

HISTORY OF
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Springfield Township, after World War 11, began a gradual transformation from a rural to an urban area which eventually led to an industrialized community.

Realizing that the Township lacked organized fire fighting facilities, a group of concerned residents met with the township trustees in the old Township Hall, on School Street, February 14, 1948, for the purpose of determining if it would be possible to establish a volunteer fire department.

Mr. J.J. Patterson, Mr. Fred Yunker and Mr. H.R. Marshall were serving as trustees at this time, and they highly approved of establishing a volunteer fire department. After a lengthy discussion, it was mutually agreed to that if \$3,500.00 could be raised by public donations, the township could allocate the sum of \$3,500.00 over a three year period, from its General Fund, having an annual budget of approximately \$4,000.00 at this time.

A campaign, spearheaded by five committee members and volunteers circulated petitions through-out the township soliciting pledges which ultimately produced \$3,520.00 of which \$3,000.00 was given to the trustees to apply on a fire truck, with the balance being spent on fire fighting equipment such as coats, boots, helmets and safety masks.

With the financing of a fire truck reasonably assured, consideration was then given to the creation of a volunteer fire department which presented many problems such as: what is the most efficient type of fire truck for a community that has no community water system; what legal aspects are involved; organization and training of fire department personnel.

With no established township volunteer fire department in the immediate area to use as a guide line, Gene Wells, Fred Yunker and David Schraedly made several trips to area communities, examining the various types of fire trucks, equipment, method of operation, organization and training of fire department personnel.

One of the areas visited was the city of Carey which had just acquired a fire truck employing a new principle of fighting fires by converting water into high pressure fog which produced a smothering effect on the fire.

Believing this type of fire truck was the logical choice for our community, Gene Wells, Fred Yunker and David Schraedly visited the John Bean Corporation in Lansing, Michigan, manufacturer of the high pressure fog fire truck for a demonstration and actual participation in fighting a fire, and were so favorably impressed by its fire extinguishing capabilities with a minimum of water, that it was highly recommended, resulting in Springfield Township purchasing July 17, 1948 a John Bean High Pressure Fog Fighter Truck, at a cost of \$7,133.00.

Faced with not having a suitable housing for the new fire truck, a building owned by the township located on the north west corner of the Gladys Fox property was converted by township employees into a fire station, at a cost of approximately \$1,000.00

On August 2, 1948, the new truck arrived, and the Springfield Township Volunteer Fire Department was established. Members of the Department were: Carl Laubscher, Chief; Wayne Danals, Roy DeVore, Harold Marshall, Loren Payton, Eugene Poffenbaugh, Carl Rupp, David Schraedly, Clint Shrader, Donald Smith, Willis Sowers, Gene Wells and Ed. Ayers.

The Springfield Township Fire Department was called to its first fire on August 3, 1948, at the Robert Mowry property on West Fourth Street. The fire originated in a one story concrete block building used for storage of oil, lubricants and tires. An asphalt kettle explosion was the cause of the fire.

The Mansfield Fire Department had been called to the fire first and soon ran out of water. A call was made to the local fire department at 5:15 and at 5:18 the volunteers were on the way to their first fire. When the truck arrived at the fire, the Mansfield firemen advised the volunteers not to attempt to extinguish the blaze since they believed the fire was out of control, and water should be used to keep wetting down the rear of the Mowry home which was about thirty feet from the burning building. The volunteers, having confidence in their ability to fight the fire with high pressure fog, extinguished the fire, using 350 gallons of water.

On August 10, 1948, twelve members of the volunteers met and elected to form an association to be known as the Springfield Township Volunteer Firemen's Association. The following officers and committees were created:

President	Gene Wells
Vice-President	Bob Armstrong
Sec'y-Treas.	Dave Schraedly
Personnel Committee	Bob Smith, Norm Kauffman, E. Ayers
Utility Man	Harold Marshall

To provide operating funds for the association, each member was assessed 25¢ a month. This policy was discontinued in 1952.

The volunteer firemen, having fought several fires in which the scarcity of available water presented a serious problem, decided it was necessary to acquire a tank truck to supplement the 400 gallon of water carried in the booster tank of the fire truck.

The firemen held a Springfield Township Volunteer Fire Department Day at North Lake Park on August 1, 1952. The profits and donations received were used to purchase a used truck chassis. Robert Armstrong constructed and mounted a 1,000 gallon water tank on the truck.

The Springfield Township Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary was formed in 1952, and in the years that followed they purchased helmets, boots, coats, gloves for the firemen, and equipped the firemen's meeting room with furniture. The first resuscitator also was bought by the Auxiliary. To raise funds necessary to purchase equipment, the Ladies Auxiliary sponsored magazine campaigns, fish fries, luncheons and bazaars.

"Doggie" Long, Sherriff of Richland County, was a frequent visitor at the firemen's meetings, usually making a sizable contribution to the Association fund. When the Sherriff's Department changed their radios, two were sold to the Springfield Township Fire Department at a small charge.

"Barney" Steele, Chief of the Mansfield Fire Department, was also a frequent visitor at the monthly Firemen's meeting, giving the firemen valuable advice in fire fighting.

With Springfield Township starting to experience a sharp rise in residential development in the early fifties, the Volunteer Firemen realized that more fire fighting equipment would be needed, and suitable housing would have to be provided.

Realizing the township budget could provide only a limited amount of funds, the firemen sponsored festivals and turkey shoots over a period of several years, and from the profits derived, purchased a war surplus fire truck at a cost of \$502.00, bought ground for # 1 fire station, at a cost of \$3,000.00, and contributed \$2,300.00 for building # 1 fire station.

In the mid fifties, Springfield Township began to rapidly change from a semi rural to an urban area. Borg Warner and Shafer Valve had located in the township. General Motors was in the process of building a large stamping plant.

To provide adequate fire protection, the Board of Trustees adopted a resolution July 5, 1954, to ask the residents of Springfield Township to support a 1/2 mill fire operating levy for a five year period. The levy was passed by a substantial majority at the 1954 general election. The levy has been continuously renewed at five year intervals. Monies from the levy have provided for the improvement of Springfield Township Volunteer Fire Department and its operation as follows:

Construction of a fire house in 1956, costing approximately \$15,000.00.

Construction of an annex to the fire station, providing a meeting room for the firemen and a Trustees Hall, at a cost of \$17,129.75.

The sum of \$4,129.75 was allocated from the Fire Operating Levy as its equitable share in the cost of the building.

In 1959 a combination "Class A" Volume and High Pressure Fog Fire apparatus was purchased from the John Bean Corp. at a cost of \$15,414.00.

At the request of the Fisher Body plant, a fire watch was established, for weekends and holidays, a fireman to be on duty at all times, starting midnight Friday to Sunday midnight, and for a 24 hour period on holidays, firemen to work a 12 hour shift at an hourly rate of \$1.00 per hour. The present rate is \$2.00 per hour.

Purchased the ground for # 2 fire station at a cost of \$2,500.00 from Julius Soka, March 30, 1961.

On May 3, 1962, contracts were awarded to the following firms for construction of # 2 station:

Don R. Watson	General Construction	\$11,790.10
Russell Ferrell	Plumbing & Heating	4,823.00
Dudley Seltzer	Electrical Work	1,319.00
Driveway, landscaping, siren & tower		4,468.00
September 10, 1962, purchased 4 wheel drive truck from Heisler's for fighting grass fires. Total cost of truck fully equipped was		4,415.25

With the volunteer firemen recommending that a radio base station be established for operation of the two way radios in the fire trucks, a resolution was adopted by the Board of Trustees to meet with the officials of the Village of Ontario to discuss the feasibility of establishing a Local Government and Fire Department Radio Base Station.

At a meeting of the officials of the Village of Ontario and the Springfield Township Trustees held February 25, 1963, Ontario Mayor, Frank A. Stumbo, recommended that the Springfield Township Volunteer Fire Department install a two-way radio base station to be operated by volunteer personnel of the Fire Department, furnishing radio base station service to the fire trucks only.

The Board of Trustees in consultation with members of the Fire Department placed an order with the Motorola Corp. for furnishing of two-way radio communication system April 22, 1963, thus making Springfield Township one of the first fire departments in the area to establish their own radio base station.

All seven of the fire trucks presently in service are equipped with two-way radios and electronic sirens that permit the radio to be used as a P. A. system.

Thirty-four "Plectrons" are in service, currently, in firemen's homes, which are tuned into the base radio station, so the firemen are alerted by a dial tone first, followed by a message informing the firemen of type of fire and location.

Two "Walkie Talkies" tuned to the base and mobile radios complete the radio communication system, representing one of the most complete and modern radio communication systems in the area. The system cost \$13,500.00.

During the period of 1963 to 1968, two old tank trucks were replaced with new units; a jeep truck for fighting grass fires was purchased; a 1948 model pumper was replaced by a new 750 G.P.M. Combination High Pressure and Volume Pumper, and a new 750 G.P.M. Combination High Pressure and Volume Pumper was added to the fleet of fire trucks, bringing the total to seven fire fighting apparatus, representing an investment of \$75,000.00 with the average being a fraction over five years. In comparison with other fire departments on the average age of fire trucks, Springfield Township Fire Department rates extremely high.

In the period from 1948 to 1970, Springfield Township Volunteer Fire Department has grown from a rural fire department with one small fire truck and an old building to house the truck in, representing an investment of \$8,500.00 to a modern fire department with two stations, seven fire trucks equipped with the latest type fire fighting equipment, representing an investment of \$147,500.00.

The Springfield Township Volunteer Fire Department is currently manned by forty-three volunteers, with all but a couple of new members having completed the Fire Service Training Basic Course, and thirty-four firemen have completed the Advanced Training Course, as prescribed by the Division of Vocational Education, State Department of Education.

Excluding the salary received from standing the fire watch, the firemen perform their services in fighting fires and attending monthly training programs without compensation, the exception being the fire chief who receives a token monthly salary as partial payment for expenses incurred in performing his duties, and two other firemen for recording reports and records involved in the operation of the fire department.