

A Fireman Remembers

A Memoir of Edward (Ed) Harder

by Arlene E. Rohrer

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In 1938 when Ed Harder joined the Hubbard Volunteer Fire Department he began a thirty-year career as a Hubbard Firefighter.

Most of the volunteers were local businessmen or persons who worked nearby. They could rush to the firehouse on West Liberty Street, near the Town Square,. Since Ed was employed at the Ford automobile agency only two doors from the fire station he was nearby always the first to arrive for duty. Not surprisingly, he became the chief daytime driver of the fire truck. Department officers were chief, captain, first and second lieutenants, secretary and treasurer.

Ever since it was first organized in 1875 the Hubbard Fire Department has enjoyed a good reputation for speed. The procedure for answering a call in Ed's day was that when a call came in a man at the firehouse would blow the fire whistle. As the firemen arrived they would quickly grab their boots and coats hanging at the door, and as soon as three or four men had come they could take the truck out.

In early December of each year the men were paid for the number of calls they had answered. The rate was \$2 per call, or \$3 if they were on duty more than four hours. Some time later the rate was upped to \$3 per call. As Ed remarked, he received a \$1 raise in thirty years. Most numerous were grass fire calls. Sixteen in one day set a record. Sometimes when the fire crew reached the scene of a grass fire they would be startled to hear popping sounds. During depression years needy persons looking for food would start a grass fire in a field to chase rabbits out into the open. By the time the fire had been put out hunters had the makings of a game supper for their families.

In 1935 a serious blaze of an unusual nature happened at the Powell Pressed Steel Company. A spark from a torch ignited highly flammable paint thinner, causing the fire to spread quickly. Hubbard firemen, attempting to control the blaze, found themselves at a definite disadvantage. They had no previous experience fighting a chemical fire; they had neither protective masks nor fireproof hats and coats. The Youngstown Fire Department was called at assist, and was very helpful. The Youngstown crew praised Hubbard's efforts and were impressed by the amount of water pumped. No one was injured. The structure was rebuilt.

Another event still very real in Ed's memory is the burning of Verhagen's Bakery, which stood on the northwest corner of North Main and Liberty Streets. It happened in December of 1943, about two days before Christmas. A large vat of oil used for frying doughnuts became overheated and caught fire. Flames raced rapidly through the building, and the Youngstown Fire Department was again called in to help. Five streams of water were directed on the flames. When water hit a vat of oil there was a tremendous explosion, blowing three or four firemen down stairs and out of the building. It was a very cold night and spray from the hoses covered the firefighters' clothes with ice. Ed held a ladder and the legs of a fireman standing on the ladder. Efforts of the firemen saved all adjoining buildings, but the bakery was a complete loss, including two and one-half tons of Christmas cake, ready for delivery the day before Christmas Eve. Firemen had cordoned off the street to traffic but a drunken driver crashed through the barrier, injuring two Youngstown firemen. Although they were hospitalized overnight, they were not seriously hurt.

On the night of March 13, 1948, the building which for a number of years had been the club house on the Powell Golf Course (now the Hubbard Golf Course) burned to the ground. About two years before the fire the structure had been leased to three Carsone brothers who named it "Carsone's Manor." No one was in the building when the fire, blamed on faulty wiring, started. The alarm was turned in shortly after 5 AM by a staff member of radio station WKBN on his way home from Youngstown. By the time the Hubbard firemen arrived the building was completely in flames. It was never rebuilt. The first Firemen's Ball had been held there, with a large attendance. The following year and for many years thereafter the dance was held at Yankee Lake Ballroom. At that time the Ball was a fundraiser to buy insurance for the firemen.

Another unforgettable fire happened March 18, 1951, when the Central Christian Church at 44 South Main Street went up in flames. The fire started in the basement, where a heater being used to warm the baptismal font ignited the wooden beams on the side of the church. With no other way to get at the fire the firemen had to break through plaster. As a result the wall nearly collapsed on firemen who were up on ladders. The church was a complete loss. Only an electric organ and piano were saved. The congregation built a new place of worship on the same site.

During Ed's career about twenty volunteers were active in the Hubbard Fire Department. Among those he remembers were Leonard Stevenson, Richard Huff, Ronald Hammock, Artie Salow, Charlie Reeher, Arlie and Glen Roose, Myron "Irish" Kerrigan, Francis Malin and Ray Dosch. Robert Harder, Ed's father, was also a member, and later, so was Ed's oldest son, Bill.

A group photograph of Hubbard firefighters can be seen at the City Building. Of those pictured, only Ed is still living. Now approaching his 90th year, Ed is no longer climbing ladders but he certainly exemplifies the dedicated and capable service which the Hubbard Volunteer Fire Department continues to provide for the citizens of Hubbard City and Township. Their record is an enviable one.

Sources

Interview, Edward Harder, October 12, 1992

Lorraine Atwood, Research Assistant, Hubbard Public Library

The Hubbard News, March, 1948