

The History of the New Berlin Fire Department 1954 - 1966



1954



2014

60 yrs.



Service is Our Only Product

CHAPTER 1 - GETTING STARTED

The history of the New Berlin Volunteer Fire Department begins in 1953 with members of the local Lions Club discussing the need for better fire protection within the township. The Town of New Berlin did not have its own Fire Department nor a municipal water and fire hydrant system. The 36 square mile town contracted with neighboring communities that had established fire departments for emergency service.

Records indicate that the Hales Corners Fire Department responded to incidents east of Moorland Road and the City and Town of Waukesha handled calls from Calhoun Road West. The corridor between Moorland Road and Calhoun Road was protected by the Brookfield, Tess Corners and Muskego Fire Departments. No matter where a person lived in New Berlin, travel distances of five miles or more were common place for responding units, usually resulting in a less than favorable outcome.

A devastating residential fire on Calhoun Road, North of Lincoln Avenue in 1953 removed any doubt about the need for a local fire department. By the time the City of Waukesha Fire Department arrived at the scene on Calhoun Road the house was well involved in fire. The Waukesha engine that responded had only a 250 gallon water tank. With no hydrants in the area the Waukesha crew called for additional units but they arrived too late to be effective. The homeowner lost his fifteen thousand dollar home and the township still had to pay the City of Waukesha \$1,200 for responding.

In response to the Calhoun Road fire, the New Berlin Lions Club, in concert with the Town Council, held an organizational meeting for the purpose of establishing a local fire department on **February 7, 1954**. The meeting was held at the Melody Inn (now the Asia House Restaurant) on National Avenue. The meeting was presided over by Mr. Jack Radtke, a local attorney and Mr. Norton Dignitz, president of the New Berlin Lions Club.



(from left sitting) AC Charles Conway, Chief Earl Brennand, Treasurer Mundane Bannister, (standing) Board of Directors - Dr. Robert Burns, Jack Radtke and Norton Dignitz

At this first meeting the guest speaker was West Allis Fire Department Assistant Chief Florian Luckow who explained what the basic elements of a good fire department were. Next on the agenda was the method in which the new fire department would raise the money necessary to purchase apparatus and equipment. A three member board of directors was elected to oversee the fundraising and early operation of the fire department. Jack Radtke, Norton Dignitz and Dr. Robert Burns became the first trustees of the department. Next a recording secretary and a treasurer were elected.

In 1954 the township did not provide for a police and fire commission to oversee the operations of the new department. For this reason it was decided that the best way to establish and grow the new organization would be for the department to become a private nonprofit corporation and then pursue a contract to provide fire protection with the town board.

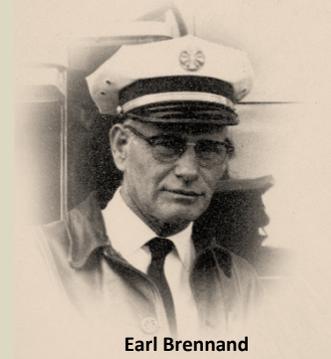
An initial fund raising goal of \$20,000 was agreed upon by those in attendance. It was hoped that a twenty dollar donation from the majority of the 2,200 families living in the town would raise the money needed to get the department started.

The last order of business that night was electing a Chief and two Assistant Chiefs to lead the department. Harvey Buege was elected Chief while Earl Brennand and Charles Conway were elected to serve as Assistant Chiefs. Available documentation on this first meeting indicates that many of those in attendance were employees of the Allis Chalmers Company with most of them living in subdivisions that lined Greenfield Avenue.

Subsequent Monday night meetings were held to establish an operational plan for the fundraising drive. The new department consulted with an advertising firm and developed a five page brochure explaining the purpose and goals of the fund drive. Department members organized into groups of two and divided the city into sections with each group responsible for fundraising in their assigned area. These weekly meetings started the tradition of the Monday night meeting and training schedule that remained in place until the end of the volunteer department.

By February 24th, the Town of New Berlin Volunteer Fire Department filed incorporation papers with the State of Wisconsin as a nonprofit organization. With incorporation papers on file the department started to actively pursue a contract with the Town Board to provide fire service at a lower rate than that charged by neighboring communities. The development of a contract with the town was also important so that the department could obtain the loans needed to pay for new vehicles and equipment.

On February 28th, Fire Chief Harvey Buege resigned his position as he felt he did not have the personal time to give to the position. In the absence of any formal bylaws yet being established, it was recorded that Assistant Chief Earl Brennand was appointed Chief of the department by the membership. At the same meeting Charles Conway would be elected First Assistant Chief over Adolf Groth. This election of Assistant Chief would be the last election held for promotional purposes. Henceforth all promotions within the department would be made by the Chief of the department. The Second Assistant Chief position was held open until Chief Brennand appointed Quintin Sutton to fill the opening later that year.



Earl Brennand

On the evening of June 7th, the bylaws that would govern the organization for the next forty-six years were voted on and approved by the membership. The bylaws called for the creation of a three man board of directors (later increased to five) that would oversee the financial matters of the department. The board of directors also served as the arbitrator in disagreements between the chief and the volunteers when needed. Because the department remained a private corporation contracted to the Town/City, the New Berlin Police and Fire Commission never had jurisdiction over matters involving the operations of the volunteer department.



In July of 1954, a fatal fire in the Gatewood subdivision would take the lives of three small children and their mother. The husband and neighbors did all they could to rescue the victims but to no avail. Newspaper reports state that the City of Waukesha, Brookfield and Hales Corners Fire Departments responded to the scene. The fire helped hasten the fundraising and development of the new department.

By midsummer the members of the department had raised \$12,000. The department used that money for a down payment and placed an order for two pieces of apparatus with the Pierce Body Works Company located in Appleton, Wisconsin.

The first rig ordered was a new 1954 Ford F800 chassis fire pumper equipped with a 500 gallon per minute pump and 750 gallon water tank. Equipped with a three stage pump, this engine also had the ability to produce a high pressure fog spray for use in interior fire attack. The use of high pressure fog was a new and innovative concept in the early 1950's and the New Berlin Department was interested in its use. This new engine would cost the department \$14,000.



The second rig was a 1941 four wheel drive 1350 gallon tanker equipped with a 200 gallon per minute pump. The department had purchased the 1941 FWD chassis from local quarry owner William Buege for \$975. The FWD was then sent to the Pierce plant in Appleton to have the water tank and pump mounted at a cost of \$6,000.

With the order for new apparatus complete the new department concentrated on training. Throughout the summer of 1954 the members of the NBVFD attended basic fire fighting courses held at the City of Waukesha Fire Department. Members of the department also made numerous visits to the West Milwaukee, Whitewater and Pewaukee Fire Departments. During these visits the volunteers looked for guidelines and procedures that could be adapted to operations in New Berlin. In addition to the training conducted in Waukesha, fundraising efforts by department members continued as well. The summer of 1954 was a very busy time for the Town of New Berlin Volunteer Fire Department.



A special town board meeting was called for by local residents in September to discuss the building of a fire station. An overflow crowd packed the small town hall. At this meeting it was proposed that a 30' x 60' addition to the east end of the municipal garage located on National Avenue be built for use as a fire station. The citizens at the meeting voted 78 to 7 in favor of using town funds to build the addition to the town garage. The \$12,000 needed to build the station would come from tax money already collected.

On November 30th, the department took delivery on the two pieces of apparatus ordered through Pierce Manufacturing in Appleton, Wisconsin. By December 5th, the New Berlin Volunteers were training on their new equipment at the pond at the end of Town Road. Located one block east of the new station, the Town Road pond would be designated as the preferred water pick up point for the department. A standpipe would be placed in this pond by the department members so that engines could safely draft there even when frozen over in the dead of winter.

Upon delivery of the new pumper and tanker the \$9,000 loan needed to pay the balance owed on the vehicles was secured through Waukesha State Bank. The department will pay off this loan within two years. Another obstacle to the new department was that the new station on National Avenue was not yet ready for occupancy when the new trucks arrived. Department members made arrangements to temporarily house them in various garages within the township until the station was finished in March of 1955.

With the delivery of the new engines one of many traditions within the volunteer department began. Painted on the doors of the two new engines were a bell, ladder and fire axe surrounded by a blue cloud. Inside the bell was printed "Town of New Berlin" and on the outside of the cloud was printed "Volunteer Fire Department". This emblem would appear on all department apparatus and uniform patches until the year 2000 when, in preparing for the transition to a municipal department, a new emblem would be used. The bell, ladder and axe survived the transition as it became the center piece of the new emblem and department patch as well.



As the volunteer department entered the new year of 1955, the main project was developing the telephone and warning system that would be used to notify the members of an emergency. In 1955, establishing a communications system was not an easy task. The establishment of the New Berlin Police Department was still 10 years away and there was no county wide 911 phone service available. Every police and fire department had their own seven digit emergency number. Working with the telephone company, the department developed a unique phone system that would serve the department from 1955 through 1983.



The alert system that was developed by the telephone company included the installation of five phone lines and a warning siren located on the roof of the fire station. Four of the lines were installed in the homes of designated department members while the fifth phone was installed at the fire station. When a citizen called the fire department number (Sunset 6 5456) all five phones would ring with the designated member for that time period answering the phone. Upon receiving the caller's information, the department member would then activate the warning siren at the fire station with a switch installed in the home and initiate a phone chain warning all available firefighters of an alarm.

Small areas of the township were not covered by the New Berlin Sunset (SU) exchange. In order to accommodate these residents a special enterprise number was established. This number, acting much like an 800 number would work today, allowed residents living in these outlying areas to have direct telephone contact with the fire department.

Since the goal of the department was to have the telephone answered within three rings careful thought went into the placement of the phones. The department telephones were placed in the member's bedroom so that they would be close to the phone at night. Also, an outdoor bell was installed so that if the assigned member was outside the telephone could be easily heard.

In addition to the five land lines established within the department, the telephone company also equipped the new Ford pumper purchased by the department with a mobile telephone. With the mobile phone installed, firefighters would have the ability to call other departments direct for mutual aid requests in addition to being able to call back to dispatch if the need arose.



On March 9, 1955, a very important part of the volunteer department was established. This date marked the formation of the New Berlin Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary. This group was started by the wives of the department members but enrollment was open to all interested women living in the area. Their role within the new department became invaluable as they became responsible for many support activities.

From the beginning the members of the auxiliary assumed the role of department dispatchers, answering the fire phone and dispatching calls from their homes continuously for the next 28 years. In 1983, due to increasing run volumes and improvements in technology, the New Berlin Police Department took over dispatching becoming a combined city wide police, fire and emergency services dispatch center.

Equally important were the fundraising activities conducted by the auxiliary. By 1957 the members of the auxiliary raised enough money to buy an ambulance for the department and equip the apparatus with two way radios. The purchase of the ambulance allowed New Berlin to be one of the first Waukesha County departments to have the ability to transport sick and injured residents to the hospital in a properly equipped vehicle. The acquisition of the two way radio system gave New Berlin a capability that only the City of Waukesha Fire Department had in the past. The

ambulance and two way radio system provided by the auxiliary helped establish New Berlin as an innovative leader among Waukesha County Fire Departments.

With the telephone lines in place, the apparatus equipped, and the firefighters trained, the department was moving rapidly toward operational status. By mid March construction on the fire station addition to the town garage was finished. The last order of business was to complete the negotiations surrounding the formal contract between the township and the fire department. On March 25th, the department signed a five year contract to provide fire protection to the township beginning on April 1, 1955.

The contract stated that the town would pay to the department an initial annual fee of \$6,000 and \$175 per call for the length of the contract. By 1960 the annual fee had been raised to \$12,000 and \$175 per call. The financial terms of the contract allowed the department to pay off, within two years, the loan it had taken out to purchase the apparatus delivered in November of 1954.

The money guaranteed by the contract with the town combined with the additional money raised by the Ladies Auxiliary allowed the new volunteer organization to establish a level of financial stability that would allow the department to grow and provide the services needed to protect the citizens of New Berlin.

CHAPTER 2 – SERVICE IS OUR ONLY PRODUCT

When the New Berlin Volunteer Fire Department became operational on April 1, 1955 Chief Brennand and the 51 volunteers under his command faced a few challenges. The most immediate concern involved problems with the initial installation of the warning siren located on the roof of the fire station.

It took the telephone company seven months to finally get the siren to activate properly. This meant that from April to November the only way to notify members of an alarm was through the telephone chain that was initiated by the department dispatcher. After the problems were corrected the distinctive sound of the siren at Station One would become a part of New Berlin history for the next twenty three years. With the move to mobile alert pagers in 1978 the need for the venerable old siren was reserved for severe weather warnings only.

Another problem unique to the new department was that the city was completely void of fire hydrants. To deal with the lack of a municipal water system the volunteers would need to draft water from a lake or pond and then transport it to the scene of the fire. This type of water shuttle operation is referred to as “tanking” in the fire service.



In order to accommodate the need to shuttle water the NBVFD designated the pond at the north end of Town Road as the official pick up point for units assigned to tanking. To assist units involved in these operations, department members installed a standpipe on the west side of the Town Road pond. This stand pipe allowed personnel to safely draft water in winter when the pond was frozen. The standpipe also allowed fire fighters to attach the special hoses needed to draft water in a faster and more efficient manner.

The department also purchased a portable 1,000 gallon folding water tank in 1955 that was designed to assist in efficient water management at the scene of a major fire where a tanking operation was necessary.

The roads in the area were also a challenge. All of the major roads in the area were two lane unimproved county highways. Street lights and stop lights did not exist. In addition, there were many poorly marked addresses in the more rural areas of the township. In these early days of the department the value of neighbors knowing neighbors came into play frequently when it came to locating emergency scenes.

In 1955 emergency medical calls were handled by Engine One. The life saving equipment consisted of a first aid kit and an oxygen resuscitator that was donated by the New Berlin Lions Club. Conveyance to local hospitals was handled by the Waukesha County Sheriff with their ambulance stationed in the City of Waukesha. Response times for the county ambulance into New Berlin were usually more than 20 minutes. This fact would not be lost on the members of the fire department as they looked to the future.

Fundraising continued within the department. In addition to their dispatch duties the Ladies Auxiliary was involved in organizing countless fundraising activities. The initial goal of the auxiliary was to raise enough money to purchase a department ambulance and a two way radio system for the apparatus. The next couple of years were very busy as the auxiliary was on a mission to reach this goal within two years.

On the operations side, the New Berlin department ran 80 emergency calls in 1955. The volunteers also involved themselves in the training needed to become more proficient in evolutions involving fire attack, drafting, tanking, and scene safety. Department records also indicate that in the early months of operation the volunteers set up an equipment and hose maintenance record system based on one used by the West Milwaukee Fire Department.

New Berlin's reputation as an innovator among Wisconsin volunteer fire departments was firmly established in 1957. Almost continuous fundraising activities since 1955 allowed the NBVFD to purchase equipment and technologies that moved the department into new and challenging endeavors.

As mentioned before, in the early days of the department, a New Berlin resident in need of an ambulance conveyance had to be transported by a unit operated through the Waukesha County Sheriff's Department. The county operated ambulance, with its average response time of over twenty minutes, was unacceptable to the members of the NBVFD. For that reason the department felt it necessary to provide its own ambulance service to better serve the citizens of New Berlin.



In the fall of 1956, using funds raised by the Ladies Auxiliary, the department purchased a 1951 Cadillac ambulance from a race track located in Illinois. The purchase of this ambulance gave the New Berlin volunteers the distinction of being the first fire department in eastern Waukesha County to operate an ambulance service.

The ambulance, equipped with the best available life saving equipment for its time, went into service in January of 1957. The volunteers assigned to the ambulance took certified first aid training as part of their duties even though the county would not mandate first aid training for ambulance crews until 1964.

The volunteers assigned to the ambulance were notified of a call by telephone through the department's dispatch system. The fire siren at Station One was used only to notify members of fire calls. The new ambulance service increased the work load of not only the fire fighters but the volunteer dispatchers as well. Department records indicate that there were 99 ambulance calls and 79 fire calls in 1958 verses 40 emergency medical calls and 40 fire runs in 1957.

Providing this new service did not come without political considerations. The county still required that the Sheriff's Department ambulance respond as the primary conveyance for all motor vehicle accident victims in New Berlin. The NBVFD ambulance handled all emergency medical and trauma related calls that occurred at businesses, farms, schools and private residences within the township. The practice of the sheriff's ambulance responding to motor vehicle accidents in New Berlin would continue until 1970.

The other big addition to the NBVFD in 1957 was the purchase of a two way radio system that directly connected the dispatchers to the fire equipment on the scene of an incident. New Berlin was the first volunteer department in Waukesha County to install this type of equipment in their apparatus. The department call sign used to identify this new system was KSG 659. Only the City of Waukesha Fire Department, which was a full-time department, had two-way radio equipment before New Berlin did.

This new system also allowed for mobile radios and home receivers to be placed in the homes of the most active members. The "Plectron" home receiving units were activated by the dispatcher upon the receipt of an alarm. The members that received the alarm on their home receivers would then activate a short phone chain alerting other members. This helped the dispatchers who were now answering and acknowledging the responding apparatus via the new two way radio system.

The number of home receivers issued to department members increased every year so that by 1970 almost every member had a unit in their home. This system continued until 1978 when the department converted to an individual pager system making the home receiver and phone chain system unnecessary.

It must be remembered that from 1957 to 1983, department dispatchers were members of the Ladies Auxiliary. The women who volunteered for this duty had a department telephone installed in their home. The goal was to answer the phone within three rings. To assist in meeting this goal the phones were placed in the bedroom to facilitate night time calls. In addition, an outdoor ringer was also installed on the exterior of the residence. Upon receiving an alarm the dispatcher would activate the warning siren at the fire station and the home monitors to alert department members.



The ambulance and communication equipment purchases were made possible in large part because the Ladies Auxiliary met their fundraising goals. Community festivals, style shows, bake sales, and card parties were a big part of the American culture in the 1950's and the NBVFD Ladies Auxiliary used these types of events to their



benefit. At one of the fall festivals sponsored by the fire department auxiliary a pony was raffled off and won by a New Berlin family. Considering that in the 1950's New Berlin was still a rural area, with many working farms within its borders, this prize was highly valued by the attendees.

By the end of 1957 the NBVFD had also established informal mutual aid agreements with the Town of Waukesha and Elm Grove. Furthermore, the volunteers started performing fire inspections as part of their duties. Early records indicate that Lester Polzin and Art Millikin were the department's first inspectors.

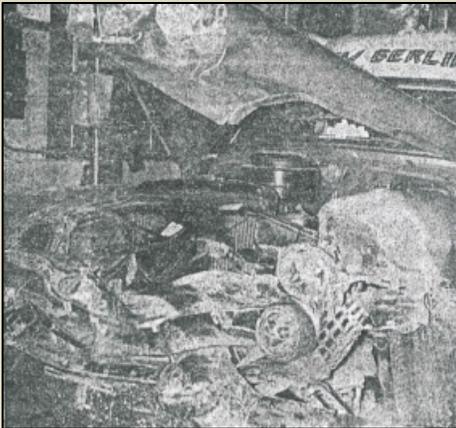
The year 1958 was an eventful year for the NBVFD. On October 26th the department recorded its first major fire. The fire occurred at the National Tea Food Store which was located in the Greenfield Plaza shopping center at the corner of Sunnyslope Road and Greenfield Avenue. The fire loss was reported to be more than \$100,000. There are no known written accounts of this fire and information on this fire is hard to come by. The only documentation the department has is a mention of this fire in a newspaper article written about a different fire that occurred in New Berlin in 1960.

In 1958 the department raised the funds needed to purchase its third piece of fire fighting apparatus. The department purchased a tandem axle Mack pumper/tanker direct from the Mack Corporation in Allentown, Pennsylvania. This rig came equipped with a 750 gallon per minute pump and a 1500 gallon water tank. The engine also carried a 35 foot aluminum extension ladder, extra lighting equipment, and a full complement of hose.

For its time this new pumper/tanker was considered a very large rig and special driver/operator training was required. Due to the vehicle's heavy weight and manual transmission that required a special "double clutch" technique, only qualified department members were assigned to this rig.



The new Mack was organized as Engine Company 3 (later 603) on December 17, 1958. This rig with its distinctive chrome radiator would serve the department for twenty years. In 1978 the Mack was retired and replaced by a diesel powered engine capable of pumping 1250 gallons of water per minute. However, to this day, the retired members still talk of "Old 603" and how difficult it was to drive.



On December 7, 1958 the NBVFD ambulance was involved in a traffic accident while transporting a New Berlin resident with a hip fracture to St. Mary's Hospital in Milwaukee. The New Berlin ambulance was transporting red lights and siren when it collided with a city bus at the intersection of Ninth and Wells Streets in downtown Milwaukee. Although the ambulance and bus sustained heavy damage there were no reported injuries due to the accident. The patient in the ambulance at the time of the crash was transferred to a Milwaukee Police Department ambulance and conveyed without further incident to St. Mary's Hospital. The ambulance was repaired and returned to service within a few months. In the interim the Waukesha County Sheriff's ambulance was used when needed.

In 1959 the Town of New Berlin became a city by state statute. With this new style of government came changes in the way New Berlin operated. In addition, a Mayor, six aldermen, each representing a district of the city, needed to be elected to oversee the functions of the new government. When the elections were concluded three residents with department ties were elected to office.

Lieutenant Dan Zebrowski was elected to represent the first district. Department trustee "Doc" Burns was elected as the second district alderman and Assistant Chief Charles Conway was elected to the sixth district post. At the time of the elections New Berlin residents apparently saw no conflict of interest in respect to fire department members being on the city's common council.

The election of three department members to the New Berlin City Council would appear to give the department an easy road politically. But in 1960 the volunteers encountered some unexpected opposition from the city. The five year

contract that the department was operating under was up for renewal. It must be remembered that the NBVFD was a private non profit corporation that contracted with the city to provide fire and emergency services. The corporation status was necessary because when the department was organized there was no established municipal fire and police commission to oversee the operation of the fire department.

The city took a hard line in the renegotiation of the contract. The members of the volunteer department objected to most of the proposals that the city brought forth. Newspaper articles indicate that both the city aldermen and the volunteer fire fighters rejected each others offers multiple times.

The fire department wanted a nine year contract but the city held firm and the department would settle for another five year contract. Furthermore, in lieu of an annual lump sum payment made by the city to the department for service, the volunteers would be required to submit both an operating and a capital improvement budget every year to the city council for approval. The volunteers would be allowed to buy the type of equipment they felt was best but the city had to approve the purchase.

A significant change to the contract included the city demand that all new fire equipment and station acquisitions be titled as city owned and then leased back to the department for one dollar per year. Over time the one dollar lease would be dropped. From this point forward all apparatus, equipment, and station needs the volunteers felt necessary to provide adequate fire protection would have to be budgeted for, approved, and owned by the city.

The new contract provided for a formal review process to handle any dispute that may arise between the city and the volunteer corporation as to adequacy of service. The review process stated that any disagreement concerning services provided by the volunteer department to the city would be settled by the state industrial commission and the fire insurance rating bureau.

Furthermore, the contract also stated that in the event of the city deciding to establish a municipal department the members of the volunteer department would be given first priority in any hiring done by the city at the rank they held on the volunteer force. Furthermore the new contract noted that the three pieces of fire apparatus owned by the volunteers would be returned to the corporation for dispersal in the event that the volunteer force was ever disbanded.

After long and sometimes heated debate on both sides, the contract renewal was finally signed. The new contract was signed on November 1st and would stay in effect until December 31, 1965. The contract signed in 1960 was very important because its stated provisions would be the cornerstone for all contracts signed by the city and the volunteer department until the corporation disbanded on December 31, 2000.

An important element of the 1960 contract was that the city had the volunteers submit a master plan that detailed what the future needs of the department would most likely be. This well written plan became the guideline used by the department as the city grew through the years. The most important part of the plan specified the need for, and the location of, future fire stations. The plan called for the building of four new stations in addition to expanding the National Avenue station as the population and other needs of the city grew.

The plan called for two stations to be built on Sunnyslope Road. The most immediate need was for a station to be built close to Greenfield Avenue and north of the railroad tracks that ran through the area. The other Sunnyslope Road Station was proposed for the area just south of Beloit Road. The plan also called for a station to be built in the Prospect Hill area of the city. The fifth station was originally suggested for the Westbrook Subdivision in the northwest corner of the city. This plan would be amended in the mid 1960's when plans for a large industrial park at the intersection of Moorland Road and Cleveland Avenue became a reality. The fifth station was then proposed for a site to be determined in the industrial park. At the same time, a sixth station was then suggested for the corner of Cleveland Ave. and Johnson Road as a replacement for the originally planned station in the Westbrook Subdivision.

The master plan was carried out by the city over time with stations being built at the locations suggested in 1963, 1966, 1968, and 1971. The only station not built was the one proposed for the corner of Cleveland Avenue and Johnson Road. The master plan also called for the stations to be built in a way that living quarters for fire fighters could be added if the need ever arose for full-time staffing.

This plan was written in 1960 when the City of New Berlin was still in its infancy. The plan is a testament to the volunteers who had the foresight and vision to see what the future needs of the department and city would be. The master plan as written is an interesting document written by people who had an understanding of the fire service and city development.

The department responded to one large fire in 1960. The June 16th fire involved a barn located at 13130 West Cleveland Avenue. The barn was used by the Schmidt Glass Company for storage. After the fire, Chief Brennand stated that the aggressive attack carried out by his department saved the stock stored in the lower part of the burning structure. Brennand estimated the dollar loss to structure and contents at \$30,000. Newspaper articles also reported that the department shuttled 28,000 gallons of water from the pond on Town Road to the fire. The City and Town of Brookfield and the Village of Elm Grove assisted in fighting the fire.

By 1961 the NBVFD had entered into formal mutual aid agreements with no less than nine surrounding departments. Cooperating departments included Big Bend, Muskego, Tess Corners, Butler, Pewaukee, Elm Grove, Town of Waukesha, Pewaukee, and the City of Brookfield.

In the fall of 1961 an important chapter in the history of the New Berlin Volunteer Fire Department sadly came to an end. On October 1st Chief Earl Brennand died after a brief illness at a local hospital. Chief Brennand guided the department through its formative years and established a foundation that the volunteers of New Berlin would build on for the next thirty nine years. The legacy that Chief Brennand left was reflected in the title he gave to the department's first annual report: "SERVICE IS OUR ONLY PRODUCT."



ANNUAL REPORT
NEW BERLIN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC.
SERVICE is our only PRODUCT

YOUR FIREMAN

He is your neighbor, your friend, and the fellow up the street. He has all the virtues and failings you have. He is supporting a family, pays taxes, goes to church, sends his children to school, takes part in civic affairs and votes; a majority are buying or already own their homes. He is just an average citizen - that is, until the siren blows - from then on he is on his way to help you, whether it is a fire, an accident, or an emergency. Knowing that he may have an accident, may be injured while helping his neighbor, and that he will receive no pay for what he does, but is motivated by his desire to help.

He is an active fireman. He is a well trained fireman. He must attend fire drills and training classes regularly where he is taught the latest methods of fire fighting. He must know how to fight various kinds of fires, how to drive a fire truck, how to operate pumps, and many other details in fighting fires.

Fire Call - SU. 6-5456



New Berlin Fire Department

Celebrating



NEW BERLIN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC.

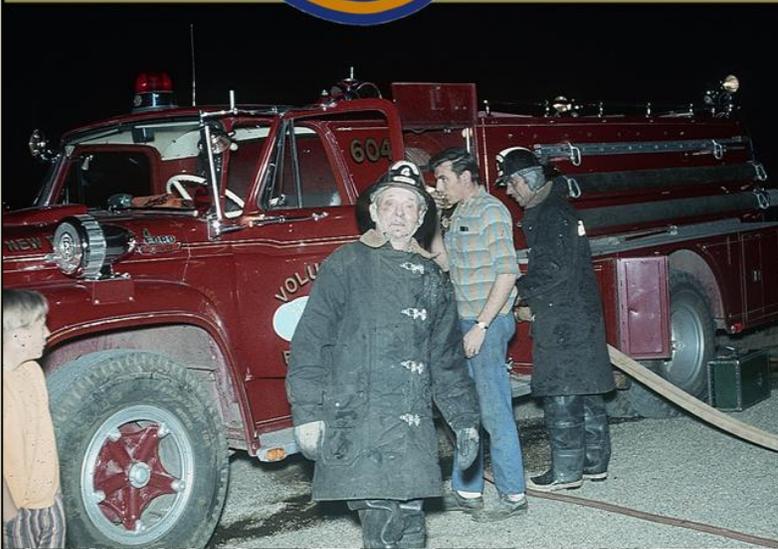
SERVICE is our only PRODUCT



60 years



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CHAPTER 3 - RAPID GROWTH

On October 27, 1961 Lester Graff was named Chief of the New Berlin Fire Department. Promoted from the rank of Captain, Graff would lead the department for the next five years. These years were years of rapid growth for both the department and the city. Under Graff's leadership, the size of the department would double and the run volume would more than quadruple in number.



In January of 1961 the FWD tanker was taken out of service to be refurbished. Within a few months a new Ford F- 850 chassis replaced the old and worn FWD frame. The original 1350 gallon water tank and 250 gpm pump were rebuilt and placed on the new chassis.



This rig remained in service as Engine Two until 1968, when it was heavily damaged in a rollover accident and retired.

By the end of 1961, the City of New Berlin had built a new city garage and maintenance facility capable of housing the Street Department's equipment and snow plows. When the Street Department moved to the new building, the fire department moved into the west side of the old city garage. This more than doubled the space available to house apparatus and equipment. With the addition of Engine 3 and the ambulance to the roster since 1955, the added space was both needed and welcomed.



On May 10, 1962 the original 1951 Cadillac ambulance was replaced with a new 1962 Cadillac ambulance. This ambulance was built by the Eureka Ambulance and Coach Company of Rock Falls, Illinois. Assigned to the National Avenue Station, this new unit responded as New Berlin's front line ambulance until 1968, when it was replaced and put into reserve status.

The new ambulance was referred in written department publications as "the pride of the fleet". When most departments look to large fire apparatus as their focus, it was obvious that the NBVFD saw things differently. Years before it became a priority in other departments, quality emergency medical care was already established as an important part of the department's culture.



As a first step toward organizing a municipal police department, the City of New Berlin established a police and fire commission in 1963. The commission was needed to oversee the general operation of the new police force that was scheduled to go into service in 1964. Because the fire department was a private corporation contracted to the city for service, it did not fall under the auspices of the commission.

Because of the close working relationship between the volunteer's and the city council, there was never a need to have the fire department come under the control of the police and fire commission. The professionalism of the department

allowed for the volunteer's to remain an independent entity until January 1st, 2001, when the department became municipal, and for the first time, under the control of the commission.

Since 1957, fire inspections in the City of New Berlin had been conducted by members of the department as part of their volunteer duties. However, the Wisconsin State Industrial Commission reimburses city governments for time and effort spent on inspecting commercial and industrial buildings within their jurisdiction. These repayments are commonly known as "two percent dues" in the fire service. These reimbursements are substantial and are an important part of many fire department budgets.

On July 9, 1963 the department and the city amended the service contract to address the payment of this reimbursement. The amendment stated that, in the future, all payments sent by the state to the city for completed fire inspections would go to the volunteer fire department as "additional payment for services rendered to the city."



In October of 1963, the New Berlin Fire Department embarked on its largest expansion since becoming operational in 1955. Station Two was built at 1711 South Sunnyslope Road. Built in the northeast corner of the city, this station and the engine company that it housed were listed as an immediate need in the 1960 master plan submitted to the city.

With many residents still remembering the fatal 1954 fire in the Gatewood subdivision, this station was considered a priority because of the population density in the area surrounding the new station. The many subdivisions built along Greenfield Avenue, the heavily used rail road tracks in the area, and the long distance for units responding from the National Avenue station created the need for the station.

The design of this new station also followed the 1960 master plan recommendations. The station was of two bay design with each bay large enough to house one truck. The station also had an office, restrooms, storage room, and day room with small kitchen. Most importantly, the station was designed to be expanded if needed. The station was built so that living quarters and additional apparatus bays could be added if the need ever arose in the future.

The new station was dedicated on October 6, 1963. With the opening came the announcement that Captain Edward Zajdel would be promoted to Battalion Chief in charge of the new north side station and all calls within its first response zone. The reason for having a chief in charge of this new station had to do with the long distance between the newly renamed Station One on National Avenue, and Station Two. Furthermore, the chance of a train delaying units from Station One was also a consideration.

Chief Zajdel would be the only member to hold the rank of Battalion Chief in the New Berlin Fire Department. After Chief Zajdel retired in 1969, Station Two was assigned a captain as its ranking officer.



Eighteen fire fighters were assigned to Station Two. The personnel were divided into two nine person platoons, each lead by a lieutenant. The platoons were known in house as the "red" shift and "green" shift. Each week one platoon was "on duty" and one platoon was "off duty."

Department policy stated that the "on duty" crew reported to the station and made sure that the engine responded to the alarm if called or, manned the station in the event of a second alarm. The "off duty" crew reported directly to the incident if their assigned engine was called.

The New Berlin department always prepared for the possibility of a second call. It was an expectation that all stations be manned when a fire alarm was received. This diligence proved its worth over the years. There were many times when multiple alarms were received by the department and every call was handled accordingly.

When Station Two opened, there was an increase in department membership. Residents living in the proximity of the new station became interested and joined. Creating an eighteen person roster for the new department was not a problem. It became an expectation within the department that with the opening of a new neighborhood station, membership would increase among residents living close to the station. Manning new fire stations in New Berlin was never a problem.

The two platoon manning system worked well for a long time. After 1963, all New Berlin fire companies operated with “on and off” duty crews. This system was in place well into the mid 1980’s when modifications were made to accommodate changes in available manpower and ever increasing run volumes.

The department purchased a new engine for assignment at Station Two. This purchase is of particular note because this engine would be the prototype for all new engines purchased by the department for years to come. This new engine was the first in a series of engines that would all be identical in design and function.

Built by the Howe Fire Apparatus Company of Anderson, Indiana, this new engine featured a 1963 Ford F-950 chassis with a conventional three person cab. The chassis was fitted with a waterous 750 gpm pump and 750 gallon water tank. The pump was built with a third stage high pressure side designed to accommodate twin, enclosed, heated booster reels capable of producing high pressure fog streams. The new engine came equipped with a 35 foot ground ladder and the compartment space necessary for hose adapters, nozzles, and other needed equipment.



Organized as “New Berlin Engine Co. No. 4”, this new engine will remain at Station Two and be “first due” in the northeast corner of New Berlin for the next twenty one years. This engine was designed and functioned so well that the next four engines purchased by the department were all built by Howe Apparatus using the same basic specifications that were used to build Engine Four.

The Waukesha County Sheriffs Department issued a directive in 1964 mandating that all ambulance crew members have American Red Cross first aid cards. This directive did not impact the NBVFD. First Aid Certification was required of all department members who were assigned to ambulance duty since 1957.

On November 25, 1964, the City of New Berlin approved the purchase of five parcels of land bordered by Moorland Road and Calhoun Road. On December 10, the sale was complete and the New Berlin industrial Park became a reality. The industrial park would become one of the largest in the state and the department started to look at the future fire fighting needs of this new development.

In December of 1964, the Town of New Berlin Fire Department Inc. petitioned the state for a change in the corporation’s official name. On December 3, the department became known as the New Berlin Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. Dropping the word “town” from the name of the corporation was done to eliminate any confusion when dealing with the city council or other outside agencies.



In 1965, the department added an equipment truck to its fleet of apparatus. A large Ford delivery type van was purchased. This vehicle had enough storage space to carry special need rescue equipment and extra personnel. This unit was also equipped with a 15,000 GVW on board electric generator. The interior of this rig was large enough to include a small area where coffee and warm food could be prepared.

This unit was originally designated as Unit Number Five and assigned to Station Two. This truck was assigned to different stations and carried various numbers until it was finally assigned to Station Four as unit 611 in 1972. This

unit served the department until 1980, when it was sold to the Brookfield Fire Associates and used as an emergency "canteen" truck for many years.

The most significant fire in the City of New Berlin in five years occurred on September 13, 1965. At 10:44 p.m. the department received a report of a working fire in a townhouse project under construction at the corner of 124th Street and Greenfield Avenue. The \$100,000 fire destroyed five units of a one block long, fourteen unit structure. Newspaper reports stated that two New Berlin fire fighters were injured fighting the blaze. One fire fighter fell through a floor and was hospitalized overnight. A second fire fighter was also treated for injuries from a fall but was not hospitalized.



Chief Graff indicated that the department did an excellent job of stopping the spread of the fire and containing it to the five units involved. Assistance in fighting this fire was received from both Elm Grove and West Allis. This was the only time in the history of the NBVFD that the volunteers and the West Allis Fire Department worked together at a fire scene.

The West Allis fire dispatch office received a telephone report of a fire at the intersection of 124th and Greenfield. West Allis Engine 5 was sent to investigate and since they were the first to arrive, laid a line and started to contain the fire. The West Allis crew stayed on the scene until responding New Berlin units arrived and became operational, at which time the WAFD engine returned to quarters.



On September 18th, the New Berlin Fire department experienced its second serious ambulance accident. The NBVFD ambulance was struck by another vehicle at the intersection of Appleton Avenue and Capitol Drive. The ambulance was transporting a patient to Community Hospital, located at 19th and Capitol Drive, at the time of the crash.

As in the 1958 incident, the patient and her mother, who sustained minor injuries in the accident, were transferred to a Milwaukee Police Department ambulance and conveyed without further incident to the hospital. No NBVFD personnel were injured in the crash. The ambulance, although heavily damaged, was repaired and returned to service.

In the fall of 1965 the NBVFD in conjunction with the City of New Berlin were, once again, involved in planning for the future needs of the department and the community. In Late September, Chief Graff announced that the department was in the process of planning for the construction of a three acre training ground. The proposed site was located on Casper Drive, just north of Station One.

The new training ground was to feature multiple training stations and, according to Chief Graff be "the only one of its kind in the state." It was hoped that the new facility would be completed sometime in the summer of 1966.

On October 12, 1965, The City of New Berlin approved the purchase of the old Prospect Hill Motors automotive showroom and garage located at 19885 West National Avenue. Over the next fourteen months this building will be rebuilt into New Berlin Fire Station No. 3. As was the case with Station Two, the need for this station in the Prospect Hill area was identified in the 1960 master plan.

The biggest accomplishment of 1965 was renewing the service contract between the fire department and the city for another five years. The conditions of the new contract followed the language which was set forth in the previous 1960 contract with a continuation of the two percent inspection dues paid directly to the department.

The new contract did have some new language in it that clearly defined the difference between the “operating budget” and the “capital improvement budget.” Records indicate that there was some discussion among the department membership about the new contract but it was approved and signed. The new contract guaranteed that the NBVFD would be providing fire and ambulance service until the end of 1970 when the contract would again be reopened.

The year 1966 would be a year of success, excitement, sadness, and loss for the NBVFD. Chief Graff and his two Assistant Chiefs, Harvey Rindt and Charles Conway, lead the department through an eventful twelve month period of expansion and growth.

The year started with Chief Graff being elected president of the Waukesha County Fire Chiefs Association. The reputation of the NBVFD as an innovative department was growing and the election of Graff to president was a validation of that leadership role. Graff was the first of three New Berlin chiefs who will be elected to this important position over the next 34 years.

In addition to the election of Chief Graff, Assistant Chief Conway will be elected as president of the Jefferson-Waukesha County Fireman’s Association. The department’s September newsletter stated at the time, “We feel very proud that our two top men hold the two top positions in the fire service in Waukesha County. This is recognition of the excellence of our entire fire department.”

In April of 1966, the New Berlin Fire Department became one of the best dressed volunteer departments in the state. The department already had a work uniform that was to be worn to all department trainings and meetings. The uniform consisted of a grey long sleeve shirt and grey pants. For cooler weather a matching grey “Ike” jacket was provided. The department patch was sewn to the left sleeve and a dark blue service hat completed the uniform.

Although the work uniform was appropriate for station duties, the membership was looking for something more. The Ladies Auxiliary had the answer. The auxiliary spent three thousand dollars of their funds and bought every department member a dark blue “Class A” uniform. The “Class A” uniform was worn by department members attending important functions and ceremonies both in and out of the city.

The grey work uniforms and the “Class A” uniforms were worn by department members until 1985, when the work uniform was changed and the dress uniform was phased out. After 1985, only chief officers were issued dress blue “Class A” uniforms.

The NBVFD training facility located on Casper Drive was completed on schedule and dedicated on June 12th. The three acre site included a three story wooden structure designed for ladder and rescue training. The facility also included a large in-ground burn pit designed to provide training in the proper methods of fighting large flammable liquid fires. The third major training station consisted of a large, one story, enclosed,



steel structure. This building was designed to provide a place where firefighters could practice interior fire attack and rescue scenarios.

The facility was built with a perimeter road that allowed for apparatus to easily access the different training sites. The three major training stations were spaced far enough apart so that multiple drills could be conducted at the same time. There were many open areas where car fires, vehicle extrication, and hose line advancement could also be safely practiced. A small grandstand was also erected on the site so that instructional programs and fire prevention demonstrations could be presented to large groups of people.

The original training facility should not be confused with the present department training facility. The original site was built just to the south of the present training ground, in the area of the north parking lot in Malone Park. The original training ground was closed when the new training ground was built in 1992.

The fact that the NBVFD built and maintained their own training facility is a testament to the fact that training was always a priority within the department. The tradition of Monday night trainings and meetings that started in 1954 never stopped. Special Saturday morning and Wednesday night trainings were also held with regularity over the years.

Stepping away from the training grounds two or three times a year, the NBVFD regularly conducted practice burns in vacant buildings that were scheduled to be torn down. The department leadership always believed that burning a building down one room at a time, in a controlled setting, was the best way to orientate new members and advance the skill level of veteran members. For all of the live burns conducted by the NBVFD, no member was ever seriously injured in these trainings. As intense as some of these burns would get, the knowledge and experience of the officers and senior members always provided for a safe experience.

On September 6, 1966, the New Berlin Fire Department Explorer Post 193 received its charter. From the beginning the post was successful. Early on, the post developed a "hands-on" approach to fire training and the reputation that this built ensured adequate membership levels throughout the years.

The department directly benefitted from the program over the years as the post provided a well trained pool of recruits. After graduation from the post many explorers pursued full-time positions in the fire service and were appointed to career departments.

Outstanding advisors such as Bill Murgas, Mike Wise and Bob Jeske lead the post as the years went on. These leaders always made the post a top priority and provided excellent training opportunities. The quality of the post was such that it outlasted the volunteer fire department. The post carried over into the municipal department in 2001.

Another event that would impact the department's operations for the next 22 years occurred in September, 1966. New Berlin Memorial Hospital opened its doors at 13750 W. National Ave. When the 86 bed facility added an emergency room the NBVFD was quick to partner with the hospital. The cooperation that existed between the hospital and the department was another plus for the community. High quality, rapid transport and emergency care were available to the residents of New Berlin until April, 1988, when the hospital closed.

On October 6, charter member Arthur Millikin 48, died of a heart attack while showing a department fire truck to members of local Boy Scout Troop 38. Millikan was conveyed by NBVFD ambulance to Waukesha Memorial Hospital where he was declared dead on arrival.

Assigned to Engine Company No. 1, Millikan was also one of the department's first fire inspectors. Having served on the department's board of directors for six years, Art was one of the department's most involved members.

In addition, Millikan was also deeply involved in Boy Scouts, having been presented with the local scout council's highest award in 1963. The loss of Milikan, who was employed as an engineer at the Allis Chalmers Company, was felt throughout the department and the community as well.



In December of 1966, the renovation of the former Prospect Hill Motors building was complete and New Berlin Fire Station No. 3 went into service. The showroom, which once featured new Studebaker cars and Willys Jeeps, was converted into an office and dayroom area. The repair section of the building was turned into an apparatus bay that would house fire apparatus for the next 42 years. Before and after photos of the former dealership show that the building went through substantial remodeling before the station became operational.

As was the case when Station Two opened, many Prospect Hill residents became interested in the fire service and joined the department when they saw that Station Three was ready to open. Station Three was assigned eighteen fire fighters to staff the two nine man platoons. As the station opened, Gordon Becker was promoted to station captain.

The engine purchased for the new Station Three was a 1966 Ford F-950 triple combination pumper built by the Howe Fire Apparatus Company of Anderson, Indiana. The new engine matched the specifications that Engine Four was built to in 1963. The one significant improvement on this engine was a larger 1000 gpm three stage pump. The new engine was lettered as New Berlin Engine Co. 6 and would respond from the Prospect Hill station for the next twenty-one years.



At about the same time that Station Three was being converted into a fire station, a remodeling of Station One was also in progress. Photos taken of Station One and Station Three in 1967, show that the front sides of both buildings were redone to match each other. Both stations featured light blue aluminum siding and identical lettering over the apparatus bay doors.

In September, Chief Graff announced that he would be retiring as chief effective January 1, 1967. Chief Graff cited "personal health and responsibilities" as the reason for his decision to retire. Graff, who was a charter member of the department, moved the NBVFD forward in many ways.

In his five years as chief, Graff oversaw the building of two fire stations and a state of the art training facility. Graff also was involved in the purchase of new apparatus and equipment that was designed to meet the needs of the department for years to come.

Most importantly, however, was the fact that under the command of Chief Graff, the department grew in terms of service to the community. The members of the NBVFD met the challenge of increasing run volumes, and at the same time, advanced their skill levels through the training programs offered by the department.

The department expanded to 100 members in 1966, up from the 51 members on the roster in 1955. At the time of Graff's retirement, the run volume for the department had increased from 80 calls in 1955 to 400 in 1966. Additionally, Graff and his staff arranged to have the state inspection reimbursement paid directly to the city as payment for services received.

During the time that Graff was Chief, the city formed a police department, a local hospital was opened and the New Berlin Industrial Park became a reality. Chief Graff and his staff cooperated with all of these new organizations in a way that allowed the NBVFD to create successful partnerships and in so doing made the city a safer place to live and work.

On Wednesday night December 14, the NBVFD held a testimonial open house for Chief Graff at Station One. On that night Chief Graff was honored for his fourteen years of service, the last five served as its chief officer. With the retirement of Chief Graff, the department sensed it was on the threshold of a new era. The needs of a rapidly growing community would soon bring significant change to the basic operation of the volunteer department.

On April 1, 1955 Chief Earl Brennand declared the Town of New Berlin Volunteer Fire Department fully operational and ready to respond to emergencies within the township. By 1985 the department grew to become the largest volunteer fire department in Wisconsin with 150 members operating 6 engine companies, one truck company and five ambulances responding out of five strategically placed stations. In 2001, as the city grew in population and the numbers of calls for emergency service increased dramatically, the department began the transition to the municipal combination full-time/part-time department that the city enjoys today.

I _____ before God
as my witness, do hereby
swear that I will obey the
constitution and bylaws of
the **New Berlin Volunteer Fire
Department**, and to always
bear in mind my obligations
as a citizen to my nation,
my state, my community,
and to my department, and
to give freely of my time
and labor. To be careful
with my criticisms and
liberal with my praise;
to build up and not to destroy.
So help me God.

Town of New Berlin Volunteer Fire Department

TRUSTEES

DR. R. J. BURNS
NORTON E. DEGNITZ
JACK A. RADTKE

FIRE CHIEF

EARL S. BRENNAND

1ST ASST. CHIEF
CHARLES CONWAY

2ND ASST. CHIEF
QUINTIN SUTTON

OFFICERS

WALTER REIT - SEC.
MURNANE BANNISTER - TREAS.

RUSSELL ANDERSON
HAROLD BERES
JOHN BERES
ROGER BRAATZ
WILLIAM BUEGE
KENNETH BUELOW
JOSEPH BURANT
NORBERT CALHOUN
THOMAS CONWAY
JAMES CROTTY
GEORGE FRANKFOURTH
LES GRAF
ADOLPH GROTH
ARTHUR HANSET
DEL HEATON
FERDINAND JOHANNES
FRANK KAPLAN
RONALD KENT
KEVIN KLAWITTER
CLAY KOHNE
GERALD KOHNE
ANTHONY KUPKOVITS
EDMUND KUCHARSKI
WILLIAM KUMM
RICHARD LAMBERT

ROBERT LATZ
HAROLD MATHER
FRED MAUL
ALFRED MAYER
RICHARD MILLER
CHESTER MEYER
ARTHUR MILLIKIN
MILTON NELSON
JAMES PAUL
LESTER POLZIN
STANLEY POWALKA
JOHN RICE
HARVEY RINDT
GEORGE SCHACK
CONRAD SZYMASZEK
JOHN VANDERBOOM
RAY WAGNER
GENE WALTERS
ARMIN WIETZKE
DONALD WINK
EDWARD WISNER
WALTER ZAGORSKI
EDWARD ZAIDEL
DANIEL ZEBROWSKI

HONORARY MEMBERS

ANTON STIGLER
JOHN CASPER
WILLIAM SCHMITZ
JOE RAUSCH
FRANK DISANTIS
JOHN EGOFKSKE

TOWN OF NEW BERLIN

This certifies that

V F D
is a member of this organization and subject
to all fines and privileges until revoked.

Chief

Secretary

No.

MUST BE COUNTERSIGNED





On a cold winter afternoon in 1954 the charter members of the New Berlin Volunteer Fire Department put into motion the beginnings of emergency and rescue services in our community. This booklet celebrates the legacy of those who gave freely of their time and effort so many years ago. Also acknowledged are the present members of the City of New Berlin Fire Department who, through their daily commitment to duty, carry on the tradition of unselfish community service which began here sixty years ago.

