

History of the Hartford Volunteer Fire Department - Told by Tony Janssen (year 1981)

The Hartford Fire Department was formed on November 10, 1902 with a meeting called to order by C.W. Knodt. The first members were Louis Willig, E.D. Pearson, H.R. Folsom, William Bruce, William Koball, William Wehler, A.L. Parson, H.D. Mundt, Herman Van Vleet, W.F. Gabel, H.G. Gillen, T. Folsam, Art Thorie, Charles Feyder, and C.W.Knodt. The first officers were Chief, T. Folsam; Treasurer, H.D. Mundt; and Secretary, H.R. Folsam.

On November 19, 1902, the department went to Sioux Falls to see if they could buy a used hook and ladder truck. Sioux Falls wanted \$100 and it was turned down. It was agreed to buy a new hook and ladder for \$275 from Seagrave and Company. The freight bill on this purchase was \$53.77. A play, a picnic (in June of 1903), and some basket socials were put on as fundraisers to pay for the hook and ladder. The first light bill of the fire department was \$1.50.

William Koball was elected as treasurer in 1903 and kept the position until 1943. On January 8, 1904, the department bought a fire gong from the Sioux Falls Fire Department for \$21.55. On December 21, 1903, they bought one more bell, also from Sioux Falls. On January 30, 1905, there was a fire at the hotel with little damage done (about \$100). On April 7, 1905, they bought coats and pants to be used for parade purposes for the firemen at a cost of \$11.50 less 10%. They also purchased 20 coats and hats (for firefighting) at a cost of \$34 for each unit. In 1912, the city bought a chemical wagon which contained soda, acid, and water. They bought a hose cart in 1920. In 1921, they requested the city buy a fire siren. In 1922, the E.A. Wendt fire took place in which the hardware and implement building burned. It was the town's biggest fire.

Carl Koball was elected as chief in 1926. This same year they bought a siren to signal at noon of each day and a Reo truck for the chemical tank from Nick Gehler (Ray Gehler's father). In 1929, they bought a used truck. In January of 1930, Fred Peters was paid \$5 to haul the hose cart and men to the Humboldt fire. A second hand Ford truck was bought in 1935 to put the hose on from the older truck. The first new truck was purchased on November 12, 1940. It was a fully equipped International, including a 250 gallon watertank for \$2,250. Including a \$150 allowance for the old truck, the city was to pay a total of \$993. Donations amounted to \$858, this totaling \$1,851. The balance was paid by the fire department.

The Rural Fire Board was formed in 1953. In November, the Hartford Fire Department gave the Farm Fire Service \$300 to apply on a second new truck. In 1957, the department had an option on the Ole Voekler building. The City of Hartford bought it. It was partitioned off for trucks and a gas furnace was installed. In 1959, the 1953 International Truck blew up causing a lot of excitement. The new motor cost \$375.39. The department did all the repair work. The Fire Department started and sponsored a gun course in 1959. Six men started to learn to be instructors, but only one completed the course and was an instructor for 21 years. In August of 1960, ten phones were hooked up. The phones were hooked up to the firemen's phones and alerted them as to where the fire was immediately. On August 7, 1964, Anton Janssen and Delbert Peters went to Civil Defense School to learn what to do in the event of fall out. They received diplomas for the fire department.

William Koball (51 years service) and Carl Koball (60 years service ending in 1975) combined for a total 111 years of service to the Hartford Fire Department as father and son. During 73 years as blacksmiths, they only charged the department four times for all the work they did on the trucks. The present trucks consist of one 1939 International, one 1954 International, one 1969 Chevrolet, one 1973 Chevrolet, and one Jeep. The Jeep was donated by Civil Defense and cost the department only \$100 in freight costs. All the trucks are loaded to make country calls. All have CB radios. The members of the department are Skywarn members.