

## **HISTORY OF THE PHILLIPSBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT**

**Phillipsburg, New Jersey  
Compiled by Chief Richard A. Hay**

**The history of organized fire protection in the Town of Phillipsburg dates to the year 1864.**

**The Warren Fire Company was formed on August 8th of that year, with Isaac H.**

**Hartpence as President. The company had a roster of 37 members. It went into service**

**with a hand drawn engine purchased by the town. Their motto was “We Strive for the**

**Good of All.” Its’ firehouse stood on South Main Street near what is now Hudson Street.**

**Shortly thereafter the fire company purchased a steamer and hose carriage. Being unable**

**to pay the entire cost, the company asked the town for assistance. The town obliged and**

**then became embroiled in a controversy with the fire company over ownership of the**

**equipment. The case went all the way to the New Jersey Supreme Court, which ruled that**

**the fire company owned the apparatus. While the case wound its’ way through the**

**various courts, the fire company was forbidden from using both the steamer and the hose**

**carriage. After the Supreme Courts’ decision was rendered, the company went back into**

**full service.**

**Three years later, in 1867, a second fire company, the Andover Engine Company was**

**formed. Its firehouse was located on South Main Street near Smith Avenue, later occupied**

**by the Jersey Hose Company. There is little known about this fire company. Andover**

**Engine also had a hand drawn engine purchased by the town. It was a large and heavy**

**apparatus and was nicknamed a “regular jumbo” by the members.**

**Both the Warren Fire Company and the Andover Engine Company disbanded sometime in the 1870's.**

**In 1876, our Nations' Centennial year, another fire company was formed. The Centennial Engine Company was organized on January 27, 1876. It set up quarters on Market Street, just off South Main. The Centennials used a Silsby Steamer purchased by the Town for \$4,000.00 and were the only fire company in town until 1887.**

**The Centennials gained notoriety by rendering outstanding service at the fire which destroyed Pardee Hall on the campus of Lafayette College on June 4, 1879. The Company's steamer was stationed along the Bushkill Creek and pumped water uphill to two Easton Fire Department steamers at the scene of the disastrous blaze some 2, 000 feet away, a feat unheard of at the time.**

**The Pardee fire was still smouldering when the Centennial Company was summoned to North Main Street, where several buildings were on fire. That blaze was caused by embers from the Pardee Hall fire. Here the Centennial Company continued its' work and saved the buildings from destruction. It was indeed a very memorable day in the history of the Phillipsburg Fire Department.**

**By the mid 1880's Phillipsburg's population had grown to more than 7,000 residents. There was an increased demand for fire protection as result of several serious fires that had occurred. Consequently, three companies, which are still in existence today, were formed in**

**1887. The Reliance Hose, the Jersey Hose, and the Alert Hook and Ladder Companies were organized by groups of concerned citizens to bolster fire protection for the rapidly growing community.**

**The oldest of the three, Reliance Hose, was organized on February 8, 1887. This company soon moved into a new firehouse on Chamber Street between Fulton and Ellen Streets in 1890. This firehouse was constructed by the town at a cost of some \$5,000.00. This Chamber Street location was the home to Reliance Hose until it moved into its new quarters at Firth and Marshall Streets in 1992.**

**The Jersey Hose Company followed two months later, organized at a meeting on April 15, 1887. With “Duty is our Pride” as their motto, the Jersey Hose Company took up quarters at the old Andover Engine Company firehouse. This building served until the town constructed a new firehouse on South Main near McKeen Street in 1957, where Jersey Hose is still located today.**

**Alert Hook and Ladder Company held its’ incorporation meeting on May 31, 1887.**

**Several preliminary meetings were held before the men decided to form a hook and ladder company. Alert Hook and Ladder was not the first name suggested, as motions to call the company Independent Hose Company No. 1 and Rescue Hook and Ladder were defeated before the present name was adopted. The Alerts also moved into a new firehouse constructed by the town on Chamber Street, south of Hudson Street about 1890. This was**

**their home until moving into the present firehouse at Firth and Marshall Streets in 1989.**

**With four fire companies now serving Phillipsburg, the Mayor and Common Council felt there was a need for one person to oversee firefighting operations, and thus help eliminate the territorial squabbles that were developing between fire companies. In September 1887 Samuel A. Metz of the Jersey Hose Company was appointed Phillipsburg's first Fire Chief or Chief Engineer as they were called at that time.**

**In 1891 the members of the Jersey Hose Company formed a "Running Team" and entered competition with other fire departments throughout the area. The contest involved pulling a hose cart over a 300-yard course, laying 150 feet of two and one-half inch hose and coupling a nozzle to the hose. The team defeated all local competition and was invited to compete against 25 other teams for the World's Championship at Coney Island, New York in the summer of 1893. An expert in the art of making the nozzle connection offered his service to Jersey Hose for fifty dollars. The Jersey Hose team refused. In the finals, Jersey Hose's time was 52 and four fifth seconds, the fastest of the day. But the Hibernia Hose Company of Albany NY hired the "ringer" and took the title by two fifths of a second. The Running Team continued to compete up to 1915. The hose cart, still in existence today, is used by the company for parades.**

**As Phillipsburg continued its growth from the downtown up to the "Hill" sections, the departments' fifth and sixth companies were formed in 1908 and 1909 respectively as the**

**town's population neared 14,000. The Warren Chemical Engine Company was formed by a group of Pursel Hill men on January 27, 1908 . The company took up quarters on Mill Street, until moving into their present firehouse on Columbus Avenue in 1942.**

**The Lincoln Engine Company came into existence on February 12, 1909, the birth date of our nations' 16th President. It was formed by the members of an organization with an unusual name--The Bachelors Club of Firthtown. Its' first meeting was held in Shillingers store, Heckman and Firth Streets, until moving to their present location on Lincoln Street. The current firehouse was occupied in 1938.**

**In 1914 the Commission Form of local government was adopted in Phillipsburg. The newly elected Commissioners decided that they were going to use a portion of the Centennial Firehouse on Market Street for municipal offices and a jail. The Centennials were outraged by this decision. As the Commissioners readied the firehouse for their use, the dismayed members of the fire company voted at their meeting of April 28, 1914 to disband, after serving Phillipsburg for thirty-eight years. The Commissioners never balked and instead moved into the firehouse and promptly transferred Centennial's Silsby Steamer to the Lincoln Engine Company. However, less than a month later, about two dozen of its' former members met and decided to form another fire company. The members met in the same Market Street firehouse, which now doubled as Town Hall and Jail, and on May 14, 1914, Phillipsburg Fire Company No.1 was organized. That Market**

**Street firehouse served as No. 1's quarters until moving to their present location on South Main near Hanover Street in 1976.**

**Thus, the present six companies that make up the Phillipsburg Fire Department: Reliance Hose, Jersey Hose, Alert Hook and Ladder, Warren Chemical, Lincoln Engine and Phillipsburg Fire Co. No.1, came into existence.**

**When Phillipsburg Fire Co. No. 1 was formed in 1914, it became the owner of the town's first motorized fire apparatus. A 1914 Oldsmobile touring car was converted for use as a fire truck by William T. Mitman, an Easton carriage builder. Motorization continued as Alert Hook and Ladder received a city service ladder truck in 1916 and Reliance Hose obtained a Hahn Pumper in 1917---painted Kelly green. Motorization of the department was completed with the replacement of the Silsby Steamer at Lincoln Engine in 1926**

**The Phillipsburg Fire Department also played a substantial role in the formation of the Phillipsburg Emergency Squad. The Squad, organized on May 17, 1936 consisted of at least two members from each fire company and four police officers. Alfred Bates, of the Lincoln Engine Company was the first squad captain. The Emergency Squad was quartered at Lincoln Engine until moving into its' present building in 1950.**

**Additionally, the Phillipsburg Fire Department played key roles in the formation of two statewide firematic organizations. Phillipsburg was one of nineteen fire departments who met in Newark on May 22, 1879 to form the New Jersey State Firemen's Association.**

**Phillipsburg is also a charter member of the New Jersey State Exempt Firemen's Association. Several of the initial organizational meetings of the New Jersey Exempts, incorporated in 1889, were held in Phillipsburg. Additionally, Phillipsburg has hosted the annual convention of the New Jersey Exempts on seven occasions, including 2014. This ties Phillipsburg with Dover, Perth Amboy and Trenton for the most times (7) acting as convention host for the Exempts.**

**Today the Phillipsburg Fire Department's 112 volunteer firefighters operate five front line Pumpers, one spare Pumper, one 95ft. Tower Ladder Truck, two Command Vehicles, two Utility Vehicles, a Special Operations Trailer, Foam Trailer and a Rescue Boat out of five fire stations strategically located throughout the town.**

**All our members must complete a state mandated 202 hour basic firefighting course upon joining. All members are required to take extra specialized courses to constantly keep pace with new methods and procedures, in addition to several levels of Incident Command Courses required of the department's officers. Our firefighters also take part in departmental training on a weekly basis as well as train with Mutual Aid fire departments and other agencies that may impact local emergency responses.**

**The Fire Department is heavily involved in pre-planning the target hazards that exist in Phillipsburg. Advance planning for various emergencies allows the department officers to adjust fire responses to ensure that the amount and type of equipment, along with**

**staffing levels are adequate to properly mitigate any incident. Target hazards include such sites as schools, nursing homes, hospitals and industrial sites, among others.**

**Thus, as you can clearly see, the Phillipsburg Fire Department has indeed come a long way from its' humble beginnings back in 1864 with 37 firefighters and one hand drawn engine to the highly trained well-equipped firefighting force of today, capable of handling a wide array of emergency situations.**

**The Phillipsburg Fire Department is steeped in history and tradition, but we always look toward the future as we must remain on the cutting edge of the fire sciences so that we can provide the best possible fire protection to the people of Phillipsburg.**