

*Courting 'Old Betsy'*  
*... And Taking Her Home*



*Thomas L. Sorensen*

inside cover

# *Courting ‘Old Betsy’*

## *... And Taking Her Home*



*Sorensen*

The American LaFrance known as ‘Old Betsy,’ the VFD’s first motor-driven fire truck, sits prominently in a retirement home named the W.H. Over Museum in Vermillion, SD. The truck was towed to the building in July 2016.

*Thomas L. Sorensen*

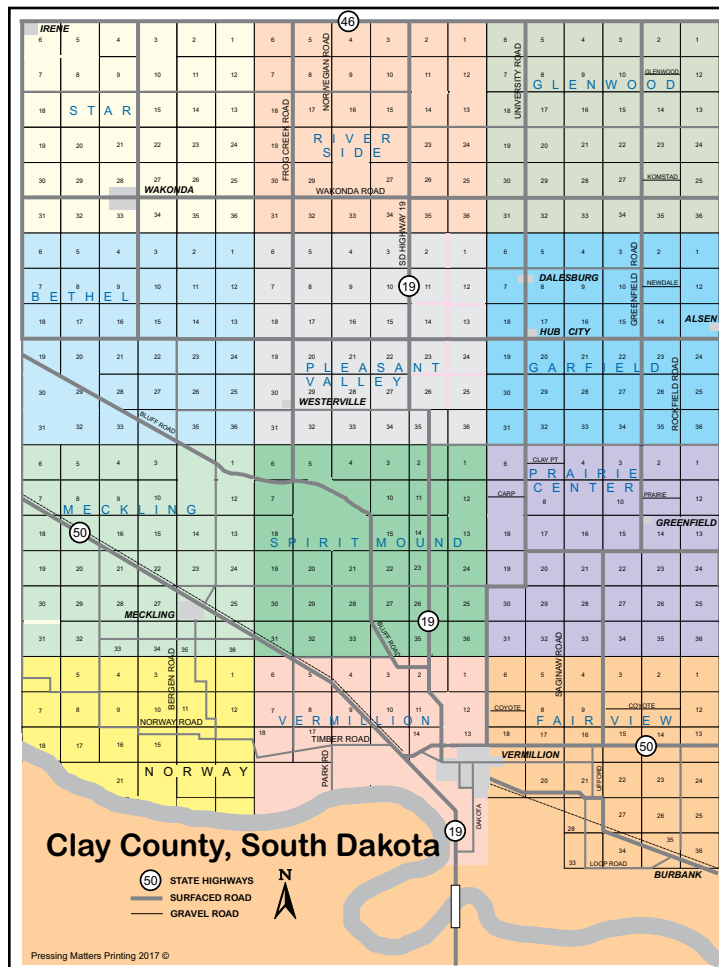


*Sorensen*

Shapes remained similar over the years, as helmets improved with liners, eye shields, and removable tags to keep track of those inside buildings.

***This project is dedicated ...***

To all the many men and women who volunteered  
to serve on the Vermillion  
Fire/EMS Department, answered calls to duty and stuck  
with their training (especially if they read their chapters before class),  
to their instructors, officers and chiefs --  
particularly Doug Brunick --  
and to the VFD Auxilliary spouses and other members  
who gave years of comfort, care, and loving understanding.  
I am profoundly grateful to have been in their family.



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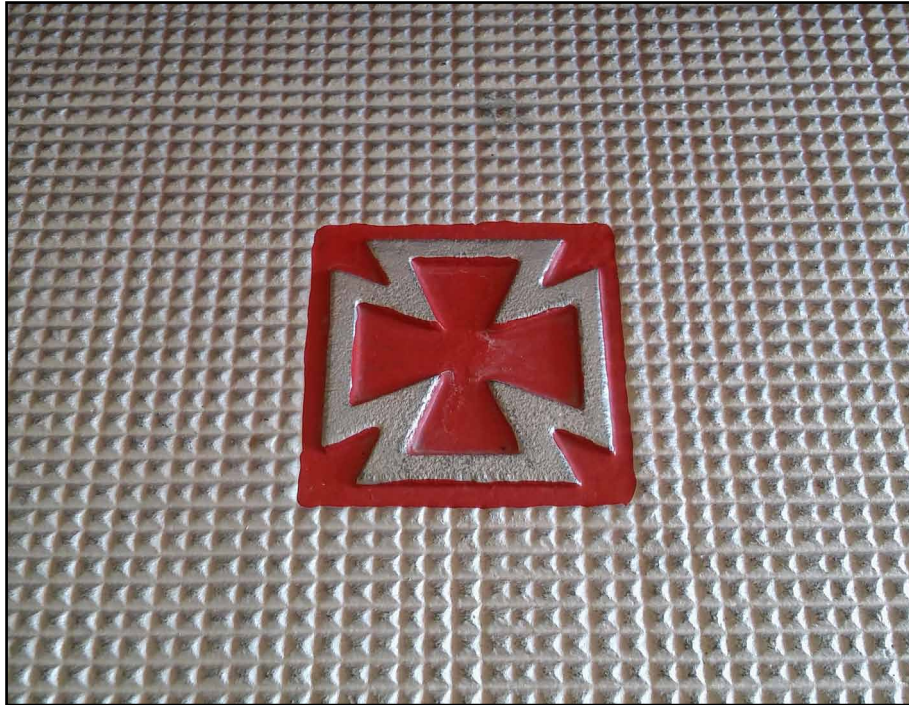
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# VERMILLION'S FIRE VOLUNTEERS FOR 125 YEARS 1892-2017

## Foreword



*Sorensen*

Maltese Cross on Old Betsy's tailgate.

From 1892 to 2017 the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department (VFD) maintained reliable levels of volunteerism and dedication. Various sources and records document the services provided over 125 years, with important mile markers. Although advances in equipment and training were evident, they were accompanied by a constant recognition of community needs for firefighters and public education. The focus has been on fire prevention, detection, fighting, and safety on the fire scene. Vermillion and the Clay County area have reasons to be proud of the consistent dedication and firefighters' willingness to keep learning. Put simply by Clyde Watts, who joined the department in 1962 and remains involved with several other retired members, "It's the best damn bargain this town's got." Clyde added, "You can't go through life without doing something in giving to your community." Watts worked for many years with local natural gas company, starting with Central

Natural Gas when it was located at the southeast corner of Main and Dakota Streets. It was a popular spot where pedestrians strolling by would stop and look into the large, curved window to read the daily temperature on a circular chart.



*VFD*

Clyde Watts

Most of the information about the events, people, and equipment in this project came from public records, published news accounts, other public sources, and by permission. The Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department members specifically authorized use of the many binders of meeting minutes and discretion was used. This additional information was gratefully accessed by the author, who has served as a long-time member, former secretary/treasurer, and trustee. The author also continues serving on the cadre of fire instructors certified by the South Dakota Fire Marshal's Office, teaching courses so members can achieve certification in Firefighter I and Firefighter II.

Publication of the volume comes through the sponsorship and support of the Clay County Historic Preservation Commission, for which the author is grateful.

The VFD is also a major contributor. Among the publications consulted were, most notably, by award-winning author Dr. Herbert S. Schell, whose thorough and helpful publications include *History of Clay County South Dakota* (Clay County Historical Society, Inc., Vermillion, SD 1976) and *Clay County: Chapters Out of the Past* (The Vermillion Area Chamber of Commerce, 1985). Schell also published a series of newspaper articles revealing interesting and educational notes of history with subscribers to the *Plain Talk of Vermillion*. Another noted researcher and author, Tom Thaden, past president of the Clay County Historical Society, also contributed through his series *Looking Back ... Vintage Vermillion and Clay County* and his valuable collection contained

within *From the River Valleys to the Rising Bluff*. Photographs are from many sources, including the Richardson Collection, University of South Dakota Archives and Special Collections, the Austin-Whittemore House collection kept for the Clay County Historical Society, and the Friends of the W.H. Over Museum. Other photos and information were obtained through the files, walls, photo and scrap books, and even trophy cases of the Vermillion Fire Department.

Among the textbooks referenced were those used in teaching classes for certification of firefighters, including *Essentials of Fire Fighting and Fire Department Operations* (5<sup>th</sup> ed., Oklahoma State University and the National Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA), 2008, and 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 2013). These study materials contribute widely and play an important role in the fire service across the United States. The author is grateful to all of these sources.

This publication also provides perspectives through in-person (or via telephone) visits with firefighters, active and retired, and in some cases, family members of those who have passed away. Some department members listed in Appendix A served for many years as firefighters and some contributed just a few years or less than one and left for various reasons, but all have been team members in some capacity and important to the community effort. These glimpses into history reveal the greater community's recognition of the crucial and constant need for safety and prevention in the development and growth of Clay County and Vermillion as its county seat.☼



Department photo take in 2015 in front of Vermillion City Hall.

VFD



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The following communication was presented and read.

January 15<sup>th</sup> 1892

To the Honorable Mayor and City Council  
of Vermillion S.D.K.

We the undersigned Offer our services  
for a fire Company, said Company  
to be known as Vermillion Area Co. No. 1.  
from  
R. Wheeler

Oscar Ernst

Oscar Olson

D. B. M. Gagne

Mike Boland

Tom Olson

G. F. Vincent

W. O. Malby

Olle Johnson

Charley Larson

P. W. Sullivan

Lincoln Evers

Jim Pylic

W. H. Fellows

G. F. Lotz

On Motion of Ald. Lee the same  
was accepted as the Vermillion  
Fire Area Co. No. 1. with power  
to elect their own officers and  
establish regulations controlling  
the same. carried

On Motion of Ald. Brookman  
G. F. Lotz was appointed Chief of  
Fire Department. carried

On Motion of Ald. Lee. council  
adjourned to Wednesday night July 20<sup>th</sup>  
1892.

Attest

J. W. Simbal

J. W. Simbal  
Mayor

Sorensen



## BEGINNINGS: FIRE & WATER -- SWEAT & FEARS



CCHS

Vermillion in 1871, before the flood.

When 16 men stepped forward on January 18, 1892, and told the Vermillion City Council they were volunteering to be the South Dakota town's first, formal group of firefighters, they had no idea about to what lengths it would evolve or the number of people like them who would follow, including women.

At least 904 volunteers joined the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department during that 125 years. Those first 16 volunteers would be more than fascinated by modern methods, training and tools available for fighting fires of 2017— equipment that pries open smashed vehicle doors, foam that smothers flames, or truck-mounted ladders 85- and 105-feet long. Could they have imagined tall boots designed with steel over the toes and the

length of the soles; or heavy lined pants and coats; or special, adjustable hat-size helmets with face shields and straps, or even strapping on the harness holding an air tank and regulator that connects to a breathing hose leading to a tight-fitting, see-through face mask one letter short of SCUBA gear (Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus in the fire service is known as SCBA)?

The modern tools available include special saws, huge jaws and cutters that help extricate victims (survivors) from vehicles or other places people may be trapped. There are specialty hose nozzles, prying bars, and a variety of air bags to prevent vehicles from falling on rescuers. Fans to clear smoke, generators to run them and the lights necessary for safer work at the scene of a call

overnight are part of the fire-fighting arsenal. There are too many items to list, but these methods and tools are far from the buckets filled from wells and ponds used back when Vermillion residents first had wooden buildings.

Life with fire continues to fascinate, frighten, injure, kill and even serve humans. Uncontrolled, uncontained fire is ever a risk to be detected, prevented, and effectively extinguished for any community or farmstead, including from the time long ago when the Native bands of people lived in what became Vermillion, South Dakota.

Some community history is in order, as Clay County, Vermillion, and the local fire fighters traveled this road in three-part harmony, at least most of the time.

Since about the early eighteenth century, according to Schell, the Yankton (*Ihanktonwon*) Sioux tribe and bands occupied the lower James and Vermillion River valleys, with their main encampment located at present-day Yankton along the Missouri River. Yankton was the early capital of Dakota Territory in 1862. Closer to Vermillion,

particularly near the mouth of what became known as the Vermillion River, “a village of about a hundred lodges was maintained by the 1850s by Mad Bull’s band.” Earlier, the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-1806 had come through and included a side trip on August 25, 1804, to “Spirit Mound,” as reported by Schell and many others. The Missouri River was long used and remains a navigable (with several dam interruptions) and recreational site for all sorts of people and natural habitat. Originating in the Rocky Mountains of Montana and emptying into the Mississippi River at St. Louis, the Missouri is the longest river in the United States at 2,540 miles, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. (The author, and certainly others, have wondered why in 1889 Dakota Territory at statehood time was divided north and south, rather than East Dakota and West Dakota, with the Missouri as the state line. Oh well.)

In the 1950s, six dams and reservoirs were constructed along the “Big Muddy” (Mnišoše or turbid water, in Lakota dialect). Below the final dam west of Yankton -- and downriver from



CCHS

Early fires in Vermillion,

the Ponca area on the Nebraska side - the river becomes channelized through Sioux City, Iowa, down to Omaha, taking an easterly turn at Kansas City and on to St. Louis -- for barge traffic, mostly. According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch May 30, 2016, flooding in 1993 “caused the only complete shutdown of barge traffic on the river in the past 36 years,” quoting Michael Collins, president and CEO of Port KC (Kansas City). Although there were some small, private barge companies that did not stop using the river, “public ports along the nearly 760-mile span from Sioux City, Iowa, to St. Louis disappeared in the late 1990s and early 2000s after a combination of drought, economic recession, low commodity prices and political infighting led shippers to turn to rail and trucks.”

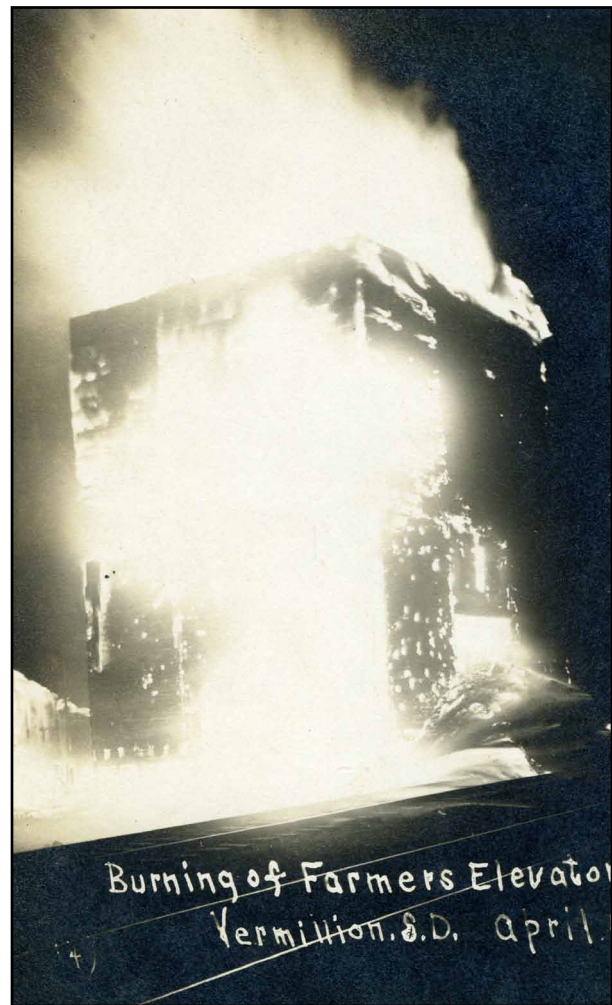
On November 10, 1978, the National Park Service (NPS) designated the lower 59-mile reach between Gavins Point Dam west of Yankton to near Ponca, Nebraska -- flowing just outside of Vermillion -- the “Missouri National Recreational River.” Another stretch some 20 miles shorter in length from Fort Randall Dam to Running Water, South Dakota, was also designated as a national recreational part of the river, on May 24, 1991.

Among the wildlife along the park are American bald eagles and two endangered species, the piping plover and the least tern. Within the water are wide varieties of fish and other aquatic life, including the pallid sturgeon (endangered), several kinds of catfish, bass, crappie, sauger, walleye, gar, carp, northern pike, perch, blue gill and the prehistoric-looking and quite tasty paddlefish (known to some old-timers as “spoonbill catfish”). The NPS invites visitors to “(R)elive the past by making an exploration of the wild, untamed and mighty river that continues to flow as nature intended.” Some claim that the Missouri River from the last dam at Yankton to Ponca resembles as closely as possible to what Lewis and Clark and their group saw in 1804, minus large herds of bison and elk and other species that existed at that time.

In the early times and in present-day, Natives (especially elders) of the community (*tiospaye*) refer to Vermillion as *Wase Wakpa*, which can be understood as “Valley of the Paint,” according to **Gene Thin Elk**, director of Native American Studies at the University of South Dakota. In the Lakota dialect, the reddish-colored paint (from

local clay) is considered ceremonial medicine which people apply as significant markings on the body. “It is an energy source drawn upon to bring us back into harmony with the Earth Mother,” Thin Elk explained. “Energy is a life force.” *Wakpa* denotes a stream or river following a valley.

Consider as well the French influence derived from Native words and influencing other phrases in the Midwest region. Examples include *Bon Homme* (good man), *Pierre* for Pierre Choteau, Jr., an early businessman along the Missouri River, who traveled in fur-trading times (but it is not clear whether Choteau had a pier or a dock or how his name came to be pronounced “peer” -- welcome to South Dakota!). *Brulé* (French for burnt) from the Lakota translation of *sicangu* for “burnt thigh” (resulting from prairie fires). The oyate or tribe on



Early fires in Vermillion

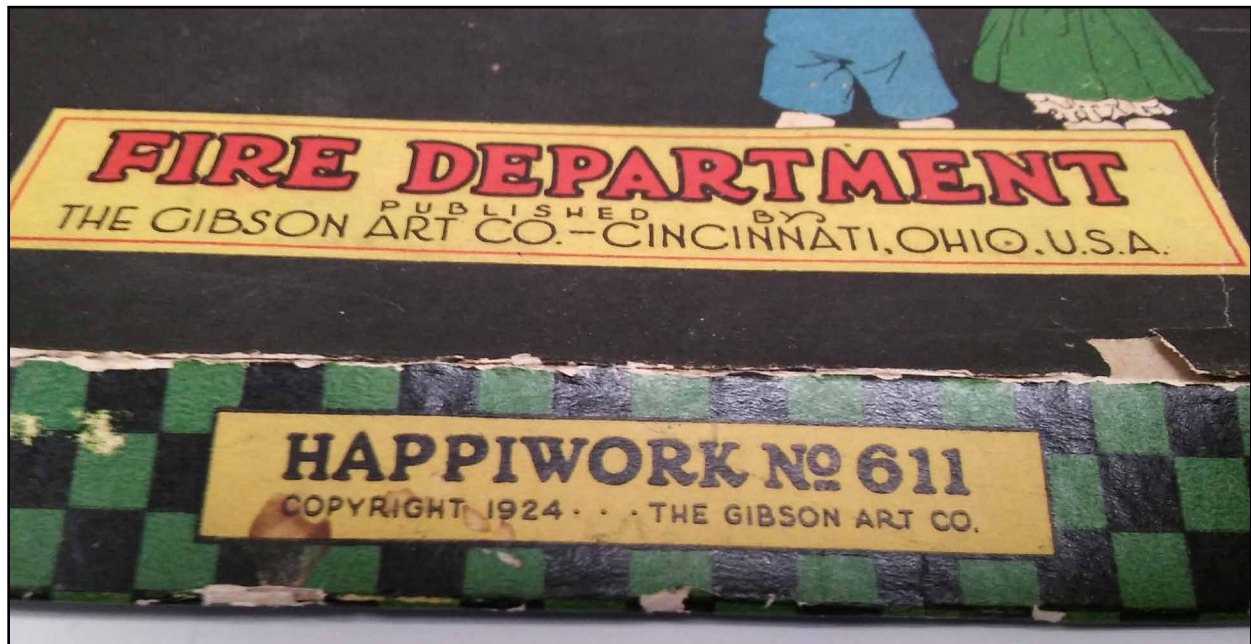
CCHS

and around the present Rosebud Reservation come from the sicangu). And, of course, *vermillion* (or *vermillion*) is French for a “bright reddish orange color; any of various red pigments,” according to The Merriam-Webster Dictionary. The community name in southeastern Dakota Territory remains Vermillion today. The Euro-Scandi-Native town Vermillion was established in 1859 (just after the Treaty of 1858, a.k.a. Treaty of Washington, with the Yankton Sioux), according to **Schell**. Vermillion formally organized with a local government in 1873. A local representative of Clay County, Nelson Miner, worked with the Dakota Territory legislature in 1877, which “provided for the town’s incorporation” and formation of the city government, according to **Schell**. “Six wards were provided under an aldermanic system as well as a board of education with a member from each of six wards.”

Fifteen years after Vermillion incorporated and the community was finally convinced the local, privately-owned waterworks might reliably produce pressurized water, attention focused in on firefighting. On January 18, 1892, a group of sixteen men stepped forward and Vermillion Hose Company No. 1 was formally established by the city government as a volunteer fire department. By the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary on January 18, 2017, the

department had experienced steady and significant changes in advancement and improvement in equipment and training. As it turned out, on this anniversary date the department’s third paid chief took the reins of the Vermillion Fire-EMS Department. There has been a strong, single constant through the 125 years of VFD history: the list of men and women firefighters who served grew to more than 900 (see **Appendix A**).

In the 1970s and 1980s, a public resolution of gratitude from the Vermillion Fire Department thanked and recognized **Herbert Schell** for his series of newspaper columns and books which focused on VFD history. He thoroughly described the early days and fire hazards of Vermillion, as well as other Clay County history. Newspaper reports and city government records as early as 1874 confirmed “that a local fire company was needed.” **Schell’s** extensive writings also include an earlier account of a December 1874 public meeting to consider Vermillion’s fire protection in the days and years to follow. Too many homes and businesses had been at risk. Discussion at the meeting focused on the location of water reservoirs and forming a hook and ladder company that would use buckets. The bottom line was agreed upon: Vermillion needed a group of local people to form a fire company; more information is below



*Sorensen, VFD Archives*

Pieces of a box depicting a children’s game about fire trucks. This ‘Happiwork’ game is dated 1924 by the Gibson Art Co., Cincinnati, Ohio.

on major fires in 1875 and in 1890 that punctuated the sentiment. For example, there was a major fire on the University of South Dakota campus in 1893 that local officials felt could lead to the loss of the university to some other community. Local citizens stepped forward immediately to keep the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

Time and energy to learn and practice methods of firefighting continues, some years with better success than others. Traditionally each October, communities across the nation hold a Fire Prevention Week and Open Houses. Aside from the safety and public education, these events often plant seeds among girls and boys looking for options in serving their community as they grow up.

So, who would purposefully run toward and enter a burning building or field or forest while all others are running to safety? What if you had a fire and no one came? Society has always needed someone to help save lives (pets included), photos, furniture and clothing, and, of course, taxable property. Firefighters work hard to extinguish the flames and enter the toxic atmosphere with hopes of ventilating it away to find what may remain and save it, if possible. Unfortunately, too often a structure is clearly being lost, but at the same time, the properties next door need to be protected and saved. Of course, the weather is always a factor in fighting fires. To blatantly borrow from a couple of popular motion pictures, “Who ya gonna call?”

Through these 125 years the firefighters and their organization have provided some support, followed and improved upon customs, and held events in their community. During the annual October open houses and National Fire Protection Week, public tours are provided showing-off the station and latest equipment; a guided tour for members of the Vermillion City Council, often with a meal included; and, a barbeque for families of firefighters both past and present, which for many years has included the day-long smoking of ribs with a famous sauce and innovative cooking techniques, which often involved corn cobs. Other typical, fairly routine community programs held by the fire department association have included an annual dance, near or on St. Patrick’s Day, to raise money for needs identified each year, such as rescue or other equipment.

Over the years, the department has supported other organizations, often involving youth, such as soccer, baseball and softball teams. In earlier years the department helped the Abbott House in Mitchell, South Dakota, which was established in 1939 and provides a variety of services to girls between seven and 17, often without much family support, who have suffered trauma, abuse and neglect. The fire chiefs also made it a point to regularly visit Vermillion’s elementary schools to educate children on fire safety and prevention, including opportunities to crawl through the smokehouse safety trailer. Other organizations receiving support have included the Red Cross and the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and various groups affiliated with the Armed Services.



*Sorensen, VFD Archives*

Parts of a children’s art game ‘Happiwork’ by the Gibson Art Co. of Cincinnati, Ohio, 1924, discovered in the VFD archives.

For many years, the department members in full bunker gear took on the dangerous task of lighting the fireworks on Independence Day, igniting fast fuses hanging from large mortars set firmly in heavy wooden boxes of sand. The job was hot and sweaty, dangerous, and (admittedly) quite exciting, too, especially when a 10-inch

round exploded only a few feet from the ground. Earplugs were among the required equipment. Later, even the large fireworks were ignited electronically by a local business and a few firefighters attended the annual events to provide stand-by assistance, if needed. ❁



*CCHS*

Photo of a fire found in the archives of the Clay County Historical Society - date and location unknown.





## EARLY, LIMITED EFFORTS



*W.H. Over Archives*

Old Main on Fire - pictured behind the horses is the empty ladder wagon.

There were several major fires early in the community's existence as the population began to increase. The Missouri River provided a "super highway" of the day and people from elsewhere began settling among the Yankton Sioux people. According to **Schell** and other historical accounts, the 1858-59 treaty, also known as the Treaty of Washington, opened the Yankton lands as ceded to the United States. This provided an impetus for settlers to move west. The earlier prong of U.S. ownership was in 1803 when President Thomas Jefferson bargained with the French (Napoleon needed money for a war with England) and bought 828 million square miles for \$15 million. The Louisiana Purchase included what eventually became parts of 15 states, including South Dakota. Over time, the treaty led to the official opening of

Dakota Territory and Vermillion was established as a community in 1859. The more-extensive farming by settlers was west of town, basically on the bottom lands of what became Norway Township. Dakota Territory had been created on March 2, 1861, and the first territorial legislature met about a year later at Yankton in 1862. While not all was peaceful in the region, particularly in northern Iowa near Minnesota, Vermillion community members -- settlers and Natives -- were "mingling freely," according to **Schell**, and were bartering and learning to break language barriers. In 1864, Captain Nelson Miner, a cavalry officer and Vermillion resident, proposed building a school house and made the first monetary donation of \$30. The first permanent, public school in Dakota Territory was built with cavalry horses pulling

cottonwood logs to the foot of Dakota Street hill. Colonel John Jolley (later the first mayor of Vermillion) taught the basics of education in 1866. By 1871, a piece of land was donated by Miner and a larger school opened on Church Street atop the bluff. Vermillion High School later existed at that location until 1965.

In 1890, the early South Dakota Legislature established SL 9-33-11, a law for towns to maintain firefighting equipment and a water supply. "Every municipality shall have power to construct, operate, and maintain fire stations, fire engines, fire apparatus, and equipment, a system of fire signals, fire hydrants, and mains, and a water supply for prevention and extinguishment of fires." The law was updated or revised in 1903, 1913, 1919, and 1939.

The Vermillion community continually progressed with more solid signs of establishing permanency. Coincidentally in December of 1892, serious progress was made in starting what became Trinity Lutheran Church in Vermillion when trustees of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church secured articles of incorporation and soon obtained a mortgaged loan to purchase

property at Harvard and National Streets. Among the church trustees was Herman O. Malby, who had also volunteered as a charter member of the fire company in 1892. As recorded in the minutes of the Vermillion City Council prior to the formal establishment of the first fire company, a group of men had regularly helped fight fires. As indicated earlier, on January 18, 1892, Vermillion Hose Company No. 1 was formed under the leadership of the first chief, C.F. Lotze. In the fire chief's annual report to the council, the fire company inventory in 1892 consisted of:

*Two, hand-drawn hose carts, and one hand-drawn, 40-foot hook & ladder truck. The crew had inventory of 800 feet of hose, 6 spanners, 4 axes, ladders, nozzles, and 4 pairs of rubber boots.*

The hand-written minutes of the city council on January 18, 1892, provided a statement listing the names of 16 volunteers who "offer our services for a fire company." The statement and names all appear on a single page in the city's large book of council minutes. They are: R. Wheeler, Oscar Arness, Oscar Olson, D.B. McCapes, Mike Odland, Free Elmore, C.F. Vincent, H.O. Malby,



*Photo provided courtesy of the Sioux City Public Museum, Sioux City, Iowa.*

This clean and well-restored fire hose cart (without the hose) is a good example of the carts used from the 1880s into the 1920s and is similar to the two used, along with a ladder wagon, in Vermillion until the American LaFrance pumper truck was purchased in 1923. The 1886 cart was made by Silsby Manufacturing Co., Seneca Falls, NY.

Ole Iverson, Charley Lawson, P.H. Sullivan, Lincoln Eves, Jim Wylie, W.R. Fellows, and Lotze.

Within a few months a second hose company was established. The steam whistle atop the Vermillion Milling Company's flour mill located at Center and National Streets (the present location of City Hall) would also be used to sound fire alarms. According to the opinions of several, older past members, the large, brass steam whistle displayed in a trophy case at the current Vermillion Fire Department Station 1 is believed to be the whistle from that flour mill, which was owned by twin brothers E.D. and S.E. Brookman.

The timing of creation of the first fire company coincided with community needs and also the formation of a sufficient and operating local waterworks plant, as pointed out in detail by the **Dakota Republican**, which was following the evolution of the waterworks and fire department. Moreover, the year 1892 is incorporated into the Vermillion Fire/EMS Department's present-day logo (right), proudly worn on shirts and patches by members and displayed on the vehicles some 125 years later. Fighting fires with volunteers (a.k.a. neighbors) has since been part of the history of Vermillion and Clay County. Given the long-employed methods of bucket brigades and use of private cisterns, wells, tanks, and ponds, the desired and more formal, "at-the-ready" approach was achieved.

Creating a water works capable of not only an ample water supply, but also sufficient pressure for fighting fires, resulted in much testing and investment of public funds. **Schell's** accounts denote that the formation of Hose Co. 1 paralleled formation (with some struggle) of a viable waterworks company, also echoed in several local news articles in the **Dakota Republican**.

Eleven days before the hose company was formed, the **Dakota Republican** on January 7, 1892, asked:

*Now that water can be used in case of fire, the question is, who will be ready to manipulate the hose in that event, and where can it be kept to be most convenient? The burning of the Dakota House indicated the need of an organization for prompt, concerted and effective service on such occasions. It cannot be truly claimed*



VFD Chief

125 Anniversary Logo.

*that the Dakota House might have been saved by a good fire department, after the fire had gained such headway: yet the fire might have been checked to such an extent that a great deal of furniture might have been saved. No more risks ought to be taken. Some inducements for a fire department should be made. Quarters for the hose-carts should be secured in some convenient place. Waterworks, without the means of the application of water, are of no benefit in case of fire. This matter should be considered as soon as possible.*

Getting the waterworks going generated some heat of its own. A **Dakota Republican** article published on January 21, 1892, reported on the recent city council meeting describing a rental and cost disagreement with S.V. Saleno, who represented the Michigan Pipe Company regarding their waterworks company. The council considered Saleno's notice that the waterworks were ready for service and his request to be paid "from the time the works were set in operation." An ordinance had provided for paying the pipe company "as rental for the use of water for fire and other purposes, \$42 for each hydrant or a sum not to exceed seven percent on the actual costs of the

plant.” The Council contended that the plant could not have cost \$32,500 and a **Dakota Republican** report provided the sentiment of Alderman Andrew E. Lee (a Populist who later became mayor and a South Dakota governor):

*And it was clearly shown by Alderman A.E. Lee, not only did the Council object to paying rental or interest for the amount claimed to be invested in the pump-house, smoke-stack and cistern, but this part of the work was a disgrace to the city and was not what was wanted when the city decides to purchase the plant; the city was paying liberally for the plant and therefore had good reason to demand a good system of works. On the other hand, S.V. Saleno claimed that the pump-house and cistern were as good as any he had built during years of experience in such work; but he admitted that the smoke-stack was not what it should be nor what was intended. In proof of his claim that the cost of the plant was \$32,500 he read the contracts, in detail, which were made with the Vermillion Waterworks, Etc., Co. (V.W. Co.) for the entire construction of the plant. And he claimed that the Council had no right to refuse the rental agreed upon, until the V.W. Co. had either refused or accepted the work done by him - S.V. Saleno. This explains a rather complicated state of affairs for which none in particular and all in general are to blame. As far as the work specified in the ordinance is concerned, there is no question about its character; the Council offered no objection to this part of the plant. While the pump-house, smoke-stack and cistern were not specified in the ordinance, yet they were expected and are indispensable to a good system of waterworks in the general acceptance of the term. This part of the plant has been contracted for by the V.W. Co., which will be held responsible for the character of the work. Now, before this is settled between the company and S.V. Saleno, the city is asked to pay rental on the actual cost of the plant including this part, which the Council had nothing to do with and is not in accordance with*

*expectations, nor previous agreement. If this work had been of first-class order there would undoubtedly have been no objections made. And Mr. Saleno would have been entitled to the rental agreed upon. That part contracted for by the Council is in first-class shape and the Council cannot be held responsible for that contracted for the V.W. Co., although it is asked and may be compelled to pay rental for it. There is no doubt but that the V.W. Co., being composed principally of Vermillion citizens, will, when the work is presented for acceptance, insist upon some radical changes. There is one thing certain, the city is not at the mercy of any individual or company. Without coming to any agreement the Council adjourned to further consider the matter and meet again on Wednesday evening.*

In late January 1892, the hot issue led to a test of the waterworks with the focus on the water mains (some were wooden) when subjected to direct pressure of the system’s engines and measured at the hydrants. Depending upon the hydrant location, the “static (‘resting’ in this case) pressure” seemed satisfactory, despite the January 28 newspaper headline: *The Waterworks Test, Not Satisfactory to the Council, A Lively Discussion at the Council Meeting*. Sites selected for the informal testing had included “at the tank, City-Hall, Congregational church (at Dakota and Main Streets), and University,” according to the published report. “A good stream was thrown high enough (via hydrants with tank pressure alone) to play on a fire on the roof of any building in the city except City-hall, and at that place it occasionally reached the roof.”

Vermillion had recruited the assistance of Fred Grant, chief of the Yankton Fire Department; however, the testing was delayed two hours (from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.) because the nozzles Grant brought would not fit Vermillion’s system, particularly the threads and the top nut (on-off valves) on the hydrants. Results of the later time testing was conducted were as follows:

*Promptly at 4 o’clock the hydrants were thrown open and the nozzles directed upward. For a short*

*time the streams rose no higher than from the tank pressure alone. However the streams gradually arose higher, until the two on Main-St. were about 70 feet high, while the one at the University is said to have arisen not more than 45 feet. When all but one of the hydrants were closed a stream was thrown fully 80 feet high. This ended the tangible test. The remainder was reserved for the Council meeting in the evening.*

People crowded the next council meeting to hear the test report. Alderman Lee proffered a written resolution stating that “the waterworks test was unsatisfactory, the plant incomplete, and part of the Machinery not according to agreement.” It was signed by Lee and Aldermen Brookman and Snyder. Alderman Myers was opposed and two others were absent.

The newspaper reported Saleno’s remarks about the test, including, “management was unscientific, not according to agreement. That he had not been treated in a gentlemanly manner inasmuch as, being a waterworks expert, he was not consulted about the preparations for the test.” Saleno had claimed that more hose had been used than was

customary, “thereby needing considerable pressure to overcome the friction. Some other instead of ring nozzles had been used. That there was a misunderstanding as to the time for opening the hydrants. That when they were opened there was no pressure at the pumps, and when the pressure was raised, the hydrants were closed.”

The council rebutted regarding the charge that if there was any unfairness “it was not done intentionally” and continued to argue that the dollar amount claimed was not the actual cost. An immediate, subsequent test did not take place because of a leak in the mains north of the Brookman brothers’ flour mill, but an eventual second test was arranged, this time including a Sioux City official along with the one from Yankton. A majority (4 to 2) of the council members were not satisfied (including Lee who subsequently became mayor defeating a pro-waterworks candidate). In February, the waterworks was temporarily shut down until June.

According to **Schell**, the company began legal proceedings to recover the cost of six months’ water use and at one point offered to rent use of its hydrants to provide water to the city. The local business owners and operators were dismayed at the risk of fires and by the likely prospect of increased insurance rates. The city had succeeded in a law suit under the initial, May 26, 1891, agreement it had with the water company. The city forged ahead and by March 25, 1895, worked out an agreement with an electric light plant newly established at the site of the former milling company. Vermillion Water, Power and Light Company would build a pump house and stand-pipe and use well water. Subsequently, the council ordered the waterworks company to move its tank and other structures within ninety days. Under the new agreement, the company placed its tank at Market and Bloomingdale Streets, first on the west side and later it was moved east across the street, according to **Schell**.

So, after the waterworks had finally been declared fully operational and “available for firefighting purposes,” the City Council authorized construction of a small building in the rear of City Hall at the west corner of Church and Main Streets to house fire hose, hose carts, and other equipment. The west room of the building was assigned to firemen as a club room and general place to meet,



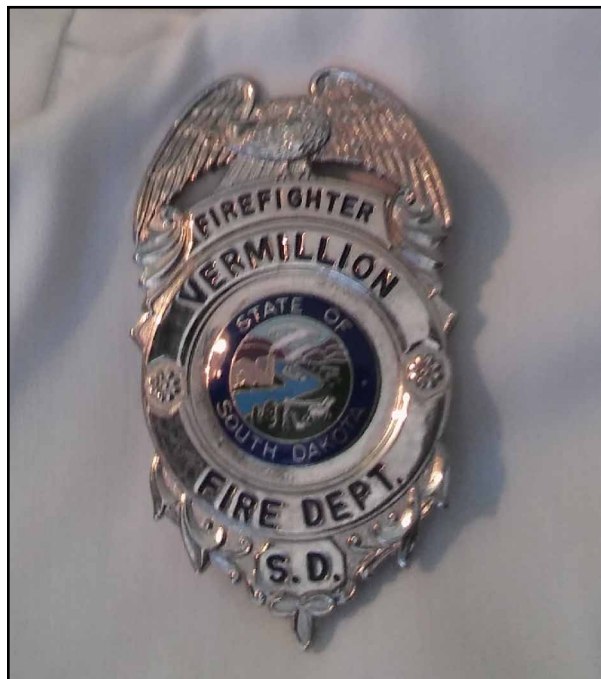
Sorensen

Some firefighters were able to train enough to sew on a long column of competed courses and certifications.

the use of which caused serious disagreement between the volunteers and some city fathers over installation of pool tables. This led to a temporary disbandment of the company, which reactivated on October 26, 1893 (11 days *after* the devastating fire at University Hall, later known as Old Main) with a new chief, George J. Kempker, Secretary C.F. Vincent and Treasurer E.E. Collins, according to **Schell**. Notably, both Kempker and Collins had responded to the major fire from City Hall with a hose cart and were joined by others who volunteered. Shortly thereafter, Hose Co. No. 1 with 15 men reorganized itself and Charles Kaiser was designated as foreman. Those joining him were Harry Brown, Miner Carter, Will Carter, E. Christy, Dan Danielson, Peter Hagen, P. Jorgenson, Herman Malby, Mel McDonald, Eric Nylen, Bub Washburn, and Elmer Washburn.

Hose Co. No. 2, known as “A.E. Lee Hose Co.,” formed with a roster of 13 men. D.H. (Patrick) Sullivan was named foreman and the group included Free Elmore, E.E. Collins, George Snyder, Lou Back, C.F. Vincent, Fred Vinson, Charles Kimball, George Walker, Pat Gallagher, Charles Holmes, T.M. Vinson, and C.I Vaughn.

By May 6, 1896, the city council passed an ordinance listing two hose companies and a hook



*Sorensen*

Badges, shirts, logos and patches all varied over the years

and ladder organization, each up to eight members. They called for a set of officers, a chief and two assistant chiefs elected annually in May. Uniforms arrived in June 1896 at a cost of \$230 for 28 sets. That summer member C.I. Vaughn was chosen as secretary of the State Association of Firemen at a convention in Canton, South Dakota. By 1900, the city council inventory listed the addition of 1,000 feet of good hose, 50 feet of damaged hose, six spanners (hose-coupling wrenches), two respirators, four axes, three lanterns, four short ladders, one extension ladder, one nozzle, four pairs of rubber boots, and one rubber coat.

The year 1900 also brought new names and faces to the city council, which according to **Schell**, led to some strained relations resulting in (another) disbandment of the department and naming of new fire officers. The city’s street commissioner (formerly with the Sioux Falls Fire Department), James C. Egan, headed the group. Assistant chiefs were James Gilbertson and Carl Anderson, and Charles Jolley was named secretary. There were 32 members on the roster. Only four had been on the previous organization, including Jolley, the son of John L. Jolley, a teacher and leading citizen. The years 1917, 1918 and 1921 provided examples of successes in saving buildings by the firefighters, along with other, major news.

Wartime certainly impacted the VFD rosters in those years. Updates on the young men from Clay County being called to service in World War I were regularly provided. On August 9, 1917, the **Plain Talk** newspaper published “the official list (of 951 as the order in which) young men of Clay County ... were subject to the draft regulation.” On October 18, 1917, the newspaper reported that, “Despite war conditions and kindred elements, the University students, alumni, town people and visitors enjoyed a peppy Dakota Day last Saturday.” The USD Coyotes beat the North Dakota Bison 19 to 0.

An article on June 6, 1918, in the weekly **Plain Talk** told of a fire at the C.E. Prentis house a week earlier. “Nothing daunted ... the firemen went to work (and) little loss was sustained in any rooms above the ground floor,” the newspaper reported. Mr. and Mrs. Prentis (and likely their neighbors) were awakened by an explosion around 12:30 a.m. in the home’s furnace room. Electric light wiring,



Sorensen

Logo prior to the 125 VFD Anniversary version.

the article stated, “must have been responsible for the blaze, and the intense heat around an air-pressure tank must have caused an explosion. The fire boys are to be commended for their quick and effective work” in saving the home. Other major concerns and news updates of this time covered the influenza nightmare. The newspaper carried announcements from the U.S. Public Health Services that “Coughs and sneezes spread diseases ... as dangerous as poison gas shells.”

On Thursday, November 14, 1918, the **Plain Talk** cheerfully reported that “the war has ended” and that “the armistice was signed last Monday.” The report stated that the news reached the city about 3 a.m. when whistles blew and the celebrating started.

The March 1919 minutes of the city council record approval of a resolution that “it is necessary” for the city to have a new and complete electric light unit to supply the city with light and housing for the same, an electric light office, storage room, a room for a fire department and equipment, a room for street cleaning equipment and city property, a vault for records, a jail, and to provide a public toilet for women with a restroom in connection, and public toilet for men to be separately maintained (per SD law of 1917, Ch. 313). The resolution called for an election on April 15, 1919, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., to determine whether City of Vermillion bonds shall be issued for the purpose of installing (the facilities as described above) in the sum of \$60,000, to bear interest at

the rate of 5% per annum, for 20 years from June 1919. At this time, E.D. Brookman was listed as the City Light Department superintendent and to be paid \$125 per month. J.J. Elliot was also listed as staff member.

Elsewhere, in northern Clay County, the town of Wakonda had formed a fire company in 1909 and plans were made to seek funds to purchase a fire engine under the leadership of Chief Wallace Wright, according to **Schell**. Other equipment was acquired and by 1912, a new engine was put to the test. Wakonda had done its best to prevent higher rates for fire insurance. According to **Schell**, by 1917 the town of Wakonda had raised enough money to build a fire station for a team of some 20 department members.

In Vermillion, city leaders were finally convinced to invest in a triple-combination pumper truck, to the specifications of the insurance industry, even at a higher bid. The motorized machine was ordered in the spring and delivered in November of 1923. The modern, high-quality machine would be in active service for 40 years and became known as “Old Betsy” (**Chapter 4**).

Fires that made the news or other accounts were numerous from about 1875 on. Many other fires in later years did not receive much press, likely because responding in timely fashion with better equipment and training meant improved success at extinguishing a reported fire. ☼



Sorensen

One of the many patches over the years.

118

1926

C.B. Richardson	July	Aug 5	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec 2
Ernest M <sup>d</sup> Donald	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ernest Bacon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fred Malone	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ralph Swisher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Frank Lull	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
L.A. Mount	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
J. E. Ballard	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Keeler Sherk	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Joe Pardee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fred Eldridge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dan Sullivan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jack Robinson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rube Hagg	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
John Vanetti	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mart Chamberlain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Claud Richardson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fred Peterson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dell Williams	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jess Harrington	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lee Millage	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
W.A. Bauman	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

122

1926

Ayt Hassmusen	July	Aug 5	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec 2
Geo. Hassmusen	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ed. Stark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sam Henry	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fred Swedeberg	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Denny Sullivan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carl Erickson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Harry Sherk	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Henry Waltz	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
C.T. Bolstad	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bob Chamberlain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pierre Fisher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bob Melton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
John Charlin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Morgan Anglin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Joe Harrington	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Herman Burke	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Joe Garvis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chris Putnam	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Elmer Millage	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Esie Steigelmeyer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Walter Morse	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

120

1926

Hubert Lee	July	Aug 5	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec 2
Lewey Pierce	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Louis Briney	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ole Anderson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bill Donahue	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Freeman Brown	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Joe Wysocki	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hugh Boyd	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ralph Sutcliff	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lester Russell	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Virgil Brown	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pat Bacon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ed Anglin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Elmer Peterson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bert Anglin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Henry Lambert	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chas. Bacon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Claud Bacon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
L.M. Wilson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
John South	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
L.L. Clark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Harold Brown	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

124

1926

Ken Collar	July	Aug 5	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec 2
Martin Erickson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chas. Stark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carl Nelson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cal Russell	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geo. Coates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Albert Palmer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
O.R. Stride	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
John Burkland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ole Jacobson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Russ. Moser	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Roy Jones	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Elmer Perkins	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Elmer Lenhart	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bill Bliss	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hutch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mike Mahan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geo Edgerton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Doc. Rosencrans	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Holmquist	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bill Hicks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carl Bauman	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

1926 Roster of Firefighters





## NOTABLE FIRES IN VERMILION AND CLAY COUNTY



*Richardson Collection, Archives & Special Collections, University of South Dakota*

University Hall in 1888, five years before fire destroyed the University of Dakota's main building.

Over the many years, the VFD has saved a lot of property, including some homes and buildings considered “historical.” Saving doesn’t make headlines, usually. Major fires make major news (TV reporters quip, “If it bleeds, it leads.”) and recorded history of such events indicate that the VFD many times was successful in saving property, crops, and even lives compared to those “big news” items that get the headlines about heavy losses, crime suspicion, and especially loss of life. Those stories were more “newsworthy,” however, there were occasional news reports of effective firefighting. As mentioned earlier, these include a report of saving the C.E. Prentis home in 1918 after an explosion in the basement. The **Plain Talk** reported that “The fire boys are to be commended for their quick and effective work.” In 1921, several frame structures were threatened, but saved

by the VFD, when a fire “of unknown origin” on Market Street “put the Ballard & Kavanaugh pool hall and café out of commission.” The article, published February 17, said “the firemen responded promptly, and by good work confined the loss to the one structure.” The news report congratulated the “fire boys” on their “quick and efficient work.”

Among the “bigger blazes” making the newspapers or otherwise related in accounts clearly reveal that the earlier conflagrations were the most destructive and notable in the news.

On January 13, 1875, a major fire destroyed most of the business section of Vermillion when it was located below the bluff, including a bank, the C.I.K. (Cash Is King) Building, the Masonic and Odd Fellows halls, newspaper plant, post office, and two doctors’ offices. The Adelphi Hotel was saved. Clay County offices were destroyed



*Richardson Collection, Photo, Archives & Special Collections, USD*  
University Hall ablaze Sunday, October. 15, 1893.

along with records; “Vermillion in Ashes” was a newspaper headline, with \$50,725 in losses. Fire destroyed or damaged some 20 business and other buildings. According to **Schell**, the fire circumstances gave “rise to some suspicions of incendiarism.” The account describes the fire’s rampant path beginning at about noon that day in the office kept by the local probate judge and county treasurer at the corner and structures exposed downwind to the south and across the street soon were involved in the conflagration. Some adjoining buildings were saved through the efforts of the town residents. “This included the greater part of the Adelphi Hotel,” wrote **Schell**. “Had this structure been destroyed, most of the town might have succumbed.”

On December 20, 1883, in the downtown rebuilt atop the bluff following the 1881 flood below, another major fire began in a furniture store on Market Street and, according to **Schell**, “every building on the west side of the block between Main and Kidder -- including the one housing the post office -- was either gutted or completely

destroyed with the exception of the brick structure at the north end.”

The Vermillion community “was shaken out of its complacency” on August 5, 1890, when fire destroyed much of the main business section, destroying 19 stores and badly damaging others. Buildings constructed of stone and brick survived more so than those built of wood. The major fire spurred the city council to prohibit construction of wooden frame buildings in favor of using brick and Sioux Falls quartzite, wrote **Schell**. It also led to “concrete plans for a waterworks” company by 1891. A representative of the Michigan Pipe Company, as noted earlier, proposed a plant to the council under a franchise of 20 years in length. The council approved a proposal. A group of citizens and a pipe-company representative organized the Vermillion Artesian Well, Electric Light, Mining and Improvement Company, with local residents purchasing stock. The city agreed to pay an amount for fire protection and, according to **Schell**, businesses and private residences paid prescribed rates. The council rejected a demand

for “an annual rental of seven per cent based on a plant valuation of \$32,500 and proposed instead a monthly rental of \$75.” Eventually, the city agreed to pay rental of \$1,200 per year and the company promised certain improvements.

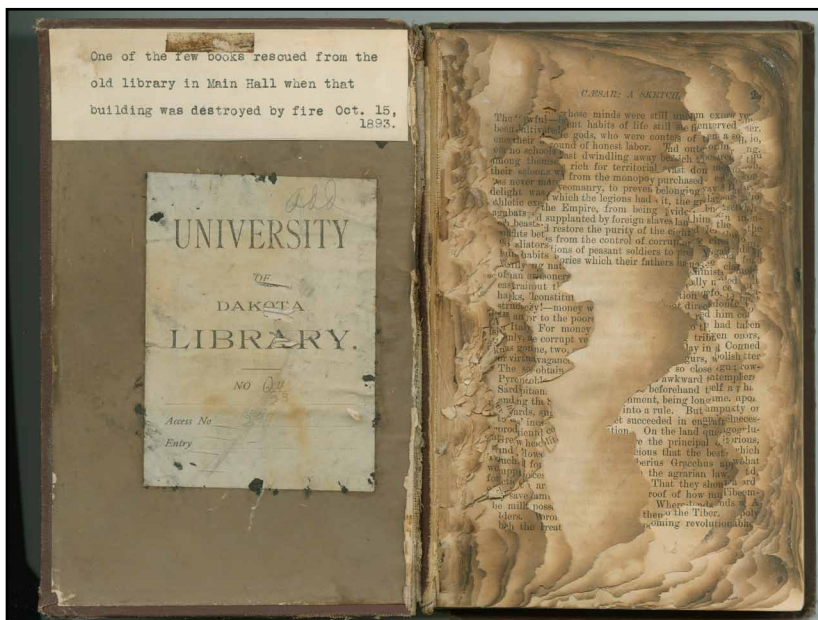
According to the **Dakota Republican** newspaper article, a university student, Ivory E. Clark, resided in West Hall (men’s dormitory) and held a student-work position as an assistant janitor. On October 15, 1893, Clark was headed toward East Hall (women’s dormitory). Chief janitor, D.W. Myers lived near campus and at about the same time, the article noted, “his attention was arrested by a heavy volume of smoke pouring out of one of the chimneys.” Clark had aroused others of the emergency and several showed up on the grounds.

More than 75 years later, an April 1969 letter of thanks was discovered in researching the fire. It was written regarding a separate matter to Professor Usher Abell, chair of the USD Music Department at the time, by Charles E. Barkl of Huron, South Dakota. Barkl revealed that he, too, had been a student at the time of the devastating fire at University Hall in 1893. The letter was discovered on file in the **Archives & Special Collections, The University of South Dakota**, and stated, “The morning the fire was

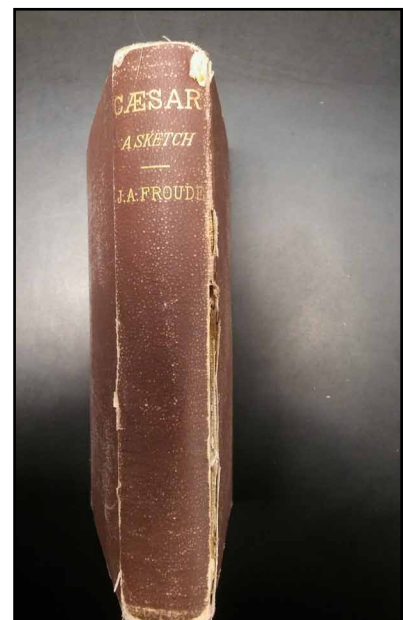
discovered, I was dipping water out of rain barrel under the West Hall eve-spout, for my wash basin in the West Hall, when I saw smoke coming out of all the ventilating spouts on the roof of the (University Hall) building.” Barkl also explained how students tried rescuing books. “We saved all the library books from the second floor of the building by tossing them out of the window at the S.E. corner of the building, where they were picked up by other students and hauled away.” Barkl was a student from September 1893 to June 1894 under Professor T.J. Sloan in the Commercial Department.

Later, Barkl served as president and board chair of Farmers & Merchants Bank of Huron from 1927 to 1947. In 1955, Barkl established a scholarship named for his son, Ronald Oakley Barkl, a music prodigy who died while a USD student in 1926. The article in the **Dakota Republican** confirmed Barkl’s account of the efforts to rescue the library books:

*Parties were in the second story, in the library-room, saving books and documents, when suddenly there was a terrific explosion in the attic of such force as to blow out the walls of the southern gable end and tear off great sections of the roof*



Richardson Collection, Archives & Special Collections, University of South Dakota  
 Damaged, but saved by students from the library on 2nd floor,  
 a book that survived the 1893 fire at University Hall.



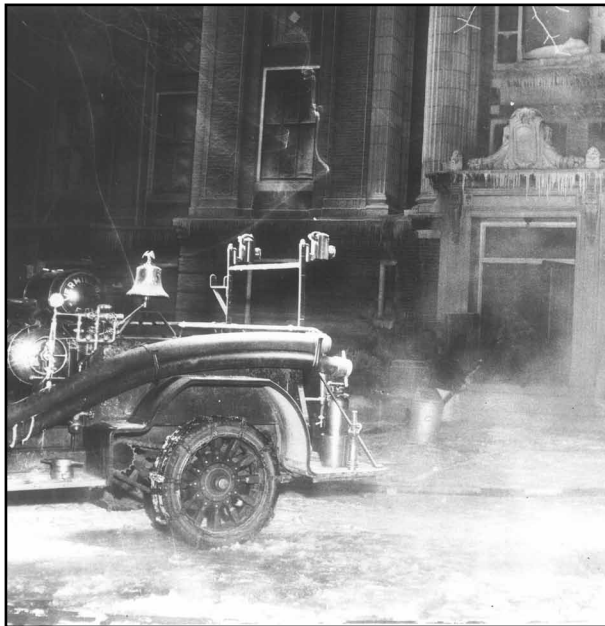
RCA & SC, USD  
 Spine of the book saved from 2nd floor University Hall, 1893.

*which an instant later was on fire, while the ceiling, over the library crashed in, causing the busy workers to flee to safety. It was here and then that most of the casualties occurred. The falling walls struck Ernest Fisher and came within an ace of crashing scores who were congregated below. The entire gable fell in a heap, and the mass must have weighed many tons. There were seven or eight persons in the library at the time among them County Sup't Kahl. They escaped by means of ladders against the windows, though Student Wallace jumped to the ground and received pretty serious injuries in the region of the spine.*

Fast forward to 1952, when fire caused an estimated loss of between \$15,000 and \$20,000 at the Brunick Garage. On April 2nd the following year, a fire at the Alpha Xi Delta sorority house caused an estimated \$17,000 in damage.

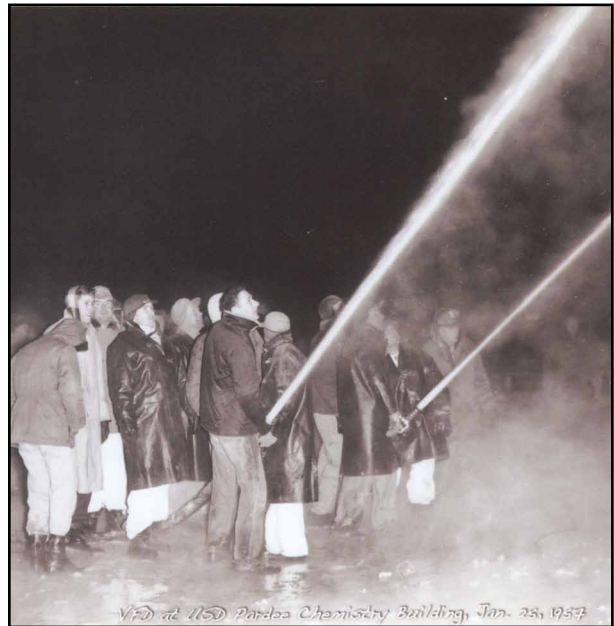
On January 25, 1957, firefighters battled an all-night fire at Pardee Laboratory, the chemistry building on the University of South Dakota campus. The hard-working and reliable 1923 American LaFrance pumper, which had been in use for 34 years, pumped all night by

several trained operators, but mostly by Herman Berke, according to some accounts. In the Fire Department's February report of fires in January, the USD chemistry building fire loss was estimated at \$184,224 and no injuries were reported. Listening to stories years later, newer members of the department heard from those at the fire and operating "Old Betsy" of the varied and "beautiful colors of smoke" emitted from the burning structure that cold January night. At least two firefighters, Bill Radigan and Reno Sorensen, personally related that in order to remove their frozen and long fire coats, they had to stand in the shower. In May, in a report to the department's annual meeting and to the city council, the chief indicated that the State of South Dakota had refunded (paid) \$185,000 to the university for the damage to the chemistry building. In the same report, the state recommended that the city purchase a new fire truck with at least a 750 G.P.M. rating, plus an aerial ladder at least 65 feet long to be mounted on the new truck, or on the Luverne Fire Truck currently owned by the VFD. There was no mention of financial support for the idea. Years later in 1982 when the first aerial ladder truck was purchased, the state did not contribute to paying the costs.



VFD

A fire at the Pardee Lab building on the USD campus, using Old Betsy.



VFD

VFD at USD's Pardee Lab.

In September 1959, a major blaze was reported at the elevators just below bluff in southwestern Vermillion. There were three buildings involved and the damage total was estimated at \$275,000. Individually, damages were estimated at \$94,000 to the Hart-Bartlett building and \$32,000 to the contents; \$89,000 to the large building at Farmers Elevator Company and \$28,000 in contents destroyed; and, to a small building, \$20,000 damage and \$12,000 to its contents.

April 21, 1972, an all-night effort went into fighting a fire at the CO-ED Theatre, which at the time featured a balcony in addition to the main-floor seating. The restrooms, a small lobby, and the business office were located in the upper level. Loss was estimated at \$42,000.

On March 7, 1979, a major fire at the Sioux Alfalfa Plant west of Meckling injured three firefighters, one severely, and all three were hospitalized.

According to Steve Reedy, who wrote a report as assistant chief for the **Plain Talk**, a large storage bin of alfalfa pellets was on fire (and had been smoldering since the previous October) and was almost full. The fire was reported at about 3:15 p.m. Some 90 minutes later, the fire was under control and the firefighters and trucks returned to Vermillion, except for a mop-up crew of five.

A hole had been cut through the steel to enable a front-end loader access into the bin. The air was filled with dust particles and when sufficient oxygen entered the bin another 45 minutes later, “a back draft explosion occurred and Reedy immediately recalled the fire department and ambulance. The bin had been weakened by the fire and the hole cut in one side,” Reedy said. “The shifting load and explosion caused the 64-foot metal storage bin to topple.” The blast also had enough force to loosen the tons of pellets still suspended inside the bin, Reedy reported. When this happened, he said, firefighters Doug Ashmore and Richard Steenholdt ran and almost made it to safety, but were injured, and that Robert Frank had “slipped on the ice while attempting to get away and was buried alive.”

An alfalfa mill employee, Steve Groves, “was able to keep track of where Fireman Robert Frank was before the storage bin collapsed,” Reedy said. Groves and other employees assisted in digging for Bob Frank (who years later told the author that

his wearing bright-colored gloves helped Groves spot him beneath the pellets). Almost an hour later, around 6:30 p.m., Frank was freed and transported to town to be examined, treated, and hospitalized. Once sufficiently healed, Frank remained active on the department for many years and in the past few years became an associate member, still attending meetings, sharing stories when asked, and offering advice.

A fire on New Year’s Day 1982 at the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity house at Main and University Streets caused damage estimated at \$300,000. This was the first fire at which the newly-delivered aerial ladder truck was utilized.



VFD

New Year’s Day 1982, fire destroys the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity house where the new aerial ladder truck was first put into active use.



VFD

The Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity house fire could be described as ‘a cold day in Hell’ for firefighters icing up at work, as did the TKE sign in the background. January 1, 1982.



VFD

TKE House fire, January 1, 1982, view from downtown at Dakota Street, looking East along Main Street.



VFD

TKE House fire, showing ice covered sign.

At the end of that year, on December 27, a fire caused between \$200,000 and \$250,000 in damages at the Electro-Magic plant, which manufactured steam cleaners and pressure washers, and according to one report, made space heaters for use at the Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, New York. Heavy snow had collapsed the roof of the plant, rupturing a gas line and breaking power lines, which shorted and ignited the fire.

In 1986, a chimney fire at a house on Norbeck Street caused losses totaling about \$60,000. Elsewhere, a gas leak was reported at N. Plum and National Streets after a car had hit a house. No

injuries or explosions were reported. In November, the Vermillion Fire Department had assisted fighting a fire at Yaggie Mills in Yankton. The grateful company sent a letter of thanks and bought lunch for the department's next regular meeting.

On Sunday, March 1, 1987, firefighters were called to Tom & Bud's Super Valu grocery at Austin and Kidder Streets when an alarm was received at 4:56 a.m. Firefighters from Vermillion (52), Elk Point (6), and Gayville (4) fought for a good seven hours and were still on the scene working until about 6 p.m., according to accounts in the **Plain Talk**. At least 800,000 gallons of water were applied, but the building and contents were destroyed. It was tough to get at, according to Chief Doug Brunick, and it was cold enough outside to create thin layers of ice, especially on the ladders. The fire in the roof area burned above the building's sprinkler system. Firefighters continually needed refilled air tanks on their self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) resulting in the department's air compressor to burn out. Eventually Vermillion had to make roundtrip drives to Yankton to refill tanks. Later in the week, members of the VFD asked the Vermillion City Council to either repair the compressor or buy a new unit.



VFD

Battling the fire on a cold March 1, 1987 at Tom & Buds Super Valu, Kidder & Austin Streets. Both Tom Rabusch and Bud Christensen had been earlier members of the VFD, joining in the early 1940s.

The store was owned by the Terry Nelson family and employed 43 other community members. Chief Brunick and South Dakota Fire Marshall Darrell Fodness investigated the cause of the fire, which began with a wiring problem to an electrical fixture in the ceiling. It apparently shorted and ignited the fire, which spread from there. One of two of the firefighters who had completed “mop-up” duties related a memory from that chilly, March morning. At the conclusion of “salvage and overhaul” duties of extinguishing any smoldering areas, they removed their air masks while walking out past the meat department coolers and into the parking lot area. “Both of our stomachs growled because it smelled so good,” he said. All of the meat had been cooked.

A particularly hot fire, as hay fires tend to be, was reported in February 1989 at H. & J. Hay Co. five miles west of Meckling. Damage was estimated at \$150,000.

Two fatal fires tragically occurred in 1990, one which also resulted in severe injuries to a firefighter. An eight-year-old, second-grade student at Jolley Elementary, Michael Shablé, died in

the smoke and fire in a trailer home in northeast Vermillion. During the activity, firefighter Rich Walker was seriously injured while working near a truck that moved to connect to a hydrant at the scene. Also that year, a fire on S.D. Highway 50 just west of Interstate 29 in extreme western Union County resulted in the death of Virginia Hawkins, 72, at her home and business, Hawkins Lawn Ornaments.

Several years later as the VFD was helping the Elk Point Fire Department in Union County at Spink, South Dakota, a two-month-old child was killed in a fire. There were also deaths at various vehicle crashes and rescues and recoveries of bodies from the Missouri River. In a rescue/recovery incident, a man who had apparently attempted to drive on a flooded county road north of Vermillion was swept away by rushing water. His car was located when someone spotted the vehicle’s radio antenna poking up out of the flooded and flowing ditch. After extensive searching, including from the air by a local pilot and under water by divers, the victim’s body was located miles downstream in the Vermillion River

and recovered a short time later in the Missouri River.

The department's history in Clay County and Vermillion records the wide variety of calls answered by the many members over the years. Some calls were quite urgent and serious. Some were kept from becoming more serious by the volunteers. Through those first three decades, fire chiefs and the volunteers knew first-hand of the

need for obtaining equipment and pressurizing water. Buckets and horsepower from stabled animals or the men themselves pulling hose and ladder carts simply were not very effective once fires found sufficient fuel and grew rapidly, often helped by wind. Hydrants offered some water pressure, but at least one modern, mobile pumping machine was clearly needed. ☛

<b>• SPECIFICATIONS •</b>	
	A Westinghouse generator and Willard battery of large capacity are furnished. All wiring is of the single-wire type, and metal armored cable is used. The head and searchlights have parabolic lenses with adjustable lamp sockets of the single-contact type. All lights are controlled by switches conveniently placed on the dash. A heavy steel battery box with lock will be provided to carry battery.
<b>Locomotive Bell and Siren Horn</b>	A large, heavily constructed locomotive bell is suitably mounted. A distinctive, penetrating siren horn will be furnished and mounted on the dash.
<b>Ladders</b>	One 20-foot solid side extension ladder mounted on side of body. One 12-foot roof ladder with folding hooks, mounted on side of body. Ladders to have natural finish with ends painted black.
<b>Pike Pole</b>	One 8-foot pike pole, mounted on the ladder brackets and finished in natural wood with black ends, will be furnished.
<b>Hand Extinguishers</b>	Two 3-gallon fire department extinguishers in proper holders and mounted in accessible position.
<b>Play Pipe Holders</b>	Two hard-wood cones for playpipes, mounted on rear step.
<b>Lanterns</b>	Two fire department standard lanterns conveniently mounted on standards at rear of hose body.
<b>Fire Axe</b>	One, heavy pick back, fire department standard, suitably mounted.
<b>Crowbar</b>	One, of steel, held by snags and mounted on running board.
<b>Speedometer</b>	One, suitably mounted on dash.
<b>Equipment Box</b>	One, mounted under rear of frame and in front of rear step.
<b>Painting</b>	The apparatus to be handsomely painted in fine coach colors. The decorative work is to be artistic in design and execution, and is to be well grounded and finished with the best wearing varnishes. The principal colors used in the work are to be as follows: Body, coach red, A. L. F. E. Co. No. 124. Frame, English vermillion, A. L. F. E. Co. No. 7. Wheels, English vermillion, A. L. F. E. Co. No. 7. or.....
<b>Finish of Trimmings</b>	Finish of metal parts and accessories to be nickel.

**AMERICAN LAFRANCE FIRE ENGINE COMPANY, INC.**  
ELMHURST, NEW YORK, U.S.A.

36.

Sorensen, VFD Archives

Shown is a page of the specifications for the American LaFrance pumper truck in 1923, including a 'locomotive bell' and 'distinctive, penetrating siren horn.'





## 1923: AMERICAN LaFRANCE TO THE RESCUE



*Sorensen*

The American LaFrance known as ‘Old Betsy,’ the VFD’s first motor-driven fire truck, sits prominently in retirement at the W.H. Over Museum in Vermillion, SD. The truck was towed to the building in July 2016.

That insurers do not relish paying claims and that insured peoples’ businesses keep watch for affordable premiums to pay insurance is no secret, of course. When it was determined that the Vermillion community’s fire insurance rating was about to cause a rise in insurance rates in 1923, the City of Vermillion and the Vermillion Fire Department studied the matter hard and fast and took official action to purchase the town’s first fire truck -- a “built to order” apparatus from the American LaFrance Fire Engine Company, Inc., in Elmira, New York. The insurance scare had occurred already in the 1890s during the days of testing the local waterworks, so the need for improved equipment and water pressure at the scene of a fire was an issue well before the purchase was actually made.

On May 5, 1921, the Vermillion Fire Department approved a motion that five members be appointed to confer with the city council about a fire truck. The **Dakota Republican**, in a June 9, 1921 report

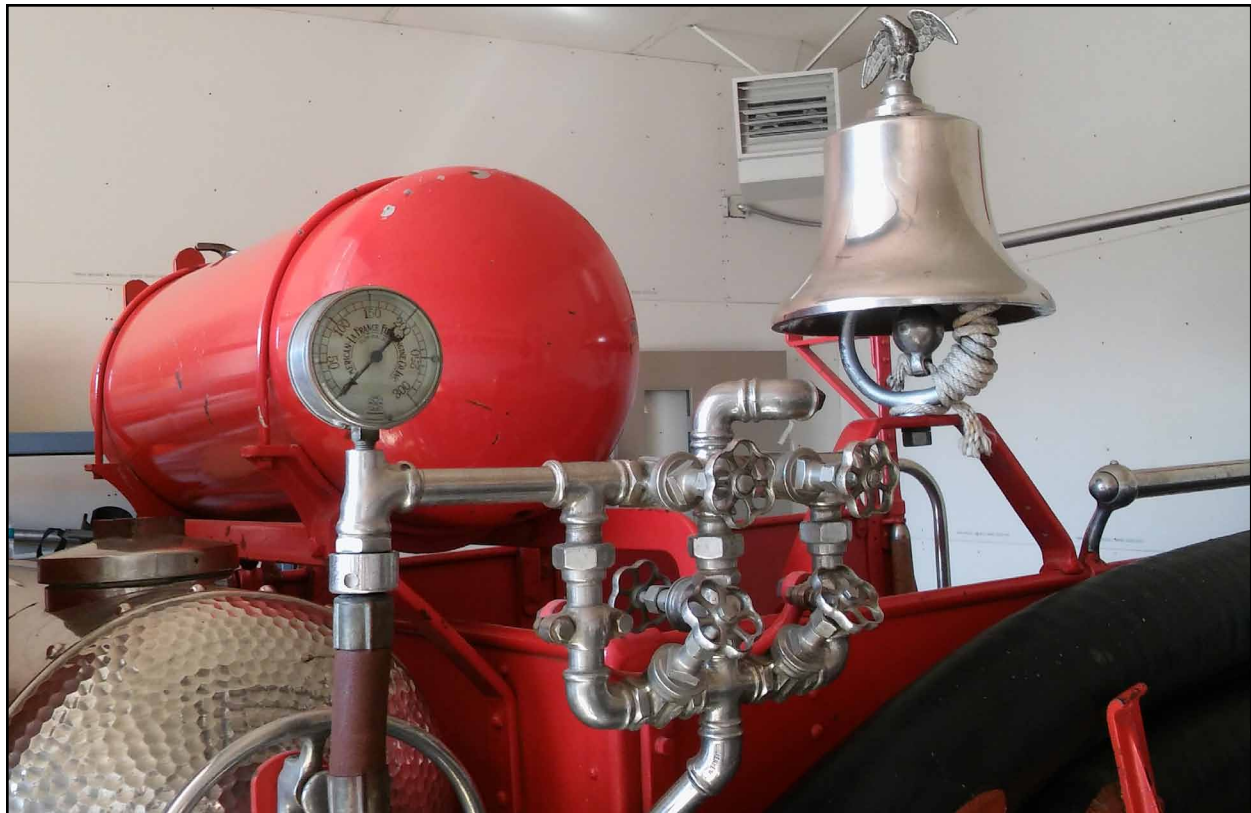
on the city council, told of attorney W.A. Bauman, a member of the fire department appearing before the council to request a new “auto fire truck.” Aldermen favored the idea, but said the cost was prohibitive and a few months needed to pass when an annual levy was due to arrive. The council did not want a “cheap machine,” according to historian **Tom Thaden**, and 16 months later, on October 5, 1922, the newspaper described a visit to Vermillion by a representative of the Luverne Truck Co. of Luverne, Minnesota, asking to demonstrate operation and use of a triple combination truck that could pump water, carry hose and ladders, and chemical equipment used in fighting fires. The council agreed and soon watched a demonstration at the Meisenholder corner, where hose was attached to a hydrant and stretched across the street to the Waldorf Hotel (located at Main and Prospect Streets) to (apparently impressively) shoot water higher than the building. Another

demonstration was held on Cherry Street. No purchase resulted. By January 4, 1923, the VFD had studied enough options to rank preferences for a fire truck and approved a motion at a monthly meeting that the “Department as a body recommend the Hawkeye (brand) Truck in writing,” overwhelmingly over other brands such as White, Samsen, REO, and Nash.

In spring 1923 inspectors of a national association of insurance adjustors presented an unfavorable report to the city council. The adjustors found the water system inadequate for Vermillion’s fourth-class rating of fire insurance. Businesses faced a possible five-percent increase in insurance premiums on their buildings due to a potential down-reclassification of the city’s rating. This possibility caught the attention of the community and Vermillion’s City Council. By March, the council approved a motion to advertise for bids for a combination fire truck to be opened April 2 at 8 p.m. At that meeting, the council discussed the matter of the re-rating of the city for insurance purposes with the insurance inspectors. An article

on April 5, 1923, in the **Dakota Republican** and information provided by **Thaden**, stated, “The only alternative to this purchase, other than the expensive one of relaying many of the mains, is to drop back into class 4 ½ or possibly class 5 insurance rates. To drop from class 4 to class 4 ½ would mean an increase in insurance rates of probably 10 to 15 percent,” according to the article. “To drop to class 5 would probably double the existing rates.”

While firefighters had earlier discussed and long-favored the idea of a motorized truck, the official, published report to the council by the insurance men from Minneapolis took the spotlight. Their detailed report was (and is presently) of particularly interest to firefighters, as well as workers among the city utility departments. Its contents are historically instructive and revealing regarding the ability of Vermillion’s capabilities to fight fires. The following report from A.E. Strudwick and R.L. Daniel of the General Inspection Bureau presented to the city council “on motion was ordered spread on the minutes:” ❖



*Sorensen*

Old Betsy came equipped in 1923 with a gas tank (top), a chemical tank (hammered chrome) and train-type bell with a loud, but nice tone.

*Town Report for Vermillion, S.D.*

*Inspected April 13<sup>th</sup> 1923*

*R.L. Daniel and A.E. Strudwick*

*General Summary*

*Town was previously graded 4<sup>th</sup> class by virtue of elevated tank and two pumps rated at 330 G.P.M. each, with emergency reservoir for pump suction. Emergency reservoir is now out of use and only one pump is in use. Town would grade National Board Class 8 or on old system grading of 4 ½.*

*Business generally mercantile, with one or two small manufacturers, and is seat of University of South Dakota.*

*Fire Department, volunteer, with hand drawn hose carts and ladder truck, few nozzles of small size. Gravity pressure 50 to 60 pounds. Mains mostly wooden, of doubtful reliability. Ordinances deficient. Streets wide, in good condition, level.*

*City in General*

*Town is growing. Situated in farming district. Principal Industries: Mercantile, with few small manufacturing plants, and town is seat of the University of South Dakota.*

*TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES: One steam railroad, also automobile bus lines.*

*STREETS: 80 feet wide, level, paved in P.M.D. and considerably beyond, graded.*

*STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS: In Fire Limits about 40% of block area built upon: 29% frame.*

*Average height two stories. Exposed openings generally unprotected. Wooden shingles permitted. Conflagration hazards mild. Fire records good.*

*Fire Fighting Facilities*

*WATER SUPPLY: Source, wells. One triplex pump rated 320 G.P.M., driven by 40 H.P. Electric Motor. One Triplex pump same as above, not in use, electric power to be installed. Elevated steel tank of 110,000 gallons capacity on 100 ft. tower furnishes gravity pressure of 50 to 60 pounds in Mercantile District.*

*UNDERGROUND SYSTEM: Supply main 10 in. cast iron, main artery 8-inch cast iron, with 2 or 3 blocks of 6-inch cast iron and an equal amount of 6 inch wood pipe.*

*Other distributing mains mostly 4-inch wood pipe, with exception of about 10 blocks of 6-inch cast iron. System partially gridironed. About 75% of mains are 4 inch wood pipe. Hydrants mostly 4-inch various makes, some open to right and some to left. Hydrant distribution fair in fire limits, deficient in some residence districts. Pressure is not raised for fires. Three to four standard streams available at 50 pounds for about 2 hours. Two standard streams available for about 4 hours.*

*FIRE DEPARTMENT: 79 volunteers; no paid men. Drills not regular. Apparatus consists of 3 hand drawn hose carts, two wheeled, carrying about 500 feet of 2 ½ inch hose each, and one hand drawn ladder truck with 40-foot extension ladder, 2 wall ladders and one roof ladder, 4 small bore shut off nozzles and small amount of other tools. No chemicals. No pumpers. Fire station ordinary brick, well located. Building inspections made once or twice a year, 1550 feet of hose in serviceable condition, none in reserve, no large hose.*

*FIRE ALARM: telephone, general alarm on steam whistle at municipal electric plant, code for ward numbers.*

*ORDINANCES: Building law deficient, prohibition of shingle roofs in fire limits not enforced. New electric wiring, fair. Old wiring, poor.*

*RECOMMENDATIONS*

*GENERAL STRUCTURAL CONDITION, wide streets, considerable amount of pavement, have probably been influential towards favoring loss ratio. Water supply would grade 9<sup>th</sup> class; Fire Department, 8<sup>th</sup> class; and fire alarm 8<sup>th</sup> class, according to National Board Grading Schedule. Town as a whole grading 8<sup>th</sup> class, corresponding to Inspection Bureau Grade of 4 ½ class.*

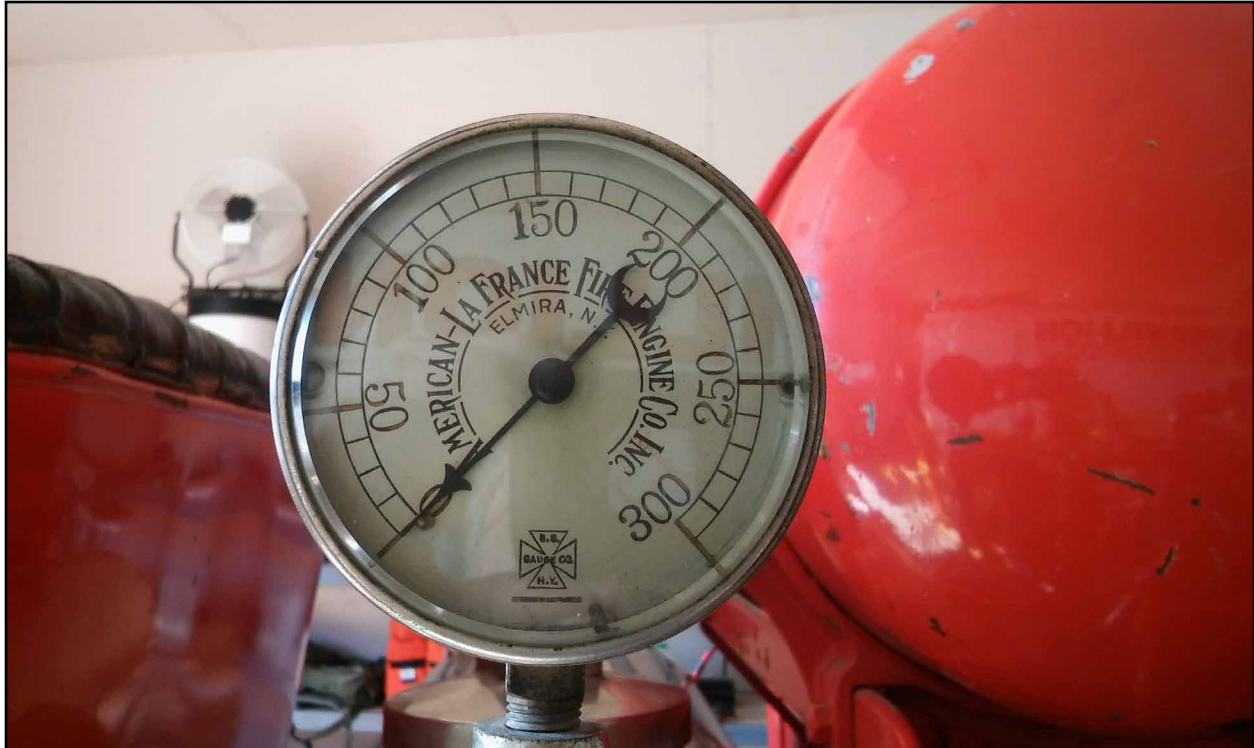
*RECOMMENDATIONS, Increase primary water supply to 750 gallons per minute, or provide 150,000 storage reservoir with 500 gallons per minute pump for fire purposes. Provide for high pressure fire streams by means of automobile pumper or pumpers in fire department. Total capacity of 750 G.P.M. is needed, but one 500-gallon pump with 40-gallon chemical and carrying 1000 feet of 2 ½ inch hose will be accepted at this time.*

*Provide 1000 feet of new hose for new truck, keeping old hose in reserve.*

*Provide two shut off nozzles 1 inch with extra 7/8 inch and 1 1/8 inch tips, also Siamese nozzle holder, cellar pipe, and hydrant hose gate to be carried by department.*

*Provide for regular inspection of buildings, particularly basements in fire limits by Fire Warden or members of Fire Department.*

*Provide and enforce suitable building ordinance and also ordinances regulating storage and handling of inflammable and explosive substances.*



*Sorensen*

American LaFrance pressure gauge on Old Betsy.

A committee of three appointed by Council President Neumayer had been asked to investigate the matter of “a suitable fire truck” for the City of Vermillion. The members of the committee were Chief C.B. Richardson representing the VFD, C.F. Grange representing the city, and B.A. Meisenholder representing the Commercial Club. On March 5, 1923, the city called for bids for a combination fire truck to be opened April 2, 1923, at 8 p.m. There was a long discussion on the matter of re-rating the community for insurance purposes with Strudwick. Two options for Vermillion were presented: either improve the waterworks and mains to provide and handle higher pressures and pumping capacity, or purchase an apparatus designed as a triple combination mobile pumper truck with hose, chemical tanks, and suction capabilities to draw water. The April 5, 1923, minutes of the Vermillion Fire Department also included that the “General Inspection Bureau man showed (the) City Council where the water system was deficient for Class 4 protection rates. Prospects are for buying of a big truck for the city.” A VFD motion followed and carried that after the meeting adjourned, the department “call the rating inspector Mr. Strudwick for a talk.”

In addition, a front-page article in the **Plain Talk** carried the headline CITY COUNCIL VOTES TO ADD FIRE PROTECTION. “The president of the council informs us that Vermillion has in the past been classed with cities of twice our population in insurance rating and that the matter of adequate fire protection has been brought to the point where it cannot be dodged,” the article reported.

Bids to the city included one from American LaFrance for a triple-combination pumper, hose, and ladder truck in the amount of \$8,500, which was the highest bid, but would meet the standards of the inspectors. The Council approved a motion “that the General Inspection Bureau be notified that the Council is willing to comply with their requirements in order to keep the city in class four as to insurance rates.” The next day the council passed a motion to purchase the truck on a vote of 4 to 2. By May 21, 1923, the city approved a motion to “place an order with American LaFrance Fire Engine Company for a Type 89 Triple Combination Chemical, Hose and Pumper.” This was followed by another approved motion that “1,000 feet of Arrow brand Wax and Gum fire hose be purchased in the amount of \$1.25 per foot.”



Sorensen

The driver's side of the 1923 fire truck (Vermillion's first) is on the right. The top (red) tank is for gasoline and the bottom tank (hammered chrome) for chemicals used in those days.

The new truck was delivered in November and the council held a special meeting "to accept the new Fire Truck." Subsequently, the council instructed the city auditor to obtain insurance rates covering the truck itself. The delivered truck was accompanied by a representative of American LaFrance for training in operation of the pumper. Fire department member Mark Chamberlain was appointed chief engineer responsible for maintenance and three other firefighters were assigned as drivers. The December 3, 1923, city council minutes indicated approval of a warrant in the amount of \$8,500 issued to American LaFrance in payment for the fire truck. The city auditor listed the \$8,500 among the bills approved by the aldermen.

Although modern in 1923, many of the parts (including the hard-rubber tires) for the truck from the shelves of American LaFrance were made as early as 1918. Yet, this high-quality machine went

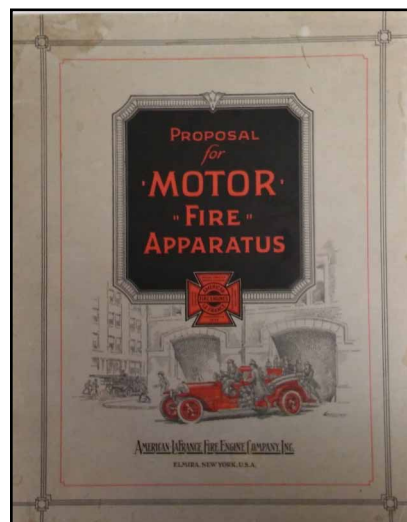


Sorensen

Purchased by Vermillion in 1923, many of the parts of 'Old Betsy' are older, patented by American LaFrance in 1900, 1901, 1908, 1914, and 1915, as shown on several plates attached to the truck.

into active service for 40 years and eventually was known as "Old Betsy" in conversations and in the monthly meeting minutes of the VFD.

Discussions between a VFD representative, a trustee (the author), and museum officials resulted in approval of a 2016 agreement between the Vermillion Fire Department and the Friends of the W.H. Over Museum. By that summer a rest home was provided for "Old Betsy," prominently displayed inside the main lobby of the Museum. Those firefighters that helped with final cleaning and preparation of the truck to move to its new home on July 16, 2016, included: Kellen Cusick, Ryun Fischbach, Tom Sorensen, Hunter Jackson, Blaine Schollermann, Matt Wanamaker, Donald Forseth, and Keith Thompson.



Sorensen, VFD

Shown is the cover sheet for the pages of specs in 1923 sent by the American LaFrance Fire Engine Co., Inc.



VFD

The VFD was asked to participate in Sioux City's annual Rivercade Parade in 1987.



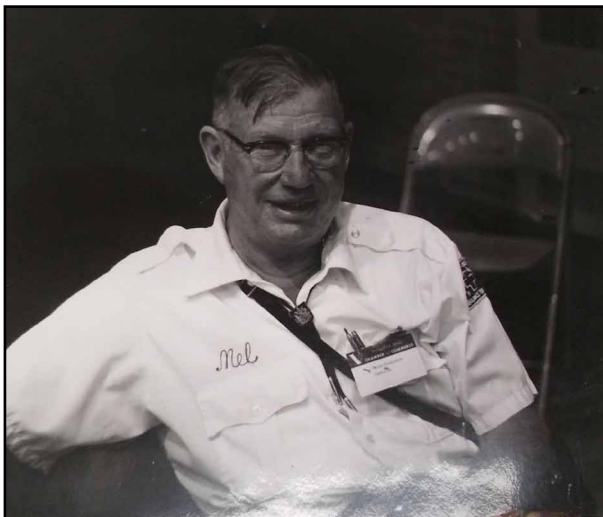
VFD

Old Betsy, driven by Bob Frank, was often featured in Dakota Day Parades.



VFD

Driver Kellen Cusick and Tom Sorensen are ready to have Old Betsy towed to the W.H. Over Museum, July 16, 2016.



VFD

Melvin Stieglmeyer, Chief, 1965-1980.

Melvin Stieglmeyer, fire chief from 1965 to 1980, prepared and published an article late in his tenure in which he encapsulated and confirmed the history of some of the equipment used in fighting fires in Vermillion. Chief Mel's annual reports to the city essentially followed the example set in 1934 by Chief Pierce in providing a fleet list. Stieglmeyer, who had served as the city water department superintendent, advised that when C.F. Lotze served as the first chief in 1892, a city

water well was available, a 100-foot water tower had been erected, and 1,000 feet of wooden water mains existed. The two hose carts and a hook and ladder wagon were available with a few hundred feet of hose. Stieglmeyer said he had learned that the men were proud of the new gear that replaced the buckets, 75 feet of heavy rope with a grappling hook, two old ladders and a chain. Before long, horses added to the pulling power, especially for the heavier hook and ladder wagon. The first motor-driven unit, the American LaFrance, worked actively until 1963 when a Howe custom pumper was purchased. A 1934 truck was retired in 1971 when, as Chief Stieglmeyer's report confirmed, another Luverne water pump was added to a Ford chassis. An International-brand truck was put to use in 1939 and the new pumper was added in 1950. In 1956, a new 1,000-gallon tanker truck joined the fleet and in 1963 another tanker (1,400 gallons) was added. Stieglmeyer also charted other, specialized vehicles, including the high-pressure, four-wheel-drive unit in 1965. According to Stieglmeyer, the 1956 tanker was replaced in 1967; the 1950 pumper was replaced in 1971; and, the 1963 tanker was replaced in 1968. He said the Vermillion Fire Department joined the CM-2 program in 1972 when the county-owned, six-wheel-drive vehicle was added. ♣



*Sorensen*

'Old Betsy' in a "retirement home," the W.H. Over Museum, summer 2016.



*Sorensen*

Even though pneumatic tires were available in 1923, the American LaFrance came with hard-rubber tires.  
The truck is chain-driven.





## MODERN FUELS REQUIRE MODERN FIREFIGHTING



VFD

Jeff Radigan (right) gets help with a new tank of air as Sheriff Arnie Nelson (back, left) apparently struggles to hear a portable radio.

Any household and commercial items that burn are considered fuel for a fire, including some of the newer materials of the day used in making carpeting, sofas, coverings or stuffing in furniture, and various finishes, whether glued or other wooden building products that line roofs and walls. When burned, these materials create smoke and fumes more dangerous than the older, ordinary combustible items such as wood and paper, which are significantly influenced by moisture, according to the **Essentials of Firefighting** text book. This has made firefighting more complex. As a consequence, fire department certification courses on a wider variety of topics were necessary and were incorporated in the curricula. The presence of greater amounts of plastics and synthetic materials, in new and old structures, increased the “fuel load” and the products of combustion became more dangerous. The importance of proper protective

clothing and training was stressed more and more, especially the use of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). The height of buildings was a major concern in the early 1980s, especially after a survey of the town’s many rental housing units, according to **Schell**. Ground ladders simply would not be effective in rescue attempts in taller buildings used and occupied by hundreds of university students on campus. The need for an aerial ladder truck was clear as potential urgency approached in Vermillion, especially on the university campus.

Fire department minutes indicate that in July 1969 discussion arose again concerning purchasing a ladder truck, but no formal action was taken. Lack of funding was a major consideration. Buildings higher than a couple of stories required more effective firefighting and protection. In September 1981, the city council agreed to provide \$150,000 toward purchasing an aerial ladder truck.



VFD

The first aerial ladder truck, an 85-footer, joined the fleet in late 1981, and put into service Jan. 1, 1982.

Weeks later several members of the fire department traveled to a fire truck company in Snyder, Nebraska, to work with a newly-designed, aerial-ladder truck and to attend classes related to operating such a new, specialized, piece of equipment, which was expected to arrive soon in Vermillion. Arrival of “Ladder One” was announced in early December. Immediately, training drills were scheduled for Wednesday evenings for the initial handful of firefighters to learn and practice operating the new equipment. The *Astrostar* truck built by the Smeal Company featured an 85-foot ladder mounted on a turntable atop the truck, which cost \$207,000. The equipment and capabilities to rescue people and to fight fires with an elevated water stream at newer, taller buildings (as well as some of the older, four-story or higher structures, such as the dormitories and the towers of Old Main) had suddenly improved, despite no financial help from the state. While the truck’s main feature was the reach and movement of the ladder, stabilized by outriggers, the vehicle also included high-pressure pumping capacity from a small tank and from hydrants through

five-inch feeder hoses. As trucks and equipment had evolved, such new tools were studied by truck committees and regularly made part of budget planning and replacement by the department and the city. The new aerial ladder truck was first used at a “working fire” on New Year’s Day 1982 at the Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE) fraternity fire at Main and University Streets, just south of the campus. The ladder truck served the department well for 27 years until being replaced in 2009 by another built by Smeal, a 2008 *Spartan Quint*, providing the five main components: a 105-foot, elevated ladder capable of providing an aerial master stream and rescue, ground ladders, hose in beds, the pump, and water (on-board and through hydrants). The cab contained seat-mounted, self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) for four firefighters and front seats for a driver and a crew member to operate the radio and sirens and to help navigate safe passage to the scene. Safety policy and regulations have long prohibited firefighters from riding to a call on the outside or back of a fire truck. The price tag of the new aerial ladder apparatus was \$595,746. ❁



## COMMUNICATION: CALL THE FIRE DEPARTMENT!

The summoning of volunteers to answer fire calls presents its own unique history, with the department, city government, and the business community working together to provide means of communication over the years. Additional and important devices for fire notification developed over more than 100 years for businesses and homes included smoke detectors and smoke alarms.

Chief Stiegelmeier's article mentioned earlier provided a sketch of the methods of summoning firefighters beginning with the steam whistle located at the flour mill and early power plant.

"In 1932 the steam whistle was replaced with two electric sirens," he reported. "In 1950 the telephone ringing system was installed." The phone method was replaced in 1965 with radio receivers and at the time of his article, Stiegelmeier said the system included "four radio tone-operated Civil Defense sirens and 75 radio receivers all toned and controlled from the dispatcher's desk in the Police Department." Receiver radios in the homes and businesses of active firefighters were chiefly of the Plectron brand, updated several times over the years. Small, battery-powered Motorola pagers used by firefighters replaced the larger home units. Eventually, firefighters received calls and training announcements via text messaging on cell phones, as well as updated Motorola *Minitor VI* personal units and chargers.

An example of needing to revert to a previous method to summon firefighters arose on October 15, 1893, when the fire calls came to hurry to University Hall (later Old Main) on the campus of The University of South Dakota. The local mill's steam whistle had been used in those days, but this 7 a.m. call was on a Sunday morning; the mill was closed and steam pressure was low. This caused delayed responses to the alarm, perhaps up to thirty minutes according to the front-page account in the **Dakota Republican**:

*The writer, though awake did not hear*

*it (the whistle alarm), but there are many who did. In a few moments a church-bell was rung, then another and another. The mill whistle was again sounded, and then, those who were awake and had heard all these alarms, must have realized that something very unusual was transpiring. We arrived at the campus limits at precisely 7:35. At that hour the building was doomed: there was no earthly hope for it.*



*Aaron Packard Photography*

This heavy, brass steam whistle is kept in a trophy case at the VFD. Several references to use of the steam whistle at the flourmilling plant near the present site of City Hall are found in the research, including a newspaper account that it had insufficient steam on Sunday morning, Oct. 15, 1893 when University Hall burned, delaying firefighter response by about 30 minutes.

Another form of communication was proposed late in 1952. Fire department minutes of December 4 indicate that Martin Jorgensen, a farmer among many of Danish descent in Norway Township, offered a map and system whereby each farmer on Timber Road would have a number, which would help ensure finding the location in case of fire. The idea led to department discussion of such a map for the whole of Clay County, but no action was immediately taken, other than to thank Mr. Jorgensen.

In the mid-1950s, minutes of the fire department indicate regular gifts to “the telephone girls” for their work with the calling system used to contact homes of firemen. Chief Lewis Radigan had reported in October 1954 that the telephone operators were “working very well with us.”

In her series of **Plain Talk** columns, the late and wonderful “History Lady,” Cleo Erickson, reported in 2009 for Vermillion’s Sesquicentennial about three members of the fire department in 1955 “making a plea to the City Council for a new alarm system” to notify firefighters quickly about the location of a fire. Just as VFD members Stanley Larson, Bill Radigan, and Joe Reedy finished addressing the aldermen, the siren outside summoned them to the fire station, which was kept on ground level in the northeast corner of the same building. “They shot out of the meeting room like sprinters and went down the stairway in about two jumps,” Erickson reported. “In a matter of seconds they were aboard the truck on their way to Noteboom Hall on the campus.” In the same column, Cleo reported that the city council had voted that year to contract with Northwestern Bell Telephone Company “for installation and servicing of a telephone alarm system for the use of the local volunteer fire department.” She also shared news at one point in 1955 that, “Fire Chief Lewis Radigan is a happy man as there have been no fires reported in 42 days.” By March of 1955 Robert Krueger and Vern Grimm of Northwestern Bell appeared at a VFD meeting to “explain the improved phone alarm system,” costing \$1.75 per month and requiring one-party phones (two-party lines were still around). A motion was approved to ask the city council to pay for the service. The new phone system was put into operation by February 1956.

Discussion also began to consider a radio system of alarms at an estimated cost of \$3,200. New,



*Nick Hytrek, Sioux City Journal*

Vermillion Mayor Dan Christopherson (L), Cleo Erickson, and Joe Reedy at Austin-Whittemore House in 2009, members of the Sesquicentennial Executive Committee.

two-way radios were also discussed in 1954, favoring assistance from the federal government to help pay for Civil-Defense radio systems. A meeting was also arranged at the time to meet with a salesman representing a company to purchase a base radio unit for the system estimated to cost \$1,800. Early in 1958 two-way radios were installed in trucks with driver/operators who were instructed on their use. Directional lights were also to be installed to communicate to drivers of other vehicles and the communication center dispatching the calls.

Aside from the means of notification, actions to summon the fire department were not all for actual fires. In March 1956, a string of false alarms had been coming in from Julian Hall on the university campus. Fire department records reveal discussions with university officials on plans to “divide up the known trouble makers and send letters to each student advising of dangers and penalties” of false or prank alarms. A letter was to be sent to students by Howard Connors, Dean of Men.

Communication methods and equipment continued to improve and in September of 1965 the city council accepted bids for home and office fire-radio receivers for firefighters. These included 70 *Plectron* receivers and one encoder for a total of \$7,674.50. In December 1968, the city purchased a new style of portable radio using “transistors”

rather than tubes, available to the VFD as modern, portable units.

Smoke detectors, usually in nonresidential and large, multi-family structures, detect “the presence of smoke and must transmit a signal to another device that sounds the alarm,” according to **Essentials of Firefighting and Fire Department Operations**. Devices installed mostly in single-family homes and smaller multi-family (apartment) buildings are smoke alarms. These “self-contained units” can detect the presence of smoke and also sound an alarm right where they are located, as explained in **Essentials**. This internal form of rapidly communicating a potential fire to occupants of business facilities, family homes, and apartments was a major step toward saving lives.

Smoke detectors and smoke alarms were the subjects of study and improvement for many years (starting in 1902), but they remained rather expensive (\$200) even into the 1960s. Most devices were limited to commercial and industrial locations, according to **The Safe Community Project, Inc.** ([www.mysmokealarm.org/history](http://www.mysmokealarm.org/history)), a nonprofit group. In 1967 the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) developed NFPA 74, setting a standard for smoke detectors and alarms. The Life Safety Code, NFPA 101, was approved in 1976 and required smoke alarms in every home. By 1980 about half the homes in the nation had working alarms, which jumped to 75% in 1984. The Safe Community Project estimates that by 2013, 96% of U.S. homes had installed smoke alarms, but that almost a third of the devices were not working because of “aging, removal of batteries, or failure of the homeowner to replace dead batteries.”

Between 2009 and 2014, the City of Vermillion strengthened its stand in adopting national and international residential codes that included provisions in the local Rental Housing Code requiring that all rental units “shall be provided with smoke alarms that receive their primary power from the building wiring and when primary power is interrupted shall receive power from a battery.” Some exceptions were included in the ordinance, which also required rental units to have carbon monoxide alarms if the unit had “fuel-fired appliances and/or attached garages.” Given that well over half the residential houses in Vermillion were rentals, these and some other building code provisions became

somewhat controversial due to the monetary expenses that would be incurred. Many landlords resided outside Vermillion or in other states, so some property owners turned the management of their units over to local realty companies.

Another communication improvement came in 1993 in a movement to install numbered, rural-address signs as part of an “enhanced 9-1-1” system to locate emergency callers and calls. In fall 1993, Fire Chief Doug Brunick had discussed the program of installing “house numbers” for rural areas with members of the VFD, but no immediate action followed. Owners of older, established farms had either begun moving around more or retiring (or worse). Places could no longer be known simply as “the Smith barn” or the “the Iverson place” (and in either case, which one among many had that name?). Moreover, younger firefighters were less familiar with the old farmstead names. To remedy this problem, blue-reflective signs measuring 18 inches by 6 inches with 4-inch white numbers were installed by Sign-Up Ltd. of Webster City, Iowa, numbering streets (east-west) and avenues (north-south). The blue numbers for individual addresses continue to assist emergency drivers and operators immensely.

The Vermillion Fire Department also augmented use of the pagers members carry with “I Am Responding,” an emergency responder reply system. According to the company’s web page, the tracking systems lets the dispatcher know who is responding and how soon. Once a page is received, the emergency responders use their cell phones to quickly reply so that drivers of fire and ambulance vehicles can get rolling with a full crew. A responder who is farther from the station and takes a little longer to arrive may need to board the next-available vehicle. The system also provides mapping capabilities and an “instant mass-messaging system” enabling texts messages for enhanced communications to all members.

The Clay County and Vermillion summoning systems advanced through the years, as the various components worked in unison, eventually triggered by calling a simpler and more-universal telephone number, easy to remember and quick to dial or key -- 9-1-1. Stickers began showing up on telephones, booths, and posters, with the reminder to those publicizing it to make sure to use the dashes; it’s 9-1-1, not 9-11 because there is no

eleven on a phone key pad. This number replaced use of Vermillion's old "Market" numbers, as in MA4-xxxx. Eventually, using the M(6) A(2) was required so all seven numbers were needed, as in 624-xxxx, as well as the South Dakota area code 605 in many cases.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the early 9-1-1 system was analogue, in that numbers are directly-measurable quantities, such as voltages. This evolved into an enhanced 9-1-1 system for effective notification, location of the caller, and the dispatch of first-responders in emergencies. Mapping capabilities were developed in the early 2000s to plot locations by triangulating cellular phones. According to Ryan Anderson, director of the Clay Area Emergency Services Communication Center (CAESCC) in Vermillion, "The analog lines of the '60s, '70s, and '80s had the ability to carry only limited information," he said. "The E 9-1-1 (Enhanced 9-1-1) provides a caller's name and address, similar to caller I-D."

According to Anderson, who started working at the Vermillion Police Department in 2008, the next step in this evolution was installation of a digital network system to become available across the state of South Dakota. "Next-Generation 9-1-1" equipment was installed in Vermillion in October 2016, he explained, but was awaiting installation in several other communication centers elsewhere in South Dakota before the network would be actively used, perhaps in 2017 or by 2018. While Vermillion and other communities waited, the need for clarification from the company why the progress was delayed from the company installing the system arose in early 2017.

"NG 9-1-1 is funded by the surcharge that comes with the phone bill people pay," Anderson said. While E 9-1-1 logs calls and ties in with a system, the newer, NG 9-1-1 digital network is designed to make use of texts, pictures and even video if a caller for some reason cannot talk or otherwise communicate a specific problem or danger. ☺

INTER-CHAMBER FIRE WASTE CONTEST RECORD

(Date)

CONTEST GRADING COMMITTEE,  
NATIONAL FIRE WASTE COUNCIL,  
1615 H STREET, N. W.,  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

The \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ submits the following record of local fire losses incurred and fire prevention activities carried on during the year 1928 for the consideration of the Grading Committee in determining the winners of the 1928 Contest awards.

POPULATION

(a) For year 1928 3400

(b) For year 1927 same

(c) Average for years 1923-1927 inclusive 3300

FIRE LOSS STATISTICS

1. NUMBER OF FIRES

(a) For year 1928 23

(b) For year 1927 18

(c) Average for years 1923-1927 inclusive

2. NUMBER OF FIRES EXCEEDING \$1,000 LOSS

(a) For year 1928 5 ex. exceeding 1000

(b) For year 1927 same

(c) Average for years 1923-1927 inclusive

3. PROPERTY LOSS (INSURED AND UNINSURED)

(a) For year 1928 6000

(b) For year 1927 same

(c) Average for years 1923-1927 inclusive

4. NUMBER OF PERSONS KILLED BY FIRE

(a) For year 1928 none

(b) For year 1927 none

(c) Average for years 1923-1927 inclusive

5. NUMBER OF PERSONS INJURED BY FIRE

(a) For year 1928 none

(b) For year 1927 none

(c) Average for years 1923-1927 inclusive none

Note: For Items 4 and 5 quote from the records of the Bureau of Vital Statistics if no more reliable figures are available.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

8. FIRE PREVENTION WEEK

Indicate in a supplemental statement the number, dates and duration of Fire Prevention Week programs and details of the plan carried out. (If a record has already been submitted to the Insurance Department, this need not be duplicated).

Sorensen, from VFD files)

Presumably completed by C.B. Richardson (chief, 1927-1930), two pages of a form for fire-waste report provide statistical information for 1928.

(b) Improvements and additions to distributing systems none

(c) Number of hydrants—Total 110 Per 1,000 population

Added in 1928 none

18. FIRE DEPARTMENT

(a) Fire fighting equipment owned by the city

Fire engines 1

Hose wagons 2

Ladder trucks 1

Other apparatus same

(b) Amount and type of fire fighting equipment added in 1928 none

For replacement

For new companies

(c) Number of officers and men in fire department—Total 80 Per 1,000 population

(d) Have a fire college and drill school been established in the fire department? no

(If available, please forward a copy of the department's annual report which will contain much of the above information.)

19. FIRE ALARM SYSTEM

(a) Number of fire alarm boxes in the city—Total General Ward alarm Per 1,000 population by Steam Whistle

(b) Number of boxes installed in 1928 same

(c) Other improvements to fire alarm system

(If available, please forward a copy of the department's annual report which will contain much of the above information.)

20. WHAT OTHER FIRE PROTECTION IMPROVEMENTS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED IN 1928? none

Note: Copies of material used and reports of your 1928 campaign to supplement this record form will be very helpful to the Grading Committee.

(Secretary)

The personnel of the Contest Grading Committee is:

GEORGE W. BOOTH, New York City, Chairman  
EUGENE ARMS, Chicago, Illinois  
FRANKLIN H. WENTWORTH, Boston, Massachusetts.

Sorensen, from VFD files)

The 2nd page of the 1928 report refers to 'General Ward Alarm by Steam Whistle,' also part of a fire newspaper story at USD in 1893.



## ROLL-CALL DURING WARTIME ABSENCES

Another major safety factor has and always will be having sufficient numbers of trained department members answering the calls. Firefighters are taught that safety is each person's responsibility and attendance at training drills and active calls is imperative. While fire department meeting minutes from the World War I years were difficult to locate, the available records show the department recognized the need to "hold the place" for every firefighter who left for service in the U.S. Armed Forces. Records for those involved around the globe in World War II and the Pacific and European Theatres, in Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East, and elsewhere reflect this attitude. Examples of this recognition follow.

Early in 1941, some fire department members began requesting a leave of absence. On December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked and involvement in the military service grew rapidly. On January 2, 1942, W.T. Scott, a representative of the Defense Council, presented a brief talk to the department members and a motion was approved to purchase \$500 of defense bonds. A month later, discussion began on forming "an auxiliary fire department" of both exempt and inactive members to cover those firefighters leaving for military duty. On May 4, 1942, the firemen approved a motion "that any fireman joining the army be carried as a fireman until their return." Then a motion was offered and passed to "look into securing a service flag for our department." The earlier discussion led to an announcement on September 10, 1942, at a special meeting of the fire department that the Defense Council wanted an auxiliary group of the exempt members formed, and the first-assistant chief "would be in charge of the new department." Chief John Button assured members that someone serving as an air-raid warden could serve in this department and that the auxiliary department would only be used in case of emergency and would not need to answer fire calls "unless the old steam whistle blew."



*Aaron Packard Photography*

1916 silver cup trophy won in Yankton.

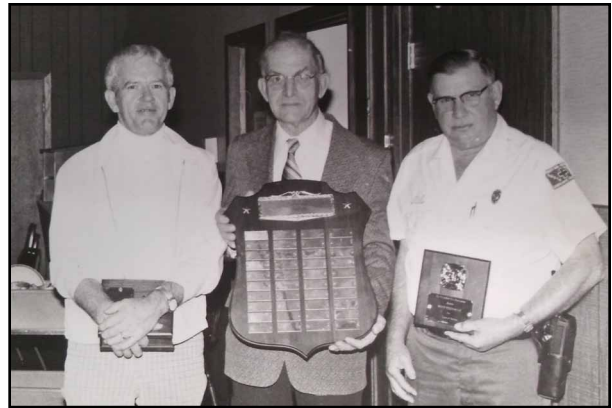
Listed "subject to call" were the names of 21 men: H. Sletwold, Tom Brick, Ken Collar, C. Putnam, C.A. Olson, L.A. Mount, R. Suttcliffe, Morgan Anglin, Art Becklene, Jim Clark, A.L.T. Anderson, Frank Lull, F. Swedeberg, Bob Chamberlain, Cal Russell, Ralph Swisher, Virgil Brown, F. Peterson, E. Lenhart, Herb Collins, and M. Chamberlain. They all volunteered. In November of 1942, Chief Button reported that "the Beta house is the only fraternity in town that has an organized fire department," and members were treated to a short speech by the "Beta fire chief, Steve Kaylor" (Beta Theta Pi, Gamma Alpha Chapter, The University of South Dakota was founded in 1912, according to their website). By this time more leaves of absence were granted by the fire department. Chief Button announced in December 1942, a year after Pearl Harbor, that "as

yet, the rationing board has not allowed any gas for firemen,” but did allow “one-hundred gallons for the trucks, up to January first.” In the months that followed, the chief made other war-related announcements, including that he would like several members to report to the truck room “in case we have a blackout,” and possibly share the annual Firemen’s Dance proceeds with the U.S.O., the Red Cross, V.F.W, Navy Relief Fund, Army Relief Fund, and the orphans’ home. The May 1943 roster indicated there were 33 department members listed as “absentee firemen.”

We shall not forget that the Cold War ignited into fire in 1950 when the Soviet-backed government in the north attacked the United States-backed government in South Korea. In August 1950, a motion was (again) approved to “give any fireman entering the armed forces an indefinite leave of absence.” In September, members took a fire truck and went as a group to “see the (national) guards off,” leaving for active duty.

By the mid-1950s, Vietnam conflicts heated up. A supply line into the south that eventually became known as the “Ho Chi Minh Trail” was established in 1959 and the United States began sending equipment, supplies, and advisors. In 1957, a motion similar to the last two was approved that

“any fireman going into the military service be given a leave of absence for the duration of their service and that they remain on the roll.” This was reiterated when another motion was approved April 7, 1966 that “any member who goes to the military service be excused from meetings and fires until his return.” This remained the policy of the Vermillion Fire Department for future wars and conflicts when men and women left for military duty. Firefighters, locally and globally, have been proud to be of service. ☺



VFD

Three past chiefs and the years served in that office (L-R) Joe Reedy (1961-65), Stanley Larson (1953-54) and Melvin Stiegelmeier (1965-1980).



VFD

VFD Officers in 1963 (L-R) Joe Reedy, chief; Rev. Walter Forred, chaplin; Tom Chaney, 2nd asst. chief; Mel Stiegelmeier, 1st asst. chief; and, Bill Radigan, secretary-treasurer.





## A FEW GOOD MEN AND A WORTHY WOMAN



VFD

Food crew for Open House, Oct. 1999, (L-R) Dwight (Ike) Baisden, Jody Johnson, Dick Brown, Dean Hansen & Jack Kastengren.

Among the nearly 1,000 individuals who served over the past century and a quarter, some volunteered nearly a lifetime and others volunteered several years and then stepped aside, allowing others to join the team. All deserve honor for volunteering in the first place and for temporarily leaving the VFD for military service to our country. Their immediate families deserve recognition as well. Many of these volunteers are no longer with us, although some family members were contacted during research for this publication. A representative group of those firefighters was interviewed and their brief stories follow. Again, this volume merely supplements past works, with hopes and expectation that future years and generations will provide updates. This chapter includes a glimpse into the life of a woman of willpower who was worthy as a pioneer for the women who followed. The author is grateful to all

for sharing their perspectives and stories. Thanks also to family and friends who shared.



VFD

Jody Johnson (R) listens with John Walker (L) during a 1985 training exercise.

## WILLIAM J. "BILL" RADIGAN



VFD

Bill Radigan helping educate kids and parents at VFD Open House, 1994.

An event of major impact on the Vermillion Fire Department and the Vermillion community was the death of Mayor Bill Radigan. He served as a member of the VFD for 55 years and as Vermillion's mayor from 1994 to 2001.

William J. Radigan was elected as a member of the Vermillion Fire Department on July 11, 1946. He had served during World War II in the European Theatre as a gunner on a B-17 flight crew. He was active for 50 years as a state and national officer of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Bill served as a member of the Vermillion City Council in 1988 and was elected mayor of Vermillion in 1994 and again in 1998. In addition, he was employed for 35 years by the U.S. Postal Service and later became a "by-the-book" local school bus driver. Some of that expertise, of course, was shared with those who drove fire trucks.

Bill was a younger brother to another prominent member who had served as secretary-treasurer

and as a chief of the Vermillion Fire Department -- Lewis Radigan. Given his long tenure, many members considered Bill as a brother or uncle. About eight years after being elected to the department in 1946, Bill began serving in leadership positions, including a year as second-assistant chief, elected May 5, 1953. At the annual meeting in May 1954, Lewis was elected chief and Bill was elected secretary-treasurer. Bill served in that position 47 years, and as a member of the VFD for 55 years, until his death on March 27, 2001. According to Sheriff Dusty Passick, Mayor Bill Radigan, 75, had died in his home sometime overnight and was discovered later in the day by family members. He appeared to have died of natural causes.

At the time, the new fire station was under construction at the corner of Dakota and Duke Streets. Bill had worked to secure funding from the state to help make the building a reality. Funds from the town's second-penny sales tax and a \$125,000 Community Development Block Grant paid for the



VFD

The William J. Radigan Fire-EMS Station under construction in June 2001 at Dakota & Duke Streets, looking southeast from Elm and Duke Streets.

new construction. The facility, featuring truck and ambulance bays, a large air compressor for refilling tanks, a kitchen and clubroom, bedrooms for on-call EMS personnel, offices, and a well-used classroom, proudly bears the name ***William J. Radigan Fire & EMS Station***.

On April 4, 2001, at the combined regular and annual meetings of the Vermillion Fire Department Association, President Rollie Isaacson assumed the duties of secretary/treasurer in the interim and appointed Tom Sorensen to take the minutes of the meeting. Filling the vacant position Radigan had held for 47 years seemed surreal to the two candidates for secretary/treasurer. Elections were held in May at the meeting and for the first time within the new fire station. The meeting was followed by a tour of the station for members of the city council, and then the group recessed to a luncheon in the old clubroom back at City Hall downtown. Other officers elected to work with Chief Brunick were Isaacson, re-elected president of the association; Chuck Taggart, first-assistant chief; Brian Waage,

second-assistant chief, and Tom Sorensen was elected secretary/treasurer.

In other business, formation of a scholarship honoring the memory of Bill Radigan was announced, thanks to Dr. William O. Farber of the University of South Dakota and State Representative Benjamin J. Nesselhuf. ☺



Sorensen

Trophy Case in the new fire Station

## *Let's Hear It For Bill!*

On the evening of Wednesday, November 7, 2001, the new William J. Radigan Fire - EMS building was dedicated. David Lias of the **Plain Talk** covered the event, and quoted the mayor who stepped into office filling Radigan's absence from City Hall, Roger Kozak, as saying, "The true testimony of what Bill Radigan meant to this community is reflected in the fact that we have a total cross section of the community with us here this evening." Kozak spoke for many in acknowledging "that special person, that one of a kind, thoughtful, generous, forward-looking leader of our community. I ask you all to please join me not in a moment of silence, but in a very robust round of applause for the fact that we are remembering once more the man whom we honor today. Let's hear it for Bill!"

Alderman Barbara Yelverton referred to Bill as a visionary. "Vermillion is better for Bill Radigan," she said. "It's a big loss. It's going to be tough.

It was my privilege to be able to work alongside a man like Bill."

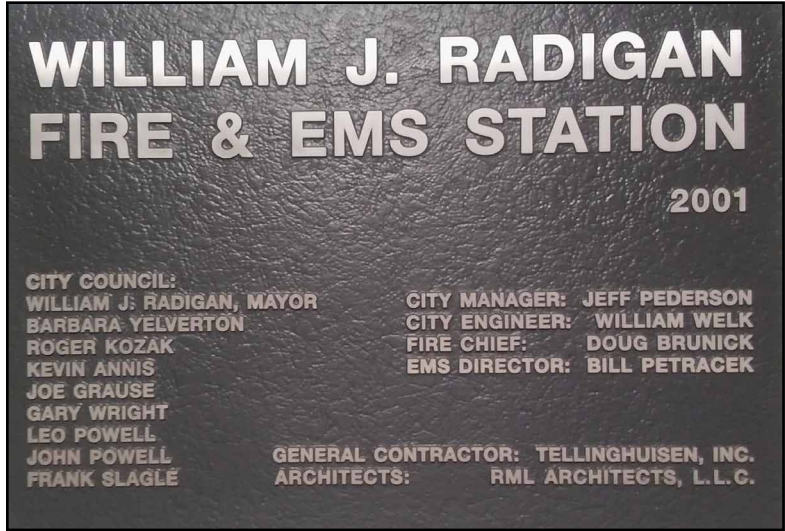
"We have some big shoes to fill," said Doug Brunick, fire chief. "We (the department) will have a special meeting tonight (it was a Wednesday) and it will be a big change for all of us not to see Bill's face at that table. I just know I'm going to miss him." For the first time in 47 years the fire department had elected a new secretary-treasurer, who promised not to try to break Bill's record and consented to serving in the office for only one year.

The sites of the earlier, original fire facilities were always connected with City Hall. The smaller fire station (new "Station 2") remains downtown in the northeast corner of City Hall between Center and Elm Streets on National Street. A new station may someday be built nearer the eastern edge of town as Vermillion continues to expand. ☘



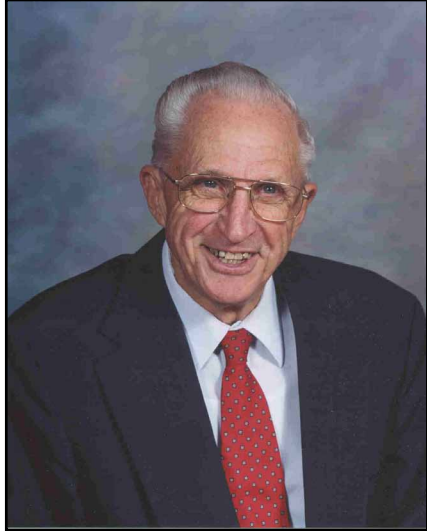
VFD

Mayor Bill Radigan in a Dakota Day Parade, chauffeured by son Jeff, also a VFD member.



2001 VFD building plaque inside the north door at  
Dakota and Duke Streets

*Sorensen*



*City of Vermillion*  
 Mayor Bill Radigan  
 1994-2001



*VFD*

Fire-truck transport for the casket en route to funeral services for Bill Radigan. (top, L-R) Keith Thompson, Rollie Isaacson, (middle, L-R) Chuck Taggart, Brian Waage, and (below) several Radigan family members.

## DOUGLAS W. BRUNICK, First Full-Time Fire Chief, Paid by the City



VFD

Chief Doug Brunick reassures a hesitant elementary student that ‘you can do this, but you don’t have to’ as she is about to enter the Smoke House. Regular visits to grade schools help kids learn about safe escape in case of fire.

Douglas Brunick, a typical Vermillion kid with the work ethic of his “baby-boomer generation,” often took the lead in helping improve equipment, training, and recruiting members soon after his election as a member of the fire department in 1971. By 1975, he was an early member of the Rescue Squad, appointed with others by Chief Mel Stiegelmeier, and began extra training for those duties. By 1980, Doug was elected to the leadership position of second-assistant chief and was re-elected the following year, a sign of confidence by the members. He was elected fire chief for the first time in 1982 and during his tenure remained focused and involved in the department’s work to improve service to Vermillion and the surrounding community. He also recognized leadership qualities in his team mates, having earlier nominated Steve Reedy for first-assistant chief in May 1979, which put the son of a previous chief (Joe Reedy) on the leadership track. The younger Reedy became chief in May 1980.

Two years later, Steve Reedy announced plans to move away from Vermillion and Doug Brunick was elected fire chief by members in July 1982. Two more significant events in this pivotal year were the purchase of Vermillion’s first aerial ladder truck and the city government’s decision to convert the volunteer fire chief to a full-time, paid employee. All other members would remain volunteers. By October 1981, a report in the fire department minutes on a joint meeting with city representatives stated that “the City wants full power in hiring” the fire chief. On April 7, 1982, Chief Steve Reedy announced that the mayor had been asked to recommend that the city council hire a full-time fire chief by June 1. On July 7, Reedy announced that he had accepted a position with a company outside of Vermillion and would be resigning as chief by August.



VFD

Chief Doug Brunick (an avid softball player) (L) visits with 1st Asst. Chief Dean Hansen (R) during Fire Prevention Week's Open House in 1983.

Two weeks later, a special resolution prepared by the Vermillion Fire Services Committee (members of the fire department and of the city council) called to hire a chief with a salary paid by the City of Vermillion and included with the city's 1982 budget revision and in subsequent budgets. The committee also agreed to send a letter to all active department members announcing the opportunity to be elected at the next meeting. On August 4, Chief Steve Reedy called for nominations for chief and Doug Brunick, the lone candidate, was elected by unanimous ballot. He was declared the department's choice as chief to thunderous applause. His election after a strong recommendation of the members carried much weight. The next month, the mayor asked Brunick to survey the active members of the fire department "to see how they feel on a paid chief." Members were polled and 70 percent of them approved of having the chief paid as a city employee. During this time, Chief Brunick led the department and announced the need to get a Firefighter One course underway by early 1983. He arranged that several members became trained and joined him as fire-service instructors certified by the State Fire Marshal's Office. The tradition of holding firefighter

certification classes for members during the winter months had begun. On January 3, 1983, at a special meeting, the city council made official the hiring of a full-time, paid fire chief. As an act of fairness, Doug Brunick announced his resignation as chief, "so that anyone interested in the position can have the opportunity to seek the office." He then called for nominations. Again, he was the sole nominee and again a unanimous ballot was cast and recorded. Doug Brunick was elected chief and served as chief until his decision to step down from the position in June 2012. As a "regular member" again, he thanked the members for their service and support over the years. In January 2013, Brunick retired from the fire department, but took phone calls and answered questions for those who asked his advice.

As indicated, Brunick had been reasonably strict on training and attendance, accountability, safety, care and maintenance of the equipment and the fire stations, and remained a leader in keeping himself and his firefighters up to date on the latest techniques, laws and equipment. He helped find ways to pay for facilities and needed space. In addition, he helped obtain other needed and often expensive new items, such as jaws-of-life, various

specialized rescue equipment, trucks and pumps, clothing, air packs, and other personal protective equipment. Beyond Vermillion, Brunick also served as a board member for the South Dakota Firefighters Association, representing the Southeast District. He worked closely with the State Fire Service Training Office and the State Fire Marshal's Office. Brunick admits that Vermillion's successful bid to host the State Fire School in 1979 was probably due to Vermillion resident Tom Fairbanks' presidency of the South Dakota Firefighters Association at the time.

According to Brunick, the fire department worked closely with Clay County Civil Defense Director Ben Taylor in 1974 to answer needs of the rescue squad. The two offices came to an agreement that if enough funds were raised by the fire department to purchase a "jaws of life," Clay County would provide a rescue van. The partnership was successful on both counts.

Another issue was figuring out how to get volunteers to fire calls without them riding on the backs and tops of trucks, which was dangerous. The practice was essentially banned around 1980 after a tanker truck on the overpass ramp entering S.D. Highway 50 eastbound rolled over. Although allowed at the time, Brunick said it was lucky no one was riding on the outside of that truck. This incident impressed the members and other means for carrying personnel were found. Further impetus for change occurred in May 1990 when a firefighter standing on the edge of a truck looking for a piece of equipment was thrown and run over when the truck left to hook up to a hydrant. At one point, the department added a Chevrolet Suburban capable of carrying fire personnel to calls and a 1992 pumper had a cab capable of holding more people than most trucks.

Keeping up with the times and changes in the community were often a challenge for the fire department, Brunick said. Every now and then in the department's and city's history arose the commanding matter of tying firefighting effectiveness with insurance ratings and rates. There was concern in 1995 when Vermillion's Insurance Service Office (I.S.O) rating went to a five. Although used somewhat less than in the past in the U.S., the I.S.O rated cities at the time on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the best rating and 10 the worst. Under Brunick's leadership

after 1995, improvements in training, equipment and protective clothing and gear were evident. By 2013 Vermillion's I.S.O. rating improved to an impressive three.

Doug Brunick also encouraged the department's first woman to apply, become certified, and serve as an active member. Brunick became a leader of EFFECTIVE AND HARD-WORKING men *and* women who took seriously the job of protecting and educating the community about safety and the prevention of fire. He also worked hard with others to develop an outstanding Emergency Medical Service, serving on the roster of the ambulance crew as well. To acknowledge his many contributions, his department members presented him an ornate, engraved plaque with a fire axe mounted on it to recognize and honor his 31 years as fire



VFD

Training at the tower with Chief Brunick.



chief and 42 years with the Vermillion Volunteer Fire/EMS Department.

“It was a great 42 years,” Brunick said. “Got to meet so many people, not just here in town, but statewide, too. None of this would have happened without volunteers willing to work.” Other than fire and rescue calls, the volunteers pitched in for many projects, from washing trucks and cleaning the station, to landscaping property for a fire station parking lot, providing a new concrete apron at the fire station, and building the training tower.

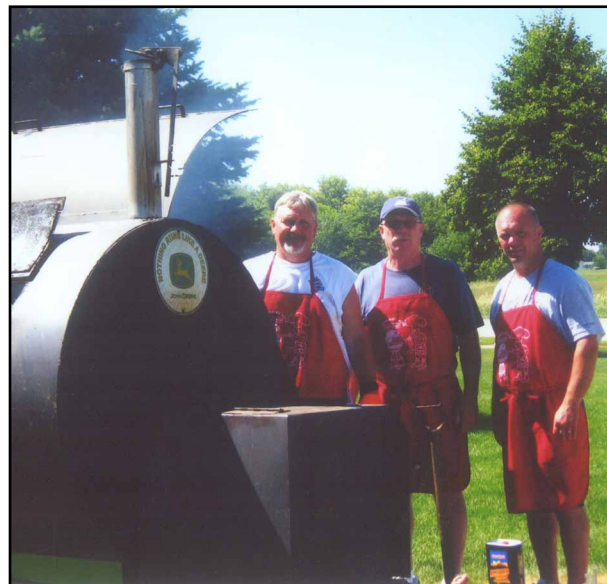
Vermillion having its own fire training tower was unique for any South Dakota fire department. As Doug Brunick explains, it all started when the son of a former Vermillion fire chief who was watching a city council meeting on a cable-TV channel caught Chief Doug Brunick’s comments about the need for a place to provide effective and adequate -- and realistic -- training. Brunick told the aldermen that the new fire station and other buildings where normal activities needed to continue without interruption was not sufficient. Within a couple of days, Ivan Pierce approached Brunick about the training needs and the two began to discuss ideas. Pierce, Brunick, and a few other interested firefighters attended an exploration meeting about training towers. The firefighters told the chief and Pierce, “We can build that.” Pierce decided to donate \$50,000 to build the training tower, but insisted that it be owned by the Vermillion Fire Department, not the city. The dream was coming true and whenever weather permitted, work progressed on the construction site near the city Wastewater Treatment Plant east of Harold Davidson Field and was named the Ivan “Van” Pierce Training Tower. During the project, noting the interest of spectators and the need for people to take breaks, Pierce purchased and donated a set of bleachers at the site.

Among Doug's other accomplishments and milestones was construction of the William J. Radigan Fire and EMS Station at Dakota and Duke Streets. Brunick and Mayor Radigan had spearheaded that effort. According to Brunick, having the offices of the fire chief and the ambulance director next to each other contributed to bringing fire and EMS together as each chief became more familiar with the other’s crew members. ☺



VFD

Doug Brunick, in 2001, served the VFD/EMS for 42 years, more than 30 years as chief.



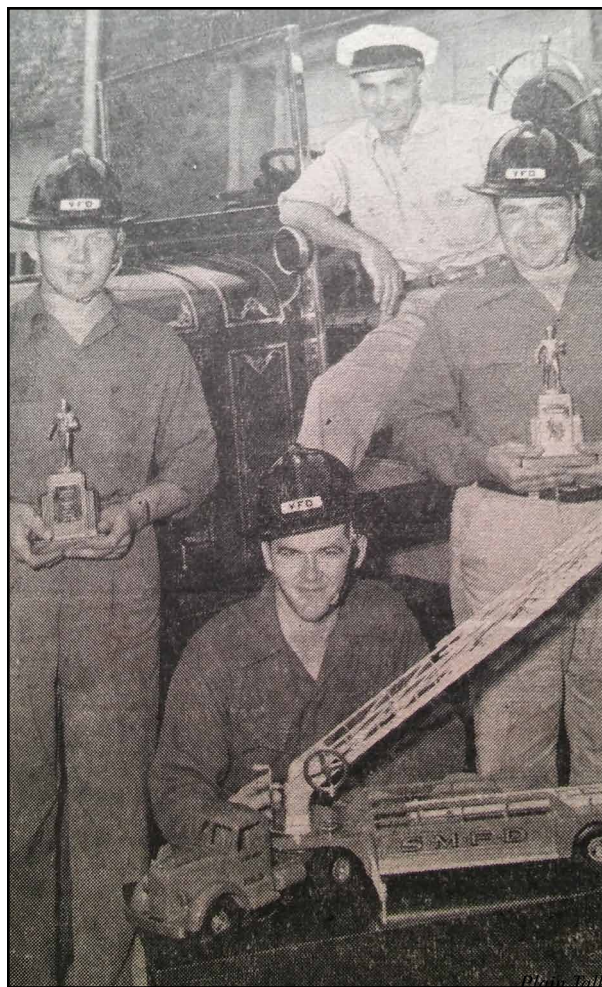
VFD

Summer 2011 BBQ - Cooks (L-R) Monty Munkvold, Doug Brunick and Gary Eidem.

## JOE REEDY

The summer of 1951 was abuzz with news from the **Plain Talk** of Nelson Eddy, a noted baritone and performer, opening the 1951-52 concert season of the Vermillion Artists Series. Another highlight that summer was the return of the famous piano team of Whittemore and Lowe. Arthur "Buck" Whittemore, a native son, would again be joined by Lowe, who "has made many friends here." The first summer band concert by the Vermillion Municipal Band opened their season on June 13 in Prentis Park with Willard Fejfar conducting and the community singing. The Vermillion Garden Club planned its annual spring flower show. In addition, the old Austin and Jolley school buildings were under scrutiny because they no longer satisfactorily met the needs of Vermillion. A survey committee recommended replacing both buildings if sufficient funding could be found. These were also the days of "mystery farm photos" in the **Plain Talk**, which were aerial pictures of a local farm each week. The first to correctly identify the owner/operator of the farm won the contest. During the week of June 7, 1951, the Jeppe Host farm (aerial photo #44) was first correctly identified by Mrs. Alfred Miller. Another news item was that the Dalesburg Lutheran Church was celebrating its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary on June 17. Also featured in the **Plain Talk** in June was a photo (by Schaupp & Jones) of Joe Reedy, Dick Walz, Leo "Digger" Albers, and Chief Herman Berke (pronounced BUHR-kee) of the Vermillion Fire Department holding a trophy for winning the three-man competition in what were called *evolutions* at State Fire School in Pierre. These demonstrated the skill of arriving at a fire scene, pulling and charging fire hose and properly and effectively dousing a fire, usually by hitting a target with the water stream. The trophy is a model of an aerial-ladder truck and remains on display at the fire station on Dakota Street. See photo on page 49.

(John) Joe Reedy was elected as a member of the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department in 1949 and his service to the Department and the community was long, well done, and provided key leadership decisions in department history. He served as an assistant chief and then chief, from 1961 to 1965, but decided not to be a candidate



(L-R) Leo Albers, Joe Reedy and Dick Walz, team members, with Chief H.O. Berke always there behind them. The 3-man team won the 1951 championship trophy State Fire School in Pierre.

again that year because he was busy operating Reedy's Hardware and it was difficult for him to leave the store to attend fire calls during the day. Melvin Stiegelmeyer was elected chief in 1965. Reedy later, however, served the public in other capacities. He was elected and served in the South Dakota Legislature, from 1991 to 1996 in the State House and from 1997 to 2004 in the State Senate.

When Reedy was asked about some of his favorite memories in his service to the fire department, rather than provide specific heroics or details of fighting fires, he preferred to relate more humorous aspects of the brotherhood and lightheartedness that demonstrated the sense of humor maintained

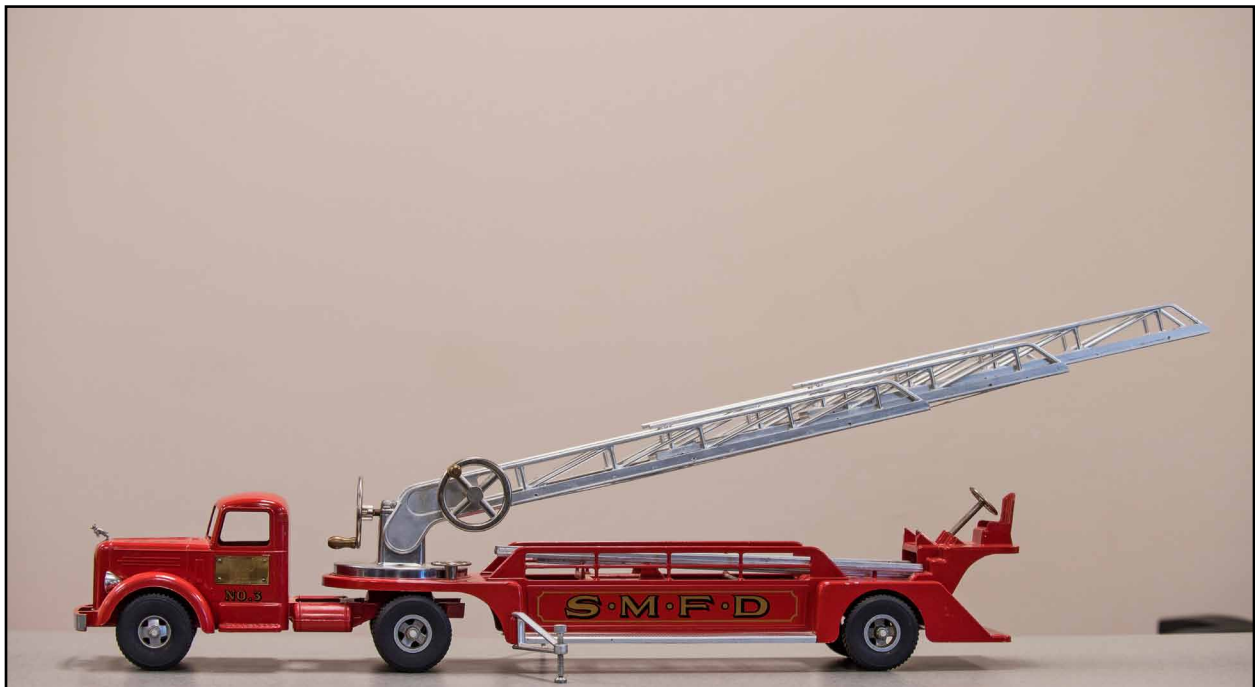
by people who often faced injury or even death as a volunteer. One such instance occurred while riding in the car returning from State Fire School in Pierre after earning that three-man championship trophy in 1951 with Chief Berke and the two other firefighters.

“(G.L.) Lewis Radigan had bought a new Chevrolet and had sold his old one, a straight shift (on the column) to Herman,” Reedy related, his voice already ‘smiling’ during a telephone interview from Washington State in fall 2016. “I remember it was a pea-green Chevy.” One of the men who did not even own a car and didn’t drive was pestering Berke to shift out of second gear to third on the highway leaving Pierre. Herman’s replies to the criticism were on the order of “you don’t even have a car and you’re telling me how to drive?!” Joe said he and the other back-seat passenger laughed mile after mile as the argument over driving continued, with the car still in second gear “from Pierre all the way to Mitchell.” The chief had apparently found third gear after Mitchell. Reedy added other funny stories which will be shared another time, perhaps.

In September of 1952, Chief Berke announced his resignation and Stanley Larson was elected

chief. Subsequently, Reedy was elected to fill Larson’s former position as first-assistant chief. Lewis Radigan, who had long been the department’s secretary-treasurer, became chief in May 1954 and Reedy remained first-assistant chief, considered an honor and recognition of confidence by the members. The new, secretary-treasurer was William (Bill) J. Radigan (who became a member in 1946), who served in that important position for 47 years until his death March 27, 2001. Bill was also serving as Vermillion’s mayor at the time.

Joe Reedy’s leadership included several important decisions in the Department’s life, including finding a replacement for “Old Betsy,” the combination pumper truck that had been in active use since 1923. He was also instrumental to find and provide a truck designated for serving the rural countryside in Clay County; the incorporation of the Rural Fire Department; and, the creation a first-aid crew/company with training and equipment that became a full-fledged, trained and equipped Emergency Ambulance Service that today is a single Vermillion Fire and EMS Department. The leadership, attitude, common sense, and skills of Joe Reedy played an important role in steering the VFD into the future. ☘



*Aaron Packard Photography*

The 1951 championship trophy for the winning 3-man team at State Fire School in Pierre was a model ladder truck bearing the winners’ names on a plate on the driver’s door.

## ROBERT FRANK

Robert (Bob) Frank moved to Vermillion in 1967 from Beresford where he had served as an ambulance volunteer. He was among those last students to graduate from Southern State Teachers College in Springfield.

He met his “hunting and fishing buddy” Vern Hasenbank in Vermillion and in 1971 his friend sponsored Bob’s application to the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department, which was approved. Frank has maintained a good grasp of department history, particularly regarding the various fire trucks and other equipment. He also spent a great deal of time caring for and operating the 1923 American LaFrance triple-combination pumper, mostly for parades and open houses. Bob Frank was a member to count on and still participates in activities of the fire department. As an active member, he has been reliable in training and attending calls, and later as an associate member helping with traffic control, open houses, and working among those building the training tower. His dedication is beyond question.

Bob could have died at a fire early in September 1979 at the Sioux Alfalfa Meal Co. plant west of Meckling. He and two other firefighters, Doug Ashmore and Richard Steenholdt, were taken to hospitals after suffering injuries when a steel tank containing tons of smoldering alfalfa pellets collapsed in the first of what turned out to be two backdraft explosions. Bob Frank was buried alive.

A hole had been cut in the side of one the several steel storage bins, in which pellets had been smoldering for some time and were packed tightly in a crusted mass higher up in the tank. The hole eventually allowed sufficient oxygen into the smoldering mass and caused a backdraft explosion. According to Frank, the fire had been attacked and the scene was calmer when the decision was made to send the department back to Vermillion. Frank and the two others were left to stand by with Engine 1 as a front-end loader continued removing pellets through the hole. “Three of us were watching (a worker) unload the bin and had water ready just in case,” Frank said. “We were about 150 feet away when the second backdraft exploded.” The trio attacked the resulting fire with a charged inch-and-one-half hose line and approached to about 10 feet away.



VFD

Capt. Bob Frank at 1991 State Fire School  
in Aberdeen, SD.

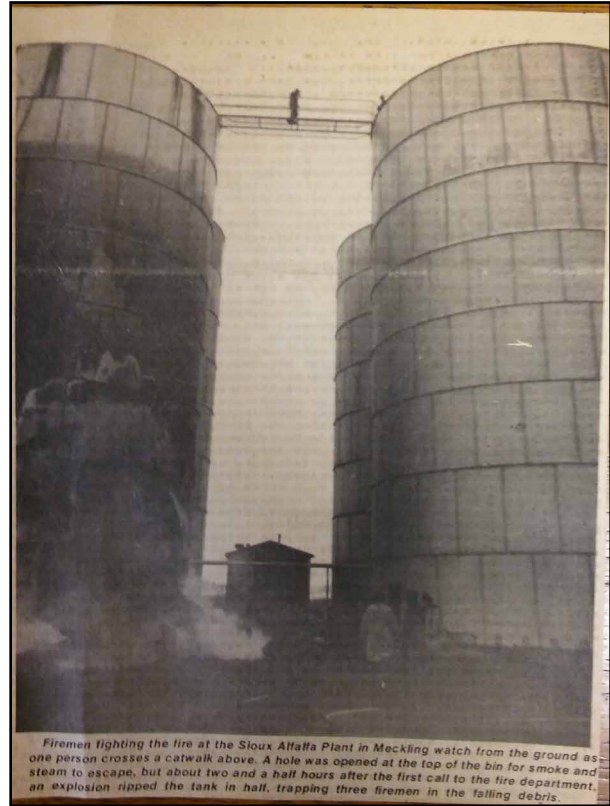
“We heard metal collapsing and started to run (to safety),” he said. “I slipped on the ice.” Bob said he was buried by the pellets and part of the heavy steel, right about where there was a split in the structure. “I was flat on my back when the hot steel came down.” Frank was covered by pellets and the edge of the steel had pinned his right foot. “It was a good thing I had my fire boots on,” Frank commented. The edge of the steel structure rested against the edge of the steel plate in the bottom of his fire boot, which was turned on its side.

“The steel sole saved it from being crushed,” he said. “I was on my back with my hand up.” He had been properly dressed in his turnout gear -- coat, pants, boots, helmet and gloves, which at that time were rubberized and bright orange. Two Sioux Alfalfa workers, Howard Gray and Steve Groves, had seen what happened and kept their eyes on where Frank was buried.

“Howard Gray was the first to reach me,” Frank said. “Leaving a few words out,” Frank said Gray exclaimed to him in a sentence ending with “something like ‘you scared me to death.’” Gray and Groves were frantically digging for the trapped firefighter and spotted the orange glove. Bob had been conscious the entire time, hollering all he could, given that he kept swallowing burnt pellets whenever he opened his mouth. The fire department and ambulances soon returned to the plant. Bob remembers that department member

Tom Fairbanks protected his damaged foot until he could be loaded into an ambulance. He was taken first to Dakota Hospital in Vermillion and very soon transferred to McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls where he experienced the first of three surgeries. "I vomited when I awoke from surgery" and the hospital staff members were surprised to suddenly see so many burnt alfalfa pellets.

Frank said his first surgery was to reattach his right foot, which was not completely severed, but certainly needed a great deal of attention to tendons, ligaments and muscles. His backside had been badly burned in one area, so Frank's second surgery was a skin graft performed in Vermillion by Dr. Harold Fletcher. The third surgery was later to fuse his broken back. Frank said he also had a broken hip, but the medical opinion was to allow it to heal itself, which took over a year. In addition, Ashmore and Steenholdt had been injured by other parts of the collapsing metal structure, including ladders, catwalks and piping. Both were also hospitalized and treated. ☺



*Plain Talk*

March 7, 1979 Plain Talk photo of the smoldering alfalfa plant west of Meckling, SD, which later exploded and seriously injured three VFD fire fighters.



*VFD*

Bob Frank "standing by" for pump operations, 2010.

## JODY JOHNSON, Vermillion's First Female Firefighter

At age 25, Jody Johnson was serving as a senior secretary at the University of South Dakota School of Medicine while putting her spouse through medical school. Her interest in serving as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) brought her into closer contact with members of the Vermillion Fire Department and annual Firefighter 1 classes, which are still required for certifying new members. In 1995, Johnson expressed her interest in the subjects offered and decided to take the classes. Chief Doug Brunick suggested to Jody as she was studying the course materials that she should apply for membership in the fire department. She finished classes and became not only certified, but the first woman member of the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department.

"At first a big challenge was responding to fire calls wearing a dress or skirt," Johnson related. "I soon learned to keep spare socks (at the fire station) and the dress or skirt would just get tucked in when I went to work" on fighting fires. When a fire was reported on the roof of the medical school, Chief Brunick specifically enlisted Johnson and another campus employee to come and help because of their familiarity with the building's layout. She gladly helped, but "struggled to get around" in someone else's bunker gear that the chief provided that was much too 'big & tall.' New members often wore "hand-me-down" gear until a set that properly fit could be obtained. She remembers hearing Bill Radigan rather pointedly suggesting to the chief to "get her gear that fits!" Bunker pants and coats, gloves, specialized boots, helmets, hoods and other items are costly for *any* member and it takes some time for measurement, ordering, and delivery, but Johnson soon got her own gear, which she kept in the trunk of her car. She realizes that she opened a door for other women to become firefighters, but does not dwell on the achievement.

As the youngest of three children with two older brothers from Hastings, Nebraska, Johnson held her own.

"My dad told me there are two things I'd have to learn in life," she said. "Learn not to throw like a girl and learn to drive a stick. I did, and my stick was an old 'three-in-a-tree'" on a Chevy Suburban. She did not doubt that she could do the jobs



VFD

Jody Johnson (R) and Tom Sorensen (L) check equipment to clean up after a 1995 fire.

required of a firefighter and was not concerned as the only woman in the department for more than 3 ½ years. But she did wonder how the wives of the other members might feel or think about her.

Memorable fires described by Johnson include standing on the roof of the house next door to protect that structure from the fire at the old Meckling High School. Protecting "exposures" has long been an important role of firefighters. Another dealt with crawling through a barbed-wire fence in rural Clay County to fight a large grass fire. "It became a little hairy," she revealed. She had been at the fire station that afternoon and Chief Brunick decided to take some new members along with him for the experience and sage advice. Johnson was helping drag a hose through the field (this is hot and dirty work!) wearing her gear and working just behind the other new member who was operating the nozzle. "The wind suddenly switched and the nozzle man was overcome with smoke," she said. Brunick was back at the truck operating the pump and monitoring the pair the whole time. Johnson took over the nozzle and created a protective fog pattern for her teammate while the chief helped her partner by leading all of them to safety. Her gear was blackened and torn but "we were OK."

Johnson never thought of becoming a firefighter as a young girl; instead, she thought of becoming a teacher or a nurse. "But, I'm sure glad I did." She remains a volunteer firefighter at Yankton and has served her two communities for 21 years, including as Health and Safety Officer with the Yankton Fire Department. Her paid, full-time job is clerk of court at the Yankton County Courthouse, First Judicial Circuit, State of South Dakota. "I really enjoyed my time in Vermillion and there will always be a special place in my heart for the fire department. I love the red trucks (Yankton's are chartreuse or bright yellowish-green). The yellow is not a color I'm used to," Johnson said diplomatically.

The author wishes to note that the Vermillion and Yankton Fire Departments highly respect each other and work together as friends. They attend each other's fund-raising dances nearly every year and, at times, work the same fires in the two counties, when needed. But more than once, a Vermillion firefighter has been heard asking a Yankton counterpart to "Finish this sentence: fire-engine \_\_\_\_\_," and rarely get a reply, except, perhaps, "OK, OK, let me buy you a cold one." ☺



VFD

Jody Johnson, first woman member of the Vermillion Fire Department - 1995.



VFD

A yellow Yankton fire truck - 2007

## LARRY MART

Larry Mart was elected to the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department in 1961 and served for 33 years, retiring from active duty in 1994. As a young man, Mart helped farm near Wakonda and in 1955 decided he wanted to find new work and opportunities and therefore moved to Vermillion. He worked for two men whose businesses were just across West Main Street from each other -- Hector Harnois' Service Station and Duane Brunick's Body Shop. Mart lived next door to the body shop in the Herb Bliss house. "Heck and Duane kept trying to get me to work more" for each of them, offering raises and more hours. Finally, about 1965 or so, Mart bought Brunick's business (and later a house Brunick owned), having learned about auto-body work and painting from his boss. Aside from changing oil and servicing vehicles, he also learned a good deal about barbeque techniques and sauce from Mr. Harnois, famous for his barbeque ribs and sauce. The day came when Heck asked Larry if he would take over the barbeque operation, Mart said. He did and "I bought sauce from him." He was told never, ever to change the recipe. He kept that promise. However, Mart's sister, Marilyn, married Heck's son John Harnois and Larry said "she has the recipe" and Mart calls her when he needs sauce for the many ribs he still smokes for such events as Vermillion's annual Ribs, Rods & Rock N Roll, mostly to demonstrate making ribs using corn cobs. Mart was featured on a popular cooking program that regularly airs on the Public Broadcasting System. He said only Marilyn and Heck's grandson, Jody Harnois, know what the secret sauce ingredients are and how to make the sauce. Mart said Heck had worked at one time for a carnival and "a guy gave him the recipe" and also told him never to change it.

Of course, among the fortunate groups to regularly enjoy Mart's ribs were fellow members of the fire department and their families at the annual department barbeque. Many other firefighters took their turns helping, but two who stand strong in Mart's memory were brothers Tom and Mike Chaney. They had also helped Larry serve up what he considers his record rib feed of an estimated three tons that used at least two full truckloads of corn cobs. Mart was also assisted a great deal by

friends Herb Bliss and "Buster" Moore for barbeques held near the rodeo grounds at Clay County Park. Several of those mentioned above were also firefighters. Their names and years elected to the department include: Hector Harnois (1943), Duane Brunick (1956), Tom Chaney (1957) and Mike Chaney (1960). Paul Bliss (Herb's son) joined in 1967.

Mart said among his more-memorable fires was one in April 1972 when Chief Melvin Stieglmeyer was out of town and, as assistant chief, Mart was in charge. The scene was an all-nighter at the CO-ED Theatre on Main Street and Mart said it was intense for him. The theatre was mostly gutted, but the walls were saved. A good deal of water was retained in the basement and adjacent businesses.

Larry Mart speaks fondly of his time on the fire department and is proud of the VFD retirement clock in his office at Mart Marine & Auto Body on West Main Street. ♣



VFD

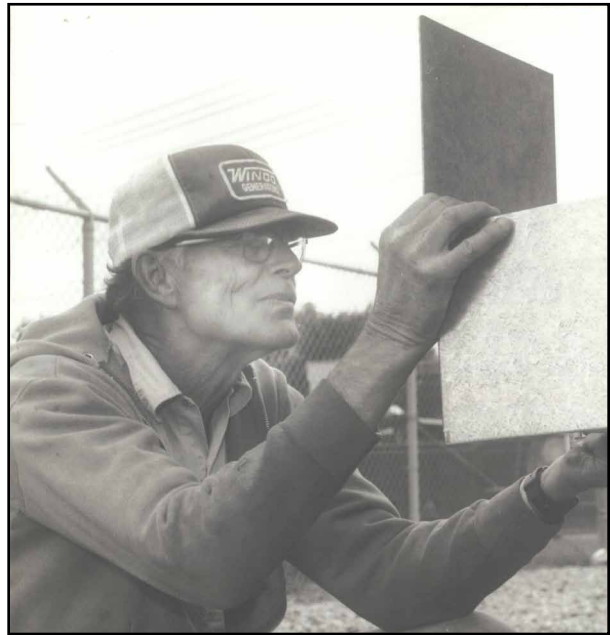
Larry Mart socializing at State Fire School in Pierre, 1974



## ROBERT BROWN

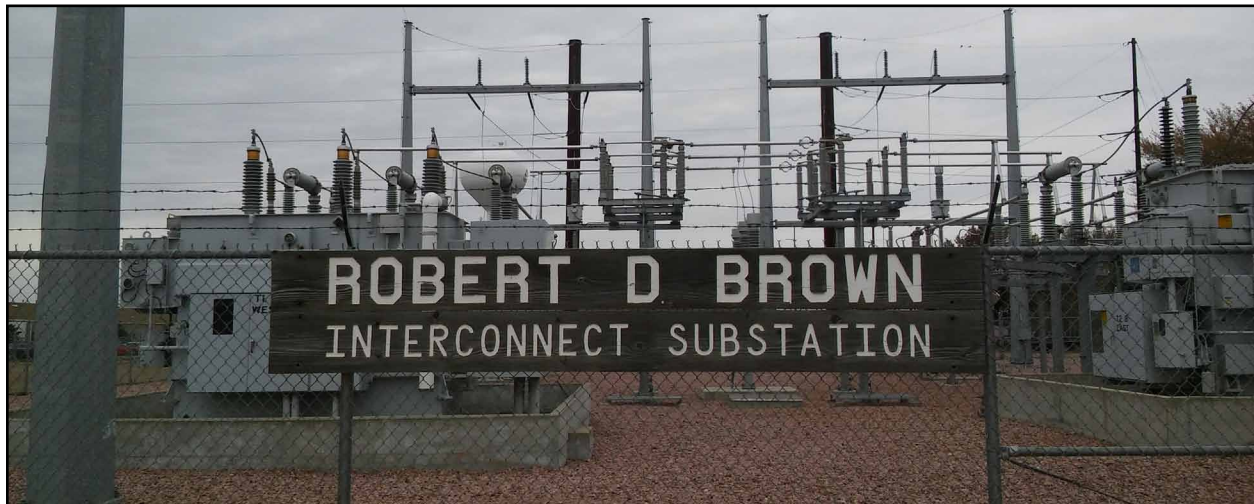
Although Bob Brown joined the Vermillion Fire Department on March 7, 1963, he was perhaps inspired by a major conflagration earlier at the local farmers' elevator, which drew a great deal of attention in the town. Like many other volunteers on the fire department, Brown was a city employee, in his case with the city power and light department. A major electrical substation located at the City Service Center on West Duke Street bears Bob Brown's name to honor him. Among "biggest" fires he recalls was the September 1959 blaze at the elevators just below the bluff in western Vermillion. There were three buildings involved and the damage total was estimated at \$275,000. Individually, damages were estimated at \$94,000 to the Hart-Bartlett building and \$32,000 to the contents; \$89,000 to the large building at Farmers Elevator Company and \$28,000 in contents destroyed; and, to a small building, \$20,000 damage and \$12,000 to its contents. Bob wanted to pitch in and eventually joined the fire department, too. When he was interviewed for his part in this volume, Bob and Elaine Brown were residing in Beresford and traveling on most Sundays to Vermillion to attend morning service at Trinity Lutheran Church. They celebrated their 66<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary January 31, 2017, and were married at Trinity when it was located at the

northeast corner of Main and Harvard Streets (the church since 1960 has been at Plum and Clark Streets across from the north end of Prentis Park). Coincidentally, in 2017, the congregation was also celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> year, like the fire department, both having been established in 1892. ☘



VFD

Robert (Bob) D. Brown, 40 years of service  
August 7, 1946 - August 7, 1986



VFD

Bob Brown's tenure, skills, and popularity resulted in the City of Vermillion naming a major electrical substation in his honor. Within the Light & Power Department, Bob started in a part-time position working with Elmer Sorensen at the City Power Plant. The Robert D. Brown Interconnect Substation receives 115 kilovolts from Basin Electric's Spirit Mound substation north of town.

## IVAN “VAN” PIERCE

Ivan Pierce was known as “Van” to most members of the fire department. His interest in the department had roots in his father’s service. Van was the son of Lewis H. and Hattie Pierce and was born in 1918 in Volin. The early 1920s saw growth in Clay County and particularly at Vermillion. According to the **Schell**, voters were planning a new City Hall in Vermillion and rejected the idea of a separate fire building for the fire department. In 1922, Lewis Pierce was elected to the Vermillion Fire Department and served as chief from 1930 to 1937. Other activities in Vermillion, Van, age 5, may have remembered were the newly-donated land for Prentis Park and the arrival of the new American LaFrance as the town’s first fire truck, both events in 1923. In 1929, Vermillion had approved (by three votes) a new swimming pool for Prentis Park, a new City Light & Power Plant replacing the old steam plant in 1931, and construction of the Dakota Hospital in 1935 when Van was 17 years of age. He graduated in 1936 from Vermillion High School with his sweetheart, Margaret Lown. They were married in 1941 after they had first become members of the freshman class at the University of South Dakota. Among other familiar names in the class were Don Mitchell, Robert Michels, Charles Wiken, and Amos Bensen. Later, Van and Margaret lived in Cleveland, Ohio, and also in California. After



VFD

Ivan (Van) Pierce (L) presents a check to Chief Doug Brunick Feb. 11, 2005 as support to provide a training tower. Labor was donated by members of the department, with equipment assistance from others.

more than 52 years of marriage, Margaret passed away in 1994. Van later returned to South Dakota. Eventually, he renewed his friendship with Deanie Christopherson and enjoyed a 12-year partnership.

Van was elected an honorary member of the Vermillion Fire Department in 2007 and worked closely with Chief Doug Brunick to provide a fire-training tower to help firefighters learn and practice their skills and use their special equipment. The tower bears the name of Ivan Pierce and remains located directly east of Harold Davison Field, the municipal airport, and adjacent to the waste-water treatment plant. Ivan Pierce donated the funds to purchase the tower, but there was a question of paying laborers for the construction. The two men, in consultation with the VFD members, arrived at a plan by which the firefighters would volunteer their skilled labor and build the steel facility. According to Pierce, in a letter to Brunick, this plan saved “approximately \$60-\$65,000 in labor costs.” Pierce’s letter continued,



VFD, May 2005

(Back L-R) M. Munkvold, T. Halverson, N. Buckman, M. Taggart, C. Taggart, G. Myers, B. Wiemers; (Front L-R) Brian Waage, G. Eidem, K. Thompson, D. Forseth, Ivan Pierce, W. Mount, D. Brunick, J. Walker.

“Starting in April of this year (2005) almost every Wednesday evening and Saturday morning was devoted to the construction of the Tower by groups of the Firefighters. Some days were frigid cold -- some rainy, and others very hot,” he said. “But the dedication was always there. The community will benefit from their training at the Tower, and in how they can work together for mutual protection and effectiveness.” Pierce signed the letter, “My Best to You and The Firefighters, Ivan D. ‘Van’ Pierce, November 21, 2005.” Van had covered a lot of life from the late teens to the turn of a new century. His father had inspired the boy and young man by setting examples for Van as a firefighter, chief, and even attending the National Fire School in Memphis, Tennessee, as president of the South Dakota Firemen’s Association. The conclusion of Van’s letter summed up his appreciation and understanding of the work of community volunteers: “(M)ost important to me is the training they (the firefighters) will receive which could save them from serious injury or death. The Fire Tower is a tremendous tribute to you and Volunteer Firefighters of 2005.” ☺



VFD

May 2006, Gary Myers demonstrates rappelling the training tower.



VFD

Ivan Pierce Training Tower ready for course work, Oct. 2005.



Training Tower July 2005.

VFD



Vermillion City Power & Light and Clay Union Electric provided crucial assistance in building the Training Tower, Sept. 2005

VFD



Fire in the burn room of the Training Tower makes learning to deal with smoke and heat quite realistic 2008.

VFD



## PREVENTION, DETECTION & EDUCATION FOR SAFETY'S SAKE

Firefighting equipment evolved notably in 1923 with the purchase of the American LaFrance combination fire truck. Generally good leadership prevailed, including recognition of the importance of regular and required training and of public education, especially young school children. Being mainly a “social member” of the department was frowned upon as the emphasis on training in the interests of safer methods of effectively combatting inherently-dangerous fires and smoke became more vigorous. The records of the department contain repeated instances where members were dropped from the roster for non-attendance and lack of participation by vote of the members. Some who were dropped were later able to qualify for reinstatement. The minutes also show of attempts by the chiefs to advise truant members of imminent action if they failed to return by the next meeting or class. Safety and effectiveness were the main goals of training and why all firefighters were needed to attend meetings and classes.

Over the years, members continued augmenting their knowledge and skills, which were often shared with interested community members with a focus on prevention, detection and home safety. Required training is also designed to meet national standards which “require that all personnel who may engage in structural firefighting be adequately trained to do so.” About two dozen separate chapters in the present-day text books and classroom materials cover a wide variety of topics in working toward required certification by members of the department. For example, among topics covered in **Essentials of Fire Fighting and Fire Department Operations (5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2008)** include: Firefighter Safety and Health; Fire Behavior; Building Construction; Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); Rescue and Extrication; Ground Ladders; Water Supply; Fire Hose; Fire Streams; Fire Control; Fire Detection, Alarm, and Suppression Systems; Loss Control; Communication; Fire Prevention and Public



VFD

Ivan Pierce Training Tower ready for course work,  
October 2005.

Education; and, Basic Prehospital Emergency Care for Firefighters.

Historically, firefighting equipment and methods started changing around the time of the Industrial Revolution when often highly-flammable materials were present in factories where flames were used as sources of light, and of course could cause ignition. Some materials burn spontaneously under the right conditions. Materials that constitute fuel in a fire include mattresses and furniture. These differ in how they burn and the kinds of toxic smoke produced, some which is dark and evident. Toxins such as carbon monoxide cannot be seen or smelled and is both toxic and flammable. According to **Essentials of Fire Fighting**, carbon monoxide inhalation is the cause of most fire related deaths. It “combines more than 200 times



VFD

Gas piping shaped like a tree is no longer used in extreme-heat training due to the danger and the melting of asphalt parking lots.

as quickly with hemoglobin, as does oxygen, and thus decreases the blood's ability to carry oxygen.”

Over time, the materials and methods to construct buildings have changed. Moreover, there are more stairways and elevator shafts in high-rise buildings, even though newer homes no longer use “balloon-frame construction,” which uses long, continuous studs from the foundation to the roof with no cross pieces as fire stops within



VFD

Perhaps some racoons lost their luxury home when this otherwise vacant house was burned in a 1997 training exercise.

the wall cavity. This method of construction is still often found in older houses. At a house built in 1940 in Vermillion, firefighters as recently as 2016 discovered that balloon-frame construction contributed greatly to spreading damage. Some fire escapes on buildings remain outdated or in poor condition and some egresses (if they exist) are too small to allow a person to escape, but also hamper entry by rescuers wearing their full protective gear, including air tank, mask and tools. Selectively-trained firefighters also visit buildings before an emergency occurs to conduct surveys and inspections. Today's Vermillion Fire Department regularly contacts business owners and occupants, even during new construction, to familiarize the members with the layout, building contents and construction materials (fire fuels), as well as capabilities and systems to fight fires and aid in rescue. A city's enforcement of building and safety codes are aimed at safety, preventing fires, and promoting rescue and escape. Larger egress windows are not only designed as fire escapes, they must also accommodate the extra equipment and heavy clothing worn by firefighters attempting to enter a building to rescue occupants, fight the fire, and clear the atmosphere.

Modernization in fire departments has been evolutionary as teams of rigorously-trained members applied specific techniques in fighting fires. State fire schools, South Dakota's included, offer prime examples in featured competitions actually called "evolutions," in which firefighters employ prescribed movements and use specific equipment as teams of three, five, and seven competing in races before enthusiastic crowds.

Presentation of trophies, ribbons, plaques, and other awards are taken home and displayed. Visit any active fire department and you will likely to see some of these items. Vermillion's department has several glassed-in cases full of such trophies. The goal of it all is to train to remain safe and make it home after effectively fighting fires and protecting people and property. Hug your local firefighter!👊



Stay low and feel your way around. SCBA training at the fire-training facility, 2008.

VFD



VFD

Progress of Training Tower, Sept. 2005. L-R Bob Frank, Brad Waage, Mark Taggart, Rob Pickens, Chief Doug Brunick, Curtis Mincks, Dick Brown, Don Forseth, Nick Buckman & Tom Sorensen.



FVD

Preparing an early test of the burn room in the training tower. Standing (L to R) are Tom Walker, Marty Monkvoid, Chuck Taggart, Doug Brunick, Layne Stewart, and John Walker. Kneeling in front is Pete John.





## SERVING CLAY COUNTY AND BEYOND



VFD

The Clay County Rescue Association provided important help with equipment, vehicles and training.

In addition to the many rural fires involving grasslands, crops, structures and vehicles and fires in Vermillion, firefighters from Clay County also traveled to area fields, brush, groves, vehicles and buildings in other communities, including Wakonda, Irene, Meckling, Burbank, and Dalesburg. Names of towns long faded, but where post offices once were established, according to **Schell**, included Lincoln, Green Point, Lodi, Riverside, Saybrook, Greenfield, Bluff Center, Glenwood, Star Corner, Bloomingdale, Bethel, Komstad, and Alsen.

According **Schell**, sufficient funds were found by 1917 for Wakonda to construct a building to house a fire station and other departments. In January 1924, once firemen determined that Vermillion's new and first fire truck, delivered in November 1923, was not made for travel on rural roads, the Vermillion City Council sought

assistance from various nearby township boards and other people to discuss purchasing a fire truck to be staffed and handled by trained Vermillion firefighters. After little initial interest from rural communities, in 1939, some fifteen years later, Vermillion helped resolve the issues of Clay County fires by purchasing a Luverne truck designed for rural fires. The truck was a much lighter machine in terms of pumping capacity, but could carry about 300 gallons of water to places where fire hydrants did not exist and pump water at a rate of 90 gallons per minute; otherwise, water was extracted from farm wells, rivers, creeks and aquifers. An important feature of the truck was the ability to draw water from ponds and rivers using hard-suction hoses. Eight of the townships donated just shy of \$1,000 to the rural efforts and Meckling citizens added a meaningful donation, **Schell** reported. The first test of the rural truck

came quickly in 1939 at a hog operation three miles from Vermillion. Firemen protected the area immediately surrounding the blaze to stop it from spreading. Just prior to this, in September, the Fire and Ordinance Committee and the fire chief had already begun investigating a new fire truck and were to report to the city council.

Eleven years later a second rural truck was added that could fight both rural and town fires. The Vermillion City Council supported the effort all along, but took a year to raise the \$6,000 to make the order. Local newspapers published public donations, each amounting to at least \$10 to keep readers interested. Fairview, Meckling, Norway, Prairie Center, Spirit Mound and Vermillion townships contributed \$100 to \$300 each, while smaller donations came from Bethel, Garfield and Pleasant Valley townships.

Prairie fires were frightening and potentially devastating to fields, farms, equipment and implements, outbuildings and homes and occupants. The amount of seasonal “fire fuels,” such as long, dry grasses, stalks and stubble, fed brush and grove fires, especially in early spring and autumn. A particular springtime challenge for extinguishing or at least controlling burning brush is the still-soft earth or often mud beneath the dry, burning fuels. This made access by heavy fire

vehicles nearly impossible, requiring firefights on foot with swatters and light hoses dragged through the mud and charred areas. It is hard, dirty and exhausting work and departments sometimes relied on help from their neighbors.☺



VFD

Not all vehicle calls involved cars, as seen in these 1991 photos.



VFD

VFD members also serve as trained weather spotters, such as this event in July 1986 south of Vermillion in the Nebraska Hills.

## Mutual Aid Among Fire Departments



VFD

VFD panel truck, likely replaced years later with a van or personnel carrier.

Volunteers continued fighting fires in area towns in Clay, Turner, Union, and Yankton Counties of South Dakota, and those regions added later across the Newcastle-Vermillion Bridge, which opened in 2001. For 50 years, probably longer, people in the area talked about building a bridge over the Missouri River near Vermillion and to Nebraska. According to **Schell** in writing about reports in both the **Dakota Republican** and a competing weekly newspaper (published from December 1876 to June 1881) the **Vermillion Standard**, often a short-lived “ice bridge” was used in the late 1870s to haul wood from the Nebraska side of the river during winter for fuel and timber in Dakota. The **Vermillion Standard** noted in May 1877 that the main channel of the Missouri River had shifted and “now runs along the Dakota shore. This change will give us a steamboat landing -- something long needed ... the big muddy does the proper thing occasionally.” Around that time, the **Dakota Republican** frequently monitored and

documented the impact of ferry traffic in bringing shoppers to Vermillion from Nebraska. In present day, businesses still pay attention to Nebraska license plates on vehicles in Vermillion parking lots that likely arrived via the Vermillion-Newcastle Bridge. So, making “mutual-aid agreements” with some fire departments in the Nebraska towns made sense. The South Dakota communities near Vermillion that agreed to help each other included Wakonda, Gayville, Volin, Irene, Centerville, Beresford, Elk Point and, in Nebraska, Newcastle and Maskell.

Wakonda incorporated as a Clay County town in 1893 and fairly quickly arranged to obtain a chemical engine as a fire truck. Like most towns, uses of bucket brigades, wells and ponds long remained necessary until a chemical engine that pumped pressurized water was utilized and a new well and windmill helped provide an adequate water supply. Reliance on people, of course, remains the main ingredient to firefighting efforts. ☺



VFD

Fire at old school in Meckling, March 1995.



VFD

Fire Training in Gayville



VFD

Teamwork is required at some rural crashes. (1992)



VFD

Hay Fire



## TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS ON THE VFD



VFD

The VFD's 2nd fire truck was purchased for a total price of \$5,500 in 1934, a Type-60 Luverne 600-gallon pumper.

As early as 1869, the territorial legislature recognized how fires on the prairie could get out of hand and provided for fines for certain burning, according to **Schell**. By 1879, the lawmakers enacted a statute aimed at preventing, to some degree, raging and racing prairie fires by providing tax exemptions for homesteaders who plowed a 33-foot "fire guard" around their claim. In the fall and especially during drought periods these brush and grove fires created thick, smoky atmospheres, sleepless nights, and even some law suits. Destruction of crops by grasshoppers contributed to the tinder-box conditions as well, especially in areas where some of the farmsteads were vacant.

Around 1879, there were serious fires in the Greenfield area and along the Vermillion River, along the bluff northwest of Vermillion, and following the Missouri River just shy of reaching Elk Point in Union County, according to **Schell** and newspaper accounts. People in the famous "hay country" surrounding Meckling and Gayville saw heavy losses, as did areas of Star Township

near Wakonda. The railroad traffic was suspected of causing some of the fires, particularly around Wakonda, as the tinder was easily lit by flying sparks from passing trains. Given that it takes extra time to reach rural areas, firefighters learned early that extinguishing the main, initial fire was too often impossible and that protecting "exposures" -- the surrounding structures, equipment and utilities -- became the main focus. Another very important factor was the time needed to make certain that all residents and other people were accounted for during a rescue.

Early in 1927, as in most years, Vermillion's officers were elected and committees were named to handle a variety of activities throughout the year. Among new members elected this year were Bill Bliss and Dell Williams, Jr. Officers elected for the year were Chief C.B. Richardson, First-Assistant Chief Ernest McDonald, Second-Assistant Chief Ernest Bacon, and Secretary-Treasurer Fred Malone. Members agreed to ask Police Chief Henry Walz to "sell St. Patrick's Day

dance tickets to businessmen on the street.” Walz was also a member of the fire department. In May, a motion was approved to donate \$50 to the local Red Cross “for the relief fund for the flood situation in the Missouri River Basin.”

On September 5, 1934, minutes of the Vermillion Fire Department revealed that “the Fire & Ordinance Committee and the Fire Chief were to investigate purchasing a new fire truck and report to the City Council as soon as possible.” About two weeks later that committee was instructed by the City Council to prepare bid specifications for a 600-gallon-capacity pumper fire truck to be advertised for bids to be opened on October 8th. The city council minutes of November 5, 1934 indicate that movement on the matter was rather quick and purchase of the truck was approved by the council on October 8. Fire Chief L.H. Pierce’s annual report to the city council provided a list of trucks among the department’s equipment, which included a new “Type 60” Luverne 600-gallon pumper, with the first of four payments being \$1,375 for a total cost of \$5,500. The chief’s report also listed the 1923 American LaFrance 450-gallon truck as being in “fair condition.” Other inventory included: 2,600 feet of 2 ½ inch hose as “good;” 150 feet of 1 ½ inch hose in good condition; 1 hook and ladder truck “obsolete;” 4 nozzles 2 ½ inch; and, 2 2 ½ inch as “poor.” The report concluded, “All other equipment in good condition.” By March 1935, the city minutes indicated there was \$7,000 in the Fire Protection Fund and, by a motion, the council raised the pay of the fire-truck caretaker from \$10 monthly to \$15 due to “more work on account of the additional equipment placed in service in the last few months.”

Chief L.H. Pierce was re-elected in 1935 and Lowell Walker’s name was added to the firefighter roster. Among city officials were D.E. Sullivan, mayor; E.A. Lenhart, city auditor; Maud E. Sloan, city treasurer; J.W. Kolb, city engineer; Peter Olson, city attorney; C.B. Richardson, water superintendent; H.A. Fowler, chief of police; L.C. Brookman, chief electrician; and, Earl Armagost, chief engineer. Armagost eventually headed the Vermillion City Power Plant, which was built just below Market and Bloomingdale Streets at the bottom of Chandler Hill beneath the downtown water tower.

Another notable item of the day in 1935 was a letter sent by the city and addressed to the fire chief and department advising that the fire club room and showers “are for the benefit of the members of the Department only and not for public use unless they get special permission from the Fire Chief.” After all, it was the “dirty thirties.”

In April 1936, the city took a major step important to fighting fires when it approved a motion at a special meeting proposing extensive water-main replacement, which had been approved by the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA). A special meeting sped up the project. “An emergency has arisen,” according to the city council minutes, making it necessary to install new, cast-iron water mains, hydrants and fittings on a dozen city streets, including: Franklin from Main to Dartmouth; West Clark from Franklin and west 300 feet; Kidder from Market to Luxemburg; Dakota from Main to Cherry; Cherry from Cottage Avenue and west 300 feet to the east side of Dakota; Forest Avenue from Lewis to Main; Yale from Lewis to Clark; Harvard from Main to Clark; Lewis from Yale to Forest; Willow from Main to Clark; Clark from Willow to Dakota; and, Main from University to Plum. The mayor was also authorized to borrow “sufficient amounts from time-to-time, not to exceed \$10,000” to provide immediate funds for necessary expenses to hurry the project along. A specific timeline or list of phases were not provided in these particular minutes, but the situation was deemed “an emergency due to the weakened condition of the present mains, and that there are not sufficient funds available in the water fund to pay for such improvement at this time.” The resolution passed unanimously, with two aldermen absent. Among the aldermen was L.H. Pierce, who was also the fire chief. Joe Garvis was first-assistant chief, Arthur Becklene was second-assistant chief, and R.J. Carr was secretary-treasurer. According to the chief’s report to the council, the fire department at the time boasted 62 members in 1937.

Discussion among firefighters in April 1937 centered on the “question of whether the city is giving the VFD the financial help they should” and that the matter should be investigated.

South Dakota towns, including Vermillion, had been receiving an annual apportionment from the State Fire Insurance Reversion Fund, according

to **Schell**. This money was collected from fire insurance companies doing business in the state. Companies outside the state were taxed on the gross amount of insurance premiums collected. The amount of funds reaching the Vermillion Fire Department represented a small percentage of those total premiums insurance companies had received from property owners. By 1980, the amount was fixed by the state legislature.

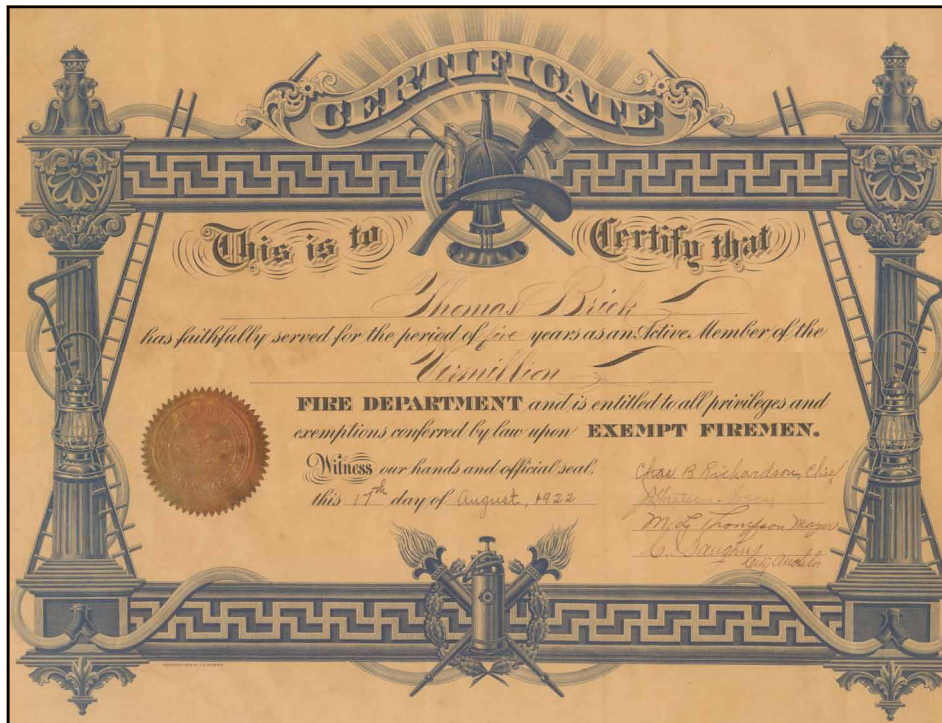
For many years, the Vermillion Fire Department's annual dance, usually near St. Patrick's Day, was (and remains) a major source of contributed funds, which the department often split fifty-fifty with various other local, charitable organizations. These monies supplemented the main source of support from the city treasury. Still later, particularly after a full-time chief was hired in 1982 and paid by the city, the department continued to be included in the city budget. Federal grants, especially after the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and organizational support for training continued to be strong through the State Fire Marshal's Office.

However, back in the mid-1930s the request by firemen for some small compensation from the city

government was denied. Fire department minutes indicate that a comparison by the volunteers was conducted and presented May 6, 1937 as follow-up correspondence from other fire departments of similar membership size in South Dakota:

*WINNER: Members received \$3 for each fire-fighter attending a fire, and \$100 for a team to attend state fire school. HOT SPRINGS: Department receives about \$2,000 per year, plus state insurance money. For their annual dance (fund raiser) the town gave \$600 this year. CHAMBERLAIN: No money financial aid from the city, but they do receive the state insurance money. CANTON: \$400 per year and the state insurance money.*

In fairness, however, firefighters did receive something in the form of fringe benefits in that active members were excused from jury duty, according to **Schell**. They were also "exempt" from paying the poll tax of those years (exempt firemen were discussed elsewhere as wartime members of an auxiliary department). Many states levied on adult citizens a per-person fee to vote in a national election. The "poll tax" was abolished by the 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ratified on January 23,



Courtesy of Kathleen Brick Carlson.

Tom Brick's exemption certificate, dated Aug. 17, 1922.  
His son, Jimmy Brick, was also a member of the VFD.

1964, and prohibited any poll tax elections for federal officials. The 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment was necessary to “clarify” the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment (1870), in which, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” The 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment came to the rescue of poor people who had been kept from voting. Although no longer necessary, firemen previously were allowed to take out papers exempting them from the poll tax after having actively served the department and their townspeople for five years.

Other notes in this historic *potpourri* include, in the autumn of 1938, firemen were discussing the need for a smaller (additional) siren in the center of town, to be operated by telephone. A short time later an announcement came that a new siren was, indeed, being bought to be placed in Austin Park. Also in late 1938, Chief John Button suggested a period of probation for new applicants for membership. An initial motion failed, but another motion was approved requiring members to vote on new members after six months of probation. In his report, the chief then spoke of raising funds for a rural fire truck, with a campaign to begin later in the month. A motion was approved to create both a Rural Truck Fund and a Rural Truck Committee to oversee a working fund. Later, Button reported the success that the Rural Truck Committee “had bought our rural fire truck and it would be

delivered about May 20th.” The 1939 rural truck, manufactured by the Luverne Fire Apparatus Company and bought for \$2,000, was insured by June 1, 1939, according to **Schell**.

Also, the summer of 1939 brought word from resident W. Morse advising the Vermillion Fire Department that he had a coupling made for his artesian well so the fire department could connect to it. The minutes included, “Sandy said we could try it out any time and suggested Sunday morning.” In August it was reported that an experiment with pumping from an artesian well was tried, and while satisfactory, “We would not make a practice of it.”

Around that same time, Chief Button and Second-Assistant Chief Henry Bergman announced that the “men at the plant would be sounding the siren” for fires, followed by another advisory that the gas company would call the fire department to find out the location of the fire when there was a call so that the natural gas could be shut off, thereby helping preserve safety at the fire scene.

Making it a point that Vermillion’s first fire truck came with hard-rubber tires (likely from 1918, but put on the “new” truck in haste to build and deliver it), the chief on October 5, 1939, reminded drivers that the tires mounted on the new truck “not having puncture-proof tubes,” but the matter (apparently an issue arose) could be straightened out “as soon as the new tubes could get here.”



VFD

"Brush One," Vermillion Rural Fire Department.



In 1941, both slightly before as well as immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, fire department minutes reflect that members periodically requested one-year leaves of absence. While new members were still being brought on, places were reserved for those leaving for military duty. For example, three days before the attack, Bud Christenson, later of Tom & Bud's Super Valu fame, was elected as a member. His business partner, Tom Rabusch, was elected in 1944. Among those returning from war was William J. Radigan, who was elected as member on July 11, 1946. By 1950, a second rural truck was added to the Vermillion Rural Fire Department, a Chevrolet pumper, according to **Schell**.

In 1953, at the annual department meeting, Chief Stanley Larson was re-elected, and others elected or re-elected were First-Assistant Chief Joe Reedy, Second-Assistant Chief Bill Radigan, and Secretary-Treasurer G.L. Radigan.

Although fairly routine, other matters handled or discussed in the mid-1950s included Chief Larson in August 1953 asking the city council for a siren for the east part of Vermillion and for two air packs. The city allowed one air pack now and another later. Mr. T.G. "Tug" Mones offered a bid on coveralls by J.C. Penney for firefighters and 17 were ordered by September.

In 1954, members of the fire department continued donating blood to the local blood bank and Dakota Hospital. At the 1954 May annual meeting, Secretary Lewis Radigan was elected chief, Joe Reedy remained first-assistant chief, and Stanley Larson became second-assistant chief. The new secretary-treasurer elected to fill the open position was William (Bill) J. Radigan, who served in that office for 47 years until his death in 2001. Also in 1954, the fire department took part in helping prepare early plans for Vermillion's "Days of '59," as the community looked ahead for the 100th anniversary year of being established, though not yet incorporated. The idea of a float for the parade was discussed, but the matter (as was often the case) was sent to a fire department committee for a report and later recommendations.

On November 20, 1954, Chief Lewis Radigan called a special meeting after receiving a telegram from Mrs. Lou Gehrig, chair of the National Muscular Dystrophy Fund, asking the department to sponsor a fund drive in the area. After

members discussed the request, the department donated \$50 to start the fund and arranged to have articles printed in the **Broadcaster** and **Plain Talk** newspapers that donations be sent to the fire chief or local postmaster. A month later, \$86.42 had been donated by members in addition to the department's initial contribution. Also around this time, the department excused firemen who were members of the local national-guard unit from attending meetings.

In January 1955, an attorney advised that "most fire departments are incorporated" and offered to contact a local attorney about the idea. In March, on-going discussion continued related to connecting the community's telephone system (Northwestern Bell) and firemen's phones for fire calls. October brought the introduction of the idea of using "wet water" on an experimental basis by adding a wetting agent such as foam to water and used to help smother flames by cutting off oxygen and reducing or containing flammable vapors.

On October 10, 1956, Merle Offerdahl was elected as a VFD member; he later would become Vermillion's chief of police and a mayor. By now the department boasted four Scott-brand air packs, at about the time that a Vermillion boy was seriously burned but survived a barn fire.

In September, a department proposal was agreed upon to add a truck bay to the east of the current fire station at the municipal building (City Hall) and was sent to the city council.

At this time in the department's history, once again a motion was approved that any fireman entering military service be given a leave of absence and remain on the fire department rolls. And, sports fans that they were (and remain), the Vermillion Fire Department sent a telegram to the USD basketball team during a tournament underway in which the team won the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II Championship. At the same meeting, Louis Pierce, listed as the USD fire marshal, appeared to the group for an update and routine discussion of any fire hazards and problems on the USD campus, about which the department should be aware.

In 1958, another rural fire truck was added, followed several years later by acquisition of a large tanker truck (rural hydrants did not exist) with some pumping capability. Early in 1959, Mayor Patterson and Alderman Poe appeared to



VFD

The Howe truck purchased in 1963 to replace and retire the 1923 American LaFrance.

the group and discussed the idea for a new fire station on the site of the old, west-side school. No action was taken. A fire in August 1959 at Holmes Auto Salvage at Market and Kidder Streets in downtown Vermillion resulted in \$4,000 loss to the building and \$4,500 loss to the contents. The business would soon rebuild and reopen at the east end of Timber Road, which presently adjoins the newer section of S.D. Highway 19 leading south to the bridge over the Missouri River to Nebraska. In September, a major, memorable fire at the farmers' elevator complex of several buildings caused an estimated \$275,000 in damages. There was a farm fire the next month and in November, arson was considered as the cause of a fairly small fire in a room at the Burke Hotel at Market, Main and Prospect Streets. The sheriff and the South Dakota Fire Marshal were contacted.

Another farm fire was reported in February 1960 at a house on River Road and an explosion and fire were reported March 1 at a home on East Cedar Street.

"Lucky Bucks" was behind an announcement by the chief in March, telling members that the fire whistle would be used at 8:45 p.m. on Friday nights to gather downtown shoppers for drawing the winner of what was a regular event to stimulate shopping on Fridays. In July, a fire caused \$10,500 in total damages at the Sioux Locker Company. In August, the Department elected Mike Chaney

and Dennis Weise. Under some discussion was a first-aid course to be made available and taught by "Mrs. Leonard at USD." A fairly small fire was reported at the Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE) house on Main Street, causing about \$3,000 in damage (a fraction of the damage from a fire some 20 years later).

In May 1961, Chief Lewis Radigan had announced that he declined to be nominated again next year for the position. Radigan was "given a standing round of applause" to begin his final year as chief. Joe Reedy was nominated and elected first-assistant chief. Radigan's brother, William (Bill), had also said he declined to be nominated for chief and, indeed, remained secretary-treasurer. In June, fire damage at a home on Valley View Drive totaled an estimated \$13,000. There was talk among the firefighters of looking into forming a "rural fire association," but no action was taken. The fire department honored and fed in October members of the local Army National Guard unit before the soldiers left for active duty. Firefighters returned in December 1961 to the Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE) house where several residents were in danger. Reportedly, one jumped from the third floor and two others from the building. Reports claimed all residents recovered.

In 1962, just after Clyde Watts had been elected to the VFD, the Department's committee reported on its research into filing to incorporate as a

not-for-profit entity. Motions to incorporate the department's rural activities and to revise the by-laws were approved. In addition, a letter in January 1962 from Mayor Ralph Leer expressed some concern over the perceived failure of some fire trucks to operate on occasion. The department took note.

At the annual meeting in May 1962, Chief Lewis Radigan repeated his announcement that he would not be a candidate for re-election. Elected were Chief Joe Reedy, First-Assistant Chief Deryl Kruse, Second-Assistant Chief Duane Brunick, and Secretary-Treasurer Bill Radigan. By June, serious discussion resumed over finding a new fire truck, as suggested by the new chief, and a committee was appointed to study the needs and possibilities. Soon after, Chief Reedy reported for the Truck Committee and recommended and that he would seek "a truck to replace 'Old Betsy' that had a pumping capacity of 750 G.P.M." Reedy also announced that two blasts on the fire whistle would signal the return on August 9 of the local National Guard unit so firefighters would not confuse that with a fire call.

After a few months of exploration and discussion, specifications were received from seven different companies for a new fire truck, and the VFD Truck Committee began working on those. Meantime, the old Plymouth truck "stored in the City lot below the hill" had been sold for \$35.

In February 1963, Reedy reported that the truck specs were completed and advertised by the City with bids, opened on February 18. However, the new truck bids that had been opened were rejected in March 1963 by the VFD Truck Committee "in the best interests of the department and the City of Vermillion." New bids were called for, to be opened April 1, 1963, the same time Bob Brown was elected to the department. The low bidder and accepted bid was from Howe Fire Apparatus Co. in the amount of \$21,880. Fire department members noted that South Sioux City, Nebraska, possessed a Howe-made truck, so a group would go down and take a look at it on April 6. Three days later the city council approved the fire department recommendation to purchase the Howe fire truck.

May 1963 brought annual elections again and Joe Reedy was re-elected chief. Others elected were Melvin Stiegmeyer, first-assistant chief; Tom Chaney, second-assistant chief, and Bill Radigan, secretary-treasurer.

In June 1963 Chief Reedy announced that he was attempting to start a first-aid crew on the fire department and that Walter Forred (department chaplain) and Daryl Jorgenson were in charge of exploring that idea. The interest grew and eventually a first-aid company was added to other companies, which usually included hook and ladder; hose; salvage, overhaul and ventilation;



VFD

Dennis Weise (R) and Tom Chaney testing the new Howe pumper Jan. 15, 1964 using Prentis Park swimming pool. Dakota Hospital is in the background and the Girl Scouts' cabin is to the right.

and, drivers who could operate the truck water pumps properly. By July, the first-aid exploration resulted in Jorgenson and Forred given authority to purchase “whatever is needed” in supplies to build up the department’s first-aid equipment.

In August, a formal motion was approved to incorporate the rural department and pay the \$10 fee to do so. In September 1963, the department approved accepting the bid of Luverne Fire Apparatus Co. (of Minnesota) for a new, rural fire truck in the amount of \$7,500. The decision was made in October that the name on the side of the new, rural truck (given the recent incorporation) would read “Vermillion Rural Fire Department, Inc.”

Events and activities over the next decades may seem routine, but the steady work of the members kept them up on the latest equipment, training, and communication, especially with their biggest partner, the City of Vermillion.

Early in 1964, Alderman (and fireman) Dick Walz passed along a message that the fire department “wishes to express appreciation to Mayor (John) Barstow and the Council members for their cooperation in buying the new (Howe) fire truck.” An open house was announced for February 21, to display the new equipment and “the Mayor and Council are invited.” By then, both of the new trucks (city and rural) had been accepted and were operational for all fires. “Old Betsy” that had operated actively for 40 years could now retire.

At the next annual meeting elections in May, all officers were re-elected: Chief Joe Reedy, First-Assistant Chief Mel Stieglmeyer, Second-Assistant Chief Tom Chaney and Secretary-Treasurer Bill Radigan. A year later, Reedy announced that he would not be a candidate for chief in 1965 because he had become so busy operating Reedy’s Hardware Store. The members elected Chief Melvin Stieglmeyer, First-Assistant Chief Annar Pettersen, Second-Assistant Chief Wilbur Weiland, and Secretary-Treasurer Bill

Radigan. A four-wheel-drive vehicle was added in 1965, and a six-wheel-drive unit was procured by Clay County and put to use in firefighting. ❖



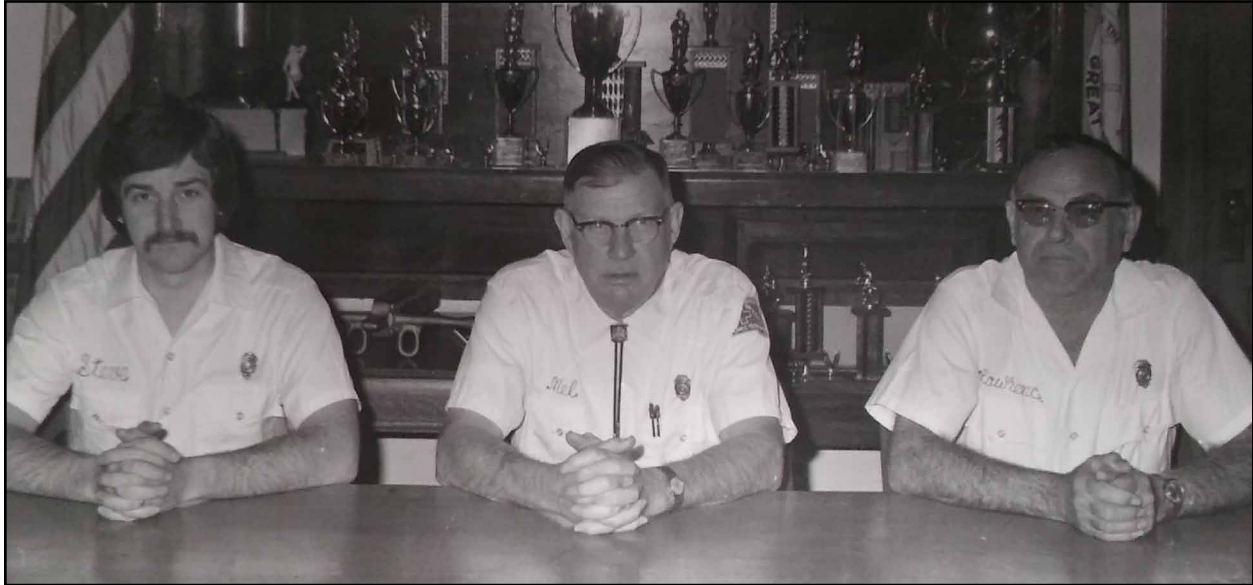
VFD

Firefighter Auxiliary members always help at Open House events during October's Fire Prevention Week. Filling Balloons (top) is Rena Brunick. Painting faces (below) is Mary Sorensen.





## A MAJOR MILEPOST AND 50 YEARS AHEAD



VFD

Officers pose in late 1979 or early 1980 just before Mel Stiegelmeier (center) resigned as chief and Steve Reedy, 1st asst. chief (left) was elected. Lawrence Burrell (right) was 2nd asst. chief.

A little more than a century after Vermillion was established and almost 50 years until the Vermillion Fire Department's 125th birthday, serious discussion began in December 1965 of a major change in Vermillion's form of municipal government. In 1966, the mayor of Yankton joined USD's Dr. William O. Farber, who also headed the city's planning commission, as the main speakers on the city council agenda December 6, and the presentation was apparently convincing. After petitions to hire a city manager were filed in February, a special election was set for March 1, 1966. The vote was 512 in favor, 264 against. Very soon there were five applications for the position of city manager and the purported "more efficient" administration of carrying out the official policies of those elected as city aldermen. According to **Schell**, after the resignation of the second city manager in late 1982, "sufficient dissatisfaction with the system had emerged to bring the issue before the voters in a special election on April 12, 1983." The city-manager system survived and two months later Vermillion's third city manager was appointed to the vacant position. While a mayor

and aldermen were still elected "to set policy," most of the communications with, budgeting for, and operations by the City were now handled through an administrator.

The new and first city manager, Michael Miller asked for council reaction to improving the old American LaFrance fire truck and placing it in the park. The council discussed the value of this truck as an antique and decided to take no action at this time, but to discuss the subject later. At the June fire department meeting, firefighter Tom Chaney's motion on the future of the old truck was approved to "inform the city that we would like to have the truck, and if we get it, to recondition it." Stiegelmeier promised to discuss the matter again with Miller and promptly appointed a committee to recondition the truck. They were Larry Mart, Tom Chaney, Gene Tosch, Albert McIlvenna, and Duane Brunick.

In June 1966, the American LaFrance truck was again discussed when Chief Stiegelmeier was again asked to check to see what the city officials would think of giving the truck to the department. It took nearly a year for more consideration and

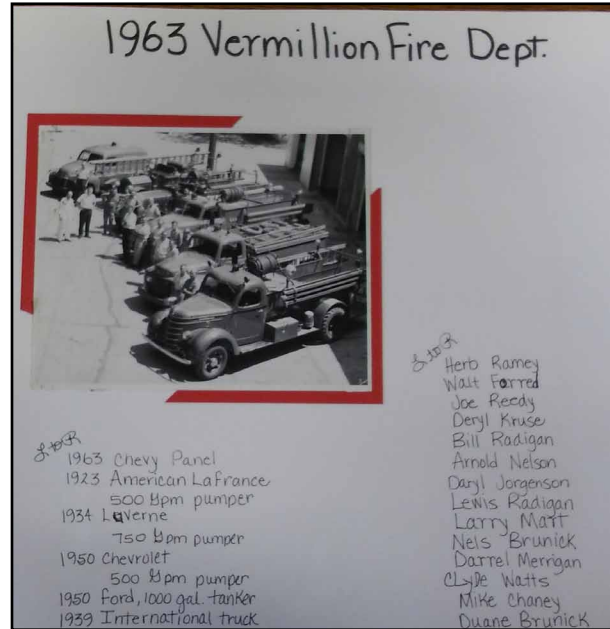
a definitive answer. That summer was pretty much business as usual. The department named a committee in July to meet with university officials regarding finding “some type of assistance in the upkeep of our equipment,” according to the records. A fire at Prairie Center School caused an estimated \$10,500 damage to the building, with the lost contents valued at \$2,600.

In May 1967, routine elections were held and Chief Stiegelmeier’s report to the city council listed, in addition to those again retained, as the chaplain, Thomas Butler, and members of the Board of Trustees were Joe Reedy, Ted Dolney and Daryl Jorgenson. The chief reported having 70 members answering 53 calls in the past year, 20 in the Vermillion city limits and 33 in Clay County and the surrounding area, including aid to other fire departments. He said the VFD averaged 22 men per call and a total of 792 man-hours in answering them.

In the meantime, the city council acknowledged June 19, 1967, that the fire department wanted permission to renovate the old fire engine “for display purposes.” Alderman Iverson’s motion, seconded by Alderman Forred, to grant permission to “restore the old fire truck at their discretion” was approved. After the council’s decision and visits with the city manager and others at City Hall, Chief Stiegelmeier’s report July 1967 to the firemen included this statement: “The old American LaFrance is now officially the property of the fire department, as the city gave it to us to rebuild or do as we see fit.”

Another hot August came in 1968 (but it’s a wet heat) and Stiegelmeier, chief of both the water plant and fire department, warned the firefighters that there was an acute shortage of water in city tanks. He said at 10:30 p.m. tanks measured 15,000 gallons, and usually there were up to 300,000 gallons available.

In January 1969, Tom Chaney of the truck committee advised that “the building on Market Street had been sold and the department needed a new home for the American LaFrance.” Discussion arose again July 10 on the idea of purchasing a ladder truck with no action taken. A year later the City Council opened bids for equipment on a different new city fire truck, choosing a Laverne apparatus which had a net bid of \$19,000; so the total cost of the new truck was \$27,895. The chief



Sorensen

As shown in a scrapbook - the VFD fleet in 1963.

estimated that the new truck would arrive May 15, but June 4 was the actual arrival date. In 1970, “Old Betsy” was again featured in the Dakota Day Parade in October and in November, the chief reported that work had started on the new addition to the fire station at the east end of City Hall. Tom Sorensen was elected to the Fire Department in 1970, sponsored by Lawrence “Curly” Burrell. A month later, new members presented “the usual 30-minute speech for new firemen.” Others elected and later initiated into membership were Steve Radigan, George Hendricks, Don Seiler, and Terry Hughes. “All of them survived,” according to Bill Radigan’s minutes.



VFD

Tom Sanborn, Ambulance Director in 1971, who became a firefighter in 1972.

In 1971, among those who had applied, were elected, and initiated included Douglas Brunick, Bill Mount, Robert Frank, and Charles Stewart. Added in 1972 were Tom Brunick, Steve Reedy, Ron Neuman, and Tom Sanborn, director of the ambulance department. Doug Brunick later became Vermillion's first, full-time fire chief nominated by fire department members and hired and paid by the city.

In April 1972, a fire at the CO-ED Theatre kept the firefighters busy all night and caused an estimated \$42,000 in damages. The theatre at the time featured main-floor and balcony seating. The restrooms, a small lobby and the business office were also located in the upper level.

In October 1976, fire destroyed Joe Kyte's house in Burbank. Joe, a long-time and active member of the Emergency Medical Service, remembers it well and remains grateful no one was injured. Damage to the house and contents totaled \$20,000. There had been occasional reports of fire, from pellets burning, in the summer of 1977 at the Sioux Alfalfa Plant west of Meckling. A fire at the plant in August resulted in an estimated \$12,000 damage. Two years later, a much more serious fire at the plant injured three firefighters. Another fire at a rental residence on East Clark Street resulted in an estimate \$10,750 damages to the building alone. The renter survived.

Fire at a residence on Sharpe Street in February 1979 was reportedly caused when an aerosol can ruptured near a hot-water heater. A damage estimate was unavailable. In May, a residential fire resulted in an estimated loss of \$42,699.

A fire September 2, 1979, at Sioux Alfalfa Meal Co. west of Meckling was included in that month's report. Pellets in storage were on fire and a large silo had collapsed in a backdraft explosion causing injuries and hospitalization of three Vermillion firefighters: Robert Frank, Douglas Ashmore and Rick Steenholdt. Among those sending donations to the VFD were Sioux Alfalfa and the Yankton Fire Department. A subsequent fire in December at Sioux Alfalfa Meal Co. resulted in a loss of \$1,000.

The May elections in 1980 named Steve Reedy the new chief. Mel Stiegelmeier had served 16 years as chief and, at this point in time, 34 years as a member of the department. Others elected at the annual meeting were First-Assistant Chief Bruce

Brunick, Second-Assistant Chief Doug Brunick, Secretary-Treasurer Bill Radigan and Trustees Mike Chaney, Joe Reedy and Daryl Jorgenson. A silo fire in September at a farm west of town resulted in a loss of \$60,000.

Finally, by late in 1981, the fire department successfully obtained and placed into service its first aerial-ladder truck. It was put to work on New Year's Day 1982 at the Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE) fraternity house at Main and University Streets. The weather was cold (and it was a wet cold). The estimated loss was \$300,000.

In 1982, plaques honoring firefighters for 25 years' service were presented to Lowell Bast, Lawrence Burrell, Duane Brunick and Tom Chaney. Melvin Stiegelmeier was presented a plaque dedicating the new aerial ladder truck, "Aerial 1," in his honor. The plaque was prominently mounted on the truck.

Agreeing to hire a city manager and changing the form of local government in the mid-1960s had been a major shift in Vermillion. In 1982 and 1983, changing from a 100-percent voluntary organization to one having a hired and paid, full-time chief was also significant. On July 7, 1982, an announcement informed members that the Fire Services Committee, which included members of the Fire Department and the city council, would meet July 13 to take up the matter of having the city hire and pay the fire chief and Chief Steve Reedy had announced his resignation and was taking a position outside Vermillion. He would, however, serve as chief until the next meeting when an election should be held. On July 21, at a special meeting, the Fire Services Committee proposed a resolution that the fire chief be hired, with the salary to be paid by the city, beginning with its 1982 budget revision. A letter would be sent to all active firefighters and an election held in August. A call for nominations was made at the next meeting, on August 4, and Doug Brunick was chosen as chief. At a special meeting on January 3, 1983, to inform the firefighters that the city had agreed to hire a full-time fire chief, Doug Brunick, in diplomatic fashion, resigned as chief "so that anyone interested in the position can have the opportunity to seek the office." He then called for nominations. Brunick was again nominated and a motion that nominations cease and that a unanimous ballot be cast was enthusiastically

approved. Doug Brunick was declared the chief and became Vermillion's first and only paid member, an employee of the City of Vermillion. All others were still volunteers.

At his first meeting as the city's new fire chief, he announced that the Firefighter I certification course would begin in February 1983 in the clubroom and that training among members would increase in future years. The course examination would be held March 27. Otherwise, little changed in the daily operations and efficient work of the fire department. All were accustomed to Brunick's approach to leadership, with the help of his team. Pride in the responsibilities and in the organization, structure, and cleanliness of the fire station operations were quite evident. Worth repeating is that Doug Brunick served 31 years as fire chief, 42 years total with the Vermillion Fire Department.

The fire department's relations with the greater community (both town and campus) were usually quite congenial, helpful and healthy. For example, a letter of thanks was sent to USD Athletic Director Jack Doyle for providing each firefighter a user card so they could "keep fit" at the Dakota Dome. This decade was about the time an announcement advised firefighters that permits were needed for the use of blue lights in their cars and pickups, and to follow the law specifying use of the lights. In 1984, bids were awarded for

purchase of a four-wheel-drive truck to be remodeled by Smeal Fire Equipment Co. A change in procedure was announced a year later after discussion was being completed on use of the siren alarms for tornado and other qualifying weather warnings, including omitting the second, "all-clear" signal, which seemed to confuse some residents. In 1986 a chimney fire at a house on Norbeck Street caused losses totaling \$60,000. A gas leak was reported at N. Plum & National Streets after a car had hit a house right where the meter was located. No injuries or explosions were reported. As usual, department volunteers assisted with activities and events each year at the Clay County Fair and 4-H Achievement Days. Yaggie Mills in Yankton sent a letter of thanks in 1986 for help with fighting a fire at their business on November 12, and provided a meeting lunch for the members.

Fires and notes on the 1980s included a February farm fire five miles north of Vermillion that caused a loss of \$30,000 to a storage shed and its contents. An "all-nighter" came on March 1, 1987. A fire downtown at Austin and Kidder destroyed Tom & Buds Super Valu grocery store. The monetary loss was estimated at \$1.4 million. In August, the chief appointed a committee to work on plans to house the old American LaFrance truck (Old Betsy). Committee members were Allan Jones,



VFD

Doubly tragic, this May 1990 fire resulted in a child's death and serious injury of a Vermillion firefighter.



Don Forseth, Dean Turner, Tom Sorensen, and Bill Radigan. A 16-by-28-foot building would cost an estimated \$2,080. The garage was eventually built within the City Service Center compound on Duke Street. Later at a special meeting, a proposal was made to purchase land for a parking lot for fire and ambulance personnel directly across from the station on National Street downtown. The project was approved, plans were completed, and firefighters volunteered the labor to get the job done. New, 1 3/4-inch nozzles were demonstrated, well-liked and purchased to help replace the 1 1/2-inch hoses. In 1989, a particularly hot fire was fought in February at H & J Hay Co. five miles west of Meckling. The chief's report estimated the loss at \$150,000. The department began exploring purchasing a personnel carrier with seat belts.

Vermillion EMTs and several firefighters were called and volunteered to the Sioux City airfield on July 19 for the crash-landing of Flight 232, a DC-10. Two much smaller, yet fatal fires, tragically occurred, one which also resulted in injuries to a firefighter. On May 24, 1990 Michael Shablé, age 8 and a second-grader, was home alone just after 2 a.m. and died in the smoke and fire in a trailer home in northeast Vermillion. Firefighter Rich Walker was seriously injured at the scene, but survived. Another firefighter suffered a hand

laceration. A fire near state Highway 50 and Interstate 29 at a home and business on the northwest corner resulted in the death of Virginia Hawkins, 72, who died of smoke inhalation, according to the Union County coroner. Her husband Carl escaped, believing his wife was right behind him exiting the thick smoke.

A fire on Aug. 19, 1991 at Landlock Marine was apparently caused when paint thinner had been knocked over. Damages were estimated at \$75,000. More calls later came for committee meetings to discuss refurbishing the antique truck, but no immediate action took place. In 1993, the department obtained its first defibrillator. After thorough discussion in July, it was agreed to reduce the maximum number of members from 70 to 55, where it remains in 2017. Fire calls in the mid-90s included a revisit (after the 1957 major fire) to the Pardee Laboratory (chemistry) building, where the loss was estimated at \$20,000. Most of the building was saved and there was consensus that the fire crews did a good job. Being health and safety conscious, Chief Brunick in early 1994 arranged for members to begin receiving a series of Hepatitis-B shots, especially for members of the Rescue Squad. A Clay County Emergency Plan was completed and meetings began to study an Enhanced 9-1-1 system. Also in Clay County,



VFD

SD Fire Marshal's car at the scene of a fatal fire in Nov. 1990 near I-29 & Hwy 50.



VFD

VFD members volunteered to prepare and construct a parking lot on National Street in 1988.

it was determined that the “jaws of life” needed replacement. The \$3,000 cost of new equipment was split three ways among the Rescue Squad Association, the City of Vermillion, and Clay County.

In 1998, the **Plain Talk** reported that members of the Vermillion Fire Department “traded their reflective, protective firefighting clothing for coveralls, and their axes for hammers as they gathered at the Wanda and Tim Hannahs’ home in Vermillion.” The volunteers pitched in to help build a 990-square-foot addition to accommodate the needs of Wanda, who remained a patient at a Sioux Falls hospital following a September traffic crash that nearly killed her. Tim Hannahs had become a member of the fire department in 1984.

Another significant announcement was made in July 1999 by the chief: the land had been purchased for the new Fire/EMS station to be located at Duke and Dakota Streets and architects would soon be hired.

In the year 2000, those who may have been concerned over “Y2K” computer chaos and societal undoing were reassured by Ben Taylor, Clay County Emergency Services Director, in a **Plain Talk** article that he had “taken potential problems seriously and he is confident that come the new

year,” Clay County and the City of Vermillion will have no problems. “We’re ready,” Taylor said. “As far as everything goes, we’re all set for it.” As defined by the newspaper, Y2K was a potential computer problem resulting from the changing of dates from the year 1999 to 2000. Clay County was among 50 of the state’s 66 counties and several larger cities that took part in a Y2K emergency test of services late in 1999. All showed they are ready for any problems that may occur. None did, but “garbage in, garbage out” continues to this day.

Vermillion assisted the Wakonda Fire Department in battling a fire in November 2000 on the northern Clay County town’s Main Street at the Sundown Café and Lounge. It was a cold and windy early morning. There was also smoke damage to buildings nearby, including the First Premier Bank and the Senior Citizens Center, according to an account in the **Plain Talk**. Election officials were forced to move the polls to the McMahon Center at St. Patrick’s church. Firefighters from Irene were also called to assist.

On September 11, 2001, nearly 3,000 people were killed in attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon near Washington, D.C., and in a plane crash near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Among those who died immediately in New York were 343 firefighters, 60 police officers, and eight paramedics. Many other people died later as a result of the toxic dust and fumes at the scene. Also early in the new century, the chief announced that a new state law allowed people to voluntarily relinquish custody of infants appearing to be less than about two months old to emergency personnel, including at fire stations. South Dakota Codified Law, Chapter 25-5A today requires the local emergency agency to “take possession of a child who appears to be sixty days of age or younger if the child is voluntarily delivered to the provider or agency.” The law is designed to prevent abandonment or mistreatment of unwanted children and notifies those delivering the child that they are relinquishing their parental rights and that the child becomes a ward of the state or licensed child placement agency. The annual VFD Open House was also held October, the usual time for this event during Fire Prevention Week, but took on much more significance given the events September 11<sup>th</sup>.



VFD

The New Fire Station truck and ambulance bays.

On November 7, 2001, the new fire facility was dedicated, former firefighter Gary Meyers was hired in December to direct Vermillion's ambulance department, and by January 2002, visitors to the new fire/EMS building came from departments in Gayville, Wakonda, Yankton, and Elk Point, South Dakota and from Newcastle, Ponca, and Wynot in Nebraska. Basin Electric donated \$500 to the Clay County Rescue Association in April.

Late in 2003, the **Plain Talk** reported Vermillion Fire Department receipt of a \$15,881 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant announced by South Dakota U.S. Senator Tim Johnson (of Vermillion). The funds were part of the 2003 Assistance to Firefighters Grant program to be used in a safety and operations program for training, wellness and fitness, firefighting equipment, personal-protective equipment (PPE), and modifications to fire stations and facilities. Within a year, thermal cameras were provided on two fire engines. Funds for fire departments and other first-responders seemingly poured in from FEMA and Homeland Security-related U.S. Government offices and agencies.

Discussion of a training tower in June 2004 was serious enough that approval was given to send members to a seminar on such structures in Dallas, Texas. On March 2, 2005, an announcement was made that a gift of \$50,000 was given to the

department towards purchase of the new training tower. The gift was made by Ivan Pierce, whose name would later be prominently displayed on the tower. By March the next year, Pierce purchased and had installed a new set of bleachers at the Ivan Pierce Training Tower site. Volunteer construction had begun in earnest, mostly on Saturdays, at the site. The summer was hot and dry enough in 2006 that Clay County imposed a burn ban "until conditions improve."

Tragedy struck in Clay County when four children, ages four to 17, died in a house fire on an acreage near Wakonda. Allyson Eckert, 17; Austin Eckert, 10; Cole Eckert, 6; and, Carli Eckert, 4, died of smoke inhalation, according to the Clay County Sheriff's Office.

Over the next several years leading to 2017 and the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary it was fairly "business as usual" for the fire department. Various members who had joined 30 or more years earlier were presented clocks or watches honoring their service. Among them were Bob Frank, Paul Brunick, Terry Bernard, Dean Hansen, Clarence Voudry, Tom Walker, Joe Reedy, Mike Chaney, Tom Sorensen, Dick Brown, Don Forseth, and Clyde Watts. Annual classes were presented by the National Weather Service throughout the state each spring for weather watchers and tornado spotters, many of whom were firefighters. Fire trucks and

personnel were provided for education and public-relations purposes to schools on the Eagles Club Safe Day in 2007. Chief Doug Brunick announced the department received a matching grant to purchase new helmets. Various other departments and groups from nearby towns and the university's ROTC students use the training tower at Vermillion. Brightly-colored and reflective safety vests became the fashion for anyone, including fire and rescue members, working on streets and highways.

In March 2008 a major fire at the corner of Plum and Cherry Streets destroyed the China Buffet restaurant. The **Plain Talk** reported that the mid-afternoon fire "swept through the building, despite efforts of the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department to bring the blaze under control." The collapsing roof forced firefighters to withdraw from inside the building.

In September 2008, a fire severely damaged The Pressbox, a bar and grill located at National and Center Streets. An article in the **Plain Talk** reported that the arrests of three men as suspects came the following July.



VFD

A green iguana, just visible (top photo) along a tree branch, is 'rescued' by his grateful owner, thanks to a long ladder and strong crew to anchor it. Below (bottom photo) at Engine 3 are Ike Baisden (L), the pet owner, Rob Pickens (C) and Jesse Bosworth (R). The rescue was near the alley between North Pine and Willow Streets, just north of Cedar Street.

The article said an investigation determined that the September 29 fire “was deliberately set.” Charges included “reckless burning or exploding ... a Class 4 felony.” Damage to the building was estimated at \$287,000.

Fire in December 2009 destroyed a residence in the rural Meckling area, but no injuries were reported, according to the **Plain Talk**. The home of a member of the Yankton Police Department at the time was reported on fire to the Clay County Sheriff’s Office. The report said the Vermillion Fire Department was joined in responding to the call a mile west of Meckling by fire departments from nearby Gayville and Volin. Occupants were safely out of the house, which was “fully engulfed in flames when units arrived,” the newspaper reported. The family lost the home and all their possessions. The outside temperature on the December day was near 0 degrees, with wind chills of minus-25 at times. At a meeting a month later, the chief expressed his appreciation to members who were available to help during the stormy weather. Weather also hampered efforts at a fire in April 2010 when, according to the **Plain Talk**, strong, gusting winds made it hard work to contain a residential fire at the corner of National

and High Streets in Vermillion. The house’s owner said the two renters were able to get out of the building and were not injured. In 2011, a fire of “suspicious origin,” according to police, was covered by the **Plain Talk**, which said the officers were seeking information regarding the possibility of arson. The fire was on Main Street at Recuerdos Mexican Restaurant. The newspaper report said the police department was offering a \$500 reward to help catch and arrest whomever had entered the business just before 3 a.m. and started the fire. Apparently, video footage was also being used in the investigation.

“Fill-the-Boot” efforts to raise donations to the Muscular Dystrophy Association continued annually in October, raising nearly \$900 in 2011 alone. Firefighters each year walked along the route of the Dakota Day Parade with fire boots in hand. The proceeds were used to benefit research and local services for the SD Chapter of the MDA.

Two particularly hard-working fires were among those reported in 2012. In May, fire destroyed the home of a retired firefighter (who had joined the department in 1956), but he and his spouse escaped to call the department at around 4:30 a.m. According to the **Plain Talk**, the fire at



VFD

The classroom is an important section of Vermillion's Fire Station 1.

516 E. 316<sup>th</sup> Street north of town kept members of the department busy most of the day trying to save a well-constructed, fairly-new house. Smoke alarms had awakened the couple. The news report indicated that the house “was engulfed in flames by the time firemen arrived” and assistance came in from the Gayville Fire Department.

In November 2012, the newspaper reported that an early consensus among fire investigators still had left the cause of fire at the Vermillion Landfill undetermined. The **Plain Talk** had interviewed the city manager, John Prescott. Based on historical costs, City Finance Director Mike Carlson estimated the landfill building and machinery might be worth as much as \$1.4 million. The October 22 fire was discovered by employees who arrived at work at the landfill site north of town on Bluff Road. “(The building) was just glowing red,” the newspaper quoted Bob Iverson, the landfill manager. Among the major pieces of equipment destroyed was a baler, a small wheel loader, and a truck. In addition, much of the firefighters’ protective clothing was ruined and needed replacing. Fire departments helping in the gigantic effort came from Wakonda, Volin, Gayville, and Vermillion. In August 2013, the Vermillion City Council discussed bids for construction of a new baler building at the landfill and was seeking a grant to augment the funding. A replacement cost of \$663,788 had been agreed upon by the city and its insurance carrier, according to the **Plain Talk**. Plans were to construct a large building, larger than before, and that would have a sprinkler system.

The South Dakota Legislature in 2013 changed state law to allow the discharge of fireworks from June 27 until the Sunday after July 4. In this particular year, the newspaper reported, that it would be legal to discharge fireworks through Sunday, July 7. Previously, July 5, the day after Independence Day, had been the legal end date for use of fireworks in the state. Individual cities were allowed to adopt stricter limits on use of fireworks.

May of 2014 brought good news to the community when the **Plain Talk** reported that the Vermillion Fire Department received word by the Insurance Service Office (ISO) that the town’s fire-protection rating was improving “to a Class 3 in the City and a 3Y (8b) for our rural community.” Previously the department was rated a 5/9, the newspaper reported. The Vermillion Fire

Department has held a Class 5 rating for nearly 15 years but will now be a Class 3 department effective Aug. 1. “According to information from ISO, of the 45,250 fire departments across the country, less than 3,000 obtain a rating of Class 3 or better,” the article stated. “That is less than 8 percent of the departments in our nation with this rating. With this new rating, the Vermillion Fire Department became only the ninth department in the state of South Dakota to achieve a Class 3 rating. The **Plain Talk** article explained that insurance companies use the fire protection ratings to determine homeowners and business insurance premiums. ISO evaluates fire department equipment, station locations, training, fire prevention efforts, the community water system, 911 systems and many other factors to assign a protection rating.



*Sorensen*

VFD wins the 2017 trophy in the blood-donor drive "Heros' Behind the Badges."



VFD

VFD Association President Ryun Fishbach tows 'Old Betsy' home to the W.H. Over Museum.

In mid-October 2015, dry conditions and an abundance of fire fuels in the fields kept fire departments busy in southeastern South Dakota and in the entire region of the nation. High winds of at least 38 miles per hour pushed fire across two large fields just east of Vermillion, according to the **Plain Talk**, quoting the National Weather Service. Multiple calls were received about smoke in northeast Vermillion, where nearby, some 40 acres were already burning. The newspaper reported that “due to the size and speed of the wind-driven fire” departments were summoned from Gayville, Wakonda, Elk Point, Centerville, and Beresford in South Dakota and Newcastle in Nebraska. Statistics in the newspaper account from Chief Shannon Draper said there were “31 fire apparatus, 1 ambulance and 93 firefighters on scene.” The next day the Vermillion department was called to 40 to 50 acres on fire south of Meckling. There were many, some quite large, field and wild-land fires at this time of 2015 across the Upper Midwest, according to the weather service.

In the spring of 2015, a new and comprehensive truck containing all the necessary rescue tools was put into service in the VFD fleet. A garage that had been built at the City Service Center to store the 1923 American LaFrance truck and other items was sold to the City and another storage

building was in the works to be constructed at the site of the Ivan Pierce Training Tower. The old truck was kept for a time in a second garage at Station 1 until, in 2016, it was moved to the W.H. Over Museum a short distance away and quickly displayed inside the front entrance.

Vermillion High School’s Class of 2016 (and other students, of course) were shown that the community cares a great deal for them when the Fire/EMS Department conducted a mock traffic crash, with injuries and a fatality, on Main Street adjacent to the school building. Students were even provided bleachers outside to watch Operation Prom Night. According to Captain Matt Taggart in an interview with the **Plain Talk**, the mock crash “aims to send a hard-hitting reminder of the dangers and consequences of unsafe driving behaviors — such as drinking and driving and not buckling up — prior to prom on April 16th, 2016 the end of the school year.” The entire student body was given the opportunity to watch what happens when emergency personnel arrive at the scene of a crash involving alcoholic beverages “We are trying to startle (students) them into thinking about the consequences of the actions they are taking if they choose to drink and drive or ride with someone who has been drinking,” Taggart said. He and EMS Chief Matt Callahan (later

department chief) planned the event, and a large group of firefighters, EMTs and law enforcement personnel assisted. A helicopter, a hearse, ambulances, and fire vehicles were all present. Among those participating in the event were Vermillion Fire EMS, Vermillion Police Department, Clay County Sheriff, South Dakota Highway Patrol, Clay County Coroner, Hansen Funeral Home and the University of South Dakota Theatre Department.

In January 2017, the Vermillion Fire-EMS Department capped its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary by winning the annual “Heroes Behind the Badges” blood-drive competition which provided a record number of units to the Community Blood Bank. The friendly contest between the firefighters and EMS members and those of the Vermillion Police Department is held to determine which department can get the most people to donate on their behalf. A press release from the interim fire chief at the time, Second-Assistant Chief Keith Thompson stated, “We saw 110 people come out and try to donate blood and 94 people were able to donate that day.” Community members had been invited to participate to help the Vermillion Fire/EMS Department celebrate its special birthday in history. ☘



VFD

Cedric Liqueur joined the VFD in 1995 and for years after leaving, sent a postcard from wherever in the world he happened to be at the time.

**VERMILLION HEROES BEHIND THE BADGES**  
**COMMUNITY BLOOD DRIVE**  
**HEROES BEHIND THE BADGES**  
**BLOOD DRIVE**

**Sanford Vermillion**  
 (125 Walker St.)  
**MONDAY, JAN. 23**  
 10:00 AM TO 6:30 PM  
 DONATE IN HONOR OF YOUR LOCAL HEROES  
*Special t-shirt to all who donate.*

Donors must be at least 17 years old (16 years old with a signed donor consent form, found at [cblifeblood.org](http://cblifeblood.org)), weigh 110 lbs. or more and be in good general health. It is encouraged that a person eat and drink plenty of fluid prior to donating blood. Please bring a valid I.D. with you to the blood drive. Call 1-877-877-3070 for more information or call Sanford Vermillion at 624-2611.

COMMUNITY BLOOD BANK  
 SANFORD Vermillion

Heroes Behind the Badges poster in Jan. 2017.



VFD

Chief Steve Reedy



## EPILOGUE

The year 2017, January 18 in particular, is among the pivotal years in the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department's 125-year existence. Considering the advancements, fits and starts, periodic modernization, and improved public and firefighter education, Vermillion has and remains in good hands. At two major points in history, City Hall and the presence of a fire department protected, and over the years improved, the insurance industry's ratings of the community. And, a stark difference in available equipment for fighting fires, for example, has made important strides by leaders who could see the looming needs.

The available "proper equipment of the day" in the 1880s consisted of one water tank, about 50 hydrants, two hand-drawn hose carts and one hand-drawn (horses eventually), 40-foot hook and ladder truck. The crew had an equipment inventory of 800 feet of fire hose, six spanner wrenches for connecting hoses to hydrants, four axes, several ladders, several nozzles, and four pairs of rubber boots. In 2017, Vermillion boasted 430 fire hydrants and three water reservoirs (two towers and one ground tank). The older tank is located in Prentis Park and the newer reservoir is located along the SD Highway 50 Bypass, just east of Princeton Street. The old, downtown water tower that was dismantled in 2016 held 100,000 gallons. The wooden predecessor was replaced when the city had acquired title and, in a special election, voters approved a bond issue for renovation and building a new steel tank. According to Water Superintendent Randy Isaacson in 2017, the two elevated tanks remaining, each hold 500,000 gallons of water and the ground reservoir held 1.5 million gallons. The ground tank location is at the site of the Melvin Stieglmeyer Water Plant at Church and Bloomingdale Streets, once the location of Vermillion High School. Stieglmeyer had

served as the plant superintendent. He was also the fire chief from 1965 to 1980.

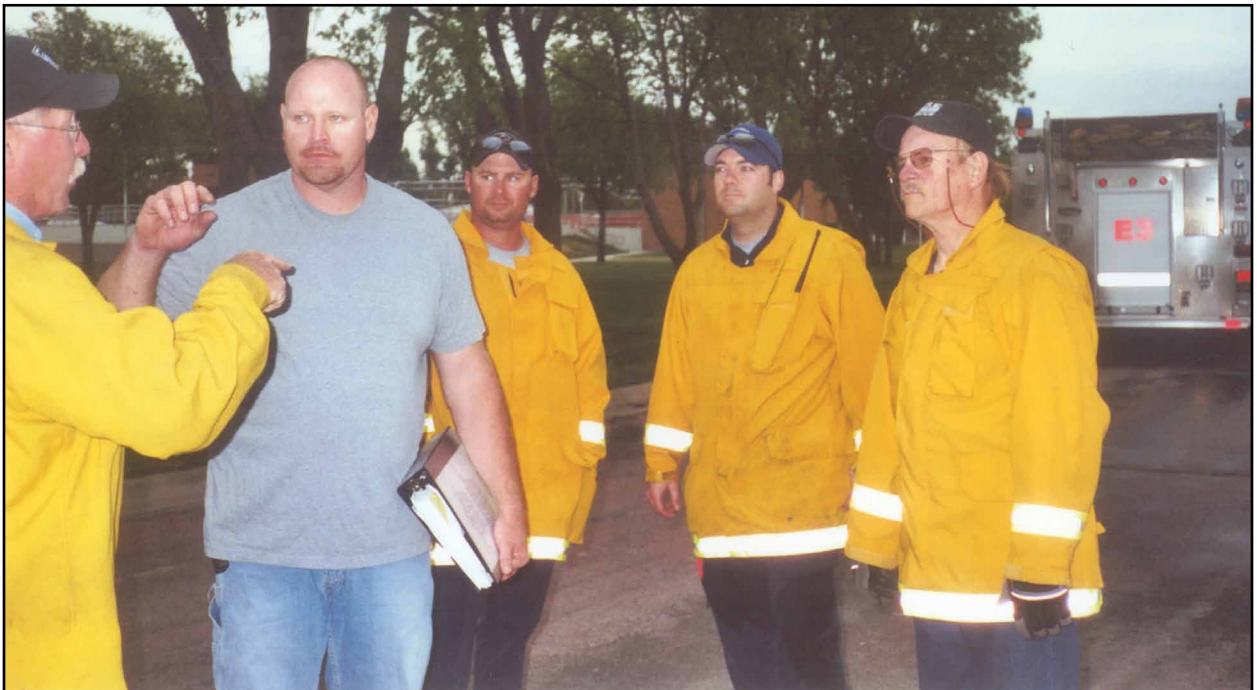
Vermillion's hydrants (not including the older system on the university campus) are color-coded by flow capacity: blue hydrants are capable of flowing 1,500 gallons-per-minute (GPM); green can flow between 1,000 and 1,500 GPM; orange are between 500 and 1,000 GPM; and, red are limited to 500 GPM or less, Isaacson said. As in the 1890s, when tests of the water pressure were performed and the Yankton fire chief assisting had to return two hours later because the test equipment did not match the hydrants, Isaacson said Vermillion's hydrants use slightly different thread patterns and operating nuts, requiring specific hose couplings and wrenches.

The Vermillion Fire Department fully-equipped fleet in 2017 includes: three, 1,000-gallon Class A fire engines; a 105-foot aerial ladder truck also capable as a pumping engine; a heavy rescue vehicle and a light rescue vehicle; three tanker trucks capable of carrying 3,000, 2,000 and 1,200 gallons of water to rural fires; a brush truck designed for wildland and field fires; three ambulances built for both advanced and basic life support; and, three pickup trucks, one each for the chief, the deputy chief, and for the local fire marshal, who also serves as a building code inspector. The vehicles contain the necessary hoses and tools to perform the respective functions for which each is designed. Add to this a fully-functional, fire-training tower and two fire stations, one of which includes a classroom for department training, which is also shared with other community organizations. Vermillion's fire and ambulance personnel all must be properly trained and practiced in using this wide variety of tools to continue to effectively do their jobs. ♡



VFD

Back (L to R) Tony Klunder, Jay Rydstrom, and Andrew Van Osdol.  
Front (L to R) Brandon Hansen, Tyler Zimmerman, and Lee Huber



VFD

Chief Doug Brunick pointing (L) assigns training duties to  
(L to R) Pete John, Todd Halverson, Aaron Leesch, and Don Forseth.

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*St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, St. Louis, MO., 2016.

## **IV. Photographs**

*Aaron Packard Photography*, historic brass steam whistle, model ladder truck trophy won in 1951, 1916 silver cup trophy, Vermillion, SD.

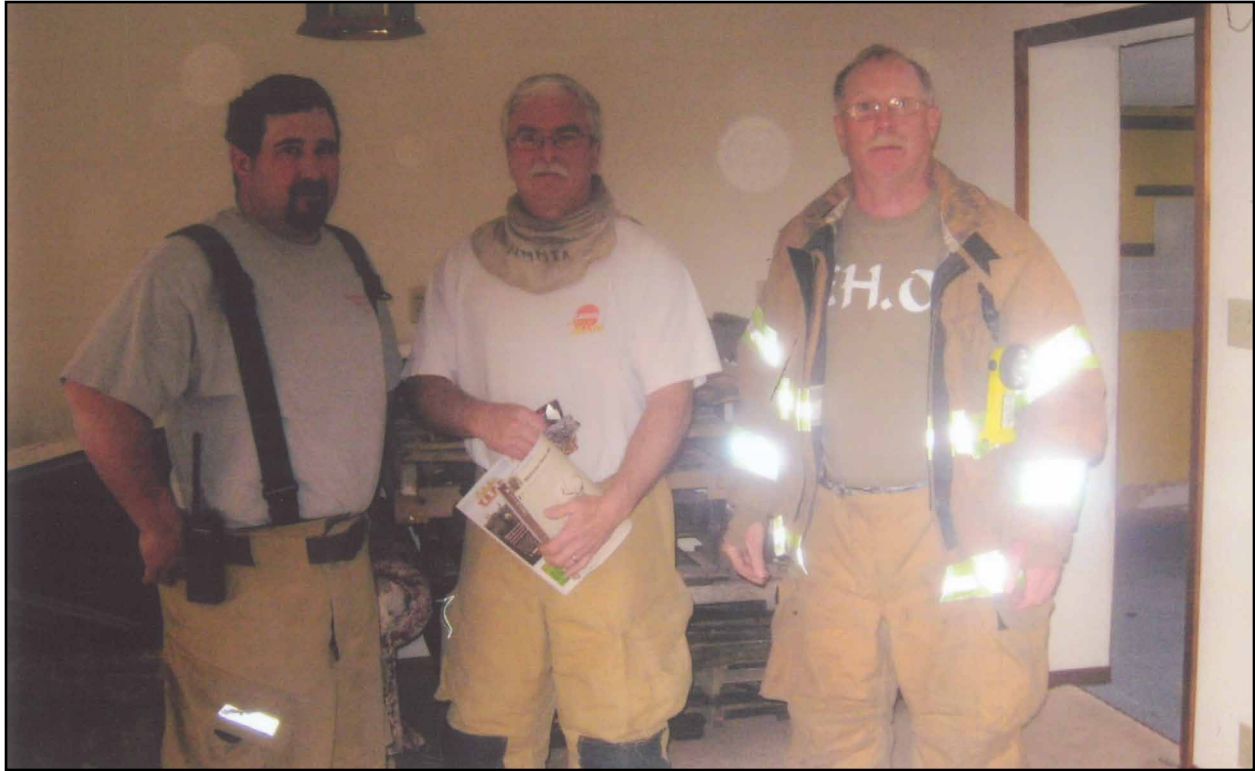
*Austin-Whittemore House*, *Clay County Historical Society collection*, Vermillion, SD.

*Mary L. Sorensen and Thomas L. Sorensen*, Vermillion, SD.

*Richardson Collection, Archives and Special Collections, I.D. Weeks Library, The University of South Dakota*, Vermillion, South Dakota, University Hall and burned library book, fire in 1893.

*Sioux City Public Museum*, *Sioux City, Iowa*.

*Vermillion Fire Department*, archives, scrapbooks, trophy cases, and displays, Vermillion, SD. ♣



VFD

Three fire departments held combined training in 2010. Their leaders (L to R) Dave Rabe, Gayville; Tom Slowey, Yankton; and Doug Bruicik, Vermillion.



VFD

The old downtown fire station before modern clothing and equipment racks were provided.

## APPENDIX A

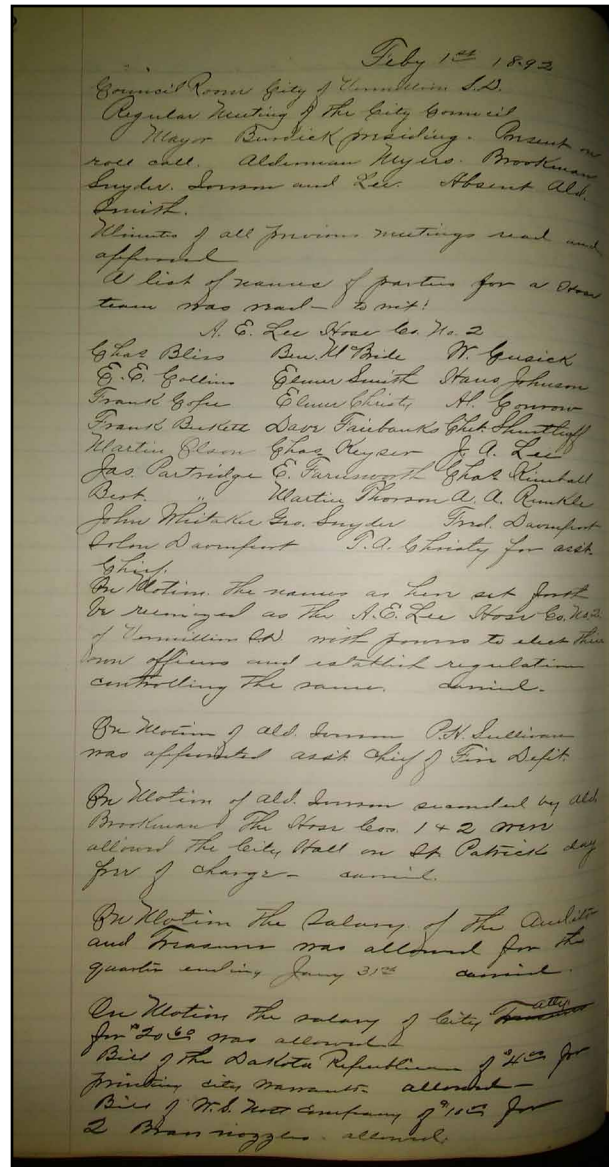
# VOLUNTEER MEMBERS AND CHIEFS SERVING THEIR COMMUNITY 1892 - 2017

Many members of the community at one time or other participated in fighting fires, whether with bucket brigades, hand-held extinguishers, and other means. Some methods were effective and some not, but no effort was easy and consequences of fires were often devastating and disheartening. The people of the Vermillion and the Clay County area eventually came to rely on a squad, team, company or department of volunteers to take on those tasks on their behalf. Training and equipment evolved and formal rosters of the volunteers were kept since 1892, although some were only partial and a few could not be located for some years. Most of the names and years each member was elected were found as the result of extensive research in this attempt to identify the names of all who volunteered their service on the Vermillion Fire Department, whether serving briefly or for many years. Sincere thanks are offered to those listed below who, for some period of their lives, contributed to the success of the fire department and its evolution. Without all of you, the VFD would not be the great fire department it was, and remains. An asterisk (\*) denotes a member who served as a chief. Some years of entry into the department were not fully confirmed, but are close. The specific years of election were undetermined for: J.G. Best, Joe Buum, A. Carlson, Ben Carter, J. Collings, James Gilbertson, William Kolb, F. Morgan, George Oak, Pat O'Neill, and John Souhrada, some of whom may have only been applicants. The author regrets the ambiguity. The author also offers sincere apologies to any who served and may have been inadvertently omitted from the list.

Among the very first identified by name as helping protect Vermillion at about the time of statehood in 1889, and perhaps prior to formation of the first fire company, included:

*John Carpenter, Ross Christy, Charles Crane, Charles Cope, Walter Dunlap, George Gordon, William Grimmels, William Ginn, Ernest Hansen, J.A. "Step" Johnson, Alva Lawton,*

*George Rasmussen, Joseph Salmer, Frank Shurtleff, John Smith, Martin Thompson, Charles Trent, Ed Vaughn, and Frank Wright. ☉*



Sorensen

The February 1892 City minutes listing the names on the new A. E. Lee Hose Co. No. 2. P. H. Sullivan was appointed assistant chief.



VFD

Equipment displayed during Fire Prevention Week at an Open House behind City Hall and the Fire Station.



VFD

The Fire Safety House, shared with Yankton, helps kids learn to low-crawl to safety, at the annual VFD Open House, in 1999.

The 16 men who stepped forward January 18, 1892, and signed up to form the first, formal fire company, as recorded in the minutes of the city council were:

C.F. Lotze,*	George Kempker	R. Wheeler	Oscar Arness
Oscar Olson	D.B. McCapes	Mike Odland	Free Elmore
Charles F. Vincent	H.O. Malby	Ole Iverson	Charley Lawson
P.H. Sullivan	Lincoln Eves	Jim Wylie	W.R. Fellows

## THE ROLL LIST OF NAMES

Abbott Thompson	Dawn	2016	Ashmore	Ralph	1942
Abell	Henry	1894	Ashmore	Sammy	1946
Absher	Clyde	1922	Aspinwall	L.V.	1919
Ahrendt	Don	1944	Austin	Wayne	1944
Ahrendt	Leo	1957	Bacon	Charles	1919
Ahrendt	Ludwig	1945	Bacon	Claude	1921
Ahrendt	William	1945	Bacon	Ernest	1924
Albers	Leo	1950	Bacon	Pirl	1920
Alexander	Deschaun	2016	Baisden	Dwight	1986
Allison	Clare	1938	Ballard	J.E.	1921
Amundson	A.	1900	Barash	Armando	2016
Amundson	Chris	1924	Barber	Roy	1900
Amundson	Christopher	2012	Barnett	D.J.	1998
Amundson	Duane	2012	Barrett	John	1901
Amundson	Gus	1958	Basom	Guy	1912
Amundson	Larry	1974	Bast	Lowell	1956
Anderson	Albin	1937	Bauder	Ralph	1969
Anderson	Charles	1913	Bauman	Carl	1927
Anderson	Alfred	1907	Bauman	William	1913
Anderson	Charles	1913	Beckett *	Frank	1892
Anderson	Chris	1949	Becklene	Arthur	1930
Anderson	George	1940	Bell	John	1957
Anderson	Gordon	1938	Benson	Burdette "Bud"	1948
Anderson	Joseph	1919	Benz	Bud	1942
Anderson	Lex	1912	Berg	Kenneth	1982
Anderson	Marcus	1931	Bergman	Bill	1965
Anderson	Marvin	1933	Bergman	Henry	1929
Anderson	Merlyn	1949	Bergstrom	Alfred	1900
Anderson	Ole	1921	Berke	John	1946
Anderson	Philip	1944	Berke *	Herman	1924
Anderson	Ray	1918	Berkland	Albert	1897
Anderson	Sever	1922	Berkland	John	1925
Anderson*	Carl	1900	Berkland	Phillip	1897
Anglin	Burt	1916	Berklene	Art	1930
Anglin	Calle	2012	Bernard	Terry	1974
Anglin	David	1984	Bertrand	Al	1939
Anglin	Edgar	1912	Best	J.G.	1894
Anglin	Hiley	1939	Beste	Raymond	1912
Anglin	Joel	1984	Blair	Dutch	1935
Anglin	Marrion	1919	Bland	Ryan	2012
Anglin	Morgan	1916	Bliss	Charles	1892
Anthofer	Larry	1980	Bliss	Paul	1967
Armstrong	J.A.	1900	Bliss	William	1892
Arness	Oscar	1892	Boes	John	2016
Ashley	Nicholas	2013	Bogue	J.W.	1918
Ashmore	Douglas	1978	Bolling	Art	1942
Ashmore	Francis	1940	Bolstad	C.T.	1922

Boom.....	Joe .....	1928	Burrell .....	Lawrence .....	1957
Boomgaarden .....	Robert .....	1996	Butler.....	Thomas .....	1966
Bosworth.....	Jesse .....	1995	Button.....	Don.....	1950
Bottolfson.....	Russell.....	1967	Button *.....	John.....	1928
Bousema.....	Justin .....	2005	Bye.....	Dave.....	1980
Bowie.....	Frank .....	1938	Bye.....	Leonard .....	1961
Bowman.....	F.E.....	1942	Byrum.....	Roy.....	1939
Boyd.....	Hugh.....	1923	Callahan .....	Matthew .....	2016
Boyd.....	O.H.....	1914	Cane.....	D.....	1912
Bradstad .....	Calvin.....	1957	Carlin.....	Jack .....	1948
Brammer .....	Clifford.....	1939	Carlin.....	Nick.....	1969
Brammer .....	Earl.....	1929	Carpenter.....	John.....	1896
Brandt.....	Jeffrey.....	2010	Carr.....	Robert.....	1929
Braunstein .....	Rich.....	2002	Carson.....	Earl.....	1900
Breeding.....	John.....	1942	Carter.....	Miner.....	1894
Brevik.....	Todd.....	1973	Cayse.....	Charles.....	1915
Brewer.....	George.....	1957	Cerny.....	Abbey.....	2016
Brewer.....	Karl.....	2012	Chamberlain.....	Don.....	1966
Brick.....	Jimmy.....	1943	Chamberlain.....	Gerald.....	1983
Brick.....	Thomas.....	1916	Chamberlain.....	Mark.....	1913
Brigham.....	Emily.....	2013	Chamberlain.....	Martin.....	1911
Briney.....	Louis.....	1925	Chamberlain.....	Robert.....	1913
Brodsky.....	Curtis.....	1980	Chancellor.....	Joe.....	1959
Brodsky.....	Greg.....	1973	Chaney.....	Gerald.....	1963
Brodsky.....	Ray.....	1959	Chaney.....	Mike.....	1960
Brown.....	Arthur.....	1937	Chaney.....	Tom.....	1957
Brown.....	Beryl.....	1943	Chaney.....	Walt.....	1912
Brown.....	Dick.....	1985	Charlin.....	Albert.....	1899
Brown.....	Freeman .....	1924	Charlin.....	Fred.....	1901
Brown.....	Gerald.....	1928	Charlin.....	H.....	1914
Brown.....	Harold.....	1924	Charlin.....	John.....	1900
Brown.....	Jeff.....	2015	Chaussee.....	Francis.....	1964
Brown.....	Kenneth.....	1939	Chaussee.....	George.....	1915
Brown.....	Lowell.....	1944	Chaussee.....	William.....	1917
Brown.....	Manford .....	1946	Chilton.....	George.....	1952
Brown.....	Max.....	1954	Christensen.....	Bud.....	1941
Brown.....	Parker.....	1939	Christensen.....	Daniel.....	1959
Brown.....	Robert D.....	1913	Christensen.....	Farrel.....	1998
Brown.....	Robert (Bob).....	1963	Christensen.....	Folmer.....	1944
Brown.....	Vernon.....	1940	Christensen.....	George.....	1934
Brown.....	Virgil.....	1924	Christensen.....	Hans.....	1918
Brubaker.....	Fred.....	1938	Christensen.....	Jon.....	2008
Bruguier.....	Henry.....	2014	Christensen.....	Kaj.....	1949
Brunick.....	Bruce.....	1967	Christensen.....	Kevin.....	1978
Brunick.....	Dave.....	1982	Christensen.....	Vernon.....	1960
Brunick*.....	Douglas.....	1971	Christopherson.....	Darrell.....	1965
Brunick.....	Duane.....	1956	Christopherson.....	Fred.....	1913
Brunick.....	Larry.....	1981	Christopherson.....	Kenneth.....	1955
Brunick.....	Nels.....	1942	Christopherson.....	Raymon.....	1936
Brunick.....	Paul.....	1976	Christy.....	Elmer.....	1892
Brunick.....	Rick.....	1977	Christy.....	Ross.....	1899
Brunick.....	Wayne.....	1949	Christy.....	T.A.....	1892
Brunick.....	Tom.....	1972	Clark.....	I.L.....	1924
Brunick, Jr.....	Nels.....	1951	Clark.....	James.....	1930
Bryde.....	John.....	1991	Clark.....	Wendell.....	1945
Buckman.....	Nick.....	2002	Cleary.....	H.....	1916
Budahas.....	Robert.....	1981	Coates.....	George.....	1924
Burdsick.....	Charles.....	1916	Coleman.....	John.....	1953
Burrell.....	George.....	1947	Collar.....	Eddie.....	1932



Collar.....	Kenneth.....	1916	Engman.....	Robert.....	1941
Collins.....	E.E.....	1892	Engman.....	Sidney.....	1938
Collins *.....	Herbert.....	1904	Entenman.....	John.....	1954
Conrow.....	Al.....	1892	Erickson.....	Arnold.....	1938
Conway.....	James.....	2016	Erickson.....	Art.....	1915
Cope.....	Charles.....	1899	Erickson.....	Carl.....	1915
Cope.....	Frank.....	1892	Erickson.....	Clarence.....	1931
Cornford.....	Raymond.....	1976	Erickson.....	Erick.....	1915
Cotton.....	Dan.....	1912	Erickson.....	Erwin.....	1916
Cowles.....	James.....	1962	Erickson.....	Gus.....	1938
Cowles.....	Dave.....	1942	Erickson.....	Jamie.....	2002
Crane.....	Charles.....	1897	Erickson.....	Kenneth.....	1948
Culp.....	Jerry.....	1972	Erickson.....	Martin.....	1915
Cusick.....	Kellen.....	2011	Erickson.....	Robert.....	1955
Cusick.....	Wallace.....	1892	Ertrett.....	Fred.....	1900
Daines.....	Thomas.....	1916	Euger.....	O.J.....	1900
Danielson.....	Dan.....	1901	Everrett.....	Fred.....	1912
Danielson.....	Francis.....	1936	Everrett.....	Leroy.....	1935
Danielson.....	Harold.....	1943	Everrett.....	M.....	1914
Darling.....	Bob.....	1934	Eves.....	Lincoln.....	1892
Davenport.....	Alden.....	1898	Fairbanks.....	Dave.....	1892
Davenport.....	Fred.....	1892	Fairbanks.....	Tom.....	1967
Davenport.....	John.....	1892	Farnsworth.....	E.....	1892
Davenport.....	Patsy.....	1892	Farrell.....	Leon.....	1934
David.....	Greg.....	1985	Farrens.....	Patrick.....	2009
Davis.....	L.E.....	1944	Fauldstich.....	Norbert.....	1968
Dawson.....	Joe.....	1916	Fellows.....	W.B.....	1892
Dawson.....	Joseph.....	1948	Finley.....	S.H.....	1915
Dean.....	William.....	1944	Fischbach.....	Ryun.....	2010
Decker.....	Ray.....	1997	Fisher.....	Pierre.....	1924
Delaney.....	Wilbur.....	1956	Flemming.....	Clifford.....	1919
Dennis.....	Meghan.....	2013	Forred.....	Rev. Walter.....	1956
Dennison.....	Steve.....	1948	Forred, Jr.....	Walter.....	1961
DePaula.....	Frank.....	2010	Forseth.....	Don.....	1976
DeVany.....	Guy.....	1941	Foster.....	C.....	1912
Dimick.....	Ralph.....	1920	Foster.....	Floyd.....	1913
Dixon.....	Charles.....	1900	Foster.....	Hugh.....	1934
Dixon.....	George.....	1900	Foster.....	L.....	1913
Dolney.....	Ted.....	1961	Fostvedt.....	Kolly.....	1983
Donahue.....	William.....	1915	Fowler.....	Harry.....	1912
Drafhal.....	Russ.....	1914	Frank.....	Robert.....	1971
Draper *.....	Richard.....	2012	Fry.....	George.....	1896
Dunlap.....	Walter.....	1899	Fuchs.....	Robert.....	1954
Dwyer.....	Harold.....	1946	Gannon.....	Donald.....	1962
Dwyer.....	James.....	1975	Garnes.....	Joe.....	1928
Dwyer.....	Jim.....	1951	Garris.....	Joe.....	1924
Dye.....	Burt.....	1916	Garvis.....	Joe.....	1924
Edgerton.....	George.....	1927	Geary.....	D.W.....	1943
Egan.....	Ed.....	1896	Gibson.....	W.....	1913
Egan *.....	James.....	1900	Giegling.....	Ken.....	1975
Eidem.....	Gary.....	1988	Gilbaugh.....	Bill.....	1949
Eidem.....	Larry.....	1967	Gilbertson.....	Marty.....	1986
Eldridge.....	Arthur.....	1896	Gillings.....	John.....	1955
Eldridge.....	Fred.....	1916	Ginn.....	William.....	1896
Eldridge.....	L.....	1916	Girard.....	Doug.....	1974
Ellefson.....	Bruce.....	1971	Girard.....	Leonard.....	1960
Elliott.....	Ed.....	1932	Glasford.....	Bernard.....	1972
Elmore.....	Free.....	1892	Glawe.....	Matthew.....	2015
Engman.....	Ed.....	1914	Gobell.....	Harold.....	1940

Gobell.....	Kenneth.....	1954	Hoag.....	Ike.....	1951
Gobell.....	Mike.....	1974	Hocks.....	Belie.....	1927
Gobell.....	Robert.....	1929	Hofer.....	Josh.....	1914
Gobell.....	Rodney.....	1982	Hoff.....	Ray.....	1959
Goddard.....	Ray.....	1913	Hogan.....	Frank.....	1916
Graff.....	Scott.....	1978	Hohenthauer.....	Gary.....	1988
Graham.....	Victor.....	1959	Holden.....	Chad.....	1999
Grange.....	Bert.....	1900	Holmes.....	C.E.....	1894
Grange.....	S.....	1913	Holmes.....	Darold.....	1952
Grassl.....	Carl.....	1974	Holmes.....	Gary.....	1971
Groves.....	Guy.....	1981	Holmes.....	Roger.....	1958
Gruchow.....	Emil.....	1914	Holmquist.....	Swede.....	1927
Gruchow.....	Gus.....	1920	Horan.....	Andrew.....	2014
Gruchow.....	Max.....	1912	Houlton.....	Lawrence.....	1920
Gruchow.....	William.....	1914	Howe.....	Shari.....	1995
Gulley.....	Nicole.....	2013	Howey.....	Marvin.....	1931
Gunther.....	Herman.....	1920	Howey.....	Raymond.....	1930
Guy.....	Charles.....	1947	Huber.....	Lee.....	2005
Haag.....	Bertie.....	1933	Huetson.....	Richard.....	1939
Haag.....	Lowell.....	1945	Huetson.....	Walter.....	1924
Haag.....	Ruben.....	1912	Huetson.....	Webster.....	1931
Hajek.....	Gus.....	1938	Hughes.....	Terry.....	1970
Halverson.....	David.....	1965	Hult.....	Bruce.....	1975
Halverson.....	Ernie.....	1983	Hult.....	Frank.....	1954
Halverson.....	Todd.....	1995	Hunt.....	L.C.....	1933
Hammerquist.....	Robert.....	1941	Husby.....	Jacob.....	2016
Hannahs.....	Tim.....	1984	Husby.....	Ryan.....	2009
Hansen.....	Brandon.....	2005	Hutch.....	L.....	1927
Hansen.....	Brook.....	2008	Hutchison.....	Clemmit.....	1927
Hansen.....	Darrell.....	1976	Hyde.....	Charles.....	1900
Hansen.....	Dean.....	1969	Ireland.....	William.....	1928
Hansen.....	JackieLee.....	1974	Isaacson.....	Bud (Merle).....	1959
Hansen.....	Jerry.....	1979	Isaacson.....	Rollie.....	1982
Hansen.....	Ron.....	1972	Isackson.....	Alfred.....	1945
Hanson.....	Alan.....	2014	Iverson.....	Andrew.....	1912
Hanson.....	Ernest.....	1895	Iverson.....	Bud.....	1943
Hanson.....	Sam.....	1913	Iverson.....	Elwood.....	1941
Hard.....	Frank.....	1968	Iverson.....	Mark.....	1995
Harnois.....	Hector.....	1943	Iverson.....	Ole.....	1892
Harnois.....	John.....	1983	Jackson.....	Hunter.....	2016
Harnois.....	Tom.....	1985	Jacobsen.....	H.A.....	1920
Harrington.....	Jess.....	1922	Jacobsen.....	Olaf.....	1925
Harrington.....	Joe.....	1922	Jahn.....	Pete.....	1987
Hartson.....	Jess.....	1916	Jahn.....	Wolfgang.....	1959
Hartson.....	Earl.....	1919	Jansen.....	Cody.....	2011
Hasenbank.....	Vernon.....	1963	Jasperson.....	Orville.....	1941
Hauck.....	Mike.....	1991	Johnson.....	Chester.....	1913
Hay.....	Claude.....	1927	Johnson.....	Hans.....	1892
Hays.....	Bryan.....	1999	Johnson.....	H.O.....	1894
Heine.....	Michael.....	2009	Johnson.....	Howard.....	1948
Helgerson.....	Hilmar.....	1931	Johnson.....	John.....	1896
Helgerson.....	Jack.....	1931	Johnson.....	Justin.....	1900
Hendricks.....	George.....	1970	Johnson.....	Lewis.....	1941
Henry.....	Sam.....	1918	Johnson.....	Oliver.....	1897
Hensley.....	William.....	1943	Johnson.....	Robert.....	1945
Henze.....	Wesley.....	2008	Johnson (Krohn).....	Jody.....	1995
Hesse.....	David.....	2015	Joiner.....	L.E.....	1915
Hewett.....	Arzie.....	1937	Jolley.....	Charles.....	1900
Hilton.....	Carl.....	1900	Jones.....	Allan.....	1079

Jones.....	Daniel.....	1995	Lester.....	Mark.....	1982
Jones.....	Roy.....	1926	Lewison.....	Chad.....	1982
Joneson.....	J.E.....	1900	Liebel.....	Wayne.....	1973
Jordon.....	George.....	1897	Liqueur.....	Cedric.....	1995
Jorgensen.....	Jens.....	1942	Lofgren.....	Larry.....	1963
Jorgenson.....	J.C.....	1900	London.....	Brady.....	2014
Jorgenson.....	Clifford.....	1970	Lotze *.....	C.F.....	1892
Jorgenson.....	Daryl.....	1947	Luden.....	Lowell.....	1954
Jorgenson.....	Douglas.....	1963	Lull.....	Frank.....	1920
Jorgenson.....	Jim.....	1948	Macy.....	Milt.....	1931
Jorgenson.....	Peter.....	1894	Madsen.....	Tonya.....	2002
Kale.....	Charles.....	1931	Mahan.....	Michael.....	1927
Karney.....	Jack.....	1913	Malby.....	H.O.....	1892
Kastengren.....	Jack.....	1979	Malone.....	Fred.....	1922
Kastengren.....	Matt.....	1996	Maloney.....	Mike.....	2008
Kegrice.....	Everett.....	1942	Markuson.....	Dennis.....	1982
Kempker *.....	George.....	1892	Marsh.....	Gary.....	1981
Kendall.....	George.....	1920	Marsh.....	W.....	1914
Kephart*.....	Clyde.....	1911	Marshall.....	Maurice.....	1946
Kephart.....	Harold.....	1971	Mart.....	Doug.....	1984
Kephart.....	L.E.....	1913	Mart.....	Jeff.....	1981
Kephart.....	Leslie.....	1969	Mart.....	Larry.....	1961
Keyser.....	Charles.....	1892	Martensen.....	Austin.....	2009
Kidder.....	Jeff.....	1895	Martin.....	Bryton.....	2013
Kimball *.....	Charles.....	1892	Martinson.....	Scott.....	2012
Kipling.....	Barry.....	1981	McBride.....	Ben.....	1892
Klamm.....	Mike.....	1983	McCahren.....	Lee.....	1967
Klunder.....	Anthony.....	2006	McCapes.....	D.B.....	1892
Knealand.....	Robert.....	1928	McCormick.....	xxx.....	1916
Knudsen.....	Mark.....	1976	McDonald.....	Burdette.....	1939
Kolb.....	G.H.....	1900	McDonald.....	Ernest.....	1922
Kolb.....	Harry.....	1900	McDonald.....	Mel.....	1894
Kolbeck (Honorary).....	Michael.....	2016	McDonald.....	Ray.....	1924
Kruse.....	Deryl.....	1949	McIllvenna.....	Albert.....	1964
Kruse.....	Mike.....	1982	Meddles.....	F.M.....	1915
Kruse.....	Tom.....	1976	Melstad.....	Korry.....	1990
Lacy.....	Charles.....	1914	Melton.....	Robert.....	1920
Lambert.....	Doran.....	1953	Menage.....	Scott.....	1997
Lambert.....	Henry.....	1925	Merrigan.....	Cody.....	2011
Lane.....	David.....	2013	Merrigan.....	Darrel.....	1954
Larsen.....	Gary.....	1956	Merrigan.....	Vernon.....	1958
Larsen.....	Tony.....	1999	Mettles.....	L.....	1914
Larson.....	Bill.....	1960	Millage.....	Elmer.....	1924
Larson *.....	Stanley.....	1941	Millage.....	Erwin.....	1944
Law.....	Sam.....	1942	Millage.....	Lee.....	1923
Lawson.....	Charles.....	1892	Miller.....	Harry.....	1928
Lawton.....	Alva.....	1898	Miller.....	Joseph.....	1951
Lawton.....	Ralph.....	1942	Mincks.....	Curtis.....	2002
Lawton.....	W.....	1896	Miner.....	Charles.....	1919
Lee.....	Dean.....	1949	Mitchell.....	Neal.....	1959
Lee.....	Hubert.....	1923	Mitchell.....	W.....	1918
Lee.....	J.A.....	1892	Moore.....	Cory.....	2002
Lee.....	Stanley.....	1947	Moore.....	James.....	1983
Leer.....	Norman.....	1932	Moore.....	J.R.....	2010
Leesch.....	Aaron.....	1999	Moore.....	Matthew.....	2013
Leikvold.....	Sterling.....	1957	Morehouse.....	Jeff.....	1976
Leitru.....	Tom.....	1976	Morgan.....	Art.....	1944
Lenhart.....	Elmer.....	1927	Morgan.....	Tom.....	1940
Lentsch.....	John (Hank).....	2016	Moritz.....	Lyle.....	1958

Moritz	Pete	1960	Owens	Dunsmore	1920
Morse	Walter	1914	Palm *	H.B.	1910
Mortenson	R.W.	1920	Palmer	Albert	1925
Moser	Russ	1926	Palmer	L.G.	1900
Mount	Charles	1938	Paradee	Joseph	1920
Mount	Clarence	1936	Partridge	Bert	1892
Mount	Duane	1966	Partridge	James	1892
Mount	Harvey	1966	Partridge	Will	1894
Mount	Louis	1906	Patton	Norman	1928
Mount	Ray	1947	Paulson	Charles	1912
Mount	Robert	1914	Payton	F.C.	1945
Mount	Roger	1967	Pearson	Elmer	1921
Mount	Roy	1939	Pederson	Julian	1922
Mount	Wade	1990	Perdue	Mike	1928
Mount	William	1971	Perdue	Millard	1921
Mulheron	Matt	1998	Perkins	H.O.	1926
Munkvold	Monty	1988	Petersen	H.A.	1917
Murra	Benjamin	2013	Peterson	Fred	1920
Murra	Mike	2015	Peterson	Richard	1929
Myers	Gary	1996	Peterson	William	1945
Myers	William	1927	Petterson	Annar	1956
Myron	Ernest	1940	Pham	Minh	2013
Nagel	William	1912	Pickens	Rob	1994
Neary	Paul	1948	Pierce (Honorary)	Ivan "Van"	2007
Neitzel	Monte	1992	Pierce *	Louis	1922
Nelsen	Dylan	2014	Pierson	Elmer	1921
Nelson	Arnold	1955	Portz	Danielle	2016
Nelson	Carl	1922	Puckett	Chris	2013
Nelson	Harry	1952	Putman	Chris	1955
Nelson	Herman	1942	Putnam	Christian	1913
Nelson	Richard	1960	Qualey	H.N.	1900
Neuman	Ron	1971	Quigley	Q.	1916
Neumayr	George	1922	Quinn	T.A.	1901
Newman	Dayrl	2013	Quintal	Arthur	1924
Newman	Ron	1972	Quintal	Joe	1924
Nicholson	Earl	1940	Rabe	Bruce	1930
Nielsen	Carl	1922	Rabush	Tom	1944
Nielsen	Larry	1970	Radigan	Dan	1975
Nissen	Jeff	1983	Radigan	Jeff	1967
Nokes	Wayne	1940	Radigan	Kelly	1976
Norden	Eric	1916	Radigan	Randy	1965
Norton	Harry	1916	Radigan	Steve	1970
Nylen	Y.	1913	Radigan	William	1946
Oakley	Jess	1916	Radigan *	Lewis (G.L.)	1929
Oakley	Robert	1920	Rakness	Elizabeth	2015
O'Connor	James	1933	Ramey	Herbert	1945
O'Connor	Joe	1928	Randolph	Charles	1916
O'Connor	Tim	1960	Ransdell	Burdette	1957
Odeen	Philip	1930	Rasmussen	Art	1924
Odland	Mike	1892	Rasmussen	Ted	1943
Offerdahl	Merle	1956	Rasmussen *	George	1923
Olson	Chester	1915	Rayhem	Bob	1914
Olson	Harlan	1945	Reed	Gary	1966
Olson	Martin	1892	Reedy *	Joseph	1949
Olson	Oscar	1892	Reedy *	Steven	1972
Olson	Stephen	2012	Richards	Alan	1983
O'Neil	Pat	1894	Richardson	Arthur	1900
Orr	Frank	1920	Richardson	Claude	1916
Ouellette	Alan	1985	Richardson	Harlan	1913

Richardson	Henry	1915	Smith	Elmer	1892
Richardson	Ike	1913	Smith	Frank	1914
Richardson	Robert	1978	Smith	Gordon	1960
Richardson *	Charles	1913	Smith	Hans	1895
Richman	C.	1912	Smith	John C.	1894
Ridenour	Gene	1948	Smith	T.	1912
Rier	Charles	1914	Smith	William	1915
Roberts	Scott	2014	Snyder	George	1892
Robinson *	John	1904	Snyder	Herbert	1895
Rohym	Rob	1912	Snyder	Tom	1912
Roscamp	Henry	1933	Sockness	Dustin	2016
Rosencrans	Doc	1927	Sommervold	Ford	2010
Ruff	William	1912	Sommervold	Gerald	1963
Ruman	Dave	1989	Sommervold	Grant	1984
Runkle	A.A.	1892	Sorensen	Jack	1920
Rupp	Ernest	1975	Sorensen	Jasper	1920
Rusk	Bill	1915	Sorensen	Reno	1940
Russell	Calvin	1906	Sorensen	Thomas	1970
Russell	Lester	1922	South	John	1915
Russell	Thomas	1931	Southerton	Charles	1916
Russell	Will	1931	Spang	W.J.	1922
Russo	Al	1949	Spencer	Charles	1979
Rustad	Anton	1900	Spensley	Elmer	1900
Rydstrom	Jay	2005	Spensley	J.M.	1900
Rydstrom	Tony	2006	Sperry	Bill	1999
Rye	Terry	2011	Speulda	Glen	1952
Sadler	Justin	2014	Stanley	Carl	1898
Salmer	Joe	1899	Stark	Charles	1915
Sammelson	Greg	1985	Stark	Ed	1922
Sampson	S.D.	1894	Steenack	Brad	2012
Sanborn	Tom	1972	Steenholdt	Richard	1975
Sandow	A.W.	1930	Steenholdt	Vernon	1952
Sanford	Richard	1942	Steever	Kevin	1997
SantaMaria	Dominick	2012	Steffen	Donald	1960
Sarekhani	Kevin	2012	Steigelmeyer	Essie	1924
Sargent	Don	1965	Steigelmeyer *	Melvin	1946
Savoie	Fred	1986	Stephens	Harry	1953
Schoellerman	Blaine	2015	Stevens	Joe	1916
Schroeder	Travis	1996	Stewart	Charles	1971
Schuneman	Rob	2008	Stewart	Don	1953
Schurman	Scott	1995	Stewart	Jack	1954
Scott	George E.	1900	Stewart	Layne	1995
Sealey	Clark	1916	Stewart	Mike	1984
Seaman	Vincent	1963	Stewart	Todd	1974
Seiler	Donald	1970	Storm	H.	1912
Seiler	John	1919	Stride	O.R.	1922
Shearer	Mike	1977	Struve	Rhett	2014
Sheldon	John	1912	Sullivan	Dan	1912
Sherk	Harry	1922	Sullivan	Dennis	1916
Sherk *	Keeler	1915	Sullivan *	P.H. Patrick	1892
Shields	R.B.	1896	Sutcliffe *	Ralph	1912
Shordahl	B.J.	1930	Swanson	Harold	1936
Shurtleff	Chet	1892	Swanson	Scott	1977
Shurtleff	Frank	1898	Swedean	Hugo	1941
Shurtleff	H.	1918	Swedean	Leo	1962
Sieck	Dale	1954	Swedeberg	Don	1948
Simmons	Doug	1986	Swedeberg	Fred	1902
Slaasted	Jeff	1995	Swedeberg	L.	1913
Sletwold	Harold	1930	Swee	Brad	1983

Swenson	Clayton	1973	Walz	Richard	1949
Swenson	Melvin	1932	Walz	Robert	1940
Swisher	Ralph	1915	Wamsley	John	1896
Taggart	Bill	1994	Wanamaker	Matthew	2014
Taggart	Charles	1980	Wanamaker	Brandon	2015
Taggart	Cory	2010	Washburn	Art	1912
Taggart	Leo	1982	Washburn	F.E.	1900
Taggart	Mark	1992	Washburn	Orvie	1897
Taggart	Matt	1998	Washnok	Robert	1937
Taggart	Mike	1984	Watson	George	1933
Taggart	Tom	1989	Watson	Leo	1931
Tassava	John	1989	Watson	Matt	2005
Taylor	Tom	1913	Watson	Wallace	1941
Thompson	Gordon	1967	Watts	Clyde	1962
Thompson	Keith	1990	Watts	John	1973
Thompson	Martin	1898	Weiland	Wilbur	1947
Thompson	Tom	1938	Weisz	Dennis	1960
Thorson	Earl	1929	Went	W.J.	1898
Thorson	Martin	1892	West	M.E.	1913
Tieman	Everett "Pete"	1961	Westre	Gustinius	1943
Tieman	Rodney	1977	Wheeler	R.	1892
Torstensen	Lawrence	1929	Whitaker	John	1892
Tosch	Gene	1963	Whitaker	Walter	1894
Towner	Robert	1974	White	Wayne	1942
Trent	Charles	1896	Whiteside	Jesse	1897
Tullis	Joyce	1942	Whiteside	Paul	1899
Tullis	Morton	1947	Whitman	Melvin	1930
Turner	Charles	1943	Wiemers	Brandon	2002
Turner	Dean	1984	Wigdahl	Melvin	1943
Urup	Tom	1949	Williams	Dell	1916
Utley	Duke	1968	Williams	George	1897
Vannatta	John	1924	Williams	Oscar	1900
VanOsdol	Andrew	2005	Williams	Steve	1972
Vaughn	C.I. Chancy	1894	Williams, Jr.	Dell	1927
Vaughn	H.E.	1898	Willroth	Bill	1980
Vaughn	Ed	1896	Wilmes	Matthew	2015
Vidal	E.	1916	Wilson	C.A.	1900
Vincent	Charles F.	1892	Wilson	L.M.	1924
Vinson	Max	1894	Wince	Carl	1944
Vogan	J.E.	1900	Wolf	Morris	1960
Vogel	Tom	1968	Woodward	Merle	1944
Voudry	Clarence	1968	Wright	Frank C.	1895
Waage	Brad	1989	Wylie	Jim	1892
Waage	Brian	1980	Wynia	C.L.	1942
Walker	John	1986	Wysocki	J.N.	1920
Walker	Lowell	1933	Young	Ethan	2010
Walker	Noah	2016	Young	Lawrence	1958
Walker	Rich	1988	Yusten	Howard	1929
Walker	Thomas (TW)	1951	Yusten	Joe	1912
Walter	Derrick	2005	Zimmerman	Tyler	2005
Walters	Harry	1953			
Walz	Henry	1915			

\* Served as a chief



VFD

VFD members in 1950 near Center and National Streets.

Chief, H.O. Berke; 1st Ass't Stanley Larson; 2nd Ass't Milt Macy; Sec/Trea., G.L. Radigan

Reno Sorensen	Bill Radigan	LeRoy Blair	Wayne White	Tom Walker
Roy Mount	Harold Gobell	Lud Ahrendt	Charles Stark	Joe O'Connor
Gus Erickson	Wallace Watson	Gene Ridenour	Francis Ashmore	Stanley Lee
Geo Watson	Darly Jorgensen	Gus Hajek	Wayne Brunick	Maurice Marshal
Beryl Brown	Steve Denison	Jim Jorgenson	Joe Reedy	Don Arhendt
Mel Stiegelmeier	Jim Berke	Essie Stiegelmeier	Harold Danielson	Folmer Christenson
Willie Weiland	Don Swedberg	Don Button	Herman Nelson	Paul Neary
Ed Elliott	Lowell Hoag	Elmer Pearson	Jim O'Connor	Tom Urup
Art Morgan	Wendell Clark	Freeman Brown	John South	Kenny Erickson
Sam Ashmore	Jack Carlin	Deryl Kruse	Jim Brick	Dean Lee
Tom Rabusch	Dick Walz	Gill Gilough	Carl Wince	Al Russo
Lowell Brown	Chriss Anderson	Hech Harnois	Harold Drywer	Kaj Christenson
Bud Benson	Clarence Mount	Herb Ramey	Lester Russell	Leo Albers



VFD

VFD members in 1985.



VFD

1994 National Emergency Medical Week at Dakota Medical Center.



VFD

VFD members in 2009 surrounding 'Old Betsy,' the American LaFrance truck purchased in 1923.



VFD

VFD members gather for a photo in 2014.



## APPENDIX B

### A VFD TIMELINE

- 1803** -- Louisiana Purchase provided the first prong of U.S acquisition of land, from Napoleon who needed money in a war with the British.
- 1804-1806** -- Lewis & Clark Expedition; Capt. Clark reports an overland journey to Spirit Mound on Aug. 25, 1804.
- 1858** -- Treaty of 1858, a.k.a. Treaty of Washington, between the U.S. and the Yankton Sioux Tribe (Ihanktonwan Oyate), providing the second prong of land acquisition to the U.S. Government, ceded by the Natives in exchange for major considerations.
- 1859** -- Vermillion established by settlers existing with the Native community.
- 1871** -- Fires reported at east side of Big Sioux Bridge; at Elk Point; on Vermillion's west side.
- 1873** -- Fire at Judge Shriner's, one mile north of town; Vermillion's village government was organized and trustees nominated, Aug. 12; trustees met Aug. 20.
- 1874** -- General agreement evident in the community that a local fire company was needed.
- 1875** -- Jan. 13, a major fire destroyed 20 buildings. The Adelphi Hotel was saved. Clay County offices were destroyed along with records; newspaper headline "Vermillion in Ashes," losses estimated at \$50,725.
- 1877** -- A representative of Clay County, Nelson Miner, worked with the Dakota Territory legislature, which provided for the town's incorporation and six wards for the city map and six for the schools.
- 1878** -- During dry spells, the railroad was a common cause of fires in town and the countryside. The city council enacted an ordinance requiring screens be installed to arrest the throwing of sparks into the dry, grassy areas.
- 1883** -- A move to incorporate a local waterworks company eventually led to a plan to install at least 50 hydrants and a water tank above a pumping station. The company also could provide electric lights when needed.
- 1890** -- A pivotal fire on August 5 destroyed much of Vermillion's main business section, destroying 19 stores and badly damaging others, spurring the city council to prohibit construction of wooden frame buildings.
- 1892** -- Jan. 2, the local waterworks was declared "available for fire-fighting purposes." Vermillion City Council on Jan. 5 authorized construction of a small building in the rear of City Hall at west corner of Church and Main Streets for housing fire hose carts and equipment. First use of the waterworks facility for firefighting purposes was at the Dakota House on the west corner of High and Main Streets. "The fire occurred while the fire company was without official status." On Jan. 18, 16 men formed **Vermillion Hose Company No. 1** by presenting a signed statement to the city council; C.F. Lotze as the first chief. Trinity Lutheran Church was established and soon had a building at Harvard and National Streets.
- 1893** -- Oct. 15, a Sunday-morning fire destroyed University Hall and an immediate effort and campaign in town and in Clay County to keep the university in Vermillion was led by A.E. Lee. By Oct. 26, the fire company became reactivated with a new chief, George J. Kempker, Secretary C.F. Vincent and Treasurer E.E. Collins. Hose Co. No. 2, "A.E. Lee Hose Co.," was formed with a roster of 13.
- 1896** -- The city council made "official" the group's status as a firefighting body on May 6, when an ordinance passed listing the two hose companies and a hook and ladder organization, each up to eight members. In the summer, C.I. Vaughn was chosen secretary of the State Association of Firemen at a convention in Canton, SD.
- 1900** -- In addition to the two-wheeled hose carts and home-made hook and ladder vehicle, the city council inventory of fire department equipment listed 1,000 feet of good hose; 50 feet of damaged hose; six spanners (hose-coupling wrenches); two respirators; four axes; three lanterns; four short ladders; one extension ladder; one nozzle; four pairs of rubber boots; and one rubber coat.
- 1919** -- On March 3, the city approved a resolution that "it is necessary" to have a new and complete electric light unit to supply light and housing for the city; an electric light office, restrooms, and a room for a fire department and equipment were to be included. E.D. Brookman was listed as the city light department superintendent and paid \$125 per month. J.J. Elliot was listed as engineer for the light plant at \$140 per month.
- 1920** -- The City Light Plant (municipal building) was constructed using the bond-issue funds approved earlier, to include space for a fire station and club room on the second floor. Wooden water mains used at the time made it doubtful they could handle much water pressure. A report to the city council by the General Inspection Bureau (the insurance industry) prompted action toward improving the waterworks or bring to town an automotive pumper truck to provide water pressure and avoid a change in Vermillion's insurance rating.

**1923** -- **The American LaFrance** motorized unit was welcomed to Vermillion as its first chemical pumper truck. The truck cost \$8,500 and arrived in November. It later became known as "Old Betsy" and was in active service for 40 years. Land for Prentis Park was donated.

**1924** -- Discussion began among those representing the fire department, city council, and various township boards of the need to serve the countryside of Clay County, leading to a meeting in November.

**1926** -- C.B. Richardson was elected fire chief. Others serving in the 1920s included Russell Moser, Ed Stark, Rube Haag, O. Anderson, Lewis Pierce, and Ralph Swisher.

**1927** -- Early each year, the department formed committees for covering entertainment, the annual dance, transportation, and food. Committees usually consisted of a mixture of equal parts old-time members and newly-elected members. Among new members elected this year were Bill Bliss and Dell Williams, Jr. Officers elected were Chief C.B. Richardson, First-Assistant Chief Ernest McDonald, Second-Assistant Chief Ernest Bacon, and Secretary-Treasurer Fred Malone.

**1928** -- New members elected included a future chief, John Button, along with Norm Patton. An Oyster Feed Committee was named. Clay County officials extended thanks to the department regarding two fires involving the county farm and shed. A motion approved in March directed purchase of "six chairs as near the same as possible as the heavy ones we have." In the May elections, Herman Berke (later a chief) was elected secretary/treasurer. In September, a check for \$50 was received from Clay County for "services rendered" at a fire at the county garage.

**1929** -- Among those elected or reinstated this year were Chris Putnam, H.O. Perkins, Walter Morse, Cal Russell, Earl Brammer, Robert Gobell, Lewis Radigan, Earl Thorson, Richard Peterson, Bob Carr, Henry Bergman, and Lawrence Torstenson.

**1934** -- The Fire & Ordinance Committee and the Fire Chief in September investigated purchasing a new fire truck. Bids for a pumper were to be opened October 8. In November, Chief L.H. Pierce's Annual Report presented to the city council set the example for future annual listing of trucks among the department's fleet, along with other various equipment.

**1935** -- In March, the city minutes indicated there was \$7,000 in the Fire Protection Fund and, by motion, the council raised the pay to the fire-truck caretaker from \$10 monthly to \$15 due to "more work on account of the additional equipment placed in service in the last few months." Lowell Walker was listed on the 1935-36 roster. Firefighters among those in city government were D.E. Sullivan, mayor; Elmer Lenhart, city auditor; J.W. Kolb, city engineer; C.B. Richardson (former chief), water superintendent; and, H.A. Fowler, chief of police.

**1936** -- On July 10, R.J. Carr was listed as secretary-treasurer, but that changed (for an undiscovered reason) the following month when, on Aug. 10, a letter in the files indicates G.L. Radigan's signature as secretary-treasurer.

**1937** -- The April minutes at the department indicate discussion centering on the "question of whether the City is giving the VFD the financial help they should" and that the matter should be investigated.

**1938** -- In August the department discussed the need for a smaller (additional) siren in the center of town, operated by telephone; later, a new siren was bought to place in Austin Park. Near the end of the year, Chief John Button's report suggested establishing a probationary period for new members. A motion was approved to create both a Rural Truck Fund and a Rural Truck Committee to oversee a working fund.

**1939** -- Chief John Button reported that the Rural Truck Committee "had bought our rural fire truck and it would be delivered about May 20th." The rural truck was made by the Luverne Fire Apparatus Company and cost \$2,000. Reno Sorensen was added to the 1939-40 roster.

**1941** -- On May 5, Chief John Button announced that he would not be a candidate for chief in the annual election. Also that year, more VFD members periodically began requesting one-year leaves of absence, often to enter the Armed Services. On Dec. 4, Bud Christenson was elected as a member. On Dec 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan and World War II raged on.

**1942** -- On Jan. 2, W.T. Scott, member of "Defense Consul" gave a short talk to the members meeting resulting in an approved motion to buy \$500 worth of Defense Bonds. A motion was approved in May "that any fireman joining the army be carried as a fireman until their return."

**1943** -- Chief John Button said he would like to have some members report at the Truck Room in case of a black out.

**1944** -- Tom Rabusch was elected; more members were leaving for service in the Armed Forces.

**1945** -- Officers elected this year were Chief John Button; First-assistant Chief H.O. Berke; Second-assistant Chief Stanley Larson (a city police officer); Secretary/Treasurer G.L. (Lewis) Radigan.

**1946** -- On July 11, **William J. Radigan** was elected to the membership. He later would become the long-time secretary-treasurer and also Vermillion's mayor. The Fire & EMS Station at Dakota and Duke Streets would be named in his honor after his death in 2001.

**1948** -- Member Jack Carlin suggested a first-aid squad be formed. Several agreed and volunteers would be sought; the minutes reflect no immediate action.

**1949** -- On Jan. 6, member Reno Sorensen was "appointed as a committee of one to secure a doctor for the initiation." In August, the department was asked to have a float for the Days of '59 celebration (10 years in advance).

**1950** -- The Korean Conflict led to a motion approved on Aug. 3 to "give any fireman entering the armed forces an indefinite leave of absence." On Oct. 5, a demonstration was presented on using an air-pack mask, along with discussion that extra tanks would be needed. A group photo was taken boasting a healthy turnout.

**1951** -- A report was presented to the fire department on a fund drive for a resuscitator. The cost was estimated at \$600 for a two-person machine. The VFW and the Eagles were pitching in to help raise the money. All members were encouraged to learn "how to give artificial respiration." In June, Joe Reedy's three-man team, with Dick Walz and Leo Albers, won the championship race at State Fire School in Pierre. Building a trophy case was discussed. By October, a resuscitator arrived, was labeled "Property of the VFD," and was stored and maintained at Dakota Hospital.

**1952** -- A fire caused an estimated loss of between \$15,000 and \$20,000 at the Brunick Garage. In September, Chief H.O. Berke announced his resignation and Stanley Larson was elected chief. Joe Reedy was elected to fill the spot of first-assistant chief.

**1953** -- A fire on April 2 at the Alpha Xi Delta sorority house caused an estimated \$17,000 damage. In May, Chief Stanley Larson was re-elected; others elected were First-Assistant Chief Joe Reedy, Second-Assistant Chief Bill Radigan, and Secretary-Treasurer G.L. Radigan. In August, the chief asked the city council for a siren for the east part of Vermillion and for two air packs. The city allowed one air pack now and another later. Mr. T.G. "Tug" Mones offered a bid on coveralls (by J.C. Penney) for firefighters and 17 were ordered in September.

**1954** -- Members of the VFD increasingly donated blood to the local blood bank and Dakota Hospital. In May, Lewis Radigan was elected chief, Joe Reedy remained first-assistant chief, and Stanley Larson became second-assistant chief. **Elected the new secretary-treasurer was William (Bill) J. Radigan.** On Nov. 22, approval was given that firemen who were members of the local National Guard unit be excused from attending meetings.

**1955** -- In March, there was discussion related to connecting the telephone system (Northwestern Bell) and firemen's home phones for fire calls. In October, the VFD began use of "wet water" on an experimental basis.

**1956** -- Merle Offerdahl was elected Oct. 10 as a VFD member. He later would become Vermillion's chief of police and serve as a mayor. By November, the department boasted four Scott-brand air packs.

**1957** -- On a cold Jan. 25, an all-night fire at Pardee Laboratory on the USD campus was fought. The chemistry building fire loss was estimated at \$184,224. No injuries were reported. More talk resumed on obtaining a new truck with higher pumping capacity.

**1958** -- The department sent a telegram to the USD basketball team during a tournament in which the Coyotes won the NCAA Division II Championship. In August, Roger Holmes was elected to the membership.

**1959** -- At the annual meeting in May, elected were Chief Lewis Radigan, First-Chief Joe Reedy, Second-Assistant Chief Deryl Kruse, and Secretary-Treasurer Bill Radigan. The chief appointed Rev. Walter Forred as department chaplain. A fire June 4 at Holmes Auto Salvage at Market and Kidder Streets resulted in \$4,000 loss to the building and \$4,500 loss to the contents. The company rebuilt Holmes Welding & Manufacturing at the east end of Timber Road, far enough outside the city limits to also sell fireworks for many years. In September, a blaze at the elevators just below bluff in southwestern Vermillion drew much attention. Three buildings were involved and the damage total was estimated at \$275,000.

**1960** -- The chief announced in March that the fire whistle would be used at 8:45 on Friday nights to signal shoppers to gather for a drawing of the winner of "Lucky Bucks," a weekly event to stimulate downtown shopping. "Ma Hawthorne" often played harmonica at a grocery store while people were waiting for the drawing.

**1962** -- Mayor Ralph Leer wrote a letter in January of his concern over the mechanical failure of fire trucks on occasion. Clyde Watts was elected to the department. Motions to incorporate the department's rural activities and to revise the by-laws were approved. In June, serious discussion resumed into finding a new fire truck, as had been suggested by Chief Joe Reedy. A month later, the chief reported for the truck committee that he would seek "a truck to replace 'Old Betsy' (and which would have) a pumping capacity of 750 G.P.M." In August, he announced that two blasts on the fire whistle would signal the return of the National Guard unit and that this would not be a fire call. Specs were received from seven different companies in October for a new truck. Also, the old, Plymouth truck "stored in the City lot below the hill" had been sold for \$35.

**1963** -- Bob Brown and Gerald Sommervold were elected to the department. Specs were nearly complete for a new city truck, and discussion turned to finding a new, rural truck. In February. The new truck bids that had been opened were rejected by the VFD Truck Committee "in the best interests of the department and the City of Vermillion." New bids were called for and opened in April. The low and accepted bid was from Howe Fire Apparatus Co. in the amount of \$21,880. The city council approved the department's recommendation and purchased the truck. In June, Chief Reedy announced he was attempting to start a first-aid crew and Walter Forred and Daryl Jorgenson were already exploring the idea for the department. They were given authority to purchase "whatever is needed" in supplies to build up the equipment. In August, a motion was approved to incorporate the rural department and pay the state's \$10 fee. In September, the department accepted the bid for a new, rural truck from Luverne Fire Apparatus Co. of Minnesota for \$7,500. Members decided that the name on the side of the new, rural truck would read "Vermillion Rural Fire Department, Inc."

**1964** -- The new Howe truck purchased by the city had arrived in January, but was not immediately accepted because the couplings were the wrong size. They were removed and replaced. An announcement was made to members that a complete first-aid training course had been secured through the Civil Defense Program and would be offered to members. Once all settled, the City of Vermillion paid \$21,915 to the Howe company for the new city truck. City Hall discussion included considering options for the best way to dispose of the old (1923) fire truck. Several members of the city council felt it was a museum piece. The Fire Protection Committee was to meet with the museum directors for discussion and report at the next council meeting, but no follow-up notes were located. In February, Alderman Walz reported that the VFD wished to express appreciation to Mayor Barstow and the council members for their cooperation in buying the new Howe fire truck. An open house was announced to display new equipment and the mayor and council were invited. By Feb. 6, both new trucks (city and rural) were operational for all fires and the department's "Old Betsy" could now retire.

**1965** -- In May, Joe Reedy announced that he would not be a candidate for chief in the annual election because he was busy operating his hardware store. The members elected Chief Melvin Stiegelmeier, First-Assistant Chief Annar Pettersen, Second-Assistant Chief Wilbur Weiland, and (as usual) Secretary-Treasurer Bill Radigan. In September, the city council opened bids for home/office fire-radio receivers and accepted the bid for 70 Plectron brand receivers for the members and one Plectron encoder for a total of \$7,674.50. By the end of the year, early discussion began of Vermillion establishing a city manager form of government, with the mayor of Yankton and USD's Dr. William O. Farber as the main advocates at a council meeting.

**1966** -- Petitions to hire a city manager were filed in February, a special election was set for March 1. Voters approved the change 512 in favor, 264 against. By April, there were five applications for the position of city manager. On June 2, the 1923 American LaFrance was again discussed and Chief Stiegelmeier was asked to see what the city would think of giving the truck to the fire department. A fire at Prairie Center School in July caused \$10,500 damage to the building and a loss of contents valued at \$2,600.

**1967** -- By May, City Manager Mike Miller asked for council advice on the 1923 American LaFrance fire truck. Ideas included placing it in the park. No action was taken. By June, Truck Committee Chair Tom Chaney recommended that "we inform the city that we would like to have the truck." The chief agreed to inform the city manager. At the June 19 meeting of the city council, a motion was approved, having been made by Alderman Iverson, seconded by Alderman Forred, "that the Fire Department be granted permission to restore the old fire truck at their discretion." In July, after further visits with the city manager and others at City Hall, Chief Stiegelmeier's report to his members stated, "*The old American LaFrance is now officially the property of the Fire Department, as the city gave it to us to rebuild or do as we see fit.*"

**1968** -- Chief Stiegelmeier, who was also the city superintendent of the water department, reported to firefighters of an "acute shortage" of water in city tanks. That shortage around August 1 amounted to his estimate of 285,000 gallons—at that time there were 15,000 gallons on hand instead of the usual 300,000 gallons.

**1969** -- Dean Hansen was elected to the department and would later serve 11 years as first-assistant chief. Tom Chaney reported for the truck committee that the building on Market Street had been sold and the department needed a new home to store the American LaFrance truck. Discussion also arose again on the idea of purchasing an aerial ladder truck, but no action was taken.

**1970** -- In January, the city opened bids for new equipment; a Luverne apparatus was chosen and, with added equipment, cost a total \$27,895. The chief reported that "Old Betsy" had been in the Dakota Day Parade and that work had started on the new fire-station addition at the east end of City Hall. Among new members elected were Terry Hughes and Tom Sorensen, who were "initiated" the following February along with Steve Radigan, George Hendricks and Don Seiler. "All of them survived," according to Bill Radigan's minutes.

**1971** -- Remodeling was completed on the addition to the fire station and trucks were eventually moved in, two per stall, by April. Applications were received and later approved for Douglas Brunick, Harold Kephart, Bill Mount, Robert Frank, Ron Neuman and Tom Brunick. Chief Stiegelmeier's annual report indicated 87 fires in the year; 50 city, 37 rural; 642 man-hours; and 819 miles traveled using 280 gallons of fuel.

**1972** -- April 21, an all-night effort went into fighting a fire at the CO-ED Theatre, which at the time feature a balcony in addition to the main-floor seating. The restrooms, a small lobby, and the business office were also located in the upper level. Loss was estimated at \$42,000. On June 9, heavy thunderstorms in the Black Hills swelled the creeks and, according to the National Weather Service, the Rapid Creek gauge above Canyon Lake between 9:15 p.m. and 11:15 p.m. indicated the water rose 12 feet in two hours. The dam failed at 10:45 p.m. and the devastation killed 238 people and injured more than 3,000. Tom Sanborn was elected to the fire department and would later become ambulance director.

**1973** -- At various meetings this year, others welcomed into the department included Todd Brevik, Steve Williams, Ron Hansen, Bernard Glasford, Jerry Culp and Wayne Leibel. The VFD hosted the southeast regional fire school in April and 140 firefighters attended. A "CM2" truck provided by Clay County arrived for preparation to put into service. This was a converted 2 ½-ton surplus army truck that would be useful for fighting fires. Larry Mart, Lawrence Burrell and Bill Radigan met with the city manager seeking more financial support from the city. The department also participated in a simulated major disaster drill in mid-October. A recommendation took hold to add a rescue squad for Vermillion and Clay County.

**1974** -- The chief contacted the local Civil Defense office about a larger pump for the CM2 truck. The rescue squad completed its first formal training session. The chief announced that the "Ladies Auxiliary" asked to clean up the kitchen and put up curtains in the clubroom, if there were no objections. There were none. In August, Chief Stiegelmeier announced that the bridge was out on the east end of Timber Road near Holmes Welding and fire trucks heading straight west of town needed to use Chandler Hill and Dawson Bridge to get over to Timber Road.

**1975** -- Members agreed with a plan that a pumper accompany the rescue squad to all calls involving an auto or truck. The chief asked that two trucks stand by at the airport for the July 4<sup>th</sup> Fly-In Breakfast, and that one be present at the fireworks display at the USD's Inman Field.

**1976** -- This U.S. bicentennial year, a group of men met and formed a "bridge building committee" to continue efforts to establish a bridge over the Missouri River to Nebraska. Groundbreaking for the \$7 million Dakota Dome was announced for June 12. Don Forseth was elected to the department.

**1977** -- A September fire in the 900 block of E. Clark caused an estimated loss of \$10,750. The renter occupying the building was not injured. A letter from Wayne Thompson, Vermillion Public Schools, thanked the department for its program during Fire Prevention Week in October.

**1978** -- Steve Reedy announced he had completed a telephone-call list for emergency use when the regular alarm system might be out. In February, Steve Reedy, Don Forseth and Tom Fairbanks were the first members to complete the course and become certified fire service instructors. The first classes were taught by Forseth.

**1979** -- A fire in February on Sharpe St. apparently resulted when an aerosol can near a hot-water heater had ruptured. On March 7, a major fire at the Sioux Alfalfa Plant west of Meckling injured three firefighters, one severely, and all were hospitalized. Bob Frank, Doug Ashmore, and Rick Steenholdt all survived. Donations came in from the Yankton Fire Department and the alfalfa plant. A house fire at the end of May resulted in a total loss of \$42,699. Vermillion hosted the annual SD State Fire School in early June. Also this year, a fire in a farm silo on Timber Road caused \$60,000 in damages. The VFD purchased 200 stickers for windows in the "Tot Window Sticker" program.

**1980** -- Loss to a rental house on Prospect St. was put at \$11,000, with no value estimate on lost contents. Steve Reedy, Joe's son, was elected chief in May after Mel Stiegelmeier had served 16 years as chief (and 34 years with the department). Bruce Brunick was elected first-assistant chief; Doug Brunick, second-assistant chief; and, Bill Radigan, secretary-treasurer.

**1981** -- A house fire on Lee St. caused \$25,000 in damage.

**1982** -- A fire on New Year's Day at the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity house at Main and University Streets caused damage estimated at about \$300,000. This was the first fire at which the new aerial ladder truck was put to work. In May, plaques honoring firefighters for 25 years of service each were presented to Lowell Bast, Lawrence Burrell, Duane Brunick and Tom Chaney. A plaque honoring Melvin Stiegelmeier was presented in dedicating the new truck "Aerial 1" and prominently mounted on the ladder truck. At a pivotal meeting, an announcement informed members that the Fire Services Committee and city council would meet July 13 to take up the matter of having the city hire and pay the fire chief. Steve Reedy had announced his resignation to take a position outside Vermillion, but would serve until the next meeting when an election would be held. Two weeks after the announcement, the Fire Services Committee proposed a resolution that the fire chief be hired and paid by the City of Vermillion, beginning with the 1982 budget revision of the city. In August, a call for nominations was made at the next meeting and firemen elected Doug Brunick chief. This was also the year Rollie Isaacson had applied and was elected to the department. On Dec. 27, a fire caused between \$200,000 and \$250,000 in damages at the Electro-Magic plant, which manufactured steam cleaners and pressure washers, and according to a report, made space heaters for use at the Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, NY. Heavy snow had collapsed the roof of the plant, rupturing a gas line and breaking power lines, which shorted and ignited the fire.

**1983** -- In January, a special meeting was held to inform members that the city has agreed to hire a full-time fire chief. Chief Doug Brunick resigned so others who may be interested could become candidates and then called for nominations. Brunick was the only member nominated and a unanimous ballot was cast, again approving him as chief. At his first meeting after that, Brunick announced that the Firefighter 1 course would begin in February and training for members would be increasing.

**1984** -- A letter of thanks was sent to USD Athletic Director Jack Doyle for providing each firefighter a user card so they could "keep fit" at the Dakota Dome. In July, Joel Anglin, David Anglin and Tim Hannahs were elected. An announcement advised that permits were needed for the use of blue lights in firefighters' cars and pickups. Bids were awarded for purchase of a four-wheel-drive truck to be remodeled by Smeal Fire Equipment Co.

**1985** -- Discussion was completed on a change in the siren alarms for tornado and other qualifying weather warnings, including omitting the second, "all-clear" signal. Elected to the VFD were Greg Sammelson, Allan Ouelette, Greg Davis, Tom Harnois, and Richard Steenholdt.

**1986** -- A chimney fire at a house on Norbeck caused losses totaling \$60,000. A gas leak was reported at N. Plum & National Streets after a car had hit a house. No injuries or explosions were reported. Department volunteers again assisted with activities and events at the Clay County Fair and 4-H Achievement Days. John Walker and Doug Simmons were elected. Yaggie Mills in Yankton sent a letter of thanks for help with fighting a fire at their business on Nov. 12, and provided the meeting lunch for the members.

**1987** -- A February farm fire five miles north of town caused a loss of \$30,000 to a storage shed and its contents. On March 1, a fire downtown at Austin and Kidder destroyed Tom & Buds Super Valu grocery store. The monetary loss was estimated at \$1.4 million. In August, the chief appointed a committee to work on plans to house the old American LaFrance truck. Members were Allan Jones, Don Forseth, Dean Turner, Tom Sorensen, and Bill Radigan. The group recommended that a garage or storage building be constructed, if the city approved the location, at the City Service Center compound. The 16-by-28-foot building would cost an estimated \$2,080. In December, plans for the construction were put on hold until spring.

**1988** -- A special meeting in March proposed purchase of land for a parking lot across National Street from the station for parking fire and ambulance personnel answering calls. A motion was approved that if it became necessary, the VFD ask the city to purchase the land and appropriate \$10,000 toward development of the lot. Plans were completed in May. Firefighters volunteered the labor to get the job done. Richard Walker and Monty Munkvold were elected and presented their speeches. New 1 3/4-inch nozzles were demonstrated; they replaced the 1 1/2-inch hoses.

**1989** -- A particularly hot fire was fought in February at H & J Hay Co. five miles west of Meckling. The chief's report estimated the loss at \$150,000. A trailer house burned north of town near I-29 with an estimated loss of \$15,000. The department began exploring purchasing a personnel carrier with seat belts. The May and June meetings were combined. Bradley Waage was elected. South Dakota firefighter license plates became available. Construction was completed by November to store the 1923 antique fire truck on the city lot. Vermillion EMTs and several firefighters were called and volunteered to the Sioux City airfield on July 19 for the crash-landing of Flight 232, a DC-10.

**1990** -- Two fatal fires occurred, one which also resulted in injuries to a firefighter. On May 24, an eight-year old second-grader was home alone just after 2 a.m. and died in the smoke and fire in a trailer home in northeast Vermillion. And, a firefighter was seriously injured at the scene; another suffered a hand laceration. A fire near S.D. Highway 50 and Interstate 29 at a home and business resulted in the death of a 72-year-old resident, who died of smoke inhalation, according to the Union County coroner.

**1991** -- A fire on Aug. 19 at Landlock Marine was apparently caused when paint thinner had been knocked over. Damages were estimated at \$75,000.

**1992** -- More calls came for committee meetings to discuss refurbishing the antique truck, but no immediate action took place.

**1993** -- The department obtained its first defibrillator. At the annual meeting in May, Clarence "Gunner" Voudry was recognized for his 25 years of service. The members elected Doug Brunick chief, Chuck Taggart, first-assistant chief, Brian Waage, second-assistant chief, and Bill Radigan, secretary-treasurer. After thorough discussion in July, it was agreed to reduce the maximum number of members from 70 to 55. Fire calls included a revisit to the Pardee Laboratory (chemistry) building, where the loss was estimated at \$20,000. Most of the building was saved and there was consensus that the fire crews did a good job.

**1994** -- In January, Chief Brunick was making arrangements for members to begin receiving a series of Hepatitis-B shots as precautions, especially for members of the Rescue Squad. A Clay County Emergency Plan was completed and meetings began to study an Enhanced 9-1-1 system. It was determined that the "jaws of life" needed replacement. The \$3,000 cost of new equipment was split three ways among the Rescue Squad Association, the City of Vermillion, and Clay County.

**1998** -- As July arrived, the VFD again made arrangements to help purchase, set up, and light the fireworks for the community's Independence Day Celebration. The smoke house was set up in September at elementary schools the week ahead of the annual Fire Department Open House. The **Plain Talk** reported that members of the Vermillion Fire Department "traded their reflective, protective firefighting clothing for coveralls, and their axes for hammers Tuesday, Nov. 17, as they descended on the Wanda and Tim Hannahs' home in Vermillion." The volunteers pitched in to help build a 990-square-foot addition to accommodate the needs of Wanda, who remained a patient at a Sioux Falls hospital following a September traffic crash that nearly killed her. Tim Hannahs had become a member of the fire department in 1984.

**1999** -- On July 7, the chief announced that the land had been purchased for the new Fire/EMS station at Duke and Dakota Streets. Next, architects would be hired.

**2000** -- Those who may have been concerned over "Y2K" chaos and societal undoing were reassured by Ben Taylor, Clay County Emergency Services director, in a **Plain Talk** article that he had "taken potential problems seriously and he is confident that come the new year," Clay County and the City of Vermillion will have no problems. "We're ready," Taylor said. "As far as everything goes, we're all set for it." As defined by the newspaper, Y2K was a potential computer problem resulting from the changing of the dates from the year 1999 to 2000. Clay County was among 50 of the state's 66 counties and several large cities that took part in a Y2K emergency test of services late in 1999. All showed they are ready for any problems that may occur.

Bids on constructing the new fire station were to go to the city council on June 5, and by September, work was underway and "moving well" on the new building. Five specially-trained Vermillion firefighters headed to the Black Hills for the "Jasper Fire."

**2001** -- The minutes of the March meeting were not immediately found due to the death of William J. Radigan on March 27. He had served on the department for 55 years, 47 as secretary-treasurer, one as second-assistant chief, and as Vermillion's mayor. Station 1 at Dakota and Duke Streets was named in Bill's honor. The VFD provided mutual aid to the Elk Point Fire Department at a fire in Spink where a two-month old infant died in the fire. Work on the new fire station was progressing. The chief and several other members traveled to Newcastle, Nebraska, to attend a district fire school. The chief advised that Vermillion and Newcastle would enter into a mutual-aid agreement once the bridge over the Missouri River is finished. By November 10, the bridge was dedicated and officially opened, according to a report in the **Plain Talk**.

On September 11, fire departments across the U.S. took notice of the Fire Department of New York losing 343 firefighters in the attack on the World Trade Center. Also killed were 60 NYC police officers and eight paramedics. Another attack occurred on the Pentagon and a third plane was crashed in Pennsylvania killing all aboard. Some firefighters who had worked in the fumes, rubble, and dust in New York City later became ill and died.

**2002** -- By January, visitors to the new station came from Gayville, Wakonda, Yankton and Elk Point in South Dakota, and from Newcastle, Ponca and Wynot in Nebraska. Basin Electric donated \$500 to the Clay County Rescue Association.

**2003** -- In December, the **Plain Talk** reported Vermillion Fire Department receipt of a \$15,881 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant announced by South Dakota U.S. Senator Tim Johnson. The grant was part of the 2003 Assistance to Firefighters Grant program to be used in a safety and operations program for training, wellness and fitness, firefighting equipment, personal-protective equipment (PPE), and modifications to fire stations and facilities.

**2004** -- Terry Bernard retired from active membership after 30 years. On Dec. 1, a motion was approved to proceed with plans for a new training tower. Thermal cameras were added to Engine 1 and Engine 3.

**2005** -- On March 2, an announcement was made that a gift of \$50,000 was given to the department towards purchase of the new training tower by Ivan Pierce, the son of a former chief. Also, four children, ages 4 to 17, died in a house fire on a Clay County acreage near Wakonda. All had died of smoke inhalation, according to the Clay County Sheriff's Office.

**2006** -- "Van" Pierce, who saw a need to build a training tower, also purchased and had installed (by March 1) a new set of bleachers at the Ivan Pierce Training Tower site. Volunteer construction work began in earnest, mostly on Saturdays, at the site. Summer was very dry and Clay County imposed a burn ban "until conditions improve."

**2008** -- The Vermillion City Council scheduled a meeting July 21 to consider a request from the fire department to construct a garage on city-owned property to add storage space.

**2009** -- The fire department joined the annual effort of the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) for the "Fill the Boot" event in October, according to the **Plain Talk**. The firefighters volunteered to walk the Dakota Day Parade with their boots, deep enough to hold generous donations along the route. The proceeds were used to benefit research and local services for the South Dakota Chapter of the Muscular Dystrophy Association

**2010** -- In April, the **Plain Talk** reported that members of the Vermillion Fire Department were hampered by strong, gusting winds as they worked to contain a residential fire at the corner of National and High Streets. The house's owner and landlord said the two renters were able to get out of the building and were not injured.

**2011** -- A fire of suspicious origin, according to police and as reported by the **Plain Talk**, which said the officers were “seeking regarding arson.” The fire was on Main Street at Recuerdos Mexican Restaurant. Police offered a \$500 reward to help catch and arrest whomever had entered the business just before 3 a.m. and started the fire. Apparently video footage was also being used in the investigation.

**2012** -- Firefighters from Vermillion, Volin, and Gayville had their hands full during a very windy September afternoon at a grass fire five miles west of Vermillion that, according to the **Plain Talk**, spread to a windbreak and threatened a rural home. The residence was saved, but about 10 acres had burned. Vermillion firefighters had just finished assisting at a fire in the Elk Point area and that day put in about 12 hours of work. In December, the newspaper reported that an emergency was declared to make it easier for the city to replace some fire department gear that was damaged in the fire at the Vermillion Landfill in November. An abundance of oil was floating on the water at the site contaminated hoses, gloves, boots, bunker pants and coats. It was estimated to take about three weeks’ time to replace the personal protective equipment/clothing. The city replaced the damaged gear at a cost of more than \$36,000. According to the **Plain Talk**, a proclamation of appreciation was read thanking fire department personnel from Wakonda, Gayville, and Volin for their assistance to the Vermillion Fire Department, and “for the dedication, bravery and hard work demonstrated by the volunteer firefighters who responded to the fire.”

**2013** -- “Knox-Boxes” began appearing on Vermillion city buildings and some businesses and were now available for residential use, according to the newspaper reports. Two residential Knox Boxes were donated to the Vermillion Fire Department by the Lions Club at the request of the police chief, also a Lions Club member. Knox-Boxes are keyless, rapid-entry systems that allow firefighters to enter a building during an emergency without causing damage to it. The keys are stored inside the boxes and accessed by emergency responders via a code they receive.

A February first fire at Midwest Ag on East Cherry Street caused damage estimated at \$50,000. According to a report in the **Plain Talk**, motorists driving past the business about 8:40 p.m. reported smoke and fire coming from the building. Assistance was provided by the Yankton Fire Department.

**2014** -- **The Plain Talk** broke the news that the Vermillion Fire Department received word by the Insurance Service Office (ISO) that the community’s fire-protection rating was improving “to a Class 3 in the City and a 3Y for our rural community.” The VFD had held a Class 5 rating for nearly 15 years but improved to a Class 3 department effective Aug. 1. “According to information from ISO, of the 45,250 fire departments across the country, less than 3,000 obtain a rating of Class 3 rating or better. That is less than 8 percent of the departments in our nation with this rating. With this new rating, the Vermillion Fire Department becomes only the ninth department in the state of South Dakota to achieve a Class 3 rating.” Insurance companies use the fire protection ratings to determine homeowners and business insurance premiums. ISO evaluates fire department equipment, station locations, training, fire prevention efforts, the community water system, 911 systems and many other factors to assign a protection rating.

**2016** -- In April, what the **Plain Talk** called a “somber event meant to teach our students the impact drinking and driving can have” was the focus of an article summing up Vermillion High School’s “Operation Prom Night” – a mock traffic crash staged on Main Street outside the school building. “The event played out as if it were an actual accident scene,” the newspaper reported. “First responders called in the accident and the Vermillion Fire Department, Vermillion EMS, Clay County Sheriffs, Vermillion Police Department, the South Dakota Highway Patrol, Sanford Helicopter, Clay County coroner and a funeral home hearse were all involved at one point or another.” *Old Betsy* is moved to the W.H. Over Museum.

**2017** -- On Jan. 18, the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary by calling on the community to donate to the local blood bank. The city also announced the hiring of Matthew Callahan as Vermillion’s new fire chief, only the third paid chief on the historic roster. On Jan. 23, the fire department won the “Heroes Behind the Badge” annual competition and a record number of units were collected. Also this year, according to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, on Feb. 9 U.S. Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ) and U.S. Representative Chris Collins (R-NY) announced the introduction of the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act with 76 bipartisan supporters. Creation of the registry could enable researchers to study the relationship between firefighters’ exposure to dangerous fumes and harmful toxins and the increased risk for several major cancers. 🌀



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author of this supplement to the fire department's history is indebted to and most grateful for the assistance of all who contributed in some way to its research and other preparation, including insights, records, photos and data, often in response to frequent requests. A special thanks to my "handler" and spouse, Mary.

To my editors I owe a great deal of thanks and I truly am grateful for their help to an old radio newsman and journalist in compiling a work that preserves many (not all) of the events and activities of the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department. The editors include Judith Zwolak and Evelyn Schlenker, with advice and support also from a friend and retired English professor, Suzanne Radigan, whose father, uncle and several brothers served on the Vermillion Fire Department. Notably among the many helpful VFD officers were Secretary/Treasurer Kellen Cusick and Chiefs Matthew Callahan and Richard "Shannon" Draper, and Captain Matthew Taggart, who graciously allowed the use of a large and

piled-high work table in his office at the William J. Radigan Fire/EMS Station 1. Vermillion City Finance Manager/Auditor Mike Carlson and his staff, City Manager John Prescott, and Secretaries Marty Washington and Jennifer Olson also assisted in providing city records for use in this publication. Hearty thanks goes to the colleagues and friends who serve or have ever served on the Vermillion Volunteer Fire Department. In particular were Doug Brunick, Robert Frank, Mike Chaney, Clyde Watts, both Joe and Steve Reedy, Jody Johnson, Bob Brown, Dean Hansen, Larry Mart, Annar Pettersen and others also contributed to this endeavor. Distinct thanks also to the Friends of the W.H. Over Museum, the Clay County Historical Society and Wess Pravecek at the Austin-Whittemore House, and to the Clay County Historic Preservation Commission for making this project possible. Finally, thanks for the support, encouragement, advice and patience from the members of the Vermillion Fire-EMS Department. ❖

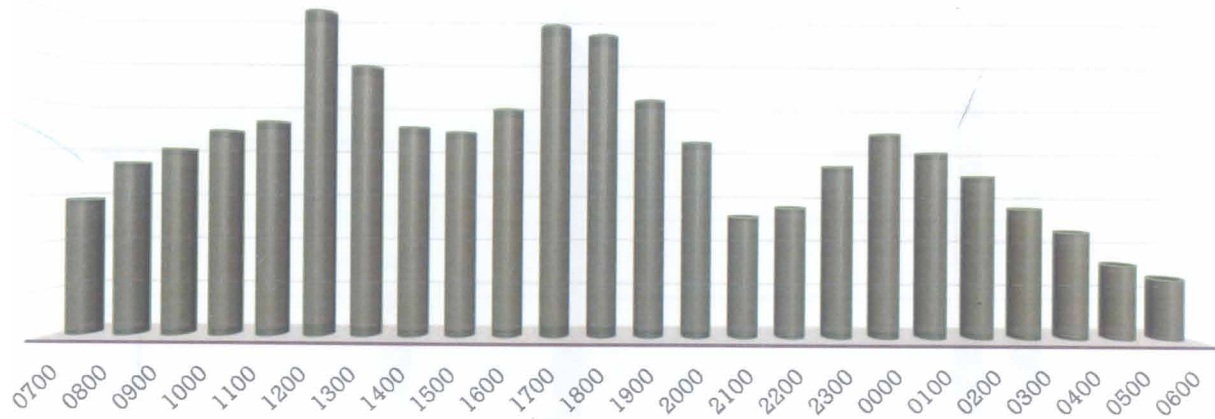


*Sorensen*

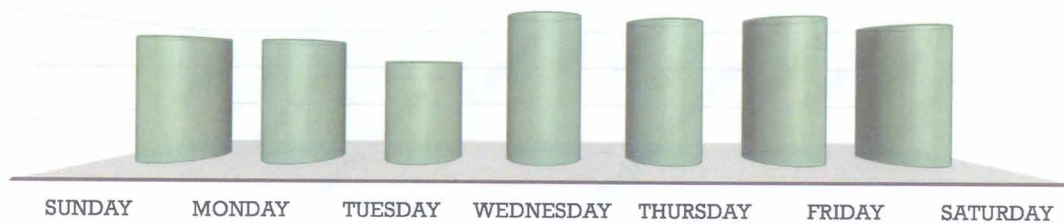
Matthew Callahan (L) became chief in January 2017, the VFD 125th Anniversary.  
Keith Thompson (R) had served as interim chief.



## 2015 Calls by Hour



## 2015 Calls by Day of the Week



## Calls per Unit

Officers		Apparatus	
Chief 1	98	Ambulance 9A	614
Chief 2	26	Ambulance 9B	122
Chief 3	49	Ambulance 9C	184
Medic 1	150	Brush 1	23
		Engine 1	31
		Engine 2	46
		Engine 3	25
		Ladder 1	23
		Rescue 1	48
		Rescue 2	46
		Tanker 1	24
		Tanker 2	19

A page from the 2015 Chief's Annual Report.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Sorensen is a Vermillion, SD native who joined the Vermillion Fire Department in 1970 after graduating from high school. As an Army-trained medic, he also volunteered for ambulance duty in 1972. He was an active firefighter for 31 years. He had moved away for about 12 years, mostly working as KSOO Radio's news director in Sioux Falls and for The Associated Press. Upon returning to Vermillion in 1986, he was reinstated on the fire department and resumed training and active service. During his active time and beyond, Tom also served as a secretary-treasurer, trustee, and a weather spotter (first trained in 1979). He became an associate member and remains on the roster of VFD fire-service instructors certified by the South Dakota Fire Marshal's Office. Tom and Mary met at USD in the fall of 1970 and married in

August a year later. His last radio position was as a program host and news director at South Dakota Public Radio headquarters in Vermillion. On their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary Tom began class at USD School of Law and later served as associate dean. Tom's loving and supporting family also includes three daughters, Sarah, Rachel and Jessica, and three grandchildren, Mattea, Adison, and Serone Oliver. ♡



Thomas L. Sorensen

