ITHACA
FIRE DEPARTMENT

by
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EARLY SETTLEMENT

Several centuries ago the Scandanavians had a God they called Thor. He was in charge of the lightning and thunder brigades. Apparently some of his brigades came to North America and Tompkins County before 1779. Several dead trees were set on fire from lightning, mostly on the hilltops. The trees on the swampy flats were too damp to burn.

In those days the forests were virgin timber. They didn't contain the brush and undergrowth which became abundant when men cleared the land for housing and the planting of crops. Fires, from the lightning, burned themselves out and left clearings which the Indians used for their own purposes. The clearings were preserved by burning them over twice each year. The Indians touched them off in the spring and again in the fall. Crops were planted in those clearings consisting mostly of corn and orchards.

In 1779 the Sullivan Expedition marched through central New York putting the torch to every burnable item they could find which might have been of use to the Indians. That army laid waste to orchards, cornfields and houses which had been erected by the Indians.

After 1779 a number of people moved into the area and constructed their houses. Naturally they didn't build in the swamps and by 1806 there were about twenty houses, or cabins, along the bases of east hill and south hill. The Owego Turnpike came through White Church, Brooktondale and down the north side of Six Mile Creek to the main road, in town, which was called Owego Street.

Between Cascadilla Creek and Six Mile Creek a road was established and called Aurora Street, running north and south. Parallel with that was Tioga Street, both of them intersecting Owego Street. Connecting those were the east to west streets named Seneca, Buel and Mill Streets.

The population increased and along with it the growth of industry. Mills were erected near each of the creeks. The one on Mill Street drew water from Six Mile Creek using a flume running under Owego Street, along the east side of Aurora Street, near the foot of the hill, then under Aurora to the industry at Mill and Tioga Streets. A brewery was started at Spencer and Clinton Streets and a distillery at 509 Lake Street which boarded cows to feed on the residue from the vats.
The town had both white collar and blue collar workers. For two decades it was the rule that each man, after his day's work, would take at least one leather bucket full of dirt from the sandbank located on Buel Street near Parker Place to dump in the swamps west of Tioga Street. The system worked well and soon individuals bought land and constructed buildings on that side of Tioga Street.

It was natural that buildings on Aurora, Tioga, Owego and Seneca Streets should become the main commercial establishments. They rose to three and four stories high. The State Turnpike crossed the north end of Cayuga Lake and supplies came in by boats which ran back and forth on the lake.

The Ithaca and Owego Turnpike was officially opened in 1811 running through White Church and down through that valley. In the same year a turnpike was opened between Ithaca and Geneva. Stagecoaches from New York to Buffalo came through the town.

Plaster was loaded on barges at the north end of the lake, in the dry state, towed to Ithaca, loaded on wagons and hauled to Owego to the extent of 800 loaded wagons each day. Owego and Aurora Streets were the hub of the community. A hotel was constructed at that corner with more being erected at other intersections. A boom town was in the making, and in 1817 Tompkins County was formed from parts of Cayuga and Seneca Counties.

In the year 1818 Ithaca was not yet a village but it made a tight fit for the population of 800. There were only a couple of roads running across the swamps to the inlet where the warehouses and boat building businesses were located. Both sides of the inlet were lined with warehouses but most of the population lived between Aurora and Cayuga Streets with Six Mile Creek the boundary on the south and Cascadilla Creek the north boundary.

There were several springs in the flatlands with their brooks merging into the swamps. One started at Buffalo (formerly Buell) and Cayuga Streets, flowing northwest. Another started on the west side of Albany Street, between State and Green, flowing north to State then west and southwest to the inlet. There were several other springs on the sides of the hills and on the flats which eventually seeped into the inlet.

Ithaca was accepted as the hub of transportation. Travelers came in by stages drawn by four horses. Cargo came in by the wagonload to be placed on boats for the trip north to the turnpike.

Prosperous days were ahead, but one night, in 1818, the cry of "Fire" resounded and men and boys brought their leather buckets to the southwest corner of Aurora and Seneca Streets to put out a blaze in the cabinet shop of John Whiton. The buckets were filled from the flume running along the base of East Hill on the east side of Aurora Street. As a fire it wasn't much. The quickly organized bucket brigade snuffed it rapidly.

The next fire wasn't as simple. It started the night of November 28, 1819 in the blacksmith shop of Miles Seymour located about the middle of the north side of Owego Street between Tioga and Aurora. The shop and barn of M. Seymour were destroyed along with two other buildings on the east, being stopped after partially destroying the home of Colonel John Johnson near the corner of Aurora Street. David Booth Beers was hurt while tossing water on the flames and later died from his injuries.

In that year there were no hydrants, no fire alarm and no fire fighting apparatus. The only way to extinguish a blaze was with a bucket brigade getting water from the nearest well, creek or flume. History does not tell us how many men and women were laid up for weeks with heart attacks or exertion suffered during that strenuous night.

The citizens really had a fright from that fire but it took a couple of years for the town to pass an ordinance that each building or household must have one full bucket of water for each fireplace in the structure. There was no central heating in those days so practically every room had a fireplace. It was also ruled that each place have an available ladder which was long enough to reach the top of their own roof.

Ithaca became an incorporated village April 2, 1821. A few more small fires were quickly, if not easily, taken care of but the Village fathers decided it was time for a better water supply; so Mr. Bennett was contracted to install an aqueduct from his millpond, in six-mile creek, above the present location of Wilcox Press, to Owego Street and west to Tioga Street, emptying into tubs, or cisterns, at the corners of Aurora and Tioga Streets. A penstock, or shut-off, was installed at each corner so the streets would not become quagmires from the overflow. The wooden pipe was one foot square. Bennett was paid $200 for the installation and for his services in ringing the Village bell when there was a fire. In a short time it was decided to extend the water line to the corner of Owego and Cayuga Streets. He was paid an extra $150 for that.

The volunteers were greatly assisted by that water supply but they needed a better system of putting the liquid on a blaze than tossing it by the bucketful.

**GROWING PAINS**

On June 6, 1823 a bunch of the leading businessmen voted to purchase a
hand pumper, of the gooseneck type, so that water could be forced through a short length of hose and nozzle to the scene of the fire. A fire company was formed and a hand engine ordered from New York at a cost of $350. It arrived near the end of the summer.

Twenty-seven feet of leather hose was also ordered, plus a drag line to pull the engine. The hose cost $27.28 and the rope $2.00. Naturally, it was necessary to have a fire house so a shed was built on Tioga Street at about the location of 109 North Tioga Street. The shed cost $72.50.

The bucket brigade was still needed because the new pumper had no suction system and it was necessary to pour water into the holding tank which held a few gallons. The leather hose was heavy and was carried by the second bunch of men arriving at the station. Those arriving first had the privilege of pulling the engine.

One of the first alarms was presumably on Spencer Street where a cabin burned while Indians sat on the bank watching the strange squirts from a four-wheeled machine.

In the year 1827 two roads ran west to the foot of the hill and a couple of roads were cut on west hill. After Ithaca became a Village the population rapidly increased to 3000 by the year 1828.

Chimney fires were common and the Village Fathers were afraid that one of them might get out of hand so it was decided to obtain another hand pumper. Therefore, on May 12, 1828 another fire company was formed and a new hand engine ordered.

When the new machine arrived it proved so much better than the previous engine the original company wanted it for their own. The new apparatus already had "RESCUE COMPANY TWO" painted on the sides of it, so after much bickering it was agreed that the original company would become company number two and the neophytes would be company number one. Thus company two is the oldest.

The shed, which had been constructed for the first engine on North Tioga Street, was not large enough to accommodate another piece of equipment so a new station was built with room for expansion. It was located at 115 South Tioga Street. The original shed was kept as the fire station for company one.

Ithaca had always been a hard drinking town, and in 1829, restrictions were made on the sale of hard liquor, methylal and hard cider in the grocery stores. About the same time 25,000 bricks were purchased for the construction of cisterns at convenient corners and flagstone sidewalks were installed on Owego Street from Cayuga to Aurora Street.

Trouble arose when chimney or roof fires occurred. Volunteers would scurry to the scene of the alarm, run home for their ladders and return. The bankers, lawyers, merchants and hotel keepers decided it was time for a truck carrying ladders long enough to reach above the first floor so, on February 4, 1831, a hook and ladder company was formed. A hand truck was purchased which could carry ladders and axes. It was installed in the Station on South Tioga Street and called Company Three.

In the year 1832 the new hotel "Clinton House" was opened and became the meeting place for local discussions. The dams, in six-mile creek, were removed because they were blamed for floods on Owego and other streets.

On July 14, 1833 a fire destroyed the buildings in the block bounded by Owego, Aurora, Seneca and Tioga Streets with the exception of those along Tioga Street from Owego to 109 North Tioga. The tavern, on the southeast corner of Seneca and Tioga was saved together with the small building, constructed of wood, at 209 East Seneca Street.

A money panic fell upon the nation in 1836 plunging the country into distress too deep for hope of a speedy recovery. Every business in Ithaca was affected and real estate became a drug on the market. The Village ran into debt although the tax budget was increased. Citizens were not in a position to pay their taxes. Stores and other establishments would erupt with fire from no apparent reason. The trouble was widespread. New York City started a paid fire department in 1837 and, in 1838, Ithaca appointed a fire chief, without pay.

Over the years enough dirt had been drawn from the sandbank on Buell Street, at the foot of east hill, so the street was opened from Aurora to Eddy Street. The name of the street was changed to Buffalo. In removing the dirt an Indian burial ground was uncovered at Parker Place containing fifty skeletons. They were reburied further south. Spring Street and Stewart Avenue were opened from Owego Street to Buffalo, Utica and Tioga Streets were extended to Tompkins Street. Yates and Marshall Streets were opened from Aurora to Lake Avenue.

In 1838 the Village bought a clock for $500. and installed it in the tower of the Baptist Church on the east side of DeWitt Park. On December 19, 1838 Jacob M. McCormick was elected chief of the fire department by the three companies. He held that position for two years until he was elected the President of the Village. When the companies got enough members together to elect another chief they did. Soon they held regular election
meetings the last of December in each year and that was the rule for about the next seventy years.

In 1839 Lake Avenue and Railroad Avenue were extended. The fire limits were adopted for Owego Street which forbade the construction of any wooden buildings within one hundred feet of the street between Aurora and Cayuga street.

**EXPANSION**

Ithaca had a theater, of sorts, located at 206 East Owego Street. It was behind a jewelry store and the business it received never warranted keeping it in operation. The owner of the building was Frank Atwater and he decided to discontinue the theater and install a billiard and ball alley in its place. This he did but Ithaca was among the top ten, in the United States, for per capita liquor consumption. Thus fights broke out in the place.

A little after midnight, on May 28, 1840, one of the fights got nasty and at two o'clock in the morning bottles, chairs and lamps were used in the fracas. A fire broke out and it rapidly spread to the east and north burning everything which had been reconstructed after the fire of 1833 except for the buildings on Tioga Street and the little house on Seneca Street which had been spared in the earlier blaze. The Village Fathers posted a bond for $1,000 to be used for the conviction of the persons fighting and starting the fire. Henry Walson painted a picture of the early stages of that fire showing the hand pumper in operation. A large warehouse in the center of the block was destroyed. It was owned by Mr. McCormick and later the blaze was called the McCormick fire.

The citizens of the Village decided that another fire company was needed so, on March 11, 1842, company number four was organized. They took over the original pumper, being used by Company One, but found it so unsatisfactory another was ordered from Button and Son of Waterford at a cost of $1200.

The new apparatus had only arrived when fire broke out at midnight July 24, 1842 in the rear of the shoe shop at 207 East Owego Street. It burned east to the Chronicle building, which was constructed of brick, west to the corner of Tioga and south to the building next to the firehouse. Water was splashed on the firehouse to preserve it at all costs.

Since most of the fires appeared to be from arson the taxpayers offered rewards for the conviction of people who had committed arson.

The fire stations, on south Tioga Street and North Tioga Street were separated by about four blocks and volunteers had the habit of running to the one on South Tioga at the sound of an alarm. A meeting of the Village Fathers was held in the elegant new Clinton House where it was voted to construct a building which would house all of the fire companies under one roof. Plans were drawn up for a Firemen's Hall with offices on the second floor for Village affairs. It was to be on the northeast corner of Tioga and Seneca Streets, practically the hub of the Village.

The start of construction of Firemen's Hall didn't prevent the breaking out of new fires. They were coming too frequently so another meeting was held at the Clinton House. At that gathering it was agreed that there should be a faster method of getting to the several water supplies in the form of cisterns and wells since fires generally broke out far enough away so bucket brigades were required to bring water to the holding tanks on the engines.

After further discussion it was admitted that another fire apparatus was needed to carry buckets and operated by a team of young sprouts who could run fast and were full of P and V. Thus Company Five was organized March 2, 1843. William Hoyt was instructed to build a light wagon with hooks to carry 100 buckets.

Construction had already started on the new Firemen's Hall at Seneca and Tioga Streets so a new location was necessary for the bucket wagon. The Village purchased the land at 308 East Seneca Street and erected a station, with a tower so wet hose could be hauled up for drying.

A better fire alarm was needed so some of the Village blacksmiths made an iron triangle four inches wide and six feet long. That was hung in the tower constructed on Firemen's Hall, with a rope hanging down through the building to the police station on the ground floor to be yanked and activate the clapper in case of fire.

Let's go back a bit so as to build up to the year of 1845. Luther Gerle came to Ithaca in the early days with a few bucks in his pocket. He started a lumber business and built the Ithaca Hotel. After a few years he was persuaded that prospects were better in Ohio so he sold the hotel, and the lumber business, and headed west.

In 1818 Luther returned to Ithaca. Opportunities for making money were just as good here as in Ohio. He constructed the Columbia Inn on the northwest corner of Owego and Cayuga Streets. When it was completed, in 1819, business flourished but being convenient for the clientele living west of Albany Street the atmosphere of the Inn changed. One evening, in 1831, Guy Clark brought his wife in for considerable elbow bending.

Before morning Guy had swung an axe through her head. He was tried and
hung, the first hanging in Ithaca, on the grounds now occupied by the Fall Creek School. He was buried there but before morning the body had disappeared presumably for the use of a doctor in making further studies in anatomy.

After the Guy Clark episode the Columbia Inn lost its business. The building was torn down and parts of the lumber were bought by a Mr. Carson who constructed a tavern on the west side of Cayuga Street between Owego and Green Streets. People knew where the lumber came from and refused to patronize the tavern so it was sold to a Mr. Franklin who converted it into the “Franklin House.” It still had some sort of stink about it so people would walk on the other side of the street instead of passing it’s door.

During the first week of June 1845 two men, at the bar, were overheard hatching up another murder. On the tenth of June 1845 a person, or persons, unknown, put a match to the straw and hay in the Franklin House stables. That fire consumed everything between Owego and Green Streets from Cayuga to Geneva with the exception of the fronts of the buildings on Owego Street, the building on the northeast corner of Geneva and Green, and the small building on the northwest corner of Cayuga and Green.

In 1840 a stone arch bridge was erected over six-mile creek for the Aurora Street traffic. In 1842 General Robert Halsey was elected chief and Josiah B. Williams assistant chief of the Fire Department. In 1845 a new hand pumper was purchased together with new hose. In 1845 Madison, Hancock and First Street were opened. In the same year a reward of $250 was offered for the discovery of the person who set fire to the plow shop behind the Ithaca Hotel, and to the Franklin stables. The fire at the stables was within a few days of the disappearance of the wife and child of Edward H. Rutloff, the great criminal and philologist.

Tornado Hook and Ladder Company Three chartered the steamboat DeWitt Clinton on August 8, 1845 for a trip to Cayuga. There they took the train to Rochester and, by using various boats and trains, ended up in Detroit. At each town, and city, which they visited, the local fire department turned out in force. Since the Hooks were in full uniform a formal spread was served and punch dipped from a tub in each locality.

The uniform was a green shirt and coat, white and green pants with oil-cloth covered blue caps. Boswell’s Ithaca Brass Band was taken along on the tour together with the department and Village officers, totaling eighty-three in number. During the return trip home, on the sixteenth, practically all of the Ithaca Department went to Aurora for a party and to act as an escort for the Hooks the rest of the way home.

The swamp, in the center of the Village, had been filled in and several individuals moved their business toward the western part of the flats. The banks of the inlet were humming with boatyards and the warehouses did a thriving business. In 1847 several miles of new streets were opened. Sewer lines were installed through Owego Street, Esty and Brindley Streets. Lake Avenue was opened to the steamboat landing.

In 1849 Plain Street was opened from Buffalo to Cascadilla Streets and Mill Street was opened from Albany to Plain Streets. Owego Street was planked and fines of ten dollars were collected for galloping horses on the streets.

Further water supply was needed for fire protection so, in 1850, a cistern was constructed at Cayuga and Mill Streets along side the Presbyterian Church, with the cistern being filled by the rainwater running off the roof. In the same year, Jay, Corn, Wheat, Second, Fulton, Third and Cascadilla Streets were opened. The first committee on fire matters was appointed consisting of Leonard Treman, General H. A. Dowe and Leander Mills paugh. They immediately ordered new hose carts for companies one and two.

The population of the Village was increasing by leaps and bounds so, in 1851, Marshall, Varick and Washington Streets were opened. Madison, Esty, Utica, Meadow and Fourth Streets were extended. Bridges were constructed over the inlet and other streams. The sidewalks were planked.

In 1853 five miles of road were completed and the people in the westend decided it was time for them to have a fire company of their own so, on March 25, 1853, The Hercules Engine Company was formed with the station, and tower, being constructed where McGuire is located at State and Fulton Streets. A hose cart was furnished the new company and a large bell was installed in the tower so as to alert the members and the rest of the Village when there was a fire in the west end. A new bridge was built over the inlet and the first fund was set up for the relief of firemen.

In 1827 the First Baptist Church was constructed on the east side of DeWitt Park. It was 47 by 70 feet in size, occupying the ground where the present church is located. It was first used in 1831. It was built of brick with a basement at a cost of about $7000.

On January 11, 1854 the wind was strong out of the south and the church caught fire from the inside. By the time the hand pumper had suction in the cistern by the Presbyterian Church the fire was out of control. The flying embers ignited the tower of the court house on Mill Street but that blaze was put out. The church burned to the ground, with no insurance. Another church was constructed on the same spot for $10,000 and used for
several years until it was removed and the present one erected. The court	house was torn down in that year of 1854 and another built in its place.

In 1854 the Central School was built and dedicated. In 1856 the control of
DeWitt Park was turned over to the Village Board and during the same year
companies one and four were disbanded and reorganized because of the
disgrace brought about by the immoral use of the company rooms.

In 1857 the triangle, hung in the tower of Firemen’s Hall, and used as a fire
alarm, was discontinued and church bells were rung instead. Also, in 1857,
one of the worst floods this area has known swept down from the hills
taking away businesses and people along six-mile creek.

In 1858 a bell was hung in the tower for fire alarm purposes. It weighed
2000 pounds and cost $684. It was the first fire bell the Village had and was
credited, from all around, as being the most perfect alarm available. It was
cast steel forged by Naylor, Vickers & Co. of Sheffield, England, F. Riene’s
patent #715.

In 1859 a new hook and ladder was purchased for company three at a cost of
$720. Goats were no longer allowed on the streets, the fine being ten cents
apiece. They were forced to go north of Cascadilla creek in the goose pasture.

On June 25, 1860 fire laws were adopted by the Village and it became
obligatory for property owners to sweep to the center of the street, in front
of their location, every Saturday morning. Land was added to the north end
of the Village cemetery and a large plot was presented to the fire
department.

The population of the Village increased to over 7000 by the year 1865 with a
number of the people moving to the goose pasture and further north,
mostly along Linn, Aurora and Tioga Streets. The northerners decided
it was time for them to have their own fire company so one was organized
December 31, 1863.

A small station was built for the apparatus on Lake Street opposite the
intersection of Lincoln Street. They answered a few calls in the next year
but found that, in winter, the ice on the streets caused the truck to go
around the men and pull them down the hill. The swearing of the men
didn’t straighten up the truck. After two years of that a new station was
constructed at 207 Queen Street, on the flats, so both men and truck felt
better. The cost of the station was $1500.

In 1863 two of the companies were reprimanded by the Village Fathers for
taking their pumps from the rooms to places where they washed out a
couple of brothels in the Village. They were instructed that the Village had

a committee to look into those problems and the fire companies were to
keep their fingers off.

In 1867 the name of Owego Street was changed to State Street. Cisterns, or
reservoirs, were being installed in various locations around the Village.
Most of the fires were kept to a minimum during the next few years. The
only trouble was that the bystanders wanted to get in the way of the firemen
so Company Eight was organized January 31, 1868 to stretch ropes and
control the onlookers at the scene of an alarm.

Ezra Cornell donated the Library Building to the community and Captain
Buckbee was appointed as the caretaker, with rooms on the top floor. In the
evenings the Captain would sit in the tower of the Library watching the
lights of the Village. The bell, in the tower of Village Hall, was anchored
down and a wire was strung from the clapper to the tower of the Library
where the Captain sat during the evenings. If he saw a flame he would
yank the wire so as to ring the bell. The first time he did that was for a fire
November 14, 1869.

During the same period rockets were used to designate whether more help
was required at an alarm or the incoming apparatus should turn around
and return to their station. Operations were going so smoothly the chief
stated that the muscle power on the hand pumps was better than any other
system.

The members of Hercules Company became provoked because they had
very few calls from their own district and the majority of times they hauled
their equipment out for an alarm up town the fire was out, so in 1870 they
disbanded.

The Village had fourteen cisterns for fire purposes. They were located at:

1. Pleasant Street, east of Aurora.
2. State Street, corner of Aurora.
3. State Street, corner of Tioga.
4. State Street, corner of Cayuga.
5. State Street, corner of Plain.
6. Fayette Street, corner of Green.
7. Albany Street, corner of Seneca.
8. Geneva Street, corner of Mill.
9. Cayuga Street, corner of Mill.
10. Farm Street, west of Aurora.
11. Buffalo Street, corner of Spring.
12. Under Firemen’s Hall.
13. Seneca Street, east of Spring.
14. State Street, east of Corn.
The working force of the Fire Department consisted of one Chief Engineer, two Assistant Engineers, a Treasurer, five hand pumpers, one hook and ladder, one bucket company, and a company of fire police, with the manpower numbering, in all, four hundred and twenty-six men.

CONFLAGRATION

The year of 1871 was probably the most historic in the annals of the Village. At the annual election of officers for the fire department, held the last of December 1870, Barnum R. Williams was elected chief engineer. The Department filed with the State Legislature and became incorporated on April 1, 1871.

In January 1871 there were three silent alarms with minor losses. On February 18, 1871 an alarm was sounded for the Presbyterian Church where flickering gas jets shone through the red panes in the windows giving the idea that the church was on fire. The choir was rehearsing and there was no fire.

At 1 AM Friday, the seventh of April, fire was discovered in the rear basement of Andrus, McClain & Lyons' Book Store. The fire had gained so much headway it was impossible to save the building and it soon was a wreck.

The following day a stubborn fire was in a barn south of Green Street next to the lumber yard of Howland & Van Houter and other wooden buildings. The firemen confined the fire to the first barn with the exception of a small roof fire on the barn next door.

During the warm spring weather the inside of W. E. Palmer's Clothing Store had been painted and the doors and hatches to the upper floors were left open to air it out. An incendiary went to work and by 1 AM April 25th a fire had gained considerable headway. Five streams of water were put on it from the front and back keeping the loss down to $20,000.

There were two small fires at Eddy's Tannery and one on the west end of Cascadilla Street in a small barn. All of these happened during extremely dry weather.

Most everyone had a job and, due to the hot weather, the saloons made money. The official opening of the Ithaca and Athens Railroad was on August 21, 1871. It was a gala affair, with apparently most of the town and the area closing up shop to celebrate the occasion. It may have been the start of a two day drunk for the county.

That same evening, the 21st of August, some men chartered the boat Lilie for an outing on the lake. When they returned to the inlet, at ten o'clock, the boat was nearly capsized because a cable had been strung across the inlet from bank to bank so it might possibly turn the craft over. It didn't quite succeed but no doubt suspicions ran high as to who was responsible.

As mentioned before, the year of 1871 was hot and dry with temps working on short wicks. The Patrick O'Leary's lived on the northeast corner of DeKoven and Jefferson Streets in Chicago. They had all sprawled out on their beds early but the neighbors, in the other side of the house, were having a party. It was rumored that at 9:30 PM one of the celebrants went to the O'Leary's cow shed to swipe some milk to make oyster stew. The smart cow was lying down so the intruder placed his hand on the ground and tried to raise the cow. The tusks sent the lantern flying and started a fire. That was a rumor and later proved false. The big Chicago fire started about seven blocks away killing 250 people. The Peshtigo, Wisconsin, forest fire was in process at the same time as the Chicago fire and ended up with the death of 1,182 people.

Shortly after midnight, on the 23rd of August 1871, fire broke out in the building next to the Aurora Street bridge over Six-mile creek. It originated in the turning shop of T. Hollister, on the bank of the creek. The heavy wind, which was blowing from the southeast, spread the flames to the carpenter shop of Hyatt & Oltz, on the west, and Cowdry's carriage shop on the north, from which points it spread rapidly in both directions.

Herculean efforts were put forth to save the Ithaca Hotel, which for a time promised success, but a sudden change of the wind, and the increasing heat defied all opposition and it was clearly evident that Ithaca was doomed to have a disastrous conflagration.

The local forces, using hand operated pumpers, were unable to control the flames so Owego was telegraphed for aid. Before that help arrived the flames had burned their way through to Tioga Street, cleaning the south side of State Street to Culver and Bates store where the high walls and metal roof prevented further spread in that direction. On Tioga Street, everything was burned south of Culver and Bates storehouse, and the Wilgus block. Burning west on the south side of Green Street it cleaned out Eddy's Tannery, Howland & Van Houter's Planing Mill and lumber yard, and a small house owned by Mr. Eddy.

At three in the morning the D L & W unloaded the Owego steamer at the top of Aurora Street. It was braked down the hill to the Clinton Street bridge where water was drafted from the creek and hose stretched to Cayuga and Green Streets. In the meantime the north side of Green was on fire, burning to the residence of Stephen Atwater.

At that critical moment the Owego steamer went into operation, with
eighty men, headed by their chief C. F. Hill, and ex-chief Joe DeWitt. The fire was subdued. Losses were sustained by fifty-nine places of business. Before the smoke ceased a special election was held authorizing $10,000 to be spent for the purchase of two steamers and appropriate hose.

Salesmen came pouring into town eager to sell steam apparatus to Ithaca. The Fire Department Committee was sent on a tour of investigation finally deciding on the purchase of two Silsby Manufacturing Company’s rotary engines of the third size. The losses from the fire of 1871, based on the valuable dollar of those times, was $185,000. Not all of the claims were paid since too many of the insurance companies went into bankruptcy from the flood of claims, mostly from Chicago.

CASCADILLA AND FOREST CITY

The two new steamers were built in Seneca Falls and came to Ithaca via the steamboat Sheldrake on November 10, 1871. The entire department met the boat at Green’s Landing, across from where Johnson’s Boatyard is now located, and they were placed in charge of the companies to which they were assigned.

One steamer went to Company Number One and was christened “Cascadilla” with the other going to Company Two being christened the “Forest City.” Each steamer weighed 6000 pounds and was designed to be drawn by horses. Since no horses were available to the fire companies the members pulled the apparatus by hand. They dragged the heavy machines through the streets, in triumph, to the corner of State and Tioga Streets where they were given a partial trial using the old hose since the new lengths had not yet arrived. The trial proved perfectly satisfactory.

After the arrival of the engines it was discovered that the quarters in Firemen’s Hall were too small to accomodate them. Four years earlier the Village had purchased the lot on the east of the half from the Episcopal Church for $500. A new building was erected at that location large enough to house the two of them. It was ready before the weather became too cold for safety but the interior remained unfinished until Spring. The new engine house cost $1713.56 and the engines were bought for $4000 each.

Before the end of 1871 the new hose was received, amounting to 1500 feet at a cost of $1800. The Village had fifteen cisterns and one hydrant, that being located at Cascadilla Mill, at the foot of University Avenue. It was installed by Mr. Williams and 250 feet of old hose from Companies One and Two were located nearby which were at the disposal of the Fire Department. It was deemed that the central portions of the Village were well protected by water for fire fighting purposes, but north and south of the center, and west of Aurora Street, there were very meager facilities.

During the month of May 1872 there was a fire at the house of Mr. Johnson, in the north end. Company Two’s steamer, the Forest City, was placed on the Lake Street Bridge over Fall Creek to take suction and pump through a long lay of hose. The vibration of the pump collapsed the bridge sending the steamer and people into the drink. One man died from his injuries. The steamer was recovered and repaired while the bridge was replaced.

Six thousand pounds of apparatus was a lot of weight for a few fellows to drag to a fire so a gentleman, living at State and Quarry Streets, said he would bring his two mules to the fire station at the sound of an alarm. That arrangement didn’t last long because invariably the men would rather drag the steamer to the fire than wait thirty minutes for the mules.

After the fire of 1871 people in the west end reinstated their fire company and, on October 31, 1872, Number Six’s was reorganized as the Sprague Steamer Company. A Clapp and Jones Steamer was ordered for a cost of $3700 and was installed in a new station, on west State Street, about where the present one is located. A new bell was hung in the tower to alert members, and the rest of the town, when there was an alarm of fire. It was the second largest bell used by the department. The Clapp and Jones steamer was rebuilt by American LaFrance in 1896 and is the one located at this time in Central Fire Headquarters.

The Ithaca Water Works agreed to install some hydrants and, by the end of 1873, ten had been located in the town. Hose could be attached to the hydrants so the Bucket Cart of Company Five was discarded and a four wheeled hose cart purchased in its place. The apparatus was constructed by E. Leverich of Brooklyn at a cost of $775 and placed in service the latter part of 1873. It carried 600 feet of rubber-lined hose, cast off from other companies, and was in poor condition.

In the year 1875 an aqueduct was run from upper Buttermilk creek to a reservoir at the top of Turner Place where the Morse Chain Company Service Building is now located. That reservoir held over one million gallons of water, and by the end of the year the town had twenty-one hydrants in service. The apparatus, of the department, consisted of three third class steamers, one hook and ladder, one axecart, one hand engine and six hose carts carrying 4000 feet of hose, part of which was worthless.

On June 15, 1875 a call came from Newfield for help since the town was on fire. Company One’s steamer, the “Cascadilla,” was taken to the railroad yards with the hose carts from Companies One and Six. They were loaded on flatcars, taken to Newfield Station, unloaded and since there were no horses available the men dragged the equipment two miles up the hill, arriving one and a half hours after the call. The fire had burned itself out...
and the men were asked to remain for lunch, which they refused, and returned to Ithaca the way they had come.

Garbage, debris and dirt from the sandbanks had been used to fill in the swamps on the south side of town, as had been done on the north and west sides, so it was decided to move the fairgrounds from Railroad Avenue to South Meadow Street. That was done and the Ithaca Calendar Clock Company built a factory on the old site of the fairgrounds.

The business of the Clock Factory was booming but, at 3AM, on February 12, 1876, a fire started in the building and completely consumed it. There were no hydrants available in the near area. The ruins were cleaned out and a new structure immediately erected. It is the same building which is at Dey and Adams Streets today.

BELL TROUBLES

The last two weeks of 1875 were very warm. It is said that the grass grew two inches and that, on New Years Eve, men celebrated in their shirtsleeves. All of the bells in town were rung to celebrate the start of the centennial year of the spirit of seventy-six. Even the fire bell which had been installed in 1858 was rung with such gusto it cracked.

That bell, which was cracked, is presently mounted in Thompson Park, in the 500 block of north Cayuga Street. It was used from 1858 to January 1, 1876 and was cast steel from Naylor, Vickers and Company of Sheffield, England. F. Riepen's patent #715. On May 9, 1876 the bell was removed from the tower and a new Meneely bell put in its place. Village President W. W. Esdy and Chief of Police B. R. Williams rang it for the first time at 6 PM that evening. A test alarm was put through on May 10, 1876. The firemen, and the public, were never satisfied with the tone of the new bell as compared with the one ahead of it.

On the 29th of August a telegram was received from the town of Spencer asking for assistance since the town was on fire. Company Six put their steamer on a flatcar along with several volunteers. An hour and a half after the call they arrived in Spencer. The fire had burned out. The men from Ithaca had breakfast and cigars, loaded their equipment back on the flatcar and returned home.

Back in 1845 Company Three bought an axc cart to carry extinguishers and axes. It wore out and was replaced with a four-wheeler. Being a light cart it could really roll if pulled by the right fellows, but it had tough use and was replaced in 1874 with one built by Watkins and Martindale of Ithaca. It was a two-wheeler with long spokes and since most of the sidewalks were planked it was easier and better to run it on the sidewalks than on the muddy streets. Most of the landowners had picket fences along their property and, when answering an alarm, running along the sidewalks the spokes would tear out some of the fences. It finally wore out and was discarded in 1880.

The bell, which was installed May 9, 1876, had a short life. In the early morning of May 20, 1876 it started to ring loud and clear for a barn fire but it cracked before completing the alarm. A new one was ordered and, in the meantime, the churchbells were pressed into service, which necessitated the use of a fast runner and the arousing of the various bellringers.

The new bell arrived during the summer from Sheffield, England. It weighed $160 pounds and required a ramp to be constructed from Buffalo Street to the top of the tower so as to skid it up into place. It was tugged up and hooked in on August 7, 1878 being rung the same afternoon for a test. It was more sturdy than the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia which weighed only 2080 pounds.

Ithaca's new bell was a faithful one being used until the seven PM test on November 23, 1964 when it was replaced by the sounding of horns and the use of radios. The bell is now mounted on West Green Street in front of Central Fire Headquarters.

CONVENTIONS

The New York State Veteran Firemens Association had their annual convention in Ithaca with a parade being held on August 22, 1878. That was the fifth annual convention of the State Association and, in those days, most of the members, and their brothers, went in force along with their equipment. They relied on the law of averages. In 1878 Ithaca had thirty alarms so that came to two and a half per month. Having the truck out of town for a few days was a fairly safe bet. The out of town companies figured the same way.

The procedure was for a local company to be responsible for a couple of the visiting out of towners. During the Convention of 1878 Cayuga Steamer Co. No. 1 was host to Hyatt's Military Band and Keuka Steamer Co. No. 1 of Penn Yan.

Rescue Steamer Co. No. 2 was host to Hadley's Brass Band of Rochester and Ontario Steamer Co. 3 of Canandaigua. Toronado Hook and Ladder Co. No. 3 was host to the Union Cornet Band of Buffalo and the Ellicott Hook and Ladder Co. 1 of Jamestown.

Eureka Hose Company No. 4 was host to the forty-ninth Regimental Band
and Neptune Hose Co. No. 1 of Auburn. Torrent Hose Co. 5 was host to the fifty-fourth regimental band of Rochester and the Prendergast Hose Company No. 1 of Jamestown.

Sprague Steamer Co. 6 was host to the Troy Cornet Band and the Os-co-luwa Steamer Company of Troy. Cataract Company 7 was host to the Military Band and Excelsior Engine Company of Trumansburg.

Horses and buggies were normally hired to carry the visitors on a tour of the city and the campus. In the evening fancy setups were made with Companies Three and Five generally chartering a boat to carry them to Sheldrake where the Cayuga Lake House was used by the members of Company Three, with their guests, and the Sheldrake House was used by Company Five with their guests.

The parades were not short, normally averaging about five miles in length. During the 1878 Convention it was calculated that 2000 men were in line and 25000 watched the parade.

One month after the Convention, on September 21, 1878, the barn of George McChain, behind the Boardman House at 120 East Buffalo Street, caught fire, burning it and four others. It also blistered the window sills on the Baptist Church.

On Sunday, the 30th of April, 1882 fire was discovered in a small building connected with the glass works on third street. The nearest hydrant was half a mile away and the closest cistern was at Second and Madison Streets. The main buildings, and most of the smaller ones were destroyed.

At the end of the year 1882 the Fire Department consisted of one hook and ladder truck, two Silsby steamers, one Clapp and Jones steamer, one Button hand engine, two hose carriages (four wheeled), three spaders and one jumper, (two wheeled carts). There were thirty-six hydrants and sixteen cisterns. Four of the cisterns were filled from the water works system and the rest by runoff from springs and roofs.

NEW STATIONS

During 1882 the quarters of Company Five, on East Seneca Street, were deemed unsatisfactory so a new building was constructed just east of the northeast corner of State and Geneva Streets. It was a brick building with a reading room in the rear of the apparatus room and a handsome parlor and bunk room on the second floor. The former quarters, on East Seneca Street, were used for drying hose in the tower and the storage of obsolete equipment.

The membership of the companies in 1883 consisted of 405 men, some of them "sidewalk firemen." Cayuga Steamer Company One had 32, Rescue Steamer Two had 56, Tornado Hook and Ladder Three had 55, Eureka Hose Four had 53, Torrent Hose Five had 59, Sprague Steamer Six had 49, Cataract Hose Seven had 39 and the Protective Police had 40.

Company One was stationed in the east room of Firemen's Hall with one Silsby rotary steamer and one four wheeled hose carriage with 900 feet of cotton hose. The Company's parlor was located in the south part of the building over the truck room of Company Three.

Company Two was located in the brick building adjoining Firemen's Hall, on the east, with one Silsby rotary steamer and a four-wheeled hose carriage carrying 800 feet of cotton hose. Stables had been fitted up in the rear of the building where nightly a pair of horses were kept. A heater was installed for the purpose of keeping warm water in the boiler on the steamer at all times. A bunk room was located on the second floor of the building.

Company Three kept their apparatus in the room next to the police station. It was necessary to build an addition on the back of the building to give room for the truck with its ladders. The parlors of the Company were in the northeast corner of the building over Companies One and Four's apparatus rooms.

Company Four was located in the middle room of Firemen's Hall, between Ones and Threes. They had a four-wheeled hose carriage plus a two-wheeled jumper. They had 700 feet of linen hose in fair condition. The parlor was on the first floor behind the apparatus room.

Company Five was located in their new brick building on State Street just east of Geneva with their four-wheeled hose carriage and 700 feet of linen hose which was in fair condition. They had a reading room behind the cart room and a handsome parlor and bunk room on the second floor.

Company Six was located on West State Street, near Fulton, with a Clapp and Jones piston pump steamer and a two-wheeled jumper carrying 800 feet of cotton hose and 300 feet of linen hose. The pump, in the steamer, had been replaced and a new suction hose purchased placing the steamer in the best condition of any in the Village.

Company Seven was located on Queen Street with a Button hand engine and a four-wheeled hose carriage with 300 feet of linen hose. The hand engine was formerly used by Company Four and only saw use in fighting fires in the neighborhood. The station was the poorest of any which housed fire department apparatus. Several attempts had been made in the
past to get water piped into the quarters but without success. The Company had no facilities for washing hose after it was used or for flushing a toilet which they didn't have.

In the year 1884 it was decided that it was a waste of time and money trying to repair the pump, and apparatus, of Company One so it became a hose company with a four-wheeled cart carrying 600 feet of hose; 50 feet of it being rubber lined and the rest cotton hose.

All of the stations, except for Fives, had a tower with a bell so as to alert the members and the rest of the companies in case of an alarm of fire.

At 2:10 AM on the seventh day of November 1884, the bell in the tower of Company Seven rang rapidly and, when the members, and other firemen, arrived it was found that the entire firehouse was on fire causing the loss of the building, the last hand pumper in the department and all of the other equipment. No mention was made of who set the fire or who rang the bell. Temporary quarters were established in a frame building near the paper mill opposite the intersection of Lincoln and Lake Streets. Company Seven was given a two-wheeled jumper, which had formerly been used by Company Four, with five hundred feet of cotton hose.

During the year of 1885 a new station was constructed for Cataract at 1012 North Tioga Street. The quarters were convenient and pleasant with a reading room in the rear of the cart room with a bunk room and parlor on the second floor.

The Protective Police had their quarters in a parlor located in the southwestern corner of Firemen’s Hall, over the Police Station. They had no apparatus.

The Chief of the department, in 1886, was Edmund E. Robinson. He made several recommendations for the improvement of the fire safety in the Village. In 1886 there were forty-one hydrants and sixteen cisterns. The number of volunteers had dropped to 353. The Village had a territory of about four square miles, the greater portion of which was covered with buildings, mostly of wooden frame construction.

The department had 4,200 feet of hose; 5,000 feet of cotton hose in good condition, 500 feet of cotton hose in fair condition, and 300 feet of cotton hose and 400 feet of linen hose in old condition which would probably last only a short time.

The Village, north of Farm and Cascadilla Streets, had only four hydrants. The hose carriages carried 500 or 550 feet of hose. Across the street from the Clock Factory was a cistern on the corner of Auburn and Lewis Streets. Any steamer could pump it dry in ten minutes.

From Company Seven’s quarters to the nearest hydrant was 1125 feet. The next hydrants were 2500 feet from Seven’s. The nearest hydrant to the Clock Factory and the Autophone Works was 1750 feet. West of Cascadilla creek and north of Cascadilla Street there were no hydrants. There were no hydrants within a half mile of the Glass Works and it was 1500 feet from the railroad shops to the nearest hydrant with the second closest more than 2000 feet away.

The system of turning in fire alarms needed immediate attention. It depended on the telephone and that was very unsatisfactory. If a fire broke out and a man ran to the nearest telephone exchange, if he was fortunate enough to know its location, he would hang away on the button for two or three minutes then say there was a fire on Geneva Street. He then ran around and rang the gong telling someone else that the fire was on Green Street. The bell, in the tower, would ring and when someone asked where the fire was the answer would be someplace on Wheat Street. If the fire was at right and firemen were awakened by the big bell they didn’t know whether the fire was at Mose Van Drool’s or at the Shoofly depot.

FIRE ALARM BOXES
The Chief encouraged the installation of fire alarm boxes which could repeat the number of the location four times and ring the big bell plus the small bells in each of the fire houses. Such a system would save ten, twenty or thirty minutes from the time the firemen took in reaching the location of a blaze.

The Chief also suggested that heaters be placed in the steamer stations so that hot water could be kept in the boilers at all times and, when answering an alarm, the ignition of the excelsior had steam ready when reaching the location of the alarm.

In 1888 Ithaca officially became a city and the title of Chief Engineer was changed to Chief of the Fire Department.

On August 30th, at 11 PM the stables, owned by E. G. Phelps, situated on East Seneca Street, two doors above Aurora, ignited from suspected arson. It burned the stables before hose was laid from the nearest hydrant. The former quarters of Company Five, next door, were consumed burning road scrapers, wagons, and 1150 feet of hose.

In 1890 Chief Frank Cole followed the ideas of his predecessor in requesting better fire protection. He wanted fire alarm boxes, more available hose, more hydrants and other items.

The steamer of Company One was worn out and ready for the scrap pile so it was suggested that a chemical engine be purchased, and placed in service
since it could probably put out most of the fires while the rest of the
department were still arriving.

The fire alarm system had no definite signal system so the Chief divided the
City into seven districts, with zone numbers to alleviate the problems of a
fire alarm.

The first district comprised all that portion west of Geneva Street, south of
Seneca Street, extending from Geneva to west of the inlet.

The second district was that portion east of Geneva Street, south of Seneca
Street and west of Stewart Avenue. The third district was the portion north
of Seneca Street, west of Cayuga Street, south of Cascadilla Street, and east
of the inlet.

The fourth District was north of Seneca Street, east of Cayuga Street, south
of Farm Street and west of Stewart Avenue. District Five was north of
Cascadilla Street, west of Cascadilla creek and east of the inlet.

District Six was all of that portion east of Cascadilla creek, north of Farm
Street and west of Stewart Avenue. The seventh district was all of that
portion east of Stewart Avenue.

When there was an alarm of fire the police would ring the bell, and if they
knew the district, they would ring the number for that area. If they didn’t
know they would guess at it.

The cisterns were being filled so by the end of 1890 there were fourteen
with seventy-two hydrants.

The year 1891 saw the addition of sixteen fire alarm boxes. They were put
in service on July 21, 1891 with the testing of box 23 at State and Cayuga
Streets. The alarm circuit consisted of ten miles of wire, forty cells in the
batteries, plus many other items like gongs, galvanometers, indicators etc.

The sixteen alarm boxes were different than the type used at present. At
that time it was necessary to have a key to open the box and turn in an
alarm.

Box 16 was at the corner of Aurora and Pleasant Streets with the keys at the
residences of Adelbert Mackey, G. F. Bardsley and J. A. McCauley.

Box 18 was on the corner of Stewart and Seneca with the keys at the
residences of W. B. Georgia, George Pew and Patrick Diffin.

Box 23 was at the corner of Cayuga and State with keys at Treman, King &
Co.’s store, M. Casey’s hotel, Clinton House, Alex Smith’s livery and C. S.
Seaman’s livery.

Box 24 was at the corner of Clinton and Albany with keys at the residences
of C. G. Selover and H. L. Haskin.

Box 25 was at State and Plain with keys at McClure & Fisher’s drug store,
J. F. Tetley’s residence and the Williams Brothers Machine Works.

Box 26 was at Company Six on west State Street with keys at William
Ryan’s saloon, M. Cleary’s Hotel and the Police Station. The cop on the
boat in the westend would carry the key.

Box 27 was at Buffalo and West Port Streets with keys at the Lehigh Valley
House and the Lehigh Valley Depot.

Box 28 was at Esty’s Tannery with the keys located at the same place.

Box 34 was on the corner of Albany and Mill Streets with keys at T. S.
Thompson’s store, William Heggie’s residence and the Gas Works.

Box 35 was at the Gas Works with keys in the same location.

Box 37 was at the corner of Auburn and Lewis Streets with keys at the Clock
Factory and James Norton’s grocery.

Box 43 was at Mill and Linn Streets with keys at the residences of T. B.
Campbell, J. E. Van Natta and Frank Cole.

Box 45 was at the corner of Aurora and Yates with keys at the residences of
William Knickersbocker, John French and William Harrington.

Box 46 was at Aurora and Railroad Avenue with keys at Will Tree’s
grocery, S. H. Laney’s mill, Enz & Miller’s mill and Paetow’s saloon.

Box 47 was at Tioga and Seneca with keys at City Hall, the Tompkins
House, the First National Bank and at the Police Department.

The holders of the keys were given specific instructions as to their use, as the
following:

1. Keep your key in a safe and convenient place.
2. Be sure there is a fire before sending an alarm.
3. Never give an alarm from any box for a fire seen from a distance.
4. Upon positive information of a fire near your box unlock the door
and pull the hook gently all the way down, (once only) and let it go.
After pulling the box wait at the box to direct the firemen to the fire,
also to prevent malicious persons from tampering with the box and
to receive the key when it is released.
5. Never let the key go out of your possession unless to some responsible
person, for the purpose of giving an alarm, or when called for by the
proper authorities.
6. Key holders changing their residence or place of business will please
return their keys to the Chief Engineer.
7. By no means leave them with a new tenant.
New hydrants were added during 1891 bringing the total to 73 in use. Some of the new hydrants installed were of the type with a connection for a steamer suction hose.

A department running card was set up which had Companies 1, 4, 5, and truck 3 answering all alarms. Steamer and hose No. 2 responded to boxes 16, 18, 23, 36, 37, 43, 46 and 47. Steamer and hose No. 6 responded to boxes 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 34, 36 and 47.

Hose Company Seven responded to boxes 30, 37, 45 and 46. Companies not responding to a first alarm were to remain at their quarters thirty minutes unless a recall was sounded sooner.

When a portion of the department answered an alarm, and another was given from another box those remaining in quarters would immediately respond.

The first alarm from a pull box was on Saturday, October 22, 1891 at 1:30 PM with an alarm from box 35. Fire was in the barn of Adam Bopp on Madison Street. The barn was destroyed and the house adjoining partially destroyed. The alarm was pulled by Alderman William Eaton, of the third ward. Twelve hundred feet of hose was used and the fire was caused by children playing with matches.

When the fire alarm system was installed the wires were run from tree to tree. Several breaks in the line occurred, so in 1892, poles were erected and the wires transferred to them. A system of fire alarm signals was set up which was:

One stroke denotes a break in the line.

Two strokes called Steamer and Hose No. 2.

Three strokes indicated the fire was out, or under control.

Six strokes called Steamer and Hose Company Six.

Seven strokes called for Hose Company Seven.

Ten strokes called out the entire department.

The Unitarian Church was located at 314 East Buffalo Street, at the corner of Terrace Place. An oil stove overurned at 3:15 PM January 30, 1893, ignited the whole building, destroying it. It was rebuilt on the northwest corner of Aurora and Buffalo Streets.

NERITON IS BORN

The growth of Cornell University instigated the construction of residences and business blocks along Eddy Street, Dryden Road, Stewart Avenue, College Avenue and the intersecting streets. Several fires occurred in the area, with most of them serious since it took twenty or thirty minutes for the apparatus from downtown to arrive. Also, there was only one hydrant, located on Cascadilla Place. People demanded fire protection for East Hill.

The William H. Sage Fire Company was organized September 19, 1894 and during the October meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners forty-seven men were signed up as firemen. A station was built on Dryden Road in the location of the present First National Bank and Trust Company parking lot.

At the meeting of the members February 5, 1895 the name of the company was changed to Neriton Fire Company No. 9. On May 16, 1895 a new Holloway Chemical Engine arrived and was placed in service. It had twin 35 gallon tanks and cost $1100. The station, on Dryden Road, had been constructed at a cost of about $1200. One of the hose carts was transferred from downtown to the new company putting them in business. The first alarm answered was practically a false alarm since it was for hot ashes behind the Sibley shops. That was at 12:45 PM on Sunday, June 9, 1895.

There were five alarm boxes on east hill. Box 18 at Stewart and Seneca; box 52 at State and Eddy; box 53 at Eddy and Buffalo; box 54 at Dryden and Heustis and box 56 at the Cornell Campus business office. The boxes had to be opened with a key and, normally, three keys for each box would be located at a house or business place in the immediate area.

In 1899 a water closet was installed in the quarters of Company 9 and boozed to the city sewer line. A 30 foot extension ladder was placed in the apparatus room and a bell was hung in the tower as an alarm bell. The annex way and entrance were paved with brick.

At 11 PM January 4, 1899 there was a false alarm and at 4 AM, on the 5th box 53 was sounded. Most of the firemen figured it was another false so didn't step lively. Box 53 was sounded again followed by box 47 and the members took off. The Kappa Alpha Fraternity house was on fire and ended up in ruins.

At 5:55 AM on January 29, 1900 an alarm from box 54 was for a fire at the Delta Chi Fraternity House, 315 Heustis Street. The building and contents were destroyed with the fire spreading to the house of Edward Tallby, on the north, completely wrecking the third floor. Several students had been sleeping on the third floor of the fraternity and were obliged to jump to the frozen ground. All were more or less injured but John Lunegori, one of the students, was so badly injured he died a few days later.

The owner of the property, Mrs. Jonathan Snaithe, later sold to John Gainey. He had property across the street on the corner of Dryden Road and asked the city to trade the land used by Company Nine for what he had acquired on Heustis Street. It took the city some time to accept.
CLINTON HOUSE

An alarm was sounded at 4:15 AM on November 12, 1900 calling the department to the New York Veterinary College. The fire was on the upper floor but, due to the low water pressure in the campus hydrants, the fire gained good headway. Streams from Steamers two and six soon checked the blaze in the main laboratory on the third floor. The entire building was, however, more or less damaged by water.

Box 23 announced a fire for the Clinton House at 5:30 PM March 23, 1901. A second alarm was sounded and the entire department responded. The building was owned by Mrs. Charles Bush and was operated by Grant McDonald as a hotel. The fire originated on the third floor and rapidly worked its way to the air-chamber between the third and fourth floor. These two floors were totally destroyed and the rest of the building damaged by smoke and water. The cause of the fire was said to be crossed wires but that was argued for some time since other people said there were no wires in that part of the building.

The rear and the first floor of the Cayuga House were gutted by flames at 2:15 AM October 27, 1901 which caused the death of H. L. Gale from smoke.

A general alarm of ten raps on the bell hadn’t been sounded since 1857 but at 10:40 PM December 14, 1901 it was sounded again for a major fire. The dams in six-mile creek washed out; the Street Railway paint shop tumbled into the creek with two trolley cars. The carpenter shop of Driscoll’s was washed away followed by the dry kiln and the lumber. D. B. Stewart’s barn and the Cornelii Lavery on South Iroga Street dropped into the stream; the F. H. Brook’s planing mill disintegrated and a dike gave way allowing water to cross Cayuga Street and go down Clinton Street.

People had borrowed keys to turn in fire alarms and had neglected to return them. Some had made copies of the keys. A few false alarms had been turned in and it was thought that a new type of box should be installed. On September 1, 1901 the new style of boxes were received and the first one installed at State and Cayuga, box 23. It was given a test the same day. Instead of running to the corner saloon for a key a person only had to break the glass and turn the key which was inside. It rang the alarm.

AUTOMOTIVE EQUIPMENT

A few of the men around town, who were better off, plus a small number of students, were driving the new fangled autos. At 7:30 PM on June 27, 1903 box 37 came in for an alarm at 411 Willow Avenue. It wasn’t much of a fire but a gentleman, living on north Cayuga Street, cranked up his Locomotive and when the men from Company Four came by with their heavy hose cart he told them to climb on the back end drove them, towing the cart, to the fire. He hung around and towed them back to the station after the fire was out. The idea was good and Company Five gave it plenty of thought.

Changes had been made during the last few years in the operation of the fire department. Stables were installed and horses bedded down overnight for use in drawing the equipment. Members took turns bunking in the various stations, with horses, so as to hitch them up in case of an alarm. During the day the horses were used by the city to pull garbage trucks and other equipment. If there was an alarm during the day the horses, with wagons in tow, were raced to their respective stations unhitched and hooked up to the fire apparatus. That generally took twenty or thirty minutes often spilling garbage along the streets while going to their duty as fire horses.

The steamer of Company One was worn out and was finally discarded. The remaining apparatus of the department consisted of:

- One Chief’s buggy.
- One combination wagon with double 35 gallon tanks.
- One chemical engine with double 35 gallon tanks.
- Two hose wagons.
- One third size LaFrance steamer.
- One third size Clapp & Jones steamer.
- One Hayes aerial truck.
- Two four-wheeled hose carriages.
- Three two-wheeled hose cars.
- One supply wagon.
- Two four-wheeled hose carriages in reserve.
- One two-wheeled hose cart in reserve.
- Twelve horses.
- Ten drop harnesses.
- Twelve blankets.
- Eight whips.
- Three white rubber coats.
- Three pair rubber boots.
- Three service hats.
- Three uniforms, consisting of caps, belts and coats, badges and trumpets; also three sets of release keys for night alarm service.
- 700 feet of condemned single jacket hose.
- 6250 feet of double jacket hose.
- 400 feet of one inch chemical hose.

In 1905 the city exchanged the lot occupied by Company Nine for the lot on
Heustis Street owned by Gainey. Plans were made for replacing the small wooden building on Heustis Street with a brick structure. That would give additional room for fire apparatus on east hill.

The city had troubles in those days finding the money to pay for new equipment or horses. If the company purchased new apparatus, or horses, the city generally made space available in the respective stations. A second floor was added to the building of Rescue Steamer Two plus a concrete floor for the apparatus room. Stables were placed in the quarters of Tornado Hook and Ladder Three to house the team they bought. The teams would not be used for purposes other then fire department needs, or parades with the apparatus. Since Company Five planned to buy an automobile hose wagon alterations were made in the building so as to accomodate it when it arrived.

Torrent Hose Company Five circulated subscription papers for the purpose of raising $1200 to pay for their new equipment which they hoped would be a combination hose and chemical truck. That desire raised the price to $1800.

At 12:40 AM on November 19, 1905 a call came from Trumansburg for assistance since they had a fire in the basement of the grocery store of F. U. Frost. Trumansburg had a steamer but it hadn't been used in a year so there was no water in the boiler. When the fire was hit below it the thing split. An old hand engine was put into use while the switch engine of the Lehigh Valley Railroad was fired up and took a steamer and hose carts from Ithaca. They arrived one hour and fifteen minutes after the call was sent in. Captain Fred B. Howe took his men into the basement with a chemical hose and axes where they succeeded in putting out the blaze. They returned home at 5:30 AM.

During the following evening, November 20, 1905, the members of Company Five, sitting in front of the rooms, saw two lights coming up State Street, gradually growing larger until the sound of exploding gasoline could be heard and then there appeared in full view the new automobile hose cart. For the next few hours twenty men climbed aboard and went up and down the hills to try it out.

Later in the week it was loaded with hose. The machine was built by Buick and had two cylinders. It was fitted with a Bunch opposed motor in connection with a Ball planetary transmission. It was designed to carry 2000 pounds of hose, four men, and a driver. Accessibility to the engine was insured by making the flooring of the body detachable. It had a double chain drive, brake drums on the rear countershift and three inch solid material wire tires. The body was made of sheet steel and the railings were brass, nickel plated.

In March of 1906 the Gamewell Fire Alarm Co., of Utica, was awarded a contract to install a fire alarm system for Cornell University using one of the bells in the library tower. The cost was about $1600 being paid by the University with the City paying $100 for the installation.

Company Five's automotive equipment didn't belong to the city. It was paid for by the company. Therefore it was out for practice runs nearly every evening. On July 22, 1906 it broke the main drive shaft and, since it was supposed to be in the exhibition at the firemen's carnival the following day, it was taken to McClune's garage where the men turned out a new shaft overnight.

A couple of weeks later, on August sixth, another test run was made around town and out Spencer Road to check some shady ladies. They then headed for the hill and instead of there being only three bridges over the inlet they counted eleven. Choosing to cross number eleven the machine ended up in the water to be pulled out the next day by James Gibbons and Company Sixes team.

Five's auto was put in running order by August 15th and used only for fire fighting purposes. The machine became very unsatisfactory so a raffle was arranged and tickets bought from near and far. The drawing was in 1910 with Doylestown, Penn. having the honor of winning the second oldest automobile fire truck in the country. They gave it a hard workout and it was finally scrapped.

CONFLAGRATIONS

The Lyceum Theater was doing business and during the first week of December 1906 a dancing group was present. The students enjoyed the entertainment but the girls thought it would be more realistic if they went to one of the fraternities. They went to the Chi Psi, the house built by Jennie McGraw Fisk, the evening of December 6, 1906.

The taxis, in those days, were horse drawn and called drays. Several had been used to take the girls up the hill. The party wasn't supposed to last all night so the drivers kept their drays in the driveway with the snow flurries making the seats of the wagons wet.

At 4:00 AM on the morning of December 7th, box 62, at the corner of Seneca and Ithaca Streets, announced a fire. It was for the Chi Psi Fraternity house on University Avenue. The firemen had difficulty dragging their equipment up the hill because of the snow and ice plus the drays headed down hill with bunches of girls. They were taken to the quarters of Company Five where they rested up.

The fire gutted the place killing students and firemen. No one ever said
how many girls might have perished in the place. One of the walls collapsed killing three firemen: Alfred S. Robinson of Tornado Hook and Ladder Company Three, Esty J. Landon of Eureka Hose Company Four, and John C. Rumsey of Torrent Hose Company Five. Four students were killed in the fire. They were W. H. Nichols, F. W. Grelle, Oliver LeRoy Schmuck and Billy Nichols.

During the year of 1907 the chief of the department was E. Schuyler Stoddard. He inaugurated several improvements for the organization but there was also one serious fire at 8:10 PM on January 28, 1907 when box 35, located at Buffalo and Eddy, announced a fire at Eddy and Williams Streets.

It was the most serious fire since the conflagration of 1871, starting in the basement of the McAllister block on Eddy Street spreading rapidly to the south. When the flames were subdued the stores of John A. Chacona Candy Co., the Student Laundry Agency, the meat market managed by J. B. McAllister, the men’s furnishing store of T. A. Kelly, the grocery store of Conlon and Hunt, the Cascadilla Pharmacy conducted by Egbert and Blackmer and F. A. Scusa’s shoe repairing shop were destroyed. The loss was established at $100,000.

When the Fire Alarm System was installed, several years ago, the management of it was intrusted to the Telephone Company, and for some time the plan was satisfactory, but owing to the constant increase in the number of fire alarm boxes, it became evident that the care of the system required more time than the company could afford to devote to it and, therefore it was decided to appoint a Superintendent of fire alarm who would have entire charge of the fire alarm and its maintenance. Mr. Jay W. Spalding was appointed as superintendent of fire alarm October 1, 1907.

The brick building for Norton Company 9 was completed at a cost of $10,000. An up to date hook and ladder together with a combination chemical and hose wagon, with teams, were installed having been made possible by the favorable vote of the taxpayers in raising $20,000 by special tax for the improvement of the fire department.

During the year the Board purchased 2,000 feet of new hose. A new combination chemical and hose wagon, with team, were installed at Sprague Steamer Company Six’s on west State Street, and a new combination chemical and hose wagon were installed in Cataract Company Seven’s building on north Tioga Street together with a team of horses. Eureka Fire and Police Patrol Company Four purchased, at their own expense, a handsome wagon, drop harness for the team, and all other appliances needed in their apparatus room. They presented it all to the city.

Eight horses were constantly on duty, two each with Companies 2, 3, 4 and 9, while those attached to Companies 6 and 7 were used during an eight hour day for city work within certain street limits. At that time there were twenty-eight men sleeping in the various Company quarters with fifteen of them bunking in Companies 1, 2, 3 and four. Up to that time the alarm system had been tested once each week by one rap on the bell. It was decided to test it each night at seven o’clock with two raps on the bell.

The average number of alarms every year were on the increase. The number of alarm boxes had jumped and the number of hydrants had really climbed. Fighting fires was getting to be more than a volunteer job, especially for the officers who were in charge of the paid drivers. It was felt that a paid chief should be in the department so as to be available twenty-four hours a day. These ideas were brought to a head in 1912.

Torrent Hose Company Five decided they were going to buy the best in fire fighting equipment so they ordered a Knox pumper. It had not arrived by 5:43 AM February 14, 1912 when it was reported to the police that the Ithaca High School was on fire. Within six minutes three alarms had been sent in bringing all of the city apparatus to Cayuga Street between Seneca and Buffalo.

It was a cold morning and the hydrants had frozen. They had been packed in straw and a wooden hood placed over them but a water supply could only be started by burning the straw. The fire apparently started in the
basement on the Seneca Street side. While the hydrants were being thawed out the fire crept up and spread horizontally floor by floor.

The roof, on the Seneca Street side collapsed at 6:35 AM taking the lower floors into the basement. The roof on the north side gave way at 7 AM to be followed by the tower on Cayuga Street. Sparks ignited the roof at 112 West Seneca Street but they were put out with chemical lines. The blaze was under control by 8 AM. Fire Chief William Burns stated that the fire could not have been stopped even if the hydrants were not frozen. He said it was too far gone when they were called.

The new apparatus for Company Five arrived, and was accepted by the Fire Commissioners, on March 5, 1912. It was a Knox triple combination automobile and, during a test at the inlet and Cascadilla street, it pumped as high as 790 gallons per minute. The first alarm they answered was at 4:30 AM March 15th for a small fire at the Ithaca Fuel Supply coal yard on South Meadow Street.

At 12:30 PM April 13, 1912 box 48, on Thurston Avenue, summoned the department to the home of Louis Agassiz Fuerres on the corner of Wyckoff and Thurston. Damage was slight from an overheated stove. At 2 PM on April 22nd box 34 called firemen to the Central School where trash was found burning in the basement. It was put out before any serious damage was done.

At 11:58 AM April 28th fire destroyed eight boathouses and two boats along the inlet. On the 29th, at 2:58 PM a fire was spotted in a desk at Central School and when firemen arrived the building was doomed. That left the educational system of the city in bad shape but churches and private homes were opened where classes continued until other arrangements could be made.

**IMPROVEMENTS**

The Knox fire engine of Company Five was given a speed test on August 17th making a run to Jacksonville in seventeen minutes. When purchased it's top speed was listed as 30 MPH. Chief Burns, as had his predecessors, indicated the need for a full time chief of the department so, in 1913, John A. Fisher was appointed the first paid Fire Chief of Ithaca. He had some choice in the naming of his assistants so he picked James L. Murphy, who had been assistant for two years, and Bernard J. Reilly who was an insurance adjuster and secretary of Company Nine.

Chief Fisher established a commendable precedent by wearing his uniform while on duty. In the past the volunteer chiefs didn't wear uniforms when in the office, but Fisher was the first full paid, 24 hour per day chief, and was in his office each day.

On September 4, 1913 the Knox of Company Five went to Danby for a fire which people thought would destroy the Village. It didn't, but the next day when the driver, Fred Smith, cleaned out the pump of the truck he found a large crab which had apparently been sucked in but not squashed. It was very much alive and probably ended up on somebody's dinner table.

During the year of 1913 Company Seven was given a Thomas Flyer by the Tremain family with the understanding that it be converted into a hose wagon. The members of the company raised the money to do that and by the middle of January 1914 it was in service. The machine had a 70 horsepower motor, 150 feet of chemical hose, with a 35 gallon tank, and carried 850 feet of two and one-half inch hose.

On September 10, 1914 Chief Fisher died at his cottage along the shore of Cayuga Lake. He had joined Company Two May 10, 1882 and was elected foreman of the Company in 1895 holding that position until he was named the first permanent fully paid Chief of the Department January 1, 1913.

The Fire Commissioners were Ernest D. Butts, E. S. Stoddard and Clinton D. Cass. They wanted a new chief who had been an active fireman, was a smoke eater and could handle the records. They chose Bernard J. Reilly and appointed him as of October 1, 1914. Using the same train of thought they appointed James R. Robinson as the assistant chief in November. He was a Lieutenant with Company Three and a lawyer with offices in the library building across the street from central fire headquarters.

Both Fives and Sevens had automotive equipment so Companies One and Four decided they needed similar apparatus. A combination hose and chemical for Cayuga Hose Company One arrived August 25, 1914 from Elmira where it was constructed by American LaFrance. The cost was $6,150 with 500 allowed on the horse drawn apparatus. All three of the automotive apparatus were used at a fire November 11th when a defective furnace ignited the drug store of Christianity and Dudley at 212-14-16 East State Street. The fire made a loss of over $13,000.

On December 17, 1914 the fire department purchased a heavy bob-sled for use in the winter. The sled was formerly owned by the United States Express Company and was capable of carrying 3,000 feet of hose. It was for emergency purposes.

In 1915 a second assistant chief was appointed. He was Ernest A. Rogers, a contractor, who was also a smoke eater and could answer alarms. He was a member of Company Seven.
The automotive equipment of the department, at that time, consisted of a 90 horsepower American LaFrance, type 12, combination hose and chemical with a forty gallon chemical tank also carrying 1,000 feet of 2½ inch hose. It was assigned to Company One.

Company Four had a police patrol automobile. It was a Thomas, model 6-70, with first aid kits, stretchers, tarps and ropes.

Company Five had the Knox triple combination with a 50 gallon chemical tank and carried 1,000 feet of hose.

Company Seven had a 70 horsepower Thomas with a 35 gallon tank and carried 800 feet of hose.

The members of Company One were sure they had the best machine around so they made a bet with some of the men from Seven's that Company One would beat them to the next alarm on east hill. The bet was accepted and covered. The driver of One's slept in his shorts so he could pull on his boots and togs when an alarm came in. One came one night and everyone in One's was in such a hurry the driver neglected to get dressed. It was a cold night and when Company One pulled out of the stall number Seven was turning off of Tioga Street on to State. They were a bit fast on the turn and took off a couple of store fronts on State Street. Company Seven won the bet but someone else had to drive the rig of number One back to town because the driver was starting to get frozen up.

At 6:05 AM on February 13, 1916 box 56 summoned the department to Morse Hall, the chemistry building, on the Cornell Campus. The pumps in Sibley failed to put pressure in the Campus hydrant system which was required to meet the demands of the situation. The firemen were also menaced by nearly constant explosions in the building. Later in the day, as the men returned to their quarters, it was necessary to stand before the stoves and thaw out the coats so they could be unbuckled.

A campaign was instituted on east hill to obtain funds for the purchase of an automobile pumper for Company Nine. The fund was growing and it went over the top when Cornell University put in $5,000. An American LaFrance triple combination gasoline driven machine was purchased. It had been on show at the Pan American Exposition in San Francisco so it had more spit and polish than the run of the mill machines off the production line.

On April 30, 1916 the F. W. Woolworth five and ten cent store at 133 East State Street was gutted by fire. The A. T. O. House at 625 University Avenue had a serious blaze on September 21st. At that fire a backdraft slammed a door and broke Chief Reilly's arm. That didn't prevent him from answering alarms but it did slow him up a bit when he went duck hunting.

The City had discontinued using the old reservoir on Turner Place so it was auctioned off with Morse Chain buying it for $1,200. That is where the so called service building is located at the present time.

The Wharton Studios were in the process of filming something called "Paria." Part of it was to take place in a palatial Fifth Avenue residence so a good fake front was constructed on West State Street, just east of Meadow. Smoke bombs were set on the scaffolding inside the third floor windows. Irene Castle, as the star, leaned out the window screaming which was not heard on the film since it was before the time of talkies. The fire department with both horse drawn and motorized equipment answered the anticipated alarms. Ladders were erected and the Assistant Chief, in his white coat, climbed the ladder, tossed the fair damsel over his shoulder and brought her down to safety. That was filmed September 26, 1916.

The Remington Salt Plant was built in 1900 at a cost of $150,000. It was located where the Cayuga Heights sewage plant is today. At 8:00 PM on November 19, 1916 it was destroyed by fire causing the death of one man.

Part of the department was motorized and the rest still used horses. In the year 1917 the population of the City was not entirely sold on the idea of discarding the horses so the Assistant Chief was elected to make a speech before the ladies of the area. Part of the talk explained the role of a bunker. Let me quote:

"If an alarm is at night there are an average of forty firemen in the bunker who are ready to get on the apparatus and out of the quarters within a minute of the time of the alarm. When an alarm is turned in you can perhaps appreciate the extent of the system when I tell you that besides the large bell in the City Hall Tower there are 19 gongs tapping the alarm in as many different places in the city to set the organization in motion. These gongs include one in each company quarters, one in each of the two assistant chiefs houses; one at the filtration plant which immediately alerts the men to see that pressure is maintained in the water mains and one gong at the sewage treatment plant so the operator can have the proper count to blow the whistle.

The alarm also registers on nine indicators, one at each company headquarters, so that they can see the number, besides counting the bell. It automatically opens 14 doors and releases as many horses who immediately take their places under drop harness.

It also opens eight trap doors around slide poles so that the firemen, in quarters, can slide to the main floor without going down any stairs. It automatically stops five clocks which indicate the exact time the
alarm came in. If the alarm is at night it also automatically turns on the lights in all the bunkrooms of the various companies so firemen can pull on their boots and clothes without waiting for someone to flick the light switch."

The year of 1917 nearly sneaked through without too bad a fire until 3:35 PM December 23rd when the White Studio, at 308 East State Street, was ignited and kept the boys busy the rest of the day.

February 25, 1918 had two men overcome by sewer gas in the manhole at Buffalo and Meadow. The fire Department was called and a dry line was dropped down the hole with air being pumped in so they were rescued. During 1918 it was decided to motorize the ladder truck of Company nine so it was placed in Lang’s garage and soon was operating with a 70 horsepower Thomas gasoline motor. It was known as a city service truck with eight different ladder lengths, plus life net, ropes etc.

A couple of the officers of the department showed that “Boys will be Boys” when notice of the Armistice came through. All the staff was waiting for the news from the Journal and, when it arrived, the bell was rung, the pumping station was notified and the big whistle blown.

One of the officers had purchased a salute cannon with ten gauge shells filled with black powder. They carried it over to the front of the Sideboard Restaurant which was where the entrance to the Trust Company is today. Setting it on the sidewalk, loading it with one shell and yanking on the cord made a tremendous boom which broke out the windows of the Sideboard. The two scammed to the front of the post office where they tried it again with another window blowing out from the concussion. That was the end of the downtown operations but the cannon was taken up Buffalo Street, set in the front yard of 440, then fired again. No windows were shattered in that go around. Since that time the Legion has borrowed the contraption and say it has the biggest boom they could ask for. It is now kept, in seclusion, except for July Fourth, at Sheldrake.

THE TWENTIES ROAR IN

Company Two received a new combination pumper December 21, 1918. It was a 105 horsepower, chain drive, American LaFrance, type 75, with a 750 GPM pump, 40 gallon chemical tank and could carry 1000 feet of 2½ inch hose.

Four firemen were injured and a horse was killed in a fire at Percy Field in May 1920. The blaze started in the stands and the firemen were injured when a large beam fell from the covered grandstand as it was burning.
Lodges which were located in the Savings Bank building on the southwest corner of Seneca and Tioga Streets. By the time someone discovered the smoke the fire was going to town.

Ladders were put up to the roof of the Trust Company so hose lines could be hoisted and water squirted from there. It was necessary for the men to spray their feet and freeze them to the roof to prevent sliding off. When it was time for the next shift on the hose line they were chopped loose and the next gang went through the same procedure.

The firemen were cold and shivering but the Assistant Chief had an office on the third floor so he opened his safe and found some snakebite. It was soon gone. The Police Department took pity on the poor working man and opened up the room where the confiscated prohibition liquor was stored. That helped fight the fire.

With the motorizing of Company Three there was no need for horses so they were sold or given away, but something happened making the department wish they still had some horses.

Ithaca had the privilege of seeing a solar eclipse January 24, 1925. A couple of days later it started to snow with no indication of stopping. Most of us old fogies, who were kids at that time, dressed in our warmest, with the help of the parents, and trudged away to school but the buildings were closed so we trudged back home. Lots of fun.

The official snowfall was 29.3 inches but it was over 40 inches deep where the wind had tossed it around. A call came in from 111 Cobb Street saying that the house was on fire. The apparatus from downtown could not get beyond State and Mitchell Streets. Company Nine could not turn up Dryden Road. The Fire Department sleigh was stationed at Nine's but there were no horses. A gentleman came up College Avenue with a horse and sleigh offering to cart hose. Quickly it was transferred from truck to his sleigh and he got to Cobb Street. Men, on foot, dragged extinguishers. Luck was with them. One house was practically destroyed and only one other damaged.

The Cornell Junior Prom, in 1929, was on Saturday the sixth of February. Shortly after dinner on Monday, the 11th, two members of the Alpha Delta Phi Fraternity at 777 Stewart Avenue went up stairs to do their studies. The room was getting hotter and one got up to check and see who had turned up the thermostat.

Before getting out of the room he heard crackling sounds from above and, on lifting up the trap door, he and his roommate found the entire attic afire. One of the freshmen called the fire department and when the Chief arrived, he told the boys it wasn't much, just put your stuff on the beds and cover it up because a lot of water will be used. The students did as instructed, the hoses were connected to the hydrants and the water turned on. Only per streams came out the nozzles. A barrel of ripe cider was sitting in the cellar and while the building burned to the ground the cider disappeared.

THE THIRTIES START WET

Normally when Cornell celebrates Spring Day there is a boat race, and, in the past, an observation train carried hundreds, perhaps thousands, along the shore on the east side of the lake so they could keep pace with the shells. Several boats would come onto the lake with many guests just to see the excitement.

May 24, 1950 was Spring Day and a boat from Syracuse had gone up the inlet to fill with gas near the Buffalo Street bridge. Shortly before noon the mission was completed so people sat in the cabin and on the deck jabbering and bending their elbows before heading back to the lake. The Captain prepared to cast off, turned on the ignition switch and the boat exploded. A
bystander, on the bridge, ran to the corner and pulled the fire alarm box. Pike poles, ropes, short ladders and hose were brought into use. The injured were removed and taken to Tompkins County Hospital. One of the forty year old victims died July First. The boat had sunk shortly after the people were pulled ashore.

In 1930 the drill tower was completed behind the station of Company Six. It was the school house for many of the members of the department who were active twenty and thirty years ago. That is where they learned the fundamentals—rope and ladder work—cranking the hand operated aerial ladder of the 1920 LaFrance truck—scaling ladder work, rescue with a rope from the top floor, smoke mask practice in the base of the tower with a smudge bucket stoked with an assortment of paper, sticks, rags, wet grass and old motor oil. Hookups for turret pipes and other interesting things like jumping in the net were also part of the practice.

There were fires during the thirties but none of them as destructive as some of the previous. On March 30, 1932, an early morning fire at Pritchard’s Style Shop gave the firemen several hours of smoky labor and resulted in heavy damage. In October, of the same year, a mid-day fire at White & Burdick Pharmacy gathered a large crowd of spectators watching firemen battling the flames through a cloud of smoke and fumes generated by an assortment of badly overheated drugs and chemicals.

The horse barn, on the Cornell Campus, burned in 1938 but the last spectacular blaze of the thirties came on the morning of October 18, 1939 when fire severely damaged the New York State Electric and Gas building at Plain and Court Streets. At the time of the fire a new fence had been placed around the property with a lock which they claimed could not be picked or broken. As the flames shot from the windows of the buildings, inside the fence, one of the firemen took an axe from three’s truck, used the spike end and opened the gate. Hose lines were dragged inside and the fire soon squelched.

**FIREMEN ARE DRAFTED**

Shortly after one, in the morning of, February 27, 1940 fire was seen in the A & P store in the 100 block of East State Street. It gutted the building but brought about new procedures for ladder work.

Up until that time a man on a ladder, handling a hose line, would put one leg over a rung and hook his toes under the rung below. That left his hands free to operate the nozzle. The temperature was five degrees above zero and the spray froze. One of the firemen, on the top of the ladder, found that when it was time to change shifts the ice on the rungs was so thick he had trouble disengaging without taking off his boot. The Chief noticed the trouble and from then on safety belts were worn and the buckle snapped on a rung.

When World War Two got under way some of the retired members of the department returned to active firefighting. A call system, originating in the Police Department, was set up to insure prompt notification of all fires. As a result of these efforts, Company Three and others were never caught short during the entire war without an adequate fire fighting crew.

In the dark of the night on the fourth of July 1942 there was a slight earthquake which was felt by only three people in Ithaca. It tripped a sprinkler alarm on State Street near Tioga. When the three-bell alarm was sounded there was another small tremor causing all of the bells in the various stations to clap six times. It was the following January before a newspaper mentioned the earthquake on July Fourth.

The Cornell horse barn fire of October 11, 1942 was exciting because a bucket brigade was used. George Genung, who was the dispatcher for the fire department, had been called to active duty at Cornell to train raw recruits. He was marching a platoon when the horse barn blaze took off. The basement of the building was loaded with cages of rats and mice for research projects. George had his men line up and pass the cages from hand to hand until they ended up in another building. In the meantime the barn burned to the ground.

About five o’clock in the afternoon of October 30, 1942 a fire, fanned by a strong southwest wind, destroyed the Old Burn’s Bakery in the 100 block of North Corn Street, involving eight structures on State, Corn and Seneca Streets. All of them suffered varying degree of damage. That being an hour when men were being freed from their daily duties in shops and offices there were plenty to squirt water and climb ladders. Someone had a bottle of snakewater and when the fire was under control Chief Reilly said he wanted the waverers to go back to the barn.

During this period the department lost the services of its long time chief, Bernard J. Reilly. In the fall of 1941 he was appointed Director of Civilian Defense for Tompkins County. At the time of Pearl Harbor he was taking instruction in civilian defense at Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland. Upon his return he organized the sprawling civilian defense organization for Tompkins County, directing its activities and conducting classes of instruction. In the fall of 1942 he suffered a heart attack from which he never fully recovered. He retired from the department on January 15, 1943 and died November 18, 1943. Assistant Chief Raymond Travis, who first joined the department March 1, 1915, was appointed Chief April 29, 1943.
Company Three received a new Hook and Ladder Truck in December 1944. The first alarm it answered was at the empty Tremans house, 623 University Avenue, December 23, 1944. The truck was placed in front of the building and the ladders erected. When it was time to clean up it was found that the weight had sunk the wheels in the front yard and it was necessary to call a tow truck to shake it loose.

January 24, 1945 brought lots of snow so some of the volunteers bunked in the firehouse since they would have been unable to drive their cars in case of an alarm. After playing cards and going next door for beers phone calls came in telling of a big fire in the north end but nobody could pinpoint it. Two of the bunkers rode with Assistant Chief Herm Frantz northward until they spotted the fire at Johnson's boathouse.

Because of the depth of the snow Company Seven could only get to the hydrant; Company Four got to the office and Company One was the only apparatus to drag hose halfway down the yard where the fire was located. One man, sleeping in the boathouse had died and one of the firemen froze on his hands.

The afternoon of August 16, 1947 brought a severe thunderstorm. One house was hit on south Albany Street, a man in the Morse Chain parking lot was knocked out by lightning, the temporary diesel lab at Cornell was hit and made a serious fire. The sewers, on Mitchell Street, couldn't hold the runoff and the manhole covers popped off letting water run so fast it didn't turn the corner into State Street but went straight ahead through backyards to the Hospital, where it flooded the basement to the ceiling. Firemen, and others, went in there cleaning up, finding grapefruit andanges perched on the heating pipes at the top of the rooms and hallways. Company Four sat out front generating electricity for the Hospital. The clean-up took night and day for a week.

The old Seely Feed Mill on West State Street, just west of the inlet bridge, caught fire February 9, 1947. It spread to the adjoining Tri-State Egg building, destroying both. Company Six, by yeoman work, prevented heavy damage to the Wheaton Metal Shop on the west side of the fire. Embers the size of billiard balls were carried by a strong southwest wind directly toward the Champaign Coal Yard just across the inlet. Chief Travis assigned one company to patrol the east side of the inlet. They had their hands full putting out several small fires.

If the Champaign Coal Yard had caught fire and gone to town it would have been only a stones throw across Fulton Street where wooden houses and the population was thicker. It could have started a conflagration except for the heroic work of the crew assigned to the task of protection.

February 14, 1948 saw a spectacular fire at the High-Voltage Laboratory on Mitchell Street. There were several transformers, each containing 2500 gallons of oil which split from the heat and made a blaze which could be seen 'or several miles.

**BREAD, DRUGS, EATS AND HARDWARE**

The Wool-Scott Bakery, on South Tioga Street, gave the men a tough workout when it was severely damaged by fire June 1, 1950. There was plenty of smoke and some of the hose crews stood in Six-Mile-Creek squirting water into the building from the south.

In 1951 the department put on two major, but not on the program, demonstrations for the Central New York Firemen's Convention. Just before midnight, on July 20th, a fire was discovered at the Lynch Coal Company, on West Buffalo Street. By sun-up the building had been nearly demolished.

The following afternoon, just as the Convention parade had started, another alarm sounded on the big bell. The firemen, participating in the parade, were in boots and coats riding the trucks. They were still weary from the fire of the night before. The alarm was for a smoky fire which started on the stage of the Ithaca College Theater, quickly working its way to the roof. Weary firemen, battling hot weather, flames and smoke, collapsed right and left, with the oxygen equipment being kept busy. These two fires were the last of a series, including several at Ithaca College making a matter of mystery and suspicion. A certain individual left town and there was no more obvious arson for awhile.

On July 2, 1953 a spectacular and stubborn blaze hit Robinson and Carpenter lumber yard, on the Boulevard between Seneca and Buffalo, nearly resulting in the destruction of the Lehigh Valley House. The fire burned through the wall to the small dining room where so many fire companies held their annual shindigs.

In the same year, on October the 12th, a spectacular fire occurred at the old processing plant of the Lake View Dairies located at 609 North Tioga Street. It was fed by thousands of paraffin-covered paper containers and enlivened by the explosion of a quantity of small CO2 cartridges.

About one month after the Lake View Dairies, an alarm called the trucks to the temporary barracks constructed on Kline Road. They were empty but five of them were on fire. Company Nine went down among them to hook on to the closest hydrant. The only trouble was the hydrant was being
front door was smashed and the heavy black smoke poured out so that the man on the hoselines had to hit the deck. The aerial ladder was put up and a hole cut in the roof so the smoke shot out of that and the ground floor cleared enough so the hose crews could enter. It was a long fight with water going in from front, back and top. The building was wrecked.

Chief Raymond Travis had serious troubles with emphysema, enough so he resigned November 1, 1956. He died November 20, 1956. Frank Stamp was appointed Chief with a permanent appointment from June 18, 1957 until he requested that he be returned to the ranks on January 26, 1958. Charles Weaver was then appointed Chief of the Department.

On March 18, 1959 an alarm came in from College and Dryden. There was plenty of smoke coming from the large building housing the Hill Drug Store and other business places. It didn’t scare anyone. It was in the attic. The hose lines going upstairs and spraying water into the attic didn’t face the fire. It burned ceilings and dropped into each of the stores. The men inside had to back out and squirt water from the streets. Company Nine ladder truck was operating from College Avenue and soon Three’s ladder truck was brought up to work from Dryden Road. The building was so demolished it was all torn down. The First National Bank College Avenue branch is now in that location.

THE BUSY SIXTIES

The Sport Shop had started as an Army and Navy Store located in the one hundred block of South Aurora Street. It moved to larger quarters at 209 East State Street where it did a thriving business. Soon after closing up for the night February 24, 1962 a fire enveloped the basement racing upstairs feeding on all of the boxes of shoes, shirts, rows of hanging suits and other types of clothing. The ruins were cleared away being the start of the demolition of the whole block between Tioga and Aurora Streets.

The old West Hill School was similar, in style, to the East Hill and Fall Creek Schools before any additions. It was located at 234 Elm Street and caught fire January 10, 1965. The insides were dry and it burned well keeping many hose lines in operation and later with one to care for the small embers which flared up off and on.

An Ithaca College Fraternity, the Delta Sigma Pi, was located at 502 North Aurora Street. On October 28, 1965 it ignited causing lots of heat, smoke and fire. Rescues were made from front and back with water being poured in from all angles. Despite all efforts two students died.

The Ithaca Bowl and Billiard Lounge, at 378 Elmira Road, was built in 1958. It had 24 lanes, billiard room, banquet room, cocktail lounge and...
work, how fast and how well. That caused more false alarms and the annual number of runs by the department jumped three or four hundred.

On the fifth day of the fourth month (Ezekiel 1:1-13) 1967, shortly after 4 AM a girl screamed for help from burns on her feet. She was in a parking lot on Highland Avenue and people in the apartment house nearby went to her aid and called an ambulance. The professor, in the Cornell Residential Club on Country Club Drive, phoned in a fire alarm. Two men on Oak Hill Road heard cries for help and ran to the club to find it full of heavy black smoke. Cayuga Heights Fire Department arrived and immediately called for help from Ithaca and Varna. All of the smoke masks available were put into use in the building for people still alive. Rita Bangs, a nurse, took her stethoscope in to check for heartbeats. She started to pass out when one of the officers put his mask on her. The oxygen kept her semi-consious while she was taken to the hospital for recovery. Eight students were overcome and died plus the professor who had phoned in the alarm. Total dead was nine.

The students were placed in other dorms or apartment houses. Three of them moved to 211 Eddy Street. On May 31, 1967 that building was gutted by fire. Laboratory tests proved that both fires had been caused by arson.
After the Wool-Scott Bakery fire, on South Tioga Street, June first 1959, the building was put back together and various occupants used it. During the sixties Alcor, an electronics firm, used the front part next to the creek.

When plans were made to demolish the Ithaca Hotel and the rest of the block the Ithaca Printing Service moved in the space to the south with an ell so that the back of their business extended behind Alcor. It made a good convenient setup for both. On February 25, 1969 fire was spotted coming from the rear of the Printing Company about 12:15 AM. When the alarm was turned in, a couple of minutes later, the whole place seemed to be on fire. A hose line was taken into the front door of Alcor but the blaze was more than it could handle. Lines were stretched from the back, front, and from the aerial ladder. Also, for the second time in that location men were located in the creek or on the south bank of it squirting water so it arced into the roof section. Company Seven was called to stretch hose from State and Tioga Street. The two business places were wiped out and they made other arrangements.

SEVENTIES START SCREWY

During the late sixties the Ithaca Hotel was town down. Some individuals wanted to construct a new hotel. No kickback was mentioned. The offers were not accepted. Various parcels were bought up and were demolished.

The three on the southeast corner of State and Tioga were not purchased. The price was not right. All of the tenants moved out except for the Towne House which served lunch and a drink to lawyers, bankers, brokers and their office girls. When the day was over most of them came back for a touch before going home. People around town went in for dinner.

On January 11, 1970 a fire started in the rear and, since there was no wind, the smoke settled all over the city. It was a long battle for the fire department but when it was over the rest of the buildings were torn down. The whole block was cleared for new construction, sitting vacant until the summer of 1974.

All across the country the A & P stores were having mysterious fires. It happened in Ithaca on February 3, 1970 to the store on Hancock Street between Lake Avenue and First Street. The fire had erupted so that the only thing to do was pour water on it. That was done with spray freezing on the pumps drawing water from hydrants. That A & P was replaced in 1974.

A Victorian three story wooden house at 320 Wad Avenue had been renovated and the Cornell Africana Studies and Research Center moved in during the summer of 1969. It had a large staircase going up from the front hall. The internal fire alarm system was manually operated. A little after 1
AM on April 1, 1970 the Cornell Safety Division received an alarm from the building, apparently caused by the burning of some connecting wires. When the first patrol car went across the bridge at Triphammer he could see fire on every floor. As he pulled up, on Wait Avenue, the inside heat started to pop out the windows. It was a two alarm blaze with the ice forming on trees from the spray in the 27 degree temperature. The parts of the building left standing, after the fire was out, were later removed.

Spring recess ended and classes started, at Cornell, Monday April 6, 1970. About fifteen students roomed on the second and third floor of 323-327 Eddy Street. The first floor had a laundromat and a Pants Shop. A malfunctioning electrical fixture in a second floor bathroom apparently started a fire Tuesday afternoon. No one was aware of it until those people on the third floor saw smoke coming through the floor. The building was evacuated and the fire department called at 6:30 PM. It was an old building with air spaces in the partitions and between the floors. The fire crept up to the roof. There was no wind blowing, to speak of, so hose lines could be used from the roofs of adjoining buildings. The smoke was so thick in the street a couple of ropes were fastened to the nozzle on top of Nine's ladder truck and the stream controlled from the ground. The last crew left the scene after three in the morning.

There were other serious fires during the rest of 1970 and in 1971 with one February 7, 1971, on Linden Avenue, resulting in the death of a girl.

October 26, 1971 found fire erupting in Shulman's warehouse on Third Street at Adams Street. It completely engulfed the building causing so many hose lines and pumps being brought into the fray the water supply couldn't keep up with the demands of the suction. A couple of lines had to be shut down so more water could be thrown on the hotter spots.

The year of 1972 had fires but it could be classified as a rest period until three in the afternoon of January 18, 1973 when fire erupted at Shulman's warehouse at 509 Eddy Street. It was a two story building with the fire apparently starting on the second floor. There were no windows and the heat was enough to keep the firemen with hoseslines from getting much further than the front door. The fire was only a stone throw from where the gas tank truck caught fire July 1, 1968 so there were a few anxious moments. Firemen were on the scene until seven the following morning.

Back in 1877 William Henry Miller, Ithaca's foremost architect, designed a building for Henry Sage at 603 East Seneca Street. It was a present from his father and was built with stained glass windows, large rooms, which was the trend of the times for the benefit of entertaining and formal parties. After the demise of Sage and his cronies of that period the building changed hands. At one time it was the home of the Delta Gama Sorority. More recently it became an apartment house with the large rooms cut up into two and three apartments. About 8:30 PM May 3, 1973 crackling sounds were accompanied by smoke. Everyone safely evacuated but the third floor became an inferno with the roof falling in and the fire dropping to the second floor. The 19 tenants watched their belongings, and belongings go up in fire and smoke before it was finally put out. Chief Weaver suffered a heart attack about ten o'clock, was taken across the street to Sage Infirmary and then transferred to the Tompkins County Hospital. He recovered.

At 5:35 AM Saturday, June 2, 1973 an alarm came in for 1002 North Aurora Street. When the trucks arrived the fire was burning inside and outside the building. Smoke was being pushed out every little crack. After some ventilating work the fire was extinguished but not without considerable damage. About noon on July 18, 1973, fire, at 608 South Albany Street, took the life of one woman.

Late in the afternoon of Saturday, September 22, 1973, a terrific lightning storm scurried back and forth across the County putting out electrical systems and causing several fire alarms, the first at 5:12 PM. One lightning strike apparently hit a pole at Cayuga and Green Streets with the powerful juice following the wires into the Golden Dragon at 120-124 South Cayuga Streets. Before that fire was under control it had cleaned out the Golden Dragon Restaurant and a barber shop.

At 2:24 PM October 29, 1973 a gasoline explosion rocked Patterson's Service Station at 221-223 North Aurora Street. Two cars were being worked on in the bay where the fire started. One belonged to the F.R.I. and the ammunition in the luggage compartment had firemen jumping when they heard another pop, like fireworks. Some of the gas fumes seeped into the sewer lines and cars were kept off Aurora Street all the way to State Street. One employee was injured and let his beard grow to cover up his burn scars.

Christmas afternoon, December 25, 1973, people were walking along Stewart Avenue by Willard Way. They saw lots of smoke and sparks coming but of a chimney at 704 Stewart Avenue. They thought the inhabitants were anxious to clean up their Christmas wrappings and tree. They didn't know that the house was empty. Everyone was away for the holidays. Shortly before five PM two passers-by saw the whole first floor on fire and turned in a fire alarm. It became a two alarm blaze with hose lines stretched from the University hydrants through three inch hose since panners were draining the water from the nearby hydrants. The last truck left at 12:41 the next morning. The investigation, which followed, showed that the fire had started in a wastebasket in a first floor bathroom.
Sunday afternoon, April 28, 1974 fire in the Agway Mill on Fulton Street activated a detector calling the department. It was a spectacular fire for people living in the area and on the hills. The tower had to be rebuilt but water did considerable damage to some of the feed stored below.

Shortly after nine in the morning of November 27, 1974 fire erupted in the basement of 131 Fayette Street. It was a nasty smokey one. It crept up through the house so that ventilation had to be made through the roof. A few of the new volunteers had lessons in firefighting. One didn’t break a window in the proper manner and received several severe cuts. Others didn’t understand house construction. Experience proved to be the teacher. They found that chopping plywood over rafters bounced like chopping on rubber. It was much better between the rafters. The trucks returned to their stations after two hours.

Shortly after two, in the afternoon, of the fifth of December 1974 the attendant of the gas station at Cayuga and Farm Streets saw a smokey fire on the second floor porch at 509 North Cayuga Street. He phoned the department and, as the alarm was ringing, a man came out of the North Side Pharmacy, heard a boom and saw the windows blow out at 509. A second alarm was sent in. Companies Two and Seven hooked up to hydrants near the front of the building with Fives a block away dragging hose from the pumper to the scene. Seven’s pumper purred along like a kitten but Two’s went ka-thump, ka-thump, ka-thump, wheeze, spit, cough, ka-thump etc. Of the eight people living in the house all were safe. The roof fell in and eventually the water soaked the fire out through it was necessary to wet down the embers the next morning.

Another two-alarm fire was at the Y.M.C.A. Friday the thirteenth of December 1974. Discovered about 5:30 AM it was apparently a case of arson. Damage was heavy but everyone escaped, many being brought down ladders.

About one o’clock, in the morning, of December 22, 1974 kerosene was poured over a piano in St. Paul’s Methodist Church located at Aurora and Court Streets. At the same time kerosene was dumped in the Empire Building Supplies at 332 Spencer Road. Both were then ignited. Detectors in the Church sounded that alarm. A few minutes later someone saw flames at Empire. One, Three, Five and Seven went to the Church. Two and Six went to the other with Engine Nine coming on a second alarm. When the fire at the Church was out Companies Three and Seven went to Empire. Three days later five fellows were arrested for robbery and setting fires at Stewart Park, YMCA, the Methodist Church, Empire and others.

HORSES AND PETS

After the trial and error of waiting for mules from Quarry Street to draw the the Steamers to fires the plan of drawing them by hand went back into affect until the members of Company Two decided to buy a team of horses. The only trouble was they had no money. Doctor Tarbell, Harry Clark and Ezra Shepherd drew up a note for three hundred dollars, took it to Douglass Boardman, President of the First National Bank, who endorsed it so they could purchase a team.

That is where the trouble started. The fire houses had no stalls for horses so it was necessary to keep them in the livery stable up Seneca Street. The men had no money to pay for their feed so they were used for livery service. If they were in the area when an alarm came in they were taken to the station, hitched to the steamer and used as fire horses. The length of service for that team was only a few years. They went the way of man and beast. The horses of the various stables were used, when the owners figured they were available.

During the warm summer days the doors of the fire houses were open while one or more of the men sat around waiting for an alarm. On May 26, 1900 a grocer named King, from Trumansburg, was driving quietly up Seneca Street, crossing Tioga, when a northbound trolley rang it’s bell. The horse bolted dashing into the open door of Company One, squeezing between the hose cart and the lockers. One locker was kicked to pieces, three large panes of glass were smashed and the partition behind the hose cart was broken through. A few scars appeared on the hose cart. No damage was done to Mr. King, the buggy or the horse. He told the members of the Company to fix things up and send him the bill.

Some of the citizens of the City were concerned about the use of horses for the Fire Department when there was no place in any of the fire stations to stable them. During the summer of 1901 the City Superintendent requested the Journal to print a statement in the paper which went about as follows:

The horses used on the corporation wagons are the property of the City. The City teams are at present, and have been for a long time, hauling coal for all the rooms of the different companies of the Fire Department. The expense of keeping the six horses, which are used by the Corporation to draw fire apparatus, in case of fire, is met by the City. One-third of the expense is charged to the garbage department, one-third to the highway committee and the rest to the contingency fund.

During April, of 1902, one of the horses used by Company Three was injured during the day while doing Corporation work. That evening there was a fire alarm and the horse could not stand up. The hook and ladder was
late arriving at the fire since it was necessary to obtain a team from the Cornell Transfer Company. Within a year that horse, called Jack, died of paralysis. He was one of the best trained horses used in the department.

In 1903 the City built stalls in the various stations and Company Two was the first to purchase a horse named Black Dan. They previously had Nel and Jen, bought in 1894, to pull the steamer, but they were kept in a livery stable. Black Dan started in a livery stable but ended up in the station when the stall was built.

Black Dan was a smart horse. There were no paid drivers so the first competent volunteer to arrive was the one to drive to the fire. There was an alarm March 13, 1903 and Black Dan used his nose to unhook the doors to his stall, open the gates, and get out into the apparatus room before a volunteer arrive. That brought up the problem of having a man on duty so the first full time paid fireman was appointed.

Black Dan was the first horse purchased by a fire company, but Rescue Company had ordered a new combination hose and chemical wagon so they wanted a team instead of one horse. The City bought Black Dan and transferred him to Company Seven, with Two’s hose cart, when the new machine arrived. Between shifts from Two to Seven, Black Dan had one month in the high grass of a nearby farm.

The drop harness, in the stations, were arranged so they could be left down by a rope trip. The front doors, on the station houses, were also arranged so the driver could open them from his seat on the apparatus. The doors on the stalls were hooked up with the alarm system so they would spring open on an alarm.

Every time a new horse, or team, was purchased the members would spend time training the four-legged animals to leave the stall, get under the drop harness and be ready for a run. The smart horses caught on quite fast. One man would stand by the trip for the stall doors, another by the rope to release the harness and another, with a bar, to tap the inside gong so the horses would know what they were expected to jump on.

Some of the stations had small pastures in the backyards so the horses could get out for a sunning. When new horses were acquired they were broken in and trained in the downtown stations. One of the teams was transferred to Company Nine in the spring of 1906. The horses were Bill and Mary. When their first call came in to go north on College Avenue they refused to pull the apparatus up the slight grade.

The evening of September 13, 1906 wasn’t too bad a night so SKY, one of the horses in Company One’s team decided to have a bit of an outing. He loosened his halter, kicked the rear door of the stable open and wandered around the block. Mark LaFrance, one of the drivers, noticed he was among the missing and started a search. After contacting the other drivers and the police SKY was finally found in the kitchen of the Tompkins House having had time to devour half a bushel of potatoes.

Black Dan had been in the Department longer than any other horse. In 1907 he was replaced at number seven with a team and was used to draw a garbage wagon. On the tenth of March 1908 he collapsed while drawing a garbage wagon behind the car barns.

Jim Gibbons was one of the old hands at handling the horses and was called on to bring some of the bigger teams for special tasks such as pulling stumps out of Washington Park. In August of 1906 he had his team pull Company Five’s automobile hose wagon from the inlet.

On July 21, 1908 the team from Company One was drawing a garbage wagon near station six, on west State Street, when an alarm was sounded. The team turned, without the driver, into Corn Street then ran the length of Seneca Street to Aurora, striking a fish market wagon along the way. They eventually turned into the Smith Stables where they were caught.

In November, of 1913, the team of Company Six was working on Linn Street when an alarm came in from Corn Street. The horses were too late to draw the steamer to the fire.

Bernard J. Reilly was appointed Chief of the Department the end of September 1914. His office, living quarters and barn for his horse and rig were located in the little house on north Tioga Street known as city hall annex. Jim Robinson was to be appointed Assistant Chief in November and invited Chief Reilly to his office for a discussion of procedure and policies. That was on Halloween night. Jim sat where he could look out the window and after the planning had been mapped out the meeting broke up. The Chief went home and checked his horse before going to bed. The horse was in the stall but the rig had departed. In case of fire he would have to ride the horse bareback. He contacted the police department and the men at the fire station. After considerable searching, here and there, the rig was discovered on the roof of the Chief’s abode.

People born before 1920 have seen teams of horses. Those born later probably saw a horse and wagon, or a saddle horse. When you saw a saddle horse you knew the right side from the left side but with a team it was the near horse and the off horse. The men who drove the fire horses knew the difference.

In the United States the driver of oxen walked on the left side to drive his
team. Hence the left ox was called the nigh ox and the one on the right was called the off ox. When horses were driven, with the diver in the vehicle, he rode on the right side, but the horse nearest him, or the right one in the team, was called the off horse and the one on the left side, farthest from him, was called the nigh, or near, horse. When the automobile came the diver rode on the left side, the same side on which the ox driver walked.

Neil Sheehan, driver for Company Two, was driving their big black team, hooked to a garbage sleigh, in December 1915. They were on South Aurora Street, near the bridge, when the horses were frightened and ran to Seneca Street where the sleigh swayed against a telephone pole, severing it from the horses and throwing out the driver. The team kept running to Buffalo Street where they managed to get a tree tangled up in the harness between them. That stopped the spree.

One week later an alarm called out the equipment and, while going down Seneca Street, Tom, the off horse of Company Three, collided with an unlighted automobile. Tom was thrown to the pavement and badly hurt. The owner of the car was fined ten dollars.

In December, of 1915, the Board of Fire Commissioners decided that the Chief should have an automobile instead of a horse and rig. Therefore a Simplex roadster was purchased for his use, the horse and rig disposed of and he shouldn't have to worry about future Halloween nights.

While answering an alarm October 23, 1919 a woman stood in the middle of the intersection of Cayuga and Green Streets. It was necessary for Tracy Stillwell, the driver of the hook and ladder truck, to pull the team and apparatus to one side. In doing that Tom fell and was severely cut on a leg. That laid him up and he was replaced by Jim.

Colonel and Jim got along fine. One day an alarm came in from Cayuga and Cascadilla Streets. The horses got in place, the harness was snapped tight, the doors were opened and away they went but the reins hadn't been hooked to the bits. The horses took off, following the rest of the companies, and ended up at the proper location, even stopping with the rest, all without driver control.

When Jim Gibbons was driving for Company Three, he was cleaning up the horses one day and apparently hit a sore spot on Colonel. The horse kicked and broke Jim's leg. After he was cured he was more careful about the rubdowns.

During 1914 and 1915 several teams were retired and replaced with new ones. When Companies Two and Three obtained automotive equipment the best horses were sold to the Morse Chain Company and a few years later to Thomas F. Maroney, living two miles out of Brooktondale. The horses went the way of other creatures with Colonel dying in the summer of 1932 and Jim living a bit longer with another four legged friend to share the pasture with him.

The firemen missed the horses but the oldtimers still talked of other things with more than two legs. Several of the Companies had pet dogs. They would ride the apparatus to fires sounding their barking alarm as the heavy equipment rolled down the street. They behaved very well except when one of the dogs, from another Company, got in the way.

Tornado Hook and Ladder Three started with Bruno in 1882 then they had Fanny, a bulldog, and while rounding a corner, in 1908, the dog fell off and was crushed by the heavy wheels. Company Three obtained another bulldog and in 1910 more than 100 people gathered in front of Rescue Steamer Company Two to referee a dog fight between that one and the bulldog from Company Four, named Tigé. It ended up in a draw.

In October of 1915 SMOKE, the burly bulldog owned by Chief Reilly, tangled with a black spaniel in front of the Police Station and it took four men to pull SMOKE away from the kill. In April of 1916, when an alarm sounded, MAX, the mascot of Company One climbed aboard and so did SMOKE. They started a fight on top of the hose and were pushed off the truck. When the fire was out, and the trucks returned, the dogs were still fighting the fifteenth round but it was stopped by the referees calling it a draw.

University students were encouraged to bunk in the fire stations. One came down for an interview and to look the place over. He liked the idea of ventilators for the stables but when he was taken up to the bunkroom he said "nothing doing." He said he could smell the oily secretion from bedbags and he didn't want any part of it. The regular bunkers had become more acquainted with the things which hid during the day and came out at night when the boys were sleeping. They were real vampires leaving blood spots all over the sheets when a victim rolled over.

CHITTER CHATTER

Many firemen have had boats at one time or another. A volunteer brought his 28 foot cruiser into the slip at Freeman's Boat Yard one Saturday afternoon, tied it up and heard a loud "Bang" across the inlet. Looking over he could see a sheet of flame going up. Jumping in his car he scamped across the bridge and to the foot of Cascadilla Street where he found a gas pump blazing away quite merrily. Going to Meadow Street, where people were standing watching the fire, he asked who had a phone?
The next house did so he phoned the desk at Central Fire Headquarters. The bell was ringing when he came out the door. Going back to the corner of Cascadilla and Meadow he saw Company Six use Fulton Street and the back alleys getting to the scene. The apparatus from central were preceded by a police car, going down Seneca to Cayuga to Cascadilla where they headed west. At that time the volunteer stepped into the intersection and stopped the north-south traffic. The Purity Ice Cream, on the corner, called the police and said a drunk was stopping traffic on Meadow Street. When the trucks crossed the intersection the Ice Cream Plant hung up the phone.

A large number of the people that turn in false alarms don't get caught. One series of them, one after another, ended up being classified as an honest mistake. Half of New York State was involved in solving the case. When Tompkins County decided to install radio control to all of the stations in the county and to supply the volunteers with receiving monitors the logical spot for the antenna was on Connecticut Hill. The connections were made and tests began. All parts of the county reported fine results but the rest of the counties didn't share the same idea. Every test made the horns sound off in Watertown. That is why the antenna is no longer on Connecticut Hill.

The new Central Fire Headquarters, 310 West Green Street, was dedicated March 12, 1967. The apparatus room was on the west side of the building, separated from the control room, the kitchen, meeting rooms etc. Without the daily traffic going around and between the trucks they didn't receive the daily pats of affection which they had on East Seneca Street. About ten minutes of noon one Sunday morning the firemen were preparing for lunch. They heard a motor start, looked at each other, and heard a crash. The Hook and Ladder got tired of no action so tried itself and ran part way through the front door.

A P & L phone hook up all of the fire stations with central. If any receiver is removed from the hook it rings the phones in the other stations until it is answered. It is procedure to answer after the third ring. When there is an alarm, other than a box alarm, the man on the controls at central picks up the P & L phone and hears each outside station announce their presence as "five, six, seven, nine." They are then alerted as to which company is to answer the alarm and where it is. One time the wires became crossed in the telephone company and were not straightened out for a couple of weeks. On lifting the telephone one would hear "five, six, seven, nine, Tabernacle Baptist Church."

When the Treman house burned December 23, 1944 the fireman taking the first line upstairs could hear a dog whimpering in a back room. By the time two more firemen came up to take over the baseline the dog had become quiet. The first man went in and found the dog in a corner of the room. He put it under his coat, gave it artificial respiration, took it down stairs and gave it to another fireman. The dog had come to by then. It was passed from hand to hand and finally ended up on the porch across the street. The dog froze to death.

Some people don't believe some of the information they are told. Such was the case at one of the Normandie Restaurant fires. It was a smoker, down in the cellar, near the liquor supply, Chief Reilly slid down the back stairs, took a look, came out and told the firemen what to do plus "don't drink any of that smoked whiskey or you will be sick." One of the volunteers made several trips from the fire to Company Five for a rest. Each time he had a bottle in each boot. By the middle of the evening the floor had to be swabbed down and the beds changed.

One night the Dryden Fire Station caught fire. No apparatus was saved and mutual aid sent in pumpers from every direction. Apparently the screening on the intake, in Dryden Lake, had rusted off because a pumper could deliver water for about four minutes then no longer due to frogs being sucked into the filters of the pumps. The motors had to be shut down, the filters removed and cleaned before the next try at supplying water.

Trumansburg had a bad nasty fire at three o'clock one morning. Ithaca sent Company Two which they were glad to see. Some of the volunteers drove up and after parking their cars were greeted in the middle of Main Street with a cold beer before they started lighting the fire.

Company Nine Engine was going down Thurston Avenue one night while answering an alarm. The sirens was screaming and the red light was working trying to get a car to move out of the middle of the street. The car moved over to the right, stopped and threw the front door open which was hit and taken off by the engine. Investigation found that the man was anxious to get out and see what was going on.

There have been advantages in being friendly with your milkman. A box alarm came in from Thurston and Highland about six o'clock one Christmas morning. A milkman had pulled the box and told the Chief that the people in the second house had gone to Florida three days ago but smoke was coming out every crack. Two hoselines were charged and manned before the door was broken open. The smouldering fire had nearly suffocated itself but the extra air flared it up. The water had been made ready and the blaze was soon extinguished.

A man was walking up Aurora Street one morning on his way to work at Morse Chain. He took his pipe out of his mouth and put it in his coat
pocket. A man, across the street, going down hill saw the pocket start to
smoke. He yelled to the fellow to put snowballs in his pocket. He did, just
as he felt the heat, and quenched the fire. A few repairs were needed on the
coat.

Firemen need to have cast iron stomachs. One night there was an alarm
from Third and Morris Avenue. A child was trapped on the second floor.
When Chief Travis and his rider arrived a hose line had already been
stretched with two paid men on the nozzle at the top of the stairs. The Chief
asked where they were going and when they said after the kid he told them
that the child was at the foot of the stairs and they had dragged their line
over him. The two men dropped the line and took off. The Chief and his
rider fell on the hose and put the fire out. They then had to pick up the
corpses from the foot of the stairs and wrap it in the tarp. The rest kept away
from it.

There was a fire on the southeast corner of Aurora and Marshall. A woman
and two children were rescued from the roof over the front porch. Two men
were missing. The second floor apartment was searched by two firemen,
crawling on their bellies since the smoke was so thick. They didn’t find
anyone but after the fire was mostly out and the smoke thinned one of the
men was found in the tub with the cold water running. Later one of the
men took a hose line up the back stairs to put out that part of the fire and
found a well, doubled over, cooked piece of roast beef. While going for the
Chief he told the others, in the backyard, to stay outside if they were
planning to have breakfast. On returning, with the Chief, each of the
fellows in the backyard had taken a look and were shooting their cookies.

The Department bought two Scott Packs in 1958. The first fire with a
chance of using them was on South Plain Street. Two of the officers
donned the new tanks and masks going upstairs with a non-masked
volunteer right behind them. It was only medium smoke. One of the
officers lost his balance and fell halfway down the back stairs. The
volunteer re-arranged him.

On Sunday morning in February, with lots of snow on the ground, a
rooiming house caught fire. Everyone got out and was accounted for with
the exception of one fellow. The last he had been seen was weaving down
the hall towards the bathroom, where the fire started. The fire was put out
but it was quite some time before the fellow was found under two double
beds pushed next to a wall. He was lying on his back and hanging on for
death life. It took men to break him loose, sit him up, slap his face so he
knew what was what. He shot his cookies and filled his pants. Put on a
stretcher he was taken to the hospital. Two days later his father wanted to
see the city for taking so long in finding him. They picked out the name of
an attorney, contacted him and stated their case. The attorney knew all of
the details of the fire. He suggested they forget the whole thing since the
son was prime suspect number one on starting the fire. After some further
legal talk they decided to forget it, got up and departed.

Fire Company Thirteen was in operation for a few years. It was instigated
by a fraternity on Edgemore Lane. One of the members was the son of a Fire
Captain on Long Island, thus the idea. The front hall had a rack for
helmets and coats with boots just below. Each day and night a freshman
was assigned the job of listening for the firebell and, when it rang, phone
the department for the location. The men on the desk didn’t enjoy that
because the phone would ring before the trucks were out the door. Chief
Reilly told them they could help stretch hose, pick up hose and run errands
but no fire fighting. They still answered alarms. When Chief Travis took
over there was a fire in a chicken house located where the Hasbrook
Apartments are today. Not many firemen arrived but Company Thirteen
was there. It was necessary for a hose line to be dragged thirty feet through a
smokey room to the area of the fire. The floor was covered with chicken
slime but the boys from Thirteen were eager. The volunteer, leading the
way, told them the smoke was thickest by the door and as they got close to
the fire there might not be any. They would have to crawl on their bellies,
keep their nose on the charged line for air, hang on to the boot of the man
ahead and the other hand on the hose. If one had to retreat, the line was to
close and the one leaving was to follow the hose line outside. When the
crawl started there were seven behind the volunteer. When they reached the
fire there were three. The fire was doused in thirty seconds. Company
Thirteen had their initiation.

The Happy Hour Theatre was on the top floor of the library. The paid men
would go in and watch the shows, sitting near the fire escape so, in case of
an alarm they were ready to roll. There was a famous gal around Ithaca
called Sybella Wehe. She would sing between shows and at other times
make her rounds of the better bars where pennies, nickels, dimes and
quarters would be tossed to her for the off key singing.

One day in 1962 there had been no excitement around the fire department.
A volunteer was in the station when it was time to put on the seven o’clock
test. He suggested something might happen if they counted in Spanish. It
was done: uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho, nueve, and diez.
Two phone calls came in right off the bat. “What’s that?” “That’s the
Castro count.”
VET FIREMEN

A bunch of the boys, who had put in decades of fire fighting, decided that it was time for the oldtimers to form their own organization. The idea jelled March 15, 1919 in the office of C. B. Johnson. A formal gathering was held on May 12, 1919 with the election of officers and trustees.

Rescue Steamer Company Two offered the use of their parlors for future meetings and several were held there in the next few years. An application was made to the Legislature of the State of New York for a charter and it was accepted March 16, 1921.

The Vets were incorporated to “maintain and perpetuate the traditions and social relations, cherished by all members of the Ithaca Fire Department; to collect and preserve all relics and articles of historic value to the firemen; and to provide funds for the relief and aid of its members, their windows and orphans.”

The Incorporation, being consumated, the Vets rented part of the rooms of the City Club which was located on the northwest corner of Cayuga and State Streets. In the late thirties they moved to the present quarters at 136 East State. Having rooms of their own they started to accumulate historical documents and mementos.

The Veteran Volunteer Firemen’s Association bought an old hand pumper from the city of Endicott for $250. It was drawn by the Vets in parades, both at home and in other localities. For several years it was kept in the Williams garage on Willets Place, then in the old Cascadilla boathouse at Stewart Park until it was donated to the State Museum August 27, 1971.

Many other items were donated to the Vets. They included photographs, banners, badges, a bell stand, nozzles, trumpets, a gold headed cane and gold badges. At a meeting September 19, 1921 the Vets accepted an offer of Company Four to donate a hand painted banner depicting the fire of May 28, 1810. Henry Walton was the artist while he was living in Ithaca. It makes a prized picture because it is perhaps the only one of a local happening and is on demand from many museums and art galleries to be placed on display. At present the Vets have an arrangement with the DeWitt Historical Society to oversee its care and loaning to others.