First apparatus, a 1916 American LaFrance triple combination chemical truck with a Ford model T chassis, in front of 2014 Pierce Velocity that is a pumper, has a water tank, fire hose, aerial ladder, and ground ladders. Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

History of

Hamilton's Fire Department

Fighting fires, in Hamilton, has come a long way from the early colonists turning out, with their leather buckets, when hearing the shouted alarm, "Fire, fire, fire!"

By law, every household was supposed to have a fire bucket to take to fire scenes. People, in a line from a water source to a fire, passed buckets of water to each other to extinguish a blaze and empty buckets back to the source. Each bucket had a family name on it, so that each could be returned to the owner after the fire.

For all of the 1600s and 1700s, there were no fire departments. Therefore, being near a source of water, a creek, pond or well, was very important fire insurance.

Then, the 1797 Massachusetts law (*MGL Chap. 88, Sec. 1-8*) enabled towns to appoint "prominent men" as Fire Wards (*also called Fire Wardens*) for town districts, and give them a badge. Appointed by the selectmen, they were responsible for sounding the fire alarm, operation and maintenance of the fire equipment, and directing efforts to extinguish fire. In effect, the Fire Ward was a fire chief. [14]

However, it was nearly 100 years before a mention of a fire warden appeared in a Hamilton Annual Report. The 1888-89 report lists Benjamin W. Patch as being the town's Fire Warden, for which he was paid $2. [20]

In 1890. the town built a firehouse, on Willow Street, for which Daniel C. Smith was paid $115.26 for lumber; $46.14 to S. Cross for building the firehouse; $64.48 to C. W. Moulton & Co. for hooks and ladders. During the year, 11 firemen were paid, in total, less than $20. [21]

At the 1895 Annual Town Meeting, voters approved $1,000 to furnish fire protection in the thickly settled portions of the town. [23] These were what now is the historic district, along Asbury Street between Main Street (*now Bay Road*) and Highland Street, and South Hamilton, the area between the train depot and Pine Street.

A year later, on Jul. 8, 1896, Hamilton created its first volunteer fire company. Members of the company were: Samuel E. McGlauflin, foreman; George H. Gibney, assistant; Charles R. Holmes, clerk; George M. Adams, treasurer; Thomas B. Riddle, steward; Alden J. Chandler, Charles A. Hills, Edward Horne, axemen; George F. Cross, Edward P. Gibney, Charles W. Greenlaw, Frank H. Holmes, Amie Perron, Edward W. Smerage, chemical men. [10]

The company purchased, in 1896, a horse-drawn hook and ladder truck, which they kept at the Willow Street firehouse. For hauling the wagon to fires, the company hired horses from nearby livery stables. [10]

Additional fire-fighting equipment was stored at the town's fire wards. In the East Ward, fire warden Fred Berry, in his Essex Street cow barn, had a wagon loaded handheld fire extinguishers; in the West Ward, ladders were kept, under cover, at the west district schoolhouse on Highland Street. [10]

The ringing of church bells alerted fire fighters and, beginning in 1907, by the bell on the Willow Street hook and ladder house. [10]

Such meager apparatus and equipment sufficed until 1910. For fighting its first great fire, "the Good Friday fire" of Mar. 25, 1910, Hamilton heavily relied on men and equipment sent by surrounding communities: a hand tub, a wagon with chemical fire extinguishers, and hose cart from Wenham; a steam-powered pumper and hose cart from Ipswich; and another steamer from Beverly. [10]

The fire, which raged on for over 5 hours, left a trail of smoldering embers, three quarters of a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide, covering about 50 acres. The damage extended from Hamilton's business section through its residential and summer cottage sections to the Wenham line. The fire was, up to that time, the most disastrous fire in Essex County's history. [2, 14]

Some reports said as many as 100 people in Hamilton became homeless. The property loss was estimated to be between $75,000 and $100,000. [2, 14] Also consumed were trees, shrubs and vehicles.

Besides not enough fire fighting equipment, the 1910 fire also revealed that Hamilton did not have sufficient water supplies. The previous practice of drawing water from streams, brooks, wells, and ponds did not give the firemen nearly enough water for fighting a major fire.

Working pump handles at 60 strokes per minute could pump 120 gpm. Fire fighters pulled the engine with ropes wound on reels below the tow bar, which also was used to steer the pumper. The rig was stopped by grabbing the pump handles. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

Began with Fire Engineers

Following the 1910 Good Friday fire, many meetings were held to discuss what had to be done. These meetings went on for five years. Finally, in April 1915, Hamilton voted to establish a fire department. At the time, there were about 950 people in the town and 834 dwellings. [28]

The Board of Selectmen, as allowed by Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 48, Section 45, appointed a five-member Board of Engineers to govern a fire department. Members of the first Board of Engineers were: Erle G. Brewer, George F. Pendexter, Walter C. Clifford, Lester M. Whipple, and Frank Dane. [28]

On May 4, 1915, the Board members held their first meeting. They developed an initial set of bylaws to govern the department. [2] Two years later, they updated the bylaws for submission to the town's Board of Selectmen. [30]

The Bylaws were:

Article I established the officers of the Department, as being a Chief Engineer and four Assistants, one of whom was to be elected as the Clerk. The Chief Engineer was put in command of the Department at fires, and in his absence one of the Assistants was to take command.

Article II required the Board of Engineers to meet on the first of each month at 8 p.m., with the Chief Engineer presiding.

Article III required the Clerk to notify the Board of Engineers of all monthly meetings, and of special meetings at the request of the Chief Engineer or any two members of the Board, and to keep a record of all meetings and fires and all bills approved by the Board.

Article IV stipulated that all the firemen were to be individually approved by the Board. All those selected were to be given a certificate assigning them, for a year, to a Company. Each Company was required to draw up a code of bylaws. A copy of the bylaws was to be sent to the Board for approval. [2]

Article IV called for each company, at its annual meeting in June: to elect a captain, 1st lieutenant, 2d lieutenant, clerk, and necessary needed officers; and create bylaws for the Company.

Article VI required the captain of each company to remain by his company or the apparatus, of which he has charge, and preserve order and direct their operations. On arriving at the fire, the captain or person

A. Merrill Cummings, Chief for 32 years, 1931-1962.
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

First "strong" Chief, Philip Stevens, 2001-2018.
Photo, thelocalne.ws

Raymond Brunet Chief, Jan. 1, 2019 joined the Department in 1987.Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

in charge was to report at once to one of the Engineers, and all members of the Department during a fire were to remain with the apparatus to which they were attached and also return with the same, and no member was to leave the equipment during the fire. All members were to return with the apparatus to the house, unless they were excused by an officer of the department. [2, 3]

Article VII prevented apparatus from being removed from a fire without permission from an Engineer. On return to the firehouse, the Clerk was to call the roll. Any member excused from returning was to be answered by the officer who excused him. [2, 3]

Article VIII established the Board of Engineers being in charge of the department, which included all of the public pumps, reservoirs and cisterns, hose carriages and hose, hooks and ladders and other apparatus with the several houses, fixtures and appendages. No apparatus was to be removed from a fire without permission from an Engineer, or the person in command.

Article IX The Board of Engineers was allowed to divide the companies into platoons or squads and assign duties to each. The Board could issue running orders to the companies, platoons or squads, which applied only to the unit to which they are issued.

Article X The Board of Engineers was given complete charge of the whole department, including all apparatus used to extinguish fires, with the several houses, fixtures and appendages.

Article XI The Chief Engineer had authority to prosecute anyone charged with disobedience of orders in time of a fire, or in going to or returning from fires. Certificates of any member of the Company could be revoked by the Board for disobedience of the rules and regulations.

Article XII prohibited gambling and drinking alcoholic beverages by firemen, when at the firehouse. Anyone found guilty of violating this article was to be immediately expelled from the department.

Article XIII required the various Fire Companies to hold a meeting each month.

Article XIV gave the Chief Engineer charge of the operation of the fire alarm System. However, at least one other person in the department was to be familiar with its operation.

A 5-member Board of Engineers, appointed annually by the Board of Selectmen, governed Hamilton's fire department. The Board chose the Chief Engineer.

In 1965, a switch from a Board of Fire Engineers was considered. At the Annual Town Meeting, voters were asked "to establish a fire department pursuant to Sec. 42 of Chap. 48 of the General Laws, said department to be under the control of an officer to be known as the Chief of the Fire Department, who was to be appointed by the Selectmen. The Board of Fire Engineers opposed the change and voters said no. [73]

A Board of Engineers, with 5 members, ran the fire department until 2001. From 1982 to 1986, it had only three members: Robert A. McRae, Robert H. Chittick III, and Henry Stelline. The longest serving Board members were: Rudolph H. Haraden, 31 years and Robert H. Chittick III, 26 years.

In May 2001, the town voted to switch to the "Strong Chief Law." On Oct. 31, 2001, the Board of Fire Engineers, which served Hamilton for almost 86 years, ceased operation. [76]

Hamilton's Fire Chiefs

Years	Fires Chiefs
1915-1918	Erle G. Brewer
1919	George F. Pendexter
1920-22	Lester M. Whipple
1923-1930	Chester H. Knowles
1931-1962	A. Merrill Cummings
1963	Gordon L. Thompson
1964-65	Benjamin A. Dodge
1966-81	Lawrence Lamson
1981-1989	Robert A. McRae
1990-2001	Douglas Woodman
2001-2018	Philip W. Stevens, Jr.
2019-current	Raymond Brunet

By the strong chief law (*MGL: Chap. 48, Sec. 42*), a fire department is under the control of the fire department chief, appointed by the selectmen. The chief has the authority to purchase apparatus for the department, subject to approval by voters at town meetings. The chief hires department members and sets the compensation of the full-time and call members, subject to the approval of the selectmen. [2]

On Nov. 1, 2001, Hamilton's first "strong chief" was Philip W. Stevens, Jr. [76] He replaced Doug-las Woodman, who became Chief of the Fire Engineers in 1990.

Stevens became the 11th chief. He served for 17 years. The longest chief, 32 years, was A. Merrill Cummings. He began Chief Fire Engineer in 1931, replacing Chester H. Knowles, and retired in 1962.

All firefighters were volunteers

In 1915, the Board of Fire Engineers appointed 28 men as firemen, all volunteers. On May 28, they held their first meeting, electing the following Fire Company officers: Robert Robertson, Jr., Captain; A. Merrill Cummings, 1st Lt.; John O'Leary, 2d Lt.; Charles A. Foster, Clerk; and Calvin Perl, Steward. [28]

The Board appointed drivers for the Company's new fire truck, a 1916 Ford American Chemical Truck and trailer, which joined the previous horse-drawn ladder and pick wagon. The Board appointed a driver and assistants. Lt. Cummings as driver; Raymond C. Gould, George Checketts and John Melanson as assistant drivers. Chauffeur licenses, as required by the state requirements, were secured for them, and also one for Capt. Robertson. [29]

The Board established orders and duties for the drivers. The first call-driver arriving at the house was the driver, and was not to leave the engine house until at least two more men arrived, and not permit more than 4 firemen on the apparatus. The driver was to remain with the vehicle and operate the chemical tanks, and refill the tanks, on return to the house. Daily, drivers were to inspect the apparatus. [29]

Through 1990, all the firemen were "call men." They had regular jobs, which they left when they heard the fire alarm. Up through 1989, the departments annually had 28 to 32 call men, of which one was the chief, generally 4 assistant chiefs, a captain, 2 lieutenants and 20 to 23 "privates."

In the beginning, firefighter training mainly was by on-the-job experience and weekly instruction at the engine house.

One of the earliest mentions of formal training is in 1941: an officer from the Haverhill fire department instructed the town's firemen, during the summer, on modern methods of fire fighting. [53]

In 1951 and in 1962, the Massachusetts State Board of Education provided a 20-sesson firefighting course. Diplomas were given to the firemen at the completion. [61, 72]

In 1964, the Fire Engineers held 10 drills for instruction and refresher courses. The drills included instruction in pump operation, hose laying, ladder work, and use of gas masks. [72] The department began complying, in 1980, with mandated training and equipment to deal with hazardous materials. There also was a district's Mutual Aid Fire arrangement the department could call for assistance. [103]

Hamilton Board of Fire Engineers

Years	Board Members
1916	Walter C. Clifford
1916-1920	Erle G. Brewer
1916-1920	Geo. F. Pendexter
1916-1930	Frank Dane
1916-1930	Lester M. Whipple
1917-1930	Rodney H. Adams
1921-1929	Harry R. McGregor
1921-1923	Raymond C. Gould
1927-1930	Chester H. Knowles
1930-1961	Rudolph H. Haraden
1932-1938	Douglas H. Knowlton
1932-1938	John E. Cross
1932-1948	Earl E. Johnson
1932-1961	A. Merrill Cummings
1949-1954	Harold G. Dodd
1955-1967	Raymond A. Whipple
1961-1964, 1968-1971, 1987-1988	Gordon L. Thompson
1961-1979	Charles W. Dolliver
1962-1967	Benjamin A. Dodge
1962-1988	Robert H. Chittick III
1968-1970	George Morrow
1968-1981	Lawrence Lamson
1971-1979	Wayne Gauthier
1980-1986	Henry Stelline
1981-1988	Robert A. MacRae
1987-1988	Donald Maidment
1987-2001	Douglas A. Woodman
1991-2000	Philip W. Stevens
1993-2000	Kenneth R. Brand
1991-2000	Daniel E. Parsons
1993-1995	Gordon W. Lamson
1993-2000	Kenneth R. Brand
1995-2001	Channing Howard

Beginning in 2001, members were enrolled in the Firefighter 1 certification program offered to fire fighters by the state Department of Fire Services. The program takes 4 months, spread out over nights and weekends. Participants learn how to fight fires that contain hazardous materials spills, conduct water rescues, free people from wrecked automobiles, and perform basic lifesaving and CPR. Graduates receive state Firefighter I and Firefighter 2 certifications.

In 1988, Hamilton established a medical aid team of 6 Emergency Medical Technicians (*EMT*) and 3 First Responders, charged with responding to emergency medical aid calls from the police department. [94]

In 1991, the department had 12 firemen certified as EMTs; 8 of them also were certified in the operation of a defibrillator. [97]

The town provides special gear for firemen to wear in fighting fires; however, it was not until 1958, that voters approved MGL Chap. 40, Sec, 6B authorizing the appropriation of money for uniforms for members of the fire department. [118]

A Class A uniform has navy blue dress pants; navy blue 3/4 length dress jacket, with a department patch on left sleeve, and rank appropriate badge. The jacket for firefighters is single breasted with silver buttons. Lieutenants, captains and the chief wear a double-breasted jacket.

For lieutenants, the buttons are silver and there is a silver piping on the sleeves; the captain's jacket has gold buttons and 3 pipings of the sleeves; the Deputy Chief's jacket has gold buttons and 4 gold pipings on the sleeves; .and the Chief's jacket has gold buttons and 5 gold pipings on the sleeves. Shoes, belts and socks are black. All wear a department bell hat with badge: the hat is white for officers and blue for firefighters. All wear a white dress shirt, a black tie and white gloves.

Preventing fires, as well as extinguishing fires, has always been seen as a primary duty of the fire service. Beginning in the 1950s, fire departments appointed members to serve as fire prevention officers. However, it was not until 1988, that the Hamilton fire department named its first Fire Prevention Officer, Daniel Parsons. [95]

Duties of the Fire Prevention Officer included building inspections for hazardous materials and equipment, issuing controlled burning permits and monitoring some burnings, providing fire prevention courses and inspection of fire protection systems in public buildings. Further, the Officer is charged with keeping informed on Mass General Laws, Massachusetts Fire and Building Codes, and national standards (*i.e., National Fire Protection Association and International Code Family*). In 2007, the fire prevention officer conducted 673 inspections and issued 562 permits, not counting open burning permits. [92]

In 1996, Fire Prevention Officer, Deputy Chief Parsons, obtained grant money for fire prevention education. This SAFE Grant (*Student Awareness of Fire Education*) money is to be used for education both in and out of the school system. [114] In 2007, the fire department began offering free fire prevention audits of homes. [92]

As early as 1915, it was recognized that the town needed full-time fire fighters. In its 1915 report, the Committee on Motor Fire Apparatus stated that two or three men should always, at a salary of $1,000. [28]

The town's total reliance on volunteers began to draw attention in the 1980s. There were fewer volunteers willing to respond and leave their homes, families and jobs to protect the town 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Until 1988, all of Hamilton's firemen were on-call. Voter's approved, that year. The department's first full-time member was a fire inspector. [95] This happened following several previous failed attempts.

In 1997, the department went to 1.5 full time, when an Assistant Fire Inspector was appointed. [103] In 1998, the department hired firefighter Susan Snow to fill a half time position. [104] Also that year, an additional full-time fireman, Raymond Brunet, was appointed, bringing the total to 2.5, [104] of which, in 2000, two graduated from the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy. [106] In 1999, a third full-time fireman was appointed [76] and a fourth in 2001. [78]

A significant action by Hamilton voters, in 2004, was approval of $15,000 for health or benefit insurance for call firefighter families and reserve police killed or disabled in the line of duty. [54] While the families had Federal Death Benefits, State Death Benefit, and a Town Insurance Benefit, there was nothing for them if they were unable to provide health insurance.

Memorial Day Parade, 1937 – Fire department, in dress uniforms, annually marches in town parades. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

A new service began to be offered in 2005. Lt. Ray Brunet and firefighter Edmund Mullin completed a 40-hr. child-seat installation class. That year, he installed 106 child car seats, at no charge. [56] In 2007, the department did 236 installations. [92]

The 2015 fire department staff had 29 members, including four full-time employees: Chief, Deputy Chief, Lieutenant and Fire Prevention Officer). [51]

From Monday through Friday, during the day, the Fire Chief and 2 or 3 firefighters are on duty; on the weekends and holidays, three are on duty from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. [51]

Hamilton's fire departments never had a Dalmatian. Back in the days of horse drawn fire carts, Dalmatians provided a valuable service. Very compatible with horses, they were trained to run in front of the engines barking to help clear a path and guide the horses and the firefighters to the fires.

From ladder house to public safety building

The first firehouse, built in 1890 on Willow Street, was on land the town leased from Angive M. Adams. [112] Daniel C. Smith built the firehouse [7] that basically was a small, simple garage for the department's hook and ladder truck and a small amount of equipment.

In 1895, firemen refurbished the hook and ladder house. [22] They widened the front door, and installed a hot water heating system that provided heat to the engine room and also two large radiators, in a small room where they held their meetings. [120]

It was quickly realized that the engine house was not sufficient for the needs of the fire department. It was small and crowded with the department's engine and equipment. Also, it was unheated. A replacement building would cost about $4,000, exclusive of the land. [28]

At the November 1919 Annual Town Meeting, the Board of Engineers and the firemen requested the town vote to erect a new firehouse or refurbish the existing building. The town voted $340 to remodel the old firehouse, including providing better sanitary conditions. This was done in 1921. [113]

A year later, the town graveled an area behind the firehouse: this became a parking area for the firemen's cars that previously were parked on Willow Street. [35]

In 1926, the Board of Fire Engineers installed a new heating plant. [38] In 1933, two additional radiators and a pressure tank were installed for heating the apparatus area, which became very cold when the doors were opened in the winter. Several unemployed townspeople painted the outside and inside of the firehouse. Screens also were made. [45]

Following WW2, with the end of spending restrictions, the Board of Fire Engineers, at the 1947 Town Meeting, asked voters to approve $3,000 for alterations and repairs to the engine house. The motion was carried unanimously. [58]

As fire equipment became larger in size and the number of volunteer firemen increased, the Willow Street engine house once again became crowded.

Willow Street engine house closed in 1957.
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

In 1956, a committee investigated the feasibility of providing a new building for the fire and police departments. Its report stated that fire department's quarters were "most inadequate and unsafe, as to size and construction. The location is not suitable for any possible expansion or new construction." [64]

The Committee stated that, "a definite need exists for a new building to serve as quarters for the fire and police departments." [104]

In 1957, Hamilton built a new fire and police departments building at 265 Bay Rd., the former Anderson property, acquired in 1951. [61, 65] The recently created Emergency Center also was relocated in the building.

The new building did not have a hose tower, therefore the drying process was regularly done by hanging the hose inside the building. Such drying was important since the hose was made of rubber reinforced with cotton.

It took 29 years before, in 1981, the town added a hose tower to the fire station. [87]

Fire station, built in 1957, at 265 Bay Rd.
Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

In 1995, the department reported that the building was "no longer adequate for housing the fire department's vehicles and associated equipment." New replacement engines were too wide for the doors and too long for the bays. Further, the building had no living quarters for firefighters, which would be needed when around-the-clock coverage became necessary. Renovating the 1957 structure was not possible. [101]

Despite these unacceptable building conditions, voters that year, in a rare occurrence with regard to previous requests for funding fire department needs, strongly voted against new police and fire facilities. [101]

Two years later, at the 1997 Annual Town Meeting, voters approved the fire department's purchase of a small parcel of land at the south end of the Bay Road property for firefighters to park their cars when responding to alarms, rather than parking on the road. [103]

Again, in 2001 and 2002, the fire department called for the fire station to be made larger. Again, their requests were denied. The cost of a new police station and the cost of renovations to the fire station would have been $4.6 million. [76, 78]

Determined to solve the problems, the selectmen, in 2004, appointed a Public Safety Building Committee, which they charged with exploring all options for construction of facilities to satisfy the needs of the police, fire, and ECO departments. Guiding their efforts were: the need to satisfy mandatory building regulations, maintaining the community atmosphere of Hamilton, and consideration of the cost for the taxpayers. [54]

In May 2005, voters approved a request for a new Public Safety Building, at a cost of $5,939,00. [56] Two years later, in April, the building was completed. [92]

Multifunction apparatus

In 1915, the Hamilton Fire Department did not have a pumping apparatus. The firemen only had a hook and ladder truck, ladders, a long pole with a hook, axes, brooms, pails and chemical extinguishers. Horses pulled the truck to the fire.

In February 1915, the Board of Fire Engineers formed a Committee on Motor Fire Apparatus. The Board directed the Committee to determine if the fire company should buy a motorized chemical, truck. Also, determine if Hamilton should to cooperate with Wenham in the truck's purchase and operation. [28]

Public Safety Building, built in 2005, has police station, emergency response center and fire station. Garage has 4 bays; offices are on left and hose tower on right. Photo, J. Hauck, 2018

The Committee recommended acquiring a machine combining both chemical and water pumping ability, as well as having hose and a water tank. [28]

The Board of Engineers purchased, in 1916, an American LaFrance chemical truck with a Ford model T chassis and a trailer from the American LaFrance Fire Engine Co. [29] The tank of Chemical 1 was filled with a dilute sodium bicarbonate. Sulfuric acid added to the solution formed a gas forcing water through the hose.

Also purchased were special tires, an extra tire and rim, a set of chains, an acid box (*held tartaric acid for charging sodium-bicarbonate foam extinguishers*), a Callahan door opener (*long metal bar with a chisel end*), two steps on rear fenders, a canvas windscreen with transparent panels (*called a Cambridge windshield*), and a special set of ladder brackets. The cost was $1,495. [29]

The department kept the previous horse-drawn hose wagon in a separate garage it leased on Willow Street. [31]

The trailer that came with the LaFrance truck was not big enough to hold all the hose, nozzles, shovels, brooms and other equipment brought to fires. Therefore, the firemen kept a large amount of this equipment on the engine house floor and hanging from the walls. [29]

In 1921, the department bought a 1919 Peerless Chemical truck. Designated Chemical 2. [1]

The department acquired a third truck, in 1924, a Seagrave triple combination, 350-gal. pumping engine, and 1,000 ft. of hose. [36] Designated Engine 1, it was the first truck with a pump: it was in service until 1965. [10]

In 1929, the department bought a G.M.C. American LaFrance combination mounted on a G.M.C. chassis. [41] It could pump 500 gpm; had an 80-gal tank; and a 28-ft. extension ladder and a 16-ft. hand ladder. [41] Fire apparatus bodies often outlived the chassis on which that they originally were mounted. Remounting compared to purchasing a new vehicle reduced costs without losing performance.

By 1929, the 1919 Peerless truck needed a lot of repair. However, the Peerless Co. no longer made the model and replacement parts had to be made to order. [41]

Also showing its age was the 1916 Ford chemical truck. It too needed many expensive repairs. Further, the chemical solution used damaged interior furnishings, such as carpets, rugs, clothing, curtains, and upholstered furniture. [46]

While age of the apparatus was important with regard to repairing the vehicles, more important with regard to buying new trucks was advancing technology. Improvements continued in: water output (*gpm*), water distribution (*range*), safety (*ladder stability*), operating conditions (*4-wheel drive*), flexibility (*multiple functions*) and communication systems.

The Seagrave triple combination engine received additional pumping capacity, in 1931, when the department added a 100-gal. water tank. [43]

In 1935, a Dodge truck with a 150-gal. booster tank and pump for maintaining system pressure replaced the 1916 Model T Ford chemical truck. [47]

With budgets tight during WWII, the department, in 1942, canceled an order for an $8,400 1929 American LaFrance G.M.C. ladder truck. It would have cost much more than the department had previously paid for any of its apparatus. [115]

During WW2, the federal government provided towns with fire equipment for use should there be war hazards. In 1943, Hamilton received a 500-gpm pump trailer, with 1,200 feet of hose and all other essential equipment attached. Valued at $3,000, the truck could be used at all fires. [55]

In 1947, the department bought a Seagrave triple combination, 750-gpm pumper and 300-gal.booster tank. [58]

Returning to the department's apparatus, in 1947, was the 1916 Ford chemical truck that was sold in 1935. Clifford Smith, who had acquired the truck, gave it to the town. It is kept in the station for visitors to see and occasionally participates in parades. [58]

In 1955, the department replaced the 1929 LaFrance G.M.C. truck with a Ford F 750, 152-hp truck that had a 50-ft. power aerial ladder. One man could set the ladder for use in two minutes. [63] The previous 1929 truck had a ladder that took 5 men to operate The Ford truck had a 500-gal booster tank and pump. It also carried hose, a lighting unit, an inhalator and other equipment.

The first apparatus with a mechanical ladder was a 1955 Ford truck, with a body made by Wood Engineering of Topsfield. Designated Ladder 1, it replaced the 1929 G.M.C. truck with hand ladders. [1]

In 1960, the department bought a Farrar International. It replaced the 1935 Dodge. [68]

In 1965, the department bought a new Mack B-95 that could pump 1,000-gpm. It replaced the 1924 Seagrave that had an engine in the front. It had been in use for 41 years. [73]

The first fire vehicles had open cabs. Firefighters needed to quickly climbing into or onto the engine, or quickly climb onto the back. Fully dressed firefighters took up more space, and an enclosed cab would limit the number of occupants.

Seagrave introduced the first fully enclosed fire engine, in 1935. Hamilton's first enclosed fire truck was Ladder 1, a 1947 Ford F 750.

In 1969, the department bought, for $4,500, a 1969 Chevrolet 3/4 ton, 4-wheel drive truck and equipment. It became the department's Squad 1 for use as an air carrier to supply the men with instant refills of their self-contained breathing units. [77]

Also in 1969, the department acquired a new Chevrolet C20, 4x4 to serve in fighting grass and woods fires, rather than using its larger trucks. Equipped with a 150 gpm booster pump and a 200-gal. tank, it was designated Forestry 1 [1] and in 1974 became Squad 1.

In 1976, the department bought a new Engine 3, a 1975 Howe 1,250-gpm pumper that had both 3- and 4-in. supply hose and a 750 gal. tank; [84] and with a diesel engine. The $45,000 truck replaced the 1958 International/Farrar, 150-gpm pumper. [83] The first Engine 3, a 1935 Dodge, cost $2,000. [47] It replaced the Model T Ford chemical truck.

In 1971, the department purchased a used 1950 Maxim 65-ft. aerial ladder on a 1981 International chassis. It was refurbished, equipped and painted. The 1950 ladder was sold. [79]

The fire station was extended 20 ft. in order to house the 45-ft. long ladder truck. [79]

Apparatus Purchases

Year	Vehicle	Description	Cost
1916	Chemical 1	American LaFrance on Ford Model T chassis	1,495
1921	Chemical 2	1919 Peerless Chemical; re-placed 1918 Ford Model T chemical truck	2,658
1924	Engine 1	1924 Seagrave Triple Combination	6,500
1929	Ladder 1	LaFrance G.M.C. truck	2,658
1935	Engine 3	1935 Dodge with a 150-gal. booster tank and pump	2,000
1947	Engine 2	Seagrave triple combina-tion; replaced 1924 Sea-grave	10,000
1955	Ladder 1	1955 Ford F 750, 152-hp truck that had a 50-ft. power aerial ladder; re-placed 1929 LaFrance G.M.C.	8,500
1960	Engine 3	1958 Int'l Farrar; replaced 1935 Engine 3	8,000
1965	Engine 1	1965 Mack B-95; re-placed 1924 Seagrave Triple Combination	25,000
1969	Forestry 1	1969 Chevrolet C20, 4x4	4,500
1971	Ladder 1	1950 Maxim with 65-ft. aerial ladder; replaced 1955 Ford with ladder	10,000
1974	Squad 1	Forestry 1 became Squad 1	0
1976	Engine 3	Howe 1,250 gpm pump-er, diesel engine; replaced 1958 Int'l Farrar	45,000
1985	Engine 2	1985 Int'l 1800; replaced 1947 Seagrave with 750 gpm pump	90,000
1985	Mobil Air Unit 6	1978 Chevrolet C20 van	0
1991	Squad 1	1991 Ford F-350 4x4; replaced 1969 Chevrolet 3/4 ton, 4-wheel	30,400
1994	Mobil Air Unit 6	1994 Ford E-350 van; replaced 1978 Chevrolet C20 van	23,000
1995	Squad 7	1995 Ford F-250 4x4;	0
1996	Engine 1	1996 Pierce Saber pump-er; replaced Engine 1, 1965 Mack triple combi-nation	200,000
1996	Ladder 4	1980 American LaFrance 100-ft. aerial; replaced 1950 Ladder 1 with 65-ft.	10,000
2004	Engine 3	2004 Pierce Saber pumper; re-placed 1976 Howe pumper	60,800
2008	Squad 7	2008 Ford F-250 pickup 4x4; replaced 1995 Ford F-250 4x4	30,000
2008	Utility 8	1998 Ford F-150 pickup	0
2009	Ladder 4	1988 E-One, 110-ft. aerial; replaced 1980 American LaFrance	10,000
2009	TRT A	1994 Ford F-700	0
2015	Ladder 4	Pierece Velocity Quint, 105 ft. aerial; replaced 1988 E-One, with 110-ft. aerial	940,000
2015	Car 8	2015 Ford F-250 pickup; replaced Utility 8, 1998 Ford F-150 pickup	38,000
2018	Engine 1	Pierce 1,250/750 gpm pumper; replaced 1995 Engine 1, Pierce	664,300

Engine 2, 1985, International Ranger, 1,000 gpm front mount pump, with a large diameter hose reel mounted in the back carrying 2,000 ft. of 4-in. hose.
Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

Engine 2, **1947 Seagrave**, 750 gal., triple combination 50 gpm pumper, with open cab.
Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

Apparatus

Engine 1, 1996**, Pierce** 1,250/750 gpm pumper.
Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

Engine 1, 1965 Mack 1,000 gpm pumper.
Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

Ladder 4, 2014, Pierce Velocity, with 105-ft. aerial ladder and a 2,000 gpm/500 gal. tank. Photo, Hamilton Fire De-

Ladder 1, International chassis with a 1947 refurbished body, with a 65-ft. aerial. Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

TRT-A, 2018, Ford F-700
Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

Engine 3, 1958 International combination
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

Apparatus

Squad 7, 2008 Ford F-250
Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

Engine 1, 1916 - American LaFrance triple combination chemical truck with a Ford model T chassis.
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

Mobile Air, 1994 **Ford F-350 van** with Cascade
Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

Boat, 1992 18-ft., run-about, with center-console and 90 hp outboard motor. Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

Car 8, 2015 Ford F-250 pickup
Photo, Hamilton Fire Dept.

Squad 5, 2006, Ford F-550 with former Squad 1 body.
Photo, Ernest F. Tozier III

In 1983, the department changed to a new numbering system, as instituted by all departments in both owns, to eliminate the confusion of duplication of numbers. [89] Engine 1 became 501, Engine 2 became 502, Engine 3 became 503, Ladder 1 became 504, Squad 1 became 505 and 522 was the Chief's vehicle. [1]

In 1985, a 1978 Chevrolet van truck was acquired. The department fitted it with a cascade air system to supply the men with instant refills for their self-contained breathing units. [85] Lights and other accessories also were added and the North Shore Vocational School painted the truck.

Also in 1985, the department acquired a 1985 International with a 1,000 gpm front-mount pump, a large diameter hose reel mounted in the back carrying 2,000 ft. of 4-in. hose; [91] It bcame Engine 502. [85]

The department recommended, in 1994, that with the cost of fire apparatus becoming very high, the town should draw from its stabilization fund, for replacement of fire apparatus. A preplanned annual contribution to the fund would allow timely replacement, without the burden of additional tax levies or overrides.

In 1994, the 1978 Chevrolet air supply van, Unit 506, replaced, through a lease agreement, by a 1994 Ford E-350. [1] Voters approved $2,592 be taken from the stabilization fund to lease, with an option to purchase, an Air Van and related equipment. [100] A previous attempt, in 1992, to replace this vehicle failed by one vote in 1992. [85, 98, 101]

The town also appropriated, in 1994, $24,918 from the stabilization fund and authorized the lease, with an option to purchase, a 1996 Pirece fire truck and related equipment. [100]

Another old apparatus replaced, in 1995, was Engine 1, a 30-year old Mack pumper that failed a pumping capacity test. This left the department under the recommended fire protection capability specified for the town by the fire insurance underwriters. Voters approved $24,918 from the stabilization fund for leasing, with an option to purchase, of a Fire Engine and related equipment, [101]

Also replaced in 1996 was the 1947 Ladder 1 with its 50-ft. ladder. The department bought a 1980 American LaFrance with a 100-ft. aerial. [101]

The next replacement came in 2004, when the department replaced Engine 3, acquired in 1976, with a 1,500-gpm Pierce Saber pumper, with seating for 6 firefighters. [1, 54] This was a 10-yr. lease/purchase.

In 2006, the department purchased a new Ford F-550 chassis for the Squad Truck 5. Department personnel refurbished the cab and used the body from the 1991 squad. New accessories were added. [82, 1]

Two pickups were acquired in 2008: a 1998 Ford F-150 (*from the Department of Defense*) and a 2008 Ford F-250 4x4, which replaced the 1995 Ford F-250 4x4. [1 & 102]

In 2009, the department purchased a used 1988 Emergency One with a 110-ft. aerial ladder, from Beverly, for $10,000, to replace Ladder 4. A new aerial ladder would have cost more than $800,000. The previous ladder, also purchased used from Beverly 15 years ago, was 30 years old. [74]

Also in 2009, the department acquired a used Technical Response Team (*TRT*) truck from the Department of Defense. The town owns the truck, but it is part of the Essex County Technical Rescue Team. [74] The TRT, which has 3 fully equipped trucks and trailers, consists of rescue personnel from across Essex County. [102]

The TRT provides emergency and non-emergency response to specialized rescue and industrial situations involving confined spaces, structural collapse, vehicle accidents with entrapment, high angle or below grade rescues, as well as swift-water rescues.

Firefighters in many parts of the state are able to respond within 20 min. to emergencies involving collapsed trenches, confined spaces or situations that call for high-angle rope rescues, such as victims trapped on rooftops or water towers. Rescue teams have been certified to respond to structural collapses.

Teams exist in five regions, similar to the state's system for responding to hazardous material spills. The team in Fire District 14, which includes Hamilton, responds to incidents in 22 communities. Members train monthly, and take annual refresher courses. Equipment is located around the district, so it can be quickly deployed. [18]

In 2008, the department received, from the Department of Defense at no charge, a used Ford pick up truck. The membes of the department restored the truck with the help of gift money. Designated Utility 8, transports firefighters to trainings, and fire department business. [74]

In 2014, the department acquired a 2014 Pierce Velocity. A quint, it serves five functions: a pump, a water tank, and carrying fire hose, aerial ladder, and ground ladders. It has a 370-600 hp diesel engine, seating for 10 firemen, and a 105-ft. aerial ladder. It replaced Ladder 4. [66]

The first new ladder acquired since 1955, the Pierce Velocity, cost $910,000, which was far more than ever paid for a department vehicle. [66] It was acquired via a 10-year lease/purchase agreement, with the annual fee being $94,000.

Hamilton's fire department apparatus, in 2015, consisted of: [51]

- Engine 501, a 1996 Pierce fire pumper,
- Engine 502, a 1985 International Ranger, 1,000 gpm front mount pump, with a large diameter hose reel mounted in the back carrying 2,000 feet of 4-in. hose;
- Engine 503, a 2004 Pierce Saber 1500/750
- Ladder 504, a 2014 quint
- Squad 505, a 2006 Ford-F350, 4-wheel brush truck
- Mobile Air 6, a 1994 Ford F-350 van w/cascade
- Technical Rescue Team truck, 1994 Ford F-700
- Squad 7, a 2008 Ford E-250 pickup.
- Car 8, a 2015 Ford F-250 pickup
- HazMat trailer, a 2011 Bay Bridge enclosed trailer
- Foam trailer, a 1966 military ¼ ton, 90-gal. foam capacity

The department, in 2018, replaced Engine 501 with a 2017 Pierce Impel 1,500/750 gpm pumper. The apparatus has:

- Seating for 6
- Cummins 450-hp engine and an Allison 3000, 5-speed transmission with push button controls
- 1,000 ft. 4-in. LDH
- 200 ft. attack 2½-in. hose
- 200 ft. 2-in. hose connected
- 300 ft. 2-1/2-in. hose
- 100 ft. 1¾-in. hose (*front bumper*)

Lots of water needed

Up to 1925, the only sources of water for fighting fires were ponds, brooks, rivers and wells. To determine the reach covered by each water source, the Board of Fire Engineers measured a distance of 2,000 feet, the amount of hose carried on its trucks. [44]

As houses began to be built in areas not near natural water sources, it became clear that something had to be done for their fire protection. A standard fire system, at the time, poured 250 gpm of water through a 1-1/8-in. nozzle.

In 1925, the Board of Fire Engineers created a Water Protection Committee to "consider the question of water for fire protection." The Committee developed a plan for installing 15,000-gal. water cisterns, at different points in the town. Their locations were to be selected by the Board of Engineers and the Selectmen. The Committee recommended the creation of 2 cisterns every year, at a projected cost of $500 each. [37]

The first cistern was built, at a cost of $1,247, in 1925, on the corner of Union Street, and Hamilton Street. (*There was no explanation for the high cost.*) In 1926, the town built 2 cisterns, one on Maple Street near Asbury Street and the other at the junction of School and Essex Streets. [38] In 1927, 2 more were built: one at the entrance to Asbury Grove, and the other at the Hamilton depot. [39] In 1930, a hydrant was built on the corner of Moulton and Main Streets. For an unexplained reason, the cost was $2,000. [42]

The last cistern built, as reported in the Annual Town Reports, was in 1937: on Sagamore Street, it cost $425, and was built using W.P.A. workers. [49]

While cisterns were still being built, Hamilton began to install, in 1930, water mains for fire fighting. The first water main was on Railroad Avenue from Main Street to Willow Street. It had four hydrants. Pressure for the mains came from a water tower at the railway depot. For property owners in the Railroad Avenue area, the water main allowed them to significantly reduce their fire insurance. [42]

In 1931, the water and hydrant line on Railroad Avenue was extended 1,700 feet, and six hydrants added. The hydrant line was extended to Hamilton Avenue on Union Street. [43]

In 1935, the Boston and Maine Railroad refurbished its 50,000-gal. water tank and gave it to the town. Supplied by an automatic pump of 300 gpm, the tank provided water and pressure for over a mile, in the area of Railroad Avenue, Union Street, Main Street, Walnut Road and Pine Street. [47]

In 1931, the Board of Fire Engineers said it intended, as fast as an appropriation permitted, to improve and give the outlying sections of the town water sites for fire protection. [43] Attention to the availability of water for fighting fires, in the eastern area of Hamilton, came in 1933. ERA and unemployed workers cleaned the brooks and water holes and created two large water basins. Knowlton Brook on Bridge Street and the Brook on Sagamore Street were cleared and widened, furnishing from 25,000 to 45,000. gal. of water each, even in the dry season, for the districts. [45] Also in 1933, water from Cutlers Pond was connected with a cistern on Farms Road. [45]

Water lines continued to be laid throughout Hamilton, in the following years. In 1991, 15 new hydrants were installed. [97]

Also in 1935, the installation of pipe on Walnut Road assured an unlimited supply of water from the Miles River. [47]

During 1936, the town began to extend the fire protection mains on Union and Asbury Streets. The Federal W. P. A. approved the laying of about 3,000 ft. of pipe and installation of 6 new hydrants, bringing the total to 21. [48]

Again in 1937, a W. P. A. project extended water mains on Asbury Street. A 3,000-ft. section was laid, and 5 hydrants added, thus achieving a total of 26 in operation. [49]

During 1940, the W. P. A. added a mile of water main, bringing the total to 14.5 miles. In all, 447 houses and shops were connected to the system. As part of the W. P. A. project, 65 new hydrants were installed bringing the total to 92 and there were also 7 on private properties. [52] In 1946, the number was 103; [57] in 1960, it was 168; in 1990, it was 331; [96] and in 2018, the total was more than 400.

Hose with high water output

In 1878, the American Fire Hose Manufacturing Co. of Chelsea made the first seamless cotton fire hose for steam-powered fire engines. The cotton hose still had to be washed and dried to prevent mold growth.

Hose often was dragged long distances from water sources to fire sites. Each year the fire department replaced worn lengths that had become cracked and scratched. As an indicator of the wear to which hose was exposed, the Fire Engineers began reporting, in 1928, the amount of hose laid to fight fires. [40] In 1929, the total amount of supply hose laid was about 12,000 ft.

Another concern was vehicle damage. Hose often was stretched across streets. The department placed steel covers over the hose to protect it and ensure uninterrupted supply when a vehicle drove over it. [50]

The heavy supply hose was not suited to fighting of fires inside of buildings. The department, in 1929, purchased 200 feet of 1-in. hose, with necessary size nozzles and tips for fighting of fires inside of buildings, without excessive damage by water. [41]

Not all the hose was for use with water. Chemical hose, 1-in. diameter, also was needed. It, too, was regularly replaced, although not as often was the water hose.

Booster hose began to be acquired, in 1964. [72] The rubber-covered, thick-walled, flexible hose, 0.75 and 1.0 in. inside diameter, is used to fight small fires. It retains its round cross-section when it is not under pressure. The standard length is 100 ft. it is usually carried on a reel on the pumper.

Polyester fiber hose, in 1967, began to replace the cotton fiber hose. Polyester does not rot like cotton, but must be dried to prevent mold. The elastomer

Hamilton began installing in 1930, water mains for fire purposes. First water main was on Railroad Avenue from Main Street to Willow Street. It had four hydrants. Pressure for the mains came from a water tower at the railway depot. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

lining is subject to aging, so it must be hydro-tested every year. [75]

To draw water out of ponds or rivers, the trucks carry suction hose. [110] The rubber-covered, semi-rigid hose, with internal reinforcements, uses vacuum pressure. A strainer reduces the intake of twigs and pebbles in a stream or pond water. The standard length is 10 ft. Suction hose, which has a strainer on the feed end, cannot be folded, so it is mounted on the side of a truck.

The Department, in 2002, replaced much of its forestry hose through a grant from the Forest Service through the Mass. Department of Environmental Management. [78] Forestry hose, which has a polyester fabric-cover and a polyurethane core, is used to fight fires in grass, brush, and trees, where a lightweight hose is needed when the terrain is steep or rough.

In 1983, the department switched to large diameter (*LDH*) supply and relay hose. Engine 2 was the first apparatus to have the 4-in. diameter hose. Having a synthetic fiber reinforced jacket with an elastomer lining, LDH is lighter weight than cotton fiber jacketed hose and can be repacked wet. [1]

Equipment began with hooks and axes

As the fire department expanded the services provided to the town beyond fire fighting, so also it expanded the types of ancillary equipment needed by the firemen.

In 1924, the Hamilton-Wenham Branch of the Red Cross gave the department a stretcher and first aid emergency kit, for use with injured fire fighters and people taken from burning buildings. [36]

1928: Box with acid bottles used to recharge chemical extinguishers; Callahan door opener, a bar with a claw to open locked or jammed doors [40]

1931: An oxygen Inhalator, with two extra tanks, to help resuscitate firemen and victims overcome by smoke. Also, two gas masks equipped with service canisters. [18, 43]

1933: 6 rubber coats and a driver coat. A carbon tetrachloride extinguisher for oil and electrical fires. [45]

1938: 6 pairs of rubber boots. [50]

1952: A Homelite lighting unit [62]

1959: A smoke ejector, a high-powered fan, for ventilation. [67]

1967: 20 Scott Air-Pack Masks and 30 min. air supply acquired; [75]

1967: Telephone Group Alerting System installed in homes of 12 firemen. This allows the Emergency Center to confirm the location of a fire, [75]

1969: Foam Eductor, pump for dispensing foam [77]

1969: Plectron VHF/UHF single-channel, emergency alerting radio receiver, used to alert emergency response personnel [77]

1963: Replaced the old Indian pump cans that were worn out. [71]

1979: AFF foam control of hydrocarbon (*diesel, gasoline, kerosene, etc.*) spill fires [86]

1979: Ansul powder, sodium chloride-based dry powder for use on Class D fires, those involving combustible metals, such as magnesium. [86]

1982: Self contained breathing units

1991: Capitol replacement plan for turnout gear and equipment initiated. With the exception of apparatus replacement, the plan eliminates the need for major capitol requests. A percent of turnout gear etc. is replaced annually as a budget item. Previously, these requests required a warrant article. [97]

1997: Extricating people from crashed vehicles became much faster, when the department acquired a hydraulic apparatus, commonly called the "jaws of life. [103] The tool can pry apart a crashed vehicle, to free people, in a few minutes.

2003: Self contained breathing apparatus. [34]

2003: A handheld thermal imaging camera. It allows firefighters to see through smoke or heat-permeable barriers. [34]

2004: New radios and an upgraded the radio system compatible with the regional mutual aid radio system. [54]

Turnout gear becoming more advanced

Protective clothing worn by Hamilton's early fire fighters included canvas workpants, a long rubber slicker, leather work gloves, high leather or rubber boots. Beneath the slicker, they wore a long wool coat and a wool shirt.

From this very simple dress, turnout gear evolved into a very wide array of protective clothing and gear. In 2018, the basic turnout gear includes:

Boots, pants, coat, gloves, helmet, facemask, communications equipment, flashlight, lamp, breathing equipment, and under garments. All special made for fire fighting. The total cost per firefighter is more than $10,000.

At the start of the department in 1915, some members wore dress uniforms, which they purchased, at special events and parades.

In 1957, the state enacted MGL Chap 40, Sec. 6B, that allowed towns to appropriate "money for the purchase of uniforms for members of its police and fire departments, which may include the purchase of rubber boots, shoes, and other outer clothing necessary for the use of members of the departments when traveling to or from or during the course of their employment." [65]

At the March 1958 Annual Town Meeting, the Hamilton firemen requested $1,000 for dress uniforms. Voters denied the request. [118]

At a Special Town Meeting in June 1958, voters unanimously approved the same article. [118]

Church bell was first alarm

When the town formed a fire department in 1915, ringing the church bell sounded fire alarms. [28] The Board of Fire engineers realized that this was not the best way to alert the firemen. A better alarm system was needed to improve response times to fires.

The Board recommended the town be divided into districts and that people telephone the fire station to report a fire. To sound a call for firemen, the Board said an apparatus be installed to strike bells at the Congregational Church, then the center of the town, and the People's Union Church, on School Street. An electrical connection between the firehouse and the church buildings activated the ringing of the bells. [28]

All houses and businesses with telephone were issued, by the Fire Department Chief, a red card, with directions of what to do in the case of a fire.

In 1916, the Board bought a compressed air fire alarm. It had a diaphone horn activated by compressed air produced by an electric motor. The cost was $2,000. [29]

The Fire Engineers divided the town into 14 fire districts, each with an alarm code. Volunteer firemen would learn where the fire was by the number of fire alarm blasts. The fire alarm signals had 2 separate blasts and were made 3 times. [29]

The alarm signals were: 1-2, area near the school at the corner of Bridge Street; 1-3, Woodbury's Crossing; 1-4 Ipswich Junction; 1-5 Chebacco Woods; 1-6 Miles River Road, Corner of Essex Street; 2-1 South Hamilton; 2-3 Hamilton Center; 2-4 Main Street, Corner of Gardner; 2-5 Farms Road, Railroad Bridge; 3-1 Asbury Grove; 3-2 Willowdale area; 3-4 Norwood's mills; 5-5 firemen assembly Call; 5-2 Test blast; 2-2 and 2-2, at 7 am. and 12.30 pm and no school; 2, fire out; 1, at 12 noon. [29]

Early call boxes, mounted on telephone poles, used the telegraph system to alert a fire department. When the box was triggered, a spring-loaded wheel spun and tapped out a signal onto the fire alarm telegraph wire, indicating the box number. A fireman at a fire station matched the number to the neighborhood. Unmanned or volunteer departments had a diaphone horn that sounded the box number.

In 1933, the Board established a protocol for people to follow in telephone calls: briefly state the caller's name and exact location of fire. [45]

As Hamilton's population grew, street traffic became a major concern for the fire department. In 1973, a siren alarm was installed at the corner of Bay Road and Asbury Street to alert motor vehicle drivers of an emergency and to keep the area clear for arriving fire fighters men and departure of equipment. [81]

In 1982, the town installed a fire alarm whistle on the fire station's new hose tower. It replaced the whistle on the former Willow Street firehouse. To minimize the noise disturbance to the neighborhood, the fire department reduced the number blasts on the initial alarm and ceased the "all out signal" of 2 blasts. [88]

In 1987, the town had installed a new fire alarm system that improved portable coverage within the two towns and eliminated the "dead spots". All call firefighters had pagers. A new radio tower at the rear of the Hamilton Public Safety complex provided a back-up system to the main radio system. In July, during a violent storm, the main radio lost all power, but by flipping a switch, vital communication were maintained with all departments. [93]

Further improvements in the department's communication system came in 1994. Hamilton's police, fire and ECO acquired radios for the Boston Area Police Emergency Radio Network. BAPERN provides officers an efficient means of communication with surrounding towns and the State Police. Each jurisdiction has an assigned unit number. [100]

In 2006, the department received a $47,500 Assistance to Firefighter Grant from Homeland Security. It was used to upgrade the radio system, purchase portable radios for all firefighters, and to replace all the mobile radios in the fire apparatus. The project

1927 Asbury Grove Fire destroyed more than 100 cottages.
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

enhanced radio communication and increased firefighter safety. [82]

Fire calls and much more

The 1915 Hamilton fire company's sole responsibility was to extinguish building, field and forest fires. During the first year of its existence, the Company responded to 7 fires; one was a major fire. [28]

- Samuel Green, Hamilton Hall, Railroad Avenue, caused by an electric iron.
- Metz Motor Car, Willow Street, caused by engine backfire. (*This was not a vehicle fire*.)
- Frances Appleton house, Goodhue Street, cause unknown, damage $100.
- Frank Whipple barn and outbuildings, Bridge Street, cause unknown, burned to ground, loss $3,000.
- Wendell Dodge house, off Asbury Street, caused by overturned lamp.
- Myopia Hunt Club, off Main Street, caused by chimney sparks on roof.
- Sidney C. Gould house tenant, J. M. Low, Union Street, chimney fire.

The following year, 1916, there were only 9 minor fires to which the fire department was called. [29]

Then, in 1917, there were 29 calls. Of these, 10 were chimney fires and 6 grass fires. The Hamilton fire company assisted in 2 fires in Wenham. All the fires were minor. [30]

In 1918, there were 35 calls, again all being minor. The two fires were due to sparks from train engines causing grass fires. Some fires were caused by persons trying to burn over land without sufficient help or under bad weather conditions. The Fire Engineers called for the selectmen to remind the public that starting a fire without a permit was against the law. [5]

During 1919, the company responded to 15 calls. [32] In 1920, there were 22 alarms. Of these, 8 were for building fires. Two of the building fires were total losses, the first to be recorded by the department. [33]

During the 1920s, the annual reports began listing "still calls," fires reported by means other than the alarm horns.

On Mar. 13, 1924, a fire destroyed the Grange building on Railroad Avenue. The branch library, which opened here in 1913, lost all of its books. [36]

On May 8, 1927, Mothers Day, a fire at Asbury Grove destroyed 109 cottages, of the 275, and damaged 7 others. Some say the number destroyed was 119 and a dozen damaged. [13] Assisting in fighting the fire were units from Wenham, Beverly and Danvers.

In the 1930s, the Company generally responded to 30 to 50 calls annually. However, in 1937, there were 67 alarms. Many fires during the 30s were expensive to extinguish: many buildings were involved.

- In 1934, there was the fire on Railroad Avenue during which the 3-story Hamilton Block building was destroyed. The large fire required the calling of 7 towns for assistance. [46]
- In 1935, fire destroyed Pelitier's food market, at the junction of Highland Street and Asbury Street. Efforts to extinguish the blaze drained a recently built water cistern, requiring the firemen to relocate their hose to a nearby brook. [7]

In the 1940s, generally there were 50 to 60 calls, except for the 88 in '46 and the 71 in '47. From 1942 to 1945, most of the able-bodied men, under the age of 40, were off fighting in WW2. There were 30 calls in '42, 48 in '43, 52 in '44, and 39 in '45.

In the 1950s, there were several years with a large number of calls: 99 in '57, 81 in 59 and 71 in '55. The calls in the '50s dealt with more than putting out fires. In 1952, firemen rescued a cat, [62] and in '54, also rescued a cat, as well as a dog. [64] Following a major rainstorm, the department pumped out the basement of houses on Moulton Street. In '55, the firemen were called to remove a body from a tree. In '58, firemen rescued a bird, removed a refrigerator, and even rescued a raccoon on Bay Road. The following year, 1959, firemen removed a TV set for a homeowner. [67]

In the 1960s, the number of calls, each year, were between 60 and 70. However, there were 92 in '63; 85 in '64; 126 in '68 and 108 in '69.

January 1989 fire destroyed the Junction Ice cream shop.
Photo, Hamilton Fire Dept.

Turnout Gear Then & Now

Turnout gear, 1919, included canvas workpants, a long rubber slicker, leather work gloves, high leather or rubber boots. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

Modern turnout gear includes impact-resistant helmet, with wide brim, and full-face respirator. Photo, Patch.com

Self-contained breathing apparatus air tank provides clean air.
Photo, Patch.com

Total cost for turnout gear, per firefighter, by 2015, was more than $10,000.
Photo, Patch.com

Leather helmet *(right*) with molded ribs for stiffness had a high dome to deflect falling objects, a wide brim and long tail section to channel water and burning embers off the helmet and not into the wearer's coat collar. The shield identified the fire company, unit and firefighter. Holder for helmet shield (*left0* on Hamilton firefighter helmets was an eagle emblematic of pride, courage, and valor. Photos, J. Hauck, 2017

Also in the '60s, there were more cat rescues. In 1960, the department was called to help find a young boy and to assist in a plane crash. [68] In '61, there was a call to rescue a horse. [69] In '62, the firemen responded to a tree-house fire. [70] In '65, three Hamilton fire department assisted the Ipswich fire department battling a church fire.

- A fire of note in the '60s was the 1966 blaze at the Troop 10 Boy Scouts camp near Chebacco Lake. Set by vandals, the fire wiped out all the camp's tents and equipment. [5]
- While not a major fire, the location of a 1967 fire was significant. The department extinguished a fire in the basement of the General Patton house on Asbury Street. [15]
- In February 1968, a fire at Asbury Grove destroyed 7 cottages. The closest hydrants were 1,500 ft. away. While firefighters were at the Grove, the caretaker's cottage at the town dump burned to the ground. [6]

Several towns in Essex County assisted in fighting the fire at the Grove. In 1967, Hamilton joined the Essex County Mutual Aid Fire Dept. A radio was installed to allow the dispatchers to request or send assistance to and from any city or town in Essex County. [75] This replaced previous informal agreements.

In the 1970s, there began a significant increase in the number of calls the department received: there were more than 100 calls in most years.

In 1976, the excellent performance of the Hamilton fire department resulted in an improvement in the town's fire Insurance rating. The former 8 D rating was lowered to 5 C. The change allowed many property owners to pay less for their fire insurance. [84]

One of the original shopping center businesses, the Bay Bank, had a major fire January 1975. Adjoining shops suffered no damage due to the building's firewall construction. No bank records, cash or files were lost. [3]

The rise in the number of calls received by the fire department continued in the '80s: 1981 had 205, [87] and 1987 had 252. [93] A reason for the spike in calls was the town growth of houses in the outskirts.

The department has assisted, from its early years, in fighting fires in surrounding towns, when called upon. Fire fighters from these towns have responded to calls for help by Hamilton's fire department.

- On Nov. 28, 1981, Hamilton assisted in fighting a major Lynn fire, sending Engine 3, and 3 shifts of 5 men. They each, worked from 3 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. [87]
- On Nov. 2, 1987, Wenham and Essex fire departments aided Hamilton fire fighters at a fire on Highland Street. It took more than 5 hours to get the blaze under control. [1]

In 1984, Hamilton answered 8 mutual aid calls: 2 to Beverly, 1 to Peabody, 1 to Salem, 1 to Gloucester, 2 to Wenham, and 1 to Ipswich. [90]

In February 1983, the town's firefighters volunteered to help in the search for several missing children. Although called out on a regular alarm, they refused any compensation for the nearly 12 hours they spent in the search. [89]

A service provided by the department, first reported in the '80s, was pumping water from flooded cellars following major storms. In 1987, the department pumped out 122 cellars. [93]

The steadily increasing calls for non-fire assistance led the town to establish, in 1988, an Emergency Medical Service group, as part of the Fire Department. This replaced the service previously provided by the Wenham emergency response team. [94]

In 1991, a new squad truck in addition to use in firefighting, was equipped with medical aid equipment. It provided assistance to the police department's emergency medical service. [95] The truck also carries the "jaws of life" to extract a passenger from a damaged vehicle.

In 2008, the police department ceased providing ambulance service. Earlier in the year, the state banned a hospital practice of diverting ambulances to other hospitals. As a result, ambulances could spend more time at hospitals waiting to transfer a patient to emergency personnel, delaying their response to the next emergency. [102]

The rapid increase in calls to the fire department in the '80s continued into the '90s. By the end of the decade, yearly calls were in excess of 300: '96 there were 324, 371 in '97, and 387 in '99.

In 1994, the department reported calls involving carbon monoxide. Special training began to deal more effectively with such occurrences. The colorless and odorless deadly gas could come from portable generators, charcoal grills, improperly operating furnaces, space heaters, clothes driers, and fire places. The department encourages homeowners to install carbon monoxide detectors and to regularly check them at least once per month and change the batteries at least twice a year at daylight savings. The Fire Prevention Officer provides a free fire prevention audit of homes. [100]

21st century services

The 21st century began with the department responding to 400 calls. During the first decade, there were many years where the calls exceeded 500. In 2001, the number was 607; [76] in 2004, 579; [54] in 2006, 565; [82] and in 2009, 520. [74]

A fire, in 2000, destroyed the former baggage building/waiting room and the platform at the train depot on Bay Road. [106]

May 13, 2007 started the busiest 9 days in the history of the department. There were many flooding calls, 2 structure fires and many other calls. Many firefighters worked over 90 hours in 8 days. [92]

In 2008, the Massachusetts booster seat law, MGL Title XIV, Chap. 80, Sec. 7AA, required children ages 7 and younger and less than 57 in. tall must ride in a child safety seat. [102] The Hamilton fire department had already begun, in 2007, a service for installation of child car seats. Hamilton's 2 certified installers did 254 installations. [92]

In 2009, the department expanded its roll in emergency medical services. Hamilton no longer had an ambulance. Therefore, firefighters went with Squad 5 to medical emergencies. Two firefighters were on call at night. [74]

During the second decade, there were many years when the calls exceeded 800. In 2010, the number was 1,128, which included 652 fire calls and 476 EMS calls. [1, 108]

2013 Cutler Rd. house fire assisted by Wenham, Ipswich, Manchester, Essex, Topsfield, Rowley and Beverly fire departments.. Photo, Hamilton Fire Department

In 2013, the town had a 3-alarm fire on Cutler St. Close to 50 firefighters, including 39 from Hamilton, responded. In all, the fire drew firefighters from nine towns, and two other towns covered for other possible calls to the Hamilton station.

Although horses have been a major part of Hamilton's history for many years, - in 1902 there were 455 horses in the town [121] - there were no mentions of calls to aid these animals until January 2015. The department rescued a horse that fell through ice in a marsh off of Bay Road. It was believed she escaped a nearby paddock. The 1,800-pound horse, Moonshine, was up to her neck in mud when emergency crews arrived. [4]

Later that year, members participated in equine rescue training sponsored by the Myopia Hunt Club Stables. The program focused on the use of a rescue glide, a backboard for horses, as well as other safety techniques. [19]

Very noticeable since 2000 are the number of false calls sent to the department. Annually, they are well above 100 and, during a few years, nearing 200 (*195 in 2006 and 190 in 2010*). These calls were in addition to many "good intent" calls.

The department made 320 inspection calls in 2015. The calls assess potential fire and safety hazards in buildings and provide a written report of any necessary corrections. Such calls are required when homes are sold or transferred: the department issues a certificate of compliance that smoke and CO alarms meet certain standards.

In 2015, the Hamilton Fire Department responded to 865 calls, with only 23 being for fires. Others were:

50 Rescue & EMS
80 Service
72 Hazardous condition (No Fire)
30 Good intent (*false alarm*)
2 Special incidents
1 Severe weather
170 False calls
437 Emergency medical calls
15 Mutual aid to other towns

In addition, the department participated in:

307 Open burnings
3 Agricultural burnings
320 Inspections
20 Plan reviews
41 Public education presentations
44 Fire drills
42 Senior smoke/CO detector installations
207 Car seat installations

Expenses rise above $500,000

For the fire department, the town voted, at the 1916 Annual Town Meeting, to appropriate $5,000. Of this amount, $1,000 was for general purposes, $2,000 for fire apparatus and $2,000 for an alarm system. [29]

The actual cost came to $4,600.68. Of which: [29]

$1,480.61 Equipment,
$1,810.60 Fire alarm system,
$ 507.40 Reconstruction of engine house,
$210.89 Equipment and repairs,
$174.88 Other expenses,
$161.64 Maintenance of buildings and grounds,
$160.67 Salaries and wages,
$62.91 Fuel and Light,
$31.05 Horses hired,

Five years after its start, 1920, fire department expenses totaled about $1,200, of which wages were $400 and $520 went equipment and repairs. [33]

In 1925, the total cost for the department (*exclusive of capitol purchases*) was about $6,800. Of which: wages were $2,700 (*40%*), and equipment and repairs were $2,300. [37]

In 1930, the department expenses, about $3,500 (*exclusive of capitol purchases*), were 50% below what they were in 1925. The largest expense, $1,700, was for wages, and $800, was for equipment and supplies. [42]

A decade later, the 1940 department expenses were about $3,300, (*exclusive of capitol purchases*). The largest expense was for wages, $1,000, followed by $900 for equipment and supplies. [52]

Even by 1950, the fire department expenses were only about $5,220 (*exclusive of capitol purchases*). The largest expense, $1,970, was for wages, followed by $915 for general expenses, and $795 for equipment and repairs. [60]

However, in 1975, the fire department expenses, $15,800 (*exclusive of capitol purchases*) were 200% greater than what it was in 1950. The largest expense, $8,700, was for wages, followed by equipment and supplies for $3,620. The fire and police departments shared a building that incurred $4,700 for maintenance. Further, the fire department paid $1,000 for maintenance of its old station house. [83]

In 1990, for the first time, the fire department expenses were more than $100,000, being $104,300. The largest expense, $63,000, was for wages, followed by $27,000 for expenses. [96]

The fire department expenses exceeded $200,000 in 1997, reaching $214,400. The largest expense, $138,000 for wages, followed by $46,100 for supplies, and $26,000 for training. [103]

The wide diversity of calls requires special training for responders. All members train in encountering hazardous materials, animal rescue, medical treatment, water and ice rescue, terrorism, electrical fires, rescuing the elderly and physically impaired.

In 1999, a Fire Services Study Committee reported that Hamilton's Fire Department budget compares favorably with those of fire departments of towns in Essex County, with similar populations. [105]

In 2000, the fire department expenses were $221,800. The largest expense, about $150,000, was for wages. The reported expenses did not include shared costs with the police department for station supplies and equipment. [106]

Fire Chief Philip W. Stevens, Jr., at the 2008 Annual Town Meeting, said that "call firefighters save the town a considerable amount of money. …. It would cost the town about $2 million per year to man one engine company, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week." [103]

The fire department expenses exceeded $500,000 in 2011, reaching about $552.400 (*exclusive of capitol purchases*). Of this amount, about $469,300 was for wages and training and $83,100 for operating costs. [119]

In 2017, Fire Chief Stevens called for the town to "start looking at regionalized fire services now." [2017] He cited two strong reasons: 1) There are fewer fires - most responses are for medical calls; and, 2) It is hard to find “on call” firefighters. "The cost for Hamilton to have a full-time staff of firefighters would be huge."

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