

## THE POLAND VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Until 1923, any house or barn that caught fire in Poland, would burn merrily to embers, unhindered except for the rather futile efforts of a bucket brigade. Every householder kept a bucket on the gatepost for just such emergencies. Summoned by the fire bell, he grabbed his fire bucket and followed by his excited children and dogs, ran to the fire. With other citizens, he formed a line from the creek or the nearest well to the burning building. Buckets of water passed from hand to hand and the empty buckets passed back along the line. Many funny tales are told by old timers about local fires, but all of them remember the time the Hen Hub, a village character, ran off to a blaze carrying a bucket without a bottom.

Insurance rates were so high because of the lack of fire-fighting equipment that few could afford insurance. Property owners had to be philosophical about the ruin which faced them from fires caused by electrical storms, overheated chimneys, or by spontaneous combustion in the haymow. Few were as calm as Marcellus Zedaker who was awakened in the middle of the night and told that his big hay barn was on fire. He went to the window, looked at the towering flames and said, "Well, there's nothing I can do now," and went back to bed.

Finally in 1923, when W. L. Countryman was mayor, 27 village men petitioned Council to authorize a fire department. Chad Johnston was named Fire Chief and, in 1924, a used fire truck, a "Thomas Flyer," was purchased from the City of Youngstown for the price of \$150.00.

This fire truck needed constant repairs, but was able to travel. In 1928, the Chief reported to Council that the truck was unsafe but action was delayed until 1929. By that time, the only way to get the truck up to the Main Street hill was to back it up, because it did not have enough power to go in forward gear. In November of that year, a house caught fire and burned to the ground because the truck could not be started. In desperation, the faithful firemen removed the hose, tanks, ladders, and bells to an old truck owned by the Johnston Co., and answered fire calls with it.

In 1930, township trustees, George Bishop and Henry Fitch, with Mayor Countryman, worked out a cooperative arrangement whereby the township and the village would pay for the truck jointly and it would be used to service both areas. At that time a Seagrave pumper was bought for \$6,500.00. Minutes for the meetings have been lost but a book lists 37 fires in 1944-1945, with five listings for a grass fire that became so monotonous that the minutes simply mentioned, "same place." What the story is on these fires remains a secret.

In 1945, Chad Johnston, the first Chief of the Department stepped down, and Ivan Blackman was appointed Chief. Chad Johnston, one of the greats of the Department, should have full honors, and no doubt did. However, the records are void of any mention. Chief Johnston persistently held the Company together, even when there was no fire truck for answering alarms. He simply "borrowed" the Johnston Hardware truck and used it for some time for fire calls.

Following the appointment of Chief Blackman, the Department membership continued to grow. Council was asked to make attendance at the monthly drills a compulsory matter, and by an ordinance thereafter adopted, any member who missed three drills and/or meetings was dropped from the rolls without questions asked. The

Department also began getting serious about fire prevention, and instituted a program of fire drills for the schools. Regular station duty was also assigned to three-men committees in order to improve service.

In October 1947, the Chief instructed the Department to draft a letter to Village Council for the purpose of purchasing a new fire truck. Council was asked to formulate a plan for a timetable on the purchase. One year later, negotiations were still going on with the Council for the new truck, without any real progress being made. Department members were in favor of a new tax levy to raise funds. In late 1948, Chief Blackman reported that Council announced that they would put a bond issue on the November Ballot for the fire truck. Specifications in anticipation of the new fire truck were discussed. Also in that same year, the Canfield Fair Board informed area fire companies that there would be no Fireman's Day at the Fair. Fred Kridler also resigned from the Fire Department after 25 years; he was an original signer of the 1923 petition. Records do not mention the fate of the bond issue for the purchase of the new truck; however, at one point the Chief did report that progress was being made.

In early 1948, Council began working on a new contract with the Township for fire calls. The Department also sought an addition to the existing fire station. Twenty (20) firemen also attended the State Fire Convention in Canton at the Hotel Belden. In August 1949, Chief Blackman reported on his meeting with Council. In the mist of the report, it was suddenly moved and seconded to ask the Township Trustees for the opinion of applying their Village Fire Contract money for securing two (2) new pieces of fire equipment, "as the present truck should be disposed of." The motion carried. However, when 1949 drew to a close, the Department had no fire truck, no equipment and no new addition as had been requested. However, in 1950, Council began advertising for bids for the purchase of two new fire trucks. The first was to arrive in August of that year. The second truck had no definite arrival date, but was on order, along with "pumping and lighting equipment." The Department planned to hold an Open House when the second truck arrived. A new sign was built by Charles Smith, who with Harold McCrone, erected it on the fire Station. When the second new truck, A Dodge, finally arrived on December 30, 1950, the Department found that it was 18 inches too long for the fire station garage!

In 1950, the Department members also sought to establish a 35-man membership limit, instead of 30, set some years earlier. A check of firemens' ages ranged from 21 to 59 years. Eligibility was permitted for men up to 65 years (without a physical examination). In 1953, ten calls occurred, with no false alarms, which was a record as of that date.

The Mahoning Valley Firemen's Association finally met in Poland on February 10, 1953. At that time, the Department was up to 34 members. A reminder was read out loud at the meeting that the Department's fire truck was to be driven only to calls by a member in good standing, and only members were to man the truck on calls. Apparently, a non-member had recently driven the truck to answer an alarm.

In the spring of that year, the Department was requested to help handle parking and traffic at the county-wide track and field meet that was held in Poland. A golf party, mentioned for the first time in the Minutes was also planned for the Department. The first mention of the Poland's Firemen's Association occurs in July, 1953, when all assets of the Association were transferred in total of the "Poland Firemen's Association, Inc."

Department records also report the use of "Fog" chemicals for fighting fires. These chemicals were tested and demonstrated successfully, as reported by Assistant Chief McMillen.

Fire calls, including false alarms, continued to grow in 1954. In that year, the Fire Department was called for pumping out flooded basements, a perennial Village problem, which tied up equipment. The Department was also called to assist in dragging the Mahoning River in search of a person who had drowned while swimming south of Lowellville. In February, Chief Blackman echoed an order of the past: "All men should return to the station after fire calls, equipment must be checked out and put back in good condition!"

In October 1954, Mayor John Weed Powers and Council wrote an official "Thank You" note for the Department's services in the Halloween celebration, which included patrolling. The Department reacted critically because no mention was made of reimbursement for out-of-pocket gasoline costs or time. In the fall, the Junior Firemen's organization was again proposed, and a committee was formed to report on the matter. Fireman Dale Wegele passed out proposed rules for the Auxiliary Department. On a motion, it was voted 14 to 2 that the Department proceed with this organization. However, Junior Firemen were not to ride the truck. (Some of their fun had been taken away already!). There was also the matter of insurance coverage to be settled for this group. In that same month, the Department records also reflect that a new station bond was to be listed on the November ballot.

By the end of 1954, interest in drills was fading, and Chief Blackman expressed his dissatisfaction and disappointment that members were not taking part. The Chief also announced that the fire station bond issue would not be on the fall ballot. While nothing is mentioned in the Minutes, the deadline for listing was probably missed. The Department also asked Mayor Powers to attend the next Firemen's meeting.

By 1955, pumping cellars had become a regular seasonable job. The Department began assessing charges for performing the service to builders. Fire hazards in the Town Hall and Fire Station were also discussed. Wiring was overloaded, and had to be replaced. Village Council had not yet approved the purchase of a new oxygen resuscitator, which was the key to the Department's first aid service.

In 1956, alerting procedures for first aid and fire calls was changed to avoid extra trips by all men. Fire related emergencies were signaled by one steady blast of the siren instead of the regular siren calls. A new phone number was given to the Department so firemen could call and be directed to the fire instead of going to the station first. In that same year, the Chief also began receiving a salary of \$150.00 a month for his services. He announced that his goal was to get some sort of pay schedule for firemen for calls. The Department also had a committee meet with the Chief at Village Council to discuss the need for a new fire station - apparently the bond issued failed. The Department was able to secure a radio for the fire truck, after long discussions through Civil Defense. The final note for 1956 is that the Junior Firemen helped make an ice skating rink in the woods area.

As the Department continue to grow in the 1960s and 1970s, it found itself caught up in the modern pace of action associated with those decades. The total number of fire calls became too great to list or describe, and the days of hearty oyster stews after a fire alarm seemed dim and distant. The matter of lost Minutes of the Department and

Association also took its toll for the historians in their hopeful attempts at recording key events. Records found reveal that an order was issued that fire trucks not be taken over the bridge on Riverside back of the Cemetery due to the fear of overloading the span. Unruly people and bad behavior on the part of spectators at football game was also reported. Firemen who assisted in handling the grounds and first-aid calls at games conferred with school officials on how these people were to be handled. Junior Firemen purchased a two-way radio for use at fires; Department members listened to its use in a conversation between the Department and an accident scene on North Lima Road. Red lights for Firemen's cars to be used for answering alarms were also approved for purchase by Council. Mayor Tatman relayed to the Department complaints he received about firemen answering alarms - speeding and crashing lights. The Mayor asked that the men not use their flasher lights on returning from fire calls or for police purposes.

In 1964, uniforms were discussed for firemen. One member of the Department offered criticism before a meeting that too many firemen did not report to the truck at fires, but seemed to just go to see the fires. It was also reported that 17 past members of the Department now rested in Poland Riverside Cemetery. Firemen were also typed for blood for possible use in emergencies. Mr. O. Fox, who recently passed away, had required blood, which had been donated by several Department members.

The question of a new fire station continued to simmer. The question of Junior Firemen riding trucks still had not been clarified, as the Department had been waiting five months without a decision from Council. In January 1964, the new fire station was assured per reports from Council, which had returned the acceptance letter to the Federal Agency for funding. The Firemen's Association also contributed \$20,000.00, with funds matched by Village Council appropriations, towards the construction of the present Fire Station, which was dedicated in May 1965. As part of the agreement with Council, the Firemen's Association was given permanent use of the second floor of the station, which had been used by the Village for administration purposes. Age limits were also set at 21 to 65 years for membership eligibility. Those persons over 65 had to pass an annual physical to remain active. Truck radios were also made to comply with Federal Communications Committee Standards at an estimated cost of \$400.00.

A constitution committee was formed to draw up a constitution for the Poland Firemen's Association, Inc. It is not clear from the Minutes when the work was completed, but beginning with the January 4, 1966 Association meeting, the Minutes appeared on new and official letterhead. There are no official minutes for 1965, and evidently the Association was incorporated and became active in the operation of the Fire Department. One noted event in 1965 was the official dedication of the new Fire Station, completed as an addition and renovation of the old Village Hall in the Spring of that year.

In 1966, the Association awaited Council's reaction to the purchase of a new truck, and recommended no further expenditures for equipment be made for the old trucks. The Association also handled the publicity of a bond issue seeking funds for the new fire truck. The Ladies Auxiliary and the Association also assisted in promoting and helping with the Village Centennial, which commemorated 100 years of incorporation. On December 1, 1966, Chief Blackman announced his retirement at the Annual Christmas Party and Dinner. The Chief was first elected a member of the Department at a meeting held June 8, 1926. In his forty years in the Department he served in many capacities. He was first elected as an officer in 1928 and became the secretary. He

served in that capacity until he was elected as Chief following Chad Johnston's retirement in 1946.

Upon the retirement of Chief Blackman, Dale Wegele became the Chief of the Fire Department. Hugh Gunn served as President of the Association, and in that same year, he accepted a used film projector, which had been donated to the Firemen's Association by the Christian Education Committee of the Poland Presbyterian Church. The Association also began the process of gathering photographs of its membership.

That winter, Fire Chief Wegele asked for names of firemen who were not going to the annual ice follies outing. He was concerned about proper fire protection coverage for the Village and the Township area due to absence of men. Mayor Worsencroft also commended the firemen for their many services to the public, and said that it was disappointing that so many of Poland citizens take their fire services for granted year after year.

In 1967, Chief Wegele appointed E. A. (Sonny) Chinowth, Assistant Chief, who had replaced Assistant Chief K. Barnes as Poland Township Fire Marshall in February of the prior year. The Department continued to grow under the leadership of Chief Wegele, and the first of two custom pumpers - a 1967 Mack (the second being a 1975 Mack) - were put into service. The Junior Fire Department, which had been started in 1954 by Chief Wegele, also continued to grow and expand. Members ages 18 to 21 were now called Cadets. At 21, Cadets became full volunteers and were allowed to enter a burning structure.

Chief Wegele retired in October 1978, and Assistant Chief/Poland Township Fire Marshall Chinowth was appointed as his replacement on October 17th. Chief Chinowth appointed Anthony (Tony) Sferra as his assistant. As the Township and Village grew there was a need to expand the fire protection. In 1980, the idea of forming a Joint Fire District was first discussed. Over the next four years it became paramount that the fire service expand.

On July 1, 1984, The Western Reserve Joint Fire District (WRJFD) officially started. The Village Council passed a resolution in May 1984 and the Township Trustees passed a similar resolution in June 1984 forming a partnership with the Village to establish the Joint Fire District.

The Fire District is a separate entity created by the Ohio Revised Code. By law, the name "Poland" cannot be used in the District's title, even though both the Village and the Township share the same name. The Fire District's current name was chosen to reflect the history of the Area.

The WRJFD is governed by a board of five Trustees. Two Trustees represent the Village, and two Trustees represent the Township. The fifth Trustee's position is rotated on a yearly basis between a resident from the Village and Township. The Clerk-Treasurer is appointed by the Board of Trustees.

Station 1, Located at 111 South Main Street, which had been built in 1923 and used as the Village Hall and Library, was leased to the Fire District by the District. Station 2, which is located at 7519 Youngstown-Pittsburgh Road, was built by the Township in 1987, and is also leased to the Fire District. Station 3, which is located at 2040 S. Hubbard Road, was built by the District in 1987.

All firefighters continue to serve as volunteers, receiving no compensation for their hours of service, other than workers compensation. In addition to these duties

regularly associated with fire fighting, there are several areas where members devote additional time and energy. The WRJFD has an inspection and prevention division, with 5 state certified inspectors. It is a member of the Metro Arson Strike Force, and has 5 firefighters who regularly participate in its activities. The District also has representatives on the Mahoning County Hazardous Materials Team. Other department members have specialized skills in engine and truck mechanics, computers, electrical and plumbing work, and general construction. These talents are often loaned at no charge.

Many WRJFD members are also trained in providing emergency medical services. The district routinely responds to automobile accidents and specialized rescue situations where these skills are put to use.

Currently to become a volunteer firefighter, each person must take and pass a 36-hour course sponsored by the State Board of Education and the Mahoning Joint Vocational School within one year of their appointment. Thereafter, each firefighter must complete at least 30 hours of training annually. Training sessions take place on a weekly basis. Each Tuesday night, the volunteers meet for several hours at the various stations to review fire fighting techniques, hazardous material situations, defensive driving techniques, and first aid. Officers and firefighters also attend the State Fire Academy or other seminars on their own time. In July, 1991, Kelly Marie Cramer was the first woman to become a fire fighter in the Western Reserve Fire District.

The Ladies Auxiliary, consisting of firefighter's family members, aids and assists the firefighters in all weather conditions, and purchases fire department equipment by moneys raised at their fund raisers. The Ladies Auxiliary also assists families stricken by fire, by the provision of clothing and food. They continue to have their cookbook sale as a fund raiser. The Poland Firemen's Association also continues to function, although with the formation of the Fire District, its purpose has primarily focused upon preserving the history of the Department, and providing social and entertainment outlets for firefighters and their families.

In 1994, an Explorer's Scout program was started in conjunction with the Boy Scouts of America. We are Post 4111 and our youths' ages are 16 through 18. This program replaced the Junior and Cadet Firefighters program.

As of October 1995, the Department is 55 members strong, and is in the process of drafting specifications for two new trucks, which will likely be delivered in 1996. Like his predecessors, Chief Chinowth also expects that the Department will continue to expand and welcomes all those persons who are interested in joining the District as firefighters. While the Department has changed over its 72-year history, some thoughts, as reflected in the Department's history, have remained the same:

"Courageous men and woman from all walks of life - the well to- do and the poor - the skilled craftsman, and the hard laborer, the clergy man, artist, businessman, and store keeper, all join efforts in joining their community, all helping perform a duty to fulfill a need, as they saw it, and still see; this is the Volunteer Firefighter in Poland, Ohio.

A Poland Volunteer, in his or her best hour rallies against catastrophe and serves not only himself, but others for the good of all. This, then is a creed if there is one, for the volunteer firefighter. And if he sees it as fun and sport in camaraderie as well, what finer welding of talents to the ends of accomplishment can he find. What thanks we owe."

[This article was compiled from previous articles written by Chet Hunt (50 Year History of the Department"), Village Councilman and Chairman of the Fire Committee: Chief Chinowth ("History of the Department through the 1980's"), Current Fire Chief: and David C. Comstock, Jr., ("The Current History of the Fire District"), current firefighter and Fire District Attorney.]



Kenny Barnes, Ivan Blackman, Dr, Jim Preston, Howard Wosencroft, Leo Taaffe



Front row l to r: McMillan, Felger, McCrone, Barnes, Coppage, Patrick, Linden.  
Back row l to r: Cover, Miller, Chief Blackman, Herlich, Hawley, Sanford, Chinowth,  
Fenton, Kalmer, Fox, Smolen.

## FIRE CHIEF EDWIN CHINOWTH

Fire Chief Edwin Arthur Chinowth was born Feb. 26, 1936, in Youngstown,

Ohio. His family moved to Poland in 1940. After graduation in 1954 from Poland Seminary High School, he joined the U.S. Coast Guard, serving during the Korean Conflict. He trained at the Coast Guard Academy and had Petty Officer Training in Connecticut; he was involved with the Florida Air Sea Rescue and had Special Duty at the North Pole. He was discharged from the Coast Guard in 1958. In February, 1959 he joined the Poland Volunteer Fire Department, serving with his father who was also a volunteer Fireman. Mr. Edwin Chinowth became Assistant Fire Chief in 1967 and was appointed Fire Prevention Officer of Poland Township in Feb. 1968. Ten years later (1978), he was appointed Fire Chief of Poland Village. In June, 1984, Poland Village and Poland Township formed the Western Reserve Fire District and Chief Chinowth was appointed Chief of the Fire District. Chief Chinowth is the Coordinator/Zoning inspector for Poland Township.

Chief Chinowth married the former Nancy Yard of Boardman in November, 1961. They have four children: Cheryl, Edwin, Lori and Bruce, plus seven grandchildren. Nancy and Ed are volunteers for the Ronald McDonald House and are members of the Zion Lutheran Church of Youngstown. Chief Chinowth's mother, Mae Chinowth still resides in Poland.

## POLICE CHIEF CARL MASSULLO

Carl Massullo presently serves in the capacity of Chief of Police with the Poland Township Police Department and has served in this capacity since 1991. Mr. Massullo graduated from Boardman High School and holds a bachelors degree from Youngstown State University with a major in management. He is a lifelong resident of Mahoning County and resides in Boardman, Ohio. Mr. Massullo was employed previously by the Beaver Township Police Department where he worked in the patrol and detective divisions.



Lionel (Lee) Goodin  
First Police Chief

## **POLAND TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT**

The Poland Township Police Department was established in November, 1977, when voters approved a 2-mill, five-year levy for police protection. Before the Poland Township Police Department was created, Poland Township contracted with the Mahoning County Sheriff's Department for police protection. David Ludt felt that the township would best be served by its own police department. A citizens' review panel was appointed and, after studying the various types of police protection available to Poland Township, recommended that the township create its own police department. In December, 1977, Poland Township Trustees David Ludt, Nick Jeswald and Jack Raupple approved Lee Goodin to be Poland Township's first Chief of Police with an effective starting date of January 1, 1978. On February 1, 1978, Poland Township Police began to patrol the township and provide police services to the residential and business community. The original staffing consisted of a full time Chief of Police, four full-time patrol officers, and four reserve patrol officers. The salaries of the Chief of Police and two of the four full-time patrol officers were paid with township money, generated by the levy that was passed by the voters. The salaries of the other two officers were paid by the CETA program through a grant that enabled political subdivisions to hire additional employees.

The original uniform, which was designed by Chief Goodin, consisted of black shirts, gray trousers with a black stripe, and gray campaign-style hats. The department fleet consisted of two 1977 Dodge police cruisers that were white with a blue stripe on each side. Each new police cruiser cost \$4,500.00.

The Poland Township Police Department was originally housed on the second level of a building located at 7474 Clingan Road, which was known at the time as the "Quonset Hut"; this building also housed the township road department and served as the

meeting hall for the Poland Township Trustees for the monthly and special meetings.

The first arrest was made by Chief Goodin and patrolman William Conti, who had been called to the Sierra Lounge, a local liquor establishment. After responding to a radio call of a fight at the lounge, Goodin and Conti arrested a 19-year-old suspect who was eventually charged with obstructing official business.

The citizens of Poland Township were quick to recognize the importance of its own police force. During the first year of service, Poland Township Police officers responded to 419 criminal complaints, investigated 130 traffic accidents, and provided a myriad of other related services to a growing community. During the first year of service the reserve force doubled in size from four to eight officers.

Police Chief Carl Massullo was appointed Acting Chief, August 7, 1991, and full-time chief on January 1, 1992. Today, the department consists of seven full-time officers and four part-time officers, under the general supervision of the Chief of Police. Chief Massullo changed the police uniforms to the traditional blue uniforms. Duties are divided between a patrol division, under the direction of a Sergeant, and a detective division. The department has a D.A.R.E. officer and a certified firearms instructional officer. During the 1990's great strides have been made toward professionalizing the department's training programs and purchasing additional equipment. In November 1995, the Board of Trustees authorized the construction of a new police complex to house a growing police department.

## **SLAIN POLICEMAN**

On Nov. 6, 1983, Richard E. Becker, a part-time Poland Township Police officer, was in the wrong place at the wrong time. While on routine patrol, he had pulled into the parking lot of Arnold's Tavern to assure that all was quiet. He was gunned down.

Officer Becker went to the location to check a report of a man skulking in the shadows behind the tavern. The gunman was hiding in a corner beside the back door. The single mercury vapor light illuminated the parking lot, but not the building. Becker unknowingly walked past the man in the darkness and continued on to the end of the building, shining his flashlight. A woman yelled, "He's behind you." Becker spun around, and a shotgun blast caught him high in the right side of the chest near the collarbone. He died of a massive hemorrhage from the single wound.

Bloodhounds were brought in from surrounding police departments. A manhunt was launched in the woods and fields, and within a quarter-mile radius of the tavern the hounds led police investigators to the suspect's house. The suspect had fled the area but later died of a self-inflicted bullet wound to the head in a hospital in Winchester, Virginia.

Becker was the first police officer slain in Mahoning County since October, 1981. He was survived by his wife, Sally, and their children, Mark and Michelle.