

History Fire Department of Sac City

In 1885 the first fire brigade was organized. A merchant Fire Brigade (department.) Haugen Store was the meeting place and a group of boys and men banded together, forming a fire department. They used a big steel triangle for fire alarms. Each member brought his pail, axe, and ladder to scene of fire. This was type of fire department until April, 1902.

At this time, the city council voted in an ordinance forming Sac City Fire Department. And is still known as the City Fire Department.

The first water system was a big well windmill and a wooden water tank at 12th and Early Street. And the first water main was wooden water pipes. Then the stand pipe was built and reservoirs built to catch spring water. And iron pipes laid from pumping station to stand pipe. Also distribution system was had a long streets through town. In 1969 a new water tower was built to replace the stand pipe. Much larger capacity. And better elevation.

When the Electric Light Plant was built, the old triangle was replaced by a steam siren whistle. (Wish we had one today.) This was heard four to six miles in the country whenever it was blown. About 1916 or 1917, the old steam siren was replaced with electric sirens. I think three different size whistles were tried. Finally the present two 5-horsepower sirens were installed. This was about 1919. Both whistles have been repaired several times. They have Babbitt bearings and will not stand to continue a run. So are not satisfactory for C/D type storm warning three minute blast.



The first piece of fire equipment was a four-wheeled chassis with frame to carry ladders, axes, crow bars, and pails to fires.

The first hose was leather hose and hung on pegs outside the lumber yard across west from NWRR Depot. In area of McCorkle's shop. [On south side of Early street in the building currently owned by Howard Activity Center.] This was carried to scene of fire on shoulders of five or six men.

Then the two-wheel hose reel carts and cotton hose rubber lined came into use. This had a rope that ran out through loops on cart tongue so eight or ten men could pull them to a fire. Believe it



Two-wheel
hose cart in
parade, July
1912.

or not, but loaded those things weighed 1000 to 1800 pounds, depending on how much hose the fire department had. And when streets were muddy it took eight, ten, or twelve manpower to pull them to scene of fire.

About 1910, two 45-gallon chemical carts were added. This was a real boost. One quart acid, five pounds soda, and 45 gallons of water really built up pressure in the tank. And $\frac{3}{4}$ inch hose and nozzle let firemen direct water at the base of fire. When it ran dry, it could be refilled at scene and used again. It took about two minutes to reload if everyone worked at it.

In 1915 the city bought two REO Speed Wagon trucks. One equipped with two 45 gallon chemical tanks, ladders and essential hand tools. The other one chemical tank, a 900 foot hosebox, ladder and tools. Now the firemen felt they really had it made.

In 1925 the fireman started out a drive to raise some money. The people were good to them. And the fund was over \$9000.00 they raised. The Seagraves Fire Truck (the first pumping tuck) was bought, also some 35 and 40 [foot] ladders and other needed equipment.

We [way?] back about 1912 or 1913, a call for assistance came to Sac City Fire Department for fire at the William Rhodes farm. The firemen pulled their two-wheel chemical carts to the farm behind cars. Also took kegs of soda and Carboy of acid. The fire was finally put out. This began the rural fire business for local fire department.

When the two REOs were bought, one was called Clipper, the other Summit. Clipper was the all chemical one and it answered many rural fires. And then it and Seagraves answered fire alarms together.

Now let's go on

In 1931 the firemen decided a pumper tanker type truck was needed. So sold \$10.00 membership and raised enough money to buy the Chevrolet truck with pump, water tank, and hose body. This replaced the REO trucks. The truck was equipped with 1 ½ inch hose as well as 2 ½ inch hose.

In 1936 a Model A Ford one ton truck was bought and a 600 [gallon] water tank put on it. This was donated by a good friend of the fire department. This was a big help in farm fires, and answered many fire calls in the following 10 years or so. In 1940 the Iowa State law authorizing township tax for support and maintenance of Fire Departments. In 1941, Jackson Township, Douglas Township, and Sac City joined hands and bought the International Pumper, equipped fully 500 gallon per minute pump, 500 gallon water tank. This truck was equipped with 1½ inch hose and 2½ inch hose, ladders and hand tools.



Ford truck (purchase 1936), Seagraves (purchased 1924) and Chevrolet (purchased 1929) in front of Fire Station on North 5th Street. Photo taken 1937.

Emil Schoenthal, Phil Needham, and Bud Peyton in trucks, J. C. Lake (manager of telephone company) and W. L. Philips (fire chief) standing.

In 1947, the firemen bought Fort Dodge's old aerial ladder truck. Yea, we took lots of ribbing about our plaything, but when we showed it used at a bad fire, the people rallied, and took up a collection giving the firemen \$2700.00. A portable light plant and some flood lights, fire coats, helmets and other articles for the safety of the firemen. [editor note: presumably, the fire in question was in the Park Hotel, which was the first fire for which the aerial truck was used.]

In 1955 a 3000 gallon semi trailer tank truck was added to the equipment. Then in 1960 another tanker replaced the first one. It holds 5000 gallons.

In 1963 a Ford Luverne Fire truck was bought. This truck has 750 gallon per minute pump, 750 gallon tank, 1 inch hose on reel carrier, 1½ inch hose and 2½ inch hose also ladders and small tools.



1916 Ladder truck purchased on July 4, 1947, from Fort Dodge.
First used at a fire at Park Hotel on August 2, 1947.



In 1970 a new truck was contracted for and was received March 11, 1971. It is 750 gallon per minute pumper equipped with a 50 foot snorkel (basket boom). Also equipped with two one-inch hose reels, 1½ inch hose and 2½ inch hose. This also has a portable 3000 watt light plant. This unit replaces the Aerial ladder (which was a 1916 model) and the old Dodge pumper.

So as of March 20, 1971, the Sac City Fire Department have the Seagrave (our antique) the International the Ford Luvurne, the Snorkel International, the semi tanker with and International tractor.

In 1947 or 1948, a Chevrolet Panel Truck was bought for a squad rescue truck. This was not very satisfactory. No room. So in 1964 a school bus was bought to replace the panel truck. And the boys rebuilt the inside. This has lots of equipment in it used at the scene of a fire. Coats, helmets, axe, sledge hammer, crow bars, bold cutters, tin roof tools, cutting torch, chain saw, Scott air packs, resuscitator, stretchers, etc. Quite a change and growth in 86 years.

(early part of this told to me by early day firemen Ern (E. C.) Waterson, Bill (W. J.) Peacock and others.)

Phil Needham

1925 to 1972

[Phil Needham's time on the Sac City Fire Department]

In my 47 years, I have served the Sac City Fire Department with many men. Yes, great grandpas, grandpas, dads, and sons. Guess you name it, we have had it. Yes, nephews also. No nieces yet.

Clif Mooney, Phil Needham, Andy Moeller, Bud Peyton all have more than 40 years in active membership in Sac City Fire Department.

Yes, at least 35 sets of brothers have been members of Fire Department. Several father and sons. Yes, uncle and nephew. At the present, I can count 12 sons and grandsons and five nephews in the fire department and 6 nephews in my 47 years.

The fire departments of all your towns is made up with "A Peculiar Breed of Men." The Insurance Bureau has money they call the above name. Yes, the remark about the men who crawl out of warm bed in below zero weather to aid a friend in need. And he enjoys doing so. He must be "A Special Kind of Men."

Well I wish to state after 47 years, I'm not really physically able to take the strain of Fire Fighting. I still keep active assisting the boys in all the ways I can.

Many a sorry deal as the fate of a fireman. Yes many heart breaking experiences. Yet, we are always ready for the next call.

Just a few problems in a fireman's life. Someone's home goes up in fire. Yea! It hurts as though it was your own. Yes, and property on fire is his own to any sincere and true fireman.

Then there are the hours spent becoming how to give first aid to sick and injured. This makes one feel well paid when I can give good care to those in need.

Times that any person wishes he were somewhere else. Cases of drowning, serious auto accidents, disasters, and finding bodies in fire burned place. Yes! Maybe our language isn't always from the Bible. Our hearts are truly bent to care for our fellow-man.

In my 47 years there have been 28 or more brothers in the fire department. Seven or eight sons of firemen, and at present some nine or ten nephews and grandsons have been in Sac City Fire Department.

Yes! Firemen are listed as being in the most dangerous occupations in the World. We never get scared—THE HELL WE DON'T. But we do drill to know how best protect ourselves.

One saying always amuses me. When a barrel of oil blew up, a young fireman was running for his life with shoes on, said, "When Hank 70 years old passed me up wearing hip boots, I thought no chance for me." Well, I'm glad to say no one was hurt that time. No, they weren't scared—they just ran to keep living. Ha!

Many times in 47 years there have been many close calls. Nothing serious—just sprained ankles, cuts, burns, bruises. Yep, perhaps cracked ribs, broken fingers, etc. But no one hurt as these are just part of the game.

Sac City, at the present, has four living firemen with over 40 years in fire department and still active. There are six firemen who have over 20 years in and ten with 15 or more years and 18 men with less than 15 years, ranging from eight months to 15 years.

So our aim is to keep a young group coming up and we attempt to teach them what to look for and how to handle each situation. No two fires are a like.

A few local large fires

Hobbs home: most of the original area survey records were lost in his fire. Mr. Hobbs was first civil engineer in Sac County area.

Sac County Court House Fire: about 1889 [editor note: burned 1888] Many records were lost. At today's prices, I would guess the loss to be several million dollars.

Bakery fire on South 5th Street in early days, where Orv's Appliance is today. \$10,000 to 20,000 estimated loss. (editor note: 109 South 5th Street)

Coal shed on CNWRR yards on Early Street about 1910. Loss \$10,000 IN THOSE DAYS. Today would be six to ten times higher.

The Opera House fire—6th and Main in 30's. Lost \$75,000. Odebolt, Early, Lake View fire departments assisted. [Editor note: February 12, 1930]



Farmer's Grain Co. fire in 1927. This fire kept firemen on duty for four days, tho under control in about 6 hours. Loss in today's prices \$250,000.



Elms Apartment fire. 6 families lost all in this fire. No one hurt except firemen. Est. loss \$300,000. [1015 Audubon Street]

Williams Mill and Elevator. This was rough. Lytton, Early and Lake View Fire Depts were here. [Where present FC is]

Early Day Mutual Aid fire. About 1912. Sac City Firemen loaded 2 two-wheel chem.. carts on a truck. Also extra acid and soda and drove to Newell to assist them in a real serious fire. Ralph Kurtz had a Model T Ford farm truck that hauled the equipment. Temperature about 10 degrees below zero. Yea. The Good old days!

First Rural fire: SCFD members pulled two-wheel chemical cart to Wm. Rhodes farm and saved the house and wash shed. This was about the year of 1913 or 1914. Next year SCFD got their first fire trucks.

**Charter members of Sac City Fire Department
April 2, 1902**

Clipper Company

George Lovel, chief
F. V. Healy, assistant chief
H.G. Knight, secretary
O.O. Volkerts
Philo. Dory, Dec
E. L. Fosdick
John Kappleman, Dec
G. G. Cluver
Jesse Peacock
W. J. Peacock
H. H. Sawyer
Olliver Staley
Fred R. Sheily, Foreman
Roy Brockman
John M. Fox
Tom Pratt
Gus W. Stroehmeier, Stewart
D. L. Prather
Lou M. Wilcox

Summit Company

W. W. Cooper, Treasurer
W. T. Boreing, President
Frank Alexander, Stewart
E. W. Wayt
P. T. Van Patten, Foreman
Dan Wingerson
H. A. Young, Dec
J. C. Harper
E. C. Waterson
M. T. Lee, Dec
W. H. Eaton, Dec
H. J. Rimmer
R. R. Cobb
Jay Fosdick, Dec
W. A. Cobb
H. G. Knight
H. Minder

Charter members still in department on September 12, 1940

E. C. Waterson and W. J. Peacock

Original Fire Department organized at Jackson

Hangers – Grocery Store

J. D. Brazee was chief

A few of the other members were:

Sam Watt

J. Brownell

Eli Harter

D. Schenck

C. E. Waterson

Walter Boreing

Earl Wayt

And others

This group was organized about 1885. And was reorganized in 1902 under the city charter which is still the operating Fire Department of Sac City.

The first piece of fire equipment was built locally by Alex Waterson, wagon maker. J. D. Brazee and Farnsworth Cobb help – doing the iron work.

When the first hose was had, it was kept on a reel in a shed, and at the alarm of fire, the boys would unreel and carry the hose to the fire. Later a reel cart –a two-wheeled outfit—was bought. Thas made the hose more useable.

Just think of it. Early day fire fighting was done with axe, ladders, pails, and sweeps. Then came water system and hose. Then pumpers, chemicals and on upward to the present day pumper truck.

The water pail is still as efficient as ever, but a small amount of water under pressure puts out a bigger fire, as the entire amount of water can be directed at the base of the fire.

Additional Fire History (written 1977)

Phil Needham

The city council passed ordinance in 1902 to have a city fire department. April 2, 1902, a group of men were called together and formed the first fire department under government ordinance in Sac City.

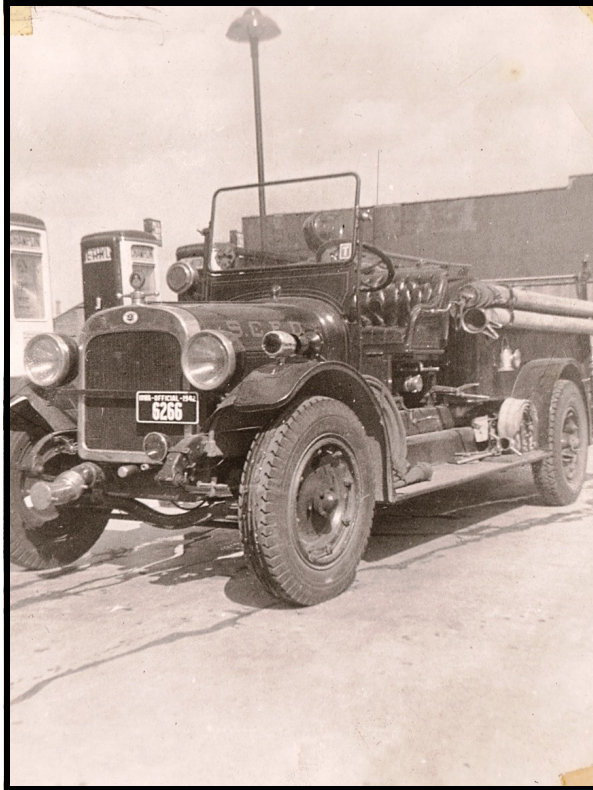
Two companies were formed, named Summit and Clipper. Summit Station was on North 12th Street, Clipper on North 5th Street.

Prior to this date, Sac City had the merchant's organized fire brigade. The first organized about 1880, and a second reorganized about 1887. These were the old bucket brigade type fire departments. When fire triangle was struck, each grabbed bucket, ladder, and/or axe and ran to the fire, usually by the route of the triangle to learn where the fire was if you couldn't see it. This is what "The Big Boys" told me such as Ern Waterson, W. A. (Bill) Cobb, Wilder Eaton and others who were old MEN of my younger years.

In 1902, the city bought two two-wheeled hose carts. The fire boys built two two-wheeled carts to haul ladders ect. to fires.

So as far as water mains reached and fire hydrants were, the firemen began putting more fires out. The first water system was a well at 12th and Early Streets that had a wind mill pump and a wood storage tank on an elevated platform. Later, springs north of town were piped across the river to reservoir, a pumping station, and the stand pipe. First pump was steam operated; then a one cylinder diesel engine; later an electric pump. As the water mains spread further around town, more fire hydrants were installed. In 1925 there were 48 fire hydrants; today (1977) there are 100 or more hydrants. In 1914, two REO Speed Wagon trucks were bought equipped with chemical tanks and hose box and all fire tools of the time (ladders, etc.). The hose carts were stored in convenient space for safety and had extra hose on them. In 1924, the fire department bought a Seagrave Pumper truck. This truck was the first pumper truck in Sac County. It had two chemical tanks (Soda Card(?) 45 gallon size), extra fefill containers, 1200 foot hose box, ladders and hand tools. In 1930 a Chevy truck was bought. It was equipped with pump, 300 gallon water tank, 300 feet 1½ inch hose, 300 feet 2½ hose, ladders, etc. The Chevy pumper was also equipped with 26 feet suction hose pre-connect. At this time, the two REO trucks were gotten rid of.

In 1941, the Fire Department bought International truck equipped with 500 gallon per minute pump, 500 gallon water tank, welded hose box, 700 feet 2½ inch hose on each side, in center 25 foot folding aluminum ladder in compartment, with 1½ hose space above. This holds 500 feet of 1½ inch hose. Side compartments for tools and supplies. The body on this truck comes out over the running board and the rear wheels. Most fire trucks today use this same method. In 1957 we bought a Dodge truck with a 500 gallon per minute pump, 500 gallon water tank, and equipped with a truck body for 1½ inch and 2½ hose, ladders, and all tools. At this time, the little Chevy truck was disposed of. [Sold to the town of Westside in 1942]



Seagraves pumper was the first pumper truck in Sac County.



W. L. Philips, longest serving fire chief.



Meeting room at fire station on North 5th Street showing radio and kitchen area.



Sac City Fire Department, November 1947

(Standing left to right) Phil Needham, Harry Barnhill, Ike Phillips, Erv Waterson, Harry Macknill, William Downs, Pete Phillips, Andy Moeller, Paul Paulson, Bob Lange, Louis Garlock, Emil Schoenthal, Henry Bowman, Louis A. Peyton.

(Kneeling left to right) Harve Wilcox, Lynn Freeman, Art Phillips, Fred Marshall, Louis N. Peyton, Glen Bunker, W. L. Philips, C. D. Mooney, Boyd Waller, Guy Bechler, C. A. Gerken, Merle Schoenthal.

Members absent from picture: Frederick Henson, Harry Trickel, Bert Hartman, Alva H. Jennett, Phil Lewis.

Information scanned and compiled from photos and writings in scrap book given to Sac City Fire Department by Phil Needham's sister.

Editing and additional photos from collection of Bruce Perry.

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