



Firefighters

From 1937 with a volunteer force of seven men to today's modern facility, Dublin's citizens have always been well protected.

By Brad Haynes

The Dublin Fire Department in the early days was much different than it is now. Before the fire department officially opened in 1937, fires were put out with buckets of water from the town pump in the middle of 161 and High Street. When a large fire broke out, it was a community affair and the citizens formed big lines to pass buckets to the fire. One of the worst fires in Dublin was when E.W. Tuller's store burned in 1887 and threatened to take most of the High Street buildings with it.

The Dublin Fire Department was formed in 1937. At this time there were only seven firemen, all strictly volunteer. They were Chief James Moffitt, Assistant Chief Harold Shriver, Captain H.A. Termeer, Albert Smith, Henry L. Coffman, and Dan Ashbaugh. Later the firemen were paid one dollar for the first hour while responding to fires and 50 cents every hour after that. "The dollar was to get you out of bed and get you there," said George Eger who is the longest living volunteer with 43 years of service.

In August of 1937, Dublin's first fire truck, an open-cab 1937 Reo Seagrave Combination 500-gallon Pumper and Hose Car with a 200-gallon water tank was purchased for the price of \$4,541 from the Seagrave Corporation in Columbus. The truck was called the "Reo" by the firemen because it was built on a Reo truck chassis. The Reo was stored in Basil Brown's garage just across the Dublin bridge (on the east side of the Scioto River).

In 1940 a second fire truck was purchased for \$2,632. It was on a Ford ton-and-a-half chassis with an 800-gallon Barton Tanker outfit and a 400 gallon-per-minute

pump. Two years later the Washington and Perry townships joined together. A large Federal Electric Fire Siren was purchased and installed on top of a pole in the center of Dublin. This siren could be heard for three miles and proved very effective in summoning the firemen night or day. When the firemen heard the siren, they got up to the fire truck as fast as they could because "The first one up there got to drive the fire truck," laughed George Eger.

The first firehouse was completed in 1944. It was located at 37 West Bridge Street. This firehouse was shared by both townships until they split and Perry Township relocated on Sawmill Road.

The second fire chief of the Dublin Fire Department was Harold Shriver. He and his wife Madge were the major forces behind the early fire department. All of the phone equipment, recording devices, siren switch and radios were located at the Shriver home on Post Road just outside of Dublin. "One of us (was) there 24 hours a day", Madge recalled. "During the Dublin Club fire (1967), I was by that radio for 16 hours straight talking to other fire departments that were coming to help." Dr. Harry Whitaker and his wife also had a fire phone in their house. Dr. Whitaker trained the firemen in first aid and operation of emergency equipment.

George Eger relates an oral history of the fire department as he remembers it:

"I always called the first seven firefighters that started the department back in 1937 the 'Dirty Seven'. Up to then I remember the Reo fire truck, the first piece

of equipment we ever had here. That was a beautiful piece of equipment. It was a 1937 Reo Seagrave, open cab. They built it right in Columbus. Before they built the firehouse we kept the Reo across the river in Thomas' garage. At that time Harold Shriver and Doctor Whitaker had a fire phone and they had the controls to the siren. The pole to that siren is still standing down there on the corner.

"In June 1942 I was accepted into the fire department. In November 1942 I went into the service. I got back from the service in June 1946. A strange thing happened in connection with the fire department before I got back that year from the service. Zora, my wife, got back two weeks before I did. And she was staying with my mom and dad. Dad (Dan Eger) and my brother who lived at home too and my other brother Ralph was just home from the Navy. Anyway, one evening they were eating dinner and the siren rang. Of course, Zora was just back from Germany where they had air raids and no one had warned her ahead of time about the siren and all of us being in the fire department. When that siren went off, all of them took off from the table and ran across the street to the firehouse. Then after they left, she thought it was an air raid, so Zora got down under the table!

"I was on the run the night the Dublin Club burned down (1967, across the river where the Wendy's [restaurant] is now). They called in at closing time two or three o'clock in the morning saying the Club was on fire. We had our Reo fire

truck and a Ford front mount fire engine that had 800 gallons of water on it. That fire started on the north side of the building in an office. Faulty wiring probably started it, that's what they came up with. What made the fire so bad was all the false ceilings. When that building was originally built it was only 12 by 16. It had been added on and added on. The wire in it was old and the fire got up in those false ceilings and we couldn't get to it. We pumped water out of the river. That amounted to a total loss. I think we had every fire department in the county at the tail end helping us. That fire was a total disaster to the community. Because they (the Deleweses [owners]) were good people, they helped the school out and everyone met there after ball games.

"Back when we were all volunteer, we worked all day in our place of business and then when we're at home dead asleep, that siren would ring. You could hear it three or four miles out in the country, that's how loud it was. I know there were nights when I left here and wasn't wide awake until I got to the firehouse. I'd dress on the way, socks hanging out of my back pocket. I'll tell ya, I never seen such a dedicated bunch of dedicated people. The first one up there got to drive the fire truck. And I was always the closest one living to the firehouse so it was usually me.

"I remember one day, a Saturday about 1958 or 1959, a storm came though and it was raining and knocked out the electric. They had a house that was smoking down on Fishinger Road. Harold (Chief Shriver) of course had the fire phone and he got the call. He couldn't ring the siren so he didn't have any help. Anyway Shriver came up and parked up here (under the traffic light) and it was raining hard and that Reo was open cab, just a windshield there. I heard the Reo's siren and I didn't know where it was coming from so I looked out there on 30 S. High Street and I seen Harold sitting up on the corner with the red rolling light on and blowing the siren. So I told Zora there must be a fire so I said, 'I'll see ya,' and opened the door to go and the dog ran out. So old Sarge, our big border collie, was just as crazy about fires as I was and he was running ahead of me; he knew where I was going. He jumped up in the seat beside Shriver! Shriver says, 'Get that dog out of here! Get that

dog out of here!' Old Sarge wouldn't budge. We took him to the fire. I never will forget that..."

One of the most memorable fires in the history of the Dublin Fire department was the Hilliard train wreck. This fire and explosion occurred just after World War II when a train full of machine gun shells burned. The Dublin department responded and spent 48 hours fighting the blaze. Every fire department in the county was there to help.

The worst fire in the history of Dublin happened in 1967 when the Dublin Night Club (formerly located where Wendy's [restaurant] is today) burned to the ground. The fire started at closing time at two or three in the morning.

Herb Jones, a 29-year veteran of the fire department, remembers that night:

"When the Club burned we were pumping water out of the river. I think old Danny Stormont went across the bridge and got the old Reo; they had it down to the river too. Danny said, 'If the Club's gonna burn down, then damn it, the Reo was gonna be there to see it.' He went and got it and pulled it right up on that concrete island in front of the Club, then after a while they moved it down over the bank and pumped water with it. Sharon Township had their aerial ladder and we ended up blowing the booster tank out of it."

(Jones continues) "In the old volunteer days everyone lived in the Dublin community and half of them lived in old Dublin right in town. When we started out we got a dollar a year and then they started paying you a little like 50 cents an hour or something like that so we could get Workers' Comp. That didn't even pay for the clothes you ruined or dry cleaning for them. In the old days we used to set up chairs out in front of the firehouse when we were on duty. That was great pastime. That's what's missing today. It was nice and quiet in the evenings and you knew every other car that passed. Seemed like they were always waving and blowing the horn at you. We'd watch the nighthawks catching insects.

"Years ago we used to pump water out of the Scioto. There was a pump house down under the bridge that had an eight-cylinder Chrysler diesel engine in it. Then it had a big suction pipe that went out into the river. When that engine was running, it would pump water up into the hydrants on High Street there. One of the old hydrants is still

there in the alley between the barber shop and John Herron's old store. And there was another one right straight back on the alley. When there was a fire someone would go down and kick over that Chrysler diesel and it would pump water up to those hydrants. They took that engine out of there when they quit using it and it laid over there in John Thomas' garage for years. After that we could still take the Reo down and hook into that old line and pump water clear up to High Street. After they put sewer and water in, there wasn't any more need to pump out of the Scioto."

According to some of the old-timers on the fire department today, things are much different from the volunteer days. Now most of the firemen do not live in the community and being on the fire department is just a job to them. Gone are the days of the siren and men racing up to the fire station to protect their community from danger.

SOURCES

"Shanachie; A magazine of Dublin culture and history"; Dublin High School, Dublin, Ohio, Volume II, Spring 1985.