

RECOLLECTIONS OF BALLSTON, VIRGINIA'S FIRE-FIGHTING EQUIPMENT IN THE YEAR 1913

By

Mrs. Charles Debevoise

It was truly frightening to be awakened in the night by the call of fire, fire!! fire!! and see the outside of one's home surrounded by red light! My brother nine, and I seven years old, were hustled out of bed and downstairs in our bed clothes. Then, outside to our front porch where we could see our woodshed in back of the house all aflame! We were afraid for our home as our kitchen was just three feet from the burning shed.

No telephone, no fire-engine to arrive at one's door to extinguish the flames.

The only fire-fighting equipment luckily stood one-half block away at the northeast corner of Ballston Avenue, now Stuart Street and Fairfax Drive. A long vehicle with about twelve metal buckets dangling from each side and a long bar from each side in the front of the wagon appeared to be ready to "hitch up a horse" but no, it was designated for people to drag to the scene of the fire.

Soon neighborhood men and the wagon arrived, pumped water into the buckets as fast as they could, while others poured water on the wood-shingled back-kitchen roof. When our well became dry, the men pumped from our neighbor's well about thirty-five feet away. It took quick action. The men were wonderful, and their "quick action" really saved our home and possibly others nearby.

My mother, widowed in 1909, had opened a small grocery store in our living room. She stored a few non-perishable items in the wood shed. One item was a carton of large wood matches, which were in demand at that time to light the oil lamps and the cooking and heating stoves.

At daylight, when we checked through the rubble after the fire, some "chewed" pieces of the wood matches were found in rats' nests; they caused the fire. What a shame, we thought. My mother learned a lesson.

In later years men from this same area built a two-story "Ballston Fire House" on Ballston Avenue near Fairfax Drive.

They worked unceasingly to accomplish this project. The women, too, worked for years preparing delicious oyster, ham and hot turkey dinner. After dinner, the upstairs hall was cleared and there were dances. There were carnivals! They maintained this wonderful spirit all through the years. All these wonderful people of "by gone years."

P.S. I lived on Ballston Avenue (now Stuart Street) from 1906 'til 1970 (was born there).