

History - Frazee Fire Department

The Frazee Volunteer Fire Department was organized on January 16, 1898, only a short time before the first big Frazee fire of July 22, 1898, which burned 11 buildings on the north side of the street from the middle of the block up to the river. Among those destroyed were the State Bank, Hendry's Store, Wilcox Lumber Co. Office, a blacksmith shop, a millinery store, and a couple of saloons.

In 1908 the Frazee Fire Department incorporated and joined the Minnesota Fire Department Association. Quarterly meetings were held and a penalty of 25 cents was imposed on any member who missed a meeting. The officer, who succeeded in getting his team of horses onto the water tank first, and hauling it to the fire, received \$5.00. The second team received \$3.00. Mr. D. L. Durkin was appointed fire chief and served until 1918, except for the years 1913 and 1916 when W. O. Geisenheymer served. In 1919 Peter Schmitz served as chief.

The Frazee Fire Department was called to Detroit Lakes, Minnesota in August, 1914, to help fight the great fire which started in Rahm's Livery barn and which almost destroyed the entire town. The Frazee Fire Department was called again to Detroit Lakes in December 1915, when the large Minnesota Motel burned to the ground.

Back in Frazee, on July 22, 1918 (exactly 20 years after the first big fire to the day and almost to the hour) the Frazee Fire Department again fought a big fire which swept through almost the entire block. This fire burned 10 buildings from the middle of the block to where Seip Drug is now located and around the corner to where Dr. Korf's Dentist Office is now located. Some of the businesses which burned this time were Hendry's Store (again), Clayton's General Store, Ckola's Cafe, Mee's Livery Barn, Buehl's Blacksmith Shop, Nolan's Grocery, the Lone Tree Pool Hall, Purrington's Barber Shop, and a duplex dwelling occupied by Wm. Collins and Sig Mayers.

With only chemicals and horse drawn water tanks to fight these fires, there were always one or more arguments in the early days of firefighting. Everyone wanted to "man" the fire hose and nobody wanted to pump the hand-operated pump, which required eight men.

Peter Streukens became fire chief in 1920, followed by John Jess (1922 to 1926). In 1927 when James Woodard became fire chief, the Department purchased a siren.

In January 1933, the third major fire swept through 1½ blocks of the business district from behind the present All-N-All location and down to the railroad tracks. Businesses burned included Gerber's Jewelry Store, Como's Cafe, a tin shop, a grocery store, Mayer's Barber Shop and Schmitz Filling Station. Two weeks later the hospital building, owned by Dr. H W. Arndt, was destroyed by a fire.

Howard Daniels became chief in 1936 and served until 1939, followed by Rudolph Rethwisch (1940 to 1942), and Fred Hall (1943 to 1947).

On August 8, 1947 a spectacular gas tank blaze at the Victoria Elevator periled the entire city for two hours before being brought under control. Two youths who backed their Model A Ford car against the gas pump narrowly escaped with their lives.

James Anderson served as fire chief from 1949 to 1950. Barney Brenk served as chief from 1951 to 1957 and was followed once again by James Anderson who served from 1958 to 1960.

In 1960 with the help of two townships, the Frazee Fire Department purchased a new Ford F-600 pumper truck, which had a 350-gpm pump and carried 750 gallons of water. Howard Turnbull served as chief from 1961 to 1965. Jim Anderson was called upon one last time to serve as chief in 1966. Denton (Denny) Jacobs was elected chief in 1967 and 1968. Jarrod Christen held the title of Chief from 1969 until 1972.

Russell (Russ) Vikesland was elected Chief of the Frazee Fire Department in 1973 and served until 1988. During the 15 years that Russ served as chief, the Department went through vigorous expansion in the size of the fire district, which is covered today by the fire department. The Frazee Fire Department provides fire protection to the townships of Burlington, Silver Leaf, Height-of-Land, and Evergreen. The department had also provided protection to Shell Lake Township but turned it over to Carsonville Township Fire Department upon their starting a department and a portion of Hobart Township but turned it over to the Vergas Fire Department.

The department has been called to assist Perham with two large fires and one major main street fire when a hardware store burned. They also assisted Detroit Lakes with large fires when the Holmes Jr. High burned, the Bunnells Sport Center, the building housing the Eagles which was then a bowling alley and meeting hall, and most recently Lindrud's Department Store on Washington Avenue. At this last fire, there were seven area departments called to assist and three firefighters were hospitalized, one being Frazee Fireman and future chief Robert McTaggart, who suffered a broken leg when a ground set deluge gun broke loose and striking the men while they were conducting a briefing in what was thought to be a safe area. Robert McTaggart was elected chief in 1989 and served until 1996.

In 1990 the Frazee Fire Department moved into its present location. The new fire hall was brought about by the generosity of the Frazee Lions Club and Vernon Daggett. The Frazee Fire Department was in desperate need of a new facility and could not afford one. Many discussions were held on the matter and it was determined that neither the Fire Department nor the city could afford one. Up stepped the Lions Club and said that they would set aside money from their charitable gaming. We were still a long way from building when one day Chief Russ Vicksland received a call from Vernon Daggett. Vern had been a long and generous supporter of the fire department, so much so that when the department needed to purchase a new truck or equipment they always went to Vern who would give a loan at "no interest" and "pay me back when you can" arrangements. When Russ arrived at Vern's house and inquired as to the nature of his summons Vern asked "how much will the new hall cost?" Russ replied that the hall we would really want would cost \$300,000 but realizes that it is only a dream. Vern then asks, "How much are the lions going to give you?" Russ replied that the lions had saved some money

but had committed to go as high as \$150,000. Vern smiled and said, "you tell the Lions when they get to \$150,000, I'll match it!" Russ has the department paged summoning all the firefighters to the hall where Russ relayed the conversation he has just had with Vern. There was an extensive celebration and we sure were glad there were no fires that night!

Frazee Fire Department's darkest day arrived on Mother's Day 1998 when our Fire Chief Paul Jacobs passed away suddenly at his home, from a viral infection that attacked his heart. Firefighters and the community prepared to say goodbye to the Chief. Hundreds of firefighters from area towns and surrounding states were here to pay their respects. Paul had worked for the Division of Emergency Management and had been a fire instructor and held many other fire related offices. Fire apparatus from area communities lined the streets as Paul's coffin was brought from the church on the back of the old Ford cableless fire truck we use for parades. A detour enroute to Lakeside Cemetery by way of Main Street past the fire hall, which meant so much to Paul, was lined with area Firefighters and apparatus. The day was overcast and dreary, all the Frazee firefighters were lined up in front of the Fire Hall with all of our vehicles lined up behind us to say farewell, and as the coffin passed the fire hall the sun broke through the clouds and began to shine! Paul was saying goodbye.

Gerald Mitchell assumed the duties of Fire Chief through the end of 1998. Jerome Tappe became Fire Chief in 1999.

The new century brought with it a new Kenworth four door 1250 gpm Engine at a cost of \$250,000. This was a huge step in upgrading the equipment and image of our department. The Townships & the City of Frazee increased their fire budgets by 60% to make this a reality.

From 2000-2010 FFD averaged 57 calls per year, most notable were the many vehicle accidents that required extrication. Wayne King became Fire Chief in 2002 and served as the 2007 Freightliner water tender/pumper was built to spec and purchased for \$195,000, and the 2002 AFG Grant was awarded for New SCBAs and PPE. Paul Thon became Fire Chief in 2007, Budgets were tight and old equipment was replaced with used apparatus. The 1991 Ford F-600 was purchased to be the Jaws of life apparatus and equipment hauler, then in 2013 we purchased a used 1990 Spartan 1500 GPM Pumper to replace the 1982 Ford two seat, gas engine 750 GPM pumper. Regi Ueke became Chief in 2014 and helped get the 2015 Polaris Ranger wildland vehicle, he served as Chief until 2016. Albert Doll became chief in 2016 as social media became a trend, kept the ISO rating at 5, and secured the 2017 AFG grant to purchase new SCBAs and PPE. Joe Nelson became Chief in 2019 and is the current Fire Chief.