



# NEWSLETTER

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## FIRE DEPARTMENTS IN THE NORTHERN VALLEY

Uncontrolled fire, regardless of origin, has been a life-threatening hazard to living creatures since the beginning of time. As humans progressed in numbers sufficient to benefit from communal life, some methods of response became a necessity – probably beginning simply with a warning shout which would be spread by word-of-mouth as people fled from overwhelming flames. According to modern know-all web sites, here in this northern valley of ancient Lenapehoking, the earliest formulation of that dreaded shout “fire!” may have been the Lenni Lenape word “ateha!” and soon thereafter it may have been the Netherland Dutch word, “brand!”, or the alarm called out in English, German, Polish, Italian, etc. as successive waves of immigrants joined our melting pot population.

Aside from natural disasters, in Colonial days many firefighters may have initially been women simply because most fires began at home. The use of this element in its essential form, as in the endless task of cooking meals, preserving foods, the use of candles, and in the attempt to provide household warmth, constant opportunities for catastrophes were present. The famous Dutch open-hearth system of cooking used wood fires built in wide but minimally protective alcoves against a brick or stone-lined wall of the home. Here the long skirts of women who did the cooking were particularly dangerous targets of random flares or red-hot embers which might also be spit out into the room. The obvious, instinctive reaction to small bursts of flame would be to beat it out, or more effectively, to grab the ever-present bucket of water to drown it. In the case of serious conflagrations every available person and every form of container would immediately be put into action in a bucket brigade which might stretch to and from the family well or a nearby stream. Indeed, it is astonishing to note that even as buildings became larger and higher, extended versions of lines of basic people-powered bucket brigades are mentioned as valued aides to fire response vehicles well into the modern era.

### ALPINE

This spring, the Borough of Alpine will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Volunteer Fire Department by installing a memorial bell in front of the firehouse on Church Street.

The original Alpine Firehouse was located on Miles Street. In 1962, the Reliance Fire Company was formed with 15 members and the department was moved to a garage behind the borough hall that was at the site of the current firehouse at 94 Church Street. In those days, Alpine was a smaller, close-knit community of mostly dirt roads and tiny wooden homes.



Over the years the community changed and

apparatus was upgraded dramatically. In the 1980's, many of the larger and more luxurious mansions started being built. As the community changed, the firefighters also changed. They are now equipped with more technology, such as thermal imaging cameras which allow the firefighters to see through walls and they are trained more extensively. Detectors will tell the firefighters exactly where the fire is burning, even if it cannot be detected with the naked eye.

The department has all the apparatus it needs, but it could still use more staffing. Half the members of the Alpine Fire Department are from

surrounding towns, such as Closter, Cresskill and Englewood. Most of the volunteers have full-time jobs, but manage to respond to calls.



The company of 30 volunteers respond to roughly 150 calls a year. Half of the borough's fire calls are from automatic fire alarms and the others range from oven fires to car accidents.



Cabin Fire in Nov. 2008

The 9.2 square-mile borough includes a golf course and a Boy Scout camp. There are 40 miles of highway, including 9W and the Palisades Parkway to the state line.

**CLOSTER**

The Closter Fire Department was established in April 1893 as the Knickerbocker Hook and Ladder Company, named after the local Knickerbocker baseball club whose teammates included several of their 41 charter members. Then, as now, it is manned totally by volunteers who donate their time on an as needed basis, 24 hours a day 365 days a year. They respond to 300-500 calls a year.



C. 1895

The department was initially funded by public subscription amounting to \$780. It was originally located on Railroad Avenue, becoming a focal point for community activities and from 1904-1938 served as the meeting place for the mayor and council. The fire department moved to Borough Hall in 1938. They moved to their current location on Ruckman Road, adjacent to the Ambulance Corp. in 1973. Early records indicate Irving Kipp "driving a horse and buggy through the town and arousing the people" gave the first fire alarms. Several other methods were used prior to our current system which includes central alarm and smartphones.



C. 1925

The first apparatus was a hook and ladder of the hand drawn type; it now operates an 85-foot ladder tower and 2 fire engines carrying 1000 gallons of water per truck. It also includes an emergency support truck and confined space rescue trailer to aid in the collapse and trench rescue entry.

The department also serves as a fraternal unit, boasting several generations of volunteers. "A peculiar thing is the number of retired fire fighters who retain membership in the company. So pleasant are the relations between brother fireman."(Closter 1938 It's Economic and Political Life). This accounts for the many wonderful photographs that have survived through the years.



C. 1955

A Ladies' Auxiliary was added in August 1939. The "Fire Lassies" soon bought uniforms and

marched in parades, as well as assisting the firemen and fund raising.

Currently, the 25 members are an active presence in town, march in parades, provide scholarships, run a fire explorers program for high school students as well as teaching fire prevention in our schools. There have been four generations of the Dolt-Pierro family in the department. Members also were responders on 9-11, earning them a remnant of the tower, which now stands as the focal point of Closter's 9-11 Memorial.

**CRESSKILL**

No information submitted

**DEMAREST**

The formation of the Demarest Volunteer Fire Association took place on November 13, 1894 at the Demarest Railroad Station. Mr. Edmund W. Wakelee was elected chairman pro tem and conducted the meeting at which 46 men signed to join the fire department. A committee of three, W. E. Demarest, George Tooker, and George Florence, was to draw up a constitution, and by-laws for the following week's meeting. In the meantime each member was to solicit subscriptions to help purchase fire equipment.

A month later, on December 17, 1894 official incorporation occurred with Mr. Wakelee elected as the first president. The officers of the association were elected that included Chief J. D. Demarest, 1st Assistant Chief, George W. Florence, 2nd Assistant Chief, William H. Meyerhoff and 3d Assistant Chief, E. P. Underwood.

About a year later on property donated by John H. Z. Demarest the fire house was built. This housed the first fire equipment, a "Rumsey Truck with Bridgeport Extinguishers" purchased for \$450. It was pulled by a team of horses owned by fireman, Mr. J. E. Collins who had a business in the area. Two iron rings were used as fire alarms. One was located at the hotel situated on the rise a few hundred feet behind the firehouse. The second was at the railroad depot. A large bell was located in the belfry as a means of alerting a fire.



Mr. Collins would hitch the horses when the alarm was rung. It has been reported that Mr. Meryerhoff, who lived nearby, also tended to the hitching of his horse to the equipment.

In the late 1890's and early in the 20th century, the fire department had a band that had been photographed several times in Demarest and in Closter.



The firehouse has had its changes through the years but retains much of its original look. Around 1900 the building was moved back from its original location on Park Street. A second floor was added. This addition served as the Demarest Borough Hall until the mid 1950s. The fire house was also used as the location for local, state and federal elections for many years. Additional garage space was added for the trucks as the town grew and trucks became larger.



In September 1977 while many men were attending the New Jersey Firemen's Convention in Wildwood, a fire occurred damaging the firehouse and destroying many of the historical collections of the association.

Recently the bell tower was repaired and the original bell was removed for cleaning. Names of the first men to serve the fire

department are inscribed on the bell and has been placed back into the bell tower.

The Demarest Fire Association is an integral part of the Memorial Day Parades. Formerly, following the parade, the firemen would treat local children to a short ride on a fire truck around the block of the Demarest Public School on Piermont Road. This yearly tradition ceased due to insurance concerns.

The Ladies Auxiliary of the Demarest Volunteer Fire Association was formed in 1939 by Mrs. Arthur Griffin. The fifteen charter members and subsequent women served the firemen on call for many years. They also participated in the Memorial Day Parades.

The volunteer fire association continues to be important to many families. There are still many second and third generation participants. Several years ago a scholarship was created to be awarded to a student of a member of the association.

**Memorable fires:**

- Demarest Public School in 1919*
- Summerland house 1940's*
- Brush fire from the former racetrack on Knickerbocker Rd (now the Northern Valley Regional High School) to County Rd mid 1950's*
- Kyle House late 1960's*
- Mosconi house 1974*
- The Fire House 1977*
- Friedhauer house*
- Aldecress Country club*
- Mertz house fire 1989*

**HARRINGTON PARK**

No information submitted

**HAWORTH**

When the Borough of Haworth was carved away from Harrington Township in 1904 and incorporated as a separate entity, the town fathers addressed the matter of establishing a volunteer fire company in the first

council meeting. By that time, the community had already witnessed the burning of a valued two-story wooden elementary school in 1898 ,as well as several homes . Nevertheless, progress moved along at a leisurely rate. Perhaps it was spurred forward in 1906, after a bill amounting to the sum of \$2.00 was presented to the town from the Borough Clerk in Demarest for services rendered by their firefighters while extinguishing a field fire in 'East Haworth'. Obviously, something had to be done. Two years later, in 1908, the Haworth Fire Company No. 1 was officially established. Numbering about fifteen to twenty firefighters, the membership rolls included a generous representation of prominent citizens whose names will be recognized today by those even slightly familiar with the history of the town – McCulloch, Christie, Copeland, Osmer, Hennessey, Phyfe, Crocker, McGloin, Dedecker, and Weiss.

However, in an unexpectedly bold stroke, during the second month of its existence, the Company's equipment supply had gone up from non-existent to medieval. At that time it took possession of two hand-drawn firefighting wagons (to be pulled by the firemen), twelve lanterns, leather water buckets, axes, a thousand feet of hose and soon, a basic gong-type warning system. The first firehouse was built on Schraalenburgh Road conveniently adjacent to the fifty-foot tall water tower which was then located at the top of 'Tank Hill' at the point where Haworth Avenue intersects that old road. The mysteries of operating such a simplistic firefighting enterprise atop a steep hill which bisects the town it serves, remain unexplained. One must admire the strength and courage of those men who seem to have agreed to attempt such service, especially when winter snows covered typically rudimentary roads. However, in time, the most obvious problems were gradually addressed. A newly formed Fire Department established a one-bay station for its fire equipment in the old multipurpose

building near the center of town (now the Haworth Apothecary) where the Police Station and the Library were also located. The hand-drawn wagons were converted to horse-power, allowing more men to ride aboard, along with an improved pumper water tank system. In 1923, Hawthornians were further enthralled by the purchase of its first motorized fire vehicle. It was a gleaming red, streamlined, four-cylinder Reo Speed Wagon. By 1928, Fire Chief William McGloin and Mayor Horace Wheeler, oversaw the building of a new fire station on Hardenburgh Avenue on the east side of town. In 1953, answering the ever-increasing need for change, it became clear that because of the height of modern trains and bigger, heavier Fire Engines, the old wooden bridge over the railroad track at Ivy Avenue - which had initially been built as a crossing for farm animals, was now obsolete. Therefore, a second Fire House was built on Park Street on the west side of town. Thus if a disabled train blocked the Haworth Avenue railroad crossing, the west side of town would be accessible to modern firefighting equipment.

At this point Haworth was well established in the modern era but the rate of progress has continued to put additional pressure on the town's services. In 1904 the population of only about 420 residents lived in some forty homes which were spread in widely separated clusters on the east and west side of Schraalenburgh Road. In contrast, today the Haworth Fire Department protects about 3,500 residents and their 1,000 or so increasingly large houses. Added to these, are the Elementary School, three churches, many small businesses, two country clubs, the United Water Treatment Plant, areas of the Oradell Reservoir, and many acres of woodland.



Currently headed by Chief Robert Henion, The Haworth Fire Department is still a one hundred per cent volunteer organization with a core membership of thirty seven or so men and

women. They are proud mentors of three fire engines, one a 'fast truck' with extensive ladders and which pumps 1750 gallons of water per minutes from its 400 gallon water tank. It is equipped with such hi-tech items as a Bullard Thermal Indicator, useful for locating hidden heat sources before firefighters enter dangerous zones, a Scott gas detector and high grade protective clothing. Another 750 gallon tank Pumper Engine, with seating for eight has a Thermal Imaging Camera, and is usually taken out on Interborough Mutual Aid' missions to nearby towns. A third, a 500- gallon- capacity Pumper Engine, may be counted on to accompany its brother engines if necessary. Of equal importance to the above apparatus is the Rescue Truck, which carries a Homeco Extrication device, Scott air bottles (to treat and protect those endangered by smoke inhalation), a generator, and portable 'scene' lights'. Three accompanying vehicles likely to be seen at a conflagration, are the Chief's truck, that of the Assistant Chief and /or the Department's Utility car.

When the old wooden bridge over the railroad tracks replaced by a modern reinforced metal structure after the Golden Anniversary in 2004, it allowed the Park Street Firehouse to become the new home of the Ambulance Corps/ Emergency Medical Service. This organization, an affiliate of the Fire Department, is made up of volunteers admirably-trained in accordance with the standards of The American Red Cross and New Jersey State requirements. The members are greatly appreciated for their dedication, skill, ever-pleasant efficiency and their almost miraculous ability to appear within minutes of being contacted.

Small towns such as Haworth often overlook the hard work, the generous constancy of commitment of our volunteers. Today, most towns in the Northern Valley are desperately in need of additional volunteers in all areas - primarily those services as the Fire Department which are vital to our very survival. They deserve our thanks and our help.

### NORTHVALE

At a candle-lit meeting in June, 1895, the establishment of a volunteer fire company was discussed by six residents of the section of Harrington Township that would later become the

Borough of Northvale. The Northvale Fire Association was duly incorporated on December 5, 1896, an event which actually predated the



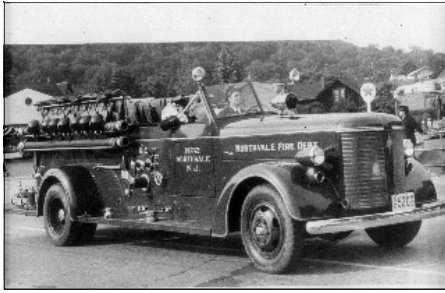
incorporation of Northvale by almost 20 years.

The 1900 census gives Northvale a population of 387, enough residents to need protection from fires - especially in the pre-electric days when it is estimated that 40% of residential fires were due to the open flames of candles and kerosene lamps that were the common means of lighting.

The first fund raiser was the "Grand Masquerade and Civic Ball" sponsored by the Fire Association in 1897 which was so successful that it was followed by another in 1898. Monies earned by fund raising and by donations paid for everything: land on Washington Street acquired in April 1900, construction of the first firehouse (built by the firemen themselves at a cost of \$420 in lumber), and the first horse-drawn fire wagon. During the earliest days of the Fire Association, the volunteers had no horse of their own and had to quickly borrow one of three horses owned by nearby residents when the fire alarm sounded. On occasions when a horse was not available, the firemen pulled the wagon themselves.

In 1927, the Fire Association bought their first motorized fire truck; a 500 gallon per minute Hahn pumper that cost \$2,500. It was the first and only truck purchased by the Fire Association itself, as state law eventually required fire trucks to be purchased by the towns. Other trucks used by the Fire Association include a 1947 American LaFrance, a 1954 Ford, a 1966

Seagrave, and Mack trucks purchased in 1972 and 1981. The current Pierce Dash pumper was acquired in 2000. The original Hahn was an outstanding truck that, during the 1930s, served at a major fire at Camp Merritt in Cresskill and pumped for 48 consecutive hours at the



Robert Gair Company inferno (paper cartons) in Piermont, NY.

#### 1947 American LaFrance Pumper

By 1931, there was need for a new, larger firehouse. It took many years to gather the necessary funds (perhaps due to the Depression) and work only began in late 1938. The new, and current, firehouse was built on property adjacent to the original house and was dedicated in 1940.

In the earliest years, the only way to alert firemen was the ringing of four fire gongs, made from the iron rings of broken railroad locomotive rims and placed strategically around town. The attached sledgehammer could be used by any resident to bang the gong to alert townspeople and firemen. A gong is still in place at the rear of the firehouse. The first electric siren was installed in 1924. Presently, firefighters are alerted through a pager system and through their cell phones.

Training in the early years was limited to bucket drills and, later, hose and ladder drills. In 1951, Northvale firemen began attending a "fire school" in Tappan, NY. Since 1965, all new firefighters train at the Bergen County Police and Fire Academy in Mahwah.

Past and present residents are grateful for the long years of service by the volunteers of the Northvale Fire Association, some of whom are now the second and third generations of founding families.

#### NORWOOD

In 1911, with the extension of water mains to Norwood, the men who fought fires with buckets of water from wells and cisterns and limited hose supply decided to band together and or-

ganize a fire company. At the May 2, 1911 borough council meeting, an ordinance was passed defining fire districts and providing for fire protection. In November of that year, property was purchased on the south side of Central Avenue (now called Broadway) between Livingston and High Streets. Construction of



the fire house was completed on February 22, 1913. In May of that year the borough council and many of the of the town departments rented space in the Fire Hall.

The firehouse soon became the site for many social functions and activities. After sharing the firehouse with many civic organizations for 63 years, the Fire Department is now the only borough organization operating there.

The first piece of fire fighting equipment owned by the company was a hand-drawn cart, used from 1905 until 1919. A horse drawn ladder truck was added when the firehouse was completed. Although this was made to be drawn by two horses, the firemen often pulled the ladder truck by hand. At other times, when only one horse might be available, the firemen had to pull along with the horse! The first injury to a fireman occurred while helping a horse draw the truck. A wheel of the truck ran over the foot of Chief Herbert Falkenstern breaking his toe as



the truck was being pulled up Central Avenue over the hill to West Norwood! Equipment was motorized in 1919 with the purchase of a Model T Ford chassis which was used until 1946!

In 1908 the fire alarm system consisted of four used steel locomotive tires that had been purchased from the West Shore Railroad for \$1 each. In 1911 five others were obtained and placed in various parts of the town. One of these gongs has been placed as part of a memorial on the grounds of the firehouse and sev-

eral others may still be found about the borough. In 1913, the borough council asked Closser for an old school bell they were not using. It was installed at the firehouse and used to call the volunteers.



Norwood Fire Company No. 1 has grown in size, equipment, and responsibility but still remains a volunteer company. Today the volunteers serve Norwood with the same fighting spirit as the founders of the organization.

Source: "Norwood Through the Years" 50th Anniversary Journal

#### OLD TAPPAN

In 1932, the borough's mayor and council provided the funding to establish the Old Tappan Volunteer Fire Company. The allocation of \$67. dollars allowed the company to purchase its first equipment: one dozen brooms, 2 fire extinguishers, 4 water tanks and 6 Indian tanks. An Indian tank is a 2-strap backpack and holds five gallons of water. The Indian tank was equipped with a long pump-activated handle and was capable of shooting water approximately 20 feet.

To alert townspeople and sound the alarm of a fire call 5 gongs and hammers were placed at various locations throughout the town. Every able bodied man in town was expected to respond when the alarm sounded. The Old Tappan firehouse was eventually built in 1936. At the time, local citizens provided the collateral and supplied the labor as no bank would lend the money needed for construction.

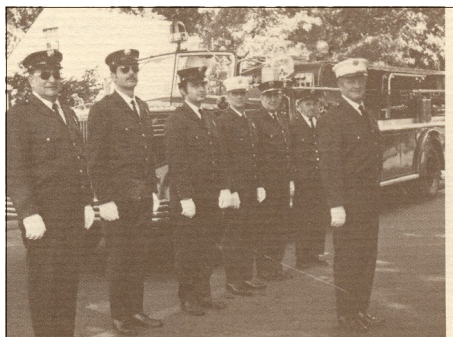
Today, the fire department has an active membership of about 55 firefighters who live or work in Old Tappan. Each January the line officers of the Old Tappan Volunteer Fire Department are sworn in at the borough's reorganization meeting. The Board of Fire Officers includes a Fire

Chief, Deputy Fire Chief, Captain and four lieutenants. The fire department operates with a fleet of four fire trucks and a rescue boat. joins the commercial and residential communities of Rockleigh.

### ROCKLEIGH

As Rockleigh Borough developed into a separate entity, the need for a fire department became evident. Between 1923 and 1931, Rockleigh had relied on the neighboring boroughs of Northvale and Norwood for fire assistance, paying an annual fee for their aid and cooperation. In 1932, the Rockleigh Volunteer Fire Department was organized and incorporated with a request that they be recognized as the official borough fire fighters. With official approval, they received financial assistance from the borough to purchase a Mack truck and equipment from the Ridgefield Park Fire Company for \$200. Finding themselves without a home for their new equipment, they "rededicated" Tallman's garage as the official "Fire House"!

Temporarily disbanded a few years later, they reorganized again in 1944. It was then that a "War Surplus Fire Truck" was purchased from the War Assets Administration. These fire trucks had been used at airports where there were few if any hydrants. Each truck carried several hundred gallons of water, making them very desirable for the suburban and rural communities of the time. What's more, most were sold for less than \$1000 making these practically new trucks a real bargain.



C. 1973

A unique aspect to fire fighting in Rockleigh Borough is the "Day Brigade." Unofficially formed in the 1950's and formalized in 1964, the Day Brigade is composed of volunteers from firms that make up the Rockleigh-McBride Office and Technical Park. When fire coverage became a problem because of the number of Rockleigh residents who worked outside the borough during the day, employees of Astral Industries and Carlee Corporation volunteered their services for fire duty during the daylight hours. The Day Brigade is a vital bridge that



Fire Department Today

Rockleigh also can lay claim to having the first woman fire fighter in the country! When Rockleigh was reorganizing its fire department in the 1940's, Mrs. Pauline Muzzio Willett, a borough council member, checked state laws to see if there were any restrictions precluding a woman from being a fire fighter. Finding none, she joined the department and learned to drive the truck! When Mrs. Willett died in 1996 at the age of 93, her funeral procession passed the Rockleigh Borough Hall and fire house.

Source: rockleigh.org