

# History of the Oradell Volunteer Fire Department

Est. 1897

The following is a short written history of the Delford & Oradell Fire Departments. As with any history some parts are personal accounts or recollections from former or current members. Some information is sketchy at best, but we shall do our best to update or change the history page as needed.



The pictures and items photographed are items owned by the Department or members of the department, unfortunately many pieces were given as gifts or removed from the firehouse over time, and it is our hope of getting any items related to the Delford or Oradell Fire Departments returned. In addition any items related to the fire service would also be appreciated. If

you or anyone you know has any items and are willing to donate these items please notify us at <http://www.oradellfire.org/contact/>

The following two articles were taken from the Bergen County Democrat news paper. These are the two earliest articles relating to fires in Oradell prior to the town becoming its own municipality.



Tuesday night the depot narrowly escaped being burned. Persons passing the station noticed a blazing lamp in the agent's office while he was at supper. The door being locked, James Searles busted it open and threw out the defective lamp, the room being filled with smoke. Mr. Searles discovered the fire in time to prevent the destruction of one of the company's finest depots. [BERGEN COUNTY DEMOCRAT – December 8, 1893]

Tuesday's fire has renewed the agitation for fire protection. Oradell certainly should have a fire company. It has among its residents two old New York State Firemen – A.A. Devore and John Hoyt, who distinguished themselves at the Leedy fire.



The home occupied by Mrs. Leedy and owned by Barney Cole narrowly escaped destruction by fire on Tuesday morning. The family, excepting Mr. Leedy, was at home, when Mrs. Leedy discovered that the extension of the building at the chimney was on fire. By hard work and liberal use of water the flames were quenched. The damage is about \$300. [BERGEN COUNTY DEMOCRAT – February 9, 1894]

**T**he Borough of Delford was incorporated on February 24, 1894. In late 1895 four men meeting out of the local general store put the idea of forming a volunteer fire company for the town on paper and began the process of forming our organization. On January 18, 1897 the Delford Volunteer Fire Department was founded. They elected A. Landmann, president; George F. Moore, vice-president; James Hall, secretary; and James Searles, treasurer. To organize and command the members at a fire they selected D.Z. Westervelt, foreman and James Earl, assistant foreman. By June 7<sup>th</sup> 1897 there were 45 active members registered in the department.



**A** piece of property on Linden Avenue (now Kinderkamack Road) belonging to R.W. Cooper was purchased for the price of \$300 dollars. The Fire Committee was given \$765 for the construction of a fire house. This firehouse served the department until 1949 when new quarters needed to be sought to house the new heavier and larger equipment. Currently the old fire house building is occupied by the Bergen County Players.



**N**ow the newly organized fire department needed equipment the first piece of fire apparatus a hand drawn hose jumper was purchased from the Maltese Hose Co. for \$96 dollars in 1897. This piece of equipment was ordered with 700 feet of carbonized-rubber hose at the cost of \$1 per foot. A hand drawn hook and ladder made by Hayward & Co. was also purchased for the price of \$425. The ladder cart was equipped with seven wooden ladders of various lengths, two hand torches, four Dietz Fire King Lanterns, one lamp, twelve leather fire buckets, one length of rope, two axes (one flat head one pike head) and two pike poles. At the time of delivery the proud owners hired a local sign maker Mr. William Barnes to emblazon the departments name on their apparatus.



Unfortunately the new fire house was not ready and the apparatus needed a home. Peter Demarest leased his barn to the borough for \$200 dollars a month for housing the apparatus. In 1902 the hand drawn hose jumper which had served the borough was replaced and in turn was sold to the new Riverside Volunteer Fire Brigade (now the River Edge Volunteer Fire Department). In 1997 as a gift to the Oradell Fire Department for their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary it was given back to the borough of Oradell. Currently the department is looking to restore this hose jumper by replacing the wheels, the pull bar, the missing nozzles, and the spring bells.

In 1903 a horse drawn hose cart was purchased by the borough of Delford from the Seagrave Company. This apparatus was able to be pulled by a team of horses allowing firefighters to respond even quicker to



emergencies. The new hose cart was equipped with 800 feet of fire hose, two Dietz Fire King Lanterns, two leather and brass nozzles, an axe, and two chemical fire extinguishers. As far as getting it to a fire that was a whole different story.



Two different stories exist in the archives of the fire department. The first is that any person able to respond and hitch their team of horses to the hose cart would be paid \$5 dollars for their use. John Haring; if a fire was Westervelt would bring a team



The other is from sounded Biss

of horses to the fire house, but the eager and dedicated volunteers were so quick they were able to pull the hose cart to the fire before he could even respond.



The hand drawn hook & ladder at some point in time was converted to a horse drawn ladder for quicker response. Unfortunately nothing remains of this apparatus but a carriage torch and a lantern.



In 1916 and 1917 the borough purchased the fire department two Reo motorized fire engines. One engine carried hose and a chemical tank the other carried ladders and hose. In 1928 realizing that the town was growing and with the advances in the fire service with the



development of the "Fire Pumper" an American LaFrance Metropolitan Class B Type 145 fire pumper was purchased.



This pumper was able of pumping 1000 gallons of water per minute. This pumper became affectionately known as "Old Moe" which it is still called today. This apparatus has been showcased not only in Oradell's Forth of July Parade, Chiefs

Parades, New York & New Jersey Firefighters Association Parades, but also for fire prevention week in New York City by the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey. This pumper is still kept in original condition by the membership.

In 1932 the members tried to build their own. After purchasing a GMC chassis and equipping it with a water tank, a booster pump, hose and various equipment it was placed

in service, and served the borough for many years. In 1939 a Buffalo Ladder Truck was purchased. This apparatus carried ladders large enough to “reach any roof in Oradell”. The truck also was equipped with a flood light system and various tools for salvage and overhaul. This ladder serviced the borough until 1962 when it was sold to a local chimney sweep.

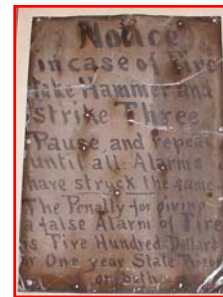


Fire fighters now needed a way to be notified of a fire. The reformed Church of

Delford used its bell to signal an emergency. A rope hung outside of the bell tower for people to report a fire.

Realizing they need a better way of dispatching the members “fire gongs” (used railroad steam engine wheels) were strategically placed throughout the borough. These gongs when struck with a

hammer resonated a loud tone that could be heard by the members. In 1912 the gong system was disbanded and the Water Company steam whistle was used to signal the members (the steam whistle is now located at Bergen Tech in Hackensack). The only remaining gong is located in front of the firehouse as a memorial to members who have passed away. In 2004 the wooden posts supporting the gong were removed due to rot, the department is currently looking into redesigning the memorial area.



In 1927 a siren was mounted to the hose tower of the old firehouse and eventually relocated to its current spot behind the new firehouse, it is this system that is still in use today. In 1949 the telephone company installed bells in members’ homes, these bells were set off by the police department to dispatch the firefighters to their alarms. With technology advancing at such a rapid pace, members are now notified by pagers that they wear similar to cell phones. These pagers are activated by the police department whenever the department is needed to respond.



On July 2, 1949 the new firehouse was dedicated, located on an old corn field just a block from the old structure it was built to handle the weight of the new style of fire apparatus. An addition was added to the fire house to allow for the equipment due to their growing size. In 2004 the fire house went under its latest renovation, lowering the apparatus floor and widening the door openings. This project was done to accommodate the growing size of fire apparatus today, a far cry from the humble hand drawn apparatus of the past.

**W**hether you are a resident, a fellow firefighter, or have attended a firefighters parade you've most likely seen us, dressed in our traditional red parade shirts, black bow ties, white pants, polished shoes, and leather parade belts. These wool (yes; wool) parade uniforms were worn by almost every fire department founded prior to 1900. Although many departments have forgone tradition for the suit type uniform, Oradell Firefighters have remained steadfast in continuing the tradition.



Our members have marched with pride in many parades over the years; some of the trophies won by the department are pictured within this text. Trophies in our collection date back as far as 1910, our greatest recent achievement was in 2000 winning; Best Over All Department at the New York & New Jersey Firefighters Parade and Convention.

IF YOU KNOW OF ANY IMPORTANT ITEMS THAT HAVE BEEN LEFT OUT OR WOULD LIKE TO GIVE US YOUR RECORDED HISTORY OF THE FIRE DEPARTMENT, PLEASE CONTACT US AT:

[HTTP://WWW.ORADELLFIRE.ORG/CONTACT/](http://www.oradellfire.org/contact/)

WE HOPE THAT THIS PAGE GAVE YOU A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF HOW OUR ORGANIZATION WAS FOUNDED AND OUR HISTORY. PLEASE STOP IN AGAIN AS I WILL BE TRYING TO ADD IN ADDITIONAL PICTURES FROM THE FIREHOUSE ARCHIVES.