

FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!

Almost from the start, Omemee has suffered heavy losses by fires, but until 1877 no great effort seems to have been made to provide any effective means of fighting them. In 1874 came the incorporation of the village, and its separation from the township, which separation placed responsibility for the safety of the town in its own council.

About this time several rather big fires occurred which brought the matter to the attention of the citizens and the council, with renewed force. One such was the destruction of James Ivory's saw mill, which was located near the King Street bridge — a wooden one at that time — on the evening of August 24, 1875. Several nearby structures, including the bridge, had a close call.

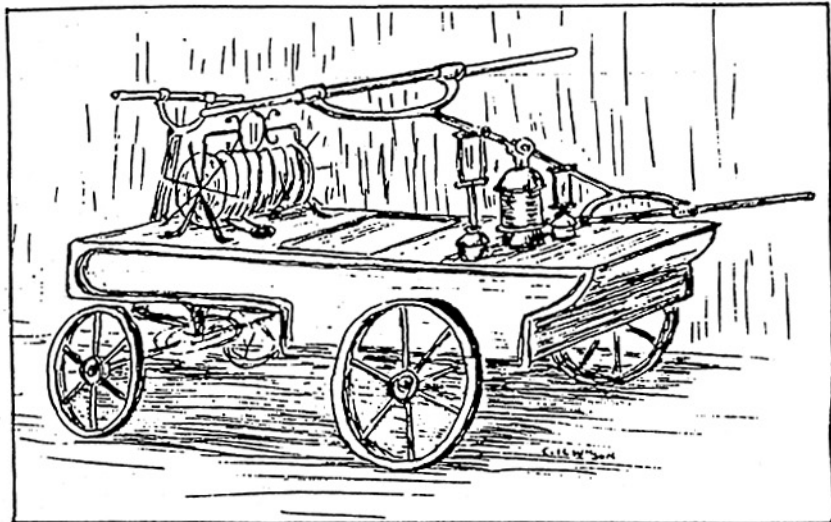
Not until two years later, however, did the Council make a move to face the problem. At the meeting on March 28, 1877, a committee was set up "to inquire into the advisability of providing some means of fire protection for the village". The committee consisted of the Reeve (Mr. W. H. Cottingham), and councillors Kincaid, Lamb and Laidley. They were to report back at the next meeting of Council, but no further action was taken until after another fire occurred, which in May levelled the east end of the sawmills — Cottingham's, together with its shingle mill, and the shingle mill belonging to John Kincaid. So, at the June 27 meeting of Council, the following motion was passed: moved by Mr. Lamb, seconded by Mr. Kincaid, that the Reeve be authorized to purchase one of Mr. Hamilton's small fire engines with 20 feet of extra hose and couplings for the purpose of extinguishing fires within this Corporation" So the engine was bought, and on August 7, Council ordered "that the Reeve do cash his cheque for the amount of Forty-two dollars being for Hand Fire Engine, hose and couplings."

The village now had a small engine, but there was no organized group to insure that effective use could be made of it when needed. The Council, aware of this lack, put on record, at its meeting on May 20, 1878, the following: "that the Council, being as they do the necessity there is for more effective protection against fire, do hereby agree to any reasonable assistance any person or persons desirous of getting up a Company, or otherwise providing for such object." Apparently some citizens took the Council seriously, and got together a group interested in forming a Hook and Ladder Company, and a year later approached the Council with some suggestions. On September 8, 1879, George Williams addressed the Council, requesting the provision of necessary apparatus for a Hook and Ladder Company, to which the Council replied by decreeing: "That Messrs. George Williams, John Beatty and William Curry be requested to act as a Committee to ascertain the probable cost of equipment for a Hook and Ladder Company and report at the next meeting of Council". This Committee lost no time in providing the requested information, and reported as follows at the meeting of Council on September 15:

Your Committee appointed to enquire as to the probable cost of necessary equipment for a Hook and Ladder Company, beg leave to submit the following report:

For—Ladders	16'	@ 20¢	\$ 32.00
Axes	3	@ 1.25	3.75
Hooks	20 lbs.	@ 8¢	1.60
Poles	4		4.00
Rope	80 lbs.	@ 11¢	8.80
Buckets			30.00
Waggon			100.00
Chains			3.00
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			\$183.15

Signed, Geo. McWilliams.



No. 103

An "Evans & Redpath" Hand Fire Engine

This is a drawing of a hand fire engine, made in Omemee at the Evans & Redpath plant, and which is now in possession of the Oakwood Fire Department. Some years ago, for convenience in hauling the machine behind a motor vehicle, it was mounted on a Model T Ford chassis. In the drawing, the original wheels have been depicted, from a newspaper picture of the old hand engine at Millbrook, which still has the old trucks. The handle at the front of the "rig" was for pulling the engine to the scene of the fire. The two handles of the pump are here shown in the position of action. When the engine was being pulled through the streets, these handles were folded inward, over the pump. The hose-reel is at the front. The hand engine in use in Omemee for many years was of a similar type.