

Early history of the McKownville Volunteer Fire Department  
excerpt from McKownville News and Comment by Fred B. Abele  
(on pages 2 and 10 of the Altamont Enterprise, January 13, 1983)

**65th Anniversary**

McKownville volunteer firefighters as well as the McKownville community will observe during 1983 the 65th anniversary of the founding of the McKownville Fire Department and the formation of the McKownville Fire District.

First agitation for formation of a fire company began at a meeting of the Great Western Turnpike Association of Jan. 10, 1916, called by President Alfred Garrison to discuss fire protection for the area. On April 18 of that year a meeting was held at the Witbeck (McKown) Hotel to form the McKownville Fire Department. Then in May a committee was formed to look into buying fire apparatus.

During 1916 and 1917, proceedings were begun to establish a fire district. A petition signed by 37 property owners was presented to Town Supervisor Frederick J. Van Wormer requesting that the Albany County Board of Supervisors approve creation of the McKownville Fire District. One of the signers was Squire William McKown (1842-1924), great grandson of Billy McKown, founder of the hamlet.

On Dec. 31, 1917, the county board, on motion of Supervisor Van Wormer, approved formation of the district under Section 38 of the County Law as it then existed, and McKownville Fire District became a political subdivision. In June 1918, the county was requested by the fire department to organize the district and the first board of fire commissioners was then seated.

On March 18, 1918, an organizational meeting was held for the McKownville Fire Department. Subsequently a constitution and bylaws were adopted and a charter obtained. On June 22, 1918 the board of directors consented to formation of the McKownville Fire Department, Inc. and a certificate of incorporation was presented to Dr. Thomas Helme, clerk.

The McKownville Fire Department was the second fire department to be formed in Guilderland, preceded only by the Altamont Hose Co. It was closely followed by

the Guilderland Center Fire Department, however, also formed in 1918.

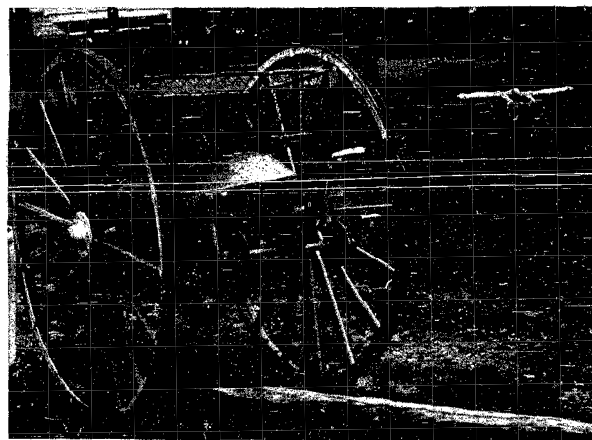
The first McKownville fire apparatus was a two-wheeled chemical and hose cart procured from the O. G. Childs Co. of Utica at a cost of \$199. Moeny was raised for this purpose by the fire company which was reimbursed by the fire district after collection of taxes had begun. The hose cart was towed to fires behind a Paige touring car apparently made available by one of the Witbecks, all of whom were charter members, and who operated an auto sales agency in Schenectady for many years.

The Paige served until 1926. There is no record apparent of the disposition of either the hose cart or the Paige. There are no known photos of the Paige. This writer would appreciate hearing from anyone who is aware of one, or any snapshots or photos of the early apparatus.

Sixty-five years later, on Jan. 26, the Board of Fire Commissioners for the McKownville Fire District will open bids on the eighth piece of apparatus in its history. The board has examined and demonstrated a variety of models and makes of pumpers, mini-pumpers, midi-pumpers, commercial chassis pumpers and custom pumpers. After careful consideration it was apparent that a 1250 gpm custom Class A pumper would be best for the use of this district. Many weeks work have been spent by the commissioners to prepare the specifications for such a pumper.

For the past several years, the commissioners have carefully budgeted monies in reserve for this

(Continued on Page 8)



McKownville's first fire apparatus was a two wheeled chemical and hose cart manufactured by O. G. Childs Co. of Utica, later merged into American LaFrance.

(Continued from Page 2)

purpose. Inflationary interest rates have helped keep pace with inflationary prices and no bonds will be issued, nor will taxes increase as the result of the purchase. The new truck will replace the 1957 American LaFrance 750 gpm pumper now in service which will then become the spare. This truck has served well, but parts for it are increasingly difficult to come by.

The fire department and fire commissioners are justly proud of the progress made in 65 years, from a two-wheeled chemical and hose cart to the most modern apparatus. In 1918 there was no water supply and if the chemicals could not extinguish the blaze, it burned while waiting for aid from Albany. The department and the commissioners have fought long and hard to upgrade the water system available and will continue to do so.