

KEENE VALLEY HOSE AND LADDER COMPANY

The First 50 Years

A Short Story

by

ADRIAN EDMONDS

The following text is an extension of the remarks which were verbally made by Adrian Edmonds at the annual Fireman's Meeting held on the evening of January 14, 1995. On that occasion, it was announced that Adrian had been a member of the local Hose Company since 1927, a period of 67 years.

I sincerely thank you for this recognition by your generous applause. If you will kindly accord me your brief indulgence, I would like to take you back for about ninety years and outline a sequence of early events which represent the historical background of this laudable organization to which you have added so much fire protection and greatly expanded the health and medical needs of Keene and Keene Valley.

In The Beginning: Impure Water

100 years ago and earlier, the native people obtained their drinking water from mountain streams, from springs on the hillsides or from wells which they dug at or near their local home.

At that time, there was no public running water as we know it today. There was no indoor plumbing. Among the native people, little was known of sanitation or of the many impurities in certain sources of water. For example:

Philo Estes and his family lived on the "Youngs" Plateau, west of the local hardware store near where the former big green Merle-Smith home now stands just west of the entrance to the present Thorne-Prouty Estate.

About ninety years ago, Philo's wife and all the children died in a period of one week. They contracted a disease known as diphtheria, the origin of which was polluted water.

Philo, a middle-aged man, later married a young woman named Mae Edmonds, by whom she had two sons, Halsey and Harry Estes. At least two of their descendants are here in this room tonight, namely Joan Estes Hall and her son, Ronald Hall. After the death of Philo, Mae married George Wells, by whom Mae had one son, Robert, and three daughters, Susan, Clara and Kitty. Robert lived in Elizabethtown and died prematurely. Susan married George Lamb, a long time guide in Keene Valley. Clara married Lawton Metcalf, the druggist at Elizabethtown. Kitty married George Parker, the Ford Dealer in Peru, New York.

Mae and her daughters would never acknowledge any kin to the Edmonds clan who hailed from Edmonds Hill, a hoot and a holler beyond Bedbug Corner, Kerosene Heights and Smithville. Mae insisted she was a descendent of Senator Edmonds in Vermont. Apparently, we were the hillbillies and stump jumpers who came from the distant woods on the fringe of civilized life in Keene and Keene Valley.

A Benevolent Family Act

On a hill, east of the present Keene Valley Country Club, a "summer family" from Staten Island built a fine, seasonal home. This couple, namely Mr. and Mrs. Geo Notman, were descended from a much more advanced educational, cultural and economic class than the native people of Keene and Keene Valley. Mr. and Mrs. Notman recognized the need for a dependable, pure water supply in the native settlement.

By local standards, Mr. and Mrs. Notman were much better informed and much more economically affluent than those among the native families. Moreover, Mr. and Mrs. Notman were a compassionate and philanthropic couple.

In 1905, Mr. and Mrs. Notman bought property, built a dam in Slide Brook and a small reservoir near Interbrook Lodge. Also, they obtained rights-of-way, dug ditches and laid water mains down Mill Street (now Interbrook Road) along Market Street, around Main Street, up Mill Street (now Adirondack Street) to Vivian Washbond's, along the west end of the Beede Road and easterly along the Country Club Road.

At a later date, a "summer" line was laid along the upper end of the Beede Road to provide seasonal water for numerous cottage owners beyond the little bridge over Phelps Brook. Three other underground lines were extended westerly, one behind the Keene Valley Hardware to the Merle-Smith homes and one to Dunham Hill, which served Glover, Dr. Isaac Adler, Dunham and Brinckerhoff (now M/M Winkle), and one along the Trail's End Road to

the Shurtleff property.

Smaller water lines were later extended north to the vicinity of the Seth Holt Farm (now Upjohn) and south to the farm of Geo Kelly (now the home of Gussie and Ethel Edmonds). The latter served Louise Garno, Fred Barton, Eli Ducharm, Ed Hall and Dennis Garno.

Apparently, some effort was made to enlist the interest and participation of the local people in ultimately taking over the ownership and maintenance of the water system. I believe Bryon Estes, George Luck and John Morrison obtained stock in the Water Company by gift or by purchase. These men were at different superintendents of the local water system acting on behalf of Mr. Notman.

In the middle 1930s when the highway was improved through the hamlet of Keene Valley, new and larger 8" waterlines were laid under the road for some distance along Main Street.

In 1905, Ray Manley and Wade Whitney were not there with efficient backhoes and bulldozers. The ditches were dug, the pipes were laid and covered by manual labor. In this glacial soil of sand, gravel and boulders, a strong healthy manual laborer could dig, on average with pick and shovel, one rod, or 16-1/2 feet of ditch per nine hour day. This will illustrate the magnitude of the Notman undertaking.

From 1905 forward for the next 50 years, the native people and a few summer subscribers had pure drinking water in their homes. The local residents were charged only \$15.00 per year and a few summer residents paid \$20.00 a season for their seasonal water supply.

Fortunately, with much foresight, the Notman family installed fire hydrants at intervals along the local water mains.

Early Medical Services

It may be of interest to you to learn that in that earlier era, there were practically no medical services available. In the early years, a man from Jay named Mr. MacCasland occasionally came into the Town of Keene in an effort to provide needed medical attention. Mr. MacCasland was said to be experienced in giving physic!

Women who had babies were attended by two half-breed Indian midwives, one of whom was Florence Emmeau Edmonds, my paternal grandmother, and her sister, Margaret

Emmeau Germaine, great grandmother of Paul Tryon, now residing in the big white house at the corner of Market and Main Street.

Most of the foregoing relates to the development of a safe, dependable water supply. The next advancement in local fire protection also grew out of a very tragic loss.

The Burning of the Tahawas House Hotel

In the late 1800's, "Norm" Dibble, a native residing in Keene Valley, built a large hotel, reputed to have had 88 rooms on the present site of Carl Bigelow's Garage. About 1885, Norm Dibble sold this hotel to George Egglefield, a former English seaman. George Egglefield died about 1905. Thereafter, his widow, Permelia, his son, Bert, and his daughter, Mary Egglefield Brown (Jimmie Brown's paternal grandmother) carried on the summer boarding house enterprise.

On the evening of September 30th, 1908, the Tahawas House burned to the ground. The native people were helpless in their efforts to save the building. The fire insurance of \$8,000.00 expired the next day at noon. Bert Egglefield took his \$4,000.00 share of the insurance money and went to reside in Elizabethtown where he established the Ford Agency, which has prospered to the present day.

Permelia, the widow of George, took up residence with her daughter, Mary, in the building where Lola Coolidge Porter today has her widely known and well patronized coffee shop.

The writer, in his boyhood, remembers frequently seeing the elderly widow Egglefield sitting in a rocking chair in the corner by the kitchen stove. She usually wore a dark shawl over her shoulders and smoked a clay pipe!

The burning of the Egglefield hotel was a tragic loss to the family and to the community. This fire, and earlier residential fires, stimulated the urgent need for local fire protection.

The Origin of the Keene Valley Hose and Ladder Company

George Parker, a local artist and a native who apparently had more formal education than most other local residents, became very helpful. George, the local landscape artist, was also the local Justice of the Peace. He researched, organized and formerly instituted the Keene Valley Hose and Ladder Company about 1910. The Charter Members were: Orlando Beede, Frank Barton, Vincent Beede, Clarence Edmonds, Raymond Edmonds and Fred Martin.

Having the benefits of the local water system which the Notman family had installed in 1905, the Keene Valley Hose and Ladder Company undertook to build a basic organization for fire protection and fire fighting in the little hamlet of Keene Valley.

The first vehicle purchased for fire protection was a two-wheeled, hand-drawn cart on which the firehose was coiled on a rotating drum. Money was also needed to purchase hoses, water pails, fire axes, ladders, lanterns, rubber boots, fireman's hats and rubber coats.

Financial Funding

For the first forty years of its life, the Keene Valley Hose Company was largely supported by volunteer fundraising. In the beginning, a small fire district had been established embracing the native settlement and extending, as the writer remembers, from the Gibson Gate, the Shurtleff property and the Merle-Smith property on the west, east along the Beede Road to the former residence of Levi Lamb, thence up the AuSable River on the east behind the Country Club to Ranney Bridge and on the the Faulk Bridge, thence returning northerly along the main road to the entrance of and along the Shurtleff Road, forming the southerly boundary. By this development, limited funds became available by taxation. Other funds for these needs were raised almost entirely by volunteer activities such as community dinners, dances, card parties and minstrel shows.

The Contributors

The Helms family of Port Henry and Newcomb, from whom the Halls, the Browns and the Egglefields in Keene Valley were descended, had very considerable musical talent around which these volunteer fundraising activities were organized and developed. Also, from the early 1920s on, the community fundraising was considerably strengthened by the organizing and directing skills of Lulu Freyberg Brown, wife of Jimmie Brown and teacher of music at the local public school. She was an organist, choir director in our church, and organizer and director of numerous Gilbert and Sullivan operettas.

The others who were most frequently involved in the volunteer work to support the Keene Valley Hose and Ladder Company were the following talented individuals: Daisy Hall Ellsworth, Grace Hall Brown (daughters of Jim and Eva Hall), Spencer Egglefield and his sister, Lena Egglefield Edmonds (grandchildren of Mr. and Mrs. Geo Egglefield); Bessie Brown Torrance and her nephew, Jimmie Brown (also descendants of Mr. and Mrs. Geo Egglefield); Evangline Nye Egglefield (wife of Spencer Egglefield and daughter of Spen Nye

and his wife, Grace Hale); Cheney Crawford (grandson of Eli Montgomery Crawford); George Dibble (grandson of Norm Dibble); and Wilbur Edmonds (son of Lena Egglefield and grandson of Geo Egglefield).

Jimmie Brown and Cheney Crawford were usually the end men in the minstrel shows; Bessie Torrance and Cheney Crawford were the singers, the dancers and the cloggers; Daisy, Grace, Lena and Evangline were the pianists; George Dibble the violinist; and Spencer, Wilbur and Dr. Goff were often the saxophone and banjo players.

For years and years, many fundraising benefits were organized and carried on to support not only the Hose Company, but also the local church and the hospital. From 1910 to 1952, the Keene Valley Hose and Ladder Company depended heavily on funds raised by benefit minstrel shows, dances, card parties and community dinners. The music was furnished by those noted above. For refreshment, the local women furnished various foods, including meats, oyster stews, coffee, salads, cookies, pies and cakes.

The Neighborhood House is Established and Dr. Goff Arrives

During the first World War, or shortly thereafter, two significant events occurred: a) the birth of the Keene Valley Neighborhood House; and b) the arrival of Dr. Goff, who ably and generously served the medical needs of our Township for the next sixty year. (See my account of his activities written shortly after his death in 1980.)

A little earlier, before 1920, four doctors briefly served the Town of Keene, namely Dr. Simmons, Dr. Hubbard, Dr. Rand and Dr. Miller.

To pinpoint the dates, the following facts may be helpful: Dr. Hubbard attended my mother when I was born in February of 1909; Dr. Miller attended my mother when my sister was born in mid June of 1920; Dr. Rand, Uncle of Dr. Goff, died in ____ and Dr. Goff arrived in the summer or fall of 1920.

In the brief span of a few years, these two very significant developments greatly influenced the advancing trend of health care in our communities.

The first was the purchase by Dr. Hatfield of a two-story frame building situated on the west side of Main Street in Keene Valley. It stood in the northeast corner of the land, now owned by the Nature Conservancy and very close to the south line of the present Gourmet Shop (now the Cliffhanger Cafe in 2002). Dr. Charles Hatfield was a Philadelphia physician who spent summers in Keene Valley. Dr. Hatfield, following the purchase of this property, set up a

first-aid station in his new ownership. He named the building, "The Keene Valley Neighborhood House" and dedicated it to the loving memory of his wife, who had died prematurely. In the next few years, the Keene Valley Neighborhood House became a community center, and the expanding first-aid center became The Keene Valley Neighborhood House and Hospital.

The most dreaded diseases of that earlier era were measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever, pneumonia, tuberculosis, diabetes and polio. Living in the marginal economy of this region, the haunting fear of the elderly was the possibility of having to go "over the hill to the poorhouse" in Whallensburg. It must be remembered that life's savings among the native people were very, very limited, if any. In those days, there was no Compensation Insurance, no Social Security, no Unemployment Insurance, no Medicare or Medicaid. The only consolation that the infirm and the elderly had if they became destitute and were required to go to the poorhouse was the fact that Horace Nye, whose family lived in Keene, administered that facility and would take good care of them, which he certainly did!

Dr. Goff took wonderful care of the ill and the aging in several communities. My family was a typical example. "Doc" took care of my maternal grandmother, my paternal grandfather and grandmother, and my father and mother for which he received very few dollars in payment. Father usually bought Dr. Goff a box of cigars at Christmas! Doc came to our house frequently for meals, to play bridge and to take my father, my brother and me rabbit hunting, fox hunting and deer hunting.

Lora and I were married on Christmas Eve in 1939. Lora became pregnant in early 1940. I had no idea how I was going to pay Doc for prenatal care, delivery and postnatal care. Discussing this subject with the good doctor, he said I should plan on \$35.00! During the summer and fall of 1940, I paid him \$1.00, \$2.00-\$5.00 from time to time until he was fully paid, when Martha Lee arrived in early December of 1940. The financial limitations of our family were not unlike that of most other families in Keene, Jay, Wilmington, North Hudson, Lewis and Elizabethtown where Doc traveled day and night to serve the medical needs of the people. For my father's and mother's generation and for Lora's and my generation, the frightening question was: What are the people going to do when Doc Goff becomes inactive?

The Fire Company's First Mechanical Improvement

About 1934, the local Hose and Ladder Company passed from the hand-drawn, two-

wheel cart stage into the more advanced mechanical age. A new 1934 Chevy chassis was purchased on which vehicle the writer designed and built both a carrying bed for folded firehose and a wide fender to attach along the sides and rear of the vehicle. Firemen could stand and ride to the fire on this wide fender and at the same time hang onto a metal pipe rail mounted on top of the parapet, which formed the sides of the baggage compartment. On a shelf behind the driver and passenger seat, an accommodation was provided to fasten and carry a small gasoline pumper. If the fire was beyond the limits of the local water mains and hydrants, and if there was a stream nearby, it became possible to achieve a measure of fire control by the use of this small gasoline "pumper".

The Fire Commissioners and the Expanding Fire District

At some date, which I'm not able to pinpoint, local district Fire Commissioners were elected to provide for some financial needs of the firemen. In 1951-1952, the local commissioners were reluctantly supplying \$600.00 per year for the fire department. These funds were made available by taxing the property owners in the little fire district in the Keene Valley resident and nonresident community.

However, what began as a means of furnishing fire protection to a small residential community gradually expanded into feeling of responsibility to fight fires at the summer cottages on the hills around Keene Valley, at St. Huberts, at the AuSable Club, in Keene Center-Cascade, Alstead Hill, East Hill, Irish Hill and Spruce Hill. Needless to say, this was an exhausting no-win situation.

The writer became Fire Chief in 1951 and 1952, at which period he was Justice of the Peace and a member of the Town Board. Recognizing the limitations of the local fire departments and having witnessed the efforts of the community to continue support for the organization, it seemed at least one of my responsibilities as Fire Chief was to learn more about the organization and function of a Volunteer Hose Company. By reading and studying the laws relating to this subject and discussing the matter with our Town Attorney, Daniel T. Manning, Sr. of AuSable Forks, it became evident that measure could be undertaken which had not been fully understood or explored in earlier years. These were as follows:

- 1) The Hose and Ladder Company was not necessarily heavily dependent upon funds raised by community benefits;
- 2) The Officers of the Volunteer Fire Company were permitted by law to submit

their budget to the Commissioners of the Fire District:

3) The Fire Commissioners could, within the limits of their judgment, impose taxes upon the property owners to support the needs of the firemen; Also,

4) The law provided the ways and means to expand the limits of the Fire District, if this seemed advisable.

Shortly thereafter, by my invitation as Fire Chief, the Town Attorney, Mr. Manning, and the local Fire Commissioners were invited to a special meeting with the members of the Hose and Ladder Company. On this occasion, Mr. Manning explained and interpreted the intent of the law and our rights within the law as related to the subject of our volunteer firefighting needs.

Thereafter, several important developments occurred: a) A closer relationship was established between the members of the Volunteer Hose Company and the elected Fire Commissioners; b) Additional funds soon became available; c) Fewer volunteer benefits were required; d) The limits of the fire district were planned and expanded permitting the discrete taxing of more Keene Valley property owners; e) And last, but not least, we tactfully informed our good neighbors in Keene that we could no longer pretend to provide their fire protection needs. We urged them to organize a similar fire fighting facility and to join us in providing mutual aid for the fire protection of the whole Township. As you all know, this has been accomplished with surprising success.

From Private to Public Ownership

In the early or middle 1950s, Arthur Notman (son of M/M George Notman) found the increasing requirements and expense of the New York State Health Department a burdensome responsibility. Mr. Notman approached me (Adrian Edmonds) on the street one day and said, "Unless you local people get off your duff and take over the care of this water system as a community responsibility, I'm going to sell the assets to a development company and you people will really learn what it costs to provide water in Keene Valley". At that time, the rates for water service were still \$15.00 per year for all-year residents and \$20.00 a season for seasonal residents who were served by the existing system.

A committee was formed and the writer was delegated to prepare the necessary requirements which would allow the Notman family and perhaps one other minor owner (John Morrison) to sell the water system to the people in the Keene Valley District.

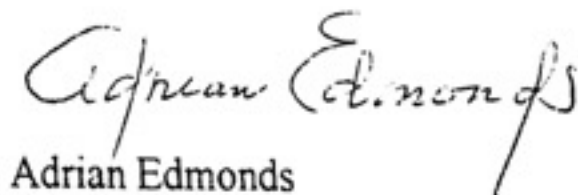
My first objective was to have Arthur Coonrod, the Elizabethtown surveyor, make an accurate map showing the existing water facilities (the dam, the reservoir), including the sizes and location of the existing water mains and the private homeowner's connections to the same. It was also necessary for me to work with representatives of the Water and Power Control Commission in Albany in order to acquaint that public agency as to where the facilities existed on the land in Keene Valley, inasmuch as the approval of that Commission was required in every detail before the people of our Keene Valley hamlet were allowed to purchase the Notman water system for public use.

The most time-consuming part of this endeavor, for me, was the need to obtain the written approval of at least 51% of the all-year residents (as recorded by assessed value) and likewise, at least 51% of all the nonresident owners who obtained water from the system. It took me a period of over 2 years to accomplish the preparations for the transfer of this water system from Private ownership to the Keene Valley District for Public use.

Dan Manning, Sr., Attorney in AuSable Forks, prepared the necessary legal papers. His bill to the Town was \$1,500.00. I was paid \$25.00 to cover my expenses for travel and meals during one trip to Albany where I visited the offices of the Water & Power Control Committee. At that period, I was a very, very busy volunteer fireman.

Water supply, fire fighting, emergency health care and financing are very, very much interrelated. The volunteer work which has been provided for nearly 100 years by the residents of the Town of Keene has been an outstanding contribution to the community life of our Township.

Through the long years of continuing perseverance, through the remarkable organizing and unifying abilities of your leaders, and through your sustained compassion for human life and property, the Keene Valley Volunteer Hose and Ladder Company and its companion group in Keene have, by your progressive actions, demonstrated the functions of democracy at its highest level.


Adrian Edmonds

