

History of the Tilton Northfield Fire District

The Town of Northfield was incorporated in 1780 after separating from the town of Canterbury. There is no real evidence of an early fire department in Northfield, although it is mentioned in "The History of Northfield" that citizen Obe Munsey held the position as head of the fire department. It also mentioned that he was a business man on Main Street, who, along with other Main Street businessmen made up the department. This may indicate that he was in charge of the Tilton department.



In 1828, there were 4 fire wards elected at "The Bridge". In 1829 a set of fire regulations was drawn up which provided for the duties of fire wards and general safety provisions including storing ashes in iron or tin and placing them someplace that was not combustible. It was noted that in 1857 voters were once again not in favor of an engine company at "The Bridge". However, in 1864, the citizens of Sanbornton Bridge voted to purchase a fire engine for \$300.

In 1869, Sanbornton Bridge was "set off" and became Tilton. However, it is recorded that the Tilton Fire Precinct was formed in 1867. The villages are united in what is known as the FIRE PRECINCT, which was formed in 1867, the fire apparatus consisting of two hand-engines; the large one having eight-inch cylinder, and requiring fifty men to properly operate, and throwing a stream one hundred and sixty feet. The small is the most efficient. Both tubs are kept in good condition. They have fifteen hundred feet of hose, and with the mill-pumps answer all ordinary requirements.



Beginning of a New Era. November 1929.
Old 'Rescue' hand pump beside modern fire pump. Chief Herbert A. Dolley with hat standing.
Walter Bosworth standing, Roy Jordan Sr. driver.
Photo by R. E. Prescott.

The Tilton Fire Department provided services during that time, as photos of firefighters with horse-drawn equipment stand outside the then "Church Street Station" with its sign "Tilton Fire Department". There are also photos of a horse-drawn ladder company of that period with "Tilton Fire Department" on its side. It is recorded that in 1911, the department owned two horse-drawn wagons. It is believed that with the hiring of Chief Herbert Dolley, the Tilton and Northfield Fire

Department was formed. In 1912, the land was purchased from the Town of Tilton to construct a fire house on "Church Street", as was a small fire truck. In 1924, records indicate that the "Tilton Fire District" was the government entity of the fire department. In 1925, Engine 1 bore the lettering "Tilton" over "FD" over "Northfield" on the front fender as it was parked in front of the station next to the "Rescue" hand tub. The station was added onto in 1926, and again in 1944. At some point in time later, the department became known as the Tilton Fire District and functioned as such until 1945, when it was referred to as "Tilton and Northfield Fire District". For part of that time, they also performed the duties of the former street light precinct. In 1946, it was recorded as it is known today: "Tilton-Northfield Fire District."

On September 13, 1943, Willis Craik was named Fire Chief; Simeon Walker, Fireward; and, Wendell Crowell, Deputy Chief. On October 13, 1943, Willis Craik and Wendell Crowell resigned and Roy Jordan accepted the Chief's duties.

The department responded to 65 calls in 1941, but only 31 in 1942. In 1944, the Tilton Town Report noted that "Now each fireman has his own rubber boots, rubber coat, and helmet." Also, "the new addition, after considerable delay, is now well underway, and when completed will be one of the outstanding fire stations within the state." (Referring to the "right side" of the existing station on Center Street. The addition was a mirror of what existed.) And, furthermore, "The new fire siren, that arrived several weeks ago, will be installed upon a seventy-five foot tower in the rear of this building." Also that year, there were 31 incidents "in precinct" and 20 "out of precinct" causing \$20,000 and \$4,000 in damage, respectively.

In 1945, the Tilton and Northfield Fire District was formed. Northfield paid 34.43% of the budget and Tilton paid 65.57%. From the 1947 Tilton Town Report: "The Rescue Car has been purchased and has been used most effectively on many occasions."

In 1948, all members of the fire department took a refresher course in Red Cross First Aid. The Red Cross also presented the department with a "fine" aluminum boat to be used in conjunction with the Rescue Car.

In 1949 a radio was installed, "being able to talk direct from the station with the Fire Chief at place of fire regardless of location or distance." The report of the Firewards also stated, "The highlight of the year was the Fireman's Convention in September." It reportedly drew 500 firemen.

In 1950 the department received a "new, three-section, all-metal, sixty foot ladder" and a 1,000 gallon oil tank was installed. Hydrant rental that year stood at \$50/hydrant and there were 53 hydrants in the district.

In 1952 the department put into service a "Scott-Pack smoke mask, the latest and best type available."

In 1953, the Winnisquam Fire Department responded to 4 calls in Tilton. "The new pumper (Tilton-Northfield) has proven to be a very efficient unit, having a water capacity of 600 gallons."

Winnisquam responded to 3 calls in Tilton in 1954. That same year, the State Fireman's Convention was rained out by Hurricane Edna.

1956 - 22 calls. 1957 - New rescue truck, \$4,000. 26 calls. 1959 - 46 calls. 1960 - Winnisquam responds to 15 calls in Tilton. 1964 - 76 calls. 1965 - Winnisquam responds to 15 calls in Tilton. 79 calls for Tilton-Northfield. 1969 - 83 calls. 1971 - 95;

In 1972, the district was expanded to take on the borders of the sum total of both communities and there were 83 calls. 1973 - 95; and the century mark was broken in 1974 with 136. Also in 1974, Kenneth Lockwood retired as Chief after 35 years of service to the District. 1976 - 245; 1977 - 281 (34 volunteer firefighters). In 1978, Tilton played host, again, to the NH State Fireman's Convention. In 1979, the District voted to purchase land on Park Street for a fire station. In 1980 there were 409 calls and in 1981 Winnisquam responded to 54 calls in Tilton. In 1985, \$211,000 was raised and appropriated to build the Park Street Station, and, a motion was made and passed to sell the Church (Center) Street Station. On March 17, 1986, \$125,000 was voted and approved to construct a Park Street Station. It is not clear as to how and why this sequence of events took place, however...

In 1986, the Park Street Station was constructed and occupied. In 2005, the Winnisquam Fire Department was absorbed into the Belmont Fire Department. Winnisquam once serviced East Tilton and Lochmere along with our own department. In 2010, Belmont ceased operating the station all together. In 2005, the department responded to a record-high call volume of 1621.

At the March 13, 2012, district meeting the District voted to change the name of the district from "Tilton-Northfield Fire District" to "Tilton-Northfield Fire & EMS".

