



**2020  
Summer  
Newsletter**

**LOOK WHAT'S INSIDE:**

**Do You Remember?**

*(see page 2)*

**AND**

**We're Moving!**

*(see page 5)*

**AND**

**Your aluminum can recycling  
benefits the**

**Norwin Historical Society!**

*(see page 6)*

## Do You Remember?

# WESTMORELAND CITY V.F.D.

## The Early Years

by Bob Cupp



*"Old Bill," the Model T Ford (on the right), was the first truck purchased by the department in 1926. The Seagrave Pumper (in the garage) was purchased in 1929.*

to community emergencies. Then, in 1924, the town experienced a disastrous fire at the Sadler Hotel on Main Street. John Nanno, one of the firefighters, was burned to death in the blaze. The following year, a group of citizens organized the Westmoreland City Volunteer Fire Department.

When I read the early history of the Westmoreland City V. F. D., from the organization's record books (compiled by past Fire Chief, Harry McCracken), two things stood out loud and clear. First: Some things never change; fundraising required as much effort and imagination 90 years ago as it does today. Second: It's clear that, in terms of providing community services, the organization goes far beyond fire protection.

The new department chose Andrew Adamson as Fire Chief and John Wright, Assistant Chief.

In 1926, the company purchased its first fire truck, a Model T Ford, built by Oben Chain Boyer Company of



*This two-room school was located to the right of the existing Westmoreland City School Building. When the old school was torn down, the material was used to build the first fire department truck garage.*

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Ohio. The initials "O. B." were mounted on the radiator. Bill Edwards was the primary driver; the truck was fondly referred to as "Old Bill." The Model T was kept in several different locations until a temporary truck garage was built on Third Street.

Charles McCracken, President, and William Edwards, Secretary, signed a charter granted to the new fire company by Westmoreland County in 1927.

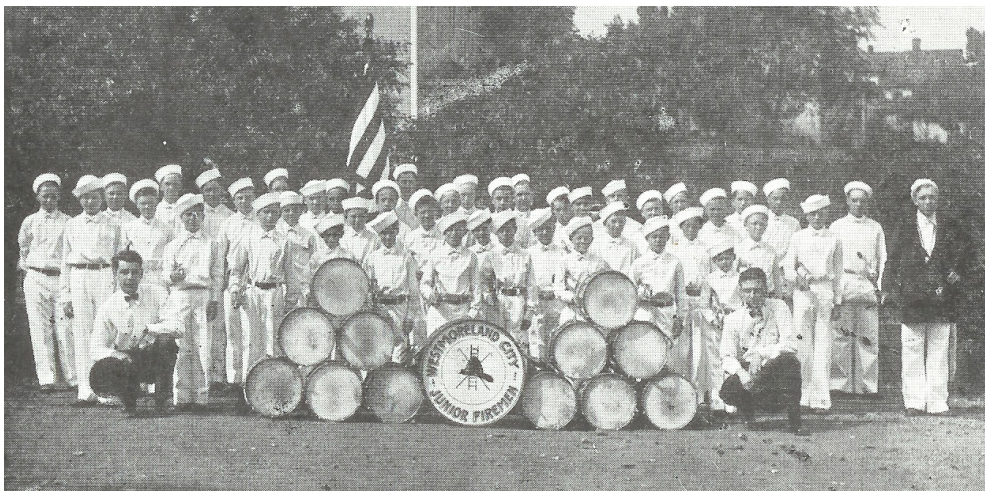


*Original Fire Department personnel pose in front of the first truck garage (built in 1929).*

The departments' initial bi-laws were finally approved the same year. By 1929, the company had constructed its first permanent firehouse on Main Street. A new Seagrave chain-drive pumper was purchased in 1929; it proved its worth only a year later when a \$10,000 blaze destroyed Lazaar's Store and, thanks to the pumper, firemen were able to save the adjoining homes.

In 1938-39, a new building was erected and a social room added to it. In 1942, the company purchased a new Chevrolet Pumper and several years later bought a new Diamond T Squad Truck for rescue operations.

In 1958-59, the firemen erected a four-bay modern truck garage on Main Street. It was dedicated "in memory of our departed brothers called to higher duties by the biggest chief of all" on Sunday, August 23, 1959. The same day, a new International Seagrave Pumper was dedicated to the living members of the department.



*This photo of the Westmoreland City V.F.D. Drum & Bugle Corps. (Junior Firemen) was taken in front of the old truck garage.*

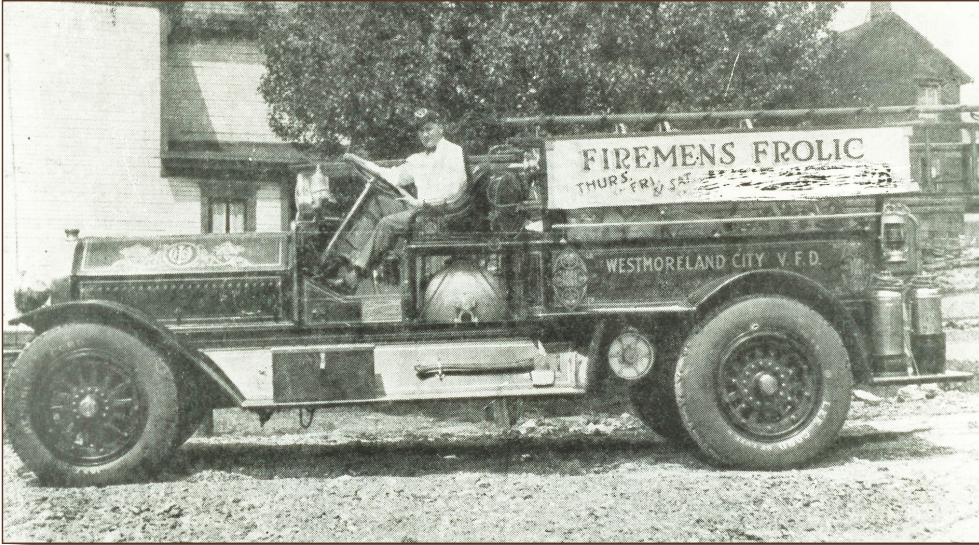
## History of V.F.D's Fundraising Activities

"Necessity is the mother of invention." That old saying perfectly describes the creative fundraising activities the firemen used to meet the needs of the community. The Westmoreland City Volunteer Fire Department first demonstrated that ability by showing a movie at the Manor Theater: **"Firemen Saved My Child."** Adults were charged 30 cents and children 15 cents; the profit was \$72.65. Then they began to hold dinners for \$1.00 per plate.

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*In the early years, the popular Firemen's Fair was known as the "Firemen's Frolic." The Seagrave Pumper was used to advertise the event.*

Canvassing the community for donations became common practice in the 1930's. One such campaign in nearby Shafton raised \$44.05. Throughout the Depression years, after four months in arrears, firemen would be suspended for non-payment of dues. When they got a few cents, they would pay up and be reinstated. Raffles were held to raise money; one raffle offered four tons of coal as a prize, reflecting the high value placed on coal in those days. The long tradition of the Pennsylvania Fireman's Fair was already alive in 1940 when the Westmoreland

Coal Company allowed the department to hold a fair in Biddle. *"Any fireman not helping with the fair was fined \$2.00."*

In 1955, President, Thomas Hoak, informed the department of a financial problem so severe that it might be forced to disband. It was then voted to pass out coin cards to the community, asking for \$3.00 per card. Today fire departments are still involved in fundraising activities all over western Pennsylvania. The events may have changed over the years, but the need remains the same.

## History of the V.F.D.'s Community Service

In 1931, the department started a "Relief Association" by approving a plan to pay injured firemen \$1.00 per week. In case of death, the amount would be \$25.00.

By 1936, the department had initiated a "fireman's funeral service;" it was used for the first time at the death of Fire Chief, Joseph Hoak. Beginning in 1939, it was agreed to give firemen's widows \$5.00 at Christmas. In later years, it was voted to give them Christmas hams. In 1956, they started the tradition of activating the siren at short intervals when a fireman's funeral passed the fire hall.

After Pearl Harbor was attacked, the department offered the U. S. Government the right to use their facilities for national defense – to house the Red Cross or troops. During this time, Westmoreland City was divided into four districts. The firemen were to report any sign of sabotage to the National Defense Council. Fire and Air Raid Wardens were also designated. Donations were collected to erect a World War II monument for the recognition of service men and women from the Westmoreland City area. It was decided to place the monument in front of the fire department.



*The Westmoreland City Volunteer Fire Department dedicated its new building on August 23, 1959.*

(continued on page 5)



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**1973 Fire Department personnel gather in front of the most recent truck garage .  
(Dedicated in 1959)**

In 1954, the department agreed to partner with the township for ambulance service. Rodgers and Snyder Funeral Homes provided the ambulances. In May, 1959, Rodgers and Snyder Funeral Homes decided to end their ambulance service. After much discussion, it was finally agreed to purchase a Ford station wagon to be used as an ambulance. All the fire departments were to help pay for it and to man it. Nick Dubich volunteered to man it, representing the W.C.V.F.D.

The Westmoreland City Volunteer Fire Department has supported the community in every way imaginable. When your local fire company asks for community support, it's important to remember how they've benefited the people they've served for so many years. These dedicated volunteers best summed it up at the 1959 Building and Truck Dedication: *"We earnestly hope and pray that a mutual understanding may exist between the people of our community*

*and our Fire Department so that we as voluntary firemen shall have at all times the best in manpower and equipment, so as to serve you to the best of our ability at all times."* They've been doing just that since 1925!

*NOTE: Past Fire Chief and long-time Norwin Historical Society member, Harry McCracken (now deceased), provided the vintage photos for this article.*



**Westmoreland City V.F.D. Truck Garage and Firemen's Club with War Memorial in front of the buildings (2005 Photo)**



# WE'RE MOVING!

TO: 304 MAIN ST.  
IRWIN, PA 15642

So far, it's gone from this.... to this....



## Please consider supporting the Norwin Historical Society!

We continue to preserve our local history, promote the history of the Norwin Community, and embrace the opportunity to educate the Norwin area about the people, places and events that comprise the history of Irwin, North Irwin and North Huntingdon Township.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

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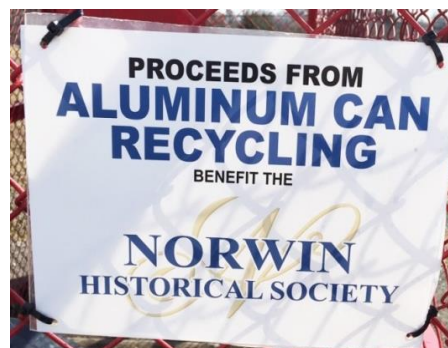


## **You can Recycle Aluminum cans and help us at the same time!**

**Please help the environment and support us at the same time by recycling your aluminum cans at one of our 4 recycling bins:**



- **St. Agnes Church Parking Lot**
- **Calvary Assembly Upper Pkg Lot**
- **Irwin Playground Parking Lot**
- **Behind the Giant Eagle Store**



**THANK  
YOU!**



2020 SUMMER NEWSLETTER

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TO:



*Your gift to the  
Norwin Historical Society  
helps to preserve our history!*