

BOLTONVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT

The History of the Boltonville Fire Department (provided by Ann Enright)

Although the village of Boltonville suffered several serious fire losses since the start of the present century, such as the loss of the Peter Wood business in 1904 and the school in 1913, there had been no organized fire department, though Batavia did help with a fire on one occasion in 1916.

Casper Klunke, local grocer and tavern keeper, was instrumental in arranging the first organizational meeting of the fire department. Mr. Joseph Riley presided and Ben Wierman acted as secretary of the committee of Casper Klunke, William Groeschel, Oscar Marbes, Paul Belger and Oscar Frauenheim to assemble information pertinent to the establishment of an effective fire fighting organization. The committee was also authorized to raise funds to purchase equipment and solicit subscriptions from residents. They also sponsored a dance. These efforts raised over \$1,100.00 and the committee was authorized at a July 1917 meeting to purchase two No. 10 chemical engines from La France Company of Chicago. These engines were delivered in November at a cost of \$350.00 each. With these purchases, fire protection for the community became a reality.

The trustees purchased a parcel of land from Hamm Brewing Company of Random Lake at the southwest corner of the property which now comprises the Firemen's Park. A building was erected which housed the equipment of the department until 1955 when the western portion of the present firehouse was constructed. Records indicate that \$25.00 was paid for the land and that the building cost over \$500.00. Fifty-eight members of the community are listed as charter members of the organization, which included three women: Mrs. F. Pietschmann, Mary Dullea, and Mrs. J. Schoetz.

At a meeting held in January, 1918, the Constitution and Bylaws were adopted. The preamble reads as follows:

The members of the Boltonville Fire Department, in order to maintain perfect union among themselves, establish discipline, define duties, insure harmony and promote objects for which they are associated, do ordain and adopt the following code of laws for the government of the company."

The bylaws stipulated that meetings were to be held on the first Tuesday of each month and membership dues were to be ten cents per month. For non-attendance at meetings and practice sessions of the fire company, there was to be a fine of twenty-five cents for each infraction of the rules. Article 22 provided that if a member was injured while fighting an fire, and such injury prevented him from doing his regular work, he was to receive a compensation from the Department of three dollars per week for not more than six weeks.

The officers elected at this meeting were President, Joseph Riley; Fire Chief, Ben Wierman; Secretary, Oscar Frauenheim; Treasurer, Casper Klunke; and Steward, Robert Ruel, Sr. Ten men were appointed to act as a fire company for each new engine, and ten others were designated as a hook and ladder company for the new wagon that was built by the Belger Brothers at their blacksmith shop.

The first Boltonville Firemen's picnic was held on August 4, 1918, and the resulting profit of \$410.70 was deemed a highly successful accomplishment.

A bell was purchased in 1919 for \$41.16. A siren replaced the bell in 1947 and the bell was mounted in a planter next to the firehouse. In 1920, the department took on a "new look" when it became mechanized through the purchase of a new Ford run-about for \$450.00, enabling the chemical engines to be driven instead of pulled by horses. A chimney was added to the building so that it could be properly heated and the equipment cared for, as well as for comfort at meetings. The department was incorporated in 1924. During these early years, the younger men of the community were also being enlisted as members to help man the equipment. The night of August 13,

1927 marked the first meeting at the firehouse with electric lighting, a gift from Louis Morbes, who was given a rousing vote of thanks and designated an honorary lifetime member. On November 13, 1927, the members participated in the unveiling of the Courthouse monument in West Bend that had been erected in honor of the soldiers who had served in the Civil, Spanish-American and the First World Wars.

In 1930, two new chemical tanks and a booster pump were purchased at a cost of \$1,775.00. They were mounted on a new Model A Ford chassis purchased from Art Groeschel for \$569.00. A quote from the secretary's minutes of February 1, 1934 reads: "Chief reported call to Elmer Plaum's on a bitterly cold day to extinguish chimney fire, stated that though the chimney was hot, the weather was not so hot," B. Wierman, Sec'y.

In 1938 the department purchased the lots adjoining the fire department from George Fay and the Wendel estate. To facilitate this effort a "Tree Day" was held on April 6, 1940, and the members were asked to bring trees and plant them in the park. Also in 1938 a 1932 model Chevrolet truck was purchased and a 500-gallon tank and booster pump were installed. In 1946 the bylaws were revised and the articles of incorporation renewed in accordance with the more recent provisions of the state statutes.

A new Ford truck chassis was purchased in 1948 and outfitted with a 500-gallon tank for \$9,000.00. The fire department joined the Badger Firemen's Association and was awarded the Annual Association Tournament in 1950 which proved to be a gala day in the annals of Boltonville and netted the department a profit of \$1,997.00. During the early years, fire departments existed almost wholly on fundraiser events; since 1945, however, state law stipulated that municipalities provide a portion of the department support through the tax rolls.

In 1953, the former Belger Brothers property was purchased and a new firehouse was built in 1955; the westerly portion of the present firehouse, which was constructed for \$24,000.00. The upper story housed the equipment and the ground floor included a modern kitchen and meeting/dining/bar and rest rooms. The first floor was frequently used for organizational meetings, town meetings, wedding, and private parties. A panel truck was added in 1958 and used to carry coats, boots, tools, etc. It was jokingly referred to as the "paddy wagon."

In May of 1960 a sizeable group of local firemen took part in a firemen's training course conducted by the West Bend Fire Department, and in April 1961 a course in first aid. When the Boltonville Sportsmen's club was organized in 1962 with the intent of replacing the mill dam and creating the pond for recreational purposes, the fire department cooperated and installed a hydrant and constructed approaches to fill the trucks with water. The hamburger stand was built in the park in 1965. In 1966 the old firehouse was taken down and the basement converted to out-house-type toilets and storage. To supplement aging equipment, the department purchased a Chevrolet chassis from Honeck's in Kewaskum and the pumper and equipment was built by the John Bean Division of the FMC Corporation of Tipton, Indiana. Several members of the department spent a few days in Indiana training on the new equipment and brought it home on January 20, 1967. A new siren was installed in 1969 and a new hypalon portable tank purchased at \$236.00.

In 1970 the new paging system was installed replacing the old phone call-siren sounding system. The Sheriff's Department would use their radio equipment to signal the alert that was received in ten firemen's homes on 10-10 Motorola receivers. Ronald A. Petermann was elected Assistant Chief in 1971, and also served as a training officer, picnic chairman and hamburger stand chairman until his death in 1995. His passing was a great loss to the department.

More equipment was purchased in 1973 – a 610-gallon-per-minute capacity portable pump, twenty feet of four-inch rubber suction hose and fifty feet of four-inch discharge hose at a cost of \$1,295.00. A Chevrolet van was purchased in 1975 from Cooley's International of West Bend for hauling apparatus and equipment. This truck contained extra SCBA's (self-contained breathing apparatus), fire-fighting clothing, extra air tanks and miscellaneous equipment. The old "paddy wagon" was sold for the best offer of \$200.00. In 1976 and 1977 new Motorola pagers were purchased for individual firemen at the cost of \$230.00 each. With these purchases, the response time to the fire alert was drastically shortened. A new mini-pumper was purchased in 1979, built by Welch Fire Equipment Company. The new pumper had a capacity of 400 gpm with a 250-gallon water tank. It was also

equipped with a foam attachment for fighting flammable fuel fires. Other equipment on the pumper consisted of 250 feet of two and one-half inch fire hose line on an automatic reel used primarily for fighting grass fires.

In 1980 the department added a 2,500-gallon tanker on a GMC tandem axle chassis purchased from Five Corners GMC in Cedarburg. The original flat roof of the firehouse was replaced with a hip roof in 1985, and a five-tank Cascade System was purchased for filling air tanks, along with a Malco compressor. In 1989, they took delivery of a Darley Pumper which was able to seat ten men inside a totally enclosed cab.

In 1991 the membership voted to purchase the Edna Gilford (tavern) property adjacent to the east property line for \$52,000. From 1991-1995 the buildings on the property were used for storage and training. In 1992, a committee was formed to plan an addition to the firehouse which was constructed in 1995-96, ready just in time for the 1996 Rain Days Picnic. Added to the original structure was a two-story concrete block structure, fifty-four by seventy-two feet. The upper addition provided four truck bays for parking, a hose drying tower, bathrooms, showers, mechanical room and an SCBA storage room. The old portion of the building was remodeled to contain three truck bays and three private offices. A computer and printer were added to the equipment.

The complete lower level housed the kitchen, meeting room, banquet hall and furnace room. The grand opening included special speakers Town Chairman Jack Theusch, State Representative Glen Grothman, Ray Wolf of the Washington County Fire Chiefs Association, Jim Dieringer, president of the Fillmore Fire Department, and the architect who designed the building. MC'ing the event was Norbert Dettmann. Displays and refreshments rounded out the event. In June 1997, 4.4 acres of land adjacent to the millpond was purchased from Ken and Janet Enright to use in drills, demonstrations and for parking.

As of 1997, monthly meetings of the volunteer fire department were held on the first Thursday of the month, and yearly dues were two dollars. Fire training practices are held on the second and fourth Mondays of the month, and new recruits must attend sixty hours of classes through Moraine Park Technical College before becoming certified by the state, a required procedure. Additional training is also required before the recruits can participate in actual fire fighting. The Assistant Chief, Ken Ramthun, is a fire science instructor at the MPTC. Also in 1997, a 1,500-gallon tanker was purchased as a need to improve the department's ISO (insurance) rating.

The annual Firemen's Picnic, which was christened "Rain Days" in 1973 because of the frequent inclement weather on the chosen Memorial Day weekends, has proved to be very profitable and well-attended fundraiser for the department. A street dance event has also been added to the list of fundraisers since the new addition was opened.

The Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary was originally organized in March of 1955. Their traditional dinner on the weekend of the Annual Firemen's Picnic has been continued by the current members of the auxiliary. The proceeds from the dinner have been used to remodel the kitchen in 1982 by adding some new storage cabinets and paneling. Additional remodeling, new stoves and refrigerator were purchased in 1992. Donations are periodically made to the Fire Department for gear, clothing, etc.

The Ladies Auxiliary provides the firemen with sandwiches and refreshments while they are hard at work fighting fires at all times of the day or night.

The First Responders started serving the community in April, 2002. Lt. Norman Bandler served as trainer. Twenty firemen initially took the classes that consisted of forty-five hours of classes and hands-on training in first aid and trauma intervention. The First Responders answer the call to 911 emergencies and trauma accidents. The department responded to thirty-one calls in 2003. Refresher training courses are conducted every two years, for a total of thirty-two hours. Currently, there are twenty-four members of the team. Lt. Bandler was instrumental in obtaining a federal grant for the Department of \$120,000. They purchased forty-five sets of turn-out gear and twenty-one sets of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA).

In May, 2002, the Department purchased a 3,500-gallon tanker. It has an International chassis purchased from Cooley's in West Bend. In service as truck number 2393, the whole unit cost \$162,000. A new Peter-Built

equipment truck is expected to be delivered in May, 2004. The twenty-two-foot long Marion Body Works carries twenty-four sets of gear, a Cascade Air System to refill air tanks, twenty-one spare air bottles, six SCBA units, a generator with light tower and a canopy for a re-hab area. It will serve as a command center with a desk, radios and maps.

The current Boltonville Fire Department has thirty-five active volunteer fire fighters.

Fire Chiefs of the Boltonville Fire Department: 1917-1918- Ben Wierman; 1919-1920-Fred Belger, Sr.; 1921-1922-Oscar Koth; 1924-1934-Arthur Birkholz; 1935-1938-Brooks Meissert; 1938-1948-Arthur Birkholz; 1948-1968-Lawrence Staehler; 1968-1971-Elmer Belger; 1972-present-Joseph Enright.
