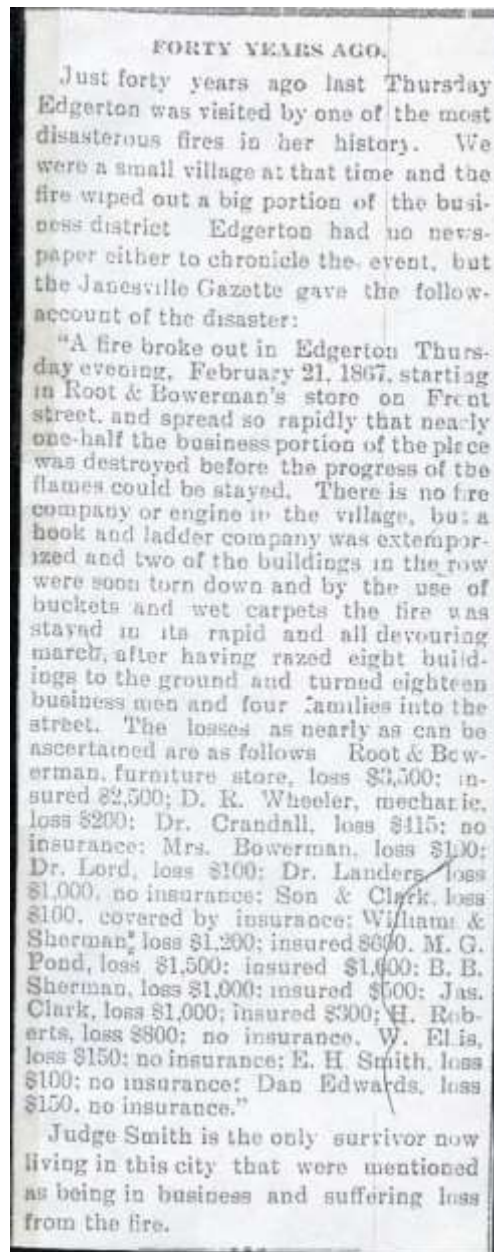


Origins of the Edgerton Fire Department

In the 1800s across the country, if there was a fire in a rural town or village there was no fire department to call. Neighbors and citizens would help by creating a "bucket brigade" to pass buckets of water by hand to each other along a line and at the end of the line the water in the bucket was then thrown on the fire.

Edgerton, Wisconsin, had its share of fires. On February 21, 1867, half of downtown Edgerton along Front Street (now known as Fulton Street) was destroyed by fire. Eight buildings were destroyed, and 18 businesses and 4 families were displaced.



Edgerton incorporated as a city in 1883 and had no fire department yet. A number of fires occurred during the early years as a City that prompted discussion on the need for a fire department with engines and other equipment, however the city was slow to take action.

On August 21, 1883, a major fire destroyed one building and damaged several others all in a row in downtown Edgerton (known as the Croft Hall fire). In the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* newspaper (now known as the *Edgerton Reporter*), the editor noted that cost of the damage would pay for and equip a good fire apparatus. It raised the question of whether or not Edgerton should consider purchasing a steam fire engine.

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter - August 24, 1883

A SCORCHER!

Edgerton Visited by a \$7000 Fire

Between the hour of 1 and 2 o'clock Tuesday morning Mrs. W. C. Banks was awakened by a bright light shining into her room. Thinking there was a fire in the vicinity, she called her son Jon, who hastily gathered his clothes and ran into the street, when he discovered flames running up the outside northwest corner of Croft's Hall. J. I. Lusk appeared on the scene about this time. The fire was entirely on the outside of the building and covered the siding from the foundation to the roof. These gentlemen raised the cry of fire and began arousing the residents of the block. Soon a large crowd of willing hands were present, but the flames had gained such headway that all efforts to extinguish it were useless, and their attention was turned towards removing the contents of the buildings endangered. The burning building stood in the middle of a wooden row which was surrendered at once to the mercy of the flames and bucket brigades formed to protect the bank building on the west and the residence of Mrs. Banks, Henry Bardeen and T. L. Stillman's shop on the north. Fortunately but little wind prevailed, or the fire could never have been confined to its present limits. It was by dint of hard work that these buildings were saved as they were. The building first to succumb to the flames was Croft's Hall, owned by James Croft and valued at \$1,500. Insured for \$500 in the North British. It was occupied by John Tall as a restaurant and grocery. Mrs. Tall and child were sleeping in the building at the time and awakened only in time to barely escape with their lives. Scarcely any thing of the contents could be saved owing to the heat and smoke that prevailed the rooms. There was an insurance of \$500 on the stock, which will not cover the loss by at least \$300 more.

The fire next communicated to the

new store of Marsden, Whittet & Co.

The fire next communicated to the new store of Marsden, Whittet & Co. containing flour, feed and agricultural implements. A portion of this stock was saved. The store and contents were covered by an insurance policy in the Hekla of \$1,275. If the whole amount is paid the company still figures their loss at \$500.

Adjoining on the west was the cigar shop and residence of W. R. Brown. The greatest share of the cigar stock and household goods were saved. The building was insured for \$700 in the Hekla, which has been paid in full. The loss will probably exceed this amount by over \$200. Nelt Taylor had some household goods stored in here, most of them were saved and the balance fully insured. East of the point where the fire started stood the blacksmith and wagon shop of H. O. Lintved, a brick structure. The carriages and a portion of the stock on hand were taken out, but all of the tools and materials were lost. The Hekla Co. held insurance on the building of \$900 and on stock etc. of \$1,200, which will probably be settled for \$1,800 or \$1,900. Mr. Lintved figures his loss at \$2,700.

The total loss by the fire as estimated by the sufferers aggregate \$9,800. If the insurance companies are liberal, the amount returned in insurance cannot exceed \$1,800 all of which except \$500 falls on the Hekla, of Madison. The agent, Geo. B. Leonard, was on the ground at the time of the fire and has been busy effecting settlements of the losses since that time.

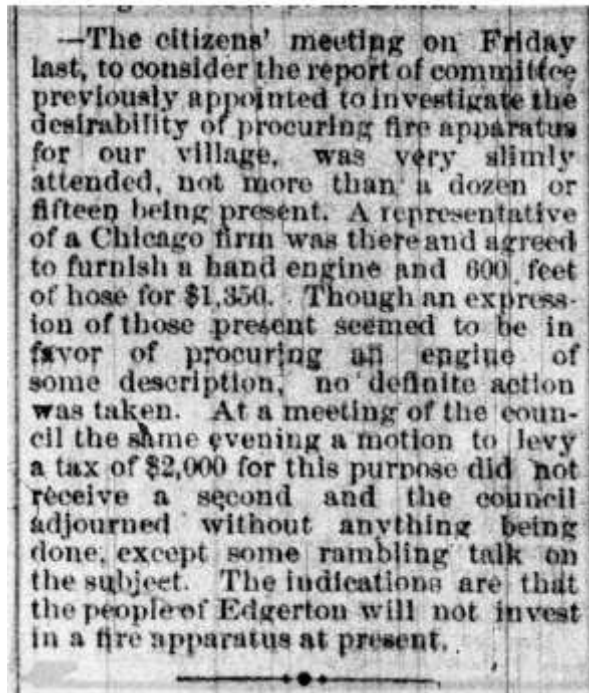
The scorching our village has received by this fire ought to be a reminder that our property is at the mercy of the firebrand in a time of conflagration.

A steam fire engine is not beyond the reach of a town having a business pretensions of Edgerton. The value of the property destroyed Tuesday morning would pay for and equip a good fire apparatus.

It is a question that might well be discussed at this time, whether the city of Edgerton cannot afford to purchase a steam fire engine.

In October of 1883 there was a citizens meeting to discuss the report of a committee that investigated procurement of a fire engine. There were only about a dozen people present, and though most seemed in favor of procuring a fire engine, no definite action was taken. The city council met later that evening and there was a motion to levy a tax of \$2,000 for the purpose of procuring a fire engine but it was not seconded and the council adjourned "without anything being done, except some rambling talk on the subject. The indications are that the people of Edgerton will not invest in a fire apparatus at present." (*Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*, October 12, 1883).

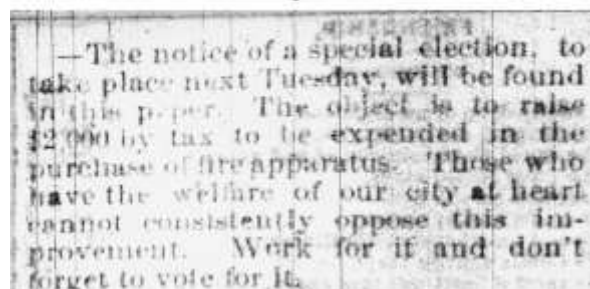
Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – October 12, 1883



—The citizens' meeting on Friday last, to consider the report of committee previously appointed to investigate the desirability of procuring fire apparatus for our village, was very slimly attended, not more than a dozen or fifteen being present. A representative of a Chicago firm was there and agreed to furnish a hand engine and 600 feet of hose for \$1,350. Though an expression of those present seemed to be in favor of procuring an engine of some description, no definite action was taken. At a meeting of the council the same evening a motion to levy a tax of \$2,000 for this purpose did not receive a second and the council adjourned without anything being done, except some rambling talk on the subject. The indications are that the people of Edgerton will not invest in a fire apparatus at present.

About a month later on November 6, 1883, there was a special election to raise \$2000 by taxes for the purchase of fire apparatus. The newspaper encouraged people to vote for it. The ballot actually had two questions: 1) to raise \$2,000 by tax to organize and equip a fire department, and 2) to issue bonds in the amount of \$2,000 for the purpose of organizing and equipping a fire department. The voter turnout was exceedingly light, and there was some confusion about whether the city wanted a vote on one or the other option, or if the city was really trying to raise a total of \$4,000. The newspaper reported that "The whole matter appears to be in something of a muddle, but we trust nothing serious will result to prevent the purchase of the apparatus." (*Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*, November 9, 1883).

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – November 2, 1883



—The notice of a special election, to take place next Tuesday, will be found in this paper. The object is to raise \$2,000 by tax to be expended in the purchase of fire apparatus. Those who have the welfare of our city at heart cannot consistently oppose this improvement. Work for it and don't forget to vote for it.

Special Election Notice.

STATE OF WISCONSIN, CITY OF EDGERTON.

Notice is hereby given that a Special Election will be held on Tuesday, November 6th 1883, at the office of R. H. Brown & Sons, in said city of Edgerton, to vote upon the following propositions, viz: First—To raise by tax the sum of Two Thousand dollars, to be used in erecting and equipping a fire department for said city, including a fire engine, hose, hooks, ladders and procuring water and such other materials as are necessary or proper for an efficient safeguard against fire. Second—To issue the bonds of said city of Edgerton to the amount of \$2,000 to be paid within five years from date, in five equal annual payments, with such rate of interest as the city Council may fix. Said Bonds to be sold and used exclusively in erecting and equipping a fire department for said city, including a fire engine, hose, hooks, ladders and procuring such other materials as are necessary or proper for an efficient safeguard against fire.

The polls of said Special Election will be opened at nine o'clock in the forenoon and closed at sundown, on the said 6th day of November, 1883.

Given under my hand, at the office of the clerk in said city, this 18th day of October, 1883.

Z. H. Brown,
City Clerk.

—The Special City Election, on the subject of levying a tax for the purchase of a fire apparatus took place on Tuesday and while the question was warmly discussed at the polls an exceedingly light vote was out, numbering only 184. There was two propositions presented, one for levying a tax of \$2,000 for purchase of fire apparatus, on which there was 89 votes cast "for" and 71 "against." The second was issuing bonds to the amount of \$2,000 for the same purpose, which was carried by a vote of 68 to 61. The question has been raised that the carrying of both proposition authorizes the raising of the sum of \$4,000; two thousand by direct tax and two thousand by the issuing of bonds, but it is not likely that the board so understood it. Then again it is claimed by the opponents, that the voting of both propositions in one ballot box would invalidate the election. The whole matter appears to be in something of a muddle, but we trust nothing serious will result to prevent the purchase of the apparatus.

Even though both propositions in the November 6, 1883 election were voted for, there was no action taken. In mid-December the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* learned that the city treasurer was not collecting the \$2,000 tax approved in the November election and they didn't know why. (*Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*, December 21, 1883)

—A call upon City Treasurer Robinson this week brought out the information that taxes are coming in slowly. The rate this year is a trifle under 12 mills, a decrease of nearly two mills from last year, a favor though small is none the less appreciated. W. W. Child was the first to call at the treasurer's office Monday and put up nearly \$110 for his receipt. We learn that the tax voted for fire apparatus was not put into the roll now being collected, and why we do not know.

1884

The following spring, the question of a bond to raise \$2,000 for the purpose of organizing and equipping a fire department was again put to the voters in the election on April 2, 1884. A light turnout of only 270 people voted on a dreary rainy day and this question was voted down by four votes (113 to 109).

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – April 4, 1884

The Spring Election.

The election Tuesday passed off quietly in this place. A drizzling rain set in during the morning which seemed to dampen the ardor of any inclined to electioneer at the polls. Practically there was but one ticket in the field, though there was a number of side issues and splits out, that effected nothing in the result but the election of the ticket regularly nominated in the caucus. Rather a light vote was polled, only 270 names appeared on the list. The proposition to vote bonds for fire apparatus was defeated by four votes.

The following is the result.

FOR MAYOR.

E. W. Babcock,	195
Matthew Croft,	69
Scattering,	5

ALDERMEN,

1st. ward—	
T. A. Perry,	180
Andrew Jenson,	84
C. R. Bentley,	26

2d ward—	
R. R. Brown,	141
W. H. Clark,	124

3d ward—			
G. W. Price,		270

CLERK

Z. H. Bowen,	269
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ASSESSOR.

E. R. Squires,	266
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TREASURER.

R. G. Robinson,	270
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JUSTICE.

J. P. Towne,	263
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Scattering,	4
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CONSTABLE.

Frank Lawler,	268
---------------------	-----

R. J. Maltpress,	1
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SEALER

James Duffy,	268
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For	issuing bonds,	109
Against	" "	113

The *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* had encouraged citizens to vote for it in the March 28, 1884 issue, stating "That a town which has in store upward of \$300,000 worth of tobacco, not to mention the other valuable property, ought to have some protection against fire, seems too self evident to need any argument to support the assertion."

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – March 28, 1884

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – March 28, 1884

—It may be seen by notice elsewhere that at the election on Tuesday next, the question of voting the sum of \$2,000 to be expended in fire apparatus will be submitted to a vote. The same question was voted upon at a special election held last fall and carried by a light vote, though the tax so authorized, was not levied by the council, for reasons we never fully understood. THE REPORTER is of the opinion that if the people of Edgerton have the best interest of the town at heart they will vote to carry this measure. That a town which has in store upward of \$300,000 worth of tobacco, not to mention the other valuable property, ought to have some protection against fire, seems too self evident to need any argument to support the assertion.

NOTICE.

At the ensuing annual election in the city of Edgerton to be held on the first Tuesday of April, 1884, the following proposition will be submitted to the electors of said city, viz:

To authorize the Common Council to raise the sum of two thousand dollars by issuing the bond of the city or otherwise, (provided that not more than one half of said amount shall be raised by tax the first year.) And in case said Common Council shall issue bonds, such bonds shall be made payable within five years, and to bear such rate of interest as the Common Council may fix.

That the amount of two thousand dollars so raised shall be expended by the Common Council at their earliest convenience for the purpose of organizing and equipping a fire department for said city, including a fire engine, hose, hooks, ladders, water supply and such other supplies and material as are necessary for an efficient safeguard against fire.

Z. H. BOWEN, City Clerk.

Dated at city of Edgerton this 22d day of March, 1884.

By order of the Common Council.

After the vote lost, The *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter's* editorial comment in the April 4, 1884, issue was "Perhaps after all, Edgerton doesn't need any fire department. But let a fire sweep over us and there is a chance for a change of sentiment."

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – April 4, 1884

—Perhaps after all, Edgerton does not need any fire department. But let a fire sweep over us and there is a chance for a change of sentiment.

It may be worth noting that on April 25, 1884, the city council levied a highway tax to be spent on improving the streets and highways leading to town. Perhaps if the citizens knew that was coming they didn't also want to pay for a fire engine in the same year.

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – April 25, 1884

—There is a prospect of better streets in our city. The council levied a highway tax of 5 mills at a late meeting to be expended on street work. The tax is a large one, but no more than is needed. A better investment cannot be made than improving the streets and highways leading to town.

The lack of support for a fire department was noticed by the neighboring city of Janesville. In the April 18, 1884, issue of the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*, an editorial from the Janesville Times was printed, stating “The neighboring city of Edgerton voted down a proposition to issue bonds for a fire engine, by four majority. Clearly the city of Edgerton doesn't intend to be caught with metropolitan ideas if she knows herself. Still we should suppose that a fire engine was among the necessities.”

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – April 18, 1884

—The neighboring city of Edgerton voted down a proposition to issue bonds for a fire engine, by four majority. Clearly the city of Edgerton doesn't intend to be caught with metropolitan ideas if she knows herself. Still, we should suppose that a fire engine was among the necessities. — Janesville Times.

In the June 27, 1884 issue of the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*, it was noted that “Evansville has a new Steam fire engine and is happy. The late fire has brought about a great change of opinion on the engine question. Edgerton will some day think different about it.” It appears that envy, pride, or competitiveness were being used to prod Edgerton to purchase a fire engine.

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – June 27, 1884

—Evansville has a new Steam fire engine and is happy. The late fire has brought about a great change of opinion on the engine question. Edgerton will some day think different about it.

On October 30, 1884, a fire destroyed the Edgerton jail, and a confined person died in the fire. The *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* published an editorial comment from the Janesville Gazette in the October 31, 1884 issue, "The people of the city of Edgerton having lost their jail by fire, being compelled to look on and see the fire destroy the entire building in which a half witted person was confined, and who perished, will now revive the discussion of procuring some kind of a machine to extinguish fires, and if it does not end in talk, similar to a previous agitation of the same subject, they will provide themselves with something better than hand grenades to fight the flames."

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – October 31, 1884

—The people of the city of Edgerton having lost their jail by fire, being compelled to look on and see the fire destroy the entire building in which a half witted person was confined, and who perished, will now revive the discussion of procuring some kind of a machine to extinguish fires, and if it does not end in talk, similar to a previous agitation of the same subject, they will provide themselves with something better than hand grenades to fight the flames.—Gazette.

Friday, January 26, 1979—THE JANESVILLE GAZETTE—Page 9E

Jail Destroyed in Fire

EDGERTON—In the late 1870s Edgerton's jail was first built. A fire destroyed that jail on the morning of Oct. 30, 1884. Andrew Berry discovered smoke pouring from the jail windows as he was on his way to open his wagon shop. Berry and others summoned help to try and break the lock on the door. When Deputy Sheriff C.L. Brown arrived, the lock was so badly mutilated that it couldn't be opened. The door was finally forced open allowing the men to remove the body of a prisoner. No attempt was made to save the building. A

cell placed in Andrew Berry's wagon shop was used as the city lock-up until the present jail was constructed.

The new jail, completed in December 1885, consisted of four brick and stone cells equipped with a steel door. There was only one window on the south side of the jail and no windows in the cells. A small kerosene lamp bracketed on the south wall furnished light enough for the officers to find their way around in the corridor. The cells were very dark and difficult to heat so the jail was often referred to as the "cooler."

1885

Throughout 1885, actions started being taken towards the creation of a fire department.

In February, 1885, members of the Edgerton Athletic Association organized a private fire company with a membership of between 40 and 50. The Athletic Association had only been created the month before. The following officers were elected:

- President - C.R. Bentley
- Secretary - Nelson Taylor
- Foreman - Alex Van Praag
- 1st Assistant - Chas. Whitcomb
- 2nd Assistant - P.C. Brown

The company called upon the City for ladders, pails, hooks, etc., so they would be able to respond to a fire. Again, the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* called upon the citizens to support and encourage the new fire company, adding "which the town sadly stands in need of." (*Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*, February 20, 1885)

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter - February 20, 1885

—The members of the Edgerton Athletic Association have organized a fire company with a membership of between 40 and 50. At a meeting recently held the following officers were elected: President, C. R. Bentley; Sec'y, Nelson Taylor; Foreman, Alex Van Praag; 1st. Ass't, Chas. Whitcomb; 2nd. Ass't, P. C. Brown. The company propose to call upon the city authorities for an outfit of ladders, pails, hooks, etc., and if their wishes are supplied, will be in shape to take charge of a fire should one occur. THE REPORTER is confident that such an organization can be of great help at a time of fire and the company deserves the hearty support and encouragement of our citizens. It is a move in the right direction towards providing some protection against fire, which the town sadly stands in need of.

A third election was held on April 7, 1885, to authorize the City of Edgerton to establish a fire department. The *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* wrote a lengthy editorial encouraging citizens to vote for it, stating "the prosperity of Edgerton is largely due to the tobacco trade" and that "tobacco dealers often complain that our town grants no protection against fire, and insurance rates are exhorbitant." It raised the question of what would happen to Edgerton if the tobacco trade left town, painting a pretty dire picture—property values would drop, income would drop, and businesses would have to close up shop.

Vote for a Fire Department.

A question to be submitted to the vote of the citizens of this village next Tuesday is that of authorizing the establishment of a fire department. The proposition is so plain and we believe that no intelligent voter will deny it, that the business prosperity of Edgerton is largely due to the tobacco trade, which has made this the leading market in the state. This trade now is pretty well established here, but other towns are holding out inducements and working to draw it from us. Besides tobacco dealers often complain that our town grants no protection against fire, and insurance rates are exhorbitant. All these influences are against us and the inquiry arises, cannot we do something to counteract them? The *Reporter* has before shown that a fire department and apparatus will do more towards cheapening insurance rates and at the same time furnish the protection so much in demand. It lies now with the voter to say whether we shall have these improvements or not. Since the trade has developed here our city has more than doubled in population and property increased in value in like proportion. Let us lose this trade and what becomes of our town and the value of this property? The laboring man, depending upon this trade for employment, as a large share of this people are, will find that his little home which he owns, worth to-day \$1000, not worth then \$500 and his occupation gone as well.

Lose their customers and our merchantile business is crippled and imperiled at once. Isn't it better to spend a few dollars in taxes for a fire department in encouragement of a tobacco trade which is the very life of our town, then to say no and allow other places to take away from us an opportunity for prosperity and improvement? Now this is a question that comes right home to every one who has property interests in Edgerton. It makes bread and butter for the laboring man and woman. It means profits to our business firms. It means prosperity to all of us. If our citizens have public spirit and enterprise, as we most earnestly hope they have, now is a good time to exhibit it. Let us start in on this question, and start right. Public necessities must be met, even if they do cost money, for it is expected that they would.

Really, is it desirable to have plenty of work, plenty of money and plenty of business in Edgerton, or not? Every person who reads these lines will vote, aye. Now will you do as much next Tuesday on the question of authorizing a fire department in this city?

The results of the April 1885 election were overwhelmingly in support of a fire engine with 268 in favor and 43 against.

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter - April 10, 1885

The Spring Election.	
Tuesday brought us about the usual weather for spring elections—cold, damp and rainy. There was very little excitement about the polls in this city though the fire engine and city hall project was quite warmly discussed at times. When the votes were counted those who opposed the improvement doubtless felt as though their time had been poorly spent. The votes on this question clearly show that the people of Edgerton are alive to the best interests of the town and THE REPORTER feels like congratulating them on their good sound sense.	
FOR COUNTY JUDGE	
Amos Prichard	66
FOR ATTORNEY JUDGE	
David Taylor	66
FOR MAYOR	
E. W. Babcock	131
W. P. Bentley	186
ALDERMEN	
1st ward—	
A. S. Flagg	132
Nelson Taylor	127
Andrew Jensen	125
2nd ward—	
R. J. Maltress	135
C. L. Burnham	118
John Kiser	191
H. H. Dickinson	212
3rd ward—	
Geo. Wildermuth	125
Patrick Monney	263
Geo. Price	122
CLERK	
Z. H. Bowen	350
ASSESSOR	
E. R. Squires	320
TREASURER	
C. F. Mabbett	106
R. G. Robinson	224
JUSTICE	
E. H. Smith	112
John Spencer	217
CONSTABLE	
Philip Welch	123
Frank Lawler	336
SALER	
James Duffey	261
For fire dept.	268
Against	43
For City Hall	268
Against	42
Whole number of votes cast 319.	

At the city council meeting a week later on April 14, 1885, the members listened to a presentation on fire engines, but no other action was taken towards forming a fire department.

In June, 1885, the City Council voted to raise money by bonds for building a city hall and the purchase of a fire engine, and a fourth (and final) election was held on July 9, 1885, to vote for a fire department, along with a city hall. "In order to dispel any doubt that might arise upon previous proceedings it was thought best that another election be held, result carried out strictly, according to law" (*Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*, July 3, 1885). The bonds were a total of \$7,000, with \$4,000 to be used to organize and equip a fire department--including the purchase of a fire engine--and \$3,000 to be used to erect a building that would house City Hall as well as an engine house and jail.

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – June 19, 1885

—The city council met in adjourned session Monday evening and allowed several bills. The specifications and contract for the new iron bridges was approved. The application for a pharmacist license by Willson Bros. was also granted. The council voted to raise money by bonding the city, for building a city hall and the purchase of a fire engine.

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – July 3, 1885

—From a notice published elsewhere it will be observed that the city council has ordered a special election, upon the question of fire department, city hall, etc. In order to dispel any doubt that might arise upon previous proceedings it was thought best that another election be held, result carried out strictly, according to law. The election will occur next Thursday, July 9th. The friends of a fire department ought not to allow the election to go by default in not voting.

Special Election.

Take notice that on the 9th day of July, 1885, in pursuance of a resolution of the Common Council of the city of Edgerton, a special election for said city will be had, at which election the following questions will be submitted to the electors of said city. "Shall the Common Council of the city of Edgerton be authorized to issue the bonds of said city, to the amount of seven thousand dollars (\$7,000), for the purpose of borrowing the sum of seven thousand dollars (\$7,000), to be used and expended as follows:

Four thousand dollars (\$4,000) to be used and expended by said city in the establishment, organizing and equipping a fire department for said city, and in purchasing a steam fire engine, hose, hooks, ladders, and in furnishing necessary materials and supplies, including a supply of water for an efficient protection against fire. Three thousand dollars (\$3,000) to be used and expended by said city, in purchasing land and erecting a building for the use of said city as a city hall, engine house, and jail. That said bonds shall become due and payable as follows, respectively. "One thousand dollars (\$1,000) to become due on February 1st, 1886; one thousand dollars (\$1,000) to become due on each succeeding first day of February for six years thereafter."

That said bonds shall bear interest at a rate not exceeding five (5) per cent per annum, provided that not more than one fifth of said amount shall be raised by tax the first year after said bonds are issued; that the form of ballot to be used at said election shall be as follows, respectively.

To authorize the Common Council of the city of Edgerton to issue bonds to the amount of seven thousand dollars (\$7,000) for a fire department, engine etc., city hall, engine house and jail.

Against the issue of bonds of the city of Edgerton for fire department, engine etc., city hall, engine house and jail." That said election will be held on the 9th day of July, 1885. That the polling place at said election will be at the office of G. W. Price, in said city of Edgerton. That the polls of said election will be kept open from nine o'clock in the forenoon until five o'clock in the afternoon.

Dated at Edgerton, Wis., this 1st day of July, 1885.

Z. H. BOWEN,
City Clerk.

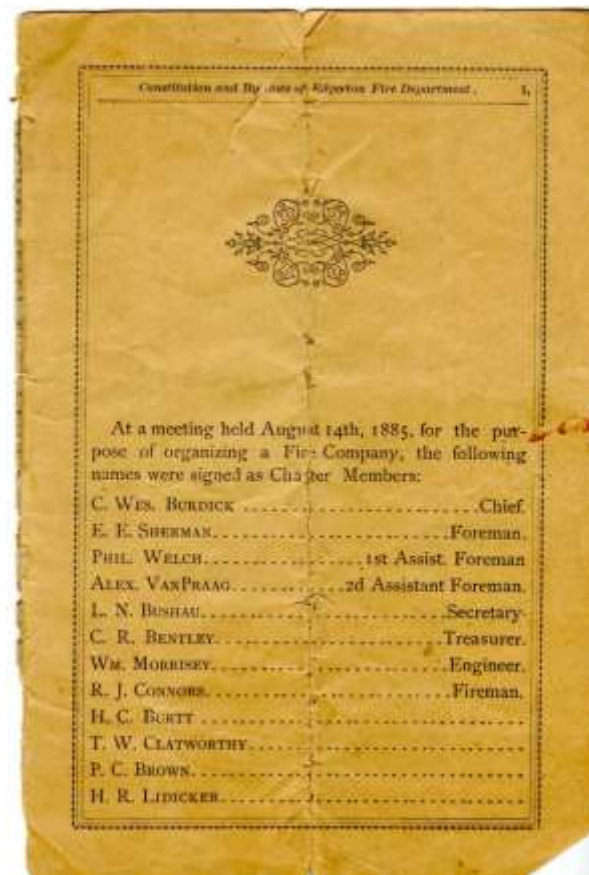
The Edgerton Fire Company that had formed in February, met on Friday July 31, 1885, and they recommended to the city council that C. Wes. Burdick be named chief of the department. The company continued to meet regularly on Friday evenings.

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – August 7, 1885

—At a meeting of the Edgerton Fire Company last Friday evening the name of C. Wes. Burdick was recommended to the city council as chief of the department. The company will meet every Friday evening at 8 o'clock at Chas. Bentley's warehouse.

Note: There are previous publications stating that George W. Price was the first fire chief in Edgerton in 1883. As you'll see here, there was no fire department until 1885 and C. Wes Burdick was named the first chief of the privately organized fire company in 1885. You'll see further on that Price was the first chief of the "newly re-organized", officially incorporated department in 1894. Read more about these men in the chapter on Fire Chiefs.

The "Constitution and By-laws of the Edgerton Fire Department" show that on August 14, 1885, a meeting was held for the purpose of organizing a Fire Company, namely "The Edgerton Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1".



The following names were signed as Charter Members on August 14, 1885:

- C. Wes. Burdick, Chief
- E. E. Sherman, Foreman
- Phil Welch, 1st Assistant Foreman
- Alex VanPraag, 2nd Assistant Foreman
- L. N. Bushau, Secretary
- C. R. Bentley, Treasurer
- Wm. Morrissey, Engineer
- R. J. Connors, Fireman
- H. C. Burtt
- T. W. Clatworthy
- P. C. Brown
- H. R. Lidicker

The City Council approved Burdick as chief at their August 13, 1885, meeting, and approved the full list of the 12 charter members at their August 17, 1885, meeting.

Common Council Proceedings.

Council met Aug. 13th in special session; members all present.

The proposition submitted by the La France Engine Co. and Button Engine Co. were read. A memorial from the citizens of Edgerton, advocating the purchase of the LaFrance engine, was also read. A communication from Prince & Eaton was presented, read, and laid upon the table. Ald. Dickinson, chairman of committee on fire department, reported in favor of the purchase of the LaFrance engine and outfit as per terms of the proposition. Ald. Price moved that the report be accepted. Ald. Dickinson, Kizer, Price and Mooney voted aye; Ald. Jenson and Taylor voted no. Ald. Price moved that an order be drawn in favor of the LaFrance Co. for \$4,000, less the value of two hose carts, \$250, which was adopted. Ald. Mooney moved that C. W. Burdick be appointed chief of fire department for term ending May 1st, 1886; carried. A petition of fire department for recognition was referred to committee on fire department. Council adjourned.

Aug. 17th—Council met in special meeting to consider the matter of building city hall, engine house and jail, and provide for water supply. All members present. A list of 12 names, proposed as charter members of the fire department, was read, and on mention of Ald. Price, approved. A request of Taylor & Squires, asking permission to sink a well and remove the side walk in front of their warehouse, was presented and granted. Ald. Kizer moved that the committee on building be requested to prepare plans for city hall, etc., and report at next meeting; motion adopted. Ald. Price moved that committee on fire department be instructed to make a survey from Culton's pond north to Fulton street, thence down Fulton to Main street; also from the brick-yard pond along the south line of depot grounds to a point opposite Dickinson's warehouse, and make estimates for water supply along said lines, and report at next meeting. The Council then adjourned.

In August of 1885, there were additional presentations and demonstrations of fire engines from LaFrance and Prince & Eaton, including a side by side test of these two. The city alderman were torn between the two. Leading citizens started a petition to purchase the LaFrance.

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – August 7, 1885

—The Eaton & Prince fire engine was given a trial test Monday afternoon on Front street. The engine is of a new pattern, same as that owned in Brodhead, built we believe with the view of combining the virtues of the high priced engines in a machine that is nearly one half cheaper. When everything had been prepared for a quick fire, the word was given and match applied. In five minutes the whistle was sounded and the pump started. At eight minutes water was thrown from 500 feet of hose. Tests were made with 1,000 feet of hose, two lines of hose and the other usual methods in engine trials. As far as we are able to judge the machine did fairly well but there seems to be a variety of opinions as to its merits among our citizens. No one however, expected it to equal the workings of the standard engines. We are informed that a La France engine has been sent from the factory here and when it arrives a trial of that engine will be given, probably sometime early next week.

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – August 14, 1885

—The fire engine test between the LaFrance and Prince & Eaton engines last Wednesday afternoon drew quite a number from Stoughton and Janesville to witness the exhibition of power between the two engines. The La France engine threw 1 1/2 inch stream of water through 700 feet of hose a distance of 193 feet and also threw water 160 feet into the air, as estimated by the Janesville firemen. The Prince & Eaton engine did remarkably well, throwing the same sized stream 150 feet. Everybody seemed well pleased with the LaFrance engine and think that the city can do no better in the purchase of an engine. We are informed that the aldermen can not yet quite decide which engine to purchase, that some favor one thing and another something else, while a majority are in favor of buying the LaFrance. A paper is being circulated among our leading citizens and those in favor of buying the LaFrance engine are signing their names.

It appears the City purchased the LaFrance engine as a year later at the August 9, 1886, City Council meeting they approve to pay a bill for the LaFrance engine.

The following accounts were allowed;	
H. O. Linvedt, blacksmithing...	\$ 8 30
J. Crittenden, lighting lamps...	20 00
Wm. Barnes, street work to 7th	
inst.....	190 61
La France Engine Co.....	1750 00
On motion an order was drawn in favor of W. A. Morrissey for service as engineer for the months of May, June and July, \$30.	
On motion of Alderman Lawler, an order was drawn in favor of Ald. Jensen for \$2.45 for stone.	
The council then adjourned.	
T. H. BOWEN, Clerk.	

The Edgerton Fire Company responded to a fire on November 6, 1885. They had to wait for a team of horses to be brought from a stable to pull the steam engine, then drive to a cistern for water, but the streets to the cistern were almost impassable and they got stuck several times. The fire had completely enveloped the building before it was noticed so the Fire Company likely wouldn't have been able to save much anyway. The newspaper noted "It is hardly to be expected that the fire company can make very good time in getting out to a fire so long as the engine is kept in one place and hose carts, etc., in another and the location continually being shifted, or until the cisterns are graded so that the engine can get up to them." Again, pushing the need for a full-fledged fire department.

—Shortly after midnight Sunday night the alarm of fire was sounded, which soon brought upon the streets a good share of the residents of the town. When the alarm was first given the southern portion of the town was lit up by the flames, which proceeded from a small unoccupied residence two doors south of the old Finney House. The fire company rolled out the engine and as soon as a team could be brought from Brown's stable, attempted to reach the cistern located in that part of town, but was stuck several times, owing to the almost impassable condition of several of the streets now being graded. Before water could be thrown the entire building was consumed, in fact, was entirely enveloped in flames before the fire was discovered by Jerry Crittenden, special night watchman. It is hardly to be expected that the fire company can make very good time in getting out to a fire so long as the engine is kept in one place and hose carts, etc., in another, and the location continually being shifted, or until the cisterns are graded so that the engine can get up to them. The property destroyed was owned by Mrs. S. A. Palmiter. The building was old and about to be moved away. The loss is mostly covered by an insurance of \$200 in the Rockford Co. There is but little doubt but the building was set on fire, being vacant at the time. Elias Dawe, who drove past the place late in the evening, is certain that he saw lights in the building at that time.

By December, 1885, the new city hall building which would also house the fire department was complete and the fire engine and hose carts were moved into the fire department. This building also had three jail cells, and the second floor served as the police court room, city council room and city clerk's office. This building still stands today at 16 Burdick Street.

Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter – December 11, 1885

—The city hall building is so far completed as to receive the fire engine and hose carts. A new heater for supplying the engine boiler with warm water has arrived and is now in working order. The lockup portion is fitted with three cells built securely with solid walls and iron doors. Each also contains iron bedsteads. It is intended that the lockup will furnish as safe and secure a repository for offenders as is necessary. The second story is arranged for a police court room, City clerk's office and council room. Altogether the building is an ornament and credit to the town.



A new fire alarm bell was purchased in January, 1886, and placed in the engine house tower, at a cost of roughly \$100. That bell still stands today, in front of the current fire station at 621 N. Main Street.

—The Common Council met Monday evening and allowed miscellaneous bills to the amount of \$200. A committee was appointed to purchase a fire alarm bell, cost not to exceed \$100.

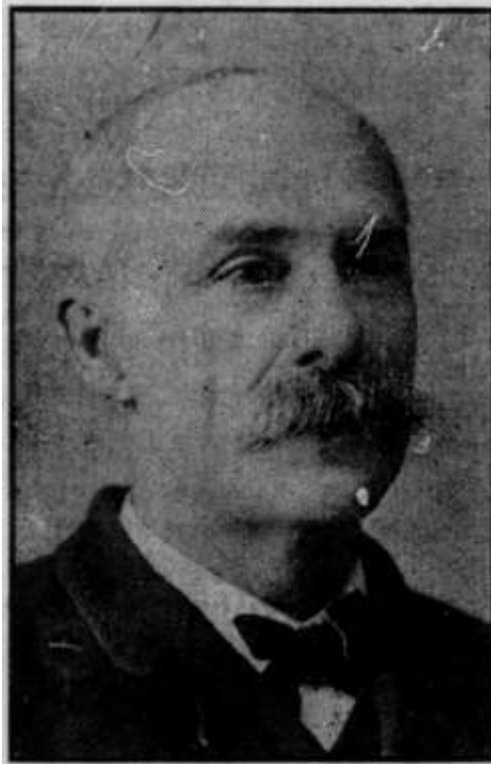
—The new fire alarm bell, which the city has purchased to be placed in the engine house tower, has arrived. It weighs something over 500 pounds, and can be heard anywhere in the city. The cost is a trifle over \$100.

It took about two years to create but the City of Edgerton finally had a fire department by the end of 1885.

As was common at that time, the City of Edgerton owned the physical assets of the fire department, such as the engines, ladders, hoses, and the station to hold them. The firefighters themselves were still members of the private fire company.

In addition to all the efforts by the editor of the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*, Frederic William Coon, to encourage the creation and support of a fire department, another resident who served on the City Council was also a strong advocate for the new City Hall and Fire Department. His name was John Murwin Kizer. His obituary in the May 20, 1921 issue of the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* recalled his efforts to create a fire department, a cistern for water, and obtain an engine.

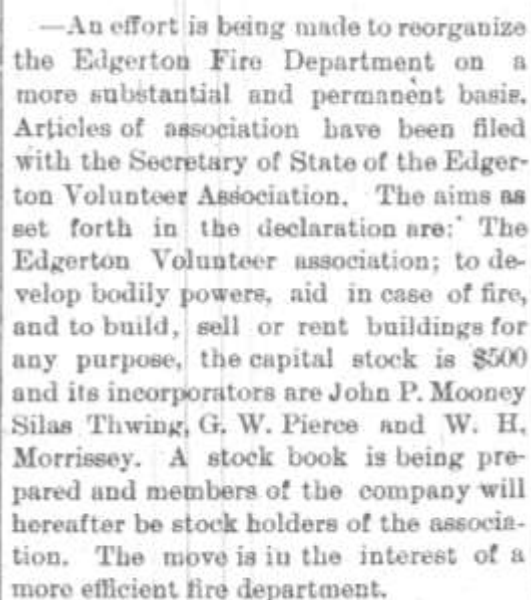
John Murwin Kizer



At the time Wm Bentley was the mayor of this city, Mr. Kizer served two terms on the city council. He was one of the leaders in the movement to build a city hall and organize a fire company in the city, and thru his efforts mainly a engine was secured, and the storage cistern established for the protection of the property against fire.

1893-1894 Re-Organization

Eight years later, during 1893 and culminating on February 1, 1894, the Edgerton Fire Department was reorganized “on a more substantial and permanent” basis (*Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*, October 20, 1893).



—An effort is being made to reorganize the Edgerton Fire Department on a more substantial and permanent basis. Articles of association have been filed with the Secretary of State of the Edgerton Volunteer Association. The aims as set forth in the declaration are: The Edgerton Volunteer association; to develop bodily powers, aid in case of fire, and to build, sell or rent buildings for any purpose, the capital stock is \$500 and its incorporators are John P. Mooney, Silas Thwing, G. W. Pierce and W. H. Morrissey. A stock book is being prepared and members of the company will hereafter be stock holders of the association. The move is in the interest of a more efficient fire department.

On April 20, 1893, a committee of five members voted to draw up a new set of bylaws. The five elected were Harry Toynton, Ben Springer, J.P. Mooney, George Ogden and George Green. The new bylaws were to be read at three meetings—they were read at September 7 and September 21, 1893 meetings and at the January 4, 1894 meeting.

At the October 5, 1893, meeting a committee was formed to charter the fire company. J. P. Mooney, Silas Thwing and W. H. Morrissey were appointed to the committee. The charter cost \$27.35. At the October 19, 1893, meeting a member of the department, C. W. Clatworthy, was appointed to work with a member of the city council to take an inventory of the property of the fire company and appraise its value.

Articles of Organization had been filed with the Secretary of State, and on October 14th, 1893, the “Articles of Organization” for the “Edgerton Volunteer Fire Company” were signed. The capital stock was \$500, which consisted of 250 shares valued at \$2.00 each. The incorporators were John P. Mooney, Silas Thwing, G.W. Price and W. H. Morrissey. The *Edgerton Reporter* re-printed a copy of the “Articles of Organization” in their centennial issue on June 22, 1983, shown below.

Articles of Organization

Know All Men By these presents, that the undersigned, adult residents of the State of Wisconsin, do hereby make, sign and agree to the following:

ARTICLES OF ORGANIZATION.

ARTICLE FIRST—The undersigned have associated, and do hereby associate themselves together for the purpose of forming a corporation under chapter 98 of the Revised Statutes of the State of Wisconsin, for the year A. D. 1878, and the acts amendatory thereof and supplementary thereto, the business and purpose of which corporation shall be For the improvement of the

city of Milwaukee and for the purpose of extending
and in case of fire also for building a bridge
or other buildings of any kind

which said business is to be carried on within the State of Wisconsin, and especially within the County of Waukesha in said State.

ARTICLE SECOND—The name of said corporation shall be Edgemoor
Company and its location shall be in the
City of Waukesha in the County of Waukesha in the State of Wisconsin.

ARTICLE THIRD—The capital stock of said corporation shall be Twenty thousand
dollars and the same shall consist of 200 shares,
each of which said shares shall be of the par or face value of one dollar.

ARTICLE FOURTH—The general officers of said corporation shall be a President, Vice President,
Secretary and Treasurer, and the Board of Directors shall consist of
five stockholders.

ARTICLE FIFTH—The principal duties of the President shall be to preside at all meetings of the
Board of Directors, and to have a general supervision of the affairs of the corporation. and
to preside at the meetings of the corporation

The principal duties of the Vice President shall be to discharge the duties of the President in the
event of the absence or disability, for any cause whatever, of the latter.

The principal duties of the Secretary shall be to countersign all deeds, leases and conveyances executed
by the corporation, after the seal of the corporation thereon, and to keep all other papers as shall be
required or directed to be made, and to keep a record of the proceedings of the Board of Directors, and
to safely and systematically keep all books, papers, records and documents belonging to the corporation, or
in any way pertaining to the business thereof.

The principal duties of the Treasurer shall be to keep and account for all moneys, credits and property,
of any and every nature, of the corporation, which shall come into his hands, and to keep an accurate
account of all moneys received and disbursed, and proper vouchers for moneys disbursed, and to render such
accounts, statements and inventories of moneys received and disbursed, and of money and property on hand,
and generally of all matters pertaining to this office, as shall be required by the Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors may provide for the appointment of such additional officers as they may deem
for the best interests of the corporation.

Whenever the Board of Directors may so order, the offices of Secretary and Treasurer may be held by the
same person.

The said officers shall perform such additional or different duties as shall from time to time be imposed
or required by the Board of Directors, or as may be prescribed from time to time by the by-laws.

ARTICLE SIXTH—Only persons holding stock according to the regulations of the corporation shall be
members of it.

ARTICLE SEVENTH—These articles may be amended by resolution setting forth such amendment or
amendments, adopted at any meeting of the stockholders by a vote of at least two-thirds of all the stock of
said corporation then outstanding.

In Witness Whereof, We have hereunto set our hands, this 14th day of
October A. D. 1893.

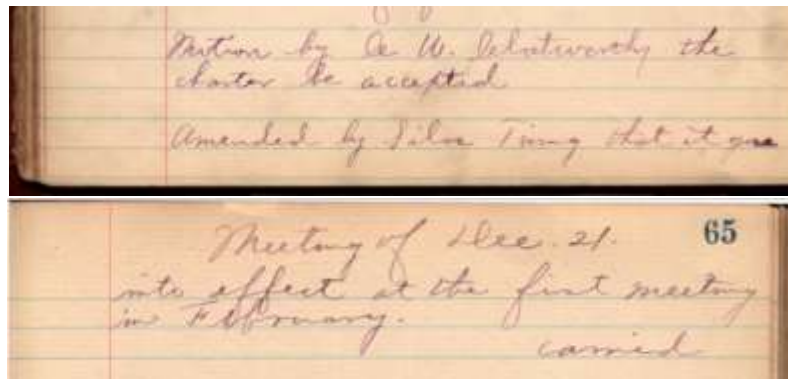
SIGNED IN PRESENCE OF

Ch. Brumbaugh

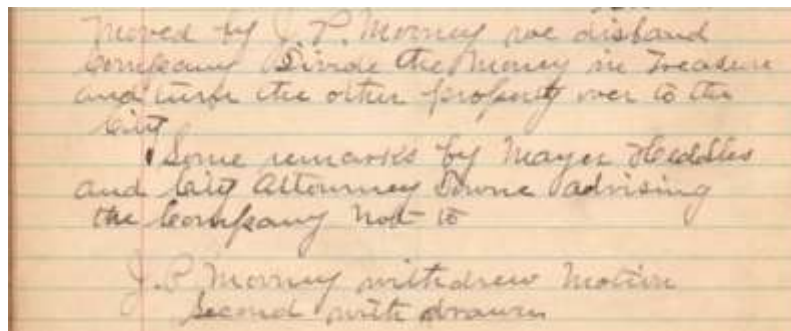
Geo. J. Allen

John P. Dorney
John Dorney
E. H. Dorney
H. H. Dorney

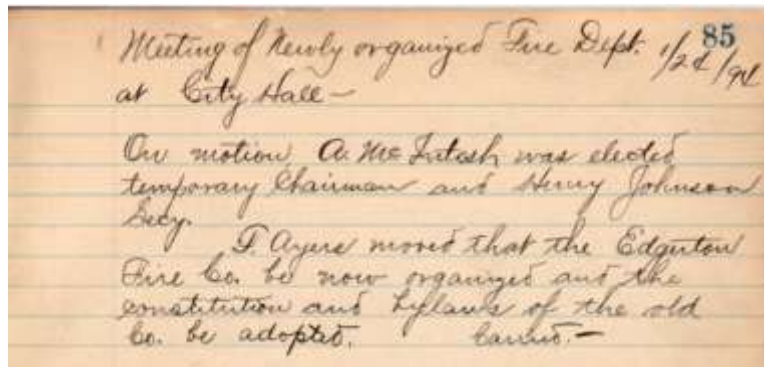
At the December 21, 1893, meeting of the fire company, a motion was made and carried to accept the new charter and have it take effect at the first meeting in February.



The January 4, 1894, meeting appeared to function as normal, with election of officers as usual. However, the January 18th meeting had a lot of discussion and motions for and against the new charter. At one point there was even a motion to disband the company and turn the property over to the City, but Mayor Heddles and City Attorney Towne advised them not to.



A few days later on January 24, 1894, the Fire Department met with the City Council at City Hall. A motion was made and carried "that the Edgerton Fire Co. be now organized and the constitution and bylaws of the old Co. be adopted." Twenty-nine new members were accepted, and new elections were held for officers of the company which resulted in many positions being filled by men other than the ones elected earlier in the month at the January 4, 1894 meeting. Fire department elections for "street officers" (chief, foremen, hose company, hook and ladder) were held over until a meeting on February 1st, 1894. At that meeting, George W. Price was elected chief and the department voted to "furnish the City papers with list of Officers as elected."



At that same meeting the City Council accepted the new fire company and disbanded the old company. A new Ordinance, No. 36, was passed officially disbanding the old Edgerton Steam Engine Fire Co. No. 1, and creating The Edgerton Volunteer Fire Department.

Common Council Proceedings.

EDGERTON, WIS., Jan. 24, 1894.

Special meeting of the Common Council at the City Clerk's office pursuant to due notice by the mayor.

Present, Mayor Heddles; Sups. Coon and Marsden; Ald. Ayers, McIntosh, Vaughn, Hoon, and Clatworthy. Absent, Sup. McInnes and Ald. Tallard.

A petition was presented by 25 citizens asking that they be organized as a volunteer fire department. On motion the petition was granted.

Sup. Coon presented an ordinance disbanding the Edgerton Steam Fire Engine Co. No. 1. Ordinance passed. Ayes, 7; nays, none.

On motion of Ald. McIntosh the city attorney was instructed to notify the president, secretary and treasurer of Edgerton Steam Fire Engine Co. No. 1 not to sign any orders or pay any moneys until further notice.

On motion of Ald. McIntosh the meeting was adjourned to the City Hall. Motion carried and the council so adjourned.

Sup. Marsden moved that the rules and by-laws of the Edgerton Steam Fire Engine Co. No. 1 be adopted for the new company. Carried.

Ald. McIntosh moved that Sup. Marsden, Ald. Ayers and the city attorney be a committee to revise and amend the rules and by-laws of the fire department. Carried.

On motion the council adjourned.

HENRY JOHNSON,

City Clerk.

Ordinance 36 was published In the January 26, 1894, issue of the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*.

Ordinance No. 36.

ORGANIZING A FIRE DEPARTMENT.

The Common Council of the City of Edgerton do ordain as follows:

SEC. 1. The Edgerton Steam Engine Fire Co, No. 1 is hereby declared dissolved and disbanded; all, each, every and all organization or body of individuals hitherto acting as a fire department of said city of Edgerton shall cease to exist and their services as such organization are hereby dispensed with.

SEC. 2.—In lieu thereof there is hereby organized The Edgerton Volunteer Fire Department, to consist of not less than 25 or more than 50 members to be elected, organized and managed in accordance with such rules and regulations as the Common Council may adopt and shall from time to time be enacted by it in relation to the organization, government and control thereof.

SEC. 3. The duty of such Edgerton Volunteer Fire Department to be as follows:

To have control of and manage the fire engine, hose and carts, hook and ladders and trucks and other paraphernalia owned by the City of Edgerton, used in extinguishing fires. To aid in extinguishing fires: to act in such manner and perform such duties as the Common Council of the City of Edgerton may direct.

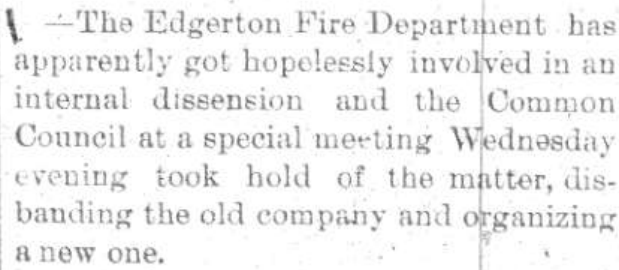
SEC. 4. This ordinance shall be and remains in force from and after its passage and publication.

Passed by the Common Council of the City of Edgerton, Wis., this 24th day of Jan. A. D. 1874, Attest.

HENRY JOHNSON,
City Clerk.

W. S. HEDDLES,
Mayor.

The *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* also noted there was an internal issue going on with the Fire Department in the January 26, 1894, issue.



—The Edgerton Fire Department has apparently got hopelessly involved in an internal dissension and the Common Council at a special meeting Wednesday evening took hold of the matter, disbanding the old company and organizing a new one.

It is not known why the department had to re-organize but there are some possible reasons. Early in 1893 the state Legislature revamped the charter for general laws for city governments and perhaps there was a need for the fire department to be officially incorporated. Possibly they needed to become an official corporation in order to receive the “2% dues” tax which the State collected from all fire insurance premiums and distributed to municipalities for their fire departments. There simply may have been members that wanted a different organization structure for the fire department (note there was a large turnover in membership at that time).

The original meeting minutes from the department document the activity that occurred during this time period, but no specific reason is mentioned.

After the re-organization, there was still an issue of what to do with money in the old fire company’s treasury. This was discussed at the City Council meetings on March 6, March 20, and April 10 of 1894. It was decided to pay them for the value of the property that had been inventoried, and it was to be divided equally among the members in good standing after any debts had been paid.

Common Council Proceedings.

EDGERTON, Wis., Mch. 6. 1894.

Council met in regular session, Mayor Heddles presiding.

Present—Sup's. Coon, Marsden and McInnes, Ald's. Ayers, Hoen and Clatworthy. Absent—Ald's. McIntosh, Vaughn and Tallard.

Minutes of last meeting were read and approved.

Sup. Coon offered an ordinance licensing dogs, which on motion was passed. Ayes 5, nay 1. Sup. McInnes voted no.

The committee appointed, to revise and amend rules and by-laws of the Fire Department, made report which was read and adopted.

Ald Clatworthy moved that \$200 of the January fire tax be placed with the amount in hands of Treasurer of old Fire Department and the whole amount divided equally among members of the old company. On motion of Sup. Coon an amendment was offered, that the amount now in the hands of the Treasurer of the old Fire Department be divided among members of the Fire Dept. in lieu of any claim against the city for services or property held by them. On vote amendment allowed. Motion as amended carried.

On motion of Sup. Coon the City Attorney was authorized to confer with Mrs. Goss in regard to her claim against the City.

Petitions for sidewalks on Fulton, Mechanics, Rollin, Broadway and Henry streets and electric lights on Broadway and Chauser streets, were received and referred to St. Committee.

Bills were allowed as follows:

T. Cook, street work.....	\$11.80
" " stone.....	58.50
B. Springer, marshal.....	51.82
W. H. Morrissey city engineer....	23.00

Common Council Proceedings.

EDGERTON, Wis., Mch. 20. 1894.

Council met in regular session, Mayor Heddles presiding. Present—Supervisors Coon, Marsden and McInnes; Alds. Ayers, McIntosh, Vaughn and Hoen. Absent—Alds. Clatworthy and Tallard. Minutes of last meeting read and approved.

Street Committee made report recommending that sidewalks be built in block 29, corner Mechanics and Fulton Streets and on Henry St. from Pollard's to Mrs. Rooney's. Sup. Marsden moved adoption of the report and the Street Commissioner be instructed to notify property owners to construct the walks. The motion was carried.

Sup. Marsden moved that a 32 candle power incandescent street light be ordered placed at intersection of Broadway and Chauser Streets and one at bridge on Chauser Street. Motion carried.

A communication was received from T. E. Joyce in reference to overtaxation, which was read and on motion referred to city attorney.

St. Com. Cook addressed the council recommending a slight change in the grade on Swift St. On motion of Sup. Coon the matter was referred to the Street Committee.

Attorney Metcalf, in behalf of members of the old fire department, addressed the council in reference to division of funds belonging to fire department. On motion of Sup. Coon the matter was referred to a committee composed of Ald. McIntosh, Sup. McInnes, Ald. Hoen to report at next meeting.

Bills were allowed as follows:

T. Cook, street work.....	\$24.45
J. D. Hain estate.....	4.75
F. E. Ash, stationery.....	3.15
R. H. Gile, election blanks.....	5.83
W. Hakes, repairing hook and ladder truck.....	2.29
E. C. Hojkins, Insurance.....	30.00
C. L. Burnham, ".....	15.00
L. H. Towne ".....	15.00
Henry Johnson, ".....	15.10
Total.....	\$115.43

On motion the council adjourned to meet Monday evening April 2d

HENRY JOHNSON,
City Clerk.

THE
WISCONSIN TOBACCO REPORTER.

EDGERTON, WIS. FRIDAY. APR. 13, '94

Common Council Proceedings.

EDGERTON, Wis., April 10, 1894.

Council met pursuant to adjournment of April 2d, Mayor Heddies, presiding. Present, Sups. Coon and McInnes; Ald. Ayers, McIntosh, Vaughn and Hoen. Absent, Sups. Marsden; Ald. Clatworthy and Tallard. Minutes of last meeting read and approved.

The following report was received and on motion adopted:

To the Mayor and Common Council:

Your committee, to whom was referred the matter of reporting the best means of making a settlement with the old Fire Company, beg to make the following report;

We have examined the books of the treasurer and find that a considerable amount of the moneys of the fire company have been expended for purposes not necessary for the maintenance of the company. From investigation we are led to believe that the old company are only wanting what they consider the property that they have accumulated to be worth, and they will be satisfied with the payment of same. We would therefore recommend that the City Council reconsider its former proposition granting the company \$161.13 (that being the amount of cash in the treasury of the old company) and grant them pay for the property as per attached inventory, (amounting to \$218.15) to be divided equally among the members in good standing, after paying the debts of the old company and the balance now in the fire company treasury be paid over to the city.

A. MCINTOSH,
ANDREW HOEN,
H. MCINNES,
Committee.

Ald. McIntosh moved that the motion made March 6th, relating to amount voted to old fire department be reconsidered. Carried.

Ald. McIntosh moved that the amount of inventory (\$218.15) be paid the old fire department subject to the conditions of the report. Carried, ayes, 6.

For nearly 100 years, the fire department operated on the basis of this new organization. In 1992 the “Edgerton Fire Protection District” was created (which included the Towns of Albion, Fulton, Porter and Sumner as well as the City of Edgerton), absorbing the equipment from the City of Edgerton, and the volunteer firefighters and EMTs.

The legacy of the Edgerton Volunteer Fire Company lives on today as the “Edgerton Fire and Rescue Association” in which current and former firefighters continue fundraising activities to help purchase equipment for the Edgerton Fire Protection District.