

Pottsville Fire Department

Looking Back

May

Mike Glore

20 Years Ago

05/03/1992 – Box 61 – 02:08 – 515-517 N. Centre St;

Companies arrived on scene with a 3-story, frame occupied multiple dwelling with heavy smoke banked into the street. Initially, this made it difficult to determine which building in the area was actually on fire. Fire originated on the second floor and quickly spread to the third floor and cockloft. This turned into a very labor-intensive fire based on the building construction and fire spread. The fire was placed under control in 2 hours. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors and the roof were all heavily damaged, resulting in the building being demolished following the fire. Fire damage totaled \$75,000. Asst. Chief G. Witmier had Command. The Schuylkill Haven Fire Department assisted on scene, while the Palo Alto, Port Carbon, and Mar Lin fire companies were placed on stand-by.

The fire originated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor apartment of Lester Murton in 515. The buildings at 513 and 511 N. Centre St. suffered smoke damage. Seven individuals were left homeless including Mae Kilcullen, Donald Baker, and their three children in the 1<sup>st</sup> floor apartment in 517. Fire service veterans in the Pottsville area are likely very familiar with Mae (Hahn) Kilcullen.

A funny personal story with this fire... I had followed Asst. Chief G. Witmier into the long 500 block of N. Centre St. that morning. The smoke was banked heavily into the street. Both he and I thought the fire was further up the street – closer to Nichols and likely in Sorge's Apartments. As he continued further up the block, I pulled in at a parking space in front of what used to be the Electronics Outlet on the east side of N. Centre St. At the time, I had a tan 1991 Saturn SC 2. As I began to exit my car, the smoke briefly lifted and I could clearly see smoke pouring from the apartment building directly across from where I had parked. Before I could get the words, "Oh shit!" out, I heard a Jake brake grab...hard. With that, Phoenix pulled alongside of me with their newly-refurbished American LaFrance 100' tractor-drawn aerial ladder truck. Just a few feet from my driver's side door was the vertical hydraulic outrigger on the ladder truck. This was not good. I make a quick decision to back up a little, cut the wheels hard right, and put the car up on the sidewalk. This car wasn't made to jump curbs, but it did! I actually parked under the marquee of the Electronics Outlet store. I wish I had a nickel for everyone who asked, "How in the hell did you end-up parked there?" I had to fess-up because I was pretty sure that there was evidence. Thanks to friend and noted fireground photographer Frank Wesnoski, there is video of this little escapade. If you watch the YouTube video, you can briefly see my car and then Phoenix arrive. In fact, you can hear me ask Frank to "back-up" so I could get my car onto the sidewalk!

YouTube video (Pottsville N Center St) courtesy of Frank Wesnoski...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLPDQZieYjg&list=UUK3abiMnaUL6VqYuH9x102g&index=1&feature=plcp>



Phoenix has their aerial ladder positioned as fire begins to break through the roof of 515-517 N. Centre St. Humane's E33 (1980 Seagrave WB 1250 gpm pumper) was first-due. I believe Good Will's Engine 41 was out-of-service for that fire. Photo courtesy Frank Wesnoski.

### 30 Years Ago

05/01/1982 – 05:16 – STILL - Assistance to Schuylkill Haven; Fire at the bleachery at Market & St. Peter Sts; Chief sent West End and American Hose. A dust/lint explosion near a large drying machine was suspected to have been the cause of the fire that destroyed the Schuylkill Haven Bleach & Dye Co. At the height of the fire, flames shot 40-50' into the air. One employee was hospitalized. Water was relayed almost 1000' to the scene. In addition to the three Schuylkill Haven fire companies and two Pottsville fire companies, the Orwigsburg Fire Department was also on scene. The Cressona Fire Department was placed on stand-by.



West End's 1977 Seagrave 100'/1000 gpm quint has the ladder pipe in service at the Schuylkill Haven Bleach and Dye fire.

05/17/1982 – Box 76 – 13:55 – 2070-2072 W. Market St; Cause: Spontaneous combustion; Loss: \$45,970;  
Occupants and losses:

2070 – Ruth Zellner                      \$19,570

2072 – Max Rudnick                    26,400

Two firefighters were injured fighting the fire that heavily damaged the attic area of both homes: John Hoffman and Jim Hampford of Yorkville Hose suffered burns to their necks and ears. Minersville Fire Chief George Ulmer was passing-by when he discovered the fire. He promptly hooked Box 76 – 21<sup>st</sup> & W. Market. These homes still stand. You can actually tell the difference in the roof area of the fire building compared to the other 2.5 story duplex homes in that stretch.



Fire Chief Todd March directs operations from the front yard of the duplex on West Market St. as heavy smoke pours from the top floor. Firefighters accessing the roof are (l to r): Bill Dewald (Yorkville), Dean Meyers (on ladder – Good Intent), and Mike Braukus (Yorkville).

5/28/1982 – Box 82 – 20:22 – 260 Forest Road; Occupant: Ronald Nocket; Cause: buildup of creosote in chimney; Loss: \$1,100. Fire ran the wall behind the chimney. Companies were on scene for an hour and a half.

5/29/1982 – Box 522 – 01:20 – 315 Laurel Blvd, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor; Occupant: Joan O'Boyle; Cause: Careless smoking; Loss: \$5,700.

A seat cushion was discovered to be on fire in the apartment. The occupants placed the cushion in the bathtub and applied water. Though they thought it was extinguished, it eventually reignited. Companies arrived with occupants attempting to exit the building. Firefighter Jack Conway of the Humane entered the apartment and located

Francis Morgan in a bed on the third floor and carried him to safety. Conway was treated for smoke inhalation. The fire was placed under control in 20 minutes with companies on scene until 02:25.

### 35 Years Ago

05/27/1977 – Box 63 – 09:40 – 152 W. Railroad St; Occupant: John Reppert; Cause: Child playing with matches; Loss: \$2,000.

A 4-year old child set fire to curtains in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor front bedroom of the home. Fire gutted the bedroom. Mr. & Mrs. Reppert and their 3 children were left homeless. 154 W. Railroad St. suffered smoke and water damage. The fire was placed under control in ½ an hour. The 2-story home still stands, but looks to be a duplex converted into a single dwelling.

### 45 Years Ago

05/05/1967 – Box 54 – 19:55 – 444 W. Race St; Occupant: Joseph LaBandera; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$900.

05/09/1967 – Box 115 – 00:40 – Rear 318-320 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> St; Salvation Army; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$100.

05/18/1967 – Box 42 – 20:40 – 702 W. Arch St; Occupant: Lamar Hamilton; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$740.

Fire originating in the kitchen damaged the first floor rear, the second floor back bedroom, and the back-flat roof area of the home. The other half of the duplex at 700 W. Arch was unoccupied at the time of the fire and suffered smoke and water damage. 654 W. Arch also suffered some smoke damage. This double-block stone/stucco home was built around 1894 and still stands today. I can attest that the fire didn't damage the roof area along the front pitch. When I was a freshman in college, I worked for Woodward Roofing Co. We re-roofed the front peak of this home. At the time, it had a standing-seam (i.e. "tin") roof, covering what may have been the original wood shake shingles. There was no fire damage noted, but it was a terribly dirty and dusty tear-off with those aged shingles! In fact, while we were working there a box was struck for Kline Brothers Auto Body for a working vehicle fire inside their garage. I remember standing there filthy watching the rigs screaming out West Market St.

05/24/1967 – Box 14 – 02:56 – 2<sup>nd</sup> & W. Arch Sts; Caravan Printing Co; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$100.

### 50 Years Ago

05/17/1962 – Box 65 – 04:10 – 338-340-342 Prospect St; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$13,780; Occupants and losses:

338 – William Heller           \$ 1,630

340 – William Lecher           12,000

342 – Francis Gainer           150

Mr. Lecher discovered the fire in the dining room of his 2-story, frame home as he was preparing to leave for work at Alcoa in Cressona. The fire spread rapidly. Mrs. Lecher was trapped on the second floor of the home and escaped by crawling through a window over the porch roof. Companies arrived with the Lecher home well-involved. Supply lines were laid from two fire hydrants and multiple booster lines immediately stretched. The main body of fire was knocked-down fairly quickly. While some companies began to take-up after an hour or so, the Good Will remained on scene until 06:30. All three homes still stand. 338 and 340 are a frame duplex, while 342 is a 3 1/2 story home with a front basement entrance.

05/31/1962 – Box 51 – 06:01 – 310 N. Centre St; Schoeneman & Son building; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$1,500.

Fire originated in a sofa in the living room of a 2<sup>nd</sup> floor apartment occupied by Daniel Deveto (no joke!). The fire burned through the floor into the PA State Liquor Store below. The heat also set-off the sprinkler system below and damaged the Schoeneman stock room. Firefighters used all-purpose masks as well as self-contained breathing apparatus to attack the fire.

### 55 Years Ago

5/14/1957 – On that Tuesday evening, the Good Intent Fire Company voted to purchase a new Oren pumper with a 750 gpm pump and 500 gallon booster tank. George Seiders was president of the company and the chairman of the Apparatus Committee. He signed the contract with the Oren Roanoke Corporation of Roanoke, Va. The new pumper replaced the company's 1929 Ahrens-Fox 1000 gpm pumper and served the Good Intent for 17 years. Oren was acquired by Howe Fire Apparatus in 1961. Fire apparatus manufacturers Oren and Howe were later absorbed by Grumman in 1976.



As pictured on the cover of the [Schuylkill County Firefighting](#) book, Good Intent's 1958 Oren pumper operates in Shenandoah in 1965.

05/16/1957 – STILL – 05:57 – Call for help at Auburn; Brick works fire; American Hose responded.

An overheated fan caused a fire which heavily damaged a portion of the Auburn Brick Works complex. The loss was placed at \$30,000. Fire companies from six communities assisted the Auburn Fire Company. Auburn Fire Chief Don Shihe had "Command."

05/16/1957 – STILL – 15:55 – 111 Mahantongo St; The Pottsville Republican; Cause: Dust ignited in ventilating chute on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, heat from metal pot; Loss: \$300.

05/30/1957 – Box 27 – 02:58 – Rear of Palo Alto bridge and Mauch Chunk St; Saylor's Planing Mill; Out of the City; Cause: Unknown.

Fire destroyed a lumber storage shed on the Saylor property causing over \$1000 in damage. The fire was very spectacular as flames and smoke could be seen all over the city. Palo Alto and Schuylkill Haven fire companies also responded. The fire was placed under control in 1 hour. American Hose steamed the hydrant at Mauch Chunk and Anderson Sts. with their 1948 American LaFrance 700 Series 1500 gpm pumper and, pumping into their Eastman deluge gun, threw a stream across the Schuylkill River and onto the fire.

**75 Years Ago**

05/22/1937 – Box 17 – 06:41 – Jackson & E. Norwegian Sts; Jackson St. School Building; Cause: Unknown, fire started in attic and burned under roof; Loss: \$5,153.

The Jackson Street School Building had just undergone an extensive renovation as part of the "New Deal's" WPA (Works Progress Administration) school project program. Early that Saturday morning in 1937, smoke was seen from the top floor of the building. A passer-by pulled the fire alarm box. Companies arrived with smoke pouring from the roof. As they stretched hoselines into the building, it became evident that the main body of fire seemed to be in the northwest corner and was spreading toward the center, under the cupola that used to exist on the roof. Firefighters had to battle heavy smoke on the third floor of the building in order to open the ceilings to expose the fire. Several firefighters were overcome, but none hospitalized. After almost three hours, the fire was extinguished. The third floor and roof area were heavily damaged. Classes were held the following Monday on a staggered schedule in undamaged classrooms on the first and second floors.

#### 80 Years Ago

05/16/1932 – Box 42 – 02:09 – 621 W. Arch St; Occupant: Joseph Duggare; Cause: Cigarette set parlor furniture on fire; Loss: \$100.

#### 85 Years Ago

05/21/1927 – Box 41 – 06:30 – 13<sup>th</sup> & W. Arch Sts; Occupant: Brenner & Weiner; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$250.

#### 100 Years Ago

05/09/1912 – Box 52 – 08:25 – North 2<sup>nd</sup> St. Flats; Cause: Clothes hung over lighted gas stove; Loss: \$122.96.

#### 125 Years Ago

05/20/1887 – 01:15 – Fire at Ulrich & Riffert's carriage factory and Mrs. John Diehm's house; Coal St. between Norwegian and East Arch.

05/23/1887 – West End Hose Company # 7 is chartered.

#### 135 Years Ago

05/04/1877 – A slight fire at Buechley's Planing Mill, in the engine room; On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, there was another slight fire in the mill.

#### 140 Years Ago

05/11/1872 – A fire at the Pottsville Rolling Mill destroyed the engine house, forge, and car shop; the loss was several thousand dollars.

05/18/1872 – Fire at Mt. Carbon; two tenant houses owned by the Rolling Mill Company.

#### 145 Years Ago

05/20/1867 – 20:00 – The broom factory of Miller & McDonnell on Railroad St, opposite Snyder's machine shop; damage slight.

#### 180 Years Ago

05/05/1832 – Fire at Port Carbon; The Schuylkill Hydraulian Company of Pottsville responded at 02:00.