

“Carroll County Firemen Held First Convention in 1924”

Carroll County Times Article for 20 January 2002

by Jay A. Graybeal

From the founding days of the county, accidental fire posed the greatest risk to life and property. Wooden homes heated with fireplaces or stoves and lit by candlelight were frequent casualties. Volunteer fire companies were organized in the larger towns during the nineteenth century to help protect a community from a devastating fire. Despite their best efforts nearly every town in Carroll has a great fire in its history.

The members of the then six volunteer fire departments in Carroll County organized an association in 1923 to promote issues of common concern. The Carroll County Firemen’s Association held its first annual convention on May 15, 1924. The May 16 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper reported on the opening events of the successful event:

“The new association of firemen, known as the Carroll County Firemen’s Association, held its first meeting yesterday in this city, and was a success in every way, and pleased the crowd of people who witnessed all the demonstrations.

A number of buildings were decorated for the occasion.

The session opened at 9 a.m. by addresses of welcome by Michael E. Walsh for Westminster Fire Company; Mayor Howard E. Koontz, for the citizen; and Mr. W. Frank Thomas for the Rotary Club. The response was made by Robert McKinney, Taneytown, in behalf of the association. Rev. J. W. Reinecke offered prayer before the opening.

The business transacted at the meeting was to elect officers and amend several sections of the by-laws. During the meeting Mrs. Charles Billingslea, Mrs. Charles Forelines, and Mrs. Martha Shaw, a committee of W.C.T.U., presented a resolution adopted by the society in regards to all games of lottery. A motion was offered to table the resolution and was unanimously carried.

The old officers were reelected as follows: Dr. E. M. Bush, Hampstead, president; Frank T. Schaeffer, Westminster, vice president; Horatio R. Wentz, Lineboro, secretary; Walter A. Bower, Taneytown, treasurer; Meade Ohler, Westminster; Wm. C. Sharrer, Manchester; Edward C. Tipton, Hampstead; D. M. Warehime, Lineboro; Charles E. Gray, Union Bridge, and Robert S. McKinney, Taneytown, executive committee.

Hampstead was accepted for the meeting place next year. The executive committee after the luncheon went into session for the purpose of considering the division of the \$8,000 appropriation to fire companies of Carroll County that was made a law at the recent Legislature, and was decided to divide equally among the six fire companies of the county for this year.

The Westminster fire company in the past year responded to 31 fires, 21 of them being in the country.

At 3 p.m. our citizens were treated to a parade of all the fire companies present. The formation of the parade was as follows:

Marshall John N. Weigle.

Mayor and Council.

Westminster Band.

W.M.C. students in full uniform.

Glyndon Fire Company and truck.

Reisterstown Fire Company and truck.

Owings Mills Fire Company and truck.

Boys' Band of Hanover.

Hampstead Fire Company and truck.

Manchester Fire Company and truck.

Union Bridge Band.

Union Bridge Fire Company and truck.

Alesia Band.

Alesia Fire Company and truck.

Westminster Fire Company and two trucks.

Parade formed on Belle Grove square and Bond street. Line of march, West on Main street to Pennsylvania avenue to Union street, to Main, east on Main to Washington Road, to Green, west on Green to Center, to Main, west on Main to Firemen's building and dispersed.

The successful prize winners were:

Best equipped fire apparatus in Carroll County in line \$25, went to Hampstead Fire Company.

Greatest number of men in line \$15, Lineboro-Fire Company.

Company coming longest distance \$10, Owings Mills Fire Company.

Company making the best time from Forks-of-the-Road to Shriver building, with fire truck, making connection to hydrant, laying 150 feet of hose and throwing water. First prize \$15, to Manchester Fire Company; second, \$10 to Owings Mills Fire Company.

Reisterstown made an excellent run but lost in connections.

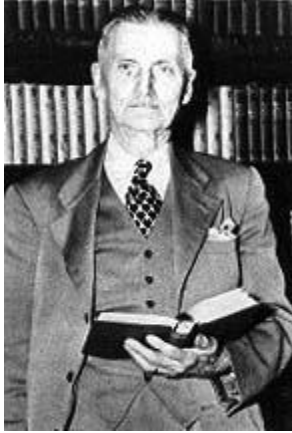
In the evening a band concert was given in front of the building by Westminster and Alesia Bands.

A festival will be in progress tonight and tomorrow evening at the Firemen's Building.

Hampstead Fire Company had the youngest uniformed firemen in line, "Buddy" Blocher, aged 3 years. He is the son of J. Harry Blocher of Hampstead, who is vice president of the Company. Buddy has taken part in two parades.

Another feature of the parade was the hose carriage drawn by two mules of Union Bridge Fire Department."

The annual meeting of the Firemen's Association provided an opportunity for local firemen to discuss matters of mutual interest, to socialize and sometimes compete. The convention also served to educate or entertain the general public with demonstrations or a parade. In 1959 a committee of the Firemen's Association looked back over its history and noted a number of changes. The membership had grown from six companies to twelve; annual fire calls had increased from 100 to 785; and the County's allotment had risen from \$8,000 to \$47,000. Since then a few fire companies have been founded but the number of properties protected by them and operating costs have skyrocketed. Volunteer firemen, however, remain the backbone of the fire service in Carroll.



Dr. Edgar M. Bush of Hampstead served as the first President of the Carroll County Firemen's Association founded in 1923. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.