# Westerly's Witness

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## *In this Issue*



## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

# On behalf of the Executive Board of the Westerly Historical Society

# Happy Holidays!

**While we normally do not publish a December edition of the Newsletter, we wanted to share a special digital edition only with our digital subscribers who receive the newsletter via email each month!**

**Your willingness to forgo the black and white mailed hard copy and enjoy the colorful digital version is appreciated!**

**Your decision saves us a great deal in postage and printing costs while also reducing paper usage and helping to be environmentally friendly.**

**PLEASE ENJOY THIS EXCERPT AND PHOTOS FROM A BOOK COVERING THE HISTORY OF THE FIRE PROTECTION IN BRADFORD THAT WAS RECENTLY PUBLISHED BY THE WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.**

# BRADFORD FIRE DEPARTMENT  FIRST FIRE TRUCK


**Photo of the driver side of the 1936 Howe Fire Apparatus on a Ford chassis when it was initially delivered by rail car on July 1st of 1936.**

**The photo was taken inside the inner perimeter fence of BDA near the Main Entrance.**

**The truck was built on a Ford chassis with a V8 engine, a two hundred gallon water tank, and a five hundred gallon per minute pump.**

**The truck was equipped with a 24 foot extension ladder, a 14 foot roof ladder, three lengths of hard suction drafting hose, a one hundred foot booster hose reel, two lanterns, two axes, two soda acid activated water extinguishers, a suction strainer, assorted nozzles, assorted fire tools, and "all required equipment necessary to allow the truck to pass the standard underwriters performance and acceptance tests."**

**(Dwight C. Brown Collection)**

# BRADFORD FIRE DEPARTMENT  FIRST FIRE TRUCK


**Photo of the passenger side of the 1936 Howe Fire Apparatus on a Ford chassis when it was initially delivered to Bradford by railcar on July 1st of 1936.**

**The photo was taken inside the inner perimeter fence of BDA near the Receiving Department.**

**Stuart Cruickshank, the Chief Engineer at BDA, and one of the original founders of the Bradford Fire Protective Association in 1931, is at the rear assisting with loading the twelve hundred feet of cotton jacketed hose that was donated by BDA.**

**The truck was delivered by flatbed railcar from Indiana and was accepted following the successful passing of the standard underwriter's performance and acceptance test.**

**The final cost was $2,682.**

**After the donated hose from BDA was loaded into the hose bed, the truck was officially placed into service and backed into its donated garage space on the BDA property.**

**(Dwight C. Brown Collection)**

# HISTORY OF FIRE PROTECTION IN BRADFORD

In the late summer of 1931, at the instigation of William Atkinson, the Master Mechanic at the Bradford Dyeing Association, and Stuart Cruickshank, the Chief Engineer of the Bradford Dyeing Association, a meeting was held by a small group of Bradford citizens interested in providing expanded fire protection to the village of Bradford.

While little is known of William Atkinson, other than the fact that he lived in Bradford and worked at the Bradford Dyeing Association, much is known about Stuart Cruickshank. Stuart was a very industrious, intelligent, hardworking, and dedicated worker. He was born on June 11th of 1903 and went to work at the Sullivan Quarry located in Bradford in June of 1916 at the young age of just 13. He worked 44 hours a week doing hard labor in the quarry and was paid seven dollars per week (less than sixteen cents per hour).

Two years later, he was hired at the Bradford Dyeing Association, commonly referred to as simply BDA, in late 1918 at the age of 16 and worked there for three years working 54 hours a week doing piece work rolling cloth. His work ethic was apparently noticed by the management of BDA and he soon became an apprentice electrician in 1921 at the age of 19. He then was promoted to supervisor in the Boiler Room in 1925 at the young age of 22. In 1927, at the age of just 24, Stuart Cruickshank was appointed Chief Engineer at BDA. He held that position for 40 years until he retired in 1967 at the age of 64.

During the time when the small group of citizens was meeting to discuss expanded fire protection, the only water supply distribution in the village that served individual homes and provided hydrants for fire protection was provided by the Bradford Dyeing Association in the form of a privately owned and operated water distribution system with water supplied from multiple wells and stored in two 100,000 gallon elevated water tanks on the property of the BDA.

This water distribution system was completed in 1924 and supplied a domestic drinkable water supply to the Mill as well as to the approximately fifty-five homes on Main Street, Bowling Lane, and Douglas Park that were built by and owned by BDA to be used as staff housing. The water tanks were located on the river side of the Mill and at the end of Douglas Park. This domestic water supply distribution system also provided fire protection in the form of eleven fire hydrants spread out around the perimeter of the Mill and along Main Street, Bowling Lane, and Douglas Park.

The only public Town of Westerly municipal water supply in Bradford during this period was a single four inch water main that came directly from Westerly to the Bradford School on Church Street. However, this water line had no fire hydrants and no household connections on it and only served the elementary school which was constructed in 1924.

The small group of concerned citizens, led by Stuart Cruickshank and interested in improving fire protection in the village, proposed that if residents living adjacent to this existing four-inch water main were willing, a request could be made to add fire hydrants along the line. In the first of many supportive efforts by the BDA, the mill owners offered to furnish hose and its fire apparatus and equipment at no charge when needed to benefit the community. A committee was appointed to approach all of the property owners that would be affected by the proposed fire hydrants and all of the property owners unanimously agreed to pay their share.

At the next meeting of the group, the "Bradford Fire Protective Association" was formed with John "Jack" Thompson as President, Joseph Monti as Vice President, Lafayette Kenyon as Treasurer, and Ray Kenyon as Clerk. The affected property owners were assessed at a rate of $3.50 per $1,000 of assessed valuation and the three hydrants were installed by the Westerly Water Works at a cost of $424.38. ($8,805 in current dollars). In addition, the Westerly School Department agreed to pay the cost of installing a fourth hydrant in front of the Bradford Elementary School.

An article in the Westerly Sun reported that eighty percent of the people received a reduction in their fire insurance rates and premiums that was greater than their hydrant installation assessment. The other twenty percent were already reportedly receiving discounted rates due to their proximity to the BDA owned hydrants on Bowling Lane and Main Street which were installed approximately seven years earlier by BDA to protect the staff housing on Main Street, Bowling Lane, and Douglas Park. The article noted that these property owners paid their assessments despite already benefitting and noted that "These people showed a fine community spirit by paying their share".

In November of 1934, a letter to the Westerly Chamber of Commerce seeking broader access to the Westerly water for the residents of Bradford brought attention to the need to expand the water lines throughout Bradford in order to provide safer drinking water and to improve fire protection to the residents.

In 1935, a petition was presented to the Town Council for the study of the water needs of Bradford. The petition was a joint collaborative effort of the Bradford Fire Protective Association, the Bradford Citizens Club, and the Bradford Dyeing Association. The request was approved by the Westerly Town Council and the study was completed by the Westerly Water Department, also known as the Westerly Water Works.

During the same year, a subcommittee of the Bradford Fire Protective Association was circulating a subscription paper to raise funds to purchase a fire engine to provide improved local fire protection in Bradford. In addition, another subcommittee of the Bradford Fire Protective Association was investigating the types of fire apparatus available and working to determine the best type of fire apparatus to recommend to the residents.

Following several meetings, it was agreed by the fire truck evaluation committee to recommend to the members of the Bradford Fire Protective Association the purchase of a fire engine from the Howe Fire Apparatus Company located in Indiana for a cost of approximately $2,500. ($56,774 in current dollars)

In February of 1936, during the Westerly financial town meeting, it was voted to accept the study recommendations of the Westerly Water Works and to build an independent water system in Bradford at a cost of approximately $150,000 ($3,406,446 in current dollars). As part of the project, the water department estimated that 18 fire hydrants would be needed and determined that the Bradford Fire Protective Association should be charged $25 annually per hydrant ($567 in current dollars) as an assessment or rental fee. It was also determined that household users that choose to be connected to the water system would be charged $10 annually ($227 in current dollars).

Interestingly, the hydrant rental fee increased slowly from $25 in the next four decades to a level of $54 in the early 1970's and then to $71 a decade later in 1982 but then remained at just $71 per hydrant per year for almost forty years before finally being raised starting in 2021 in approximately $20 increments over a three-year period to a current cost of $125.

However, politics apparently intervened and delayed the water system project in 1936. Since a bond issue greater than 3 percent of the total valuation of a town was prohibited by state law without legislative approval by the State of Rhode Island General Assembly, a formal request had to be submitted by the Town Council to the General Assembly.

Unfortunately, this was not done in 1936. Various reasons and rumors were postulated in newspaper articles and editorials to explain the delay in submitting the request to the General Assembly. However, the known facts were that the request was not submitted to the General Assembly as required and therefore was not acted upon before the General Assembly adjourned for the year in July.

The matter appears to have become a political football in town pitting Bradford against Westerly and Westerly against the State of Rhode Island. The matter was pushed by several groups and many vocal residents, It also resulted in numerous reportedly very heated debates including an extended debate between Town Solicitor John Ferguson and State Representative John Datsun.

Fortunately, in late July of 1936, the Works Progress Administration issued notice that it had approved a project using primarily federal funds to build an independent water system in Bradford with the town providing approximately one third of the total cost and the federal government providing approximately two thirds of the total cost.

Unfortunately, the notification to the citizens and the acceptance of this offer was apparently delayed by the Town of Westerly for several months. Once again, various reasons and rumors were postulated in the newspapers to explain this apparent delay, but none could be confirmed.

In October of 1936, following an extended outcry by the citizens of Bradford, the Board of Water Commissioners of Westerly notified the Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) that they would accept a $113,000 grant for the construction of an independent water system for the village of Bradford. The Town of Westerly agreed to be responsible for approximately $63,000 in matching funds. Since this amount was less than 3 percent of the total valuation of the town, authorization by the General Assembly was no longer required and the project moved forward.

The timing of the acceptance ensured that construction would begin before winter since the Works Progress Administration contract required that work must begin by December first. However, the chairman of the Board of Water Commissioners, Lewis Stanton, perhaps in a veiled effort to placate the voters of Bradford, assured them that work would begin even sooner. The timing of the acceptance was also possibly related to the upcoming National and State elections that were scheduled just weeks away in the beginning of November.

The project called for a pumping station, a standpipe (water tower), and large water mains throughout the village. Two electrically driven pumps capable of pumping 300 gallons per minute would draw water from twenty-five deep artesian wells driven on the Capalbo property located between the Bradford Road and the train tracks that ran through the Pawcatuck River Valley.

These pumps would then pump the water into a 300,000 gallon steel water tank on the highest point of Woody Hill Road. Gravity would then distribute the water throughout the village via a series of six inch, eight inch, ten inch, and twelve inch water distribution mains.

Although the system was originally designed to be an independent water system only serving Bradford. The Town of Westerly announced that it intended to connect the system to an existing twelve inch

main in Dunns Corners. The entire Westerly water system would then be connected, and Bradford would simply operate as an auxiliary pumping station to the main pumping station in White Rock.

Once the entire system was completed and joined together, there would be almost two million gallons of water supply available at any given moment in the Town of Westerly including 500,000 gallons each in the two water tanks on Quarry Hill (now Ledward Avenue), 500,000 gallons in the water tank on Winnapaug Road, and 300,000 gallons in the tank on Woody Hill Road.

On January 24th of 1936, under the provisions of Chapter 248 of the Rhode Island General laws, the Bradford Fire Protective Association was officially incorporated by John "Jack" Thompson, Joseph Monti, Lafayette Kenyon, Ray Kenyon, and Stuart Cruickshank Jr.. One of the first orders of business was to select John Thompson as the Fire Chief.

The newly formed group went to the financial meeting of the Town of Westerly in 1936 and requested $1,000 toward the purchase of a fire engine to serve the residents of Bradford. They were successful and then continued their efforts which had started the year before to raise the remaining funds of approximately $1,500.

In May of 1936, the Bradford Fire Protective Association placed an order with the Howe Fire Apparatus Company for a fire truck to be built on a Ford chassis with a V8 engine, a 200 gallon water tank, a 500 gallon per minute pump, a 24 foot extension ladder, a 14 foot roof ladder, three lengths of hard suction drafting hose, a 100 foot booster hose reel, two lanterns, two axes, two soda acid activated water extinguishers, a suction strainer, assorted nozzles, assorted fire tools, and "all required equipment necessary to allow the truck to pass the standard underwriters performance and acceptance tests."

While the new fire truck was being built, the Bradford Dyeing Association, once again demonstrated their commitment to supporting the local community by agreeing to donate twelve hundred feet of two and one half inch fire hose for the new truck. In addition, the owners of the BDA, recognizing the value of close cooperation and collaboration, also agreed to provide a heated garage on the mill property to store the fire truck, agreed to work out a method of signaling the firefighters for an emergency call using the steam whistle on the roof of the mill, and agreed to allow certain mill workers (primarily BDA Fire Brigade members) to leave work to assist at fires in the community.

On July 1st of 1936, the new Howe fire truck, built on a Ford chassis, was delivered via flatbed railcar from Indiana and was accepted following the successful passing of the standard underwriter's performance and acceptance test. The final cost was $2,682 ($60,907 in current dollars). The donated hose from BDA was loaded into the hose bed and the truck was officially placed into service and backed into its donated garage space on the BDA property.

Bradford resident John "Jack" Currie, the son of Fire Chief Walter Currie, remembered that the arrival of the new fire truck on a train was quite an event in Bradford and that many residents came out to witness the arrival, unloading, and testing of the new truck.

Ironically, later in the fall of that same year, the Howe Fire Apparatus Company experienced a significant fire at their manufacturing facility in Indiana when a potbellied stove used for heating malfunctioned. The resulting fire destroyed much of the facility including the offices and two fire trucks that were under construction as well as a car belonging to a visiting insurance underwriter.

# BRADFORD FIRE DEPARTMENT

# FIRE TRUCKS

**The Bradford Fire Department purchased eight fire trucks in the first fifty years of their operations. Two were purchased new and six were purchased used from other departments.**

**These fire trucks are pictured on the following pages.**

**This photo was taken in 1973 for a Southern Rhode Island Firefighters League advertising promotion. The current Bradford fleet is parked inside the BDA fence near the shipping department and includes, from left to right, the 1936 Ford, the 1948 Ford, and the 1958 Ford. (William Peacock Collection)**


**Bradford Engine 54, later renumbered as Engine 514, was a 1980 GMC 750 gallon per minute pumper with a 1000 gallon tank manufactured by the Maynard Fire Apparatus Company and purchased new in 1981. (William Peacock Collection)**

**Bradford Engine 53, later renumbered as Engine 513, was a 1958 Ford 500 gallon per minute pumper with a 500 gallon tank manufactured by the Farrar Fire Apparatus Company and purchased new in 1958. (William Peacock Collection)**


**Bradford Engine 56, later renumbered as Engine 516, was a 1957 International 500 gallon per minute pumper with a 500 gallon tank manufactured by the Farrar Fire Apparatus Company and purchased used by the Bradford Fire District from the Wequetequock Volunteer Fire Department for $10,000. (William Peacock Collection)**


**Photo of the 1957 International (Engine 56 pictured above) while it was still in service with the Wequetequock Volunteer Fire Department before it was sold to Bradford. The wooden box on top of the truck was used to carry forestry hose. The wooden box and the rotating light on the roof of the cab had to be removed in order for the truck to fit into the low garage doors on the Bradford Fire Station. (Rob Palmer Collection)**


**Bradford Ladder 58, later renumbered as Ladder 518, was a 1960 Ford 65 foot Aerial Ladder with a 250 gallon per minute pump and a 250 gallon tank. It was manufactured by the Farrar Fire Apparatus Company and was purchased used by the Bradford Volunteer Fire Company from the Watch Hill Fire District for $10,176. (William Peacock Collection)**


**Photo of the 1967 International Harvester manufactured by the Farrar Fire Apparatus Manufacturing Company while it was still in service with the Quiambaug Fire District prior to being sold to the Bradford Fire District in 1987 for the sum of $10,000. It was re-lettered and became Bradford Engine 512. (Rob Palmer Collection)**

**In 1982, a surplus military chassis was purchased. The 1953 6x6 all-wheel drive truck had served at Fort Devens in Massachusetts. The process of refurbishing and converting the truck to a brush tanker began with thousands of dollars of donated funds and hundreds of hours of donated volunteer labor from the Bradford firefighters. In 1987, the truck was almost finished following extensive refurbishment including adding a front mount pump, installing a thousand-gallon water tank, and building custom storage compartments. However, the truck was now being deemed by many taxpayers to be a liability to the Fire District. A motion to fund and finish the refurbishment failed by a large majority and a counter motion was made and approved to sell the truck. As a result, the 1953 truck was never placed into service and was never operated as a Bradford Fire truck. (Hank Knight Collection)**

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