

Dedication to Joe Vant

VVFC's First Fire Chief

(this document was read at the new station dedication ceremonies on November 10, 2001)

Joe Vant was a big man. He had a huge impact on our community. Joe possessed a large pool of talents which he used to the fullest. God gave him a gigantic source of energy which was needed to assess, plan, organize, execute and over see the tremendous problems and tasks set before him. Joe was also a man of great stature: tall, broad shoulders, long arms and big hands. He also possessed a deep commanding voice, heard above the crowd.

Joe loved Volney and to him, there was no other place to live. This man had Volney's dirt in his veins (a pun on his occupation of a dairy farmer). His family, friends and neighbors were his main concern. His family roots were set down in the early and mid 1800's in Volney Center and Mt. Pleasant. Their history shows a great deal of community involvement and civil duty. Joe lived up to and surpassed these high standards.

Joe was a senior in high school when his father died. His broad shoulders took on the responsibilities of the family and running the farm. When his mother passed away in 1943, there were still school-aged sisters at home. At this time he began his civic career by assuming his mother's job, one of the town's Republican Committeemen. It was in 1948 when he was approached to head up the organization process of forming the town's fire department. About 1951-52 he saw a need to have better communications with other town fire chiefs, therefore the *Oswego County Chief's Association*. It was soon clear to them that a larger network was need so about 1953, the *Oswego County Fire Advisory Board* was formed. One of their first objectives was the development of Oswego County's mutual aid system. Jim and Pearl Jackson were secured to be the coordinators with a radio in their home. For many years this dedicated couple manned their station 24-7. Another objective was to have all the townships place road signs on all their roads enabling the aiding fire companies to locate fires.

Back home in Volney, Joe facilitated the brainstorming of ideas needed to raise money for much needed equipment, land, buildings, and training for the department. There were the field days, and its activities, organize parades. A task that he took on as a personal one was to roam around the field to see that the operation was working smoothly and stop problems before they escalated. Surely his intimidating size encouraged some that they had had enough and it was time to go home. Joe also served on the Volney Town Planning Board. He was most proud with the Miller Brewing plant in Volney. He was also on the board or directory for GLF, now Agway. Overseeing the building of their building on West Broadway in Fulton was a time consuming task. In later years his son Jim took over the farming duties and Joe took on the hat of Volney Town Highway Superintendent.

What special talents did Joe possess in order to accomplish all that he did? He was a global thinker. He could see the "big picture", and what was needed to be done to accomplish it. He knew people and their talents. So as a good administrator, Joe would present the task to a man, encourage him, and then set him loose. Some quick examples: John Falanga was the chief engineer for the trucks. John knew the job, took pride in his work, was always there, and would never let you down. Al Seguin was the medic at all fires, Bud Hawksley was Chaplain, Charlie Coe oversaw the parades with Joe. Ced Hall was his right-hand man at fires and working at the field days. If there was low manpower at fires and Amos Baldwin was on hand, he would handle one line alone. Need men in high places and on the roof, send in the iron workers. Joe had great pride in his men.

People sought his council and rational decision-making ability. There was often a second row of chairs around a dinner table. The man had a sense of equality and fairness. He didn't prejudge people, he believed in the goodness of men. His integrity wasn't questioned. Joe had the amazing ability to be comfortable with people of all kinds of social levels. His philosophy with meeting people: first of all put your hand out and tell them who you are. Joe Vant loved life and could step back and laugh at life. If something was really bothering him it showed in his dark, Irish humor. Joe had a big heart. He gave not only his advice, but from his garden, his table, and his pocket. He believed that a man's self esteem improved when he had a job. Joe helped many secure jobs and if he couldn't do that, he created work on the farm. Let's not forget that he was Volney Center's Pied Piper as there always quite a following of teenaged boys under his wing. The undeclared "*Mayor of Volney*" held court in his kitchen, the barn, committee meetings, and at various field days. Just look for the real tall man with a group of laughing men circled around him.

At the fire scene he was definitely the man in charge. His voice, like a bull elk could easily be heard issuing orders. He knew exactly what he wanted and you had best jump! But, he never asked a fireman to do what he would not do himself. There were several fires that he put himself in very dangerous situations. The man was humble and was not one to toot his own horn.

For sure, Joe wasn't living life for money or fame. Then why did he set out to be involved in all those activities? For one, who wasn't very good at saying: "No." His payment was to see the improvement of life around him in his community. His belief was you start at home and then it will spread. He enjoyed people and fed off their lives and contributions. There was an inner drive in him to be the best that he could be. But all of this could not happen if he hadn't had his executive assistant, his wife, Clara. He'd give the orders and she spent the hours on the phone and the road taking care of the details. Their skills were truly entwined and worked smoothly as a unit.

Joe has been gone for nearly 12 years. Many who knew him best have also left us. Hopefully, this monument will help those of us left to remember this giant of a man and his contributions to our community.



Joe Vant
Volney's First Chief