



John Clark, third from left, succumbed at his home this morning from inhaling smoke and fire when, as a member of the Hope Valley Volunteer Fire Association, he fought a blaze that burned over 7,000 acres of woodlands in South County May 2.

Recent Forest Fire Is Fatal to Hope Valley Man

John Ray Clark, 52, chief engineer and secretary of the Hope Valley Volunteer Fire Association, died this morning at his home in Hope Valley, as the result of a fire in which he inhaled smoke and flames.

Mr. Clark was a member of a four-man crew from the Hope Valley Department, which was temporarily trapped at the Carl Barber homestead on Escoheag Hill, in the West Greenwich Center-Hope Valley fire on May 2.

The truck and men, with their avenue of escape cut off, and a broken water pump, made a heroic effort to come safely through the roaring inferno. Clark, riding on the back step of the big pump, inhaled large quantities of smoke and flame.

Dr. Frances A. Kenyon of Woodville, who had been attending him, said Mr. Clark's death is a direct cause of the fire, and traced it to inhalation and tremendous exertion.

Dr. Kenyon said his condition was so critical, he could not be moved from his home. "It was a miracle he lived this long," said the Woodville physician.

Firemen said that Clark, despite his condition, insisted on working on the broken water pump when the disabled truck rolled into the Hope Valley Fire Station. However,

he was prevailed upon to go to his home and receive medical attention.

Others in the crew with Clark were Oscar Pratt and Edward Kuckas, and Clifford Andrews, the driver.

The Barber Homestead is the scene where Carl Barber was seriously burned, and is still a patient at The Westerly Hospital, where he is under treatment.

The West Greenwich Center to Hope Valley fire burned over 7,000 acres and took firemen 24 hours to bring under control.

William J. Bennett, 32, of West Greenwich, a former inmate of the Exeter School, admitted setting the fire, and is awaiting grand jury trial in the Kent County Superior Court later this month.

Mr. Clark was born March 25, 1899 at Wood River Junction, the son of the late Adelbert Ray and Mary Ella (Wright) Clark. He was employed as a mechanic at Main's Service Station in Hope Valley.

He was a charter member of the Hope Valley Volunteer Fire Association, and had been engineer since it was founded in 1942. During the past year he also served as secretary of the company.

He was a member of Charity Lodge, No. 23, F. and A. M.; Franklin Royal Arch Masons No. 7,

Hope Chapter No. 4 OES; a Past Master of the Hope Valley Grange, No. 7; a member of the Washington County Pomona, No. 2; a member of the Rhode Island State Grange.

He also held membership in the Degree of Ceres National Grange, Mechanics Lodge No. 14, IOOF, and Betsy Williams Council No. 8, Daughters of America, in Wakefield.

He was a past president of the Rhode Island Fish and Game Protective Association in Providence, a member of the South County Fire Chiefs and Forest Wardens Association, a life member of the Rhode Island State Firemen's League and a constable with the Hopkinton Police Department.

Surviving is his wife, Edith C. (Potter) Clark; a daughter, Thelma I. Clarke of Hope Valley; son, Ray M. Clark of Hope Valley; sister, Mrs. Peter P. Palmer of Canochet; brother, Edwin A. Clark of Burlingame, California. He also is survived by his step mother, Mrs. Nellie M. Clark of Hope Valley, a half brother, Lewis D. Clark of the U. S. Army in Camp Stewart, Ga., and several nieces and nephews.

The funeral will be held Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock from the Avery Funeral Home, Hope Valley. Interment will be in Wood River Cemetery, Westerly.

Other members of this crew were Herbert Niles and Frederick A. Stanley, at age 15. They escaped riding in the back of Chief Smith's pick up.



A MEMORIAL STONE in honor of the deceased members of the Hope Valley Volunteer Fire Department was dedicated last Sunday in front of the village's fire station. Escorted by members of the department's memorial committee, Robert Stanley (left) and Peter Zegarzewski (center), Edith Kenyon (center) places a memorial wreath next to the Westerly granite monument. Mrs. Kenyon is the widow of John R. Clark, a chief engineer in the department who lost his life while fighting a forest fire in Exeter in 1951. On hand for the event was Rep. John Gilman (D-Dist. 52), who gave the dedication speech, Rev. William Hollis of the Hope Valley Baptist Church, who gave the benediction and closing prayer, and former Fire Chief Alexander Smith, who unveiled the stone memorial. (Times photo by Daniel G. Dunn)