

CHAPTER XXX

THE JAFFREY FIRE DEPARTMENT

Since 1930 the following men have capably discharged the duties of Chief of the Jaffrey Fire Department.

1924-1932 Perley H. Enos
1932-1933 Herbert N. Packard
1933-1941 Samuel La Freniere
1941-1962 Philip Tremblay
1962-1966 Nelson Gill
1966- Paul A. Leach

The Department was strengthened in 1954 when the Jaffrey Center Fire Company was consolidated with that based on the Emory Memorial Fire Station in Jaffrey. The first named had been formally organized in 1926 with a baker's dozen members headed by Charles Chamberlain as Captain, Carl Spofford as Clerk and Robert Bunce as Steward. The officers remained unchanged until Chamberlain resigned in 1953. He was succeeded by Robert Bunce.

The organization of the Jaffrey Center Company was occasioned by two factors. The first was the provision of greater pressure at the local fire hydrants by the completion of the Mountain Reservoir in 1925. But equally vital was the initiative of Miss Kate Fox who persuaded "her Jaffrey Center boys" to band together as fire fighters. She herself was soon made an honorary member of their Company.

Their equipment was at first merely a hand drawn hose reel. Later Robert Bunce provided a Dodge touring car which was converted into a truck carrying soda acid extinguishers and ladders and capable of towing the hose reel. Not until 1938 was a pumper provided — Engine No. 2 — a Chevrolet still in use.

The Jaffrey Center Company dealt valiantly with local fires and often joined hands with that from Jaffrey. But worthy of special note was the gala occasion of August 1952. Miss Mabelle Cutter had already passed her 80th birthday. She had long made an annual contribution to the Company's treasury and was present at the annual party given for it by the Bakers and Stevensons. Miss Mabelle was there made an honorary member, whereupon someone suggested that she be taken for a ride on the Chevrolet. The suggestion was quickly acted upon and, standing on the rear step of the truck, Miss Cutter had a wild ride through the town.

In 1958 the Jaffrey Fire Department voted to join the South-

western New Hampshire District Fire Mutual Aid System which embraces the Departments of more than two score towns. Through its headquarters in Keene their resources are made available for one another's use in case of need, including stand-by service at a local station when its trucks are out in action. The unusual facilities of the Meadowood Training Center were made use of at about the same time to give the Department greater skills in fighting all variety of fires.

The Department steadily improved its equipment. A Ford truck — Engine No. 3 — was acquired in 1953. The following year Engine No. 2 was placed in the Fire Station at low cost since the Department purchased an Army cab and chassis, and, with its own labor, rebuilt its body and shifted the booster tank and front end pump to it from old Engine No. 2. In 1964 a very modern Ford pumper — Engine No. 5 — was added together with a deluge gun, and a year later a trailer pump, useful in forest fire fighting, was made from the engine of an old car. It was almost immediately followed by a 2000 gallon tanker whose chassis was procured from the State Forestry Department. The Jaffrey firemen themselves made the tank and added the pump and other equipment.

In 1969 the Department gained national notice when it was among those who pioneered in the use of large diameter, rubber lined, all synthetic hose thanks to the cooperation of the Town's Water Department. Its light weight permits rapid laying and recovery, but it is invaluable because it allows the delivery of a greatly increased gallonage of water at high pressure to a ready pumper or directly to nozzles. Thanks to the ingenuity of Chief Leach a power driven reel capable of carrying 2000 feet of this hose was mounted on Engine No. 2 in 1969. Finally, construction of a new Fire Station on the Mountain Road in Jaffrey Center was begun in 1968 and finished in the following year. Once again, much of the labor was contributed by the firemen.

The Department kept abreast of the times in the matter of accessories. Its trucks now carry inhalators and saws of varied types for rescue work, air packs which enable firemen to work in smoke filled rooms, auxiliary generators to drive exhaust fans and furnish power for lights, together with portable pumps of special value in forest fires.

Communications are of the utmost value to the Department in making possible speedy response to an alarm. In 1958 a Fire Alarm System was provided. Radios were placed in the trucks and sup-

ported by portables. Monitors were set up in the major factories and in the homes of many firemen which picked up the whistle alarm and spread the news. The whistle was also tied in with the Mutual Aid Center in Keene to give information to the member departments.

So long as wood was used as a fuel for stoves and furnaces chimney fires were of frequent occurrence. The extreme instance was in 1935 when 64 out of 79 fires were of this nature. The number fell off as oil replaced wood as fuel.

Major fires in the past four decades can be quickly listed, each of a devastating character. The old Halfway House burned to the ground in 1954; in 1965 lightning was responsible for the fire in the Monadnock Academy for Girls; great damage was done to the Match Factory in 1966; and in the same year the vulnerable Annett Lumber Co. was a total loss. However, the great conflagration was the forest fire which broke out on the eastern slope of Monadnock on the morning of October 19, 1953 and raged for nearly a week. The season had been unusually dry and winds carried burning leaves far and wide. With fires high up on the mountain the provision of water was difficult. But the problem was met by Keene's trailer pump which forced water from the reservoir up through 2500 feet of 2½-inch hose to Jaffrey's Engine No. 2. This pumped the water up into Falcon Springs whence Dublin's pumps pushed it further into barrels where firemen could fill their portable pumps. The fighters worked for the first 48 hours without rest. Those from the towns already mentioned were supplemented by others from Fitzwilliam, Harrisville, Roxbury, Swanzey, Troy, Marlboro, Hinsdale, Winchester, Richmond, Marlow, and Milford. Volunteers were recruited from the Conant High School and elsewhere, and the efforts all were supported by the constant labors of the Jaffrey Department's Ladies Auxiliary and its reinforcements. These ladies brewed countless gallons of coffee and provided sandwiches and doughnuts to sustain the men.

The Jaffrey Department is provided with modern equipment. It is alerted by excellent communications. It is supported by its fellow members of the Mutual Aid System. Its volunteer members possess the requisite skills for fire fighting. It has effective leadership and is endowed with high morale. It stands ready to afford the Town all possible protection against the ravages of fire.

—Robert H. George



FIRE ON MOUNT MONADNOCK — 1954