

Former chief remembered for toughness, sense of humor

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reel Peel Physical Bior

By MIKE SOLOMON

At 135 pounds soaking wet, Jack Braithwaite (John George to the uninitiated) was one of the toughest and most respected men in Mississauga.

He died at Peel Memorial Hospital last Tuesday night, having reached his eighties.

Known as a man who called a spade a spade, he founded and built the nucleus of what is now the city's fire department, using all his unique expertise to gather the cash to do it.

Back in the 1940s, when the old police village of Malton went out on a limb and bought a fire truck it knew it couldn't afford, Braithwaite pitched in and saved the day. Somehow — it's still not entirely clear — he sorted out the funding problem. That kind of thing was his forte.

He was a man who could be counted upon. Everyone knew that. Ontario cabinet ministers would come to him. He didn't have to go to them when the chips were down.

There was the time when, hard-pressed for cash, the old Township of Toronto Council was toughening up on spending dollars, and the fire department budget was no exception. Braithwaite needed "long-johns" for his men — at that time a volunteer brigade.

He got them by hiding the budget request in a section headed "heaters". He got his way, even though the ruse was discovered. He was a man with a strong sense of humor and a dedication to his job.

"A real workhorse, was Jack," as Joe Miller, the city's existing fire chief puts it.

"He was very well appreciated by the people around here," Miller said Monday.

Always looked after his "boys" and many of them remembered that when they turned up en masse for his funeral service at the Turner and Porter Funeral Home Friday.

Both his son William and grandson Robert are following in the family tradition as captains in the city fire department. Another grandson, Jack, is with the Etobicoke Fire Department.

Jack Braithwaite was a man of character, a man with color from his early beginning as a cavalry member in Europe in the First

World War, through his tinkering around with engines and running a service station in his early days, through to fire chief. He was always mechanically minded. He always minded the money. He always minded his men.

He liked to help people. He ran a tight ship, as some put it. A self-made man. Little education but plenty of common sense.

Not a man to talk much of his past, Jack Braithwaite was known as a workhorse. He was a dedicated, 24-hour-a-day fireman who not only founded the local force but built it up to 60 strong before he retired as chief about 10 years ago. He had been chief since 1954, when the township's population stood at 26,000.

He began fighting fires in the late 1930s, with the old Cooksville

firefighters.

He had a way with him that made things go — a manner of treating everyone as his equal.

He was one of the last real "characters" left from the old township days.

He will be sorely missed by many.