



Probationary Firefighters Manual

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FDNY

Organized fire fighting began in New York in 1648 when the first *Fire Ordinance* was adopted by the Dutch Settlement of New Amsterdam. Fines levied for dirty chimneys provided funds for the maintenance of buckets, hooks and ladders. It also established a fire watch of eight Wardens and required that each male citizen stand his turn on watch.



Old time method of transporting water buckets to a fire. Buckets were made of leather by the Dutch shoemakers.

After the first Wardens were appointed, an organization known as the *Prowlers* was formed and furnished with buckets, hooks and ladders. Often called the *rattle watch*, they patrolled the streets on the lookout for fire from nine o'clock at night until dawn.

When the colonists were organized in 1658, bucket brigades were formed and equipped with 250 leather buckets made by Dutch shoemakers of the colony. Thus, our first inauspicious beginning was made. Seven years later, in 1664, the colony

became a British settlement and was renamed New York.

It was not until 74 years later, in 1731, that fire brigades were put into service. Two hand-drawn pumpers, brought from distant London were the first fire engines to be used in the colony. They were designated as Engine Company 1 and Engine Company 2. All able bodied citizens were required to respond to alarms and perform duty under the supervision of the Aldermen.

Faced with the problem of a fast growing colony, the General Assembly established the volunteer Fire Department of the City of New York, in December of 1737. Able, discreet and sober men were appointed as firemen to be ready for service by night and day and be diligent, industrious and vigilant.

Following the Revolutionary War, the Department was reorganized and incorporated as the Fire Department of the City of New York.

The volunteer Fire Department continued to protect the lives and property of the citizens of the city until after the close of the Civil War when, in 1865, they were superseded by the paid Metropolitan Fire Department. The change created resentment and bitter actions were taken by some who opposed the elimination of the volunteers. This resulted in rough and tumble battles fought on both personal and political levels.

The introduction of the steam engine spelled the final doom of the volunteer department in New York. The steam apparatus eliminated the need for men to pump the water, and the horses ended the problem of hauling engines by hand.

At the beginning, the paid fire service extended only to certain parts of New York City (Manhattan). The Act of 1865 united Brooklyn and New York (cities) to form a Metropolitan District. By the end of 1865 the department consisted of 13 Chief Officers and 552 Company Officers and firemen. They worked a continuous tour of duty, with 3 hours a day for meals and one day off a month. They were paid salaries according to their rank or grade. The first regulations were also formulated and they were fairly strict and straight-laced.



First Company of paid Fire Department to go "in service" was Engine Co. 1, located in lower Manhattan at 4 Centre Street. Apparatus was horse-drawn Amoskeag steam-powered pumper which was same type issued to later companies. Wheels were steel rimmed.

The volunteers, despite their disappointment, accepted the decision and publicly declared that they would continue to function and serve until properly relieved by paid units.

The Act provided that members of the volunteers were to be given preference over all others in filling the rolls of the paid department.

Due to major fires, which resulted in excessive fire losses and a rise in insurance rates, the department was reorganized in 1866 under the command of General Alexander Schaler. Under military discipline, the department began to realize its full potential and fire losses began to generally reduce.

The merit system of promotion in the Fire Department was instituted in 1870.

In 1874 Westchester County (later called the Bronx) was annexed and gradually volunteers there were replaced by companies of the paid department, until the last volunteer unit was disbanded in 1928.

A further consolidation occurred in 1887 covering what we now know as the Borough of Queens. Again volunteer units were gradually replaced by paid companies until, by 1929, this Borough was protected by the paid department of the City of New York.

Richmond became a part of the greater City of New York in 1898. No change in the volunteer status took place, except for nominal supervision, until 1905 when the first group of volunteers was disbanded and replaced by paid units. More paid companies were installed in 1915, 1928, 1932 and 1937, when all but two volunteer companies were disbanded. These two were the only legal volunteer companies still active in the City of New York.

New Year's Day 1898 heralded the consolidation of the different areas of the city and the beginning of a new era for the Fire Department. All fire forces in the various sections were brought under the unified command of the first Commissioner of the Fire Department.

Following this amalgamation many changes took place involving many aspects of the job including installation of the high pressure systems, motorization of fire apparatus, creation of a Marine fleet, adoption of vastly improved working conditions and the utilization of perfected radio communications.

Today the Fire Department protects more than 8,000,000 residents in an area of 320 square miles. The department is administered by the Fire Commissioner appointed by and responsible to the Mayor. The uniformed force is under the command of the Chief of Department and consists of more than 11,400 Fire Officers and fire fighters. In addition, the Department includes 2,800 Emergency Medical Technicians, Paramedics and Supervisors assigned to the Bureau of Emergency Medical Service (EMS), as well as 1200 civilian employees.

Ranking Order of the FDNY Uniformed Force



Firefighter Marine Pilot Fire Marshal Lieutenant
 Engineer/Wiper



Captain Battalion Chief Deputy Chief Division
 Commander



Deputy Assistant Assistant Chief of Chief of Chief of
 Chief Department Operations Department

THESE ILLUSTRATIONS ARE FOR THE INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE OF MEMBERS IN THE PROPER WEARING OF INSIGNIA ON THE UNIFORM DRESS SHIRT AND/OR WORK DUTY SHIRT.