



THE MUSEUM & ARCHIVES OF VERNON

Joint Media Release

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Local painting to get new home at Museum & Archives of Vernon

A painting based on a real-life fire that occurred in 1960, and was presented to the Vernon Fire Department's Fire Chief more than 60 years ago, will now have a new home at the Museum & Archives of Vernon.



"The Night Rescue" is a painting by Australian artist Howard Totenhofer and shows the dramatic rescue that took place during the fire. The painting is based on the photograph that appeared on the front page of The Vernon News newspaper on April 25, 1960.

The woman being rescued in the photograph is Mrs. Winnifred Neff, being helped down by Fire Chief Fred Little and Firefighter Jack Vecqueray. Also pictured are Volunteer Fire Fighter Irish Connelly (above the Fire Chief) and RCMP Officer Ken Coburn.

The fire began around 11:00 pm on Friday, April 22, 1960, in the Interior Appliances' offices in the Bagnall Building located at 3500 32nd Avenue in Vernon.

The following is from *The Vernon News* edition printed on Monday, April 25, 1960:

“Fire Chief Fred Little said he believed anyone left in the building would have perished. The smoke was so thick, that anyone trying to get upstairs could just go so far and then they’d have to come back. Every available smoke mask was in use, he said. The boys were facing two problems, rescue and fire fighting. We knew the construction of the building so knew how important it was to get the fire out. We had to take chances, something we only do when life is involved, the Fire Chief said.”

The painting was commissioned by Guy Bagnall, who was the original owner of the Bagnall building where the fire occurred. The painting was presented to Fire Chief Fred Little and the Officers and Men of the fire department on October 14, 1960. For several years, the painting was located at the Vernon Fire Station 1. But in an effort to share the painting with the community at large, at the request of Chief Little’s extended family, it is now moving to Museum & Archives of Vernon.

On Saturday, May 20, 2023, members of Fred Little’s family reunited with the “Night Rescue” painting at Vernon Fire Station 1 in a small private event. In a demonstration, the Little Family received the painting from David Lind, current Vernon Fire Chief, and then handed it over to the Museum & Archives of Vernon (MAV) who accepted the painting into its permanent collection.

The painting will be on display at the Museum beginning on May 24, 2023. For the Museum’s current hours, please visit its website www.vernonmuseum.ca.