

100+ years of fighting fires!

Last month we offered a historical perspective of the Police Department, which is undergoing another major change in Granite Falls (in fact, the new organization took effect on March 1st). Part of the history showed the tremendous difference in duties and pay, but it was clear that the commitment to public safety of our law enforcement officers has never wavered.

The same can be said for our local firefighters. For many years, we had only volunteers. In fact, in the 1970s we became nationally famous for the program that enabled high school students to train with, and serve as, firemen in our community.

Their commitment has never changed . . . but their equipment certainly has! Our Fire Department started with a cart that carried a couple chemical tanks, along with a bunch of buckets. The first real "vehicle" was a man-pulled wagon that held ladders (and more buckets), and then a man-pulled hose cart (hoses were valuable only after we installed a city water system with hydrants). Then the town pulled together to buy an actual motorized vehicle and converted it to a fire truck! After that early REO, we had a '20s Chevy, and after that we bought a used 1929 Pirsch fire truck from Snohomish (and we still have that beauty today!). Granite Falls can look back with pride at the staunch service provided through the years by both volunteer and paid firemen, and nothing shows the pride they take in their service more than the incredible array of modern equipment stationed in the middle of town (in a fire station that's over 100 years old itself).

Here's a short article written by Frank Niles, early Granite Falls newspaper editor (and fireman), as the tenth part of a series of historical sketches he wrote in the 1940s.

"One institution of which Granite Falls could be proud for a number of years was the volunteer fire department. It is rather difficult for me to write of it without being too enthusiastic because of the fact that from the time of its organization, about 1906, until I left town in 1918 I was an active member, and at various times held the offices of first lieutenant and captain of the hook and ladder company as well as chief and assistant chief of the department.

For some time the only equipment consisted of a chemical engine and a bunch of buckets, which furnished little means of effective drill. Then a hand-drawn hose cart and a hook and ladder truck were purchased. From that time we had the most faithful and efficient volunteer department I have ever known.

The hook and ladder company was the mainstay of the department and for a large part of the time it was the whole thing. Hose companies were organized but none lasted very long. The hook and ladder drills were held twice a week in winter and weekly in summer, and they were strenuous. Discipline was as rigid as in a paid department, and rigid also were the requirements as to attending drills. Many who joined lasted but a short time, but there was a core of the faithful who stayed with it year after year.

The degree to which the boys were trained is illustrated by a race held one Fourth of July. A small flag was placed on the ridge pole of a two-story building. The company was divided into two teams. Each team pulled the truck 100 feet, took off a wall ladder, carried a roof ladder, and a man went up, grasped the flag and returned to the ground. The difference in time of the two teams was four-fifths of a second!

The boys were equally efficient in handling hose. After the water system was in and hose purchased, only three buildings% burned in eight years. Two of these were late at night - one of them 1400 feet from a hydrant - and the other early in the morning.

The big triumph was when we won the championship for Northwest Washington in a tournament at Everett July 3, 1913. Our team, under coaching of G. W. Hinman, cleaned up every major event, and made a state record in one race! Then we lost a booby race for which we were not scheduled. This was to have been between the two lowest teams. However, when the time came for the race, the other teams had gone home, leaving Burlington without an opponent. In order to give Burlington another chance for some prize money Granite Falls agreed to enter. Our team was scattered and one man could not be located. I was not a member of the team and I had been sick for two days, but I took the absent man's place. The teams started from hydrants three blocks apart and ran one block toward each other, attached to a hydrant and met in the center block. The team which met the other first was the winner. We ran uphill with dry hose, Burlington downhill with wet hose. These advantages were too much for us to overcome and we lost the race.

H. E. Jewell was chief of the department at the time. Soon after this tournament the firemen, the town and the residents united in the purchase of a Reo touring car and converted it into a fire truck-one of the first in a small Snohomish county town. The purchase of the auto showed the spirit of the people. Each property owner was asked to contribute \$1.00 and each renter 50c. Only one man refused, and he owned his residence and a store."

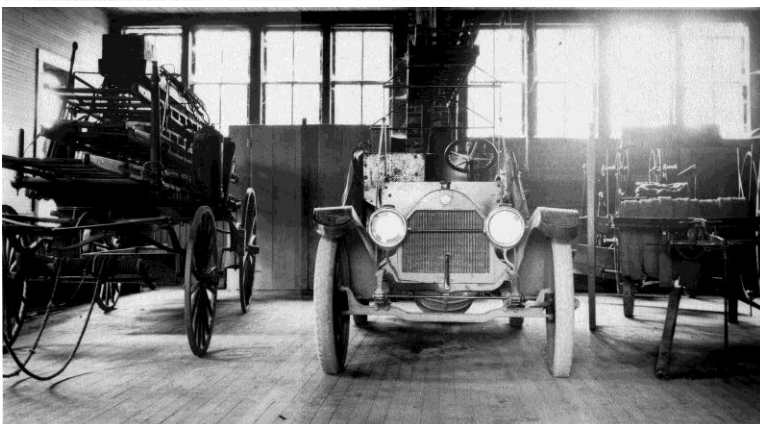
Our police services may be County-provided now, and our fire services have been provided through the county for some years, but our town supports both as "local" organizations. Our willingness to contribute to their success is reflected in other organizations such as the Pilchuck Foundation – committed specifically to support both departments and their public safety mission.



This shows the chemical cart, the "new" ladder truck (man-pulled wagon) and the many buckets involved.



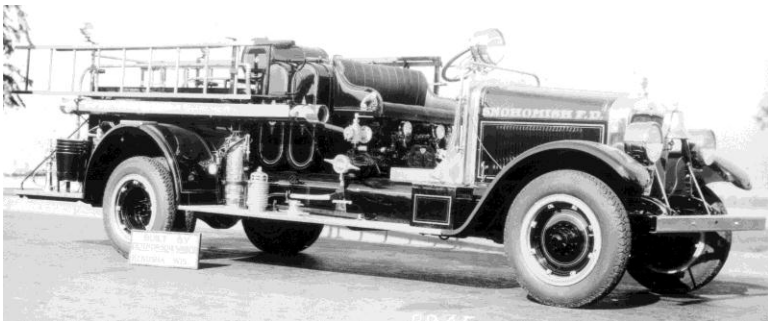
Here the hose cart and the REO fire truck lead the parade, and it looks like the truck is towing the ladder wagon.



The ladder wagon, the REO, and the hose cart are all ready for duty inside the fire house.



City Hall was about to be razed and replaced when the fire dept posed outside in 1940, with the 1920s Chevy fire truck. That's Chief H.E. Jewell at the front of the truck.



The Pirsch was beautiful in this 1929 factory photo, and it looks just as good today!



l-r Jeff Impson, Jay stone, Ron Serles (in truck), Duane Desrosier, and Tim Quillen.

These were five students trained a firefighters. Check out the hair these guys had in 1978! (The Pirsch held up better)