

The Shoreline Journal

PROUD TO FEATURE - Onslow-Belmont Fire Brigade 50TH ANNIVERSARY



Pictured in front of a 500 gallon tanker truck and Civil Defense Fire Truck at the opening of the new Onslow Belmont Fire Hall are (left to right) Karl Barnhill, Lee Higgins, Darrell Clarke, Maynard Wilson, Keith Hamilton and Councillor Kenneth Crowe.



Lee Higgins, Russell Jennings, Ellen Hamilton, Vaughan Dickie and Neil Morash (left to right) cut the 50th Anniversary Cake at the Onslow Belmont Fire Hall on Jan. 29th, 2011.

By Linda Harrington

In the late 1950's fire protection was becoming a major concern for the communities of Onslow and Belmont. A serious fire in Belmont, in April of 1954 almost wiped out an entire section of the community. The Truro Fire Brigade, Camp Debert and Bible Hill Brigades were helpful in times of emergency but mostly it was the long ring of a crank telephone that drew neighbors to help neighbors in times of crisis.

By 1959 people were taking an interest in forming a Fire Brigade. After a fire at the home of Earl Kirk in January of 1961, it was decided the time had come to take a serious look at fire protection. Meetings were first held on January 14th and 21st, 1961.

Several members of the Civil Defense Group who were behind starting the Brigade included Aubrey MacInnis, Ira Flemming, Darrell Clarke and Bob McLellan. Their Civil Defence training was important in getting the Brigade started.

The Onslow-Belmont Fire Brigade was formally organized on January 28th, 1961, with 38 men present. Members of the Truro Fire Brigade were on hand to help with organization.

Keith Hamilton was elected as the first Fire Chief, a position he continued to hold for 39 years.

Four zones were established, each with a Captain

and a Lieutenant. In Onslow the Captain was Maynard Wilson and Lieut. was Neil Morash; Lower Onslow, Capt. was Robert McLellan and Lieut. was Darrell Clarke; Belmont, Capt. Karl Barnhill and Lieut. Chesley Matthews and in Crowes Mills, Capt. was Lee Higgins and Lieut. was Robert Crowe.

Harry Elliott started off the fund raising by slapping a \$50.00 donation on the table. A house to house canvas generated \$2000.00 The Dept. of Lands and Forest donated 1500 feet of hose.

The first truck was purchased on Feb. 11th, 1961. Members worked long hours on the truck, which was equipped with a 750 gallon tank and a high pressure pump.



Lee Higgins represented himself during the reenactment of the first meeting of the OBBF. He is shown wearing the same sweater he wore to the meeting back on Jan. 28th, 1961.

The first fire call was to assist Truro Fire Brigade at a house fire in Truro Heights on Feb. 21st and a month later the Brigade was called into action at a home belonging to Frank Baird.

The community of Masstown was added as the fifth district later in the year. 400 properties were now covered by the Brigade.

Construction of a 27ft x 30ft fire hall began in the summer, with the official opening held on Nov. 17th, 1961. A fund raising dance was held that evening. The hall was built almost entirely by volunteer hours, with a total cost of \$1000.00

Penny cans were distributed to homes, asking residents to deposit a penny a day to help the Brigade. Cans were collected at the end of the year.

The first Harvest Sale was held on Oct. 10th, 1962, and \$591.57 was raised. This annual auction has grown each year with \$17,500.00 being raised in 2010.

A variety concert was held on March 28th, 1963 but it was cut short when a service station in Lower Onslow caught fire and the men had to leave.

In 1962, an international 4-wheel drive chassis was purchased and over-hauled by members into a 250 gallon fire truck with pump and ladders.

Much of the early gear purchased was refurbished by thousands of volunteer hours. The Brigade purchased a former air force gasoline tanker, a cube van and even a retired ice cream truck. All were made into 'like new' fire trucks for minimal costs.

Fire ponds were established as water sources throughout the communities in 1963.

The increase in the number of trucks required a hall expansion in 1968. A 50x60ft section was added and included room for two more tucks, an electrical room, furnace room, chief's office, wash-rooms, radio control room, kitchen and meeting area.

By 1971 the Brigade

owned a total of four trucks. Fund raising events included monthly dances, penny cans, harvest sale and special events such as winter carnival and ticket draws.

Monthly dances were first held at the hall but later moved to local schools. One of the early bands was the Brigade's own Fire House Four with Keith Hamilton, Wayne Elliott, Herb Constantine and Dannie Andrews.

Instant alert radios were used for the first time in 1972, a welcome change from the phone system.

The Brigade set up a booth at the NS Provincial Exhibition in 1974 and continued this fund raiser for 34 years. One memorable event was the time the Exhibition booths were raided by the RCMP. Several members from the Brigade were arrested and taken off to jail. Two of the games being used were determined to be illegal. The members were eventually released but the games were confiscated and never returned. There have been plenty of jokes and stories written about the event over the years.

Annual awards are given out to deserving members of the Brigade. The first award was established in 1962 by Chief Hamilton and Deputy Chief Wilson. The Fireman of the Year Award was given out yearly to the firefighter who displayed good interest, attended training, calls and meetings.

In 1976 a Fellowship Award was added in memory of Cliff MacDougall. A membership vote determines the winner of this annual award.

In 1984, a memorial award was established in memory of Carl King. The Officer of the Year Award is determined by a membership vote, as well.

John Petrasch, owner of Atlantic Travel, established the Most Improved Fire Fighter Award in 1985.

The position of Assistant Deputy Chief was added in 1975, to reduce the work load of the Chief.

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A large crowd was in attendance at the Onslow Belmont Fire Hall on Jan. 29th during the 50th Anniversary celebrations.

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