

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 481

Brighton, MI 48116-0481

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Our current exhibit at the CoBACH Center, located on Main Street in Brighton next to the Millpond is entitled, "Brighton Fire Department." This is an extensive display of the role the fire department has had in Brighton which continues to this day. The display runs September through November. We hope you will visit the CoBACH Center and see the history of Brighton's Fire Department.

Brighton's Altruistic Fire Department

Brighton Village was incorporated March 25, 1867. Fire wardens were appointed to the "...stern and unrelenting supervision of all heating facilities in the homes and business places ...". In the absence of an organized fire department and fire equipment, they were the only protection against the fearful enemy, fire.

May 19, 1868, the village council authorized the purchase of hooks and ladders. This equipment was carried by hand when and where needed. Just how the need for this protection was broadcast is not recorded. Nor was there a storage facility for these hooks and ladders. Ned Seger, local historian, in 1944 surmises the men of the department utilized various places in town. He mentions one, the Bierworth Building, located just east of George B. Ratz' Blacksmith Shop on West Main (across from the mill pond).

May 3, 1872, the village Council ordered the purchase of five fire extinguishers from the Babcock Fire Extinguisher Company. The destruction by fire of the home of the village clerk April 8, 1873, and two years later that of Godfrey Westphall's Hardware Store at 202 W. Main, October 28, 1875, piqued the need for a better means of fighting a fire. A month later an aye vote authorized the purchase of a hook and ladder apparatus for no more than \$975. January 20, 1876, Babcock Manufacturing Co., Chicago was given the contract to supply a truck equipped with hooks, ladders, eight patent fire extinguishers (four on each side) and buckets. James Thomson was elected keeper of the chemicals. An extra 26-foot ladder was included. It is recorded this truck and its appurtenances was hand drawn and made "...a very snappy outfit".

At the next council meeting, President Benjamin Howard Lawson was ordered to appoint nine men to the hook and ladder company, to be responsible for the equipment. They enrolled Gilbert Abrams, Lyman

W. Birge, George Carpenter, Samuel H. Conely (foreman), Clinton Dewit, A. Giles, Robert Jolly, William W. Lewis (assistant foreman), Richard J. Lyons (secretary) William Mann, George Ratz, A.A. Reed, August Schmidt, George G. Smith, H. Soule, William Sutherland, G.W. Sweet, Ira Thomson and James Van Loon.

The village now has its first fire department, all volunteers. A month later, May 20, these appointees requested exemption from poll taxes as compensation. This practice probably continued for many years.

A uniform was adopted, which consisted of a black silk cap, red shirt, and patent leather belts. On July 4, 1876, the company marched in its first public parade in its new uniform. (Each Independence Day since, the Brighton Fire Department has participated.) The ladies contributed flowers and other decorations to complete the regal appearance. (Today the Brighton Fire Department still parades in the same classy style.)

Not until the town hall was built, 1879, was there storage space for the various fire fighting equipment and uniforms. Two outward opening doors on the first floor allowed for quick response to an emergency. A jail was across the back of the building; the council met on the second floor.

(This is a reprint of a story previously published in Trail Tales and was compiled by Marieanna Bair from press clippings; 1880 History of Livingston County and Ned Seger's History of the Fire Department.)

