

# Wilton Fire Department

## 1869 - 1959

Open House August 28, 29, 30 - 1959

Dedication 2 p. m. on August 30, 1959



*Engine House No. 4*

## History of the Wilton Fire Department

By NORMAN DRAPER

Wilton has not escaped the destruction caused by the ravages of fire. Available records show this to be so by several notable instances, besides the destruction of single houses, barns and mills.

The fire that opened the eyes of the citizens of Wilton as to the need for a fire department took place on December 2, 1874, when the business section of East Wilton succumbed to fire. When the fire was discovered there was great excitement to find the hand engine given to the town prior to 1870, with money subscribed by residents of East Wilton, now Wilton Village. Nobody knew where it was stored and it was not until the fire had made great headway that it was found in a barn. One account says it took 50 minutes to thaw out its frozen valves so that it could be worked.

Three weeks later on December 23, 1874, at a special town meeting, this hand engine (named "Carmi") was formally accepted. The outcome of this meeting was the organization of a fire department, the appointment of fire engineers, the authorization to purchase another fire engine and to provide a suitable



*Engine House No. 1*

place to keep the engine and for the assembling of the firemen.

At the annual Town Meeting held March 9, 1875, the sum of \$3,000.00 was raised to carry out the votes of the preceding meeting. Also at this meeting it was voted to raise \$425.00 to purchase the Engine House at French Village of Peter Putnam to be used for the Fire Company and for no other purpose. This engine house became known as Engine House No. 2 and Hand Engine No. 2 known as "Carmi" with hose carriage complete was placed there, when the new engine arrived for East Wilton.

The Engine House, just vacated, was built that same year (1875) for \$1,075.00, the lot costing \$175.00. This Engine House became known as Engine House No. 1 and the new engine placed in it as Excelsior Hand Engine No. 1.

Before the time of the Fire Department and the hand engines, Wilton had what it called a bucket brigade.

In 1887, two years after the Town House was built, Engine No. 1 (Excelsior) was moved to the east end of this new building. (We will call this Engine House No. 3). In 1889, Excelsior No. 1 was moved back to Engine House No. 1 and Carmi No. 2 was moved from Engine House No. 2 in French Village to East Wilton and placed in Engine House No. 3, in the Town House. In 1911 Carmi No. 2 was placed in West Wilton all equipped, but the Engineers' Report of 1917 states the "Hand Engine Carmi is in a sadly neglected condition and would recommend that it be disposed of at a fair price." Carmi was later junked.

Engine House No. 2 was sold and made into a home some time after Carmi Engine was moved from there in 1889, and this building now makes up part of the present home of Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Richardson of French Village. The picture of No. 2 shows just the Engine House part of their home. One can still see the Hose Tower on the back of the building.

In 1913, the Fire Department asked for a motor propelled vehicle and received a 60 H.P. Alco car which was fitted out with the necessary equipment. This was Wilton's first motor truck and a large picture can be seen of it in the Fire Station with the men on it. They were called "The Flying Squadron." The cost of the vehicle, not equipped, \$615.75. In 1920 a new Reo truck was bought at a cost of \$1,685.00, and the Alco was disposed of.

In 1924, a Stromdos Triple Horn Air Alarm was placed at the top of the hose tower of Engine House No. 1 at a cost of \$386.75.

In 1929, a new Chevrolet chemical truck was added to the Department at a cost of \$2,000.00. A portable pump was also placed on this truck. Wilton then had two motor trucks.

On May 1, 1931, a new GMC American LaFrance 500 gallon pumper was put in commission at a cost of \$5,600.00 This gave Wilton Fire Department three motor trucks. This new pumper was Wilton's first pumper and was to be a great asset in fighting fires in areas where there was no hydrant service but where there was some kind of a water supply such as a water hole, river or brook.

In 1936, the Department bought a Ford truck chassis for \$616.00. A pump and other equipment was added, giving Wilton four motor trucks, two with pumps.

In 1944, the Reo truck was sold for \$100.00, thus reducing the number of trucks to three. In 1949, a Ford tank truck was added, thus bringing the number of trucks up to four. This truck has a 250 gallon pump and can carry 600 gallons of water. This truck is considered a very important piece of equipment, especially for our rural area. Cost \$2,800.00

At the 1949 Town Meeting the old Excelsior Fire Engine No. 1 was turned over to the Selectmen for preservation.

Radios were installed in two trucks in 1955. In 1957 the Department asked for a new pumper as the GMC American LaFrance pumper was unreliable. On August 1, 1957 an FWD 750 gallon pumper was delivered with a 500 gallon booster tank. Cost \$15,251.00. With the purchase of this new truck the Department asked for a new engine house where all fire fighting apparatus could be housed under one roof, for better coordination of the Department, as two trucks were kept in Engine House No. 1 and two in Engine House No. 3. The Department had long outgrown these buildings and as far back as 1930 a Fire Engineers' Report read "housing facilities very poor."

A new Fire Station was proposed at the March Town Meeting of 1957, and an official committee was appointed and final plans and bids were presented to the citizens of Wilton at an adjourned Town Meeting, June 17, 1957. A new station was voted, which we could call Engine House No. 4. Low bidder was



*Engine House No. 2*



*Engine House No. 3*

Abbott Machine Co., Inc., Building and Wall Complete \$71,826.00. The architect was Clifford Broker Associates, Concord, N. H.

In the picture of Engine House No. 1, which was built in 1875, one can see the Tower that was added in 1890, to take the place of the one that had been inside, but only went to the ridge of the roof. To the right of the building can be seen the old Blacksmith Shop and the area where the New Station now stands.

Wilton's first Fire Engineers, 1875:

David Whiting  
P. H. Putnam  
David Gregg  
George W. Boynton  
George S. Neville

Fire Commissioners for 1959:

Clifford Schultz  
Lawrence Paro  
Charles McGettigan, Jr.

Fire Chief: Wilfred Berube

Assistant Chiefs: Franklin Edwards and William Cleaves

The Fire Station Building Committee:

Norman Draper, Chairman  
F. Howard Bardol  
Charles McGettigan, Jr.  
Fred C. Nelson  
Ernest Clarke (Deceased)  
Lynn W. Potter  
William Cleaves  
Ernest Hutchinson  
William P. Whiting, Jr.

New Fire Station dedicated August 30, 1959.