

(Talk to Ishpeming firemen, at cemetery -- June 5, 1938)

In the course of our daily lives we sometimes grow forgetful of those who lie beneath us here, so still and hushed is their rest. And it is perhaps fortunate for us who live that we do not always have that sorrow before us. But on a day like this, our thoughts must bravely turn to those who lie here, and it is well that we may ponder here together but for a few too fleeting moments.

Ever since man invented fire and rose from savagery, fire has been both a blessing and a curse. Controlled fire is of course one of man's greatest friends, whereas, as you men know all too well, uncontrolled fire can, in a few minutes, not only deprive men of their lives, and the lives of their loved ones, but reduce them to permanent poverty and ruin.

As man became more civilized and came to live in groups, in villages, towns and cities, it became readily apparent that the members of the group could not handle their fire hazards alone -- they must need the help of their neighbors. The volunteer fire department was born with this knowledge.

I am aware of no more unselfish group in human life than the members of our volunteer fire departments. They are men who are aware of the anger of uncontrolled fire. They are men who know that the community and the women and children must be protected from fire.

Why does a man join the volunteer fire department? It is self-evident that it is not because of any compensation in it. Nor is a man taken out of bed in the deep of night or out in a wild storm, perhaps in his best clothes, just because there is a turkey or two in it at the holidays. He joins the volunteer fire department because he is a true citizen of the community, because he is unselfish and uncomplaining, -- because he knows the horror and tragedy of uncontrolled fire.

It is fitting that we gather here today for a few brief moments to revere the memories of such men -- men who came from all walks of life, but men who were united in the common bond of their love for home and community and security.

We may erect statues to our statesmen and build pillars to our patriots -- but our volunteer firemen do not look for any of these things. These men were willing to spend their lives to protect you and me, and our loved ones, and when the fires of life finally consumed them, they have gone quietly to their rest, a rest from which we may feel sure, no other fires will ever again rouse them.

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