

Robert Pratt



Robert Isaac Pratt was born in North Gower Ontario March 8, 1875. son of Isaac Pratt and Sarah Pettapiece. He left the farm and joined the Ottawa Fire Department June 30, 1900. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant in 1915 and to Captain on December 15, 1919. Captain Pratt was 55 years old, married and had 6 children.

Three generations of the Pratt family would serve the Ottawa Fire Department. Captain Pratt's son's John Forrest joined Ottawa Fire February 19, 1929 and served until March 31, 1963 and George Stanley joined in 1934 and would serve until 1973. Stanley's son Brian joined in 1971 and at one time was a Captain assigned to Station 2, the same company that his grandfather led at his last alarm.

The Fire:

Just before lunch on Monday May 19, 1930 firefighters from Ottawa's west-end station 11 on Parkdale Avenue responded to a report of fire at the Favorite Ice Company located at the end of Parkdale near the Ottawa River. On arrival, firefighters reported that the fire had spread to an adjoining icehouse, threatening the entire block of homes, and requested a second alarm. Firefighters from Station 2 arrived led by Captain Robert Pratt and immediately placed ladders along the east side of the two ice houses to combat the fire from there. The crew from Station 1, which included firefighter William Willette, also attacked the fire at this location from ladders. They had the fire in the icehouse, containing 4000 tons of ice, under control in

about half an hour and although there was a strong wind, the neighborhood houses were saved from destruction.

The fire was almost completely extinguished when a terrific explosion occurred and the east wall flew in all directions. Captain Pratt, who was at the top of a 25-foot ladder, tried to jump onto the roof as the ladder was pushed out backwards by the descending wall. He never let go of the ladder tip and took the full force of the ladder and debris from the wall on top of him.

Firefighter Willette was also blown backwards while still on his ladder and crashed across a back yard fence, which prevented the full impact of the ladder landing on him.

Lieutenant Harris of Station 1 escaped death by falling off his ladder down the inside of the falling wall and avoiding the debris that landed on Captain Pratt. The other firefighters working below the ladders managed to escape at the first notice of the wall coming down and suffered minor injuries from flying debris. The firefighters working on the roof were fortunate, as the roof fell a very short distance and rested on the large pile of stacked ice.

Firefighters immediately began uncovering their injured comrades while citizens from the area, who had just started to congratulate the firefighters on saving their houses when the collapse occurred, called for an ambulance and doctors. On seeing the seriousness of Captain Pratt's injuries the residents also summoned a priest to the scene, who gave him the last rites. Firefighter Willette was semi-conscious and also seriously injured.

Rather than wait for the ambulance, they placed the two injured firefighters on the hose bed of a pumper and rushed them to the Civic Hospital. The truck, with siren sounding, collided with a car that failed to give way at the intersection of Parkdale and Wellington Streets but the driver was unhurt and the pumper continued without stopping.

Captain Pratt, with many broken bones, was dead on arrival; firefighter Willette was rushed into the operating room, but succumbed to his injuries two hours later.