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The Pinery



Firehouse Restoration Project

The Society has begun a long-term project of restoring Historic Fire House N^o 2 on Strongs Avenue, in Stevens Point.

The fire house, built in 1885, originally consisted of the two story section with the bell tower pictured to the right. An addition was added in 1895 consisting of a large room and front porch downstairs, a large room upstairs, and a jail in the rear. The fire house, the oldest municipal building in Stevens Point, served as the city's second fire station until 1967, when the current headquarters station was built at Franklin and Division Streets.



Franklin and Division Streets.

Over the years the bell tower and front porch were removed and the brick was painted, as can be seen in the picture to the left.

The restoration project will begin in the Spring. The bell tower will be replicated, and a new, metal roof will be constructed.

This project is being funded by a generous grant from the Seramur Family Fund and a matching grant from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). The Society is still accepting donations toward the match of the DAR grant. The names of donors giving \$100 or more will be placed on a permanent plaque to be

installed at the Fire House. If you would like to donate please send a check to PCHS Fire House, C/O Karen Zinda, 1880 Pine Bluff Rd. Stevens Point WI 54481



The Pinery

Of Fires, Fire Engines and Genesis of the Fire Department (SPFD)

By Mark Seiler

Today the City of Stevens Point has two fire stations, 40 fire fighters, 4 fire trucks, as well as other emergency vehicles. Should a major conflagration occur, neighboring fire departments can be called in to assist battling the fire. There are fire hydrants on nearly every corner, many buildings are equipped with sprinkler and fire alarm systems, while private homes are equipped with smoke detectors. In case of a fire, modern detection systems can automatically notify the fire department or individuals can simply dial 911 to summon help.

160 years ago none of this existed in Stevens Point. There was no fire department, no fire trucks, no running water, and no telephone. Moreover most buildings were constructed of easily combustible pine. Cooking and heating were dependent on wood burning stoves which often overheated, and whose chimneys usually consisted of a stove pipe penetrating a roof covered with wood shingles. In a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, the *Wisconsin Pinery* (1/8/1854), the author wrote about "Mr. Stove Pipe", of whom he says: "If the truth must be said, this same old 'Stove Pipe' is responsible, as anybody knows, for nine in ten of all of the fires".

Given these conditions, it is not surprising to read in the *Pinery*, numerous reports of fires, some extinguished quickly with little damage, others with calamitous results, including the destruction of entire parts of the Village of Stevens Point and sometimes resulting in death.

Even before Stevens Point was chartered as a city in 1858, there were calls for the establishment of a fire department. The *Pinery* (7/6/1853) reported about a fire on the Fourth of July in "Mr. Phelps tavern at the foot of Main street...":

[The] ...the wind from the N. W., quite fresh, drove the smoke and flames directly up the street, endangering the whole town. To all human appearance the whole of the north side of the street must in a few minutes be reduced to ashes; but the vigilance and activity of the Pinery Boys arrested the destroying element. [...] Never did men fight the devouring element with more determination, or greater success.

At the end of the article, the editor asked: "Is it not time to provide this town with a fire engine?" Stevens Point was a lumber town and the "Pinery Boys" were the

young men, residing in rooming houses, who came to Stevens Point each year to run logs down the Wisconsin River, once the ice went out. These men, when a fire broke out, would form bucket brigades to throw water on the fire from the river, wells, or cisterns, and wet down the wooden shingles of buildings in the vicinity of the fire, in the hope that they would not also catch fire. In winter fighting fires was more difficult, without the Pinery Boys-- who had returned home-- with the river frozen over and cistern pumps sometimes frozen up.



In 1854 the *Pinery* (11/20/1854) reported on the burning of a Mr. Martin Perkins' house just East of the Public Square: "In less than 20 Minutes the house and nearly all its contents were in ashes. A most fastidious and valuable citizen is thus, in a moment, houseless, without clothes, furniture or stores!". The *Pinery*

continued: "No Engine, no Fire company; --not a hook, ladder or bucket, even, in this closely built village of pine board. When are we going to 'take the hint,' and adopt the ordinary, common precautions against the common enemy. When?"

In 1855, after another fire, the *Pinery* (12/22/1855) made an appeal to the citizenry: [This fire] "should be regarded as but a precursor of what may follow in our wooden village: it is another call for a Fire Engine". A few days later on December 27, the *Pinery* reported on a fire that destroyed "Widow Luce's" home on Main street, which for an hour also endangered the Presbyterian Church. "In ten minutes 200 men [again, the pinery boys] were on the ground, and every exertion made in vain to arrest the flames". The article ends with the question "What about the Fire Engine??"

In 1856 the *Pinery* (10/2/1856) printed an advertisement, exhorting citizens to have brick chimneys:

TO BE WATCHED.--There is a suspicious fellow about town, having a stand in almost every house, called STOVE PIPE. He is responsible for nearly every fire that has broken out in our village for the last five years. He is decidedly a slippery fellow, dodging out of the way, getting out of joint and neglecting his duty when he is most needed--on a cold morning for instance. Look out for him: tie him up strong, 'put the rivets to him,' or 'turn him out, 'and fill

The Pinery

In 1858, a few months before the City of Stevens Point was chartered, after another fire on Main street, the *Pinery* (1/8/1858) continued to call for enhanced fire protection: "The village is large enough to have an Engine, Hooks and Ladders, and we honestly hope that our citizens will look into the matter." On January 22 the *Pinery* published an announcement that the "Hook and Ladder Company" would meet in the Post Office. This was an informally organized group of volunteers, not a fire department created by the City.

In February 1858 the *Pinery* (2/26/1858) reported on the "most disastrous fire ever occurring in Stevens Point", which burnt to the ground 14 buildings on Main street, with a total loss of nearly \$25,000, nearly \$649,000 in 2011 dollars.

In 1859, after the City of Stevens Point was chartered, yet another fire occurred, this time destroying *only 2* buildings. Again the *Pinery* (5/20/1859) lamented the lack of a fire engine. But in June 1859 there was a meeting of citizens in the post office (*Pinery*, 6/10/1859), at which resolutions were passed "calling for a Hook and Ladder Company". The *Pinery* stated:

...it is earnestly hoped that our citizens will come forward with their usual liberality and furnish a good supply of Hooks, Ladders, buckets, etc. We would suggest that a bell be placed in a position so that in case of fire at night, the whole force of the town can be raised.

Finally in 1860 the City of Stevens Point purchased a used fire engine, Fire King No. 1, from the City of Chicago which had purchased it in 1835. Fire King 1 served the city until 1874. It was a pumper that could throw the water 125 feet and required 16 men to operate, pumping water out of cisterns, wells, or the river. Since the city had no fire house, the engine was housed at Dr. Rood's on Clark street. When a fire broke out, volunteers would pull the engine to the site of the fire. The *Pinery* (2/23/1860) complained that a larger engine should have been purchased. Members of the City Council apparently argued that a larger machine would not work, since it would be impossible for citizens to "drag the 'creature' through the sand" during the "running season", i.e. when the men were out on the river "running" logs. The *Pinery* responded: "...again we say humbug. Our women will remain here still and when they put their heads to the work, if the thing won't move, then we admit the argument."

In December 1865 another disastrous fire broke out, spreading south and west from the Public Square and east to Third street. It leapt across Main street and soon both sides of Main street were ablaze. The loss was estimated at \$50,000 with only \$6,000 covered by insurance.

Although the city had a new fire engine, the fire company was still an *unofficial, volunteer* organization. It was not until 1867 the Engine Company No. 1 was organized as an *official, volunteer* fire department (*Stevens Point Journal* 6/28/1958). But, since this still was a *volunteer* organization, supplemental funds had to be raised from functions such as an annual fireman's ball, to purchase equipment and uniforms. The importance of volunteers was clearly stated by the *Pinery* as late as 1874: "Now when you hear the tap of the fire bell, do not make a straight break for the fire, when ten chances to one you can do no good, but rush to the engine house and help to get the engine out." In addition to the purchase of the fire engine, the City did make improvements to its infrastructure with the construction of three cisterns in the downtown area, and a year later a new cistern on the Public Square that held 100 barrels of water (*SPJ* 6/28/1958).



In 1874 the *Pinery* (2/21/1874) reported about a petition presented to the City, "praying the Common Council to purchase a steam fire engine." The *Pinery* endorsed this petition, stating: "Our present means for the extinguishment of

fires are manifestly inadequate, and although the expense [...] may seem large, it is something that we must have, sooner or later."

The City purchased an Amoskeag Steam Fire Engine, which threw a stream of water 194 feet into the air and 300 feet horizontally. The *Pinery* (10/31/1874) reported it was housed in the mayor's barn until a new Engine House was built on North Second Street, with a large water reservoir in front of the building. There was enough land for the "building of a stable directly in the rear of the engine house should it ever become necessary to keep a team with which to haul the engine."

The *Pinery* (9/19/1874) reported on deliberations by the Common Council to meet other needs of the fire department, including buying 13 spanners [wrenches for hose couplings] and 18 belts, and having repairs done on the hose wagons. Furthermore the Council considered a request from the Stevens Point hose company,

...asking permission to reorganize under the name of the Central City Steam Engine Fire Company No. 1 of Stevens Point, Wis., and to increase their

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Synagogue Notes

The Synagogue Museum has been given several beautiful items for display. Paul and Nancy Barks of Anoka, Minnesota donated a silver Havdalah set, consisting of a plate, a candle holder, a Kiddish cup, and a spice jar. At the completion of the Shabbat, Havdalah is recited over kosher wine, a special braided Havdalah candle is lit, a prayer recited, and spices are handed around.



David Garber, a former member of Beth Israel, donated two plates which his mother had purchased in Israel. One depicts the Ten Commandments, flanked by Lions of Judah. The other is a Passover Seder plate, which at

the Passover Seder contains symbolic foods retelling the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt.



If you have driven past the Synagogue recently you will have noticed the new steps. This project was made possible by a generous donation from Jeff Tannenbaum of Katonah, NY, in honor of his daughter Riana's Bat Mitzvah. Jeff and Riana visited the Synagogue this summer.



The Society has received donations in memory of Jerry Schein, a former member of Beth Israel, who passed away November 4 in California. We send our sympathy to Jerry's family and thanks to the donors: Phyllis Harris of Houston, TX and Charlotte

Mirman and Bill and Virginia Cable of Stevens Point.

From the President

Tim Siebert

This has been a great year for the society. We completed construction projects at Heritage Park and our new July event, "Heritage Days", and the Civil War Reenactment in Pfiffner Park went very well. New front steps have been installed at the Synagogue Museum and in Spring the roof of the Historical Fire House Nr. 2 will be replaced. The Society has received a number of artifacts, including a collection of documents from the Rotary Club, donated by Dick Judy, and a scrap book collection from the family of Milvern "Stub" Jacklin. All of these donations help us better describe the history and heritage of Portage County. Finally, the society received grants totaling \$3,750 to purchase archival boxes to store our photo and clothing collections, and \$10,000 towards the roof and bell tower reconstruction at Historic Fire House N^o 2 from the Special Grants Committee of the National DAR. We wish to thank everyone who helped the Society this year.

This coming year Heritage Park will continue the agricultural theme and the Board of Directors is investigating the possibility of erecting a building on the open basement-foundation in the park. The building that once stood there was destroyed by arson a number of years ago. A new building might provide storage for our collection of agricultural.

On the down side, the Society has fallen victim of the bad economic times. We have lost \$6000 funding from the City of Stevens Point and Portage County, nearly 10% of our operating budget. Our mortgage now amounts to only \$20,000, which we continue to pay down. With these economic realities, the Board has adopted a budget that reflects these changes. The society still recycles aluminum cans and small electrical implements to raise funds to supplement our operating budget. We certainly would appreciate your considering an increase in your membership-giving to help us through these difficult times.

We thank you, the members, for your support in the past and send you heartfelt greetings for the New Year.

Calendar of Events

April 10th, Annual Meeting, Portage County Library, downtown Stevens Point. Meeting at 7 p.m. with special guest Michael Edmonds, author of "Out of the Northwoods: The Many Lives of Paul Bunyan"

4th weekend in July—Heritage Days at Heritage Park in Plover

August 25 & 26 —Civil War Encampment at Pfiffner Pioneer Park, downtown Stevens Point

The Dinery

The board wishes to give a special thanks to Patti Becker and Sam Solberg for their service. With the resignation of two Board members this fall the nominating committee is interested in hearing from members who would be interested in serving. Board terms are three years, and the board meets 11 times a year (January –November). Board meetings are normally held in the basement of the Synagogue Museum on Water Street and take place on the 2nd Wednesday of the month. Meeting time is 6:30 p.m.

If you are interested in becoming a board member please contact Mark Seiler at mseiler@uwsp.edu

Board members must be a member of the PCHS.

On behalf of the Board we would like to thank the following people who volunteered, donated, or in other ways helped out the Society in 2011.

Loras Smithback
 Tim and Debbie Angers
 Larry Zimmerman
 Karolyn Solberg
 Greg, Michelle, & Katherine Richards
 Janet and Susannah Zblewski
 Melissa, Rachel, Susan, & William Simonis
 Anna Rathman
 John Berg
 Willow Macy
 Laura Habel
 Leigh Johnson
 Jeanine Brost
 Engford Family
 Ruthie & Frank Clark
 Maggie Fletcher
 Mary Beth Anday
 Nancy Siebert
 Chuck Egle
 Pat West
 Mitchell Sluzewski
 Tom,Michelle,Jake & Elizabeth Oakland
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 Lynn's Greenhouse & Garden Center
 Robert Knowlton
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 Tony & Sandy Bronk
 Dean Suave
 Dave Suchon—Dave's Body Shop
 Dick Judy
 The Milvern "Stub" Jacklin family
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 Lee Ayers Jewelry
 Golden Sands Home Builders Assoc.
 Riiser Energy
 Café 27
 The Main Grain Bakery
 Trig's Grocery Store
 Politico's Pizza
 Rand C Erback RCE LLC Call it New/Call it Antique
 Mary P. Reeve
 Mark J. Daly
 Lauri & Scott Rockman
 Jeanne & Ed Severson
 Mitchells Hilltop Pub & Grill
 Washington Elementry School
 Mc Dill School
 CWMR, Ltd.

And everyone who stopped by one of our sites or attended one of our events.

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membership to 73, and to have control of the 'Central City' steam fire engine, hose carts hose and all articles belonging to the engine and present hose company.

Also, the Chief of the fire department, J. D. Mc Lean reported that he had ordered three cisterns repaired, which had been leaking . After the creation of Central

City Steam Engine Fire Company No. 1, an advertisement appeared in the *Pinery* (11/17/1874), calling a meeting of Fire King Engine Company No. 1 "for the purpose of settling up the affairs of the company previous to disbanding".

Although the City now had a new fire engine and a newly constituted fire company, there were no horses to pull the new engine. The *Journal* (12/19/1874) argued:

It would cost the city nearly two thousand dollars a year to keep a team. The expense should be avoided if possible, but it cannot be unless the people have their wits about when the fire bell rings, and assist in getting the steamer out.

Evidently the steamer proved to be too heavy for citizens to haul out, so \$5 was offered to the first man to bring a team of horses after the fire bell rang. Finally, in 1877, the city purchased a team of chestnut Morgans to haul the engine, and sometime later another horse was purchased to pull the heavy hose cart.

In 1875 Fire Chief Mc Lean reported on additional problems. Three cisterns were leaking, and the Fire King engine did not have a hose cart, rendering that engine useless. H. Welty, the foreman of the company, complained that the company had only one ladder--in need of repairs--and only one ax. He recommended the repair of the ladder, the purchase of a second ladder and four axes (SPJ 2/13/1875).

In 1877 the *Journal* (SPJ 6/9/1877) reported that the Central City Fire Company No. 1 had disbanded due to the failure of the Council to reimburse members for fighting a fire in the Knox lumber yard. Also a meeting of businessmen was called to discuss whether "it is best to have a paid or volunteer department".

Disagreements with the Council must have been resolved, for in 1880 the volunteer firemen adopted a constitution for the *Central City Fire Engine Company No. 1*. In 1885 the City purchased a second Amoskeag steam engine, called the "General Ellis No. 2", for the new Southside Fire House No. 2, that was under construction on Strongs avenue (SPJ 9/5/1885).

The firemen, however, still were volunteers and did not receive a set salary. The Fire Company received \$15 for each fire and payments from insurance firms, which

was divided among the firemen. In 1890 the total income for the year was \$1,586.56, divided among 30 firemen meant \$52.88 for each fireman.

Finally in 1892 a paid fire department was established by the City Council--4 firemen at each station with two designated as teamsters. Salaries were set at \$100 per year plus use of the telephone for the chief, \$50 a month for teamsters, and \$40 for the foreman of each company. In addition to the creation of the municipal fire department, changes in the City's infrastructure dramatically changed the nature of fire-fighting in Stevens Point.

In 1889 the water works was built with a pump house in what today is Bukolt Park. Initially there were eight fire hydrants--one on the North Side, two on the Public Square, one at the Courthouse, one near the Lutz Brewery on Water street, one near the Wisconsin Central railroad shops, and one each on the east of west sides of town. Ultimately there were 11 miles of water mains and 125 fire hydrants. A standpipe nearly 140 feet height provided the water pressure. This development made the steam engines obsolete and they were retired (SPJ 6/28/1958).

In 1901 the city installed a fire alarm system--24 alarm boxes at key points throughout the city. When the system was tested by the mayor, who turned in an alarm from the corner of Arlington Place and Strongs Avenue, calling Company No. 1, the fire wagon appeared in 2 minutes and had a stream of water turned on in 50 seconds.

In 1917 the first motorized fire engine was purchased--a LaFrance pumper, with a 300 gallon per minute capacity, chain drive and hard rubber tires. It served the city until 1945 when it was converted into a hose cart. In 1924 a chemical tank and hose truck were purchased, and in 1933 a 12 cylinder American La-France fire truck



with a 1,000 gallon capacity joined the force, bringing the Stevens Point Fire Department into the era of a modern fire department.

Note: The Fire King fire engine is in the collections of the Chicago Historical Society. The 1917 LaFrance fire truck is owned by Nick and Dianne Somers of Stevens Point. The 1933 LaFrance, on permanent loan from the Stevens Point Firefighters Local 484, is on display at the Historical Society's Historic Fire House N^o 2 on Strongs Avenue.



Portage County Historical Society

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Julie Richards (volunteer coordinator)	Open Position
Dave Simonis	Open Position
Beverly West	

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Karen Zinda and Mark Seiler, Editors
Masthead Design by Jessie Michelson



Annual Membership Appeal and Volunteer Thank You Issue

Like all non-profits we rely on our volunteers, with out their help we would not be able to hold the events we host or have our sites open. THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!

And like many non-profits we have or lost funding for the coming past year - funding which has helped us to operate our four sites in Portage County: Heritage Park in Plover, The Rising Star Mill in Nelsonville, Beth Israel Synagogue Museum and the Historic Fire House N^o 2 in Stevens Point. That's why we ask that you read the codes on your mailing label. "Jan-12" means your annual dues are due and we would appreciate your continued support (dues run from Jan—Dec). If it says "life", you have made a one time payment entitling you to this designation, however, continued support is always welcomed. If it says "donor" consider making another donation this year. If it says "complimentary" - consider joining. If it says "elected official" - well ... support us in every way you can.

Thank you for your investment in Portage County's history. Together we can keep growing the Portage County Historical Society.