

Treasures from the Sherman Room

An Introduction to Brimfield History from the Library's Historical Collections

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A History of Fire Department Apparatus

John Sherris, Retired Assistant Fire Chief has produced a wonderful document providing a history of the fire apparatus used by the Brimfield Volunteer Fire Department since its earliest days. The paper, dated January 4, 2021, was generated in response to a request from the Brimfield Historical Commission on its efforts to compile a book on town history.

The "Old Ford"

This truck was mentioned in the original article in the 250th anniversary booklet. It preceded the "Buffalo" and according to the article was taken out of service in 1925. I have heard of this truck anecdotally (from Bob Hanna I believe). I believe I was told that it had a flatbed body with a gasoline powered pump and some fire hose on it. Because of the timeframe, I have to presume that the truck was a Model T. I do not know if it was purchased new or used.

1927 Buffalo (Buffalo Fire Appliance Corporation)

Again, according to the 250th anniversary booklet, this piece of apparatus was purchased for the sum of \$6,000 in 1928. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first piece of purpose-built apparatus owned by the town. It was in service until 1973.

The truck was built on a Selden chassis and powered by a Continental 6-cylinder gasoline engine. The fire pump was a 500 gpm Hale rotary gear pump. In 1985, the town voted to donate the truck to the Fire Museum at the Connecticut Trolley Museum. In the early 2000's, the truck was purchased back by the Brimfield Firefighter's Association and they are the current owners.

1942 Ford

I do not know what company converted the Ford chassis into a fire truck. The truck was purchased at the beginning of World War II. The story that I was told was that the manufacturer's representative was going town to town, touting the trucks as good units for use after a bombing raid. The truck had a front mounted pump (250 gpm? – Barton-American) and I was told that it had a 500- gallon water tank.

1958 Ford / Farrar

I have to presume that this truck was purchased in 1958 or 1959. The Ford chassis was made into a fire truck by the Farrar Company in Woodville, MA. This truck was quite large in comparison to the Buffalo and '42 Ford. The truck had a front mounted pump (500 gpm Barton-American?), a 1,000-gallon water tank, and a 40' extension ladder mounted in a rack on the top. The truck was also fitted out with six 5-gallon Indian pump cans. Review of old town reports confirms that this truck had 500 gpm pump and that it was a Ford model F700. In early 1987, this truck was transferred to the Highway Department for conversion to a sander.

Military Deuce and ½ Tanker

In the mid 1960's, the town acquired a military surplus 2 ½ (deuce and ½) truck, which the firefighters converted into a tanker. I have it in my mind that the truck was a 1942 vintage, but I can't verify that. I also have it in my mind that the truck was made by Chevrolet. I did some research that indicates that most if not all of these trucks were built by GMC or Chevrolet, so this is a possibility.

My first encounter with this truck was at a dump fire. I grew up near the town dump and after I joined the Junior Fire Department (spring of 1964) if I smelled smoke and saw the fire truck go by, I would hike to the dump to assist with the firefighting. During one of these times, I saw a blue military truck with a box type cargo body on it pull in. The firefighters opened the back doors of the body and there was a tank located inside. They hooked a hose from the tank to the fire truck and used the water to fight the fire.

Bob Hanna relayed to me at a much later date that the truck had been a military field kitchen and that the body was lined with stainless steel for easy cleaning. He made a deal with a local junk yard owner to swap the body for a tank that the man had. The body was removed from the truck, the tank was attached to the frame, the truck was painted red and the town had its first tanker.

I was told that the tank held 1,000 gallons of water but I don't know if this is correct or not. Review of old town reports gave the year of this truck as 1943 and 1945, so take your pick. It was also referred to several times as a GMC.

The review of the town reports also indicated that at the annual town meeting of May 14, 1979, it was voted to sell this truck to the Holland Fire Department for the sum of \$1.00.

1968 Chevrolet / Maxim

In 1968 the town purchased a new Chevrolet fire truck. The truck had been fitted out by Maxim Motors, a fire apparatus builder in Middleborough, MA. The truck had a 1,000-gallon tank and a midship mounted Hale pump (mounted in the center of the truck). I believe it was 750 gpm capacity.

This truck replaced the 1942 Ford. It was the first time since the retirement of the "Old Ford" that a fire truck had been replaced by a newer one.

Before it was sold at auction, the fire pump was removed from the 1942 Ford and installed on the Deuce and ½ tanker. A town report review confirmed the truck had a 750 gpm rated fire pump and also that the truck was a model 80 series.

1974 Ford / Worcester

In 1974 the town purchased a new Ford fire truck. The truck was built on a Ford C900 chassis by Worcester Fire Apparatus of Auburn, MA. Word on the street was that the company built three fire engines plus several other pieces of apparatus and then went out of business. Our truck was one of the three.

The truck had a hale 750 gpm midship pump and a 1,000-gallon water tank. It was also the first cab over engine truck that the Fire Dept. had. The truck replaced the 1927 Buffalo.

I have found more information about the purchase of this truck. At the annual town meeting on March 5, 1973, \$30,000 was appropriated for the purchase of this truck. A Fire Truck Purchase Committee was formed to achieve this objective.

The committee consisted of James A. Adams, Jr. (selectman), Richard E. Souliere (Finance Committee), Robert L. Hanna (Fire Department), Walter Burnham (Member at Large) and Theodore Skowyra (Member at Large). This truck was delivered and put in service in July 1975.

2nd Military Deuce and ½ Tanker (The Yellow Submarine)

In the mid 1970's, several department members who lived in the west end of town became concerned about the amount of time that it took to get a fire truck from the center of town to their location in the event of a fire. This problem was resolved by acquiring another 2 ½ ton truck through Civil Defense. The truck was parked in Cliff Norton's garage on Washington Rd.

The truck had a low sided cargo bed on it. Cliff, Brian Haley, and several others enclosed the bed with steel to form a tank. They mounted a gasoline powered pump at the front of the tank, and I believe that they mounted a hose reel. The truck was then painted yellow (painting fire trucks yellow was considered a safety feature at the time, until it was discovered that people were mistaking them for utility company trucks). When it went in service, the truck was housed in Cliff Norton's garage since there was no funding available for a West Brimfield Fire Department sub-station. Later, the truck was moved to the fire station in the center of town (I think this might have happened when Cliff Norton died in 1978 but I'm not sure of that). The truck took over tanker duties from the 1st Deuce and ½, which made its way to the Holland Fire Dept.

The moniker "Yellow Submarine" was given to the truck after it was driven into a shallow section of the Quaboag River to get the pump closer to the water when refilling during a brush fire.

More information on this truck was revealed by going through old Town Reports. At a special town meeting on September 29, 1975, it was voted to accept this truck from the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency. It was also voted to appropriate \$1,200 to convert it to a fire truck. The truck was listed variously as a 1951 or a 1954 GMC. At a special town meeting on October 16, 1984, it was voted to sell this truck at auction.

1979 Autocar Construcktor / Yankee Coach Co. Tanker

At the annual town meeting on May 14, 1984, \$70,000 was appropriated for the purchase of a water supply fire truck. A committee was formed to achieve the purchase of this truck. The committee members were Jean McGann, Robert Joyce, Gene Roberts, Ernie Blake, Bob Hanna, Ken Weglarz, and Peter Whitten.

A refurbished 1979 Autocar cab and chassis was procured from Baskin's Truck Sales in Chicopee, MA. A contract to build a fire tanker on this truck was awarded to Yankee Coach Co., an ambulance builder in Palmer,

MA that wanted to break into fire truck manufacturing. The truck had a 290 HP Cummins diesel engine (the first piece of diesel-powered apparatus owned by the Fire Dept.) and a Roadranger transmission. It was equipped with a 3,000-gallon tank and a 1,000-gpm front mounted Hale pump. This truck replaced the 1958 Ford fire engine and the early 1950's GMC Deuce and ½. The latter was sold at auction. The 1979 Autocar Tanker was sold on Municibid.

1973 Dodge Forestry Truck

At a special town meeting on October 16, 1984, it was voted to appropriate \$1,000 for repairs to the Fire Dept. pickup truck. This truck was a 1973 Dodge 4-wheel drive that had been acquired through government surplus. A skid tank (tank, pump, and hose reel unit) had been installed in the back to make this a forest fire truck. I was told that the tank was purchased at a yard sale (possibly by Bob Hanna). This was the Fire Department's first brush (forestry) truck.

1969 Dodge Power Wagon Brush Truck

In early 1991, the Fire Dept. obtained a 1969 Dodge Power Wagon 4-wheel drive truck from government surplus. Even though the truck was older than the 1973 Dodge pickup, it was heavier duty and better suited to the department's needs.

The truck was painted red, the skid tank and equipment were transferred to it and it became the department's forest fire truck.

In September of 2001, the department obtained a grant from the Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary for the purchase of a new skid tank unit. This unit carried more water than its predecessor and also had foam capabilities. At the May 13, 1991 Town Meeting, it was voted to donate the 1973 Dodge pickup to the Wales Fire Dept.

1986 Ford Crown Victoria

At the Special Town Meeting on November 4, 1991, it was voted to accept a 1986 Ford Crown Victoria for Fire Dept. use. The car was a former police cruiser purchased from \$600 (I believe that it was purchased from the Millbury PD but I don't trust my memory on this). The 6 officers of the Fire Dept. at the time each contributed \$100 toward the purchase. We were told that we would be reimbursed when the town accepted the vehicle, but this never happened. The car was painted red, equipped with a light bar, and put in service as an officer's car.

1986 Chevrolet Hi-Cube Van

At the annual town meeting held on May 9, 1994, the town voted to accept a government surplus 1986 Chevrolet Hi-Cube van for use by the Fire Dept. The truck was painted, warning lights, a radio, and siren were installed, and racks were constructed inside the left wall of the van body (there was a bench seat along the right wall). Power tools and miscellaneous equipment was put on the racks and the truck was put into service as the town's first rescue truck.

1996 Freightliner / E-One

At the annual town meeting held on May 15, 1995, it was voted to appropriate \$185,000 for the purchase of a new fire truck with a 1,000-gallon tank and a 1,250-gpm fire pump. A contract was awarded to Greenwood Emergency Vehicles of North Attleboro, MA to supply a 1996 Freightliner Model FL80 built into a fire engine by the E-One company of Ocala, Florida. The apparatus went into service in 1996 (as Engine 3) and is still in service at the time of this writing.

1984 Chevrolet Blazer

In 1996 (possible late 1995), the Fire Dept. acquired through government surplus a 1984 Chevrolet diesel powered Blazer SUV. The truck received the customary paint job, light bar, radio, and miscellaneous equipment installations and was put into service as an officer's and administrative vehicle. This vehicle replaced the 1986 Crown Victoria.

1996 International / E-One

At the annual town meeting on May 17, 1999, the town voted to appropriate \$180,000 for the purchase of a four-wheel drive fire truck. A contract was awarded to Greenwood Emergency Vehicles in North Attleboro, MA to supply a 2000 International Model 4800 four-wheel drive fire truck with a midship mounted Hale fire pump of 1,000 gpm capacity and a 500-gallon water tank. The truck was also to have a diesel engine (International).

At the same town meeting, a sum of money (I believe \$30,000 but I'm not sure) was appropriated for the purpose of purchasing a "Holmatro" rescue tool (jaws of life). This tool was installed on this truck and was the Fire Department's first set of "jaws". The fire truck was built by the E-One company of Ocala, FL although I believe the actual construction was subbed out to their Superior Emergency Vehicle division in Ontario, Canada.

The truck was put into service primarily for use at forest fires and automobile accidents / fires (it had foam capabilities). The truck was designated as Engine 2 and is still in service as of this writing. This truck replaced the 1968 Chevrolet / Maxim, which was sold at auction.

2003 Ford F350 Pickup Truck

At the annual town meeting held on May 12, 2002, \$30,000 was appropriated for the purchase of a new utility vehicle. This was a 2003 Ford F-350 four-wheel drive crew cab pickup truck powered by a 7.3-liter diesel engine. I believe that the truck was purchased from Colony Ford Trucks in Warwick, RI but I'm really not sure of this.

The truck was delivered with Fire Dept. graphics and equipment and was designated Squad 1. This truck replaced the 1984 Chevrolet Blazer, which had been taken out of service because of engine trouble.

1974 A.M. General Deuce and ½ Tanker

In 2004, the Wilbraham Fire Department transferred to the Brimfield Fire Department a 1974 A.M. General military 2 ½ ton all-wheel drive truck that was surplus to their needs. The truck had a water tank mounted on it (I think it was 750 gallons) and a small gasoline engine powered pump for refilling.

The truck served as a forestry tanker for about five years, give or take, until a defective connecting rod bearing in the engine sidelined it.

2005 GMC C5500 Rescue Truck

In 2005, the Town of Brimfield purchased new a GMC Model C5500 / VRS Sales rescue truck. The truck was a collaboration between Motor Services Inc. of Auburn, MA who provided the cab and chassis and VRS Sales of Clifton Park, NY who installed the rescue body.

The truck has a diesel engine and automatic transmission. The rescue body has roll up doors and slide out shelves for easy access to equipment.

This truck is still in service at the time of this writing. It replaced the 1986 Chevrolet Cub-Van that was taken out of service because of transmission failure.

1994 Ford F350 Brush Truck

In 2008, the Fire Dept. acquired two government surplus trucks. One was a 1994 F350 pickup truck with four-wheel drive, a crew cab, a diesel engine, and automatic transmission. The second truck was an inoperable Ford light duty flatbed truck.

Fire Dept. members swapped bodies between the two trucks. The skid tank unit was transferred to this truck from the 1969 Dodge. New toolboxes were installed to hold tools, equipment, and forest fire hose. The truck was painted, lettered, and put in service as the forestry truck. This truck replaced the 1969 Dodge Power Wagon, which was taken out of service because of the unavailability of repair parts. The Dodge was sold at auction.

1968 Mack 10-ton Military Tanker

In 2009 or 2010 (I could not find an acquisition date), the Fire Dept. obtained a 1968 Mack 10-ton all-wheel drive military tanker. This truck was intended to replace the 1974 A.M. General deuce and ½ forestry tanker with the bad motor. Information that I have found online suggests that the truck was transferred to Brimfield from the Upton, MA Fire Department.

When the truck was received it had a leak in the water tank. It was also larger than the deuce and ½ trucks that preceded it. This made it awkward for forest firefighting. To the best of my knowledge, the truck never fought a fire during its time in Brimfield. It was sold on Municibid Auction in September of 2013.

2012 Spartan ERV Pumper

In 2012, the Fire Dept. ordered a Spartan ERV (Emergency Response Vehicle) model Spartan Force custom pumper. (A custom fire truck is one built entirely by the apparatus builder instead of using a "commercial" cab and chassis such as a Freightliner or International). The truck has a six-person cab, a Cummins diesel engine, and Allison automatic transmission. IT has a Hale 1,500 gpm fire pump, integral foam system, and a 1,000-gallon water tank. The truck was purchased from C + S Specialty, Inc. of North Smithfield, RI.

The truck was put in service in May of 2013 as Engine 1. This truck is still in service at the time of this writing. This truck replaced the 1974 Ford / Worcester (former Engine 1), which was sold on a Municibid Auction in September of 2013.

2005 Ford Crown Victoria

In 2016, the Fire Dept. acquired a 2005 Ford Crown Victoria cruiser from the Brimfield Police Dept. The Police Dept. had replaced this car with a newer vehicle. Very little was done to this car to adapt it for fire department service except for exchanging the blue lenses on the warning lights for red ones. The car remained black as it had been in police service and no graphics or lettering were applied.

The Fire Chief used this car as an administrative vehicle for the duration of his tenure in office and it was sold on Municibid Auction in August of 2020.

2001 Ford F550 Brush Truck

In the latter part of 2016, a 2001 Ford F550 four-wheel drive, diesel powered truck was transferred from the Brimfield Highway Dept. to the Fire Dept. The truck had been in highway service as a dump truck and was replaced by a newer vehicle.

The dump body was replaced by a flatbed body, the skid unit was transferred from the 1994 Ford, and the truck was equipped and put into service in April of 2017 As Brush 1. The 1994 Ford F350 was sold on a Municibid Auction in January 2018.

2018 Chevrolet Tahoe

At the end of 2017, the Fire Dept. purchased a 2018 Chevrolet Tahoe full sized SUV. The vehicle was equipped and lettered for fire dept. use and was put into service as the Command Car. It essentially took the place of the 2005 Ford Crown Victoria. The vehicle is in service as of this writing.

2017 Freightliner / Spartan Tanker

In 2017, the Fire Dept. ordered a Freightliner Model 114 SD /Spartan ERV 3,000-gallon tanker. The truck has a Cummins diesel engine and a 1,250 gpm Hale midship fire pump. The truck is also equipped with several preconnected, cross mounted hose lays, a ladder, and miscellaneous firefighting equipment. The pump and equipment allow the truck to make an attack on a fire in addition to being used as a water carrier. In essence, this makes the truck a tanker/pumper.

The truck was purchased from C + S Service, Inc. in North Smithfield, RI and put in service in December 2017. It replaced the 1979 Autocar / Yankee Coach Tanker, which was put in service in 1984 and served the town for almost 34 years. The Autocar was sold on a Municibid Auction in February 2018.

2019 Ford F250 Pickup Truck

In 2018, the Fire Dept. purchased a 2019 Ford F250, four-wheel drive, extended cab pickup truck. A cap was installed on the pickup bed, the truck was equipped and lettered for fire dept. use and was put into service in November of 2018 as Squad 1. This truck replaced the 2003 Ford F350 pickup truck, which was transferred to the Wales Fire Dept.