

History of the Hartford Fire and Rescue Department

On Nov. 10, 1902, a meeting was held for the purpose of establishing a fire department for the city of Hartford. There were fourteen people present at the first meeting. A committee of five was formed to draft a constitution and by-laws. On Nov. 17th, by-laws and a constitution were adopted and Hartford Fire Department became a reality with 14 members. I. T. Fossler was elected the first chief of the department. The department went to Sioux Falls for the purpose of looking at buying a used hook and ladder truck, Sioux Falls wanted \$100 and was turned down. A new hook and ladder from Seagrave Co. was purchased. The freight bill on the truck was \$53.77. A play, a picnic (in June of 1903), and some basket socials were put on as fundraisers to pay for the truck. The first light bill for the department was \$1.50. In January 1904 the department purchased a fire bell from Sioux Falls for \$21.55. Rope for the bell cost \$0.75.

In 1912 the city bought a chemical wagon, which contained soda acid and water. In March of 1917 the number of possible members was increased from 20 to 30. In 1922 the E.A. Wendt fire took place in which the hardware and implement building burned. It was the town's biggest fire. In 1926 the department purchased a Reo truck for the chemical tank. The same year they installed a siren to signal fires as well as at noon every day. In 1953 a farm fireboard was established to help fund the department from the rural population and the department took on the responsibility of rural fire protection. In 1983 a separate rescue unit was formed and named F.I.R.S.T.H.E.L.P. with 13 members. Ray Schulte was elected president, Rick Missell was elected vice-president, and Miles Siebelts was elected secretary/treasurer. In 1985, the FIRSHELP unit joined the Fire department and the names were changed to Hartford Fire and Rescue.

The early Department consisted of an Engine Co., Hook & Ladder Co., and a Hose Co. Some of the trucks the Department has acquired over the years have been, 1903 hook & ladder, Model A truck, 1939 International pumper, 1954 International pumper, 1969 Chevrolet combination tanker/pumper, 1969 Diamond Reo tanker, a 1952 Jeep (set up for grass fires), current trucks are a 1973 Chevrolet tanker, 1978 Chevrolet pumper, 1985 Chevrolet rescue truck, 1987 Mini pumper, 1995 Spartan pumper, 2000 GMC tanker, 2001 Dodge grass unit.

The first building to house the fire department was located at the corner of 2nd and Main. In 1957 the city purchased the Ole Voekler building just south of 2nd in the business district and it was converted into city hall and fire station. In 1960 fire bar phones were installed in the homes of firemen. These would let them know immediately who was calling about a fire. In 1976 it was increased to 20 phones. In 1985 the fire department built a new station, thanks to the efforts of Ernie Kroeger and Delbert Peters, on Menth Street where it still resides today. The new station was built with all volunteer labor.

Some of the longest serving members of the department include William Koball with fifty-one years of service and his son Carl Koball with sixty years of service, for a total of one hundred eleven years of service. Not far behind is Anton "Tony" Jenssen with 51 years of service.

Our coverage includes all of Hartford and Wall Lake townships as well as parts of Benton, Grand Meadow, Humboldt, Wellington townships in Minnehaha County and part of Home Township in Turner County. The calls the department responds to include grass fires, structure fires, car fires and many types of EMS calls. The department has averaged over 160 calls the each of the past years. During an average year 1/3 of our calls will be fire related and 2/3 will be EMS related. The annual Firemen's dance fundraiser is held the last Saturday before Lent starts. Currently there are 31 members on the department. Members are firefighters and/or EMT's, with many having training in both areas. There have been a total of 32 different persons who have held the office of Chief, and many more who have held various offices. At the present time the officers of the department consist of Chief, four assistant chiefs (two for the fire part and two for the EMS), a treasure and a secretary.

While times have changed many things, some of the problems that faced the early department remain, recruitment of dedicated personal that can be there for the calls, training and meetings remains one of the biggest challenges facing the department.

Current members of the department are: Gloria Anderson, Greg Anderson, Rich Ankeny, Rob Dobbs, Rick Blume, Kelley Boysen, Matt Brandt, Mark Brennaman, Shriley Eggers, Stacy Grace, Tim Groenewold, Jon Hall, Linda Hartman, Paul Lathrop, Susan Lathrop, Todd Lowe, Lance "Dean" Lunde, Bob Lutter, Jim McMartin, Glenn Mehlhoff, Gail Olson, Doni Rolfson, Kermit Rose, Ray Schulte, George Sechser, Kyle Sorenson, Barb Thaler, Louis Thompson, Craig Wager, and Keith Wipf