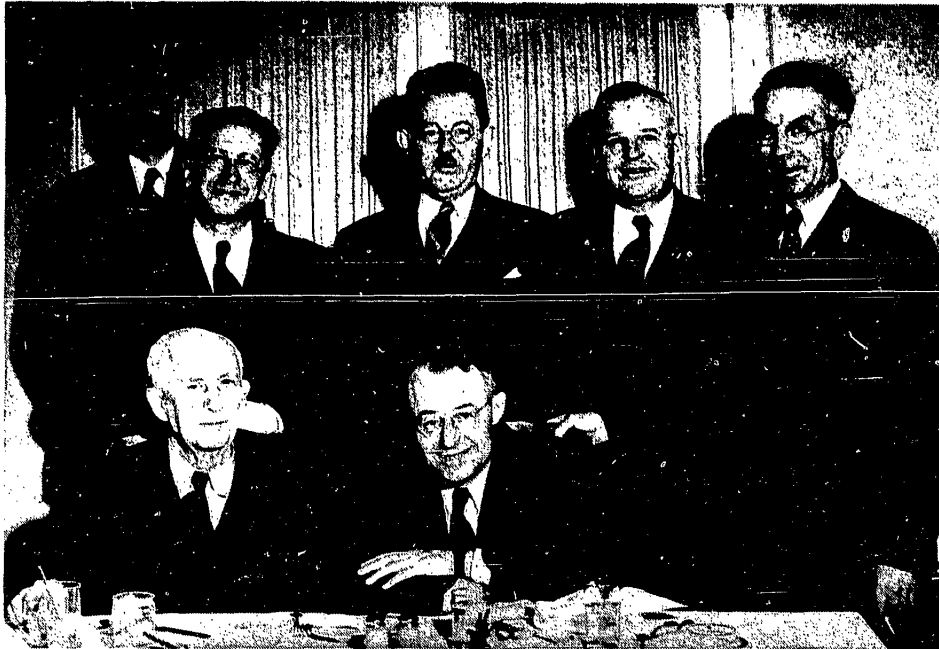


Early history of the McKownville Volunteer Fire Department and tribute to former members  
 excerpt from McKownville News and Comment by Fred B. Abele  
 (on pages 2 and 3 of the Altamont Enterprise, February 10, 1983)

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Posing for a group photo is the McKownville Board of Fire Commissioners of 1935. Seated are Alfred Garrison (left) and Clifford Bowdish. Standing, from left to right, are John Sheridan, John Feldmann, Earl B. Conklin, Byron Snowden [chairman], and James Ammenhauser. Conklin was Guilderland town supervisor at the time; Feldmann later served in the same position for one two-year term during the early '50s.

Looking back over the 65-year history of the McKownville Fire Department, one finds that certain dedicated individuals have periodically risen to the fore to give their time and effort to further the safety and well-being of this hamlet of McKownville.

Such a man was Alfred J. Garrison, who seems to have been the chief motivating force behind the founding of the department. It was he who presided at the first meetings held in 1916 at the old McKown (by that time Witbeck) Tavern to discuss the formation of the unit. From the time the fire department and the fire district were formed, he was a leader. From 1918 when the fire district was formed until his death in February 1950, he was a member of the board of fire commissioners. He was a charter member of the

fire department and served as captain in 1919.

Alfred's son, George, was also very active. He joined the department in 1921 and served in the various offices of chief, captain, lieutenant and clerk from 1927 to 1950, serving through World War II days with the rank of captain. He passed away in 1971. The Garrison homestead stands across the new McKownville Fire House, set back from the road, at 1257 Western Ave.

Another of the prime movers to form the fire department and an early member was Milo H. Clark, who later became town clerk of Guilderland and held that post for many years. E. F. Hunting, proprietor of Hunting's Drug store at Central and Lexington Aves. in Albany, served as a fire commissioner from 1918 to 1929, most of the time as chairman of the board.

The Witbeck family, by this time owners of the McKown Hotel and farm tract, were also deeply involved, Ben as one of the prime movers to establish the department and district, W. H. Witbeck as a fire commissioner from 1918 to 1929 and also as a line officer in the fire department, and A. W. Witbeck as a line officer. Other members of the family were members of the fire department.

Fire commissioners were elected for three-year terms during the early years. In 1930 the law was changed and fire commissioner terms were extended to five-year terms, one to be elected each year, as is the case today.

John F. Feldmann was elected a fire commissioner in 1930 and held that post until 1949. He also served as captain and other posts in the fire department. Also involved either as commissioners or line officers were Thomas Gordon, Thomas King (father of Tom, Chet and Jack), O. Wendell Holmes, and Charles Ebel. Perennial treasurer of both the district and the department was Harmon E. Vedder.

During the 1930s the cast of characters changed. Byron Snowden chaired the board of fire commissioners through the construction of the Arcadia Ave. firehouse, serving as a commissioner from 1930 and 1946. Clifford E. Bowdish, John Ammenhauser and John Sheridan also served on the board. Earl B. Conklin served as secretary and treasurer of the district. Both John Feldmann and Earl B. Conklin became supervisors of the Town of Guilderland, the former in 1952-53 and the latter from 1936 through July 1949.

Many others contributed to the effort who have not been named. Those mentioned have passed from the scene but it is fitting that we

should remember them at this time for their public-spiritedness and accomplishments.