

# The Early Years of the Walnut Fire Department

BY WGS MEMBERS JIM & KAREN HANSEN

**T**he Walnut City Council first appointed a committee on May 6, 1880 to inquire into “the most feasible plan for the extinguishment of fire.”

The first fire engine was delivered on November 17, 1880.

At the January 22, 1881 Council meeting, Mayor Linfor and Councilman Packard were appointed to investigate the organizing of a fire company.

Sixteen buildings in downtown Walnut were lost in the first big fire on Sunday, February 6, 1881 as reported in the February 10, 1881 issue of the Walnut News.

A meeting was held Tuesday at Linfor & Koll’s office for the purpose of organizing a fire company.

Twenty-five volunteers presented their names for membership, a constitution and bylaws adopted, and the meeting adjourned to next Tuesday evening, at which time the company will elect its officers. (The Walnut News, Thursday, Feb. 17, 1881, p. 3)

**T**uesday evening the fire company held a meeting and elected its officers. The following are the names of the same: Captain, J. R. Miller; Assistant, E. A. Bigelow; Foreman of hose, W. H. Linfor; Assistant, Woodring; Secretary, C. Brown; and Treasurer, W. H. Linfor. (The Walnut News, Thursday, Feb. 24, 1881, p. 3)

**N**otice to Firemen All members of the Little Giant fire company, are notified to be present at the meeting of the company next Friday evening, August 19<sup>th</sup>.

All failing to do so will be fined to the full extent of the by-laws, and render themselves liable to be dropped from membership. W. H. LINFOR, Chief Engineer. (The Walnut News, August 12, 1881)

**T**he firemen took their first lesson as a department, Thursday afternoon, at 5 o’clock.

Some one yelled “fire,” and each of the boys left their grocery store, and jack-plane, and soldering iron, and printing office, and anvils, and implement stores, standing in the furrow, and made rush for the engine house.

Whenever there was a span of horses and a lumber wagon in the way the boys didn’t stop to go around, but either jumped over them or got down on their hands and knees and crawled under.

They got there in very good time, considering the distance they had to run. The building proved to be Sam Smith’s shanty, on the east side of Roaring Hollow, and was burned down in ten minutes from the time it was first discovered.

A stove-pipe through the roof was the cause. The engine threw a couple of tanks of water on the coals, to pay for running down.

Nothing was saved and Mr. Smith is now a homeless waif, on fortune’s billowy strand. (The Walnut News, Sept. 2, 1881)

**T**he Walnut Fire Company disbanded in 1883 and reorganized in 1884, electing the following officers: A. S. Burns, Chief; Charles Jacobsen and Charles Eroe, Foremen; W. S. Margeson, Secretary-Treasurer. (Walnut Memoirs, Roma Arndt, 1966)

**O**n Feb. 7, 1888, the Walnut City Council voted to dissolve the Walnut Fire Co. No. 1.

They claimed that there was a lack of interest in the organization and that the firemen did not have the required knowledge to keep the “Little Giant” fire engine in working order.

The resolution stated that Walnut had had very severe experience with fires in the last few months and the said Fire Company No. 1 made no effort to take their engine out, claiming that it was worthless.

The same “Little Giant Engine” had been put in good running and working order.

The Fire Co. was required to turn over to the Mayor the Engine house and all tools and fixtures belonging to the town of Walnut.

H. C. Noack, representing the Revere Rubber Co., of Chicago, spent a few days in town the first of the week in consultation with the mayor and city council who closed a contract with him for 1000 ft of 2-ply mastiff hose, 1 hose cart, 1 forty foot extension ladder, 2 nozzles and other supplies for our new fire system. (The Walnut Bureau, May 15, 1896)

**T**he fire company has purchased a ladder and ninety buckets to be used in conjunction with the fire engine, in case of fire. The firemen of Walnut are rustlers and don't you forget it for a moment. (The Walnut Bureau, 1896)

**Q**uite a number of our citizens interested in forming a fire company met last evening at the city hall and organized a hose team. The following officers were elected: W. H. Jones, chief; Otto Ronna, Secretary; Louis Hanson, Treasurer. (The Walnut Bureau, May 22, 1896)

**T**he chime whistle on the power house is a dandy and fills a long felt want for the proper kind of a noise to alarm our sleeping inhabitants in case of fire. It will be a big saving on the lung power of the town. (The Walnut Bureau, July 3, 1896, p. 5)

**M**ayor Bardsley had the juvenile fire company out Wednesday morning filling up the cisterns. (The Walnut Bureau, July 10, 1896, p. 4)

**A**t the Dec. 1, 1896 City Council meeting, Mayor Bardsley advised the Council of the appointment by him of W. H. Jones as Chief and H. P. Koll as Assistant Chief of the Walnut Fire Company.

It was moved by Kincaid that the Council confirm the appointments. Seconded by Backus and carried.

The Constitution and Bylaws of Walnut Hose Company #1 were presented and read.

It was moved by Backus that they be approved as read and the organization be constituted the Fire Department of the Town of Walnut, Iowa. Seconded by Moser and carried.

On April 6, 1897, the Mayor appointed W. H. Jones as Chief of the Fire Department and H. Burmeister as Assistant Chief. They were appointed again on April 5, 1898.

On Sept. 6, 1898, the resignation of W. H. Jones as Fire Chief was accepted.

The Mayor appointed Hugo Burmeister as Chief of the Fire Department. Hugo was also appointed Chief on April 4, 1899 and on April 3, 1900.