

## THE HISTORY OF THE CORSICANA FIRE DEPARTMENT

In 1855 the Navarro County Court House was destroyed by fire. At that time there were no Fire or Water Departments. The only means of water were underground cisterns at street crossings.

On September 13, 1879 a group of civic minded merchants met to discuss the organization of a Fire Department. These men were: N. J. Mills; C. N. Winkler; A. J. Robins; A. M. Wilson; S. F. Starley; James Garitty; J. M. Eainwater; Miller Tarder; A. Ferguson; Darne; R. P. Goodman; Johnson; J. W. Rogers; Stephen Smith; Kamsler; J. P. Vance; J. Y. Bates; C. W. Jester; Cerf; Raphael; J. J. Strupper; J. B. Stephens; F. W. Carruthers; C. H. Allyn; J. B. Stiteler; C. L. Fewell; A. Fox; C. C. Marshall; U. M. Lee; Mellory.

On December 29, 1879 the first volunteer Fire Department was organized with 25 town merchants. The department procured a charter under the name of Corsicana Hose Company #1 with J. J. Strupper as chief and Abe Mulky as asst. chief. The department was equipped with buckets and ropes. Later a hand pump with 2 horses attached was acquired. This pump took four men to operate it.

In 1892 F. N. Drane was chief. He procured from the city a new fire engine, one hook and ladder, and two 2 horse drawn carriages and six fine horses. He also acquired from the city a new building at which to house the department. He bought 2300 feet of hose and also a \$1600.00 sound alarm bell. While Drane was chief, he saw a need for an extended water supply. Deep wells were bored and at 2200 feet a hot mineral water well was found. This well greatly increased the water supply for the fire protection, but the water could not be used for drinking purposes. In 1892 there were 16 volunteer firemen.

In 1923 the city lake (Lake Halbert) was dug and this was then used as a primary source of water for fire fighting.

In 1924 our present department was organized and the city went to an all paid department. The fire bell sound alarm was discontinued and an electric alarm system was installed. The wood burning pumpers were discarded and replaced with an automobile truck pumper.

In 1926 the Hook & Ladder Companies were disbanded and the present system was begun. The men worked twelve straight days and had the thirteenth day off. In 1943 they worked seven days and had off the eighth. In 1946 they would work two days, have off the third, then work for three days and have off the fourth. In 1953 the shifts were changed to work 24 hours and then off 24 hours. In 1974 the present routine was established. The department went to a three platoon system, working 24 hours and off 48 hours. The department has three

shifts (A,B &C) with two station commanders on each shift. The present department is staffed with 34 men.

#### EQUIPMENT:

Besides the equipment already named the department has acquired several other pieces throughout the years. In 1913 the department purchased a combustion pump and hose wagon. In 1923 the department operated with a 12 cylinder Packard with hose wagon and carried two 35 gallon chemical tanks.

In 1926 the equipment consisted of a 1914 American-LaFrance chain driven pump with solid rear wheels. A 1917 Cadillac hook & ladder with conastoga wagon wheels was also in operation. A 1923 American-LaFrance chain driven pump with two wheel mechanical brakes and a 1923 Studebaker which carried chemical and water buckets. In 1926 the department also purchased a chemical and hose Studebaker which carried a 150 gallon booster tank with booster pump. It worked on power take off and carried 1000 feet of hose.

In 1927 the department purchased another Studebaker like the one above and also a straight 8 Studebaker coupe for the Chief's car.

In 1929 a 750 GPM American-LaFrance pumper was purchased. Also in the same year an American-LaFrance hook & ladder was bought. The ladders on the truck were operated manually.

In 1940 Burke & Sims of San Antonio assembled a 1½ ton Dodge truck for the department. This truck carried 150 gallon booster tank and operated with power take off.

In 1946 a 1947 Chevrolet pickup with a 235 gallon booster tank operated by power take off was purchased.

In 1947 the department acquired an International 1½ ton, 500 gal. combination pumper and booster wagon from the Army.

In 1948 a new 1949 Chevrolet pickup was purchased with a 235 gal. booster tank operated by power take off.

In 1954 a Seagrave 750 GPM pumper with booster line and 450 gal. booster pump was purchased by the department.

In 1956 two more of the same was purchased. Also in 1956 a 65 ft. aerial ladder truck was purchased from Seagrave. Two Chevrolet pickup booster wagons carrying 300 gallon of water operated by power take off was bought by the city.

In 1959 a 1960 Ford was bought for the Chief.

In 1961 an International ½ ton pickup was purchased. This pickup carried 235 gallon of water and operated by power take off.

In 1963 another International was bought. This was a ¾ ton pickup carrying 255 gallons of water.

In 1967 the department eliminated the operation of the booster tank with power take off.

In 1968 a Dodge, 300 gallon, Briggs & Stratton engine was purchased. The Chief's car was also replaced with a 1969 Ford.

In 1971 a 1972 Chevrolet pickup was purchased with a 350 - 8 cyl. engine. This pickup has a 354 gallon booster tank with a Briggs & Stratton engine with an individual pump.

In 1973 another car was purchased for the Chief.- a 1974 Plymouth.

In 1974 the department purchased from the Boardman Company a 750 GPM pumper

## Members of the Corsicana Fire Department in 1924

## Hook &amp; Ladder Company #1

P. C. Buckner; H. E. Kinsloe; C. H. Allen; J. J. Ashmore; Jess Garitty;  
 Charlie Bee; W. R. Pryor; H. E. Walker; F. C. Mirus; Jacob Allen;  
 N. J. Garrity; Dan Kiber; J. J. Strupper; J. E. Whitesell; Fred Brassart;

## Hook &amp; Ladder Company #2

L. W. Ashmore; H. J. Leighton; Ed Staggs; J. W. Benton; Fred Martin;  
 W. H. Davis; J. A. Holly; Arthur Johnson; and C. L. Pitman

## Members of the Corsicana Fire Department in 1974

## A Shift

B. G. Clay; R. A. Owen; C. H. Vise; V. G. Costello; Morgan Blair;  
 H. H. Hoffman; L. Z. Green; H. C. Dunbar; L. O. Johnson, and R. P. Gunnels

## B Shift

W. B. Hanna; G. W. Scott; J. M. Meadows; D. A. Fogg; W. R. Smith;  
 B. T. Smith; V. C. McCarter; G. W. Bridger; R. L. Blue, and A. J. Hoffma

## C Shift

Jesse Praytor; B. R. Richardson; G. P. Broughton; S. R. Hart;  
 L. H. Richardson; D. W. McDaniel; B. D. Ray; L. G. Herrin; J. R. Miller;  
 R. H. Stovall, and J. L. Barlow

## Administrative

Duane Womack, C. G. Tieman; and W. H. Talkington, Jr.

## CHIEFS OF THE DEPARTMENT

1879	--	J. J. Strupper	1911	--	R. Freedman
1892	--	F. N. Drane			P. Mayers
1893	--	J. W. Benton			Luther Ashmore
1894	--	E. H. Church	1920	--	Harry Leighton
1896	--	J. J. Strupper	1922	--	Elmer Keith
1898	--	R. Freedman	1941	--	H. P. Bivins
1908	--	J. D. Redden	1958	--	C. G. Tieman
			1974	--	Duane Womack

## FIRES:

In 1906 the Corsicana Fire Department answered a total of 57 alarms with an insurance loss of \$5,728.75. Fifty years later, the department answered a total of 445 alarms at an insurance loss of \$214,711.53. A few of the fires that were prominent in these years are related below:

On July 2, 1929 at 8:35 a.m., an alarm was turned in from the Rosenberg Hotel in downtown Corsicana. Firemen answered the alarm and found the hotel engulfed with smoke and flames. The fire seemed to have begun in a third floor bedroom and the fire marshal thought a cigaret might have ignited the blaze.

One fireman was injured as he tried to help a resident out of the burning building. The lady, who had gone back to her room to save some of her belongings, caught hold of an electrical cord which had shorted out. She was standing out on the balcony and as the fireman tried to grab her, the electrical current from her body passed through him.

The hotel manager estimated the damage in the neighborhood of \$50,000. Several businesses around the hotel suffered extensive damage when a large portion of a wall collapsed crashing through the roofs of the surrounding buildings.

Even though firemen were handicapped by a lack of water pressure, the blaze was brought under control in a matter of hours.

One of the largest fires in Corsicana occurred November 3, 1950 at the Commercial Hotel. The hotel owner estimated the loss at over \$150,000 with only part of that covered by insurance.

The fire which started in a third story room about 10 p.m. gutted this Corsicana landmark as well as causing almost total losses to the five offices and shops on the ground floor.

A Corsicana fireman received a painful leg injury while laying a hose on the fire. A well-meaning citizen was helping him lay the big line, when a burning screen fell to the ground. The fireman's helper let go of the hose and left alone the fireman was thrown and the hose hit his leg.

The fire department had the blaze under control at about midnight but remained on the job until late the next morning. Strong north winds blew flames for blocks, but no other building ignited. Firemen were handicapped by the cold, high winds and a few minutes after they started pouring water on the blaze, they were drenched.

The flames were propelled by the wind and could be seen about 15 miles from Corsicana.

The Ennis Fire Department was called upon and sent a pumper and a full crew of men. Between the two departments, 15 lines of hose were laid.

City officials, business men, and the citizens congratulated the fire department for the efficient manner in which they fought the blaze and prevented it from spreading to other areas of the city.