

Hartsville Fire Company, Station 93 History

It was Labor Day, 1923, a calm and peaceful day in Hartsville. Farmers and the village folk were at their ease enjoying the late summer warmth after a full day of picnicking and chores.

Suddenly, the blare of an automobile horn shattered the quiet as a touring car raced down Bristol Road, the driver shouting fit to burst his lungs, Archie Darrah's barn is on fire, Archie's barn is burning!"

As the people ran towards Creek Road (now Graeme Way), they could see the long streamers of flame, capped with a towering hood of black smoke, signifying the destruction of stock, machinery and a full summer's crops. They pitted their best efforts against the blaze, using garden hose and buckets, but the barn and its contents were a total loss, a year's labors wasted. After the flames had dwindled to a few glowing sparks and the tired and dirty neighbors had drifted back to their homes, firemen sat on the porch at "Mal" Coffin's home in Hartsville. They discussed the fire, and considered how each of them and their new friends lived every day with the threat of the same disaster hanging over them. The closest protection was in Hatboro, too distant to be of much help.

As a result of the informal meeting the Hartsville Fire Company was formed and the first formal meeting was held on January 3, 1924, and dues were set at \$2.00 annually. Thirty men joined at that first meeting and one week later ten women met with the men and formed the Ladies Auxiliary. The Charter, applied for in 1923, was approved and delivered by the state of Pennsylvania in 1924.

The first engine was a Model T Ford Chemical truck obtained through the generosity of the defunct Jamison Fire Co. The firehouse was a stall in the carriage house behind Mike Boland's Hotel (Hartsville Hotel) at York and Bristol, Roads. The alarm was a battered, hand operated, second hand siren mounted on a post nearby.

Within a few weeks most of the adults in the Hartsville and the surrounding countryside had become members, even though many had to pay their \$2.00 in installments. These willing workers held a series of suppers at the Hartsville Hotel. The fame of these suppers spread and soon they were drawing diners from as far as Philadelphia. So successful were they that a new Brockway/LaFrance Chemical Truck was purchased at a cost of \$3,600. There were other successful fund raisers in that first year including a raffle for a radio and one for a building lot in the Speedway Tract in Warminster, dances and a carnival. Total receipts for the year 1924 from all sources amounted o \$3150. A princely sum in 1924.

Before another year had passed, negotiations were underway with the Neshaminy Warwick Church for the purchase of the old "Lyceum" on Old York Road for use as a firehouse. The "Lyceum" was built in 1849 and was in use as a cultural; center by a Literary Society, Woman's Clubs and a library. It was purchased in 1927 and by the close of 1928 another hall twice the size

of the original had been added. Most of the construction and the finishing of the addition were done by the members. The enlarged Lyceum served as a social hall and firehouse until 1972 when a new station was built for \$132,000 on company owned property on the New (Old) York Road (RT 263).

Dispatch of the company was done by telephone. The phone rang in three places: the Hartsville Hotel at the corner of Old York & Bristol Rds.; the Post Office/General Store across from the Hotel and at the DeCoursey house which was next to the south side of the firehouse. Anyone who answered the phone and received the incident location had to run to the station and ring the bell that was outside. Later, when a siren was added, a switch was installed in the basement of the DeCoursey house that activated the siren. Whoever rang the bell or siren had to wait until the first firefighters arrived to give them the location and nature of the incident.

In the 1967 a house fire on June Rd. claimed the lives of two small children. Smoke detectors had only recently been invented.

Fund raising was important function of the company. In addition to hall rental and catering by the Ladies Auxiliary, all you can eat suppers were held. Preparation for a typical Sunday supper began on Friday night with the hams sliced, placed in foil, the beans delivered to individual homes, cabbages quartered and the hall cleaned up. Two large cans of beans were delivered to the homes of people who offered to cook them along with a box of brown sugar and a bottle of catsup to enhance the taste. Beans were brought to the station all afternoon on Sunday to supply the kitchen.

Saturday saw the potatoes peeled and the cabbages ground to produce the Cole slaw at Christ's Home. Early Sunday was time to remove the fire trucks, set the tables, and make the slaw with the mayonnaise and other ingredients. Pies were delivered and large cans of apple sauce were opened. All the place settings were with china and silverware. Everyone had to wear an apron. The firefighters cooked and the Ladies Auxiliary served the meal. Some assisted with parking in a field across York Road. Everyone had a job and some floated to offer relief. Although the kitchen was small, every dish was washed, dried and returned to the dining hall and staged on tables in each corner of the room. Steam table held the prepared food, the cooking stove was full and the refrigerators kept up. The cooks were responsible to insure everything was hot when it left the kitchen. This was a challenge during the peak 5 PM time.

Ten people were seated at a table and served "family style" (serving dishes were passed from one person to the next) until they couldn't eat and more. As the waiting room filled, the names and number in the party were placed on a list. Names were called to complete a seating for a full table as soon as a table was available.

Everyone was always on the lookout for people who wished to take home ham or rolls by way of a plastic bag. Someone would politely ask them to return the food and remind them the meal was all you can eat at the table. When the lines grew long, others who dallied too long after eating

were politely asked to take their coffee or conversation outside in order to create room. 500 plus was the normal attendance and afterwards there was the clean up, trash removal and tables to put away in order for the fire apparatus to be placed in the station.

It was normal for the treasurer to complain at the next business meeting regarding those who didn't eat their entire piece of pie. We could make more money by cutting down on the number of pies that were purchased. He was sometimes detailed to the "slop" table where the plates were scrapped before going to the sink. He could stand the waste of uneaten pie.

Members essentially committed themselves to the fire company for the weekend.

The Ladies, with help from the men, provided catered meals to weddings and other events. A typical event began on Friday night with the cleaning and setting up of tables as much as possible while the fire trucks were in the station. On Saturday the trucks were removed and the tables arranged. After the event, usually midnight or one AM the hall needed to be emptied and trucks moved back into the building. Sunday was clean up day.

Weeknights, along with anything else that could produce income, were dog obedience classes. These classes were held with the trucks in the building. Having the siren mounted on top of the station excited the dogs before the firefighters arrived for a fire call. The dogs would become very agitated with the firefighters hustling to get their gear on, starting the trucks and leaving with the sirens blaring.

A barn fire at the historic Washington Headquarters Farm in the late 1950's produced a close call. During the height of the blaze one of the stone gable walls fell outward. Fortunately, all the fire fighters were able to escape, but were hit by rolling stone fragments. Just weeks before the fire, all the company officers received new white coats, which became soiled with black ash.

Three fire trucks were parked in the station and all entered through one door. In the early 1960's the Hahn pumper backed straight in, the 1947 Ford backed into a spot next to the Hahn and the FWD parked in front of the Hahn. It was always a good thing for the FWD to start and allow the other trucks access to the door.

In 1964 PennDot claimed a portion of property purchased by the fire company for a new station. At the time the property was purchased, access was from the Old York Rd. two properties south of the old fire station. When Penn Dot planned to widen York Road they by-passed the old Hartsville Community and chose to take a few new homes that had been built on Bristol road east of the Old York Road. Thus, the company gained frontage on the new 4-lane York Road.

The company has progressed steadily since those early days, struggling in the bad years, storing fat in the good ones. Fund raising was a priority in the early years with soliciting, mailings and social events. Claim bakes were held in the summer at the Fetzer Greenhouse property on North York Rd (Rt 263), hall rentals, dances, turkey shoots, golf events to name a few. A Fire Tax instituted in 1966 and temporarily eliminated the need for fund drives, assuring a stable financial

situation. Technological advances in fire apparatus and safety improvements sent the price of fire apparatus soaring. The 1947 Ford pumper cost \$7,600. By 1972 a standard Mack pumper cost \$45,000 and the 1993 Pierce Sqrut cost \$323,000. In 2011 the KME Snozzle cost \$610,000. These numbers would have staggered the founding members.

Robert (Bob) Roberts collapsed at the scene of a dwelling fire in Warminster on September 17, 1972. Bob had recently retired from the U.S. Air Force and joined the fire company to spend time with his son Gary. Gary was an active firefighter. Bob died of an apparent heart attack.

On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary the company hosted the Bucks County Firemen' Parade. It was also a housing for the new Mack CF engine and the dedication of the new fire station. In addition, arrangements were made to sponsor the Competition teams from Long Island, NY. At the awards ceremony came to an end a hotrod from the Hicksville, NY Fire Dept. made a demonstration run southbound on York Rd. as the Warminster Police closed the road. It was outrageously fast and noisy as the accelerated, skidded to a near stop, began their hose layout and shot a water stream at a make believe target. All within at 10 seconds.

These competitions are held weekly and had appeared on ABC's Wide World of Sports. Permission was obtained from the U.S. Navy to erect 5000 temporary stands along a secondary runway. Seventeen teams arrived on Friday night for Saturday's competition. A temporary scaffolding bridge was placed on the runway and a temporary hydrant. A full house watched extremely entertaining event as Hartsville members provide the track crew.

In 1975 a small Chevrolet box truck was purchased to carry an eight storage cylinder cascade unit and breathing air cylinder fill station. Storage cylinders were initially filled at the Second Alarmer's building in Willow Grove. This vehicle was the first in the County to re-fill breathing air cylinders at the fire scene. A compressor was soon bought and installed in the station. A fill hose connected the compressor to the cylinders. When a Saulsbury/Hahn Special service apparatus was ordered in 1985 the air compressor was installed on the apparatus. George Rounds designed a novel idea for the breathing air. Four cylinders would be mounted on each side of the truck body to equalize the weight, but the air coming from the compressor would never be placed directly into the cylinders worn by firefighters. Through the use of a 4-way valve, storage cylinders on one side of the truck were separated from those on the other side. The 4-way valve allowed one side to be filled from the air compressor as the other side was used to transfer air to the fill station. By doing this all of the breathing air produced was tested for CO and moisture before it passed to the fill station. The 4-way allowed the operator to switch sides when the pressure became too low with the compressor continuing to produce air. Power for the air compressor's electrical motor was supplied from the PTO driven generator or from the station power. This allowed the air compressor to be run inside the station without running the diesel motor. The Hahn chassis was replaced with a Spartan chassis in 2005 by Swab Wagon Company of Elizabethville, Pa.

A second CF Mack engine was purchased in 1977 from Central Florida Mack. Dale Hall, Homer Hall and Ed Pfeiffer flew to Florida to check out the truck. Since it was a stock unit, it was available immediately with automatic transmission, 1250 GPM pump, 500 gallon tank, high side compartments and crosslays. It was delivered a couple months later and lettered to match the existing (stick shift) Mack.

In the early 1980's there were three engines and a mini-pumper in service. Alsace Manor Fire Company of Burks County experienced a devastating fire that destroyed their station and apparatus. The company decided to loan them the Hahn engine. After speaking with Alsace Manor, Chet Kratz and Ed Pfeiffer delivered the truck to them on the Saturday after their fire. The Alsace Fire Chief was in tears when we pulled up and offered to show his drivers how to draft. Several months later, they liked the truck enough to offer to purchase it and the offer was accepted.

Two of the original six drive thru apparatus bays of the 1972 station were converted into a large meeting/training room in 1985. An addition was built on to the station in 1993 for \$165,000 which added a second floor for offices, meeting rooms, exercise room, lounge and bathrooms. We also hosted the annual Bucks County Firemen's Parade in celebration of our 75th Anniversary and the housing of the 1998 Pierce engine.

At 10 PM on November 15, 1999 a boy, his father and grandmother lost their lives in a fire on Darrah Rd. When the neighbor across the street called 9-11, flames were already shooting from the windows. Three of the six occupants were awake watching Monday Night Football. Two children escaped from their bedroom through a window and dropped to the ground. There were no smoke detectors in the home.

Other office changes were done by company members in 2013. These changes brought the lounge to the first floor and moved all the offices to the second floor. Male and female bunk rooms, exercise room and computer room are all on the second floor.

Members took on a challenge in 2010 when they applied to get a donation of a piece of steel from the World Trade Center. What size steel we hoped to obtain and what we would be granted was anxiously awaited for months. Internal planning developed a model to be placed on the south front lawn. After it was approved by company vote, many local companies donated the labor, material and equipment towards the construction. Members worked all summer to get the memorial finished before the 10th anniversary of the bombing of the World Trade Center Towers in 2011. The memorial stands today as a proud commitment of the our members. Names of every Firefighter (343), New York Police Officer (23) and New York Port Authority Officer (37) are engraved on the memorial. It is open to the public during daylight hours every day. A yearly ceremony is held each year to remember those fallen heroes in September.

In 2013 Hartsville became the 20th volunteer fire company in the State of Pennsylvania to receive recognition from the State Fire Commissioner, Ed Mann, for achieving 100% of our firefighters certified to the National Firefighter Standard.