

## **HISTORY OF THE SNYDER FIRE DEPARTMENT**

Snyder, or Snyderville as it was first called, was named for its first postmaster and one of the first settlers in the area, Michael Snyder. It developed into a small farming community that saw little growth for many years. But the area began to develop rapidly at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as attention was directed to its desirability as a residential community and several sub divisions opened up.

In July of 1905, twelve buildings in the Snyder area were destroyed by fire. The fire began at approximately 5:00 in the afternoon in the loft of a barn loft located to the rear of Helfter's Blacksmith Shop and Wagon Works on the north side of Main Street, just east of Harlem Road. Bucket brigades were formed and the community turned out to battle the blaze. Winds carried embers to the south side of Main Street and the west side of Harlem Road starting fires at barns and sheds. The Buffalo Fire department was summoned, but by the time they arrived most of the intersection was in flames. All of the wells and cisterns were drained quickly. Within two hours, only smoldering ruins of the twelve buildings were left. Estimated damage was \$50,000.00.

With a good supply of water, most of the buildings might have been saved. Ironically, only a short time before, a water company had offered to install hydrants at the cost of \$60.00 each, but frugal town fathers rejected the offer.

Coupled with the continued steady growth and the memory of the disastrous fire, citizens began to discuss the need for fire protection. When the Western New York Water Company placed water mains in the area, spirited citizens continued to discuss this need and meetings were held in Fischer's Hall on Main Street.

Department records indicate that paperwork was signed for the purpose of becoming an Incorporated Hose Company on November 26, 1915 and was approved by the Amherst Town Board on December 6, 1915.

A taxpayers meeting was held at the old School House on December 20, 1915 to finalize plans for the establishment of a fire district. This is recognized as the first meeting of the Snyder Hose Company. At this meeting, the company's first officers were elected.

Edward Weitz was elected the department's first President and Edward Helfter the first Chief - a position he held from 1916-1921 and again in 1925. The first fire commissioners of the Snyder Fire District were also elected sometime in 1916.

On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1916 a meeting was held at the old school house to install the first elected officers and review the proposed company By-Laws. Meetings would continue to be held there held there until January 1918. The old school house was located where the Eggertsville-Snyder Branch Library now stands. From January 1918 until January 1919, meetings were held in Dr. Robert Conn's barn on North Harlem Road. These meetings were referred to as the "meetings in the loft". In January 1919, they moved the meetings to the Amherst Community House, where they continued to meet until a fire station was built.

The original Constitution and By-Laws were adopted on March 13, 1916 and the Justice of the Supreme Court of New York State approved the Certificate of Incorporation on March 24, 1916 and it was then filed in the Office of the Secretary of State on April 13, 1916. The Hose Company's charter remained open until July 2, 1917.

It is interesting to note that the original company banner lists the date of the hose company's organization as May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1916. That date is also stamped on some early hose company badges. However, after extensive review of all department minutes, correspondence and other records, nothing can be found indicating the importance of that date. One possible answer is that may have been the date the Certificate of Incorporation was approved. But again, there is nothing in the paperwork indicating that. In 1991, during the planning for departments 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1916 was adopted as the official date of incorporation.

To help raise funds, the Hose Company hosted a card party and dance on February 16, 1916. This proved so successful that dances and card parties became an annual event hosted each February. Later, annual St. Patrick Day card parties and dance parties were held every March.

Picnics were held on company grounds every summer, except during the summer of 1918 when many members were away fighting in Europe during World War I. The entire community looked forward to the picnic and it was always well attended. A variety of games were played and a grand parade was held in the afternoon, followed by a large dinner. Music and dancing would continue well into the evening.

The first major problem the department had to address was the lack of any firefighting apparatus or equipment. The department had no funds to purchase all the necessary paraphernalia required. At the department meeting January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1916 Michael Fischer, a well known Snyder businessmen and hose company director, announced his business, Fischer Brothers, would donate 250 feet of fire hose and a hose cart. Later that year, ladders, axes and lanterns were also purchased to equip the cart and in 1918, the department purchased its first turn out gear. \$89.03 was paid for 15 used raincoats and 12 hats.

Apparently, the donated hose cart was in poor condition. At the department meeting on June 5, 1916 three men were appointed to meet with the fire commissioners and ask that they get the fire apparatus and hose in shape.

In February 1917, a motion was approved that the company purchase a new wagon designed to carry hose, ladders, buckets, lanterns and wrenches. The company agreed to make the purchase on the condition that the Board of Fire Commissioners would agree to reimburse the company as soon as tax money was collected. A committee was appointed to meet with the commissioners to discuss this proposal. No action was undertaken the following few months however because some of the commissioners were out of town.

On May 7, 1917, Chief Helfter reported that he received communication from the Fire Underwriters severely criticizing the condition of the company's equipment, especially the hose cart.

He stated he could "purchase a rubber tired running gear for \$10.00 second hand and that

approximately \$40.00 would build a good box with necessary attachments for ladders, lantern, wrenches, etc.”

The minutes indicate that two carts needed to be provided, so a motion was approved at this meeting to draw \$60.00 from the company treasury towards the purchase of two carts and Chief Helfter was authorized to purchase the running gear and build a body on it.

At the department meeting held on August 6, 1917, it was agreed to pay \$53.25 for the hose cart, ladder hooks and a sledge handle. It's interesting to note that the hose cart was built at Helfter's Wagon Works - the site where the famous fire of 1905 started.

The hose cart was first stored in a barn located on Firefighter Joseph Beck's property at Main Street and Harlem Road. In 1917, it was moved to a barn located on the Snyder Estate, which was leased by Firefighter Michael Fischer. In 1920, a garage was built at Main Street and Lincoln Road for the purpose of storing the cart. The garage was referred to as "the little red barn" and remained on the sight until fall, 1948. Electricity was installed in the garage in 1921.

As stated earlier, the minutes from May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1917 indicated two carts needed to be provided, but no record of a second cart is seen until the following year. The minutes from the department meeting held May 6, 1918 indicate a motion was approved to pay Helfter Wagon Works the balance due on *two* hose wagons. The second wagon was apparently stored near the College Hill section (Main Street and Washington Highway area). At the department meeting held May 3, 1919, it was reported, "...two lanterns and one hydrant wrench are missing from the hose cart located at the College Hill Section”.

To get the cart(s) to an alarm, a passing motorist was stopped whenever possible and the cart would be attached to their vehicle. When no vehicle was available, the firefighters would use a long rope and pull the cart(s) to the scene of the emergency.

To call out the volunteers for an alarm, a sledgehammer was used to strike a huge iron rim fastened to a tripod. There were two of these rims. One was located in the rear of Helfter's Wagon Works and the other was located on Washington Hwy. about 300 feet in from Main Street.

The old steel rims were replaced in 1922. Jacob Fruehauf, a member of the department, pledged to provide a large bell when a new fire station was built. However, he passed away before completion of a new facility. When a new building was eventually erected, his wife in memory of Jacob donated a modern fire siren. The siren was determined to be a better method for alerting firefighters. It cost \$525.00.

On February 12, 1923 Snyder was summoned to help Williamsville fight a fire in an old brewery in the heart of the village. Firefighter Tony Fischer secured the hose cart to the rear of his truck and firefighters Fred Ludwig and Bill Sanford jumped into the back of the truck and tried to keep the cart steady as they went down Main Street.

The cart rocked back and forth and just at the edge of the village, the cart struck the curb, knocking off a wheel. The men continued on with the broken cart and helped extinguish the fire.

After the fire, the cart was dragged back and placed behind the red barn where it remained for many years.

Now the Hose Company had only one hose cart in service. The story collected from an old newspaper article and confirmed in department minutes, tells of the Williamsville Fire Department sending Snyder, as a joke, a two-wheel hose reel. But the Snyder Firefighters ended up using this reel for several years.

The construction of an actual fire station was an ongoing project and several committees were appointed to seek property to build on. But due to the increased value of the land in the now thriving area, the members felt they could not afford to purchase any.

Emil H. Bergens, President of the company, gained possession of the Snyder property located in the Main Street and Lincoln Road area and offered to sell a lot to the company. If the company decided to purchase the lot from him, he offered to donate an additional, larger lot adjoining the purchased property.

At the company meeting held on September 8, 1919, a resolution was approved allowing the company to pursue purchasing the land, measuring 50 feet x 150 feet, from Bergens. The deed to the property was delivered at the meeting held February 2, 1920 and after the Search and Title was deemed in order, a special meeting was held on April 12, 1920 and the company officially agreed to purchase "from Mr. E.H. Bergens lot no. 35, on Main Street, Snyder, NY, next to the property of Mr. William Berryman for the sum of thirty seven hundred fifty dollars, paying cash therefore". At this meeting, Mr. Bergen's re-iterated his intent to donate an additional, larger plot of land, but only after a new building was assured of being built.

The company began making plans for a new building. Architect Mr. G. Morton Wolfe designed the new facility. He donated his time not only to draw the plans, but to oversee the construction process as well. Plans called for apparatus to be housed in a basement and exit the garage, up a ramp, to Main Street. The meeting room and clubroom were to be located on the second floor. Cost of the building was financed by a mortgage of \$10,000 from the Bank of Williamsville.

Emil Bergens turned the deed to the donated plot of land over to the Hose Company at the department meeting on April 3, 1922. The extra land, actually four lots, was to the rear of the original plot of land, and was to be used for parkland and would be used for picnics, outings, etc. Bergens donated the land together with his business partner Mr. Adam Shabtac.

Ground was broken for the new station on Monday, March 20, 1922. A team of horses and skids dug out the basement. It could not be dug very deep because of bedrock. A grand ceremony was held to celebrate the laying of the cornerstone on Sunday, May 14, 1922.

The first meeting was held in the new building in August 1922. At the regular department meeting that August, a motion was made and posted to ban intoxicating beverages in the building. Violators would be fined \$25.00 and could be expelled. (This was later rescinded).

A special meeting was held on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1922 for the purpose of organizing a Ladies

Auxiliary. 22 charter members were present and the auxiliary was formed to help raise funds for the department and support the firefighters in any way they could. They also responded to emergencies to assist the firefighters and provide refreshments. The auxiliary was in existence until approximately December 1933, when minutes indicate they sold their china and silverware.

Snyder's first motorized fire engine, an Ahrens-Fox, was purchased in 1925. It was shipped to the department on July 20<sup>th</sup> of that year and served the department proudly for many years. The Ahrens Fox would be proudly displayed at parades and conventions and collected many prizes over the years.

On December 13, 1926, 24 members formed the Exempt Association of Snyder, N.Y. The exempts, along with honorary members, assisted the active members in raising funds to pay for the new fire station. The organization continues to exist today with members assisting the active firefighters in many different ways.

The Audubon Topics, a community newspaper, reported in its March 1927 edition the proper procedure for residents to follow to report a fire:

"Use phone. Tell operator you want to report a fire to the Snyder Hose Company. She will then connect you with Beck's Meat Market. Give him the location of the fire. This applies day and night. Should operator fail to get Beck's Meats, she will attempt to notify several other members listed."

After one of the firefighters was notified, he needed to go to the fire station to sound the siren and summon the others.

In December 1929, a contract was signed between the Snyder Fire District and New York Telephone Company to provide a separate telephone line direct to the Amherst Police in Williamsville. Residents would call the police to report a fire and the police would sound the fire siren and firefighters would report to the station and talk directly with them to determine the nature and location of the emergency.

Because the area was growing rapidly, it was decided that more equipment was needed. In August 1934, the Board of Fire Commissioners approved the purchase of a small REO fire engine from American Fire Appliance for a price of \$254.00. In 1936 that engine was traded in with the purchase of a new pumper. This new piece of apparatus was referred to as engine 2 and was manufactured locally by the Buffalo Fire Appliance Company.

In 1939, a 1932, 16 cylinder Cadillac chassis was purchased by the department from local resident George Waite for \$200.00. After volunteers added a body to it, the car was presented to the Fire Commissioners.

The vehicle was painted white and was referred to as "The white car" or "squad car". It was utilized at EMS calls and parades.

On December 2, 1940, Francis "Shorty" Ludwig was elected to his first term as Chief. He

continued to lead the department as chief for the next 26 years.

The United State's involvement in World War II presented many challenges for the membership. Because so many men in the community were called to the armed forces, there was a shortage of personnel. To ensure 24-hour protection, Chief Ludwig instituted a night watch system in 1942. Two men slept at the fire station between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. One member would drive a rig to the location of the alarm while the other would telephone the other members to notify them of the emergency.

At first, members on night watch slept on cots in the rear of the truck room. Later, a bunkroom was constructed on the second floor (later, when night watch was no longer being done, this room became the chief's office). The night watch program proved so successful during the war years that it continued until April 1966.

A second Buffalo Appliance vehicle was dedicated in 1942. It was a quadruple combination or "quad" and was known as Truck 1. Along with being used as a pumper, it also functioned as a ladder truck. It carried 200 feet of assorted size ladders, enabling the firefighters to reach any structure in the district. Due to the war, this was the last piece of apparatus the department would be able to purchase for some time. The government reportedly loaned an auxiliary pumper to the department in early 1944, but it was recalled by the end of the year.

With the conclusion of World War II, the department was free to continue purchasing apparatus. Their third and last Buffalo Fire Appliance manufactured rig, a pumper, was put in service in 1946. In 1947, a car was purchased for Chief Ludwig. This was believed to be the first time an Amherst fire department supplied its chief with a vehicle.

At the suggestion of Chief Ludwig, a Building Committee was established on May 3, 1948 to investigate expanding the fire station or building a new facility. To make room for the growing fleet, it was decided that apparatus bays should be constructed facing Lincoln Road. Apparatus would exit the station both on to Main Street and Lincoln Road. A hose tower was also constructed to hang wet hose in. The addition was completed in March 1949.

With the assistance of the Town of Amherst Highway Department, the members volunteered to construct a parking lot to the rear of the hall. The parking lot was completed by October 1949.

The Snyder Hose Company officially changed its name to Snyder Fire Department with the adoption of new company By-Laws on November 7, 1949.

Also in 1949, the use of blue lights by volunteer firefighters was authorized by the State and many Snyder Firefighters joined others in purchasing them for their personal vehicles.

In the early 1950's Snyder continued to purchase new apparatus. Two Ward La France pumps were placed in service in 1951 and 1954 respectively. A small rescue vehicle was purchased in 1953. Known as Rescue 2, this Ford panel truck served for years as the department's primary EMS response vehicle. In November 1953, the department completed the installation of two-way mobile radios in the apparatus.

In 1955, the Snyder Fire Department had the distinction of becoming the first 100% radio equipped volunteer fire department in Erie County. In addition to the radios installed on the apparatus, all 73 members received radio receivers for their home. The members would not have

to rely on the telephone or fire siren to alert them to alarms. It was decided to have the fire siren activated between the hours of 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. only.

In the mid 1950's, the Snyder Fire District began discussing plans to replace the 1941 Quad. It was decided to purchase a 75-foot aerial ladder.

To make room for the new truck, an addition needed to be built. On October 31, 1956, construction began on a new truck bay large enough to accommodate the vehicle. It was built next to the other bays located on the Lincoln Road side of the building. The addition was completed in early 1957.

In March 1957, the department accepted delivery of the new Ward La France aerial truck. This was the first aerial ladder in the Town of Amherst and one of the first owned by a volunteer department in Western New York. Over the years, it responded to fires throughout Amherst and into many other communities as well. In August of that year, all apparatus started responding out of the Lincoln Road bays, and the ramp facing Main Street was filled in. The original apparatus bay was turned into a clubroom.

As the years went on, the department continued to add and replace vehicles and equipment to help maintain the department's position as an efficient and modern operation. By 1961, the department boasted a chief's car, a small rescue truck, three Ward La France pumpers, an aerial ladder and a newer custom made heavy rescue truck.

Late in 1959, the Snyder Fire Department became responsible for more territory when it agreed to protect property on the north side of Sheridan Drive.

In 1962, Amherst Fire Control began operating as a dedicated fire/rescue communication center, and two Snyder firefighters, Harrington B. Woodworth and Herbert McKenna, were among the first fire dispatchers.

On April 23, 1963, the Snyder Volunteer Firemen's Benevolent Association was established. Derived from legislation in the New York State Legislature, the association was formed to provide relief for sick and indigent firefighters and their families. The association is still active today.

Snyder continued its relationship with the Ward La France Corporation in Elmira, New York, when replacing all three pumpers during the decade of the 1960's. The engines were placed in service in 1961, 1965 and 1969.

Rescue 2 was replaced in 1969 when a Chevrolet Suburban was delivered. Snyder continues to utilize this type of apparatus as its primary EMS response vehicle. A new one is placed in service approximately every five years.

In 1970, the fire station underwent a major remodeling.

On April 20, 1973, 42 members of the Snyder Fire department completed extensive training and were certified as Paramedics. This was a new concept at the time and this was recognized as the first Paramedic program in the United States sponsored by a volunteer fire department.

On November 4, 1973, a mobile cardiac care unit was dedicated. This was the final step needed to complete the Paramedic program initiated by Chief Robert Drexelius, Jr. The cardiac care unit was used to transport patients to the hospital while monitoring and transmitting vital information to the hospital. If required, emergency room personnel could direct the Snyder Firefighters/Paramedics to administer drugs, defibrillate, start IV's or take other medical actions to assist the patient. Previous to this, patients had to wait until they arrived at the hospital before receiving this advanced care. This is routine care today but at the time, it was truly bold and progressive.

The 1957 ladder truck and 1959 heavy rescue vehicle were both replaced in 1976. When the new apparatus were delivered, they sported a new color scheme. Popular at the time, lime yellow was designated as the color of all new Snyder fire apparatus and would remain so until 1994, when the department again returned to red.

Two Pierce pumpers were delivered in 1979 and another in 1981, replacing the tired Ward La France vehicles purchased during the 1960's.

In the early 1980's, New York State adopted new training guidelines for Paramedic personnel. The amount of training hours now required made it extremely difficult to maintain a Paramedic program on a strictly volunteer basis. Responding to the need to maintain top-level emergency care in the community, the Snyder Fire Department was instrumental in establishing a working relationship with a paid Paramedic service. The system proved so successful, it was soon available and utilized town wide. This was the forerunner of the current program available to all departments under Amherst Fire Control today.

New apparatus purchases and upgrades continued throughout the 1980's. Among the many purchases, a new heavy rescue rig was commissioned in August 1986. Over a two-year period beginning in 1987, the three pumpers were extensively refurbished. Among the enhancements was the installation of a fully enclosed cab, which eliminated the need for firefighters to ride on the tailboard of the rigs. Snyder was the first department in the area to equip all its pumpers with the enclosed cab.

The 1980's presented new challenges to the volunteers at Snyder. For various reasons, membership started to decline. Residents were not volunteering fast enough to fill the ranks depleted by the members who had left. The department began sponsoring recruitment programs. In 1989, with the passage of state legislation, a benefit program was initiated. It was designed to attract and retain volunteer firefighters. The program provides a monthly payment to the individual firefighter based on years of active service. The benefit payment begins when the firefighter reaches age 55.

Today, the fire department enjoys a healthy compliment of firefighters, with approximately 75 active firefighters on the rolls.

In 1990, Snyder accepted delivery of the third ladder truck in the department's history when a Sutphen Tower Ladder was delivered. In 1991, the Snyder Fire District purchased vehicles for the chief and assistant chiefs. This marked the first time that an Amherst company provided

vehicles to its entire chiefs' line.

Snyder entered a new era in emergency medical care by purchasing a cardiac defibrillator in 1993. The Board of Fire Commissioners and firematic officers recognized the importance of having a unit available for the residents and the potential life saving impact it would have. Over the next few years, defibrillators were placed in service in all the chief vehicles and other rescue rigs as well. A large majority of the Snyder Firefighters have been trained and qualified to operate these defibrillators.

Three new Sutphen pumpers were delivered in June and July 1994. This marked the return of red apparatus for Snyder. After lengthy discussion, the Board of Fire Commissioners decided to return to the traditional color, much to the appreciation of most members. In addition, the ladder truck and heavy rescue were and re-painted red. The commissioners decided to have all future small rescue and chiefs' vehicles painted white.

By far, the largest and most ambitious project ever undertaken by members of the department and Board of Fire Commissioners concerned demolishing the old fire station and constructing a new one. While discussions concerning a new building went on for years, and a private residence two doors away from the station was purchased in the early 1990's with expansion in mind, it was not until September 1993, when the department purchased neighboring McMahon's Restaurant that efforts really got underway. Within the next few years, several other neighboring parcels of land were secured and demolished and plans were developed for constructing a modern 20,000 square foot facility. The building would face Main Street and all apparatus would exit the station on to Main Street, just as the Ahrens-Fox did 70 years before.

For construction to progress smoothly, all operations were moved out of the old facility and into a temporary quarters located at the old United States Post Office at 25 Chateau Terrace. A clubroom, offices and kitchen area were constructed inside the building and a pole barn was erected to the rear of this property to house the apparatus.

An emotional farewell party was held at the old station on February 17, 1996, and on February 28, 1996, after a series of moves, all operations commenced from Chateau Terrace.

In March, members gathered to watch the wrecker's ball demolish 74 years of history as the venerable old edifice came tumbling down. Construction of the new station had begun!

All apparatus was moved into the new facility on the evening of Wednesday, January 15, 1997. Members and residents alike were awe struck at the splendor and beauty of the building. Most inspiring was the careful attention to detail and capacious size. The first call out of the building was an EMS run on January 16 to 100 Lakewood Parkway at 06:18 hours. Over the next several months, finishing touches were applied, new furnishings were ordered and members adjusted to life in the new station. It was truly one of the most exciting times in the department's colorful history.

Even through the busy years of planning, building and moving into the new station, equipment and apparatus still had to be updated and emergency calls had to be handled.

A new Chevrolet Suburban rescue squad was placed in service in 1993 and a back up rescue squad and support vehicle was added in 1994. Also in 1994, three new chief cars, Ford Crown Victorias, were purchased.

Continuing the tradition of replacing the chief vehicles every three years, three new Fords Crown Victorias arrived in March 1997. The Board of Fire Commissioners, in conjunction with the firematic officers, decided it was best to keep one of the old Chief cars for use on a rotating basis by captains. It was referred to as a command vehicle. Captains would now handle squad calls and assist with an adequate and timely response during all hours of the day. The concept had actually been tested for a few years prior to this when Captains were allowed to utilize the back up rescue squad during the day for the same purpose.

A new Chevrolet Suburban EMS response vehicle was purchased in 1999 and the chief vehicles were replaced in 2000.

A new heavy rescue vehicle was delivered in October 2001. Because of the success and quality experienced with the tower ladder and pumpers, the Sutphen Corporation, along with Super Vacuum Manufacturing Company, manufactured the new rig. The rescue truck boasts a command cab with computer and fax capability along with an Amkus Ultimate Extrication System; allowing for six hydraulic extrication tools to be used at the same time.

In October 2002, three Chevrolet Tahoes were delivered to be utilized as chief officer vehicles.

Over the course of its engrossing history, the department has engaged in some very memorable, spectacular and disastrous fires.

One of the first documented fires concerned a very large grass fire in August 1929. Thousands of motorists reportedly flocked to the scene of the fire, located in the Audubon Terrace development. Sparks from a passing locomotive were believed to have started the fire. The fire burned for hours and threatened numerous residences.

A large fire extensively damaged a home at 191 Burbank Drive on May 16, 1935.

In March 1944, fire destroyed the upper floor of a home on Folgersonger Road (now known as Park Club Lane). Members from the Williamsville Fire Department assisted at this call.

A three-alarm fire destroyed a gymnasium at the Park School in February 1946. Williamsville and Eggertsville Fire Departments delivered help and the Buffalo Fire Department sent Engines 23 and 34. Snyder Firefighter J. Clark Ryan injured his leg at this fire and was unable to return to active duty. He was awarded life membership in the department.

It was reported that the department handled 34 calls during the month of March 1946. 24 of those calls were for grass fires, a common response in those years.

D & E Motors, located at Main Street and South Forest Road, suffered a fire in November 1946 and three men were burned.

Members rescued two people from smoke filled apartments when flames erupted at the Loblaw Supermarket on Main Street near Lincoln Road in December, 1946.

Eight members were overcome by smoke battling a fire at the Loblaw Supermarket at 2002 Kensington in August, 1951.

On August 10, 1954, a stubborn fire raced through a home at 845 Le Brun Road. Snyder and Eggertsville battled the fire for several hours. The home was formally owned by Lawrence Bell, founder of Bell Aircraft Corporation and former member of the Snyder Hose Company.

On December 28, 1955, workers working in a home at 77 Brantwood Road spilled gasoline that ignited when the water heater went on. Responding firefighters found the three closet hydrants were frozen. Before firefighters could secure a water supply, the entire house was engulfed.

On March 15, 1959, the department was called to fight a raging fire at the Loblaw Supermarket at the Sheridan-Harlem Plaza.

On February 1, 1961, 150 volunteers from Snyder, Eggertsville, and Williamsville battled a fire at the Park School of Buffalo. Flames shot 100 feet in the air as firefighters contended with temperatures of twenty below zero. Hose lines had to be laid in from Harlem Road and hand dragged from the end of Fruehauf and Chateau Terrace in waist deep snow. Hose reportedly froze in place. The temperature reading still stands as the record low.

On May 24, 1962, Snyder sent its aerial ladder to the City of Buffalo to fill in at empty fire stations. Buffalo was fighting two five-alarm fires. One was located at St. Michael's Catholic Church on Washington Street and the other fire was at a burlap warehouse on Carolina Street. Both fires required all on duty and off duty firefighters and every piece of equipment available. Snyder responded to several small fires that night.

Smallwood Drive Elementary School was heavily damaged by fire on March 4, 1966.

A boiler room fire struck the Amherst Central High School on January 3, 1968. Spilled oil inside one of the boilers was listed as the cause of the blaze.

On Easter Sunday, April 14, 1968, Snyder, Eggertsville, Williamsville, North Bailey and Getzville Firefighters fought a raging fire at the old Four Winds Nursery at 4196 Main Street.

On May 22 of the same year a spectacular \$75,000 fire destroyed the Kenmore Builder's Supply on Sheridan Drive. Another large fire erupted there one month later on June 26.

Although not in Snyder, it is worth noting that Snyder assisted in what were probably the two largest firefighting operations in town history when fire destroyed Glen Park Casino in the Village of Williamsville on September 23, 1968 and again on September 8, 1973.

The decade of 1970's began with a large fire at Hector's Hardware at Wehrle and Harlem on August 17, 1970.

Hundreds of residents, including 600 children, were evacuated from their homes and Maplemere Elementary School when fire struck the old sewage treatment plant on North Forest Road on February 4, 1971. Toxic chlorine gas endangered a large area.

On April 30, 1971, a large fire was battled at the old Amherst Builder's Company at Main and Union.

An explosion and fire ripped through the Rotary Gas Station on Main Street on August 10, 1973, killing a worker there. The presence of a gasoline tanker being off loaded presented an additional hazard.

Fire again struck Kenmore Builders Supply on September 22, 1974, destroying storage sheds.

Four days into 1975, a strange fire struck at the Amherst Chabad Center, a religious retreat located on Maple Road. Twenty-three occupants were forced to flee after the fire was discovered, but their religious beliefs prohibited them from using a telephone. Precious time was lost as the retreaters desperately tried to flag down a passing motorist to call the fire department. Luckily, no one was injured.

Two arson fires, exactly one week apart, struck the old Bishop Neumann High School on Park Club Lane in 1975. The first fire, on May 27, was discovered in an art room and caused \$250,000 in damage. The second fire proved to be much hotter and heavily damaged the home economics area. It also caused damage of \$250,000. A student at the school was later arrested and charged with starting the fires.

June 30, 1976 saw the Taiwan Restaurant, a popular eating establishment at the time, suffer a \$100,000 fire. Firefighters today recall how they were crawling in to fight the blaze, and bar patrons were refusing to leave.

Snyder was called to assist several Cheektowaga companies battle a fire that destroyed an old Super Duper supermarket on March 11, 1979, at Kensington and Century Road.

The spectacular fires witnessed so often in earlier decades have declined dramatically in recent years. New fire codes, better building codes and an increased emphases and awareness of fire prevention can be credited for this.

None-the-less, Snyder Firefighters still continue to face challenging fires and emergency situations.

In July 1984, firefighters from several neighboring departments assisted Snyder in fighting an extremely stubborn fire in the large refuse pile at the rear of the Town of Amherst Highway Department. It took more than 24 hours to finally extinguish the blaze.

On February 12, 1985, one of the most spectacular residential fires to ever hit Snyder destroyed a home on Harper Road. Several hours were spent battling this fire, as a heavy fire load in the basement hampered firefighting operations. 10,000 bolts of material were stored there. Twenty-

two cats and several dogs perished in the blaze.

Quick work by the Snyder, Eggertsville, Williamsville, and Getzville Fire Departments prevented a potentially disastrous situation at the Presbyterian Village Retirement Complex on Village Park Drive on Monday, April 27, 1987. Fire caused \$100,000 damage to one of three units there, but the fire was stopped before it could spread much further.

A dangerous situation developed on the morning of April 19, 1994 when a tanker truck overturned just west of the Williamsville toll barrier. The truck contained toluene, a very flammable product. The Thruway was closed for more than 10 hours as crews cleaned up the spill.

Another spectacular residential fire occurred on December 22, 1997 at 400 Roycroft Boulevard. Firefighters had to contend with a large volume of fire that was threatening neighboring homes as well.

On September 28, 2000 a very dangerous basement fire was quickly extinguished at a local Subway Restaurant located on Kensington Highway at Harlem Road.

Through the years of firefighting and emergency rescue situations, the Snyder Fire Department has suffered two line of duty deaths.

On October 14, 1956 after driving a pumper to a leaf fire that spread to a telephone pole at Harlem Road near Kings Highway, Rudolph Lutz, age 50, suffered a heart attack and died. Firefighter Lutz had just completed hooking up to a hydrant and reported that he was ready to pump water when he collapsed.

On June 3, 1966, while fighting his second fire of the day, Second Assistant Chief John Bresnahan collapsed and died. The fire was in a barn at the Park School of Buffalo.

It has been an exciting and challenging 85 years for the Snyder Fire Department. There have been many changes within the community and department itself. Reports show that the department answered 45 fire calls in 1934 and 117 calls in 1945. By 1976, the department was running over 1,000 calls a year. Currently, the department averages over 1200 emergency calls per year.

Through the years and all the changes, one thing has remained constant. Men and woman from all walks of life have continued to step forward and volunteer. They have bonded together with the single concept of service to the community. As we approach the new century, Snyder residents may rest assured that no matter what the emergency, the thoroughly trained and dedicated members of the Snyder Fire Department will be there in time of need.

Compiled by Thomas A. Merrill  
April 14, 1997

Revised: June 11, 2003

## **Chiefs of the Snyder Fire Department**

1916 – 1921: Edward J. Helfter

1922 – 1924: Frederick A. Ludwig

1925: Edward J. Helfter

1926 – 1931: Erven E. Doan

1932: Frederick M. Baehre

1933 – 1934: John E. Denz

1935 – 1940: Russel C. Rhea

1941 – 1967: Francis B. Ludwig

**\*\*\* In 1953, chief officers began being elected in April \*\*\***

1967 – 1972: Clarence E. Wilson

1972 – 1976: Robert F. Drexelius, Jr. (resigned from office 10/1/1976 – became Secretary of Snyder Fire District)

1976 – 1978 Robert G. Schrader (appointed by Board of Fire Commissioners 10/12/1976)

1978 – 1980: Eugene F. Konczakowski, Jr.

1980 – 1982: Roger G. Probst

1982 – 1987: Thomas P. Kenney, Jr.

1987 – 1992: Thomas T. Hammond

1992 – 1997: James E. Koepfel, Jr.

1997 – 2002: John V. Fildes

2002 – Present: Allan L. Brown

## Presidents of The Snyder Fire Department

1916:	Edward F. Weitz
1917 – 1918:	Allen L. Link
1919 – 1922:	Emil H. Bergens
1923:	Frank A. Bauer
1924:	Richard H. Hoyt, Sr. (resigned from office 4/7/1924)
1924 - 1925:	Albert H. Wolf (elected 5/5/24)
1926:	Percy R. Bugbee
1927:	Oscar Rykert
1928 – 1931:	Albert F. Glassman
1932:	Everett A. Guest
1933 – 1936:	Lewis S. Castle
1937 – 1940:	Harlow L. Beale
1941 – 1942:	Nelson J. Carter
1943 – 1944:	William J. O'Brien
1945 – 1946:	Edwin G. Grieser
1947 – 1948:	William L. Schottmiller
1949 – 1950:	Edgar R. Harris
1951:	Joseph J. Dunn
1952 – 1953:	Arthur E. Kolb
1954 – 1955:	Chester T. Durr
1956 – 1959:	Herbert J. McKenna
1960 – 1961:	Charles S. Oliver
1962:	Karl R. Beccue (resigned from department 5/7/1962)
1962 - 1963:	Leonard R. Lipowicz (elected 6/4/1962)
1964 – 1965:	Richard M. Brown
1966 – 1967:	Bernard J. Mergler
1968 - 1969:	Marvin R. Pike
1970 – 1971:	Paul N. Eberhard
1972 – 1973:	Carl A. Visciano
1974 – 1975:	Thomas S. Oliver
1976:	Daniel A. Teplesky
1977 – 1978:	James N. Koeppel, Sr.
1979:	James R. Phillips
1980 – 1982:	J. Philip Teller
1983:	Robert J. Kraft
1984 – 1985:	Roger G. Probst
1986 – 1988:	Andrew C. Giese
1989 – 1991:	Thomas P. Kenney, Jr.
1992 – 1998:	J. Philip Teller
1999 – 2003	Thomas P. Kenney, Jr.
2004 - Present:	Alan L. Craik

## Commissioners of the Snyder Fire District

Franklin Eiss: 1916  
Michael J. Fischer: 1916-1925  
W. Allen Gardner: 1916-1922  
C.J. Hamlin: 1916-1917  
William C.T. Suor: 1916-1925  
Robert W. Appleton: 1917-1923  
Emil H. Bergens: 1923-1946  
Chalres M. Perott: 1923-1925  
Walter W. Krueger: 1925  
Erven E. Doan: 1928-1938  
George Eiss: 1928-1933  
Carl Michael: 1928-1933  
Michael White: 1928-1933  
Franklin Schafer: 1934-1938  
Peter Engelhardt: 1934-1947  
Joseph Feeley: 1934-1935  
Charles S. Vincent: 1935-1950  
Joseph J. Beck: 1938-1947  
Russel C. Rhea: 1938-1943  
Harry E. Benson: 1943-1947  
Edward A. Drews: 1946-1959  
J. Clark Ryan: 1947-1951  
Dr. Daniel F. Rahill: 1947-1957  
George J. Kohl: 1947-1963  
Everett A. Guest: 1950-1963  
Neville Hammond: 1951-1958/1960-1969  
Raymond E. Ryan: 1958-1961  
L. Joseph Wood: 1959-1963/1977-1978  
Robert L. Schonewolf: 1961-1976  
Richard Hall: 1964  
Joseph G. Weber: 1964-1977  
George R. Reiller: 1964-1974  
William S. Bloss: 1964-1967  
Leonard R. Lipowicz, Jr. 1967-1969  
Donald Cunningham: 1969-1972  
Thomas P. Kenney, Sr.: 1970-1979  
Bernard J. Mergler: 1973-1990  
Ronald R. Yensan: 1974-Present  
Paul N. Eberhard: 1977-1993  
Michael Dimino: 1979-1983  
James N. Koeppel, Sr.: 1980-1985  
Fraser M. Mooney: 1984-1998  
Brian L. Parkot: 1986-Present  
Earl L. Zimmerman: 1990-Present

Thomas T. Hammond: 1993-Present  
James E. Koeppel, Jr: 1999 - Present