 100 feet of 2 ½ inch hose which they feel is inadequate. The small fire hall has no storage area and, with the condition of the bell tower, no facilities for drying hoses after a fire. At a subsequent council meeting authorization was given for the study by the Fire Marshal's office and in May 1971 council initiated meetings with the fire brigade to discuss plans for the new fire hall.

The Tavistock Gazette of November 19, 1980 reported on the discussion at the Oxford County Liaison Committee meeting regarding **standardized** fire protection including recommendations for the establishment of:

- A minimum standard for fire protection
- Remuneration for fire fighters according to qualifications and time spent in training and fire fighting
- A minimum compulsory training program per firefighter per year
- A centralized grid system for fire reporting

The fire chiefs did not support the first three recommendations as practical however the grid system in the county, with a central answering office, was expected to operational in 1982 as soon as the county-wide radio system is set up.

In September 1981 council was advised that one fire chief should be appointed for East Zorra – Tavistock. However, council, citing a letter from the Fire Marshal's office, were doubtful as to the need for only one chief and the legality of the regulation.

In September 1984 Tavistock Fire Chief Mahlon Leis was named chief of the newly formed East Zorra – Tavistock Fire Department.

In September 1985 the East Zorra-Tavistock council authorized a contract with the Woodstock Fire Department for automatic response to the Oxford Regional Centre for use of the aerial ladder and in other cases upon request. The Oxford Regional Centre is the only facility in the Township which has more height than the Township Fire Departments can serve.

Fire Calls

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

The Tavistock Gazette of April 18, 1912 reported the new formed fire brigade responded to their first fire call the previous Saturday on April 13th. The report did not provide the location of the call but did comment that the brigade was “throwing water” within two minutes of the whistle being sounded.

The fire brigade responded to one fire call during the past year according to the Tavistock Gazette of December 19, 1935. The editor wondered that with such a record perhaps the fire insurance rate could be lowered for the village.

1954 was another good year for fire loss as only one fire call was recorded and the damage negligible.

Other years for which Tavistock fire call information was published in the Gazette:

1955	Five calls answered during the year
1958	Two fire calls during year
1960	Three fire calls during the year
1963	Seven fire calls during past year
1965	Four fire calls & two false alarms in past year
1967	Four fires attended in the past year
1972	Three fire calls, two assistance calls during year
1973	No fires for one year.

At the June 18, 1956 meeting of the East Zorra-Tavistock council Township Fire Chief Mahlon Leis reported that 57 fire calls had been answered in East Zorra -Tavistock in the previous six months, 12 to Tavistock, 21 to Hickson and 22 to Innerkip.

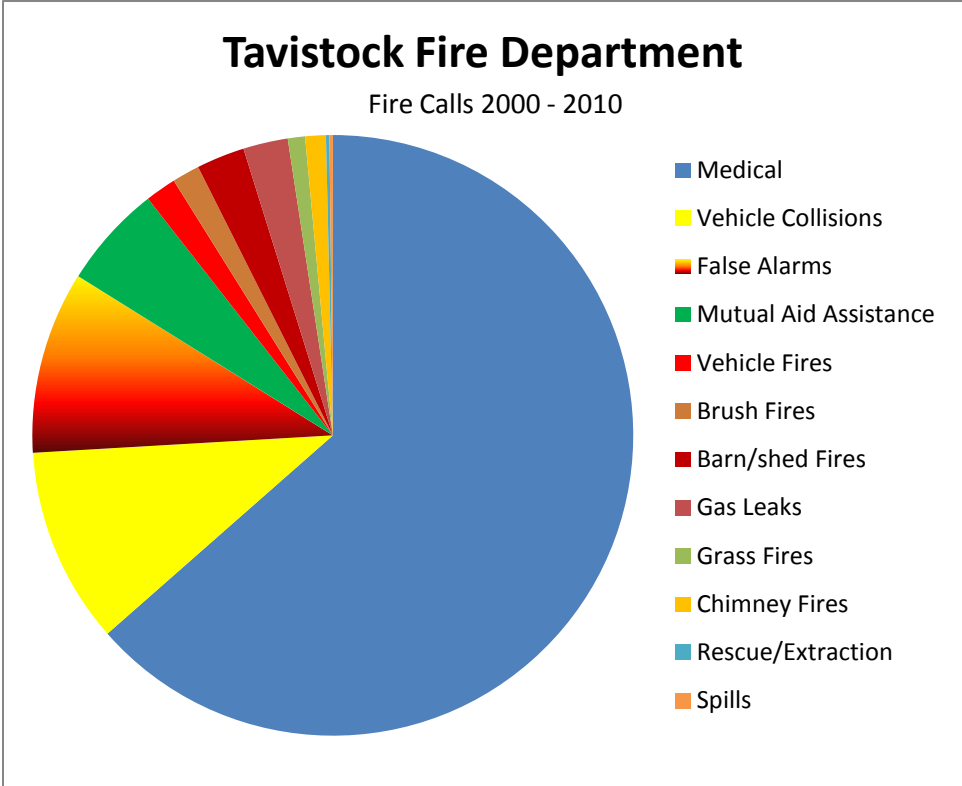
The May 12, 2010 Tavistock Gazette reported a ten year summary of fire calls for the Tavistock Fire Department and the East Zorra-Tavistock Department.

	Tavistock	EZT
Medical	343	793
Vehicle Collisions	57	245
False Alarms	53	145
Mutual Aid Assistance	30	110
Vehicle Fires	9	70
Brush Fires	8	62
Barn/shed Fires	14	57
Gas Leaks	13	36
Grass Fires	5	30
Chimney Fires	6	20
Rescue/Extraction	1	14
Spills	1	7

Fire Calls

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

Figures that stand out in this summary are the medical and vehicle related calls which clearly reflect the changing role of the fire department in our society.



Did You Know?

History of the Tavistock Fire Department 1911-2011

Tavistock Milling Company Fire November 1922

The Stratford Fire Department travelled to Tavistock to assist in fighting this major blaze. It took the Stratford firefighters about thirty minutes to reach Tavistock.... **by train!**

Fire Fighter's Uniforms 1932

The Tavistock branch of the Women's Institute organized a community card and crokinole party to raise funds to help the volunteer fire fighters purchase uniforms.

Citizens are getting in the way! 1933

It was reported that crowds of onlookers, a number of whom voiced their opinions concerning the proper way to fight the fire, often impeded fire fighters as they attempted to gain control of a fire.

Chimney fires were quite common 1936

Although we do not hear about chimney fires very often today, chimney fires were a very common cause of fire calls in the early days of the fire department.

Fire Brigade

The term "**Fire Brigade**" may have had its origins from the old days when fires were fought with buckets. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "**brigade**" as *'a group of people organized for special activity'*.

Fire Department

By the 1950's the term "**Fire Department**" was becoming more commonplace than "**Fire Brigade**". By the 1980's "**Fire Department**" was used almost exclusively in this area.

Fire Hose Threads Standardized 1953

In 1953 the Tavistock Fire Department had the threads on their hoses & fittings re-cut to the 3 1/8" – 5 TPI, a standard that was adopted by the Fire Marshall of Ontario. Prior to this time threads were not standard which sometimes led to problems when fire departments came to each other's aid.

Muscular Dystrophy Appeal

The Tavistock Fire Department first collected for Muscular Dystrophy in 1957. Over \$30 was contributed. In 1993 the Fire Department raised \$4000 for Muscular Dystrophy.

Fire Trucks Do Not Need to Stop at Red Lights 1968

Fire department vehicles are not subject to red traffic lights when answering an alarm. Magistrate Ehgoetz said in a recent ruling in Stratford court. It is "essential to the public good and in accordance with public expectations" that fire trucks be permitted right-of-way against a red light when an alarm is sounded.