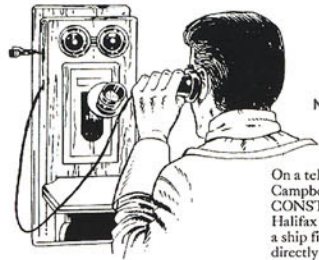




# A Tribute to the HALIFAX FIRE DEPARTMENT ON THE 85th. Anniversary of the HALIFAX EXPLOSION



Narrated by firefighter Billy "Blaze" Burns

On a telephone, similar to this, Campbell Road shop-keeper, CONSTANT UPHAM, called the Halifax Fire Department to report a ship fire. He could see the blaze directly across the street from his store. Other citizens in the area rang a warning bell in a nearby fire hall tower.



The ship, in flames, was the "Mont Blanc" which, moments before, had been in collision with the Belgian Relief Ship "Imo" in the narrows of Halifax Harbour.

The call from Mr. Upham was received at the West Street Engine House sometime after 8:45 on the morning of December 6, 1917.



AN HISTORICAL DOCU-COMIC

written and illustrated by

OWEN MCCARRON

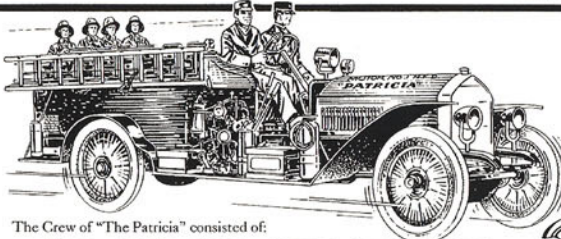


Fire alarm No. 83, which was located at the corner of Roome St. and Campbell Road (which later became Barrington St. and ran through the community of Africville), was rung in, alerting all other fire stations in the Halifax Peninsula. By now, the Mont Blanc had drifted up against pier 6 setting it ablaze.

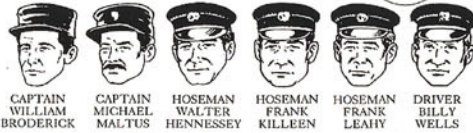


Halifax boasted 8 fire stations: Stn.1 Brunswick St., Stn.2 West St., Stn.3 Morris St., Stn.4 Bedford Row, Stn.5 Quinpool Rd., Stn.6 Spring Garden Rd., Stn.7 Isleville St., Stn.8 Grafton St. In all a total complement of 122, 36 permanent and 86 part paid, 13 pieces of apparatus (only one was motorized) and about 30 horses.

The crew of the 67 h.p. "Patricia", the first motorized pumper (750 gpm) in Canada, which had been built by American LaFrance Fire Engine Co. in Toronto, was quickly mustered to make the first run of the day. It raced from Station 2 manned by 6 firemen. They earned from \$17 to \$20 weekly. Their fire-fighting outfits consisted of nothing more than a sou'wester, rain coat and rubber boots with none of the present day protection.



The Crew of "The Patricia" consisted of:



CAPTAIN WILLIAM BRODERICK

CAPTAIN MICHAEL MALTUS

HOSEMAN WALTER HENNESSEY

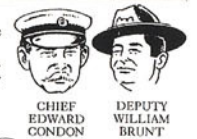
HOSEMAN FRANK KILLEEN

HOSEMAN FRANK LEAHEY

DRIVER BILLY WELLS

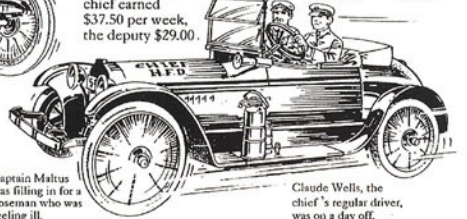
Captain Maltus was filling in for a hoseman who was feeling ill.

Following closely behind "The Patricia" was Fire Chief Edward Condon along with his deputy, William Brunt, in their 45 h.p. 1911 McLaughlin roadster which had cost \$1475.00. The chief earned \$37.50 per week, the deputy \$29.00.

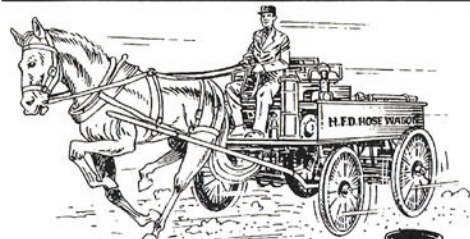


CHIEF EDWARD GONDON

DEPUTY WILLIAM BRUNT



Claude Wells, the chief's regular driver, was on a day off.



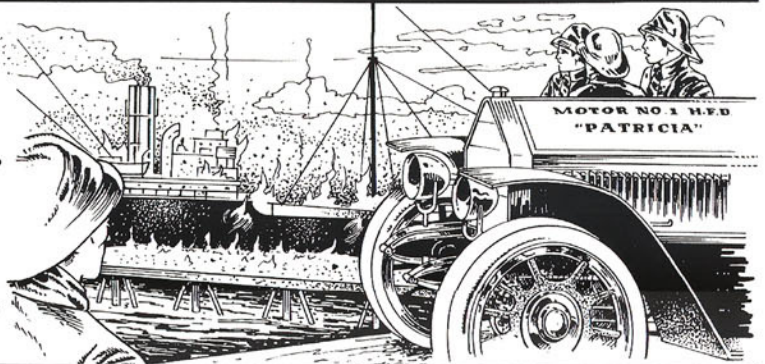
At the Isleville Street Station, a horse-drawn hose wagon had been readied. The harness was hung from the ceiling, dropped onto the horse who was then hooked up to the wagon. The horses lived in stalls in the fire station. It galloped from the station to join the others at the fire site.



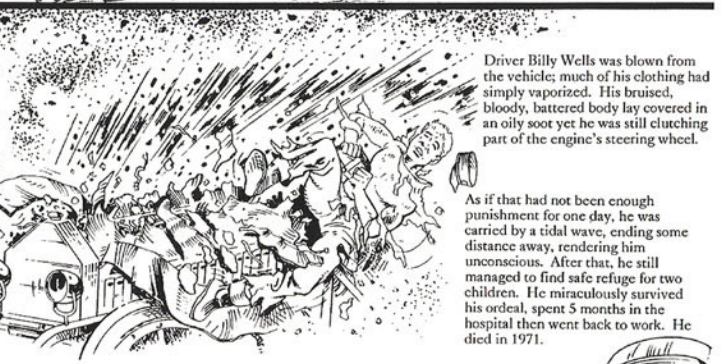
HOSEMAN JOHN DUGGAN

As "The Patricia" reached Pier 6, the crew was ordered to roll out the hose lines. A fire hydrant was nearby. The chief and deputy had arrived on the scene and the hose wagon was now in sight. But for all of them, it would be too late. None of them, nor the hundreds of spectators who had gathered on this bright, sunny winter's morn, knew the fiery ship was carrying a cargo of instant death.

At "ground zero", the final seconds before 9:05 a.m. were ticking...ticking...tic...

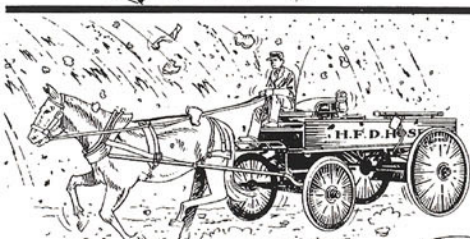


The whole world seemed to split as fire and smoke spewed into the heavens...bodies and debris flew helter skelter. The chief's car flew through the air, though it had been a child's toy, landing upside down, totally wrecked. Both the chief and deputy were killed. Four firemen from "The Patricia" were killed instantly, another died on December 31<sup>st</sup> from injuries he had sustained. The hose wagon driver was killed, his horse never recovered. His horse was also killed...his collar found some two miles away.



Driver Billy Wells was blown from the vehicle; much of his clothing had simply vaporized. His bruised, bloody, battered body lay covered in an oily soot yet he was still clutching part of the engine's steering wheel.

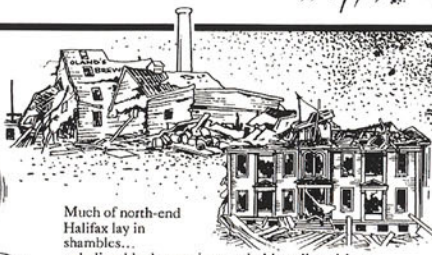
As if that had not been enough punishment for one day, he was carried by a tidal wave, ending some distance away, rendering him unconscious. After that, he still managed to find safe refuge for two children. He miraculously survived his ordeal, spent 5 months in the hospital then went back to work. He died in 1971.



While the city trembled, another horse-drawn hose wagon, from Station No. 1, was racing along Brunswick Street to the disaster scene. Black rain, of unconsumed carbon from the Mont Blanc, fell from the dirty sky. The street and houses were being pelted with shrapnel, a piece of which struck the driver. He died at the scene.



HOSEMAN JOHN SPRUIN, Sr.

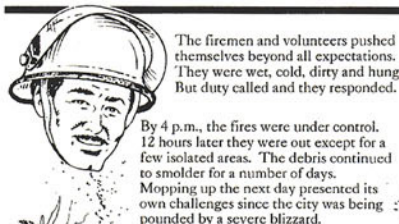


Much of north-end Halifax lay in shambles... unbelievable devastation... mind-boggling visions of death... sights no eyes were meant to behold. Buildings collapsed like kindling wood. Schools, churches, orphanages received no special dispensation from this unspeakable fury. Hundreds of children were killed as buildings, which should have been safe havens, instead crumbled about them. Then there were the fires.

Other fire-fighters had arrived at the chaotic scene, with a variety of apparatus, and immediately hooked up their hoses to hydrants. The water

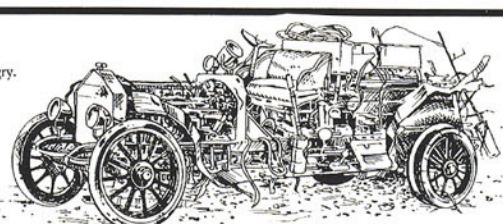
pressure was weak and the systems old. As well as factories and other buildings, houses were flattened.

Many cellars were stocked with coal for the winter months. Coal-filled stoves overturned and wooden houses were ablaze. The firemen's task: stop the fires from spreading to other parts of the city. The winds, from the south, were variable which was a blessing.



The firemen and volunteers pushed themselves beyond all expectations. They were wet, cold, dirty and hungry. But duty called and they responded.

By 4 p.m., the fires were under control. 12 hours later they were out except for a few isolated areas. The debris continued to smolder for a number of days. Mopping up the next day presented its own challenges since the city was being pounded by a severe blizzard.



Extensively damaged, "The Patricia" was sent back to the makers for repairs costing \$6,000. They took \$1,500 off the bill and asked that it be placed in a fund for the firemen's families. The families of the firemen who were killed received \$1,000 from the city except one who received \$500. As well, the city bought another pumper which arrived only days after the explosion and the chief's car was replaced as well.

From its beginning in 1754, five years after the founding of Halifax, until present day, the Halifax Fire Department still hasn't seen anything like December 6, 1917... the day Halifax faced its own mortality.



THIS MONUMENT IS DEDICATED TO THE 85 MEMBERS OF THE HALIFAX FIRE DEPARTMENT WHO LOST THEIR LIVES WHILE FIGHTING A FIRE ON BOARD THE MONT BLANC ON DECEMBER 6, 1917. THE CENTER PIECE IS BY HOSEMAN JOHN DUGGAN. THE CHIEF EDWARD GONDON. DEPUTY CHIEF WILLIAM P. BRUNT. CAPTAIN WILLIAM BRODERICK. CAPTAIN MICHAEL MALTUS. HOSEMAN WALTER HENNESSEY. HOSEMAN FRANK KILLEEN. HOSEMAN FRANK LEAHEY. DRIVER BILLY WELLS. HOSEMAN JOHN DUGGAN.

### SPECIAL THANKS

to Don Snider, former member of the Halifax Fire Department. This project would not have been possible without his help and guidance. Don is a collector of fire memorabilia and artifacts who is anxious to establish a firefighters' museum. Anything you have relating to the Halifax Fire Department that you would like to share with him, call (902) 454-8392 or dsnider@ns.sympatico.ca. Thanks, too, to Alant Platters for the phone reference and to my son, Stephen, for the typesetting.