

"Seventy-five Years of History"

The year 1991 brings with it the Diamond Anniversary of the Delran Fire Company No. 1. Over 75 years ago, ideas, plans and meetings to establish our Fire Company were part of many residents' thoughts and actions throughout Bridgeboro and Delran. The Bridgeboro area suffered several fires a few years prior to 1916, from which the need for a fire company was recognized. As discussions for the need to establish a fire company were heard in every area of town, "A group of concerned citizens" decided to meet to discuss firefighting. They met at different locations, namely Issac Browns' store, the W.T.C.U. Hall and the place most notable to us today, Lester Fortnum's Garage. There at Fortnum's Garage on March 28, 1916, those caring citizens took the first formal steps toward the organization of a fire company by selecting George Friday, Sr. as chairman. Several meetings followed and on April 14, 1916, Delran Fire Company No. 1 was officially established and our first officers were elected. J.N. Spawn was our first president and William J. Smith, our first chief.

The Fire Company was on its way down the path of history. At the very beginning, it was known that there could not be a fire company established without the equipment to perform fire fighting services. One of the most important questions that was put to the members during those first meetings was "Where will we get the funds to make this idea work?" There were many suggestions, one of which was to hold a chicken supper on September 27, 1916. The cost of the tickets was set at thirty-five (\$.35) cents each. Members were also asked to canvas the town and solicit donations from the citizens. Profits from that first supper, plus donations, were used to purchase our first fire truck, a 1901 Simplex Chassis, with an American LaFrance Chemical Tank Unit. Through the combined efforts of Fortnum's Garage and George Heaton's Blacksmith Shop, the Simplex Chassis and Chemical Tank were built into a fire engine. When this truck was completed it was housed at Lester Fortnum's Garage until our original firehouse was built.

The drive to raise money did not end with the purchase of our first fire truck. In July 1917, a carnival was held and a Ford car was raffled for a net profit of \$484.80. Along with the apparatus came the need for a building where it could be housed. A committee of members, consisting of Howard Anderson, William Smith, Frank Fenton, Walt Southwick and Dan Haines were appointed to investigate the purchase of property and a building for a firehouse. Since the W.T.C.U. Hall was being used as a meeting place during those times, it was felt that the company should try

to buy it. However, before the W.T.C.U. members could decide to sell or not, it was thought that a small plot of ground should be purchased from William J. Smith for \$200.00. A cement block structure was decided upon, and the members agreed to make the blocks themselves from molds and with sand donated from the excavation that many of us knew as Olympia Lakes. The projected cost at completion for the new firehouse was \$269.00, but finished costs were closer to \$2000.00.

Around the time that the building was started, the company received a gift of an old windmill tower from William Bramall. It was agreed that we could have it if it was moved from his property to ours and reconstructed with the intentions of hanging a fire alarm on it. Our first fire alarm system was an iron ring from a train wheel that hung in the tower and was sounded by striking it with the hammer that lay on the ground at its' side.

Work continued throughout the second half of 1917. After those many hours of labor that were put into the new "House", we had our first meeting there on January 13, 1918. At that eventful evening meeting, we were presented a bell from the Union Fire Company of Mount Holly, for our use as a fire alarm. That bell hung in the tower for many years.

During the 75 years since our start, many planned activities were held to provide funding to maintain our building and purchase new fire equipment. We have held carnivals, turkey, chicken, roast beef and spaghetti dinners, weekly bingo, raffles, and donation drives, we have even parked cars at area shows.

Throughout the years, it was necessary to enlarge our firehouse to better accommodate our equipment. In 1926, an addition was added to the rear of the original firehouse and a kitchen put in on the second floor. The building remained this way until 1956. It was then decided to purchase some additional property from William J. Smith in order to greatly enlarge our congested firehouse. The addition was designed by Horace Anderson, Sr. with most of the work once again being done by the members.

Around 1965, we purchased another parcel of land at the corner of Cleveland Avenue and Bridgeboro Street, (then called Main street). The building on this property was called the "Redmens' Hall" and belonged to a fraternal organization that wished to sell this property to us. After the purchase was made and the building moved to the Abrasive Alloys' property, (our neighbors to the east) the lot was landscaped and a flag pole with two granite monuments were set in place. On May 30th of that year this area was dedicated as a Veteran's Memorial Park.

Improvements to our firehouse were very important throughout the years, and so was updating our fire apparatus with new trucks of modern

day design and technology. We have come so very far from the days of our first fire truck, the 1909 Simplex. Today we have five very modern and well equipped trucks with which we attack those dreaded fires. We have two pumpers each capable of pumping 1000 gallons of water per minute, one aerial ladder, with 100 feet of reach, a four wheel drive brush unit and a walk in van for fire support services and light rescue needs.

Training has always been so very important in the fire service and at Delran Fire Company No. 1 there is no exception. With financial support from the Fire District, the officers are able to arrange for training our members at the many firematic schools available to day to keep up with the constant changing technology in fire fighting.

As we scan back over the years, many thoughts and pleasant memories surface making us proud to be members of an organization of such importance to our community. In 1987, the members felt that it was again time to take another look at remodeling or adding on to the firehouse. A committee was appointed to look into the matter. After many, many meetings, discussions of design, location and funding, it was decided to proceed with plans to construct a completely new firehouse at our present site. An architect was hired, plans were finalized, funding was procured and a contractor was hired to complete the task of constructing our new house. The new house contains 11,000 square feet of space, with modern offices, meeting rooms, apparatus room and a support spaces such as a kitchen, bathrooms, storage closets and a repair shop. With this new facility, the quality of support that we will give to the community will be greatly improved. Our heartfelt respect and thanks goes out to every person in Delran who made this building possible. Along with that gratitude is a promise to continue that special attention we have found most important to give to Delran Township and it's great citizens.

Today, almost 75 years to the day when we officially organized, finds Delran Fire Company No. 1 still a driving force in a firematic community of Burlington County and throughout New Jersey. Our members are knowledgeable and well trained. We have very modern, well maintained, fire apparatus and equipment and also a recently completed, a well designed and built firehouse. All of this would have been impossible were it not for the dedication of the heart and soul and most especially the time that our members have given to bring us to where we are today... 75 years young and standing at the doorway to the future with inspiration, desire and most of all pride, knowing we are a part of this great organization of "Concerned Citizens" known as Delran Fire Company No. 1.