

The history of New Canaan Fire Company, No. 1 can be traced as far back as 1845, if not beyond, when informal bucket brigades were first organized in town. The town's fire service may have evolved over the years into an organized, formalized public safety department featuring both volunteer and full-time paid staff in the past 173 years, but the spirit that drives neighbors to respond when others are in need remains at the heart of the fire service.

Early History:

After a local newspaper called for better fire protection in 1869, the original Hook and Ladder Company was formed, which in 1873, led to the formation of Quinnipiac Hook and Ladder Company No. 3, the precursor to the modern New Canaan Fire Company. The Fire Company as it exists today was chartered on December 8, 1881, and New Canaan Hook and Ladder Company and Fire Engine Company No. 1, was incorporated by the Connecticut legislature in 1885.

The original firehouse was erected on Forest Street and was paid for with a \$500 loan. In 1891 a two-story firehouse was erected on Railroad Avenue, now known as Elm Street. In 1938, the current firehouse was constructed at the intersection of Main Street and Locust Avenue. The building has been renovated over the years to meet the needs of the firefighters, and included a large addition that doubled the space for fire apparatus, constructed in 1965.

Firefighters were once summoned to the firehouse by a bell, which was replaced by a large horn installed in the tower on top of the firehouse. The fire horn is still prepared for use in the event normal means of dispatching fire units are offline. New Canaan's first fire engine was a Gulf Stream Hand Pumper, purchased from the City of Stamford for \$400. Stevens Livery Stable provided the horses to pull the pumper. That pumper was traded in for a truss ladder capable of pumping 300 gallons per minute — an astounding feat in those days. In 1912, Mr. A. H. Mulliken donated a combination hose and motorized fire truck. On its first alarm, this truck had difficulty leaving the firehouse due to the number of firemen who climbed aboard.

The Modern Era:

In over a century of service since 1881, New Canaan Fire Company No. 1 has continuously evolved to meet the needs of the townspeople of New Canaan and the fire service as a whole. Town Charter revisions in 1963 established a Fire Commission to oversee the Fire Company and Fire Marshal's office. Members are nominated by political town committees and appointed by the Board of Selectmen.

Today, 24 career firefighters and 30 volunteers make up the New Canaan Fire Department. All personnel, including off-duty paid and volunteer firefighters, can be called to respond in an emergency. Fire apparatus and personnel are still quartered in the firehouse at the corner of Main Street and Locust Avenue, where they have been for over 75 years. Trucks are housed in the bays on the main level, as well as in the added, rear portion of the building, on lower level. Unlike the days when the horn or bell was the main means of summoning fire personnel for a response, radios, pagers, and cell phones alert firefighters to calls, and dispatching duties are now handled by the Westport Fire Department after both towns agreed to establish a new regional partnership on the issue of fire dispatching. A new regional dispatch facility is being built in Fairfield that will handle fire dispatch in late 2019.

The role of paid firefighters in New Canaan has also changed from years ago. Originally, career staff members were hired to be drivers, responsible for getting apparatus to the scene. Over the years, their responsibilities have expanded to include full-time firefighting duties. Now, twenty-four career

firefighters, divided into four shifts of six personnel lead by a Captain and Lieutenant, work twenty-four hour shifts in the firehouse every day of the year.

The command staff of the fire department has changed as well. On July 12, 2013, Jack Hennessey was promoted to the position of Director of Fire Services for the Town of New Canaan and Chief of the New Canaan Fire Department. Chief Hennessey is the first paid chief fire officer in the history of the organized fire service in New Canaan. Currently, all personnel, paid and volunteer, report up the chain of command to the chief on matters relating to the administration of the department and Fire Company, and tactical decisions on the fire ground.

The modern fire apparatus currently in service are a far cry from their predecessors. They are custom built to meet the specific emergency incidents encountered in the community. The department owns four engine-pumpers, one rescue, one tanker, and one ladder. Each vehicle is designed to carry out a specific firefighting or rescue function.

With specialized vehicles and tools, the training of firefighters has become more rigorous and technical since the days of the bucket brigade. Gone are the days of throwing on a raincoat and boots and charging off to a blaze. Modern protective equipment is heavy and durable, breathing apparatus protects firefighters from smoke and noxious fumes produced by burning building materials and chemicals. These advances in personal protective equipment allow firefighters to be more aggressive in their efforts to save life and property, but require more intensive training for new firefighters, and a better understanding of fire science.

These changes were brought on, in part; by changes in the way homes are built and furnished. With more large homes being built in town, a quick response is needed to fight fires that burn more quickly and hotter than in years past. Newer furniture and building materials are often constructed using highly combustible glues made from petroleum-based products (plastics, synthetics). Newer, larger homes also tend to have more open spaces constructed using construction methods that while safe during normal use, can fail quickly and without warning during a fire.

Firefighters know their training can be put to the test at any time, in any number of situations. Every year, firefighters are called to structure fires, rooftop rescues, situations involving downed electrical wires, motor vehicle accidents, gas leaks and to extricate animals stuck in drain pipes. Although many of these incidents can be simulated in training environments, there are times where firefighters are required to think creatively to solve emergencies quickly and safely.

In the modern era, the vast majority of calls to which the department responds are not working fires. Even though these calls are taxing on fire apparatus, which see much tougher use than the average passenger car, they are evidence of the success of smoke detectors and fire safety education programs. 30 years ago, a fire that began in a pot left unattended on the stove might have resulted in a serious kitchen fire, but today, modern fire detection devices frequently help save property and lives.