

Fire Service History

Protection of lives and property from fire can be documented back to the Roman Empire in 6AD. They established Bucket Brigades to fight fires and assist home- owners. Since that time all major civilizations have had some sort of Fire Brigade and most of these were volunteer obligations by a community or area.

Benjamin Franklin helped shape the country and the fire service. In 1736, Franklin founded the Union Fire Company in Philadelphia, which became the standard for volunteer fire company organization. A fire fighter himself, he was also a writer, printer, philosopher, scientist and statesman of the American Revolution

In the 18th century, American cities and towns lacked the types of institutions that fought fires. In response, Americans developed their own tradition of fighting fires as a grassroots collective. The first response of those communities was what would later be called a “bucket brigade.” Neighbors from all around the fire would run to help or at least toss their buckets into the street for volunteers to fill with water and pass forward to be dumped on the fire.

Throwing water on a fire one bucket at a time wasn't a very effective way of saving one particular house, but it could buy the occupants enough time to salvage some belongings and prevent the fire from spreading to other buildings and potentially destroying an entire neighborhood.

In the period around 1800, some early fire engines with manually operated pumps were horse-drawn, but large groups of strong men moved them around. Hose companies were formed when municipal water sources were built with primitive hydrants.

As buildings grew taller, stronger steam-powered pumps were needed. Those required fewer, but better-trained firefighters to operate. Shrinking the sizes of fire companies was somewhat of a social problem. Volunteer fire companies existed to do more than just fight fires and also served as fraternal organization. With no social safety nets at the time, fraternal organizations provided things like death benefits for a family.

As firefighting equipment evolved from buckets to engines, the need for special training and tools emerged, thus creating volunteer fire companies.

Today nearly 70% of the nation’s fire fighters are volunteer.

Caledonia Fire Department History

The present-day Caledonia Fire Department resulted from the merger of five fire companies. The first documented company was the Big Springs Hook and Ladder Fire Company formed in May of 1887 and their first truck purchased that same year in June from the Rumsey Company. This fire company would eventually be disbanded and become the Hook and Ladder Company in 1894.

Four more companies were formed in addition to the Big Springs. In 1897 the J.C. Tennant Hose Company #1, the Chemical Hose in roughly 1894, the Legion Hose in 1920 and the Big Springs Pumper Company in 1937.

The Legion Hose was disbanded in 1936 and the Chemical Hose and J. C. Tennant Hose Company #1 may also have been disbanded at this time.

In 1936, the Caledonia Rural Fire District was organized.

In 1987, the remaining two companies Big Springs Pumper Company and the Hook and Ladder Company were disbanded, resulting in all firefighters becoming members of the Caledonia Fire Department.

A look back...

1891 – In February a fire destroyed 18 businesses and four homes. At this time there was little support for the Fire Company due to lack of a Village Board. The local newspaper editor noted the economists of the day had forced the Fire Company to the wall, lacking funds to even buy chemicals for their fire extinguishers. This is the first-time mutual aid was offered. Avon and Mumford Fire Departments responded to the call, with Avon being sent by special train on the Erie Railroad. Unfortunately, they arrived too late to be much help.

1910 - The J.C. Tennant Hose Company #1 receives a request from the Mayor to either reorganize or disband. They took the opportunity to reorganize. From 1899 to 1910 they received \$100 annually to operate on.

1937 – The Fire Department held its first annual carnival or field days on the old school grounds, behind the present fire hall.

1942 – An old hearse was purchased and converted to an ambulance. This was one of the first ambulance services in New York State.

1945 – The first tanker in Livingston County was built by the Department.

1954 – The Fire Police were organized. Annual Corn Roast began.

1955 – Ladies Auxiliary was formed.

1959 – Village residents voted to approve the construction of a new Fire Hall and Village offices.

1960 – New Fire Hall was opened on April 1.

1966 - The Department begins a Babysitters Course, that is still offered today. Benefitting and educating many young people in the responsibilities of childcare.

1975 - An Ambulance Auxiliary was formed, enabling women to serve on ambulances.

1979 – A generous donation from J. W. Jones allowed the Department to open a recreation and training center, known as J. W. Jones Hall.

1994 – The Caledonia Fire District is organized by joint resolution of the Town of Caledonia and the Village of Caledonia Boards.

2011 – The Burnwell Propane Plant in Mumford explodes and burns for many hours. The Caledonia Fire Department was the first mutual aid company on the scene and remained there from approximately 3:00 pm on September 13 to Noon on September 14.

2014 - Commodity Resource Corporation burns on the evening of November 2 and into November 3. More than two dozen fire departments battle the fire that destroys the large industrial grain facility. Twenty-eight tankers from fire departments in four counties assisted at the scene. It took firefighters more than five hours to control the blaze. Windy conditions overnight challenged firefighters. Flames reaching into the sky could be seen up to 15 miles away.

Firefighters were also faced with protecting Spring Creek from run-off, which had mixed with fertilizer inside the building.

2018 - To deal with the dwindling number of volunteer firefighters, and to further protect our communities, the Chiefs of Caledonia, Mumford and Scottsville Fire Departments agreed to a mutual aid plan where all three Departments respond with each other for all fires, motor vehicle crashes, rescues and smells of gas in each other's response area.