

The History of Gale Hose Co.

1897 - 1947

By Thomas F. Welch, Fire Chief

As this is a brief history of the organizing of the Hose Company and the Fire District, it may be well to give a description of some of the fires that influenced the organizing of it.

In the late winter of 1892, a disastrous fire occurred opposite what is now the Cornish Wire Works when a house and barn burned. The house was occupied by a family named Ames, and also by the family of Daniel J. Connors. These two families lost all of their possessions. The Boston Finishing Works was operating the mill at that time and used their hose and pumped water from the reservoir.

In the summer of 1893, a house and barn on Meacham Street owned by Mrs. Chamberlain and a barn owned by Patrick Collins burned. As there was no way to combat it, this fire was a total loss also.

In the winter of 1893, the Delta Upsilon Fraternity on the corner of Main and Southworth Streets burned. Again the Boston Finishing Works used their hose connecting it on a hydrant in front of the Sherman property. This hydrant was one of three hydrants in town. The other two were located at the corner of Main and Spring Street and near West College.

In the spring of 1894 occurred the big fire on Spring Street in the Danforth property where the Danforth Block is now located. Seven buildings burned in this fire; a double tenement house used for dwellings and stores. One side was occupied by Herbert McClain and his harness shop, the other side was occupied by Charles D. Brown and his baking shop and store. George M. Hopkins occupied one store. In these buildings was a barn, carpenter shop, grain store and two sheds. These sheds were owned by L. A. Hunt. All these buildings were burned as the only method of combating this fire was by a bucket brigade drawing water from the little brook that runs through the college property.

In the fall of 1894 a special town meeting was called to take action on the organizing of a fire department and Fire District. This company was called the Volunteers. A public spirited citizen, John B. Gale, gave the new fire company and fire district 1000 feet of 2½ inch hose and two hose carts. The carts carried 500 feet of hose,

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bars, axes and lanterns. The fire district added to the above, namely two hose carts, one hook and ladder horse drawn truck and 1000 feet of hose. It consisted of fifty members.

The location of the equipment was as follows: 1 hose cart at the lower end of Spring Street in Dennison's barn, 1 hose cart in B. F. Mather's barn on the site where the present Adams Memorial Theatre is now located and the other two hose carts and horse drawn truck were housed in the present headquarters. After a few years one cart was moved to Hall Street in a barn owned by Edmund Noel.

This company was disorganized in 1897 and at that time the present Gale Hose Company came into existence.

The first chief of the Fire District and newly organized Gale Hose Company was W. S. Crosier. He served until 1898 and the Hose Company consisted of fifty members.

In 1898, Frank Pease was elected chief and he served until his death in 1905. Under Chief Pease's administration, the soda and acid chemical was added to the fire equipment. This was a new chemical used to combat small fires such as chimney fires and fires confined to a room.

After the death of Chief Pease, Amide Remillard was appointed chief and he served the Fire District very faithfully for thirty years.

Under Chief Remillard's administration came the change in the fire apparatus. In 1916 he changed from the hand drawn carts to motor power. He purchased one truck that carried 1000 feet of hose, ladders and small tools used in fighting fires. In 1923 he purchased a Stutz truck which added to the efficiency of the Fire Department. In 1926 he made the greatest change of all by purchasing a Seagraves pumper which is still in use. This truck would pump 350 gallons of water a minute and also had a 40 gallon soda and acid tank and carried 1000 feet of hose, ladders and small tools used in fighting fires. In the early thirties he changed the soda and acid tank on this truck for a tank holding 100 gallons of water, the water being forced through the pump and with this arrangement, the Hose Company was able to put out fires with a smaller amount of damage from fire and water.

In 1933 a Chevrolet Truck was purchased and placed in the White Oaks section to give the people of that section better protection and also lower insurance rates. This truck has a capacity of 200

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gallons per minute and carries 1000 feet of hose and other needed equipment. In 1938 a Mack truck was purchased which has a capacity of 500 gallons per minute and carries 1000 feet of hose, one 40 foot ladder, one 35 foot ladder, the shorter ladders, roof ladders and other necessary equipment including a life net and stretcher.

At the present time the equipment of the Fire Department consists of three triple combination trucks, 5000 ft. of 2½ in. hose, four scaling ladders, four roof ladders, six pipes and nozzles, several different size tips and other tools and equipment such as axes, bars, ladder straps, Y's for separating one stream into two, also 200 feet of 1½ inch hose, 450 feet of booster hose, one fog nozzle and two spray nozzles.

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THE WILLIAMSTOWN FIRE DEPARTMENT

THE GALE HOSE COMPANY

In the 65 year history of the Gale Hose Company, the present Chief, Edward H. McGowan, is only the fifth man to head this organization. Back in the fall of 1894, a special town meeting was called to act on the organizing of a fire department and a Fire District. This followed four serious fires in 1892, two in 1893, and the big Spring Street fire in the spring of 1894. After the District was started, a group first known as the Williamstown Volunteers was formed.

A public spirited citizen, John B. Gale, gave the new group 1000 feet of 2½ inch hose and two hose carts, each cart carrying 500 feet, bars, axes, and lanterns. The District added two more carts, one hook and ladder horse drawn truck and 1000 feet of hose. The group was comprised of fifty members. However, the Volunteers were disorganized in 1897, and at this time, the present Gale Hose Company came into existence.

The first Fire Chief was William S. Crosier who served for two years, 1897 and 1898. He was succeeded by Frank Pease who served until his death in July, 1906. Amidee Remillard was elected to succeed Mr. Pease and he capably led the company for 30 years until 1936. During this period, the Company obtained its first motorized equipment. Thomas F. Welch followed Mr. Remillard as Chief, and he retired from this office in 1950. Mr. McGowan was elected as his successor, and he is now starting his 13th year as head of the Williamstown Fire Department.

Along with the growth of the town goes the ever increasing responsibilities of the Chief and his men. Chief McGowan's devotion to fire protection work has resulted in much time and labor spent. The routine but law-inquired inspections of many kinds, the over-all knowledge required for this type of work, the follow-up and required investigations of various types of fires, the detailed reports required by law and many reports sought by insurance companies involved, tend to make the position of Fire Chief extremely important to the welfare of any average American community today.

Chief McGowan became a member of the Gale Hose Company in June, 1934. Two years later, he was one of four men who attended a four week course in Firefighting held in Pittsfield. Since then, he has attended several courses of instruction including those sponsored by the Department of Public Safety held at the Framingham State Police School, that of the Connecticut State Firemen's Association held at New Haven, the Mass. State Firemen's Association courses held in several locales, Worcester, Boston, and Springfield.