

Historical Highlights

Sand Lake Historical Society

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Leamon Eweg's Diary

Submitted by Michele Sprague

West Sand Lake Fire Company Historian



On Thanksgiving Day 1913, the West Sand Lake Fire Company, which was organized in 1872, broke ground behind the 1876 Engine House to construct a fund-raising facility. The first of its kind owned by a fire company in Rensselaer County, the building would be named Firemen's Hall. Plans immediately got underway for the grand opening event, the Firemen's Fair, which would be held Thursday, Friday and Saturday, March 26-28, 1914. The head carpenter was George W. Fredenburgh, a fire company member, who was being paid 25¢ an hour for the job. Assisting him was Joel P. Hitchcock, the fire chief, who received 17.5¢ an hour. Construction progressed through the Christmas and New Year's holidays, and the villagers were proudly and eagerly anticipating the grand opening event. In February 1914, Leamon B. Eweg, then 14 years old, began keeping a personal diary. Leamon's father, a long-time member of the fire company, had died in an accident only seven months before Leamon started the diary. The diary was maintained daily for little more than two months, but, together with the fire company's minutes, it accurately describes life in West Sand Lake in the late winter and early spring of 1914.

As the diary begins, Leamon was attending school regularly, but he did not always attend full-day sessions. If the school was too cold, or if the teacher was absent, school was closed for the day. Leamon was looking forward to receiving a certificate from the school but never did, for he quit school on March 25, 1914. The next day — the opening of the Firemen's Fair — Leamon began working at the mill; at first part-time, soon full-time. He received \$1.95 in his first pay for about seven days of part-time work. On another occasion, he was paid \$7.07 for 11 days of work. Very often, after work, Leamon and his friends could be found romping in the mill yard, playing childlike games such as hide-and-seek or wild horse.

Particularly because the diary entries are written in youthful innocence, the statement by this boy of the fact of his being a man during the day and a child at night is all the more profound. In winter-time, the youths ice skated, went sledding or build snow forts. Occasionally, they entertained themselves with an Ouija Board or played a card game called "euchre." They enjoyed playing hide-and-seek in the barn. When the weather improved, Leamon went fishing with his friends, probably more often for the sake of putting food on the table than for sport. He wrote that he "went to Burden Lake and fished down the creek to Miller's Crossing."

The Town of Sand Lake has three Volunteer Fire Companies that have served the Town for many years. The West Sand Lake Volunteer Fire Company No. 1, is celebrating its 150th year of service this year. The Averill Park-Sand Lake Fire Co. No.1 will be 100 years in operation in the year 2000. Taborton Fire Co. the youngest, was organized in 1958. To recognize the many years of service these organizations have given to the people of the Town of Sand Lake, we proudly dedicate this issue to the Volunteer Fire men and women.

Leamon called his bicycle "my wheel." Louis Cipperley had a violin, and Leamon once tried playing it. Leamon wrote that he spent an afternoon "catching rides" — evidently that which later became known as hitchhiking. He sometimes went to Troy. On one such trip, he purchased a flashlight for himself. Leamon and the others played ball in the mill yard. They frequently attended birthday parties for friends and relatives.

At home, Leamon's chores including gathering eggs and counting them, getting feed for the chickens, restocking the woodpile and cleaning the chicken house. In the diary, he never once complained about his responsibilities, either at home or at the mill.

The mill was closed on Sundays. Leamon and his family went to church regularly and participated in the religious, social and fundraising activities of the church. Leamon helped to sell tickets and solicit door prizes for the Firemen's Fair. In March, Leamon wrote that he went to Cipperley's, where he "learned to dance a little."

Leamon attended every night of the grand opening of the Firemen's Fair. The admission price was 10¢. An oyster supper was served on each of the three occasions. Booths were set up in the hall, and the firemen sold ice cream and soda. It rained Friday night and all day and night on Saturday, but spirits were not dampened. There was live music, dancing and entertainment. Leamon wrote in his diary that he danced the tango on Friday night. Door prizes included a rocking chair and a pair of pants. Thermo Knitting Mills had donated a wool blanket for a door prize. Eighty years later, the fire company was told that the blanket was "still perfectly good."

The first use of the hall by an organization other than the fire company was on April 18, 1914, when the Knights of Pythias Lodge paid the fire company \$5.00 to rent the hall for a dance. A play was produced at the hall on April 25. The fire company charged 25¢ admission and 10¢ extra to sit in the first five rows; Leamon Eweg attended the performance. Soon the churches began to rent the hall for concerts and socials. Before the end of the year, the hall was being rented for moving picture shows. The last entry in Leamon's diary is April 30, 1914: "Rained and cleared up. We had our church concert in Firemen's Hall."

Three years later, on March 1, 1917, Leamon B. Eweg walked into the West Sand Lake Engine House and dutifully signed his name in the fire company's roster book. He was 17 years old. The 190th person to join the fire company, he would remain a member for many years.

Averill Park-Sand Lake Fire Company No. 1

By Robert W. Shuey



The earliest record of any form of fire protection in the Town of Sand Lake shows up on a list of items that were to be sold after the demise of the Glass Factory in Glass House Village following the fire of 1790. Included in the list is one fire engine. It wasn't until 110 years later when a bucket brigade was unable to contain a fire at Metcalf house on Johnny Cake Lane, that several prominent residents of the village of Averill Park and Sand Lake realized that organized fire protection for the Village was drastically needed. On July 31, 1900, a meeting was held at Gabeler's Hall (present day Lakeview Inn) in the village of Averill Park to discuss the possibility of forming a fire company.

At the meeting, Alpheus Bailey and John P. Kelley offered to sell the residents of the two villages a hand-drawn pumper, hose cart and 500 feet of hose that formerly belonged to the Town of Poestenkill for the sum of \$200. The offer was accepted and a committee was formed to solicit subscriptions to raise the necessary funds. Rare photographs of the engine indicate that it may have been of the First Class design, "piano" style pumper built by Cowing and Company in Seneca Falls, New York. Although the age of the steam fire engine was well under way by the turn of the century, this new, yet already outdated, hand pumper would serve the small area village well until its retirement in the early 1920s.

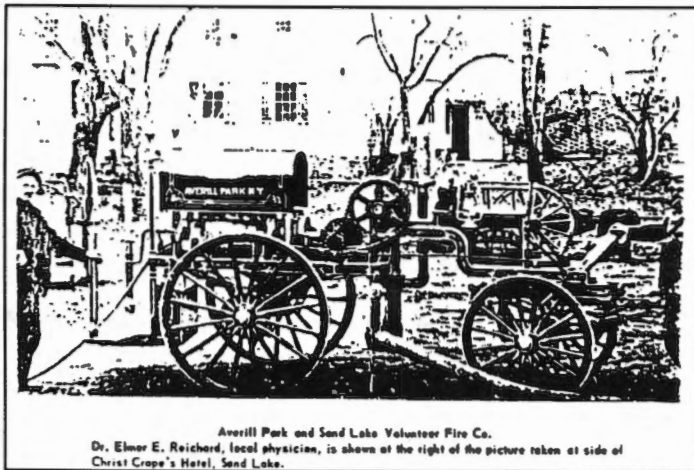
On August 4, 1900, a board of nine trustees was elected and a committee of two was named to locate and evaluate all water sources capable of supplying sufficient water to extinguish fires. They were all elected for a term of one year and called themselves the Averill Park and Sand Lake Fire Association. Since most of the committee were too old to take an active part in fire-fighting, the group voted to act primarily as a board of directors; another organization would be formed to actually conduct the labors of firefighting.

Now that the new fire company was organized, named and owned a fire engine (thereafter known as Nickwackett), they were confronted with their first real task. They needed a firehouse. George Brownhard agreed to sell a lot big enough for an engine house for \$50. Terms were agreed upon, and a lot was purchased on the Averill Park-Sand Lake Road half-way between the two villages.

After a fundraiser held at Crystal Lake Park, construction of a 22 x 36 ft., two-story firehouse was begun immediately under the supervision of Edmond F. Hack. By mid-March 1901, the construction crew, which was made up of the firefighters and other townspeople, had the new building so far along that it could be occupied.



On April 15, 1901, the Articles of Incorporation were officially registered with the State of New York, and the formation of the Averill Park and Sand Lake Volunteer Fire Company Number One was complete. Ten months later, a fair held at Crystal Lake Park raised enough money to pay off the mortgage and furnish the new firehouse.



Averill Park and Sand Lake Volunteer Fire Co.
Dr. Elmer E. Reichard, local physician, is shown at the right of the picture taken at side of Christ Crosse's Hotel, Sand Lake.

The importance of the individual could not have been stressed enough. A very large number of men were needed at a scene of a fire. It took at least 25 men to operate the hand pump on old Nickwackett, and more men were needed to handle the hose cart, hose line and nozzle. This dependency on the strengths of the individuals is evidenced by the fact that every man was assigned a position such as "hose cart," "pole on engine," or "suction." These positions were rotated from time to time so that every man had a chance to learn every position. The military-style drill was reminiscent of the "school of the gun" taught to artillery crews of the period.

The mountainous area to the east and the predominantly agricultural area to the south of Averill Park, Sand Lake and Glass Lake Villages were sparsely inhabited, and fire protection was nonexistent. The West Sand Lake Fire Company, active since 1873, had been called to assist with firefighting efforts in the Averill Park on numerous occasions after 1876. One reason for this was the concentration of wooden mills utilizing the power of the Wynantskill Creek running along Mill Street that were prone to fire.

Now that the Town of Sand Lake had two organized fire companies, areas of responsibility had to be delineated. On June 2, 1903, fire district boundaries were established as follows: *running down Mill Street (Burden Lake Road) to and including the paper mill (Gardner Road), running on Albany Road to Jacob Smoders and including same, running on the Troy Road to William Pohe including same, running on the road leading to the Sand Lake Mountain to Philip H. Howard's place and including same, running to the*

Glass Lake Village to Edward McNary's place and including same, running on the road leading to Crooked Lake to Henry Henkles including same, running on Johnny Cake Lane to the Midnight Place including same, running on the Troy Road from Glass Lake Village to Kincels including same.

With a fire district this size and the constant addition of new homes and outbuildings, the fire company soon realized that Nickwackett alone could not handle a substantial conflagration adequately. On February 9, 1904, a shiny two-wheeled chemical wagon was purchased at a cost of \$572. The hand-drawn soda acid chemical wagon saw good service in the villages extinguishing small interior fires and burning chimneys.

One of the greatest fires to occur in the town of Sand Lake took place on December 13, 1906. The Faith Knitting Mill that stood on Mill Road (Burden Lake Road) was completely destroyed. Although every piece of firefighting equipment in the area was pressed into service, the fight was lost. One contributing factor was the fact that the aging pumpers just couldn't put out the water necessary to extinguish a fire of that magnitude. More change was imminent.

After the mill was rebuilt, several hose houses were constructed around the mill property. In later years these small buildings also contained fire hydrants fed by the water of the Wynantskill Creek. The mill owners also purchased a hose car and a hand-drawn soda acid chemical cart. Both of these pieces still exist and have been restored.

Five hundred feet of hose was purchased by the fire company on May 20, 1909, at a cost of \$500.00. With the added hose on the hose cart, the weight was too much for the men to pull by hand. Art Larkin volunteered the use of his horses to double as fire horses when they weren't pulling the ice wagon around to his customers. The transition from hand-drawn to horse-drawn fire engines was made.

Only two years later an even more significant event took place with the introduction of gasoline power to the fire company. Although the firemen hated to admit it, Nickwackett had seen its day and was near retirement. On December 16, 1911, a horse-drawn pumper was purchased by the Averill Park Fire Company. Although horse-drawn, the pump was powered by a 45 hp gasoline motor that was capable of pumping 40-45 gpm (gallons per minute) through 600 feet of 1¼" hose at a pressure of 150 pounds. It could throw a stream of water over the tallest church steeple in the village. The engine was purchased from the Howe Fire Apparatus Company at a cost of \$2000.

Art Larkin's horses were now employed to pull the larger, heavier engine at a salary of \$3.00 a fire. Mr. Larkin lived on Troy Road (now County Route 45) across from the entrance to Crystal Lake Park, but the firehouse was situated half-way between the villages of

Averill Park and Sand Lake. When an alarm of fire was tolled out on the village church bells, Mr. Larkin would run with his horses toward the firehouse, and the first firefighter to arrive at the firehouse would pull the engine by hand toward the village. They would hitch up at what ever point they met. If the fire was known to be in the direction opposite Larkin's house, he would bring the horses directly to the firehouse.

It is said that no matter how quickly the men arrived at the firehouse the horses were always in sight. No one really understood how Art Larkin could harness his animals so quickly. In fact, it became very competitive. Who could get to the center of the village first — Larkin or the firemen? Larkin won every time. Years later, Art Larkin was killed when he fell from the loft of his horse barn.

In 1914, the fire company took another significant stride towards modernization with the purchase of its second gasoline-powered vehicle. The difference here was that the gasoline motor powered the vehicle and not the pump. The new chemical truck, mounted on a Model T Ford chassis, was purchased from Ed Rendert's dealership in Averill Park. (Rendert, a member of the fire company, had his showroom three doors east of the firehouse on what is now Rt. 43. This building currently serves as law offices for Conrad Lang.) The age of horse-drawn fire engines had ended.

This new piece of apparatus was excellent for extinguishing smaller fires by means of its sodium bicarbonate chemical tank; however, the firefighters still had to rely on the more powerful Howe pumper at larger fires. For over 10 years, the old horse-drawn Howe engine and hose cart were drawn to the scenes of fire behind the Ford chemical truck. But the winds of change were again blowing strongly down the roads and across the fields around the village.

With the invention of the automobile and its increasing popularity in the rural areas of Rensselaer County, the small villages began to grow at a much greater rate. This, of course, put more demands on the capabilities of the fire company. In 1926, a Seagraves Triple Combination Pumper was purchased. Triple combination refers to the fact that the engine carries hose and ladders and is capable of pumping water, thus eliminating the need of an additional ladder wagon and hose reel. This engine rivaled any of the modern apparatus being used in the cities, and set Averill Park apart from most small town volunteer organizations of that time.

By this time the firehouse had been expanded to facilitate two pieces of equipment, side by side. The age of motorized fire apparatus was here to stay. In 1935, Averill Park purchased its second engine, an open cab Ford housing a 500 gpm pump and carrying 100 gallons of water. This engine remained in service well into the early 1970s, though the Seagraves had been retired to

Ferguson's barn many years before. It had been replaced in 1950 with another Ford/Seagraves fire engine with a 750 gpm pump. In 1960 still another Ford was added to the fleet of firefighting equipment. This 750 gpm pumper, built by the Howe Fire Apparatus Company, served the district for over 20 years.

About the same time, the fire company expanded its scope of emergency service with the addition of a rescue squad. The first rescue unit was a 1959 Ford station wagon that carried some basic first aid supplies and an oxygen inhalator. This was soon replaced by a 1963 Chevrolet panel truck from funds raised by the firefighters. This unit was capable of light rescue as well as providing first aid. Rescue 22 was in service until 1975, when it was replaced by a Chevrolet/Olsen rescue van that was redesignated soon after by Rensselaer County as Rescue 1.

By now it was obvious to all that, with the expanded emergency services and increased demands on the fire company, yet another significant forward step was necessary. In 1968, a new, modern and much more spacious fire station was completed on Eastern Union Turnpike outside the village of Averill Park. This is the present home of the Averill Park-Sand Lake Fire Company No. 1. Since its construction, the fire company has continued to modernize. Six additional pumpers and two rescue vehicles have been purchased since 1968. The three most modern of these engines and a new rescue unit, purchased in 1993, are presently in service offering the residents of the fire district the finest and most modern firefighting capability available anywhere in the State of New York.

[Ed. Note: for those with computer access to the Internet and the World Wide Web, look at the Averill Park-Sand Lake Fire Company Web site at:

<<http://www.nethomes.com/homes/Averill.Park.FD/>>.]

Taborton Volunteer Fire Co. Inc.

By John Walsh

The Taborton Volunteer Fire Company was organized by Louis Ronzitti and received its incorporation papers as a not-for-profit organization on May 31, 1958. The 49 charter members elected Russell P. Dingman, Jr., as their first fire chief. The company now has 21 active members and 10 associate members.

The two-bay garage was built on land donated by George Carr and originally housed one fire truck for the Sand Lake Fire District #3. A second truck would be put into service in the early 1960s. During the mid 1970s, the company purchased an Agway building and, with its own work force, built it to use as a meeting/banquet hall. The fire service was rapidly changing and, by the late 1980s, the company added a rescue squad to better serve the needs of the community. They put an addition on to the engine bays to house a third piece of apparatus.



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Now in the latter part of the 1990s, the fire apparatus to be purchased in the future has outgrown the size of the engine bays, so the company is in the planning stages of building a new facility to meet the community's needs for many years to come. Today the company operates four pieces of apparatus for the Sand Lake Fire District #3. The S.L.F.D.#3 had only owned used fire trucks until 1991 when they purchased a new International custom engine/tanker from Central States Fire Apparatus.

The district purchased a used ambulance in 1989 and converted it for use as a rescue vehicle. Now in 1997 a truck was taken out of service and was replaced with a Ford engine/tanker, which was purchased for \$1 from the Castleton Fire Company. It would be used as an interim truck until one could be found to meet our needs. Shortly after getting the Ford, the district purchased a 1976 American LaFrance engine/tanker which is now in service but will soon be going out for modifications. Specifications are now being written for a new rescue vehicle that will meet the dynamics of emergency service, with hopes of being purchased in the near future.

The company responds to emergencies in Sand Lake Fire District #3, which is approximately the eastern third of the Town of Sand Lake and a contract district that covers a large portion of the southwestern corner of Berlin. These two areas make our coverage about the same size as Averill Park and West Sand Lake combined, although much less populated than either individually. Members are trained in structural fire suppression, auto and bus accident extrication, wildland fire suppression, ice rescue, farm accident rescue, hazardous material incidents, CPR, certified first responder, emergency medical technician, etc. The company is dispatched to all medical emergency calls with the Sand Lake Ambulance within our district, to begin emergency medical treatment prior to their arrival. The company, in staying with the times, is online with its own

World Wide Web page. We have been online since April 1996 and have had responses from around the world. This is a site you have to see and check occasionally to find out what's going on in the fire company. We have some pretty big plans for our Web site in the future, so check us out at <http://www.albany.net/~taborton/>.

Upcoming Meetings

ANNUAL MEETING: TUESDAY, MAY 13, 1997.

The annual dinner meeting of the Sand Lake Historical Society will be held at Dino's Restaurant, 175 Main Ave, Wynantskill. Make your reservations now! Cost is \$15 per person.

This annual event has always been a gala affair, and this year will be no different. An interesting program is being arranged. Please use the reservation form on the back page to make your reservation or call Bea Danks at (674-5030) or Linda Ormsby (674-3388). Reservations must be made by Friday, May 9. Also annual dues, \$5 per person, for the 1997-98 year are due on June 1. Why not include your dues with your payment for the dinner?

JUNE MEETING: looks like this will be a big surprise!!! Watch *The Advertiser* for an announcement. Remember Tuesday, June 10, 1997, for an extra special fun meeting!



FIRST CLASS MAIL



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**Reservation Form
Sand Lake Historical Society
Annual Dinner Meeting
May 13, 1997**

NAME(S) _____

NUMBER OF PERSONS _____ X \$15.00 PER PERSON = _____ TOTAL

Mail to: Sand Lake Historical Society, PO Box 492, West Sand Lake, NY 12196
or call Bea Danks @ 674-5030 or Linda Ormsby @ 674-3388
Make check payable to *Sand Lake Historical Society*.

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Membership dues are \$5.00 per person.
Membership cards will be presented at the Annual Meeting or mailed to you.