

McLean County Museum of History

**Bloomington Fire Department
Collection**

Processed by
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Collection Information

Volume of Collection:	1 Box
Collection Dates:	1856 -
Restrictions:	None
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Location:	Archives
Notes:	None

Brief History

In the early days, citizens and patriotic volunteers used only buckets, ladders, and hooks. They would form lines, passing water-filled buckets from one person to the next until the fire was out, or as most often was the case, the water ran out. Cisterns, of approximately 1,000 gallon capacity, were built in the downtown area to keep a good supply of water. It was not unheard of that a store owner would actually fight the volunteers away from their cisterns, not wanting to use up their water supply unless of course their store was on fire. Ladders were used to get to the upper floors and the hooks were used to pull the building's walls down to prevent spread of the fire.

In the year of 1850 the City Fathers had begun to recognize the dangers of fire and appointed a Fire Warden who would inspect each building once a month. The first engine was a hand pumper with long poles on each side. As the men pumped down on one side, the other side would push up and vice versa. It arrived in December of 1855, two months after a devastating fire south of the courthouse, and was promptly named the Prairie Bird No. 1.

In 1854 the citizens of Bloomington decided to organize their first volunteer fire company. Marion X. Chuse rang the courthouse bell to call the citizens together. On 16 October 1855, a devastating fire destroyed eight buildings on the south side of the courthouse. An engine had

been ordered but the newly formed group had only buckets, ladders, and hooks to combat the fire.

M.X. Chuse worked as a harness maker, always ready to drop everything to fight a fire. He worked as a pipeman initially advancing to "1st Assistant Forman of the Hose" under Ephrime Platte, the first appointed Chief of the Prairie Birds.

A second fire company was established and named the "McLean". It would later be known as the "Young America". Both of these companies were private fire companies manned by volunteers. The Private fire companies were enthusiastic; they would race each other to the fire and their language and actions were so bold that the citizens complained regularly to the paper. It was not unusual for the men to actually fight each other and trample through a yard trying to get there before the other companies.

There were many problems in the early years. The Prairie Bird Engine and the hose cart were heavy. The streets were not paved in those days and it took approximately 20 men to pull the Prairie Bird with seven or eight men pulling the hose cart. It was not unusual, if the streets were muddy, for the men to pull the engine on the sidewalk.

In 1865, at the age of 34, M.X. Chuse was appointed Chief Engineer. It was M.X. Chuse who went to Rode Island in 1867 to purchase the City's first steam fire engine. When it arrived, the citizens threw a grand ball and celebration in its honor. It was a heavy piece of apparatus and had to be pulled by hand at least for the first year until harnesses were made and horses could be trained. The new steamer had to be kept stoked and ready, so it was necessary to have someone on duty at all times. On 19 June 1868, an ordinance was established to employ three full-time firemen.

In 1871 a telegraph message was sent from Chicago saying that the entire City of Chicago was on fire and help was desperately needed. Just 12 hours after the alarm sounded in Chicago for the "Great Chicago Fire", M.X. Chuse, along with six other men, loaded their new steamer (less than two weeks old) onto a railroad car and within four hours, they were in Chicago. Two days later, the Prairie Bird Firemen had reached home with the engine in good condition and no casualties.

It was in 1888 that the department became a fully-paid department. Before that time, there were approximately 18 full-time men and the rest were paid on-call. These men usually worked or lived near the station house so they could answer the fire bell.

Bloomington Fire Department had only two steamers to fight the great fire of 1900. One was 32 years old and the other 29 years old. In a matter of days after the great fire, a new steamer was purchased and money allotted for what was to be the finest firehouse seen in Illinois, the Central Station.

On 11 December 1911, Bloomington Fire Department took purchased its first motorized apparatus. It was a 1911 Seagrave Chemical Truck. It carried hose and ladders and used a dry powder chemical for small fires. The City was very pleased with the purchase because it saved many thousands of dollars that would have been needed for purchasing and maintaining horses.

The Fire Department was fully motorized by 1916. The old steamer, purchased in 1902, was kept in reserve and was actually used in 1939 on a large downtown fire. The steamer was eventually taken to the waterworks, disassembled and used as a boiler to power a portion of the plant.

As time progressed, the old chain driven fire trucks were phased out and new state-of-the-art apparatus was purchased. In 1928, the Bloomington Fire Department received a new 1,000 gallon per minute pumper. It was an Ahrens-Fox from Cincinnati and cost \$13,000.

Before 1933, all promotions and appointments were made by the mayor. It was recommended by Underwriters Laboratory that the Fire Department adopt Civil Service Regulations. They also indicated the department had become inadequate with not enough apparatus and needed more manpower and better coverage of the City.

The City suffered a large loss fire on the corner of Main & Jefferson Streets when the Durley Building burned on 4 February 1939. Again, the City asked the Underwriters Laboratory to come and evaluate the department. In the next year, the City purchased a 1,250 gallon per minute pumper, and 85-foot Seagrave aerial ladder, and a 65-foot aerial ladder service truck.

The department took a big step forward in Fire Prevention when the City adopted a Fire Prevention Code in 1953. A Fire Tax was passed by referendum in 1956 to provide funds for the Fire Department.

Bloomington presently has five fire stations and 106 full-time, paid firefighter positions with eyes on the ever expanding community of Bloomington.

- Adapted from "OVER 160 YEARS OF HISTORY", by Robert E. Williams
(<http://www.cityblm.org/index.aspx?page=162>)

Scope and Contents Note

This collection consists of photocopied newspaper articles, a few original artifacts, and a CD-ROM of digital images of a scrapbook kept by former BFD members.

Box and Folder Inventory

Folder 1: History & Fire Department Events

- 1.1.1 Bloomington FD Ball tickets: Fourteenth Annual Ball, February 12, 1929, and Eighth Anniversary Ball, February 22, 1866.
- 1.1.2 Card listing locations of fire alarm boxes on one side and election precincts on the opposite, dated before 1887.
- 1.1.3 Photocopy of a booklet listing the location of fire alarm signal boxes in Bloomington, dated approx. between 1887-1896, 2 p.
- 1.1.4 Check made out to Bloomington Fire Department from Wm. V. Evans, including envelope, April 21, 1894.
- 1.1.5 Photocopy of a list of fire alarm box locations, c. 1898

- 1.1.6 Bloomington FD pictures from page of the Souvenir Program of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the City of Bloomington, May 10, 1900, 1 p.
- 1.1.7 Photocopy of program "5th Annual Entertainment given by Bloomington Fire Department", March 12, 1914, 2 p.
- 1.1.8 Fire Alarm Boxes, page 6 from 1945-46, Bloomington Normal Telephone Directory, 1 p.
- 1.1.9 "Grand Opening Airport Fire Station", flyer, c. 1975
- 1.1.10 "History of the Bloomington Fire Service", *Illinois Firefighter* 3(1), Spring 1976, pp. 20-22.
- 1.1.11 List of the Twin Cities worst fires, 1980-1988, 1 p.
- 1.1.12 Annual Report, 1990-91. 17 pp.
- 1.1.13 "The Bloomington Fire Department Celebrates 125 years of Service", booklet, 1993, 8 p. (2 copies)
- 1.1.14 Invitation to the Open House in honor of the 125th Anniversary, June 19, 1993.
- 1.1.15 Bloomington FD recruitment flyer, trifold, n.d.
- 1.1.16 BFD 388 bumper sticker, n.d.
- 1.1.17 Bloomington FD Historical Display, n.d., 3 p.
- 1.1.18 "City Directory Search for Bloomington/Normal Fire Departments", includes names of fire chiefs, 1868-2011.
- 1.1.19 History of bell from Central Station plus plans for firefighter memorial, email from Susie Ohley, May 2017.

Folder 2: Firefighters

- 1.2.1 Bloomington FD fatalities, 1912-1928, list, 1 p.
- 1.2.2 "M. X. Chuse, early fire chief, dead", 18 July 1911; "Rites for M.X. Chuse", 20 July 1911, *Daily Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.2.3 "Maurice Luby is no more", 10 March 1912, *Daily Bulletin*, 1 p.
- 1.2.4 Photocopied enlargement of picture of M. Luby from *Daily Bulletin*, 10 March 1912, 1 p.
- 1.2.5 1880 U.S. Census entry for Luby family, 1 p.
- 1.2.6 3 color photographs of the Luby headstone, taken 02/09/2003
- 1.2.7 Maurice Luby Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1889-1911, 1 p.
- 1.2.8 "Luby for Captain", 10 November 1911, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.2.9 "Fireman M. Luby Dies Suddenly", 7 March 1912, *Daily Bulletin*, 1 p.
- 1.2.10 "Fireman Luby Dies Like a Hero", 8 March 1912, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.2.11 "Fireman Colton is Dead", 19 September 1912, *Pantagraph*, 1 p..
- 1.2.12 "The City's Oldest Fireman Dead", 12 January, 1917, *Pantagraph*, 2 p.
- 1.2.13 Firefighter Record for Leonard Elliott, printed from Internet 1/10/2011, 1 p.
- 1.2.14 "Death Claims Leonard F. Elliott, City Fireman", 10 January 1919, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.2.15 "Death Summons John Radbourn", 6 April 1920, *Daily Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.2.16 "Resolutions" by Local No. 49, of the I.A.F.F., concerning the death of John Radbourn, 7 April 1920, 1 p.
- 1.2.17 "Fireman, Injured in Fall, May Die", 16 January 1922, *Daily Bulletin*, 1 p.
- 1.2.18 "Firemen Respect Honored Captain", 20 January 1922, *Daily Bulletin*, 1p.
- 1.2.19 "Last Rites for Lawrence Burns", 21 January 1922, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.2.20 "Assistant Fire Chief Summoned", 7 July 1922, *Daily Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.2.21 "Hold Final Rites for William Glave", 19 February 1927, *Pantagraph*, 1p.

- 1.2.22 Firefighter Record for William Glave, printed from Internet 1/10/2011, 1 p.
- 1.2.23 “Henry Mayer is Taken by Death”, 10 October 1928, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.2.24 “Jesse Minton, 67, Veteran Fireman, Dies in Champaign”, 5 July 1932, *Daily Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.2.25 A.F.F. I Honor Guard Induction Ceremony program, Feb 26, 1995.
- 1.2.26 List of firefighters by Bloomington cemetery, 2015. 10 pp.
- 1.2.27 CD-ROM of digital scans from scrapbook of Fred Wade and his father, firefighters.
- 1.2.28 List of firefighters buried in select local cemeteries with email by Bob Wills, 9 February 2017. 11 pp. Some include date/page for *Pantagraph* obituary, added by Museum volunteers.
- 1.2.29 Envelope with return address from City Fire Fighters Union Local No. 388, Feb 1, 1946.
- 1.2.30 Emil from Torii More with attached 3 images of new firefighter memorial statute at sculptor Andrew Jumonville’s workshop, Aug 1, 2018. 4 pp. Reportedly, statue’s ultimate location will be at Miller Park.

Folder 3: News Articles 1856-1899

- 1.3.1 “Coming Out”, 2 January 1856, *Weekly Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.2 “Improvement on the Burnt Districts”, 16 July 1856, *Weekly Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.3 “Disgraceful”, 10 July 1857, *Pantagraph*, 1p.
- 1.3.4 “Firemen’s Badges”, 18 November 1857, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.5 “Firemen’s Dinner”, 25 December 1957, *Pantagraph*, 1p.
- 1.3.6 “Firemen’s Dinner” advertisement, 25 December 1857, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.7 “Messrs. Editors”, 30 December 1858, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.8 “Firemen’s Dedication Festival” advertisement, 28 November 1859, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.9 “Firemen’s Dedication Festival”, 28 November 1859, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.10 “Fun among the Firement”, and “Fire”, 2 December 1859, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.11 “Firemen’s Festival” advertisement, 26 December 1859, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.12 “Firemen’s Festival”, 26 December 1859, *Daily Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.13 “Firemen’s Festival”, 2 January 1860, *Daily Pantagraph*, 2 p.
- 1.3.14 “Firemen’s Ball”, 24 December 1860, *Daily Pantagraph*, 1p.
- 1.3.15 “The Annual Ball”, 25 December 1860, *Daily Pantagraph*, 1p.
- 1.3.16 “Complimentary”, 27 December 1860, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.17 “Come and See Us!” advertisement, 24 December 1861, *Pantagraph*, 1p.
- 1.3.18 “Firemen’s Ball”, 26 December 1861, *Pantagraph*, 1p.
- 1.3.19 “Annual Ball” advertisement 24 December 1862, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.20 “Prairie Birds’ Ball”, 27 December 1862, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.21 “Firemen’s Ball” advertisement, 23 December 1863, *Pantagraph*, 1p.
- 1.3.22 “A Well Merited Compliment”, 26 December 1863, *Pantagraph*, 1p.
- 1.3.23 “Tenth Annual Festival and Ball” advertisement, 23 December 1864; “Festival and Ball”, 24 December 1864, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.24 “No. 1’s Ball”, 27 December 1865, *Pantagraph*, 1p.
- 1.3.25 “Firemen’s Ball”, and “Firemen’s Parade”, 6 September 1866, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.26 “Firemen’s Social and Ball” advertisement, 24 December 1866, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.27 “Firemens’[sic] Ball”, 25 December 1866, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.28 “The Firemen’s Parade”, 6 September 1867, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.29 “Festival and Ball” advertisement, 23 December 1867, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.

- 1.3.30 "A Prosperous Festival", 27 December 1867, *Pantagraph*, 1 p./
- 1.3.31 "The New Steamer", 21 September 1871, *Daily Leader*, 1 p,
- 1.3.32 "Managing Fires", 20 November 1872, *Daily Leader*, 1 p.
- 1.3.33 "Remember ...", 23 December 1875, *Daily Leader*, 1 p.
- 1.3.34 "Fire Alarm", 22 May 1879, *Daily Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.35 "The Electric Fire Alarm", 30 November 1881, *Daily Leader*, 1 p.
- 1.3.36 "Little Drops", 12 November 1885, *Daily Bulletin*, 1 p.
- 1.3.37 "Brave Boys Are They", 3 August 1889, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.3.38 "The Old Prairie Bird", 4 February 1891, *Daily Leader*, 1 p.
- 1.3.39 "Need More Houses", 27 September 1897, *Daily Leader*, 1 p..

Folder 4: News Articles 1900-

- 1.4.1 "Four-Legged Firemen", 8 August 1900, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.2 "Moving Into New Central Fire Station", 13 November 1902, *Pantagraph*, 2 p.
- 1.4.3 "Open New Houses", 13 March 1903, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.4 "Fire Department Horses Scarce", 4 March 1904, *Daily Bulletin*, 1 p.
- 1.4.5 "Glimpses of Bloomington's Fire Department History", 19 June 1907, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.6 "Two Pictures of the Old-time Fire Department", 13 July 1907, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.7 "May Establish Firemen's Pension", 3 September 1907, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.8 "Old Fire Horse Dead", 11 September 1908, *Daily Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.9 "Firemen's Record Run to Save City", 16 April 1910, *Pantagraph*, 1p.
- 1.4.10 "Buy Auto Fire Truck and Sell Engine House", 18 February 1911, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.11 "Fire Anniversary Recalls Rescue Story", 11 October 1911, *Pantagraph*, 2 p.
- 1.4.12 "Fireman Corman Gets First Vacation", 4 June 1913, *Pantagraph*, 2 p.
- 1.4.13 "Henry Mayer is Chief 26 Years", 30 July 1921, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.14 "Firemen Turn Santa Claus and Repair Toys for Children" and "Firemen Continuing Repairing of Broken Toys for Christmas", 12 December 1927, *Pantagraph* and *Bulletin*, 1 p.
- 1.4.15 "Chief Neal Lists Big Fires", 26 August 1930, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.16 "Old Time Hand Pumper Fire Engine Here for Centennial", 25 August 1930, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.17 "City's Fire Chiefs Few", 26 August 1930, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.18 "Last City Fire Horse, 'On Pension' at Highland Park, Holds High Rating for His Intelligence", 24 April 1932, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.19 "Fire Bell Now Without Cover" June 11, 1934
- 1.4.20 "Sees Fire Department Grow Up With the City", 5 June 1938, *Sunday Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.21 "Behrend Starts 30th Year", 4 May 1949, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.
- 1.4.22 "Firemen Made Ultimate Sacrifice in '28 Fire", 23 September 2007, *Pantagraph*, 1 p.