

## Pottsville Fire Department

### Looking Back

#### February

Thanks again to Dave Derbes and Dr. Pete Yasenchak of the Historical Society of Schuylkill County with their help in identifying some business locations.

#### 5 Years Ago

2/6/2007 – Box 532 – 18:53 – 1246 Rhododendron St. – Room & Contents, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor apartment. Companies were originally dispatched to the 200 block of Spruce St. on Box 65 for the report of the fire. As units headed into the Jalappa section of the city, it was realized that there was no 200 block of Spruce St. in that neighborhood. It was immediately discovered that it could be the 1200 block of Spruce St. in the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward. After follow-up contact with the original caller, companies arriving in the area verified the address of fire on Rhododendron St., running between and parallel to Cedar St. and Spruce St. Firefighters encountered heavy smoke and high heat on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor as the result of a room and contents fire in the apartment. The fire was quickly knocked. Schuylkill Haven Fire RIT was requested, but redirected to stand-by at Humane Station 30 after the fire was controlled. Temperatures were bitterly cold at the time of the fire. Asst. Chief Glore had Command.

#### 15 Years Ago

2/19/1997 – Box 323 – 01:13 – 1602 W. Norwegian St. Companies arrived with heavy fire blowing from the top floor of the 3-story, middle-of-the-row dwelling. A line up the interior stairwell quickly knocked the main body of fire. No extension to the exposures.



The third floor of 1602 W. Norwegian is gutted as West End Ladder 51 has the aerial ladder on their 1992 E-One 75' quint to the front of the D exposure.

### 20 Years Ago

2/17/1992 – GEN – 16:26 – City Asphalt at the end of Atlantic Ave., off East Mines Road. A single-story block garage was gutted. While a general alarm was transmitted, no box was struck. Engines 11, 33, 41, and 71 operated on scene with the remainder of the assignment being placed available. The fire itself was out of the city. The garage itself was of average size with no exposure problems. Asst. Chief G. Witmier had Command.

### 25 Years Ago

2/18/1987 – Box 63 – 13:37 - 137 W. Railroad St. An arson fire heavily damaged the attic area and roof of a 2 ½ story vacant frame dwelling. The fire was placed under control in ½ an hour. Companies were on scene an additional hour or so. This home was also involved in another arson fire on 8/17/1985. Fire damaged the basement in that fire.



Phoenix firefighters exposure fire in the roof area in the rear of the vacant home 137 W. Railroad St. American Hose Engine 71 – 1984 American LaFrance 1500 gpm pumper operates on Railroad St.

2/25/1987 – Box 614 – 11:20 – 344 North St. Companies arrived with heavy fire showing from the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor rear of the 3-story frame dwelling. Fire extended to the third floor of the home. The home was occupied by Gary and Sandy Schaeffer and three of their four children at the time of the fire – none of whom was home. Lines were advanced via the interior stairwell. The interior attack was pressed and the main body of fire was knocked-down fairly quickly. Lines were also advanced to the rear of the home to knock-down the exterior fire. A vent hole was sunk in the roof by Ladder 51. The second and third floors were gutted.



Smoke and steam pour from the upper floors of the 3-story frame dwelling at 344 North St. West End Ladder 51 has the aerial on their 1977 Seagrave 100' quint to the roof as American Hose Engine 71 – 1984 American LaFrance Century series 1500 gpm pumper – and Good Will – 1982 Ford/FMC 750 gpm high pressure pumper – operate on North St.

### 30 Years Ago

2/3/1982 – Box 68 – 09:32 – 14-15-16-17 Peacock St; Pottsville Housing Authority; Fire in basement crawlspace; Cause: Propane leak caused explosion; Loss: \$5,300. These homes were heavily damaged by fire shortly after being built. A fire on January 2, 1974 involved units 15-16-17-18-19 and resulted in \$72,500 in damage.

2/15/1982 – Box 45 – 20:28 – 244 N. 10<sup>th</sup> St; Vacant building; Cause: Arson; Loss: \$2,000. A fire was set in two separate locations on the exterior of the 2-story end-of-the-row home on the south side in an alley. It quickly spread to the roof line via the asphalt (i.e. “gasoline”) shingles. Companies arrived and quickly knocked-down the exterior fire. The roof was opened above and the ceilings opened below to insure that the fire didn’t enter the 4’ cockloft toward the front of the row frames at 244 – 250 N. 10<sup>th</sup> St. – all 2 story. We lived at 250 N. 10<sup>th</sup> St. at the time of the fire – at the other end of the row. We were watching TV at the time and heard our neighbors at 248 N. 10<sup>th</sup> running frantically up and down the interior stairs of their home. I happened to glance

out the front window and immediately saw the reflection of the fire against the night sky. I had a photo of West End's Ladder 51 (1977 Seagrave) with the aerial out of the bed in front of our house, but for the life of me I don't know what happened to it (believe it or not!). This row of homes still stands on a very narrow N. 10<sup>th</sup> St. off Race. 250 is separated from 252 by a 4' alley. 252-256 is a similar row of 2-story frames. The hydrant that services the fairly long 200 block of N. 10<sup>th</sup> St. is at 10<sup>th</sup> & Race. The nearest big-water hydrant, should it be needed, would likely be at 10<sup>th</sup> & Laurel. There is also a hydrant, that is somewhat hidden, on 11<sup>th</sup> St. in the 200 block at the dead-end off Race. This, however, would necessitate hand-jacking the line over the embankment. But, it's there in a pinch and also would provide good access to the rear of the 200 block of N. 12<sup>th</sup> should it ever be needed.

2/22/1982 – Box 542 – 17:24 – 617-627-629 Harrison St; Occupant at 623: Cuccia family; 627-629 vacant; Cause: Arson; Loss: \$4,000.

Companies responding to Box 542 were immediately aware that they were heading to a working fire. Perched high on Harrison St., the 2 ½ story frame home at 627 had fire blowing from both sides of the attic. The fire had extended to the roof of the adjacent home at 629 Harrison St. and had ignited the side of 2 ½ story frame end-of-the-row home at 617 Harrison St. approximately 15 feet from the original fire building. The fire was very spectacular on arrival. As handlines were stretched, Humane placed the Stang gun in service on their 1980 Seagrave 1250 gpm pumper to knock-down the heavy exterior fire. West End also set-up the ladder pipe on their 1977 Seagrave 100'/1000 gpm rear-mount quint. Once the exterior fire was knocked, crews advanced into the homes to complete extinguishment and check for extension. The homes at 627-629 are no longer there.

### 35 Years Ago

2/3/1977 – Box 514 – 11:35 – 1502 Mt. Hope Ave; Occupant: John Wasko; Cause: Frozen pipes being thawed; Loss: \$500.

2/8/1977 – Box 56 – 01:55 – 612 Oak St; Occupant: Susan Weaver; Cause: Candle; Loss: \$3,000. Fatal fire.

Companies arrived on scene to find heavy smoke showing from the upper floors of the three story frame, end-of-the-row apartment building. One block long, Oak Street runs from Harrison St. to Fairview St. between 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>.

Firefighters were immediately informed by Pottsville Police officers and the other occupants of the building – Pamela J. Comfort and Richard A. McNeely –

that Susan Weaver was trapped in her third-floor apartment. Lines were stretched via the interior stairs to knock-down the fire which originated in Weaver's bedroom. Assistant Fire Chiefs Jack Rose (Phoenix) and Bob Dusel (Good Will) located Weaver in the bedroom. Unfortunately, it was immediately clear that she had perished in the fire. Weaver, age 26, was pronounced dead by Deputy Coroner Joseph Bedway. The fire was largely confined to the bedroom and was placed under control in 20 minutes. An investigation by Fire Chief March, Pottsville Police Detective Dale Repp, Schuylkill County Detective Walter Berger, and PSP Fire Marshal Thomas Slane determined that a candle caused the fatal fire. This row of 3-story frames still stands on Oak St. The nearest hydrants are at N. 8<sup>th</sup> & Fairview Sts. and N. 7<sup>th</sup> & Harrison Sts.



Asst. Chief Bob Dusel, Good Will (left) and, I believe, Larry Reed, West End (right) operate in the bedroom which was gutted on Oak St. Note the high pressure fog nozzle on Good Will's booster line resting on the mattress. Photo courtesy Bob Dusel and Good Will Fire Company No. 4 ([www.goodwill40.com](http://www.goodwill40.com)).

40 Years Ago

2/21/1972 – Box 19 – 20:25 – Logan & E. Norwegian Sts; Joyce’s Café; Cause: French fryer; Loss: \$100.

#### 45 Years Ago

2/16/1967 – Call for help – 17:00 – 1198 Pottsville St., Mechanicsville; Occupant: Leo Klare; Kitchen fire; Chief sent Humane, Good Intent, American Hose and Greenwood Hill.

#### 55 Years Ago

2/21/1957 – Box 14 – 15:05 – 5 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> St; Trudy Shoppe 1<sup>st</sup> floor; Lloyd Martz apartment 2<sup>nd</sup> floor; Cause: Unknown; Fire started in stock room in rear of store on 1<sup>st</sup> floor; Loss: \$13,171,65.

The Trudy Shoppe sold children’s clothing and was owned by Nicholas Ventresca and Mrs. Benjamin Meyers of Pottsville. A store employee discovered smoke in the stock room to the rear of the store around 15:00 hrs. She immediately ran to the Good Intent Fire Company next door at 7 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> St. She informed the firefighters present of the fire. They immediately stretched the booster line from rear of the company’s 1937 Ahrens –Fox 500 gpm Model VC pumper. The rig was placed in service in the engine room. Firefighters found the stock room well-involved in fire. The box alarm was transmitted. Fire Chief George Smith supervised firefighters as they removed burning clothing from the stock room to the rear alley in order to access the rear of the store. Fire was found burning in the walls in above the pressed-tin ceiling. The American Hose arrived with their 1952 American LaFrance 700 Series 750 gpm pumper and stretched their booster line through the front of the store. Humane’s 1929 Buffalo hose and booster truck did the same. The main body of fire was soon knocked-down, but extensive overhaul was required due to the fire load and fire extension via the interior walls. The fire was placed under control at 03:42. Lloyd Martz occupied the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor apartment, which suffered extensive smoke damage. Martz was member of the Good Intent and was then treasurer of the Pottsville Area School Board. It was Lloyd Martz for whom Martz Hall was named.



A booster line is run directly from Good Intent's 1937 Ahrens-Fox Model VC 500 gpm pumper to the Trudy Shoppe next door to the firehouse. Note the 2 1/5" supply line snaking from the hydrant into the engine room. The hydrant is now at the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> & W. Norwegian Sts.

2/26/1957 – STILL – 10:38 – 12<sup>th</sup> & Russell Sts; Boxcar at Isaac Weiner's Junkyard; Cause: Unknown; Baled rags in boxcar on fire; Loss: \$4,189.71.

### 60 Years Ago

2/9/1952 – Box 34 – 10:00 – 617-619-621 Pierce St; Cause: Fire started in 617 on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor and burned to roof and side walls; Loss: \$5,875; Occupants and losses:

617 – Robert Strause	\$2,374.00
619 – Earle Uckele	957.00
621 – Mr. Ackalusky	2,544.00

Box 34 at 6<sup>th</sup> & Pierce was pulled when smoke was discovered pouring from the row of six, 2 ½ story frame row homes. It was believed that the fire was the result of a defective chimney. Fire broke-through the rear of the Strause home. The fire traveled via the attic spaces and interior partition walls. This necessitated extensive overhaul. Firefighter John Travitz, Good Intent, was injured in a fall inside one of the homes. While 617-621 suffered fire damage, the other three homes in the row suffered smoke and water



damage. Interestingly, the homes at 617-621 still stand. 611 exists as a stand-alone now as 613-615 are no longer there.

2/20/1952 – STILL – 12:34 – 219 S. Centre St; Sandwich Shop Restaurant;  
Cause: Fat in pan on stove ignited; Loss: \$616.

### 65 Years Ago

2/3/1947 – Box 57 – 15:34 – 663 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> St; DiMarcello garage; Cause: Bad light cord set fire to work bench in garage; Loss: \$100.

2/6/1947 – Box 52 – 14:58 – 525 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> St; Occupant: Milton Neiswinter;  
Cause: Man welding in workshop set shop on fire; Loss: \$383.88.

2/10/1947 – STILL – 18:50 – 5<sup>th</sup> & W. Norwegian Sts; Yuengling Apartment;  
Cause: Unknown, fire in room on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor; Boy had chemical set; Loss: \$1,700.

The Yuengling Apartment complex was of ordinary construction and was located on the southeast corner of 5<sup>th</sup> & W. Norwegian Sts. (directly behind the Yuengling Ice Cream plant where the parking lot is today). The portion of the building in which the fire originated housed three families, but the Yuengling Apartment complex housed 10 families in all. Fire originated in the third floor apartment of Graeff Fiester. The alarm was telephoned to City Hall by Patrolman Robert Rehnert. West End (1937 Ahrens-Fox 500 gpm “Emergency Car” and/or 1928 Ahrens-Fox 900 gpm piston pumper) and American Hose (1924 American LaFrance 450 gpm triple and, perhaps, 1917 American LaFrance 750 gpm triple) arrived in response to the still alarm to find fire showing from a window on the third floor. Booster lines were immediately stretched to the fire floor. The bulk of the fire was largely contained to one room, with the remainder of the third floor apartment suffering extensive smoke damage. The first-and second-floor apartments received some minor water damage. The room in which the fire originated was found to contain a chemical set, a movie projector, batteries, and many electrical cords. Can you imagine the concerns this fire would generate today!? One can almost picture the leather-lung firemen crawling low under the smoke down the interior hallway to reach the fire apartment. Note also that the fire was held to a still alarm.

### 70 Years Ago

2/27/1942 – STILL – 01:00 – 19 N. Centre St; Tuckler’s Store; Cause: Electric wires grounded in switch box set insulation on fire; Loss: \$171.78.

75 Years Ago

2/22/1937 – Box 18 – 16:05 – Centre & E. Norwegian Sts; Grace Shop; Cause: Electrical transformer from neon sign set fire to building; Loss: \$4,600.

80 Years Ago

2/26/1932 – Box 51 – 01:47 – 433-435 Railroad St; Cause: Overheated stove; Loss: \$2,600; Occupants and losses:

435 Railroad – Hummel Furniture Store - \$1,500

Mrs. M. Johnson 700

Wm. Dempsey 200

433 Railroad – Brighter Furniture Co. 200

The building in which the fire originated was a combination furniture warehouse and garage. Firefighters arrived with flames shooting 10-20 feet above the roofline. The fire was initially reported to be in the Beuchly Lumber Yard, directly across the street. The first 2 1/2” hoseline placed into service burst. The burst length was quickly replaced and eventually, three 2 1/1” lines were able to knock-down the main body of fire. The fire extended approximately 15’ across Wynn Alley and set the weatherboards on fire on the Brighter Furniture warehouse. This was quickly contained. The location of this building would have been to the rear of the Pottsville Post Office today.

85 Years Ago

2/21/1927 – Box 51 – 07:00 – Railroad & Minersville Sts; Pottsville Steam Heat Co; Cause: Sparks from boiler; Loss; \$150.

90 Years Ago

2/18/1922 – STILL – 13:30 – N. Coal St; Occupant: Hoover Mercantile Co; Cause: Hot water boiler exploded; Loss: \$1,200.

2/28/1922 – Box 73 – 22:00 – 22<sup>nd</sup> & W. Norwegian Sts; Occupant: Chas. Portland; Cause: Stealing gasoline; Loss: \$26,000.

The Yorkville Hose and Fire Company was holding a dance that Tuesday evening. Rather than storing their 1912 White chemical and hose truck outside the firehouse at 20<sup>th</sup> & W. Norwegian St., arrangements were made to house it in the Portland Contracting Company's garage on 21<sup>st</sup> St. between Norwegian & Mahantongo. The 2-story garage fronted 21<sup>st</sup> St. The first floor was of masonry construction while the second floor was wood-frame. The building itself was approximately 100' long. Attached to the rear was a boiler house. August Portland, nephew of owner Charles Portland, had just fixed a fire in the furnace. As he exited the boiler room, he noticed what he first thought was a light on in the second floor of the garage. Then, the window failed and flames rolled out. As he ran to telephone the alarm to City Hall, a passerby, Charles Gordon, pulled Box 72 at 20<sup>th</sup> & Mahantongo Sts. Another unidentified passerby pulled Box 73 at 22<sup>nd</sup> & W. Norwegian Sts. Fire Chief William Stevenson arrived with the companies to find the building heavily involved in fire. Yorkville firefighters attempted to retrieve their apparatus, but were driven back when fire erupted from the first floor garage area. The fire spread rapidly due to the oils and gasoline stored in the building as well as a large amount of Class A combustibles on the second floor. In addition to the Yorkville rig, several automobiles and a truck were stored in the building. Several explosions were reported during the course of the fire, which were attributed to the gasoline tanks on the motor vehicles stored within. Charles Portland, Jr., the owner's son, was returning from an engagement in Minersville via the trolley and spotted the flames from West Market Street. Fire Chief Stevenson was assisted on the fireground by Asst. Chiefs Blum and Buehler. The address carried for the Portland Contracting Company was 2064 Mahantongo St. The garage was located behind this property. Interestingly, 2064 Mahantongo St. was the scene of a fatal fire on 2/8/1985 when a resident of the Turning Point MH/MR group home perished. This was a large 2.5 story home of ordinary construction on the northeast corner of 21<sup>st</sup> & Mahantongo Sts. I'm wondering if that home wasn't the original Portland Company home? In 1922, Yorkville replaced the destroyed rig with a White triple combination pumper.

### 95 Years Ago

2/10/1917 – Box 54 – 06:40 – 713 Mine St; Occupant: W. Driscoll; Cause: Lamp exploded; Loss: \$1,977.77.

### 120 Years Ago

2/2/1892 – Yorkville Hose & Fire Company is chartered.

### 130 Years Ago

2/6/1882 – 03:00 – The People’s Railway Company destroyed. This was located at 221 South Centre St.

### 160 Years Ago

1852 – No record of fires (for the entire year!)

### 175 Years Ago

2/13/1837 – Fire in a frame building in the upper end of the borough, occupied as a butcher shop.