

HISTORY OF THE EXETER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Reverend John Wheelwright founded Exeter in 1638. After several years of struggling and hardships, Exeter started to prosper. Even after one hundred years of systematic Indian attacks all over New England, Exeter was spared a full-scale attack. Early in the eighteenth century prosperity began to settle in, as Exeter became a bustling center of trade and shipbuilding yards. The Squamscott River and its wharves were then as busy as Water Street itself. During the late 1700's Exeter had become the seat of State Government, and supplied troops and gunpowder at the battle of Bunker Hill. Shortly after these years had passed President George Washington would be a guest at Folsom's Tavern on Front Street. In 1860 Abraham Lincoln visited to see his son who was attending the Phillips Exeter Academy.

Records indicate that the first voluntary Fire Association began in the year 1798. A number of citizens entered into a voluntary association called the "Fire Society of Exeter". Their constitution provided that the number of members should not exceed twenty-five. Each member was to keep, always in readiness, two leather buckets, two bags a yard and a half in breadth, with strings at the mouth; and at every alarm of fire was instantly to report with his buckets and bags to the house or other building whose danger appeared greatest, and make every effort for the preservation of this building and personal property.

Through the years, great progress was made in the fire protection of the town with the purchase of "hand tubs". In 1835, the Piscataqua Hand Tub was placed in service and was operated by eight firefighters. The Atlantic Hand Tub was added in 1846 and required twelve firefighters. The Hand Tubs were pulled by firefighters to the scene and were then pumped by hand.

In 1873, the town purchased an **Amoskeag Steamer**, which could pump over 600 gallons per minute. The cost for the steamer was \$4,400. The steamer was designated "Eagle" and was pulled to the scene by a team of horses. Only two firefighters were required to operate this unit.

By this time, the Exeter Fire Department had grown to 149 members, manning 5 companies housed at four fire stations. The stations were located on Water Street, Main Street at the foot of Town Hill, on Front Street at the tracks and on Epping Road.

In 1891, the fire alarm system was installed and on April 27 of that year, the fire alarm box at the corner of Front, Pine and Linden Streets was pulled for a house fire. The system had proven itself and more boxes were added.

In 1928, Ray Simpson, Sr. was hired as the first full time firefighter, and worked six days a week. That same year, voters approved the purchase of the first motorized apparatus for the department. Two 750 gallon per minute McCann Pumpers were purchased and placed in service.

Finally, in the 1950's all men and equipment were consolidated to the Court Street Fire Station. With the added task of providing **ambulance service** to Exeter in 1962, it was realized that more men and equipment were needed. The Court Street Fire Station soon became obsolete and in 1979 all fire department equipment and personnel moved into the newly built Public Safety Complex on the corner of Court and Bow Streets. The Complex houses Police, Fire and Communications personnel. The cost of the federally funded building was 1.2 million dollars.

The Fire Department currently is comprised of 40+ full time career personnel and part time call personnel. Full time personnel consist of a Chief, Two Assistant Chiefs, Office Manager, Health Inspector, Fire Inspector, four Lieutenants and twenty permanent firefighters. The call force is comprised of a Captain, one Lieutenant and ten firefighters. The Department operates three Engines (E1/E2/E5), one Squad (S3), one Ladder Truck (L1), one Forestry (F1), two Ambulances (A1/A2), a Fire Alarm Bucket Truck, four staff vehicles, a utility pick-up and a boat.

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