

A TRIBUTE TO THE VOLUNTEER

FIRE DEPARTMENT OF

STOUGHTON, WISCONSIN

100 YEARS OF SERVICE

1883 - 1983

BY BURNS L. KAUPANGER



A TRIBUTE TO THE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT OF STOUGHTON, WISCONSIN

100 YEARS OF SERVICE

It is with pleasure and gratitude that we pause to recount the story of Stoughton's Fire Department. It is also fitting and proper that we remember the countless number of men who showed us the admirable trait of personal obligation.

All citizens of Stoughton should be reminded of the Firemen's great attributes, their self-sacrifice, their long hours of battling the ravages of fire, their dedication to duty with little recompense for this hazardous part of their lives.

It is eminently fitting and proper that we should often - with reverent and thoughtful remembrance - bow our heads in loving memory of the men who have gone before us, and to those who are with us now and continue their great and noble duty.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing the history of one department of City government cannot be done entirely by one person. Much help is needed.

In this history of the Fire Department of Stoughton, I wish to name those who were helpful in bringing this story to a reality.

Steve Ehle of the local newspaper who permitted me to use references from the local paper.

Judy Kinning and Lois Benson who did the beautiful job of typing.

Helen Johnson, our very knowledgeable City Clerk, who gave me permission to review the City Records.

Robert Bradley, Richard Kittleson, Richard Scheel and Francis Gardner who were so helpful with the records of the Fire Department.

Rolfe Hanson for his Record of City Government 1868-1968.

Mayor Douglas Pfundheller who encouraged me in many ways.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE STOUGHTON, WISCONSIN, FIRE DEPARTMENT

1883 to 1983

A century of history of the Stoughton, Wisconsin, Fire Department is an interesting story and it is worth telling. I have condensed the story and though many days were taken to report the many changes of men and equipment, it became an enjoyable challenge to the writer.

The pattern of progress by the department has been manifest by the energy and determination shown by all who have taken part in these historic years.

The many men who have risked their lives all these years, the quality of bravery and determination have always been noted.

The U. S. colonial fire departments were the volunteer bucket brigades. Later volunteers ran to fires, pulling hose carts and carrying hand pumps. The first successful steam engine was used in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1850. The first one in Stoughton was used in 1883. Purchased for \$1,950.00, it was given the name of the "City Queen".

It is regrettable that the official records for Stoughton prior to 1877 have either been lost or misplaced. It is conceivable that the village has had some fire-fighting equipment of sorts from 1847 to that date. Records of earlier days are scarce, and it is tragic that people would be so careless in not saving them. By records it is our only means of knowing what happened before us. Future historians are going to be as baffled as much as I am today.

A fireman's life is a dangerous one at times, and fighting fires must often be carried on under severe conditions. The fire department in Stoughton has always been of a volunteer type. The men usually are appointed, with the requirements that they be sober, reliable citizens, etc.

The huge fire at the Mandt Wagon Works on January 13, 1883, was perhaps the main reason a volunteer fire department was organized soon after this debacle. The fire began at 4:30 P.M., the fire whistle blew continuously - bringing every man, woman and child to its source in a few moments. The fire spread rapidly, every able bodied person would do his best. Nearly all of the wells in the neighborhood were pumped dry in a short time. The fire department from Madison came down on a special train, but too late to be of any good. Just about every part of the plant was consumed by fire.

This catastrophe ignited the City Council to make some drastic changes, 225 men out of work was enough to shake it out of its slow ways. The Council acted promptly -- appointing Mr. Peter Johnson to organize a fire engine and a hook and ladder company to consist of no less than 40, or more than 75 members.

Mayor Jacob Wettleson was instructed to visit the Fire Department in Milwaukee in order to ascertain the best fire extinguishing equipment that would be suitable for the City of Stoughton. On February 21, 1883, the Council considered the proposal of the Extinguisher Manufacturing Company of Chicago to furnish the City with a Chemical Engine with a Hook and Ladder attachment for the price of \$1,950.00. The Council accepted this with the understanding that it would be in Stoughton on or before April 1, 1884.

The name of the engine was to be "The City Queen".

On March 5, 1883, Mr. Peter Johnson was authorized to organize a fire engine and hook and ladder company of not less than 40 nor more than 75 members. On December, 1883, a stove, a lamp and a table for the business room were furnished by Mr. Olson. On October 6, 1884, the Fire Engine Committee was authorized to buy a fire alarm. The Council met on the 17th to find a suitable building for housing the fire engine and Lot 13, Block 38, was purchased by the Council to house the engine. This lot was in the building now occupied by Strand's Store - directly across the street from the present City Hall.

On June 2, 1885, the Fire Company elected Mr. George Zwicker as Fire Chief, and he at that time, was confirmed by the City Council. A motion was made that a committee be appointed to buy and furnish the Fire Company with the necessary supplies and aid in organizing a Hook and Ladder Company.

On November 9, 1885, G. W. Gerber and O. C. Lee were instructed to go to Chicago to buy 1,000 feet of hose, 22 wheel hose carts and a H. and T. Truck (whatever that was). They were purchased for a sum of \$1,445.00. The two men, Gerber and Lee, were given \$15.00 for expenses.

On February 10, 1886, the "City Queen" Fire Company was ordered to disband for the sole purpose of reorganizing. On March 29, 1886, a committee was appointed to work over the bylaws and constitution of Hose Company No. 1.

The Mayor appointed Louis Farkel, Chief, and George Sarbacker and Sam Peterson as Assistant Chief's. Chief Farkel was instructed to purchase supplies for the department.

In 1887 a fire bell was purchased for the engine house, and later in 1896 the bell was sent to a foundry to be recast. In February of that year all members were instructed to bring in boots and raincoats, etc., to be marked, and to be sure to have a cupboard to put them in. They also voted to pay a salary of \$10.00 for the Chief. (I do not know if that was for a year or what.)

December 15, 1888, a meeting was called to order for the purpose or reorganizing the J. M. Clancy No. 2. The new Company was to be known as #2. The members were:

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| D. Buckman | Wm. Atkinson |
| C. Hildreth | W. Parish |
| W. Dawes | N. Graham |
| N. Dawes | W. S. Wood |
| Bud Lynch | |

Wm. Atkinson was elected fireman.

A huge fire in 1889 on Main Street burned a row of business buildings. Some said it was a good riddance. A neat row of brick business buildings were erected that year by a Mr. Becker. These buildings enhanced the beauty of Main Street. (Recently they were elected to be a National Landmark.) This was the largest fire since the one January 1883 at the Mandt Wagon Works.

On August 24, 1889, a large fire at O. O. Forton's and Charles Johnson's Stores did considerable damage, \$10,000 to \$15,000 loss. Partly covered by insurance, Mr. Forton's loss was \$6,409.00 and Mr. Johnson's was \$1,703.41.

On December 14, 1889, a motion was made that the company get out on the 21st at 2:00 o'clock to throw water for practice. On this date two new members were inducted - Mr. Ansel Dickenson and F. Lynch.

March 17, 1890: At this meeting W. S. Wood was elected Foreman. He had served on the City Council for some time and was considered a capable man. Jim Emmons was inducted at this meeting.

January 7, 1891, Mr. Herm Showers and W. O. Mains were inducted. On April 24, 1891, they both resigned. (I wonder why.) On this date W. E. Atkinson and H. Graham were inducted and W. S. Wood elected Foreman. A motion was made and carried that \$100.00 be withdrawn from the treasury, and to divide it equally among the members.

March 28, 1892, the members of the Fire Department Hook, Ladder and Hose Company No. 1 and Hose Company No. 2 were:

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| A. Erickson | Henry Franksay | Charles Hyppenmyer |
| Ole Gunder | Charles Shumway | Alex Peterson |
| Al. Schrode | Sven Legreid | George Sarbacker |
| Sam Gregerson | A. L. Gregerson | Levi Olson |
| Matt Gregerson | Ole Nordness | A. Matson |
| Wm. Swenson | | John Gullickson |
| C. Rasmussen | <u>Hose No. 1</u> | Robert Hatzinger |
| O. Erickson | Al. Rasmussen | Wm. Schroede |
| Fred Jenson | A. Johnson | |
| M. Franksay | Ed Severson | |
| | A. C. Johnson | |

Hose No. 2

W. S. Wood
H. Everest
A. Buckman
P. Lynch
R. McComb

J. Emmons
Wm. Parish
George Burnett
C. Johnson
Wallace Atkinson
Frank Gaulke

These three departments were directed to meet as one group in 1892. At this meeting W. S. Wood was elected Chief.

December 12, 1892, the receipts for the masquerade were \$200.00, Expenses were \$73.06. Total profit was \$126.94.

March 1895: The Stoughton Cornet Band was permitted to practice in the Fireman's Hall.

The next year, at a meeting, it was moved and carried that the money be divided the same as last year. (\$12.00 each?). (Perhaps from the masquerade).

In 1897 it was moved and carried that each member be allowed \$14.00. On February 10, 1898, the price of the masquerade tickets was \$1.00. In 1899 the dance was held at the Opera House - \$1.00 for dancers and 25¢ for people watching from the gallery.

There were times that donations were received from certain parties who had had fires. The money was accepted with little argument.

At one dance every fireman was given five (5) tickets to sell for the masquerade and to pay for them before getting more.

1900 - Bills of \$800.00 for hose cart. A bid was received from Bonnett, Michie & Company for construction of a City Hall and Fire Station. Bonds for \$23,000.00 were issued for the construction of the City Hall and the Engine House. In December of 1900, the Mayor was authorized to purchase a new fire bell.

On January 7, 1901, the bill for the Fire Bell was paid - \$175.00. In March of 1902, Mr. W. S. Wood retired as Chief. He was given a rising vote of thanks for his years of leadership.

March, 1903, Al Schrode was made Chief. Each member received \$16.00. What funds they had I do not know, but perhaps from the City and returns from the dance. Bills for \$80.00 for hose were allowed.

April 12, 1904 - Ed Severson was elected Fire Chief. On August 22, 1904, a matter came up before the group. The School Board requested that the Firemen vacate their room for school purposes. Needless to say, the request was turned down.

On February 22, 1905, Ben Aaker, a fireman, passed away. Everyone was requested to turn out for the funeral. \$10.00 was given for flowers. W. S. Wood was elected Chief.

In June 1906, a motion was made to have another attraction instead of the Mask Ball. A concert was held, but it seems that it was not well attended. You can be sure that the Mask Ball would continue after that.

1907 - J. E. Emmons was elected Fire Chief. Each member received \$29.00.

1909 - Each man was taxed \$1.00 for a ball team. They were to have two ball games. (I can imagine that Harvey Firkins was behind this.) A fire escape for the City Hall was purchased for \$995.00.

1910 - The members requested an annual pay of \$35.00 each. January 12, the Masked Ball to be held as usual and the entire department to turn out. Failure to report would mean a 50¢ fine.

1911 - The election of officers was postponed until a future date because the Fire Department was to be reorganized. March 6, 1911 - Dow Chief.

May 6, 1912 - E. A. Anderson, S. A. Peterson and Frank Lynch were elected to the Firemen's Pension Fund Board. At that meeting Giles Dow was elected Chief. (Note: City Council adopted an Ordinance prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to minors under 17 years of age.)

March 3, 1913 - Motion by F. Lynch that they divide the profit of the Mask Ball, allowing each member \$14.50, was carried.

March 16, 1914 - Motion made by J. Dawes that the rules be suspended, and the secretary cast a unanimous vote for Giles Dow for Chief of the Fire Department for the ensuing year.

In 1915, a motion was made that the money on hand in the treasury be used for charitable purposes.

In 1916, the first fire truck was purchased from Kissel and Company for a price of \$2,875.00.

In 1920, the City Council motioned that a fireman take care of the fire truck and equipment for \$50.00 per month. That same year the City purchased a Ford fire truck for \$2,680.00. Also, the Firemen were to receive \$50.00 per year. The Firemen's Pension Fund reached \$1,138.16.

On March 14, 1921, a disastrous fire at the Stoughton Wagon Works. The entire truck department was wiped out. Water was drawn from the river. Cause of the fire was a blow torch used near gasoline cans. The loss was estimated at \$400,000.00. Frank Lynch was seriously hurt at the fire. Pension Fund at \$1,847.01. By 1922, it was at \$1,918.16, and by 1923 it was \$2,565.90.

May 6, 1924, the City Council combined the job of the Fire Truck Driver and City Hall Janitor at the cost of \$125.00 per month.

In 1925, the Fire Fund (not pension) was \$3,200.00. That year there were 21 alarms in the City and eight (8) outside the City.

In 1928, a charge of \$25.00 was made for each call of the Department outside of the City. At this meeting the Council voted to accept contracts with nearby Townships.

1924 - The Fire Chief reported fore losses of \$20,000.00. In 1930 losses were \$1,327.00, with 23 alarms. In 1931, there were 31 alarms with losses of \$17,520.00.

The 1933 budget for the Fire Department was \$2,500.00. Nothing was said about the Pension Fund. There were 35 alarms that year.

1935 - Chief Dow reported 43 alarms in 1934. On April 3rd, the Council voted to purchase a combination fire truck. In July of 1936, the Council voted to purchase a Pirsch Fire Truck.

In 1939 the budget for the Fire Department was \$3,240.00, and in 1940 the members of the Fire and Police Commission resigned - indicating lack of cooperation by the City Council. There were 54 alarms that year.

In 1943 the Firemen were granted an increase in pay to \$100.00 a year for the duration of the war.

In 1944 the Council voted to appropriate \$876.00 for Firemen's uniforms. In 1947 an Ordinance was adopted to include City employees under Retirement Fund. (Question - How did the Firemen's Pension Fund begin and when?).

1948 - Firemen were granted an increase to \$125.00 per year. \$110.00 to be charged per fire call outside the City. On May 10, it was voted to purchase an American-LaFrance fire truck for \$15,753.00.

1949 - Ed Overland was elected Chief. March 17, 1949, Chief Dow retires.

In 1951, the budget for the Fire Department was \$7,994.00. In 1952 the budget for the department was \$5,125.00. On November 22, the Council voted to increase the membership in the Fire Department to thirty.

In 1960, it was voted to build a new Fire Station and heating plant in connection with the City Hall. It was also voted to purchase a new pumper for \$15,557.00. On March 1, 1960, Chief Overland died and Ing Johnson became Chief on March 1, 1960.

1961 - The salaries of the Firemen were raised to \$195.00 per year. The budget for the department in 1962 was \$12,500.00.

In 1963 the budget was \$21,608.00; in 1964 it was \$17,000.00. The Firemen's Pension Fund was \$41,445.70 in 1967. By 1968 it had increased to \$42,191.00.

In 1966 a Fire Truck replacement was purchased for \$4,980.30.

In 1966 Fire Chief Ing Johnson died and Robert Sawyer was named Chief.

In 1967 it was voted to buy a Snorkel Truck for \$67,336.00, and in 1968 the appropriation for the department was \$42,000.00. The profits from the Masked Ball were \$1,050.50. The pay for each Fireman was raised to \$320.00 per year.

In 1969 the Firemen petitioned the Council for a pension equal to 75% of their salary and a reimbursement of 50% of a Fireman's salary if he were injured.

In 1970 the American-LaFrance truck was still in service. The Mask Ball had a net profit of \$1,100.00. The Chief stated that there were 61 fire calls.

In 1971 the Pension Board members were Elwood Johnson, O. C. Forton and William Skinner. The profits from the Masked Ball were to be used for the equipment for the Firemen's quarters.

In 1972 the records were really good. Chief Sawyer died on May 14, 1972, and Oscar Forton was now at the helm of the ship.

1973 - the fire losses were \$70,840.00. Orville Gauger died while fighting a fire on December 13, 1973. He had been a Fireman for 21 years.

1974 - The losses from fires were \$245,200.00. Alvin Udstuen died in December of 1974. He had given 25 years of service to the Fire Department.

1975 - The Fire Department had 30 members, the Chief, two (2) Assistants, one (1) Secretary, one (1) Drill Master and two (2) Drivers. Fire losses were \$27,000.00.

1976 - Ward Hanson was Secretary and Ken Maas Treasurer.

1977 - Cliff Bakken was Secretary and Ken Maas Treasurer. The Pension Board members were Eugene Bjoin, Dan Bradley and Dean Horner.

1978 - The dance was held at the VFW Hall.

1979 - The dance was held at the VFW again. Glen Hanson passed away. Robert Bradley became Secretary.

1980 Roster: Oscar Forton - Fire Chief

Art Thompson - 1st Assistant

Odean Teigen - 2nd Assistant

As of January 18, 1983, the Fire Department has four (4) Pumpers; two (2) Tankers; one (1) Rescue; one (1) Grass Rig; one (1) Boat. The Townships of Dunn, Dunkirk, Rutland and Pleasant Springs own a part of two (2) tankers and one (1) pumper. There are three (3) full time custodians and drivers. I would say that the people of Stoughton are in good hands.

This is the end of the first 100 years of the history of the Stoughton Fire Department. It's a story of 100 years that fill one with respect and admiration for a fine group of people. Without intelligence, integrity and love for mankind, no part of the City government can be stable. I know that in the future this Department will continue with its great record.

The people of Stoughton, Wisconsin, owe their respect and admiration to you for such a great Fire Department - with such a great record and with such great people.

Burns L. Kaupanger