

“Manchester Firemen’s Hall Dedicated in 1899”  
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by Jay A. Graybeal

The incorporation of local volunteer fire companies eventually led to the construction of firemen’s halls in Carroll’s larger communities by the end of the nineteenth century. The traditional hall provided a facility to house and maintain firefighting apparatus and equipment. The large buildings also served as a place for community events, some of which were fundraisers for the firemen, including dinners, concerts, theatrical performances and parties. An article about the dedication of the Manchester Firemen’s Hall appeared in the September 9, 1899 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

“As announced in THE ADVOCATE the dedication of Manchester Firemen’s Hall took place on Saturday, September 2nd, 1899.

The Fire Department had made extensive preparations for the occasion and arrangements were made by the hotels to accommodate a large number of visitors. On account of a heavy rain early in the morning and the threatening condition of the weather during the early part of the day, few strangers came to town in the morning and at no time during the day was the number of visitors as large as on several previous occasions.

The visiting Fire Companies were met at the edge of town by the reception committee and a delegation of Firemen, and headed by a band of music, were escorted to the new hall from whence they were distributed through town and dined and entertained by the citizens.

At 1:30 p.m. all were assembled at the hall. At 2:30 Chief Marshal Nelson Warehime, with a corps of assistants, formed the procession on York street and paraded through the several streets of the town in the following order: Alesia Band; open platform spring wagon carrying fourteen young misses dressed in white, carrying a banner bearing the inscription—‘Oh don’t you see, we represent the age of the M.F.D.’; carriage containing the speakers and master of ceremonies; Manchester truck and ladder, drawn by firemen; Manchester Engine, drawn by two horses; Manchester Band; Union Bridge Fire Company; Westminster Drum Corps; Westminster Jr. Fire Company No. 1, truck and ladders; Westminster Jr. Fire Company No. 2, truck and ladders; Westminster Fire Company; Westminster Reel.

Upon returning to the Firemen’s Hall all were dismissed except the Union Bridge Company and they gave an exhibition drill, to the delight of many hundred persons who witnessed it. The evolutions were made with such a degree of precision as to elicit repeated applause, and at the close they were given three hearty cheers.

Next in order was the dedication exercises, in which the following program was observed, B. F. Crouse, of Westminster, in the capacity of master of ceremonies:

Music by Alesia Band; prayer by Rev. S. M. Roeder, pastor of Trinity Reformed Church; singing, America, by a select choir, Miss Ida Roeder presiding at the organ; dedication address by Chas. E. Fink, Esq., of the Westminster bar; music by the band; address by William H. A. Hamilton, Esq. of Hagerstown, ex-president of the Maryland State Firemen’s Association; music by the band; doxology by all; benediction by Rev. C. M. Eyster, pastor of Emanuel Lutheran Church. The exercises were interesting. The address of Mr. Fink was an able production and well received. Mr. Hamilton’s address was more in a

humorous vein, and was very much enjoyed. One of the most attractive and pleasing features of the parade was the Jr. Hook and Ladder Companies. Each company had a well made and neatly painted truck, with full outfit, and each a different style of uniform.

The hall dedicated fronts on Main street in the business part of the town; is a weather boarded building, 20 feet front by 45 feet deep, two stories and mansard roof. The first floor is cement for engine and truck. The front part of the second story is an elegantly furnished parlor, and the back part is office and room for holding meetings of the company."

In an ironic twist of fate, the Manchester firemen lost their hall to a June 21, 1921 fire. The men had helped to fight a devastating fire in nearby Hampstead the day before and had not yet been able to replenish their chemical apparatus. The story was front page news in the June 24th issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper and included a list of structures lost in the fire:

"Headquarters of the Manchester Fire Engine and Hook and Ladder Company, the office of the Dug Hill Fire Insurance Company, seven residences, a garage, four barns, seven automobiles, one motorcycle, the outbuildings of three homes, a horse and three hogs were destroyed, and a large building occupied by the Manchester bank and store, one dwelling and the public school were damaged. Telephone communication with the town was cut off. Manchester's only fire protection is a chemical engine and this apparatus was put out of service at the Hampstead fire, leaving the town unprotected."

The present Manchester Firemen's Hall is a masonry structure built shortly after the 1921 fire. The writer has many fond memories of visiting the hall as an elementary school student and bowling in the cellar bowling alley during birthday and scouting parties.



*Construction of the Manchester Firemen's Hall was well underway when this image was taken on December 29, 1898. The firemen were unable to save their building when fire ravaged Manchester on June 21, 1921. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Mrs. Ed Jordan, 1988.*