



Dix Hills Fire Department
The Early Years

By Ex-Chief Perry D. Hatch

Introduction

The following historical account was written and presented to the Department in 1996 by Ex-Chief Perry Hatch. It chronicles the Department's formative years, as well as the obstacles it had to overcome into the mid 1950's.

Ex-Chief Hatch recognized the importance of recording the history and evolution of the department for all future members. This well written narrative, relating his first hand experiences during those earliest years, is truly a gift passed along to each of us.

It is now presented to you, unedited and exactly as written, in order to retain its original sense of history and tradition. At several points in the narrative, photos have been added to provide a visual understanding of equipment, locations and events during those early years.

Dix Hills Fire Department

The Early Years

Looking at the Dix Hills Fire District today, it is hard to imagine what it was like back in 1947. Dix Hills was totally rural then, heavily wooded, interspersed with several large estates and farms. Its main road was Deer Park Avenue, a north/south two-lane road connecting the towns of Babylon and Huntington. Other roads were Vanderbilt Parkway, Half Hollow Road, Old Country Road, Caledonia Road, Wolf Hill Road, DeForest Road and Burr's Lane. In the south, Carll's Straight Path and Pine Acres Boulevard. There was one school; an elementary called the Hills School, located opposite and slightly north of Station #1 on Deer Park Avenue. There were no commercial or retail business, no municipal water, no fire hydrants and no fire protection except what was furnished by the New York State Conservation Department to fight brush and forest fires. This consisted of a small pick-up truck carrying Indian tanks, shovels, rakes and brooms manned by Ranger Fred Goldsmith and occasionally, his young assistant. Bear in mind that the ranger's territory covered most of western Suffolk County.

Dix Hills was spectacular in the springtime and folks came for miles to see the wild dogwoods in bloom in early May. It was full of wild life: birds, small game, fox, raccoon and even white tail deer. Summers were seasonably cool, especially in the evenings and the fall of the year was ablaze of color.

With the end of World War II, returning veterans began to discover the Dix Hills area as an attractive place to build a home. The zoning was B-1 (1 acre) and land became available as several land developments

opened up. Also, larger tracts of five and ten acres on existing roads were purchased for home sites. Many young couples bought a plot and built their own homes. Others secured building loans and had contractors erect the dwelling. These were all individual custom-built houses. There were no housing developments as occurred later in the 60's and 70's.

Because Dix Hills and the Melville area were so rural, there was no fire service except from the neighboring established fire departments and only if they chose to leave their respective districts to answer a call. However, with increased concerns over insurance coverage for firefighters operating outside their jurisdictions and in leaving their own districts without coverage, the Boards of Fire Commissioners were obliged to forbid the practice. Remember that this was before the Mutual Aid program was established.

The older, established families in Dix Hills were too few in number to pay for contract fire protection from the neighboring fire districts, so they were forced to buy fire insurance at an "unprotected" rate or do without it altogether.

With the post-war increase in population and the necessity to carry fire insurance as required by the mortgage holders, residents became aware that something had to be done to provide fire protection in Dix Hills.

I believe that the initial effort to do something was originated by Eric Hamilton and a group of older residents including Godfrey Mattson, Walter Mattson, Hugh Bennett, Hener Agnew, John Jones and others whose names I cannot recall. Meetings called early in 1947 resulted in a very favorable response from the area and a charter was secured with approximately forty names and the Dix Hills Fire Company, Inc. was formed. Mr. George Hahn, a Justice of the Peace in the Town of

Huntington, who lived in Huntington Station and was a member of the Huntington Manor Fire Department, rendered invaluable legal and technical services to the new fire company during this time. Judge Hahn, as he was called, was a lawyer and was well known in Huntington. To my knowledge, he offered his legal services free of charge.

Meetings of the fledgling Fire Company were held in the auditorium of The Hills School. Eric Hamilton was elected the first Chief and Charles Schneider, Assistant. I do not recall who the first secretary was, but I believe Roy Sanders was elected Treasurer.

As may be imagined, the first priority of the newly formed company was the raising of funds and the purchase of fire-fighting equipment. The charter and the papers of incorporation established all of the area of the southern part of the Town of Huntington designated unprotected with the exception of the area covered by Melville, whose company was also formed in 1947. This area, which later became The Dix Hills Fire District, is essentially the same today, the largest in area in the Town of Huntington. So the task which those early organizers faced was formidable. It quickly became apparent that the collection of dues and canvassing the district for donations would not raise sufficient funds. At the time, Chief Hamilton and his young family lived in a rented farmhouse on Wolf Hill Road. On this property there was a large unused barn. The barn was in reasonably good condition and a decision was made to hold an old fashioned barn dance in the barn.

In September of 1947, my father-in-law and I were cutting and trimming trees and brush piled up by a bulldozer on my property located at the corner of Deer Park Avenue and Landview Drive. My wife and I had purchased a one-acre parcel on which we intended to build our home. While working, a young lady stopped by with information of the upcoming barn dance that the Fire Company was

holding in late October on Wolf Hill Road and offered me some tickets. I bought two. This was my first knowledge of and contact with the Dix Hills Fire Company.

CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION

-of-

DIX HILLS FIRE COMPANY, INC.

Pursuant to the Membership Corporations Law

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED, all being persons of full age,
at least two-thirds being citizens of the United States, and
at least one being a resident of the State of New York,
desiring to form a membership corporation pursuant to the
Membership Corporations Law do hereby make, sign, acknow-
ledge and file this Certificate of Incorporation.

FIRST: The name of the Proposed corporation is:

DIX HILLS FIRE COMPANY, INC.

SECOND: The purposes for which it is to be formed
are as follows:

1. To acquire and own fire apparatus for use
by the Corporation in the protection of
persons and property from injury, loss,
damage or destruction by fire;
2. To own and acquire land and buildings and
to construct and erect buildings for
corporate purposes and for the use of the
members of the Corporation in connection
with the housing of fire apparatus and
for the providing of a place of meeting
and recreation for the members of the
Corporation.

THIRD: The territory in which its operations are

1.

1948 - Certificate of Incorporation

Subsequently, my wife and I rode out from Wantagh in Nassau County and attended this dance. We had to park on one side of Wolf Hill Road and walk up to the barn. There were several men assisting with the parking. There were cars parked from the barn at the top of the hill all the way down to Deer Park Avenue. It was soon evident that a great deal of effort went into this affair. It was well attended; good barn dance music and the members served food and refreshments. We had a great time and met people who would be our neighbors. I later learned that the fire company raised approximately \$1,000.00 on this affair; a huge success at the time!

The next step was the purchase of the company's first piece of fire apparatus. With the assistance of Judge Hahn, the company acquired a 1924 chain driven Mack 500 g.p.m. pumper. This truck was being retired by the Huntington Manor Fire Department because of its age. The company paid \$800.00 for the truck.

I should mention at this point that, because of World War II, no fire apparatus for civilian use was manufactured for about 4 years. All the surrounding fire departments were in the process of ordering and acquiring new apparatus to replace equipment that had been used past its normal useful life because of the war. This old Mack was a challenge to drive, especially on some of the hilly Dix Hills terrain. It had the traditional bulldog Mack front end, open cab and of course, no power steering, manual mechanical brakes and no synchromesh transmission. If you missed down shifting on a hill and lost forward motion; you found yourself crawling up the hill with siren wailing in first gear at about 4 to 5 miles per hour. I know because it happened to me!

The truck was equipped with a small booster tank (approximately 300 gallons). It had a positive displacement (piston) type 500-g.p.m. pump that performed well, especially in draft. The six-cylinder motor was equipped with dual ignition, both electric start and magneto for hand

cranking. Most of the time, we had to hand crank the monster, especially in cold weather. When it did start, it could be heard for miles because it had no muffler. Normal conversation was impossible when it was running. Equipment on the truck was minimal, a couple of hundred feet of booster hose on a hand crank reel, several hundred feet of 2 ½ inch and 1 ½ inch hose, straight and navy nozzles, two ten foot lengths of hard suction hose, a wooden roof and a short extension ladder. But, the company was now in business.

The next step was housing for the truck. It was first kept in the barn on Wolf Hill Road at Chief Hamilton's residence. Hamilton advised the company that the Wolf Hill property was for sale and proposed that the company acquire the property and establish a fire house there using the barn to house the equipment until such time as the company could build a proper building. This proposal had merit except for several major flaws.

First, the location favored the very lightly populated northern part of the district. Second, since the majority of the company membership lived in the more populated southern section, response to farms would be extremely hampered due to the distance. Third, Wolf Hill Road was narrow, hilly and was not even paved on its westerly end.

Because of the foregoing, the majority of the membership did not favor the Wolf Hill Road proposal and opted for a more southerly or central location. This difference of opinion led to a heated debate and finally a serious rift in the company.

I attended my first meeting of the company at the Hills School in late 1947 with the intentions of joining. The debate over the Wolf Hill Road proposal was the topic of the evening and it was heated. No one recognized me nor was I invited to join the company. I kept my counsel and listened.



1951 - 1st Dept Photo with 1924 Mack Bulldog Pumper

As a result of the inability of the company to resolve the issue, Chief Hamilton and about ten or twelve members resigned. Assistant Chief Charles Schneider became Chief and John Perron became Assistant Chief. The Mack pumper was moved to Chief Schneider's property on Pine Acres Boulevard.

It might be interesting to the reader of this account to learn of the method by which fire alarms were handled. Persons reporting a fire would call the telephone operator and ask for the Dix Hills Fire Company. The operator would connect the caller to Chief Schneider's home. The person answering would take the information (i.e. type of fire and location). A call with this information was then relayed to the homes of several firefighters.



1951 - Ladies Auxiliary

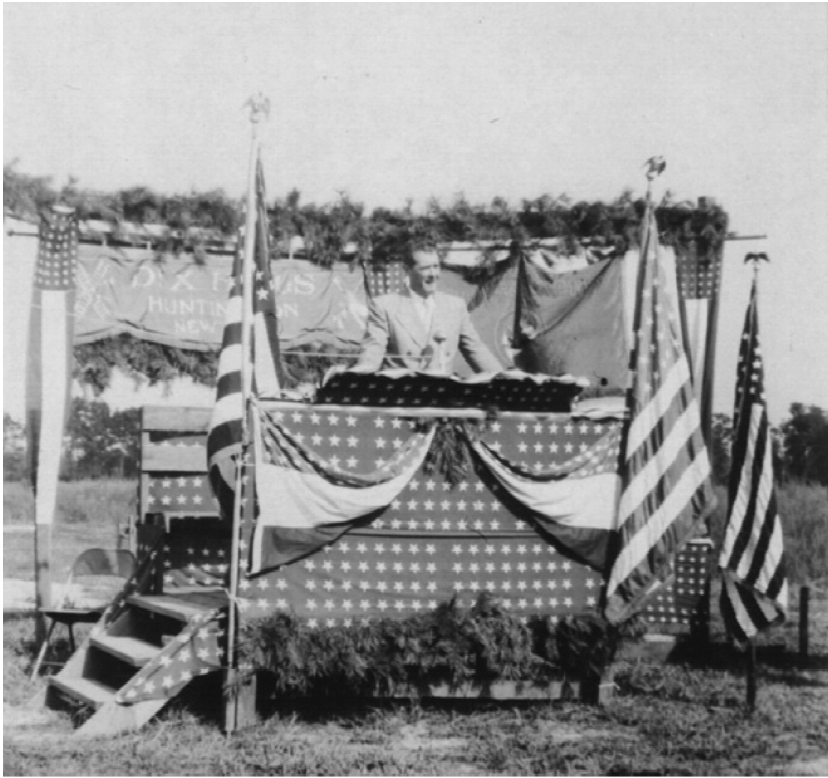
The initial call was usually made by the Chief's wife, Malvina Schneider, who would call several women, such as Gladys Jester, Freda Kuhne and Frances Randazzo, who in turn would call others on a prescribed list. Calls for brush or forest fires were reported to Chief Schneider's home by persons manning the Forest Service tower in northerly Bay Shore. This system, all volunteer, was slow but effective. Each firefighter received the type and location of the fire before he left his home. Firefighters living in the Carll's Straight Path, Pine Acres Boulevard area, generally reported to Chief Schneider's home and manned the truck.

This system prevailed during 1948 during which time continued efforts were made to raise money. I attended my second meeting of the company in early 1948 at the Hills School. This time, I was accepted into the Company and was appointed Secretary at that same time! Due to the efforts of Assistant Chief John Perron, a second fire truck was secured from one of the departments in the Moriches area. This was a

vintage, early 1920's Ward LaFrance, wooden wheeled, light pumper. This truck was donated and it was not very dependable. In the meantime, with fall coming on, housing for the Mack pumper was needed and arrangements were made with Dan Baldwin to house the truck in one of his buildings on the east side of Deer Park Avenue, just north of where Station #1 stands today. As a result of Dan Baldwin's generosity and his continued interest in the progress of the fledgling fire company, a two-acre parcel of land was purchased on the east side of Deer Park Avenue, with 100' frontage by approximately 800' deep. The long narrow strip was conveyed by Mr. Baldwin to the fire company for a cost, I believe of \$500.00 and this became the Dix Hills first firehouse.

The company continued its' efforts to raise funds. One method was to hold a "Tag Day" on the major summer holidays, such as Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day. Members would be posted at Jericho Turnpike, East Deer Park Avenue, Vanderbilt Parkway, Commack Road and where Deer Park Avenue and Straight Path intersect. The traveling public would be solicited as they stopped for traffic lights or stop signs. Since the practice was, to say the least, dangerous, a small committee visited the NYS Police barracks in Commack and advised them of our intentions to hold a "Tag Day" with the date and locations. While the troopers could not grant permission, they did not interfere so long as there were no incidents or complaints and that we did not unreasonably hamper traffic.

By the end of 1949, the company managed to increase its treasury to about \$1,500.00. The urgent need was for a firehouse. Much discussion took place at meetings on this topic. Some members felt that the company should increase its treasury before building. Others felt that a start should be made now. Finally, at a meeting held in January or February 1950, a motion was made by John Mead and seconded that the members of the company build a firehouse on the Deer Park Avenue



site purchased from Dan Baldwin. The motion was carried.

Subsequently, a simple building was designed, resembling a large two-bay garage, with dimensions of 30' x 40', including a meeting room on the second floor. The company was blessed with several skilled tradesmen, including masons, carpenters and electricians. These men supervised the construction.

The work was started in February, under severe winter weather conditions. But the membership pitched in willingly and the building slowly began to take shape. The walls were of cinder block. The six

steel casement windows were donated, as were several other items. During extremely cold and windy days, several of the ladies served hot port wine, coffee, soup and sandwiches that they prepared in a large tent erected on the site. I remember the names of some of these women. They included Malvina Schneider, Gladys Jester, Frances Randazzo, Alice Schiller, Freda Kuhne, Velma Stricker and others. These were hardy people and I will never forget them.



February 1950 - Construction of Station 1 Begins

By April of 1950, the building was roofed over and it remained to finish the interior. After the installation of two used overhead doors, completion of the electrical work and poured concrete floor, we were able to move our vintage fire apparatus into the building. It was a humble firehouse but we had built it with our own hands and were proud of it. A small 2 HP siren was mounted on the roof.

I would like to pause here and list the names of those early firefighters who contributed so much toward establishing a fire service in Dix Hills

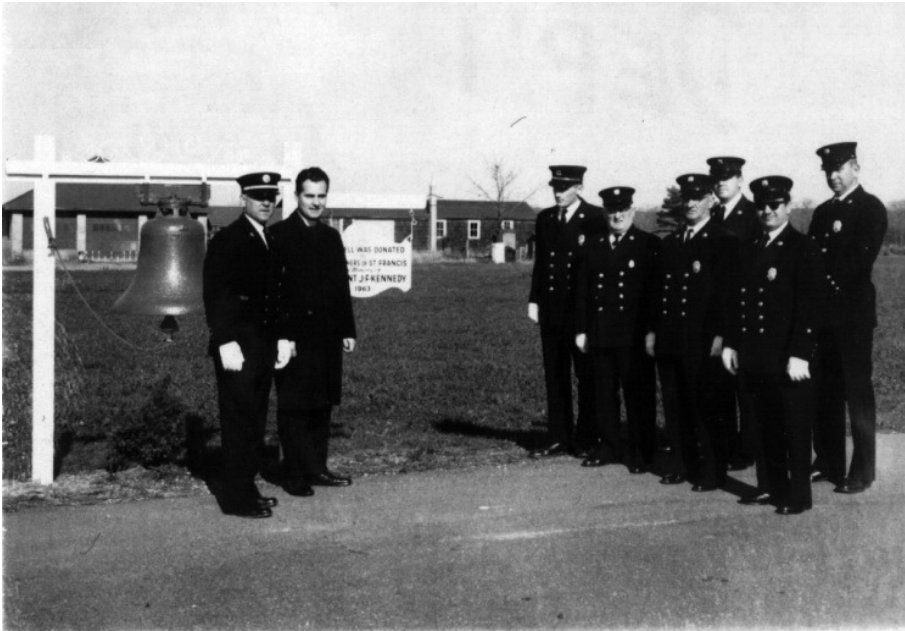
and in the construction of this first firehouse. They are:

Henry Crop	Richard Kump	Godfrey DeBoy
Ken Gusovious	Harry Jester	Harry Jester Jr.
Alfred Kuhne	Fred Kuhne	Eugene McCabe
John Mead	Fred Meditz	John Perron
Victor Pibernick	Anthony Randazzo	Roy Sanders
Joseph Scheffer	Charles Schneider	Steve Scholar
Herman Striker	Wesley Striker	Ben Wreck

The next major problem facing the company was our alarm system, which left much to be desired. The telephone relay system of contacting firefighters was slow and often unreliable.

At this time, there existed a facility located on a large parcel on the east side of Straight Path (Seaman's Neck Road) called the St. Francis Novitiate. This was a Roman Catholic school to teach and train young men to become Brothers of St. Francis. It was a complete residential school with personnel always on the premises and available. One of our enterprising members (and I wish I could recall who it was) came up with the suggestion that the Brothers might consent to serve as our fire dispatchers. A visit was made to the head of the Novitiate, Brother Bernard, who willingly agreed to the proposal.

Accordingly, arrangements were made whereby the telephone company installed a telephone in the Novitiate to receive alarm calls with a relay telephone at the firehouse.



1964 – Station 1 Bell Donated By the St. Francis Novitiate

The system worked as follows:

Person reporting a fire would dial the operator and ask for the Dix Hills Fire Company.

Operator would connect the caller to the St. Francis Novitiate.

The Novitiate would get the type and location of the fire and activate the siren and stay on the line.

The first firefighter responding to the firehouse picks up the phone, takes the information and writes the type and location of the fire on the blackboard.

This system worked very well. It was refined over time and was tied into other sirens as they were installed. The Brothers provided reliable

fire dispatching service free of charge to the Dix Hills Community for years.

During 1950, the company became the recipient of a steel tower, which was installed behind the firehouse. I believe the tower was secured free of charge from one of the departments in the Moriches area through the efforts of John Perron, who succeeded Charles Schneider as Chief. A 5 HP siren was mounted on this tower which is still in service today.

The company also acquired a 1927 American LaFrance 500 g.p.m. pumper from the North Babylon Fire Department for \$175.00. This truck had an open cab, was driven from the right side and had steel disk wheels. It was in very reliable condition for its age. The Wyandanch Fire Company donated a Reo truck (year unknown). This truck had a smaller pump and was basically a hose truck. I can clearly remember that, at any given time, one or more of these old relics was out of service for repairs. Since we had little or no money, the repairs were handled by the firefighters and more particularly by John Perron, Joe Scheffer and Herman Stricker. We called it "the bailing wire Fire Company"!

In the summer of 1950, the Dix Hills Fire Company held its first bazaar and fair. In those days, all of the departments held these affairs. A bazaar resembled a small carnival with rides, side shows, games of chance, food and beverages. The bazaar would run every afternoon and evening for five days or a week, topped off by a "Firemen's Night" which included a parade attended by visiting fire departments. The fair required many hours of time both in the planning and in its staging. These fairs were usually the major fund raising affairs run by the volunteer fire services. As a matter of interest, I believe only Greenlawn continues the tradition in the Town of Huntington today.



At this point, the reader of this narrative is probably wondering: But what about fires? Well, sure we had calls. Most of these were brush or forest fires; some were vehicle fires and some were structure fires. In contrast to the department today, where you have hundreds of fire and rescue calls each year, calls in those early years might number ten or fifteen a month with a really busy month at 20 or so. However, every call was a challenge. With no modern dispatching, no radio communication, no municipal water system and very old, slow apparatus, the odds were always stacked against us. If we were unable to kill the fire in its early stages, we had a bad problem. Consequently, the Chief frequently was forced to call neighboring fire companies for assistance, particularly for structure or bad brush fires. I can recall, as I tore down Deer Park Avenue to the firehouse, praying that we would get there in time.... before our water ran out... before the wind took

control.... before a rotten hose burst or a truck quit. Yes, it was a challenge all right.

The tradition of Sunday duty was established around this time. Because the old equipment required constant maintenance, most of the time was occupied by work on the apparatus. However, the company began a training program. A shallow pit about 12' x 12' was dug some 100' or so behind the firehouse. Used motor oil or old fuel oil was dumped into the pit, set on fire and repeatedly extinguished by the firefighters. By adding old tires and other debris, we could simulate vehicle fires. Several drums of magnesium scrap were secured by Wes Stricker from Republic Aircraft in Farmingdale. Magnesium, used extensively in aircraft construction, burned fiercely and could not be extinguished by water. So, the company practiced with CO-2 and dry powder extinguishers, valuable training at the time. From time to time, because of the rapidly expanding growth in the area, old, obsolete structures became available. These were set afire and much very valuable diversified training was possible. Town and county training programs and facilities came in later years.

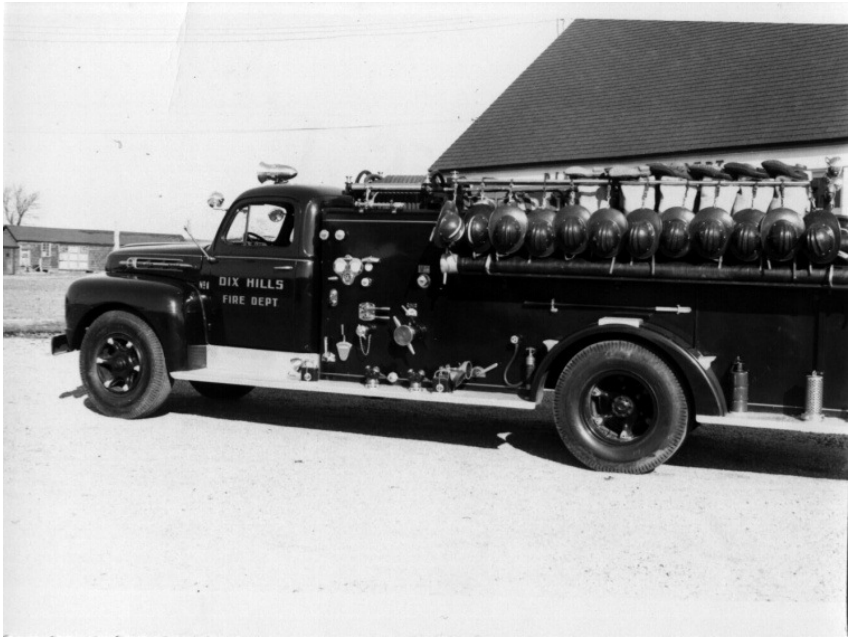
It began to be apparent to us that we could not hope to create a modern fire fighting service on the slim funds that we could generate in spite of our continued efforts. The answer seemed to be in the creation of a tax supported fire district. We now could offer a two-acre parcel of land on which a two-bay firehouse was located, an alarm system, old but usable fire apparatus and approximately 30 volunteers. Once again, our good friend Judge George Hahn assisted us in setting in motion the procedures necessary to create the Dix Hills Fire District as it exists today.

Accordingly, the appropriate papers were prepared and a resolution was introduced and passed by the Huntington Town Board; setting up a referendum in order that the residents of the proposed fire district be

given an opportunity to vote for or against the proposal. The people subsequently voted in favor and the Dix Hills Fire District was established. The town board appointed the original board of fire commissioners to serve until such time as a normal election could be held. The names of these original commissioners have slipped from my memory over the years. However, I do believe that Charles Schneider, Fred Meditz and Alfred Kuhne from our Fire Company, were among them, with Roy Sanders as treasurer. The records at the Huntington Town Hall can be relied on to furnish official information on the entire process, including names and dates.

Naturally, the volunteers were extremely pleased with the success of their effort and wasted no time in petitioning the board of fire commissioners for the replacement of our obsolete apparatus. However, the board was slow to act and reluctant to commit the district's taxpayers to any excessive tax obligation too soon. But, they did agree to replace the aged Mack pumper as a first step.

Accordingly, a contract was signed with American Fire Apparatus for a new 500 g.p.m. pumper. This truck was to be built on a 1951 Ford F-800 chassis equipped with a 500 g.p.m. three stage centrifugal pump and high pressure booster hose and reels. The truck also carried an 800 gallon water tank, 14 ft. roof and 24 ft. extension ladders, hard and soft suction hose, 2 ½ inch and 1 ½ inch hose, Navy type fog nozzles and other related equipment. We could hardly wait for this unit to be built and delivered.



2-8-1

In the meantime, the department (as it was now called) decided to divide into two truck companies. The method by which this was done was rather innovative. It was decided to hold an election for company captain. The two candidates receiving the largest number of votes would become captains of each of the two engine companies. Several candidates were nominated and an election was held by ballot. As a result, Perry Hatch and Herman Striker received the most votes. Striker became captain of Company #1 and Hatch became captain of Company #3.

Co. #1 was renamed Co. #3 as the first order of business

The department membership was then divided into two companies by a simple method quite like choosing sides for a game of baseball. Captain Striker would choose a man and then in turn Captain Hatch would

choose, alternating like this until all of the membership was divided. As I recall, there were no protests or disagreements. And so Companies #1 and #3 were created with Stricker and Hatch becoming the first captains of each company. It wasn't until later that lieutenants were elected.

First meeting of Co #1 Dix Hill Fire Dept
Sept. 10, 1952

Capt Perry Hatch called the meeting to order at 7:45 P.M.

Called for volunteers to be recording secretary
Mr. Calk was volunteered.

Discussion was opened as to the naming of the Company, it was decided to name company - Hills Engine Co. #3

Motion was made by G. Amelquist & seconded by R. Sanders & carried.

Capt Hatch suggested that a training program be organized for the instruction of the men in the company on all points and use of equipment. This training be in conjunction with our Sunday morning detail. The officers would instruct their own detail and draw up the course jointly.

Discussion was opened on the establishing of set of rules & regulations. It was decided that more information would be gathered on how other Dept. Companies were organized, before any definite action would be taken.

Sept. 10, 1952 Minutes of the First Co. Meeting

It might be well to pause here and explain the reason why the companies were designated #1 and #3, instead of #1 and #2. The reason was quite simple. At the time of the election, the department had only two pumpers housed in the new firehouse. One was the Mack secured from Huntington Manor and the other was the American La France obtained from North Babylon, as previously described. Each truck was lettered and numbered in gold leaf. The department names were changed to Dix Hills Fire Department but the truck numbers remained; the Mack was lettered No. 1 and the La France carried No. 3. And so, the two new engine companies were called 1 and 3 to match the existing numbers on the trucks. As the years passed, and the headquarters fire house and new Station #1 and Station #2 were built, the late John McGinty had great sport at our annual installation dinner with "Company #1 in Station #2" and "Company #3 in Station #1". This all came about as a result of reorganization in accordance with the geographical location of our firefighters in respect to the three firehouses.

About the time of the creation of the two truck companies, several new younger members joined the department. Among them were Walter Long, Mike Heidt and Ted Socha, all destined to become future chief officers. Also, a young man named Al Soulagnet, who succeeded the writer as department secretary and who faithfully performed in that position for many years. Also, it was gratifying to find that those early members, who left because of the Wolf Hill Road disagreement, had returned. And so, 1951 found the department optimistically looking to the future.

The spring of 1951 turned out to be very dry. The department was very busy answering calls for grass and brush fires. The first Sunday in May (Mother's Day) dawned clear and dry with a brisk west wind blowing and increasing in intensity as the morning wore on. At about 9:30 am, the department received a call for a brush fire just north of MacNiece

Place, east of Deer Park Avenue. Upon our arrival, we found the fire rapidly gaining in intensity deep in the woods some 100 yards or so north of MacNiece Place and moving to the east, fanned by the wind. We pulled the American LaFrance into the driveway of a house under construction (Carl Woltal's) and stretched all of our booster hose. We came very close to knocking down the fire when the old booster hose parted. The fire raced through the woods to the east spreading as it went and crowning through the trees 25 to 30 feet high. We called for help and then tried to stop it at Candlewood Road and Carll's Straight Path. By now, the front was at least a half-mile wide. We desperately fought to save homes and structures and except for some small buildings and sheds, were successful.

However, even with the help of early arriving neighboring units from Deer Park, Wyandanch, Commack and Greenlawn, the heat and smoke forced us back and the fire moved on. Late Sunday afternoon, some thirty fire departments with some forty or fifty pieces of apparatus and over 150 firefighters, stretched out along Commack Road for several miles and finally stopped the fire. But, not before three Brentwood firefighters were trapped with their truck west of Commack Road. Two of them burned to death as they took refuge under their pumper, which was totally consumed in minutes. One of these volunteers was a professional New York City firefighter. Units were kept on the scene well into the late evening, while bulldozers cut access roads through the smoldering, blackened woods so that hot spots could be wet down and rekindles avoided. Our exhausted members spent thirteen hours battling this blaze, the worst brush fire in the history of the Dix Hills Fire Department.

Fires Scourge 1,000 Acres; 3 Vamps Hurt

Wind-whipped flames yesterday devastated more than a thousand acres of scrub oak and pine in brush fires that sprang up in Brookhaven, Wyandanch and West Bay Shore. Three vamps were injured, one seriously enough to be hospitalized.

Two Melville vamps were injured when they fell off a truck on its way to the scene of the Wyandanch blaze where firemen of 11 nearby departments fought a fire that destroyed 10 acres of woods and left a leveled summer bungalow in its wake.

After it broke out about 12:30 PM at Jamaica Ave. and 28th St., the Wyandanch fire raged for five and a half hours, and swept south to Straight Path and east to 21st St. where high tongues of flame remained a constant menace to the parish hall of Our Lady of Miraculous Medal Church.

Vamps, Cops on Job

Besides fire police, eight state troopers commanded by Sgt. William Mrazek and eight state parkway cops led by Sgt. John Bonser circled the area to control traffic and the curious. As a precautionary measure, no children were let out of the nearby Wyandanch School when the 3 PM whistle blew.

Assisting Wyandanch Chief John McGee's men at the scene were vamps from Babylon, West Babylon, North Babylon, East Farmingdale, Dix Hills, Lindenhurst, Brentwood, Melville, and Deer Park.

Melville vamps Conrad Herman and Edward Reynolds were rushed to Huntington Hospital by the Deer Park Rescue Squad after they fell off a truck at Straight Path and the railroad.

Melville Fire Chief John Hauser, who accompanied them to the hospital, said Reynolds was treated for severe bruises and taken home. Herman, who suffered a dislocated shoulder, was kept at the hospital. He is in fair condition.

No one was occupying the summer bungalow destroyed in the fire. All the occupied homes in the path of the fire were saved.

Bay Shore vamps fought a stable-burn brush fire on the Hagelike Manor Dairy property on Montauk Highway in West Bay Shore for more than five hours. The blaze spread from Union Ave. to Montauk Highway.

Woods Ablaze

According to Chief Charles Brennan, who commanded 20 vamps at the scene, about 12 acres of woods and brush were laid to

waste by a fire that three times threatened a barn on the dairy property.

Small blazes were spotted in the walls and on the roof of the barn and extinguished before they could make headway. A truck from the Babylon Fire Department assisted the Bay Shore vamps.

Sweeping over several thousand acres of Brookhaven woodland that had been untouched by flame for many years, a fire in the Brookhaven area gave firemen from eight villages a hot time for more than eight hours late yesterday. One vamp suffered burns.

The fire started shortly after 3 PM near Farm-to-Market Road and Yaphank Ave. Before it was brought under control by 11 PM in the meadows near the south end of Carmen's River, it had jumped Farm-to-Market Road, Yaphank Ave., Montauk Highway and the Long Island Rail Road right of way.

Flames swept to South Haven, tied up Montauk Highway traffic for several hours and threatened dozens of homes.

Radio Helps

Firemen responded from Brookhaven, Yaphank, Bellport, Hagerman, Massie, Massie Beach, Medford, and Coram. Brookhaven National Laboratory and the state conservation unit at Halden sent men and equipment.

The scattered task of fighting the flames was greatly aided by the Brookhaven Fire Department's recently installed two-way radio system. Department officials estimated the fire covered about 25 square miles.

Robert Hawkins, Bellport vamp, suffered wrist burns.

The search for a fire bug, believed responsible for a half dozen fires a week ago in the heavily wooded area east of Haverbrook, was intensified yesterday afternoon after another blaze broke out in the same vicinity. The fire covered a large strip of woods between Patchogue-Holbrook Road and Waverly Ave. and was fought by Holbrook, Haverbrook and Patchogue vamps.

At 11 PM last night, Patchogue vamps were called out to fight a brush fire near Ocean Ave. and Patchogue Avenue.

Continued

May 6, 1951 Brush Fire

Our new Ford pumper was finally delivered later in 1951 and the old Mack was retired. It was wonderful to have a new, reliable piece of fire apparatus in service. The new truck went to Company #1, while Company #3 operated the American LaFrance. The old Reo from Wyandanch was kept in reserve and was parked outside the firehouse. Then, fighting another brush fire south of Dix Highway, the American LaFrance was taken into the woods and broke down. Damage was severe and repairs would have been prohibitive on such an old unit. The truck was retired.

Once again, the officers and membership appealed to the Board of Fire Commissioners for a second piece of new apparatus. But the Board could not justify the expenditure so soon after acquiring the Ford pumper. And so, we limped along with the old Reo.

Since we were unable to persuade the Board of Commissioners to order another new pumper, other solutions were sought. One of these was a proposal offered by the writer to purchase a heavy duty three-quarter ton pick-up truck, equip it with a power take off driven booster pump and by salvaged parts from the obsolete, retired apparatus. This proposal utilized a 200 gallon booster tank, booster reel and 250 feet of booster hose and various miscellaneous gear; such as, lights, siren, axes, six Indian Cans, brooms and shovels, all salvaged from the retired apparatus.

The Board approved the proposal and Al Sammis of Eastern Fire Apparatus was engaged to build the unit. A new 1951 Chevrolet pick-up truck was purchased and sent out to Carl's' Welding Shop in Commack where the necessary custom work was performed. The result was a dependable, light, quick-response unit, ideal for grass, brush and vehicle fires. The Board was pleased with the economy of the truck and the members of Company #3 finally had a dependable piece of apparatus.



2-8-2

Around this time, Suffolk County adopted a Mutual Aid plan, which included coded numbers for each township in the county, each fire department in each township and apparatus numbers. This system continues to this day. And so, our Ford pumper became 2-8-1 and the Chevrolet 2-8-2. Both were housed in the two-bay firehouse on Deer Park Avenue. With the adoption of the County Mutual Aid System, many of the departments installed radio equipment in their districts. Since we had no central dispatch system, our first radios were installed on our two trucks and were furnished by the New York Telephone Company on a rental basis. This allowed us to communicate truck-to-truck and with neighboring units during mutual aid situations.

During this period, the department, through the Board of Fire Commissioners, began to acquire our first new helmets, coats and boots. These were kept on a rack and were shared by the firefighters responding to the fire house. Also, new hose and other miscellaneous gear were received.

The population of the district continued to increase. A proposal came before the Huntington Town to approve a residential subdivision on a large tract of land off Caledonia Road, west of Deer Park Avenue. This subdivision was called Woodedge.

Dix Hills Will Vote On Fire Proposals

Dix Hills—Residents in this fast-growing community will be asked to approve a \$149,500 fire department expansion program June 5.

The proposal calls for the construction of two new firehouses, a large fire-equipment-storage building, and the purchase of a 1,000-gallon-a-minute pumper. Perry D. Hatch, chairman of the Dix Hills Board of Fire Commissioners, said last night: "These new facilities are urgently needed if our department is to continue to provide full fire protection." He said several housing developments are now under construction, and that others are being planned. The Long Island Expressway, now under construction, also passes through the fire district.

The program will be broken down into four separate propositions. They are (1) the construction of a two-bay, expandable fire station on a two-acre site on Carl Straight Path, north of Candlewood Road, \$49,000; (2) the construction of a three-bay fire station on fire district property on Deer Park Avenue, opposite the Hills Elementary School, and the demolishing of an existing, but obsolete, firehouse on the site, \$59,000; (3) the construction of a storage building on the site of the present three-bay fire headquarters on Deer Park Avenue, north of Northern State Parkway, and grading, blacktopping and provision of parking facilities for a total of \$10,000, and (4) the purchase of a heavy-duty, 1,000-gallon-a-minute pumper for \$31,500. Hatch said approval of the program would add 18 cents to the present fire district tax rate of 65 cents for each \$100 of assessed valuation.

Hatch urged voters to approve all four propositions. "It is a comprehensive program, and each proposition is related to the others to provide over-all fire protection for the district," he said.

A public hearing will be held on the program at 8 PM May 31 at the Deer Park Avenue fire headquarters. Voting will be in the same building from 7-10 PM June 5. Hatch said that if the program is approved, the facilities could be ready by late October.

1956 Proposed Expansion Plan

The initial plans attempted to break the B-1 (1-acre) zoning down to ½ acre. In addition, a strip type shopping center was proposed on the west side of Deer Park Avenue, north of Caledonia Road. This proposal met with stiff resistance from the Dix Hills community and, as a result, a compromise was reached. The Woodedge developers agreed to drop the plan for a shopping center and further agreed to conform to the B-1 zoning provided that all interior roads and drainage areas are included. This resulted in building plots of approximately ¾ acre but protected the density of the B-1 (1 acre zoning)".

One of Dix Hills' prominent citizens, a Mr. Charles Stoll, who was a lawyer, was one of the prime movers of the Woodedge project. Judge Stoll, as he was called, proposed Dix Hills' first municipal water district. The water system would be installed by the Woodedge developers to serve the new housing community. Later, the district was expanded and eventually became the large municipal district that exists today. In any case, it made water hydrants available for fire fighting for the first time in Dix Hills.

The rapid increase in population, as a result of new housing development in the north part of the fire district, made it apparent that adequate fire protection was lacking. Since the tax base was increasing, the Board of Fire Commissioners was in a more favorable position to meet the need in the north end.

Accordingly, through the efforts of Al Soulagnet, the district secured an option to buy an abandoned fur farm located on the east side of Deer Park Avenue north of Northern State Parkway. Plans were then drawn to construct new firehouse large enough for four pieces of apparatus with offices and meeting rooms on the south side. Also, it was planned to obtain two new pieces of apparatus to be housed in the new building.



Headquarters and 2-8-3

This entire plan (land, building & apparatus) was presented to the taxpayers in the form of a bond resolution. The voters approved the plan and ground was broken in 1956.

The new firehouse was named Headquarters. The old firehouse was named Station #1. Two new pumpers were ordered from American Fire Apparatus, one was a 500 g.p.m., three-stage centrifugal pump built on a model R-185 International Chassis. This unit was designated 2-8-3 and remains today as the department's parade truck. The other unit was a 4-wheel drive brush truck power takeoff driven pump also on an International chassis numbered 2-8-4. These two units were delivered from the factory by several members of the Board of Commissioners.



2-8-4



May 1956 - Station 2 Groundbreaking

Once again, the department was reorganized. Headquarters Company was formed and was staffed by many fine, new volunteers from the northerly parts of the district. Companies #1 and #3 continued to operate out of Station #1.

In the writer's view, the construction of the Headquarters building in 1956 marks the end of the early years of the fire service in Dix Hills. From that point to the present, records are better and more complete. Also, there are a number of firefighters still available to contribute their experiences and recollections to make the record complete.

Needless to say, I have omitted many humorous and sometimes tragic incidents that I recall from those early years. And, I miss those early pioneers.

Respectfully,
Perry D. Hatch
Ex-Chief
July 5, 1996