

PROVINCETOWN FIRE DEPARTMENT

PROVINCETOWN, THOUGH SITUATED FAR FROM ANY LARGE CITY, AND THEREBY HANDICAPPED BY MANY THINGS THAT WOULD MAKE CLOSE PROXIMITY TO A LARGE TOWN VERY DESIRABLE, HAS ONE THING OF WHICH IT IS JUSTLY PROUD, AN EXCELLENT AND EFFICIENT FIRE DEPARTMENT.

THE FIRST MOVE TOWARDS THE CREATION OF A FIRE DEPARTMENT WAS MADE IN TOWN MEETING, MARCH 7th 1836, WHEN IT WAS VOTED TO BUY AN ENGINE. JOSEPH P. JOHNSON WAS AUTHORIZED TO MAKE THE PURCHASE AND THE WASHINGTON WAS BUILT AT THE HUNNEMAN WORKS IN BOSTON EXPRESSLY FOR THIS PLACE. AFTER FORTY YEARS OF GOOD SERVICE IT WAS PLACED IN THE BASEMENT OF TOWN HALL, WHERE IT MAY STILL BE SEEN. (IT IS NOW ON DISPLAY AT THE CAPE COD PILGRIM MEMORIAL MUSEUM ON TOWN HILL).

IN 1850 THE FRANKLIN WAS ADDED, THE RESCUE HOOK AND LADDER TRUCK, (1859), MAZEPPA ENGINE NO. 3, (1868), EXCELSIOR NO. 4, (1868), ULYSSES ENGINE, NO. 1, (1869), FRANKLIN ENGINE NO. 2 (1871).

THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO GET A STEAM FIRE ENGINE WAS MADE AT THE TOWN MEETING IN FEBRUARY, 1867, WHEN THE TOWN VOTED TO BUY ONE; THE APPROPRIATION WAS \$11,000. BUT THIS ORDER WAS SPEEDILY RESCINDED AT A SPECIAL MEETING, AND NOTHING FURTHER WAS DONE UNTIL THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING, IN 1889, WHEN IT WAS VOTED ALMOST UNANIMOUSLY TO BUY A STEAMER AND A CHEMICAL. THIS COMPLETED OUR EQUIPMENT. THE ENGINE WAS NAMED FOR THE CHIEF THAT WAS THEN SERVING, JOHN D. HILLIARD. DURING THE DEBATE IN 1869, ONE STRONG-HEADED OLD FELLOW WAS OPPOSED TO THE PURCHASE OF A STEAM ENGINE ON THE GROUND THAT HE BELIEVED "COLD WATER WOULD PUT OUT A FIRE AS WELL AS BILING WATER AND THERE WOULD BE NO DANGER OF SCALDING PEOPLE AROUND THE FIRE".

IN 1859 THE BOARD OF ENGINEERS WAS FORMED, WITH E. G. LORING AS CHIEF, WHO WAS SUCCEEDED BY EBEN S. SMITH. THE NEXT CHIEF WAS JOHN D. HILLIARD, WHO WAS APPOINTED MAY 7th, 1872, AND HELD THE OFFICE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS.

THIS ARTICLE WOULD BE INCOMPLETE WITHOUT A BRIEF NOTICE OF MR. HILLIARD'S EFFICIENCY. EVER ALERT FOR THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE TOWN AND ITS PEOPLE, WIDE AWAKE, ENERGETIC, AND THOROUGHLY INFORMED AS TO THE MOST APPROVED METHODS OF FIRE-FIGHTING, MUCH OF THE SUCCESS OF THE FIRE DEPARTMENT AT THE PRESENT TIME WAS DUE TO HIS WISE JUDGMENT. THE FIRST DEATH OF AN ENGINEER IN ACTIVE SERVICE WAS JONATHAN COOK, THE SENIOR ENGINEER, WHO SERVED TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AND WAS THE ONLY ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE ORIGINAL APPOINTMENT OF ENGINEERS IN 1859. HE WAS A FAITHFUL SERVANT AND TRUE FRIEND TO FIREMEN.

GEORGE H. HOLMES SUCCEEDED MR. HILLIARD AS CHIEF AND HELD THE OFFICE FOR SEVEN YEARS. THE PRESENT EFFICIENT CHIEF IS MR. JAMES H. BARNETT, WHO HAS HELD THE OFFICE NINE YEARS, HAS BEEN ON THE BOARD TWENTY-TWO YEARS, AND IN THE DEPARTMENT FORTY-FIVE YEARS.

THE PRESENT BOARD OF ENGINEERS ARE: J. H. BARNETT, CHIEF, T. J. LEWIS, L. A. LAW, J. E. CALLAHAN.

CONNECTED WITH THE DEPARTMENT IS A MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY, ESTABLISHED IN 1873, TO WHICH FIREMEN ARE ELIGIBLE.

THE OLD HAND ENGINES, NOW OUT OF COMMISSION, ARE KEPT IN ORDER FOR AN EMERGENCY, BUT ARE ON OCCASIONALLY USED. THE DEPARTMENT HAS THE FOLLOWING APPARATUS: ONE STEAMER, ONE HOOK AND LADDER TRUCK, SIX HOSE REELS, ONE HORSE CARRIAGE, TWO HAND ENGINES, AND ONE CHEMICAL ENGINE. THE MEN COMPRISING THE DIFFERENT COMPANIES NUMBER ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SIX MEN.

IT IS A REMARKABLE FACT AND STANDS AS A LASTING MONUMENT TO THE EFFICIENCY OF OUR FIRE DEPARTMENT, THAT ALTHOUGH THE TOWN IS CLOSELY SETTLED WITH WOODEN BUILDINGS, IN THE SEVENTY-SEVEN YEARS SINCE THE DEPARTMENT WAS ESTABLISHED, ONLY FOUR DISASTROUS FIRES HAVE OCCURRED.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1858 THREE BUILDINGS ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF COMMERCIAL STREET, NEARLY OPPOSITE THE SITE NOW OCCUPIED BY MASONIC HALL, WERE TOTALLY DESTROYED BY FIRE; THE OLD UNION HOUSE WHICH STOOD ON THE SITE OF MASONIC HALL WAS BARELY SAVED.

ON MARCH 4th, 1875, ADAMS HALL WAS BURNED. PROBABLY NO FIRE HAS TESTED THE STRENGTH AND EFFICIENCY OF THE DEPARTMENT MORE THAN THIS. A SEVERE SNOW STORM WAS RAGING AND THE HAULING OF THE HAND ENGINES THROUGH THE BLOCKED STREETS WAS A SERIOUS UNDERTAKING; YET THIS WAS SUCCESSFULLY ACCOMPLISHED AND THE ENGINES WERE WORKED SO SKILLFULLY THAT THE WALLS OF THE BUILDING WERE SAVED, AFTER THE ROOF FELL IN. A DWELLING HOUSE, SEPARATED FROM THE BURNING BUILDING BY SCARCELY TWO FEET, WAS HARDLY SCORCHED. THE FIRE WAS PROBABLY CAUSED BY THE EXPLOSION OF GAS IN THE STORE OCCUPIED BY ROTHENBURG BROTHERS, ON THE GROUND FLOOR.

THE NEXT DISASTROUS FIRE WAS THE BURNING OF THE OLD TOWN HALL SITUATED WHERE NOW STANDS THE PILGRIM MONUMENT. THE DATE OF THIS FIRE WAS FEBRUARY 16, 1877. THE ALARM SOUNDED AT 8:25 P.M. THE DEPARTMENT QUICKLY RESPONDED, BUT THE FIRE HAD GAINED SUCH HEADWAY AND WAS AT SUCH AN ELEVATION THAT BEFORE AN EFFECTIVE STREAM COULD BE BROUGHT TO BEAR, THE BUILDING WAS PAST RECOVERY. THE ESTIMATED LOSS WAS \$4500.00 AND THERE WAS NO INSURANCE. THE LAST ENGINE WAS RELIEVED FROM DUTY AT 6:30 A.M. next morning.

AND LAST, BUT BY NO MEANS LEAST, WAS THE BURNING OF CENTENARY CHURCH. ON MARCH 14th, 1908, IT WAS SET ON FIRE BY A BOLT OF LIGHTNING, WHICH STRUCK THE TOP OF THE SPIRE, TWO HUNDRED FEET ABOVE THE GROUND. THIS FIRE NEARLY COST THE LIVES OF SEVERAL FIREMEN, AND VERY NEARLY DESTROYED SEVERAL NEARBY DWELLINGS. IT WAS A SEVERE THUNDER STORM, AN UNUSUAL THING TO OCCUR IN THE MONTH OF MARCH. THE PEOPLE LIVING NEAR THE CHURCH WERE AWAKENED BY THE THUNDER AND WHILE THE STORM WAS AT ITS HEIGHT A GREAT BALL OF FIRE WAS SEEN TO FLASH DOWN THE SPIRE OF THE CHURCH. THE ALARM WAS GIVEN AND THE TIP-MOST POINT OF THE STEEPLE WAS SEEN TO BE ON FIRE. THE FIREMEN WAITED UNTIL THE FIRE WAS WITHIN REACH. SUDDENLY THE BASEMENT WAS IN FLAMES; IN WHAT MYSTERIOUS MANNER THE FIRE JUMPED TO THE LOWER PART OF THE BUILDING WILL NEVER BE KNOWN. NOW A SEVERE FIGHT BEGAN IN EARNEST, AS THE FIREMEN TRIED TO CARRY LINES FROM THE BUILDING TO PLAY A STREAM UPON THE STEEPLE AS FAR AS POSSIBLE.

AT ONE TIME IT SEEMED AS IF THE FIRE WERE UNDER CONTROL; THEN SUDDENLY IT LEAPED UP AGAIN WITH GREAT VIGOR AND SPARKS BEGAN TO SAIL THROUGH THE AIR, LANDING ON ROOFS A QUARTER OF A MILE AWAY. SEVERAL FIREMEN WERE IN GREAT DANGER AS THE FIRE HAD A WAY OF DARTING FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER. THE MEN MIGHT EASILY HAVE BEEN CUT OFF BY THE FLAMES, BUT FORTUNATELY THEY ESCAPED WITH ONLY SINGED CLOTHING AND BODIES. THE FIREMEN WERE AIDED IN THEIR EFFORTS BY THE FACT THAT THERE WAS LITTLE OR NO WIND AND THAT THE RAIN HAD DRENCHED THE ROOFS OF THE ADJOINING HOUSES. AT FIVE O'CLOCK THE CHURCH WAS IN RUINS; THE LOSS WAS \$16,000.

ALL HONOR, THEN, TO OUR BRAVE FIREMEN, NOT ONLY FOR THE HARD AND PERILOUS WORK THEY UNDERTAKE WHEN A FIRE IS ACTUALLY UNDER WAY, BUT FOR THE WISE PRECAUTION THEY TAKE IN EVER BEING ON THE LOOKOUT TO PREVENT FIRES.