

“The Clear Lake Fire Department is needed for a

By Jack Wilcox, Public Information Officer, CLFD -----

When the 40 members of the Clear Lake Fire Department hear this phrase broadcast over their pagers, it means that someone in the 98-square-mile fire district needs emergency service from the 135-year-old emergency provider.

Back in 1871 things were very different. There was no organized fire department. Following a major conflagration that destroyed a local furniture store, citizens called for such a service. It was known as Clear Lake Fire Company 1 and consisted of a bucket brigade and a few long poles to push in burning walls, along with a few dozen dedicated citizens. Paging was done by ringing a large bell in the city park.

In 1883, a hand-pumped water engine, hose cart, 300 feet of hose, and six extinguishers were added. Power was added in 1917 when a Model T fire engine was purchased. The hose cart is on exhibit at the Clear Lake Fire Museum.

A 1924 Ahrens-Fox 6-cylinder engine, the Rolls-Royce of fire equipment, came next and is still commissioned to the city. The fire engine is in the Fire Museum and appears in parades and other exciting tours around the area. Its last official duty was during the 1975 Junior High School fire.



Twelve firefighters passed the Emergency Medical Service training and exams to establish a EMS service in the department in 1989. This service has expanded over the years as the EMTs and First Responders have prepared victims and medical patients for the ambulances arriving from Mason City.

In 1993, the department welcomed its first female firefighter, Kay Wilson. Four others have joined since Kay joined. The addition of the ambulance squad has brought 5 additional women.

The city's old timers certainly remember the “classic” fires over the years: the Mach III building on Main Avenue in the same year as the school fire, Williams pipeline, and the old Surf Ballroom.

In recent years, a kitchen fire brought down the historic Ritz Supper Club in 1999. Firefighters from Clear Lake and six other fire departments fought the blaze for over 12 hours, which brought the

building to the ground, but saved the attached house. Lack of available water, even at the shore of the lake, compounded the task.

In February, 2000, the Clear Lake Central School burst into flames while being torn down. The blaze was so powerful that the aerial ladder from the Mason City Fire Department was called over to flood the building from above. Much water from several hydrants in the area was required for the host of fire equipment. The fire smoldered for almost a week.

A railroad train at North 20th Street struck a semi-tank truck carrying 7200 gallons of diesel fuel in August 2002. The two locomotives were carrying an additional 4000 gallons of fuel. Although there was a major blaze, the truck driver and two engine personnel were able to escape through the flames. The street crossing



had to be rebuilt because of contaminated ground beneath the tracks.

Firefighters were called to Emery, the Transit Railroad terminal during a freezing

rainstorm on New Years afternoon in 2005. A large building burned for several hours while winds drove heavy smoke towards the firefighters who were also fighting ice on the ground and their clothing. Water had to be brought from over a mile away, as there was no service in the area. Fortunately, several neighboring cities' departments helped in the transportation.

Until December, the Clear Lake Fire Department was a fully volunteer department. Of the 871 departments in Iowa, 90% are such, while only 4% are fully career. The rest are combination-staffed. Now, with the addition of the EMT-squad, Clear Lake is ranked as combination.

