

150 YEAR HISTORY OF THE CRISFIELD VOL. FIRE COMPANY AND THE COMMUNITY IT SERVES

This is a Chronological Narrative of the history and happenings of the Crisfield Volunteer fire company.

THE EARLY DAYS

To tell the story of the Crisfield Fire Company we need to first look at the history of the area known in the early records as Annemessex. The colonial records describe the place as the lands between the Chesapeake Bay and the Pocomoke sound. Before colonial settlement this territory was only occupied by Native Americans, known as the Annemessex, a sub tribe of the Pocomoke Paramountcy located near the entrance of the Great Pocomoke River. Most of the colonial settlers in this area were from Virginia arriving as early as 1663 to take up land that the government of Maryland was making available for little consideration in the form of rent and 50 acres of land for each person you brought with you. Most of these settlers were of the Quaker religion and were forced to leave Virginia because of oppression. Annemessex contained rich land for growing crops, and the waters were abundant with fish, clams, oysters, and many varieties of water fowl. Annemessex as it was known became a small village with Royal land grants issued for land under the rules of King Charles II of England, issued by Cecil Calvert II of Maryland's colonial government. The Calvert's called this region their eastern shore of Maryland, thus the name we still use today. In 1666 the colonial legislature formed Somerset County, and establishing a local government. Transportation

was mainly by water in the early days of the County. In 1667 one of the first acts of this newly formed County was the establishment of roads. A road or Highway was created from William's Point near present day Shell town on the Pocomoke River to Marumsco Dams, Hudson's Corner today and north thru the present community of Kingston to the head waters of the Great Annemessex River. The road continued south to the head of Coulbourn's Creek and down along what is Md. Rt. 667 today to Watkins point and the Village of Annemessex. Main St. in present day Crisfield is part of that early winding road leading to a terminus known as fishing point on early maps. This point was near the present day historical sign nere 9th street and was that first connection between highway and river traffic. Along this old winding road farm houses of these settlers were established, thus forming the community known as Annemessex near Somers Cove on the lands of Benjamin Somers patented in 1663. Many land grants were issued in this area known as Annemessex Neck by the land surveyors. These parcels were described by the surveyors to be located in a neck of land called Annemessex, located between the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and the Pocomoke sound as previously mentioned. The tracts were in the upper, middle or down the Neck, thus the term still used today. Also mentioned above this established the old Families of Lawson, Roach, Dixon, Somers, Ward, Cullen, Sterling and many others, that are the ancestors of many residents that still live in the area today. Colonial rule officially ended in 1776 and the community survived the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, while remaining a sleepy little farming village raising tobacco, corn and other crops. Seafood was harvested for personal consumption and not likely sold, because of the lack of refrigeration. Foods were dried or salted to keep for the long

winters. The threat of fire was always feared in colonial times with open fireplaces for cooking and a source of heat on a cold night. If fire broke out there were no fire brigades to respond and the dwelling was sure to be lost. Annemessex continued to survive for around 200 years without major development, and no record of any fire protection. In the year of 1866 the Railroad came to the Village of Annemessex and the community started a new era of development and growth. The rails terminated near what is known as Ward's crossing today. Seafood arriving at fishing point in the lower part of the village then was hauled to the railroad station by oxen carts; this was an added expense for freight. In 1867 the rails were extended on pilings over the marsh and low land to the deep waters of the Little Annemessex River, developing a depot for connecting boats to the locomotive. Seafood and other commodities could now be delivered to the northern markets, of New York, Philadelphia and Boston. Around these newly installed tracts, buildings and business sprang up rapidly, in some cases on pilings, these structures were made of wood and placed very close to each other. Saloons, hotels, houses and places of entertainment, seem to be the priority for the thriving economy, literally being built on oyster shells around the new set of rails. This growth continued for the next five years without any organized fire protection to protect lives and property.

THE BIRTH OF THE CITY OF CRISFIELD

In the spring of 1872 by an act of the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, the town of Crisfield was official incorporated. Crisfield would probably have retained the name Annemessex or Somers Cove but for a trifling accident which befell The Honorable John Woodland

Crisfield, a leader of the Somerset Bar, member of Congress for the District and official of the railroad. Mr. Crisfield fell overboard during an inspection tour at the dock near the railroad terminus. Mr. Crisfield a well-dressed gentleman, wet and fished out of the river, must have embarrassed others in the party. So on that day the new city was christened as Crisfield in honor of the delegate. The first election was held on April 3, 1872 and elected five town Commissioners, that had their first meeting June 12, 1872. These new officials had their hands full of many new issues to be brought under controlled in the previous lawless community. One of these goals was to form a fire brigade. Some local business men and other community oriented individuals knew the danger that loomed over the new City.

THE FOUNDING OF THE CRISFIELD FIRE COMPANY # ONE

In November of the year 1874 several concerned citizens meet with City Commissioners about organizing some fire protection in the town. City records indicate that 96 feet of ladders and 50 buckets were purchased for firefighting in the City of Crisfield, and as a result of that meeting the Crisfield Fire Co. #1 was formed. Two years later in 1876 City Bailiff John E. N. Sterling was authorized to purchase with city money 48 buckets made of white cedar at the cost of 30 cent per bucket. Later the same year Mr. Sterling purchased 6 axes and a 30 foot hook ladder. This new company was no more than a fire brigade with no alarm system or any means of communication. In 1876 the city authorized Bailiff John E. N. Sterling to purchase a bell that was in the possession of Mr. William T. Lawson, to be used as a fire alarm bell. A wooden enclosure was constructed in the community conveniently located,

were the bell was housed under lock and key. The bailiff and other authorized persons rang the bell to alert the members of the brigade, as an individual on horseback rode thru town blowing a horn and yelling fire, usually this person was said to be Jack "Wallowper" Sterling. The "bucket brigade" was anything but satisfactory and more houses were destroyed by fire than those that were saved. Sometime around 1880 a hand pumper was acquired by the city to help the fire brigade to do a better job of protecting the many wooden structures in the community. It appears that at the same time a hose wagon was also purchased by the City used to carry the necessary hose, pike poles and a ladder to the fire scene. I guess we could consider this hand pump and hose wagon as our first pieces of apparatus. At first small ponds were dug to hold water in areas in town to supply water for the hand pumper. Movable hose reels held a fair amount of fire hose, to deliver water to the fire scene. The funds allocated to operate and house this equipment were very limited. Mr. Andrew Poleyette agreed to let the small group of men house their necessary equipment in his livery stable, located in the lower down town section, which is 9th street today. (Rear of Watermen's Inn) Some of the old-timers in the Fire Department recall that on those cold winter nights things did not go well. They told of a night when a fire broke out in the uptown section near the location of Mt. Pleasant Church today, the morning was very cold and several feet of snow was on the ground. The old county road which is main street today, was not the best for travel and the men had to pull and push the old hand drawn wagons all the way uptown to the fire. The only thing that was in the favor of the fire company in those days was the fact that houses were some distance apart, therefore stopping the spread of fire to other structures. Needless to say the

house in question burned to the ground and the fire company only made it half-way. At this time the arsenal of equipment may have been an improvement in fire protection, but was not a drop in the bucket for the conflagration that was about to take place.

Sometime in the year of 1883 a very large fire broke out in the lower part of Crisfield. The fire company's equipment or water supply was not sufficient to control this fire. Most of the wooden structures on both sides of the Railroad tracks were apparently reduced to ashes. This event was a great setback for the growing economy. This resulted in the City purchasing its famous horse drawn steam pumper, which still to this day is housed in a restored condition, at the Crisfield Vol. Fire Company's Firehouse. City records indicate that this Steamer, as we still call it was state of the art, equipped with a steam signal whistle, two lanterns, and name plate, along with the necessary tools and accessories. The purchase price in 1884 was \$2,800.00 issued to the Clap & Jones Manufacturing Co. of Hudson, New York. The new piece of equipment apparently arrived by train at the Pine Street Station. It was later reported in a newspaper article that Crisfield's Steam pumper was one of the finest pieces of fire-fighting apparatus on the Eastern Shore.

Crisfield's steam pumper was put into service in 1885 with hopes that the City of Crisfield would not experience another disaster like the Great Fire of 1883 that leveled the lower part of town. The new Clapp and Jones pumper had only been in service for a short period of time, when the call for mutual aid came from the City of Salisbury by telegraph. According to historical records this efficient piece of firefighting equipment, along with skill and knowledge of the members of Crisfield Fire Company No. 1, the ravage of fire was stopped, thus saving the newly constructed Wicomico County Courthouse from sure

destruction. Two hundred and nine buildings, including a large part of the business district was lost to the flames that night. It is interesting to note that the telegraph for mutual aid from Salisbury Fire Co. was dispatched at around 7:30 P.M. on the night of October 17th, 1886. Firemen were alerted by the City bell that apparently remained in the center of the community. Crisfield's pumper with a crew of men arrived at the train station in Salisbury around 9:00 P.M. that same night. With today's modern diesel trucks and excellent highways it would take 35 minutes or more to cover the same distance today. The Crisfield Fire Company responded to this call by a special train delivering our new Steam Engine and members of our company to Salisbury. It has been reported by older members that the Engine was stored at the fire station on 9th street near the windmill and city well. There was no time to hitch up horses, so the piece was pushed and pulled to the loading ramp by hand, to the Pine Street Station where it was loaded onto a flat car. Among Crisfield firemen that made the trip that night were Chief B. Hufty; Jeff D. Stubbins (1862-1936); James Purnell (1867-1940) and others.

Our steam pump was placed at Humphrey's pond, to draft water which was delivered up the street to the newly constructed Courthouse. Members of our company gathered up rugs, blankets and sheets that were soaked with water and placed on the roof of the building to extinguish embers blowing from the center of the fire in the lower part of town. It must have been a long night, but there were no reports of members in our outfit receiving any injuries. The Salisbury fire was the most devastating the town had ever experienced and destroyed 21 acres in the heart of the City. According to a newspaper article published on October 17, 1886, the fire started in a small barn owned

by City Commissioner S. F. Toadvine on what is Market Street today. The article stated that the fire “could have been extinguished by a bucket brigade”, but Salisbury’s pride was a new fire engine, manufactured by L. P. Almond Company also a Steam pump. Everyone waited for this piece of equipment to arrive on the scene. The engine had been out service for a long period of time and apparently the piston and valves were stuck and it never put the first drop of water on the fire. The piece was soon pulled away from the scene to save it from the flames. Several other cities were called that night to help extinguish this monstrous blaze, including the Wilmington Delaware and Pocomoke City Maryland fire departments. Mr. Fred Grier responded with the Wilmington Company by train and after their apparatus was placed in service, Fred started to repair Salisbury’s pump. Being a machinist by trade he soon discovered the problem and in a short time had the unit in service. After helping to fight the fire of 1886 Mr. Grier moved to Salisbury with his family and started the R. D. Grier Company with his brother Robert. In 1889 to 1900 Grier served as Chief of the Salisbury Fire Company.

After the great fire in Salisbury in 1886 the citizens of that city sent a card of thanks to the members of the Crisfield Fire Company in appreciation of their assistance in stopping the progress of the blaze, thereby saving much property and preventing the total destruction of their town. This beautifully framed certificate still hangs in the meeting room of the Crisfield Fire Hall. In January of 1989, The Historical Committee of the Crisfield Fire Department restored the original plaster frame, and inspected the document. The paper document was found to be in good condition considering its age. We decided to replace the old mat with a new acid free one, but decided to retain the original glass

which was filled with bubbles and ripples. After returning the old certificate to its restored frame we sealed the back with a dust cover also made of acid free material. This document serves to remind us of the fact that our cities not only need dependable fire equipment, but the willing spirit of its volunteers and assistance of its dependable neighbors.

At a special Meeting
OF THE
Commissioners of Salisbury, Maryland

Held December 13th 1886

It was decided as requested at a Town Meeting of citizens

That a Card of Thanks be presented to

THE CRISFIELD FIRE COMPANY No. 1

OF CRISFIELD MARYLAND

On the night of October 17th 1886 the town of Salisbury startled by an alarm of FIRE

It soon became apparent that the home department was unable to stop its ravages, when the

COMMISSIONERS OF CRISFIELD

Were appealed to for assistance

THE CRISFIELD FIRE COMPANY No.1

*In charge of their able and efficient Chief Col. B. Huffy promptly responded arriving on a
Special Train kindly furnished by Superintendent H. W. Dunne Their TIMELY AND EFFECTIVE
ASSISTANCE quickly arrested the progress of the flames thereby saving much valuable property and
Preventing the total destruction of the town.*

In Grateful Acknowledgment thereof

We beg to

Present

CARD OF THANKS
THE OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF
CRISFIELD FIRE COMPANY NO. 1.

John Tracy President

John P. Owens Secretary

J. R. T. Laws Treasurer

S. F. Toadwin & H. Hitch

Commissioners

P.L.G. 2024

Older members of our company told the story of how the horse drawn engine was operated. After returning from a fire the water tank to make steam was refilled. The fire-box was cleaned out and was made ready for the next call. The fire-box was filled with wood shavings & excelsior. Kerosene was carried in containers so that when the alarm was sounded, all the Steam Engineer had to do was pour a little kerosene in the box, strike a match and hook up the horses. The old-timers stated that it only took around three to five minutes to get up steam. They always carried a supply of soft coal and wood. There is no evidence that the fire company owned any horses, but sources indicate that Mr. Poleyette furnished the horses from his livery stables just across the street from the firehouse.

By 1886 the Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company No.1 was well established, and equipped with a state of art piece of equipment. The New York, Philadelphia and Norfolk Railroad were also well established as previously mentioned. The water system was an antique. A windmill and shallow well with a cedar wooden storage tank was located at Kennerly's Wharf, near the first Crisfield Fire House built about 1878. (Now 9th street today) This system was used by the citizen of town for drinking water and other household uses. Water for the train was supplied by wells further up land near Hopewell and Marion Station. No one seems to know when the old Kennerly Windmill was installed, but was apparently working as early as 1865. Sources indicate that Gustavas A. Maddox sunk the first artesian well in the city for a water supply .This well was capable of moving water without the need of pump, because of the natural hydrostatic pressure in the local aquifer that had never been tapped. This was an improvement on water for firefighting, but was only one small well with limited storage. Records

do not indicate the depth of this early well, but apparently was used for firefighting. In the spring of 1892 on Easter Sunday fire broke out across from the Immanuel Church in Phillip's store near the home of Mayor Crockett's house. The store was destroyed and several homes damaged, again by spring winds hampering the actions of the Fire Company and limited water supply. In the fall of the same year another large fire took place in the block in-between 4th & 5th Streets, stores and shops in the block were swept away by the flame, the fire start in Jeff Webb's grocery store. It was reported in the newspaper that someone dropped a match in the floor and fire spread to a coal-oil barrel causing a large explosion. Mr. Charlie Mooney was in Webb's store and received serious injuries to the head, but survived. Mr. John Carman, the old Railroad ticket agent, was coming up Main Street from the Depot when the alarm went in and was run over by the steamer being pulled by horses. He received a broken leg, but survived. There were more fires before the turn of the Century, but in all of these big fires, the old Crisfield fire-fighters and their steam engine pumper, pulled by horses, were ready to answer the call. Many times they drafted water from the Annemessex River saving much property. It was said of the old members long since gone that they could make her talk. With the fire box loaded with kindling and soft coal and water tanks full steam was up and ready to pump in short order, many times before arriving on the scene.

By 1896 several major improvement were made in the City of Crisfield. The first was an ice plant to make artificial ice for storing and shipping seafood. In the late 1800's equipment was available for generating electricity which was needed to run refrigeration equipment. The first enterprise was known as Crisfield Ice Manufacturing Company

established in 1890. This new plant was built mainly of wood, and housed electric generators, refrigeration equipment, oil, coal for fuel and some storage. The first deep well was drilled at this location near the waterfront to supply clean clear fresh water to make ice. The contract was awarded to Mr. John Henry Kelly Shannahan of Easton who put the well pipe down 1100 feet without hitting any water. Sam Kennerly who ran the old windmill at Kennerly's wharf, suggested perforating the pipe because of a lot of sand that had been encountered at that level. Mr. Shannahan agreed and struck another lick going down several more feet where he struck a large flow of water that shot out of the well head going 10 feet in the air. They had successfully entered what is known as the Potomac Aquifer. This was a great achievement for the City and Crisfield Fire Department, because it showed city officials that a good water system was achievable in the waterfront community. This aquifer is still in use today by the City for domestic and business uses as well as fire protection. By 1898 a complete water system was under construction, with more deep wells drilled to around 1100 feet. Water mains were being laid throughout the City and a standpipe erected to hold water creating hydrostatic pressure for delivering water under pressure in the system that could supply fire equipment. The J.H.K. Shannahan Artesian Well Company is still in business today in St. Michaels, Md. When the Crisfield Fire Company was first organized there were no telephones in the city, neither was there any fire alarm other than a small bell on the roof of the fire house, [located on what is 9th street today], and when a fire broke out the person who discovered it was compelled to run to the fire house and ring this bell, after which a man on horseback would ride through the streets of the city blowing a horn and shouting fire in an

effort to arouse the citizens and firemen who would form a bucket brigade and assist the firemen in hooking up the steamer and other equipment. Later on the Ice Plant which had steam infallible 24 hours a day to make ice, was used to operate a large steam whistle like used on Steam locomotives was place atop the Ice plant building to alert the fire company. When that whistle blew the entire city new that fire had broken out some were in the community. Another much needed innovation was the adoption, of a complete fire code alarm system. After hearing the original very long blast, a series of short number of blast indicated what district or part of town members would respond too. There were 6 different districts throughout the community.

In 1900 the Clapp & Jones Manufacturing Company of Hudson, New York, operating as American Fire Engine Co., rebuilt our steam pumper. On the rear boiler stack a brass plate was installed. The plate reads:

CLAPP & JONES M'F'G CO.

577

AMERICAN FIRE ENGINE CO.

There is no evidence of how the steamer got to Hudson, New York, but it probably was delivered by train on a flat car, just like it had been transported to Salisbury during the Great Fire of 1886. In 1909 Mr. Fred Grier of Salisbury did some work on the pumper, and recertified the apparatus and put his name and date in one of the steam gauges.

In December 1907 the Crisfield Fire Dept. received a consignment of fire hats. They were the first owned by our company, since its organization, and we were now equipped to fight fire in the most

improved manner. There is now evidence of the material they were made of, but most likely leather.

In the year 1917 fire underwriters were in town to review the structures and firefighting capabilities of the city. At the completion of their study maps were drawn and recorded about the type of construction and the materials that were more fire resistant in present structures. The amount of water available was reviewed, the size of water mains, as well as the storage of the water supply for fire protection. Equipment available to fight fire and its location in town were also studied. These maps are known as the Sanborn maps and are available in the Library of Congress. They established the fire insurance rates for the city. (This is equivalent to the ISO ratings our city must use today). The 1917 the Sanborn map shows the location of the fire house on what is 5th street today. Equipment listed at the station was as follows: "Fire Dept. Eng. Ho, one 75 hp. American La France Auto Combination Pump, Chemical & Hose, One Clapp & Jones 2d Class Steamer, Two Hose Reels." Station located on the north side of 5th street in the rear of the Lyric Theater Moving pictures, with an 8 inch water main on Main Street.

By the late 1920's this alert system was improved by combining the steam whistle with a siren, using a variation of the two to indicate the district number that the fire was in. (This system seems to have been too complicated for members to remember when trying to get to the correct location). After telephone communication was later installed an electric siren was mounted on the roof of the fire house.

According to the Charter and Corporation papers recorded in the Court House records on March 4, 1921, the Fire Company a department of

the City of Crisfield was reorganized. In an article published in the Crisfield Times Oct. 11, 1935, it was stated that the Fire Company was disbanded in 1908. The article further states that the city was without firefighters for one year, except for an organization known as the "Kid Glove Gang", which was equipped with an old "steamer". {This must have been the Clap & Jones steam pumper purchased in 1884 by the city} In 1909 the Fire Department was reorganized with Mr. Rupert Somers as chief, and about 33 members.

In 1909 the town started paying its firemen a salary of 12.00 per year and \$1.00 additional for each fire attended. Firemen were also fined \$1:00 if they did not attend a fire unless they had a bona fide excuse. ***(Even to this day as we close out any business meeting the last call is "Payments, fines & dues.)*** This was later discontinued and replaced by a system of compensation, whereby firemen who attended a specified number of fires would receive a reduction of their City taxes. Also these individual were exempt for paying a City water bill. In 1909 Crisfield Fire Co. # 1 had approximately 33 members, the old faithful Steam pumper and an eight piece band. There are some reports of older firemen indicating we had a ladder wagon with some pike poles, hose and lanterns. This piece of apparatus was stored in another location in town and assigned to members in that location. After hearing the fire whistle they would go to that location to get the wagon and pull it to the fire. No matter how hard we try or how much good equipment we buy, major fires just popup when we least expect them.

Around midnight February 12, 1910 a large fire broke out at the warehouse and freight office known as the Depot at the end of the Railroad tracks downtown. It was reported the night watchman was found dead in ruins. Although the case was never solved the theory was

that the man was murdered and the fire was set to cover the crime. This fire was fought by the Crisfield Fire Co. and the old steam pumper probably drafting water from the Little Annemessex River.

In the early morning hours of August 14, 1912 another large fire broke out at the Crisfield Ice and Electric Company that was started in 1898 a wooden structure on the waterfront. The fire apparently started by an oil tank used for fuel oil storage. The engineer reported that the tank exploded and spread fire throughout the entire complex, including a large storage building. The Maryland & Herald newspaper stated a light rain assisted the prompt and excellent work by the Crisfield Fire Department, pre-venting the spread of the flames to surrounding buildings. Again the Steamer was on the scene. A new building was constructed at the same location, and the owners said we are going to construct a better structure made of brick, tile and steel to help prevent loss by fire. Crisfield Ice and Electric Company was one of the most modern facilities on the shore. Two large Corliss steam engines driving two General Electric dynamos were installed, that were capable of running the 60 ton Frick Refrigeration unit as well as supplying the City of Crisfield with electric. Records do not tell us if the old Steam whistle was still used to alert the Fire Company. This was a great improvement for the Community and the fire Company, with electric lights in the new Firehouse now on 5th street and the capability of using electric siren to alert the Firemen. Members of the now Crisfield Vol. Fire Co. Station #2 still say the fire whistle is blowing and not a fire siren. An interesting note: The Ice plant later supplied the City of Crisfield with street lights and electric in the homes. This company became The Eastern Shore Public Service Company ESPSC, serving a

large portion of the area. It later merged with The Delaware Electric Company and is known today as Delmarva Power.

On August 2, 1916 Crisfield Vol. Fire Company #1 received its first self-propelled American –LaFrance combination pumper and chemical, type 45 at a cost to the City of \$5,500.00. The vehicle was equipped with a 75 HP 4 cylinder gasoline engine that required starting with a hand crank and was equipped with solid rubber tires. The unit had additional tools such as lanterns, pike poles and ladders. In that same year several fires broke out in the Jersey Island area destroying many of the old wooden structures, including the Pierce Lime plant.

On February 15, 1917 a fire broke out again over in the area known as Jersey just across the Draw bridge. The fire was located in a large building containing the foundry and machine shop of Mr. Nat Gates valued at \$20,000.00. The structure was a total loss, but the Crisfield Fire Company managed to save a large schooner tied to the dock. Also near the dock was a boat house containing two large yachts valued at \$15,000.00 owned by Mr. Edward E. McCready of Chicago, formerly of this City. (His estate built McCready Hospital). Due to the efforts of the Crisfield Fire Company with their new fire truck members managed to keep the flames from spreading to other buildings. In the following year of 1918 Old Asbury Park burned in the Lawsonia area. This park was a recreational area on what is William Maddox Road today. The park had a small train with tracks around the grounds and a Merry-go-round which was also lost in the fire.

In April 1919 the Asbury Methodist Church and several homes burned in the Lawsonia area. Crisfield Fire Company responded with Eng. No.1 and tried to extinguish the fires with no success, there is no record of

the steamer present at this fire. The Crisfield water system had been installed but no water mains were present on Asbury Ave at that time. This building of worship was located in the Cemetery used today by the Asbury Church. A short time after this devastating blaze, the congregation decided to build a new Church that was built across the street from the old location for a cost of \$250,000.00.

In 1921 the Fire House was still located on what is 5th Street today. The organization already had a band and was meeting on a regular basis to conduct business of the department. A social Camaraderie was starting to develop within the organization; a decision was made to hold an annual Banquet and Ladies night every year in the future. So a tradition was established and Crisfield Vol. Fire Company Inc. continues to celebrate with this activity each year for 103 years now. On February 18, 1921 the Crisfield Fire Department #1 was incorporated and a Charter published. The information was recorded into the records of Somerset County, and the State of Maryland on March 4, 1921.

In 1924 the City purchased another self –propelled fire truck for the Fire Company. Again we chose an American-LaFrance piece, Model year 1925 type 75, with balloon tires, 6 cylinder 100 horsepower engine, and a chain driven drive train. The Model 75 was state of the art and very popular with departments throughout the Country. The unit was equipped with a 750 GPM fire pump and necessary suction and discharge hoses. Eng. No 2 remained in service for many years. Fire trucks were owned by the City Government and after being declared surplus they were sold for Junk. Mr. Harold Howard of Lawsonia was a local scrap metal dealer who purchased many fire trucks for recycling from the City of Crisfield.

In 1924 a new Firehouse was built by the City on Broadway near the City's maintenance and water departments. The structure was constructed of brick and was two stories high with an engine room on the lower section and meeting room upstairs. The rear of this structure was the water department storage areas where the old steamer was kept. As a child Roy Sterling and I played at the fire station in the 1950's while the Monday night meetings were held on the second floor. After the meeting we were allowed to play on the shuffle board, if no firemen were using it. There was a brass pole in rear of building used by the firemen to repel down to the engine room in case of an alarm. Roy and I were not allowed in this area. We often played outdoors around the building and remember seeing the old steamer in garage out back. The new station had an electric driven fire siren located on the roof and was connected to the telephone system on Pine Street. Through telephone operators a fire could be reported and the siren set off. After arriving at the station firemen could receive the nature and location of the alarm. Broadway headquarters was now the third location of the firehouses in the Community. The corner stone of this station still remains in the show case at the present building on the dual highway.

Remember 1919 and the Asbury Church fire? Well it burned again doing major damage to the 5 year old structure. This structure was constructed of stone but had a wooden roof. In May of 1926 fire started in a garment factory on the southwest side of Asbury Ave. sources indicate the fire was started by kids playing with matches. Windy conditions that day caused embers from the burning factory to cross the street starting a fire in the wooden roof of the new Church. Again the Fire Company responded this time with two pieces of equipment and used all the water and chemicals they had, but again

they could not get any water because no mains were in that area. Pocomoke Fire Company answered the call of mutual aide, but nearing the scene they were notified that they were too late. The Church received considerable damage with only the stone walls standing. The congregation decided to rebuild again this time the roof was constructed with terracotta tiles, and a 4 inch water main was installed and connect to the Crisfield system.

In 1928 probably the most destructive fire this City had ever witnessed broke out in March at the Odd Fellows Hall located at the corner of Main & 4th Street. Newspaper articles give us a good report of this event. ***(March 31, 1928 Headlines Crisfield Times Retail shopping district in the City's busiest center burned Thursday night. Ninety buildings burned as disastrous blaze rages in Crisfield's most destructive fire. Fire departments from five other cities called to help.)*** One man killed sixty families homeless and sixty-six firms have burned. Firefighters overcome by heat and smoke. Two theatres and a hotel, wholesale stores, packing plants and numerous retail establishments fall before the flames. Thursday night destroyed the heart of the retail business section and did more than a million dollars damage. An area of four blocks surrounding the city's busiest corner, at Main and Fourth streets, was wiped out by the conflagration, which raged through the night. Only was subdued after a shifting wind had made it possible for the Crisfield Fire Department and five departments from five other cities, to control the blaze. The fire started in Odd Fellows Hall later known as Arcade Theater one of largest structures in Crisfield. The fire was discovered around 8:30 on Thursday evening in the projector room. The audience numbered more than 700 people, walking out of the theater without any indication of panic. As the flames burst out

through the side of the building the Crisfield Fire Department responded to the alarm. The blaze progressed fast being fanned by heavy winds and within an hour flames were spreading fast, sweeping through the streets on both sides and in all directions. The telephone and telegraph were soon destroyed cutting off communications with the outside world. Soon the electric lines were being destroyed, which furnished lights for city streets and power to the municipal water system. The water mains were now very low on pressure and water supply depleted. Engines were moved to Cove landing to draft saltwater from Somers Cove. A relay of fire engines finally started to deliver water to the scene. Realizing the seriousness of the situation representatives of the City Government drove by car to Westover eighteen miles north of Crisfield to use their telephone. Calls were made to many fire companies for help. In a short while Salisbury Fire department got underway repaying a call for mutual aid from 1886. Princess Anne, Pocomoke, Delmar, Laurel and Seaford Delaware, with their equipment came to support the Crisfield Firemen and stayed until the flames were under control. The fire was reported under sum control early Friday morning. During the height of the fire several firemen were overcome by smoke from here, and one member of the Salisbury Company was injured. Frank Morgan a young Crisfield boy was struck by a concrete pillar when the walls of the Gibson building fell and was fatally injured and died a few hours later at McCready Hospital. People came by the thousands from all over the Eastern Shore to witness this disastrous blaze. On the south side of Main Street where the blaze started, the flames swept down to Fifth Street destroying the A&P Store, the pool hall of Mr. Dougherty, the Lyric Theatre and many buildings in the rear facing both Fourth and Fifth Streets. On the north

side of Main Street, a large warehouse of O. L. Tawes Company was destroyed and the Brick Hotel property. The flames soon started to progress northward burning several residents. The Pine Street Station of the Pennsylvania Railroad soon was burned to the ground. Homes on the other side of the railroad tracts in an area known as the Turf were leveled. Also along the east side of Main Street, north of Fourth Street the establishment of the Webb Packing Company, Shager Store, the City Market and the big Gibson building, a three story brick structure housing many offices of other business concerns. On the opposite side between Main and Pine Streets the McCrory's Five & Dime Store, Sterling's Restaurant, The Quality Shop and Uptown Branch of The Bank of Crisfield were destroyed. It is believed that the spread of fire would have been much greater but for a change of the wind saving many residences along Pine Street. Mr. Robert L. Tawes {1922-2023} told us that as a small boy he was in the Arcade Theater with a family member when the fire broke out, living on Pine Street at the time they hurried home to start removing their possessions. Because the change in wind direction that night their home was saved. Mr. Bob served the Crisfield Fire Company for 70 years and died at the age of 101. Mr. Robert H. Goldsborough the writer's Father {1918-1999} told us that Mr. Vincent P. Bonomo member of the Fire Co. ran a store near Pine Street that sold ice cream, he was sure that his establishment would burn so he gave all of his Ice cream supply to the kids that night, but do to the wind change his store did not burn.(Mr. Bob Goldsborough also served the Crisfield Fire Company for over 50 years.) As soon as the magnitude of the disaster was realized, the Mayor and City Council of Crisfield appealed to Governor Ritchie to order out Company L of the Maryland National Guard to patrol the burned district. The Governor immediately

ordered the troops to stay on location until properties were secure. Electric service was restored late on Friday by a large group of linemen from all over the peninsula. Telephone and telegraph service was also restored within a few days. Within a week City Officials had planned to rebuild the business District, with wider streets and upgraded infrastructure. There is more to this story but not necessary to this history.

In 1928 the City purchased another American-LaFrance fire truck which remained in service for about 25 years, until the 1950's when it was sold to the local scrap metal dealer Mr. Harold Howard in the Lawsonia district. On Monday morning January 7th 1929 fire broke out in the Kitchen of the Davenport Hotel & Restaurant in the downtown section. The structure was a three stories Landmark and intimately connected with the early history of this City. Originally ran by the late Mr. John Adams, it was later known as the Curtis Hotel, the Palm Hotel and then Hotel Davenport. Ross Catlin was living on the first floor and died in the flames. At the time of the fire the building was owned by David and Aaron Saltz, and operated by Mr. Reese Davenport. Mr. Adolph Justice one of the local firemen was seriously injured by a falling brick wall, but later recovered after a stay in McCready Hospital. The heroic work of the Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company with their three large fire engines saved the lower business section of the city. Again a heavy wind caused the blaze to be a stubborn fight for firefighters, but they managed to keep the blaze contained in the walls.

Older members of our Company told us that the Steamer was used for the last time at the Great Fire of 1928. The Steamer was later stored at the Water Department building behind the new fire station on Broadway. All of the fire engines were owned by the City of Crisfield

with the power to sell or dispose of surplus equipment. In September of 1938 the old antique Steamer was declared surplus and sold to Mr. Harold Howard mentioned above, operating as **Harold's Scrap Iron & Metal Company**. Mr. Harold towed the piece to the Junk yard, but did not have the heart to dismantle it. He had watched the old pump as he called it displayed proudly in the parades sometimes still pulled by two horses. Meanwhile the members of the Crisfield Fire Company found out about the City Fathers selling the piece and were concerned that they had not been properly notified. Mr. Howard returned his pump to the volunteers apparently on loan and asked them to keep the apparatus so they could again return it to its place of honor in the street parades on the 4th of July and other occasions. ***Recently the receipt for the sale of the pump was found and indicates that the selling price was for \$12.00 to the Junk man. A copy of this document was place in the Fire Company archive. This 86 year old document was wrote on a paper titled Executive Department, City of Crisfield, William E. Ward Mayor, H.H.Matthews City Clerk and Treasure, City Council, Charles M. Woolston President, Elyard Holland, and E. L. Quinn. The hand written section reads, received from Harold Howard for Pump \$12.00 on September 15th 1938 signed H.H. Matthews City Clerk.*** This is not the end of the Steamer story; there will be more information later in this narrative.

In the 1930's the Volunteer Company operated out of the Broadway location funded by the City budget with no record found of any major changes. There were many alarms of fire throughout this decade but no major ones found by the writer. Just remember things do not always stay the same.

On May 19th 1939 Crisfield was the host of the tenth annual Delmarva Firemen's Association, which proved to one of the largest events held in the City. Business meetings were held in the New Arcade Theater. The meeting was presided over by the president of the association Raymond Carey of Princess Anne. After the invocation by J.R. Bicking, pastor of the Immanuel Methodist Church, Mayor William E. Ward made an address. Mr. Ward welcomed all of the visiting firemen and guest and presented them with a key to the City. C.W. Milligan of Cape Charles Virginia, a past president of the association gave a response. President B.S. Miles Jr. of our company also responded by welcoming guest. Former Chief Ben Scott, of Chincoteague, Virginia who was 101 years old on May the 8 of that year was recognized as the oldest member at the convention and was a Civil War Veteran. (Thanks for your service) Mr. Ben spoke to the audience for a short time. The first president of the Delmarva Firemen's Association, Mr. George Coulborn, of Princess Anne made a short address. Three new fire companies, Salisbury No.2, Sudlersville and Marion Station were added to the association roster. State Comptroller J. Millard Tawes, a member of our company was also among the speakers that day. Senator Dorsey, of St. Mary's County was the principal speaker for the convention. The local newspaper reported a large street parade that afternoon, with many fire engines and bands.

January 26 1940, Chalk one up for Crisfield fireman J. Millard Tawes, former President of the Maryland State Firemen's Association, Comptroller of the State of Maryland. Firefighter Tawes was returning from Annapolis around 2:00 A.M. and while passing through Marion Station he saw smoke rising from the store of Mr. George Parson. He turned around and went back and found the store was on fire. Tawes

rushed to the fire engine house and broke out the window in the door attempting to set off the siren, but could not get it to work. After starting one of the fire engines to warm it up for the personal when they arrived, he realized that his car had a siren so he ran through the community trying to alert the firemen. Marion Vol. Fire Co. did a fine job keeping the blaze in the one structure and saving a row of stores and homes from possible destruction. Damages were estimated at \$15,000.00. Remember volunteer firefighters are always on duty.

In 1940 the City of Crisfield purchased a new International fire truck for the Volunteers. Marked as Engine #4 equipped with a booster reel, ladders, large hose bed and 500 gallon booster tank. The piece was manufactured and supplied by the W.S. Darley Company of Itasca, Illinois in business since 1908. This truck was housed at the present station in 1961 and remained in service until 1964 when it was decommissioned and sold by the city of Crisfield.

Firemen have responded to alarms in various ways over the years, some on horseback, some running and others by motorized vehicles of all kinds. One interesting volunteer came to the station on his bicycle. Mr. Grover C. Adams is a legion in the Crisfield Vol. Fire Company. In 1940 Grover responded to 70 alarms out of a total 73 for the year only missing 3 alarms, but for a good excuse. He was hit by a hit-and-run driver in route to the station and was in the hospital for some time. When the whistle was sounded Grover jumped on his bicycle equipped with a hand cranked siren and peddled as hard as he could to arrive at the station or location of the fire. He claimed that he had worn out several bikes and responded to 748 alarms in his career. In 1934 he was presented with a gold metal bar for being the most active member of the year.

I recently reminded you that things do not remain the same. On December 7th 1941 the United States entered World War II with the bombing of Pearl Harbor and volunteerism was about to change.

VOLUNTEER FOR VICTORY 1942

In a local newspaper article Jan. 16, 1942 the headline reads Fire Department Auxiliary classes started for defense. Many of the regular members of the Crisfield Fire Company have gone to fight for their country. If you are qualified for one of the armed services, your country needs you. If not your community needs you. Classes for training auxiliary firemen are been held on Tuesday & Fridays where instructions will be given on the proper handling of fire apparatus, hose, ladders and other equipment. Instructions will be given on how to put out incendiary bombs as well as other duties that may be needed in case of an enemy strike. 32 men of the community have signed up so far. Mr. Horace Ford, a former chief of the department will be the instructor. Currant Chief Stevenson has requested that the number be added soon as possible to 100.

In the year 1944 the Ira Saltz store and Blades barber shop were destroyed by fire and damaged both of the town's banks. The Bank of Crisfield and Marine Bank were located on both sides of the fire. Another fire in the Jersey Island section broke out in the George A. Christy & Son oyster house and ice plant, both buildings completely destroyed. Remember many of our men are still overseas fighting for our country.

In 1946 the firehouse on Broadway was renovated to house the new aerial ladder truck that was scheduled to arrive in 1947. The original

building constructed in 1924 had one bay door and housed three pieces of equipment. The Steamer was stored in the rear of the building. After renovations the firehouse had two bay doors and new ladder truck had its own bay when it finally arrived after the War.

In 1947 a new American LaFrance Aerial ladder truck was purchased at the cost of \$19,000.00. This truck was equipped with a 12 cylinder V style engine, 65 foot hydraulic extension ladder mounted on a military style turn table. A 750 gallon per minute water pump, mounted under the turn table to supply water up the ladder by 2 ½ in hose to a master stream nozzle. Engine # 5 was a welcome piece of firefighting equipment, capable of rescue of people trapped in high structures, as well as placing large amounts of water above those buildings. The ladder truck as we called it was the pride of the Fire Department and was shown in the various street parades in town. She was an open cab design and was drove to Baltimore for Thee; I am an American Day Parade on many occasions. Engine #5 remained in service into the 1990's. There are several interesting stories about the ladder truck. When the vehicle was first order just before the World War II, the contract was canceled by American LaFrance, because that company was force to supply equipment for the war effort. As stated above the truck was purchased after the war at a cost greater than originally quoted. Although the V-12 engine worked very well, and could be ran on either of the two 6 cylinder banks with dual ignition systems including plugs, wires, coils and distributors. The engine developed a low oil pressure condition, causing the engineer and members of the company to believe the engine was failing. The manufacturer was contacted to get a replacement engine, because all warranty had expired. They reached an agreement to trade the V12 for a 500 horse

power Red Seal Continental 6 cylinder gasoline motor. Several members chose to drive the unit to Elmira New York to have the engine swapped out. Upon arrival at the American LaFrance workshop the mechanic discovered that the V12 oil pressure was normal and the problem was a faulty oil pressure gauge. Our company decided to make the switch anyway, because we were getting a new engine. It was later discovered that the V12 was worth a lot of money and was wanted by many engine buffs. This unit served the community for a long time and made us proud. Interesting note: The original order for Ladder #5 was a 500 series quint but due to the delay because of the War the truck was delivered as a new design 700 series reported as being the first to be delivered in the Country. Ladder #5 served the community until the 1990's.

In 1949 the Bureau of Fire Underwriters was in town for the purpose of testing equipment and firefighting systems which included general alarm systems. It was discovered that there was only one fire siren at the time which was located on the roof of the fire station on Broadway. After examining the attendance records of the fire company the underwriters suggested the installation of an additional siren some where else in the community. The one siren was not effective at alerting volunteers in the northern sections of Crisfield, especially in the fall and winter months. This time of the year people have their homes closed up and sound does not travel as well thru the air. On cold windy nights some members may not hear the alarm at all and this according to the inspectors could cause the attendance records to be lower. There were twenty odd members located in this area which comprises over half of our active membership. The old Gunby's College grounds located at the corner of Columbia and First streets were selected to erect a siren on a

pole. This spot was also the site of Somerset County election house for Dist. #2 and was owned by the Board of Education. After approval by the County Commissioners the project was ready to move forward, but there was a problem. Apparently some of the residents in this location were opposed to the idea because of the loud noise level, but eventually the siren was mounted and the majority ruled. There is no evidence that the numbers went up after the system upgrade, but we complied with the inspectors ruling.

Briddell fire march 1951

(Headline in local News Paper Saturday March 3, 1951 reads Briddell, Inc. officials say fire reported to have started from defective switch in stock room.) Fire which supposedly started from defective wiring in a switch box completely gutted the big Charles D. Briddell, Inc., plant here in the early hours of Saturday morning. The alarm was sounded at about 2:45 a.m., within a few minutes after several men who were working on a night shift, left for their homes. The night watchman, Mr. Fletcher Morris, was making his rounds, and only a short time before had visited the stock room where the fire started. At that time there were no signs of fire. When the first fire engine of the Crisfield Fire Company arrived within several minutes of the alarm, the firemen found the fire raging in one part of the building. The blaze was very close to where containers of lacquer and other flammable materials were stored. Cans of paint and lacquer exploded like bombs, spreading the fire and causing the flames to break through the roof of the building, and very soon the entire structure was a raging inferno. Mr. Bill Sterling, an employee, was working in the plant and had smelled smoke and came down from the second floor to investigate. He and Mr. Morris were responsible for reporting the fire and turning in the alarm.

At 2:30 just before the fire started, two employees, Charles Sterling and Lora Johnson, Jr., had clocked out for the night and left the plant. Night watchman Morris reported that the blaze was near the storage room where several large 50 gallon drums of lacquer were stored. The Crisfield Fire Company called their neighboring fire departments located to the north, in the communities of Marion and Princess Anne. The mutual aid companies were responsible for protecting surrounding structures from fire spreading. The buildings destroyed by the fire were constructed of brick, and those walls help contain the fire to one location. There had been fear that this blaze could have spread and wiped out several blocks of the downtown business district. Hundreds of people came to watch the inferno, as smoke rose thousands of feet in the air. The writer remembers at the age of 5 years watching the fire with his parents, seeing the glass melt out of the steel frames, and run down the walls. Robert and Minnie had worked in the plant during World War II manufacturing 3.5 inch rocket projectiles and other military hardware. The Briddell plant was located across the street from what is Gordon's Confectionary today, and near the Little Annemessex River, where several fire engines were set up to draft salt water from the river. At big fires like this one the city water system is depleted rapidly, causing pressures to drop that effect firefighting. Nearby rivers are tapped to supply unlimited water supply, with fire pumps maintaining adequate pressures. Mr. John Nelson was soon to arrive on scene to investigate the origin of the fire, and found the source was from an electrical issue in the stock room. Chief John Holland of the Crisfield Fire Department said the fire gained considerable headway in just a short time, quickly spreading to the lacquer storage room, just as the firemen arrived on scene. This immediately placed the fire out of

control. Mr. Charles David Briddell watch from across the street in the corporate office building as his father and brother's life time of work went up in smoke, later estimated at loss of \$500,000.00. Mr. Briddell was a hard man to break, as the fire raged he was planning the rebuilding of the business even to a greater level and again employing many residents to the Community. As a sidelight to this story Mr. Walt Cooper running with a fire extinguisher to put out the fire that broke out near the oldest Crisfield fire engine apparently stored at this location. This was probably the old famous Clapp & Jones Steam pumper that survives to this day and holds a place in the headquarters of Station #2 Crisfield Vol. Fire Company, part of Somerset County 911 System. Note: The Steamer was stored in various locations after being decommissioned in 1928.

1951 In cooperation with Mayor and Council, a new pumper has been ordered to replace an obsolete piece of equipment. The truck was ordered from the American-LaFrance Company and will be mounted on a GMC chassis known as Engine #6 The truck will be equipped with a 750 gallon fire pump and 1250 feet of two and one half inch fire hose. Also the unit will be rigged with a 300 gallon water tank and a new fog apparatus, which is a new device for firefighting, designed to save damage to homes and business from excessive water. This piece of equipment was purchased new Sept. 12, 1951, serial # B1946 at the cost of \$6,000.00 and remained in service until the mid-1960s.

January **1952** fire broke out in the men's room of the Elks Home on Main Street, causing extensive damage estimated to be \$12,000.00. The significance of this fire is the fact that the Crisfield Fire Company not only arrived on scene within a very few minutes, but used their new fog making equipment to extinguish the raging blaze. Fire Marshall

Nelson reported the fire had started from a faulty electrical switch in the Men's bath room. The Elks Club temporarily moved to the Plantation Night Club, located on Plantation Road north of town. Plans were made to rebuild.

In 1957 our company received a new Engine known as #7, installed on a GMC chassis purchased at the cost of \$5,500, apparently paid for by City and Fire Company funds? The truck was equipped with a 750 GPM multi-stage fire pump, water storage tank and two electric hose reels, serviceable from both sides of the vehicle. The unit was manufactured by American Fire Apparatus Co.

In January 1958 it was becoming obvious that the fire house on Broadway was not large enough to house all of the vehicles and equipment in the inventory of Crisfield Vol. Fire Company. The 65 foot American-LaFrance ladder truck was occupying one whole bay. The upstairs meeting room and office area were not large enough to hold dances or public activities.

Sometime around this time period the University of Maryland, Fire Extension Service started to train local fire companies on modern firefighting techniques as well as training in first aid. These courses were at college levels and were a great help to our personal, and continued in the future.

On January 25, 1959, Sunday morning the firemen were alerted for a fire in the W. T. Grant building on Main Street uptown. Later it was reported that an exploding oil stove had started the fire. With smoke billowing from the roof the volunteers responded from the Fire Station located on Broadway, with pumpers and the 65 foot big hook & ladder. Chief W. Clinton Dize stationed his men most advantageously, with

some of the members with special ladder training taking a commanding post at the big machines placing water streams from all directions. With pumpers in front and rear of the structure and assisted by the Marion Vol. Fire Company, the local *Smoke Eaters* soon had the blaze under control. Note: This fire was about to bring back memories of the Great Fire of 1928. Yes the usual crowd of spectators were lining the street, but were high in their praise for the way the local firemen handled what could have been a serious fire.

The January 3, 1959 front page of the Crisfield Times read; **New Fire House Here Would Be Third Built In City; Committee Working Toward Construction During 1959.** Crisfield Volunteer Fire Department is planning for new headquarters, sufficient to house the organization and a hall and dining room sufficient to accommodate any local banqueting parties to be located on Main Street. The proposed structure would be the forth fire house in the history of the organization and its predecessors. The first built about 1878 on what is 9th street today, and was located near the old City Jail and windmill near Kennerly's wharf. The second building was located on 5th Street behind the old Lyric Theater but not apparently built by the city; the third now outgrown was built in 1924 by the city on Broadway. (Three built one occupied four locations in all). The members of the new committee named by the company were, Mr. Robert Bradshaw, President, Mr. Clinton W. Dize, Chief, Mr. J. Wilbert Coulbourne, Treasure, and members Mr. Jerry Hill, Mr. Hilton M. Dize, and Mr. Davis Horsey. It was agreed at a regular business meeting of the members of Crisfield Fire Company that the volunteers would assume no less than 1/3 of the cost of the entire project. The other portion would be the responsibility of the City of Crisfield and the City would hold ownership of the land and the

building. Crisfield City Council voted to issue bonds of \$1000.00 each for their part. All contributions received as long as the indebtedness exists were deposited in a special account with City of Crisfield, as the trustee of the account. The total cost of the project was estimated at \$100,000.00. This was to include general construction, heating, Plumbing, electrical, curbing, surfacing, fencing, landscaping and furnishings. The new building was to be 70 foot by 80 foot masonry type structure of block & brick, two stores high. The first floor well be for all fire department activities, consisting of the engine house capable of housing seven pieces of equipment, office, lounge, meeting room, firemen's showers and rest room, furnace room, a ladies rest room. The building will have three large automatic doors with glass windows in the front and one of the same in the rear of the structure. The second floor will contain a large banquet hall, canteen and pantry, ladies powder and rest room, men's rest room and large cloak room. (source; Article in the Crisfield Post May 1, 1959) On the 16th day of April 1957 the Mayor and City Council had purchase a lot on the north side of West Main Street & 6th Street from the New York, Philadelphia and Norfolk Railroad Company for the consideration of \$1,000.00. This lot was used by the Railroad for a storage yard and was the location of a turn table used to turn the locomotive around. The City decided to use this property for the new fire house and turned it over to the building committee to start construction of the new building. Actual construction started in June of 1959 by installing water and sewer pipes, and preparing the land for the new foundation and pilings The members of Crisfield Vol. Fire Company in the fall of 1960 put out a request to the community for a fund raising campaign to hopefully pay off a debt of \$40,000.00 that had been promised to the City

Government. Also the member's hosted carnivals, bake sales and other forms of fund raising and started on a journey to pay back their part of the project. In March of 1960 an agreement was signed with Mr. Robert Henry Goldsborough (Member of the dept.) to be the contractor for the masonry work on the new fire station, with supervision by the City of Crisfield.

An interesting note; The Ewell Fire Department dedicated its new fire house on October the 15th, 1960. I believe it's important to mention the Ewell Vol. Fire Company at this point in our history, because it shows the brotherhood that was developing in Somerset County. Although Ewell is isolated from our community and cannot help with equipment, personal can and did arrive by boat to help with those fires that last all night. Mutual aide among companies has already been very helpful in many large fires.

Mr. Jimmy Stewart of Delmar drove oak pilings for the foundation to a depth of 20 to 30 feet and sawed them off after they refused to go any further. Stewart also set all of the steel during the construction. An elevator was made from an old car lift and used to carry materials to the second floor. This elevator shaft was built into the masonry and later became the dumb waiter still used today to carry food and supplies to the kitchen on the second floor. 7 brick masons working on the building including; Robert H. Goldsborough Jr. Contractor, Reginald Wilson, Otwell Goldsborough Sr., Charles W. Goldsborough II, Earl Ward, Paul Clayton and Benson Somers. Mr. Hope Banks and a gentleman named Man mixed all of the mortar for the laying of bricks and blocks. Reginald Wilson Jr. was employed as laborer and the writer worked as a laborer at times after school. Mr. Austin Cox did the plumbing and heating and Mr. Davis Horsey was responsible for the

electrical portion. Robert, Reginald, Otwell, Austin and Davis were members of the fire company and all took great pride in their work. Mr. Robert L. Tawes was responsible for ordering much of the materials for the new station. On March 6th 1960 Mr. Tawes ordered bricks for the project from Salisbury Brick Company in the name of Mr. Jesse Long of Hopewell, to obtain a discounted price. At the time Mr. Tawes was the President of the City Council. The type of brick to be used was Roanoke-Webster's face brick 1-805-AL at a cost of \$55.00 per thousand F.O.B. to the site by train from Draper, North Carolina. This would indicate that construction of the new building was well underway by the spring of 1960. In June of the following year the structure was nearing completion. Mr. Robert Tawes told us that at the completion of the job the cost was around \$125,000.00 and included the dishes, knives, spoons and forks in the kitchen. This figure was slightly over budget, but was not bad compared to what the cost would be today. Construction was completed in the spring of 1961 and was dedicated in June of that year. On Saturday night June 10th the dedication Ball was held on the second floor of the new building in the auditorium. Music was supplied by, The United States Air Force Dance Band and started at 9:00 P.M continuing until 1:00 A.M. The band consisted of an eleven piece orchestra and a vocalist group.

On Monday November 7th of 1960 at 8:00 P.M. the Ladies Auxiliary was established at a meeting held in the Firehouse on Broadway. Lady officials from the Delmarva Fireman's Association were present and assisted in the organizational proceedings. Twenty-four ladies of the local firemen, including wives, mothers, sisters and girlfriends were present, and elected the following officers President, Mrs. Robert H. (Betty) Bradshaw. Senior Vice President, Mrs. J.C.W. (Edna) Tawes Jr.

Junior Vice President, Mrs. Jerry (Evelyn) Hill. This organization proved to be a great asset to the Crisfield Vol. Fire Company, then and well in to the future. (Thanks to the Ladies).

June 11, 1961 Dedication of new Fire House.

The Crisfield Fire Department made a formal request to the members of the local Masonic Order, Chesapeake Lodge No. 147, AF & AM, they graciously consented to perform the ceremony of laying the cornerstone for the new edifice. Wade D. Ward, Worshipful Master and other officers and members of Chesapeake Lodge did conduct the ceremony as requested on June 11th, 1961 at 3:00 P.M. in front of the new building. The actual cornerstone was placed into the wall by Robert H. Goldsborough and his brother Mr. Otwell Edison Goldsborough Sr. Also on that that Sunday an open house was held so members of the community could tour the new building that had already been moved into a few weeks earlier. A concert was held by the Seaford Fire Department Band before and after the laying of the cornerstone in front of building. At 4:00 P.M. dedication ceremonies were held in the auditorium on the second floor of the new building. The Honorable J. Millard Tawes, Governor of Maryland and life member of the company was the guest speaker and Mr. Philip W. Tawes was Master of Ceremonies. The invocation was given by Rev. Addison L. Smith pastor of the Mt. Pleasant Church. Selections were performed by the Eastern Shore Public Service all-male chorus two times during the program. The benediction was given by G. Edward Sheriff, Chaplain of the Crisfield Fire Department. Refreshments were served and the ceremonies were open to anyone in the city to attend. The success of this dedication was the responsible of a dedication committee consisting of the following people: Ira Lowe, co-chairman, Clinton Dize,

John S. Holland, J.C.W. Tawes Jr. Auxiliary members: Mrs. Lillian Holland co-charlady, Mrs. Edna Tawes, Mrs. Margaret Parks, from the City Mrs. France Carson, and Fred B. Gerald. Our neighbors of the Marion Station Fire Department were on stand-by under the leadership of Chief Stanley Conner with a fire-fighting crew and apparatus in case of an alarm. It was in this time period that two-way radio systems were installed in Crisfield and Marion Fire companies making communication possible from headquarters to fire trucks in route and on the scene. In late fall of 1961 the City raised the water rates by fifty cent a month, making the new rate \$1.00 per month for city residents and People out of town would get an increase of \$1.00 more per month. This would bring in an increase of about \$1,500.00 monthly which should pay off the city debt in around 5 to 6 years. The firemen were holding dances (Chop-Hops) once a week, some carnivals and spaghetti dinners to pay off their part of the debt. In a letter to the editor of the local paper Mr. Homer Windsor asks will the rates go back to the previous amount after the new building is paid off. The writer can answer that question and the answer is no, of course not. In 1963 The Ladies Auxiliary of the Crisfield Volunteer Fire Department hosted a community birthday party. Tables were set up for each month of the year. Refreshments were served and entertainment provided. A donation of \$1.00 for adults and 50 cent for children was suggested. The ladies worked hard in playing there part of the fund raising campaigns to pay down the departments debt. They also cooked and prepared all the meals during the annual banquets in an effort to save money.

By Late summer of 1965 our fire company was settled in to our new building, with fund raising well underway. It was becoming obvious that the equipment brought from the station on Broadway was getting

some age on it. It seems to have been a pattern to replace a fire engine about every 10 years. The present average of our apparatus was 17 years old, the youngest almost 10 years old and the oldest now 25 years old. So in August of 1965 the Crisfield Vol. Fire Company entered into a contract with Mack Trucks Inc. of Allentown, Pennsylvania to build us a custom build Pumper. It is important to understand that the fire company controls the fire insurance rates of all the taxpayer in the area that they serve. Fire insurance rates are established by the age and performance of equipment as well as the number of truck available for fire suppression. In order to meet this challenge the company was about to go in debt again. The new vehicle was contracted at the price of \$30,000.00 delivered to Crisfield, with the full price to be pay by the Crisfield Vol. Fire Company at the time of delivery. The volunteers hope that all citizens and businesses would respond with a contribution when contacted. Some of the outstanding features of the new engine will be a pump capable of delivering 1250 gallons per minute, a tank containing 750 gallons of water and 2750 feet of fire hose. The crew cabs will accommodate 5 firefighters. The unit will be powered by Mack Thermo dyne gasoline engine rated a 276 horsepower with 707 cubic inches of displacement. After delivery of this piece the station will house a total of four pumpers with water tanks, an aerial ladder truck and one utility truck. So again our volunteers are going door to door and mailing letters to pay down yet another debt. In January of 1965 Mrs. Hettie Somers, President of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Crisfield Fire Department presented Fire Chief Clinton Dize with a Master Steam device also known as a deluge gun, that was light weight and designed to clamp to the aerial ladder top section. This apparatus will place large amounts of water above a fire and in the center where firefighters

cannot access; Chief Dize said he believes it will be very helpful on tall buildings. The devise can be swiveled up and down with a handle and comes with a combination nozzle and two straight bore pipes. Thanks again to the Ladies for raising the money for this gift.

In 1967 we purchased a 1200 gallon tanker truck known as Tanker #3 for the purpose of a fire fighting tanker vehicle. The unit was purchase for \$200.00 at a supply sale, and equipped with the necessary equipment for an additional cost of \$2,000.00.

On June 22, 1968 Saturday afternoon on Broadway, a fire broke out in the Star Baking Company plant. The bakery as we called it had stood for seventy-five years and was the workplace of many residents of Crisfield. A fire was spotted around 2:00 P.M. in a supply storage area. The Crisfield Fire Company was alerted and arrived on the scene with minutes, to find that the fire had already gained headway and was being fanned by a brisk southwesterly breeze. As firemen hocked to hydrants on Broadway the blaze was spreading through the large cinder block Structure. In the meantime the Marion and Princess Anne Fire Departments had been called for assistance, and within a short time more than 100 men and seven pieces of equipment were on the scene. The cause of the fire was never been determined that I remember. The complete plant was destroyed with the exception of a garage section. The only thing recovered from the rubble was the safe, which contained Friday's receipts amounting to \$1,100. The money was not burned although the heat the safe had been exposed to was very intense. So as I have mentioned before the wind has always been a factor in all of the major fires. I remember Engineer Dave Horsey moving one of the pumper out to Main Street to hock up to one of the hydrant on that water main, only to find no water from the plug. "Dave

said what is going on after a firemen had turned the valve all the out". He took his foot and pushed the fire plug over and it fell on the pavement with the hard sleeve still attached, as he said someone has struck the hydrant with a car and not reported it. They have just stood it back up so it appeared to be ok. By that time it was no need to look for another one, because by this time the building was about gone. The fire was later described by many spectators as the "hottest" they had ever seen, and had its effects on the firemen. Crisfield Chief Clinton Dize, overcome by the intense heat, refused to be taken from the scene, and after a few gulps of oxygen, was back on his feet again directing the procedure. An interesting note is that smoke from the fire was carried as far north as Westover by the strong southwesterly wind.

March 21 1969 Headline local newspaper reads "*Crisfield Fireman Died Friday after Being Overcome by Smoke*" Mr. Reginald Wilson died about 10:00 P.M. last Friday in McCready Hospital after being overcome by smoke while fighting a chimney fire earlier the same day. The fire was at the home of Edward Thornton in the Lawsonia section of Crisfield. According to Fire Chief Clinton Dize, Mr. Wilson was standing in front of an open flue when a backdraft occurred and a large amount of smoke and soot came at him. It was understood that Mr. Wilson had been looking up the chimney with a mirror to determine the extent of blockage when the incident occurred. Reginald was an assistant chief and 20 year veteran of the Crisfield Fire Department. He was married with four children and also had served in World War II in the Pacific Theater. Remember Reginald was one of the fine bricklayers that work on the construction of the new fire station. Two of his sons are currently members of our company.

Sometime in the 1970's our department received a circa 1940 M151 surplus Willy's Army Jeep from Civil Defense. We painted it red mounted a master stream device in the back, a small portable fire pump on the front and mounted lights and siren. This unit was the start of a series of trucks known as #8. Several other vehicles would be placed in service as utility units.

March 31, 1971 one of Crisfield's old landmarks was destroyed by fire. At the time of the blaze the structure was occupied by Carson's Marine, outboard motor sales and service. The old brick structure was about 100 years old and was the original General & Marine Hospital established in 1909, forerunner of the McCready Hospital. The property was owned by Mr. Lee Roy Carson Sr. who operated the Lee Theater there in the 1950's and was also a Hotel, lumber yard and hardware store throughout its history. Firemen from Crisfield, Marion and Princess Anne fought the blaze at the scene on the corner of Main and 6th Street across from the Firehouse. The fire was a total loss of the building and contents. A new building would soon be built on the site.

February 11th 1972 Headline in the local newspaper reads; **Arson Suspected in High School Fire.** District Fire Marshall Stanley Conner stated that last Wednesday's fire completely destroyed the old Crisfield High School building on Somerset Ave. Conner further stated the fire was incendiary in origin and that investigations were continuing. The 1926 building was a landmark on Somerset Ave. for the past 46 years and had graduated many classes over those years. Now the four large wooden columns that we have seen in many graduating class photographs were burning all at the same time and memories were going up in smoke. The fire spread so fast that it could not be controlled and had started in the rear of building about 8:35 as school

was getting started. No students' were in the structure at that time. When the fire company arrived the old school house was fully involved and there was no chance to save any portion of the building. So firemen started to spray water in the air to keep embers under control. Mr. William "Domie" Sterling's house was the closest exposure and firemen were trying to protect one of the homes of their own members. This fire was an inferno hampering firefighters from getting in close, all they could do was stay safe and watch her burn. Around 500 students were currently using the school for classes in three of the rooms. The Recreation department was also using the building and new athletic equipment was stored there. Dr. Jack Kussmaul, Somerset County Superintendent of Schools, stated that new equipment would be ordered immediately. A marble dedication plaque was the only thing salvageable after the fire. The Crisfield Fire Company was highly praised for their efforts in keeping the blaze from spreading to any other structures. Crisfield firemen were assisted by the Marion Station, Fire Co. and Princess Anne was in route but asked to turn around. An interesting note: Wednesday's fire was the latest in series of School fires on the lower shore. It was the second school fire in just two weeks in Crisfield. Fire had occurred at the Woodson Junior High School just two weeks ago, damaging 3 classrooms. It was the fifth school fire in just one month. The writer believes this is a good time in our story to quote Mr. Charles Nelson Black IV of Hebron, Maryland. "Charlie said boy's you catch them on the way up or on the way down, but no fire company can stop them when they are on top" Mr. Black {1945-2019} now deceased operating as The Potomac Fire Equipment Company, sold our company several new trucks in the past. Charlie also ran a museum at his company's business location in Hebron. For a while our

old steamer was on display at that location. So as we have learned in our history, three factors control our ability to save lives and property. They are water supply, the time to respond and set up and the amount of wind and its direction. As previously stated in this narrative all of the big fires occurred on very windy days and nights and eventually burned their self out.

On Tuesday night July 11th 1972 the Crisfield Vol. Fire Company responded to an alarm on Broad Street near the County wharf and at the loading dock of the Tidewater Express Trucking Company. The alarm was reported as an unexplained explosion and when our personnel arrived they were confronted with several tractors and trails fully involved. The business was owned by Mr. Clifton G. Somers who reported to the firemen that Marvin Williams a 17 year old employee from Deep Creek Virginia had just finished refueling a diesel trucks fuel tank when a large explosion occurred. Mr. Williams was blown several feet away from the truck receiving minor injuries and burns, but made a full recovery. Several other pieces of equipment were moved away from the flames and were saved. Mr. Somers stated that as usual the members of the fire company were in action within a few minutes and had the fire under control in short order. Our department was on scene about an hour. Mr. Somers lost 2 truck tractors and one trailer.

Also in the year of 1972, the year Philip L. Goldsborough the writer was voted into the company, we installed a radio controlled monitor alarm system by Plectron Corporation. Firemen on the active list were issued a home monitor that most of us placed in the bead room of our homes. The system was activated from the Crisfield Police Department that had dispatchers on duty 24/7. With the volume turned up and the device on alter you would literally be blown out of the bed. Several high pitch

tones followed by the message “alerting Crisfield for a 10-70”, then a noisy squelch got you awake instantly. Within less than a minute with adrenaline rising you were to the front door, were you jumped into your pants that were arranged on top of your shoes just waiting for the possibility of an alarm. Grabbing your coat we rushed to the car or truck, throwing the newspaper of the windshield to keep of any possible frost on a winter night. Then rushing to the fire house, safely of course, trying to be the first to the drivers set. Or maybe grabbing your gear trying to catch the first run piece of equipment, which many times was leaving the station within in minutes.

In 1973 Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company was ask to assume responsibility for the operation of the ambulance service in the area of lower Somerset County. The McCready foundation had operated an ambulance service for many years in the community. Employees of the McCready Memorial Hospital were supplying the vehicle and personal from their staff. This was becoming a burden for the hospital because, the patient case volume was increasing and staff that was hired to care for patients in the beds, that were to many times out on an ambulance call. The boards of directors were willing to turn over the ambulance vehicle to the fire company at no cost. The unit owned by the foundation was a van and not a regular ambulance. The fire company at a regular meeting voted to turn down this offer. Hospital administrator Elbert Detwiler, stated that he was very disappointed in the decision of the local fire company, but would continue the service until a more satisfactory method could be found. The problem was no solved until 1980, more on this later.

In March of 1973 Engineer Otis “Ditty” Harris, a member of the Crisfield Fire Company was hit by a pickup truck will operating a fire

Engine on Maryland 413 about a mile north of Hopewell. The fire company had been called to a house fire near where Liberty Rock church is located today. Engineer Harris received injuries to his arm as he was standing at the fire pump panel on the highway side of the fire truck. Ditty was transported to McCready Hospital, but later was sent to Peninsula General Hospital in Salisbury for advanced treatment.

1974 CRISFIELD VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY # ONE CELEBRATES 100 YEARS OF SERVICE TO ITS COMMUNITY.

ACTIVE MEMBERS in 1974

Joe Beauchamp, Mears Bozman, Robert H. Bradshaw,
Victor Brice, Wilbert (Scoby) Coulbourne,
Carlton Yank Dize, W. Clinton Dize, Paul Dorsey, Kenny
Evans, Benny Franklin, Fritz Gerald, Bobby Goldsborough,
Phillip Goldsborough, Robert Goldsborough,
Harold Griffith, Otis (Ditty) Harris, Jerry
Hill, John Holland, Davis Horsey, William Howard,
Randy Laird, Elmer Lane III, Ira Lowe, Jackie
McCready, Eugene Mills, Norman Mister, Ronnie
Mrohs, Arza Owens, Robert Parks, Milbourne
Revelle, Roger (Buddy) Riggin, Richard Scott, _
William (Domie) Sterling, Mike Sterling, Randall'
Sterling, Jerry Swift, Bob Lee Tawes, J.C.W. Tawes,
Allen Tyler, Billy C. Tyler, Larry Tyler, John
Townsend, George Tull, D.J. Ward, Paul Ward,
Russell Ward, Mike Wigglesworth, David Wilson,
Reginald Wilson, Jr.

PROBATIONARY MEMBERS

Barry Gerald, John Dize, Timmy Tyler

LIFE MEMBERS

Hilton Dize, J. Millard Tawes, Ralph Charnick,
Harold Poleyette, John P. Tawes, Otis Harris.

Line Officers

Chief W. Clinton Dize
Assistant Chief Jerry Hill
Assistant Chief Douglas J. Ward
Assistant Chief Fritz Gerald
Captain Allen Tyler
Captain George Tull
Captain Bobby Goldsborough
Lieutenant Randall Sterling
Administrative Officers
President Larry Tyler
Vice President Robert Tawes
Secretary Ronnie Mrohs
Assistant Secretary Philip Goldsborough
Treasurer Bobby Goldsborough
Trustee Wilbert Coulbourne
Trustee Jackie McCready
Trustee Roger Riggin, Jr.
Trustee Richard Scott
Trustee J.C.W. Tawes

The Governor of Maryland Marvin Mandel proclaimed the week of October 6th thru 12th as Fire Prevention Week. Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company was celebrating its 100 anniversary and thought they would combine both events. So members of the local department made elaborate plans to fittingly commemorate the 100th Birthday. They decided to host the annual Delmarva Firemen's convention in Crisfield. A 100 Anniversary Dance was held at the station on Saturday night upstairs with quests and a band. The evening was reported to have

been a relaxing and fun event for all. On Sunday the air was filled with the sound of bells and sirens of firemen showing off their fire trucks as they enter the City. The visiting companies from all over Delmarva were welcomed by City and County Officials as well as members of our own company. At Woodson School on Sunday afternoon several contests were held to crown "Little Miss Delmarva Fire Prevention" as well as the "Delmarva Fire Prevention Queen". Contestants represented Maryland, Delaware and Virginia. The Honorable J. Millard Tawes of Crisfield, former Governor of Maryland and now the State Treasurer, and life member of our company, presented a brief history of the Crisfield unit as well as welcoming all the Visitors. At about 5:30 a street parade was held on Main Street showing Fire trucks and equipment from all over the Peninsula. Monday and Tuesday of Fire prevention week was used by local firemen to get their house in order, and on October 9th, 10th and 11th the fire house was open to the public, to personally inspect the equipment and fire trucks.

In 1974 a news article gave honorable mention to several members of the department. Crisfield's Honorable J. Millard Tawes, former Governor of Maryland, 52 year member of the department and past president of the Maryland State Firemen's Association during 1936-1937. Another fireman Mr. B. Horace Ford {1886-1954} also served in that capacity during 1927-1928. Mr. Ford had served as fireman for 45 years, 16 of those years as Chief of the department. Mr. Harold Poleyette, oldest member in 1974 served the department 51 years. Police Chief John S. Holland served 44 years. Holland also was Chief of the department for 10 of those years. Mr. Ralph Charnick served for 44 years. Mr. Grover C. Adams mentioned in the first part of this history served 52 years; he died suddenly at the age of 78 years from a heart

attack while performing his duties as a fireman at a fire on Collins Street, during a controlled burning of the Collins Street School. W. Clinton Dize served the company 32 years and was Chief for 25 years and holds the record of the longest serving Fire Chief. There have been many Crisfield firemen down through the years and up to the present, that deserve honorable mention, but there is not enough space or time to mention all of them in this history. These individuals have been long serving, dedicated, loyal and hardworking members of the Crisfield Vol. Fire Company. So thank you for your service and achievements while Volunteering in our community.

On Thursday January 16th 1978 Walden Clinton Dize our Chief for 25 years consecutive years had answered his last alarm. He directed his men for the last time and his gear & boots hung in their familiar place as mute evidence that they would not be used again. Chief Dize was given great respect by his men, because he was a great leader, a man of wisdom and his love for the Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company. He was known by the entire community by his nickname of “Snorky”, he was one of the firefighters known as the “smoke eaters”. Before SCBA these guys would enter a burning structure with smoke and fire raging and come out coughing to immediately light up a Pal-mal or lucky strike. The beloved leader’s body rested in the meeting room on the first floor of the firehouse. He had seen a many a night in that room carrying on the business and operations of an organization he loved so much. Funeral services were held on the second floor on Sunday. Following the service firemen paid a final tribute to their Chief in a memorial service. His body was carried to the final resting place at Sunny Ridge Cemetery on one of the company’s engines, a most fitting means of

transportation. Clinton was born in this City on 7 October, 1917 son of Walden Clinton Wyatt Dize & Rubie E. "Bethard" Dize.

In June of 1980 the Public Service Commission directed Armstrong Telephone Company and The Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company of Maryland to start adding 10 cent to all phone bills after July 1st 1980. This action was mandated by legislation, which became effective July 1st 1979, concerning the implementation of the **state wide 911 emergency phone system**. The act also established a trust fund managed by the State Comptroller. It was determined that \$5,950,000.00 will be needed to provide the funding. This was the start of a big change for Somerset County and all of the fire companies that would be mandated to make the change.

STARTING OF THE ORGANIZATION THAT WOULD BECOME STATION #8 LOWER SOMERSET COUNTY AMBULANCE & RESCUE SQUAD

In July of 1980 a group of Somerset county residents interested in forming an ambulance Rescue Squad for the lower county area meet on several occasions to discuss the issue. On the first get together, there were sixteen citizens present. The consensus of opinion of the group was the fact that the area needed an emergency response system, because the ball had been dropped by the local hospital, possibly because of HSCRC regulations coming down through the State and changing regulations by the Federal Government. One thing was clear in the minds of this group, and that was that the situation had become

critical, because the current Ambulance service at the hospital would terminate on January 1st. 1981. The group decided to form a steering committee that would meet on a regular basis. At the first official meeting of this group, officers were elected to head the group. The Reverend Howard P. Ketterman was named Chairperson, Harold Whitehead vice-chairperson, Mrs. Polly Lohmeyer Secretary and Norman (Sonny) Adkins Treasurer. Other members included Jerry Miley, Bob Bradshaw Jr., Dennis Cooper, Logan Widdowson, Mrs. Irma Riffin and John Somers. The name selected for new organization was ***Lower Somerset County Ambulance and Rescue Squad.***

The territory to be served by this new station included all of the area south of Kingston, including Smith Island. At the end of this month a plea went out to the community for donations. So here we go again, with money always being the means to the end. Like other endeavors in our past the resources to develop and maintain the equipment we need to serve the public and fulfill our mission statement are always present. Thanks to all those individuals that have worked in this department. By August the Somerset County Commissioners were onboard with the new project as Chairperson Ketterman was present at their meetings. In August in a letter to the Editor of the Crisfield Times it was stated that need for an ambulance service was going to be a costly affair. So at the 33 annual Hard Crab Derby people attending the affair should be informed of newly formed Lower Somerset County Ambulance & Rescue Squad, in hopes of receiving some needed donations. On the 28th Chairmen Scott Tawes and Co-Chairmen Scott Davis of the 33rd annual National Hard Crab Derby announced that a percentage of the proceeds from gate receipts would be turned over to the Ambulance Committee. By mid-September the Ambulance Squad

had official announced a subscription drive. Letters were mailed asking residents to consider coverage for their families for an annual fee of \$25.00, which would cover members of the immediate family for free unlimited emergency service to either McCready or Peninsula General Hospitals for a period of one year. A target date has was set for starting the service at midnight January 1st 1981. We must purchase our ambulance and necessary equipment and find suitable housing by that date. In another letter to the Editor of the Times, Mr. Allen Mathews of Marion Station stated "An ambulance is a lot like a fire engine, an insurance policy or the shotgun that sits in the corner in your house. It is something that you hope that you will never need to use, but if you just happen to need it, you want it to be there." This statement also is something for us to consider in firefighting, well maintained equipment makes the best tool. (Remember the condition of Salisbury's steamer during the Great Fire of 1886) By October donations were on the rise even Dr. Robert Thomas owner of Peyton Pharmacy contributed 10 percent of cash sale for two days and a donation jar was on the counter. The largest donation by a business or organization so far was received from Sherman Williams Co., Rubberset division for \$1,000.00. The local newspaper was reporting many business, organization and individuals donations to the Squad. (Too numerous to mention here) By October 10th donations and subscriptions were reported at \$15,305.67. October 23 1980, the Lower Somerset County Ambulance and Rescue Squad, Inc. had its fund drive boosted by \$1,375.00. This was the result of the officers and members of the Crisfield Volunteer Fire Department voting to contribute the sum to secure Membership in the Ambulance Service for each of its members. Fire Department, president Randy Laird presented the check to Robert Bradshaw Jr. to be deposited in the

Ambulance Squad's account. Mr. Bradshaw was the treasurer of the fire department and member of the Ambulance Squad. This was a time in our history that many individuals chose to serve as a volunteer in both Companies. (Thank you for your service) In the final week of November the Ambulance fund drive had climbed to over \$30,000.00 as a result of donations and subscriptions, for over 500 families now members of the service. \$1,585.00 was received from the Churches in the area that will be served. On Wednesday December 18th 1980 Lower Somerset County Ambulance and Rescue Squad Inc. received its new Horton Ambulance mounted on Ford chassis. The unit was displayed on that Saturday near City Hall for the public to see the new piece of equipment. The vehicle was state of the art at the time. The unit was completely paid for with the funds from donations, memberships and contributions from organizations in the community. At midnight on January 1st 1981 ambulance and rescue service was launched.

In October of 1980 Mr. John Somers was designated as Chairman of the 911 Planning Committee and the following individuals from various agencies to make up the Committee; David Donohoe, Sgt. Peter H. Ennis, Chief Steven G. Frey, D.J. Ward, Donald L. Howard, C. Elmer Ashley, Officer Michael Bloxom, Robert H. Bradshaw Jr., Sheriff Thomas Foxwell, Mary Ellen Scott, 2 Lt. Robert D. Graham, Peggy Tyler, P/O William E. Bowen and Dr. Leon Copeland. The 911 System was to be located at the Emergency Operating Center at the Somerset County Office Complex in Princess Anne. The equipment was designed to operate 24/7 and handle all types of emergency calls. 5 clerks and one supervisor were employed for the system. In January of 1985 articles in the local newspapers announced that the 911 call system was about to go into service. It was explained that by a law enacted on July 1, 1979

that Somerset County had to comply with the ruling. For about 5 years the system had been studied and designed by members of special committee. John R. Somers the Somerset County Civil Defense Director officially announced the effective date would be one minute after midnight on July 1st 1985 for the system to go online.

This was a major change for Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company because it was about to change our name that we had used for over 100. Our alert system at the Crisfield Police Station was now obsolete and all of the alerts were broadcast from the Central Station in Princess Anne. Crisfield did keep our local alert system operating for a while as a backup. Radio and siren systems had to be upgraded and members received new pagers. The future had arrived for old Crisfield #1, but we were committed to our mission statement and were ready to continue to protect and serve our community.

SOMERSET CENTRAL 911 SYSTEM STARTED THE FORMING OF STATION #2 AND STATION #8

In 1985 it was obvious that the old steam pumper was in need of repair. The old antique had been stored in several locations in town over the years. The last location was in the Tawes building in the down town area. That building was torn down so the Steamer showed up one day in the lot behind the present fire station. For several months it sat near the fence, abandon and ignored, again ready to be sold or junked. It was so sad to see a part of our history painted with several coats of silver and gold paint, which had faded and peeled. The boiler had been cracked by the freezing weather of many winters. The pride of Crisfield had been reduced to a rusting antique.

The members of the Crisfield Fire Company at a regular meeting decided that if the pumper was not going to be repaired and taken care of, it should be sold. The vote was unanimous to restore the old pumper and not to sell it. A special committee was formed to undertake the task. The steam pumper was stripped down to its chassis and then sand blasted. All the brass parts including three steam pressure gauges, one steam whistle, and blow off valves were completely dismantled. All the brass parts were polished to their original shine, the pumper was spray painted with the original colors of paint. The boiler was not repaired, but the pump was freed up and lubricated [it appeared that it would still pump water]. The wheels were sanded down and repainted to the original color of red. One of the original hose nozzles was found in town, which was later donated to the company. This nozzle was polished and returned to its holder on the engine. During the restoration on **October 11, 1987** a large fire broke out in the downtown section of Crisfield. Our company responded with all of its equipment and 53 men. The fire soon got out of control and calls for mutual aid went out to nearby cities. Salisbury repaid a debt due over 100 years by responding with a much needed ladder truck, 3 other pieces of equipment, and 22 men. Fifteen companies, 26 pieces of equipment, and 164 men fought the raging blaze that night. Crisfield had just taken delivery of Engine 206 just a few weeks earlier and the writer pumped her that night, arriving with Chief Frederick Gerald. We laid a line from Broad Street to the hydrant near the old Ice plant and start to deliver water thru a 2 ½ inch line. After pumping for about a half hour the pressure dropped because the water towers were becoming empty and flushing a toilet was a problem at that point. So we turned the Engine around and started for the

Depot picking up the hose in the road as we progressed thru the smoke. Finally at the west side of the wharf, I set up a draft operation and was still on location when the sun came up the next morning. An oil truck delivered fuel during the night and when we shut down about mid-day #206 had recorded 650 miles on the odometer. Basically speaking the fire had destroyed two city blocks and became known as the Phoenix fire. The old steam pumper was the only piece of equipment left at the station that night; all it could do was serve as a reminder that history will repeat itself.

1993 In 1993 we saw a need for an aerial ladder truck, because our 1947 truck had failed inspection. Again money was an issue so we started looking for a used replacement. A committee was formed and they found a 1974 Baker Aerial scope 75 foot ladder, on a Mack chassis, which after some repairs was placed in service. This second generation ladder remained in service until 2005.

Crisfield's steam pumper is now restored and in very good condition. In **1996** Mr. Charles Black asked the company if he could put the Steamer in his newly started fire museum in Hebron, Maryland. Charlie was at our station on several occasions trying to sell us a new pumper, (Engine 202) and was always eyeing the old antique which was brightly painted, with all of her brass just a shining. The Company decided to loan the piece of equipment to the Chesapeake Firemen's Museum in Hebron. We asked the City to write a loan agreement and insure the pumper with the stipulation that if the facility was ever to close the Steamer would be returned to the Crisfield Fire Department, at the expense of the museum. Our pump was the main attraction and visited by many people from the shore and the rest of Maryland. Charles Nelson Black

died in 2019, a few years earlier the museum was closed due to illness and the Old Antique came back on a flatbed trailer towed by a truck this time and not a locomotive. It is stored in the Firehouse and out of the weather, where it should remain in good condition for many years to come.

In 1988 we purchased a new rescue utility truck that became known as Rescue No. #8 (208) we had owned several units for this purpose starting with the Army Jeep, but now we were receiving for the first time a brand new Rescue vehicle. Unit 8 was mounted on a GMC chassis supplied by Tawes Brother's dealership in town and shipped out west to have the box unit installed as well as an electrical generator and lights. This unit was later turned over to the City and eventually sold.

In 1996 we accepted delivery of a new Pierce Custom Pumper, from Potomac Fire Equipment Company of Hebron, Maryland. A committee of various members of our company had been planning to replace some aging equipment as part of a strategic plan for a 10 year period. We all decided that replacing our first run pumper should be first on our list as our newest pumper was more than 10 years old. As a result another committee was form to develop a set of specifications and to consider the needs of the community at large. We also discuss the funding of the new vehicle because it would be titled to the City of Crisfield. We soon discovered that wishes were one thing, but money was something else. So we sent a group over to City Hall to ask for the blessing of the City Officials and we were simple told that they were also limited with funds, but would help in any way they could. So with the city behind us and the money in our savings account we decided to continue with our plans and contacted three different manufactures of fire engines. Over many weeks of committee meetings we had designed

a state of the art, class A pumper with 1000 gallon tank, 1250 GPM Waterous two stage fire pump, electrical generator, large hose bead to hold Large diameter hose and a 10 man crew cab. Members of the truck committee went before a review board across the bay known as the Emergency Trust Fund Committee, to try to obtain a state grant for the truck. We were turned down because we were told that the apparatus we had specked out was more than our small town needed. We contacted Mr. Norman Conway and told him what we had been told by the state board of review. He agreed with us and stated there job is not to tell you what your community needs. He told us he would make some calls and see what he could do to help. Delegate Conway arranged for a meeting in Crisfield at the fire station meeting room. He requested that several of the members of Emergency Trust Fund Committee, including Mr. Lewis Decameron to come down to Crisfield to meet with him and members of Station #2. Mr. Decameron was the person that turned down our application. After some discussion the matter was straightened out and we got are grant and loan. The details will remain a mystery. This fund was used for grants and low interest loans throughout the state. Appropriations replenished the fund and interests form loans paid back keep the fund solvent. Total cost of Engine 202 was \$317,000.00 and the vehicle was ordered from Pierce. Several members of our company, including Chief Engineer Philip Goldsborough, Chief Danny Tyler, Engineer Maurice Davis, Engineer Danny McCready and Scott Ward went by air to Appleton, Wisconsin to inspect the truck and drove the truck to Crisfield with Mr. Charles Black of Potomac Fire Equipment a 1,000 mile trip. (202 is still in service at the time of this document).

In 2001 we accepted delivery of a new 2002 Pierce Custom Pumper, from Potomac Fire Equipment Company of Hebron, Maryland. A committee of various members was formed to develop a set of specifications for what would become Engine 203. Before delivery of the new vehicle Chief Engineer Philip Goldsborough and Assistant Chief Engineer John Tawes were chosen by our Company to fly out to Appleton, Wisconsin to inspect the truck. John and Phil meet Mr. Charlie Black at the manufacturing plant of Pierce, now owned by Oshkosh Truck Company to go over the specifications and examine the vehicle to see if it had meet all details in the contract. Oshkosh Truck Company did not allow members of any fire company to drive apparatus home like we had done in the past. After making a few changes that we found John and I returned to Crisfield to give a report to the member of our Company. After all the paperwork and signatures were completed, Engine 203 was delivered and demonstrated at Station #2 in Crisfield. This became our first run piece of equipment and had a 7 man cab, 1250 GPM Waterous two stage pump, 1000 gallon water tank, and hose bead capable of storing 1000 feet of large diameter hose (LDH). By the way this truck came equipped with cab air condition which has become a necessity in today's world of fire and rescue. As always now comes the part about the money. We were turned down for a grant like we received with Eng. 202, because we did not have any apparatus that had failed pump test. So with the blessing of the Crisfield City Officials at City Hall, we entered an agreement to borrow the funds from the PNC bank here in town after using \$186,000.00 of our savings for a down payment. The loan was issued thru the City of Crisfield for the remaining \$201,000 with payments to be made by Crisfield Vol. Fire Co. The City agreed at a regular Council

meeting to give us \$5,000 each year toward paying back the loan. The total cost of the truck was \$387,000.00. It is important to note that on several occasions the company did not have the funds to make the payments. Philanthropist Margaret Lee Tawes came to the rescue and help us to pay for the fire truck. Engine 203 was dedicated in here memory and her name is on the plaque attached to the crew cap.

**THIS TRUCK IS DEDICATED TO
JOHN P. & MARGARET LEE TAWES
FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT
OF THE CRISFIELD FIRE DEPARTMENT**

In order to get room for new Engine 203 we decided to get rid of the old Mack Engine No. 4, and contacted Fairmount Vol. Fire Company to see if they could use the pumper. They responded with a yes and we presented the truck to them in February of 2003 on the front ramp of the Crisfield Fire Station.

Around the year **2004** under Chief Scott Ward's administration our company started using a command vehicle for the first time. Due to forest fires out west a few years earlier a national policy and procedure was established, creating what became known as the Incident Command System. The idea was to give better control over minor or major emergencies. Our company purchased a used command vehicle from another company in the state. We have owned several command vehicles over the years and of course we still utilize the system. The Chief or assigned officer responds to the scene and establishes command with central alarm, reporting the conditions to central and all units in route. Fire & Rescue boats and command vehicles are an added expense to the fire service, but have become necessary to carry out our mission as we continue to write our history in the 21 century.

2005 In 2005 again used aerial apparatus proved to be very expensive to maintain and service. The 1974 vehicle was costing more than it was worth, so we formed a committee of engineers and members and went looking for a replacement. They found our third generation truck, which was a 1985 Simon/Duplex LTI 100 foot ladder tower with fire pump, in Concordville, Pennsylvania. We measured the height of the truck and discovered it was very close on actually clearing the door way of our station. When the truck arrived we found out that it did not fit in the door. The vehicle remained outside that night, as we studied the situation. The next day with cooler heads we found that one piece of molding removed allowed the truck to be backed in as long as the bucket was level.

2012 Our company has always been aware of the fact that water for the initial attack of a fire in the outer perimeter of our assigned area was critical. Mutual aid with our neighbors is a duty we must perform, because we will need their assistance in the future also. So in **2012** our department was looking to purchase a new fire truck. As usual we formed a committee to research the needs of our assigned area. This project was focused on water supply and the requirement to serve the City of Crisfield and the outlying area of our district. So we thought that a tanker pumper with the capabilities of Pump and roll was a good choose. A Pierce vehicle was on our wish list so we contacted several suppliers with the specifications that we had developed. Prices we received were much higher than what we were expecting. Because this was a type of truck that we had never owned, companies were asked to bring a demonstrator to our department for the committee and members to make a decision to proceed. A Pierce Company representative soon arrived with a Pierce tanker pumper demonstrator

that had been used in shows and demonstrations in the Northeast area. Our first comment was this is just what we specified and was looking for. We drove the truck and were impressed with its capabilities. Our committee members asked how much are you asking for this unit. The salesman replied Pierce will give you a discount of \$10,000.00 off the list price. Our company decided to go with the deal, and purchased what became Tanker 2000 at the price of \$385,000.00. A loan from a local bank was established, with payments of \$26,012.00 per year. At the time of this document there were 5 more payments due.

Fire and rescue boats, were a new addition to the equipment inventory of The Crisfield, Volunteer Fire Company, and now Station #2 of Somerset County's emergency system. Several other companies in the county had purchase small aluminum boats with outboard motors for rescue. The mission was to evacuate citizens in the times of high water. Later on this operation started responding to rescues of stranded boaters in the area, dispatched by Somerset Central (911). Because we were part of the overall county emergency system, station two started looking for a watercraft to serve our department. I believe our first craft was a Boston Whaler with a 150 H.P. Johnson Engine, acquired from Maryland Department of Natural Resources surplus properties. In 2019 our department received a donation of a larger fiberglass boat from Chesapeake Boat Builders. Mr. David Mason a member of Station #2 and owner of the boat manufacturing company stated he did not want any money and wished to give this boat to Crisfield Fire Company. The boat was built with a cabin and measured 28 feet in length by 10 feet wide. We spent approximately \$56,000.00 to equip the hull with two 250 H.P. Mercury Outboard motors and other necessary equipment. At the time of this document this unit is still in service. We have a trailer, but normally the rig is docked at Somers Cove Marina. A portable fire pump onboard makes it a fire and rescue response unit.

Our 1985 Simon/Duplex LTI 100 foot ladder tower again was starting to be a maintenance problem. We found what we thought was a good deal from The Indian River Volunteer Fire Company in Millsboro, Delaware. They were about to take delivery of a brand new piece of equipment and what'd to sell their 1989 Pierce 105 ft. Tower, that was still running calls. So the company decided to take the deal for \$15,000.00. This vehicle was manufactured by Pierce Manufacturing, Co. Inc. of Appleton, Wisconsin in September of 1989. The MFG plate indicated that the vehicle's GVWR was 63,000 LBS. The Ladder with self-leveling platform and master stream device was 105 feet. All of the small tools and other accessories were still in the compartments and were sold with the unit. We were also informed that the truck had new tires. This unit #205 has just returned to the station undergoing some hydraulic repairs, and as of Dec. 31, 2023 is in Station ready to take calls. Note: The Simon/Duplex vehicle was sold to Mr. Alfred Bradford of Marion Station, Md.

There is much more to report in this history, but research is a laborious process and historians must decide what is important to include in a story. Some may think I have missed some things, but if I did it was not intentional. Some may think I have left them out, but all members past and present of our fire company are important and have played a role in its history. We now are challenged to carry out our mission which has not changed in 150 years, as those who have served before us.

Philip L. Goldsborough
Historian Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company
Jan. 2024

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Bibliography:

Document sources:

Archives of the Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company; stored at Somerset County Station #2 Headquarters, Rt. 413, and Maryland Ave., Crisfield, Maryland.

Documents found in the Maryland State Archives of Maryland, Annapolis, Maryland.

Philip L. Goldsborough; Personal records & memories, as past Chief Engineer, historian and 52 yr. Member of Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company (Articles from The Crisfield Times and The Crisfield Post). (Maryland State Archive Microfilm collections).

Robert Dean Goldsborough; Chaplin and firefighter, member Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company. (Articles from the pages of the Crisfield Times and The Crisfield Post. (Maryland State Archives Microfilm collections.)

Col. Woodrow Wilson; History of Crisfield and surrounding area of Maryland's Eastern Shore, published 1973, Library of Congress # 73-88799, also select articles published in The Crisfield Times in the 1970s.

Records and research; A Souvenir of the Crisfield Volunteer Fire Department No. 1, 1921 edition by Rupert R. Somers, Chief, Donated to the Crisfield Fire Co. by; Katy & Gregory Cox

Appendix:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF THOSE WHO HAVE ANSWERED THEIR LAST ALARM, THOUGH YOUR SMILES MAY BE GONE, YOUR MEMORIES LIVE ON, WE SAY TO YOU, A JOB WELL DONE, GO NOW AND REST IN PEACE.

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Lorie C. Quinn, Jr. | John W. Parks, Sr. | Otwell Edison Goldsborough Sr. |
| Louis Goldberg | Granville T. Evans | Fieldy S. Dize |
| Charles Ward | Upshur L. Adams | Harold Poleyette |
| Isaac T. Powell (Past Chief) | John T. Justice | Hilton M. Dize |
| Benjamin F. Gibson | Dave Ricks | W. Clinton Dize (Past Chief) |
| Herman Hill | <u>Reginald E. Wilson, Sr.</u> * | John S. Holland (Past Chief) |
| Frederick N. Holland, Jr. | Gordon I. Adams | J. Millard Tawes # |
| John M. Berger | G. Edward Sheriff (Past Chief) | Ralph C. Charnick |
| J. Fletcher Sterling | Robert H. Riffin | Robert "Puckers" Parks |
| Grover Lescalette | W. Clinton Marshall | Clinton "Kenny" Evans |
| George W. Daugherty | Joseph Beauchamp | Arza Owens |
| Fred N. Stevenson | John P. Tawes | John S. "Jack" Townsend |
| Benjamin S. Mills, Jr. (Past Chief) | Wilbert J. Coulburne | Clarence Eugene "Squeaky" Miles |
| Vincent P. Bonomo | Carlton E. Dize | Curtis Larry Tyler |
| George W. Davis | Ira T. Lowe | Norman Allen Tyler |
| Gordon L. Lawson | <u>Otis W. Harris</u> * | Randal Sterling |
| Raymond K. Woodland | Jerry V. Hill (Past Chief) | Steve R. Marshall |
| Prentiss W. Evans | J.C.W. Tawes Jr. | <u>Robert Powell Goldsborough</u> |
| Frederick N. Holland Sr. | E. Milbourne Revelle | <u>(Past Chief) (Writer's Brother)</u> |
| B. Horace Ford (Past Chief) % | William F. Howard | Roger "Bubby" Riffin |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Irvin J. Betts | William Thomas Walston Jr. | Russell Ward (Past Chaplain) |
| Carlisle Daugherty | Robert Henry Goldsborough Jr. | Fredrick B. "Fritz" Gerald III |
| Edward L. Justice | William "Domie" Sterling | (Past Chief) |
| William H. Lowe Sr. | Norman Mister | Franklin "Frankie" Morgan |
| Walden C. W. Dize | Davis Horsey | George Edward Tull |
| Aldolph Q. Justice | Douglas J. Ward | Elmer Lane III |
| William H. Byrd, Jr. | Harold J. Griffith | Richard Denny Scott |
| Percy J. Marshall, Sr. | Robert H. Bradshaw Sr. | Ronald "Ronnie" Mrohs |
| Christopher C. Owens Sr. | James "Tucker" Sterling | |
| Rupert R. Somers (Past Chief) | Earl W. Sterling Sr. (past Chief) | |
| Charles C. Spires | <u>Grover C. Adams Sr. *</u> | |

Source: From the files of the Current Chaplain Robert Dean Goldsborough

| | |
|---|---|
| Denotes Two Term Governor of the State of Maryland 1959 thru 1967 # | Denotes past Chief of the Crisfield Volunteer Fire Company now deceased. (Past Chief) |
| Denotes Line of Duty death or permanent Injury * | Denotes Past President of the Maryland Firemen's Association. % |

An annual memorial service is held in the area churches to honor our deceased members. The roll call above is read during this service by one of the members of our organization.

PAST CHIEFS THAT SERVED THE CRISFIELD VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY

| Chief | Years Served | Chief | Years Served |
|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Colonial B Huffy* | 1886 | John S. Holland* | 1944-1950 |
| C. O. Mills* | | Earl N. Sterling* | 1950-1952 |
| Elmar Gandy* | | W. Clinton Dize* | 1952-1978 |
| Issac T. Powell* | | Jerry W Hill* | 1978-1984 |
| Rupert R. Somers* | 1909 / 1921 | Robert P. Goldsborough* | 1984-1985 |
| B. Horace Ford* | 1923-1928 1930-1935 | Fredrick B. Gerald III * | 1985-1994 |
| Benjamin S. Mills* | | W. Danny Tyler | 1994-2004 |
| G. Edward Sheriff* | 1935-1936 | Scott Ward | 2004-2006 |
| George R. Stevenson* | 1941 | William Reynolds | 2006-2010 |

* Deceased

Our current Chief is Frankie Pruitt 2010-2024

Final document as of January 1, 2024