

V FILE
CL FIRE DEPT

THE HISTORY OF THE CENTER LINE FIRE DEPARTMENT

1926 TO 1980



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PRE-1975 BONDOLA HIST. 1975

FIGURE #1

District photo of the CLFD 1975 American
Lafayette Ave. Fire Station

FIGURE #2

*This brief history is dedicated to all those fire fighters
who through the years shared in their communities
joy , celebration, pain and tragedy.*

*The gave of themselves, often leaving loved ones, to serve
and risk their lives so to reduce risk to their fellow citizens.*

May we not forget their service and dedication.

FIGURE #4

Reprint of one of the first CLFD group
photos.

FIGURE #5

Reprint of CLFD group photos 1937 and 1941

By: Patrick R. O'Lear

FIGURE #6

Reprint of Center Line calendar with photo
of Fire Chief and the 1984 Ford/F71 pump
at bottom of page from 1975.

FIGURE #7

The group CLFD officers circa 1975 (left to
right) Sgt. Madorsky, Sgt. Marino, Fire
Chief M. Smith, Fire Marshal W. DeMarco,
Sgt. J. O'Lear, Sgt. Swenson. (Note the name
on the sign, this was for the Bicentennial
Celebration)

Lafayette Ave. 1957 American Legion

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BiLo's Supermarket sign accross Ten Mile Rd.
In glass door).

Lower right photo- Delivery photo of 1973
International Harvester ambulance with
Chief Smith, Councilmen A. Grobbel,
Councilman R. Hazen, Sgt. O'Lear and F.F. A.
Kozlowski.

FIGURE # 8

Fire in Asphalt Storage tanks in1948.

FIGURE #9

Fire in storge garage at Memorial Park (unk.
date, possibly mid 1950's.).

FIGURE #10

Chief H. Lyerla looks down of fire fighters at
a second story house fire in the early
1960's.

THE HISTORY OF THE CENTER LINE FIRE DEPARTMENT

It was the roaring twenties, only a decade after the "War to end all wars" and the United States was growing. The suburban Detroit area was growing also. The population of Macomb County would climb from 38,000 in 1920 to 63,000 in 1927. Warren Township shared in a good deal of this expansion in the south end of the township. By 1926 the assessed valuation of property in Warren Township was just under 16 million dollars.

The Village of Center Line was formed in 1926 due to the need for better services. The Village had approximately 2,000 people living within borders from 9 1/2 mile to 11 mile; from Lorraine to Sherwood. An unincorporated area called Van Dyke was just to the south of the Village limits. This area was then referred to as Van Dyke due to the cluster of population from Baseline (8 Mile to 9 1/2 Mile from Hoover to Mound). This area was never incorporated into a separate village, it remained part of Warren Township and later the City of Warren. The area of Van Dyke had over 5,000 population by 1926 giving a combined population of over 7,000 people between 8 to 11 Mile Road/Hoover to Mound. When the Village of Center Line was formed so was the Fire Department.

The Center Line Fire Department began forming on December 28th, 1925 when the Village of Center Line unanimously approved the purchase of a 1926 Ford / American LaFrance fire engine for \$2,350.00. The Type E chemical / hose wagon (without pump) from the American LaFrance Fire Engine of Elmira, New York (ALF), became a controversial piece of equipment early in the history of Center Line. Some residents felt that the response time would be too long for any saving of property. Another problem was the lack of water supply by hydrants or any other source. Hydrant locations were important at the time. The only water source available for the fire engine was a well or cistern. The fire engines of the day did not carry their own water supply. They relied on their chemical tanks and/ or their ability to draft water from a cistern or well to extinguish a fire. The Village of Center Line had wells and cisterns that could be pumped from by a fire engine with a pump, but they did not order that type of fire engine. The chemical fire engine that Center Line ordered didn't have a pump to pump the water from a well or cistern, and on to the fire. Many homes, barns and other property just burnt to the ground. Many news reports of the day in the Van Dyke - Center Line Press wrote about fires where all that was saved was the furniture from the house, a barn and the clothes on the residents backs. An article in the February 3rd, 1926 edition of the Warren / Fraser Gazette reports that the Theisen home at Edward and Van Dyke burned to the "earth". "Efforts to save the furniture were of little avail and the house was in ashes within a very short time. The house next door was saved by valiant work upon the part of individuals attracted by the fire" (The Ford / ALF had not been delivered as of this fire).

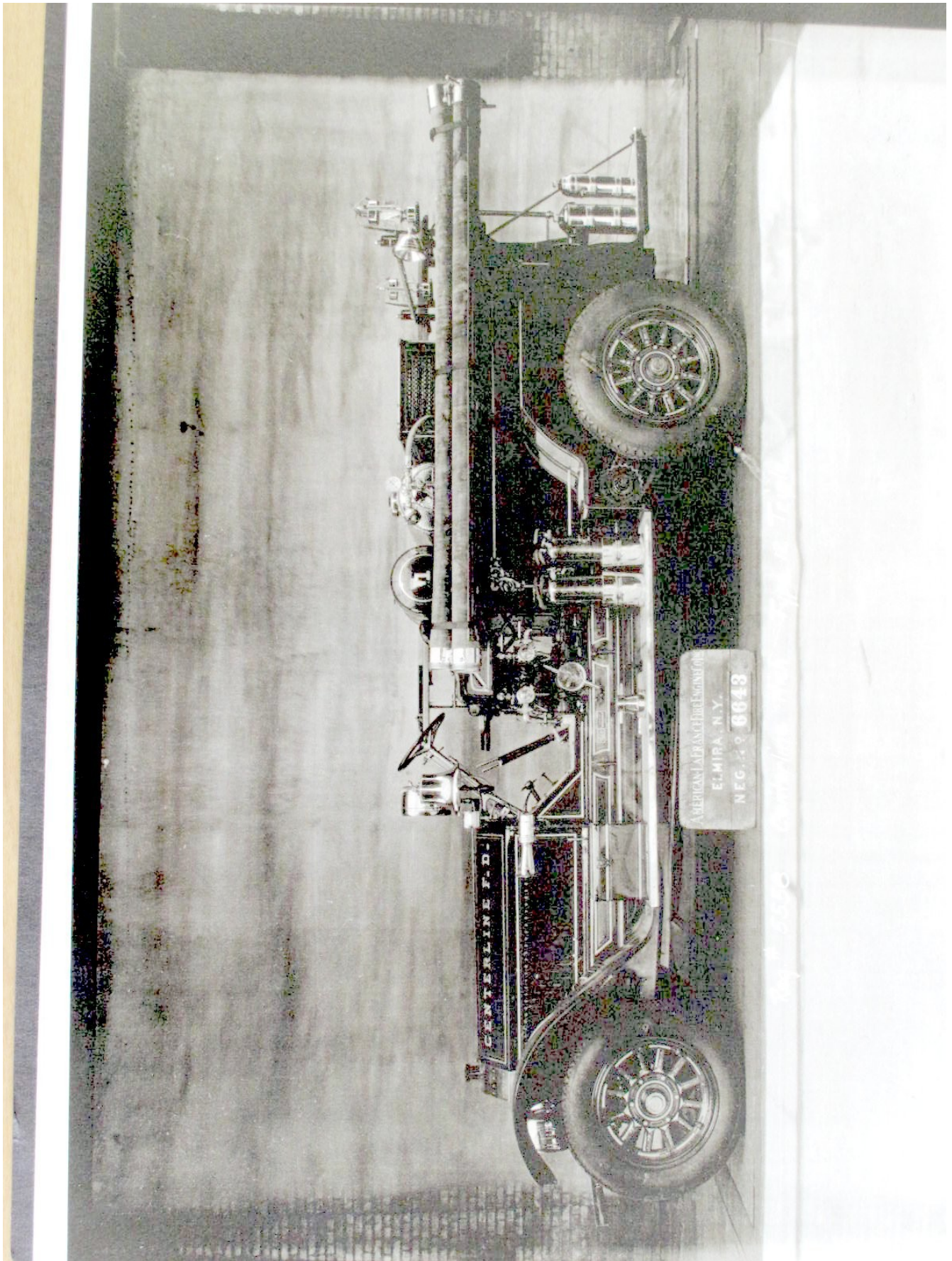
On January 15th, 1926 , three members of the Center Line village commission, Mr. Smith, Mr. Wolf, and Mr. Wilson were appointed to a committee to lay out plans for water supply for fire protection. The Superintendent for the Detroit Fire Department Water Board was also appointed to the committee to study water supply plans (hydrant size, location and water main sizes) and to share his expert opinions.

Fires like the Theisen fire were probably normal occurrences without fire engines, an organized fire department and an adequate water supply, . On February 10th, 1926, Village President Bernard Wolfe, H.H. Alvis (President of the Eureka Hose Co.) and the Chief McGinnity of the Detroit Fire Department, made a tour of the Village of Center Line to locate possible sources of water supply and to discuss the need for providing cisterns of sufficient size in case of a large fire. Chief McGinnity pledged the City of Detroit's Fire Department assistance to the Village of Center Line if needed for a large fire.

As the result of the tour of the village's water supply, the village commission ordered the addition of a front mounted pump on the already ordered Ford / ALF chemical truck. The final report from the committee was a \$175,000 plan for water lines , hydrants and pumping station to serve the Village.

On Sunday March 3rd the American LaFrance Co. brought a \$10,500.00 pumper to Center Line. The demonstrator engine placed its suction hoses into a well near Bob Miller's soft drink saloon, and sent two streams of water hurling through the air for several minutes. About 600 gallons of water was pumped out of the well during the demonstration, and there was still ten feet of water left in the well afterwards." The American LaFrance Co. used this demonstration to convince the folks of Center Line to upgrade the order from the Model T chemical truck without a pump to this new pumping engine. It must have worked! On March 4, 1926, the Village contracted with the American LaFrance Fire Engine Company for a new 750 gallon per minute pumper with a 40 gallon chemical tank and hose bed. The \$12,500 the Village paid for the engine included the cost of delivery and training for the driver. The contract signed on March 4, 1926, rescinded the previous contract the Village had signed with the American LaFrance on December 28, 1925. The Village had previously signed for a Ford/ALF Chemical Engine Type 'E'. Not everyone was happy with the purchase of this larger and more costly fire engine. There were basically two schools of thought on this issue. A debate took place at the Center Line Board of Commerce meeting when three "councilmen" spoke against the purchase of such an expensive and large fire engine when the Village did not have an adequate water supply system. Dr. T.P. Russell a member of the board, arose and severely criticized the three for their remarks against the new fire pumper. The good Doctor told the nay sayers to "cut it out", he defended the fire truck by saying that it affords the growing community better protection with the 40 gallons of chemicals until the water system is completed, and will continue to serve the city when the water supply is completed. Dr. Russell also addressed the need for Center Line to have its own telephone exchange. He said it was "a shame" residents had to put up with inadequate service given to them by the small exchange in Warren.

Newspaper accounts and fire department log books of the day report fires burning out of control for several minutes due to poor phone service. The phone calls went to an operator in Detroit and then back to the Village of Warren and then to Center Line. When seconds count, this phone system proved to be dangerous and unreliable. The problems with the phone system will be documented later.



On June 30th, 1926 the C.L.F.D. fire engine and one engine from the Detroit Fire Department fought to control three houses ablaze on Timkin St. and Van Dyke. On the front page of the June 30th edition there were two other noteworthy articles. Both of these articles dealt with the safety of the residents. One headline read, "WANT TELEPHONE EXCHANGE MOVED". The Center Line phone subscribers were circulating a petition started by Dr. Russell to petition Michigan Bell about moving and upgrading the phone exchange. It seems the phone system was all party lines for business, police/fire and domestic use. Some subscribers had as many as nine other parties on their trunk system. A constant busy signal was common. The problem with the phone system was still prevalent six months later when on December 1st, 1926 a mid night fire at 937 & 939 Studebaker St. in Garland, Warren Township destroyed two homes. The CLFD arrived on the scene a half hour too late due to a slow telephone connection.

When the fire on Studebaker was reported at 1:00 am and called into the phone company. The call went to the long distance exchange to Detroit before the Warren operator would get it and transmitted it to Center Line. A neighbor jumped into his car and drove to Chief Thuet's office and alerted him before the phone company could. By the time of the C.L.F.D. arrival at 1:30 am the fire consumed two dwellings and the CLFD saved a third from falling prey to the fire.

The other story revellent to the fire department was the upcoming meeting of the Village board to review the final plans and cost estimates for the water system they were planning to install. Both of these stories were hot topics given the recent Schoenherr fire.

By the end of 1926 fires due to defective chimneys plagued the CLFD. As the heating season approached in November and December, the fire activity rose also. Three homes burned within two days in December 1926. A 3:00 am fire in a 2 story dwelling on Jewett St. resulted in a total loss (\$4,000). This fire was due to a defective chimney as were the fires on Studebaker St.. One day Later at 2:00 am the CLFD answered a call at 1623 Paige St. (8 Mile and Van Dyke) to find two dwellings (1621 Paige) involved in flames.

By the beginning of 1927, Center Line had 1 engine, 1 full-time Chief, 18 volunteers and was the only full time fire service in Warren Township. It was up to the Center Line Village Fire Department to protect the 36 square mile Township. The Village of Warren officially organized their fire department on December 17th, 1926 and the large area coverage by the C.L.F.D. would change by March 3, 1927 when the Village of Warren began responding to all fire calls in the northern half of the Township, and the Village of Center Line responded to the southern half.

The Center Line Fire Department response to fires in hamlets of Baseline and Van Dyke were not always positive. On Feb. 9th, 1927 the newspapers carried the news that the Center Line fire fighters refused to respond south of the village of Center Line due to "unwelcoming receptions" of residents in the southern part of the township. The C.L.F.D. stated in the news article and in a letter to the residents of Van Dyke:

"We the volunteer fire department of the village of Center Line, Michigan, do hereby resign and refuse to respond to any fires south of the village unless the parties be of a reasonable nature. We are under no obligation and demand a white man's consideration."

The following issues of the Van Dyke - Center Line Press were filled with letters from the residents of the Van Dyke area thanking the great work of the Center Line Fire Dept. and begging them to reconsider. This policy of not responding would continue to be in effect for some time to come.

The first mention of the use of "gas masks" and mutual aid with the newly created Village of Warren Fire Dept. was at a fire on February 27th, 1927. A smoky basement fire started on Engleman St. in Center Line, when a large amount of papers started on fire in the basement of a house. Using chemicals to fight the fire, thick smoke and heat forced the C.L.F.D. to use gas masks to enter the basement to control it. Fearing the spread of fire throughout the house, Chief Thuet called for the Warren Village F.D.. Before the W.V.F.D. could arrive, the C.L.F.D. had the fire under control. This fire was important in the history of the C.L.F.D. for the use of gas masks and the first time the Village of Warren responded to the Village of Center Line.

A new agreement was reached between the Village's of Center Line and Warren Fire Departments that gave Center Line sections 21, 22, 25 to 36, and the southern 1/2 of sections 19, 20, 23, and 24 to cover for fire protection. Warren Village Fire Department would now cover the north half of the Township. (figure 2)

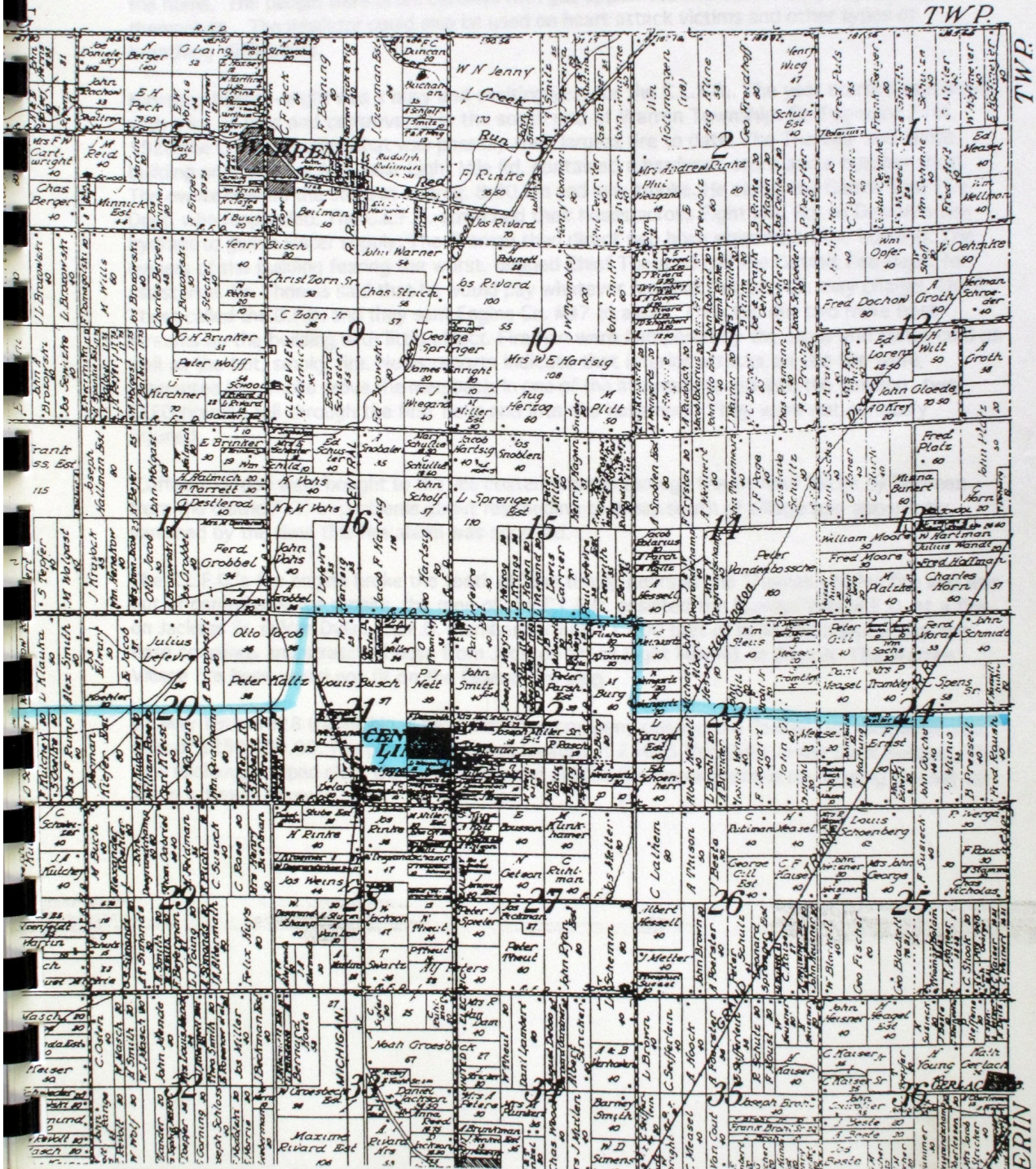
The fire commissioner of the Village of Center Line in 1927 was a man by the name of Joseph A. Henk. Early in 1927 while the C.L.F.D. was under scrutiny from the residents of the Township, Mr. Henk had a fire in his house on Gronow St. that caused \$50.00 in damage. Mr. Henk went on record in the newspaper to say what a great job the C.L.F.D. did in saving his home in property.

May of 1927 Center Line began plans to improve their water system again, this time they began planning a 100,000 gallon water tower to supplement the new water system. The tower was eventually constructed behind the Village/Fire Hall at 7550 10 Mile Road. By June of '27 the first water mains on a residential street were being laid on Warren Blvd. in Center Line. Three thousand feet of mains were already in the ground.

In October 1927, the Village Commission approved the appointment of one additional full-time fireman. Mr. VanderBrook was offered the position but declined. Mr. Elmer Flecshig was appointed with a salary of \$150 a month. This position allowed an around the clock fire fighter on duty. Chief Thuet would begin work at 8:00 a.m. and work 24 hrs. and be relieved by Mr. Flecshig who would work his 24 hour shift and be relieved again by the Chief. This schedule of 24 hrs. on duty and 24 hrs. off duty for each man would continue on a daily basis.

WARREN TOWNSHIP IN 1917

Township 1 North, Range 12 East of the Michigan Meridian



December of 1927 the Village approved the purchase of a H & H inhalator to be used with the fire engine for answering medical emergencies. An inhalator can best be explained by a Nellis newspaper article in July of 1928: "The machine ejects oxygen and carbon dioxide in correct proportions and counter-attacks the results of carbon monoxide poisoning". Carbon monoxide poisoning was a major concern in the 20's and 30's due to the advent of natural gas appliances in the home. The people were often careless with gas appliances and accidentally asphyxiated themselves. The inhalator could also be used on heart attack victims and other types of breathing difficulties.

Nineteen twenty-eight was a busy and exciting year for the C.L.F.D.. The year started as it ended with a lot of fires and controversy in the south end of Warren Township. On February 21st, 1928 the C.L.F.D. fought what was possibly their largest fire to date. The Thomas and Malec building on Van Dyke Ave. near Eight Mile Rd. contained a hardware store and a butcher shop. The owner opened the store at approx. 8:00 am and saw smoke. He called the Center Line Fire Dept. who responded. The C.L.F.D. stretched their hoses across Eight Mile Rd. to Detroit's fire hydrant to gain a water supply. The fireman then direct two hose streams on the building. The owners of the building fearing the worst, begged Chief Theut to call the Detroit Fire Dept. for assistance. Mr. Thomas said that he would pay whatever fee that Detroit F.D. may charge. Chief Thuett called the D.F.D. and they sent Engine Co. #47 to assist. They laid out two more hose streams on the building with little effect. Fireman were hampered by the snow and bitter cold as well as the hot, smoky fire. News reports indicate that interior attacks on the fire were attempted but smoke drove the men back. In one of the attempts to get into the building, two CLFD fireman fell through the first floor and into the basement. They were not seriously injured.

Coffee and food were bought to the ice coated fireman through the six hour battle by "women from the district". The problems about responding to areas south of village had apparently vanished by the time this fire alarm was sounded.

The C.L.F.D.'s fire engine broke the teeth off the timing gears at the Thomas - Malec fire and was out of commission for repairs, the men of the C.L.F.D. assisted the Warren Village F.D. at a fire on Jackson St. in Van Dyke. C.L.F.D. members brought 1,000 feet of hose and adapters for the hose couplings and stretched hose from Jackson St. to Eight Mile Rd. in Detroit. The Warren Village fire hose would not fit on the Detroit fire plug.

On May 19th, 1928 the Michigan Bell Telephone company opened the Center Line exchange at a cost of \$250,000.00. The phone office was located at 25615 Van Dyke in the Bank Building. The new exchange helped clear the phone lines and aid the fire department in responding to calls for aid in a timely manner.

In early June of 1928 the new municipal building at 7550 10 Mile Road was completed and the 1926 ALF was moved from George Thuet's garage to the new fire hall in the municipal building. The Nellis newspaper from July 1928 described the new Village hall this way: "No sooner was the water system completed than another Bond Issue was floated to provide the erection of a new municipal building... The building houses the village offices, council chambers, courtroom, kitchen, firemen's quarters, fire hall and a police station with two jail cells." The fireman quarters was upstairs and the hall area where the fire engine was stored was on the first floor the building was equipped with a brass pole for the fireman to slide down to get to the fire truck.

The new fire station was prepared for service by the Fire Chief, George Thuet and the newly appointed Assistant Chief Elmer Flechsig and the volunteer fireman. The triple combination American LaFrance fire engine was moved from the garage/fire station on Engleman St. to 7550 10 Mile Rd.. The kitchen area was stocked with dishes and a stove and a bunk room was furnished due to the 24 hour service maintained by the Chief and Asst. Chief.

The new station also was equipped with state of the art coded fire alarm system to alert the volunteer fireman of a call. The system was a powerful siren manufactured by the Sterling Co..The claim was that the siren, mounted on the hose drying tower of the Village / Fire hall could be heard up to seven miles away. The siren was hooked up to the telephone exchanges in the village. The village was divided into six districts and depending where the call came from and what district it was in, the siren would give a different number of blasts. For example, on the east side of Van Dyke Ave. from Ten Mile Rd. to Helen St. if a call was in that district the signal would be two blasts, a pause then two more blasts.

The three districts on the west side of the village were coded with one blast followed by a pause then one, two or three more blasts. The East side was coded with two blasts a pause then one, two or three more. This coding of the alarm gave the responding volunteers an area of the village in which to look for the fire or the fire engine to locate the incident in a rapid manner.

While the Village of Center Line water system was completed, the areas just outside of the village limits had to rely on wells and cisterns. A house of 11 Mile Rd. and Buck (?) was almost under control when the C.L.F.D.'s LaFrance pumped the homeowners well dry. The nearest fire hydrant was a half mile away in front of Ellis school. The fire plug was beyond the reach of the hoses and the house was destroyed after being nearly saved.

By the end of 1928, the community of Van Dyke, south of Center Line Village, received water from Detroit. Entering into the 1930's, the Center Line Fire Department was still responding to all fires and medical calls in the southern 1/2 of Warren Township. The expenses for the C.L.F.D. for 1928 was in excess of \$6,000.00. This figure included \$4,355.00 for salaries for the two full time men and "volunteer " fireman. The Village of Center Line also received \$187.50 from the Township of Warren for fire protection.

The 1929 Budget for the fire department was \$7,000.00. The total village budget was approx. \$19,000.00. Of the expenses for the fire department, the village of Center Line budgeted for \$1,000.00 in revenue from the C.L.F.D. for 1929. This revenue would be for service fees charged to the Township. The Center Line Police Department budget was only \$4,000.00 dollars. The revenue the police department would make for the Village in tickets and fines was budgeted at \$1,500.00. That amount was only \$500.00 more than the revenue generated from the fire department!

In April of 1929 the Center Line Police Department added another police officer to cover the day shift and traffic duties with the police car. With officers Ryan and Tebo the village had 24 hour police protection.

As of September 29th, 1929 the C.L.F.D. responded to 28 fires outside of their borders. The Township had paid the Village of Center Line \$2,298.00 as of that date. Of that figure, \$1,534.00 was for the fire truck and 764.00 was for manpower fees. The residents of Van Dyke were given a separate telephone number on the Center Line exchange. In case of a fire in the Van Dyke area of the Township the residents were urged to call "CENTER LINE 200" and state the street name, address and tell the F.D. if the fire was on the east or west side of Van Dyke Ave..

Considerable debate raged about the fire department response to Center Line if and when the LaFrance broke down. Agreements with the City of Detroit and Roseville were questioned by the citizens due to the distances that both departments would have to travel. It is unknown why the C.L.F.D. did not rely on the Village of Warren Fire Department for backup fire protection.

On October 29th, 1929 the first recorded fatal fire that the C.L.F.D. responded to was on Maxwell St. in Van Dyke, Warren Township. A three year old boy was burned to death in a house while his mother ran an errand next door. The valiant work of a neighbor saved the boy's 2 yr old brother. However the three year old could not be saved. He was found only six feet away from the window which his brother used to exit to safety. The cause of the fire was a gas burner that was left on filling the house with gas and the gas igniting. The news reports state that the dwelling just "burst into flames."

In 1930 the Village of Center Line adopted their Fire Prevention Law. The law as written was very simple. Two paragraphs in text, but it allows for fire inspections of all commercial, industrial and multi-residential properties by the fire department.

In the early thirties, the Center Line Fire Department was responding to approximately 50 alarms a year, in 1934 alone the fire loss was \$14,470. Fourteen thousand dollars doesn't seem like much today, but consider that the entire budget for the City of Center Line in 1936 was \$29,915. The large fire losses for 1934 can be attributed to many dwelling fires; 13499 & 13497 Labethlyn (Warren Township, street no longer exists) both houses burned due to a delayed call. The callers called the Detroit Fire Department by mistake, DFD called the Center Line Fire Department. By the time the CLFD engine arrived after the four mile trip, one house was completely involved and spreading to the neighboring house. Four miles one way to a fire was not uncommon in the 20's and 30's, however, the greatest distance was when the CLFD responded to a large dwelling and barn fire with the Warren Village Fire Department at 16 Mile and Van Dyke. The Center Line Firemen spent 1 1/2 hours at the fire which destroyed \$4,000 worth of property. Distance travelled and road conditions were not the only problem the early

fireman encountered, major problems with water supply in the rural areas outside of Center Line and Van Dyke.) The American LaFrance (ALF) only carried 40 gallons of chemical (soda and acid mixed with water) to fight small fires. For large fires in rural areas where hydrants were sparse at best, the ALF had to use its hard suction hoses to draft water from wells, cisterns or ponds. At large fires many feet of hose had to be used in order to get the water from the source to the fire. The ALF only carried 1200 feet of hose, so other cities' fire engines were called to assist. This was the beginning of mutual aid to other area communities. Center Line often gave and received aid in the early 1930's by Warren Village to the north, Royal Oak Township to the west and Halfway (East Detroit) to the east.

In 1932 a national fire insurance company surveyed all fire departments in the area. The surveys and records for Center Line and Warren villages were put on maps with information regarding building locations, water systems, fire department organization and communications. Center Line in the 1932 report had 2 full time men working a 24 hour schedule, sixteen paid on call men, and 1- 750 gpm fire engine. The fire engine had an inventory of: 40 gallon chemical tank, 1250 feet of two and one half inch diameter hose, 2350 ft of one inch and a half hose, 1 24 ft ladder, 2 12 ft ladders and 1 45 ft ladder on a trailer.

The water system contained 75 fire hydrants in the village supplying 55 pounds of pressure in the system, one 100,000 gallon water tank at the Ten Mile Rd. pumping station (located to the rear of 7550 Ten Mile Rd., the city / fire hall), two 122 foot wells, 1 on Wyland and one on Ten Mile Rd.. The Village of Center Line had 2,604 residents and 5 concrete paved streets (Van Dyke, Ten Mile, Eleven Mile, Warren Blvd. and Sherwood), the rest were gravel or cinder. The communication system for the fire department was by phone lines and/or building siren.

Warren Township had a population of 14,269 in 1932. The paved roads were only 9 Mile Rd., 8 Mile Rd. 12 Mile Rd. and Van Dyke. The rest were cinder and gravel. The lack of paved roads creates a problem with the ability of fire equipment to respond in a timely manner during wet or snowy conditions. Unpaved roads many times were impossible to drive on in the spring and winter due to mud and ruts. Warren Township by this time had Detroit supply their water. They had 324 hydrants in the township with 35 lbs of pressure in the system.

The Warren Village Fire Department was also surveyed in '32. The fire department was housed at 31746 Mound Rd.. The F.D. was staffed with one volunteer chief and 8 volunteer firemen. The fire engine was a Ford Model T chemical truck with 40 gallons of chemicals, a front mounted 100 gallon per minute pump and 1800 ft. of two and one half inch dia. hose. Communication was by a bell and/or phone system. The population was 515 residents and the water supply was from the village and supplied 38 hydrants at 50 lbs. Of pressure.

In 1935, Royal Oak Township assisted the Center Line Fire Department on two dwelling fires on Robert Street (on the west side of the Township, Robert Street no longer exists).

The City of Center Line was chartered in 1936, along with the change from village to city, the fire service experienced changes. The new city purchased a new 1936 Dodge Truck/General Fire Trucks Inc. fire engine. This new engine was the modern truck the city needed, although it was an open cab, it wasn't chain driven like the ALF. The new Dodge also carried 300 gallons of water on board with booster hoses unlike the American LaFrance. The booster tank feature was significant because small fires such as cars and fields could be easily handled without looking for a hydrant or alternative water source. This new Dodge would now be called Engine 2 and

assist in covering the large area and increasing work load by the CLFD.

The first couple years after Engine 2's arrival proved to be very busy. In 1936, two infants died in a house fire on Hupp Street in the Van Dyke area of the Township on December 7th. Earlier in the year the CLFD fought a fire involving three buildings at Nine Mile and Van Dyke for over 3 1/2 hours. The East Detroit Fire Department assisted Center Line at this fire on January 27, 1936. The new engine was not in service at this time. The CLFD responded to 95 alarms with over 60 hours of fire service time.

On May 1, 1937 a woman died in a shed fire on Essex Street in "Van Dyke", the third fatality in six months. In 1938 the City of Center Line had responded to 74 alarms for the year, 55 of which were in the Township.

The Township of Warren organized their own fire department in 1939 and opened their first station in the densely populated Van Dyke Area. Warren Township Fire Department's station was opened at Essex and Van Dyke in the Township Hall (the building still stands today on the east side of M-53). The Warren Township Fire Department was operated separate from the Warren Village Fire Department. These two fire departments would operate separately until the late 1950's when Warren was chartered as a city. With the Warren Township Fire Department in operation, the Center Line Fire Department annual alarms fell to only 46 for 1939.

The 1940's started slow for the Center Line Fire Department. By the end of 1941, the world was at war, and changes would be few in the next nine years.

During the early forties, the population reached over 3,000 people which was served by two full time firemen (1 Chief and 1 Assistant Chief) and approximately 18 volunteers. The full-time men worked 24 hour shifts, one man on a shift, staying on the second floor of the city building. The volunteers were alerted when an alarm was sounded by the full-time man or house man as he was called, by pressing a button at the fire station which activated a series of bells that was installed in every volunteer's home (usually in the cellar) wired to the phone line system. It was said that the members of the fire department wired the houses themselves. The volunteers would then drive to the fire station to get the address from a chalk board which the full-time man had used to notify the incoming volunteers. The first man to the station would assume the duties of houseman to answer the call for another emergency or to bring the other engine if need be. In 1943, Chief George Thuet resigned and Andrew Wiegand was appointed chief.

Through the 40's the Center Line Fire Department continued to provide emergency medical care with the inhalator and first-aid kit being taken to incidents by either a police car or fire engine. The transportation of the sick and injured to the hospital was left up to a spare hearse operated by Jones' Funeral Home (located on Qualman and Van Dyke in Center Line). On June 5th, 1944 volunteer fireman Richard Tieche was reported "missing" after his ship was torpedoed during WWII. He was officially declared dead on November 3rd, 1945. The war had hit home on the C.L.F.D.. In 1947 Andrew Wiegand resigned as Chief and Nelson Bruchert was appointed chief.

Some of the major fires in the forties were:

1944 - lumber yard - assisted by Warren Township. 4 hours fire service. 1949 - 6685 10 Mile, W & M Products - bulk storage tanks. Center Line Fire Department was assisted by

Warren Township Fire Department, Roseville Fire Department, East Detroit Fire Department, and Ford Motor Company Fire Department from Nine Mile and Mound Plant.

By the end of 1949, the Center Line Fire Department responded to 60 alarms with fire losses over \$24,500 for the year. Newsreports from the late 1940's claimed that Warren Township was the most populated "unincorporated" place in the United States. The City of Center Line would start to experience this growth also.

The 1950's started the suburban push from Detroit after WWII and the population climbed over 7,500 people at the end of the decade. The city and the fire department would see rapid growth throughout the decade. In 1953 the city council passed an ordinance creating the position of Public Safety Commissioner. This position was filled by ex-Detroit police officer Dennis R. Frazier. Frazier's job was to coordinate police and fire activities. With the creating of the commissioner, the fire department personnel assumed 8-hour shifts abandoning the 24-hour shift. The fire personnel had grown to 4 men including Chief Bruchert, and would now assume desk and dispatch duties for the police department. The firemen were assisting with record keeping, licensing for drivers, jailing and booking of prisoners, etc. This practice would continue until mid 1980 when full public safety consolidation was put in place and civilians were hired to perform desk duties.

The fire department budget for 1953 was \$17,228.00. An increase from the 1952 due to the increases of hiring the additional men in the fire department. Salary costs jumped from \$9009.00 in 1952 to \$14,023 in 1953. Fire losses for 1953 were the among the lowest on record for the City. The Center Line Fire Department responded to 75 fire calls with only \$8,870.00. This was far below the \$20, 758.00 loss for 1952 with only 39 fires. The CLFD also responded to seven resuscitator calls in 1953. The assessed valuation of Center Line in that year was set at \$11,171,725.00.

In 1956, the city seeing the need for an emergency ambulance to transport citizens to the hospital, purchased a Chevrolet station wagon to be used as a fire department ambulance and spare police vehicle. The city also purchased a 1956 Ford pick-up truck for the fire service to be used for fire inspections and transporting rescue equipment. With the new ambulance Jones' Funeral Home was relieved of their duties and the fire department began the task of emergency medical care that would last 30 years. In the first year of operation the Center Line Fire Department station wagon transported 98 people to area hospitals (usually Memorial or Holy Cross hospitals).

The home alerting system for off duty firemen was upgraded by installing an improved bell system in the fire fighters homes. In the event of an alarm, the on duty firemen would send out the bell signal over leased phone lines from Michigan Bell to a bell or buzzer in the houses of the fireman. The firemen would still have to drive to the fire station and get the address off of a blackboard that the on duty men wrote the location on prior to their response.

Nineteen Fifty Seven brought more equipment purchases for the fire department. On June 14, 1957, the 1926 type 12 American LaFrance was retired and replaced with a Series 700, 1000 gallon per minute American LaFrance Pumper (ALF). The new, fully equipped ALF fire engine cost over \$20,000.00.

By 1958, the 1956 Chevy wagon/ambulance was replaced with a 1958 Cadillac ambulance. It is rumored that the Cadillac was purchased because the mayor and council believed that the citizens deserved to be transported via a Cadillac to the hospital.

Between 1957 and 1958, the new LaFrance saw a lot of fire service time. One of the largest fires was a second alarm fire at the Center Line Motel on Van Dyke just north of Stephens. The fire started in the middle of the building as a result of faulty wiring and spread throughout the structure. It took all of Center Line's equipment (2 engines and pick-up truck) and 2 engines from Warren Township three hours to extinguish the fire. The total dollar loss for that fire exceeded \$20,000. By the end of 1957 the fire department handled 110 ambulance calls and 49 fire alarms and had five full-time men on the roster. There were eleven volunteers augmenting the full time men. The dollar loss for the year was over \$60,000 primarily due to the second alarm fire and numerous other dwelling fires.

The Chief's position changed again in 1959. Chief Nelson Bruchert was demoted to fire lieutenant and Harold Lylera was promoted to Chief. At the end of 1959, the Center Line Fire Department had responded to 257 total alarms (131 ambulance and 126 fire). The 257 alarm is almost a 200 alarm increase per year, in only ten years.

In order to organize more manpower for large fires, the City of Center Line Fire Department entered into a mutual aid agreement in December of 1959 with Roseville, East Detroit, Warren, and St. Clair Shores. The agreement also implemented a county numbering system for each station and piece of equipment for organizational purposes. Center Line Fire Department was known in the county as Station 180. Engines 1 and 2 were now called 181 (1957 ALF), 182 (1936 Dodge), 183 (Ford truck) and 186 (Cadillac).

The mutual aid agreement also set terms for sending equipment to help other communities with large multiple alarm fires. Each of the five cities in the agreement would be responsible for sending an engine with at least five men to another city to assist when needed. Although the agreement has been changed numerous times over the last 30 years, it still remains in place today.

Center Line's population in 1960 was approximately 10,000 people. The decade of the sixties was the largest growth period for the fire department.

The fire department quarters was changed along with the entire city hall building in 1961. This changed moved the fire quarters and apparatus to a new addition on the west side of the existing building. The addition contained four bays for the trucks, a training room and a work-shop area. In the same year Firefighter Ralph Rieterman transferred to desk sergeant for Police and Fire dispatching. Sergeant Rieterman's vacancy was filled and an additional man was hired bring the full-time personnel to six men. With six men, one man was guaranteed on every 8-hour shift around the clock. Every so often two men would work a shift if there were no vacations, leaves or sick days taken on any of the shifts.

In 1961 a new Cadillac ambulance was delivered replacing the 1958 Cadillac ambulance. The 1956 Ford pick-up/rescue was replaced in 1962 by a GMC Panel Truck. The the enclosed design of the GMC, made it possible to transport manpower and equipment (rescue tools, extra resuscitators, air cylinders, etc.) and when needed served as a back-up ambulance. The ever-increasing run load made the back up ambulance necessary.

In 1963, the Center Line Fire Department transported 329 people to the hospital. Seven major house fires that caused \$24,867 worth of damage caused fire loss to take a sharp increase in 1963. A new alerting system for off duty and volunteer fire fighters was installed. For the first time the responding fire fighters were alerted to the alarm and its location via a radio in their home. The radio equipment that was purchased for \$1,900.00 and proved invaluable for increasing speed of manpower response time. The radio dispatching of an alarm eliminated the time consuming drive to the fire station to see the address on the blackboard before proceeding to the fire. With the new technology the firemen could keep their equipment at home and respond directly to the scene or to the station for additional equipment to take to the scene.

In 1964 the City of Center Line had purchased a major piece of equipment for the Fire Department. A Ford/Fire Truck Inc. 1000 gallon per minute pumper was put in service on January 23, 1964. The 1964 Ford replaced the 1936 Dodge fire engine. The new fire engine had a 534 cubic inch gas motor, a 500 gallon water tank, hoses and equipment. The cost of the engine was over \$18,500.00.

As with its counter part, the 1957 ALF, the '64 Ford saw a lot of fire service in its first year. Center Line had two second alarm fires and one fatal fire in 1964. The fatal fire occurred at the Bella Motel on Van Dyke and the second alarms occurred at (Tip Top Market) Ten Mile and Van Dyke and on Sherwood (See extra alarms). The Fire Department would be called out of the city on mutual aid eight times in 1964, including rescue operations in Chesterfield after a tornado struck the area of Sugar Bush and Jefferson. The total emergency responses for Center Line in 1964 was 435 with a fire loss of \$35,837.47. In just five years the annual responses grew by 178 alarms per year.

The Center Line Fire Fighters Union #1587 formed in 1965 to represent the 6 full-time fire fighters in bargaining with the city for wages, hours of work and conditions of employment.

Chief Harold Lylera resigned in mid 1965. Sergeant Norman Smith was promoted to replace Harold Lylera. One more fire fighter was hired due to the vacancy. By this time the Center Line Fire Department staffing had two men assigned to duty on every shift. When a vacation day, leave day, or sick day was taken it left one shift without one man. Frequently one firefighter would cover eight hours. If the ambulance was needed, a police officer would drive the ambulance with the fireman as an attendant. When only one man was working, his entire eight hours was devoted to working the police desk, the trucks weren't checked out adequately, training and maintenance waited until the second man was working on the shift.

An event on August 14, 1966 would change the practice of one firefighter working a shift. At 7:15 p.m. the lone firefighter on duty at the Police/Fire dispatch desk received a call of a gasoline tanker fire in the gas station at Ritter and Van Dyke (Kayo Gas). The firefighter alerted the off-duty and volunteer men by monitor radio and police officers on patrol. When the fireman was relieved by a police officer on the radio, he proceeded to the scene and found a gasoline tanker next to a building with flames extending over 100 feet in the air. The fireman started the mutual aid system by calling a second alarm. The fire was brought under control in one hour without damage being done to the gas station 75 feet away. The fire posed another problem: burning gas streaming down Ritter and heading for the storm drains. The Center Line

Fire Department must be commended for averting a true disaster.

This fire changed the mayor and council's minds about one man working on a shift, and they agreed to staff each shift with two men at all times. This would continue to be the practice until 1980 when the Public Safety Department was instituted.

Another fatal fire would occur at the Bella Motel on July 20, 1967. The man died of burns over 70% of his body three days after the fire.

Three additional men were hired in 1967 bringing the total full-time staff to nine. These men were added to provide the three men per shift coverage, and have two men working at all times.

In keeping with the State Labor Laws for fire fighters, the city was forced by court action by Center Line Firefighters Union Local 1587 to return firefighters to 24-hour shifts. To accomplish this, some structural revisions had to be made to the fire station. A dormitory, kitchen, bathroom/shower, and day room along with office space was added to the building. The new addition was the attached small building west of the bay doors. At the same time the city added the new courtroom and council chambers to the east of the old city hall.

In 1968 one additional firefighter was hired bring the total to ten men. The Chief stayed on a 40-hour week, eight hour per day and the firefighters were divided into three units of three men, each unit was led by a sergeant.

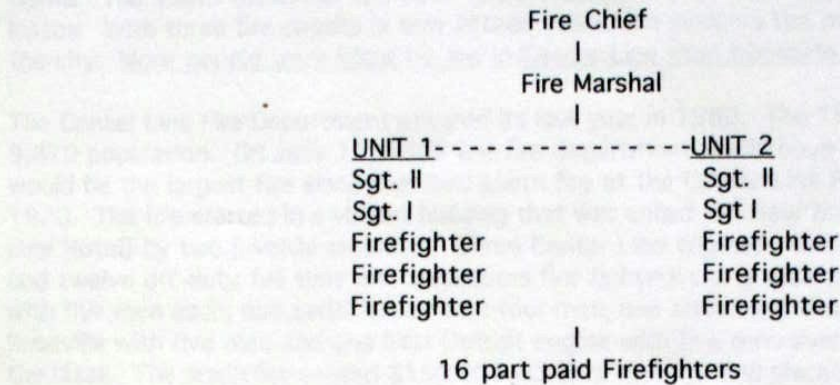
The 24-hour day began at 8:00 a.m. and ran until 8:00 a.m. the next day with the firemen having to still keep their police/fire dispatch and clerical duties. One man would now take the first eight hours, another the second eight, and another the third or mid-night shift. Throw in a couple of emergency alarms and no sleep was ever guaranteed. Training, equipment and station cleaning and maintenance were also part of the firefighters daily routine along with an occasional tour for school children. The 24-hour shift worked like this: there were three units; A, B, C. Unit A would work 24 and be replaced by B for 24. A worked another 24 and be replaced by C and the cycle would continue.

In 1969 the alarm total was 467 with a \$109,088.14 fire loss. The increase of dwelling and building fires that year (158 fires), the loss resulted in losses that where uncharacteristically high.

By 1970 the census would report Center Line's population at 10,379 and by the mid-seventies would climb to 10,980. That is over 5,000 people per square mile (1.74) making Center Line the second most densely populated city in the county. The population would never get that high again.

The year 1970 would be the busiest and most costly year for fire in Center Line's history. Between January 1970 and December 1970, the Center Line Fire Department had five major fires (one three alarm and one second alarm). The fire losses on just those five fires accounted for over \$380,000 of fire loss and over eighteen hours of fire service time. As a result of federal urban renewal programs and general growth, new construction was increasing steadily. The position of Fire Marshal was created. The function of Marshall was to inspect the

new construction as well as the existing buildings for fire codes and pre planning of fires in structures. The fire department roster, with the addition of this position, would climb to an all time high of twelve men. Ten men were on two units working 24-hour shifts (56 hours per week) and the Fire Chief and Fire Marshal were on 40-hour per week shifts. The organizations chart circa 1976 was as follows:



This type of staffing would allow each unit three men working and two men off, and a third of the time, due to scheduling, four men would be working. The times in which four men were on duty, two would go out on an ambulance call and leave two men back without having to call overtime people back to maintain two men in the station at all times. All four men would respond to all fire calls along with the off-duty men and volunteers.

In 1973 the fire alarm totals were 550, with the alarms being over 500 per year consistently. The Cadillac ambulance was retired and sold to the Washington Township Fire Department. The new ambulance was an International Harvester Modular type.

The mid seventies also found the Center Line Fire Department still involved with the City of Warren on mutual aid just like they did 50 years earlier.

In 1974 alone, Center Line responded to Warren nine times for mutual aid alarms. Warren responded to Center Line seven times from January 1970 to December 1979.

In 1978, another record was set when the alarm totals topped 600 to 615 for the year. In the same year the GMC Rescue truck was replaced with a new 1978 GMC C-65 Emergency One Pumper/Rescue. The '78 E-1 Pumper/Rescue had a 500 gallon water tank with a 750 gallon per minute pump, plus storage room to carry all the rescue equipment. The extra space proved useful because the Cpl. Menge Post of the VFW donated the Jaws of Life to the fire department the same year. The Jaws helped to free victims in car accidents who were pinned in cars. This tool was a welcome addition to the fire department due to its life-saving speed in freeing people.

By 1978 the Center Line Fire Department had three pumpers and one ambulance in service for the first time in its history. At the end of 1978, the Fire Marshal retired and was not replaced. Chief Smith assumed the role of Fire Marshal and Chief. The manpower dipped to eleven men and would stay at eleven until July 1, 1980.

The third fatal fire in fifteen years was to occur on January 23, 1979 when a second alarm fire occurred at the Center Line Plaza Apartments. One man died as a result of smoke inhalation and burns. The alarm totals for the year 1979 were 575 (182 fire calls) with \$103,000 in fire losses. With three fire deaths in only fifteen years, fire became the most threatening killer of the city. More people were killed by fire in Center Line than homicide.

The Center Line Fire Department entered its last year in 1980. The 1980 census reported 9,870 population. On June 11, 1980 the fire department would have one last major fire. It would be the largest fire since the third alarm fire at the Center Line Plaza Apartments in 1970. The fire started in a vacant building that was called the Hauf Brau Haus (the old Center Line Hotel) by two juvenile arsonists. Three Center Line engines, three on duty men, the Chief and twelve off-duty full time and volunteers fire fighters along with two Warren fire engines with five men each, one aerial ladder with four men, one squad with four men, one engine from Roseville with five men and one East Detroit engine with five men over five hours to extinguish the blaze. The arson fire caused \$150,000 worth of damage and placed one fire sergeant from Center Line and one Warren firefighter in the hospital.

A little over two weeks later by vote of the mayor and council on July 1, 1980, the Center Line Fire Department was dissolved and the Center Line Public Safety Department was formed. The history of the actual fire department ends here since all firefighters were trained as police officers and all police officers were cross-trained as firefighters. The 24-hour shift for the fire department was abandoned for the second time in the department's history. All Public Safety personnel went on 8-hour shifts, with no one manning the station. Civilian dispatchers were hired to do the dispatching freeing up everyone for patrol duties. In the event of an ambulance or fire call, the PSO would be called in from patrol, drive to the station and change into his gear and pull the desired piece of equipment (ambulance or fire engine) to the scene. No manpower were assigned to staff the station. All personnel were assigned to patrol duty until a fire alarm sounded.

(A few footnotes are added after the Public Safety Dept.was instituted)

In May 1981, the Fire Chief Norm Smith retired and was not replaced. Due to organizational changes under consolidation, the Fire Chief's position was eliminated.

A \$175,000 fire at the Kramer Homes co op. on April 30, 1983, made the residents of the Kramer Homes question the new public safety concept and how efficient it was at fire protection. One fire engine from Warren assisted at the fire.

Hearing the outcry from the Kramer Homes citizens, the council appointed ex-fire sergeant, then public safety sergeant, Guy Swanson to a newly created position of Deputy Director of Public Safety. His job was to coordinate fire related business with the PSO personnel, conduct fire inspections and train the volunteers. Guy Swanson would serve in the position until his retirement in 1988.

In 1986, the City of Center Line retired the 1985 Ford/Wheeled Coach Ambulance. This ambulance was only in service for approximately one year and was mothballed during a trial period in which the city would employ a private advanced life support ambulance that was housed in Warren. The public safety officers continued to respond to medical emergencies with emergency first aid equipment like they did thirty years ago, and the private ambulance would transport patients to the hospital.

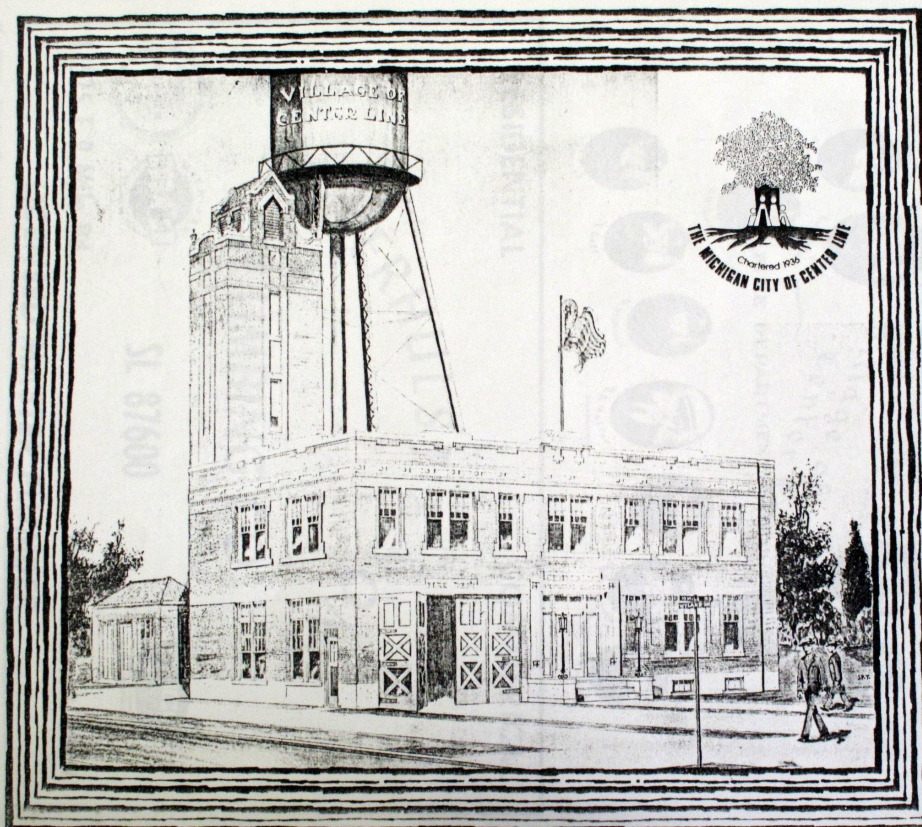
After the city council decided to have Universal Ambulance provide all EMS to the city, the ambulance was sold to Utica Fire Department in Utica, MI. (Re-painted lime/green and white).

In July of 1989, the City of Center Line took delivery of a new Ford/Grumann 1250 gallon per minute pumper with a 750 gallon water tank. This new engine replaced the 1964 Ford/FTI.

In 1997 the City Hall Fire/Police station was moved from 7550 Ten Mile Road to 7070 E. Ten Mile Road. The 1928 city hall complex was torn down along with the pump house.

Fires continue to be fought every month, every year by the Center Line Public Safety Department. The organizational structure remains unchanged since the early 1980's. As mentioned previously, this short work catalogs the history of the Fire Department of Center Line and the history of the City. The detailed history ends here, basically in 1980, with the exception of a few footnotes.

To all of those dedicated souls who through the years gave of themselves, thank you. Some one was watching.



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1976 · 1977

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