

# The Back Step

The Newsletter of the Frederick County Fire & Rescue Museum

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All the News We Feel Like Printing

March 2021

## United Steam Fire Engine Company No. 3 Celebrates 175 Years of Service

By Clarence "Chip" Jewell

November 22, 2020 is the 175<sup>th</sup> year of uninterrupted service of the United Steam Fire Engine Company No. 3 of Frederick. The company was organized in 1845, exactly 100 years after the founding of Frederick in 1745. An ordinance was passed by the town in 1817 establishing fire wards and assigning the early companies to each ward. The Second Ward was originally assigned to the Union Fire Company. In 1837, the Washington Hose Company was organized on East All Saint Street and assumed the responsibilities for Fire Ward No. 2. The company had a metal "tank" fabricated to capture water for a bucket brigade at a fire scene, but never owned a pumping engine.

The firehouse was built in a very swampy area near Carroll Creek, thus, the firehouse was dubbed "Swamp Hall" and the firefighters of the Uniteds got the nickname "Swampers". The colorful figure atop the cupola is the company mascot "Johnny Swamper." Even the bell atop the cupola was locally known as the "Swamp Bell" as noted in Englebrecht's Diary. This bell was also sounded to warn the citizens of a rapid rise of Carroll Creek during times of flood. The original part of the firehouse is still in use and is believed to be the oldest continuously operating fire station in the country having been in service as a fire station since 1848.

In 1858, Captain John Sinn of the United Fire Company organized the "United Guard," a militia

group of United members. The other fire companies in Frederick also organized militia units, the "Independent Rifles" and the "Junior Defenders". These three fire company militia units were summoned to Harper's Ferry on October 17, 1859 to help quell John Brown's Raid.



In 1860, the Uniteds purchased an engine named "Old Lady" of the Mechanical Fire Company No. 1 of Baltimore when the Baltimore paid fire department was organized. The Uniteds received the mahogany engine, "Old Lady", from the Mechanical on April 19, 1860 for a cost of \$400. As this engine would have been owned by the United Fire Company on May 8, 1861, it is highly probable the "Old Lady" fought the 1861 Court House fire the weekend after the Maryland Legislature met in Frederick to vote down an attempt at succession from the Union. The "Old Lady" is on display at the Frederick County Fire & Rescue Museum in Emmitsburg, MD.

In 1878, the United Fire Company entered the then "modern" era of the steam powered fire engine pumper. The steam piston pumper was delivered by rail at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Depot across the street from "Swamp Hall" on February 22, 1878. The Uniteds paid a total of \$4,000 for the engine and 500 feet of gum hose. Upon arrival in Frederick, the excited members removed the tarp placed over the engine during shipment and were immediately

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distressed. Instead of the beautiful shiny steam fire engine they saw in Philadelphia, an ugly big, black machine was revealed. The firemen attempted to remove the covering by scraping, but were concerned they would damage the metal. Mr. Clapp of the Clapp and Jones Company arrived and directed the “Swampers” to put boiling

hot water over the engine to remove the protective covering. The Uniteds tested the “Lily” by throwing water over the “Town Clock” actually damaging the clock, so much damage that the church consistory voted the fire companies could no longer test the fire engines by throwing water over the steeple of town clock. The members named the new engine the “Lily of the Swamp”, indicative of the location of the firehouse built in the swampy area south of Carroll Creek. Upon receipt of the “Lily of the Swamp”, in 1878, the United Fire Company changed the company name to the “United Steam Fire Engine Company”. At some point in time thereafter, the number 3 was also added to the official company name.

The “Lily of the Swamp” was in service for a total of fifty four years, quite an accomplishment for a steam pumper. In 1932, the “Lily” was donated to the Smithsonian Institute where she was on display for many years at the American History Museum. Today, she is on loan to the Fire Museum of Maryland in Lutherville, MD where the engine is on display.

In 1919, the Uniteds purchased the first of six Ahrens-Fox apparatus that would be in service in Frederick. The chain-driven piston pumper was delivered on September 4, 1919. The engine was shipped to Frederick on the Pennsylvania Railroad. While the train was being situated on the siding along East Street, an automobile struck the rail car carrying the new engine and pushed the rail car off the tracks. This engine is still in Frederick, owned by the Gladhill family and displayed at the Gladhill Tractor Mart near Jefferson.



1919 Ahrens-Fox pumper.

In 1939, the Uniteds continued with Ahrens-Fox with the purchase of a magnificent 750-gallon piston pumper. Engine 32, as it was known, remained in service until the early 1980's pumping at both the YMCA fire December 6, 1974 and the Goodwill Fire on August 8, 1979, 40 years after the engine was placed in service. The number “32” was permanently retired from the roster when the “Fox” was finally placed out of service. The Uniteds still proudly own the 1939 Ahrens-Fox, which is on display at the Frederick County Fire & Rescue Museum in Emmitsburg and is occasionally brought out of retirement for special events.

## Museum Leadership

President: Chip Jewell

Vice-President: Susie Nicol

Secretary: Kathy Knipple

Treasurer: Paul Stull

Directors:

Tim Ayres

Sharon Botkin

"Doc" Kinney

Rose Marie Ray

Doug Riddle

Ramona Ridgely

Cynthia Ropp

Curator: Frank Schmersal



The Frederick County Fire & Rescue Museum is located at 300B South Seton Avenue (Business Route 15) in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Hours are 12:00 Noon to 4:00 PM, Saturdays and Sundays, April through October (pandemics permitting!)

To arrange a special tour for a group, please contact Chip Jewell at 301-676-2285 (cjecc@comcast.net) or Frank Schmersal at 301-788-5768 (accobonack@aol.com).

In 1935, the United Fire Company purchased the first rescue truck in Frederick. The 1935 Diamond "T" was equipped with floodlights, ladders and early rescue equipment. Dr. James Marrone was truly the father of EMS in Frederick County and was the captain of the members of the rescue squad. This unit was replaced with a 1959 Ford/



1935 DiamondT rescue truck.

Young rescue truck which was the first rescue unit in Frederick County to be equipped with a hydraulic rescue tool. In 1954, Dr. Marrone was instrumental in coordinating the first fire department ambulance service in Frederick when the Uniteds purchased the first ambulance. The unit was a Superior Cadillac that even had hot and cold running water.

1970 marked a historic change in the United Steam Fire Engine Company No. 3, and ultimately to the entire fire service in Frederick. A simple by-law change deleting two words, "white male" opened a new chapter in our city fire service. John W. Howard was the first African American to join a fire company in the City of Frederick as the Uniteds became the first fire company in



1959 Ford/Young rescue truck.

Frederick to eliminate discrimination based on race or gender. These actions especially opened the door to the African American community that was so much a part of the area served by the Uniteds. The Uniteds had another first in 2003 when Jerry Dorsey became the first black fire chief in Frederick County. This by-law change

also allowed the first female firefighter in the City of Frederick.

The United Steam Fire Engine Company No. 3 is an original member of the Maryland State Firemen's Association. The company has had outstanding administrative leadership in the 175-year history of the company with company Presidents Lloyd T. McGill, Joseph W. Gaver, W. Bartgis Storm and William Moore all serving as president of the Maryland State Firemen's Association

The United Steam Fire Engine Company No. 3 of today is a vibrant fire company responding to the needs of the citizens of Frederick County, or wherever called, over 10,000 times each year. Over 100 committed volunteers work hand and hand with the career staff of the Frederick County Division of Fire/Rescue Services to assure the public of expeditious service with the highest level of training. The "Swampers" of yesterday built the foundation of the men and women of the United Steam Fire Engine Company No. 3 that will serve into future.

## Chip Shots

As we enter 2021, COVID-19 is still prevalent in the country. I am hopeful that by the time you read this article more vaccinations will have been distributed and the metrics will begin to show substantial decline. If this happens, we hope to be able to open the museum by late spring. In anticipation of opening this year, we have started to install some new displays and pictures.

This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash of the Air Force jet over Walkersville. AGAR23, the aircraft call sign, was AIRA 328 flying out of Dayton, Ohio. The aircraft exploded over Walkersville killing all 23 souls on board. Keith Robeson has donated the display of the aircraft catastrophe that was previously on display at the former Red Cross building in Walkersville. We hope to have the museum open in time to have this special display open to the public.

The museum has received a grant of \$5,000 from the Delaplaine Foundation to purchase a new computer that we can use for data management and producing our own 8 ½ x 11 photos. We will also purchase a large monitor to enable continuous display of rotating pictures and information using the computer. A new color printer has been donated for use with the new computer and should greatly enhance our display capabilities.

I am very happy to announce I have a new book on the Frederick fire service history being published by The History Press, Arcadia Publishing, that will be released in late summer of 2021. The book will be a more detailed history of the early Frederick County fire service and of the each of the volunteer companies as well as origins of the MSFA in Frederick. The book will compile information available in several books, individual fire company histories, as well as information from the Frederick News-Post Archives, Maryland State Archives and Jacob Engelbrecht's Diary. All proceeds from all sales of the book will benefit the Frederick County Fire & Rescue Museum as well as the books actually sold by the museum will provide an even larger amount of income for the museum.

We hope to begin some work days/meetings sometime in March or April as the pandemic subsides and many of our members will have their vaccinations. I hope everyone has survived this most difficult time in our nation's history and will have a healthy and safe 2021.

BE SAFE!

**CHIP**



## Angle

We've been hearing rumblings about a new fire museum in Roanoke, Virginia, supposedly opening this spring. Now your Fearless Editor's older daughter, Johanna, who lives in Roanoke, has tracked down its location. She saw a video on Facebook, showing a museum member driving a new acquisition around the parking lot, and said, "I know where that is!" We'll check it out the next time we're visiting.

**News Flash** – Johanna was right, and we found the new museum! We can't reveal its location, because it isn't open to visitors yet, but we may or may not have had a sneak preview, and the collection of apparatus is impressive. More news in later issues.

## Tools of The Trade

by Doug Riddle

This is the first in, what will hopefully be, a series of articles that focus on historic fire tools. The museum staff has been assembling a variety of historic fire tools to construct a new display in the engine bay. As part of this effort, we have been combing through the museum and personal collections and setting aside interesting items that we plan to include in the display.

All of us have heard the saying that the fire service is more than 100 years of tradition unimpeded by progress, but most of us also know that there are valuable lessons learned by generations of firefighters that are still applicable to the job today. And it is probably no surprise that this also applies to some of the tools that are still in use. While these tools may have morphed with the advent of new materials that incorporate added strength, lessen weight, and improve ergonomics, the simple fact is some things truly fall under the "if it ain't broke don't fix it" mantra. But fear not, we promise that our display will have a few tools that many of you have not seen before, or at least have not been used in the last 100 years.



Let's consider the lowly hydrant wrench. We still use it, it is not exactly glamorous, it hasn't changed too much, and it still fulfills an important and critical function. And while it really hasn't changed that much, some of the older hydrant wrenches did earn the title of "multi-function" tool. So, cast your mind back to the era of hand and horse-drawn hose carts, hose wagons and steamers. One of our members came across this tool a few years ago. While it was clear that it was a hydrant wrench, and most of you can probably recognize that it doubled as a spanner for pin lugs, the function of the hexagonal "box wrench" at the other end was not readily apparent.



While we can't be sure that this particular wrench actually worked on the wheel hubs of horse and hand drawn apparatus, a quick check on a circa 1900 hand-drawn hose cart seems to provide reasonable proof. It fits perfectly on the hub cap. Wagon wheel wrenches are still available for sale on eBay and look quite similar. The wagon wrenches, and perhaps this tool, were also used with motorized vehicles. 1920's vehicles had hub caps and accompanying wrenches of similar size.

In the end, it's obvious that this tool worked as intended. Unfortunately, there are no identifying casting marks or stampings, so its origin is unknown. Its function is no mystery though, since it will still crack open a hydrant today.



# The Big Ones – The 1842 Court House Fire

By Clarence “Chip” Jewell

The most famous fire of the Frederick County Court House occurred on May 8, 1861 when it was believed “Rebel rascals,” as Jacob Engelbrecht called them, set the building on fire in protest against Maryland’s decision to side with the North. However, there was an earlier fire that also involved the Court House.

The most disastrous fire in the Court House Square occurred on March 31, 1842 when fire totally destroyed the home and office of Dr. William Tyler and damaged several other surrounding buildings, including the Independent Hose Company. An article in the March 31, 1938 News on the 96<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire describes the event as a day when a “furious gale was prevailing” the contributed to the spread. When the alarm was sounded, the Independent engine responded from the enginehouse then located on the Court House Square, responded to the mill race owned and operated by Mr. Charles Mealey.

According to Engelbrecht’s Diary, “The double dwelling of Doctor Tyler in Record Street west of the Academy was consumed by fire this afternoon. Commence between 3 & 4 O’Clock. The house was entirely consumed. Nearly all the furniture was taken out, but much of it was injured. One part was occupied by Mr. James Keith. The fire originated by the burning of Mr. Keith’s kitchen chimney. The house was ensured for six thousand dollars. Mr. Keith’s furniture was ensured. The court steeple was on fire several times. Also 10 or 12 other houses in town. Thursday, March 31, 1842 10 O’clock PM”

The fire started in the dwelling of Dr. Tyler, but was soon spread by the furious winds. “Large sparks and pieces of burning timbers were carried in every direction”. Soon the fire spread to at least six other buildings, including the engine house of the Independent Hose Company. The fire also extended to the steeple of the Court House. Firefighters carried hose to the court house roof. The stream of water was directed by Ezra Holler, Levi Moberly, Willian C. Martin, Baldwin Woodward, Thomas Prince and James Hopwood.

The other buildings that “took fire” were the blacksmith shop of Fred Keefer as well as the nearby residence of Mr. Jacob Rohrback. The fire continued to spread to the stables of the City Hotel and Keller’s rope factory on Patrick Street. The establishment of B. Rosenour and Sons on North Market Street was also damaged by fire. As many as 12 buildings in total were destroyed or damaged in the blaze.

People were seen standing on roofs of houses and businesses throughout downtown Frederick putting out flying debris and sparks. It was reported the “directors of the Independent Company walked around with sticks in their hands and compelled everyone to assist at keeping the fire at bay.” There was great concern the fire would spread and destroy the entire city.

Articles of clothing were thrown from the windows of the house section occupied by Dr. Tyler, some which were caught in the wind and landed in trees. Dr. Tyler collected his household effects into a dwelling on West Third Street. After the fire, Mr. James Keith moved to Georgetown. Dr. Tyler constructed another double dwelling on the site of the old one very similar in construction to the structure that was burned. Dr. Tyler lived in this house until 1872. This building still exist today locally known as the “Tyler Spite House.” The initial house at that location was built to prohibit the city from extending Record Street across Church Street to Patrick St. to “spite” the city.

## Rig from the Past



This 1951 Ford/American pumper came to Graceham Volunteer Fire Company No. 18 after service in another department. It is now privately owned, and is shown at a Chesapeake Antique Fire Apparatus Association muster in Westminster in 2013.

**In the next issue:** an early rig from Brunswick Volunteer Ambulance Company No. 19.



## Coming Events

*(Note: These are the events that, as of press time, are scheduled to take place. Because of Covid-19, we strongly suggest that you call ahead before you jump in the car!)*

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|----------|--|
| March 28 | Mount Airy FD memorabilia and equipment sale, 10 AM - 2 PM   |
| May 1    | Fire Museum of Maryland steam show, Lutherville MD, 10 AM - 2 PM                                     |
| May 15   | Mack fire apparatus show and picnic, Manheim PA, noon - 8 PM   |
| June 5   | Chesapeake Antique Fire Apparatus Assoc. muster, Pleasant Valley FD, Pleasant Valley MD, 9 AM - 2 PM |
| July 10  | Pennsylvania Pump Primers muster, Harrisburg PA, 10 AM - 3 PM  |
| Sept. 11 | Fire Museum of Maryland motor muster, Lutherville MD, 10 AM - 2 PM                                   |