

Review of Monmouth Junction Volunteer Fire Company History

by Roger Potts

At a meeting of "The Monmouth Junction Red Sox" baseball team on August 8, 1924, a discussion took place on the number of serious fires that had taken place in the area over the last two years. The idea of forming a fire company was brought up. Mr. J.J. Ryan, president of the Red Sox, set August 15 as the date of a meeting dedicated solely for the purpose of forming a fire company. At the August 15 meeting a motion was passed to hold a meeting in Al Lewis's movie theater on New Road (now Pierson Street) and to invite the entire town. The meeting was held on August 24, 1924. Thirty-four men from the community attended this meeting. Those men became the charter members of the Monmouth Junction Volunteer Fire Company. They had no property and did not have a fire truck. They determined the one item needed most was money to purchase land and equipment. It was agreed to hold a carnival on September 18, 19, and 20. At that three day event \$2400 was raised. This fund raising carnival was held every September for over 20 years.

The Trustees being optimistic in their ability to raise the needed funds entered into an agreement with The American La France Company for a 1925 Brockway American La France Soda and Acid Fire Truck at a cost of \$3850 (see attached specifications and contract). The truck was delivered on January 20, 1925 and used at a fire on that same day. The truck was housed in a garage on Walnut Street next to the hotel that once stood between the garage and the railroad and rented for \$8 a month.

As there were no electronic fire alarms the first device used to get the men the fire station was the outer wheel of a freight car hung from a pole and struck by a sledge hammer. That device was given to East Brunswick when Monmouth Junction obtained an electronic alarm. This freight wheel now stands at the Brookview Fire House in East Brunswick.

In early 1925 a Ladies Auxiliary was formed. They raised and turned over to the Fire Department \$118 of which \$100 was used to purchase a building lot 45' x 75' from Mrs. Emma Morten Rowland (see attached deed).

Notice of Incorporation was advertised in the Daily Home News on January 29, 1925 and the company was incorporated on February 13, 1925. The first officers were

Corbit S. Luker, President
David Stewart, Vice-President;
John T. Ritter, Secretary
John J. Ryan, Financial Secretary
Elbert C. Pierson. Treasurer (for the next 36 years)
Chief David Stewart
Foreman Leroy Carlisle
Assistant Foreman Asa Morrell

On February 13, 1925, Township Committeeman George Walters informed the Department that the Township Committee would donate \$200 to help them get started.

On December 21, 1926, the Trustees reported that ground had been broken on the Ridge Road lot on December 23, 1926. The Trustees reported the building was completed and accepted at a cost of \$645.03. In order not to have the truck freeze, men were assigned to stoke the pot-bellied stove. Minutes from December 23, 1926 meeting indicate that a motion carried to have an opening-night affair on January 15, 1927. Same to be a Smoker, expenses to be carried by those attending.

On August 23, 1928 a motion was passed to sell life membership in the Department to members between 35 and 40 years old for \$30 and \$25 for those over 40 years. Later that year on November 19, 1928 another motion was passed to take all of the ladies who helped for the four days of the carnival to dinner at the Forsgate Country Club. The cost was not to exceed \$2 per person.

In 1933 the wooden garage was torn down and a wooden frame, stucco faced, 2 bay garage with a meeting room was erected on the Ridge Road site at a cost of, as near a can be determined, \$2,852.

In 1936, the need for a modern truck, that could pump water from a well or creek and push it through a hose to the fire was needed. The Company entered into a contract to purchase a 1937 Dodge Pumper. The Township Committee agreed to provide to the company \$1,500 a year for three years to pay for the truck. Total cost of the truck was \$4,486. The Company would be responsible to purchase hose, fittings, and any other accessories along with any interest charged.

In late 1939, the Fire Department began talking about the Township's need for ambulance service. Over the period from 1939-1940 there was much debate as to the merits of the Fire Department's operating the squad or if it should be a completely separate organization. There were those in town who desired to serve in the First Aid, but did not desire to be members of The Fire Department. By 1941, the squad was formed as a separate body. Bill Voorhees being Captain and Bill Van Dyke, President. The first ambulance purchased in 1941 was housed in a barn behind the Fire House.

August 1940: The fire house meeting room to be loaned to the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company to be used for a public meeting so as to familiarize them with a new concept in telephone systems, a dial system. Monmouth Junction was one of the very early dial systems in the country.

In 1947, the company purchased a 1947 International 1000 gallon pumper at a cost of \$8,200. The 1925 chemical truck was taken out of service and sold to Charles Tammaro, better known as Charlie the Barber.

In 1956 a Ford pumper was ordered. As the Department was now going to have three trucks and only room to house two of them. We, the members completely built an addition onto the rear of the fire station. (Still in service 56 Ford)

In 1964 the 1937 Dodge was involved in an auto accident on Route 1 and Lambert's jughandle and taken out of service. As the pump was still usable, the truck was sold to Holsten's Farms and used as an irrigation pump.

In 1965, a Ford, specially-built to handle field fires, was purchased at a cost of \$8,500.

In 1967 the company had outgrown its 3-bay stucco building and also was in need of a new pumper. As a new building and a truck was beyond the reach of the Company, the Township Committee purchased a 1967 Ford Pumper at a cost of \$32,000. The Fire Department went to bid for a new building designed by Vozek and Mahoney. It was constructed by Magill Construction at a cost of approximately \$70,000 under the direction of President Anthony Santowasso, Sr.

In 1975, with industrial expansion in the township, a new specialized piece of equipment was needed. Under the direction of Chief Charles Spahr and the Township Committee, an 85' snorkel aerial truck was purchased at a cost of \$141,000 by the Township Committee. (Still in service, replacement cost in 1998 would be \$850,000)

By 1976 it was becoming nearly impossible to raise the amount of money needed to support the Fire Department. The Department was doing door-to-door canvassing, had been performing a variety of minstrel shows, holding card parties, etc. The town was growing rapidly. An expansion was needed in the Dayton area. Reider Land Development donated land to be used for a Fire Station on Georges Road. During the late Seventies the Township Fire Departments, with the cooperation of the Township Committee and Mayor Carolyn McCallum, went to the Fire District concept where funding for fire protection was provided by a separate tax. Several pieces of Fire apparatus have been purchased by the District since 1977 and operated by the Fire Company.

In 1980 the Fire Department proceeded to erect a two-bay fire station on the Georges Road property built by Michael Toth. In 1990, a three-bay addition was put onto the building. One bay housed the expansion of the Monmouth Junction First Aid Squad.

The Ridge Road Station is now closed and up for sale by the Company as of April, 1998. The District has built a new state-of-the-art Fire Station on Ridge Road at Route 522 at a cost of \$2.3 million dollars. The Company presently maintains and operates two buildings and twelve pieces of fire apparatus.

