

East Haven Memories

EAST HAVEN ADVERTISER 2-25-89

In the earliest years in East Haven Village, the fighting of fire which on infrequent times broke out of bounds was an operation carried on by neighbors who lent willing hearts and hands to the opportunity to help persons and property. Bucket brigades were formed and brought water from streams, wells and pools to aid stricken families. Fire of greater or lesser loss went unrecorded but remained in a generations' memory, like the blaze that swept the yellow school house on the Green.

On the night of June 1, 1882 the whole Town of East Haven, from the hills and valleys of Foxon to the seashore at south end was aroused like never before, when the general store of Calvin C. Kirkham was burned to the ground. This spectacular and disasterous fire reduced the general store and town hall to ashes. This fire stirred the residents of East Haven into what for the time was speedy action. A special meeting was called and met in the Old Stone Church basement Chapel to start proceedings for a civic fire fighting service in East Haven. A committee of three citizens of the town were appointed to inquire the cost of fire hydrants to be placed in the town center, also the cost of 500 feet of hose and a hose carriage (It is stored today as a prize relic and used in many of the town's parades). A month later the fire vehicle trundled through the streets of East Haven manned by volunteers.

In 1901, Issac Hagaman was made first fire chief and Charles Gerrish, foreman. In the same year 56 townsmen rallied to the call and the first volunteer fire department was formed.

In the early years of the department the horse drawn hook and ladder provided a reasonable amount of dependability of service. However by 1911 the equipment became inadequate and the department purchased the community's first motor driven apparatus.

In 1920 came the installation of the first fire alarm system, soon after the first telephone system was installed in town. Th first central switchboard of the East Haven Telephone and Electric Company was located in the Atwater Store. next

door to the Fire Station and later in the home of Lottie Fairchild on Kirkham Avenue, who took reports of fire and relayed them by sounding the location number to each telephone in town. In 1921 the system was changed and people were to go to the nearest telephone and call central.

In 1901, it was voted that the "First Selectman of the Town be elected to purchase a suitable lot for a Hose House and that \$2,000 be borrowed by the town for this purpose." The present Main Street site was selected and a hose house was erected, by Chidsey Brothers, builders and contractors. The building stands today but was moved back from the street in 1938 to put to other use; it now houses the Town's Public Works Department.

The building was completed and turned over to the Volunteer Fire Department by First Selectman John Tyler on Aug. 5th, 1901. This occasion marked by the town's first street parade and followed by a public inspection of the new building, a two story wooden structure.

The first and second decade of the century saw not only a slow growth and development of the East Haven Fire Department, but it brought forth the need for fire protection in outlying areas. The accelerating increase in population which was reaching out to the west end beyond Gerish Avenue, the Riverside section along Short Beach and into Foxon Park region brought need for fire protection in those areas. This led by slow degrees and stages to action and the formation of volunteer departments in the developing neighborhoods.

(Compiled by Julius W. Korn, Former Captain, East Haven Volunteer Fire Dept., Member of East Haven Historical Society.)

Shore Line Newspapers
Yellow Classified
453-5463
or
1-800-922-7066