

By the time this column sees print, bids will have been opened on Jan. 26 for the new fire truck for the McKownville Fire District. As this is written, commissioners, officers and fire department members await the event with eager anticipation.

What a contrast the efficient, complex, fire apparatus of today presents to that available to the little group of volunteer firefighters at the department's founding 65 years ago and for the first few critical years. The little two-wheeled chemical cart, towed behind the Paige fire car seems woefully inadequate by today's standards.

Coupled with this was the fact that the nearest help, if needed, was Albany Fire Department's Engine 10. Neither the Westmere or Guilderland Fire Departments were in existence at that time.

Early records of fire district and fire department alike are brief and terse.

First reference to housing for the equipment was the rental in 1919 of a garage from Mrs. Lydia Koonz on Western Ave. at \$125 per year. After four years of such housing, the budget of the fire district for 1923 of \$175 included an item for construction of a building to house the fire car and chemical trailer. The building was constructed that year on land made available by Mr. Witbeck and was heated with a stove.

In that year also the district became affluent enough to paint the name "McKownville Fire Department" on the fire car and 12 galvanized buckets were purchased for the fire car. In that year also, the luxury of a battery and starter were installed in the Paige. In this day and age it seems hard to conceive, in the excitement of a fire alarm, for it to be necessary to start the vehicle by hand cranking it, assuming that none of the four tires (tube type) were flat.

The alarm system consisted of an old locomotive tire hung near the McKown (Witbeck) Hotel with a heavy sledgehammer provided for striking. There is one occasion on record when the hammer was missing at the time of an alarm. Records show a new hammer purchased in 1924. In that year also a telephone line was installed, three oilskin coats, two pair of gloves and a warning device (siren?) for the fire car were purchased.

The 1926 budget for the fire district of \$325 included an amount of \$150 for new apparatus. The record shows by the problems encountered that the old Paige was nearing the end of its usefulness. Wendell Holmes, who ran the Albany Country Club garage was

authorized to purchase "a chassis similar to the one used by him as a wrecker" and to mount the chemical tanks thereon. This was a Packard touring car chassis and the completed vehicle was placed in service in June 1926.

Following the acquisition of the Packard and its conversion, Wendell Holmes, a member since 1922, made a room available in the basement of his country club garage for its storage. A meeting room was provided upstairs and these facilities continued in use until completion of the Arcadia Ave. firehouse in 1935.

Missing from the accompanying photo of the building is the ramp to the upstairs. The photo was taken about 1960 shortly before it was demolished. It stood on the site presently occupied by the Across the Street Pub, south side of Western Ave. near the City of Albany line.



Albany Country Club garage was home of the McKownville Fire Department from 1926 to 1935.