

## History

Prior to the 1956 incorporation of Fremont, the area was comprised of five large unincorporated communities: Irvington, Mission San Jose, Centerville, Niles, and Warm Springs. Each of these communities had its own volunteer fire department and elected its own Chief Officers. Originally, the departments were just hose cart operations. Some of the members of these volunteer departments are still living in our community today, and we consider them great resources of the Fremont Fire Department's history.

## Irvington

In 1880, a fire destroyed Irvington's big Walker Warehouse. Soon after, the Irvington residents organized a "bucket brigade." In 1882, the Irvington Volunteer Fire Department was established. However, the volunteers were unable to quench a big fire in December 1887 that began in a printing office and wiped out most of the business district of the township. A modern fire district was formed in 1937, headed by Fire Chief Joseph Corey. Within the next two years, \$9000 was raised to build a fire station on Mission Boulevard, with an adjacent recreation hall. Several fundraisers later, 2 pumper trucks were purchased. The Irvington fire volunteers' first big fire was in the barn of an insurance agent who had, of all things, neglected to insure his own ranch buildings.

## Mission San Jose

On a quiet Sunday morning in 1884, a fire broke out at Muthwillig Brothers' bakery that nearly destroyed the Mission San Jose township. It spread quickly and, for some time, threatened St. Joseph's Church. The men fighting the fire ran out of water, so they broke open several large barrels of wine and used the wine to douse the flames. Soon thereafter, a volunteer fire department was organized, and Joseph Sunderer was named Fire Chief. The volunteer fire department was later complemented with a ladder carrier, hose cart, and 400' of 2" hose. In 1895, members pulled together to save the town from a destructive fire. This department was abandoned around 1904, and a new district was finally formed in 1931. The hose cart was replaced with a 1921 Buick car converted into a fire truck with platforms for the men and two 30-gallon water tanks. In 1934, the trucks were stored in a tiny firehouse built on Vallejo Street. A new fire station was built on Anza Street in 1954, which now houses Fremont's Museum of Local History.

## Centerville

W. W. Walton was appointed Fire Chief for the newly organized Centerville Fire Department in 1890. With their 500' of hose, one hydrant and a bucket brigade, the Centerville Fire Department operated continuously until the townships were finally incorporated into the City of Fremont in 1956. The members of this department had

a difficult time stopping the fires that followed the 1906 earthquake. The Women's Association donated land and money in 1946 for a new building to replace the original, tiny firehouse. By 1950, the Centerville Fire Department had acquired 2 pumper trucks, 40 hydrants, 2000' of hose, 2 chemical tanks, and 22 volunteers. Fred Rogers served as Centerville's Fire Chief for more than thirty years.

## **Niles**

The Niles Fire District was organized in 1909 with a tax of \$1000 voted by the Niles property owners. The first year's budget was \$300 for a firehouse, \$200 for hoses, and \$390 for an alarm and a wagon to haul ladders and tools. The first call that the Niles Fire District volunteers responded to was a fire on Second Street, which was put out in less than six minutes after the call came in. Frank Rose was the Fire Chief at this time. The following year, enough money was raised to build a small 2-story firehouse with a cupola for drying hoses. They had a good water system, a cart, ladder and some hose, but needed to reorganize the department. In 1911, it was decided to purchase more hose and a gong for the firehouse. The Niles Fire District reorganized again in 1922, and at that time, they purchased some "modern" pumper trucks. For a time, though, Niles had two fire departments. In the 1920's, Edward Rose, a Chevrolet dealer in Niles, converted an old Buick into a fire truck, complete with ladders and chemicals. Often, Rose's private fire service beat the regular fire department to the scene of a fire. Then somebody mentioned the word "liability" to Mr. Rose, and from that point forward, he was content to "assist" the Niles Fire Department.

Niles resident Tom Estudillo first signed up for the town's volunteer fire department in 1941. In 1954, volunteer Estudillo signed on as a "paid man" with the Niles Fire Department--one of only three paid positions at the time. Firefighter Estudillo was promoted to Captain in the new Fremont Fire Department in 1957, and became Fire Chief in 1960. He retired from the department on New Year's Day in 1977, after he placed his final "out of service" call from in front of his Niles home. He recalls some fierce fires, including the one at Weibel Vineyards in 1961. Forty firefighters battled the blaze at the Mission San Jose winery for more than three hours. The fire, which began after a gas tank exploded, caused \$1 million in damage. As recounted by retired Chief Estudillo, the worst fire in the city's history, however, happened two years earlier at the Booth Cannery in Centerville. That fire, causing more than \$3 million in damage, was so hot that it melted the lights off the tail of the fire engine.

## **Warm Springs**

This fire district was formed in 1945 with John Souza appointed as Fire Chief. The Warm Springs Chamber of Commerce helped raise the needed funds for equipment, and a firehouse was built in 1946. The volunteers responded to a variety of calls. On one particularly busy weekend, they put out a truck fire, pumped out the Hidden Valley Ranch pool searching for a drowning victim, and fought a grass fire near the county line.

All of these firefighters in the five districts were volunteers who were never paid for their work. Most of them were local businessmen who served because they were needed. When the siren went off, they dropped whatever they were doing and reported to the firehouse. The first ones to arrive opened the station doors and

started the truck motor. As the men reported in, they jumped on the truck, then all raced to the fire together aboard the fire truck. Each town was fiercely proud of its firefighters and grateful for their volunteer service. Furthermore, each town thought that theirs was the best district and had the best fire service.

## Catching Up With Our History

When the City of Fremont incorporated in 1956--then serving a population of 22,493--it immediately set about implementing a Public Safety department (it was the first City department put into action). This department was the idea of then-City Manager Bob Coop. Members of this newly-formed department not only fought fires, they also wrote tickets and performed other police functions. Two years later, the Public Safety department was disbanded, and the Fremont Fire Department was formed. At that time, the Warm Springs fire station was only staffed between the hours of 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. When the sole firefighter on duty at the Warm Springs station went home, he would answer a "hot line" at his home for any emergencies, then respond to the fire station to activate the siren, summoning the other volunteers. When they arrived, they would respond together to the emergency. Slowly, throughout the 1960's, all firehouses began staffing 24 hours a day. In 1969, volunteer firefighters were phased out and full time paid firefighters staffed all stations.

The City fire stations were originally plotted throughout the city with a proximity to the then-functioning volunteer fire departments.

- **Station 1** at the corner of Mowry and Argonaut--built in 1963--provided coverage for the central business district.
- Once the home of the bustling movie company Essanay Studios, Niles became the home to our present **Station 2**, which was built on Second Street in 1952.
- **Station 3**, in the Irvington District, was first erected in 1939 on Washington Boulevard, then relocated in 1979 to its present site on Chapel Way.
- The district of Mission San Jose housed **Station 4**, first located on Anza Way in 1954, then welcomed its relocation at Pine and Paseo Padre Parkway with a grand opening on Saturday, June 23, 1990.
- Warm Springs' **Station 5**, first situated on Warm Springs Boulevard in 1946, was rebuilt in 1992 at the same location but turned on the property to now be assigned a Hackamore Lane address. The new Engine Company 5 responded to their first call at 1:54 p.m. on Thursday, April 9, 1992.
- The Centerville **Station 6**, built in 1954, became the fire department headquarters when the City formed in 1956, and housed our dispatch center until 1963. After more than five decades of faithful service, Fire Station 6 was decommissioned in January 2009 and a new Fire Station 6 was welcomed into service on Central Avenue.

- **Station 7**, built in 1964 at the corner of South Grimmer and Durham, provided coverage for Fremont's industrial area. Today, it includes a classroom and tower for continued training.
- To keep up with the building boom of the early '70's, **Station 8** was constructed on Darwin Drive in 1971. Originally, the building was planned for just two years' use but stayed in service for an additional 35 years. The Darwin Drive firehouse was finally retired from service in 2008 and replaced by the new Station 8 on Fremont Blvd.
- **Station 9**, located on Stevenson Place, was placed in service for the first time at 10:33 p.m. on April 27, 1992. Engine Company 9's first incident occurred 20 minutes later when they responded to a request for medical aid at the Fremont Jail.
- Dedicated on November 3, 1990, and followed by a grand opening on Saturday, January 19, 1991, **Station 10** on Deep Creek Road complemented our existing coverage in north Fremont.
- Our temporary **Station 11** on Landing Parkway responded to its first call on August 4, 1999, at 8:51 a.m., and provides coverage for the industrial area in south Fremont. Plans and design of a permanent Station 11 are underway.

## Chief of Department

Frank Madruga served as the first Fremont Fire Chief from January 10, 1956 until 1960. During his tenure, volunteer donations were used to start up the City's fire operations. Radios were placed in every fire engine, and our inspection program was initiated.

The second Chief of Department, Tom Estudillo, was at the helm from 1960 - 1971. He oversaw the expansion of the department to 8 fire stations, the first Truck Company (snorkel) purchased and located at Station 1 in 1963, Station 6 in Centerville renumbered from Station 1, Station 7 built in 1964 with its drill tower and classrooms, a first-ever Training Officer was appointed in 1964, and the Fire Prevention Bureau opened for business. A "temporary" Station 8 was built in 1971 (there was a 2-piece Engine Company at Station 6 prior to this date). Also, Firefighters' Local 1689 of the International Association of Firefighters was chartered in 1968, and Daniel Lydon was elected as its first president. Beginning in 1969-1970, volunteers were no longer called out. There was Union unrest in 1970 over wages, benefits and hours worked (63 per week), coupled with a perception of a lack of progress in negotiations. Chief Estudillo stepped down. In 1971, the firefighters began working a 56-hour work week.

Dean Holzgrafe was named as the third Fire Chief and served from 1971-1987. During Chief Holzgrafe's span of years, the department saw the implementation of 3" hose in 1973, and Lieutenants were reclassified to Captains in 1974. Truck One (the second Truck for the department) was purchased in 1975--a Quint with a price tag of \$106,471. Emergency Medical Technicians were certified in 1976. Proposition 13 came along and affected the ways the City routinely did business, bringing with it

more Union unrest followed by a no confidence vote for Chief Holzgrafe, and the firing of the then-City Manager. The rank of Fire Engineer was implemented in 1982, as well as our Computer Aided Dispatch system. A department-wide physical fitness program was instituted in 1983, and Paramedics were placed on every Engine Company in 1986.

As the fourth Fire Chief, Daniel Lydon was appointed on March 16, 1987, and recently retired after serving his first day of his 40th year of service with the Fremont Fire Department on March 17, 2002. During Chief Lydon's early years as Chief, the city added two new fire stations and relocated 2 others. In his later years as Chief, 3 more stations were built (1 temporary), and another was rebuilt on the same property.

The next few years for Fremont Fire were somewhat tumultuous with deep budget cuts and regular changes in leadership. Ron Coleman, a nationally-recognized Fire Chief was hired for a six-month interim assignment until a permanent replacement could be found. That recruitment yielded Fire Chief William "Willie" McDonald who came to the City from the San Mateo Fire Department. Chief McDonald took the helm in July 2002 and that very same year, the City faced a severe fiscal crisis with the bust of the "dot-com" industry and decline of the related high-tech business sector.

The resulting fiscal year 2002/03 budget was a painful one in which Fremont Fire was called upon to make significant cuts in order to help the City close a deep budget gap. The cuts resulted in the loss of the City's "Fire Alarm" dispatch service and the layoff of 11 dispatchers (the City subsequently contracted with the Alameda County Regional Emergency Communications Center (ACRECC) for dispatch service) and the layoffs of three analysts and one nurse-educator. Several sworn positions were also eliminated including three Division Chiefs and three Staff Captains. Lastly, the Department had to close the temporary Fire Station 11 and began implementing daily "brown-outs" (mandatory rotational station closures), thus reducing daily service levels to the City by two engine companies. Less than two years after taking over as Chief, Willie McDonald left the City to become Fire Chief of Scottsdale, Arizona.

Division Chief Bill Reykalin of Fire Prevention took over as Acting Fire Chief in June 2004 and served in that capacity until a permanent replacement could be found, at which time Chief Reykalin retired. In June 2005, Fire Chief Bruce Martin took over after serving as Chief of the San Rafael Fire Department. Chief Martin has done well to bring stability back to the Department both in terms of leadership and re-organizational change. Under his direction, Fire Station 11 was reopened and approved for construction, brownouts were eliminated, seven new fire apparatus were purchased, and 10 new firefighters were hired under the federal SAFER grant program. Once again, the program moves forward.

## **Conclusions**

Log books in Fire Alarm only date back to 1966. That year, the Fremont Fire Department responded to 1,776 emergencies. In 1992, the department responded to 10,122 emergencies. By comparison, in 2008--with a population of approximately

210,000 and dispatch from the Alameda County Regional Emergency Communications Center (ACRECC)--the department responded to 13,190 incidents.

We've come a long way since our early beginnings, but our mission statement of today is most likely the same tenets our firefighting predecessors held to be true....

The Mission of the Fremont Fire Department is to deliver the services necessary to minimize the loss of life and property threatened by the hazards of fire, medical and rescue emergencies, hazardous materials incidents, and disaster situations in our community.