

## A Fire Department for Bushnell's Basin

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

Behan's Grocery Store was the unlikely birthplace of the Bushnell's Basin Fire Department. It was in James Behan's store near the church on Pittsford-Victor Road that he and nine other men, ranging in age from 22 to 61, met on Thursday, September 12, 1940. The ten who met were mostly farmers, mechanics and merchants. They had long lamented the lack of adequate fire protection in the Basin, and decided to do something about it. For several months, the men met in the rear of Behan's store, and in doing so, planted the seeds for the creation of a fire department.



*This photo provided by Joanne Hayford is a 1940s view of the original Bushnell's Basin firehouse.*

Along with James Behan, others involved in the formation of the Bushnell's Basin Fire Association included Joseph Rock, Oscar Priest, Curtis Mendenhall, Robert McIntyre, Orrin Haschmann, Phillip Garbutt, Carl Christ, Howard Brooks, and F. Hale Billings. The men assigned a delegation to meet with representatives of the Fairport Fire Department, who helped them along the path of establishing their own department. The men returned to the Basin with plenty of information, and an obsolete 1917 fire engine, for the price of one dollar.

The old truck provided a few months service, but they soon realized the Basin deserved something better. The mechanics among them cobbled together a former limousine chassis, along with parts from several old fire engines, and built a respectable fire-fighting machine. A nearby barn provided limited protection for the Basin's fire engine. Soon an all-out effort was underway to give the fire engine and other necessary equipment a proper home.



*Dick Houlihan (standing) and an unidentified Bushnell's Basin firefighter with their homemade fire engine, cobbled together from a former limousine. 1940s image provided by Joanne Hayford.*

Clambakes, parades and carnivals were held to raise money for the purchase of a lot, along with the materials needed to build a real firehouse. Families pitched in, holding rummage sales, tea and bridge parties, and other fundraisers. Ground was broken for the 60 x 40 foot wooden structure in October of 1941. A nearby farm horse known as Mealbag pulled the scraper used to level off the earth, in preparation for construction.

Just like a barn raising from decades earlier, the community rallied together on a Sunday morning in December of 1941 to raise the walls of the hamlet's first firehouse. The workers, all volunteers, probably got an early start that morning, warmed by coffee, comradery, and pride. I imagine that at some point after their lunch break, in mid-afternoon, the sound of pounding hammers and ripping saws came to a sudden stop. For all across America, news spread like wildfire of the attack on Pearl Harbor at 7:55 AM, or in Bushnell's Basin, just before two o'clock.

The original firehouse served for about 18 years, until the needs of the department required a larger building, built in about the same spot on Pittsford-Victor Road.