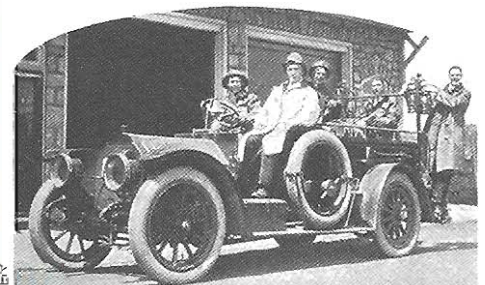


100 Candles on the Cake – Call the Fire Department!



Firehouse No. 1 - 1916 - 1964



Was rarin' for a fire. The distinguished volunteers include, left to right, T. F. McLoughlin, T. J. Campbell, H. Miller, and the two visiting firemen hanging on at



ORIGINAL WATERCOLOR BY CAROL SCHAEFFER

When delivery driver George Lee woke up on Monday morning, December 20, 1916, he did not realize it, but he was going to drag the sleepy crossroads town of Newtown Square into the 20th century. He had gone to the Pennsylvania Hospital farm in Newtown Square that morning and loaded up his Autocar – an early form of delivery truck – with cans of milk, and then drove the 14 miles into Philadelphia to deliver the milk to the Pennsylvania Hospital. He returned and at about 1:00 p.m. he pulled the car into Harry Matson's small garage at West Chester Pike and Bishop Hollow road. As reported by the local newspaper, "Ten minutes later, the building was a mass of flames, and hurry calls were sent to the Media, Bryn Mawr and Ardmore fire companies, all of which raced to the scene." The garage was near the Newtown Square Hotel and its stables, and the nearby switching station of the American Telephone and Telegraph, which handled the long distance calls for much of the Eastern United States from this building. Newtown had no fire department, and so the job of fighting the fire fell to whoever was in the vicinity that day, with whatever equipment they could employ.

By the time the area fire departments had arrived, it was clear that the garage would be a total loss. There were four vehicles in the garage, each with a tank of gas, and the explosions from those tanks fed the fire. The volunteers worked to stop the spread of the fire to the other area structures. Horses were rescued from the burning stables, whose roof was ignited in several places. The firemen were finally able to put out the fire and contain the loss to the garage.

In that year, telephone lines came in and out of Newtown on a forest of telephone poles each holding multiple sets of lines. Newtown was the junction of "the New York-Washington, New York-Newtown Square, Philadelphia-Harrisburg, Philadelphia-Chicago, Poughkeepsie-Philadelphia, Newtown Square-Temple lines and the Philadelphia-Harrisburg cable." The loss of those lines would have played havoc with the nation's telephone service. Fortunately, the

loss that day was limited to the melting of the Philadelphia-Chicago lines. But the fire was a wakeup call to the community, and to the local employees of AT&T. Newtown needed a fire company.

A community meeting was called for January 31, 1916 at the Hotel. As related in a 1922 article from the AT&T company newsletter: "A public meeting was called, a telephone man was made temporary chairman and from this meeting our fire company originated. A telephone man was made vice-president and fire chief, with other telephone men as first and second assistant chiefs and others as secretary, director, executive committeemen, drivers and enginemen." The author of the article was a modest Thomas J. Campbell, the temporary chairman and first fire chief.

As a result of the meeting, the organizers moved forward in several directions – forming a non-profit corporation, raising money to buy equipment, soliciting local residents to act as volunteers, picking a site to locate a fire house, and then raising the money to build the fire house. On March 13, 1916, local merchant and hotel owner E.N.G. Davis donated a tract of land to the new fire company – the same location occupied by the current firehouse. By April of that year, while still without equipment, the initial fire company volunteers responded to a call and beat out a brush fire in the woods near Archie Moore's house. In May, the company purchased its first equipment: a 60 h.p. Stearns chassis, a Hale pump, and two 35 gallon Holloway tanks. By July it was reported that "Judge Johnson has signed the charter for the Newtown Square Fire Company No. 1, a company which has the backing of all the wealthy people who have settled in Newtown township in the last few years ..." An AT&T architect, Mr. Steele, drew up plans for the building, volunteers in the community pitched in to do the preliminary excavation work, and on September 25, 1916, Marple resident Charles Dickinson began the work of building the 2-story stone and frame building that would house the fire company. The plans included an upstairs hall with a seating capacity of 250. The cornerstone was laid on October 3, 1916, and longtime resident

Elizabeth Calvert Lewis recalled that "We all sat on piles of lumber to watch the ceremonies." The AT&T office again contributed their talents in wiring the building for electricity.

The fire house became one of the social centers for the town. The wives and daughters of the firemen organized the Women's Auxiliary a few years later to sponsor socials, suppers and minstrel shows to raise money for the fire company. As a result, the original mortgage on the fire house was paid off by October 5, 1923, and a mortgage burning party was held the following month. A local resident recalling the years prior to World War II said "Most of the men felt it a duty to serve with the volunteer fire company." While the initial idea may have been prodded by the AT&T men, the community responded to the call, and within a year of that initial fire at the garage, Newtown had a functioning volunteer fire department, with modern firefighting equipment, housed in a new building.

In 1964 the old fire hall was razed to make way for new one. Six living charter members witnessed the opening of the old cornerstone and looked over the items they had placed there as young men: coins, newspapers, name cards, several photos, and a brief history of how the fire company was formed.

One hundred years later, the volunteer fire company endures – although with far more people in the community, there are far fewer volunteer for community service. The Fire Department hopes to try to change that attitude on the 100th anniversary of its birthday. It is planning a huge parade on West Chester Pike, for Saturday June 4, 2016, with 100 fire trucks in attendance. There will be a series of other events as well that day. They also just announced plans to build a new fire station on Saw Mill Road and Newtown Street Road.

We are no longer a tiny crossroads community, and we need a modern 21st century fire department. And to do so, the fire company needs the support of more than the 40% of residents and 20% of businesses that regularly respond to their annual calls for contributions. And they always need volunteers, not just to man the trucks, but to do all of the administrative tasks that it takes to operate a modern fire department. It would be a wonderful birthday present to see the entire community rally around the department as they did one hundred years ago.

Written by Doug Humes, Newtown Square Historical Society



A Message Regarding the Last of Winter...

While we were spared a difficult winter in November and December, the blizzard of January 22nd, 23rd and 24th was certainly complicated for us all. Thank you to everyone for their patience while snow and ice was removed. Residents looked after each other and did their part in getting the community back up-and-running again quickly. Among the heroes was Stan Siberski of Timber Lane, whose wife Regi

e-mailed us after the storm with this picture: "Our thanks to all of the guys. If you need some additional help, please contact Plow Doc. This retiree is available with his own equipment!"



Celebration of Newtown Saturday, June 4th 2016

- The Historical Society's Annual Colonial Days Celebration
- Newtown Square Fire Department 100th Anniversary Parade

