

# Austin's Burning Past

Fires and Emergency Care from 1797 to the Present Day



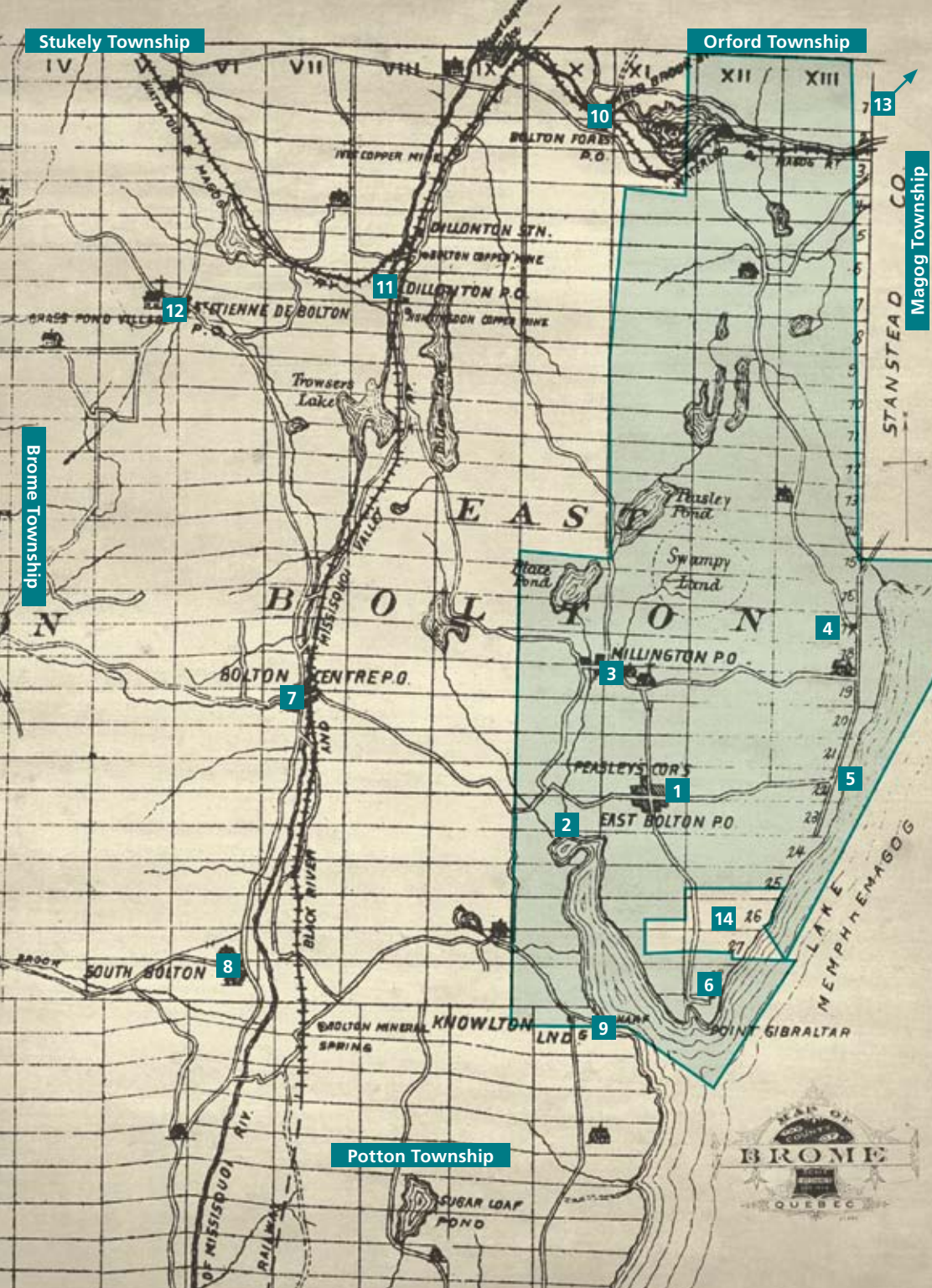
# Austin's Burning Past

Fires and Emergency Care from 1797 to the Present Day

*For nearly 150 years, fires constituted a calamity that could befall each and every resident. However, in the past 35 years, citizens and their elected members of Council have mobilized to better combat the "Fire Demon."*

*Today, Austin's Fire Department - which also covers East Bolton - is highly recognized for the quality of its fire protection services and the rapidity of its emergency care.*

*This is the story of its long struggle.*



**EAST BOLTON  
in 1881**  
with its hamlets,  
post offices and  
train stations

- Austin since 1938
- 1 Peasley's Corner, once the heart of EAST BOLTON
- 2 Head of the Bay
- 3 Millington (Thompson's Mills)
- 4 Channell
- 5 Bryant's Landing
- 6 Company of Villas of Cape Gibraltar
- 7 Bolton Centre
- 8 South Bolton
- 9 Knowlton's Landing
- 10 Bolton Forest
- 11 Dillonton
- 12 Grass Pond (Saint-Étienne-de-Bolton)
- 13 Outlet (Magog)
- 14 Saint-Benoît-du-Lac since 1939

Belden, H. & Co. 1881.  
Map of E. & W. Bolton Township.  
Toronto.

**Foreword**

This publication coincides with the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Austin Fire Department. The period covered, however, goes back to the very beginnings of the Township of Bolton and topics include the Fire Department's two current spheres of activity, namely:

- 1- Fire protection (including firefighting and prevention);
- 2- Public health and (emergency) pre-hospital care.

The choice of including the entire Township of Bolton (a wider territory than Austin's) in the scope of this research was motivated notably by the fact that Austin also provides fire protection services to the Municipality of East Bolton. Sources used include the minutes of municipal council sittings, period newspapers and testimonials from persons involved in firefighting and emergency care services.

**Bolton: a rough out-of-the-way place**

In 1869, Catherine Day, a historian and friend of the Austin family, characterized Bolton as a “rough out-of-the-way place.” To understand such an assessment, let us take a look at the territory and what it has become.

The largest township granted by the British Crown, Bolton was traversed from north to south by a double range of mountains as well as by streams and marshes. In its centre flowed the unnavigable Missisquoi River. While few of its lands were conducive to farming, the Township was nevertheless covered by lush forests and concealed a wealth of mineral resources.

The topography which made east-west communications – and travel - difficult led to a series of dismemberments:

- In 1849 the settlement of Outlet, in the northeast, was amputated from Bolton, taking with it the most fertile and accessible lands. It would later become Magog, the most populous settlement of the area;
- In 1876, another promising area comprised of the Township's four westernmost ranges broke away; the “residual” territory would henceforth be known as East Bolton;

- In 1888, East Bolton was downsized yet again, this time to the north, losing Eastman, a hub for forestry operations and the site of the most important train station;
- In 1938, the Municipality of Austin seceded, taking with it the last remaining vista on Lake Memphremagog;
- Soon after in March 1939, Saint-Benoît-du-Lac splintered away from Austin to become a municipality in its own right;
- Finally, in May 1939, Saint-Étienne-de-Bolton, whose population was largely composed of French-speaking Catholics, broke away to the northwest.

Ultimately, more than three-quarters of Bolton's initial territory would be lost, including some of its most desirable lands. An outlying, sparsely populated rural territory, Bolton quickly lost any of the advantages its seniority might have conferred over neighbouring townships as indeed, none of its settlements were fated to become a strong central hub. It took some time for its small communities to organize.

For a long time, Bolton would offer little in terms of fire protection and health care at the local level, and access to external resources remained limited because of transportation difficulties.



# Historical period – 1797-1938

From the Township’s beginnings in 1797 until the creation of the Municipality of Austin in 1938, fires and emergency care were constant sources of concern. Despite its progresses, Bolton appeared to be less prosperous than other, larger communities nearby.

## The “Fire Demon”

For nearly 150 years, fires constituted a calamity that could befall any resident.

Indeed, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fire was essential in all facets of daily life: for heating and food preparation, for clearing forests, and for repelling mosquitoes and wild animals. This reliance, however, inevitably increased fire-related hazards. One sometimes got the impression that everything burned down: mills, hotels, shops, homes, barns and outbuildings, stockpiled hay, farm tools, animals and, from time to time,

persons, both children and adults. In 1926, it was remarked that every inn around Lake Memphremagog had burned down at least once. The causes were manifold: the poor condition of pipes, a barrel of ashes in a shed, an exploding lantern, children playing with matches, collapsing stove pipes. . . In Bolton, where most houses were made of wood, fires were that much more destructive.

Fires were so disastrous that in 1926, the author William Bullock ascribed their evil deeds to the “Fire Demon.”

### Individual, Community and Municipal Responses

While certain cities, such as Magog and Sherbrooke, adopted bylaws on fire prevention (making chimney sweeping mandatory, for instance), in Bolton, the responsibility fell first and foremost to the property owner.

And the techniques used to combat fires continued to be rudimentary: water would be collected from the nearest pond or stream and brought to the blaze by passing buckets along a human chain.

Relief for victims of fires came primarily from their extended family and neighbours, although assistance could also be had from their religious congregation and from local associations such as the Masonic Lodge and temperance societies. Support was usually offered in the guise of direct aid or donations. Sometimes a work bee would be organized to rebuild the lost structure.

During this extended period, governments did little to intervene in fire protection matters. Following the creation of municipalities in 1840, the Municipality of the Township of Bolton, which had scant resources at its disposal, focussed on transport problems (both road and rail) for many of its roads were virtually impracticable. Indeed, as late as the early 1950s, an Austin teenager who attended the regional high school in Magog was forced to board there during the winter months.

### Disparity between Town and Country... and Inevitability

Like most other rural municipalities, Bolton is not concerned with protection against fire, even as other urban municipalities were becoming more active, impelled by fear of the great fires which had laid waste to entire neighbourhoods in Boston, New York, Montreal, Toronto and other big cities.

Disparities also appeared following the introduction of insurance in the 1800s, for premiums were determined based on two criteria: local firefighting equipment and the availability of a water supply (water distribution system, stream or well). Consequently, the residents of Bolton were doubly penalized for they had neither a fire brigade, nor any consistent access to water. Indeed, premiums could be so costly that residents were often unable to take out insurance or could only afford partial coverage.

Generally, blazes were viewed as an unavoidable twist of fate. The accounts of fires in Bolton shown opposite paint a rather dismal picture of the situation.

While some fire victims elected to rebuild their homes, many others chose to relocate elsewhere, often in the United States. Indeed, the statistics of the period show a relatively stagnant population, confirming that departures from Bolton were a common occurrence.

### The Patch family: work accidents, fire and departure

1894 September	“Stillman Patch met with a severe accident a few days ago. While cutting ensilage he got his right hand in contact with the knives, and lacerating it severely. Dr. McGowan dressed the wounds and he is doing as well as could be expected. ”
1901 October	Baby Lucy dies.
1917 April	Stillman dies in the aftermath of a bad cut sustained at the saw mill.
1918	A fire razes the house, the general store and the mills.
1920 July	Nancy Brill Patch (his widow) immigrates to the United States with her children.

### Bolton fires chronicled in the Waterloo Advertiser, a regional newspaper

*... No insurance. No blame is laid to anyone. (1873-04)*

*... Before assistance could arrive the flames had gained such headway that it proved impossible to subdue them, and the whole property was destroyed. (1878-02)*

*... lost his house and its contents by fire last Sunday night. The family barely escaped with their lives. Cause unknown. . . (1878-04)*

*... the death of Miles E. K. Knowlton, who was so severely burned a short time since while trying to save his horse at the burning of his barn that he never recovered. (1882-08)*

*... Before help could get there the fire burst through the door the inside being all in flames. (1883-04)*

*... farm ... destroyed by fire one night last week. Cause of fire unknown. (1894-11)*

*... barn was burnt to ground. . . One horse and several tons of hay and mowing machine &c. were also burnt. Cause of fire unknown. (1894-12)*

*... two barns ... burned down their contents consisting of a number of tons of hay, one hog, calves and farming implements. The neighbors and friends turned out to save the house. (1898-06)*

*... dwelling house and shed... together with the entire contents were destroyed by fire. (1899-05)*

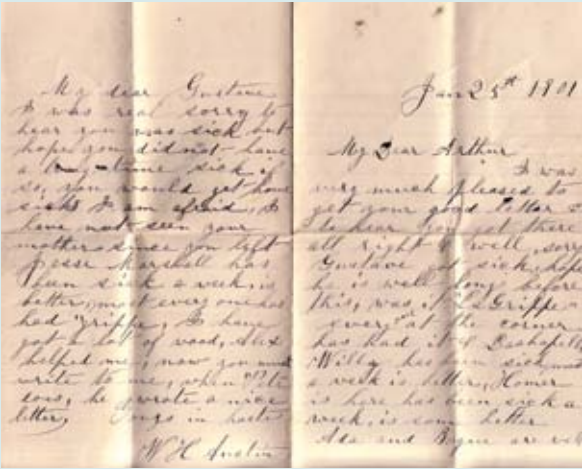
*The fire had gained such headway when discovered that no effort made to save the building or contents. Only the most strenuous efforts saved the surrounding buildings. (1903-12)*





Winter 1901: Letter of W. H. Austin – illness, the Grippe, death and vaccination

In January 1901, William Harvey Austin and “Madam Austin” (Hannah Anna Page) wrote a letter to the young Dufresne brothers, Arthur and Gustave. (Arthur would become Austin’s first Mayor.) They related news of their parents and grand-parents and wrote of daily life in Gibraltar Point and Peasley’s Corner. Everyone was ill or had been.



Extracts:  
... was it “La Grippe” every one at the corner has had it...  
... Lachapelle... has been sick most a week  
... Homer is here has been sick a week...  
... Jesse Marshall has been sick a week...  
... most every one has had “grippe”...  
... Johnny Hunter has another sick spell...  
... now you better be careful and not get sick, you better be vaccinated so you will not get Small Pox...

Health and Emergency Care

If the problems caused by fire were appreciable, health-related issues and access to care were even greater sources of concern. The general outlook was rather dismal: high infant and maternal mortality rates, frequent accidents, alcoholism. Local newspapers often chronicled Bolton’s illnesses, many of which were infectious and sometimes even epidemic: typhoid fever, gastric fever, diphtheria, scarlet fever, mumps, small-pox and the measles. Another recurrent ailment, “the Grippe,” was commonly referred to by its French name.

For a long time, harsh or mediocre living conditions and lack of sanitation (quality of milk and drinking water, garbage disposal, sewer systems, insulation and heating of homes) remained at the root of many illnesses.

Accidents were also common, and child labour constituted an aggravating factor for many were injured at a very young age. Accidents occurred not only on the farm and in the woods, but also in the grist mills and sawmills and in the mines. Naturally, there were no “First Responders”. When someone got hurt, he was brought home and perhaps a doctor would be fetched, if there was one to be had, if one could afford it and depending on whether the injury “could wait” or not. A poorly treated injury could lead to permanent impairment.

For a Bolton patient, resources were local. And more often than not, one died at home. Few people were ever hospitalised.

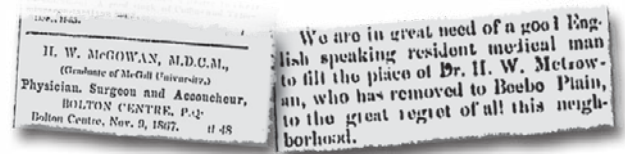
Local Resources

While health problems were numerous, Bolton was not without resources, nor was its population entirely helpless.

Already, the first settlers had benefitted from the knowledge of Mark Randall, one of Nicholas Austin’s Associates and a “root and herb doctor.” Part of Randall’s knowledge had been acquired from the Amerindians who, for millennia, had used medicinal plants for healing. Others likely sought the healing skills of the Abenaki, whose presence in the Township extended until the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Midwives, bonesetters and tooth pullers also dispensed traditional medicine. Indeed, many doctors in the Eastern Townships will testify that for minor operations, a competent bonesetter is often as efficient as a surgeon.

Despite the progresses of “modern” medicine, few doctors settled in Bolton. The first, Dr. Amos W. Lay, opened his medical practice in 1825. He moved away, however, in the wake of his involvement on the Patriot side of the 1837 Rebellion and his subsequent imprisonment. Next came Dr. H. W. McGowan who, settling in Bolton in 1867, advertised himself as a “Physician, Surgeon and Accoucheur.” But prosperity failed to materialize in the region and in 1881, he relocated to Beebe Plain. Disheartened, the citizens of Bolton placed an advertisement in the newspapers to seek a good, English-speaking resident doctor.



« We are in great need of a good English speaking resident medical man to fill the place of Dr. H. W. McGowan, who has removed to Beebe Plain, to great regret of all this neighborhood. »

Waterloo Advertiser, 1881-07-29

Community Assistance and Municipal Intervention

Fortunately, in the face of adversity, citizens in distress could rely on support from the community.

In those days, individuals – such as members of the founding family of Thompson Mills (later Millington) – would come forth to tend to the sick, the poor, the victims of fires or accidents and the orphans. Alexander Thompson I (1750-1835), builder of the first mills in 1796, supported the community by contributing to the erection of a school and a church, all the while continuing to tend to his flourishing businesses. His son, Alexander II (1787-1845), not only took over his father’s businesses but also became a preacher, dispensing succour to persons in distress for some thirty years.

Gradually, municipal councils also began to intervene. For example, the Municipality of Bolton, having no employees of its own, would charge fellow citizens – and sometimes Dr. McGowan – with overseeing the relief given to the poor, the wounded and the destitute. Municipal interventions could even be high-handed on occasion: in one instance, G.A. Bowen, a noted Magog physician, was directed to care for a woman by hospitalising her as needed, and authorised him to place her young child in an institution.

However, the most impressive interventions made by successive municipal councils occurred when the spread of infectious diseases threatened, by energetically ordering the posting of notices and the disinfection of infected homes. In one case, a “By Road” was even opened to temporarily circumvent an affected area.

For a long time, the Government of Quebec had deemed poverty relief to be the responsibility of the family and the Church, yet it would eventually come to support municipal actions in this regard, especially during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The creation of Austin in 1938 occurred at a transitional time, when provincial authorities began to intervene more directly, particularly after the creation of the Department of Social Welfare in 1940. Like other rural municipalities, Austin gradually began to pay more attention to fire protection.



# 1939-1977: Austin and Fire Protection: Lacking an Overall Plan

With its 300 inhabitants, the new Municipality of Austin resembled East Bolton, though more agricultural in nature. Indeed, Austin’s first Mayor, Arthur Dufresne, as well as five of its six elected Councillors were farmers. For decades, the Municipality’s only (part-time) employee was the Secretary-Treasurer and, as a result, the works decided upon by Council were often carried out by the members of Council themselves.

Most of the hamlets that had dotted Austin’s territory had disappeared: Head of the Bay had disintegrated, Cape Gibraltar had been flattened by a tornado in 1877, and Millington had so deteriorated that its church had been demolished in 1936. The sole surviving settlement, Peasley’s Corner, became the village core, a cluster comprised of a few shops, churches and a school. Austin’s population, on the other hand, was dispersed over a territory of 86 square kilometres.

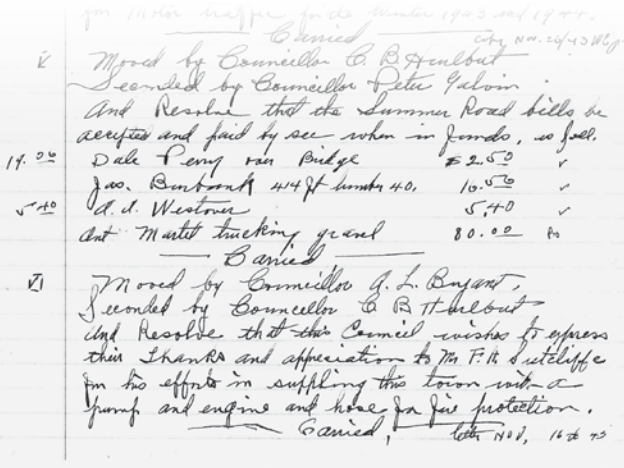
Travel continued to be a problem. For instance, the fifteen kilometres separating the northern sector (at the foot of Mount Orford) from the village core consisted of a sinuous path that was impracticable at times. Roads, therefore, continued to be a priority: at the very first sitting of the newly elected Council in January 1939, the sole current business resolution addressed the maintenance of winter roads.

Fire protection, therefore, remained a lesser concern. The issue was rarely raised in Council, nor was there any interest shown in the incentives offered by the Government of Quebec to rural municipalities who acquired firefighting equipment. In a 1943 resolution, Council expressed “their thanks and appreciation to Mr. F. H. Sutcliffe for his efforts in supplying the town with a pump and engine and hose for fire protection.”

## Well-Intentioned But Piecemeal Response

Clearly, events dictated the courses of action, which were carried out in good faith, but with little overall strategy. Two fire chiefs were appointed in 1948, but they seem to have had little authority for in 1951, Council appointed someone to “take charge of the Fire Engine & Equipment and keep it in good order,” enjoining him to “keep gas in the Engine and some on hand in case of fire” and maintain the hose in good order. Such action brings to mind scenarios where Austin firemen might have arrived at the site of a blaze only to discover that the hose was blocked or leaking, or that there was not enough fuel for the pump. The purchase, in 1963-1964, of 100 feet of hose provides another example of Council’s sluggishness in this regard, for the transaction required three resolutions and took nine months to complete.

Around the same period, in the north, near Lake Orford, citizens cited water supply problems to put out fires. In 1948, there was talk of building a fire station in the sector, but the project never materialized.



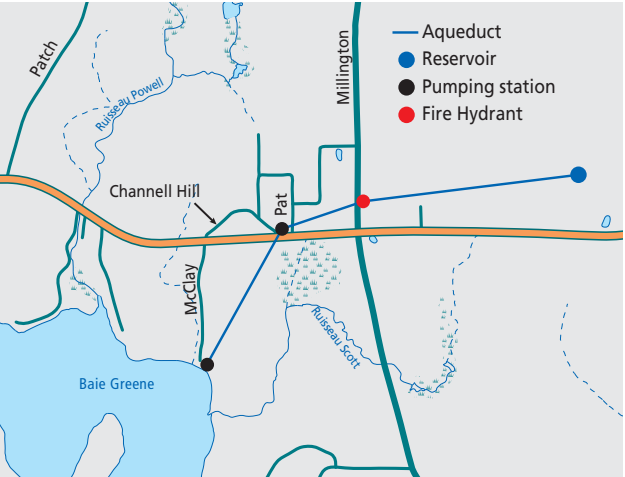
At its November 1943 sitting, Council expressed its gratitude and appreciation to Mr. F. H. Sutcliffe, who had supplied the town with a pump, engine and hose for fire protection. The two preceding resolutions on winter and summer roads clearly show that the roads were Council’s first priority, and budgets were largely allocated to road maintenance.

## Magog Firefighters and the Butters’ Centre

Two phenomena in the 1960s illustrate the difficulties experienced by Austin in trying to establish a regular fire department.

Over the years, Magog firefighters often came to combat blazes in Austin, especially in the northwest sector, near Magog. Indeed, residents would sometimes take matters into their own hands by calling the Magog Fire Department directly! In the summer of 1959, Austin Mayor Peter Galvin met with the Magog Fire Chief to discuss a possible service agreement. Gradually, a procedure was established whereby the Municipality would reimburse Magog for fire interventions on its territory. In 1977, however, the Municipality asked citizens to cover half of the costs of a Magog Fire Department intervention on their properties.

Near the village core stood the *Cecil Butters Memorial Hospital* – or Butters’ Centre – a home for the mentally handicapped. The Centre had opened in 1946 and its patients numbered nearly 450 in 1972. The Municipality, however, did not compel the Centre to implement any fire prevention measures, as municipalities were empowered to do under Quebec law, even though the main building was overpopulated and housed dozens of physically-handicapped residents and lacked a system of automatic sprinklers and fire exits. At most, it asked the Centre on one occasion to reimburse part of the costs of a Magog Fire Department intervention.



Layout of the aqueduct, from Lake Memphrémagog to the Butters’ Centre

The years 1976 and 1977 were difficult ones for Austin. Already in 1974, The Official Language Act (Bill 22) had made French the language of public administration. The Government was also getting ready to offload additional obligations on small municipalities with respect to fire protection. In December 1976, following Mayor Galvin’s death, Council appointed a French-speaking Councillor to succeed him in the Mayor’s office: Mr. Roger Nicolet.

# 1979-2014: The Volunteer Brigade Turns Professional

For the past 200 years or so, roads had remained the top priority of public authorities in Bolton. Public protection (police, fire and civil security), sanitation (drinking water, sewers, household waste) and healthcare (except in cases of epidemics) had remained minimal.

In 1977, Austin was a tranquil community of 755 homes, 50 farms, a sawmill with about 10 employee, and the Butters' Centre with its residents. Fires were common, damages were considerable and insurance premiums were on the rise. The Municipality owned a portable pump, but it often arrived too late or could not be put to good use for lack of a water source nearby. The population was disgruntled.

At the same time, the Government of Quebec jolted rural municipalities out of their quiescence by gradually devolving new responsibilities onto them. As a result, Austin could no longer disregard obligations such as the monitoring of sanitation and security facilities at the Butters' Centre.

## The Big Change, 1977-1997

Austin's Council kicked off the Municipality's journey on the road to change. The Insurance Bureau of Canada outlined the basic conditions to be met before premiums could be reduced: a fire station, water supply points, a tanker, a pumper, equipment, and a brigade numbering at least 15 firemen. In just a few months, the situation had already undergone some changes. In January 1978, a steering committee proposed the creation of a bona fide brigade of volunteer firefighters. With the assent of the population and with financing secured at the bank, recruitment got under way in March. In April, six volunteers travelled to Vermont to receive training (in English). The following month, Dom Claude-Marie Côté, an architect and monk at the Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Abbey, agreed to prepare plans for a fire station similar to the one in Potton. By year's end, a fire brigade for Austin, Saint-Benoît-du-Lac and East Bolton had been officially established and a Fire Protection Committee with representation from each of the three municipalities had been formed. An inter-municipal budget of \$6,500 was set. The Department of Municipal Affairs gave its blessings to the project and promised financial help.

In 1979, Arthur Bryant was appointed Fire Chief. The purchase a pumper truck, and then a tanker (because of the scarcity of water sources in many locations) were decided upon. Basic materials such as bunker suits and boots also had to be acquired. A service agreement was entered into with the Butters' Centre, whereby three of its employees would act as firemen in case of a blaze.

If the Brigade's first fire, on February 5<sup>th</sup> 1980, was extinguished "to everyone's satisfaction" according to Chief Bryant, other fires were not always so easily mastered. For instance, on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1982, flames destroyed the Wood Acres Hotel. The Brigade arrived late because of communication problems. The blaze claimed one victim, a child, although in the first hours, as many as seven and even eight victims had been reported by the media.

The January 1<sup>st</sup> 1982 fire made news the world over. Several papers mistook the locality (placing the blaze in Knowlton's Landing rather than in Austin) and erred on the number of victims (there was only one, not seven or eight).



By a singular coincidence, three major fires touched the properties of citizens associated with the revamped Brigade: first, the Mayor's house and later his barn (1981), then the sawmill belonging to the president of the Fire Protection Committee, Reginald Dingman (1983) and finally, the Fire Chief's own barn (1987), including the loss of 34 animals.

The first fires revealed certain shortcomings in the techniques used to extinguish different types of fires. It appeared that further training would be needed.

## Broadened Mandates

Fairly early on, the range of firefighting services was broadened to include prevention. For instance, as early as in 1981, permits for open fires became mandatory and fires would henceforth be prohibited during high winds or periods of drought to minimize the risk of propagation.

The most important change, however, occurred in 1988 when the Government adopted two new laws: the *Fire Safety Act* charged each Regional County Municipality (MRC) with the development of a "Fire Safety Cover Plan," while the *Act Respecting Pre-Hospital Emergency Services* provided for the coordination of pre-hospital emergency care services, including those dispensed by first responders. Austin immediately began to integrate these new regulations, although they would only really be put into effect later.





### Improvements and Consolidation

In 1989, a by-law ordaining the permanent, standardized numbering of houses to allow rapid identification in emergency situations was adopted.

In 1993, a communication system – including an antenna atop the Butters' Centre water reservoir – was activated.

Also in 1993, a second fire station was built in the northern sector of Austin to provide a more thorough coverage of the entire territory and thereby realizing the aborted 1948 project.

In 1994, Council's new attitude toward fire protection was exemplified by a formal notice sent to the Butters' Centre to order the immediate repair of the pumping station and water distribution system.

### Leading Figures in the Life of the Community

In the first years, volunteer firefighters often had to solicit the population for donations to purchase equipment, for the funds contributed by the three municipalities (Austin, East Bolton and Saint-Benoît-du-Lac) were limited. A Firemen's Fund was created. On December 1<sup>st</sup> 1979, the Volunteer Firemen Association organised a fundraising dance in Austin and East Bolton which featured a three-prize draw for a pig, a fire extinguisher and a smoke detector. Street dances, Christmas dances, and other celebrations followed. Firefighters also instigated the annual Canada Day parade on July 1<sup>st</sup> as a means to raise funds, increase fire protection awareness and celebrate as a community. As the only organized corps in the municipality, they orchestrated the 1993 celebrations for the Bicentennial of the Township of Bolton, including a grand parade, the relocation – by a team of oxen – of the Nicholas Austin commemorative monument erected in 1898, and an exhibition of ancient photographs which is still on display at Town Hall.



First responders doing simulated response exercises in order to develop their emergency preparedness.



When it comes to increasing awareness in the population, firefighters and first responders always answer the call!





A Professional Service: 1998 to the Present Day

At the end of the 1990s, nature's unleashed fury over southern Quebec revealed flaws in emergency systems. This would have a bearing on Austin's Fire Department, whose mission was to be broadened yet again to become the core dispenser of fire protection, security and emergency healthcare services. These services, however, were to be defined at the Memphremagog MRC level, as required by provincial norms. The Austin Fire Department would be transformed under the command of the new Fire Chief, Paul Robitaille.

The 1998 Ice Storm and Professionalization of 1999

In January 1998, southern Quebec and the American northeast were hit by a massive ice storm, which has since been classified as the worst natural disaster in Canadian history. The storm damaged thousands of trees and downed electrical and telephone wires. The situation was so severe that a state of emergency was declared.

Austin would not escape it. Volunteer firefighters immediately responded: helped by regular citizens, they opened roads and rescued victims. Once the situation had returned to a more "normal" status, they organized a firewood drive to help the families of Mont-Saint-Grégoire in the Montérégie, who had been without power for several days.

The ice storm showed how the firefighters were more and more called upon to handle various emergency situations. Further, as the complexity of intervention methods increased, so did the hours of training and practice. Also, the calls were becoming much more frequent. For 20 years firefighters had worked voluntarily, but in 1999, they felt that their work now deserved fair compensation. And so, the Municipality entered into a first labour agreement with its firefighters.

Extending Services: Emergency Care and Prevention

At approximately the same time, pre-hospital emergency care was added to the Fire Department's range of services. In 1998, Council voted to hire four women as "First Aid Auxiliaries," the precursors of our current day "First Responders."



MRC de Memphremagog. 2008. *Schéma de couverture de risques en sécurité incendie*

The Fire Safety Cover Plan is a process by which all fire risks on the territory are identified and assessed, prevention measures are implemented to abate them, and detailed intervention plans are drawn to limit damages should a fire occur.

In the matter of fire prevention and control, the Fire Safety Cover Plan essentially rests at the heart of the Fire Department's actions. In Austin, the Plan was initiated in 2001 and adopted in 2007. Already, since 2005, systematic inspections had enabled the Municipality to assess the level of risk for each residence and building on its territory and to verify the numbering of houses and the presence of smoke detectors. Because prevention constituted an important component of the Plan, it was decided to create the position of Fire Safety Inspector, a task which was taken over by the Fire Chief in 2008.

However, the most important achievement pertained to the training and development of both the firefighters and first responders. All members receive a basic training common to both services, after which those who wish can pursue more specialized training.

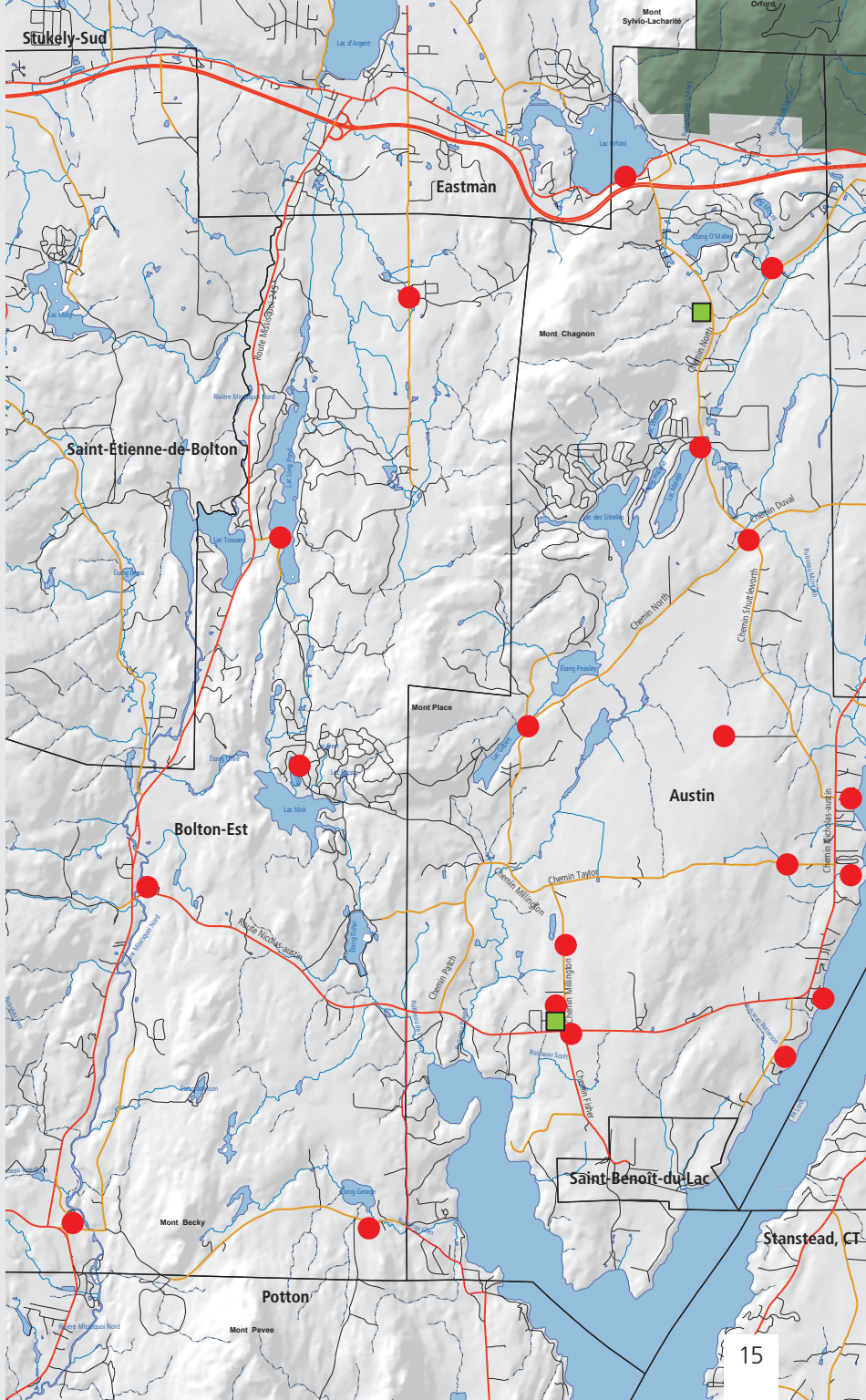
Another ice storm hits in 2013

On Sunday December 22, 2013, the municipality is hit by a severe ice storm. Very quickly, the large majority of the residents are left without electricity and the roads, both private and public, are blocked by broken trees and branches, making them impassable. For nearly 48 hours, 31 volunteer firefighters work tirelessly, in teams of 2, using their personal vehicles and equipment (chainsaws mostly) in order to clear the roads.

Summary of actions undertaken to cover the risks in matters of safety:

- the connection to the 9-1-1 call centre;
- the purchase of equipment for the new "First Responders" and the replacement of other, older material;
- the acquisition of generators;
- the enlargement of Town Hall to provide shelter in the event of a disaster;
- the acquisition of new vehicles (including a "Rescue Unit")
- the enlargement of Fire Station no. 1;
- the installation of 14 dry hydrants in Austin and 6 in East-Bolton to ensure continuous access to water;
- the acquisition of a boat for nautical rescue (given the presence of nine lakes and ponds in Austin, including Lake Memphremagog);
- the installation of a system of standardized civic numbers over the entire territory;
- the installation of a communication system with relay first on Mt. Orford, then on Mt. Gauvin and finally on North Road, to better cover Austin's northern sector.

- Fire stations
- Dry hydrants



Dedication and Continuity

The Austin Fire Department is a work of continuity. Indeed, one of the members of the steering committee formed 35 years ago, Robert Benoit, and Victor Dingman, son of the committee's second president, Reginald Dingman, 32 years ago, now sit on the Council's Fire Protection Committee.

Even as they professionalized their operations, firefighters and first responders have preserved the volunteering spirit of yore. They continue to contribute to *Austin en fête!*, the annual community celebration held at the beginning of summer, to guard the population's safety at public events, including that of the trick-or-treaters at Halloween, to organize fundraising activities such as draws or car washes at various times of the year, and to give a hand during cardiopulmonary resuscitation and automatic external defibrillator training.

Their exemplary dedication certainly explains why in 2013, seven of our 20- and 30- year veterans received the *Governor General's Fire Services Exemplary Service Medal*. Exemplary service is characterized by good conduct, industry and efficiency.



George Fancy, Claude Cyr and Ralph Ruck (in back)  
Arthur Bryant, Paul Robitaille and Alain Viscogliosi (in front).  
Absent: David Dingman



Honouring all volunteer firefighters

In 2003, as the Fire Department celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Canada Post issued a stamp honouring all Canadian volunteer firefighters.

“Volunteer firefighters have long been an invaluable part of emergency response to domestic threats involving fire, medical emergencies, hazardous materials, motor vehicle accidents, and rescues across Canada. Although the ranks of volunteer departments have declined, nearly 3,500 of the 4,000 fire departments in our country depend on volunteer services (...). Eighty-five per cent of Canada’s firefighters are volunteers, protecting 80% of our communities. ”

The Four Pillars of the History of Austin’s Fire Department

Within a few decades, Austin’s Fire Department has grown from a rudimentary brigade to a well-oiled, efficient and highly respected organization. Four persons – two council members and two citizens/firefighters – played a key role in this transformation:

**Roger Nicolet** who, during his 33 years as Mayor, supported the creation of the brigade and its evolution throughout successive mandates.

**Allen Dowbiggin**, a municipal councillor from 1965 to 1986 (although not in one continuous stretch) was the first president of the Fire Protection Committee and a vocal advocate for the necessity of having a local brigade, both within Council and in the community at large.

**Arthur Bryant**, descendant of one of the first settlers, joined the brigade in 1963 and became the first Chief of the revamped Fire Department.

**Paul Robitaille**, a young firefighter in 1979, was appointed Deputy Fire Chief in 1990, then Fire Chief in 1997. He added Fire Prevention Inspector to his duties in 2007.

Chiefs of the pioneer brigades

- 1946 Keith Taylor and Gordon Bryant
- 1951 Elwin Bryant  
Carl C. Juby (Deputy Fire Chief)
- 1963 Flemming Jensen
- 1966 Albert Willey

Fire Department Chiefs and Deputies

- 1979 Arthur Bryant  
Melvin Bryant (Deputy Fire Chief)
- 1990 Paul Robitaille (Deputy Fire Chief)
- 1997 Paul Robitaille (Fire Chief)
- 2007 Paul Robitaille (Fire Chief and Fire Safety Inspector)

List of past and present members of the Fire Department, since 1979

Allain Fernand	Cormier David*	Éthier Larry	Mitchell Romulus	St-Pierre Robert
Allain Paul	Crawford Antoine*	Fancy Brian	Moquin Éric	St-Pierre Patricia
Bachand Dany	Croken Albert	Fancy George	Nicholson Stephen*	Stone Philip
Beausoleil Philip Michael	Cyr Bernard	Fournier Richard	Ouellet Martin	Stone Wilfred
Belleville Serge	Cyr Brigitte*	Gagnon David*	Pariseault Charles	Taillon Francis
Bergeron Patrick	Cyr Bruno	Gagnon Marc*	Phaneuf Barrie	Taillon Gabriel*
Bonin Michel	Cyr Camille	Gaudet Gaston	Phaneuf Brian	Trudeau Jean-Martin*
Bouchard Dominic*	Cyr Claude*	Gaudreau Jennifer	Priest Ross	Turcotte Alain
Boucher Charles	Cyr Guylaine*	Hardy Edward	Rainville Michel	Turcotte Lois
Bratt Adam	Cyr Normand	Isabelle Richard	Raymond Michel*	Viscogliosi Alain*
Brulotte Denis	Davies Carl*	Jensen Flemming	Raymond Natacha*	Viscogliosi Luigi
Brulotte René	Dingman Danny*	Jolicoeur Mario*	Raymond Serge*	Viscogliosi Michel
Bryant Arthur	Dingman David	Labrie Stéphane*	Robitaille Anthony	Viscogliosi Mikael
Bryant Clifford	Dingman Gordon	Lachapelle Daryl	Robitaille Jonathan*	Viscogliosi Paolo*
Bryant Gordon Jr.	Dingman Jackie (Brulotte)	Lamoureux Jacques	Robitaille Paul*	Voyer Denis
Bryant Melvyn	Dingman Joshua	Lechasseur Daniel*	Roy Mario	Westover Randolph
Cioffi-Duret Samuel	Dingman Reginald Jr	Lee Michael	Roy Sylvain	Wikeruk Emerson*
Compagnat André*	Dingman Timmy	Lefebvre Mathieu*	Royea Janice	Wilkinson Diana
Compagnat Anthony*	Donahue William*	Maillé Oliva	Royea Stanley	
Compagnat Francis	Doré Julie*	Martineau Guy	Ruck Ralph*	
Compagnat Pat	Ducharme Albert	McNicholl Patrick*	Ruck Nicholas	
Côté Bruno*	Dustin David	Meunier Maxime	St-Jean Sébastien	

\*Active in 2014



Nowadays, the Fire Department numbers 6 officers, 24 firefighters of whom 12 are also first responders and 16 are trained in nautical rescue, as well as 3 first responders (who are not firefighters). Equipment's include a network of 14 dry hydrants, 3 trucks [an 850-gallon (US) pumper, a 3000-gallon (US) pumper tanker and a 1500-gallon (US) pumper tanker] as well as a Rescue Unit.

## Conclusion

In the last decades, social and governmental requirements for security and emergency care have increased. Austin's Fire Department is certified for building and forest fires, carbon monoxide, and both nautical and emergency rescue. Our firefighters and first responders have known how to keep up and adapt.

Fire Protection represents the Municipality's most important budget item. However, the quality of our equipment and the competence of our personnel have been confirmed by the MRC's 2008 Fire Safety Cover Plan. And the cost of insurance premiums has decreased as a result.

While our firefighters and first responders ceased to work in a volunteer capacity in 1999, these men and women contribute voluntarily, with generosity and professionalism, to the protection of our homes and, in an emergency situation, of our health as well.

## 35 years already!

Our firefighters and first responders deserve our grateful thanks.



March 9, 2008



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*"Volunteer firefighters are the first-line defenders against many domestic threats involving fire, medical emergencies, hazardous materials, motor vehicle accidents and rescues ranging from trench collapse to high and low angle."*

*Mike Walsh, President, Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association (CVFSA)*

*We couldn't do without them!*



The Brigade in 2004