

# Iola & Rural Fire Department History

Presenters: Cliff Mishler & Chuck Fritz

March 31, 2014

Lee Halverson introduced the program on the Iola Fire Department, which began with Chief Chuck Fritz. Chief Fritz mentioned that the new fire truck is a 2012 demonstration model from Pierce Manufacturing in Appleton. It cost \$310,000, and with a six-person cab it holds more people safely than the old fire truck. Being a demo, it has about \$50,000 in additions not found on the standard model. The audience adjourned out to the parking lot to view both the new fire truck and the one being retired from service.



- Fire fighters Ben Wasrud, Jim Irish, Tyler Hines, Wes Mork and Joe Barden were present to answer questions.
- Some of the things Chief Fritz mentioned include,
  - The department now has a new thermal imaging camera. It was demonstrated for the audience.
  - There was no fundraiser for the new vehicle, with the Village of Iola and the townships within the fire department district covering the cost.
  - The first truck considered cost \$518,000.
  - This new truck was built in Florida, and it was featured in a NASCAR race.
  - Plans are to sell the fire truck being replaced, which is Engine 924.
- Ben Wasrud presented a list of names to the IHS of those who had served on Engine 924 (No. 4) since the mid-1980's. In total, there were 192 people.

After reconvening back inside the fire station, Cliff Mishler then made a presentation covering the history of the Iola Fire Department. Some of the highlights include the following.

- Sept. 3, 1892: The Iola Village Board creates the 'fire protection committee'.
- Nov. 5, 1892: \$22.62 was paid for the first village owned firefighting equipment, which was ladders.

- Apr. 24, 1894: A bid of \$238 was accepted for construction of a fire "Watch House.
- Oct. 6, 1896: The first fire company was formally organized with G. Amunson designated as Chief. Associates included George C. Taylor (Chief of Pail and Bucket Squad), Albert Weinmann (Chief of Hook and Ladder Squad) and Gilbert Bullickson (Chief of Chemical Squad). Up until this time, the fire department was largely unorganized.
- Dec. 5, 1899: Authorization was given to spend \$1,421 for the steam fire engine from the W. S. Nott Company.
  - Feb. 7, 1900: The Nott Steam Engine had a capacity of 350 gpm, and was able to "throw a stream over the flag pole of the I.O.O.F. Hall from a 3/4 inch nozzle, held by a man standing on the ground." Around that time the department had about 35 members.
- Oct. 16, 1900: The Johnson and Thompson \$1,432.34 bid for the engine house on State Street was accepted.
  - Jan. 10, 1901: First meeting held at the new engine house. Fire company now "entitled to two percent on all insurance premiums in the village."
- July 26, 1913: The Village Board met with Waterous Engine Company representatives to discuss the purchase of the 1912 horse drawn No. 6 gasoline fire engine with full equipment.
  - Aug. 13, 1913: Borrowing of \$2,250 for the purchase of the Waterous Engine was authorized.
  - After service in the Iola Fire Department, it was sold to Hobie Edmonds at Edmonds Dock on Waupaca Chain O' Lakes to be used for cleaning canoes. It was then passed to Hobie's son, Don, at the sale of the business following Hobie's passing. Chet Krause acquired it from Don in the mid-1970s. It was then sold to Doug Olgilve, who was president of Pierce Manufacturing. It was on display until Oshkosh Corporation took over the company. The Iola Historical Society was contacted, but there was no money to buy it and no place to put it until the current IHS fire station building was completed. It was presented to the Iola Historical Society by Pierce on Feb. 3, 2005 on the condition that it is not sold.
- June 18, 1926: The purchase of used Ford Model T truck chassis was authorized. The construction of the fire truck was completed in Iola and put in service that same year.
  - After service, it was sold to Melvin Forseth for \$340 at public auction on Mar. 9, 1944. It was then sold to M. Hasse of Waupaca in 1950, Ward Hanson of Stoughton in 1967, Armin F. Meyer of Madison in 1985, Mike Mazemke in 2001, Chet Krause in 2002 and finally it was gifted to the Iola Historical Society in 2005.
- Feb. 2, 1931: Shortly after this date, the fire calls record book indicates rural calls being responded to. Up until this time, rural areas were not covered due to the difficulty of drawing water.
- Apr. 30, 1942: The purchase of a used 1938 long wheel base 1-1/2 ton REO Speed Wagon chassis was authorized for a price of around \$350. The cost of a centrifugal pump, booster tank, and other manufactured parts was about \$300.
  - First of 24/26 fire trucks crafted by R. I. Anderson in his State Street shop.

- Feb., 1976: The REO fire truck was taken out of service. It was sold to Chet Krause for \$1,650 at a public auction held in July 1976 during the Lola Old Car Show. It was gifted to the Lola Historical Society in 2005.
- May 28, 2007: A replication of the 1901 Lola Firehouse was dedicated as a \$150,000 Lola Historical Society project.
- A number of questions were asked by the audience.
  - Doug Watson asked about chemical fire fighting. It was a method of using chemicals along with water to put out fires.
  - Leonard Haroldson asked about the whereabouts of the Jeep with the little trailer. No one knew.
  - Charlie Thompson asked if the fire department had its own stables. As far as Cliff knew, the fire department did not have its own horses, so they had to be borrowed from local people.

Chief Fritz took over the presentation. He started with the department in September of 1976. He noted that the REO fire truck was not in service at that time. The fire & rescue department now has twenty-seven members. The fire service area is roughly 216 square miles and covers Lola (both the Village and the Town) as well as the townships of Helvetia, Harrison and New Hope (in Portage Co.). They get around 60 to 70 calls per year, with most lasting less than one hour. The ambulance service does not cover New Hope, but it does cover Scandinavia. He was involved with putting together a PowerPoint presentation for village and town leaders for the purchase of the new fire truck. The following slides were covered in the presentation.

- The 1999 Father's Day fire in downtown Lola. It was the worst one he has seen, and it took a number of creative moves to put the fire out.
- Engine 926, which is a 1993 Pierce model. It will now be the main backup vehicle.
- Engine 924 (old No. 4), which is a 1977 Pierce model. It has a gasoline engine, while the newer trucks are diesel powered.
- Tender 922 (tanker), which is a 2007 Pierce model. The term "tender" is being used for the motor vehicles, since the term "tanker" is now used for airplanes that drop water on fires.
- Rescue 925, which is a 1998 3D Freightliner model.
- Brush 923, which is a 2002 Ford F-350. It was paid for by car show proceeds.
- Squad 921, which is a 1998 Chevrolet Suburban. It was bought used.

After the slideshow, Chief Fritz went on to talk about the following.

- It is a mistaken belief that all they do is "save the foundation". They try to get out in less than 5 minutes from when they get the fire call. Many times, the biggest delay is caused by people trying to handle things on their own before calling for help. The department also covers a big area, so it takes some time to get to the outlying regions.
- They practice risk management when assessing how they will fight a fire. The three considerations are,
  - Risk a lot to save a lot.

- Risk a little to save a little.
- Risk nothing to save nothing.
- If a flashover were to occur, a firefighter's only protection is their clothing and a water hose. It costs from \$1,800 to \$2,000 for each person's gear. Once inside a structure, the main strategy in fire fighting is to remove heat as quickly as possible to prevent flashover. There is training involved as to what to do in the event of a flashover.
- It has become standard practice to use Rapid Intervention Teams (RIT's). This is a fully-outfitted group which is only on standby in case they are needed.
- They hold meetings on the second Monday of every month, with training on the following Thursday. They do have a lot of training sessions with the Scandinavia Fire Department.
- They seldom go on top of roofs anymore, since they have found positive pressure methods using fans to be just as effective and safer.
- Chief Fritz discussed the situation where Jamison Kampmeyer was killed in March of 2012 while fighting a fire in the old Abbotsford theater. There was some miscommunication between fire departments fighting the blaze, and a message to evacuate the building was not received in time. The good training relationship between the Iola and the Scandinavia Departments goes a long way to avoid a similar situation.
- All new firefighters now go through state sponsored training. It takes about 90 hours to complete Level 1 training.
- Chief Fritz and Tyler Hines are trained inspectors.
- Chief Fritz is now the longest serving Iola Fire Chief.

A few questions were asked by the audience.

- Why firefighters and EMT's aren't cross-trained? Chief Fritz explained that training requirements are now a lot more complex than they had been in the past. We are fortunate to have both services, since many small areas do not.
- How is the recruiting going? Chief Fritz said it was still ongoing, and two new members have recently joined. The firefighters do receive some compensation for their efforts, even though they are considered "volunteers".