



# NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

Jim Greenfield Town Historian 283-6384

## **The Great Wynantskill Explosion**

65 years ago on August 4, 1942, a small article appeared in the Troy Record announcing the formation of the Wynantskill Emergency Ambulance Service. Two weeks later to the day, the ambulance was first used in connection with an explosion/fire at McLoughlin's Bar & Grill on Main Avenue in Wynantskill.

Harold Rowe converted his dry cleaning delivery truck into a vehicle which could serve a dual purpose as ambulance. He told me that he had seen carnage in war photos and felt if something like that happened here, we would need local ambulance service. He obtained a casket undercarriage from an undertaker and he himself provided a cot, sheets and a blanket. Harold said the inside of the truck may have looked strange-half containing dry cleaning and the other half his ambulance equipment. It was soon to get its first test.

August 15<sup>th</sup> had been a typical hot summer day. However at 2AM, Wynantskill residents were jolted out of their beds by a loud explosion. William DeLair, who lived nearby thought it felt like an air raid. Remember that this was the early part of World War II and as people stumbled out into the street and saw the wreckage, their first thought was that this was war related. People as far away as two or three miles heard the blast.

McLoughlin's building was completely destroyed. It wasn't until days later that investigators could piece together what had really happened that evening. The tavern was on the site of an old gas station (about where DEA Computing is now so I'm told). The bartender, Ted Cox had gone to the basement to turn off the compressor. He either lit a match or threw a switch which caused an arc. Unknown to him, gasoline had leaked from the old gas tanks. He didn't recognize the smell of the fumes and didn't realize the danger. The place blew up and the tavern was completely flattened. Joseph Haughney's house next door was wrecked on one side and next door on the other side, Donald Bassett's home suffered similar damage.

Cox was killed instantly. Harold Rowe and his ambulance were on the spot and took McLoughlin to the hospital. However he suffered third degree burns and died a few days later.

Harold Rowe, Dorothy Woodhead and Les Dickerson administered first aid at the scene to firemen Lou Miller, William Vitalis and Francis McHenry of the Wynantskill Fire Department who suffered slight injuries. The new Wynantskill Emergency Ambulance Service certainly got its baptism under fire that night!

I'd like to thank Dick Carter and Harold Rowe for information for this story. Anyone else remember the great explosion-fire in Wynantskill? Contact me at 283-6384.