

History of the Sanbornton Fire Department

On March 11, 1829 – Eight “Fire Wards” were elected, four at the “Bridge” (present day Tilton) and four at the “Square” (present day Sanbornton Square).

The Bridge

Nathaniel Holmes
Joseph Smith Jr.
Samuel Tilton
Daniel Mose

The Square

Charles Lane
Charles Gilman
Thomas Taylor Jr.
Thomas P. Hill

On April 13, 1829, *“The fire regulations for the town of Sanbornton, made and adopted by the fire wards, April 13, 1829, were well drawn up, and are useful for all time in the history of the town. After providing fire regulations for a simple organization of the fire wards, soon after their election in each March, sundry salutary direction are given for preventing fires, among which: -“*

“That all ashes when taken up shall be kept in vessels of iron or tin, or in some place made of materials not combustible; and when carried out, if put into wooden vessels, shall be placed at least fifteen feet from all buildings or combustible matter; also, that shavings and other light materials shall be seasonably removed to a proper place, and shall not be burned out of doors within fifteen rods of any building; that no person shall carry a lighted cigar or pipe into any stable, barn, or shed, by day or night; nor carry fire, unenclosed in non-combustible vessels, within forty feet of any building, lumber, etc., the burning of which would endanger the property of any individual; finally, that engine companies shall be made up of able-bodied men residing within one and one fourth miles of their engine houses, where the engines shall be kept in complete order, so as to be worked at any moment, and be ready to repair immediately to the place of any fire on the notice of its breaking out.”

It is interesting to note that back in 1829 when the regulations were “well drawn up”, they were considered to be “useful for all time in the history of the town”, the founders never believed that growth was simply inevitable.

From 1829 to 1951 the town had no formal Fire Department and was protected by its citizens or other surrounding towns primarily Franklin and Tilton which had formal Fire Departments due to the industrial nature of their particular towns. The 1936 town report showed the first official payments to other towns to “fight fires” in Sanbornton:

Franklin - \$98.00 Tilton - \$22.00

It wasn’t until 1912 that the town appointed its first “Forest Fire Wardens”, Frank Hunkins was appointed “Fire Warden” with three “Deputy Wardens” Charles Odell on the East side, Frank Thomas in the Center, and Edwin Lane on the West side of town. In 1917 the annual town report showed that funds were raised for the “protection of persons”

Police - \$24.25 Forest Fires - \$5.00 Damage from Dogs - \$25.00

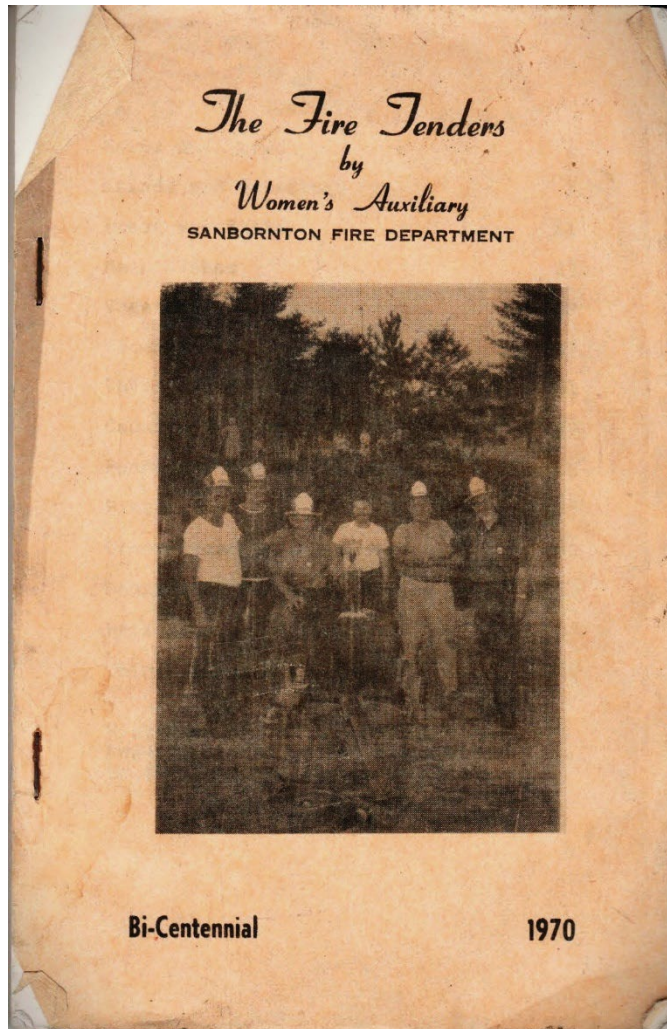
In 1942 the town report had an article “To provide \$250.00 to provide more Fire, Police and Health Protection during the War Emergency”, no breakdown of the funding was listed. In that same year \$130.35 was spent to “fight fires” in Sanbornton and in that same year the Winnisquam Fire Department was organized and in 1944 the town of Sanbornton begun financially supporting the private fire department with \$200.00. (more on the Winnisquam Fire Department later on)

In 1946 the discussion was started to create a Fire Department for the town of Sanbornton and its first “Fire Pumper” was purchased for \$835.00, in 1947 the first Fire Chief (George Currier) was appointed and given the task of creating a Fire Department. The first written report of the new Fire Department was in 1950 and there were 20 men on the roster with a \$1,727.54 budget, the first organizational meeting was held in Chief George Currier’s home on January 3, 1951. (Interesting to note that the town population in 1950 was 755 persons) In 1951 the department purchased its first fire truck, a 1939 Chevy Tank Truck outfitted to fight fires.



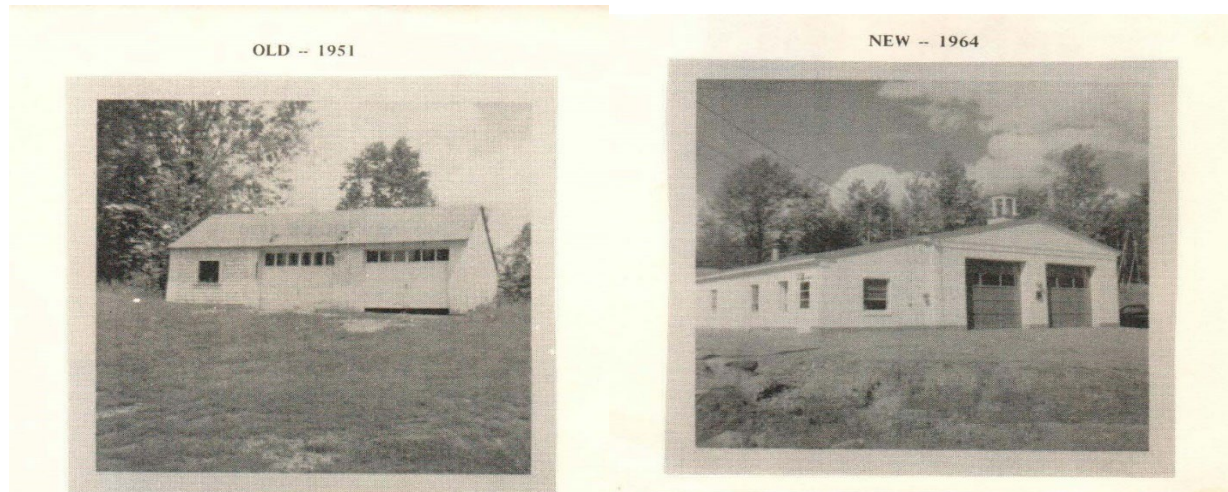
The above photo shows the 1939 Tank Truck purchased in 1951, the “all wheel drive” truck used as a forestry in 1954 and the 1958 “Engine One”, all parked in front of the original fire station.





"In 1960 a capital reserve fund was started to build the new building which continued for four years looking towards the erection of a new fire station, the land for the new building was secured by the Harmony Grange and presented as a gift to the town. The lowest bid for the building was \$6,000, far more than what was available, however through the contributions and cooperation of contractors, townspeople, and the fireman in particular, this dollar gap was bridged by some two thousand man-hours of labor and over 450 hours of men and machines given free to the project. Literally it was a blasting success." (This is an excerpt from the 1970 "Women's Auxiliary" cookbook "The Fire Tenders" sold as a fundraiser to support the department)

The first formal fire station was a two-bay building adjacent to the Academy Building (the current Library) and the Congregational Church on Meeting House Hill Rd, this land with a shed had been deeded to the town in 1950. This building was used for 14 years until the building of a new “modern” fire station was built in 1964 on Sanborn Rd. (adjacent to the current Life Safety Building and serving as the town offices until 2022 when a new town office building was constructed, and finally becoming the Police Station in 2023).



In 1973, an additional fire station was erected on land donated by Den Brae golf course on Weeks Rd. and currently serves as a sub-station still today, housing an Engine and Forestry Truck.



In 1986, the current Life Safety Building on Sanborn Rd. was completed (adjacent to the fire station erected in 1964)



While the *full-time* population center seemed to be in the center of town and the west side of town, there was a large summer population on the east side along Lake Winnisquam and that portion of town was primarily protected by the Winnisquam Fire Department (Organized in 1942) that was located over the town boarder in Belmont. At the time the Winnisquam Fire Department was also the primary response for what is known as “East Tilton” (along NH Rt. 3) and a portion of Belmont along Lake Winnisquam and NH Rt 3. All three towns (Sanbornton, Tilton, and Belmont) financially supported the Winnisquam Fire Department until it’s dissolution in 2005 leaving a void in response capabilities for the Winnisquam area (eastern portion) of Sanbornton.

Interesting dates in the department’s history

In 1953 the Fire Chief was appointed the “Civil Defense” Director, which today is the equivalent of the “Emergency Management” Director, the Fire Chief continues to act in that role for the town.

In 1955 “fireman” were added to the town’s insurance in the case of injury.

In 1957 the Fire Chief’s home phone number was listed as the number to call in the case of a fire in town. In that year the “firemen” responded to 9 fires in Sanbornton.



In 1960 a new “Fire Horn” was installed on the tower of the Town Hall. In case of a fire in Sanbornton, the Fire Chief’s wife would receive the phone call at their home, and she would proceed to the Town Hall and sound the horn to let all the fireman in the vicinity know of the fire.

In 1963 Sanbornton's "Firemen" along with multiple mutual aid departments fought to contain a large forest fire on Steele Hill, which lasted for days.

In 1966 the fire pond in "the square" was finished which included dry hydrants for firefighting water in the square, also that year the department responded to 21 fires in town of which 5 were building fires with complete loss and 5 mutual aid to other towns.

In 1969 a new fire truck arrives (1969 Ford F860 with 1,600 ft of hose), November 18th of that year the "Women's Auxiliary" is organized to assist the "firemen" with fundraising.

In 1970 Deputy Chief Alphonse Surowiec passes away and work begins on the organization of the "Lakes Region Mutual Fire Aid" to aid departments in the time of need. Also in that year we find the first photo of the Fire Department "Hand Tub" (more on this in a later posting).



In 1972 the first listing of the department members in the Town Report:

George Currier – Chief	Warren Wilson – Asst. Chief
Aura B. Smith, Asst. Chief	William Gardner, Asst. Chief
Robert M. Bodwell, Capt.	William Powers, Capt.
Duncan Craig, Capt.	Paul Abbott, Capt.
Wayne Elliott, Lieut.	George Stone, Lieut.
James Cluett, Lieut.	Dennis Akerman, Clerk

“Firemen”

Arthur Abbot	Timothy Gallagher	George Cotsibas
Roger Abbott	George Glines	Robert Parks
Thomas Abbott	Ernest Hill	Nick Cotsibas
Robert Beadle	Delacie Laughy	Murry Sanborn
Raymond Beaupre	Arthur Moses	Edward Craig
Ken Cegelski	Donald Moses	Wayne Sanborn
Vern Cole	Glen Moses	Herbert Fiske
William Cole	George Nudd	Lee Sanville
David Fogg	Ernest Smith	

In 1972 the town adopts NFPA 101 “The Life Safety Code” for fire prevention and to this day the Fire Department enforces the State Fire Code with permitting and inspections, also that year 17 fires were responded to and 15 mutual aid.

In 1974 Robert Hasting Gray passes away – FD clerk from 1950 to 1972, also that year Carl Hanson passes away – Forest Fire Warden from 1936 to 1940.

In 1975 after 28 years of service as the Fire Chief, Chief George Currier retires, and Captain William Powers is appointed Fire Chief.



Chief George Currier



Chief William Powers

In 1977 “firemen” respond to 69 fires with the bulk of the fires from woodstoves, also that year the concept of “Automatic Aid” was started where neighboring departments would be dispatched at the same time for a fire.

In 1980 Captain Paul Abbott passes away, he was a charter member of the department. Also that year the department responded to 124 fires including mutual aid.

1981 Chief William Powers retires, and Duncan Craig is appointed Fire Chief.



Chief Duncan Craig

1985 Chief Duncan Craig retires, and Arthur Dowling is appointed Fire Chief, also in that year the department had 16 Emergency Medical Technicians on the department responding to medical calls.



Chief Arthur Dowling

In 1987 a Utility Truck was placed in service to respond to medical calls, also that year the department responded to 147 calls with 13 structure fires.

In 1990 the first Rescue Truck was purchased and placed in service to assist with the medical calls the department was responding to. And in 1992 cross training as a Firefighter/EMS provider was made mandatory for all members.

In 1997 Chief Arthur Dowling retired and Chief Jon Sanborn was appointed Chief.



Chief Jon Sanborn

In 1997 an article was presented at town meeting to hire the first full-time Firefighter/EMT and it was defeated.

In 1998 the first ambulance was placed in service to transport patients to the hospital.

In 2001 the town voted to appoint its first full time Fire Chief and in 2002 Chief Jerry Busby was appointed.



Chief Jerry Busby

In 2005 the department transitioned from an all-volunteer to a paid-on call department, in which all members were paid to respond to emergency calls per call.

In 2006 an article at town meeting was passed to hire one full time Firefighter

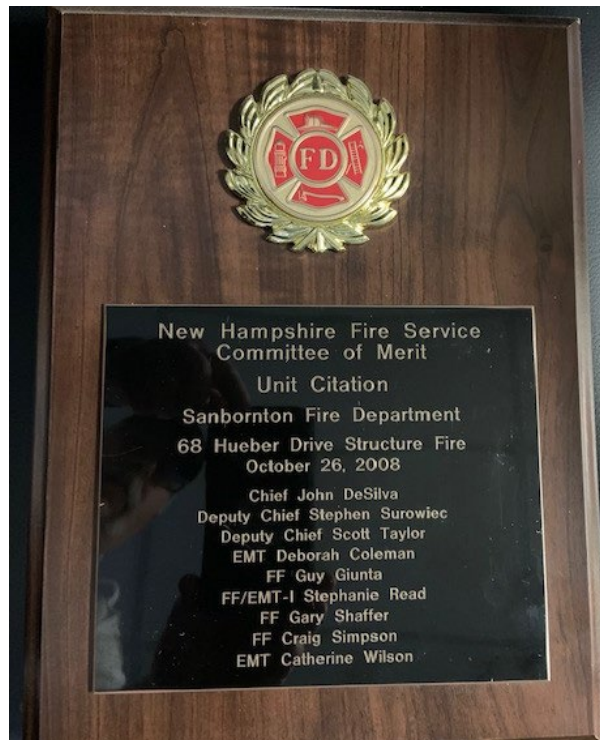
In 2007 Chief Busby resigns and Chief John DeSilva is appointed as full time Fire Chief



Chief John DeSilva

Since the funding approved in 2006 was insufficient to actually hire a full-time firefighter to work 40 hours, Chief DeSilva used the funding to hire part-time per diem firefighters to cover that shift and in 2007 one per diem Firefighter/EMT position was approved to staff the fire station Monday thru Friday during the hours of 8am to 4pm along with the Fire Chief and in 2008 two additional per diem Firefighter/EMT's positions were approved to cover the weekend days. This allowed the department to cover with two Firefighter/EMT's seven days a week.

In 2009 members of the department were recognized for their "lifesaving" efforts at a fire on Hueber Drive in Sanbornton on October 26, 2008.



In 2011 Chief DeSilva resigned and Chief Paul Dexter Jr. was appointed Fire Chief.



Chief Paul Dexter Jr.

In 2012 an additional per diem Firefighter/EMT was added to the Monday thru Friday shift to allow the Fire Chief the ability to conduct more prevention/inspection activities throughout town and to assist with the increased call volumes.

In 2012 the 1982 "Engine 2" was replaced by a 2000-gallon pumper/tanker to assist with the need for additional water supply needs for firefighting.

In 2017 the first two Full-Time Firefighter/EMT's were hired, Firefighter/AEMT Daniel Chapman and Firefighter/Paramedic Ken Carleton, and the shift coverage went to twelve hour rotating shifts with one Full-Time and one Per Diem on shift for twelve hours a day for seven days. This assisted with dealing with 75% of the emergency call volume and allowed for improved response times.

In 2023, the Police Department moved out of the Life Safety Building into their own space (the old town offices on Sanborn Rd. were renovated to accommodate the Police Department), and the Life Safety Building became the Central Fire Station and with this change the Fire Department gained the much-needed administrative space and allowed for the space to accommodate future staffing needs with the addition of sleeping quarters and showers.

At town meeting in March Of 2023, the voters approved the addition of another two full time Firefighter/EMS providers and the move to staff the Central Fire Station 24 hours per day, this will provide better coverage and improved response times.

The ongoing improvements over the last 72 years have been used to better serve a diverse population and as we continue to see changes to our community, we will continue to re-evaluate the needs and capabilities of the Fire Department to make sure that we are capable of meeting those needs.

We have come a long way in 72 Years and here's to the next 72 Years of service to the Town of Sanbornton.