

Pottsville Fire Department

Looking Back

November

Mike Glore

5 Years Ago

Several away games...

11/6/2008 – STILL – 11:22 - 34 Chestnut St, Cressona; Good Intent, American Hose, and West End assisted the Cressona Fire Department at the scene of a fire that destroyed a 2 ½ story, frame private dwelling.

[Schuylkill Hose Company Photos 2008-11-06 Cressona](#)

11/11/2008 – STILL – 01:30 – Wiggan St, New Philadelphia; Good Intent, American Hose, and Phoenix assisted the New Philadelphia Fire Department at the scene of a fire that destroyed a 2 ½ story frame duplex.

[Coal Region Fire Photos 2008-11-11 New Philadelphia](#)

11/17/2008 – STILL – 08:30 – 38 Maple Ave, Cass Township; West End and Yorkville provided RIT at the scene of a fire that damaged a 2 ½ story frame duplex.

[Coal Region Fire Photos 2008-11-17 Cass Township](#)

11/27/2008 – STILL – 07:50 – 113 Fourth St, Port Carbon Borough; a child perished Thanksgiving morning as fire tore through a 2 ½ story frame dwelling. Good Intent, Yorkville, Phoenix, Humane, and West End responded. Mechanicsville and Palo Alto companies also assisted on scene.

[Coal Region Fire Photos 2008-11-27 Port Carbon](#)

10 Years Ago

11/22/2003 – Box 15 - 20:48 – 408 E Market St; Heavy fire was showing from the first floor of a 2-story occupied multiple dwelling when companies arrived. Another of those unusual multiple dwellings that are occasionally “tucked-away” in town.



Companies overhauling on E Market St in 2003

20 Years Ago

11/2/1993 – Box 36 – 14:37 – 205/207 Howard Ave; Cause: Electrical short.

Companies arrived to find heavy fire showing from the 2nd floor of a 2 ½ story duplex of ordinary construction. A classic firefighting example of, “what you see is NOT always what you get.” First-arriving Good Intent Engine 11 – 1988 Hahn 1000 gpm pumper – utilized the wagon pipe to knock-down the exterior fire while awaiting additional personnel. Firefighters then stretched a 1 ½” handline via the interior stairwell to the 2nd floor of the 205 side of the duplex. With heavy smoke throughout, firefighters noted the “glow” at the end of the hallway and advanced toward it. Arriving in the front bedroom, they noted sunlight coming through the undamaged windows in an undamaged bedroom. Turns-out, the house was converted into one dwelling with the adjoining wall removed at the top of the interior stairs on the 2nd floor. The fire was caused by an electrical cord overheating under a wicker laundry basket. Voters at the nearby polling place at St. Joseph’s Church noticed the fire that Election Day and transmitted the alarm.

A funny story with this one... Bob Piccioni (Good Intent) and I were both working at the State DWP office, then located at 2nd & W. Norwegian St. Gary Witmier (Good Intent) was the Duty Chief that day and was at the Good Intent firehouse a half block away. When the box was transmitted, I left the office and glanced backward as the address of fire was only 2 blocks away. The office buildings and Mahantongo parking deck on the west side of 2nd Street screened the fire area. I didn’t see a thing. As he was passing with the Chief’s vehicle and I put my palms up, shook my head, and shrugged my shoulders in a “nothing showing” gesture. He looked at me with wide eyes and a distinctly “you’re nuts” look. “Wonder what’s with him?” I thought.

As I wheeled the Hahn pumper out of the firehouse to go south on 2nd Street, I quickly found-out. It looked like a thunderstorm over the Mahantongo parking deck! He had a much clearer view of the fire area from the east side of 2nd Street.



Good Intent's 1988 Hahn 1000gpm pumper using the deck gun to knock-down exterior fire on Howard Ave in 1993. Bob Piccioni and Kevin Sibbett (American Hose) on the gun.

11/15/1993 – The City Hall dispatch center is officially closed. All dispatching would now be done through the new Schuylkill County Communications Center at 435 N. Centre St via the enhanced 9-1-1 network.

30 Years Ago

11/2/1983 – Box 37 – 05:57 – 229 Pierce St; Occupant: G. Slackus; Cause: Overheated chimney; Loss: \$12,000. A homemade wood burning stove configured from a 55-gallon drum was installed a few feet from the living room wall on the first floor of the home. The chimney overheated, causing a fire to erupt in the attic of the 2 ½ story frame dwelling. Richard C. Cooper was arriving for work at the nearby Yuengling Brewery when he and another employee notice smoke pouring from the home. He ran to the home and alerted the occupants, George R. Slackus and his son, George, Jr. The adjoining frame home suffered some smoke and water damage. These homes still stand on Pierce St.

11/17/1983 – Box 323 – 11:06 – 1610 W. Norwegian St; Vacant Factory; Cause: Arson; Loss: \$20,000. Heavy fire was showing from the single-story building of ordinary construction when companies arrived, seriously exposing the row of occupied homes only a few feet away on the east (D) side of the fire building. The fire was confined to the building of origin. The factory, which was gutted, was remodeled and still stands today.



The vacant factory on W Norwegian St is fully involved in fire as firefighter Harry Reed runs to join the West End's 1977 Seagrave quint after just having laid a supply line.

11/19/1983 – Box 26 – 17:00 – 210 Union St; Occupant: S. Gilbert; Cause: Kerosene heater malfunction; Loss: Unknown.

35 Years Ago

11/14/1978 – Box 725 – 18:25 – 1956 3rd Ave; Occupant: Walter Jones; Cause: Pot of grease on the stove; Loss: \$20,000. For those who have been following the “Looking Back” series closely, this is the same Walter Jones that previously lived at 405 Howard Ave and had a series of fires in the late 50’s/early 60’s. He moved to 3rd Ave and, believe it or not...



Firefighters operating at the Walter Jones home on 3rd Ave in 1978.

11/28/1978 – Box 522 – 11:40 – 319 Laurel Blvd; Occupant: Edward Hoy; Cause: Child playing with matches; Loss: \$7,500. Companies arrived with heavy smoke showing from the frame home. Lines were stretched to the second floor over ladders in the front and rear of the home. A middle bedroom on the second floor was gutted, with the rest of the second floor suffering heavy heat, smoke, and water damage. The fire was placed under control in 40 minutes.

40 Years Ago

11/4/1973 – Box 14 – 02:30 – Logan & E. Market Sts; Davis Hotel; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$100.

11/20/1973 – Box 544 – 03:34 – 220 N. 3rd St; Occupant: Steve Hbranchak; Cause: Unknown; Loss: Unknown.

11/21/1973 – Box 27 – 23:59 – Mauch Chunk St at Palo Alto Bridge; PA Department of Highways vacant building; Cause: Unknown; Loss: Unknown.

11/22/1973 – Box 734 – 10:05 – 2119 W. Norwegian St; Occupant: Wm. Yost; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$665.

11/26/1973 – STILL – 15:58 – Pavilion to the rear of 2031 Mahantongo St; Cause: Unknown; Loss: Unknown.

45 Years Ago

11/8/1968 – STILL – 20:05 – Boulevard & Mill Creek Ave; Tasty Freeze; Chief sent Humane, American Hose, Good Will, and Good Intent; Loss: \$20,200. A French-fryer boiled-over and a fire erupted in the serving window area of the front of the building. The building was heavily damaged. No injuries were reported. Fire Chief Hoke had command with Asst. Chiefs Curtier (Humane) and Stephenson (Good Will) assisting on scene.



A poor PREH photo from microfilm of companies operating at the Tasty Freeze in 1968.

11/11/1968 – Box 78 – 06:05 – 2335 W Market St; Occupant: Jerry Frank; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$850. Fire erupted in a second floor bedroom closet. The fire was confined to the bedroom closet area and was placed under control in 20 minutes.

11/13/1968 – STILL – 18:30 – B & M Farms at Glenworth; Chief sent American Hose, Good Intent, and Greenwood Hill. Fire broke-out in the warehouse and bottling building located on an old farm. Companies were on scene for just under an hour. The Mt. Carbon Fire Company also assisted on scene.

50 Years Ago

11/10/1963 – Box 33 – 05:55 – 1324-1326 Mahantongo St; H.O. Bechtel estate; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$12,580.

Pottsville Police Patrolmen Albert Dusel and Thomas Laubach were on routine patrol in the area early that Sunday morning and noticed smoke pouring from the 2-story occupied multiple dwelling. They immediately pulled Box 33 at 15th &

Mahantongo St. Fire was showing from the windows of the first floor apartment of George Knox at 1324 when companies arrived. Lines were stretched and quickly knocked-down the main body of fire. Fire also extended to the second floor apartment of Arline Boone at 1324. The adjoining apartments at 1326 suffered heavy smoke and some water damage. Asst. Chief Bill Clay (West End) had command. These are the same apartment buildings that were destroyed by fire on New Year's Day 2009. Interestingly, an Assistant Chief from the West End – Mike Messner – had command of that fire. While pulling ceiling in 1326 to expose heavy fire in the cockloft during the 2009 fire, we encountered an unbelievably heavy layer of plaster that defied almost all but the heaviest striking tools to penetrate. After taking a blow, I remarked that perhaps that was the result of the 1963 fire. With the heavy smoke damage, rather than strip every room of the interior wall surfaces, an additional layer of plaster may have simply been applied to the existing plaster walls to cover and seal the smoke damage.

Some pics from the 2009 fire of the 1324-1326 Mahantongo Street buildings:

[Coal Region Fire 2009-01-01 Pottsville](#)

11/22/1963 – Not FD related, but very historically significant: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

55 Years Ago

11/19/1958 – The Phoenix Fire Engine Company signs a contract with the American LaFrance Corporation for a new “Rescue” model 900 Series tractor-drawn 100’ aerial ladder truck.

11/25/1958 – STILL – 16:17 – 449 Adams St; Occupant: Rich Neyer; Cause: Fire caused by putting kerosene on wood fire; Loss: \$100.

60 Years Ago

11/29/1953 – Melody Bar Fire – See Part II

75 Years Ago

11/11/1938 – STILL – 22:45 – 423 Front St; Occupant: Mrs. George Burck; Cause: Heat pipe in floor, fire went through partition all to roof; Loss: \$450.

80 Years Ago

11/28/1933 – Box 32 – 09:38 – 349 Union St; Occupant: Joseph Winters; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$100.

85 Years Ago

11/28/1928 – Box 26 – 06:20 – 314-316-318-320-322-324-326-328 S. Centre St;
Cause: Smoking in store; Loss: \$198,940; Occupants and losses:

Montgomery Ward & Co	\$167,000
A & P Store	25,000
H. O. Neil	2,350
Benesch & Sons	4,525
Jack Schven	65

See Part III...

11/30/1928 – West End’s 1928 Ahrens-Fox triple combination, 900 gpm piston pumper arrives by rail in Pottsville. It was viewed by members while still in the boxcar in the Pennsylvania Railroad freight yard. It wasn’t removed until representatives from Ahrens-Fox were on hand to supervise the unloading, operation, and acceptance testing. With the arrival of this rig, every company in Pottsville operated a triple combination pumper. The West End’s “truck committee” for the purchase of the Fox consisted of: George Schaffer, George Hood, Ira Gangaware, William LeVan, George Koegel, and C. Early Manhart. The committee witnessed demonstrations of five other makes and models of fire apparatus before selecting the Ahrens-Fox. West End’s Fox featured an 80 gallon booster tank, 1” booster line, 24’ and 12’ ladders, and, when in front-line service, 1150’ of 2 ½” hose. The pumper cost \$13,500 when new. Thanks to the tireless efforts of past and present officers and members of the West End, “The Fox” survives today in operable, nearly original condition.



A perennial parade favorite: West End's 1928 Ahrens-Fox participating in the 1975 Schuylkill County Convention in St. Clair. On board are Doc Bound and, I think, my great uncle Lawrence "Moe" Seaman driving.

90 Years Ago

11/5/1923 – Box 35 – 03:15 – 715 Mahantongo St; Occupant: Mrs. Emma Corley; Cause: Overheated stove; Loss: \$2,900. Neighbors hear glass breaking and, upon investigating, found fire showing from the home. A phone call was placed to City Hall to report the fire as the box was pulled. Companies had the main body of fire knocked-down in 10 minutes, but remained on scene for some time for overhaul. The interior of the first floor was gutted with heavy heat, smoke, and water damage throughout. A firewall spared the adjoining apartments of J. Lowery of serious fire damage, with those suffering minor smoke and water damage. This building - then converted to apartments - was the scene of a serious fire on the third floor on April 1, 1959 when Box 35 was again struck at 06:30. Loss in the 1959 fire was \$10,000.

11/5/1923 – Box 41 – 08:15 – 1101 W Market St; Occupant: Miles G. Smith; Cause: Children playing with matches; Loss: \$200. Fire damaged the front, 2nd floor bedroom of the home.

11/23/1923 – STILL – 21:10 – Westwood Switch; Occupant: C. Portland and Swalm Hardware; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$5,000.

95 Years Ago

11/29/1918 – STILL – 13:00 – Assistance for Cressona; Humane, American Hose, and Chief responded.

Chief Stevenson received notification that the Cressona Wagon Works was on fire. He called for the Humane and American Hose companies to be dispatched and quickly hopped in his Stutz Bearcat chemical car to head to the fire. The Wagon Works was owned by William Seifert. A professional painter, Mr. Riffert, was in the building on the second floor eating his lunch when he discovered smoke coming from the floorboards. He ran to the interior stairs, which were blocked by heat and smoke from below. With no other means of egress, he jumped from the second floor window. Fanned by a stiff breeze, the frame Wagon Works were soon heavily involved in fire. In addition to Pottsville companies, Schuylkill Haven companies also responded to assist the Cressona Fire Department. In addition to the buildings of the Wagon Works, the North Ward Schoolhouse was also destroyed in the fire. Damage was estimated at \$40,000. The fire was placed under control at 14:30 hours, with American Hose returning to Pottsville at 15:00. Humane's 1911 Knox hose and chemical wagon struck an obstruction in the area of Connors Crossing while responding to the fire, causing damage to a running board on the rig.

100 Years Ago

11/3/1913 – Box 18 – 12:40 – South Centre St; 3-story brick building occupied by Woolworth store and William Wilhelm; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$9,438. I've always referred to Woolworth's as a "fire magnet" in Pottsville. A year later, a fire would originate in the store that would become Pottsville's "Great Fire of 1914" – the largest fire in Pottsville's history.

115 Years Ago

11/6/1898 – The land upon which Good Will's present firehouse is built was purchased for \$1,600.

11/15/1898 – The contract to build the new Good Will firehouse at Coal and Nichols Sts is awarded to T.H. Knerr in the amount of \$7,142.

11/25/1898 – The Pottsville Firemen's Relief Trust Association is chartered.

120 Years Ago

11/27/1893 - Good Will receives a new LaFrance steamer. The old steamer – Humane's 1866 Silsby – was sold to the Friendship Fire Co. of Orwigsburg.

130 Years Ago

November, 1883 - Good Intent's new Amoskeag 3rd Size steamer is officially housed.

11/12/1883 – Good Intent with the new steamer and two hose carriages responded to the devastating fire in Shenandoah. Fire originating in the Shenandoah Hotel burned 300 properties and displaced 500 individuals. Damage totaled \$750,000 - \$1,000,000 in 1883. This would equal \$17 - \$24 million today. Both Mike Kitsock and I agree that this was the largest fire in Schuylkill County firefighting history.

155 Years Ago

11/1/1858 – 21:00 – The clothing store of E.T. Elrich & Company, corner of Centre & Mahantongo Sts, was destroyed by fire and water to the extent of \$3,500.

165 Years Ago

11/23/1848 – Fire broke-out in the stables in the rear of Mason & Co's store and, before the flames could be subdued, three adjoining frame dwellings were partially burned; the buildings belonging to Andrew B. White; there was no insurance.