

The 1940s

Exactly four months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, a meeting was held to organize the fire company. There is much evidence to support the notion that the fire company was indeed organized for the primary purpose of protecting the local citizenry from the effects of an attack by the enemy forces of World War II.

During this decade, the fire company experienced many of the growing pains of any organization, but was further impacted by the war. Much of the young male population was serving “over there” and unavailable to volunteer as firefighters. While women filled many of the roles vacated by the men called to service, the fire company was not to be one of them (although the women were permitted to serve in the ladies auxiliary formed in 1948). The war also impacted the fire company’s ability to procure certain supplies, as is indicated by their difficulty in obtaining rubber coats and boots (see January 1944 notes). Rubber, and specifically rubber footwear, was rationed during the war and difficult to come by.

Financially, the fire company was poor and was constantly borrowing money to pay bills. Members were often found to make and donate equipment used by the fire company.

In the early years, fires were reported and personnel alerted courtesy of Keefer’s Store, then on southeast corner of “the square” of Grantham (the building remains to this day). Danny Keefer, eventually to become the fire chief, would receive calls at his store and manually blow the siren to alert the volunteers of a fire. A signal system was created in 1943, which would associate the siren blowing with the geographic location of the fire.

The Grantham fire station was built during this time and remained an active fire station until 1985! It has since been converted to apartments and remains at its original location on the northeast corner of Grantham Rd. & Low St. If those walls could talk!

1942

April 7

Meeting to organize; executive committee appointed

April 11

Operations officers appointed; membership fee of 10 cents per month established; initiation fee of \$1.00 (waived for “charter members” – those who contributed to firefighting equipment) (the initiation fee remains \$1.00 today); the position of Assistant Secretary was renamed Financial Secretary

April 30

Name determined – “The Grantham Volunteer Fire Company”; first equipment purchased for fire apparatus – 300’ 2 ½” hose for \$315.00, and 200’ 1 ½” hose, two nozzles, and one siamese for \$195.80; first reading of proposed constitution and bylaws (the word “colored” was stricken from the membership eligibility clause)

June 12

First “practices” scheduled; 12 galvanized buckets purchased

July 21

Charter applied for; regular meeting night established

September 25

\$292.00 in the treasury; constitution and bylaws adopted; it was decided that the fire alarm would be sounded on fire company meeting nights

November 20

First mention that the fire engine was housed in John Brubaker’s garage; hose ordered through Darley was canceled because of “slow progress”; reordered through Reading Fire Equipment; charter paperwork signed; next meeting to be held at Old Main, Messiah Bible College

November 27

Reported that the Harrisburg Fire Chief, Mr. Swartz, is working for us to get our equipment more quickly

December 29

Total bill for fire equipment - \$524.40; it was decided to make a siamese rather than buy one; noted in minutes to have "Shiremanstown Fire Co." removed from fire engine and replaced with "Grantham Volunteer Fire Company" (first evidence of the source of the fire engine); Upper Allen Supervisors to be approached for an annual contribution

One dollar in 1942 was equal to \$12.63 in 2006

President: J.S. Kratz

Fire Chief: John Neff

1943

January 22

Siamese made (solid brass); Mr. Kratz volunteered to obtain "water hose coupling wrenches"; \$61.00 needed to pay all bills and to take advantage of fire hose/equipment discounts; "Mr. S.S Keefer cheerfully offered to loan the company \$100.00 without interest until the first of April"

April 30

Joint meeting with the Home Defense Council to "put on a program for the benefit of the community to better acquaint us with actual bombing and how to handle fire bombs"; decided to "let the charter ride for the time being"

July 2

Discussion to "fill the old reservoir with water so as to give protection to those homes near there"; Mr. Pote (?) was directed to repair the old reservoir. Mr. Kratz offered to give the cement

August 28

Committee appointed to develop fire signals for various parts of town; the signals will be printed on cards, along with where to call in case of fire, and cards to be distributed to all homes in town; the meeting was interrupted by a report of fire at Zook's cottage

September 29

Earlier proposal to list fire company in phone directory can be done if the Mayor of Mechanicsburg would sign a petition;

Fire signals:

General alarm	30 second blast at intervals
College campus	One short, two long
Treona area	One short, three long
Center of town	One short, one long
Grantham Manor (west Grantham)	One short, four long
Out of town	Four short, four long
Fire under control	One long

Each signal to be sounded three times

One dollar in 1943 was equal to \$11.95 in 2006

President: No record

Fire Chief: No record

1944

January 28

Raincoats and boots ordered through Sears, Roebuck, and Co.; order could not be filled; secretary ordered to contact the Ration Board and secure application blanks to apply for boots, coats, hats, and gloves; report of hydrant being installed at Messiah Bible College

March 24

\$124.90 in treasury; boots and hats distributed; S.S. Keefer loaned the company \$50.00 to pay for new fire hose; prayer offered for "the boys in the service"

May 25

President Kratz suggested that the fire company “consider having a home of its own”; also suggested that a new chassis was needed for our engine; suggested canvassing the community for funds for the “home” and new chassis; the Fire Chief “reported several fires planted in the community and that detectives were called in to investigate the fires”

One dollar in 1944 was equal to \$11.27 in 2006

President: J.S. Kratz

Fire Chief: John Neff

1945

No written records found for 1945

1946

March 22

Pep talk by the President; committee appointed to investigate a building site and price

April 26

James Davis, Sr., elected Engineer to keep the pumper in repair at all times and inspect same at regular intervals; proposal to buy two gas masks and four smoke masks; available lots for fire station “on either side of Bowmansdale Rd. on the Musser and Brubaker sides, east of Low St.”; Brubaker lots - \$70 per lot; Musser lots - \$6.00 foot front, 10% rebate to fire company

May 5

Motion authorizing arrangements for renewal of the township contract with the Mechanicsburg Fire Co.

May 31

Report on sites for fire station – Musser lots – 133 1/3 foot front - \$680, less 10%; Brubaker lots – 107 foot front - \$350; Keefer lots – 132 foot front, 256 feet deep - \$900; motion made to purchase three corner lots east of Low St. on Brubaker side with an option on three additional feet and six lots in the rear; moved to contact the fire chief at the Mechanicsburg Depot to give a talk on firefighting

June 28

\$91.52 in the treasury; proposal to build a fire house – 20' front, 30' long, two story; basement not complete (finished?), upper rooms furnished; constructed of cinder block; building committee appointed; motion carries to blow fire siren every Saturday at 12:00 noon

July 26

Decided to set the new fire house 40' way to the front and 30' back; general design proposal by H.W. Mann (not specified in the record) be approved; motion to “concrete the basement floor as soon as the rest of the firehouse is completed”; building committee will supervise gratis labor

August 8

Special meeting of the company convened to change the size of the building from 30' x 40' to 40' x 40'

September 28

\$2,000 borrowed from S.S. Keefer to pay bills (approx. \$2500) for new station construction supplies

October 25

Mortgage approved (\$5,000 @ 5%) for new station; also borrowed \$2,000 to pay bills

November 22

\$1047.43 in treasury; policy drawn up for rental of social area of fire house (tabled); moved to make minutes available to all members, including what bills are for; incorporation papers finally completed

One dollar in 1946 was equal to \$9.90 in 2006

President: No record

Fire Chief: No record

1947

January 3

Special meeting to consider fire house rental policy – “Any person or concern, who proposes to rent any part of the fire company building for the purpose of conducting a business, shall agree to conduct and carry on the same in such a manner as not to conflict or compete in any way with any person or concern that is now operating a business in our community”

January 24

Borrowed \$4,000 to repay S.S. Keefer loan; fire house rental approved for \$25.00 per month

February 28

Company explored the Blue Cross hospitalization plan

March 28

B.T. Brubaker advanced a check of \$151.60 to pay the fire company bills, but “no more improvements nor purchases were to be made until check was satisfied”

April 25

Approved to charge an additional \$1.00 in rent for each \$100.00 in improvements to the social room; no conclusions on Blue Cross plan; favored approaching Monaghan Township Supervisors for financial support

July 26

Fireman’s Relief Fund established (\$50.00 annual contribution by the State); plans to finish concreting the basement on August 2

September 26

Special meeting to be called to change monthly meetings date to allow for bills to be paid earlier in the month; proceeds from the annual festival - \$621.64

October 21

Decided that monthly meetings be held on first Tuesday evening of each month; moved to finish windows and cap the roof

November 4

Decided that the Board of Directors give permission for any public or private entertainment and that groups be properly chaperoned (relates to fire house usage); trustees (Board of Directors) be elected for a term of three years – one expiration each year

December 9

Decided to keep fire in the furnace – members volunteered their service (building was heated by a coal stove at the time); water from commode and water pipes are to be drained; accepted resignation of Fire Chief Edgar Keefer

One dollar in 1947 was equal to \$9.22 in 2006

President: J.S. Kratz

Fire Chief: Edgar Keefer

1948

February 3

First documented incidents (responses); Ladies Auxiliary created

April 7

The bible class of Grantham was granted permission to use the “left hand side of the garage” for their meetings at no charge until it was rented; \$850.00 paid on the mortgage; “J.S. Kratz is to see to the purchasing of a 10 ft. vacuum-proof hose” (hard sleeve?)

May 4

“Mr J.S. Kratz purchased a Seagrave fire truck from the Middletown Fire Department, April 30, 1948, with the idea the Volunteer Fire Company of Grantham might be interested in purchasing the truck since it appeared to be what a number of the members were desirous of purchasing. After a very wholesome discussion in relation to its merits and its low purchase cost, namely \$650.00, a motion was made and carried that the company purchase the truck from Mr. Kratz at the price he paid namely, \$650.00. A vote of thanks was given to Mr. Kratz for his services in making available such a fire truck”

June 1

Fire Chief reported that the Seagrave or purchased fire truck is now equipped and has been tested as to its pumping ability; a committee was appointed to secure means of disposing of the old fire truck; “the fire chief is to contact State Police and have them instruct the company on state regulations as to operating at a fire – also before and following a fire”

July 6

The annual festival of the fire company to be August 14 in the afternoon and evening and the price of tickets to be 50 cents; Captain Ray Hoover of the State Police Department was present at the request of the company and gave a very interesting and instructive talk on regulations affecting the fire department

August 3

The festival committee reports were given by Edgar Keefer on the chickens and corn, by G. Greenfield on tables and grounds, and by Harry Mann on dishes; paid J.S. Kratz \$500.00 of the \$650.00 forwarded towards the fire truck; “Mr Strayer and his friend were present and presented the conditions of ambulance service which is free to all within a radius of 10 miles. The volunteer fire company desired to cooperate in the financing of the new ambulance” (research indicates that this would have been the Mechanicsburg based ambulance, not an Upper Allen based ambulance)

September 7

Donations to fire truck amounted to \$761.50; proceeds from festival \$401.16, plus some proceeds expected later; approved the proceeds received by the ladies auxiliary be left to their organization to be disposed of by them as they wish; it was suggested that a letter of appreciation be sent to neighboring contributors and invite them to a “stag party”; it was suggested that a recreation room be established in the fire house; sale of the fire truck discussed – no buyers; it was suggested that individuals make tables so that they will be available to fire company for special occasions; moved and approved that the room containing the fire truck be entered only by authorized members, except for a passageway to other rooms, and that a regular passageway be indicated through the room containing the engine; the other rooms of the fire house were designated as recreation rooms

October 5

\$317.59 in treasury; previous month’s minutes corrected as follows: “to the effect that the engine room be restricted to members of the fire company, and that by a sign or other means, people be kept out of this room – that public entrance to the building be through the door of the west room and that a chain be hung from the door between rooms to the head of the steps, to designate a public passageway from that west room through the engine room to the downstairs recreation room”; the heating committee recommends the purchase of two large Norge oil burning heaters – one for the downstairs and one for the eats room, and that the previous coal furnace be retained to supplement these in severely cold weather; passed that the old fire truck be brought to the fire house and such equipment be removed as is practical for winter storage; rejected the recommendation from the trustees relating to an age limit of 21 on persons capable of chaperoning activities in the recreation rooms of the fire house

November 2

\$18.54 in the treasury; individual appointed to solicit funds for the Mechanicsburg ambulance

December 7

State Department of Labor and Industry made several recommendations involving doors in the building; \$250.00 loan from Second National Bank floated to pay bills

One dollar in 1948 was equal to \$8.77 in 2006

President: H.W. Mann

Fire Chief: George Lenhart

1949

January 4

\$40.99 in treasury; trustees authorized to sell pieces of the antiquated fire truck; permission given for the college to hook into the fire company electric line for the purpose of flood lighting the skating pond; committee appointed for the purpose of looking into the young people's activities and interests in the fire company

February 1

\$20.02 in treasury

March 1

\$41.88 in treasury; borrowed \$250.00 to pay outstanding bills

April 5

\$71.20 in treasury; old fire truck sold for \$50.00

May 5

\$33.60 in treasury; the report of the fire chief regarding the Kennedy fires case was moved dropped; treasurer instructed to reimburse the ladies auxiliary for the purchase of the tea towels and dish cloths

June 7

\$42.64 in treasury; a fire call in Shepherdstown "brought about the real and urgent need of a larger booster tank on the present fire truck"; a motion was made to have the fire chief and engineer install a 250 gallon capacity booster tank on the truck; Joseph Kratz donated three gas masks and a foam generator

July 5

\$138.17 in the treasury; Boy Scout charter presented to fire company, its sponsor; realized \$142.42 profit from the strawberry festival

September 6

\$371.80 in treasury; festival donations – 37 chickens, 1 turkey, and \$33.50 in cash; fire chief authorized to purchase – eight fireman's helmets (\$88.00), six pairs of boots (\$39.00), six raincoats (\$60.00), two nozzles (\$117.00), one portable light (\$15.00), two hose lights (?) (\$16.00), one hose clamp (\$7.45), one set reflector flares and flags (\$10.50), eight helmet straps (\$4.00), and one fire chief's handbook (\$4.00)

October 10

\$535.75 in treasury; assistant fire chief resigns

November 1

\$480.65 in treasury; extensive drills with Washington Fire Company of Mechanicsburg; motion to establish active and associate members; "Danny Keefer showed some very interesting movies having to do with fires started by professional arsonists"

December 6

\$382.26 in treasury; fire chief advised that a fundamentals of firefighting class was starting consisting of 18 weeks of three hour sessions; the secretary and the fire chief concluded that there be no distinction between active and associate members; net profit from the ham supper - \$80.60

One dollar in 1949 was equal to \$8.52 in 2006

President: S.R. Keefer

Fire Chief: Daniel Keefer