

The Little Fire Brigade that Could

The Great Fire of 1899, which swept through Bridgewater on a cold January night, is still remembered for the devastation it wrought on the growing town it forever changed. As terrible as it was, many do not realize how much worse that great fire could have been.

Formed in 1876 with 27 unpaid members, the Bridgewater Fire Engine Company (BFEC) started as a bucket brigade to protect the growing town of Bridgewater¹. They leapt into the modern era with the purchase of a steam-powered pump in 1880. The fire on January 12th would be the greatest test yet for the young department.

With no more protection than their flannel shirts and white caps, every member of the department showed up that night, and along with many citizens set to fighting the roaring flames with buckets, until the pump and hose could be set up on Liverpool road to make a stand against the fire. The firefighters battled the cold in addition to the heat; if the hoses stopped flowing while being moved, the water inside would quickly freeze. By the time the fire was out, it had destroyed 54 buildings, but the rest of the town remained, thanks to the actions of the BFEC².

¹ *One Hundred Years: A Pictorial History of Bridgewater*. Friends of the DesBrisay Museum and Bridgewater Heritage & Historical Society. 1999. P. 23.

² *One Hundred Years*. p. 10.