

THE TUSCOLA FIRE DEPARTMENT

Prior to 1881, Tuscola had no precautionary plans for fighting fires. When a fire happened, neighbors and volunteers did the best they could, but many times that wasn't enough to save the structure and sometimes surrounding buildings. Firefighting equipment was badly needed. After each burn a meeting would be held by the city council, they would pass a few resolutions in an attempt to gain by the vote of the people, authority to purchase fire apparatus, but it failed. Finally, on December 6, 1881 approval was given to issue bonds in the amount of \$2,500 to purchase the firefighting equipment.

A contract for the apparatus was then made December 17, 1881, with the "Fire Extinguisher Company" of Chicago. The apparatus consisted of 2 two-wheeled chemical engines, each weighing 2,500 pounds. Each was equipped with 300 feet of rubber hose, axes, crowbars, and two dozen rubber buckets. They also purchased 2 forty foot ladders and 2 spike poles.

The engines arrived March 15, 1882, over the Illinois Central Railroad. The engines were temporarily housed in a vacant room in Union Block on Sale Street, pending the building of a firehouse. The new firehouse was completed on April 10, 1882, at a cost of \$500. It was located in the 100 block of north Main Street, on the northeast corner of the alley. The front room was 20'x20' with a large meeting room at the back end for the use of the fire department, city council and a place for holding city elections.

May 2, 1882, the city appointed a committee to purchase an alarm bell, not to exceed \$60. The first bell that arrived on June 1, 1882, was set up on trestles at the firehouse and within a half hour was badly cracked. January 3, 1883, the second bell arrived and placed in the belfry of the firehouse. As the bell was being tolled for a meeting, it too developed a crack. A third bell was hung and it was all right.

For a couple of years after the purchase of the new apparatus there were no "big" fires, though several false alarms and slight fires occurred. On one occasion, a box car on the I. B. & W. railroad was burning and the firemen saved the running gear. It was found later that the fire was set for the purpose of bringing out the new fire apparatus. The culprits were never caught.

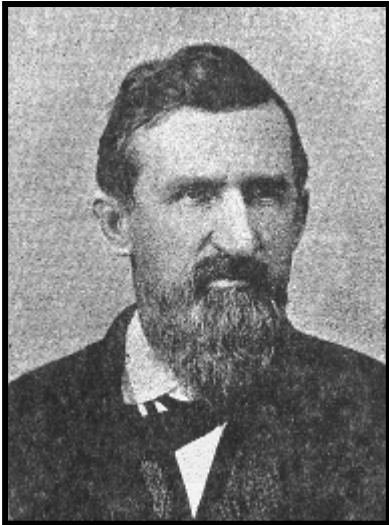
After the fire of 1873 that burned a large portion of downtown, a fire limit was established by the city council. It comprised Blocks A, B and 16, the business part of 17, all of 24 and 25, in the original town, which included the entire built-up portion of the business center. Within this limit, under the ordinance, it is illegal to erect any wooden buildings.

Henry Niles was appointed the first fire chief. Two companies were formed of volunteers from the community. The names of the members were:

Company No. 1 named "Tuscola" - H. Madison, Captain; B. G. Madison, J. F. Niles, John Fairbairn, B. F. Ford, E. and S. Ashville, F. A. E. Starr, J. B. and H. Wamsley, J. L. Dawson, M. V. Daggett, John and Jacob Wells, J. H. Jewell, O. A. Squires, A. A. McKee, S. Miller, James d. Higgins, H. Westfall, Frank Cummings, R. Watkins, G. downey, C. Bye, A. Clayton and Brown Ervin. The company color was red; Foreman, John Fairbairn; Treasurer, J. B. Wamsley.

Company No. 2 named "Rescue" - Frank Morris, Captain; Charles Camery, H. Woody, H. S. Bassett, F. B. Gohring, E. E. French, S. L. Hazelitt, C. A. Dunnigan, M. P. Cooper, A. W. Ingraham, R. R. Root, C. Linton, W. B. DeGroot, McC. Hazelitt, H. Wallace, J. H. Thrasher, B. F. Henderson, R. B. Niles, A. C. Sluss and Dr. S. T. Spees. The company color in blue; McC. Hazelitt, Foreman; R. B. Niles, Treasurer.

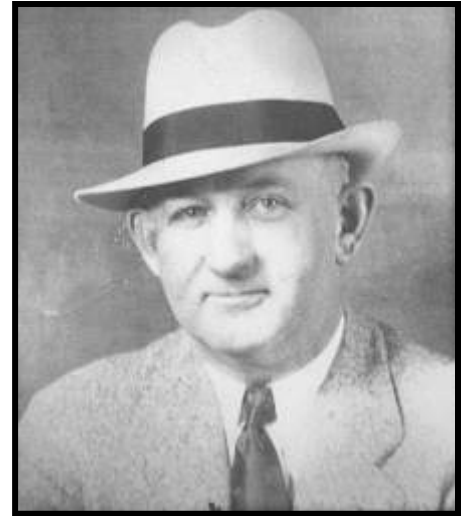
Some of Tuscola's Fire Chiefs



Henry Niles
Tuscola's first Fire Chief
appointed in 1882



Charles "Turp" Burmeister
1905-1947, 1951



Earl Parker
1947-1949



Wilbur Jolley
1949



Dean Ziegler
1949



Jeff Morris
1949-1951



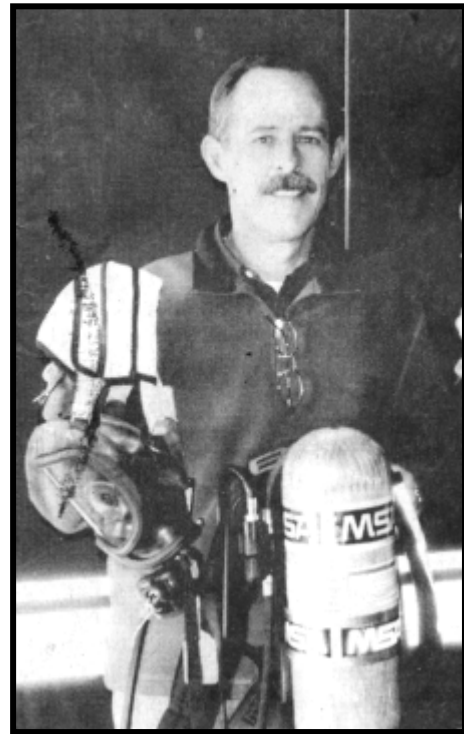
Lloyd Holmes
1951-1954



Douglas Ball
1954-1961



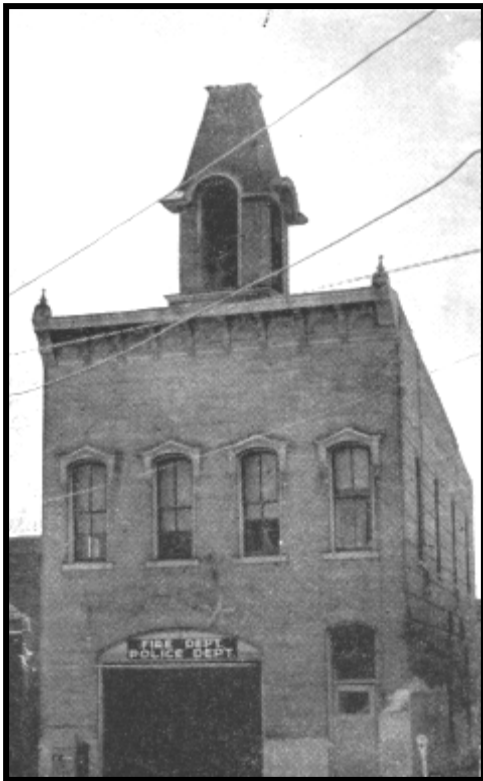
Dennis Dietrich
1961-1994



Steve Hettinger
1994-Present

Horse-drawn Fire Apparatus

This photo was taken in 1905 at the Star Store fire.



Sign hanging in firehouse in 1966

In 1888, a new firehouse and city hall was built on north Parke Street at a cost of \$3,500. The firehouse and calaboose was located on the ground floor and the council chambers were on the second floor.

The bell that hung in the balcony served as a fire warning for many years. Later, a siren was used. However, the presence of the bell above tended to make the building less safe for use. This building was replaced in 1958, having served the community for 70 years.

The bell has been hung in Ervin Park as a memento of earlier days.



TUSCOLA FIRE DEPARTMENT 2006



Tuscola Fire Department North Branch
Located on North Parke Street.



Tuscola Fire Department South Branch
Located on the corner of Main and Pinzon Streets.



Tuscola Fire Explorer Post 73

1st row – Steven Ray,
Tyler Sapp, Brian
Endres, Trisha Keagle
2nd row – Zach Ritter,
Cody Ray
3rd row – Katie Haake,
Nick Kidwell



Tuscola Firefighters 2006

Row 1 – Eng. Todd Bosch, Lt. Chip Haake, Capt. John Pangburn, Chief Steve Hettinger, Lt. Butch McCollum, Rescue Coord. Brian Moody, Eng. Joe Waldrop, Eng. Gary Kidwell.
Row 2 – F.F. Bill Schweighart, F.F. Josh Cummings, F.F. Mark Maxey, F.F. Dale Denny, Eng. Tom Keagle, F.F. Ryan Hornaday, Eng. Kirk Rogers.
Row 3 – F.F. Steve Cook, F.F. Mike Thomas, F.F. Adam Seip, F.F. Tim Bloomer, Eng. Jason Mills.
Absent – F.F. Phil Bosch, Chaplin. Joseph Carter, Lt. Kevin Andres, F.F. Jim Heath, F.F. William Hemmer, F.F. Elvin Kauffman, Eng. James Nees, Lt. Gregory Ritter, EMS Coord. & Eng. Joe Victor, F.F. Edward Willmore, Asst. Chief George Wineland.

Memorable Fires to Tuscola Businesses



The Star Store

Destroyed by fire on April 23, 1905, the three-story building stood on the east corner of North Central Avenue. The loss was estimated at \$250,000.



George Moore Building

Destroyed by fire on Thanksgiving Day, November 22, 1945, there was \$150,000 loss, one killed and two injured in the six hour blaze. The two-story building was located on West North Central Avenue.



Brookside Restaurant

The restaurant was destroyed by a gas explosion on October 3, 1957. Homer Carroll was injured in the fire.



Seibold Florist

The Seibold Florist, greenhouse and the Seibold residence were destroyed by fire on Valentine's Day, 1959. The business was located on the southwest corner of South Main and West Scott streets.



Mina Arthur Building

Lost in this fire was the two-story building at the southeast corner of North Parke and West Sale Streets. Businesses destroyed in the January 13, 1963 fire were Brownie's Café, Don Bence Barbershop, Midwest Supply store and Jehovah Witnesses Kingdom Hall.



Strand Theater

Early Christmas morning, 1967, fire destroyed the Strand Theater and the Montgomery Ward Catalog store. Damaged were Harry Young Electric and the Furste building. Damage was estimated at \$150,000. The buildings were located on the south side of West Sale Street.



Masonic Lodge

On October 7, 1974, a predawn fire damaged the Masonic Lodge, Sears Roebuck Catalog Store, Carpenter's Clothing Store, Avco Finance and several offices. The fire gutted the upper stories of the buildings and heavily damaged the first floor. The building is located in the 100 block of North Main street



The Douglas Hotel

On Halloween, 1975, fire destroyed the three-story Douglas Hotel. No one was injured in the blaze that took 100 firemen, six hours to battle. Damage was estimated at \$142,000. The old hotel was located in the 100 block of East Sale Street.



The Journal Building

On Valentine's Day 1997, the old *Tuscola Journal* building was destroyed by fire. Many old newspapers and pictures of historical value were destroyed, as well as some printing equipment. The Knights of Columbus Hall and the Tuscola Community Building also suffered some damage in the blaze. The building was located in the 100 block of West North Central Avenue.



MOTHER NATURE'S FURY



May 17, 1943 - Flood
Intersection of South Main and Highway 36
Photo Pettitt Photo Service



May 10, 1996 - Flood
Highway 36
The Tuscola Review, May 14, 1996



January 28, 1967 - Ice Storm



February 13, 2007 - Blizzard



April 21, 1963 - Tornado

Left Photo - Only the bathroom withstood the tremendous force of a tornado which struck the Elmer Shunk home located on the U. of I. Trail south of Route 36. Right Photo - The Francis Duensing home was also struck by the same tornado. Their home was located on the Wyatt farm two miles east of Tuscola. Mrs. Duensing can be seen in the left side of the picture surveying the damage. *The Tuscola Journal, April 25, 1963.*