

MANITOWOC COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The History of the Manitowoc Fire Department (1851 to present)

by Edward Ehlert,
Chief R. E. Herzog and
Ass't. Chief George F. Denk

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Manitowoc was incorporated as a village on March 6, 1851. Specific census figures for Manitowoc on that date have not been found; however, a year earlier the population was about 1,300. In those years the residential section of the village was on the south side of the river, with the commercial and industrial part of the village on the north side.

Obviously the homes that were built in those days were of log or wood frame construction. Houses were heated with stoves, with the pipes leading to chimneys of brick. Many homes had stove pipes that went up through the roof. Fires thus became a problem, and it is not surprising that one of the first orders of business of the new village government was to organize a fire company.

Ralph Plumb in his book entitled "History of Manitowoc County", states: "Fire companies made up of volunteer bands of male residents were organized, and, although at first there was little apparatus, nevertheless the needs of the day were met." It would appear that these volunteer companies were no more than bucket brigades. Water to fight a fire had to come from the river, and possibly also from cisterns or from wells on local property holdings.

John Harmon, a Manitowoc Herald-Times reporter in the 1950's to early 1960's wrote in Episode Number 110 of his "Early History of Manitowoc County" concerning the development of a fire department in the 1850's. We quote:

"Fighting fire was everybody's business in the days when Manitowoc County was growing out of the woods. Anyone - man, woman or child - who could carry a bucket of water was a member of the bucket brigade which formed with the arrival of the first white settlers in the county.

The crackle of flames and the pungent odor of burning wood smote hearts of early settlers with fear, as one old-timer expressed it.

Buildings were constructed of wood. A thin stove pipe, sticking out of the roof, served as a chimney. Fire hazards were many.

The Torrent Fire Co. was the first such association organized at the Village of Manitowoc. First meeting was scheduled in January of 1857 and C. W. White was elected president. Fifty-five members, most of them from the city's First Ward, were signed to the volunteer fire fighting outfit.

Need Protection

Firemen spent hours polishing their wooden buckets. Many had their initials burned on the inside or outside. Great pride was taken in care of the buckets.

'What we need is an engine,' commented E. W. Packard, a member of the company. 'The village is growing and good fire protection is needed.'

Village President James Bennett and trustees were not exactly receptive to the idea at first. Fire engines cost money and, after all, the volunteer bucket brigade had been doing a good job of holding down fire loss.

When Charles Esslinger became village president in 1858 a concentrated move was made to purchase an engine.

'Perhaps we should order two. One for the north side and one for the south side,'

President Esslinger suggested. Village Treasurer Oscar Koch objected. He was not against good fire protection but he wanted to know where the money was coming from.

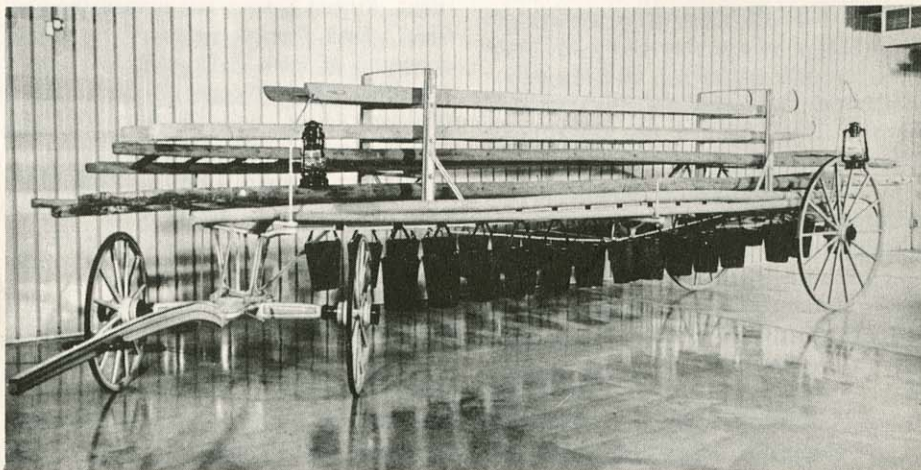
Pumper Crew

The engine, a hand pumper, arrived at Manitowoc in October of 1857. It was a handsome machine, mounted on four high wheels with long pumping handles along each side of the tank. A 20-foot hose was attached to the apparatus. The handles accommodated three pump men on each side.

Making up pumper crew number one were Charles Gerke, L. P. Wechselberg, C. H. Schmidt, John Achenbach, Joe Biegel and John F. Guyles. George Cox and H. L. Franklin were placed in charge of the hose.

Manitowoc firemen acted much the same as a small boy with a new red wagon. They spent hours at the banks of the river going through their paces in fire drills. One pumper and hose team (consisting of eight men) claimed the city record when it forced a stream of water out of the line a distance of 42 feet.

Like boys, too, the blaze fighters fought over the new engine. Members of the volunteer crew on the south side demanded that the pumper be located on



Hand drawn ladder wagon built about 1850

W
R977.567
M

their side of the river. The Torrent Fire Co. was just as emphatic that the north side was the proper place for the engine.

Refuse Order

Village officials stepped in and ordered the Torrent Fire Co. dissolved. The order was like taking a bag of black licorice stick candy from a baby.

Officers of the fire fighting company refused to be dissolved. But the engine was taken from them and they had no reason to continue meeting. Feeling ran high among volunteers of the north and south sides of the village.

In August of 1859 the Torrent Fire Co. was reorganized with Max Kuhl as president. The village board agreed to provide a second engine for the company.

The organization did valiant work up until 1872.

Charles Luling, second mayor of the young City of Manitowoc, paid glowing tribute to the volunteer smoke eaters, 'They are, without question, a valiant crew of men who have become dedicated to make Manitowoc a better and safer place in which to live.'

About that same time (1872) the Badger Engine Co., a north side volunteer group, was formulated and gradually replaced the old Torrent Company."

During the Civil War years there was little in the way of village activity. Ralph Plumb writes, "As the effects of the war disappeared village activity began to take on a more definite character. Great interest was manifested in the volunteer fire department which at this time had reached a high standard of efficiency. It consisted of Badger Engine Company No. 2, stationed on the south side, of which F. Becker acted as foreman, Phoenix Hook and Ladder Company, G. Phillips, foreman, and Protection Bucket Company, A. Pfeffer, foreman. This mode of enlisting citizens in public service was a beneficent one and formed a remarkable feature of the times."

In March 1867, by virtue of changes made in the village charter by the state legislature, the annual election of a police justice was made, and also the choice of the fire chief by the fire department volunteers.

It was in 1872 that the next important incident was recorded. That was the year in which the steam fire engine, the A. D. Jones, was added to the fire department. It was stationed on the north side. New engine houses were provided that year. The department was reorganized on a more modern basis with Fred Seeger as Chief Engineer, consisting of Steam Engine Company No. 1, Steam Engine Company No. 2, Badger Company No. 3,



First Fire Fighters — 1883

Torrent Company No. 2 and Protection Bucket Company. Within a few years, however, the old volunteer organizations, the Torrent, Badger and Protection companies disbanded.

Earlier it was stated that the Fireman's Ball was one of the social events of the season. It was on April 4, 1883 that such an event was held. Of interest is the report of the expenditures for that affair. They consisted of the following:

13 kegs of beer	\$13.00
3¾ cases of soda	2.81
200 cigars	4.63
50 signs	3.00
100 sandwiches	3.80
23 bottles of wine	5.75

Income	\$101.45
Disbursements	64.11
Balance	\$ 37.44

1883 is another important date in the history of the Manitowoc Fire Department, for it was on that date there was another reorganization of the department. August Dueno was named the Fire Chief, Emil Kaems, secretary. Personnel consisted of John F. Dumke, Jos. Skura, John Pitz, Mates, Frenk, Anton Reiniger, William Sorge, and Gebhart Bentley. Salary of these men was \$25.00 a year.

It was not until 1900 that the first team of horses was purchased by the city to take the steamers to the scene of the fires. Previously when the fire alarm was sounded, horses owned by those in the livery stable business were used. The teams to respond quickest to the alarm hauled the steamer to the fire, and second and third teams to arrive hauled other articles of equipment. There was a sliding scale of payment according to the arrival

of the teams at the fire stations.

The A. D. Jones steamer was always kept in readiness, so that the minute the alarm was sounded, the fire below the boiler was started. As the engine was on its way to the fire, the steam pressure was built up so that the hoses could force water on the fire immediately upon arrival. It was the duty of one of the firemen to keep up the fires until the time when the fire was put out.

Horses furnished the mobile power for a number of years, until they were replaced with motor apparatus. The change was gradual, with the first motor apparatus coming into use in 1915, and by 1920, the Fire Department had an American LaFrance pumper with 600 gallons capacity, and an American LaFrance Ladder Truck. Both pieces of equipment were still on standby status as late as 1955. The department was under the leadership of Chief Kratz during the transition from horse-drawn to horseless motive power. Chief Kratz took over the department on July 1, 1903 and retired November 1, 1926.

The Waterworks

This treatise up to this point has concerned itself primarily with the personnel of the fire departments, and also the fire fighting equipment which the departments used. Water is another important ingredient if a fire is to be fought successfully. We take pretty much for granted the water that comes from the faucets in our homes these days. However, that convenience also had a history. We pause here to relate the paragraphs from Falge's "History of Manitowoc County" (p. 363) which tell us how



Horsedrawn Steamer

we got "the waterworks."

"Up to the year 1911 the city depended for its water supply on the Manitowoc Water Works Company, a corporation. The plant was bonded for \$200,000 and built in 1889 by the firm of Moffett, Hodges and Company, of New York. The buildings were erected on the lake front at the foot of South Seventh Street, and were constructed of brick, one a two-story affair, in which were installed the necessary machinery and pumps. The standpipe is 120 feet in height, upon which is a tank with a capacity of 100,000 gallons. The water is supplied by a well, 20 x 30 feet, and strange to say, this well is supplied by water from swelling, bubbling springs, which were struck at a depth of 20 feet near the lakeshore. In addition to the well, which is almost inexhaustible in its supply of magnificent water, is a reservoir with a capacity of 250,000 gallons, which is kept filled and in reserve for emergency purposes.

By reason of various causes and expressions of dissatisfaction on the part of the city and private consumers with conditions, a movement to take over the waterworks plant and all its appurtenances assumed such proportions, and arrived at the stage, where it developed upon those in authority to call a special election, to take action on the proposition of issuing \$230,000 in bonds for the purchase of the plant, the price of which had been agreed upon at \$247,000. An election for the purpose herein stated was held on August 17, 1911, and the proposition was carried by practically unanimous vote of those holding the right of suffrage in Manitowoc. Previous to this, however, at a special election held on February 27, 1911, the question of purchasing the plant was submitted to the voters of the city, and the vote was almost unanimous in its favor." (End of quote)

The pamphlet entitled "History of the Manitowoc Fire Department, 1883-1955", is the source for the chronology of events which follow:

"January 1, 1922 ushered in the two platoon system of fire department organization. Eight men were added bringing the total to 26 plus the Chief. The 26 men were placed 13 to a platoon and worked on a 24 hour on and 24 hour off basis. The two platoon system is the present working system. A chronology listing of equipment changes and additions reveals growth of department to present day strength of 49 with Chief.

November 10, 1926 - J. J. Kuplic became Chief. Retired Oct. 1, 1938.

March 18, 1927 - A Nash car was purchased and designated Chief's car.

May 8, 1929 - A 1000 gal. Mack pumper purchased and designated Engine No. 2.

July 25, 1935 - Chief's Nash car replaced with a Cadillac.

October 30, 1935 - 750 gal. Mack pumper added and designated Engine No. 3.

October 1, 1937 - Electrician added to the Dept. to take care of the Fire and Police alarm systems.

October 1, 1938 - J. F. Gaedke appointed Chief, serving until July 28, 1948. Chief Gaedke died this date while attending the Fire Chief's convention at LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

1941 - Chief's Cadillac car traded for a Hudson. Two men added to the Dept. in 1941 the Dept. strength reached a total of 32 men.

1942 - Diamond T Squad No. 1 placed in service. Added two men. Total 34.

Sept. 2, 1947 - Fourth motor apparatus pumper delivered. This apparatus being a 1000 gal. American LaFrance pumper designated as Eng. No. 4. This pumper placed the first Engine purchased in 1918 in standby status at Station No. 1.

August 15, 1948 - Present Chief R. J. Wetenkamp was appointed Chief filling vacancy created by death of Chief Gaedke. Under Chief Wetenkamp's direction a large scale modernization began.

Dec. 28 1948 - An American LaFrance 100 foot Aerial Ladder Truck was purchased. This truck was designated Truck No. 2 and replaced the 40 year old Truck No. 1. Keeping pace with modern fire fighting equipment designs necessitated the purchase of much new equipment.

Jan. 8, 1949 2 Life Belts

Mar. 23, 1949 1 Scott Air Pak Mask

Aug. 24, 1949 Fog Nozzels and Asbestos Fire Suit

Sept. 9, 1949 1 Chemox self contained Mask

Nov. 10, 1950 30 lb. Chemical Extinguisher

Dec. 27, 1950 2 Flood Lights with 50' Cords

Nov. 1950 Mullikin Automatic Iron Lung. Donated by Mtwc. Labor Unions

Jan. 13, 1951 30 lb. Chemical Extinguisher

Jan. 30, 1951 2 Chemox Masks

Feb. 1, 1951 2 Smoke Ejectors

Feb. 14, 1951 2 Kohler Light Plants

Sept. 7, 1951 Acetylene Cutting Torch and Accessories

Feb. 4, 1952 150 lb. Dry Chemical Extinguisher

Oct. 3, 1953 Rescue Breathing Unit. Trade name (Pnealator.)

Jan. 2, 1954 1 Smoke Ejector

Mar. 4, 1954 150 lb. Dry Chemical Extinguisher

Sept. 26, 1954 1 Chemox Self Contained Mask

Sept. 28, 1954 1 Power Saw

Feb. 3, 1955 2 - 20 lb. Dry Chemical Extinguishers

Feb. 1950 Marked a big stepping stone in the modernization program. The Manitowoc Fire Department, with its progressive administration, adopted the two way radio communication system. This enables the dispatcher to direct the fire apparatus quickly and effectively.

Jan. 1, 1950 - 7 men were added to the department to institute the 74 hr. work week replacing the 84 hr. work week. Total man power this date is 45.

Feb. 27, 1950 - Ford car replaced Chief's Hudson car.

Jan. 15, 1953 - 2 men added to department. Total 47.

Sept. 17, 1953 - Ford truck designated as Rescue Squad No. 2 replaced Diamond T Squad No. 1. Squad No. 1 is at present in stand-by status at

Station No. 1 mounted with an auxiliary pump and water tank and ladders for emergency service to outlying areas of the City of Manitowoc.

Jan. 1, 1955 – 2 men added bringing strength to present total of 49 men.

July 15, 1955 – Plymouth car replaced Chief's Ford car.

Sept. 14, 1955 – A new 4 wheel drive truck received and designated as Eng. No. 5. This Eng. is the largest pumper, 1250 gal. per minute and will put Eng. No. 2 on a stand-by status.

Chief Wetenkamp's thoughts were directed in the future as early as Jan. 3, 1949 regarding Station No. 3. At that time a communication was issued expressing the thought that consideration be given to locating a new Fire Station in the South-West section of the City. It was pointed out at that time and numerous later dates that Fire Stations 1 and 2 were located too close together and with vast annexations to the South and West, more adequate fire protection was necessary.

No immediate action was taken, however, hopes were increased when on Sept. 6, 1949 the Chamber of Commerce urged action be taken this fall, so that at least a site for new station can be acquired. It was the thought that the next year a plan for the new station could be prepared.

A communication from the Manitowoc Insurance Board on Oct. 17, 1949 was directed to the City Council recommending acquisition of site for new Fire Station, so Item can be set in the budget.

Realizing that no action had been taken and possessed with a burning desire and firm conviction that a new fire station was a necessity, Chief Wetenkamp on October 1, 1951 sent a communication to the City Council requesting that urgent action be taken on selection of site for new Fire Station. Steady annexation and industrial development emphasized the need.

A resolution was introduced on August 4, 1952, that the Mayor appoint a committee of citizens and other city officials to recommend site for new South West fire station.

April 8, 1953, the resolution was returned to the council and passed 14 ayes 0 nays. The ray of hope brightened and the path was charted at last. The progress of Democracy is not always speedy but is certainly steady, and on May 3, 1954 a resolution was introduced, that the city purchase Lots 1, 2, 45, 46 Block 5 Shady Lane for \$3,000 for the purpose of erecting a Fire Station. The money to be taken from the fire outlay

fund. The resolution was adopted as introduced.

On June 3, 1954 a resolution was introduced to the council to hire an architect for the new Fire Station. This resolution was adopted and on Sept. 7, 1954 Perc. Brandt was engaged as the architect and the resolution passed.

The bids were received in subsequent month and the long hoped for project was started March 1, 1955. Today we welcome you to that project and are proud and pleased to exhibit Fire Station No. 3, City of Manitowoc.

It isn't possible to mention all those that had a helping hand in this new station but in fairness to all, we feel that the Citizens of Manitowoc owe their appreciation to the members of the Board of Public Works; Mayor Koepke, Earl Walter, W. Schmitz, Art Post, Gene Revolinsky, and Ed. Zigmund. We would like to mention the City Council and the police and Fire Committee headed by Chairman Ed. Plautz, Ed. Jirikowic and Herbert Ansoerge. Through the untiring efforts of these people, we have today the reality of Fire Station No. 3.

Manitowoc Fire Dept. Personnel

Reuben Wetenkamp, Chief; Nels Petersen, 1st Asst. Chief; Clarence Schmatz, 2nd Asst. Chief; Alvin Krumm, Electrician; Maurice Gallagher, Captain; James Danielson, Captain; Alvin Kiel, Captain; Roy Scherer, Captain; Harold Thielen, Captain; David Pollock, Captain; John Sigmund, Captain; Ralph Kohls, Captain; William Kirkoff, Instructor; George Rosinsky, Lieutenant; Emil Wells, Lieutenant; Stanley Sweikar, Lieutenant; Everett Pope, Driver; Daniel Andrastek, Driver; George Orth, Driver; Arthur Albrecht, Driver; Robert Rabenhorst, Pipeman; Leonard Swetlik, Driver; Urban Jacoboski, Driver; Lester Mittnacht, Pipeman; Reuben Hartl, Driver; Joseph Steeber, Pipeman; Kenneth Mueller, Pipeman; Harold Mumpy, Driver; Leonard Pikulik, Pipeman; Lawrence Waskow, Truckman; Reinhart Herzog, Driver; Arthur Nickels, Driver; Richard Wilke, Pipeman; George Denk, Truckman; Eugene Sobieski, Truckman; Roland LaFond, Pipeman; Ronald Foerg, Truckman; James Pokorsky, Truckman; George Eggert, Truckman; Russell Wachholz,



North Side Fire Station No. 1 – 1900

Lineman; Herbert Orth, Truckman; Emmett Bubb, Pipeman; Keith Vetting, Truckman; Roger Krause, Pipeman; Rudolph Hartlaub, Pipeman; Warren Hallock, Chief's Driver; Raymond Konkle, Chief's Driver; Jerome Thuss, Pipeman; Daniel Buretta, Pipeman."

Other Pertinent Facts

October 15, 1955 – Fire Station No. 3, at 1203 So. 26th St., was built and put into operation, giving Manitowoc three Fire Stations.

June 16, 1956 – Chief James N. Danielson was appointed to succeed Reuben J. Wetenkamp, who served in that capacity for eight years.

July 2, 1957 – New Fire Station No. 1 at 1410 No. 8th St., was placed in operation. (Relocation. Old Station No. 1, at 412 No. 8th St. was vacated.)

Jan. 16, 1962 – Two men added, bringing total personnel to 51.

Jan. 1, 1963 – Department went on 65 hour work week. One man added, bringing total personnel to 52.

Aug. 30, 1963 – New Emergency Reporting Telephone System put into service replacing old Fire and Police Alarm System.

Jan. 1, 1964 – Department went on 63 hour work week.

Jan. 17, 1964 – Supt. Police and Fire Alarm, Alvin Krumm, retired, not replaced. Total personnel now back to 51.

Jan. 1, 1965 – Department went on 56 hour work week. One man added, bringing total personnel back to 52.

Feb. 22, 1965 – Ford Stationwagon replaced Chief's Plymouth car.

Nov. 16, 1966 – 1942 Model Pirsch 100' Aerial Ladder Truck was purchased as a stand-by unit and designated as Truck No. 3.

Jan. 1, 1967 – Three men added, total personnel now 55.

Nov. 6, 1967 – Engine No. 6, 1000 G.P.M. Pirsch Pumper, purchased and put into service. Replaced 1935 Mack 750 G.P.M. Pumper.

Sept. 1, 1971 – Work week reduced to 51.8 hours. Three men added, bringing total personnel to present strength of 58 men.

May 13, 1974 – 19 ft. Oconto Cruiser powered by 115 H.P. Johnson Outboard, designated Fire & Police Patrol & Rescue Boat No. 1 was put into service. Manned jointly by Police and Fire personnel.

June 16, 1974 – Present Chief Reine E. Herzog was appointed to succeed James N. Danielson who retired after 18 years as Chief.

Aug. 23, 1974 – Rescue Squad No. 1, Ford-Welch, was purchased and put into service. Replaced 1953 Ford.

Sept. 17, 1974 – Engine No. 1, 1000 G.P.M. Pierce Pumper was purchased and put into service. Replaced 1947 LaFrance 1000 G.P.M. Pumper.

Nov. 1, 1974 – New Central Dispatching System put into service. Located in Police Dept. All emergency calls are handled through this system, and all emergency services are more closely coordinated.

Aug. 28, 1975 – DIAL - 911 for all emergency services in effect.

MANITOWOC FIRE DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL HISTORY

Nov. 3, 1975

From the date of its origin in 1883, to the present date, a total of 322 men were appointed to the Manitowoc Fire Department. In addition, there were three substitutes for short periods (one for only three days). Of the total men who were appointed, 166 resigned, 35 were discharged for various reasons, 5 went into the Army (World War I) and didn't return to the Fire Department, 8 died during the course of their employment, 50 retired on pension, and we have 58 active members at the present time.

There was a huge turnover of personnel in the early days (around 1915 - 1922). Many of the early firefighters terminated their employment in one month. There were some who were appointed and resigned the same day. There were many resignations and reappointments up until 1934. One fellow was appointed, resigned, was reappointed and resigned a total of five times.

In the past twenty-five years, with the betterment of working conditions, there were nine who resigned, while twenty-nine retired on pension (eleven of these were due to a disability). Two men died while in Fire Department service.

Of the eight men who died during the course of their employment, two died while on duty: John P. Hall was killed by a falling wall Jan. 14, 1906 and Fran Kapidlansky died at a fire on Feb. 22, 1922. John Gaedke died at LaCrosse while attending a Fire Chiefs' Convention on July 28, 1948.

Some of the early names and dates of appointment follow: Anton Selch – Feb. 1, 1890, John Mahler – Aug. 15, 1892, Gustave Boeder – May 21, 1900, Darwin White – Feb. 5, 1901, George Dueno – June 4, 1901, and of course one of the more familiar names, John H. Kratz – July 1, 1903 who became Chief of the Department.

Compiled by:
George F. Denk,
Ass't. Chief

November, 1975 Manitowoc Fire Department Present Personnel Roster

Present personnel totals 58, including the Chief and 3 Assistant Chiefs.

CHIEF – Reine E. Herzog
ASS'T. CHIEFS – George F. Denk,
Stanley Sweikar, Daniel Andrastek
CAPTAINS – George Orth, Arthur



Fighting a Fire on June 11, 1956

Albrecht, Leonard Swetlik, Lester Mittnacht, Arthur Nickels, Richard Wilke, Eugene Sobieski, Roland LaFond, Russell Wachholz.

LIEUTENANTS – Kenneth Mueller, Herbert Orth, Keith Vetting, Rudolph Hartlaub, Warren Hallock, Raymond Konkle, Jerome Thuss, Daniel Buretta, Joseph Jagodinsky.

DRIVERS & PUMP OPERATORS – Robert Jarosh, Donald Cayemberg, Paul Wellner, Calvin Wester, Robert Burtard, Robert Strauss, Gerald Keehan, Louis Rathack, Gerald Panosh, Vernon Rosinsky, Gerald Hutchison, Jerome Miller, *Kenneth Broehm, Thomas Little, Jack Mrozinski.

PRIVATEES – Dennis Sielski, Leslie Behnke, Charles Weiss, August Krieser, Neil McDougall, Kenneth Riebe, James Erdmann, Philip Groll, William Meyer, Michael Kunesh, David Strauss, Charles Huske, Michael Wagner, Richard Metzger, Donald Baryenbruch, James Krowiorz, Albert Griffin, David Wilke, James Keil, Larry Aumann, William Marshburn.

*Kenneth Broehm is the Fire Department Records-Clerk.

The following Fire Department members are "Emergency Medical Technicians" (EMT's) certified by the State of Wisconsin:

Chief Reine E. Herzog, Ass't. Chief George F. Denk, Captain Russell Wachholz, Lieutenant Rudolph Hartlaub, Lieutenant Joseph Jagodinsky, Driver Gerald Panosh, Driver-Records Kenneth Broehm, Driver Thomas Little, Firefighter August Krieser, Firefighter James Erdmann, Firefighter David Strauss, Firefighter Michael Wagner, Firefighter Richard Metzger, Firefighter Donald Baryenbruch.

Seven more members of the Fire Department are enrolled and scheduled for "EMT" training beginning in January 1976.

All Fire Department personnel are trained in Cardiopulmonary - Resuscitation (CPR) and Basic First Aid.

First Aid Calls responded to in 1950 – 13. First Aid Calls responded to in 1974 – 320.

The Fire Department has in the past, and will continue in the future, to upgrade its services with the acquisition of the latest equipment and the necessary knowledge to use it.

Some Fires in

Manitowoc's History

The following is Episode Number 73 by John Harmon in his series of articles entitled "Early Manitowoc County History."

One of the most disastrous fires in Manitowoc's history swept the Wisconsin Central railroad yards, damaged river docking, impaired shipping and threatened the downtown area of Manitowoc Sunday, Nov. 3, 1901.

Flames of undetermined origin started in the west end of the Central warehouse and spread rapidly to the roof of the 925 foot structure. First warning of the blaze was sounded by the whistle at Elevator A at 7:30 p.m. Fire Chief August Dueno and his willing crew arrived at the scene quickly. It soon became evident there was little they could do.

Wind Aids Fire

Flames lit the evening sky for miles around. Residents as far away as Mishicot looked at the light in the southeastern sky and decided Manitowoc must be burning out.

A northwest wind carried burning embers over the downtown business district, starting many smaller fires and threatening the entire city with destruction.

Mayor William Rahr issued an immediate call for more volunteers to battle the threatening blaze.

Contents of the warehouse consisted of 26 box cars loaded with flour and a large amount of other freight. Seventeen loaded cars on the tracks outside the building were consumed by the flames. More than 30 empty box cars were shunted onto a siding by a switch engine at the yards.

Small Fires

Residents held their breaths. The very life of the City of Manitowoc hung in the balance. Numerous reports of small fires in the center of the city poured in at fire and police headquarters but the men were too busy battling the big blaze to pay attention. The crisis was reached shortly before midnight. The wind had died down and a heavy smoke pall hung over the city by the lake.

"The docks are burning," one fireman screamed above the roar of the flames. Chief Dueno held his head in despair. The Goodrich tug Artic put out with a score of men on her deck. The men, equipped with buckets, attempted to fight the dock fire from the south but searing heat and smoke drove them back.

Fire threatened the Northern Grain Co. elevators to the north. Flames licked up the sides of the Wisconsin Central depot and roundhouse as fast as firemen and volunteers could douse them.

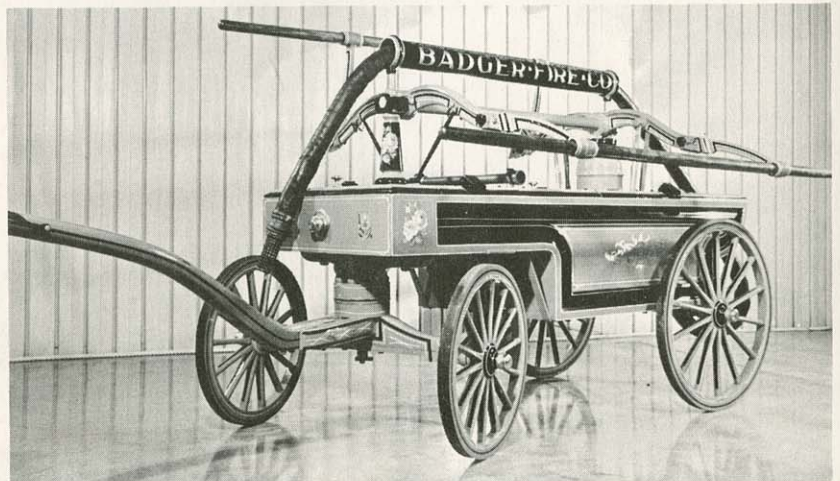
Overcome by Smoke

Firemen Gus Boeder and Louis Wilkowsky were overcome by smoke and heat and were rescued only after the greatest difficulty by fellow members.

Every available man worked in the battle against the spreading flames. L. D. Moses, president of the National Bank of Manitowoc, took a station in the downtown area to watch for burning embers. An unnamed tramp awakened from a drunken stupor and pitched in to become one of the heroes of the day.

Tracks in the yards were twisted under intense heat. The entire dock area, with exception of the carferry apron, was burned to the water line.

"Shipping will be tied up for weeks," a harbor official stated.



Badger Fire Company's hand-drawn, hand-operated pumper (1860)

At the next meeting of the Manitowoc Common Council it was voted to outfit the tug Arctic with fire fighting apparatus.

Episode 85 from John Harmon's Early Manitowoc County History

Business boomed for George Boll, building contractor at 1519 Clark St., Manitowoc, following the turn of the century.

A dull red glow lighted the sky over the City of Manitowoc during the early dawn hours of Thursday, March 10, 1905. Sound of the fire bell and crackle of flames rent fear in the hearts of citizens of the Elevator City.

"If Manitowoc could survive the scourge of fire, it might become a pretty fair sized city," Dr. J. F. Mulholland remarked.

The Wernecke Block at corner of Eighth and Washington Streets at Manitowoc was gutted by fire with loss estimated at between \$32,000 and \$35,000.

Discover Fire

Fire was discovered at 4:30 a.m. and roared out of control for hours in spite of valiant efforts of the fire department to quench the flames.

Heavy losses were sustained by Wernecke and Schmitz, owners of the building; Vogelsang and Murphy, Seehase and Wernecke, dentists; J. P. Nolan and Manitowoc County.

Cause of the fire was undetermined by Fire Chief Kratz but it was believed the flames had been smoldering for hours because the scent of pine smoke had been smelled by persons passing by the building the night before.

The fire apparently started in the rear of the Wernecke and Schmitz hardware store and was burning fiercely at the time of discovery. Flames leaped up the elevator shaft and spread to the roof. The structure became a blazing inferno.

Disregards Warning

After an hour's work by the fire department it was believed the fire was under control. Fireman August Keucker, a member of the South Side Company, watched closely and then shouted:

"It's breaking out again at the back!"

The building was doomed.

Municipal Judge A. P. Schenian, disregarding warnings by firemen, dashed into the burning structure to attempt to salvage court records in his office on the second floor. He was beaten back by intense heat and smoke after grabbing a handful of damaged records.

The block had been built in 1894 with additions made in 1895 and 1898.

It marked the second destructive fire at Manitowoc in recent years. The Wood Block at Corner of Eighth and Franklin streets had been destroyed by flames January 28, 1902.

Episode 101 from John Harmon's Early Manitowoc County History

Charles Taylor, night watchman at the Wisconsin Chair Co. factory at Sixteenth and Franklin Streets, Manitowoc, checked his pocket watch.

The time was 9:28 p.m. It was a cold Saturday. (Jan. 13, 1905)

Charlie had just lit his pipe and settled into a chair in the warm furnace room at the factory when he heard what he thought to be someone slamming a door. The watchman roused himself and turned to go back upstairs. He heard another muffled thud.

A sharp explosion split the air, hurling Taylor back into the basement. In a matter of seconds flames licked out of windows of the paint room at one of Wisconsin's largest chair factories. The watchman crawled out of the cellar to sound the alarm.

Last Ride

Firemen thundered to the scene. For one firefighter — John P. Hall of the North Side Station — it was to be his last ride on the rigs.

Chief Kratz and his loyal firemen were handicapped from the start. Water pressure was low and a faulty valve on the standpipe at North Water Street caused

trouble. Firemen could scarcely reach the second story of the building with streams from the lines.

The glow in the sky and the crackle of flames attracted a crowd of more than 1,500 persons who braved the cold of the night to view the spectacular blaze.

Firemen soon realized their task of saving the building and the dry kiln attached was all but hopeless. Flames were fed by stick lumber and explosive paint products.

Wall Buckles

"We will direct our attention to the Standard Oil tanks," the Chief screamed above the din. "If they fire we'll be in great trouble." Firemen played streams of water from four lines on the huge oil tanks located across the street and to the north of the burning building.

Hall, a 39 year old man who had been on the Manitowoc blaze fighting force three years after coming from Manistee, Mich., was removing a ladder from the blazing structure. A wall buckled under the heat and a shower of bricks caught him. Fellow firemen raced to the rescue, risking their own lives to save their trapped comrade.

Dr. Max Staehle was on the scene and he acted quickly, summoning a carriage to take the injured man to the hospital. Hall died some 20 hours later of internal injuries and a broken leg.

Meanwhile, firemen continued their losing battle with the roaring flames. Lack of water greatly hampered their



Water Tube Boiler made by American Fire Engine Co.

efforts and there was nothing to do but let the fire burn itself out.

Henry Vits, president of the Manitowoc Aluminum Co., was on hand to see that his building, located in the next block, was adequately protected.

Complete Loss

The burned building was a two story brick structure erected a few years prior by John Schuette for the Wisconsin Canning Co. The building had been purchased by the Wisconsin Chair Co. of Sheboygan and more recently by the Cartwright-Mattson Glove Co. which planned to occupy the structure early in the spring of 1905. The chair works employed 168 workmen.

Fred Dennett of Sheboygan and president of the chair company estimated complete loss between \$75,000 and \$100,000.

Indications were, immediately following the fire, that the Manitowoc Water Works Co. would be sued because the company failed to supply an adequate amount of water with which to fight the fire.

The Wisconsin Chair Co. operations were moved to the State of New York.

Mrs. Hall, widow of the fireman killed in the blaze, was granted payment of her

husband's salary (\$50 per month) for three months after which time she and the family would receive half that amount.

Episode 649 from John Harmon's Early Manitowoc County History

"We got one goin'," yelled Fire Chief James J. Kuplic one morning early in March of 1933 as he saw flames light up the southwestern sky at Manitowoc. He pulled on his trousers and glanced at the clock on the dresser. The hands indicated a time shortly before 2 a.m.

Meanwhile, firemen tumbled out of their bunks at the downtown fire station. The call had come from Fire Box 39 at 14th and Green Streets.

"Could be —" one of the firemen started and then stopped. His face froze. "Could be the entire section of town," another fireman filled in the words for him.

Manitowoc firemen had their work cut out for them during those early morning hours. Flames crackled and leaped high into the air as firemen, in the big, new Mack pumper, rounded a corner in down-

town Manitowoc. Then they spotted the fire and fear smote their hearts. The National Lumber Co. was ablaze!

Short Hose

Firemen from rigs from the two city stations fought desperately to keep the fire confined to the lumber firm. High winds carried burning embers blocks in all directions, starting small fires in grass and on rooftops. A hurried call went out for more help.

Firefighters hooked lines to the nearest hydrant and raced to the seat of the blaze. But, alas, the hydrant was some 2,000 feet from the burning building and firemen wound up short of their goal.

"If it hadn't been tragic, it would have been funny," one fireman recalled later. "Here we were about a quarter of a block from the blaze."

The fire, which caused an estimated \$25,000 damage to lumber sheds and piles, was believed caused by tramps who had moved into the yards for shelter and had been smoking.

The huge yard was owned by John A. Behnke of Brillion who was in partnership with George Houghton of Manitowoc.

MANITOWOC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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