

## **Best-Luther Fire Department History**

Excerpt from the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Installation Banquet brochure

Written by Robert Don

### *The Early Years*

The first treasurer's records show that Best-Luther Fire Department started with \$45.00 in dues in April 1946. The year end report showed \$442.83 and Best-Luther Fire Department was on its' way.

In 1947, Mr. & Mrs. Theodore Southworth donated four acres of land on the Old Best Road and a small wooden barn which the firefighters hauled down from the Southworth residence on Craver Road to their newly acquired property. This became the home of Best-Luther's first fire truck, a Sanford. In that same year, we purchased a 1935 Dodge from Clinton Heights Fire Company for \$240. By 1949, the original truck had been replaced by a war surplus purpose-built Liberty stored in the big barn on Best-Luther Road belonging to Charles La Dow. The net value of the company's assets, including the truck, had grown to about \$12,000. This was pretty good in those days for a rural fire department without any government support.

On October 29<sup>th</sup>, the members were attending a meeting about a mile away at the Luther Community Club House, a former school house which eventually became the company's second fire house, when they were informed that La Dow's barn was on fire! Upon arrival, the truck and all of the stored equipment were a mass of flames. In spite of all their efforts, the barn and everything in it burned to the ground. Not wanting to give up, even though it meant starting all over again with nothing, they borrowed a truck from the Ring Hose Company in Rensselaer and other equipment donated by several neighboring fire companies. They were shortly "back in business", this time in the little barn on their own property.

By the early 1950s it became a time to concentrate on fund raising. Much of this activity was carried on by the firefighter's wives, mothers, daughters and other women in the community, at first as an informal group but later organized into the Best-Luther Ladies Auxilliary.

In July of 1953, the Town of East Greenbush established the Best-Luther Fire Protection District and we received our first funding, three hundred dollars. In 1954, a contract was signed for the completion of a two-truck concrete building.

### *The Radio System*

Private phone lines were the only method of alerting firefighters of an emergency. The alarm was called in to three key members, one of whom would immediately proceed to the fire house or scene while someone else in the household, usually the wife, would start a chain of calls which would be fanned out to the other firefighters. Recognizing the time it took to complete this process, Best-Luther agreed late in 1954 to take part in the development of a radio alarm system. We purchased and installed a radio transmitter to operate on the "fire" frequency and obtain the necessary FCC license together with licenses for the individual firefighters who would use it. The Macal Company designed, built and installed a unit which, using our transmitter, would send out a signal which would activate an alarm tone in each of a number of radios in the homes of key firefighters and at the same time touch off the sirens on top of the fire house. Unfortunately, the system never worked satisfactorily and all the equipment was

removed. The Federal government had established the Federal Civil Defense Authority which, through the states, was encouraging the creation of shelters and other equipment for defense purposes, including alarm systems. We managed to convince the authorities that a radio fire alarm system could be a great value for Civil Defense purposes, we were able to obtain FCDA funding for half the cost of our transmitter and ten new monitor radios. After these monitors had been fitted with a radio operated alarm bell, they were installed in the homes of the Chief and nine other firefighters. The Best-Luther radio alarm system, in operation since 1957, is believed to be the first of this type in the state, if not the country.

#### *The Middle Years*

Over the years BLFD continued to develop and expand its services. In 1958, unable to afford a new truck, the members bought a new chassis, fitted it with a water tank and pump and built their own truck. In 1961, a new section comprising of a kitchen and restrooms was added to the fire house, which had been essentially only a garage previously. By 1969, we were able to buy a new truck. In 1970, the former school and later Community House in Luther was acquired and transformed into what is now the Luther Station.

In the early eighties, the company concentrated on improving and obtaining new equipment. By 1984, the garage section of the main station was completely transformed into a community room for meetings and other events. This room can also be used for an emergency shelter for the public.

#### *Present and Future*

In 1995, the company took delivery of a new Freightliner fitted with the latest in high-tech equipment with the designation of 3-7. In 2001, we were able to purchase an additional new Freightliner to replace our old '68 Hahn Tanker with the designation of 3-6. In 2002, we purchased a Polaris ATV 4x4 Commercial vehicle. The ATV-3 is used for brush fires and rescue.