

ALLISON HOOK & LADDER COMPANY No. 2
"We Kick For Our Rights"

At a mass meeting held on October 19, 1905, in Wallis' Hall at Haehnlén and Prune Avenues, by the citizenry and business people residing south of Derry Street on Allison Hill, the Allison Hook and Ladder Company No. 2 was organized. This initial meeting was presided over by S. Brady Caveny, Sr., then Alderman of the Second Ward.

The organization of this Company had a two fold purpose-namely to provide more adequate fire protection for that section of the city south of Derry Street and secondly since the "Hill District" was rapidly growing it was thought that a hook and ladder company was needed, as this area was quite a distance from the Mt. Vernon Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, then located at Fourth and North Streets.

At the second Company meeting the following men comprised the initial group of elected officers: President, Charles T. Charters; Vice President, J.H. Wohlfarth; Secretary, Charles H. Bernheisel; Treasurer, J.F. Barley; Trustees, Jesse Smith, Julius Fluss, and F.K. Kitzmiller; Directors, Dr. E.A. Nicodemus, C.M. Fitzgerald, William Gorgas, Walter Ritter, and C.S. Keiffer; Foreman, Emil C. Nather; and Assistant Foreman, G.R. Gilbert.

On January 15, 1906, the new company formally received its charter, granted by the Dauphin County courts.

Although the city had not officially recognized the new organization, it evidently had some thought of doing so in mind, for on January 22, 1907, City Councils passed an ordinance appropriating money for the purchase of a new combination wagon that was to be located in the eastern section of the city in the territory known as the Second Ward.

The company on hearing this, officially tendered its services to the city for fire duty on February 13, 1907, but Councils still refused to recognize the new organization. However on March 30th, Councils did authorize the start of construction of a new station for the Allison Company, and provided \$3,000 in payment thereof.

Because of some friction between the members of the company and some members of Councils this money was left lay idle for the time being and the company was still without adequate quarters or official recognition.

This incident did not discourage the members however, as the Company still functioned by holding meetings at different locations, until April 25, 1907, when the meeting place was designated at Fackler's Hall at 13th & Derry Streets. Meetings from June until September of that year were held in Kitzmiller's store at 1325 Derry Street, when the meeting place was returned to Fackler's Hall. The company met here until May, 1908.

By this time the members were very enthusiastic about building a home of their own and began raising money, mostly through public subscription and gifts from sympathetic friends.

On June 11, 1907, the company trustees were given the power to negotiate a loan of \$1,200 for the purpose of securing a plot of ground on the east side of South 14th Street south of Kittatinny Street. The plot secured had a front footage of 72 feet and ran eastward to Daisy Street a distance of 151 feet. This lot actually cost \$1,800.

The company after securing the above plot, donated a section of it with a 40 foot front to the City with the proviso that they would construct a new station for the Allison Company on the donated ground. The City was agreeable to this and on November 20, 1907, accepted the ground.

By November, 1907, the city temporarily placed a wagon(not a fire wagon) in service in a stable on the lower side of Mulberry Street because of the construction of the new Mulberry St. Bridge. This route was a major access to the Hill area and since it was closed fire protection was limited to only the Mt. Pleasant Engine Company No. 8. The Allison company was asked to man this rig.

Very late in 1907, Mayor Meals and Councils formally recognized the new company and on January 1, 1908, Fire Chief Charles Garverich placed the Allison Hook and Ladder Company No. 2 in city service for fire duty, with a remodeled one horse hitch hose wagon formerly used by the Citizen Engine Company No. 3. Being the twelfth company in the department that number was designated to the unit.

The running quarters at this time was in Wallis' Livery Stable at Haenhlen and Prune Avenues, and an agreement was made with Mr. Wallis to use one of his horses to draw the wagon when answering alarms.

At 7:07 p.m., March 23, 1908, the Allison answered their first fire alarm, responding to Box 34, then at 16th & Derry Streets for a minor fire in a dwelling at 1524 Vernon Street.

In the general appropriations bill of April 1, 1908, Councils again allotted the company the previously mentioned \$3,000, to build a fire station, from plans that had been previously drawn up and approved by Councils. With this money the brick stable section was built on the rear of the 14th Street plot. In this portion of the building the Company held a meeting on May 5, 1908.

On Wednesday, May 13, 1908, Allison member Eli K. Hoffman was killed at the \$2,500 Bowers Sash Factory fire on 18th Street near Chestnut. Box 34 was struck at 10:01 p.m. for this blaze which was of incendiary origin. Hoffman attempted to roll up a downed live power line and was electrocuted.

During the month of August, 1908, a pair of new horses replaced the single horse on the hose wagon. This was done due to the long runs to the north and south on the Hill District.

In October, 1908, a new combination hose and chemical wagon, built by J.G. Weir of Pittsburgh, Pa was delivered. The new wagon cost the City \$1,800 and was equipped with a geared reel carrying 700' of hose and two-35 gallon chemical tanks.

On January 27, 1909, Councils appropriated \$7,072 to construct the remainder of the firehouse, but the original plans did not meet the approval of all concerned. After several meetings with Mayor Meals, the house committee, on the Mayor's suggestion, made a trip to Baltimore, Md. to inspect fire stations of that Fire Department to get constructive ideas.

Upon their return, a new set of plans was drawn up and the two story brick, single arched entrance building located at 315 S. 14th Street was the result of their accomplishments.

A company member, George H. Sechrist, a contractor, was the successful bidder on the construction work. It was because he took a personal pride in the work and during the course of erection injected many new ideas, that the Allison Fire Company had one of the finest fire stations in the State.

The alarm bell which hung in the tower weighed about 1550 pounds.

On Tuesday, May 12, 1909, the 1884 Hayes 65' aerial ladder truck formerly used as the Mt. Vernon Truck 1, was reassigned to the Allison company. When it arrived at its new station it still had the three horse hitch. However very shortly after going into service with the Allison, the truck was taken to a local carriage shop and underwent a major overhaul where it was remodeled and lightened, and two horses were used once again to draw it.

The new quarters were dedicated May 16, 1909, with appropriate ceremonies conducted by the Rev. A.A. Kelley, Assistant Chaplain of the company. The final total cost of the building, including the ground was \$16,043.42, of which this sum was financed jointly by the city and company.

While assisting in the final construction work on the new building, William Benner, an active Allison member, fell from a scaffold on August 7th and suffered a fractured skull and spine from which injuries he succumbed eight days later.

On November 21, 1912, the company lost its second member as a result of fire duty. While answering Box 17, at 9:27 p.m. for a fire in a dwelling at 47 N. 17th Street, Samuel Wanbaugh, the driver of the wagon was killed at 15th & Market Streets. The wagon was proceeding north on 15th Street and on entering the intersection at Market Street, Wanbaugh pulled his two horse team a sharp right to avoid a collision with an automobile. On doing so the left front wheel of the wagon struck the curbstone, hurling Driver Wanbaugh headfirst to the street where he died instantly of a broken neck and fractured skull. The wagon did not upset but the team panicked and started east on Market. Fireman Dan Huber, who was riding on the rear tailboard of the wagon scurried up over the hose reel to the empty driver's seat, grasped the reins and stopped the wagon before more damage was done. Firemen Thomas Reside and J.H. Wohlfarth who were also riding on the rear step were thrown to the street but were otherwise uninjured. The driver of the auto was never identified as he failed to stop when the accident occur.

During the late summer of 1917, the Weir built combination wagon was sent to the fire apparatus establishment of Boyd Bros. in Philadelphia and everything salvagable was mounted on a new Reo chassis. Bids were received to have a tractor added to the Hayes aerial but for reasons unknown it was decided to replace it. In September, a new four wheel drive Duplex chassis city service ladder truck built by Peter Pirsch and Sons of Kenosha, WI was delivered and placed in service. This truck mounted on a straight frame and having a tillerman was a highly manoeuvrable and powerful rig. It carried several hundred feet of portable trussed ladders including a portable 55 foot extension ladder and the rest of the necessary ladder truck equipment.

At 4:17 a.m. January 2, 1922, Box 76 was struck for a very spectacular fire which destroyed the Capital Bedding Company at 14th & Howard Streets and severely damaged several other buildings. Allison Fireman Daniel P. Huber was caught between two buildings and was overcome by smoke and flames before being rescued. As a result of inhaling superheated gasses it affected his lungs and heart and subsequently died suddenly of that affliction on November 26, 1922. Fireman Huber was 42 years old and was survived by six sisters.

In May 1923, the Reo wagon was reassigned to the Pleasant View Fire Company No. 16 to become that company's first piece of motorized equipment. At the same time the Good Will Engine 7 received a new American LaFrance pumper and it's 1914 American LaFrance combination wagon was given to the Allison.

In July 1927, the Citizen Engine Company No. 3 was moved from the Friendship firehouse on S. 3rd Street, upon their request, to the Allison Station. This started a long warm friendship between the two companies which lasted for 35 years. It also gave the house an engine for the first time—a 1908 American LaFrance Metropolitan steamer powered by a Christie tractor. The rig however was still listed as Citizen Engine 3 and was subsequently scrapped in 1931.

On January 19, 1930, the Allison Coffee Association was formed under the auspices of the Allison Hook & Ladder Company. The original intent of the organization was to supply coffee and refreshments to firefighters in the Hill District. The idea immediately caught on and within short order the entire city benefitted from this organization. Either the company or the association purchased a nifty little International canteen wagon prior to April 1931. Eventually the association reorganized into the Harrisburg Firemen's Coffee Association and years later the rig was purchased by the Firemen's Relief. It was used into the 1940's.

During the year 1930, a turret pipe was added on the left front side of the hose bed of the wagon and a two fold life net was placed on the ladder truck.

When the Fire Department training schools were inaugurated in 1930, the rear roof of the Allison station was fitted with a false roof upon which exercises could be held. The training program was conducted here for a number of years under the supervision of Arthur M. Wilson, a member of the Company who had been sent by the City through the Philadelphia Fire Department Training Academy. During the course of these schools the Allison Company was well represented in the classes by its active firemen.

In 1935, the city paid fire drivers organized the Capital City Paid Firemen's Pension and Relief Association, becoming affiliated with the International Association of Fire Fighters as Local No. 428, and began calling the Allison their home. Meetings were held there until the station closed in 1980.

During the 1936 flood, the Allison members did excellent duty in the flooded southern portion of the City, and the second floor of the firehouse was used to house some refugees from that section.

Through years of hard usage and satisfactory service the Duplex ladder truck showed signs of increasing mechanical failures and in 1935, city council purchased a new Mack Model BQ tractor drawn tillered 75' wooden aerial ladder truck at a cost of \$15,000. This new truck arrived on November 11, 1935. It was the first double bank truck in the city meaning all the ground ladders were stowed in two stacks under the

aerial instead of attaching to the sides. It was also the first rig in the city with a windshield for the driver, but alas the tillerman still braved the cold winds of winter. Due to the fact the truck was almost 60' long and it was of the tractor trailer design, about two weeks were spent teaching the drivers how to handle and operate it. The final acceptance tests were held on Thanksgiving Day of 1935, during a discomfoting all day rain storm. The rig was placed in service about Dec 1st. The truck was named the "Edward Halbert Truck No. 2" in honor of the Chief of Department who was fatally injured when he fell off a roof the previous March. The old Duplex truck was later sold to the suburban Penbrook Fire Company.

Late in 1936, the hose wagon was completely rebuilt in the fire department shops, with a new Reo chassis replacing the one built by American LaFrance. The turret pipe was still retained, however in the remodeling, it was placed midships behind the driver's seat.

On July 1, 1945, during a heavy electrical and thunderstorm, the station was struck by lightning about half past midnight setting fire to the rear loft section. The men on duty immediately went to work with the chemical line off the hose wagon, but on gaining entrance to the loft were greeted by a burst of fire that was rapidly gaining headway. Box 9 at 14th & Swatara was struck by driver Ira Wagner at 12:41 a.m. summoning a first alarm assignment for much needed aid. Until the fire was brought under control it had caused damage in excess of \$3,000.

With the ladder truck seeing very heavy duty over the years, city council on January 15, 1957, authorized the purchase of a replacement. On December 19th, a new B85 Model Mack open cab tractor coupled to a Maxim built trailer having an 85' four section steel aerial was delivered to the city. This was the first steel aerial in the city and also the first ladder truck where the tillerman sat behind the aerial instead of on top of it. It was also the first truck to have all metal ground ladders. This rig was truly a drastic change from all previous ladder trucks. This truck was also one of the last to be delivered with the company name ALLISON lettered on the hood. After the crews became familiar with the rig it went into service January 7, 1958. When the city installed their radio system during the late summer of 1958, Ladder 2 was the first to be radio equipped. Cost of the rig was \$39,347.

On April 15, 1958, the city sold the 1935 Mack to the suburban Progress Fire Company. In 1961, a new Dodge tractor replaced the Mack and the rig remained in service until 1975. It then was purchased by city firefighter and fire buff David C. Buskey. Presently it is the oldest known motorized piece of equipment in existence from the city.

For a three week period from January 6th to February 1, 1959, the Allison Company had the distinction of being the last of the fire department's companies operating with two pieces of apparatus in active service. On this latter date, the combination wagon was placed in a reserve status as the paid drivers were needed elsewhere in the department due to the drastic decrease in volunteer interest.

In the late afternoon of September 14, 1961, the tower and it's huge bell were removed from the roof after the city engineering department declared the building not in condition to carry the weight any longer.

In December of 1969, Susquehanna Engine 9 was moved into the Allison Station when the Suquehanna Fire Company No. 9 lost it's quarters on S. Cameron Street due to condemnation. Within the year, the Royal No.14 firehouse on Derry Street was closed and Royal Engine 14 was moved into the Allison with Engine 9 being eliminated

from the department.

With the appointment of the second Battalion Chief to each Platoon in December, 1967, the Duty or senior chief, was moved to the Allison quarters.

On December 27, 1970, after better than eleven years as a reserve and "dump" wagon, the old Reo combination wagon was sold for \$113.50 to a Mr. Stahl in Dauphin. The truck was completely worn out.

On June 23, 1975, the Allison truck, Ladder 2, was placed in reserve status when Tower 1, a 1971 Mack 75 foot "Aerialscope" elevating platform took its place in the Allison station. Ladder 2 was moved to the Paxton No. 6 station and for a few years saw reserve duty when one of the other three city aerials was shopped for maintenance. Eventually the truck fell into disrepair and in March, 1985 was "traded" for two new self contained breathing apparatus to the Friendship Fire Company of Mt. Joy, Pa. where it saw service as Lancaster County Truck 7-5. It remained in service there until May, 1993 when it was bought by fire buff Bill Rausch of Clarkston, MI.

With the building of the new centralized fire stations in the city during 1979, the Allison firehouse lived out its remaining days in a state of disrepair. Then on March 31, 1980, the apparatus and equipment was moved into the new Station No. 2 at 140 N. 16th Street and the Allison closed its doors forever.

The Allison Hook and Ladder Company No. 2 after a somewhat retarded beginning became one of the department's foremost companies. For many years it always had a group of efficient and aggressive firefighters responding to alarms. This tradition was maintained right into the period of World War II when many of the active members were called into the armed forces. After the war, as in many of the other city volunteer companies, most of the 'young bloods' found interests elsewhere and by the mid-1960's, the Allison Hook and Ladder volleys were no longer seen on the fireground, the apparatus being completely manned by city salaried personnel.

The Allison Company still exists today. The building has been boarded up but is still retained in the name of the company trustees as it reverted back to their ownership when the city vacated it in 1980.

David W. Houseal
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