

History of the Laconia Fire Department

The town of Laconia and its villages, Lakeport, and Weirs were filled with buildings built primarily from wood. Even buildings that had brick exterior walls had wood floors, partitions and roofs. Laconia was a city destined to burn, especially when the terrain is added to the situation. The hills surrounding the City created downdrafts and the open areas of the lakes allowed constant breezes to blow across the City. The sloped terrain also allowed houses to be stacked over each other which allowed fires to spread even quicker. The circumstances have not changed all that much.

Laconia became a town in 1855 and a city in 1893. Originally it was part of Meredith and Gilmanton. The downtown area was known as Meredith Bridge. North Weirs was originally part of Meredith. South Weirs was part of Gilmanton, then after 1812 part of Gilford.

Lakeport, prior to 1892 was known as Lake Village, and in 1893 became part of Laconia, was home to many factories, lumberyards, rail yards, and ship builders. All the homes were built of wood and were centered near the factories. It was built to burn and it did in 1903.

The City had fire hydrants, reservoirs, and a fire alarm system as far back as the mid-1800s. Steam Fire Engines had a hose carriage attached or pulled separately. Hose Company's were hose carriages with no pumps. They operated off hydrant pressure or connected to the Steamers. Chemical Wagons carried tools and equipment such as chemical extinguishers. Some of the trucks had large containers of soda acid and water, which could be mixed to create pressure and push water through small hoses. Supply Wagons carried coal for the Steamers and oats for the horses.

(1792 William Hunneman from Boston built the Fire King hand pumper; first US built pumper).

With the city's growth as an industrial center came a growing need for fire protection and early private fire brigades were set up in the city by manufactures to protect their facilities. The services of these fire brigades were made available to the public as well by the companies which had set them up. The main incentive for establishing this service was the Great Fire of 1860 which destroyed most of the property on Main Street from Mill Street to Water Street on November 21 of that year. These private fire-fighting companies were well established by the 1870's with fire houses, men in uniform and up-to-date equipment. A horse-drawn Amoskeag Steamer and its fire brigade were photographed in Laconia in 1875. In 1888, a photograph of a large fire company is notable for its two hose wagons and its hook and ladder. Upon the establishment of Laconia as a city, the City Council as one of its first acts voted to have the Weirs firehouse built and that structure was complete in 1894. In winter, equipment was placed on trains to get it as close to the fire as road conditions would allow.

1788

The first recorded fire in Lake Village at Abraham Folsom's mill.

1814

Meredith Bridge, later to become Laconia, under an act of the State legislature created the Meredith Bridge Engine Company. This Fire Company was probably destroyed in the great Fire of 1860. They did purchase a hand pumper that was filled

by bucket brigade. It was replaced by "Torrent No. 2". The 1815 hand pumper remained in service until 1855 when it was dismantled. The original station was on Mill Street near the Belknap boarding house on Mill St. It was later moved to the Gilford side of the river near where Gilford Hosiery Mills now stand. There were men assigned as Fire Wards. They carried long poles with brass hooks on the end (today's version of a pike pole. The hook was probably used to pull roofs apart or even pull down buildings to slow down a fire).

Stephen Perley was appointed a committee to go to Boston and purchase the engine. By his bill to the precinct we find that the sum of two hundred and seventy dollars was paid for the machine. Seventeen dollars was charged for hauling the "tub" to Meredith Bridge, and the precinct also paid eight dollars, one-quarter to Mr. Perley's expenses. The committee appointed to locate an engine-house reported in favor of building on the court leading to the burying-ground (on Water Street, where the engine buildings are now located. It was kept in Avery mill-yard until the building was completed.

1823

First Belknap Mill burned to the ground.

1834

An act of legislature created the Meredith Bridge Hose Company. This company was organized to operate the "force pumps" that had been put in. I believe the force pumps were located near the river and the fire hoses were then connected to these pumps. I would assume the pumps were hand operated or from water flowing over the water wheels. The system includes some water pipes and hydrants that were strategically located in the Village.

(1840 Steam engine pumpers were introduced in New York. They were not well received by volunteers. They were large, slow, and very heavy).

1845

There was fire in Lake Village at the "paper mill".

1846

Most of Meredith Bridge burned in what was considered to be one of the biggest fires in the State. The buildings would be rebuilt all predominantly of wood and history would soon repeat.

1849

Lake Village residents bought a hand tub pumper for \$800 from Hunneman Co. of Boston.

Lake Village was later named Lakeport.

The Meredith Bridge or Laconia Fire Precinct was recreated under an act of the legislature. Nathan B. Wadleigh was elected as Chief Engineer, Probably the first Fire Chief of Laconia. The Selectmen of Meredith and Gilford accepted the provision for the district and established the boundaries. This meeting was held on September 22, October 6, 1849 a hand engine had been purchased and a new engine house was built in this side of the river. It was called "new" to distinguish it from the engine house on the Gilford side of the river. This was named Torrent No. 2. The station was on water Street

1850

At a meeting of the legal voters of Meredith Bridge Fire Precinct, held at the Universality Church (on Lake Street) on Saturday, September 22, 1849, it was voted to adopt an act making further provision for the extinguishment of fires. Nathan B. Wadleigh was chosen chief engineer, with Alvah Tucker, Charles Ranlet, I.E. Brown, James S. Hoit, Charles Lane, J.F. Clough, E. Mallard, John T. Coffin,

A. Warren and T.D. Whipple, assistant engineers. The sum of one thousand dollars was voted for the purchase of a fire-engine and other necessary apparatus.

There were wide differences of opinion after the Precinct was formed as to the expediency of such a corporation, the expense being the great objection. It was voted to sell all the property and equipment of the precinct and divide the money among the tax payers in proportion to the amount of tax each had paid. The vote was reconsidered and rescinded. Judge Lovell then introduced a resolution to sell so much of the precinct property as to pay off the debt. . Another resolution was made by the Judge to repudiate and repeal the powers of the precinct by the vote of 1849. The vote passed but it appears to have been ignored. However, no Engineers were elected for that year.

1851

The annual meeting of the precinct was held and Col. James S. Hoit was elected Chief Engineer with ten assistants. The Engineers report from the previous year was placed on the table for discussion and approved. It seems the debt owed was \$86.99. (The Fire Precinct was dissolved over \$86.00; very possibly the first of many debates over the cost of fire protection for Laconia). Chief Engineer remained the Chief until 1860. There were no more meetings of the precinct until then. There was very little action taken for fire service owing to apathy of several well meaning persons.

Fire in Lake Village on December 24. The old Niagara was stationed at the Elm Street Bridge and water was pumped to Franklin Square. The fire was subdued and adjacent buildings saved.

1852

William Channing and Moses Farmer invented the municipal fire alarm system in Boston. After the Civil War John N. Gamewell bought the patent to the system.

1853

The Meredith Bridge Mutual Fire Society was organized, "for the better protection of property against fire". An article of the organization provides that "in case of fire it should be the duty of the members to assist in the protection of the property of the members in preference to that of others". It appears that the company had no equipment. (They may have been an early version of fire buffs).

1855

The town of Laconia was incorporated.

The Lake Village Engine Co. No. 1 voted to disband "owing to internal dissensions". After the disbandment the engine was run by anyone that chooses to do so.

1856

The Lake Village residents convened a meeting and new fire company was created.

1857

January 31 the railroad shops burned. The temperature was thirty degrees below zero, and the fireman suffered severely.

1860

The Great Fire of 1860 destroyed two thirds of downtown Main Street business area. The fire started on November 11, 1860 around 3 PM in the stables of Cerro Gordo Hotel (where Melnick's is today) and spread throughout downtown. At the time there was one fire engine in the village and one in Lake Village. They were soon assisted by Meredith village and Sanbornton Bridge. The spire of the Universalis Church on the Gilford side of the river, an eight of a mile away, soon ignited. Mr. Gove's new brick building, which was thought to be fire proof soon, succumbed to the flames. The area consumed by flames covered two acres. The area that burned was the scene of another huge fire in 1846. The force pumps were instrumentally in controlling the fire. Engines were put to draft and one end the river created a natural

fire break. The damage was estimated at \$150,000. Nearly every trader, of all classes, on the Laconia side of the river, is burned out; there are but two places in the whole village where most common dry goods can be purchased. The Selectmen of Meredith and Gilford called a meeting of the precinct. Col. Whipple was chosen as the new Chief Engineer. There were no additional meetings until 1866.

From 1860 to 1874 there was very little improvement in fire apparatus. It could be partly due to the Civil War. 1874 brought big changes.

1861

The Lake Village Engine Co. was renamed Niagara Engine Co. No. 1 on May 25. "The number of alarms during the thirty one years exceed 150, and the majority of them were in Laconia, rather than Lake Village. The "Tub" has a wide reputation, has always been well-manned (more than 400 men having been held membership in her company).

1865 The Civil War ends.

1866

Col. Whipple was reelected as Chief Engineer. And the first move was made to purchase a steam fire engine. A committee was established to essentially create measures to prevent and extinguish fires.

August 1866 it was reported by the Committee and voted to raise \$3,300 to buy a steam fire engine. The vote was rescinded at the next meeting. The issue was brought back to the forefront in 1875.

1869

B.M. Sanborn was elected Chief Engineer.

1871

Nathaniel Edwards was chosen as Chief Engineer. The District purchased a Steamer. (*October 8 Great Chicago Fire*)

1872

Charles A. Busiel was elected Chief Engineer. He held the post for 13 years. (*1870s Amoskeag of Manchester, NH started producing steam engines; San Francisco and Washington DC bought many Amoskeag*). (*Great Boston Fire November 9*)

1874

\$2,500 was raised to build reservoirs and purchase hose and hose carriages and \$250 more was raised the next year to continue the work.

1875

The town appropriated \$3,500 and bought an Amoskeag steam pumper with attached hose carriage. A hook and ladder was also purchased. The vote for this purchase was without opposition. June 1875 a vote of the Legislature allowed for the name of the precinct to be changed to the Laconia Fire Precinct. This would be the birth of the Laconia Fire Department.

There was the Laconia Steam Engine and Laconia Hook and Ladder and the Reliance Hose Co., which was established on May 11 and disbanded on June 4, 1896.

1876

Frank H. Champlin proposed a fire alarm telegraph system. It would connect to S.M.S. Moulton, chief engineer of the fire department, and his father's house. The bell would ring to let Chief Moulton aware of a fire. The Chief proposed that the bells be installed in all the firemen's homes. Money was raised and Mr. Champlin and Andrews manufactured the equipment and installed it in the firemen's homes. The system includes about ten miles of wire connected to forty three six inch alarm gongs. A twelve inch gong was installed on the outer wall of the Central Telephone office and it would awaken most inhabitants of Main Street and alert them of the fire.

1878

Laconia Fire Precinct annual report – There was some sort of a fire alarm system in service at this time. The Chief Engineer recommends that the town consolidate the highway precincts into one department and then the stable and horses could be provided for joint use by the fire department. C.A. Busiel was the Chief Engineer

- Laconia Steam Engine No. 1 had 20 members Reliance Hose Co. No. 1 had 20 members
- Laconia hook & Ladder No. 1 had 25 members Torrent Engine Co. No. 2 had 36 members.

The apparatus were pulled to fires by firefighters most times. There were 6 public reservoirs available for firefighting.

There was a fire in the Belknap Mill on June 14, 1877 the loss was trifling.

1879

The Lake Village Fire District annual report: C.E. Buxxell is the Chief Engineer, 4 assistant Engineers, three Foremen, five assistant Foremen, 112 active members on Niagara Engine Co. No.1 and Hose Carriage; Niagara Engine Co. No. 5; Alert Hook & ladder No. 1. The District owned five reservoirs – Main St, Elm St, Belvidere St. School St. and Mechanic St. The Department was called out 12 times this year. On February 12 Wood's Mill and W.H. Pepper's machine shop were a total loss.

1880

July 1 the Catholic Church burned. December 16 the block owned by Farrar and Gilbert burned. January 12 Thomas's machine shop burned. March 20 Mr. O'Loughlin's house burned.

The Hotel Weirs was built from sections of the Diamond Island House. Pieces were hauled over the ice to the Weirs. The New Hotel Weirs was a grand hotel in the same fashion as Mount Washington and Mountain View. There were fire sprinklers installed; it was over 4 stories tall in places and was more than two hundred feet long covering the entire area from Tower Street to the New Hampshire Regiment (see 1924)

1881

Laconia Car Co. burned to ground. The Weeks Block burned. The Opera House was built on the same spot after the fire. (Lakeport Square). There was a fire on Fairmount Street in a house owned by Mary Blaisdell. A colored family named Moodey live d in the ell. Moodey, his wife, and an infant escaped. Three children died in the fire.

1883

The Laconia and Lake Village Water Works was created by an act of the legislature.

1886

Lake Village Fire District Annual Report – J.D. Sanborn, Chief Engineer. There are 4 assistant Engineers, 4 foreman, 7 assistant, and 109 active members. Apparently there were no calls that year as none are listed. The Eureka Hook and Ladder Truck now takes the place of the Alert H & L. An additional reservoir is listed now at Depot Square. The hydrants which the town contracted for are in service and have been tested and all who witnessed the test agree they are adequate. There are now 31 hydrants in Lake Village on Main Street (which I believe is now Union Ave), Mechanic St., Clinton St., Depot St., Park St., Fore St., Moulton St., Franklin Sq., Elm St., Washington St., Belvidere St., and North St.

1890

Aquedokte Hotel on Endicott Street opened this year. It still stands today as the Smokehouse.

Story's Hotel was built this year on Lakeside Avenue. It was a large 3 ½ story wood hotel.

1892

George A Sanders was the Chief Engineer and local merchant who resided at 188 Main Street.

There were 8 alarms that year. The Department bought a hose carriage and 1,000 feet of hose for the Weirs. The Chief stated "We need at least 2 more hose carriages; 1 near Cook's Mill and 1 near Casino Square. There are 48 hydrants in service and 8 public reservoirs were in service. Last year we leased a fire alarm system from N.E. Gamewell and it has proven satisfactory. We recommend we now purchase the system (it is still in service today)".

Department Property and Equipment

Laconia Steam Fire Engine No. 1	Hose Wagon Engine No. 1
Reliance Hose carriage No.1	Hook and ladder No. 1
Supply Wagon	Torrent Engine No. 2
Steamer Hose Carriage	Torrent Hose Carriage

Article 8 each engine and hose company shall have equal claim to hydrants; but it is enjoined upon the engine companies to draught their own water from a reservoir whenever a suitable one can be found within reasonable distance.

There was a huge crowd of firemen from all over the State for the annual celebration that was held in Lakeport Square. The fireman stood in rows and the Chiefs were on horses.

1893

Laconia incorporated as a City. Chief Engineers were elected by the City Council. "There were 12 calls this year and losses added to \$25,655. We bought a new hose carriage for the south end but could not find a suitable building to house it so it is now at the central station". There was the Chief Engineer and 5 Assistant Engineers (probably 1 for each station) Laconia Steam Engine, Weirs Hose Co. No. 1, G.A. Sanders Hose Co. 2, Reliance Hose Co.

Chief Engineer Sanders in his annual report recommends "that the city make arrangements by which the department may have the use of the city horses, or others, to assist in hauling the following pieces of apparatus to fires: Hook & Ladder trucks Nos. 1 and 2, and Hose Carriages 3 and 4, in the winter if not all times, as these carriages are heavy (weighing about 2,800 lbs..) when fully equipped, and the men are not in good form to perform their duties on arrival at the scene of action." He also reported that new Fire Alarm Signal Boxes should be added to the present system.

1894

J.A. Green Hose Co. No. 1 was located on Lakeside avenue next to Centenary Ave bridge (next to the Weir' General Store. The building now houses a tattoo parlor). JS Green owned Weirs hotel.

(1900s Motorized fire engines are introduced in the US).

Laconia, N. H., June 24. ---The Central block on Main Street, occupied by a number of firms, was gutted by fire tonight, causing a loss fully \$56,000. The insurance on building and contents is about \$33,000. The fire caught in a drug store, probably from spontaneous combustion.

Portsmouth Herald, Portsmouth, NH 25 Jun 1900

1895

Huge fire at Laconia Car Co. losses' of \$90,000. Several neighboring buildings were badly damaged. Water pressure was very poor. The fire created considerable controversy.

The Chief Engineer recommends that a horse be provided for the department. Several times in the past year there was long delay while we waited for the city horse to arrive.

1896

Big fire at Laconia Car Co. \$15,000 loss. Fire department had 133 members.

1897

George Sanders was the Chief Engineer. Mayor Samuel Smith recommended an area in the City where no wooden buildings are allowed.

1898

Moses T. Whittier appointed Chief Engineer. Due to the poor economy the Chief Engineer reported that he had to seek employment elsewhere a portion of the time. During his absence the assistant Engineers filled in.

1900

Albert Wilcox is the Chief Engineer. There are 111 members in the Department. Laconia Steamer No. 1, Hook and ladder Nos. 1 and 2, Weirs Hose Co. 1, G.A. Sanders Hose No. 2, Reliance No. 3, Js Crane No. 4, Niagara No. 5, and Highland No. 6 February was a bad month. There was a bad fire at the Car Co. on the 17th; a bad fire at the Masonic temple on the 24th, and a bad fire at the Lake Co. mill on the 25th.

1901

Charles Busiel, Governor, mayor, manufacture, fire chief and community leader died in his sleep.

February 7 there is a bad fire at the Harvard Street School. June 24 there is a big fire involving Mallard's Drug, Mitchell's Block, Dinsmore's Block, McCarthy's building, and Burleigh's building.

1902

The Chief Engineer recommends a fire station be built on Water Street. It was built a few years after.

December 6, 1902 the Masonic Temple, the finest and most imposing public building in Laconia, was totally destroyed by fire. Many neighboring buildings were badly damaged. The Temple was similar in size to today's building. The windows on the side of DK Marsh's stable had steel fire shutters mounted on the outside wall. The Mason's occupied the two top floors and the first floor was the post office, Laconia hardware, and a dry good store, there were offices on the second floor including the City councils chambers, city engineer, clerk and marshal. The building appeared to explode possibly from a gas leak. Clerk Shastany and Mitchell of the Post Office attempted to enter the building to save the mail. There was 8 inches of snow, sever cold, and strong winds which hampered the firemen from their duties. The snow on the roofs probably saved Laconia from a worse conflagration. At about 12:30 the powder magazine in the basement exploded sending shock waves throughout the area. The spectators were prostrated by the shock wave. It was almost a miracle that no one was killed or seriously injured.

Laconia Democrat- July 18, 1902

The steam fire engine has been hauled down to the Willard Hotel stable and will be kept there until the new fire station is ready for use. It was considerable of a problem to find quarters for the steamer as it is too big to go into an ordinary barn door and too heavy to risk on an ordinary barn floor. At the Willard stable, however, the steamer stands on a concrete floor and as a large proportion of the members of the fire company reside on that side of the river, the location is

an excellent one under the circumstances. The hand hose wagon is also quartered in the Willard stable, while the horse hose team is stored under a street department shed on Water street, and the hook and ladder truck will be kept in what Councilman Jones styles "God's engine house" (out-of-doors) while the new fire station is being erected.

1903

The Great Lakeport fire occurred on May 26, 1903. The alarm was received around 2 PM from Box 84 – Franklin Street near Wood's Mill. The fire started in H.H. Wood's Mill and quickly spread to Boulia Gorrell Lumber yard and Laconia Electric Lighting Co. There was a strong wind out of the southwest, which is a warm wind. There had been no rains for many weeks. In today's fire service this would have been a high Class 5 fire danger and the National Weather Service would have issued red Flag warnings. The fire spread rapidly up hill and towards the north and east. Help was sent from Concord, Franklin, and Dover by train. Tilton and Meredith sent help as well. It is unsure if horse were used or if the fire trucks were pulled by the firemen. Most Laconia fire apparatus were still hand pulled at that time. The fire consumed almost every building in an area of 150 acres. It was under control by 6 PM and had stopped burning past School Street. It very possibly ran out of buildings to burn and the land at that point flattened out. In the end 108 homes, 2 churches, 2 factories, 2 blacksmith shops, a vacant mill, 1 fire station, and the electric light plant were destroyed. No lives were lost. There was \$268,730 in damaged buildings and \$192,755 in destroyed contents for a total loss of \$461,485.

Albert Griffin is the Chief Engineer, and there are 3 Assistant Chief Engineers. Laconia Steam Engine No. 1 had 12 members, Hook & Ladder No 1 had 14 members, Eureka Hook & Ladder No. 2 had 15 members, J.A. Greene Hose Co. No.1 had 12 members, G. A. Sanders Hose Co. No. 2 had 12 members, Reliance Hose Co. No. 3 had 10 members, J.S. Crane Hose Co. No. 4 had 12 members, Niagara Hose Company No. 5 had 9 members, and Highland Hose Co. No. 6 had 10 members.

There were 110 hydrants in service in the populated areas; 17 of those hydrants were private in the factory yards, and there were 13 reservoirs in service, several along elm Street. The reservoirs were underground cisterns for drafting water.

(It is speculation on my part but if the Laconia Electric Lighting Plant was one of the first buildings to burn then I wonder if the Water Works Pumps were still in service. Even if they were the hoses in use at the time were 2 ½" and the friction loss would have limited the hose to about four hundred feet from the hydrant. So once the fire started up the hill the fire department needed to use the Steamers to increase pressure and push the water further along).

MANY BUILDINGS BURN

Extensive Fire Raging at Lakeport, New Hampshire.

Laconia, N. H., May 27.---An extensive fire is raging at Lakeport. Twenty-five dwelling houses and a factory had been destroyed or were on fire at last accounts.

Aberdeen Daily News, Aberdeen, SD 27 May 1903

FIRE LEFT HUNDREDS HOMELESS

Laconia, N. H., May 27.----According to latest reports nearly 100 buildings were burned, 650 persons are homeless{sic} and a loss of between \$350,000 and \$400,000 has been caused by the fire in the Lakeport section, the area

burned over being about 150 acres. The fire started in the H. H. Wood hosiery mill. The flames spread quickly, and in a very short time, under the influence of a brisk southeast wind, the entire structure was burning. The city fire department was helpless to stay the progress of the flames and the destruction went on until the fire actually burned itself out for want of material.

The Evening News, San Jose, CA 27 May 1903

The new Water Street station is completed. It has five bay doors. There is a hay loft and storage room for oats on the 2cd floor and stables for five horses on the back of the building. There is a sleeping room for the night men.

1904

There was a huge fire in Bank Square. The fire Chief recommends the city buy 2,000 feet of hose as most of our hose was burned last year. He also recommends a new steamer fro Lakeport; a new Hook and Ladder and chemical wagon for Central; and a new building for Hose Co. No. 5 on Hawthorne Street. He also recommends that the pay fro member of Hose Co. 5 go from \$10 to \$15 per year. He also recommends that the city keep the Street department horse closer to the Lakeport Station to save time when needed. Lots of equipment was destroyed by the Great fire.

(Great Baltimore Fire February 7)

1905

The Lakeport High School on Mechanic Street was destroyed by fire. It was a large 2 ½ story building.

1906

Arthur Spring appointed Fire chief

(San Francisco earthquake and fire April 18)

1907

We recognize the importance of a good fire department and would suggest that the recommendation of Chief Engineer Arthur W. Spring, that a less number of firemen could be better paid and perhaps give a g-greater degree of efficiency, is worthy of your investigation. The sum of \$11,217.38 has been expended for our fire department the past year. Of this sum \$1,723 was used for repairs on the steam fire engine; \$2,578.61 for the new hook and ladder truck; and \$548.08 for a new hose wagon. The purchase of a new steam fire engine; the erection of a building to house the old machine at Lakeport; 1,200 feet of new hose; and an additional horse are among the recommendations of the Chief Engineer.

The quick response of the department to alarms has kept the small fires from developing into something more serious and consequently there have been no large fires.

Two permanent firemen are kept at the central station and one at Lakeport at a cost of \$10.00 per week. *(Possibly the first full-time firemen)*

Owing to the present high prices of hay and grain and supplies I would respectfully request that the appropriation for the department for the ensuing year be \$6,500.00, firemen's wages included.

A Resolution relating to membership in the fire department and to the pay of members: Whereas, the members of the various organizations of the fire department have tendered their resignations as such members to take effect on the first day of

October, 1907; and whereas said resignation has been accepted by the city council; and whereas by an ordinance approved June 12, 1893, it is provided that the steam engine company shall consist of not more than fifteen members, each hose company of not more than fifteen members, and each hook and ladder company of not more than twenty members; and whereas by a report of a committee to whom was referred the matter of reorganizing the fire department made at a meeting of the city council held March 31, 1897, the membership in:

- Steamer Company. No. 1 was limited to twelve men at thirty dollars each;
- Hook and Ladder Company, No. 1, fifteen men at thirty dollars each;
- Eureka Hook and Ladder Company. No. 2, fifteen men at thirty dollars each;
- Weirs Hose Company. No. 1, ten men at ten dollars each;
- Sanders Hose Company, No. 2, ten men at ten dollars each;
- Reliance Hose Company, No. 3, twelve men at thirty dollars each;
- Crane Hose company, No. 4, twelve men at thirty dollars each;
- Niagara Hose Company. No. 5, ten men at ten dollars each and Highland Hose Company, No. 6, ten men at ten dollars each.

And whereas the present organization of the fire department consists of one Steamer Company, five hose companies and two hook and ladder companies, all of the members of which companies have resigned and their resignations been accepted as aforesaid.

Now therefore resolved by the city council of the city of Laconia, as follows:

That the membership of the companies in the fire department for the city of Laconia shall be constituted and paid as follows:

- Steamer Company No. 1, to consist of ten men at fifty dollars each;
- Hose company, No. 2, to consist of eight men at fifty dollars each;
- Hook and Ladder Company. No. 1, to consist of ten men at fifty dollars each;
- J. A. Greene Company, No. 1, to consist of ten men at twenty dollars each;
- Hook and Ladder Company. No. 2, to consist of twelve men at fifty dollars each;
- Hose company. No. 4, to consist of ten men at fifty dollars each;

Said number of men in said companies to be the entire number of each of said companies until this resolution shall be repealed, altered or amended by the city council. Nothing in this resolution shall be construed as repealing or in any way limiting the provisions of an ordinance approved June 12, 1893, entitled, "An ordinance in relation to the fire department."

This resolution shall take effect upon its passage. Passed and approved September 30, 1907.

Lakeport Central Fire Station was built on Elm Street next to Hose Company No. 4 (JS Crane) The new station housed a hook and ladder and hose wagon. The City sold the School Street fire station which housed Hose No. 6, and the gold Street Station, which housed Hook and Ladder No. 2.

1910

Weekly wages for drivers was increased to \$12.00 per week and they had one night off each week. (Were these the first permanent drivers, or were they volunteers assigned to cover the station at night?)

The Fire Chief recommends that the proper owners be told to remove the overhead wires and place them underground as the condition of the wires is bad and they are a threat to fireman on ladders.

1911

Chief Spring recommends the city hire a building inspector, as there are numerous problems with installation of chimneys and wood shingle roofs. He also reports the Street Department needs to do a better job cleaning streets as the "grade" is filling the reservoirs and they will not be of use in a dry spell.

1912

A photo shows the Laconia Steam Fire Engine being pulled by horses in a parade at Veterans Square. At that time the steamer was reported to be 53 years old and could still throw a heavy stream of water across the Winnepesaukee River.

Jan. 16 went to Plymouth to help at the Draper factory fire.

Dec. 5 the first recorded grass fire in December.

Dec. 17 the Mt. Belknap House in Lakeport was badly damaged by fire.

I recommend replacing the engine at central station, it was purchased in 1872; it has proved its efficiency many times over. If it breaks down it will leave us helpless at a critical time.

1914

Cleophas Fecteau becomes the Chief Engineer. The Department responds to N. Woodstock to help at a fire on August 14.

1916

Arthur Spring is back as Chief. He recommends the motorizing of the fleet owing to the high cost of the horses (there are eight in the department). On Jan. 28, July 28, and Dec. 29 there were fires involving the Baldi Block and others; damages were in excess of \$7,000.

1917

The city bought an American LaFrance Combination Fire Truck for \$8,100 dollars. The payments were split between two fiscal years, and the balance of \$100 was paid from miscellaneous funds. (This may be the first motorized fire truck for the City). Chief Spring suggest we start replacing call men with regular firemen, which gives more efficient service and quicker response to fires.

April 6 Tetley's Box Shop on Court Street is destroyed by fire. Conditions were very unfavorable and getting the fire under control was difficult.

Boulia Gorrell plant in Lakeport burned to the ground on August 30 and was later rebuilt. The losses were \$68,000. WG & IH Chase Lumber burned this year as well with losses of \$30,000

1920

Arthur Spring was the Fire Chief. There were 126 still alarms and 29 box alarms. The fire loss for the year was \$14,696 in property that was valued at \$768,000 – a good save ratio. One June 21 the Department responded to Center Harbor to help fight the fire at the Colonial Hotel. A lady from Vermont tried to mail letter in a fire alarm box. This called out the department and we kindly took care of putting her mail in the proper box.

In service were Engine Co. 1, Hose Co. 2, J.A. Green Hose Co. 3, Hook & Ladder 1 and Hook & Ladder 2.

In his report the Chief recommends that Hook & Ladder 2 (Lakeport) get a motor driven truck as the horse from the livery stable is too small to pull the wagon. Mayor Mitchell thinks it is time to change over to all motorized fire trucks as horse are very expensive to keep and feed. (*It is reported that horses are five times as expensive to operate as gasoline powered motors*).

1921

The Fire Chief recommends putting ladder truck on a motorized chassis, otherwise buy two new pair of horse. Then the truck could respond anywhere in the city.

1922

The City bought a motor driven chemical and hose wagon for Lakeport. One pair of horses was purchased and 1 man was appointed permanent at Central. We need to hire 1 man for Lakeport to run the new machine. There were more than 109 chimney fires this year.

1923

There were 113 chimney fires. There are five permanent drivers listed in the report. Nestledown on Endicott St East by what is now St. Helena's Church was destroyed by fire on April 25. It was rebuilt and became known as the Plantation.

1924

The New Hotel Weirs burned to the ground along with 12 other buildings, including the Methodist Church and Music Hall. The fire started in the Music hall and over powered the sprinklers in the hotel. The fire changed the face of the Weirs forever.

1925

A pair of fire alarm wires was run to the Weirs at relatively no cost to the City and two fire alarm boxes were installed. The department has 2 American LaFrance pumpers, one Ford combination chemical hose wagon, two combination chemical hose wagons (horse drawn), one small ladder truck, six horses, one Amoskeag steamer in good condition that can pump 400 GPM, and five permanent drivers

1926

The City bought a City Service Ladder truck for \$9,500 – no aerial device.

1927

This year the LFD was completely motorized. The Seagraves ladder at Lakeport was motorized. A Packard chassis was put under Central's hose and chemical wagon. There were 48 box alarms, 192 chimney, and 3 fires in Gilford.

1928

There are now six drivers

1929

Lakeport Ice Co. burned on June 12, 1929 in a huge fire that also destroyed Rudzinski's stables.

1936

Independent Ice Co. of Lakeport, a 300 foot long by 140 foot wide by 44 foot high building burned in a spectacular fire in sub-zero temperatures and 45 mile winds.

1937

January 11 the new Weirs Fire Station was opened. Fireman Henry Allard and his family have moved into the five room apartment on the second floor. The new station features include a hose rack and two cell lock-up in the cellar. Mr. Allard is also a police officer so the lock-up will be convenient for him. The two door station has an automatic pulley which when applied from the driver's seat of the fire truck, will raise the doors. The masonry work was done by Merle Sargent of Lakeport (later to be Fire Chief??). Fire Chief Arthur Spring said the total cost of the project would be \$7,500.

1938

The Unitarian Church burned. The Great New England Hurricane caused wide spread damage.

1939

The Mount Washington Steam Ship, the Weirs Café, and the train station were destroyed by fire on December 22.

1940

Arthur Spring still Chief. There were 258 still alarms and 31 box alarms this year. Losses were \$41,763 dollars. The new ladder truck for Lakeport and the new pumper from the Weirs were delivered this year. The Chief recommends that the 1917 Pierce pumper at Central be replaced very soon as we can no longer get replacement parts.

There were now 6 permanent drivers in the department. Engine 1 and Ladder 1 were at Central with 20 members, Engine 2 and ladder 2 were in Lakeport with 20 members, and Hose 4 was in the Weirs with 10 members.

1941

(December 7, Pearl Harbor attacked)

1942

(Boston Coconut grove fire November 28- 493 dead)

1944

Chief Spring was paid \$2,475 in full for services. (I believe he was full-time at this point).

1946

July 31 the grandstand at Opechee Park burned in a spectacular blaze.

1947 A two platoon system was created. Firemen work 10 hour days and 14 hour nights and get one day off for every four. There are now 13 permanent firemen; six at Central, four at Lakeport, and one at the Weirs; there are 50 call men. Engine 5 a 750 gallon Maxim pumper replaced the 1917 American LaFrance. A second Maxim was ordered to replace the 1922 American LaFrance.

1950

Merle Sargent was the Fire Chief. There were 356 alarms and 30 box alarms. There were 149 fires in homes, 103 grass fires, 43 automobiles burned, as well as 20 other buildings. There was 1 death and losses were set at \$81,190, which half was from the Riverside Area fire.

On July 28 the new aerial was used for the first time on Court Street at the Riverside Arena fire.

Two firemen were added to Central Station. The Chief reports that the city needs a tank truck, and 2 more men are needed at Lakeport and Central. He also states that plans should be made to replace both Lakeport and central Stations. Lakeport was done within 5 years. Central would not get done for 25 years. The annual budget was \$59,969 and \$44,454 of that was for salaries.

1954

The Plantation, formerly Nestledown, on Rte. 11A was destroyed by fire.

International Association of firefighters Local 1153 was established on February 2 this year; one of the first unions in the State.

1955

Lakeport Fire Station was opened. The fire department has eight pieces of modern fire fighting apparatus equipped with two-way radios.

1958

(Chicago Our lady of Angels School fire, December 1 - 94 died)

1960

Bugbee Block on Fore Street was destroyed in a spectacular fire on April 16.

1961

Chertok's Furniture on Court Street as well as the City Hotel (also known as Wonalancet House) was destroyed by fire on April 4. It was at this fire that Louis "Bud" Wool became famous for many the ladder pipe for hours while being subjected to thick black smoke and heat.

1965

Laconia Country Club burned on November 9.

1968 there was a Chief, 3 deputy, 5 captains, 20 firemen and 42 call men on the department. This year they responded to 297 emergencies. There was \$47,332 in damage. The budget was \$226,347. There were 15,500 residents in the City.

1968

Sweaterville was destroyed by a spectacular fire in Lakeport on Christmas day. It was extremely cold with temperatures below zero.

1970

Bud T. Wool was the Fire Chief, 3 Deputy Chiefs, 3 Captains, 6 Lieutenants, an Inspector and 25 Firefighters plus 45 Call Firefighters. Three stations were in service and the Department operated on a 3 platoon system. Chief Wool who was an innovator and change agent started experimenting with 4" hose and large hose reels that year. There were 295 calls and there was \$104,000 in property damaged by fire.

1971

Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid was started. The first office was at Laconia Court House. This agency coordinated mutual aid throughout the region. In 2010 it services 36 communities in an area bigger than the state of Rhode Island with a population of 118,000.

1974

Central Fire Station on Main Street opened.

1976

Chief Salvador Madama resigned after an investigation into a fire last week. He had been Chief for four months coming from Patterson, NJ. Bud Wool was rehired as Fire Chief.

The Lake Village hand-pumper, which was purchased in 1849 for \$800.00 was listed for sale in the Portsmouth, N.H. for \$16,000. It was called the "Niagara No. 1" and used exclusively in Lakeport until its retirement. The sale included original equipment including hose cart, helmets, leather buckets, brass eagle, bronze bells, nozzle and paint. Chief Wool said the city was offered the engine if it would display it in a suitable building as a relic. The council declined the offer.

1980

January 21 an elderly woman died from smoke inhalation.

There were lay-offs at Laconia Fire department; four firefighters were laid off and the Lakeport Fire Station was closed on June 29, 1981. The Weirs Fire Station was temporarily closed.

Carlton Bordeau and Phil Bragg receive the Merle Sargent Life Saving Award.

1983

Weirs Fire Station and Community center opened.

1989

Brickyard Mountain Resort, formerly known as Shangri-la, and formally known as Hotel Winnicette, burned in a spectacular fire on March 16. It was a large 3 story wood hotel.

Rick Judkins became Fire Chief replacing Bud Wool

A smoky blaze at 1 AM left 45 people homeless. One resident had to be rescued by ladder. Twelve fire companies assisted Laconia at the scene. Firefighter David Monasky rescued a woman over the aerial ladder.

1990

Firefighter Scott Hopkins receives NH heroes Award for water rescue in March.

Firefighters Tim Woods, Leon Manville, and Bob Landry receive award for rescue attempts in November.

November 1 a Halloween horror story. A mother throws her 14 month old infant out a window of her burning home and she jumps out the window to the ground. Two young boys died in the two alarm fire.

October 12 – Fire destroys boat houses at Thurston’s marina

October 6 - Goodwin paper destroyed in 5-alarm fire

In the 90’s LRGH and LFD entered into a contract to provide Advanced Life Support and EMS from the fire department. This prevented privatization and lay-offs. It has become a great success for residents, the department and LRGH.

1991

September 19 Summerfield’s destroyed in 3-alarm blaze

Weirs Hotel on Lakeside Avenue burned on September 27. See 1890

March 10 Hi Fi Furniture on Court Street destroyed in spectacular 4-alarm fire.

1992

Funds restored to re-open Weirs Fire Station.

June 26 Bouliia-Gorrell Lumber heavily damaged in 3-alarm fire.

1994

George Landry became Fire Chief replacing Rick Judkins. Move to privatize ambulance service to save money. The Firefighters Union and LRGH submit a proposal to provide ambulance service and add paramedic firefighters. Possibly the first type of agreement of its kind in New England. Firefighters were instrumental in developing the proposal.

1995

The 16th New Hampshire Regiment HQ’s on Lakeside Avenue burned on in January. 1996

Jan 21, 3 alarm fire damages Overlook Condominiums

1999

Shady Lawn summer house destroyed by fire. Laconia health Club destroyed by fire on October 19

2000

The department responded to 2,631 emergencies this year. Broken Antler destroyed in June fire. Fire Department reaches full paramedic coverage

2001

September 11, 2001 America was attacked by terrorists.

December 3, 2001 Kenneth L. Erickson was appointed Fire Chief

2003

3 - alarm fire heavily damages Union Avenue apartment house; 2 – alarm fire in Southdown at the same time.

2004

March 11, 2004 Firefighter Mark E. Miller drowned while conducting a dive operation. His body was found the next day after a huge recovery effort. That August a rescue boat was dedicated to his memory. The boat was purchased from community donations totaling more than \$80,000.

Jan. 23 3-alarm fire damages Four Seasons condos in Weirs.

The department responded to more than 3,000 emergency calls for the first time.

2005

Mike Shastany receives award from State for rescue attempt in Lake Opechee.

Fire destroys Weirs landmark – Crossroads restaurant.

2006

February the department hired four new firefighters increasing the shift staffing for the first time since 1989.

4-alarm fire damages home on Spring St.

Jay Ellingson receives the merle Sargent Award for saving two people from the Winnepesaukee River and Avery Dam

September Dive Team now fully trained and in-service

2008

August 7 major flood damages Weirs Boardwalk. Fire and police responded to hundreds of emergencies including a 2-alarm fire that destroyed a building at Pedal Pushers. Two weeks later a tornado touches down just east of the City. We respond to help Barnstead.

The winter of 2008 saw major snowfall resulting in more than 20 buildings suffering collapses from excessive weight. The final tally was 113" of snowfall; just shy of the all-time record of 1873.

September 4 Lakes Region Linen is destroyed by spectacular 3 – alarm fire. Neighboring homes were severely threatened.

The City received a \$250,000 grant from Homeland Security to replace all our self-contained breathing apparatus. The units were more than 15 years old and constant breaking down.

2009

November 9 the new aerial tower was delivered to the City. The price was \$879,000. We received a \$100,000 federal grant towards the purchase of the aerial.

2010

There is a Chief, 3 Deputy Chiefs, two Captains, six Lieutenants, and 24 Firefighters, and 10 call firefighters. We respond to just under 3,400 emergency calls each year plus handle more than 2,500 non-emergency services such as inspections. With the exception of less call firefighters the Department is the same size today as it was in 1970. The fire department is very involved in planning for public health emergencies.

We are now transporting cardiac emergency patients directly to Concord or Manchester hospitals.

The term "how many runs did you do today" dates back to the early years when firemen were running with the fire trucks pulling them by hand to fires.

The information presented was research by the author and is accurate to the best of his knowledge. The information was taken from City of Laconia Annual reports, books published by Warren Huse, documents from Laconia Fire Department, notes and copies of articles from the Laconia Public Library and Laconia Historical Society, Lake Winnepesaukee Historical Society, and the Lakeport Community Association.

(Notes and comments by author and historical facts)