

History of the
DEADWOOD VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

1876 - 1989

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The history of the Deadwood Fire Department is much like that of many early departments in a mining town - the need began immediately with the hap-hazard construction of frame buildings close together and the use of wood stoves with poorly installed stove pipes. That along with the use of many coal oil lanterns, which could easily be overturned, created major fire hazards.

The start of fire protection in Deadwood was no different. The "Gulch" was over-run with gold seekers and their living quarters. Naturally fire became a part of the way of life and of considerable concern to everyone. People became aroused and the newspaper urged the formation of a committee to explore the possibility of organizing a fire department.

At this time in 1876, Deadwood was composed of many gold camps, namely Deadwood, South Deadwood, Elizabeth Town, Fountain City, Montana City, Chinatown, Cleveland, Ingleside and Spruce Gulch. After many fires including one major one in Virginia City, a citizens meeting was held on August 11, 1876, to take some steps in protecting the various camps from fires.

Following this meeting another was called in September, and although the town was not incorporated, a mayor and five council members were elected. This body represented three of the camps - Deadwood, South Deadwood and Elizabeth Town. Ordinances were written and approved, one of which was to create the post of fire warden.

Nothing further happened for several months although several serious fires occurred, until finally on June 22, 1877, a meeting was held and the ensuing organization took the name Deadwood Hook & Ladder Company. The newly formed company began to secure the necessary equipment to fight fire - ladders, axes, buckets, ropes, etc., and also to purchase a hook and ladder truck for the approximate cost of \$600.00. The group was very enthusiastic and built a house to store the equipment and the truck. This year, 1877, also began the tradition of a Fourth of July celebration. Since the truck had not arrived, the parade was cancelled, and a ceremony was held on Main Street, and a ball was held that night in the IXL Hotel. The receipts from the ball were to be used for the purchase of uniforms.

Part of Deadwood's fire protection consisted of hiring a night watchman who patrolled the town and was able to put out many small fires by himself and also alert the fire companies.

The truck arrived in September and it was noted in the paper that there was not enough money to pay for it. A meeting was held and more than enough was raised to pay for the truck and a hose cart.

For a while things went along fairly normally, there was still a need for a good water supply and apparently the Hook & Ladder Co. suffered some attention at the hands of the paper editor for having a hose cart without any hose. In May of 1878, a hand engine was ordered and money raised to pay for it. This was accomplished by the newly reorganized DH&L Co. Also the Deadwood Hose Company was organized along with an Engine Company.

Early in 1879, a water system was started in the City along with some hydrants, and in June the Deadwood Hose Company with the hand engine used a hydrant and shot a stream of water over the nearby buildings.

On September 26, 1879, an alarm for fire was sounded at 2:30 AM, the fire was located in the Empire Bakery on Sherman St., between Lee & Deadwood Streets, and was started by a coal oil lamp being knocked over. Since the building was frame, and although the fire companies arrived promptly, the flames spread quickly until the whole block was involved. Then the fire spread to a hardware store where some powder was stored and the resulting explosion spread the fire further.

The fire spread along Lee St. to Main St. and burned down Main to Chinatown. It also spread up on to Williams St., Forest Ave., and Centennial Avenue.

All the fire companies' equipment with the exception of the engine were burned. The town arose out of the ashes the next day and started rebuilding. There was much to do including fixing the hydrants where the lead bushings were melted. All of the bridges across Whitewood Creek were burned as was all of the fire companies' hose. Three sections of 50' were borrowed from the Lead Fire Department. Some fires continued to burn in basements for several months.

Along with rebuilding the town, the various fire companies had a lot of work to do. Since there was very little fire hose outside of that borrowed from Lead, Sam McMasters of the Homestake Mining Company donated 500' of hose that was placed in strategic locations in the downtown area.

Once again the interest in fire fighting became a concern of the people, and on 12/2/79, the South Deadwood Hose Company organized, followed on 12/10/79 by the Homestake Hose Co., named for McMasters and the Homestake who furnished two hose carts and some more hose. This Company was later called the "silk stocking brigade" since most of its members were businessmen.

During the months that followed the Great Fire, the usual number of fires were handled and various problems beset some of the fire companies. The truck for the Hook & Ladder Co.

was rebuilt as was a new building to house it. The Homestake Hose Co. built a new building for its equipment. As usual part of the business undertaken were uniforms and plans for celebrations and dances. July of 1880 saw hose cart races between companies from Deadwood and one from Lead - prize money was awarded.

Apparently things went smoothly as possible until August when a large fire occurred in Fountain City and the hose on hand could not stretch from the nearest hydrant to the fire and around twenty buildings were lost. Again the cry went up about the lack of water and hydrants.

In October another attempt was made to form a City Fire Department, but only the Hook & Ladder and the Deadwood Hose Companies were ready, and in November the City Department was approved by the City Council and consisted of those two companies. The other companies would join sometime later.

On November 10, 1880, Central City had a large fire and aid was sought from Deadwood. The road was very muddy but the Hook & Ladder Co. managed to find two mules to pull their truck, but the hose companies arrived on the scene exhausted, however the fire was under control by then.

Also the Homestake Hose Co. organized a Junior Fire Company complete with a small hose cart in January of 1882 - might have been the first in Dakota Territory.

January of '83 was very cold with lots of snow. Mains and hydrants froze and there was very little water in the tanks since the water ditches were also frozen. An editorial appeared in the Times stating that if there was a fire, very little could be done except by using water buckets.

On February 6th, the Homestake Hose Company sponsored a ball which was held in the Keimer Hotel, and it was a great success. On the 28th, the Hook & Ladder Co. went before the Fire Board with several requests - requested permission to move its equipment and repair facilities to a new location on Lee St.; that a janitor be hired by the city to take care of the various fire companies' buildings and that he be paid \$35.00 per month.

It was also requested that since the Fire Department had 1000 feet of hose that needed to be replaced that the same should be ordered as soon as possible. Also the possible use of electricity to ring the fire bell should be investigated, and on March 4th the city council approved all of the requests.

On March 9th the paper noted that the old hand engine located in 1st Ward was missing and that something should be done to find it. Homestake Hose Co. has only 200 feet of

hose, all of which is in bad shape from being used to wash the streets. South Deadwood Hose Co. is in almost as bad a shape, and 1000 feet of hose should be ordered according to an editorial in the Times.

In April the firemen sold tickets for nominees to the City Council election and by backing these candidates created quite a stir in the community. The results of the election showed that all of the firemen's candidates were elected.

The spring of '83 saw more snow and a lot of rain, and on May 18th, another disaster occurred to the city - a flood! The first entry in the Homestake Hose Company minute book states "The books, house, and some furniture were carried off by the flood of May 18th". The Times devoted several articles to report on the flood, showing much of Lee Street Sherman Street, and the creek side of Main Street suffered severe damage to the buildings, with many a total loss. Both the Hook & Ladder house and the Homestake Hose house were destroyed. Some buildings on the creek side of Main St. were torched so that when they fell into the creek, they would not block the stream.

All the bridges across Whitewood Creek were washed out so the town was divided in half. About noon a fire broke out in Christie's Saloon on Sherman St., and due to the lack of water it burned freely causing some damage to the roof of the courthouse located on the corner of Pine & Sherman Sts.

The Times noted that the firemen made a valiant effort to save the building by using bucket brigades. The Times editor put in sarcastically that "perhaps this would have succeeded had it not been for approximately 100 able bodied lazy loafers who sat on the hillside and never offered a hand".

A lot of damage also occurred in Lead, Central City, and Golden Gate. An estimate of damage in Deadwood was \$180,000.00.

By June things had partially returned to normal and a hose cart race was to be held between a team from Central City and the Homestake Hose Company. While there was still much rebuilding to be done, the social events of the fire department continued and usually the proceeds went for uniforms.

It was noted in the Times that on 4/26/88, a call from Central City was received of a large fire in progress and help was needed immediately. Hose companies from Deadwood and Lead responded to the 5:30 AM alarm. A team of horses was used by the South Deadwood Hose Co. to pull its equipment to the fire. The blaze apparently started in a restaurant on Main St., and since it was a frame building, spread quickly involving other buildings. The water mains

were dry, and although the companies worked hard, even tearing down buildings and blowing up one with 50 pounds of black powder to halt the spread, the flames jumped over to the next buildings and soon the entire town was afire. It was noted in the Times that from north to south about 1/4 of a mile was burned, and about 145 buildings were destroyed.

After raging on Main St., the fire then went up the hillside and consumed many residences. Estimate of damage was set at \$123,865.00.

The Times advertised that the July 4th, 1888 celebration would be the largest ever with \$3000.00 to be awarded to the various winning hose teams. It also noted that Seattle with a population of 20,000 was proud to have raised \$1200 for its Fourth of July celebration, while Deadwood with a population of 5000 had raised over twice as much. The World Champion Hose Team of Council Bluffs, Iowa, would be on hand and participate.

The Chinese-American Community of Deadwood decided to form a team of its own and won the contest. Thereafter they called themselves the Chinese Champions of America.

On March 2, 1889, an alarm of fire was sounded at the reduction works in lower Deadwood, and being out of the city limits no water was available, and the entire structure was destroyed. This location was at the southerly end of the "slag pile", and estimated damage was \$90,000.00.

The minutes of the Homestake Hose Company were written by pen, and sometimes with quite a flourishing hand, and with side remarks. One such entry stated "Frank Ickes rose to ventilate himself".

This particular minute book is one of a kind, unless there are others as yet unfound. It covers the period from 1883 to 1904, and some of the fire calls were noted as follows:

Dec. 26, 1890, 1:30 AM, fire in first ward and out of water limits - damage \$25,000.00 and partly insured.
 Dec. 26, 1890, 10:30 PM, department called to the Keystone Hotel. Homestake had the first two lines laid.
 Feb. 17, 1890, 8:30 AM, two alarms at Hoffman on lower Main St., 700 ft. of hose laid each time - building gutted.
 Feb. 6, 1893, 10:30 PM, fire started in Litcher building and burned Treber, Zipp and Litcher residences. Water famine and water did not come until hose companies had been on the ground for 30 minutes. Loss \$15,000.00, 400 ft of hose laid.
 June 24, 1893, 2 PM, department received a call from Lead City for help. The Homestake woodpile (20,000 cords) between Homestake and Star Mills being all on

fire. Company responded promptly and laid 600 ft of hose, worked until 10:00 PM and then came home leaving the hose for them to use on the fire.

June 25, 1893, 2:30 AM, Lead City sent for help once again as flames were getting the better of them.

Responded promptly and worked until 4 PM and left. Fire still burning but under control. Seventeen streams from hose lines and one 6 inch iron pipe playing water on the fire.

As one can see, these early day firemen had quite a job to fulfill. All done by manpower, no breathing apparatus, no pressure pumps other than hand, no bunker gear to protect them. No wonder they were called "smoke eaters".

Unfortunately, all the records of the fire department were destroyed in the city hall fire of 1952, so much of the information from 1904 thru 1951 was either gathered from newspaper files or from memory of some early volunteer firemen that are still around.

The minute book of the Homestake Hose Co. from 1904 to 1934 has some interesting material as concerns that company, however, very little on the other companies and the fire department as then existed under the name of Deadwood Fire Department. The Homestake Hose Company evidently was the last holdout to joining the city-wide department.

In reading these minutes from 1904 on, one thing was certain, entertainment was a must part of any meeting, and all the minutes have the entry - retire to the anti-room for entertainment and refreshments, and every meeting there were bills from the FX Smith Cafe, one from Sasse Market and one from Wm. Treber, the latter being for liquid refreshments. The company also had its own quartet that furnished musical renditions after the meeting.

Starting in 1909 there was also a bill from the Elks Club for cigars. So meetings have not changed much to date except no longer cigars, but there are always sandwiches and pop or beer now:

Entry of June 14, 1911, shows a committee from the Fountain City Hose & Ladder Company appeared before the Homestake meeting and requested a loan of \$200.00, which was granted. Also July 12, 1911, meeting showed that \$215.85 was received from the City's fire fund. Then on 12/8/15, The Fountain City Company again appeared asking for another \$200.00 so they could pay their debt to the 1st National Bank. Again the Homestake Co. loaned them the money, and took a first mortgage on their property.

At the same meeting it became necessary to drop some members and place two on an honorary status since the company could not exceed thirty and the revised list be

given to the county auditor. In April 1916 a waiting list was established for membership in the Company.

August of 1916 saw the loan to Fountain City H&L Co. as repaid and at that meeting the sum of \$20.00 be paid for each active member for their service.

Minutes of 9/22/24 show that it was suggested by the Deadwood City Department Chief that the Homestake Hose Company dissolve and join the City Department. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Homestake Hose Company chose not to dissolve at this time, and that the company would go on record as approving a three company department.

The last entry in the Homestake minute book is dated 3/14/34, and while new officers were elected, apparently the company ceased to function with regular meetings, or another minute book was started.

Another interesting development for the fire department was the use of a steam whistle as an alerting alarm for fire. The fire bell located on top of the city hall could not be heard in some parts of the town, and as a solution, the steam whistle located on the Burlington roundhouse was changed so to create high pitched sound. The whistle had two handles to pull, one was the regular sound for shift changes and the other handle when also pulled made an eerie high pitched, terrifying sound that struck fear into many a small child and quite a few adults, especially during the night.

This alerting system was in use from about 1900 to the late 30's, when a regular siren was purchased and mounted on the city hall building and was in use until that building was destroyed by fire in 1952.

According to information received, about 1926 the fire department created the Deadwood Firemens' Amusement Park, located on the land now occupied by the rodeo grounds and some houses and apartment houses. The Park had an indoor swimming pool, a dance pavilion, and the lower portion was used for the half-mile race track and the rodeo grounds. The rodeo grounds were developed in 1923 when the Days of '76 held its first rodeo, pageant and parade. The swimming pool and dance pavilion were torn down in the middle 40's

The fire department at that time still consisted of hose carts and ladder trucks, and an old Ford model T which carried hose and a few ladders, and was the only mechanized truck. In 1927, the fire department purchased an American LaFrance 500 gpm pumper, open cab type. The engine was a large six cylinder designed to run at a relatively low rpm. When the department responded to a mutual aid call to Lead where the Ellison Hoist was on fire, apparently the operator

of the truck decided it was better to run the engine higher than the suggested speed and damaged it. The engine was later replaced with a V8 one that never did perform right, and finally gave up during the Schwarzwald Furniture store fire in 1948.

On August 31, 1942, the department responded to a mutual aid call from Lead where the Hearst Mercantile building was on fire, and in spite of a valiant effort by both departments, the building & contents were totally destroyed

About 1942 a fire occurred in the Schulte Mortuary building, (located just below the Elks building) and spread to the Sasse Market building. The mortuary building was totally destroyed and the Sasse building severely damaged.

May 5, 1948, a fire alarm was sounded during the night at the Schwarzwald Furniture store. It apparently started at the rear of the building where a pile of cardboard cartons caught on fire from some source and quickly spread into the building. The American LaFrance truck had hardly started pumping when the engine blew up, so just hydrant pressure could be used during the rest of the fire. The building and contents were totally destroyed and the fire spread up to the 2nd floor of the Eagle Inn building (now where the Wild Bill Bar was located) and considerable water damage was sustained on the first floor and also in the basement where there was a large inventory of liquor.

With the loss of the only pumper the department was without a fire truck, and the Lead Fire Department loaned a truck to use until a replacement could be obtained. With many contributions from the business community and also individual donations, a 1947 Ford pumper was purchased in short order, and the 1948 Dodge 500 gpm pumper was also obtained, and the department was back in business again.

Around 1950 a potential disaster was averted when a semitrailer truck with 3000 gallons of gasoline lost its brakes coming down from Lead to Pluma and upset on the corner and flipped over beside the Cupboard Grocery store. The rear tandem set of duals off the trailer crashed thru the building and although it came right thru to the check out location, no one was in the way. Then all of the gasoline spilled out of the trailer, and created a pool right in front of the building. The department responded to a call there, and proceeded to wash down the spill into a storm sewer outlet that flowed into the creek.

It was miraculous that no fire ensued since many bystanders were there along with the firemen. Had the fuel ignited, there would have been many casualties. There was also a concern about the fuel in the creek flowing down into town, but again someone was looking after everybody.

The decade of the 50's will always be remembered by those living in Deadwood at that time. During a bitter cold night of 12/22/51, an alarm was sounded at the Sasse Market and with the temperature at 20 degrees below zero it was a very difficult situation. The Sasse building and all of those on down Main Street on that side were of frame construction until the Butler Jewelry building, a one story brick construction and then the Morris Jewelry building which was also brick and a two story one.

With the adverse weather conditions and the frame to frame row of buildings, the fire spread on down and finally stopped at the Morris Jewelry store building. Many businesses were lost and a gap on that side of Main extended from the Elks building to the jewelry store building. The gap was soon rebuilt with two modern brick/concrete buildings and the Butler Jewelry store building was repaired.

Then on 1/28/52 a fire alarm was sounded at the Deadwood Theatre about 2:00 AM, and upon arrival the firemen found the entrance to the theatre portion had fire in all walls, and there was a great deal of smoke production throughout the entire building, particularly on the upper floors. There were apartments on the 2nd & 3rd floors, and Carl & Erma Kubler could not get out through the hallway and had to be rescued from their third floor window by ladder down to the next door garage roof.

The fire progressed swiftly up the interior walls and soon thru the roof, which created an enormous fire storm and heat. Windows were broken in the Franklin Hotel building across the street when the front of the theatre wall gave way. When the steel beam supporting the balcony failed from the heat, the theatre wall next to the garage "kicked" out and fell on the garage roof, causing considerable damage.

The fire spread into the city hall building from the rear, and that building was gutted from the top down, including the firemens' meeting hall and the fire barn. All of the records of the fire department were destroyed, along with memorabilia and many photographs.

The two fire trucks were temporarily stored in the garage space at the rear of the Black Hills Power & Light building on Sherman Street, and then moved to the building now occupied by Otis Candy Sales. While quartered there, the department received the small Jeep 4x4 with a 90 gallon water tank, and a pump and hose reel. This was a cooperative unit owned by the county, State Game Fish & Parks, and the City of Deadwood.

The department remained in that building until the city purchased the old Chicago & Northwestern Railway Depot and

all the city offices including the fire department moved to that location.

This fire coupled with the other one only 30 days before had the town staggering for a little while, but again, like Phoenix, it arose from the ashes and went on to better things.

In March of 1952, the old Isis Theatre which was being remodeled caught fire in the early evening. When the fire department arrived, the entire theatre portion was involved, and the fire had started to spread into the second floor where there were apartments. The next door building which was occupied by apartments and the Eagles Club on the second floor became partially involved and sustained some smoke/water damage plus fire damage on the roof.

The Gambles building below which also had apartments on the second floor was discovered to be involved when the door which provided access to the second floor had its glass blown out. Fire was then discovered in the ceiling of the apartments and was quickly contained. Later it was found that the buildings had a common fire wall, and apparently the wood roof joists had been butted together from building to building and the fire had traveled on that route. The theatre was gutted and was later rebuilt and was called the Flame Theatre. This fire had all the aspects of an arson fire.

In 1954 the department decided that a ladder truck was needed in town because of the many multistoried buildings which could not be reached by ground ladders. So specifications were drawn up to convert the '47 Ford by removing the water tank and mounting a 65 foot aerial ladder on the chassis. The bids were let and in 1955 the truck was delivered and was in service for nearly 30 years.

On November 20, 1955 an explosion took place at the Geib building across the street from the theatre and next door to the Mint Cafe building. Mrs. Bennie Katon who lived upstairs in the Geib building had smelled gas earlier and was just leaving the front door when the explosion occurred. Fortunately she escaped serious injury, for had she been further inside the building she may not have survived. The entire Geib building was destroyed by the explosion and fire ensued which burned all of the contents and rubble that had been left by the explosion.

The explosion severely damaged the Mint building and some of the party wall that was in between was knocked down but no fire occurred in that building, although the contents did suffer considerable damage.

A fire call was received in March of '57 where the old mill

building of the Canyon Corporation in Maitland was on fire. The department responded and found that the blaze had been started by a cutting torch which had been used in salvaging some of the equipment while the mill was being razed. The mill was old, entirely of heavy wood construction, and with very little water available, it completely burned down in short order.

A fire was called in on 1/21/58 at the city garage building located one block off Sherman Street where the present block city garage is located. Upon arrival the department found the fire was completely out of control, and the flames had burned the poles and lines of the 12,000 volt power line located in that narrow street between the Fish & Hunter warehouse and the garage. There was no access for the firemen down that street since the power lines were on the ground and sparking and jumping around. The local manager of the Black Hills Power & Light Co. took it upon himself and rather than wait for the line crew to arrive, went to a sub-station and cut off the entire town, which made access possible in a short time. All of the city trucks, a street sweeper and all other contents in the garage were destroyed. The fire was so hot that coal piled against the brick wall of the warehouse started to smoulder as did an iron clad building located nearby.

The summer of 1959 had been extremely hot and dry, and the potential for a timber wildfire was in the extreme category. About 1:10 PM on September 8, 1959, an alarm was sounded for a fire that had started next to the county home (where KOA campground is now located) and when the department promptly responded the fire had already crossed a narrow field that was covered with very dry grass, had crowned and was going over the ridge towards upper Denver Avenue. Conditions at the time could hardly have been worse - a SW wind gusting to 30-40 miles per hour, humidity between 5-10 percent, and temperature was in the 90's.

The Dodge truck was turned back to Deadwood, and the fire chief called the school and informed the officials what was happening and to let the students out and tell them to go home. A radio call was also made to Rapid City dispatch to advise them of the fire and that help would be needed. The firemen then proceeded up Denver Ave. with the Dodge truck and found that the fire had already jumped the Mt. Roosevelt road. The hose was laid from the last hydrant and placed into position should the fire come back down the hill. Some heavy equipment had proceeded up the road in an attempt to flank the fire.

A message was received from the Forest Service that about 3:00 PM a wind shift would send the fire back towards Deadwood, & firemen proceeded to lay hose along Williams Street in an attempt to save residences in that area should

the fire come that way. Also at this time an order was issued to evacuate the entire town except for firemen and others engaged in fighting the fire. The evacuation was completed very quickly, including the hospital, in an orderly fashion and with little panic. Some of the business men directed traffic in the downtown area which helped avoid confusion. At this time the only way out was up Highway 85 towards Pluma since the fire had jumped over the highways going to Spearfish and Sturgis and the road to Central City.

Conditions at this time in town were very smoky and the department on Williams Street learned that the fire had jumped over McGovern Hill and the Northwest Wood Preserving Plant was on fire. The department was handicapped with no radio communication since the only two way radio was in the Jeep. The Dodge truck was pulled off Williams St. and stopped at the fire hall to pick up all the reserve 2½ inch hose. Proceeded up Charles Street where the pumper was hooked to a hydrant and a line laid across the bridge to the Standard Oil bulk plant and the tanks were watered in order to keep them cool and avoid any rupture. Nothing could be done at the wood preserving plant where there were 100,000 pieces of treated and untreated posts & poles on fire plus three large tanks of creosote afire.

By this time the fire had jumped the highway and was headed up to the Strawberry ridge country. At the height of the fire many agencies were involved in fighting the fire including the Forest Service, State Forestry, National Guard, miners from Homestake that had been turned out to help, and the local fire departments from Spearfish, Central City, Lead, & Deadwood Fire Dept. (which was involved mainly in the city limits) and many volunteers. A command post was set up in the sheriff's office, and radios installed from the Forest Service frequency and the State frequency, with the Forest Service in actual charge of the fire.

It was fortunate that very little fire damage occurred within the city limits. A lot of credit went to local people who stayed and put out many small fires near their homes, since the extent of the fire was too much for the fire department to handle.

By chance at the time of the fire, an experimental air drop method of fighting a wildfire was set up at the Black Hills Airport where mixing tanks were ready to make the fire retardant consisting of a mixture of water and bentonite which created a heavy liquid that would not only smother a fire, but also stick to the trees thereby making a barrier to retard ignition of the trees. It worked very well the second day and several planes were involved in dropping this retardant on hot spots which contained them long enough for ground crews to be able to mop up.

The second day found that the fire had slowed down, and its spread stopped mainly due to a shift in the wind which gave all the ground crews time to clean up and build fire lines. Although the weather was very hot, no one suffered a heart attack, but two National Guardsmen were burned slightly while operating bulldozers on the Mt. Roosevelt road area.

Several residences on the Mt. Roosevelt road were destroyed, and all of the buildings in the Pinecrest Park were destroyed including the main club building. All in all, the city was pretty lucky, partly because of its location in the bottom of a gulch, partly because of the wind shifts, and probably because someone in higher authority was watching over the situation.

On October 19, 1959, the fire department received a letter from the Fire Underwriters Inspection Bureau which stated that more volunteers should be responding to fire calls. Again, this problem is a continuing one for most volunteer departments, and the Deadwood Fire Dept. conducted a drive to sign up more young men, particularly in the 21-35 age bracket. Another problem was the alerting system for the town since many of the men located in first ward and upper fourth ward could not hear the siren especially at night when the wind direction was unfavorable. This problem was investigated and a new alerting system would be installed within two years.

One record in 1960 shows that in September of that year, 20 fire calls were made to the city dump since with a high wind the slumbering fire would come to the surface and jump onto the hillside and burn to the highway above. Fortunately, they never jumped the highway.

On March 21, 1961, the temporary telephone alerting system was hooked up - at first there were only five phones on the system and the wives of those firemen had a list of 5 firemen to be called at night. This worked fairly well for about two years until February of 1963 when all the firemen had the system hooked to their phones. This phone system worked quite well, and a series of short rings was the signal that a fire was being reported. The rings also over rode a line that was in use so the fireman could hang up, pick up the phone again and receive the call.

On 12/13/61, another bitter cold 17 below zero night, an alarm was reported at the Fish & Hunter grocery/hardware store. The fire was located at the rear of the building, and access was restricted because all the doors/windows were protected by a metal covering. The fire went up a shaft at the rear of the building to the second floor thru the roof and before too long, the entire building was involved.

Dawn saw the building draped in ice, but apparently the fire

was out. Also noted that the water supply was very low, so one 1½ hose was left partially running into a small opening in the rubble where steam and a little amount of smoke was emitting from the basement. This building was connected to a steam boiler in the warehouse and then the line extended to another building which was out of heat. A plumber was called and he dug a hole at the rear of the building in order to get at the line and repair it, so heat could be sent on to the building. At late afternoon the steam/smoke coming out of the rubble darkened which indicated there was an active fire in the basement. It had rekindled from a draft set up from the hole dug at the rear and some vents in the front and within short order fire broke out of the basement to the main floor and extended to the second floor where considerable paint was stored along with ammunition. The blaze was fought until late at night with paint cans blowing up and ammunition going off, which certainly kept the firemen on their toes

Early in 1962 the department decided it was in need of another pumper in order to keep the town fire classification for insurance purposes. A committee was formed to draw up specifications and go before the city council with a request to advertise for bids. In March of 1962 the bid was let and the truck was ready for delivery in October.

The truck had been built by Howe Co. at their factory in Indiana, and two of the firemen were going there to drive the truck back. Bud Derosier who owned an airplane volunteered to fly them down, so along with copilot Elmer Pontius and the two firemen they took off on 10/26/62 and headed out. However the flight was short lived as engine trouble developed over Sturgis and an emergency landing was to be made on a field near Ft. Meade. The landing did not turn out too well as the plane overshot the field and had to make a 180 degree turn back to the field and crashed with the plane flipping over. No fire ensued and the occupants made a fast exit. Bud Derosier suffered a broken nose and Elmer received a cut on the head. The two firemen suffered sore backs and bruises on the abdomen. The equipment company was called and one of their employees delivered the truck.

The truck was a 750 gpm pumper with a 500 gallon booster tank and a separate high pressure pump with two enclosed booster reels. It probably was the first truck designed by department members and saw much action and is still in service.

1/1/63 saw another milestone in the fire department as it once again became an all volunteer department. In 1946 four paid men were employed by the city fire department, two on a 24 hour shift and rotating. Their job was to operate and maintain the equipment. Most of the actual fire fighting was

done by the volunteers. The move to eliminate the paid men was cleared thru the Fire Underwriters so it would not jeopardize the town's insurance rating.

Since communication on fires was very difficult, the department decided to install a two way radio system, and on 9/10/64 the CB radios consisting of one base station, two mobile units and two walkie talkies were in service. The system worked very well for in town fires and communication within the department, but there still was a need for access to the police or other channels.

During this period there were many training sessions put on within the department and also thru the State instructors. These sessions were held to educate the firemen on fire size-up, fire fighting, & equipment maintenance to better equip them to fulfill a fireman's job. Building inspections were made from a preplanning standpoint and notes made on each building so inspected. The inspections were done on various high fire potential commercial buildings in town.

On January 11, 1964, the original constitution/bylaws were revised. The original constitution/bylaws were adopted on 3/10/41, when all of the existing fire companies (Pioneer Hook & Ladder Co., South Deadwood Hose Co., Deadwood Hose Co., Homestake Hose Co., and Fountain City Hose & Ladder Co.) were disbanded and the Deadwood Volunteer Fire Department was a single entity with one chief and other officers. This original document was later amended on 1/11/68; 1/8/73, 5/12/77 & 12/9/82 to meet the current needs of the department.

Another large fire occurred in May of 1966 when the Deadwood Motors Garage caught on fire and mutual aid was sought from Lead. The fire started in the shop part and apparently there was some delay in reporting same. By the time the fire department arrived, the fire had spread to a storage area above and was working its way into the body shop. The building was severely damaged, but the contents of the body shop, new car area and office area escaped with minor damage.

The first part of July, 1969 the department received a mutual aid call from Lead where the Wayland Building was on fire. The call came about 6:00 AM, and upon arrival found the building was quite involved within. This building was rather unusual and was built of concrete with wood floors and joists and a complete dwelling was located on the roof. The ladder truck was called up from Deadwood, and although the departments worked hard, the fire finally weakened the supports under the dwelling which came crashing down to the first floor and opened the interior of the structure to all of the fire and the building and contents were totally destroyed. One sad note saw Elmer Pontius, an exchief, suffer a fatal heart attack at the fire.

It was decided in 1970 that the old Dodge pumper should be replaced, and a new unit was designed and specifications issued for bid. The Luverne Fire Equipment Co. received the job and the truck was delivered by members of the department in 1971. This truck really complimented the other trucks and was a 1000 gpm pumper, several preconnect lines, a 500 gallon booster tank, and for once, power steering which was well received by anyone who had driven the '62 Ford.

In March of 1973, Comer's TV & Appliance another downtown building caught fire. The fire apparently had started at the rear of the building and been "cooking" for sometime and was in the third phase. It finally vented itself at the rear of the building, but with the several false ceilings and roof structure was impossible to stop, and the building and contents were destroyed.

On March 19, 1973, a fire call was issued for an explosion and fire at the Twin City Ready Mix bulk propane storage tank located just below Thundercove on Highway 85. Thick black smoke was visible from downtown Deadwood, and the department responded in short order. However, due to the intensity of the fire and the probability of another explosion, the truck could not move in very close. A propane fire with that much fuel available cannot be extinguished, and it is better to let it burn out and protect the exposures.

The Lead Fire Department was on the upper side of the fire, and they, too, could only get so close. The fire started while a propane truck was being loaded from the bulk storage, and the truck operator sustained rather severe burns. A second explosion occurred shortly and sent the tank on the truck flying across the highway where it dropped into Whitewood Creek some 300 yards away. There was not much to be done except let the fire burn itself out and then take care of several fires that had been started. Luckily the Mobil Oil bulk gasoline and fuel oil tanks located adjacent to the fire were not ruptured to the extent of spilling their contents.

On July 24, 1973, a call for aid was received from Central City, where Dave's Turgeon dinner club was on fire. It was early evening with many customers inside, and some could not believe at first that a fire was in progress. It started in the kitchen area and spread quickly via a dumb waiter shaft to the second floor. There was great concern whether the building could be saved since it was frame, however the floor of the upstairs was made of a six inch hardwood which held the fire there, and there was a rear door to the second floor which provided a clear shot to the entire area. A volume hose stream was directed at that point with good results, and the fire was contained.

At one point the false upper front of the building came crashing down and just missed some firemen who were coming out of the front door. The roof and second floor contents were total losses, but the downstairs bar & dining area suffered only minor water damage, and many of the tables still had candles burning and looked ready for customers.

On October 29, 1975, the department responded to a mutual aid call from Spearfish where the Kelley Motel/Hotel was on fire. The Deadwood crew was assigned to protect the motel which was connected to the hotel by a walkway and were successful in that only a few motel units were damaged. The two story frame hotel was burned beyond repair.

The old Ford ladder truck had seen better days and it was decided to replace it with a more mobile chassis and a steel aerial ladder. So in 1978 a committee drew up specifications to procure the chassis with the ladder mounted thereon. After the truck arrived in 1979, and since it had been agreed that the City could not afford a factory built unit, a few capable firemen built the body and salvaged the 500 gpm pump from the old Ford. The department ended up with very good unit at an approximate cost of \$38,000.00, far below what a factory built unit would have demanded.

Also, the Ford panel truck was replaced with a '79 Chevrolet unit which was remodeled inside to accommodate bunker gear, breathing apparatus, extra bottles, and other necessary equipment.

So the fire department mobile units were in good shape and with a sufficient number of bunker gear and breathing apparatus, the department was very well equipped. The 2½ inch hose that had been used from hydrant to truck was replaced with 4 inch hose that allowed the trucks to become mobile hydrants and capable of delivering their pumping capacity while positioned much nearer the fire.

On Feb. 19, 1980, a mutual aid call from Spearfish was answered where the Homestake Sawmill was on fire. Upon arrival the truck was positioned on the NE corner to protect exposures there. Since no hydrants were available, the water was drafted from a portatank which was supplied with water by several tankers. The department remained on the scene until released about 3:00 AM on the 2nd.

During these years it became mandatory for every fireman to take and pass the Firemanship I course and other classes were given by local and State instructors. Monthly training sessions were held so the firemen could also receive "hands on" experience.

A fire alarm came in during very cold weather on 2/3/82 at the Best Western Motel on Charles Street. The fire

apparently started in the boiler room and spread thru a wall to a motel unit and also into the attic space that was open clear to the other end of that block of motel units. A draft sucked the fire the entire length and out a vent at the far end. Severe damage was sustained to the motel units in that portion with some smoke and water damage to other locations.

The hose had been washed and reloaded when a fire was reported on 2/4/82 at the laundromat located on Sherman Street across from the county courthouse. The fire was located in the upstairs apartment and was attacked thru a second story window on the side, and also from the rear thru a hallway access. The front of the apartment received fire/smoke and water damage, and there was quite a bit of water damage to the laundromat below.

The final blow in February came on 2/15/82, when an explosion occurred on the second floor of the Ranger Bar building on Main Street. This was formerly the Apex building and was used in the early days as an assay office for the various mining companies. Apparently someone had been using gasoline to clean some parts, and since this was being done near the open flame of a gas hot water heater, the inevitable explosion and fire resulted. All units responded with the '62 Ford and ladder truck at the front and the '71 Ford pumper at the rear, where fire was also visible.

Flames were shooting out of the front windows of the second floor and although hose streams were directed thru the windows, due to the spread of the fire from the explosion, they were ineffective and the blaze entered into a series of flashovers and total involvement. During the fire, a second explosion occurred in the Ranger building, blew a TV set across the street, the top front of the Ranger building was blown out, and the top front of the building next door was damaged. So ended one of the most active months in fire department history as concerns major commercial fires.

The constitutional/bylaw changes made on 12/9/82 created the position of president who would preside at meetings and do some other duties while the fire chief would still be in charge at all fires and make the various appointments. A master mechanic, whose position was a paid one, would take care of maintenance and also the fire hall.

On April 1, 1984, a mutual aid call was received from Lead where the Homestake Opera House was on fire. This was a very complex structure, and the original fire located under the stage was almost inaccessible. Both fire departments worked very hard, but in the end the fire spread upwards and out into the main theatre and then thru the roof. The building was entirely gutted but the fire was confined almost entirely in that building and only the next door library/recreation hall suffered smoke and water damage.

February 24, 1985 is a day to remember in Deadwood when the Deadwood Grade & old High School buildings were set on fire by two young boys. The fire was discovered about noon that Sunday and immediately reported. A total response was made by the fire department with two pumpers going to pre-planned locations, one to a hydrant on Main Street near the lower annex location, and the other and the ladder truck to the playground off Williams Street.

Hoses were laid from hydrants to the trucks, and the truck crew on Main St. went directly to the fire located in the annex building and involved one room. This was controlled rather quickly, however, another fire had been set at the top of the front stairway in the main building and was gaining ground, so another line was laid and a crew dispatched to work on that. The fire crew at the playground found a set fire on the first floor situated between the main building and the old high school building, and where a former stairway had gone from that floor to the top floor. This fire was first attacked thru a window and then from the inside.

No amount of pre-planning could have foreseen such a situation, and mutual aid was summoned from Lead and later from Spearfish with their ladder truck. The fire off the playground area spread upwards and with the other fire also on the third floor of the main building got into a ventilation duct that ran the entire length of that building between the ceiling and the roof. This duct also vented to the outside at the far end towards the Franklin Hotel, and pulled the fire down the entire length. In the meantime, the other blaze vented to the roof next to the old building, and once that fire got into the attic area, it was not long before that building was totally involved and destroyed.

The fire in the main building was fought from both sides by hoses from the aerial ladders and some ground lines but proceeded to the end of the building. The damage was extensive, the top floor and roof totally destroyed, considerable water/smoke damage to the 1st & 2nd floors. After a long and bitter struggle the fires were under control but with damage estimated at around two million dollars, it was the largest dollar loss in Deadwood's history.

The school classes had to be moved to various locations until repairs and rebuilding were completed for the beginning of the 1987 school year. The rebuilt school is of modern design and up to building codes, and while a bit of history vanished, the end result is a better school facility than before.

Another disastrous fire in the downtown district occurred on 12/15/87 and started with an alarm reporting smoke odor at the rear of the Frontier Drugstore, located in the Syndicate building on the corner of Main & Lee Streets. The department responded promptly with all units, one pumper on Main Street across from the Frontier Drug, one on the corner of Main & Lee Streets, and the ladder truck on Lee Street. A mutual aid call was sent to the Lead Fire Department which responded with a pumper that was located on Highway 14A just down from the Lee Street corner.

No fire was present in the drugstore, but on Lee Street a window blew out from a small shop as firemen were going to enter that location. An active fire was involved at the rear of that shop, and heavy black smoke was pouring out of some windows on the highway side. This building had been built in 1888; the second floor had formerly contained apartments and was now vacant. The first floor had been remodeled several times to accommodate small shops and false ceilings were prevalent. Much of the plaster had fallen off rooms that were not in use, and most of the upstairs was in that condition.

The fire department attacked the original location of the visible fire and knocked down that part; however, it became apparent the main fire was still out of control, and shortly the fire burst thru the rear of the drugstore and out the front door to Main Street. A crew that had been inside the drugstore was chased out by these flames. Meanwhile the fire was reaching thru the second floor and to the roof behind the drugstore location. Soon the roof vented and fire raged outside and it became a fight to cool the fire as much as possible and try to keep it from spreading.

With the amount of fuel in this large building, its general condition and the head start of the fire, it was an impossible task. The building soon showed smoke buildup throughout and the fire moved thru the second story then the first completely out of control. Several fog streams were played on the Pine View Apartments across Lee Street, where the radiant heat was breaking windows and the front of the building was getting pretty hot.

A portion of the Syndicate wall facing Lee Street failed and came down scattering bricks clear across the street. Fortunately no one was seriously hurt although one fireman suffered some bruises. A little later the remainder of that wall towards the highway also fell. The ladder truck had been moved before these events and was positioned at the rear of the Thorpe building in the parking area.

A call for the Spearfish Fire Department had been made and they responded with their ladder truck and one pumper, and the strategy was to attempt to save the Thorpe building

which shared a common fire wall. However, the extreme heat and perhaps a fault in the fire wall enabled the fire to spread to that building and hose lines were directed to the Old Style Saloon building roof parapet. The fire wall there held and the fire was finally under control.

This fire not only destroyed two historic buildings, it also destroyed many businesses and put many people out of work, especially with the many employees of F. L. Thorpe Black Hills Gold Jewelry. The department stayed all night on the fire putting out hot spots, and some firemen remained there for several days.

Again, Deadwood had to pick up the pieces and forge ahead to better times. This fire, along with many others like it, illustrated the fact that older multi-storied buildings were prime targets for fire. Most had never been rewired, had been remodeled several times, and once a fire got a hold, there was little chance of stopping it.

The 1962 Ford pumper had many pumping hours on it and was due to be replaced. So in 1988 a truck committee was appointed to draw up specifications for a new truck. A great deal of time was spent by the committee to provide the department with a modern 1000 gpm pumper, diesel powered, automatic transmission and a 500 gallon booster tank. At the same time additional equipment was ordered to go along with the truck, including 1000 feet of 5 inch hose. The truck will be delivered sometime in April of 1989.

A letter had been received from the National Fire Protection Agency that all of the current self contained breathing apparatus had to be updated by 1991. Although the department's masks were in good shape, the upgrading would cost around \$800.00 per mask, so it was decided to sell or trade the current masks and buy 15 complete masks with spare air bottles that would meet the requirements now.

Another significant change in the fire fighting business is the enormous amount of record keeping that has to be done now. The age of the computer demands all sorts of information that can be sent to a central computer that produces statistics for the entire country. This paper work has reached down to the smallest department.

Another change is in the cost of fire equipment. Granted the trucks and other equipment have been updated constantly, the cost of trucks alone has gone from \$17,500.00 for the 1962 pumper to \$30,000.00 for the 1971 pumper and that of the new pumper is \$104,000.00. To completely outfit today's fireman, including bunker coat & pants, helmet, boots and a modern self contained breathing apparatus, the dollar figure is around \$2400.00.

In 1982 the department made significant change in the alerting system. Pagers were purchased that would receive radio dispatches from the central dispatch in the sheriff's office. The pagers are activated by a tone signal that is different for the various departments on the system in the county. The firemen wear the pagers when they are out of their homes and are able to receive fire calls at once and consequently response is faster. During the night the pagers are plugged into a battery charger equipped with a speaker that amplifies the tone signal and definitely awakens the soundest sleeper.

One thing that has not changed over the years for most departments is the need for something that money cannot buy, **VOLUNTEERS**. All towns have them but it is hard to attract the younger ones in the ideal age bracket 18-35. Being a volunteer fireman is one of the finest community services a person can do. One must be dedicated to take an unpaid job with no fixed hours, calls at any time of the day or night in any kind of weather, and sometimes criticized for his efforts. What would happen if there was no one to **VOLUNTEER**?

While many of the major fires that occurred in the City of Deadwood over the past years are included in this history, many more, because of space limitations, could not be. A multitude of chimney fires, car fires, residential fires, wild land fires, and false alarms happen all of the time, and are responded to by the volunteers. A fireman's job is not very glamorous either, since after working hard to put out a fire, there is still work to be done. Pick up the cold, wet, dirty hose and other equipment, clean all immediately and reload the trucks to be ready for the next fire.

This history has gone from the bucket brigade/hose cart/hand engine fire fighting to the modern department equipped with high powered pumpers, aerial ladder trucks, and all of the safety apparel worn by fire fighter now. However, it still comes down to the fireman to make everything work. Today's fire fighting is much more complicated too, since there are so many hazardous materials which can be involved and require more knowledge of the correct procedure to handle the situation. Consequently much time is spent in drills, meetings and schools to learn the correct use of self contained breathing apparatus, a must for protection along with bunker gear when answering any fire call.

Looking back it is interesting to note that the 1903 Sanborn Map for Deadwood (used for insurance underwriting) states the following: Fire Department - volunteer, 180 men, chief, two assistant chiefs, 9 hose carts, hook & ladder truck, 55 gallon chemical engine, 5000 feet first class hose, electric fire alarm system, 18 stations. No steam and no hand engine. Population 7000.00.

The Deadwood Fire Department today consists of two 1000 gpm pumpers, one 65 foot aerial ladder truck, one utility van which carries misc. equipment, bunker gear for all firemen, modern breathing apparatus for 15 firemen, 35 volunteers on the roll call, and a modern radio dispatch system.

Two of the most important needs of any fire department are water and the distribution system. The City of Deadwood is fortunate to have nearly a million gallons of water in its tanks, and an excellent source of replenishing the reserve with water from Homestake water and the Cutting Mine.

The water mains although some are quite old, are capable of delivering an adequate supply in the downtown district. The higher residential areas can now be supplied, if needed, by relay from pumpers below and the use of the 4 and 5 inch hose now carried.

The problem of a sufficient water supply on upper Charles Street and the newly annexed area towards Pluma was solved with the installation of the water tank on the Kirk road and the newly installed water line from there to the existing lines. Hydrants were also added along that line.

So while many of the water lines need to be updated and in some cases enlarged, the Fire Department is in good shape with the equipment and an adequate water supply and distribution system.

It is hoped that this history of the Deadwood Volunteer Fire Department will be interesting not only to the people of Deadwood, but also to others during this Centennial Year for the State of South Dakota. Incidentally, the Fire Department is celebrating its 112th birthday.

A. A. "Bud" Coburn

SECOND GOLD RUSH !!

The original "History of the Deadwood Volunteer Fire Department" covered the years from 1876 thru 1989, but so much has happened since November 1, 1989, that this story should be continued.

On that date when limited gambling was approved by the State of South Dakota, Deadwood entered a new phase reminiscent of the gold rush days of 1876. The City of Deadwood was to receive proceeds from the licensing fee of \$2000.00 per gaming unit and 50% of the 8% tax on net revenues. All of the money except the overhead of the Deadwood Economic Development Corp. and the State Gaming Commission was to be used for historic preservation and restoration.

The Gold Rush has been revived, only this time the "miners" are not digging for gold but rather pulling handles and playing cards. The "gold recovery mills" consist of gaming halls, and range from small & spartan to large & lush and still more to be built. The percentage of recovery is limited to approximately 10%, but the volume is large.

Fortunately for the Fire Department, which has been housed since 1953 in rather cramped quarters in the old Chicago & Northwestern Railway depot, a new fire hall was included in the various projects to be undertaken. A location was finally determined, architectural plans completed and bids let in May of 1991, and the building was ready for occupancy in the latter part of December of that year.

For the first time the department is housed in a building specifically designed for that purpose. The location is between Highway 14A and Main Street, just SW of the school buildings. There are seven fire doors which open onto the highway, and the office entrance is on Main Street. Adequate floor space for all of the mobile equipment and shop is in the "barn" area.

The fire doors are wider & higher than the previous ones, which is certainly appreciated by the firemen who might be driving the trucks. Also there is enough room to walk around all of the vehicles. Future plans call for the purchase of a new cascade system which will be a packaged unit of the latest design. All in all the layout of the "barn" is so much better than the previous location, the members of the fire department sometimes wonder if they are dreaming.

The remainder of the building contains two offices, meeting & training room, communications room, bathrooms, kitchen, and storage areas. The two offices are occupied by the fire chief and the department secretary. The communications room

contains all the radio equipment, computer and fax machine; and a new copier is in the chief's office. The kitchen has a stove, microwave, dish washer, sink and the normal cupboard storage & counter area.

An emergency generator and the air conditioning unit for the office area are installed on the roof. A bell tower was part of the design, and the 1889 fire bell was sent to the original foundry to be cleaned and equipped with an electric ringing device and was installed in the tower. It will ring again for fire alarms, more for historic purposes than the actual alert which is handled by the radio paging system.

Other improvements that are the result of the money from the preservation and restoration funds include the installation of new water mains, enforcement of the Uniform Building Code and the Life Safety code, sprinkler systems installed in many buildings, proper exits, automatic fire alarms, and wiring updated to meet code. With all of these changes the City and the Fire Department are in better position to protect the many historic buildings from destruction by fire.

This concludes the "History of the Deadwood Volunteer Fire Department" to date - 2/11/92.

A. A. "Bud" Coburn

DEFINITIONS

Hook & Ladder Truck	Four wheeled, hand or horse pulled unit carrying ladders & the hooks which hold water buckets.
Hose cart	Two wheeled unit that carried hose on a reel mounted between the wheels - hand pulled.
Hand engine	Man powered pump on wheels, 4-6 men on each side powering the handles up and down.
RPM	Revolutions per minute.
GPM	Gallons per minute.
Pine Crest Park	Formerly situated at the top of Spearfish Hill - many small cabins & main club building of log construction.
Third phase	Closed structure where open flame has stopped due to lack of oxygen, but heat builds up rapidly & caution must be used before making any opening into the building as the influx of air can cause an explosion.
Portatank	A collapsible treated canvas tank with metal frame - capacity usually around 1500 gallons.
Chemical engine	A large soda/acid fire extinguisher on wheels equipped with hose & reel.
Flashover	Occurs when a very hot buildup of smoke lacking oxygen inside vents to the outside and ignites when exposed to the air. This can also happen inside a building near a ceiling as the smoke rolls near fresh air.

Credits:

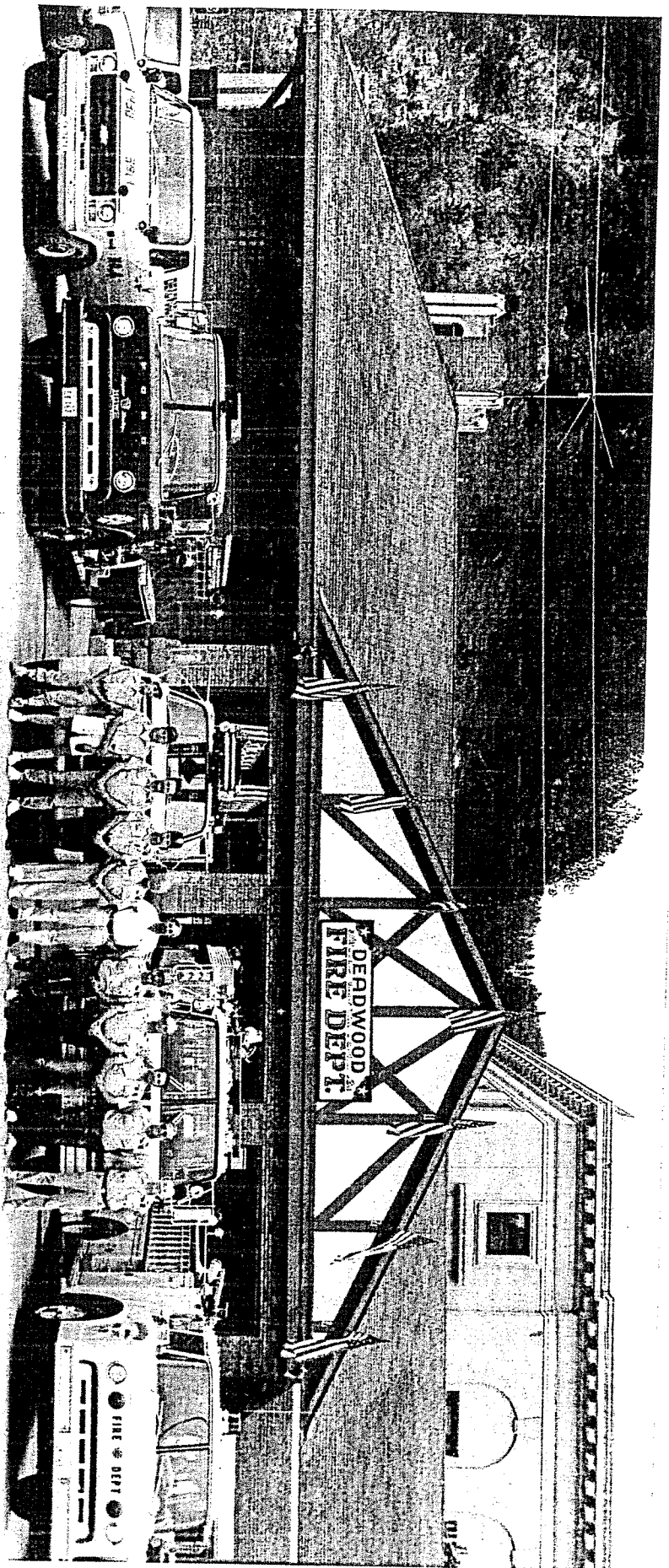
Jill Pontius "Chronological History of Deadwood Fire Fighting", 1876 - 1881. Some material for these years used.

Black Hills Daily Times - some material obtained for the period up to 1904.

Two Homestake Hose Company minute books, period 1883 to 1934.

Interviews with two long time Deadwood residents.

Much from the memory and experience of the author.



AUGUST 1991

SOME MEMBERS OF THE DEADWOOD VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT IN FRONT OF THE FORMER CHICAGO & NORTHWESTERN RAILWAY DEPOT WHICH HAD BEEN CONVERTED TO THE CITY HALL, FIRE & POLICE QUARTERS IN 1953. THE ORIGINAL CITY HALL HAD BEEN DESTROYED BY FIRE IN 1952

Jr. Members Jacob McKee & Bob Nelson, Jr., Bob Nelson, Jim Lee, Bud Coburn, Chief Ken Hawki, Bob Longden, Jim Haupt, Bill Glover, Lynn Gerving & Jerry Pontius

Hoek

CITY HALL BUILDING

The original City Hall Building, which was finished in 1889, should have been included in the original "History", but somehow was not. It was located on the corner of Main & Deadwood Streets, now occupied by a city parking lot. This addendum adds some information about that important structure and its occupants from 1889 to its destruction by fire in 1952.

The need for a building to house the various city departments had been recognized for some time, and in 1888 it was decided by the city fathers to have one built. The first phase was to dig a basement, and the Times noted that one person bid the job and did it for \$50.00! Then for several months the council debated whether it would be a two or three story building.

John Hunter even offered to help pay for the construction if the three story plan was accepted. So the three story plan was finally agreed upon, advertised and the bids were opened on April 22, 1889. The low bid of \$16,989.00 was awarded to M.J. Tuplin. The work was finished in December of 1889, and it was noted that the final cost including some extras was approximately \$25,000.00.

The Deadwood City Fire Department then had one place for equipment and offices. On January 8, 1890, the Homestake Hose Company held a meeting in the building. A fire alarm bell had been ordered from the McShane Bell Foundry of Baltimore, Maryland, and was installed in the bell tower on the roof. (It should be noted that a bell for the Central City Fire Department was also manufactured at that time).

One side was engraved:

McShane Bell Foundry
Baltimore, Md.
1889

The other side was engraved as follows:

Deadwood City Fire Alarm 1889
Sol Star, Mayor
J. R. Belding, Ch. F & P Committee
L. R. Whitbeck, Chief Eng'r.

The bell stayed in that location until the fire of January, 1952, when it came crashing down clear to the basement but outside of a few "bruises" suffered no permanent damage. It was not resurrected to a rightful recognition until the '70's, when a stone base was built and the bell mounted thereon. This was located at the northerly end of the depot building which housed the city offices, fire & police departments until late 1991.

During its lifetime the city hall building housed other occupants besides the city departments and city jail. At various times there was a candy kitchen, shoe store, household appliances store, F. L. Thorpe Black Hills Gold Jewelry, KDSJ radio, music store and perhaps others not remembered. In December of 1991, the Fire Department was moved to its new building. The city offices & police department were moved in January of 1992 to the new city hall building, located where a former Fish & Hunter warehouse had been remodeled to accommodate them.

The further story of the bell is included in an added section of the history for the 1990-92 period located at the end of the "History".

FIRE OF 1894

Early in the morning of March 5, 1894, a fire was discovered on the west side of Main Street, between Wall & Gold Sts. It apparently started when an oil lamp was knocked over and rapidly spread to adjacent properties on each side and threatened the entire west side of Main Street. Although the hose companies responded quickly, the fire spread southward until it was stopped just below the intersection of Gold & Main.

Even though the fire companies eventually brought the fire under control and successfully protected numerous exposures, the loss was substantial. The total loss was estimated at \$100,000.00 with only \$33,000.00 covered by insurance. Again, the the town had to rebuild, and better constructed buildings soon filled the burned out area. Such is the history of most mining towns and Deadwood was to lose other buildings to fire in the future.