

MEADVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT HISTORY

- 1829** On May 9, 1829, Council passed a resolution to buy one or more fire engines and other equipment for the protection of the city. Prior to this, firefighting was performed with leather buckets, and a bucket brigade to put water on the fire. Every household in the city had one or two leather buckets and every able-bodied man would show up to fight the fire. If there was a fire, the men in the city would be alerted either by word of mouth or by a bell.
- 1838** On August 27, 1838, the Meadville Fire Company was created and became the first official fire company in Meadville.
- 1839** A hand operated fire engine was purchased for \$1,800.00 and placed in the new station house at the southeast corner of the Academy lot on Center Street, where a parking lot now stands.
- 1842** A hose reel was purchased and a second company named the Vigilant Fire Company was formed. From 1839 to 1904, twelve fire companies were created and closed; there were also many name changes with those companies.
- 1844** General John Dick was appointed Chief and Colonel Samuel Quail was appointed Assistant Chief of the Meadville Fire Department. Their jobs were to quash the rivalry between the Vigilant Fire Company and the Cussewago Fire Company. They were also in charge of purchasing new fire equipment and conducting operations at fire scenes. Fire Chiefs at this point in history were also referred to as "Fire Engineers".
- 1847** The Meadville Fire Company was reorganized and became the Cussewago Fire Company. The third company was organized under the name of "The Rough and Ready Fire Company".
- 1849** City Council mandated the companies organize and implement uniform regulations, or standard operating procedures. Wilmont Bartle was appointed as Chief. At this time, the population of the city was between 1,000 and 2,000 people.
- 1850** "The Rough and Ready Fire Company" station house was built where the Shryock building now stands.
- 1861** The Cussewago Fire Company folded.
- 1863** Fire destroyed eight stores on Water Street. Council was convinced that better fire equipment was needed, which led to the purchase of a new rotary steam engine. Three new fire companies were created: Taylor Hose; Hope Hose; and Keystone Hose.
- 1865** Meadville Fire Police were organized and their duties were basically unchanged in their 133 years of operation. Their duties were to see that no one interfered with the firefighters and to keep the spectators back at a safe distance from the fire. It is recognized that the Meadville Fire Police were the oldest organized fire police in the United States.

The Atlantic and Great Western Railway, later known as the Lake Erie Railroad, had their own fire department in Meadville for their buildings and equipment, which was manned by their employees.

1867 The city purchased a fire bell which was put in the old City Hall at the foot of Chestnut Street.

1883 The DeLamater Coffee Company was organized to provide coffee to the firefighters while on the scene of fires. They later merged with Taylor Hose Company.

1888 The city purchased and installed an alarm system in the City of Meadville, The system consisted of twelve cast iron alarm boxes which were spread throughout the city.

The city organized the career portion of the fire department. The career department consisted of a paid chief and paid drivers. The salary for a career firefighter for one month was \$65.00. The crews worked 24 hours a day, with 3 hours off for meals, and every 10th day they had off. The career department was located in the old city building at the foot of Chestnut Street.

1892 The city hired A. J. Balizet as superintendent of the alarm system. His job was to maintain, repair and update the alarm system. By the late 1800's, the city had a total of 183 alarm boxes and telephone stations connected to Central Station. In the early 1990's, the city began dismantling the Gamewell Alarm System because of high maintenance, high number of false alarms and abuse of the system. With the advent of technology and the 911 system, the Gamewell System was completely dismantled in 1998. The fire department at this point in time is now dispatched by Crawford County 911 for all emergency calls.

1904 The five hose companies in 1904 consisted of:

Taylor Hose Company #1

Hope Hose Company #2

Dick Hose Company #3

Davis Hose Company #4

Keystone Hose Company #5

These were the last fire companies to be created, prior to the formation of the Rescue Squad in July of 1935. In 1904, City Council said they would not create any more hose companies and this has held true through the years. The career fire department took over Central Station when Taylor Hose and Hope Hose Companies closed.

1911 On July 19, 1911, a movement was started for the purchase of the first auto fire truck for Meadville. F. M. Graff, in a communication to City Council, recommended a bond issue for several improvements. Among the recommendations was a 40 gallon chemical automobile and pump for the fire department.

1912 On May 16, 1912 an American LaFrance apparatus was purchased for \$8,850.00, where today, a brand new fire engine would cost no less than \$150,000.00.

1914 On January 21, 1914, Chief Dowdell recommended the purchase of a motor driven apparatus, and especially the purchase of an aerial truck with a 50 foot tower. Bids for the chemical truck, the hook and ladder, and tractor for the old chemical truck were opened on February 11, 1914 and were given to the superintendent of public safety. On March 23, 1914, on recommendation from the superintendent of public safety, City Council voted to accept the bid of the American

LaFrance Fire Engine Company for the purpose of one combination chemical and hose truck for \$10,000.00.

Construction of Central Fire Station was completed for the purpose of putting all of the motor driven apparatus into one building. Taylor Hose and Hope Hose were to be the first companies to man the station. Hope Hose Company dedicated a crew to be at the station every night. In 1914, there were 53 emergency responses, compared to the approximately 3,000 emergency responses that the department runs today.

- 1915** On March 15, 1915, there was a proposal made that City Council give the volunteer fire departments permission to place a proper and suitable memorial on Diamond Park in honor of deceased firemen.

October 15, 1915, was the biggest day in the history of the volunteer fire department. A parade preceded the unveiling of the monument in dedication of Central Fire Station on Park Avenue. All of Meadville turned out to honor her fire department. This day was distinctly a firemen's day and they occupied the center stage from early afternoon until late in the evening. Chiefs and firemen from other towns surrounding Meadville, were honored guests and took part in the ceremonies. The firemen's monument came to the City of Meadville as a gift of the volunteer firemen's organization. It was erected at a cost of \$1,800.00. At this point in time, there were six career firemen, consisting of four drivers, a chief and a superintendent of alarms. The fire bell was moved from the old City Hall at the foot of Chestnut Street to the historical Central Station at 875 Park Avenue.

- 1934** In February, 1934, the bid of the Mae International Motor Truck Company was accepted for a hook and ladder truck and a 750 gallon pumper. These trucks were placed in service on July 10, 1934. The trucks that they replaced were in service for 19 years, 6 months and 20 days. This is a long time for fire equipment to be in service. Just a year later, all three volunteer companies asked for new fire equipment. After a study was done by the city, the city purchased 3 trucks for the volunteers, plus all necessary firefighting equipment for those trucks. All of these trucks were placed in service in April, 1936. At that time, the city also added 29 additional alarm boxes.

- 1935** In July of 1935, the Rescue Squad was established. Their responsibilities were first aid, water rescue, salvage and overhaul.

- 1937** In 1937, career firefighters joined the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF). Our local union was given the number 515 by the IAFF.

- 1960s** The Thunderbirds Drum and Bugle Corps was created. At its inception, membership to the Thunderbirds came strictly from the volunteer fire departments in the City of Meadville. Later, in order to increase the size of the corps, membership was opened up to the general public.

In the late 1960's the Thunderbirds were moved to Erie because of financial problems and are still going strong in Erie today. In the late 1960's, the fire bell was removed from the tower at Central Station and placed in the new City Hall on display. This was done because the vibrations from the bell were creating structural damage to the building. This was the first step toward a centralized alarm system for the City of Meadville.

In 1968, renovations were done to the Central Fire Station to make room for a new aerial piece and general improvements in living and working conditions.

In the 1960's and 1970's, the Meadville Fire Department would try just about anything to make their jobs safer and easier. The department pioneered many things. Although they did not invent them, they would try them to see if it made a difference in their work. A list of some of the things they tried follows:

- ♣ In the 1960's - preconnected hose lines, high expansion foam, silver coats (so they could get closer to the fire and stay there longer);
- ♣ In 1970 - portable hydrant, handheld radios, bracket mounted SCBA's (selfcontained breathing apparatus), back then, SCBA's were carried in boxes, with this simple mount, firefighters were able to put their SCBAs on while en route to a fire;
- ♣ In 1971 - large diameter hose, driver controlled scene lighting;
- ♣ In 1973 - water wizard nozzle, the Hurst hydraulic rescue tool, also known as the jaws of life, (Meadville was the first department in Crawford County to have this tool);
- ♣ In 1976 - wet water (this was used in rural firefighting, but it was a new twist in booster tank premix, this acted like a foam).

Most of the things listed above are still in use today, or have been developed to further improve the equipment or technique.

- 1991** The City purchased a Grumman FireCat engine. This engine served over 30 years and was retired in 2023
- 1993** The City Purchased a New Sutphen 100ft MidMount Tower. The Tower was moved to reserve status in 2023 with the addition of a quint
- 1999** In March of 1999, The Meadville Fire Department moved from the original "Central Station" at Park Ave and Center St. to its current location at 850 Park Ave
- 2004** The City purchased a Smeal Engine that still serves the citizens to this day as Rescue/Engine 16-2
- 2023** The City put in service its new Sutphen SLR75 Rear Mount Quint. This piece of apparatus replaced the 1991 Engine and the 1993 Tower. It is able to function as an aerial device and an engine.

In February of 2023, The Meadville Fire Department purchased its first 2 ambulances.

April 5, 2023, The City of Meadville Fire Department began functioning as an Advance Life Support agency and began transporting patients to the hospital for the first time in its history.