The Freeport Fire Department [1937]

Author Unknown
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Older, by far, than the Incorporated Village of Freeport, its firefighting organization dates back to December, 1874, when Excelsior Hook and Ladder Company was organized with William H. Patterson as its first foreman. The name Excelsior descended from the coat of arms of the State of New York via Patterson’s Butcher Shop, a small building located where the Big Ben store now stands on South Main Street.

Still bubbling over with the patriotism which had caused him to enlist as a drummer boy in the Civil War, “Billy” took the magic word, “Excelsior” as the slogan for his business and what was more fitting than that it should also become the inspiration for his fire company?

This Company secured land, erected its own quarters and purchased its own apparatus, and remained the only fire protection in the Village until after the Village was incorporated in 1892. The formation of Wide Awake Engine Company was authorized by the Village Board of Trustees on September 1, 1893, and on October 9, 1893 the Board consented to the organization of a department, “to consist of Excelsior Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1, Wide Awake Engine Co. No. 1 and such other companies as may hereafter be organized.”
The first department election was held December 5, 1893, at which time D. Wesley Pine was elected its first Chief Engineer and Theodore Corwin its first deputy or assistant engineer, as department officer were then known.

Consent to the organization of Ever Ready Hose Company No. 1 was granted on December 29, 1893, of Vigilant Hose Company No. 2 on June 26, 1894 and of Bayview Hose Company No. 3 on May 24, 1895. Patriot Hose Company No. 4 was organized much later, in 1911, or 1912, and Hose Company No 5, which arrived too late to receive one of the inspiring names, existed in Roosevelt as Russell Hose Company but came into Freeport as just Hose 5, following the annexation of a portion of Roosevelt to Freeport in 1923.

These companies later became and are still known as Truck 1, Engine 1, Hose 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Space will only allow of touching some of the high spots in department history. Truck 1 built its own house and enlarged it to hold apparatus of increased size until 1936 when it deeded it to the Village and in return for which it will receive the new house now under construction which will cost about $50,000. No records are available of the origin of its first apparatus. Its second was constructed by Theodore Bedell. Its third, in 1911, was an American LaFrance city service truck. A tractor was attached to this in 1914, and this combined apparatus remained in service until 1924, when the present aerial truck was purchased.

The first quarters of Engine Co. No. 1 were in what was known as Williams Livery Stable on Main Street where the Baumann Building was recently erected. They later
moved to the corner of Pine and Church Streets in a building erected for them where they remained until 1925 when the new fire headquarters building was erected on North Main Street. This headquarters building houses two companies, and the Fire Council, and originally cost Freeport approximately $65,000 with an additional expenditure later of over $60,000, when Main Street was widened. Its first apparatus was a Sillsby steam engine, hand drawn, purchased in 1894. Its second, a Nott steamer, was purchased in 1907. A tractor was attached to this in 1916 and this combined apparatus was retired in 1928 when it was replaced by a 1000 gallon American LaFrance pumping engine. Old Jumbo, the tractor-drawn steamer, was used as late as August, 1936.

The first quarters of Hose 1 were on Bedell Street near Main, in a house erected by the late Ira H. Baker at a coat of $324. Like all fire houses at that time the floor was raised about eighteen inches and it required considerable skill to take advantage of this inclined floor so that when the apparatus, pulled by hand, reached the street, it did not spill over when straightening out for the run of maybe a mile or more.. It later moved to its present site on Southside Avenue near Bedell Street upon a plot of land donated by Cadman H. Frederick, recently elected Mayor of our neighboring village of Babylon, and upon which the Village erected its present quarters. Like Hose 2 and 3, it possessed first a huge two-wheel hose reel then a light hose wagon, but in 1911 it received its first factory-built hose wagon made by Stewart, making horses necessary. These were secured wherever possible, the Village paying $5 per call for the first team to reach the various houses. Its first motor apparatus, a Mack Hose wagon, was purchased in 1916 and its second, another Mack, still in service, in 1931.
Hose 2 blossomed forth on North Main Street almost on the spot it now occupies in Headquarters. Its early history, including its house, was much the same as Hose 1, including its first three apparatus. For its fourth, however, the body of its 1911 hose wagon was mounted on a Mack chassis in 1915 and this served until 1925, when its present American LaFrance 750 gallon pumping engine was purchased.

Hose 3’s first home was on Atlantic Avenue near Bayview. Its early history was even more humble for in addition to following along the footsteps of Hose 1 and 2, it was obliged to at first put up with a reel which had previously been the property of Engine 1. Bayview was then more generally known as Coe’s Neck and its reel became known as the “Coo’s Neck Stump Jumper.” It, too, received a team wagon in 1911, but its next apparatus, in 1919, was a Brockway hose wagon. Notoriously slow, this apparatus served the Company until 1925. It was not planned to replace it then but Hose 3 had always been an efficient unit of the Fire Department and their wardens, with some of their friends in the Fire Council, voted to give its present American LaFrance pumper, slated to go to Engine 1, to Hose 3. It was a duplicate of Hose 2 apparatus. Its second and present station was on Bayview Avenue, near Atlantic Avenue, upon land donated by the late John J. Randall, where it is now located.

Hose 4 was also of humble origin, its first apparatus being kept in a barn on Pearsall Avenue and its meetings being held in the house of Excelsior Hook and Ladder Co., loaned for this purpose. They worked things a little differently. The department furnished the wagon but the company secured a second-hand automobile which they used for a tractor and for which they received the same amount per call as a team would have earned, the money going into their treasury. They received a White pump
in 1919, and their present Ahrens-Fox 1000 gallon pumper in 1929. Hose 4 is now located in its own quarters on Sunrise Highway in one of the finest buildings on Long Island.

Hose 5 had its own apparatus, a Fulton hose wagon, and owned its own building when it became a part of the Freeport Fire Department, all of which the Village later purchased. Russell Hose Company here was the holding company and has never been a unit of the Freeport Fire Department. Its quarters are on Leonard Avenue a short distance east of Main Street and will probably give place to a modern firehouse within a very short time.

The first fire alarm, system was by Loper of Stonington, Connecticut. Freeport looked for something cheap. It got it! After spending several thousand dollars, it discarded the entire system and now has close to $40,000 invested in a Gamewell Fire Alarm system.

A band of fifty pieces is composed of members of the Fire Department. It is uniformed and equipped by the Village.

A first aid squad of men permanently detailed from all companies answers all general alarms and performs valuable service.

So, briefly, Freeport has three hundred fifty men ready to serve in case of fire. It has probably a quarter of a million dollars invested in fire department buildings and most modern apparatus. It has an efficient fire alarm system, is splendidly manned with efficient officers and is a credit not only to the Village of Freeport but to the fire-fighting profession generally. And all of this service is actuated by a desire on the part of the
fireman to serve his neighbor, to protect human life and for which the satisfaction of a
duty well performed is the only reward.