

1890 Firemen Rolled Large Casks To Fires, Pumped Water By Hand

By FRED C. WARNER
Back in the early 1890s Croton Falls organized a volunteer fire department that was one of the most efficient in upper Westchester.

Previously the community had depended upon the fire departments of adjacent towns to extinguish its fires — Katonah to the south, Brewster to the north.

"It's about time we get a fire fighting system of our own," reasoned a group of local citizens who gathered in Union Hall one wintry night in January, 1893. Then and there the Croton Falls Volunteer Fire Department came into being with George Juengst Jr. as president and Fred Purdy as chief.

Naturally, the first requirement was some sort of fire fighting apparatus. A committee was appointed to raise funds for this purpose. Incidental to the main objective

were the good times that were enjoyed and the romances that budded at their garden parties, picnics and strawberry festivals.

\$935 Raised
In short time the money was raised and an order was placed for a hand pumper engine, complete with hose and carriage, at a total cost of \$935.

The new equipment arrived and was housed in an old monkey wrench factory. Then the problem arose as to the best way to get this equipment to any fire that might occur at some distance from headquarters.

A resolution adopted by the department provided: "That five dollars be paid to the person first to appear with a team of horses capable of hauling the equipment to the fire." At first that team belonged to A. B. Whitlock, the local coal and lumber dealer, whose

yards were nearby and whose team of draft horses was usually available.

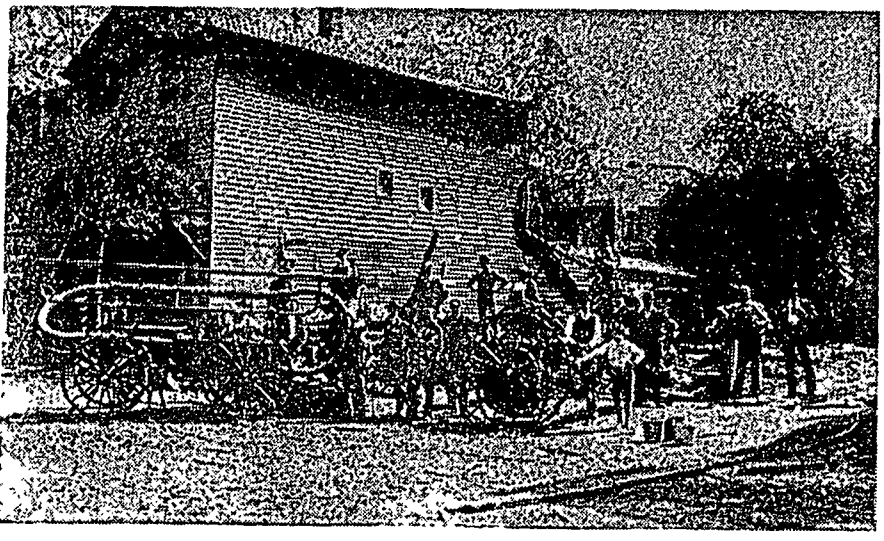
Then there was the problem of an adequate water supply, especially when the hose would not reach Croton River or the mill race that led to Purdy's feed mill. To meet that situation large casks were rolled to the scene of the fire, following which volunteers—men, women and children, with wash tubs, copper boilers, buckets and cooking pans—carried water from every available source and emptied it into the casks. Then, with the end of the hose in the cask and nozzle trained on the blaze, 18 men, nine on a side, pumped for dear life.

Crude though these methods apparently were, it is evident that some very effective fire fighting was accomplished. Take the case of the fire on Cross Street which threatened the loss of the entire village of Croton Falls early on the morning of September 25, 1894. Although the Williams Building was destroyed, the Abrams Building, scarcely a yard away, Masonic Hall and other nearby structures were saved.

On an October night three years later fire threatened the hamlet of Purdy Station, two miles to the south. Church and school bells in both communities sounded the alarm, and Ed Ellis, driving his Gilmore Farms iron grays, soon had the apparatus under way. Volunteers clung to the engine rails, some thumbed rides, and others commandeered a hand car from the Harlem Railroad siding and pumped their way to Purdy Station. However, Chief Purdy, by means of trotting horse and rubber tired buggy, was among the first to arrive.

Meanwhile, Driver Ellis was urging on his Percherons at a clip clop, clip clop gait until, at the half way mark at Casey's Crossing, while distant flames were turning night into day, the shouts of the driver and the crack of his whip accelerated the pace. His arrival at the scene at a furious gallop would have done credit to a more recent movie thriller. Old-timers still boast that the whole operation, from alarm to arrival, occupied only 14 minutes.

Although Doc Smith's denial of fire and residence and surrounding buildings were ablaze upon arrival, yet it is apparent that some excellent work was accomplished in order to prevent a much greater loss. We make brief mention of the effects of the liquid refreshments liberally bestowed upon the volunteers by the grateful people whose homes and places of business had been saved from total destruction.



FIREMEN AT WORK—1894: Croton Falls firemen take a break after fighting fire in Williams building in Croton Falls in October, 1894. Note proud stances of some of the men. Young fellow perched on rook of building, right rear, is Elbert C. Purdy, who retired several years ago as supervisor of the Town of North Salem.

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PATENT TRADER
Mt. Kisco, N. Y. Aug. 27, 1959

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County Center Being Renovated For Fall Season

WHITE PLAINS — Annual alterations are under way at the Westchester County Center to ready the building for the fall season, according to the County Recreation Commission. An estimated \$34,000 will be spent to prepare the center for the more than 2,000 individual events, shows and meetings scheduled during the coming year.

Now in progress are replacement of the wood flooring on the main auditorium stage, replacement of the flat roof; construction of safety steel guards for the elevator between basement level and auditorium, repainting of the Westchester Arts and Crafts Workshop, which opens on September 14 and installation of over 200 fluorescent lighting fixtures.

Events this fall include the Dick Clark Caravan, featuring top teenage song stylists, on September 23, professional wrestling dates on September 12 and 25 and the "Home-A-Rama," a panorama of modern living, which opens October 17.

A County Center calendar, listing all events and activities for the fall-winter season, is available

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Help Falls To Arrive
According to an old newspaper account, "At a critical point when it seemed all was lost, Joe Secord's boy, Ernest, was thrown into a saddle, and with a good horse under the saddle, was dispatched to Brewster to summon help. The fact that, for some unexplained reason, the aid never arrived, so affected the local volunteers that they performed feats that would have reflected credit upon the finest equipped department."

Lake Purdy Unit Sets Picnic; Play Day For Children

LAKE PURDY — A Labor Day picnic and an end-of-summer play day for children are in the planning stage by the Lake Purdy Ladies Auxiliary. The picnic will be held Saturday, September 5 and the play day the following Saturday, September 12.

Mrs. H. Hopkins, chairman, is in charge of planning for the picnic. Festivities will open with a mother-daughter softball game at 10 a.m. at the playing field. Immediately following will be a pop-gun game. All interested players are asked to volunteer.

The annual swimming competition will be held on the lake at 2:30 p.m. The grill will open at 12 noon and a buffet dinner will be served from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Music will be provided from 9 p.m. by Herb Turner for dancing.

Mrs. William Galligan is chairman for the end-of-summer play day, and Mrs. O. J. Denny will assist in sports. The event opens with a bicycle parade around the lake. Prizes will be awarded for the following: Prettiest decorations, bicycle showing most imagination and most futuristic vehicle. Volunteers are needed for drum major and music for the march.

Games and races will follow on the playing field. There will be dashes, ball throws and relay races by age groups.

Supper will be served at 5:30 p.m., after which a king and queen of Lake Purdy will be crowned and prizes distributed.

Tree-Fire
TRUESDALE LAKE — Firemen were called out at 2:10 a.m. Sunday to quell a blaze in some fir trees in front of Warren Sumner's home in Truesdale Lake. The firemen could not determine the origin of the fire.

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People Grateful
The people of Purdy Station further expressed their appreciation by sending a delegation to the next meeting of the department bearing generous gifts and expressions of gratitude.

As time passed, other fires brought extensive damage or complete ruin to Gassman's barber shop, the Miller home, the bottling works and the livery stables. On each occasion, the hand pumper and its faithful crew gave of their very best to combat the flames, sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

After a score of years of continuous service, this old pumper engaged in one of its last fights at the burning of the Harvey Green home. The writer having been one of the volunteers that manned the pumper, recalls the occasion and the soaking he received from leaky hose and couplings with every downward thrust of the bar.

Then followed disastrous fires with which the aging equipment could no longer cope—the White house at Purdy Station, the Croton Falls Hotel, the Wood Building, the Croton Valley Lumber Company, all requiring aid from outside sources, often too little and too late.

Around by these conditions, representatives of a succeeding generation gathered on November 6, 1934, not in the Old Union Hall, which had long since disappeared, but in the private home of R. L. Lenz, and decided "to take such steps as to insure an adequate department."

At that meeting the present modern Croton Falls Volunteer Fire Department was born.

While this sketch is intended to deal with the origin, methods of operation, and a few incidents connected with the early department, it should be known that from these modest beginnings there has developed a modern fire department in which the Town of North Salem takes a justifiable pride, a fire fighting system equally as efficient as those of comparable or larger Westchester and Putnam communities.

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