



# SAANICH FIRE DEPARTMENT

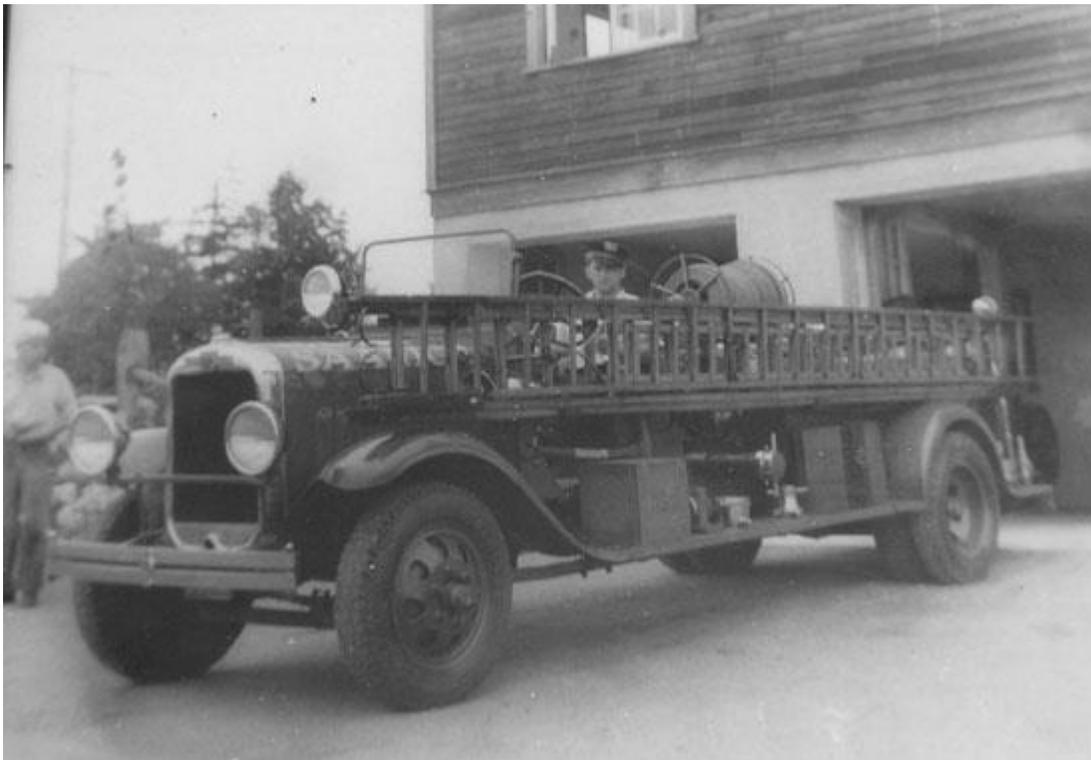
## History

Saanich established its fire department in 1919 with one "Fireman in Charge." Today we employ 123 uniformed members and seven support staff.

### Early History

By then-Fire Chief David W. Hill, February 28, 1992

The Municipality of Saanich was incorporated in 1906 and had a population of 6,000 residents. At that time, Saanich had an agreement with the City of Victoria to provide fire protection.



*1929 GMC La France outside Saanich Fire Department Station No. 1, 3681 Douglas Street (Saanich Archives).*

In 1917, due to pressures from citizens who wanted better fire protection, Council rented a building for \$7.50 per month and bought 1,000 feet of fire hose. Although the building had no electricity, it was still considered adequate for Saanich's fire station. In 1919, the building was wired and inaugurated in March with John G. Little appointed "Fireman in Charge". During this period, Saanich had 170 fire hydrants and one fire truck.

In 1929, council bought a new fire truck and appointed Burt Lock as Saanich's first official Fire Chief.

In 1934, the City of Victoria withdrew its assistance and Saanich was more or less on its own to provide fire protection to its residents.

In 1938, council bought a second truck and then in 1940, another truck and vehicle. The department now consisted of Fire Chief Joe Law and seven fire fighters. It could call on municipal Public Works staff to assist at fires.

In 1944, Saanich Fire Department had three fire trucks, one inhalator (medical) and one car and was staffed by a Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chief and 13 fire fighters. As the population increased and urban sprawl developed, the department grew with the times.

In 1947, we built a second fire station at Royal Oak and in 1950, built a third station in Gordon Head. The Department responded to 286 calls per year and had a budget of \$101,950.59.



*1926 Cadillac and 1929 GMC La France outside Saanich Fire Station No., 1, 3681 Douglas Street (Saanich Archives).*



*Saanich Fire Hall No. 2, Hamsterly Road 196- (Saanich Archives).*

The big changes in the 1960s consisted mainly of introducing an ambulance service and acquiring new pumpers. Saanich also opened our present No. 1 Fire Station, putting police and fire departments under one roof. We bought a new La France quad pumper in 1965 and a new La France triple combination tanker in 1969.

Major changes happened during the 1970s – Saanich became a leading fire department in the ambulance and rescue field. We were the first fire department in Canada in which members administered drugs and used special life support equipment to aid heart attack victims. In 1974, Saanich recognized the need to enhance our training and so established a full-time training officer's position. We also created a new fire fighter/mechanic position to repair the department's five pumpers, one van, five cars and one ambulance.

In 1975, we placed a second ambulance in service in the No. 3 Fire Station on McKenzie Avenue. To keep abreast of the changing times, we initiated promotional exams to those wishing to advance to officer ranks. During this era, the Fire Prevention and Inspection Division was well established in Saanich.

On May 27, 1978, we built a new fire station at Royal Oak in a more central location to better serve the community of northern Saanich. In 1979, we introduced a water rescue and safety program to round out the overall firefighting and rescue service to the public.

Progressing into the 1980s and 1990s, Saanich, keeping up with the modern trends, continued to expand our fire inspection and prevention programs in an effort to minimize life and property loss caused by unwanted fires. We became involved with the new BC Fire Academy in Vancouver by actively supporting its main purpose: uniform training of fire service personnel in BC.

Indeed, fire service in Saanich has evolved over the last 86 years and it will continue to evolve. The department has reacted in a sensible and efficient manner as the population and building trends increased. We modernized as new and better fire apparatus and equipment became available. We recognized the greater need to train our fire fighters and finally, recognized the need to increase the Fire Prevention and Inspection Division in an effort to decrease the loss of life and property caused by fire.

There is still a challenge that lies ahead. The Fire Service must continue to further educate the public in fire safety, continue to monitor and establish new legislation and regulations that will encourage fire protection, continue to improve equipment, training and safe fire suppression methods.

We are proud of our past because it was the early Saanich officers and fire fighters who molded our departmental traditions, values and attitudes.

## Recent History

Fire Chiefs:

- 1919: John G. Little (Fireman in Charge)
- 1929: Bert Lock (first official Fire Chief)
- 1940: Joseph Law
- 1963: J.C. Sutherland
- 1971: G. Robbins
- 1972: H.B. Gains
- 1978: R.A. Fryer
- 1984: O.W. McGregor
- 1985: Dave Hill
- 1997: Murray Bryden
- 2002: Ron Cullis
- 2003: Dave Ward
- 2010-Present: Michael Burgess

Since Chief Hill wrote the above article, we have advanced many firefighting techniques, technologies and strategies including:

- use of foam
- thermal imaging cameras
- communications
- computer aided dispatch
- on board computers

Members are better equipped and trained to respond to more types of emergencies than ever before. As a department, we are much more sophisticated in managing emergencies.

Changes in society do and will continue to drive our future. There's a greater awareness of potential risks, emergency preparedness and difficulties emergency responders face following the 2001 terror attacks. There are also new expectations to become ever more

efficient and to deliver cost effective programs and services. We also strive to further increase diversity in both members and services.

## **Our Vision**

We are committed to excellence, innovation and service into the future, and strive to be a fire service leader and model for a progressive, sustainable and successful fire service.

We are committed to exceeding the needs of our growing and diverse community by inspiring positive relationships with our citizens and community partners.

This vision drives us to be our best for one another, for our Department, and for the District of Saanich.

## **Centennial Anniversary: 1919 - 2019**

The Saanich Fire Department will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2019.