



The Fire Department's history began in 1888 with one hose company which was inadequately equipped.

A fire on New Year's morning of 1892 destroyed all buildings on the south side of Clay Ave between Sixth and Seventh Street with flames also spreading across the street and destroying a large building on the north side of the block. The fire hit home with the people of the then Borough with them realizing that they had no firefighting equipment worth mentioning, let alone a regularly organized fire department.

Eight days after the New Year's fire a solid block of two-story wood framed buildings located on South Second Street was also entirely consumed by fire.

January 31, 1892, almost the entire block of business houses on the south side of Clay Ave between Fifth and Sixth Streets went up in smoke. The fire was finally stopped after it had worked its way eastward, the whole way to Fifth Street, destroying the three-story Kaufman Building at Fifth and Clay.

Between the first and third fires on the avenue, the businessmen of the Borough took action to provide better protection against any further loss of property caused by fires. This group was led by Joseph Diebold Sr, the first grocer in Jeannette and John A. Martin. They circulated a subscription paper among the merchants to raise money to buy fire equipment. Enough funds were secured to purchase a secondhand pumper, hose cart and small quantity of hose. This equipment, as inadequate as it was, was used to fight the fire on January 31, 1892.

A fire company had begun to organize in the meantime with Isaac Evans as the first fire chief. The equipment was kept in an old stable on the west side of South Fourth Street. By 1894 three more hose companies were established. Hose Company Number 2 was in West Jeannette, Hose Company Number 3 was located on North Seventh Street and Hose Company Number 4 was located on North First Street. The four hose companies were manned by volunteers. These companies were run independently of each other and there were often disputes on fire scenes over which company would handle the call.

After an ordinance was passed by the council, the paid municipal fire department was established on February 1st, 1915. The Borough of Jeannette called upon the City of Pittsburgh (who had already been operating a paid municipal fire service for 45 years) to recommend a man of experience to act as the first

paid Chief of Jeannette and begin organizing a profession department. Paul C. Schlingmann retired from the Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire and became the first paid Jeannette Fire Chief. Chief Schlingmann hired the first paid firefighters and oversaw installation of the first 30 boxes of the Gamewell municipal fire alarm in all sections of town to alert the firefighters of an alarm more rapidly and efficiently.

In 1927 the department moved into one central station in the center of town (the current station at City Hall) and the other four stations were closed. J.R. Crouthers, S.N. Evans and H.E. Pfiel were the first regular full-time firefighters hired. Several call firefighters were also hired and paid a small sum when they responded to fires.



J.R. Crouthers replaced Schlingmann as Fire Chief when he retired in 1926, and Thomas Milburn was promoted to Fire Chief following Crouthers. Othman Seiler replaced Millburn in 1946, and he retired in 1957. Seiler being replaced by Elmer Ruettinger who served from 1957 to 1961. Kenneth Brinton Sr. was then appointed Chief and upon retirement was replaced by James A. Carasella. Ira C. Hartman then took over the command when Carasella retired and held the position until his retirement in 1993. Timothy D. Stape was then appointed Chief and served until 1999. Michael Bertlino held the position from 1999 until 2010. Since that time Randy N. Dubich and Joseph A. Matijevic have also served as city fire chief, bringing us to our current leader, Bill Frye.

Our Junior Firefighter program was started in 1974 with Jr. Chief Robert M. Carter and his Assistant Chief Mark Scalzo. Other Junior Firefighters of that era were: Dennis Kottelich, Timothy Stape, Kevin Wilke, Greg Williams, Neil Guest, Don Smith, Palmer Rose, Robert Streussnig and Wayne Petrosky.

Today's FDCJ is an aggressive, progressive and well-trained department with state-of-the-art equipment and apparatus. In addition, the Gamewell Municipal Fire Alarm System remains in place today, providing

the fastest response possible to both automatic alarm system boxes and manual street boxes with approximately 189 boxes in service citywide. The FDCJ is also heavily involved with code compliance inspections and enforcement to help ensure fire and life safety of residents and visitors to the city.

