

For over 50 years, from the time of its founding until the purchase of what could be called Perrysburg's first fire engine, our town depended on the old-fashioned bucket brigade to put out fires.

Many early homes and business buildings were built of wood and over the years there were many destructive fires. One of them, in 1838, caused Village Council to pass an ordinance creating our first fire department. It was all volunteer, of course. Before the volunteer brigade was organized, it was expected that everyone would keep a fire bucket handy, and upon hearing the alarm (typically church bells ringing), rush outside and follow the crowd, bucket in hand. In other words, anyone fit enough to pass a bucket was a fireman when the need arose.

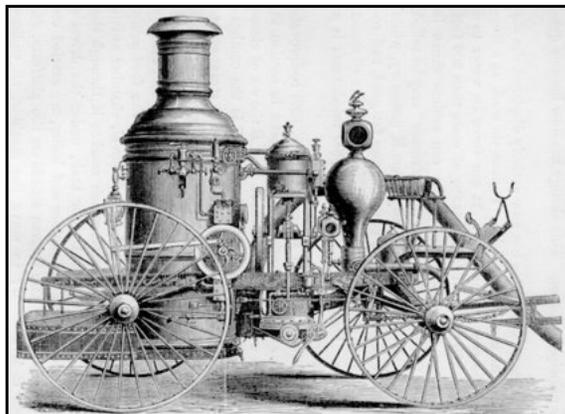
In October of 1871, City Council caused two public cisterns to be built -- one at Front and Louisiana and the other at Second and Louisiana. They each had a capacity of 78 barrels of water and were filled from the river by a pump used by the railroad to supply water for their steam locomotives.

These cisterns came about because of the earlier loss by fire of more than 4,000 cords of wood used to fuel the trains that ran along the present tracks on Third Street.

This fire precaution was fine for the downtown area, but for houses elsewhere in town, there was no such easy supply of water. When a house caught fire someone had to frantically fill buck-

ets from the nearest private well, and more often than not the unfortunate owner suffered serious or total loss.

In April of 1872, at 3 o'clock in the morning, a fire started in a barrel-making shop between Walnut and Cherry just south of Third Street. About two acres of nearby ground were used to store wooden barrel staves and other combustibles stacked up to 10 feet high between two stave mills. This material caught fire and the cooper shop, most of the staves and two houses were destroyed before the fire was brought under control.



An 1875 Latta Steam Fire Engine

All the while there was a strong wind and just after noon that day sparks from that fire flew up and caught a barn on fire (nearly everyone in town had one), then still another house. Embers from this then fell on the old county court house located where the Municipal Building now stands, and before long another 15 to 20 buildings in the neighborhood were aflame. Most of

these fires were put out with great effort, but the court house burned to the ground.

This terrible experience prompted the town to buy a used hand-pulled & pumped, fire engine (probably similar to the one shown on the cover panel) and 500 feet of hose. The engine was a cumbersome thing that weighed over 3,500 pounds. About all the men that could lay their hands on the 150-foot tow rope were needed to move the monster through the unpaved streets, sometimes in mud two or three inches deep.

Early in 1873, after a downtown fire, the town got a new hook and ladder truck delivered here by river steamer. The next year a new steam fire engine happened to be in town to demonstrate its ability to throw water when in the early morning hours, the church and school bells rang out alerting everyone that a barn at the rear of the brick building just west of Hood Park had caught fire. The demonstration engine was fired up to help, but the Village didn't own enough hose to reach the fire and what it had was in poor condition and kept bursting and having to be patched. And again, a strong wind arose. Before it was all over, a grocery store, hardware store, tailor shop and a bed springs factory had burned down.

As the years went by, organized fire companies of volunteers existed, but they didn't always last. In between, major fires made local history when in 1891 five downtown stores went up in

flames, and the next year a grain elevator on East Third Street burned and high winds scattered burning debris as far as three and four blocks away. A fire engine from Toledo was loaded on a freight train to be sent here to help but the order to ship it was cancelled when the flames were finally brought under control.

In 1892 one of our early volunteer fire companies had uniforms consisting of rubber coats, boots and helmets. Following a fire in 1904, in which at least four Louisiana Avenue businesses were burned out, Council considered laying a water main large enough to supply six hydrants on the downtown main street, but they were



Horse Drawn Steam Fire Engine

finally convinced to install a village-wide water system which pretty well ended Perrysburg's concerns about serious fires.

Today, fire hydrants are located throughout town; however, the pressure and flow in some areas is restricted by the small pipe size.



Self-propelled Steam Fire Engine

Things You Should Know About Perrysburg, Ohio

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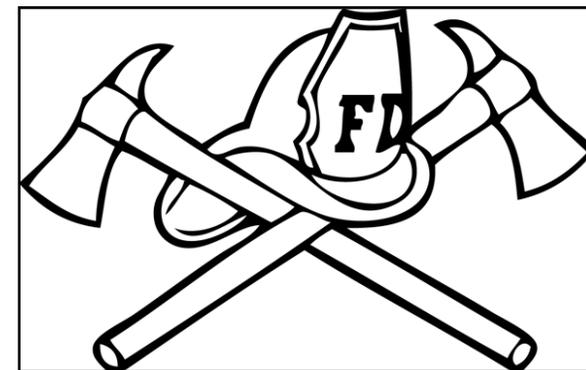
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FIRE FIGHTING Perrysburg's History



An Early Hand Pump Fire Engine



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