

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Historical Perspective: Brighton's Altruistic Fire Department (Part 5)

December 22, 1941, the Brighton Argus reported, "Brighton experienced one of its largest and most hardy fought fires here Monday evening when fire, caused by an overheated stove pipe, broke out in the Karus Electric Shop on West Main Street, shortly after nine o'clock" (north side, 400 block). The approximately 70-year old wood structures, which housed the businesses of E.J. Keehn, Gus Karus, Harold Jarvis and A.C. Stewart & Son, were destroyed. Hartland and Howell fire departments were called to assist. Within a week plans were underway by Keehn to rebuild. The other businesses found alternate sites.

With the onset of WW II, many firemen were called to service. An auxiliary fire department was organized for local youths age 17 and older who were anxious to help. Erwin R. Hyne was in charge. Rigorous training, similar to that of the firemen, assured they'd be ready in an emergency. This group disbanded in the late 1940s to be revived in 1951. It is known as the earliest Junior Department in the state.

Several major fires occurred during the war. October 15, 1942: "Despite the best efforts of the Brighton Fire Department, fire completely destroyed the 43 room Island Lake Hotel." The 20-year old structure had long been a landmark in the area. In November 1944, a fire in the Hyne woods north of Brighton resulted in the loss of about 400 cords of wood. Even during a war, local fire emergencies continued.

In 1943, members of the department were involved in the construction of an Honor Roll listing all local members of the armed services. Constructed of seven white 4x8 Masonite panels, it was installed on the vacant lot located at the southwest corner of Grand River and Main.

In 1946, with the end of WW II, there was an enthusiastic desire for a real celebration. A four-day Brighton Victory Homecoming was spearheaded by the fire department. This welcome home event properly commemorated the return of the area's service members.

Fire department veterans immediately resumed the many tasks awaiting them: the July 4th fire works and carnivals, Thanksgiving feather parties, Halloween and Christmas celebrations, and fire fighting duties.

By that September, remembering their high school football days, these firemen raised \$8,000 for a lighting system which was installed at Sloan Field (east of the school at 125 S. Church Street). This brought an end to daytime football. The quality of the system was compared to that of Wrigley Field and other major league parks. As if that wasn't enough, they installed a public address system for \$500 and took the lead in building new bleachers and stands.

The purchase of new fire fighting equipment emphasized the desperate need for a new fire hall. The question remained as to how to afford it and where to build it. The wherewithal was again provided by the firemen themselves with a wide variety of community-supported fund raisers. In 1948, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Graham donated property, a 60-foot by 132-foot lot, on the south side of Main Street at 209 W. Main.

Compiled by Marieanna Bair from newspaper clippings. Additions/corrections requested. 810/229-6402.