Historical Perspective: Brighton's Altruistic Fire Department (Part 7)

The Wolverine Brush fire, 431 W. Main (December 31, 1971) forced the recognition that fighting such major configurations required more than the local fire department. The several departments in Livingston County began seriously considering how to more efficiently do the job. By March 1977, the Livingston County Fire Fighter Association came into being. In June, the Brighton Area Fire Advisory Board, promoting the continual improving and upgrading of the quality of fire fighting, bought a rescue squad truck. Three years later, the Brighton Township Fire Department was formed and built a firehouse on Old 23, south of Hythe Road.

Following John Dymond's service as chief (1970-1971), Mel Sanch (who joined in 1964) became chief of the Brighton Fire Department on January 26, 1972. During the 1970s, festivities related to Independence Day were each on a larger scale and more well done than the previous year. The 1976 Bicentennial event was most memorable. A four-day celebration included a carnival, parade, battle of the bands, motorcar exhibition, athletic events and plenty of fire works. The 1936 American LaFrance pump, which had been in use during the '40s and '50s, was completely restored in time for exhibition. Local businesses donated to cover expenses and about 4,000 hours of labor were contributed to its restoration. The 45th annual Fourth of July parade and festivities included the new pump purchased in April 1977, for $102,000.

The 1980s saw much activity. After 30 years, the station at 209 W. Main was sold. August 3, 1982 was one of those special days: ground breaking for the new fire hall at Firemen's Field on West Grand River. It was the well-deserved honor and privilege of Charles Bidwell and Chief Mel Sanch to throw the first shovel of dirt. Upon completion of the new hall the old bell, which had been originally placed in the Old Town Hall in 1883 and carefully stored following its removal from the bellry, was installed for display in front of the new fire hall. Also, in 1988 Dick Shinseki was appointed full-time fire chief. On May 30, 1991, the popular eating spot, Lynn's Cafe at 415 W. Main, burned down. Lynn's Cafe is presently at 180 N. First Street.

The 51st annual Halloween party hosted 1,226 costumed children in 1992. In 1994, following Dick Shinseki's retirement, Charles Bidwell served as chief until the hiring of Larry Lane on January 16, 1995. By now, the job of Chief includes the establishment of formal training programs, long-range planning of equipment replacement, working with other departments of the area, etc. Public education programs have been promoted and emergency and disaster preparedness programs have been developed. The Livingston County Fire Fighters Association continues to review its recommended procedures regarding the qualifications of personnel hired/appointed to various positions.

In October 1997, Chief Larry Lane and Brighton Township Fire Chief, Roger Young, began a discussion relative to a merger of the two.

Compiled by Marianne Bair from clippings. Additions/corrections requested. (810) 229-6402

A New Walkway For Old Village Cemetery

A new concrete surface walkway is being designed so that visitors will be able to enter Old Village Cemetery from Millpond Park. There is no access to the cemetery today. The walkway will be located along a newly revised top terrace behind the gazebo. This new access is adjacent to the ornamental fence on the west side of Saint Paul's Episcopal Church and connects to the sidewalk that fronts the church.

The walkway will connect to the new cemetery entry gate (donated by BAHS) installed earlier in 2009. Revitalization of this historic burial ground is a BAHS priority. Two major cleanups in 2009 have removed significant overgrowth of brush and weed trees on the east and west property lines. Special group walking tours and individual audio tours will be developed that highlight the many early Brighton families that are buried here. Perennial flowers and shrubs are under investigation as a method for adding year-round color that will attract visitors as are areas for reflecting and reading.

Work for the walkway will begin in mid-April and will be completed in three weeks. Old Village Cemetery will be rededicated on Memorial Day, May 31, 2010. The Downtown Development Authority has made this project a priority. A well-deserved thank you is due to this group of involved local business professionals. This project will return benefits to the downtown businesses. It will further enhance the Millpond Park, by providing visitor access to the city cemetery. This DDA action is truly the right thing to do!

Thank you DDA! Jim Vichich

Time to Renew Your BAHS Annual Membership

With the coming of the new year, it is time to renew your BAHS annual membership. If you did not renew in the past few months, your membership has expired and needs to be renewed for 2010. Your dues are an important contribution to our organization and are a primary source of our funding. Your ongoing support is greatly needed and much appreciated. Please take a quick moment and send in your check for your 2010 membership renewal.

The BAHS cannot exist without the support of our members. If you value what the BAHS does, what it stands for, and the role we play in preserving our local history, then please consider supporting us again in 2010.