



Deerpark Diary

Town of Deerpark 1863 School House Museum
Town of Deerpark Historian, P. O. Box 621, Huguenot, New York 12746 (845-856-2702)
December 2006 Vol. 3 #4

Features

- History of the Sparrowbush Engine Co.
- Big Hotel Burned
- Stranded Pooch
- Local Firefighters Help Canadian Neighbors
- Walter Gochenour Sparrowbush Engine Co. History



The first fire department in Sparrowbush was organized April 24, 1917 following the near disastrous burning of a home located on Main Street. Fortunately, the owner had installed a hand force pump on a small cart for his personal use and through the efforts of the men who quickly gathered at the scene, the fire was extinguished before the house was too badly damaged.

A few days later a meeting was held in the Village Town Hall resulting in the organization of a fire department. Mr. Henry Fuhrberg was elected as the Fire Chief with John Fink, William Darragh and L. A. Johnson as assistants.

The first piece of fire fighting equipment was a two-wheeled hand-drawn chemical truck which had a capacity of approximately 250 gallons. The water in the tank contained baking soda. A bottle of acid was attached to the top of the tank. When needed at a fire, the acid was released by a lever and

mixed with the soda and water providing a good size stream to control a small fire.



The first motorized truck, a 1919 Ford, was purchased in 1920. For several years the Fire Company meetings were held in the basement garage of Henry Mink, Sr.'s home on Main Street. The chemical truck and the 1919 Ford were also housed there.

Sometime in the early 1920s the Town Hall, as it was then called, was acquired from the Hammond Estate and transferred to the Fire District. A basement was excavated under the building for a truck house and fireman's meeting room. The upstairs was used for voting, plays and basketball games.

A pond was built on the Patterson owned property near the center of town and a dam built in the Sparrowbush brook to provide water for use in firefighting.

The first alarm system consisted of two large railroad engine rims. These rims were suspended and struck with a hammer to sound an alarm. A gong effect was created. One was located in the upper part of town and the other on a hill across from the church.



Francis "Pete" Skinner

From 1954 until his death in 1964, Francis "Pete" Skinner, who was confined to his bed after contracting polio, answered all emergency calls from his home on a 24 hour basis and activated the alarm system by a special hook-up located by his bed.



Different types of answering services were then used until 1994 when all emergency calls were handled by the KEE 315 control center. Today the 911 system is being used.

When the fire company was first organized it was known as the Hammond Chemical Company. In 1947, it was renamed the Sparrowbush Fire Department. In 1965, it became incorporated under its present name of the Sparrowbush Engine Company, Inc.

The fire company was originally governed by three trustees who in turn were responsible to the Deerpark Town Board.

In 1940 the governing body became the Sparrowbush Fire District commissioners, elected to five year terms by the qualified residents living within the boundaries of the fire district.

Today the Social Officers, as they are considered, consist of a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Fire Command Officers consist of a Chief, 1st Lieutenant, assisted by

five Deputy Chiefs appointed by the Commissioners.

The Company had fire police as early as the 1930s. They were usually older members who did not wish to fight fires any longer. In 1980 a Fire Police Squad was formed with its own company approved by-laws. Once a year, Squad members select a Captain and Lieutenant to be in command, with the Chief's approval. Today, to become a fire police an active fire person must take a state approved training course, be sworn in as a Peace Officer by a Notary Public, and register with the Division of Criminal Justice Services. Being a Fire Police today is much more dangerous than in the past.

The Company started answering medical calls and had trained EMT responders around 1973. The EMT members select one of their group to be the Medical Officer in command with the Chief's approval. Many hours are spent to be considered a trained EMT. Refresher courses must be attended to remain an EMT.



Water Rescue Craft

The Company had divers around the late sixties who used their own personal equipment at calls. Around 1974, the Company started a trained Dive Squad and secured a rescue boat. The divers are commanded by a Divermaster and Assistant Divermaster. Both are selected by the Squad members

with the Chief's approval. To be a diver requires many hours of training and certification. They must be re-certified each year. The same applies to all boat handlers.

The Company also has a High-angle rescue team trained to rappel over steep cliffs wearing special mountain climbing gear.

The present fire house was built between the late 1960s and early 1970s at a cost of \$114,000. Most of the interior finish work was completed by the members. The building was dedicated in May, 1971.



An addition was built to enlarge the dining room, kitchen and bathrooms in 1994.

A three-bay sub-station was built on Route 42 in 1990 in Rio for faster response time in that area. At the present time it houses the pumper/tanker, mini-pumper and Commissioner's vehicle.

The Fire District covers approximately 32 square miles going to Sullivan County lines on both Routes 42 and 97 and the boundaries of the City of Port Jervis. It also covers the area behind Big Pond to the Sullivan County line.

Over the course of many years since its beginning the following trucks were bought and used by the fire department: a 1925 Oldsmobile fire truck; a new Ford truck purchased in 1931 at a cost of \$2,722.00; a new Ward LaFrance

purchased in 1934 at a cost of \$8,000.00; a used 1934 American LaFrance purchased in 1953 from the City of Port Jervis; a Mack truck purchased in 1961 from Port Jervis; a pumper built in 1969 by Seagraves Fire Equipment Company at the cost of \$33,939 and a 1971 International tanker.

Today the Fire Company maintains six vehicles for emergency calls: a 1989 2500 gallon pumper/tanker; a 1995 pumper; a 1991 mini-pumper; a refurbished 1990 tanker; a 1993 rescue truck used for medical calls; a 2003 heavy rescue truck; a 1993 police van and an air-boat and Jet-ski for water rescue.



Current Fleet of Vehicles

Over the course of years, the Fire Company has responded to many structure fires, forest fires, medical calls, water rescues and recoveries, searches, mutual aid calls, and animal rescues. Many calls are for severe emergencies.

In 1979 the Fire Company suffered a tragic loss when 25 year old firefighter, Vincent Inella, lost his life while fighting an interior structure fire in Sparrowbush. A flashover occurred while he and firefighter Robert Ey, Jr. were inside the building. Robert survived but was severely burned over 29 percent of his body. He still carries scars today from the incident.

A scholarship fund was established in Vincent's memory and a memorial window was placed

dec06_01.jpg

dec06_02.jpg

over the entrance door of the firehouse. A memorial plaque was also placed on the front of the building. A benefit dinner was held for Robert to help with some of his every day expenses while recovering and a life membership was given to him.

The Engine company is widely known for its many and varied fund raisers held over the years. It is also known for its good cooks and excellent meals served at many of these functions. The membership works on the theory of giving something in return for the donations people give when purchasing tickets for these affairs. A lot of these funds are used to secure much of the equipment in use today.

The Company's Ladies Auxiliary was established in 1928. Today they are considered a branch of the fire company. Their dedication to the Fire Company has been outstanding. They are always available to help with the Company's fundraisers as well as holding their own fundraisers to help the Company with generous donations. At extended alarms the Auxiliary furnishes hot and cold drinks and food to the firefighters in all kinds of weather and at all time of day or night.

In 1990 the Fire Commissioners purchased about eight acres bordering the firehouse property from William and Helen Kestler. The hopes are to eventually build a landing pad for a medic vac landing and a company training center.

In 2000 the Commissioners and fire Company came to agreement with the Town Board to use about three acres of the property for a Town Park.



The Evening Gazette
Tuesday, May 7, 1912

BIG HOTEL BURNED CAHOONZIE PARK INN IS IN RUINS

The fine summer hotel of Jacob Bauer at Cahoonzie, known as Cahoonzie Park Inn, was totally destroyed by fire early this morning. The fire started about one o'clock.

Mr. Bauer arose about midnight and went to the chicken yard with the hired man to look at an incubator. They were gone about an hour. When they turned toward the Building, fire was seen issuing from the sides, and it spread with great rapidity. When Mr. Bauer went away from the building, he left a lighted lamp in his room and it is believed that this in some manner was the cause of the fire.

The blaze could have burned in the interior a long time before making its appearance on the outside. There were no ways of fighting the fire; in fact the water system of the hotel had not been put in operation yet for the coming summer business.

The main building was a three story structure about 125 feet by 40 feet and there was a wing on the rear of the building 90 feet by 30 feet. The latter was also 3 stories high. There were about 80 rooms in the place. Preparations

were being made to open the inn on the usual date, May 30th. The loss of the building was partly covered by insurance.

Tri-State Gazette
June 28, 1996
By Oliver Mackson

HAWKS NEST—It was a sweat-palms save from a sheer cliff high above the Delaware river and then lift the victim to safety, but the victim stayed cool.

"He was fine. Only growled once," Sparrowbush fire volunteer Kenny Kent said after he and other members of the Sparrowbush High-Angle Rescue Team pulled off the rescue yesterday afternoon.



The victim, a grayish 40-50 pound stray dog with no collar or tags, blinked in the bright sunshine after he'd been pulled to safety over a stone wall on Route 97.

The Sparrowbush Fire Department was called to the snaky highway about 12:20 p.m. after a passer-by, Jack Shannon of Port Jervis, noticed the dog perched on a ledge about 20 feet below the highway. The dog's right front paw appeared to be injured.

Ken rappelled down to the dog while his cousin, Jim Kent, rappelled and perched on another ledge halfway between the wall and the dog.

"Look at this. What a good boy," Shannon said as the dog settled into the harness and was lifted to safety. "Hey Kenny, I think you adopted a dog. He's looking back at you."

The dog was taken to temporary shelter.

The Gazette
January 22, 1998
By Amy Berkowitz

Local firefighters help Canadian neighbors

SPARROWBUSH—Local volunteer firefighters left their homes last week with a quest to help others in the ice nightmare of upstate New York and Canada.

The area has been encased in ice since Jan. 8. Two deaths have resulted from the ice storm. Only some electricity has been restored and communications remain sparse due to downed power lines. Temperatures are below zero, which is making people use potentially dangerous gas heaters that are not vented....



"If you were to say it (is) bad, it's worse than bad," said Floyd Babcock, a Sparrowbush Fire Department pump man....

"The Red Cross is up there and they're bringing in some of elderly, but the majority of the

people just want to stay home. We had to check on them everyday to see if they needed any medical attention... (and to see if they had any water in their basement.)"

Up north firefighters used yellow ribbons to mark home that contained healthy people so they could keep watch on them everyday. Although the residents were already home, the yellow ribbons given them hope that they will conquer the war of "survival."

Joseph Kowal (Port Jervis Fire Chief from Maghogoock Hook and Ladder) joined Babcock with six volunteers in the first trip and seven volunteers in the second. The volunteers from each trip include: Wayne Wood, William Brewster, William Conklin, Scott Jelic, Bill Van Horn, Art Smith, Eric Waligroski, Steve Pantis and Steve Flood.

Kowal and Babcock were surprised to see how many electrical poles were down. Kowal said the ice is complicated by windy conditions. He said the power lines have about four inches of ice built up on them.

"There was one section with 35 poles in a row and only five were left standing. They just snapped like toothpicks up there," he said.

(Editor's note) Beside helping with emergency personnel, the crew helped extinguish a fire in St. Bernard, Canada with the help of an interpreter who translated for the American and French Canadian firefighters.



Sparrowbush Engine Company's First Assistant Chief Jack Flynn and Fire Police squad member Howie Harag congratulate Walter C. Gochenour at the banquet.
Photos by Sharon Siegel

Times Herald-Record June 6, 2003

Gochenour named Fire Policeman of the Year

SPARROWBUSH—At the age of 81, Walter C. Gochenour has been involved in a lifetime of Public service.

While he says he does this simply for the satisfaction of knowing he is able to help others, his good deeds have not gone unnoticed.

His involvement in an organization that is "probably closest to his heart" is what has recently brought him unsought recognition and top honors as the volunteer Fire Police Association of the State of New York's Fire Police Officer of the Year.

Sparrowbush Fire Chief Car Van Horn and First Assistant Chief Jack Flynn jointly nominated Gochenour earlier in the year, noting his more than 50 years of dedicated service. They say they are very proud of the distinction this award brings, both to Gochenour and to their company.

"Walt has brought a special honor to the members of Sparrowbush Engine Company after being selected by his peers to represent all of New York State as Fire Police Officer of the Year," they said.

He joined the Sparrowbush Engine Company in September 1953 and served in a variety of positions over the years, including chief and fire commissioner. He became a member of the Fire Police in 1970. (Editor's note—A long list of Walter's accomplishments are included in the rest of this article.)

dec06_03.jpg

dec06_04.jpg