

Spanish Fork Fire Department



History of Spanish Fork Fire Department

by Ezra Warner as found in History of Spanish Fork

Charter Members of Spanish Fork Fire Department, 1910.

The Spanish Fork volunteer Fire Department was organized May 15th, 1908 with a company of twenty men, four from each ward and four at large. The following officers were elected: Charles W. Booth, Chief, Clayton Beck, First Assistant Chief, George Ludlow, Second Assistant Chief, David R. Boyack, Secretary-Treasurer.



Charter Members of Spanish Fork Fire Department, 1910.

The department began at once training on their work and were soon equipped with a hose cart and several hundred feet of hose, which they soon learned to manipulate so well that their influence was felt for good in the reduction of fire losses.

Their work at the fireman's tournaments soon gave them the reputation of being one of the most efficient departments in the state, holding the state championship in a number of events for several years.

The city built a drying tower and cart house for the department at the city square.

On March 10th, 1920 the City Council contracted for the purchase of an American La France triple combination fire engine at a cost of \$9,250. The engine arrived on June 10th, 1920 and on June 16th it was tried out by the department. It was found that the engine could pump two streams of water from the Mill Race and throw them higher than the high school building.

It was soon given the test in actual service, for on the night of July 26th, 1920, the City Bakery was burned and the efficient work of the fire department with their new engine undoubtedly saved a great deal of adjoining property. On many subsequent occasions the engine has saved its value in fighting conflagrations.

From History of Spanish Fork by Ezra Warner 1930.

History of the Spanish Fork Fire Department

by Marvin Banks

Who knows what was going through the young mans head when Charles "C. W." Booth started to think and talk about a fire department. Well it finally happened May 15th 1908, C. W. was instrumental in putting together a group of men who would be known as the Spanish Fork Volunteer Fire Department. There were four L. D. S. wards at the time in Spanish Fork, and from each of those wards were either chosen or accepted four individuals to become part of the newly formed department and an additional four individuals at large were chosen to make a company of twenty members. C. W. Booth was chosen as the Chief of the department, Clayton Beck was elected 1st Assistant Chief, George Ludlow was elected 2nd Assistant Chief and David R. Boyack was to be Secretary/Treasure. This must have been the start of a love affair which would bond the men together in a common cause of giving aid to the community in time of need. The Spanish Fork Firemen were also very instrumental in getting the Utah State Firemen s Association started which was also founded in 1908. The states bylaws were fashioned from those of the Spanish Fork department.

The department began at once training and was soon equipped with several hundred feet of hose and a hose cart, which is on display at the Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum in Spanish Fork. A 1912 news paper article read: Chief Booth: Well boys, we now have our suits, our hose cart, our hose and our building and I think the wisest plan now is to take out some fire insurance, for if our fire house should take fire we would never be able to save a thing. Soon, the influence of the men, their training and equipment was felt around the community in fire fighting and the reduction of loss due to fire. I assume there were some who wondered what they had gotten into, especially at their first "big blaze". Much work was put into participation in the early days of the State Association many activities were undertaken by the men to display their talents. Cart races were held, hose coupling competition was held, ladder climbs were held, 100 yard dashes were held as was various other activities. The dedication and talents of the firemen and their participation in the various tournaments soon gave the Spanish Fork Firemen the reputation of being one of the most efficient departments in the state. We like to think the same today. C. W. Booth was elected President of the Utah State Firemen s Association for 1915. In those days it was common place for firemen from the other cities and towns to stay with firemen and their families while attending the conventions. Today however the Association holds its meetings in cities where an abundance of hotels and guest accommodations are available and the Association is much more just a time to visit, check out new items displayed by various vendors, drool over the new trucks on display and for some to talk over "old times" and for others to prepare for the future and to just have a "fun time".

On March 10th, 1920 the City Council contracted for the purchase of the city s first "motorized" truck, an American LaFrance, triple combination, fire engine at the cost of \$9,250.00. The engine arrived June 10th, 1920 and on June 16th it was tried out by the department. It was found that the engine could pump two streams of water from the Mill Race, a large irrigation canal and throw them higher than the high school building. On the night of July 26th, 1920 fire broke out at the city bakery. Undoubtedly the hard work of the men and their new truck saved a great deal of the surrounding properties which otherwise may have been lost.

History of the Spanish Fork Fire Department

by Marvin Banks
(continued)

The firemen were always participating in community activities. The firemen were also well known around the city and county for their annual ""Barn Dances" which took place for over 60 years.

1934 would see a new fire station on the corner of 400 North Main. Constructed as a P.W.A. project and costing for labor and material approximately \$20,000.00. The new station was a handsome two-story and basement building of wire pressed brick, dark maroon in color. It was commenced in early march and was completed in late November. The work was done by local men, approximately 250 being employed at different times. William Unk had the supervision of the construction work since the basement was completed and he was loud in his praise for the mechanics, plumbers and electricians who have helped on the building.



The full basement, 34 x 60 feet would house the offices and equipment of the city waterworks and electrical departments. The first main floor would house the equipment and trucks of the fire department and had a hose drying tower. The upper story was for the firemen s meetings and for social purposes, with an electrically equipped kitchen with cabinets and a hardwood maple floor laid for dancing.

1937 would see the purchase of the city s second motorized truck, also an American LaFrance, 500 gpm pumper with a purchase price of approximately \$7,500.00. This truck, still in good working condition was recently refurbished and is on display in the front of the new fire station, across the street from the old station site, 400 North Main Street.

1945 brought tragedy to the department when two firemen responding to the alarm were involved in an automobile accident at the intersection of 100 west and 300 north. Fireman Ross Forsythe Beck died from his injuries, broken ribs and a punctured lung sustained in the collision which ended in his vehicle striking a tree after the initial collision.

1947 brought on another new fire truck to the department. It was manufactured by the Central Company of St. Louis, Missouri on a Ford truck. It was also another year of grief for the members of the department with the passing of their founder, Charles "C. W." Booth. Mr. Booth had served as Chief of the department for 22 years and held an office with the State Association for some 20 years as well, gaining the notoriety and respect of many departments and firemen throughout the state. During the funeral services as if destined by fate, a fire alarm sounded and several of the firemen left the chapel and made a run, their first without Chief Charles W. Booth.

History of the Spanish Fork Fire Department

by Marvin Banks
(continued)

1950 was the year the department installed a second siren to supplement the original one as about half the firemen were often unable to hear the first siren due to the predictable canyon winds that Spanish Fork is well known for. 1950 was the year a fire at the airport consumed nine airplanes and ten auxiliary engines with a value of well over \$100,000.00.

1952 saw the arrival of yet another pumper for the city. Again American LaFrance was given the bid for the new 1,000 gallon per minute truck at approximately \$22,000.00. The truck has since been re-powered and had its pump rebuilt and a new paint job and this truck is still in operation today and can pump with the same vigor which it had when it was new.



One of Spanish Fork's most spectacular and costly fires to date took place the afternoon of January 8th 1959, that being the Smith Auto building located at 300 North Main Street. Early estimates put the total loss damages at \$250,000.00. Flames from a cutting torch ignited something in the paint shop and there was no stopping the resulting fire which consumed a couple of new cars, a couple of used vehicles and a couple of collector vehicles, or at least they would be collector automobiles today, i.e., model A's and or T's.

The inevitable happened in 1961 when a house fire claimed the lives of a mother and her child. This is the type of situation that no fireman wants to find himself up against, unfortunately it would happen time and time again. The explosives manufacturing plant at the mouth of the canyon would also prove this out on several future occasions.

1983 brings another American LaFrance pumper, capable of pumping 1,750 gallons per minute to the city. 1990 brings another new pumper to the city, only this time Pierce gets the contract for a 1,500 gallon per minute pumper but by now these trucks are an astounding \$250,000.00.

1994 brought another change to the way the department would function. Furnished with a small truck equipped with much necessary equipment our firefighters would assist the ambulance association on calls at industrial accidents and motor vehicle accidents, which is a seemingly never ending situation, with the increased population and traffic in the area and especially in Spanish Fork canyon.

Summer, 1996 was a nice time for the firemen to move into their new and well overdue Public Safety Building, the old station build in 1934 was razed after the new station was occupied.

History of the Spanish Fork Fire Department

by Marvin Banks
(continued)

1997 was the year of the arrival of the city's first ladder truck which has a heavy duty ladder capable of reaching 75 feet and pumping 1,500 gallons per minute. The price, double that of the last pumpers, was \$500,000.00. The truck rolled into town on mother's day which was quite fitting because the mayor was Spanish Fork's first woman Mayor, that being Marie Huff.



1998 saw the department's first female firefighter, Laurie Jarvis Purkey, a sister to two other current firemen and the daughter of a past fireman. This brings us to today, where we are on the threshold of the new millennium, your guess is as good as mine as to what the future holds for the Spanish Fork Fire Department.

It's been my pleasure to share this overview and history of the Spanish Fork Fire Department with you and I hope it was as interesting to you folks as it has been for me to belong to our department for the past twenty eight years.

Thank you.

Researched and compiled by Marvin J. Banks October 1999