

The Annual Firemen's Ball

For over 130 years, the members of the Edgerton Fire Department hosted an annual dance to raise money for the fire department to purchase needed supplies and equipment.

The first Annual Firemen's Ball, was held on Thursday, October 15, 1885, at Union Hall, in Edgerton, Wisconsin. The Edgerton Fire Company had just officially formed in August of that year, and the building that was to house City Hall along with the Fire Department wouldn't be completed until December. This ball was to raise funds for the new Fire Department. *The Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* promoted the community support in its issues of October 2 and October 9, 1885.

—Bills are issued announcing the first Fireman's Ball, to be given in Union Hall Oct. 15th. The boys hope to be able, from the proceeds of the party, to purchase supplies for the company and call upon the public to turn out and give them a lift.

—The Fireman's ball that takes place on next Thursday evening, Oct. 15th, promises to be a very pleasant affair. The committee in charge have added another new feature in offering two beautiful prizes to be given to the best lady and gentleman waltzers in the hall, which are on exhibition at Arthur Bros' store window. The arrangement committee have also prepared a cloak and coat room and a ladies' dressing room. Arrangements have also been made with Mr. Doty of the United States hotel for supper, which will be served reasonable. So if you wish to have a good time and see your fire department in good working order, come to the fireman's first grand ball. There will be an exhibition and drill by the entire company on next Thursday afternoon at 3 p. m. sharp. So all turn out. Tickets \$1.00

Arrangements had been made for the U.S. Hotel to serve supper prior to the dance. For the first twenty five years or so a supper was often offered by a hotel to people prior to going to the dance.

The first ball was deemed a success, "one of the most successful parties ever given in this city", and the department raised over \$125. That would be the equivalent of about \$3,400 in the year 2020.

—The Edgerton Fire Company's ball last Thursday evening was one of the most successful parties ever given in this city. Everything passed off smoothly under the good management. The supper at the U. S. Hotel was praiseworthy. The prizes offered to the lady and gentleman waltzers were awarded to Miss Sophie Baalen, of

Chicago, and Charlie Lusk, of this city. The company net over \$125 by the venture.

The officers and members of the fire department wish to tender their thanks to all who assisted them in making their ball a grand success, especially E. W. Babcock for the free use of his hall.

A few months later on February 18, 1886, the fire department sponsored another dance, this one a masquerade ball.

—There will be a grand masquerade ball given by the Firemen at Royal Hall, on February 18th.

—Remember the Firemen give their grand masquerade ball Feb. 22nd. This will be the big time of the season.

—Two weeks in succession THE REPORTER has given the date of the Fireman's masquerade ball on the 22d, while in fact the date fixed upon is Thursday evening, Feb. 18th, as may be seen by the large posters sent out from this office. The company offer liberal prizes for the best characters represented, so that there ought to be strong competition. A costumer from Milwaukee has been engaged to be present and supply those desiring to rent costumes for the occasion. The management of this party promise to make it the event of the season. Tickets, \$1.00. Ladies in mask, free. Spectators, 25 cents.

—The chief attraction of next week will be the masquerade given by the Edgerton fire department next Thursday evening. At 3 P. M. on that day a contest between the hose companies, for a medal given by our citizens, will take place. At 8 o'clock sharp the party will open with a grand march led by the Edgerton band in uniform. It is expected that every one in costume will be on the floor at that time. This party promises to be the most attractive masquerade ever given in this city. Come everybody.

The masquerade ball was also considered a success, both by the number of people in attendance as well as financially.

—The Firemen's masquerade last Thursday evening in point of attendance fulfilled the expectations of those having it in charge. Fully a hundred maskers were on the floor and twice that number of spectators present. Many striking costumes were worn making the party decidedly interesting to all participants. The committee awarded the prizes for the finest costumes to Mrs. Frank Wyman and Frank Hartzheim, who represented Juliet and a Prince; for the most comical costumes to Mrs. R. J. Maltress, dressed as an Indian Princess and Harry Burt representing an ape. The party was also quite a financial success.

In the first few years it appears they held more than once dance per year, although only one was called the "Annual Ball". A "grand ball" was held on April 12, 1887, and another masquerade ball was also held on April 4, 1888.

—The Edgerton Fire Department are out in bills announcing a grand ball to be given at Royal Hall Tuesday evening, April 12th. It is reasonable to expect that our citizens will give the firemen a rousing benefit in their efforts to replenish their treasury. The committee of arrangements are doing all in their power to make the occasion one of unusual enjoyment. The proceeds will be used in uniforming the company. Tickets \$1.00. Supper at the U. S. Hotel at 75c per couple.

—The Firemen's Mask Ball, at Royal Hall, Wednesday evening, proved a success in every particular. The receipts were about \$100, and a nice little surplus will remain after all expenses are met. The \$5.00 prizes for the best lady's and gent's costume were awarded to Miss Jennie Toynton and Mr. Frank Wyman, and the \$2.00 prizes for the most comical costumes taken by Miss Lillie White and Herman Lidicker. Over 100 maskers were on the floor. The supper tables spread in the engine house were bountifully laden.

The second Annual Ball was held on Thursday, October 14, 1886. It wasn't as well attended because of bad weather.

—The Second Grand Annual Ball of the Edgerton Fire department, takes place Thursday evening, October 14th. The committee is hard at work and will make this the event of the season.

—The social event of the week is the ball given by the Edgerton Fire department last evening. The unfavorable weather prevented many from out of town attending, but despite the elements a fair sized party were present and apparently enjoyed themselves. Slocum's band, of Harvard, discoursed the music.

The third Annual Ball was held on November 15, 1887 in Royall Hall, with music by Anderson's full orchestra.

—The Edgerton Fire Department will have their 3d annual ball Nov. 15th, '87, in Royal Hall. Music by Anderson's full orchestra. Supper will be served in the city hall by the firemen. A committee has been appointed to call on the ladies of the city for donation in the line of eatables. Let every one remember the date and have their best girl engaged.

The Fireman's Ball Tuesday evening was seemingly well patronized by our people, and many from abroad were also present. In all 75 tickets were sold and the company will net above expenses, something over \$75. Anderson's band, of Janesville, furnished the music and all in attendance seemed to enter into the spirit of the occasion. The supper which was contributed by our citizens and served in the City Hall was one of the finest spreads ever set up before a hungry multitude. The quantity sent in was simply enormous, sufficient to feed the whole town and leave something over. This fact alone indicates that the ladies of Edgerton have a generous interest in the success of the Fire Department of our city.

For well over a century the Annual Fireman's Ball was a popular event that the community looked forward to and was a successful fundraiser for the department.

From 1886 to 1901 the Ball was held at Royal Hall (which was located where the Masonic Lodge now sits). The music was provided by Smith's Orchestra for many of those years, although the 1st Regiment Band Of Madison, Tuckwood's Band, Soybe's Orchestra (from Stoughton) and the Ray and Williams Orchestra (from Waukesha) each provided the music for a year.

In 1902 the location was moved to Academy Hall. Kneff and Hatch's Orchestra (later just Hatch's Orchestra) was a regular from 1908 to 1922 at least.

1904 is the only year in which a dance was not held.

In the 1940s the Location changed to the Edgerton High School Gym (the original Child High School on Swift Street, which later became the junior high), and orchestras continued to provide the music until the early 1950s. Then music was provided by a variety of performers such as "Clarence Zahina and his Barn Stormers", "Louie Bashell and His Famous Radio-TV and RCA Victor Recording Artists", "Francis McMahan and his Shamrock Band", and "Ole Gerald and his Band".

In the early 1980s the location was billed as the Tri-County Community Center on Swift Street, with bands such as "Denny's Polka Band", "The Alpine Brass", and "The Classics".

In 2009, the event grew into an all-day festival event at Racetrack Park, where it was held until 2014. In addition to band performances, there were events like truck and tractor pulls, car shows, kickball tournaments and, of course, food and drinks.

In 2015 a dance was held outdoors at Central Park.

In 2016 the dance was once again held at the Tri-County Community Center, with the popular John Mellencamp tribute band "Pink Houses" performing. This would be the last Annual Firemen's Ball, 131 years after the first one.

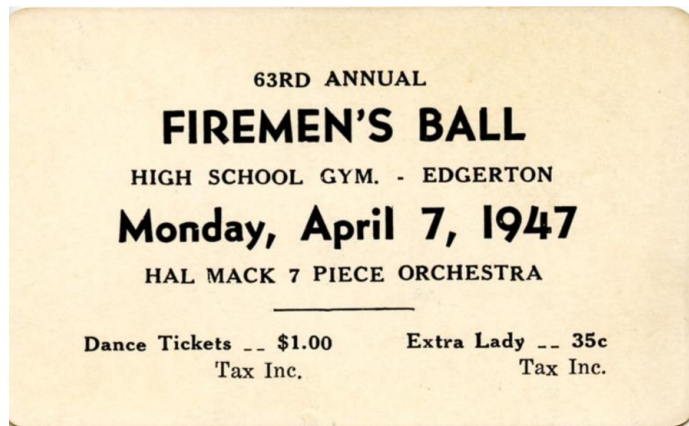
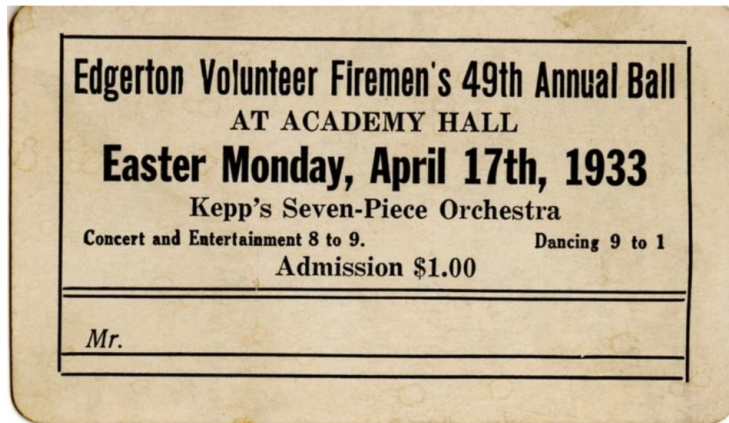
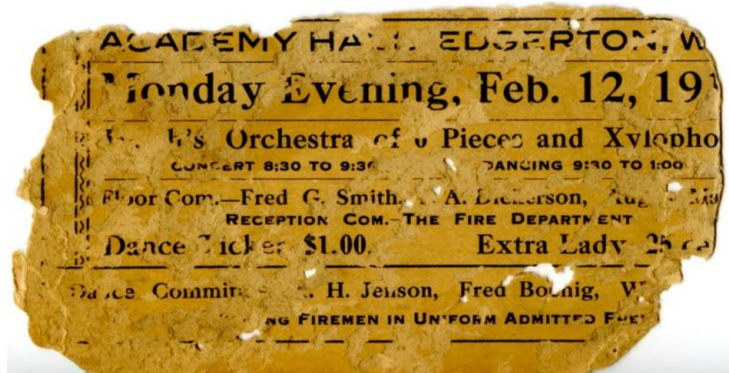
In the first 40 years, the dance was held on various weekday nights, with Monday nights and Friday nights the most frequent, although some years it was on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. From the late 1920s to the mid 1950s the dance was almost always on a Monday night. From 1957 to sometime in the 1970s it was always on a Friday night. From that point on it was always on a Saturday.

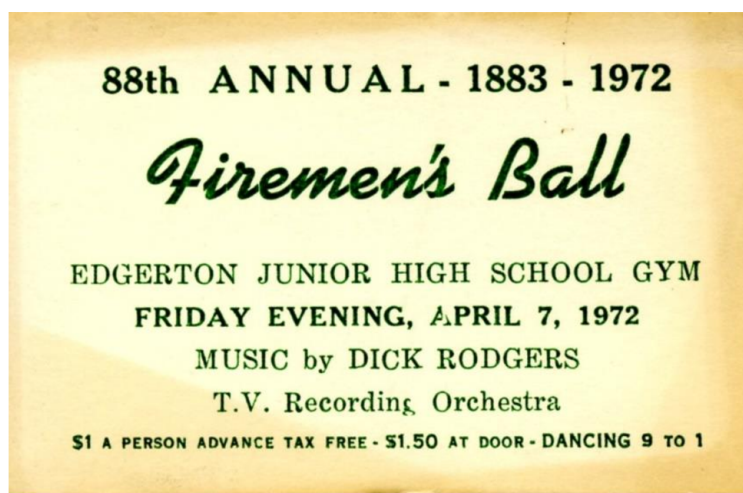
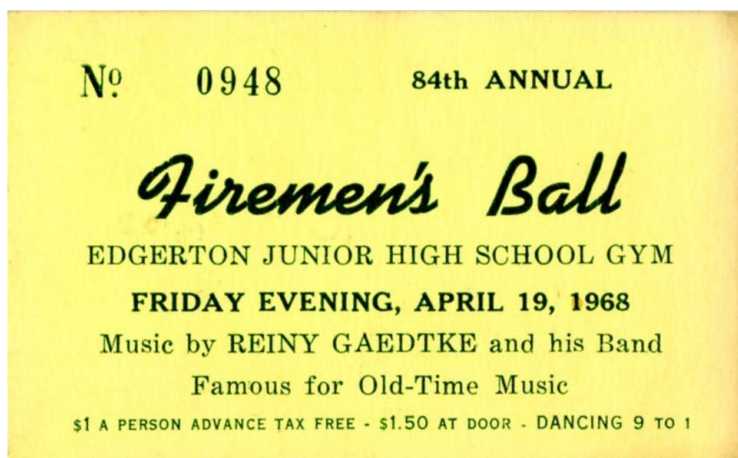
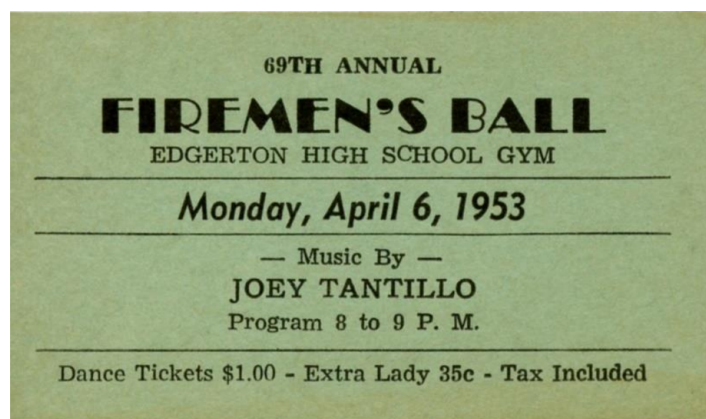
Tickets for the Annual Ball remained at a price of \$1 for decades. In 1908, an additional charge of 25 cents per "extra lady" was added. In 1918 the price for an extra lady was increased to 30 cents and a war tax was added (the U.S. was engaged in World War I at that time). In 1920 the war tax was still in effect but the price for the extra lady was back down at 25 cents. This remained the price in 1933 and 1934. In 1947 the price for the extra lady was increased to 35 cents, while the ticket was still \$1 "per Mr." In 1957 the price was modified to \$1 "per person".

In 1968 the price was still \$1 if purchased in advance, otherwise \$1.50 if purchased at the door. By 1989 inflation was catching up and ticket prices were doubled to \$2 in advance or \$3 at the door. That remained the price for twenty years until 2008 when the ticket price was increased to \$5, which included a raffle ticket with it.

History of the Edgerton Fire Department

Below are a sample of various tickets that were sold for the dance over the years. The first one is pretty worn, but based on the dance committee names and day of week for February 12, this was determined to be from 1917.





Notice that somewhere between 1968 and 1972 someone decided that the first ball was in 1883 and started adding that year to the ticket. We've since learned that the first ball was actually in 1885.

History of the Edgerton Fire Department

Edgerton Vol. Fire Dept. - 8 Burdick St., Edgerton, Wis.
99th ANNUAL 1883 - 1983

Firemen's Ball

TRI-COUNTY COMMUNITY CENTER
SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 9, 1983
MODERN AND OLD TIME DANCE MUSIC BY
DENNY'S POLKA BAND


Door Prizes: 1st \$150 2nd \$100 3rd \$75
and others drawn at 11:00 P.M.

Lic. R-3793-R-238
\$1 a person Advance Tax Free - \$1.50 at door Dancing 8:30-12:30
RETAIN THIS PORTION FOR ENTRY TO THE DANCE

Edgerton Vol. Fire Dept. - 8 Burdick St., Edgerton, Wis.
106th ANNUAL 1883 - 1990

Firemen's Ball

TRI-COUNTY COMMUNITY CENTER
SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 21, 1990

MUSIC BY  50's & 60's
Rock 'n Roll

Door Prizes: 1st \$300 2nd \$200 3rd \$100
and others drawn at approx. 10:00 P.M.
Beer & Pop Available Lic. #R3793-36189
\$2 a person Advance - \$3.00 at Door Dancing 8-12
RETAIN THIS PORTION FOR ENTRY TO THE DANCE

No 1154

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
Phone _____

Fill in and Return
Lic. # R0003793 A-34399

Edgerton Vol. Fire Dept. - 621 N. Main St., Edgerton, Wis.
116th ANNUAL 1883 - 2000

Firemen's Ball

TRI-COUNTY COMMUNITY CENTER
SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 15, 2000

MUSIC BY  **AXLE GREASE**
Madison's Most
Entertaining Musical Group

Door Prizes: 1st \$500 2nd \$300 3rd \$100 4th - 8th \$50
and others drawn at approx. 10:00 P.M.
Beer & Pop Available
\$2 a person Advance - \$3.00 at Door Dancing 8-12
RETAIN THIS PORTION FOR ENTRY TO THE DANCE

No 1154

The meeting minutes of the fire department usually included a report from the dance committees and often reported the amount raised in the treasurer's report. This was true for 1893 through the 1920's, with the exception of the years 1894 and 1904, where there was no mention of a dance and no money reported from it for those years. It is possible there was no annual ball in 1894, since the department went through a re-organization effective February 1, 1894 with a large turnover in membership. The focus that year was to participate in the State Firemen's Tournament and perhaps win some prize money there. There was no mention of a dance in the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter* in 1894.

In 1904 there also was no mention of a dance the *Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter*. The 1903 dance, held on Monday, February 2, 1903, was billed as the 19th Annual Ball, and the 1905 dance, held on Friday, February 3, 1905, was the 20th, confirming there was no dance in 1904.

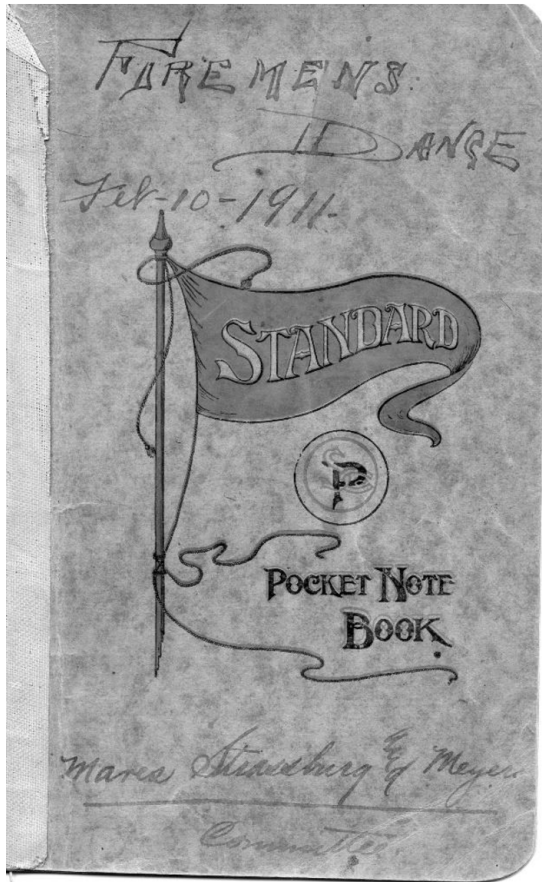
—The 19th Annual Firemen's ball in Academy hall next Monday evening, February 2nd.

—The Firemen's Annual dance at Academy Hall Monday evening scored another success. About 115 tickets were sold and the net receipts were satisfactory.

Annual Firemen's Ball.

There is one entertainment that everyone ought to patronize. It is the 20th annual ball of the Edgerton Volunteer Fire Department to be held in Academy hall, Friday evening, February 3rd. The proceeds of the annual ball goes to the treasury of the Department and is used to help defray expenses. For attending meetings, practice and work at fires the members of the company receive no compensation, and to add to all this gratuitous labor, they each year get up an "annual ball." What more could be expected of an organization that is banded together for the sole purpose of protecting the property of others? It is true that there are many people who do not participate in dancing, but at the same time they ought to be willing to aid so worthy a cause by the purchase of a ticket whether it be used or not. From every standpoint the Firemen's annual ball is conducted in a manner creditable to the organization and worthy the patronage of all. This year the committees in charge are preparing for a royal good time. Smith's orchestra has been engaged, the Fire Department will act as reception committee and the floor managers are S. A. Warner, J. A. Jenson and Geo. L. Ogden. Dance tickets are one dollar and supper will be served at the Bon Ton for seventy-five cents per couple. Tickets are now ready and agents will call upon you some time in the next few days. No one should turn them away without buying a ticket, and all will be warmly welcomed at Academy hall Friday evening, February 3rd.

The images below are from the actual 1911 expense booklet, showing the types of expenses incurred to put on the dance.



Expense —	
Hall rent.	14.00
Music (7 pks)	38.00
Hotel Bill for music	7.00
Music from 12 to 1.	1.00
Supper for firemen	19.50
Supper for music	3.50
Printing	4.00
Decorating material	5.40
Hauling Chairs - Barnes-	gratis
Rent for A. P. Chairs	gratis
Rent for Telephone chairs	gratis
Special police (Geo. Rea)	gratis
Use of mirror (Miss Johnson)	gratis
	92.40

The firemen generally donated their time to putting on the dance. In the late 1890s the three members of the Dance Committee were paid \$3.00 each for their time to organize it, although all the firemen helped set up. By 1957, the committee members were paid \$14.00 each.

History of the Edgerton Fire Department

The following photos are from the the 2004 Firemen's Ball, held at the Tri-County Community Center.

