

# Fire

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greatly. But, the dramatic increase in number of cars on the road, cars filled with people who wanted to be as near to the excitement as possible, did make firefighting more difficult. And, oftentimes, drivers paid no attention to the hoses all over the roads and repeatedly drove over them!<sup>17</sup> So, all of the problems of firefighting are far from resolved six years after the Kemp house fire.

But, even more importantly, this fire was extinguished quite quickly with far less damage and injury partly because the fire department now had a “booster truck,” a pumper which contained water which could be used until the hoses were laid and hooked up to the hydrant well up the street.

But the road to that pumper was not without major hurdles. The village board had set up a special election to be held December 12, 1925, just a few days over a month since the Kemp tragedy. The choice actually included two propositions: the purchase of three new trucks and the purchase of one truck, the latter of a better quality than the trucks in the former proposition. Each choice was estimated to cost \$20,000. Residents could vote yes or no on either or both propositions included on the ballot. Both propositions included three paid firemen and an alarm system as well.

Much public discussion was held over what would be the best way to protect the citizens of the village and its surrounding areas. The local *Ballston Spa Daily Journal* was replete with opinions and advertisements for and against the propositions as well as detailed explanations of the mechanics of how to vote on December 12.<sup>18</sup>

One also has to wonder how much the realization that the population of the Ballston Spa area was growing after some decline during the years of World War I. From 1920-1930, the village’s population increase was more than double what it had been in the decade before the war and Saratoga County’s increase was almost four times what it had been during the same decades. Those kinds of increases would surely have been noted by the people offering services to the people in the village and beyond.<sup>19</sup>

There was a significant turnout on “election day” and both propositions were resoundingly defeated: One truck, 53 yes to 279 no and Three trucks, 164 yes to 317 no. The prevailing reason why the one truck proposition failed seemed to lie in the fact that the decision of what make of truck should not have been pre-decided but rather left to the firemen at a later date. The 3 truck proposition seemed excessive to many residents; it contained too many paid firemen and too many trucks for the village’s needs.<sup>20</sup>

The debate continued in the village, among the residents, and between the existing firemen. Some suggested buying 2 trucks; others suggested combining the three fire departments into two. In February, 1926, the village board decided to offer a new proposition to the residents of the village: 3 trucks (because doing only two

and thus discriminating against one of the companies could create bad feelings) and allowing the firemen with knowledge of their craft to decide on the makes for the equipment. Again, \$20,000 was proposed to complete this deal in this March, 1926 election. But, again, the proposition was defeated.

Laws at the time did not permit this kind of proposition to go before the public again. So the Eagle Fire Department, one of the three in the village, took the matter into their own hands. “Feeling that a great emergency exists for another winter in the matter of fire protection, we, members of the Eagle Fire Department do, therefore, volunteer with the aid and sanction of the Board of Trustees and the other hose companies, to raise by contribution and otherwise, a sum sufficient to either buy a new triple combination or new pump and chassis to put under our present equipment.”<sup>21</sup> They proceeded to do just so: raise money by “subscription,” or donations from the public.

In August 30, 1926, the local newspaper pictured and described the new combination pump, chemical, and hose truck, state of the art for its time, the truck that would help save lives and structures in the years to come in Ballston Spa.<sup>22</sup> It was not totally paid for but the subscriptions had, at that point, produced enough money for the down payment.<sup>23</sup>

Ten months after the Kemp family tragedy and, after much discussion and interpretation, success has been attained. The fire’s aftermath had produced a change in firefighting in Ballston Spa.

*Sources:* 1 “Only Survivor of Boston Fire is Dying,” *Albany Times Union*, November 7, 1925: 1; 2 “Six of Kemp Family Burned to Death,” *Ballston Spa Daily Journal*, November 6, 1925: 1; 3 “Begin Movement to Modernize Fire Department,” *Saratogian*, November 7, 1925: 6; 4 *Deeds, Thomas and Bridgett McNamara and George Kemp, May 1, 1923; Congress Gas and Oil and 180 Church Ave., August 27, 2004, Saratoga County Clerk’s Office*; 5 “Six Dead, One Dying, in Ballston Spa Holocaust,” *Greenfield Daily Recorder*, November 6, 1925: 1; 6 “Only Survivor of Ballston Fire is Dying,” *Albany Times Union*, November 7, 1925: 1; 7 “Discuss Fire Apparatus Need,” *Ballston Spa Daily Journal*, November 7, 1925: 1; 8 “Six in Family Die in Burning Home,” *Buffalo Evening News*, November 6, 1925: 1; 9 “Only Survivor of Ballston Fire is Dying,” *Albany Times Union*, November 7, 1925: 1; 10 “Saratoga Woman only one of Kemp Family of 7 to Survive 1925 Ballston Fire,” *Saratogian*, July 3, 1927: 8; 11 “Only Survivor of Boston Fire is Dying,” *Albany Times Union*, November 7, 1925: 1; 12 “Begin Movement to Modernize Fire Department,” *Saratogian*, November 7, 1925: 6; 13 *ibid.* 14 “Petitions Calling for Vote on Bond Issue Circulated,” *Saratogian*, November 13, 1925: 6; 15 “Firemen Save Tuper Garage,” *Ballston Spa Daily Journal*, December 8, 1931: 1; 16 “Firemen Check Menacing Blaze in Tuper Garage,” *Saratogian*, July 23, 1931: 8; 17 “Tuper Fire Brings out Auto Parade,” *Ballston Spa Daily Journal*, July 23, 1931: 8; 18 “How to Vote on Fire Trucks,” *Ballston Spa Daily Journal*, December 10, 1925: 1; 19 “Historical Population of Ballston Spa village for the period 1810-2014,” [population.us/ny/ballston-spa](http://population.us/ny/ballston-spa) and “Historical Population of Saratoga County for the period 1800-2014,” [population.us/county/ny/saratoga-county](http://population.us/county/ny/saratoga-county); 20 “Vote Down Both Firetrucks,” *Ballston Spa Daily Journal*, December 14, 1925: 3; 21 “Eagle Fire Co A Go-Getter,” *Ballston Spa Daily Journal*, May 18, 1926: 3; 22 “The New Fire Truck of Eagle Fire Co. No. 1 Arrives,” *Ballston Spa Daily Journal*, August 30, 1926: 3; 23 “Fire Truck Tomorrow,” *Ballston Spa Daily Journal*, August 27, 1926: 5