

# Stratford History - Always Amazing

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Stratford Historical Society's

## UPDATE

This article would, likely, be more fittingly entitled "***It's a Wonderful Life—Stratford Style.***" Following Thanksgiving in 1943, an influenza outbreak seems to have hit virtually everyone in town. Even Governor Baldwin was at his home in Stratford immobilized by the flu. The outdoor temperatures had been on a roller coaster rising and falling below freezing. Early in December, a freak snowstorm raised havoc in town by spreading a snowy slush which was very difficult to remove.

Francis Brennan, age 59, the recently appointed Executive Director of the Stratford Housing Authority, left his home on December 23, 1943, with an outdoor temperature of 5 degrees. He had much work to do in his newly created Stratford Housing Authority. The Woodend Housing Project was short of coal, and he was having difficulty securing coal due to a coal shortage.

He was struggling with the administrative tasks involved with starting up any new agency. Due to a dispute between the Town and the Federal Government Mr. Brennan had not been paid his salary, and there was no certainty as to when he would be paid.

Children were coming home from school and, though there

was an ice rink provided for them at the Woodend Housing complex, some chose to ignore warnings of unsafe ice at Frash Pond and ventured out onto the Pond's frozen surface regardless of the danger.

Eight year old Eleanor Boclawski came running into Mr. Brennan's office early in the afternoon panting that two boys had just fallen through the ice on Frash Pond. Mr. Brennan, whose office was located just north of Zack's Yogurt, ran from his office stripping off his coat and vest as he dashed the 200 feet from his office to where the boys had fallen through the ice. Not seeing any sign of one of the boys, Mr. Brennan dove into the Pond, and pulled 7 year old Kenneth Mackes to safety. Just as he'd secured Kenneth on the shore, Kenneth's brother, Robert, age 9, slipped under the pond's surface.

Mr. Brennan dove back into the icy waters, found Robert, and swam with him to the shore. He began administering first aid to both boys awaiting the arrival an ambulance to take the boys to Bridgeport Hospital. Once the boys were in the ambulance, Mr. Brennan returned to his office and finished out his workday.

Both boys lived to be fathers and grandfathers. Robert Mackes lives with his wife, today, in Locust Grove, Virginia. What a different outcome there would have been had Mr.

Brennan been touched by the flu and stayed home that day. Or, if Mr. Brennan had decided the emergency responders should have rescued the boys rather than doing so himself, both boys would have perished.



Rodney Peavey, the boy Francis Brennan saved January 18, 1944. Photo from the ***Bridgeport***



Francis J. Brennan holding a clock. Photo from the ***Sunday Herald***, January 29, 1950.