

# HISTORY OF THE WAUSEON FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Wauseon Fire Department was first organized in January 1862 as the “Private Fire Company”. Fifty dollars of village funds were appropriated to build a “Fire Engine House” to serve the needs of approximately 400 citizens that lived in the village of Wauseon at the time. Another \$10 was given to Milo Portor for 100 feet of fire ladder. It was during this era that a hand pumper was purchased from the City Of Toledo and today this same pumper is completely restored and on display at the Toledo Fire Department Museum in Toledo, Ohio.

A hose cart was obtained followed by a ladder wagon, likewise pulled by hand. The source of water for the hand pumper was a series of large cisterns located along Fulton Street. For areas out of reach of the cisterns, private cisterns and open wells were used. A bucket brigade was established which involved private citizens in the battle against the flames.



**T**he first fire engine was purchased in 1863. The fire engine's first "siren" was a trumpet donated by the "Phoenix Insurance Company". The fire engine was first used at a fire on Thursday, April 30, 1863 at about 2 p.m. in a dwelling house of B.S. Waldron, which was approximately 100 rods from the engine house. The engine and company were on hand soon after the fire was discovered, but on account of the scarcity of water did but little execution. The company afterwards took the engine to the reservoir and "worked it successfully".

**I**n May 1863, the company voted to uniform themselves as a fire-fighting unit. By 1864, Wauseon was growing considerably in population as well as the business section of town and the many proprietors expressed the need for a more capable fire fighting team. In January 1874 the "**Wauseon Volunteer Fire Department**" was established and the "Private Fire Company" was disbanded. In 1875, the second fire engine was purchased. Both the new fire engine and the original engine were useful additions to putting out the many fires that wood and coal-burning furnaces and stoves caused during the cold winters in Northwestern Ohio.

**W**ith the installation of the Wauseon water system and the invention of the automobile, the way was paved to purchase a motorized fire truck in 1916, a "Seagrave" pumper was purchased,

which is currently being restored by department members and is currently on display in the Wauseon Fire Dept.



**I**n the late 1920's, the Clinton Township Trustees first organized the need for rural fire protection. As a result, in conjunction with the Wauseon Fire Department and Village Council, a chemical truck was purchased. The township trustees delegated the Wauseon Fire Department to man the truck, which was housed at the Wauseon Fire Station located at Clinton and Depot Street. This was one of the first efforts of rural fire fighting protection in the State of Ohio.

**I**n the late 1930's the need for rescue squad service was foreseen by the various Fulton County Fire Departments. The first squad was purchased from funds raised by the "**Wauseon Fire Department's Annual Feather Party**". Since the 1930's, equipment has been purchased with money from this annual fundraiser with special equipment being donated by various organizations throughout the years.

**N**o records are available as to who was the first Wauseon fire chief, but records from the early 1900's indicate that Frank Becker was chief, followed in order by Silas Overmeyer, George Geer, Roscoe Raker, Albert Gype, Harold Robinson, Eugene Gorsuch, Howard Schlosser, Robert Barnes, James Gamber, Marvin Wheeler and current chief, Rick Sluder.

**N**umerous members of the Wauseon Fire Dept. have served as officers of the Northwestern Ohio Volunteer Firemen's Association throughout the years, including four who have served as president. S.B. Overmeyer - 1924-1925, Robert Barnes - 1982-1983, James Gamber - 1994-1995 and Fred Allen - 2002-2003.

**T**oday the department's vehicles include two EMS units (purchased by Fulton County EMS), 100' aerial tower," Humvee" brush truck, Rescue-Engine which carries the "Jaws-of Life", two engines, 3000 gal. tanker and equipment pick-up truck

**M**ajor challenges facing the fire department volunteers have included:

- In 1960, the Wauseon Elementary and Junior High School explosion on Clinton Street occurred, which is where the current fire department is located.
- A fire in Hammontree's Appliance Store threatened the Wauseon downtown district in 1966 drew assistance from four other fire departments.
- Head-on train collision in 1976 where four trainmen were killed instantly.

- The 1977 Tedrow Storage Building and Body Shop fire drew five other departments to assist Wauseon. One 1,500 gallon tanker made 23 trips to re-fill from a fire hydrant.
- The 1980 fire destroyed the “Pet Milk Company” building resulting in a loss of over \$1.3 million, one of the largest fires in Wauseon history.
- Another large fire, which occurred in Wauseon, was located at the ”Winnor Canning Company in 1982 causing over \$1.1 million dollars in damage.
- May 1990, 5,000 sq. ft. Ohio Cellular Products warehouse was destroyed by fire.
- Wauseon Silo Co. manufacturing building was destroyed by fire in 1993.
- 2002 - Historic downtown Arcade fire - two people perished in this fire.
- 2005 - Historic three story downtown Hotel Blair was destroyed by fire.
- 2005 - Downtown second floor apartment was consumed by fire - fought in minus 15 degree weather.
- Largest fire in Wauseon history occurred on April 14, 2007 – Downtown fire consumed half a city block. Two separate water shuttle operations were set-up due to drainage of the cities water towers with over 3M gal. of water used. 1.7 miles of 5” hose was laid and over 300 firefighters and 28 fire departments spent over 18 hr. to extinguish this fire. Seven businesses were destroyed with a \$7.7m loss as well as 100 year-old historic buildings.
- March 28, 2010 – A fire consumed the manufacturing building of the Northwestern Ohio Foam Packaging Inc. located on Shoop Ave., which was also the site of the devastating fire that destroyed the “Pet Milk Co.” in 1980. Seven fire departments assisted Wauseon with this fire.

**I**n 1995, a major building project was undertaken to remodel the existing fire hall. Demolishing an existing building addition allowed a 10,000 sq. ft. building addition to be added to the south end of the building. While undergoing renovations, the fire department temporary moved into the vacant “Miller Ford” dealership located on Shoop Ave. for over 14 months and in December of 1996 the members of the Wauseon Fire Dept. proudly moved into our current facilities.



**O**ne of the more unusual projects that the Wauseon Fire Dept. was involved in was the 1974 “pot party”. The department was asked to burn an old house in town to make room for a new factory. The county sheriff saw the controlled fire as a good way to dispose of about \$5000 worth of confiscated drugs and illegal fireworks.

**W**auseon Firefighter’s are also proud to have built a state-of-the-art fire training facility which is located adjacent to the City of Wauseon Water Treatment plant located on County Road C. Over \$100,000 was invested into this training facility by the Wauseon Fireman’s Association. Numerous Fulton County fire departments also utilize the fire training facility to enhance their experience of live-burn training.



The training of firefighters has evolved over the years from merely learning from experience on the job to today's firefighters constantly undergoing rigorous State of Ohio required refresher training in firefighting techniques & EMS.

