BOX 52 ASSOCIATION

THE LINE BOX

Vol. 12 No. 5 SUMMER EDITION

Welcome to our summer issue of the Line Box. We have just a few stories and some coming events for you.

But first, I would like to address the email spam issues we are having with the email account. We have tried everything that we can think of to rid this hack. The Board of Directors is looking into some remedies and we hope to have them in place in a few weeks. Please bear with us as we work to correct the problem. And YES, I still want to be made aware of any on email issues.

Let's get to it! First up is a story on the upcoming centennial celebration of Stoneham Fire Headquarters by John Galla. Next in line is a story on the loss of the Jordan Marsh Warehouse in Cambridge in July of 1965 due to a lack of water. And a few other tidbits for your enjoyment and a list of upcoming events.

100th Anniversary of the Stoneham Fire Station
A History of the Stoneham Fire Station
By John Galla

On July 5, 1903, 14 buildings in Stoneham Square were destroyed by a large fire. It was suspected that the cause of the fire was fireworks, despite the best efforts to wet down all the structures and make the display as safe as possible. This would clear the way for where the new central station would be built. At the time, Stoneham had multiple fire stations. One station was located where the rear of the current town hall is now. Another was located on Washington Street. And the ladder truck was kept underneath the former town hall. The buildings were quite old, were made entirely of wood including the floors, and required a lot of yearly maintenance to keep them functioning. Two fires in 1908 further added to the problems in these buildings. One fire that took place at the Shawmut Motor Company spread to where the ladder truck was kept, damaging the building and destroying 1,000 feet of hose. A second fire damaged the E.R. Seavers Hose House on Washington Street. Finally, in 1916 a new fire and police station would be built to replace the aging buildings.

In April of 1916, it was reported that the town purchased a site at the corner of Central and Emerson Streets for the amount of $7,000. The projected cost of building a new fire station was $43,000 and the life span was projected to be 50 years. Mr. Penn Varney of Lynn was selected to be the architect of the new fire/police station and Mr. F.C. Alexander was chosen to be the general contractor. Mr. Alexander had just completed building the fire station in Winchester when he received the contract to build the Stoneham station.

1950's view photo by C.E. Beckwith, collection of Member John Galla

The fire station side of the building would have an apparatus room with a concrete floor, brick walls and a metal panel ceiling. The second floor would have six sleeping rooms, a recreation room, chief's office and a large bathroom. Considering the department was all volunteer at the time, having sleeping rooms was truly forwarding thinking for a time when there might be full time firefighters. Also upstairs would be a battery and electrical room for the town wide fire alarm system.

The police station side of the building would have a main office, chief's office, and men and women cell areas with sanitary provisions on the first floor. The second floor would have a large guard room with lockers, two bedrooms and a bathroom. Attached to the station would be a single garage to house the ambulance, which was operated by the police department.

The original 4 inch thick concrete apparatus floor held solid until the 1970's when the weight of the apparatus increased so much that the floor had to be reinforced. When the station was built, the heaviest piece of apparatus weighed roughly 8,500 pounds. Stoneham's ladder today weighs 67,000 pounds. As you can see, that is a lot more weight that the floor has to support.

Construction on the new station began on November 11, 1916. Cold weather caused some delays, but workers persevered and continued building. In December a new fire whistle with temporary wiring was installed in the tower and the first alarm was sounded later that month for a fire. The station was far enough along in April of 1917 so that the police could move into their portion of the building. At this time, the police department used donated funds to purchase their first motorized patrol car. The fire department would move all of its equipment into the building a week later.

No official dedication of the building ever took place, however the town did hold an open house where residents could inspect the new station. Several days later, firefighters from other communities were invited to tour the station and then enjoy an informal dance at the Red Men's Hall that evening. At this time the department operated a horse drawn ladder truck, a horse drawn steamer, horse drawn hose wagon, hand drawn hose wagon and the department's first motorized piece of apparatus, a 1912 Seagrave combination engine.

Over the years, some modifications have been made to the building. The original heavy wooden apparatus bay doors opened inwards and were replaced with motorized doors that opened upwards. The apparatus doors were widened in 1959 to better accommodate the larger motorized vehicles that were now in service. The front lounge room was converted into a dispatch room that would handle thousands of emergency calls. The hay storage room was converted into a kitchen and the boilers, generator and electrical systems would be upgraded. In many cases, firefighters would do the work themselves by painting, renovating and providing upkeep to this historic building.

Eventually the police department would become overcrowded in this aging building. In 1972, a new police station was constructed on the other side of town hall. Moving into the now vacated space in the 1916 station was the Building Inspector, Board of Health, Veteran's Agent and the private ambulance that provided service to the town.

Like the police, the fire department eventually found their space to be overcrowded and in need of expansion. Urgent repairs were also needed, so in 1990 the town approved funds to renovate the fire station. The other agencies that occupied the building were moved to other locations in the town, with the exception of the ambulance which would remain on the 2nd floor. This was a large project that involved removing the old cell block area, repairing the roof over it, repairing the brick work, repairing the sheet metal cornices and painting the exterior. Also, a complete renovation of the interior was needed. A first floor chief's office was created with secretary's area, chief's office, closet, fire prevention offices and bathrooms. During this renovation, all but one of the station's fire poles became inoperable and were eventually removed. The one operational fire pole remains today and may be used by firefighters if they choose to.

Photo from collection of Member John Galla

What does 100 years really mean? Visualize if you will that it's 1916. A fire has erupted and someone has pulled a fire alarm box. The new air horn in the Fire Station tower is tapping out the box number and volunteers start converging on the station. This takes time for firefighters to arrive before they can ready the horses and respond. They lead the horses from the rear stables to the front of the Col. Gould Steamer and the Resolute horse drawn ladder truck. Pull a ceiling rope and the harness drops down on the horse's backs. A few quick buckles, snap shut the horse collar and they are ready to go. A firefighter leaps onto the rear of the engine, ready to light the steam boiler on the way. Out they come, the new motorized Seagrave Combination A leading the way followed by the Col Gould, The Resolute, and a hose wagon.

It sure was quite a site. Now fast forward to 2016. Large motorized fire apparatus roar out of the station with a crew of professional firefighters. Only minutes pass from the time a call for help is telephoned to the dispatch center to the time apparatus are out the door and responding. The newest pumpers carry 750 gallons of water with no chemical tanks like in the old days and the ladder truck has a hydraulically operated

aerial with a 100 foot reach rather than a heavy 55 foot wooden aerial that required seven firefighters to raise.

The 100 year old station has protected Stoneham though countless storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, blizzards and deadly explosions. A huge chemical plant fire, an airplane crash, thousands of house and building fires, and tanker truck fires. Countless medical emergencies, motor vehicle accidents and other types of calls and the list could go on and on. And in 1984, the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Not bad for a building that was projected to only last 50 years. It is a remarkable heritage that Stoneham can truly be proud of.

On October 1st, the Stoneham Fire Department will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the fire station. There will be a parade, demonstrations and other fun events to mark the occasion. Commemorative coins and t-shirts have been produced and a commemorative book is also in the works. The parade starts at 10 AM with festivities to follow at the station. *(Look for more information on this event in the Sept General Order – Editor)*

This article would not have been possible without the assistance of retired Stoneham Fire Chief Ray Sorensen. You will not find a better historian on the Stoneham Fire Department and at 90 years old, he is sharper than most people half his age. A very special thank you to Chief Sorensen for his help.

Stoneham Headquarters circa 2012. Photo by Member John Galla

A Perfect Storm!
The Story of the Jordan Marsh Warehouse Fire
25-27 Commercial Avenue Cambridge, MA.
Thursday July 15, 1965

Photos from the collection of Late Member L. Murray Young

In the early hours of Thursday morning a Cambridge Police Sector Car cruising down Main Street near 2nd Street discovered a major water leak. The leak was called in and DPW Water Department crews were on scene in a very short time. They began to shut valves down on the large 24 inch main. Crews through the night and into the day to repair the main. However, they needed to shut down the valves feeding the main. The last valve was closed on the main at approximately 12:30 PM. This valve was located between 1st and 3rd Streets and the Fire Department was NOT notified that this main was shut down. In less than three hours, this oversight was going to create a perfect storm of problems to a fire that caused over $ 1,250,000.00 to the building and an unknown amount in stock and business interruptions losses.

The Warehouse

The fire building was a five story warehouse 178 X 98 feet, with a 15 X 75 foot one story enclosed loading dock at the rear. The warehouse consisted of two sections known as Building 1 and Building 2. Building 1 was fire-resistive except for the wood on the un-protected steel roof. Like Building 1, Building 2 had a reinforced concrete frame and tile curtain walls, but its floors and roof were plank on heavy timber. Six inch terra-cotta tile partitions in each story separated the two sections. The warehouse had no nearby exposures. The three interior stairways and two elevator shafts were fully enclosed and fire doors protected openings in the tile partitions between the two sections.

The building had a central station supervisor sprinkler system that consisted of four risers, two of which were dry-pipe valves. The system was supplied from a six inch connection to an eight inch dead end city main. Normal static pressure at grade level was 55 to 65 psi and volume was adequate for the warehouse systems.

At the time of the fire stock stored in the warehouse consisted of mattresses, box springs, sheets, children's sleds on the first floor. Summer furniture, bamboo curtains, bikes and toys on the second floor. The third floor was all toys, Venetian blinds, more bamboo curtains and hassocks on the fourth. And on the top floor where the fire would start contained toys, plastic swimming pools and bedding.

The Water Mains

For the last three years the City had undertaken water main cleaning and re-lining the mains with concrete during the spring and summer months. A fire department officer acted as a liaison between the water department and the CFD, keeping a daily schedule of operations so that the fire department would know what mains and hydrants were shut down. The 24 inch main passing directly in front of the warehouse had been cleaned and relined the summer of 1964. With the cleaning and relining 12 inch main going down 1st Street had led to the use of temporary four inch above ground pipes. These had been

laid and supplied by hydrants on side streets. Two inch hoses and pipes brought water to both residents and commercial properties and for use in fire protection systems.

The Day Shift

Morning dawned cloudy with a few scattered thunder storms to break the 90 degree heat of the past few days., By noon time it had cleared off and the temp was a pleasant mid 80's with low humidity and winds from the NW at 15 to 20 mph. Headlines in the morning Globe were filled with the news of the sudden death of former United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson in London.

The crews on the day shifts in local firehouse were waiting for the night crew due in at 6:00 PM. Drills and house work were done. There had been a few runs, false alarms, brush fires, but nothing serious. Talk had turned to the baseball All Star game played on Tuesday and the American League's loss to the National League. The Sox had two players in the game, at second base was Felix Mantilla and Carl Yastrzemski was on the roster to play the outfield, but was injured. As with every summer in Boston the talk was of the game in Cleveland that night with that 23 year old kid pitching in his 9th game of the season, what was his name…..oh yeah Lonberg, that's it Jim Lonberg (Sox lost to the Indians 6-3 – Editor) . Some guys were thinking of taking the family out to the boonies of Bedford to visit Bedford Farms for a frappe, or just running up the Ave. to Arlington and heading for Butterick's for some ice cream cones.

But the main chatter in most of the Cambridge houses was still about the recent fire and explosion on July 5th at the Harvard University Cyclatron (a type of nuclear reactor-Editor) on Oxford St. that killed 4 Harvard Professors and injured seven others. The arguments going on centered around if it was a mini nuclear blast or a hydrogen blast. (The building was heavily damaged and was built to sustain a nuclear blast, many Cambridge residents, fire and police officers, including this editor's father went to their graves swearing that it was a mini-nuke! The NRC had ruled out a hydrogen explosion. The Cyclatron and the building were gone by the end of the year - Editor).

At Engine 3's house on Third St. Lt. McDonald was breathing a sigh of relief in the office, they had a few more hours to go and they would be home free with no major jobs. He then turned his attention to the latest edition of the weekly Cambridge Chronicle newspaper.

On Commercial Ave. near First St. stood the five story brick and concrete Jordan Marsh Warehouse. This was one of the buildings that had the water supply to its sprinkler system shut down by the water main break. A few minutes after 3:00 PM a worker noticed a small fire in a metal rack in the south corner of the building. Where the plastic swimming pools in cardboard cartons and small bottles of acetone-based repair mastic on individually mounted small display cards were stored. He ran down to the fourth floor and notified the foreman, who called the fire department at 3:12 PM. They then ran back up and attempted to extinguish the fire with portable fire extinguishers. They were unable to get any closer than ten feet before they were driven back by the acrid plastic smoke. As they retreated, the foreman felt water drops dripping on his shoulder from the sprinklers. The sprinklers had operated, but with the large 24 inch main shut down they were rendered useless. The two fled the building after checking each floor for workers.

At the same time, a workman on his way to his shift at the nearby electric generating plant, stopped and looked up as he lit his cigarette. He did a double take as he saw

smoke burst from a window on the top floor. He ran to the nearest fire alarm box, and pulled the hook on box 134. He could hear the gears turning and he looked back over his shoulder and saw the fire was now coming out 3 windows.

In the F.A.O., the operator had taken the call from the foreman, as they got ready to 'strike' 134, the circuit lit up and 134 started to bang in. The operators turned to look and got ready to send it out, when the switchboard lit up like a Christmas tree and other boxes in the area started to come in. 134 was set up in the transmitter, the warning blow struck and the bells, house lights and registers in every Cambridge station came to life. In addition all the surrounding communities received the box from Arlington to Watertown. In Somerville, the box was logged at 3:12 PM and one operator was looking out the window towards Boston and yelled to his partner to "Get'em ready to roll! Look at the loom up from Cambridge!"

At Engine 3's house the watchman yelled "Box 134 we go first due! Commercial & First Streets!" The MPO started the engine on the '49 Pirsch, in front of him, the 49 GMC Wagon was already rolling out the door as the crew was pulling on their gear. They made a quick right onto 3rd St. and a quick left onto Cambridge Street the pump was right behind with sirens screaming trying to move traffic that was snarled due to the water main repairs and regular afternoon traffic from the Middlesex Court House. They got some running room as they roared past 1st Street heading for Commercial Street. Lt. McDonald looked up and could see heavy smoke and fire blowing out of the top floor windows on the warehouse. He grabbed the mic and transmitted a second alarm at 3:15 PM, less than 3 minutes since the box was received! Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Dilworth and his aide stared for the box from Engine 5's quarters in Inman Square. They both thought they were headed for a false alarm, when Engine 3's message for a second alarm was received. Deputy Dilworth had no doubt they had something good, because as he said to his aide "McDonald is a cool officer and would only sound a multiple before the arrival of the Chief if he had……Oh no, jeez look at that loom up! Guess we'll miss supper tonight!"

Engine 3's pump grabbed a hydrant about 300 feet from the building across the Lechmere Canal on Commercial. On the wagon, the crew was laying two big lines and trying to get one of the big line into the fire. Engine 3 MPO had grabbed a hydrant on a dead end main. He was able to maintain supply during the fire. The other two engines on the first alarm arrived and started the typical Cambridge two-piece engine company evolution, the pump stopping at the hydrant and the wagon dropping the lines. Engine 7 grabbed the hydrant just 75 feet south of the fire, the wagon dropping duals into Ladder 2's Ladder pipe. The hydrant was opened……and they had some water but very low pressure. When the 3rd due engine arrived and tied into a hydrant at the east corner fo the building and they had no water. Second alarm companies were now grabbing hydrants outside the area and stripping both the pump and wagon of big lines to try and make it to the fire to get some water flowing. Meanwhile, the fire had burned through the roof and was now in the other section of the building was dropping to the lower floors and the top floor was fully involved. The heat was so intense that the concrete was crumbling. As the Companies tried to get lines into operation, a new threat emerged as the metal window frames melted and rained red hot molten steel on the crews, burning holes through their Alb turnout coats

As companies were becoming heavily engaged in what was becoming a no win situation, Acting Chief of Department Philip Brownrig arrived on the scene and after a quick run down from Deputy Dilworth, the third alarm was sounded at 3:19 PM with orders for engine companies to prepare to draft from the Lechmere Canal that ran alongside the building. At this point the entire CFD still had no knowledge that the 24 inch water main was shut down.

At approximately 3:18 PM the Central Station received a water surge and the Operator started to call the Warehouse. Before the call was completed two more surges were received in rapid succession. As a precaution the Operator transmitted the signal to the Fire Alarm Office. With the water main down, the Central Station never received a water flow alarm.

By now the building was nearly fully involved and Chief Brownrig asked Boston and the United States Coast Guard for fire boats to help in the fight. As the boats responded they found that they could not get through the Charles River Locks. MDC Police Officers from the Lower Basin station used small pumps on their patrol boats to extinguish pier piling fires on the Charles River at the rear of the Museum of Science.

Engine Company 6 who had responded on the second alarm. The crew was ordered to take a big line up the rear stairs, but before they could get into action they were pulled from the building. 6's pump found a hydrant with 65 pounds of pressure and hooked up at the corner of Commercial and Bridge. The crew managed to get two big lines in the Wagons deck gun. The high pressure fog line was pulled off the Wagon and used to wet down the crew manning the gun.

Meanwhile, Ladder 2 was in operating with their ladder pipe and the crew was manning hand lines along the south side of the building. Orders were given for Engines 2, 4, 5 and 7 relocate and start drafting from the Lechmere Canal. Crews swung into action and readied the hard suction hose, put on the strainer and threw them into the canal. Pump operator primed the pumps to get draft and within a few minutes, water was finally hitting the fire from 4 Ladder pipes, 7 deck guns and numerous hand lines. Five engines were drafting from the canal.

Special calls was ordered for one additional engine and ladder to the fire. Somerville Engine 1 was ordered to draft and soon the 1954 ALF 1,000 gpm pump was pumping at near capacity. Most of the pumps at draft were able to supply 2-3 big lines with an unlimited water supply. Boston Ladder 3 arrived on scene and its crew assisted with hand lines.

As the fire continued to burn, a towering column of smoke was visible for miles, to Danvers in the north and Bedford to the west. Sparks and embers rained down on Beacon Hill and the smoke drifted across the Charles and into the Baker and Philips Houses at the Mass Eye & Ear Infirmary and also into the Charles Street jail.

As the battle wore on into the supper hour, the oncoming shift arrived and the day shift was able to take a breather for a few minutes. Nobody was going home as both shifts were still trying to bring the fire under control. Firefighters waded into the Canal to cool off their smoldering coats and boots.

Engine 5's 1958 Ford/Robinson using its gun.

By eight o'clock the fire was contained the building was still giving a fight to the last and companies were now able to hit it with master streams and hand lines from all sides. Many of the interior floors had collapsed and the fire would not be fully extinguished till the debris were removed. A crane was needed and a familiar red and gold crane of Duane Wrecking Company arrived early on Friday morning.

Chief Brownrig started to release companies about 11:00 PM. Engine 2 reported in their house journal that their 1951 Pirsch had pumped for 10 hours at 150 psi and had laid over 2,500 feet of hose.

Engine 3's journal stated that Engine 3 pumped the hydrant on Commercial St at the bridge and supplied two lines into a deck guns. These lines were later transferred to the Ladder 4 and Ladder 3 on order of Deputy Dilworth for ladder pipe operations. Also stated that the Rescue Company had transported Lt. McDonald to Cambridge City Hospital with heat exhaustion, chest, back and left arm pain.

In all ten firefighters were injured, the loss was in the millions of dollars. According to Cambridge Police Chief of Detectives John Grainger stated that no one was in the area where the fire was said to have started. MSP Captain Gerald McCarthy of the State Fire Marshal' Office was at the scene and will head the investigation into the cause of the fire. The cause is still listed as undetermined. Jordan Marsh Company released a statement that all orders would now be filled from the Dorchester and their other Cambridge warehouse.

In all 11 engine companies, 5 ladder companies, the rescue company, along with Cambridge and Somerville Aux. Lighting Plants, the Salvation Army Canteen and the Red Cross were on the scene. Five engine companies were drafting from the Lechmere Canal during the fire.

In its November issue of Fire Journal, Mr. Robert Gaudet of the NFPA wrote about the fire "*The combination of events that caused the almost total loss of this building and its contents vividly demonstrates how a major loss can come about not as the result of a single weakness or hazard but as the result of a number of elements coinciding to overpower the protection. The coup de grace was probably came when none of the first in pumpers connected to the fire department connection on the building to supply the sprinklers."*

Time Line

Time	Box	Engine Comps.	Ladder Comps.	Specials
3:12	134	3, 7, 2	2, 3	R-1
3:15	2-134	6, 5, 1, Som. E-2	1	
3:19	3-134	4, 8, 9	4	
3:28	Special	Som. E-1	Bost. L-3	

Thanks to Members Howie Smith, Ed Morrissey, Dave Parr and Bill Wilderman for their help. Thanks also to Cambridge FF John Hathaway and NFPA Librarian Nicole Dutton for digging out the Fire Journal report for us.

Coming Events

Engine 260 Muster September 10, 2016 10am - 5pmEisenhower Park, Milford, CT. More info www.engine260.org

Wings of Freedom Tour featuring WW2 Aircraft P-51 Mustang, B-17 Flying Fortress, B-24 Liberator, B-25 Mitchell
Sept 16-18 at Norwood Airport
Sept 23-25 at Worcester Airport
More info www.sfdn.org

Stoneham E-2 2016 Seagrave 1250/750/30 foam. Photo by Member John Galla