

Princeton's Fire Fighters

1788---1938

Sponsored by

MAYOR CHARLES R. ERDMAN JR.

Borough of Princeton

Text and Illustrations

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Foreword

The story of the Princeton Fire Department, which has been compiled for the first time by the capable members of the Federal Writers' Project, is a tribute to all the residents of this community who have been interested in the organization for the past 150 years.

Each chapter unfolds a new tale of work accomplished in order that Princeton might have an efficient fire-fighting unit. The fine department that exists today is the direct result of the efforts of Princetonians who cherished the volunteer spirit in serving their community.

CHARLES R. ERDMAN, JR.,
Mayor of Princeton.

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY HISTORY

Although there are indications that a student unit equipped to fight fires was set up in Princeton when the university was established in the town in 1756, its activities were not preserved for posterity either in the town records or by the college. As a matter of official history the first fire company in Princeton was formed on February 11, 1788. Its minute books from then to the year 1817 constitute an authentic account of its organization, membership, equipment and regulations, and have the following preamble:

In all well regulated cities, towns and villages the establishment of Fire Companies, for the purpose of extinguishing houses on fire and for the removal and security of the property of the inhabitants seems to have claimed early and general attention—a number of citizens of Princeton and its vicinity, sensible of the utility of such an institution, and desirous of forming themselves into a company for these benevolent purposes, held a meeting at the home of Jacob C. T. Bergen, and after a free conference on the subject, appointed John Little, Enos Kelsey and John Beatty to draught the form of an association and such articles as should be found necessary to the government of the company.

From 1817 until about the time of the Civil War, no minute books of this company exist, and the rare references to it in other local records of the period suggest that it had lapsed into a state of virtual inactivity. Not until shortly before the war between the states, when the present three companies were formed—the Princeton Engine Company No. 1, Mercer Engine Company No. 3, and Princeton Hook and

Ladder and Chemical Company No. 1—did Princeton again have an actively functioning fire department.

But that early company was an active one. Many prominent residents of Princeton were among its members and—according to the minute books—faithfully attended the meetings. The original officers were: Captain John Little, director; Dr. John Beatty, clerk; and Enos Kelsey, treasurer. Others who served as clerks were Isaac Snowden, Jr., John Harrison, John N. Simpson, Isaac Homer, N. C. Everett, Francis D. Janvier, Thomas White, Richard Voorhees, John S. Wilson, Benjamin Olden and James S. Green.

The charter members, who subscribed to the articles of association when adopted, were, in order of signing: Aaron Mattison, Joseph Leigh, Noah Morford, Samuel Stout, Jr., Zeblun Morford, Enos Kelsey, James Hamilton, Christopher Stryker, Stephen Morford, James Moore, Andrew McMackin, Jacob G. Bergen, John Lane, John Little, John Hamilton, James Campbell, Conant Cone, Isaac Anderson, Jared Sexton, David Olden, Jr., Isaac Snowden, Jr., David Hamilton, Samuel S. Smith, Robert Stockton, Dr. John Beatty, George Henry, John Barlow, John Dildine, Thomas Wiggins, John Jones and John Schureman.

Settled in 1696, Princeton had, by the time the fire company was formed, become fairly important as a university seat, a coaching stop and the home of citizens prominent in the Revolution. The first state legislature met there ten years before and John Witherspoon, one of the foremost presidents of Princeton University—then the College of New Jersey—had as his guests at the commencement of 1783 six signers of the Declaration of Independence, two of whom—Washington and Madison—were to become presidents of the United States.

Dr. John Beatty, first clerk of the fire department, had been a commissioned captain in Pennsylvania during 1775, and held titles of major, colonel and brigadier general during the Revolution; he was a delegate to the Continental Congress in 1783, a member of the Federal Congress in 1793, Speaker of the Assembly and for ten years Secretary of State of New Jersey. He was, in addition, president of the Trenton Banking Company and a trustee of the College of New Jersey, from which he had been graduated.

Captain Moore, McMackin and Little were honored soldiers of

the Revolution and personal friends of General Washington. Enos Kelsey was a member of the Provincial Congress in 1775 and a treasurer in the college; David Olden was a doorkeeper of the Assembly in Princeton in 1776. Isaac Snowden and John Harrison were treasurers of the college, Major Stephen Morford was a Princeton postmaster and Christopher Stryker and Perez Rowley were hosts of the famous old Washington House.

Membership in the company soon increased. Among those added to the rolls were Dr. Walter Minto, a mathematician and an astronomer, professor of mathematics and natural philosophy in the college from 1786 to 1796, who served as treasurer of the fire company in 1793; Henry Clow, Richard Stockton, Robert Voorhees, Colonel Erkuries Beatty and Samuel Bayard, all mayors of Princeton; Dr. Ebenezer Stockton, Daniel Agnew, John McClellan, John Morgan, Felix Herbert, John Thompson, Thomas P. Johnson, lawyer, John Juline, proprietor of the Nassau House in 1812, Peter Bogart, David Clarke, John I. Craig, John Gifford, David Crodwin, Dr. James G. Ferguson, Josias Ferguson, George G. Fullert, James S. Green, Samuel R. Hamilton, Andrew Hunter, Jacob Keene, John Leonard, John Maclean, John Norris, William Napton, John S. Nevius, Benjamin Olden, Joseph Olden, John Passage, John Robeson, Perez Rowley, Ralph Sansbury, John N. Simpson, Joseph H. Skelton, Josiah Skelton, Samuel Snowden, Charles Steadman, Job Stockton, Richard Stockton, Jr., Peter Stryker, Cornelius Terhune, Dr. John Vancleve, Thomas White and John S. Wilson.

The company was divided into four classes. The first consisted of six men whose duty it was to salvage the contents of burning buildings. The second class of 13 men had sole direction of the fire engine. Ladders, fire hooks and axes were provided those in the third class in order that they might unroof, tear down and remove such part or parts of the burning building as might, in the opinion of the director, be necessary "to obstruct the progress of the fire." The fourth class was to supply the engineer and other fire-fighters with water—a herculean task in a day when wells and streams supplied the community's water.

A list of the company's rules gives an insight into the organization and proves the seriousness with which it was regarded. A rule was

established "not to admit any excuse for non-attendance except Death"; and at the meeting following the passage of that regulation it was "solemnly ordered that those who, having been removed by death or otherwise, shall no longer be considered as members of the company."

Each member was required to provide and maintain in a conspicuous place in his home two buckets, and one basket or bag marked with his name and that of the company. The buckets, naturally enough, were for water; the basket was used for the salvaging of small articles; and salt with which to smother inclosed fires was carried in the bag.

A check-up on the equipment was made quarterly by two members. That the committee functioned is evident by such typical excerpts from the minutes as: "Mr. Kelsey was reprimanded for not having his buckets placed in the most conspicuous part of his house." The minutes also stated that the "Director have leave to lend the ladders to members of the company, but they shall be returned to their places before sundown, and if those who borrow them or either of them (apparently the company was in possession of two) do not return them to their place or places by dusk, be fined one shilling and if not returned that night, ten shillings." Dr. Beatty, prominent in the company as he was, was fined 10 shillings for a violation of that ruling.

Failure to attend meetings or neglect of necessary repairs to the buckets, the bag or the basket was punished by a fine of one shilling. In 1796 the regulation pertaining to buckets, bags and baskets was changed, and they were henceforth kept in the firehouse. A fine of seven shillings was levied upon members who failed to respond to a fire alarm or to perform their duties when present at a blaze.

The rule requiring members to respond to alarms was at one time amended to the effect that response was compulsory only when the house on fire belonged to a member. But this caused so much general dissatisfaction that the original rule was restored.

Equipment was needed, and the minute book showed the attempts made to obtain it: "January 4, 1796, a committee was appointed to present a petition to the trustees of the College praying them to furnish a number of buckers. In July this committee reported that the college was having 35 buckets made." At the July meeting of the fire company a year later the members, still without their buckets, grew

restive and began to ask questions. But their impatience did them little good, and it was not until October, 1798, that Thomas P. Johnson, in behalf of the committee of 1796, reported that the buckets had been received—two years and three months after they had been requested.

Another committee was appointed—consisting of Colonel Beatty, Thomas Johnson, Josias Ferguson, Stephen Morford, John N. Simpson and Stacy Horner—to procure a machine for lowering people from the upper stories of burning buildings. But no record can be found of such a machine having been purchased. A special committee did, however, at one time assemble paraphernalia including a light ladder, a hammer and a basket of nails for the purpose of nailing soaked blankets to the side of houses adjoining a blaze, in order to prevent the spread of a fire. The company also made a point of discouraging the popular student practice of building bonfires in the street.

A successful deal with the university, engineered by Captain Little, Robert Stockton and Enos Kelsey, resulted in an arrangement to the effect that the fire company was to have the use and direction of the student brigade's fire engine. In return the company promised to put the engine in good repair and answer all college alarms. The repairs for which the company thus contracted amounted to a matter of six pounds, sixteen shillings and three pence.

Between 1812 and 1815, apparently dissatisfied with this situation, the company made an effort to raise funds for a new engine by public subscription. The college was appealed to in vain, but in 1819 an engine was finally purchased for \$500. The necessity for a new building grew—Dr. Thomas Wiggin had been appointed to find a home for the engine to replace its College Lane headquarters when the student machine was taken over—and this time the appeal to the college was answered: on April 12, 1820, the trustees donated the sum of \$80 toward the cause.

The last record in the company's minute books was made on January 13, 1817. On that day Colonel Beatty was elected president, John S. Neville treasurer, James T. Green clerk and Perez Rowley director of the engine. Although the company functioned for some time after that the exact extent of its activities is not known. Evidently interest waned, for in 1825 a new unit, called the Princeton Fire

Company, was chartered with a capital stock of \$1,000. The incorporators were Peter Bogart, Thomas White, James G. Ferguson, Robert Voorhees, Emley Olden and James S. Green.

Eight years later the Resolution Fire Company of Princeton was incorporated with a capital stock of \$1,000 by C. M. Campbell, James Powell, John L. Thompson, David N. Bogart, William R. Murphy, Abram Stryker, John Scudder, Charles G. Hollingshead and William Joline. No record of this company's activities is available.

In the *Princeton Whig* of January 1, 1837, an account of a fire in a "small frame building occupied by Stryker and Conover as a tailor shop, adjoining the brick store of J. Van Doren and Co.," states that "the citizens and students repaired to the spot with their usual alacrity. . . . We have ample proof that talking alone will not stop the ravages of fire," the *Whig* continued, and "This event should prove an additional spur to the efforts for some time past talked of, for rendering our fire department more efficient."

There have been many arguments as to which of the companies which were formed later in the century is a direct descendant of the original company of 1788. The facts above, obtained from authentic records, are given without any attempt to settle the question.

CHAPTER TWO

PERSONNEL, PROCEDURE AND PUMPS

Princeton's present fire department consists of three companies: Mercer Engine Company No. 3, Princeton Engine Company No. 1, and Princeton Hook and Ladder and Chemical Company No. 1. Each unit has an authorized strength of fifty men.

The companies elect their own members subject to the approval of the borough council. Members must be between the ages of 21 and 45, must be physically fit, reside in the borough and be American citizens. Any member may be removed by the borough council for just cause. After the completion of seven years of faithful service members may apply for retirement from active duty.

In the final analysis control of the fire department is vested in the borough council, but because the management of so technical a department is beyond the scope of the borough officials' routine, a board of engineers is appointed by the fire department personnel to superintend the department. Heading that body is the chief engineer, whose position corresponds to the chief of most fire departments.

To insure equal representation a new engineer is chosen each year, from the three companies in rotation. The assistants to the engineer—first and second—are chosen in a similar manner.

The individual fire companies elect their governing officers—a foreman and two assistants—from their membership. These positions

correspond to the deputy chief and the first and second lieutenants of other fire companies.

The chief engineer, his two assistants and the three officers from each company, form the personnel of the board of engineers. This body, subject to the approval of the borough council, controls the entire fire department.

As becomes the ranking officer of the fire department, the chief engineer's duties extend far beyond actual fire fighting. He is required to inspect all the apparatus and the three firehouses and report to the borough council. He keeps a record of all fires attended by the various companies. He calls the members of the various companies together once each month for a detailed inspection of their apparatus and to prove its dependability by actual tests.

The chief engineer is empowered to enter any building or premise to inspect for fire hazards, and to order such changes as he thinks will render them more safe. Any person refusing the chief engineer or any of his assistants admittance is subject to a fine of from \$2 to \$200. The same fine may be imposed for refusal to comply with the engineer's orders in reference to removing fire hazards.

Another duty of the chief engineer and his assistants is the regular inspection of all fire hydrants in the borough. The superintendent of public works is required to keep the hydrants free of snow and ice.

At a fire the chief engineer is in complete command of all men and machinery. His assistants and the foreman and their assistants aid him in this work. In the absence of the chief engineer, his assistants take his place in the order of their rank. If both assistants are absent, the senior foreman is in charge. Where the seniority of the foreman is in question, it is understood that the foreman from the chief engineer's own company is in charge.

To insure proper maintenance of fire fighting equipment, the borough council appoints, from recommendations of the board of engineers, mechanics whose duty it is to carry out the orders of the chief engineer in respect to necessary repairs. As far as it is possible, these mechanics are chosen from the company whose apparatus they are to repair.

Drivers are recommended by the various companies and the board of engineers selects those they think most fit. While a driver may drive

a piece of apparatus which is not the property of his particular company, he must yield the driver's seat when an authorized driver of that company appears.

Every member of the fire department whose attendance at fires is 75 per cent or better (including official excuses from duty) receives \$2 per month as compensation from the borough council. In addition to this amount the chief engineer receives a salary of \$100 per year and each of his two assistants receives \$25 per year.

FIRE PATROL

In 1926 a valuable adjunct to the fire department—the fire patrol—was formed. Operating directly under its own officers, subject to the supervision of the chief engineer and his assistants, this unit is composed of 12 members from each company. Its officers are a captain and a first and second lieutenant. As in the case of the engineers' selection, the officers are chosen in a manner calculated to insure fair representation among all the companies. The captain must be a member of the chief engineer's company; the first lieutenant is chosen from the company that supplies the department with its first assistant engineer; and the second lieutenant is a member of the second assistant engineer's company. In this way each company is given an opportunity to contribute to the managing body of the fire patrol.

Generally speaking, the duties of the fire patrol are to maintain order at the scene of a fire, to cooperate with the police and to act as a salvage corps in the removal of goods from the burning building.

That there was a serious need for the creation of such a patrol is evident from various newspaper accounts. The *Princeton Press* of February 11, 1888, concludes a description of a serious fire at the Kingston Flour Mills with these words:

The Princeton Fire Department was called out, and No. 1 Engine Co. went to the fire. Here they rendered service in protecting adjacent property. They worked several hours at the fire. There was some disorder at the place in the afternoon by drunken men, but this, we are glad to say, cannot be charged to our firemen, who conducted themselves creditably.

Two years earlier the same paper had reported in the issue of January 2, 1886, the destruction of a large barn on the Haffey property. The headline tells practically the entire story:

A HOT FIRE IN A COLD PLACE!

At half past seven last night the large barn on the Haffey property, in the rear of Geo. C. Dohm's restaurant, was found to be on fire. The night was quiet, but efforts to save the building was unavailing owing to the inflammable nature of the building.

Two horses were in the barn, one of which was badly burned. It was blanketed and came out alive on fire, ran up the yard and through the house of G. A. Dohm into the street.

Immediately adjoining was a large ice house on G. A. Dohm's property, and this was also burned.

All three fire companies responded, but their work was greatly hindered by drunken men.

Evidently the spectators discovered that the fire alone did not supply enough warmth on a cold winter night.

Since the inception of the fire patrol, order at fires has been maintained to a high degree, and the firemen are permitted to do their work unhindered.

EQUIPMENT

It is a far cry from the first fire company's equipment to that in use at present. When a fire call was turned in during the Revolutionary period, each fireman grabbed his two buckets, a basket or a bag and ran to the scene of the fire as fast as his load would permit. When a resident turns in an alarm today, he may see the big engines roaring toward him almost before he has released the key.

The struggle for adequate equipment was a long one. *The Standard* of September 22, 1866, complains:

Another barn burned! Barn of George H. Burroughs on Nassau Street. Hook and Ladder Company promptly on the spot. No. 1 engine was there but would not work. The old No. 3 engine was there and threw water on the flames, but at least half of the water leaked out of the "good-for-nothing" hose.

The new engine was not taken out, as it was deemed of little use without hose! Might have well brought hose without Engine.

A letter to the editor in the *Press* of May 4, 1872, indicated that a fire alarm signal was likewise desperately needed:

Mr. Editor:—We are disappointed that before this, our town has not been provided with a fire alarm bell of proper size. Knowing that several of our prominent citizens are actively interested in the project we are at a loss to see why their efforts have not long since been successful. Our fire companies comprise many of our best citizens and are an honor to our town, a fact thoroughly appreciated by our people, as the liberal appropriations so unanimously voted, abundantly testify. But of what avail are our excellent fire apparatus and our self denying firemen, if we have no well understood signal to call them from their business or awake them from their slumbers.

We are so accustomed to "hornsprees" and other kindred noises peculiar to a college town, that the ordinary means of alarm, are too uncertain. Besides, if a fireman expects to do service at a fire he cannot afford to exhaust his lungs

in yelling fire for the half hour previous. Surely no one can object to contributing his share to so worthy and necessary an object, whether he have property liable to destruction or his personal safety be all he has at stake.

Let us then urge and encourage those who have this matter in charge, to press on with all possible diligence.

Not all newspaper articles on the subject were in the nature of complaints, however. In the *Princeton Signal* of 1903, the editorial chest must have swelled to the bursting point at the printing of this article:

THE STEAM FIRE ENGINE

The Steamer of Princeton Engine Company No. 1 was given an exhibition on Thanksgiving Day, the rain having prevented many citizens from seeing it in operation when first brought here. It was as satisfactory as on its first exhibition. Then it was worked in a downpour of rain. On Thursday its streams covered the trees and streets with ice. We believe, however, the best exhibition of its utility and usefulness was given on Monday when in actual service at the Odd Fellow's Hall conflagration. After that exhibition, no further tests are necessary. Subscribers to the fund for its purchase and citizens generally, are entirely satisfied. Nevertheless, the Committee, having in charge the purchase of the Steamer, will not rest until it is paid for. A large sum is due yet. Prompt payment of subscriptions, and further donations of money will be very acceptable.

A glimpse at the modern fire fighting equipment of the Princeton fire department today is eloquent proof of the efficacy of diligent and persistent efforts. The Hook and Ladder and Chemical Company No. 1 owns a four-tank Martin Chemical Engine. The same company has the use of a hook and ladder truck, and a Buffalo Engine with a 600-gallon water tank and three hoses, the property of the borough.

Mercer Engine Company No. 3 uses an American LaFrance No. 12 Combination Pumper and Hose Truck. Princeton Engine Company No. 1 has an American LaFrance No. 10 Triple Combination Pumper carrying chemicals and hose. These two pieces of apparatus are owned by the borough.

The engine houses of Mercer Engine Company No. 3 and Princeton Engine Company No. 1 are owned by the borough. The Princeton Hook and Ladder and Chemical Company owns its home and receives \$400 annually from the borough as rent.

No apparatus of any kind belonging to the borough can be taken out of the borough limits without permission of the chief engineer, or, in his absence, of the assistant in charge at that time. Even then, it cannot be taken more than three miles from the limits of the borough

without direct permission from a member of the fire and water committee.

Fires are reported in Princeton by means of a Gamewell Selective Call System, with 24 key boxes scattered throughout the borough. Any resident of the borough may obtain an alarm key upon proper application to the borough clerk; residents in the neighborhood of the 24 call boxes are all supplied with keys. A telephone call to the police department will do just as well, as a master control button is located at police headquarters. The entire system is kept in order by a council-appointed maintainer. He reports concerning his work and expenses to the council and the chief engineer.

Princeton is not content with supplying the mechanical needs of its firefighters. It has passed ordinances guaranteeing fire apparatus the right of way, and subjecting even non-members of the fire company to orders from the chief engineer or his assistants at fires. Interfering with apparatus at a fire, or disobeying an order of the officer in charge is punishable by a fine not exceeding \$10 or a sentence not exceeding ten days in the borough jail. Persons not giving fire apparatus the right of way (except those conveying United States Mail) may be fined up to \$200.

CHAPTER THREE

PRINCETON ENGINE COMPANY No. 1

Tradition links Princeton Engine Company No. 1 with the town's original unit established in 1788, but the loss of that early company's minute books for the years between 1817 and 1866 makes it difficult to trace the connection. Records show that in 1894 James Hayes, a former member of the present company, traced its origin back to 1794, evidently using the missing books. No trace of his research can be found today, but upon that authority the company had the date "1794" inscribed on its engine house.

It is known that Hayes' story included the following notices from the minutes of the board of trustees of Princeton University, then the College of New Jersey:

Princeton, April 11, 1820.

An application from the Fire Company of this Borough for aid in the erection of an Engine House was received and committed to Dr. Hillyer, Mr. Brown and Mr. McDowell, to report as soon as convenient.

Princeton, April 12, 1820.

The Committee appointed to consider the application from the Princeton Fire Company, reported, That they have attended to the duty assigned them; And finding that the Company have made great exertions, and have exhausted all their funds in the purchase of a suitable Engine, and are therefore unable, without aid, to erect a building to secure it from the weather;—And considering the advantage that may result to the property of the Board from this purchase; they recommend that the request of the Fire Company be complied with; and, that the sum of Eighty Dollars, be appropriated for this purpose.

Com: ASA HILLYER

WILLIAM A. MCDOWELL

Adopted by the Board

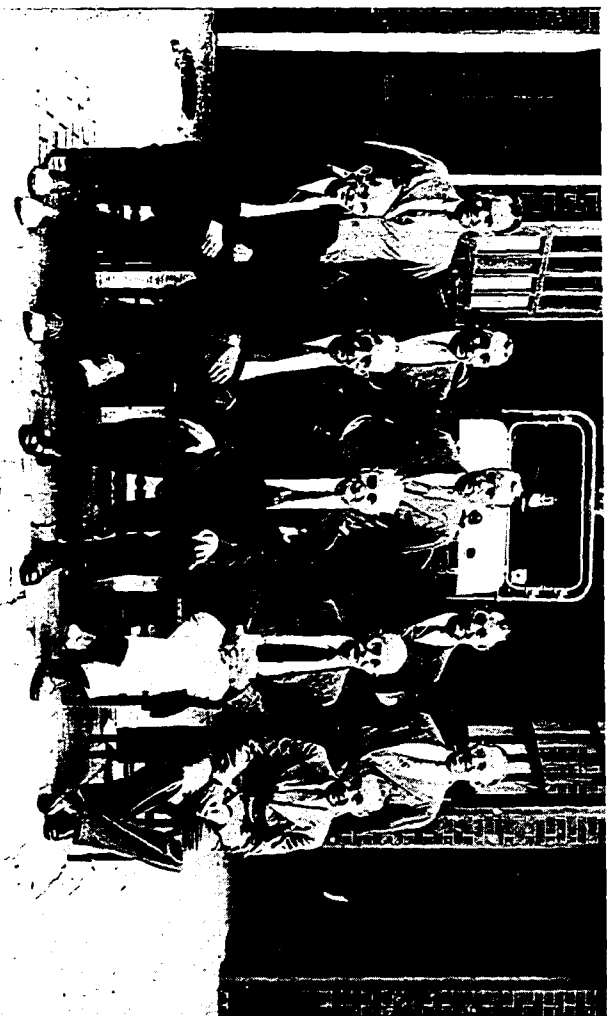
Though numerous references were made to the company by newspapers during the 1830's, the company's history officially begins with records from a battered minute book which notes a meeting on June 8, 1866. This session was attended by William Potter, foreman; John S. VanMarter, Francis Ward, George L. VanMarter, James Ketty, L. N. Terry, H. W. Bellis, Thomas Feehan, Stephen Margerum, Alex Margerum, Fred Cruser, Pat Currant, George Brown, David Gradis, Andrew Hunt, A. A. Reed, Edward Hamilton, James K. Brown and D. R. Cox. Dues amounting to 64 shillings, collected at this meeting, were stolen by members of the company—according to a notation on the margin of the page. It is interesting to note that Princeton, like other New Jersey towns, referred to a 25-cent piece as "two shillings," as recently as the beginning of the twentieth century. The amount stolen must have amounted to \$8.00.

The next meeting recorded was that of May 5, 1868, when William Potter was foreman, Stephen Margerum, Jr., assistant foreman, and Stephen Margerum, treasurer. Members were Lake Davison, Stephen Pierson, John W. Leggett, George Brown, J. K. Brown, Alfred Barlow, James Carrie, C. A. Anderson, George Leggett, James Dennis, William B. Larrence (spelled Lawrence in later records), George W. Larrence, William Voorhees, Luther N. Terry, Schenck Davison, Stryker Davis, Noble Cummings, J. Q. Adams Packer, Frank Gill, James Brigget, Patrick Currant, James Margerum, Alexander Margerum, John Smith, Samuel Blue, V. K. Hutchinson, George Bendy and William Leggett.

In May, 1870, Potter was still foreman, Stephen Margerum, Jr., his assistant, and William Larrence, treasurer. The first known secretary of this company was Stephen Pierson. Two years later James Leggett served as foreman, assisted by Albert Thompson, with Charles Abrams as secretary and J. K. Brown, treasurer.

That same year the company held its first ball and its first "Parade and Wash." At this event, which took place in Queenston during April, the engine "threw water 175 feet." In front of Dixon Hall the following June the engine "threw a stream of over 183 feet."

Records show that Princeton Engine Company No. 1 was originally located on Canal Street, now Alexander Street. The double-decked hand engine was kept there until the latter part of 1869. Then it was



Officers of Princeton Engine Company No. 1

Seated: William P. Cox, secretary; Alfred Parker, vice-president; William J. Coon, president; William H. Lewis, treasurer; John M. McCloskey, first assistant chief. Standing: George Willis, trustee; Arthur Bremen, first assistant foreman; William Larkin, foreman; Samuel Davidson, second assistant foreman; Thomas P. Flynn, trustee; Raymond J. Gunn, trustee, not shown when the picture was taken.

moved to Nassau Street near Harrison, in the section known at that time as Queenston, Queenstown or Jugtown. On April 9, 1878, the company decided to move again and sent a petition to the common council asking for aid. The wording of the petition is of sufficient interest to be quoted in full:

Your Petitioners, the Officers and Members of Princeton Fire Company, No. 1, and the friends of the fire department of the Borough of Princeton would hereby respectfully solicit your Honorable body for an appropriation to be used for the erection of an Engine House in a suitable and convenient locality, to be erected after a plan made from the Engine House now occupied by Princeton Fire Company No. 3.

Your Petitioners need not call the attention of your Honorable body to the fact that at this time a building of the description above named could be erected with at least one third less money than it cost to build Engine House No. 3.

Your Petitioners would further state that they feel it would be unnecessary to occupy your time with further arguments in favor of this matter, believing that all that is necessary to call your attention to the desire of the company is the premises, relying upon your sense of justice and fairness to prompt you to grant this, our prayer.

Why should not Engine Company, No. 1, receive the same consideration as No. 3? All we ask is like accommodations and we will persevere in a generous and manly rivalry.

Members signing this petition were: James K. Brown, James Dennis, James Margerum, William B. Lawrence, William Potter, Charles Zapf, William Clayton, John Cranston, Ben Baker, Ignatz Hoff, Alfred Thompson, Wesely Wyckoff, Fred Brown, William Peters, Cass Lake, Lake Davison, Stephen Margerum, Stephen Margerum, Jr., Alex Margerum, Theodore Skillman, John Leggett, James Leggett, Joseph Powell, Charles G. VanMarter, Charles H. VanMarter, Nicholas Culp, Peter Meeken, James M. Brown, Cornelius Guinn, Robert B. Tyrrel, Augustus Nelson, V. Goldsmith, William Guinn, William H. Warren, Ralph Schanck, George Lawrence, William Granston, C. Helleman, Thomas Etler, George Vanacker, Thomas Carroll, Richard Warren, William O. Packer, Samuel Calhoun, James Connor, Joseph Hiscock, V. Cruzar, Ben Potter, John Meek, M. O'Brien, and William Carr.

Friends of the department who signed were: R. S. Cummings, William J. Gibby, J. W. Wright, William Leggett, John Leggett, Albert E. Vanderbilt, George O. Vanderbilt, John Nelson, P. N. Williamson, Amos Burd, Elijah Anderson, James Burke, Clarkson Applegate, Henry B. Bayles, A. W. Martin, H. D. Rosenbury, W. B.

VanDeventer, I. S. Mershon, James Ross, W. L. Hankins, Joseph G. Skirm, John M. Clayton, Thomas Brown, Lewis J. Andrews, George W. McGinnis, R. Runyan (former mayor), William VanDuyn, James G. Ferguson, Marcus M. Pardoe, Waite and Son, and H. B. Clayton.

There is no record, either in the local papers or in the proceedings of the borough council, that the petition was successful.

However, the deed for the property shows it to be a counterpart of the one mentioned in the petition. The lot was purchased from Ignatius Hoff on June 20, 1879, for \$330. As the old engine house at Jugtown was sold to Stephen Margerum on January 2, 1880, it would seem that the new house at 13 Chestnut Street was built during the latter part of 1879. The company still occupies this building.

Many years later—in 1919—Mr. Hoff, then the oldest and one of the best known members of the company, was again prominent in its history. In January of that year the following item appeared in the *Packet*:

A mysterious conflagration of unknown origin, but supposed to be caused by momentaneous combustion, occurred last Saturday night about 11:30 in the evening at the home of "Ig" Hoff, at the corner of Witherspoon and Wiggins streets. The blaze, for some reason or other, started in an outhed, and fanned by the wild blasts of north wind, the interior and outterior were soon a mass of frisky flames.

A passing pedestrian, although having a cold in his head at the time, smelled the odor of smoke, and rushed in an alarm which was hastily responded to by the entire fire department, including sightseers. The firemen, by superhuman efforts, however, soon had the seething mass of blazes under control and although heroic measures adopted to save "Ig's" valued fishing tackle, which was kept in the shed, the treasures could not be saved. The entire paraphernalia was destroyed, including his celebrated 33 3-4 length reed casting rod. Unfortunately the loss is not covered by insurance.

The first obtainable record of a real parliamentary meeting of the company is dated March 5, 1883. At that time the following officers were elected: F. A. Dennis, president; James Cox, vice-president; Samuel K. Calhoun, foreman; Stephen Margerum, first assistant; William Pierson, second assistant; James K. Brown, treasurer; T. K. Warren, secretary; and Hamil Smith, steward.

At this meeting four members were named as the first representatives of No. 1 to the meeting of the Firemen's Relief Association: F. A. Dennis, Stephen Margerum, Jr., Charles H. A. Zapf, and James K. Brown.

The first picnic recorded in the minutes was held in August, 1883,

and in February, 1885, when a new bell was installed, the company gave a reception. Four teams of horses hauled the bell from the station to Chestnut Street, to music furnished by the Jugtown band. Members of the borough council, Mercer Engine Company No. 3, and Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, were guests.

The enthusiasm felt on that occasion was duplicated—with an added dash of pride—when, in April, 1888, the company's new hose carriage arrived. According to a newspaper account of the time:

It is painted red and striped in gold leaf in fine lines, has two nickel fire extinguishers, and on front arch are two nickel plated bells hanging in a yoke spring; there are nine nickel lanterns, nickel name plate with Company name, two nickel branch pipes on a frame on rear axle, two tool boxes lettered in gold leaf, patent brake for stopping the hose reel. On front, a seat for a driver, and an extra pole for horses. It will carry 1,000 feet of hose on a fancy painted hose reel, in gold, with firemen's emblems. The carriage is built strong and light, with high wheels. Has a hand pole with white cotton drag rope. The company are very proud of their new carriage. They have been in need of one for a long time, and have bought it themselves with their own money, and will run it to all fires for the benefit of the Fire Department. The committee who purchased the elegant carriage are to be congratulated by the Company for their good judgment. The committee appointed by the Company were: J. J. McCloskey, M. Bergen and J. P. Foley.

The minutes of January 1, 1891, include the treasurer's first statement, showing a cash balance of \$500. The president at that time was William B. Lawrence, William D. Thompson was secretary, and James P. Sullivan, treasurer.

Engine Company No. 1, Mercer Engine Company No. 3 and Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, agreed on April 29, 1892 to elect the chief and first and second assistant engineers from each company in rotation. There is a lapse in the records after this date.

A Princeton newspaper editorial of July 1, 1899 sympathized with the members of Engine Company No. 1, over the summary treatment they had received at the hands of the fire and water committee of the council. Empowered to dispose of one hand engine and one hook and ladder truck, the committee—to No. 1's hurt surprise—procured a key to the No. 1 firehouse and had that unit's engine removed before a fire company's meeting on the subject could be held, and leaving the unit only its hose carriage. The editorial complained:

The cool manner in which No. 1 Engine Company were treated in regard to the disposal of their hand engine, was unjust. Firemen, in general, are fond of keeping trophies and souvenirs. A more pleasant way would have been to have called the Company together, and notified them of the intention of disposing of their apparatus—giving them a chance to purchase it if they wished.

Ten members of the fire company were immediately appointed to solicit subscriptions for a new steam engine, the company heading the list with \$250.

This committee, however, either did not function or had little success, for in May, 1903, Charles McCreanor, Charles Z. Page, Thomas Murray, William Lewis and John Redding were appointed to select a "he-man" team to solicit in earnest the sum of \$4,600. Those selected were Charles Page, J. J. O'Brien and H. Quick—and apparently they got quick action. On June 2, 1903 a steamer was ordered; on June 11 the contract was signed, and delivery was promised within 80 days. The steamer reached Princeton October 5. Two days later a parade, inspection and banquet were held in its honor.

In 1926 the company acquired the American LaFrance engine which was the new pride of the department, and the "realization of the highest aims" of Coan, then chief. Coan, according to custom, was invited to christen the engine and he named it for his youngest daughter, Theresa.

After more than a score of uneventful years, Engine Company No. 1 made history for itself at the entrance of the United States into the World War. Two honor rolls hang upon the walls of Princeton's "Working Men's Fire Company"—as this company is known, despite its \$500 initiation fee—bearing names of both soldiers and sailors from its ranks.

Serving the Army were: Edward Carroll, William J. Coan, Thomas Connor, Adam Dansbury, Samuel Davison, Thomas Davison, Frank Gash, Raymond Quinn, John M. McCloskey, Edward Murray, James A. Murray, Thomas R. Murray, Walter Murray, John O'Brien, Elmer Rodweller, James Bergen, and Dennis R. Sullivan. The Navy list includes William P. Foley, Frank Hogarty, and William Palmer.

It is worthy of note that this company paid transportation home at Christmas 1918, for those soldiers who were granted furloughs. To those who could not return, an equivalent sum was sent as a Christmas gift. Most of the money went overseas. From a camp in Alabama, Captain F. Silvester of Company L telegraphed assurance to all Princeton that "the boys of No. 1 Engine Company are the best in the company." Miniature rolls of honor were presented in June

of 1920 by Chief William H. Lewis to each member who had seen active service.

John D. Cashill, who had lost his eyesight in the war, was made the first and only honorary member of Engine Company No. 1 upon his return to this country. His brother and father were members of the company.

William J. Coan, now president of the company, was chief of the police at the New York Shipyard during the war.

Another sidelight of the company's activities is the fact that on Sunday, June 22, 1919, members attended in a body the first mass at St. Paul's Church, held by the Reverend Wilfred Foley. They have always been recognized for their generosity to the needy and liberality in local affairs. They also have the time and desire to rank high in baseball, swimming, basketball and target shooting. Their fairs, carnivals, annual balls and ladies' nights are anticipated each year.

The company has more than 65 guest badges from towns in which they have paraded; their trophy case is overflowing with ball-bats, balls, canes, trumpets and silver cups that speak for their athletic prowess. One of their most valued trophies is a large silver loving cup presented by the merchants of Princeton in 1921. This is awarded at each annual inspection to the finest-looking and best conducted company, by popular vote of local citizens. Three annual awards of the cup constitute permanent possession. Other valued trophies are five lamps from the old hand-drawn apparatus of the late nineteenth century, now used as shades in the meeting room.

Three outstanding figures in Engine Company No. 1 are William H. Lewis, William J. Coan, and William P. Cox, otherwise known and loved as the "3 Bills." Mr. Cox has been an able and faithful secretary of the company for 16 years. It is an interesting fact that there have been seven different members of the Cox family in the company, from James A. Cox in 1871 to the present secretary and his son, William P. Cox, Jr.—an unbroken service of 61 years for members of this clan.

William J. Coan, who has served faithfully and efficiently in every office of the company for 36 years, is now entering his 37th year of service to the unit as president of the company.

William H. Lewis joined the "boys"—to all of whom he is "Uncle

Bill"—in 1885. Fifty years later, in 1935, Mayor Joseph S. Hoff presented him with a watch in honor of his half-century of service, upon the occasion of the annual inspection and parade of the fire department. At the same time Lewis received a unique badge to express the "gratitude and love" of his colleagues and the members of the community. A few years before Lewis had been described in the *Packet* as having participated in the annual parade "driving a team of white horses attached to the old steamer up Nassau Street like a charioteer on a Roman holiday." Nearing 72, Mr. Lewis is the oldest living member of the company and has held office in it over 40 years. At present he is financial secretary of the Princeton Exempt Firemen's Association, and a life member of the Mercer County Firemen's Association.

Present members of Engine Company No. 1 are: William J. Coan, president; Alfred Packer, vice-president; William P. Cox, Sr., secretary; William H. Lewis, treasurer; William MacDonald, foreman; William Larkin, first assistant foreman; Arthur Bremen, second assistant foreman; Frederick D. Amberg, George Cahill, James J. Carroll, Thomas Cashill, Harry E. Cauley, Walter Coan, John Conk, William P. Cox Jr., Robert S. Davison, Samuel Davison, Walter Davison, Thomas F. Flynn, Edward J. Foley, Walter P. Foley, John M. Finley, Hugh H. Golden, John J. Golden, Raymond J. Guinn, William J. Guinn, Frank Haupt, James Hogarty, James Larkin, Frank Lynch, Walter Mack, Robert McAvenia, John M. McCloskey, Robert McCloskey, Charles McGuire, James McHugh, Michael McKay, Thomas McQuade, J. A. Murray, T. E. Murray, Walter Murray, Thomas R. O'Kane, II, Chester A. Page, Elmer Rodweller, Elston B. Skillman, Charles Southard, Jr., Frederick Traegler, Thomas Welch, George Willis and William Willis.

Members of the fire patrol are James Carroll, Thomas Cashill, Harry E. Cauley, William J. Coan, William P. Cox, Thomas F. Flynn, Edward Foley, Hugh Golden, William H. Lewis, Michael McKay, Thomas McQuade and Elston Skillman.

As required by law the company has 50 active members. Unlike those of other companies in Princeton, they belong to the Mercer County Firemen's Beneficial Association.

Officers of the company report that its financial status is now the

best in its history. The last cash balance appearing in the treasurer's report was \$1,321.76. Extensive repairs on the engine house were completed in 1936 and today it compares favorably with any in Mercer County.

CHAPTER 4

MERCER ENGINE COMPANY NO. 3

The early history of Mercer Engine Company No. 3, like that of the other Princeton fire companies, is indefinite. Unlike the others, however, it can boast of having had a President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, on its roster.

Proceedings of the Princeton common council prove that the unit was organized in 1847, though the first minute books available are those of 1865, when the company was reorganized. Included on the new roll were transfers from the old company, among them one charter member, Aaron Lane Green, who had joined in 1847.

Other members of the earlier group were: Robert Priest, Samuel Vurnne, James H. Harris, John Warner, John Benham, Peter P. Packer, M. D. Stout, Samuel T. Conover, Edmund Conover, E. Stockton, James Grover Voorhees, W. C. Vandewater, George W. Morris, William Henderson, Robert Cole, Charles H. Conover, Charles S. Allen, David D. Olden, John M. Clark, J. T. Wilson, Thomas E. Benham, Henry T. Maple, John Hulfish, W. G. Ferguson, A. G. Clow, I. Anderson, W. T. Stout, James Leggett, J. W. Wright, John H. Margerum, Henry Clendening, Thomas Boyles, John S. Leard, J. S. VanDike, D. T. Pittenger, Aaron Clayton, R. L. Ridgway, Paul Benjamin, L. Vandewater, Martin Stout, and John Hollinshead.

One other clue to the affairs of the original unit is found in the

Princeton *Whig*, wherein a call is issued for a meeting of the company at the Mansion House on January 24, 1851. This was signed by William R. Murphy as president, and Robert S. Green as secretary. These few items give all the early information available.

The history of the company really starts with a meeting on August 30, 1865, attended by a number of recently returned Civil War veterans. Aaron Green presided at this session and Charles O. Hudnut acted as secretary. Following the adoption of the original constitution, officers were elected to fill unexpired terms. Green continued as president. Other officers named were William P. Milletts, vice-president; John A. Robinson, secretary; George H. Dey, treasurer; Margerum, foreman; Leggett, first engineer; and John Benham, second engineer.

Another meeting was held October 2 of the same year at the Nassau Hotel, at which all officers were renamed for another term with the exception of Milletts. He was succeeded in the vice-presidency by James L. Briner.

Green, the president, who came to Princeton in 1843, was a captain in Princeton's earliest military organization. "The Princeton Blues." He formed and was captain of Company A, Third Regiment, State Rifle Corps, in 1864, and was a member of the Washington Continental Guards, organized in 1876. Green also participated in many civic affairs, serving on the Princeton board of education for 15 years, as overseer of the poor, and as a member and president of the common council.

At the October meeting in 1865, a membership committee was appointed consisting of Hudnut, W. C. Vandewater and Crowell March, later United States Senator. The question of a new engine was taken up, and in April, 1866, a committee consisting of Marsh, Margerum and Wright discussed the matter with the common council. Quick action was obtained. The new engine arrived in Princeton on May 10, of the same year. The problems that then faced the company were the construction of a fire house, and the raising of funds to pay for the engine. The building committee consisted of Wright, Margerum and M. H. Krauskopf; and the finance committee of Wright, Hudnut and W. C. Vandewater.

A lot on Chambers Street was purchased from R. S. Field for



Officers of Mercer Engine Company No. 3

Left to right: Frederick B. Warren, trustee; Stanley Bergen, trustee; Joseph Dennen, secretary; E. F. Drake, president; David S. Lloyd, Jr., vice-president; John Hoff, treasurer; Charles Muth, chief; John Stalder, first assistant foreman; Henry W. Kenney, second assistant foreman.

\$300 on April 23, 1867. The raising of funds, however, did not progress as rapidly as desired. Early stock sales, according to a report of August, 1866, amounted only to a little more than \$1,000. On March 20, 1867, a new committee was appointed to urge the citizens of Princeton to "subscribe freely to this fund."

William Golden was finally awarded the contract for the new firehouse, to be erected at a cost of \$4,200. From council minutes it is learned that final payment on the building was made on January 7, 1868.

Several years later a miniature of the building in elaborate icing and cake was constructed by Thompson, a local baker, to grace the New Year's night firemen's ball. On display in the bakeshop window prior to the dance, "it was praised by many for its artistic skill. . . . and for its prejudged utility and acceptableness in affording refreshment and pleasure to the worthy firemen and their friends."

Interest in the company seems to have waned about this time, for there are no records of meetings in 1868, of only two in 1869 and of none in 1870. In the following year, however, a reorganization of the company took place, a new engine was purchased and members were photographed "grouped in front of their engine in a semi-circle, with their chief in the center." A newspaper account of the operation concluded: "It may be needless to add that they made a very *handsome* appearance."

The new officers elected were: Hudnut, president; Briner, vice-president; Edward M. Allen, treasurer; Thomas E. Benham, foreman; John S. Stryker, first assistant engineer, and William G. McClosky, second assistant engineer. The office of secretary was held open until the next session; although no record of his election can be found, William C. Vandewater apparently filled the office, since on September 6, 1871, his resignation is noted in the minutes. The following year Hudnut was named secretary, and Briner, president. G. A. Segar, William A. Duryea and Briner, were the company's first trustees, elected in 1871. Secretary Hudnut became a justice in July 1875, and frequently rented the firehouse for trials, at \$1 per trial.

Records of February, 1879, give high praise to Anderson, Wyckoff, J. R. Slayback and D. M. Green, as members of a well-known firemen's quartet of the day.

At a meeting on December 6, 1882, the secretary, James A. Drake, reported that "C. O. Hudnut has presented to the company an old record book of the 'Princeton Fire Company,' organized in Princeton in February, 1788. On motion it was accepted, and a vote of thanks extended to Mr. Hudnut for the same." It was ordered that this old record book be always kept at the firehouse and not lent to anyone. John F. Hageman used it in his compilation of Princeton history in 1879. Joseph R. Dennen, present secretary of the company, and president of the Princeton borough council, sets a value of thousands on the volume.

A general inspection of the three companies in Princeton—apparently the first, and apparently suggested by Mercer No. 3—took place July 10, 1884, on Nassau Street in front of the old Mercer Hall. It was a very colorful affair, as was the reception and parade held in August, 1885, when a new hose carriage was received.

The following item in regard to hose engines appeared in the *Princeton Press* of March 4, 1899:

Princeton has for 15 years relied upon the Water Company for water to extinguish fires, furnished at such a pressure that streams can be thrown directly from the hydrants with great efficiency, without the intervention of fire engines. The old hand engines that served us so long a time prior to the introduction of city water have been relegated to places of honor in the engine houses. Hose carriages have been the only pieces of apparatus that the engine companies have thought of taking out on the occasion of alarms.

We believe that No. 1's engine has not been in service at a fire in the borough for a decade and a half.

Mercer No. 3's engine was used at the burning of the Johnston barn on Chambers Street one wintry day fourteen years ago, when the water pressure was considered inadequate, or the location of the fire in reference to the hydrant made an extra stream from a cistern necessary. It was brought out again by the firemen on the morning of February 21, but they feared the rust and decay of fourteen years of idleness had rendered it unserviceable. To their great joy the old engine was in good order and rendered invaluable service at the fire!

On October 28, 1886, under the leadership of Foreman Thomas W. Lavake, a large delegation from Mercer Engine Company attended the unveiling of Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty in New York harbor as the guests of the Volunteer Firemen's Association of New York. An article from a New York newspaper of that day states:

The company made a fine display in the line of parade and received much attention. This is the only time in the century of the existence of Princeton's Fire Department when one of the its companies has marched in review before the President of the United States (Grover Cleveland) and his Cabinet, and

Mercer No. 3 did the town credit by their appearance and bearing on this occasion.

Aaron Green, charter member of Mercer, withdrew from the active roll during March, 1889, and was placed on the honorary list. After a lapse of two years, at the age of 61, he was again elected to active membership.

A painting of General Hugh Mercer, for whom the company is named, was unveiled by President Briner in September, 1891, and hung in a place of honor in the company's meeting room. General Mercer died at Princeton, January 12, 1777. January 12, 1892, 115 years later, the Mercer Engine Company's flag flew at half mast. This is now an established yearly custom. A monument to General Mercer was unveiled at the fiftieth anniversary of the company, October 1, 1897. A large copper tablet, embedded in a granite boulder, is inscribed with the date of the company's organization and that of General Mercer's heroic death at the Battle of Princeton. The boulder was donated by Dr. Marcus Pardoe, former owner of Tusculum, the home of the late Dr. John Witherspoon, once president of Princeton University. It was placed on Battle Field Farm through the courtesy of the owner, Henry E. Hale. On this occasion Hale opened to the public the room in which General Mercer died.

Princeton University granted the company the use of Alexander Hall for the anniversary exercises. The entire Princeton fire department, as well as several out-of-town companies and the mayor and common council, were present. Among the honored guests were Robert Mercer and his son, Hugh, grandson and great-grandson of General Mercer. The members of Mercer Company also took a prominent part in the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Princeton on January 3, 1927.

Sometime during 1898 a number of the company's members, late in answering No. 3's fire alarm, claimed they could not hear the bell in the outskirts of the town. Their excuses were futile. Semi-official tests proved that the bell could be heard at Jugtown, Princeton Basin, Princeton Junction and Cedar Grove.

Mercer Engine Company No. 3 had several enthusiastic and expert marksmen. A check-up of the recorded target excursions shows awards of high honor to several members, the highest mark going to Aaron Green. Other awards were made to S. M. Rose, A. Muth, E.

W. Stryker, J. Redding, W. H. Drake, John R. Drake, J. J. Stryker, Skirm, Burke, Lavake, Briner and Duryea. These target meets were usually held in Joseph Olden's Woods or at Stony Brook.

On November 3, 1911, the constitution, by-laws and rules of order of the company were revised to their present form. Drake, H. Lee McConahy and Philip Bennett comprised the revision committee.

The passing of the horse-drawn engine was foreshadowed in November, 1911, when Princeton's mayor signed a contract for a "Webb 6-cylinder auto steamer." The new engine arrived June 13, 1912, and a few days later a celebration and a parade were held in its honor.

A number of the company's members saw action in the World War and upon their return home were greeted enthusiastically by their fellow firemen. Sergeant "Duke" Dennen was a member of the famous Princeton Ambulance Unit, S. S. U. 525. Held in German prison camps for some time prior to the signing of the Armistice, he was accorded wide acclaim as a lecturer upon his arrival in this country. At a reception held for him he "modestly refrained from speaking of his own acts of bravery which won for him the Croix de Guerre."

Other members of the company who were in service included Robert A. Benham, Edward G. Clothier, Ernest F. Drake, Albert J. LaBaw, David S. Lloyd, Jr., Howard A. McKaig and Charles E. Sailliez.

It was at a banquet in January, 1918, that President Woodrow Wilson was nominated for honorary membership in the company. A telegram of notification was sent to the President, to which he responded on January 23:

My dear Mr. McConahy:—

I thank you very much for your letter of January fourteenth. It would please me very much to be enrolled as an honorary member of the Mercer Engine Company No. 3, and I appreciate the compliment paid me.

Cordially and sincerely yours,

(Signed) WOODROW WILSON

Forty-three active members were present at this banquet, and the following honorary members: William T. Warren, A. Y. Stryker, A. H. Stryker, A. Sailliez, A. A. Naylor, George Benham, George Eggers, W. C. Durner, A. Muth, W. E. Burke, H. Margerum, A.

Dohm, A. G. Zapf, T. A. Redding, D. Struve, F. A. Struve and J. R. Drake.

During 1931 the Mercer Engine Company decided to build a new engine house. A committee composed of E. C. Kopp, W. W. Golden, S. S. Bergen, J. A. Furch, J. F. Bowen, R. F. Johnson, E. F. Drake, F. F. Pierson, Dennen and McConahy, was appointed to consult with the borough council. The result of their work was an appropriation of \$15,000 from the council. A suitable site, directly opposite the old house on Chambers Street, was at once purchased and the erection of the building ordered rushed. On Wednesday, June 8, 1932, Mayor Joseph S. Hoff, in the presence of members of borough council and a few invited guests, turned the first earth with a "golden" spade, a gift from "Bud" Zapf, Jimmie and Fred Warren. Pictures were taken for posterity.

The new home of the engine company was officially dedicated and the cornerstone laid on the evening of June 28, 1933, with the mayor and borough officials in attendance. John Colt, who was president of the borough of Princeton at the time the building was planned, was the principal speaker. The exercises, presided over by the borough council president, Burt E. Myrick, were opened by the company's president, Joseph F. Bowen. Rev. Patrick J. Clune, pastor of Saint Paul's R. C. Church, delivered the invocation; the Reverend Doctor Charles R. Erdman of the First Presbyterian Church, pronounced the benediction. Mayor Hoff sealed up the cornerstone. The building is regarded as one of the finest engine houses in Mercer County.

The present membership of Mercer Engine Company is 50. Among these are some of Princeton's best known business men. An ex-mayor, an ex-councilman, the present chief of police, the health officer, one borough councilman, and the chairman of the Mercer County Democratic Committee, all fight fires side-by-side—and participate together in seasonal athletic sports. The "boys" are known, not alone for their abilities as volunteers, but for their athletic prowess and their social activities.

When Hoff was mayor of Princeton it was his custom to march with Mercer No. 3, of which he was a member, at the annual inspection parade until he had to slip out of line at the reviewing stand to take his honored share in the official proceedings.

Fairs, carnivals, card parties, dances, and athletic meets sponsored by this unit, are social events of no little importance in Princeton. Nor are these activities confined to the borough alone, for Mercer members are enthusiastically received wherever they visit. In their cabinet of souvenirs are badges and prizes from several states, as well as from various towns and cities in New Jersey.

The treasurer's report for January 1, 1936, states that the company is in a better financial condition than it has been for ten years.

In September, 1936, the death of Edward C. Kopp, a member for over 47 years, was mourned by the entire company. F. B. Warren, Jr., was named to fill the vacancy.

There are approximately 60 living honorary members, of whom George C. Dohm, 84, and Robert S. Clayton, 81, are the oldest. James R. Drake, who was also 81, died in April, 1937. Frank F. Pierson is the oldest active member of the company, having joined it in 1894; Hoff joined the company only a few years later, in 1898.

Ernest F. Drake, now serving his third term as president of the company, was chief of the Princeton fire department in 1919. Twenty years before, on March 3, 1899, he was presented with a "handsome fine gold fireman's badge," for "his acts of bravery at recent fires. . . . The badge is in the shape of a Maltese cross, in the center of which is 'Mercer Engine Co. No. 3.' On the bar above is engraved Mr. Drake's name."

The present active roll of the company is as follows: Ernest F. Drake, president; David S. Lloyd, Jr., vice-president; John F. Hoff, Sr., treasurer; Joseph R. Dennen, secretary; Stanley S. Bergen, Frank F. Pierson and Frederick B. Warren, trustees; Charles A. Muth, engineer; Joseph A. Furch, foreman; John W. Stalker, first assistant; Henry W. Kenarney, second assistant; C. J. Anderson, F. F. Birch, L. G. Birch, T. J. Birch, W. C. Blake, F. K. Bohn, J. F. Bowen, E. G. Clothier, G. M. Durner, L. C. Duryea, W. W. Golden, F. L. Grover, R. N. Grover, Conrad Gutbrodt, L. B. Harris, J. J. Hennon, J. S. Hoff, J. F. Hoff, Jr., N. Hussey, R. F. Johnson, Jr., S. K. Kaeser, H. J. Kahny, E. L. Lloyd, J. C. Lopez, J. J. Lynch, E. W. Mahan, Jr., S. C. Margerum, J. A. Mooney, H. L. McConahy, C. A. Muth, Jr., G. L. Pierre, C. J. Rocknak, F. P. Rocknak, G. W. Rodefald, P. W.

Rodefald, J. E. Ross, C. E. Sailliez, J. P. Servis, J. J. Stemmle, C. A. Thiel and J. A. Warren, Jr.

Members of the fire patrol for 1937 are Blake, Bowen, Clothier, Duryea, J. F. Hoff, Lynch, Mahan, McConahy, Thiel, F. F. Pierson, F. B. Warren and J. A. Warren, Jr.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRINCETON HOOK AND LADDER AND CHEMICAL ENGINE COMPANY NO. 1

Although tradition has it that the Princeton Hook and Ladder and Chemical Engine Company No. 1 was established about 1854, no records exist to prove the authenticity of that claim. There are, however, indications to the contrary. In the *Princeton Press* of January 22, 1858, the following editorial comment appears, inferring the existence of only two companies (Princeton Engine Company No. 1 and Mercer Engine Company No. 3):

In Princeton we have spent thousands of dollars to protect ourselves in case of fire, we have two first class engines, and two hose carriages well supplied with hose; we have enough young men to man engines and work them with zeal. But it is evident, these means are not fully sufficient in case of fire.

Besides these means, we have hundreds of citizens who come and look on at a fire who could not do much at an engine, and yet would be willing to do what they could. Why not out of this class, form a bucket company?

Apparently this editorial was not immediately fruitful, but the entire fire company was reorganized in 1865, as the result of a public meeting held in Mercer Hall on July 21 of that year. It was at that meeting that the formation of a hook and ladder company had its inception. On July 28 a committee, consisting of George T. Olmstead, Emery Olden and J. F. Hageman, was appointed to appear before the common council and urge upon that body the necessity of a reorganization of the two companies then existing, as well as the

formation of a third, or hook and ladder company. The council adopted the recommendations of the committee and authorized the members to proceed. The old hand engines were repaired and a truck, hooks and ladders and buckets were purchased.

The *Princeton Standard* of September 8 and 14, 1865, carried the following:

Notice: Those persons desirous of forming a Hook, Ladder and Bucket Company, will attend an adjointed meeting to be held at the Mansion House, in Princeton, on Monday evening, 11th inst. at 7½ o'clock. As important business will come before the meeting a general and punctual attendance is requested.

(Signed) E. OLDEN,

Chairman of Last Meeting.

Olden was named president of the new company, John R. Hamilton vice-president, Malcolm MacDonald secretary, George T. Olmstead treasurer; and D. E. C. Baker, Edward Holcombe, Theodore Leard, Ernest Sondo, William L. Hankins and Nathaniel Stout, directors. Equipment furnished for the unit consisted of 50 fire buckets, six axes, hooks and a truck with four ladders—two 35 feet long, and two 18 feet.

Members kept their buckets at their homes or places of business, but the company equipment was housed in the old market house, long since torn down. It remained there until 1869, when it was removed to the Nassau Hotel stables. In May of the same year it was moved again to a site on Canal Street, now Alexander Street. The one-story building there, at the rear of 36 Alexander Street, was also the home of the Princeton Fire Company No. 1 (now Princeton Engine Company No. 1) and an addition was erected by Henry W. Leard at a cost of \$136.10 for the hook and ladder apparatus. It was housed there until May, 1872, when it was again moved to a building erected by the borough council at a cost "not to exceed \$3,000," at 11 Mercer Street, on the site now occupied by Carlton R. Priest.

The flurry of interest aroused by the reorganization of the department in 1865 soon died down, and only occasional notices in the Princeton newspapers attest to its activity during the next nine years. But on June 2, 1874, the borough council took over the control of the department. Funds were provided for its support by taxation, and a revised charter authorized the council:



Officers of Hook and Ladder Company No. 1

Seated: John Cooper, trustee; Morris Apple, vice-president; Everett E. Sattenbush, secretary; Wilbur F. Kerr, president; John R. B. Slayback, treasurer; Walter Leigh, senior member; James L. Briner, Jr., trustee. Standing: Harold M. Hinkson, first assistant foreman; Carl Shaffer, foreman; William Labey, second assistant chief; Earl L. Wilbur, second assistant foreman.

to establish, regulate and control the fire department, with power to exempt its members from serving as jurors in the courts for the trials of small causes and from militia duty in time of peace; also to provide fire engines, hose, hook and ladder carriages and all apparatus and houses needful therefor.

The Hook and Ladder Company itself reorganized on May 28, 1879, when each member was required to sign the roll book and a receipt for a hat and a belt. The members who signed were William A. Rose, John R. Warren, W. H. Burroughs, Augustus MacDonald (one-time mayor of Princeton), J. W. Fielder, Jr., Joseph Priest, Jesse S. Clayton, C. S. Robinson, Dr. Marcus Pardoe, J. H. Stillwell, W. M. Morris, C. A. Terhune, William L. Briner, John A. Stout, John F. Hageman, Jr., Joseph S. Schenck, R. H. Rose, W. M. Wright, Frank S. McCarty, C. M. McKeu, J. C. Conner, S. G. Cox, H. S. Robinson, William H. Mershon, W. L. Hendrickson and Charles R. Hendrickson. When Dr. Pardoe and MacDonald resigned in 1881 their places were filled by E. L. Stevens and Benjamin R. Warren.

Although it is known that Hageman was president of the company in May, 1881, and that Stout was secretary at that time, the first reference to an election in the minute book is found under the date of April 10, 1882. At that time the following were named: Hageman, president; Stout, secretary; Charles Hendrickson, treasurer; Mershon, foreman; Charles Hendrickson, first assistant; W. E. Burke, second assistant. New members elected in that year were Frank Pearle and the Hon. Crowell Marsh, United States Senator, elected president of the company two years later.

On April 11, 1884, the company revised its constitution and by-laws, officially adopting the name of the Princeton Hook and Ladder Company and reducing the membership to 25. The company was not incorporated until seven years later.

The question of a new building had been in the air since 1887, when the borough council had ordered an election upon the question of raising by taxation the sum of \$3,500 for the erection of a fire-house. But no action was taken until August, 1891, when the Gamble property on Witherspoon Street was purchased. Six months later the contract was awarded to John Golden. The building was completed—at a cost of \$4,250—in time for the June meeting of the company in 1894. The old house and grounds had been sold to Dr. John Miller for the sum of \$2,500.

No further changes in the organization of the company appear

to have taken place during the remainder of the nineteenth century, but the members were doing yeoman service at fires. Notable among their activities was participation in the fighting of a bad blaze at Freehold, 20 miles from Princeton, in September, 1886. The fire had originated in a large hotel on the main street and spread to adjacent structures, due to the delay in getting Freehold's inadequate equipment into action. New Brunswick, Burlington, Trenton, Matawan, Red Bank, Long Branch, Asbury Park, Keyport and Eatontown companies were called out, and although Princeton was not officially summoned a large portion of the Hook and Ladder's membership voluntarily proceeded to Freehold by train to render assistance. Because of the meager water supply, the out-of-towners were able to accomplish little, but the fire was finally subdued without loss of life. One of the highly prized souvenirs of the Princeton company is the framed set of resolutions of gratitude from the Freehold department and citizens to the Hook and Ladder unit.

During the blizzard of '88 the firemen took the wise precaution of removing all their "Babcocks"—fire extinguishers—into the dining room of the Nassau House, centrally located, where they would be easily available during those days of difficult transportation.

The fire and water committee recommended to the borough council in April, 1899, the purchase of an aerial hook and ladder truck and 2,000 feet of hose. On June 24, the *Press* announced:

The Hook and Ladder Company with members of the two engine companies and the Princeton fire and drum corps and the South Carolina orphan band marched to the freight station for their new truck on Tuesday afternoon. On their return they marched through the principal streets and then adjourned to Odd Fellows' Hall, where the Hook and Ladder men entertained the members of the other companies.

The new truck is much more modern than the one used heretofore, and is equipped with conveniences in the way of extension ladders and other apparatus.

In 1904, following the purchase of a chemical engine, the company's name was officially changed to the Princeton Hook and Ladder and Chemical Engine Company No. 1. The committee appointed to consider the engine's purchase had consisted of Frank C. McKaig, T. W. LaVake, E. R. Kerr, Stead and Briner. McKaig was named its first captain. The chemical crew consisted of W. B. Applegate, V. B. Cook, J. W. Mershon, George McKaig and Kerr. Two months later

Captain McKaig was made superintendent of the house, in recognition of his tireless efforts to raise funds for the engine.

The Fire Patrol, formed in December, 1908, consisted of E. V. Baldwin, captain, J. W. Bickford, Briner, W. F. Kerr, F. L. Kraspack, W. W. Law, C. R. Savidge, W. C. Sinclair, J. R. Slayback, and H. M. Stillwell. A lighter note was injected in the company's usually routine business when Bickford was appointed "clock winder," and "on motion it was resolved to show him a 'good time' in payment for his services as such."

When the need to motorize the department was felt in the following year Captain McKaig was appointed to investigate the subject of automobile chemical engines. But it was not until five years later, on July 11, 1914, that the company purchased one of these new-fangled contraptions. The extent to which the company was further modernized during the 14 years that followed can be learned only by word of mouth, since the records from 1915 to 1929 have vanished. It is known, however, that the borough bought for the company a motor hook and ladder truck in 1923 and a four-tank chemical engine in January, 1930.

At the company's annual banquet in 1911, held at Nassau Inn, the 56 members and guests present witnessed the burning of the mortgage on the Witherspoon Street fire house. It was a joyous occasion, heightened by many toasts. A. Johnson spoke on "Our Company," C. C. Skirm on "Past Recollections," M. W. Hubbard on "Company History," and W. C. VanDeventer on "Our Members." Captain McKaig took as the title of his address his own name for the chemical engine, "The Comical;" and Wallace Mershon and V. B. Leigh, both recently married, shared an address on "The Newly-wed."

For the next few years the financial condition of the company was enviable. In 1915 its assets amounted to \$12,600.20, and its liabilities to only \$4,400.05.

Members of the Hook and Ladder Company were active in world war service, as they had been active during each of the country's wars since the unit was founded. Among those who served overseas were Captain Charles Browne, Captain Richard Stockton, Captain William C. Vandewater, Albert Brook, Harry A. Frohling, Harold A. Gibbs, Walter M. Riggs, William C. Snyder, Walter A. Titus and Edward B. Warren. Homecoming "blowouts" were given for several of the

men including Snyder, Brook and Frohling. Like Joseph Dennen of Mercer Company No. 3, Snyder was a member of the famous Princeton Ambulance Unit, S. S. U. 526, and a recipient of the Croix de Guerre for distinguished bravery. At a reception in 1919 William Law resigned as foreman and was replaced by Wilbur Kerr.

When the records reappear in 1929 it is found that Kerr was president; Morris Maple, vice-president; J. R. B. Slayback, treasurer; E. E. Satterthwait, secretary; H. H. Kerr, foreman; R. H. Garrison, first assistant foreman; William H. Lahey, second assistant foreman. In that year it was decided to award medals to all members who had served 25 years in good standing, and a banquet was accordingly held to so honor McKaig, Slayback and Walter C. Leigh. Leigh, aged 69, and Slayback, aged 61, are the oldest active members of the company today. Benjamin Warren, 83, and Edward R. Branch, 76—who is still remembered with gratitude for his gift of a siren fire alarm to the department in 1919—are the oldest honorary members of the company.

Leigh, familiarly known to his associates as "Walt," will have completed 50 years of service with the company in 1938. He remembers many incidents of the "good old days" when he and George Goldie, Jr., were eager members of the group of young men who helped to pull the fire apparatus to its fires. Together with William Gulick, Carl Priest; Lewis Smith, Lewis Mudge, William H. Lytle and Robert Scudder, he was among the non-members who "fell all over themselves" to be present at all the fires. Still under 21 and thus too young to join the company, they rendered valiant service. Leigh recalls that upon one occasion their enthusiasm led them into danger: pulling the truck to a fire on Canal—now Alexander—Street, the apparatus gathered momentum on the hill and threatened to crush those who were "pulling" it. The only alternative was to let it go and finally, fearful though they were of the consequences, that was done. Apparently the machine was not seriously harmed.

Leigh also recalls distinctly the opposition which members of the company expressed toward uniforms when they were first suggested. A deadlock on the question was finally broken by the absence of Joseph Priest—Carlos Priest's father; the 20 members of the company, previously equally divided in the vote, adopted uniforms while

Priest suffered at home from a severe cold. Many members who had voted against their adoption resigned from the company when the matter was decided. Walter Leigh's father, William M. Leigh, then a prominent Princeton tailor, made the outfits of "blue cloth, with gilt buttons and braid." Since that time the company has always been known by fellow-townsmen as the "Kid Glove Company."

At the May 1 meeting in 1929 a resolution was drawn up by Albert M. Wert, Walter Leigh, Satterthwait, J. H. Cray and Slayback in commemoration of the death of Frank McKaig. It read as follows:

Three quarters of a century of life may not be lightly passed over; for these years, Frank C. McKaig has been a highly respected and much beloved resident of our town and a loyal member of Princeton Hook and Ladder and Chemical Engine Company No. 1.

Thus the members of the company express their poignant sorrow at the passing of this genial spirit and stalwart character, who discharged his duties conscientiously and fulfilled his promises.

The first regular First Aid Corps of the company was formed in March, 1935. Its members were George D. Lewis, George Rollins and J. Bloom.

As a prominent factor in the community's social life the company has conducted entertainments, dances, fairs, carnivals and card parties for the general public. Athletics and other sports have always had many adherents among company members, and the two most popular are rifle practice and baseball.

The company's present members include many of the leading citizens of the town. The following are the officers for 1937: W. F. Kerr, president; Councilman Morris Maple, vice-president; J. R. B. Slayback, treasurer; E. E. Satterthwait, secretary; W. H. Lahey, second assistant chief; Carl Schaffer, foreman; H. M. Hinkson, first assistant foreman; Earl W. Wilbur, second assistant foreman; Vincent Ross, janitor; John Cooper, Councilman George Karch, and James Briner, Jr., trustees; H. M. Dickey, Russel H. Smith and Earl Wilbur, representatives to Mercer County Relief Association; W. J. Palmer, Albert M. Wert and James Briner, Jr., representatives to Princeton Firemen's Relief Association; Horace N. Dickey, George Karch and James Pace, financial committee.

In addition to those named above and forty-five honorary members the company consists of the following active members: Richard Anderson, John Belue, T. Belue, J. Bloom, E. A. Blydenberg, George

Callighan, George Carlton, R. Carter, William Cooper, J. H. Cray, E. B. Crowell, S. Davison, Thomas Davison, H. Eldridge, R. T. Garrison, G. Gutbrodt, H. Johnson, R. S. Johnson, H. H. Kerr, W. C. Leigh, E. R. Maple, R. Mundone, A. C. Peters, John Povlick, George Rollings, C. W. Rose, W. Tash, N. Theilgard, S. Thieme, C. L. Tilton and J. R. Watson. The following are also members of the Fire Patrol: John Belue, Bloom, Crowell, R. S. Johnson, Leigh, Maple, Peters, C. W. Rose, Satterthwait, Slayback and Smith. E. W. Stratton is also a member of this patrol.

The members are adequately protected through the Firemen's Relief Association, Workman's Compensation carried by the Borough of Princeton, as well as through accident insurance maintained by the company itself.

CHAPTER VI—PART 1

NOTABLE FIRES

Probably the earliest outstanding recorded fire in the village of Princeton was one which occurred on March 9, 1769, in historic and oft-damaged Nassau Hall. The building comprised then virtually the whole of Princeton University, known at that time as the College of New Jersey. *The Pennsylvania Journal* of March 16 stated that the blaze

was extinguished without doing any considerable damage. . . . It did not appear that the fire was caused by the heedlessness of any person whatever; but probably by a spark, from the windward, dropping on the leeward side of the building, as it kindled in the roof where there was no communication with any of the chimneys.

A second and far more serious fire in Nassau Hall occurred March 6, 1802. This time the building, even then referred to as venerable, was completely gutted. The *Trenton Federalist* reported:

About one o'clock the cupola was discovered to be in a blaze; the wind was uncommonly violent; and in less than two hours the whole building was destroyed. . . . The College Library, and the Libraries of two Literary Societies in the college, the Orrery of Rittenhouse, and the furniture, books and clothing of at least half the students of the college, were lost. . . . Happily, no one received any injury, though some perilous attempts were made by the students to stop the fire and save the property of the College.

Thus fell one of the fairest Temples of Science, of Literature and of Religions and left its sons to mourn over its ruins! . . . May that Providence which so long fostered this institution raise another out of its smoking ashes, equal in fame and utility!

This fire was alleged to have been of incendiary origin, although nothing was conclusively proven. Undergraduates of that period fre-

quently set off giant firecrackers and otherwise violently expressed their resentment against the petty restrictions imposed by the college administration, and it was suspected that the Nassau Hall fire was a further manifestation of their anger. No direct charge was made, but six students were expelled for having been "Unwholesomely Connected" with the affair.

Following the fire the members of the college board resolved that, "while they recognize and are humbled under the frown of Divine Providence . . . yet, recollecting the faith and prayer in which it (the college) had original foundation . . . cannot suppose either that the smiles of Heaven will be withdrawn from it, or that the benevolence of its numerous friends . . . will be wanting to re-establish it." The benevolence of its usual friends, however, seems not to have been so generous as was hoped, and the college was rebuilt only after strenuous efforts. Funds were raised throughout the young nation and as far away as England, whence one delegate was sent to secure books.

On March 10, 1855, fire struck Nassau Hall a third time. Starting in one of the students' rooms, it virtually repeated the devastation of 1802, but the college was not so completely paralyzed as a result since other buildings had been erected during the intervening years. The *New York Weekly Times* published an account of the event:

All the efforts of the officers and students of the College, and of the citizens of the town, to arrest the flames proved unavailing. . . . At an early period of the fire, even before the building was, by most persons, considered in danger, the door of the picture gallery was forced open by Mr. Cameron, one of the tutors, and Mr. Gilchrist, a member of the senior class . . . eager to rescue the portrait of Washington by the elder Peale, and the portraits of the earlier Presidents and friends of the College. These were all removed without injury to a place of safety.

The loss of the old Nassau bell during that fire was particularly mourned. In the *Princeton Press* of April 6, 1855, an old graduate laments:

That bell, whose tones for more than a century have called the laborers from the fields, has told the mechanic when to commence his daily work, and when it was finished; has called congregations to the House of Worship to hear the Word expounded by such men as Drs. Miller and Alexander; has tolled the funeral knell of all who have died in the village for years back; has warned the citizens when the town was in peril of fire, but rung no alarm when itself was in danger, will never again call her children around their Alma Mater! Well may that fire be called the funeral pyre of sad memories of the year!

Princeton University seems not to have been visited by fire again until June 28, 1905. On that date the university field house was destroyed. It was of brick with an interior finish of oiled wood, which burned furiously and made salvage of the structure impossible. Firemen battled with the flames for two hours, first attempting to subdue them and then in a successful effort to confine the loss to that one building. Handicapped by the location of the structure far from the streets, the fire fighters found the blaze the most stubborn they had had to cope with for years.

Fire struck again in January, 1913, when Alexander Hall, oldest building of the Princeton Theological Seminary, was damaged to the extent of \$8,000. The large bell, which had called classes and chapel for nearly a century, fell from its tower into the attic and was cracked and melted by the intense heat. This building, erected in 1815, had been the first in the United States to house divinity students.

In 1919, during the Summer vacation, a large covered grandstand and sections of two open stands at the varsity field were destroyed, together with a barn belonging to C. C. Skirm, at the rear of the field. In October of the same year a fire occurred in the university's Artillery Hall, with a resulting loss estimated at \$50,000. Valuable artillery recording instruments, records and supplies were lost, together with the personal property of 39 enlisted men housed in the barracks.

On May 14, 1920, Princeton's Dickinson Hall, erected in 1870, and the Marquand Chapel, built in 1882, were completely destroyed. The blaze called out not only Princeton's firemen but engines from Trenton and neighboring towns. Flames started in the top floor of Dickinson Hall and spread too rapidly to be checked. The chapel was ignited from the straw and leaves of birds' nests under the eaves. Irreplaceable murals, tablets by St. Gaudens, stained glass windows and a valuable organ were burned, although the most valuable tablet in the chapel—the heroic bronze high relief of President James McCosh by St. Gaudens—escaped the flames.

At the very height of the fire President John Grier Hibben attempted to enter the chapel with the intention of saving the famous Alexander Memorial Bronze tablets. In his zeal he resisted the efforts of Professor Varnum Lansing Collins and Chief Engineer William Lewis to dissuade him, and was finally restrained by force. Foreman

Stanley S. Bergen of Mercer Engine Company No.3 endangered his own life by attempting to enter the building in his place. Fortunately the tablets were not so seriously damaged that they could not be restored, and they adorn Princeton's new chapel today. In later years President Hibben was most generous in his praise for the men who he insisted had preserved his life.

An interesting side light on the fire is the fact that it occurred during the spring house parties of the university students, and the campus clubs were playing hosts to hundreds of feminine guests. Between dances they hurried with their escorts to view the blaze, apparently regarding it as a spectacular display arranged for their enjoyment.

The *Princetonian's* account of the fire waxed poetical:

The Chapel tower rising above the surrounding tongues of flames, the streams of water, the falling walls, the puffing engine, with the contrasting sight of pretty faces and beautiful gowns, made a scene never to be forgotten.

The local papers also commented upon the fact that, "one of the fire plugs bursting from having been frozen the previous winter, it was a miracle that the very efficient volunteer department did as good work even as they did."

After an interval of eight years the college had another serious fire in November, 1928, when the John C. Green School of Science was burned. The event was heralded with undisguised joy by the undergraduate body, which declared through the medium of the *Princetonian* that the old building, erected in 1873, had "performed a wilful act of self-destruction." "Conceived under an evil architectural star," an editorial said, "maligned and blasphemed by generations of Princeton men," it "folded its tents like the Arabs and silently stole away."

The loss amounted to approximately a quarter of a million dollars, and included the destruction of equipment, specimens, and research notes collected over a long period of time by professors and research students.

The *Princetonian* reported:

In order to help an aged professor whose notes, the result of 25 years' research, were in the building, a popular Professor of History is said to have braved the seething flames to rescue the valuable data. His deed of heroism assumed a humorous angle when he discovered that the key to the room which

he had to enter was left behind in the pants he had neglected to don in his haste. Undaunted, however, and pajama-clad though he was, he burst down the door and successfully carried away the material. The University is said to have absolved him from paying for the destruction of the door.

The tower, where the fire started, acted as a chimney for the blaze, and the puny streams of water provided by a poor water pressure had little effect upon it. The fire department at that time also suffered from a lack of adequate equipment, and the firemen were nearly helpless in the face of a fire of such proportions. A local paper stated that "no fire department unequipped with a water tower could have saved the building. Credit is owing to the Princeton Firemen for holding the blaze in check long enough to permit the removal of most of the valuable contents of the building." The residence of Dean Christian Gauss and other nearby buildings were damaged by an explosion of over-heated chemicals, occurring during the height of the blaze.

Smoke and water did some \$100,000 worth of damage to stock and machinery and publications stored in the basement of the University Press plant at Williams and Charlton Streets, in February, 1930. On that occasion it was heavy clouds of smoke from the paper and chemicals which offered the chief hindrance to the firemen.

Other educational institutions than the university have suffered the ravages of fire in Princeton. The Hun School was seriously threatened on more than one occasion, and in 1929 the recitation building, the garages and the stables at the Junior School at Edgestoune were destroyed.

Music accompanied the destruction of the historic main building of the Princeton Tutoring School on Stockton Street, which was completely gutted on the night of January 30, 1924. Loss was estimated at \$140,000. The 37 boys who used the structure as a dormitory lost almost all of their possessions, but they gathered cheerfully in a circle of chairs and sofas on the sidewalk, fortified against the weather by pajamas, fur coats and galoshes, and sang "Red Hot Mama" to the strains of a salvaged victrola, in honor of their burning alma mater.

CHAPTER VI—PART 2

NOTABLE FIRES

The university and schools of Princeton have not been the only sufferers from fire in the borough. Numerous residences, barns and business buildings have been destroyed by fire since the earliest days of the borough's history.

The largest of the conflagrations was that which, in January, 1909, razed the old Alhambra Hall, now the Branch Hall, at 33 Witherspoon Street, together with a large block of the business section of the town. The fire was so serious that Chief Higgins called on out-of-town help, and although Engine No. 5 of Trenton was sent to Princeton on a special train with the company's hose and carriage, the local department had the blaze under control before its arrival. Fireman William W. Leggett, member of the Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, was sent on a fast sprint to the railroad station to prevent the unloading of the Trenton apparatus when it was found that it would not be needed. For a time Chief Higgins contemplated the use of dynamite to stop the spread of the flames, but this drastic measure was not required.

The fire, which destroyed property to the extent of between \$65,000 and \$85,000, started innocently enough in the kitchen of the Beddiges and Verbeyst restaurant, shortly after 10 p. m. An alarm was sent in by Assistant Marshal Bert J. Hunt, but when the firemen

arrived at the building it was burning fiercely and beyond control, so that all efforts were concentrated on the adjacent frame buildings. All occupants escaped injury, although many of them had to hurry into the street wrapped in coats or blankets, since there was not time to dress. Serious accidents were narrowly averted in many cases by the watchfulness of the fire patrol.

The firemen, however, did not fare quite so well. Ladders were mistakenly removed from one of the buildings while Fireman Frank C. McKaig and William R. Foley were still on the roof. McKaig's hand was badly burned and Foley suffered burns on the face before the two men were able to attract attention and were rescued. Fireman William L. Briner, Jr., was badly cut in the leg by a falling chimney.

Besides the Alhambra Hall, the buildings burned included the frame structure belonging to the Nassau Realty Company, an adjoining building owned by Mrs. Thomas McCloskey, and two frame buildings on the north side of Spring Street. Occupants of the buildings who were entirely burned out were the Beddiges and Verbeyst restaurant, Alhambra Roller Skating Rink, J. C. Hankin's paint shop, Brown and Norton, electricians; J. J. Kelley, grocer; Samuel Ross' Billiard Parlor, Joseph Effinger's meat shop, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Brude, James Leggett, John Suydam, the Alhambra Lodge rooms and McCloskey's restaurant.

Another among the outstanding fires in the past century was that which, in April, 1860, consumed a house on John's Alley, occupied by two Negro families. The blaze was utilized by the local press—as were many other Princeton fires—as an object lesson in the newspapers' campaign for a better equipped fire department. "The engines could have extinguished such a fire in twenty minutes if there had been water," the *Princeton Press* declared; "yet why not water when there were wells all around there? We understand that there is a great deficiency in the quantity of hose, in consequence of which the water in deep wells cannot be reached. . . . How idle to raise money for the fire department, if the apparatus is defective."

The years 1898 and 1899 seem to have produced an uncommonly large number of fires in Princeton. On February 19, 1898, an explosion at the gas works "filled the vicinity with dust and debris and shattered the glass in the windows of the neighborhood." The "walls were

thrown outward" and the roof, after rising in the air and falling with considerable damage to the retort room, was set on fire. However, despite these terrifying events reported in the *Princeton Press*, the flames were quickly extinguished by the fire department and "the explosion did not interfere with the operation of the gas works in any way."

Three days later, at a little after two in the morning, "Cashier Blackwell was aroused by smoke in his sleeping room, which is on the second floor of the First National Bank Building." The blaze which caused that warning smoke quickly developed into "the most serious danger of an extensive conflagration" the firemen had been faced with in many years. Originating in the cellar of Dr. Arthur Schwartz' pharmacy, at the corner of Nassau and Witherspoon Streets, in the building adjoining the bank building, the flames completely destroyed the corner building and the upper stories of adjacent structures. Losses were sustained by W. L. Hankins, John M. Clayton, First National Bank, F. A. Dennis, lawyer, Higginson's tailoring establishment, the Nassau Land and Improvement Company and several individuals who had furniture stored in the ruined properties. Light pressure in the water mains again hindered the firemen, and two gas meters exploded to add to their difficulties before the gas could be cut off. Reports of the fire concluded happily with the information that most of the losers were adequately insured.

It is said that Grover Cleveland, then President of the United States, was among the hundreds of spectators who gathered to watch this conflagration, but whether the fire fighters were aware of his presence and thus inspired in their labors is not recorded.

In July of the same year the barns of P. Van D. Bergen and a Mr. Stead were visited by a fire which for some time threatened to become serious. Fortunately there was no breeze to fan the flames, and although the buildings were considerably damaged the stock and most of the barns' contents were saved.

Just twelve months later the barn occupied by Mrs. Thompson and Mr. Snedeker was destroyed by "the second fire this week and the sixth alarm for this month." A horse, a large number of poultry and a quantity of Snedeker's blacksmithing materials were lost, and the blaze threatened to destroy the entire village of Queenston. The

fire was believed to be of incendiary origin, as were many in Princeton before that time and afterward. The local paper commented:

We have already commented on the previous work of this fire fiend. It is high time the iniquity was stopped. . . . It is high time that something was done and done quickly and effectively to give taxpayers and property owners the sense of security and protection which they have the right to expect and enjoy.

The guilt was not attributed to any particular individual, contrary to the *Standard's* attitude in regard to a minor fire in 1866, of which it said: "Suspicion points strongly to a bound girl of Mr. Lloyd's as the incendiary."

Several other incendiary fires took place in 1899, and on April 21, 1900, the barn on the Bartine property was destroyed and the home of Harold Anderson seriously damaged in an allegedly incendiary blaze. It was "stated by some of those early at the fire that the odor of kerosene was very perceptible. Whether this came from empty vessels or oil stoves in the barn has not been ascertained," the press said, "but it is possible that the oil was used by the incendiary to make his work sure, and every effort should be made to detect the criminal."

The newspapers were complaining in similar vein 19 years later, when an editorial on January 31, 1919, appeared as follows:

From all indications the "fire bug" is with us again to terrorize the neighborhood, and the owners of old barns in particular. A couple of years ago it will be recalled that we were visited by conflagrations occurring every Saturday night at practically the same hour, and which were undoubtedly of incendiary origin. All attempts to apprehend the demented "bug" proved fruitless and finally, for some reason best known to the guilty party, the fires stopped and property owners were put at their ease once more.

That the fires of last Saturday night and the one previous were incendiary there seems no doubt, especially the blaze which destroyed the barn and sheds of the Warren estate. And had it not been for the efficient and timely work of the fire department, the houses on William Street would have been ignited from the big sparks blown across by the high wind at the time. . . . Perhaps at this point it may not be amiss to mention the fact that the W. C. T. U. were on their job as usual and distributed hot coffee to the firemen, and as the men expressed it, "saved their lives."

What might have been the most serious of these allegedly deliberate fires was the effort of September 2, 1919, to burn the hospital that was just nearing completion at the foot of Witherspoon Street. Discovery of the "dastardly attempt" was made when it was found that "oil had been poured on the building at the rear, and although ignited, had failed to get a good start, and had providentially burned itself out." A *Packet* editorial that week used stern words:

This has been going on for a period of years. . . . Why not organize a branch of "Western Vigilantes?" A movement such as this, backed with a few "Colts," would help in disposing of this terror to the community.

The famous Peacock Inn fire on January 11, 1915, was memorable as much for the arguments that followed after it as for the damage to a well-known landmark.

The fire, starting in the pile of kindling wood in the cellar, shortly after noon on a Sunday, spread rapidly. Before firemen were able to subdue the flames the interior of the rear structure was burned out, the roof of the entire building was destroyed, and the interior of the main building was so damaged by fire and water as to be beyond repair. Guests on the second floor who were shut off from escape by the stairway were brought to safety by ladders erected to the windows. Numerous guests lost valuable personal property—including an author's manuscript—and the total loss on the building and furniture was estimated at \$20,000.

Company No. 1's steamer, which "in case of a bad fire was the best apparatus Princeton possessed," blew out a cylinder just as the fire was spreading dangerously, thus cutting off two streams of water when they were needed most. Many firemen were in church when the alarm sounded, and numerous Sunday-go-to-meetin's were ruined that day, as they battled at the risk of their lives to save the guests and as much of the property as was possible. Fireman William P. Cox, who had no time to remove his finery as he dashed to the inn, lost a 13-pearl stick pin during the excitement, but fortunately identified it in the tie of a fellow passenger on the Trenton trolley car the following week and recovered it.

The arguments already referred to were between the borough of Princeton and the fire department on the one side, and the *Princetonian* on the other. Citizens and students alike had offered their services during the blaze; and when it was over irate citizens and—doubtless amused rather than irate—students, accused one another of throwing breakables out of windows and carefully carrying such articles as sofa pillows and cushions down the stairs. Apologies were requested and redress demanded. The *Princetonian* went so far as to present its "regrets" to the department that Mrs. O'Connor, proprietor of the inn, had not provided dancing as well as refreshments at the fire.

Princeton fires have been caused by a variety of mishaps. A chim-

ney spark alighting in a pine-needle-filled gutter started a minor blaze in the roof of the home of Woodrow Wilson, then a professor at Princeton University, in 1899; rats that gnawed away electric wire insulation endangered the lives of twenty horses, in a \$10,000 barn fire on the property of James McCarthy in 1919; and a stove, over-heated in an effort to thaw frozen pipes, exploded in the home of Philip Golden during the cold January of 1918. "Many of the firemen had just about gotten home and snug in bed, having remained up all night awaiting calls, from just such causes, when Bing, Bang, she went," the *Press* reported sympathetically.

The explosion of an illicit liquor still sent the fire department to Mount Lucas on January 7, 1924. Occupants of the house which was set afire had to be rushed to the hospital, but that serious note did not prevent the local newspaper from commenting that "even while the firemen were approaching the building, the popping of corks from bottles and jugs, sounded like machine gun fire, while the air was so permeated with the fumes of the stuff that it is said, that even the stray rabbits near the scene were frisking around with 'jags'."

Several serious fires occurred in the '20's. The famous old Princeton Casino, on University Place near Alexander Street, where the McCarter Theatre now stands, also known as the Theatre, Armory and "Operry House," was destroyed in a midnight blaze in January, 1924, "with seething spurts of spiral sparks scooting skyward." It was reported that no lives were lost "with the exception of a few thousand roaches." Conjecture as to the cause of the blaze was not silenced by the university freshmen's suggestion that it had been started by "memories that bless and burn," left behind in the wake of numerous college dances. This occasion was enlivened by the presence of students; gathered around the two pianos that had been rescued from the hall, they joined lustily in "Keep the Home Fires Burning."

The burning of the old Waite property, in June, 1925, said to be the second oldest building in town, kept the fire department busy for many hours, and it was only the firemen's zeal which saved the Pyne building and the structure on the west. The entire stock of the Brick Row Book Shop was destroyed, and the stocks of the Music Shop, Skirm's Smoke Shop, Clayton's Department Store and LaVake's

Jewelry Store were damaged. Furman Allen, of the Skirm Shop, rushed into the smoke-filled building and rescued his eye glasses at the risk of his life.

A blaze discovered under the porch of the historic Bainbridge House which held the borough's Public Library, in August of that year, was extinguished before much damage had been done, and a fire which threatened for a time to destroy an entire district burned a number of horses in the Princeton borough stables in November, partially destroying the neighboring borough jail. The latter was unoccupied at the time.

A fire which emphasized the danger of crowding flimsy wooden buildings in the center of town occurred on February 2, 1927. A carpenter shop formerly occupied by William Vanarsdale was destroyed, as was the home of Archibald Servis. These were located on John Street, near Hulfish. The presence of unusual danger prompted the calling of the Trenton department. A current news account declared:

Had it not been for the quick action of our department in getting control of the situation, the property loss—and possible loss of life—would have been tremendous. This location is the most dangerous for a fire to break out in. A fire at this point in Princeton would be a mighty serious matter, if it once got beyond control.

Among the most recent of the borough's conflagrations was that which destroyed the coal yards of Conover and Matthews, and the Grover and Gulick Coal and Lumber Company, on May 20, 1935. The cause was attributed to defective wiring. Although the three companies were out in full force "the heat was so intense and the gas from the burning coal so deadly that it was impossible to get near the blaze." Coal cars on the yard tracks burned until they were warped, and the wooden trestles were demolished. Coal was still burning during the early part of the following week. The damage was estimated at between \$75,000 and \$100,000.

But in spite of this imposing—and still only partial—list of Princeton's fires, there are records of only one local resident having lost her life by fire within the borough limits. She was Mrs. Anise Scudder, an 80-year-old Negro, who was burned to death on May 28, 1920, in an early morning blaze at 150 Witherspoon Street. In 1914 a fire on the farm of former Assemblyman B. L. Gulick near Kingston, cost

the life of an aged Negro who had been camping in the hay mow for several months.

Notable among the fires outside the borough at which the department has assisted, were the blaze which destroyed a barn belonging to William Mount at Penns Neck in 1917, and another at the Walker-Gordon Laboratory Company at Plainsboro on May 6, 1920. The former, caused by lightning, ruined 80 tons of baled hay ready for shipment; the latter, destroying only one building and no cattle, occasioned a loss of \$10,000.

Local papers throughout the history of the fire department have published frequent blasts against the inadequacy of the department's equipment, but they have at all times spoken well of the bravery, the resourcefulness and the stamina of the firemen.

THE END