

BRANDYWINE HUNDRED FIRE COMPANY No. 1

1006 Brandywine Blvd., Bellefonte, Wilmington, Delaware 19809

A Volunteer Organization

October 11, 2004

Town of Bellefonte
901A Rosedale Avenue
Bellefonte
Wilmington, DE 19809

Attention: President David Wishowsky

Enclosed for your review and possible storage in the town archives is a memoir covering the town history and some information on our fire company.

This was presented to us by the Hurst Family and is done from our Chief Emeritus H. B. Hurst and his Wife, Clara Hurst's personal papers. There are also two photos of their house on Brandywine Boulevard.

It is our hope that you find this interesting.

Sincerely,

Don

Donald E. McKay
Chairman, History Committee

CC: Richard T. Perillo, President
Kenneth E. Clapp, Secretary
Walter R. Hurst



A MEMOIR

A Memoir

The Town of Bellefonte, originally known as Montrose, was established in the early 1900's. It was formed by three subdivisions known as Montrose, Montrose Terrace, and Montrose Terrace Addition. In the year 1910 there were sixteen houses, two were farms and two opened small stores in their homes. They carried staples such as bread, milk, eggs, etc. Coal oil lamps were used for lighting their homes. Lanterns were used for walking outside at night, and also used for hailing the Darby cars if you went to Wilmington for the evening.

Marion Avenue was the main road into Montrose. The streets were dirt roads, dusty in the summer, muddy in the winter. In the spring the vacant lots became a profusion of wild flowers of many hues, also mushrooms and many fruit and nut trees. There were no homes below Grandview Avenue. In the late summer the farmers who lived nearby would mow the vacant lots, load the hay on their wagons and store it in their barns for the cattle.

The main grocery store located at Fifth and King Streets, Wilmington was owned and operated by Mr. Kincaid and Mr. Clark. The first of the week Mr. Kincaid would come into Montrose in a motor van, take orders for groceries from the families and deliver them on Saturday. Anyone going to Wilmington to shop could leave articles too large to carry on the Darby car at Mr. Kincaid's store and he would deliver them with their grocery order. Families moving into Montrose were moved by horse and wagon. Deliveries by coal man, ice man, milk man, and laundry man were by horse and wagon. The Post Office was located at the Edgemoor train station. Posts held mail boxes in front of each home and the mailman delivered mail from a buggy drawn by a horse.

The Darby cars manned by a motorman and conductor ran from Darby, Pennsylvania to Wilmington; one every hour. They were long, two-pole cars that ran through the center of town. The fare was five cents to Wilmington, or a strip of six tickets for twenty-five cents. During rush hours, 6:30 a.m.-9 a.m. mornings and 3:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m. evenings a one-pole tripper ran from Wilmington to Eleventh Street (later renamed Brandywine Boulevard) and Highland Avenue, Montrose. The conductor would get out and turn the pole around to return to Wilmington. Montrose Improvement Association was formed by members of the Town. They contacted the Wilmington Traction Company who owned the systems in Wilmington and the suburbs. The Traction Company also provided electric power for the area. The Association asked for cinders

for the streets. The Company sent out several flat, gondola cars with cinders. They were unloaded at upper Bellefonte Avenue. The men of the town would meet on Saturday afternoons with their wheelbarrows and shovels to spread the cinders on the roads. Later on the Philadelphia Pike was resurfaced to macadam, and the street car system was changed over to buses. Brandywine Boulevard was widened and extended from Duncan Road to Edgemoor Road and into the new Edgemoor School. Brandywine Boulevard was extended above Bellevue Road after the street car rails and ties were taken up and the road bed was resurfaced.

In January 1915 the Town Commissioners applied to the State Legislators for an Act to Incorporate the Town. The request for admission was passed by the Legislators and signed by the Commissioners on the 9th day of March 1915. The Town became known as Bellefonte. The Post Office Department moved the Edgemoor office into the Wilmington Post Office building. The Postal Department numbered all the homes in the town. They also changed the name Eleventh Street to Brandywine Boulevard so it would not be confused with Eleventh Street in Wilmington.

In the summer of 1919 the Bellefonte M.E. Church was built on the corner of Rosedale and Marion Avenues. Before the church was built the members attended The Mount Pleasant Church on the Philadelphia Pike above Bellevue Road. After buying the property for their church they worshipped in a tent. Sunday school classes were held in members homes. In 1959 classrooms were added—also an auditorium, kitchen, and restrooms. In 1962 Bellefonte Church united with Hillcrest M.E. Church and the property was sold to the Town Commissioners for a Town Hall. After the end of the first World War the population of the town increased—houses being built, people moving in. The Town Commissioners bought several lots on Brandywine Boulevard facing upper Bellefonte Avenue. A Community house was built on the lots by various craftsmen of the town. Some of the young boys helped to dig the cellar. The Community house had a large Auditorium with a stage, powder room and a small meeting room off the stage facing Brandywine Boulevard. Meetings, dinners, dances, and card parties were held in the Auditorium. The Town Commissioners sold the Community Hall to the Brandywine Hundred Fire Co. #1.

Mr. Kincaid and Mr. Clark built a store on the northeast corner of Brandywine Boulevard and Marion Avenue. They carried a full line of groceries and some meats. Several years later Mr. Kincaid left this store to return to his store in Wilmington. Mr. Clark took over the Boulevard

store. A few years later the A & P store was built on the northwest corner of Brandywine Boulevard and Marion Avenue.

As the population of the town increased the concern for fire protection became very important. Chimney and grass fires were mostly the cause. The nearest fire company was at 25th and Market Street in Wilmington. It was called the Brandywine Company. The Commissioners voted to buy a two-wheel hand-drawn 50 gallon chemical tank with 100 feet of chemical hose from the American LaFrance Fire Apparatus Company. The apparatus was kept in a small building behind Clark's store. A fire bell was mounted on a tree nearby. The Commissioners appointed a Fire Chief to care for the apparatus. At the alarm of fire the men would report at the building and pull the apparatus to the fire. When the men came back from the fire the chief saw that the chemical tank was cleaned and recharged.

In 1923 a group of Bellefonte citizens concerned with the number of fires in the Brandywine Hundred area and the lack of fire fighting apparatus north of Wilmington, began preliminary organization of the Company. During this time the volunteer fire companies in Wilmington, namely, Reliance #2, Fame Hose #6, and the Brandywine Company were being sold and incorporated in the paid departments of Wilmington. Several runners (men of these Companies) were residents of Bellefonte seeking a volunteer fire company to serve. A series of meetings was called to discuss organizing a volunteer company. Martin Ainscow, Deputy Chief of Wilmington Bureau of Fire was invited to Bellefonte to outline plans for organizing such a group. The meeting was attended by 100 people who contributed one dollar each to get the Company started. Incorporation papers were applied for in September by Harry G. Little, James Montgomery and Joseph Billingsley after the organization.

On March 19, 1924 the Brandywine Hundred Fire Company No.1 was duly organized. The Officers temporarily elected to serve until January 1, 1925 were Joshua Kelley of the Old Reliance #2, President; John Wigglesworth, Vice President; Harry Carson, Secretary; Frank Heaton, Jr., Treasurer; Harry Draper, Fire Chief; Charles Honey, Sr., First Assistant Chief; former Senator Burton S. Heal, Second Assistant Chief. On January 1, 1925 these Officers were elected to head the Company; Joshua Kelley, President; Charles Murphy, Vice President; Harry Carson, Secretary, Frank Heaton, Jr., Treasurer. Fire Officers elected were John Wigglesworth, Chief; Charles Honey, Sr., First Assistant Chief; Burton Heal, Second Assistant Chief;

H. Bentz Hurst, Chief Engineer; and William Dunlap, President of the Board of Managers.

The Company ordered its first piece of motorized fire apparatus from the U.S. Apparatus Company in Kirkwood Park, Wilmington. It was built on a Reo-Speed Wagon Chassis. It contained a 350 gallon Rotary Pump, two nickel-plated 35 gallon soda chemical tanks with 200 feet of half inch chemical hose and a hose body for 500 feet of 2 ½ inch fire hose; also two 2 ½ gallon hand fire extinguishers, two oil lanterns, one hand siren, one axe, and one bar. The Apparatus Company did not ask for any money. They trusted the Fire Company. They also loaned the Company an old chemical truck to use until the Company received their new truck. The cost of the engine was paid by holding bake sales; a carnival was held on the lot along side of the Community house. Fire Company members went house-to-house selling chances on a Model T Ford. The new apparatus was received in January 1925. The Company rented a double garage from Chief Wigglesworth on Rosedale Avenue. In those days it was the custom to ask another Fire Company to house the new truck. Five Points Fire Company, under the direction of Fire Chief Jordan, held the ceremony one evening.

In order not to overload the fire truck at an alarm of fire a board was placed on the wall with five pins. Each pin held a check. When responding to the alarm each man had to grab a check before getting on the truck. The Chief Officer and the driver did not need a check. The garage was fairly large with a pot-bellied stove for heat and also for the tanks not to freeze in the winter. A desk was placed in the back of the garage and meetings were held there. A wooden floor was installed by the members in the back part of the garage so the members would not be on the damp cement floor, especially in the winter. One winter day it was very cold and an alarm of fire came in and the men in a rush to get a check to ride the engine knocked over the stove, spilling live coals on the wooden floor. They had to pull the truck out of the garage and discharge one of the chemical tanks to put the fire out before they could respond to the alarm of fire. Organized in 1924, the Brandywine Hundred Fire Company remained the only Company north of Wilmington until Claymont and Talleyville organized around 1928.

The Reo truck was in service about three months when the Fire Company received an alarm of fire at the Coast Guard Service Station at Edgemoor near where the duPont Edgemoor plant is. The fire was in the warehouse on one of the piers. The building was about a half city block long. It housed lumber, marine supplies and cotton waste that was used to clean up around motors. In

another end was a Coast Guard yacht. The fire company was there for twenty hours. They pumped for nineteen hours without a break. The Reo came through with flying colors.

The first carnival was held on the site of Villa Monterey which netted the Company approximately \$1,000.00. It was the main source of income for the operation and maintenance of the Company. Brandywine Hundred's carnival was known as "The World's Largest Firemen's Carnival" in the state for many years, giving a new Chevrolet two-door sedan every night for ten evenings. People would play at the various booths and receive one free ticket from each play. The drawing took place at 11:30 p.m. You had to be on the grounds when the number was called. If no one claimed it another ticket was drawn. On the eleventh night a Buick or Chrysler car was chanced off. A book of six tickets cost one dollar. Following a ruling by the Attorney General's office that games of chance and the wheels used at carnivals were illegal the Brandywine Hundred Fire Co. #1 members would go door-to-door asking residents for donations. The annual campaign is handled by mail through an addressograph and file system.

Early in the 1930's the Mount Pleasant School Board rented the Auditorium as a classroom for first grade students.

In November 1936 St. Helena's R.C. Church was built on upper Bellefonte Avenue. Later the school was built. In 1954 a larger Church was built on the Philadelphia Pike with a seating capacity for 1,000 communicants. The first church was used for recreation purposes. St. Mark's Lutheran Church members met in Community Hall for services while their church was being built on Duncan Road.

In the summer of 1930 the women of Bellefonte, Hillcrest, and Gordon Heights were invited to a meeting at the home of Sophia Wigglesworth to form the Ladies Auxiliary of the Brandywine Hundred Fire Co. #1. The voting was unanimous, and in 1931 The Ladies Auxiliary of the Brandywine Hundred Fire Co. #1 was chartered. Money-making activities included harvest parties, dances, four seasons parties, birthday parties, covered dish luncheons and minstrel shows.

During World War II Chief Honey assisted by H. Bentz Hurst asked the women about starting fire classes because of many firemen leaving for the war. Thirty-six women signed up but only five women completed the course and helped at fires.

Memoir found in the personal papers of Chief Emeritus H. Bentz Hurst and Clare L. Hurst



