

Five-Mile Point Fire Station

By: Karen Ferguson, Town Historian

This year marks the 75th Anniversary of the Five-Mile Point Fire Station.

On February 9, 1946, a vote of Kirkwood residents was taken via ballot to decide if the Town of Kirkwood District 1 would attend and serve all calls in the entire town district and, as such, erect a building to house two fire trucks at Five Mile Point as soon as possible. Not all were in favor of such an idea due to the increased taxes of such a venture. However, on July 28, 1950, the Articles of Incorporation were filed and the Five Mile Point Fire Company, Inc. was official.

Dick O'Dea was just a young boy, about 14-years old, when the fire station was built and lived across the street, same house that he lives in today. He told me the first station was a single-story, 2-bay building with a dirt floor. The trucks that were housed in it were originally used at the Kirkwood Fire Station. They were a GMC Tank water truck and an Old Model A, 4-cylinder truck. The first Fire Chief was Oscar Adams. Dick said that when a fire call would come in, Oscar would holler to the young boys in the neighborhood to jump on the truck and they would. He said they were all underage (13-16 yrs old) but that didn't matter. He said most of the fires were in the Colesville Road area and it would take about 30 minutes to get there. Once they would get to the fire, Oscar and all the boys would start to put out the fire until the volunteers were able to get there.

Dave Rickard, who has been with the fire station for 53 years, told me about the changes to the station through the years and also recalled some major fires/incidents.

He, like Dick, talked about the first station being a single-story, 2-bay building. In 1963, the Fire Dept took out a loan for \$15,000 to build a new 2-story building with a 4-bay single flat. Dave said it was so tight in that bay area that you could hardly move. In 2006, the fire station flooded. The station was rebuilt in 2009. Those changes included making the entire building 2 stories and enlarging the garage area to accommodate larger trucks, making it a 3-bay building. When the 2011 flood happened, the station was up and running within 24 hours.

The first fire truck that was purchased by Five Mile Point was the 1952 Mack for \$4500. It was used for a long time and it was extremely difficult to drive and maneuver. It was also very slow getting up hills. Eventually that truck would be given to Station #2 when it was built because most of their calls were downhill so the truck was more efficient for them. He recalled a story that had been told through the years that when Chief Adams would get a call on the fire phone from Barlow Road, he would look out to see if he saw a puff of smoke from the station. If he

saw smoke, then he knew the truck started. If he didn't see smoke, he knew he had to hurry to the station to help get the it started.

There were a few calls that Dave spoke to me about specifically. Since I recently did a story on the Jungle Club, he told me that fire was started by a kerosene heater. He also mentioned the train derailment that happened in the Five Mile Point area of town. The big fire that stuck out in his mind though was the arson fire at Schneiders in the 90s. He went into detail describing how a hole was cut in the back of the building. A person broke into the safe and stole baseball cards and money. Gasoline was then poured throughout the store. The arsonist snuck out the back and lit the gasoline on fire. Within minutes the entire store was engulfed with flames from the back of the store to the front. The arsonist was never captured.

Also in my research, I discovered a letter from Johnny Hart dated February 20, 1984. With the letter were drawings. These drawing were for a logo for the Five Mile Point Fire Company. He gave them permission to use it for letterheads, patches, decals, etc. He also noted that this was done free of charge.

On Sunday, June 1, you will have the opportunity to join the Fire Mile Point Fire Company in celebrating its 75th Anniversary. There will be an Open House from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. with food and drinks. You will have the opportunity to purchase commemorative t-shirts and coins. I encourage you to stop by and tour the fire house for yourself. You, too, will be able to see pictures of the volunteers through the years, trophies, and other memorabilia, in addition to the fire apparatus.

Thank you to Fire Chief Shawn Skinner, Dave Rickard, Justin Maciak and others for opening up the fire house for research and sharing your stories with me.