CROOKSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

About a month after Crookston was incorporated in 1879 and named Crookston, the Crookston Fire Company No. 1 and Washington Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 were organized. By March of 1880, their equipment consisting of 3 ladders, 12 axes, 200 buckets and 200 feet of rope had been augmented by the arrival of a 100 gallon chemical engine.

On June 5, 1884, John R. McKinnon was elected chief and served as such until December 2, 1886. Chief McKinnon made an excellent officer and had the undivided support and confidence of the officers and men under him. He was succeeded by J. E. O'Brien, of whom it may be truthfully said, that no man took a deeper interest in the fire department and its success than "Jimme", as he was familiarly known. Chief O'Brien served until December 8, 1887 and was succeeded by E. W. Wile. Chief Wile resigned his office on January 29, 1891. A.A. McKinnon, who was serving as assistant chief, was unanimously elected Chief and served with great credit to himself and the Department until October 1893. Other men who served the early Crookston Fire Department were: Chief Rauch, Chief A. C. Schmidt (1894-1896); and Chief Tom Morris (1896-1905).

The early firemen of the Crookston Fire Department boasted of many athletes who challenged state and even national records.

The early equipment owned by the department consisted of five hose carts with 6,000 feet of hose, two hook and ladder trucks, one chemical engine, 100 gallon and tender, a full equipment of Eastman nozzles and deluge set, cellar pipes, shut-offs, Siamese. Copper hose, jackets, full equipment rubber coats, helmets, etc. and one of the finest fire halls and sleeping rooms in the country in 1905.

Today a modern 33-man department, that includes seven full-time firefighters and 27 volunteers, affords fire protection to Crookston as well as 18 outlying townships in Polk County. Residents approved a $255,000 bond issue for a new fire hall in 1968. The brick and concrete block building is 134 x 86 feet and contains three rural and three city trucks, as well as a rescue truck and two boats with trailers. There is a 30-foot hose tower, a dormitory to sleep 12 men, shower, clean-up and maintenance area, a communications room and a meeting room. Firemen enjoy complete kitchen facilities and a recreation area. The department is headed by Fire Chief H. T. "Doc" Welter, a former 21 years with the department, Assistant Chief, Wayne Radd; foreman, Rueben Gunkie; and assistant foreman, Duane Moses.

The Fire Department moved to its new station August 1, 1970. The equipment owned by the department consists of a Ford truck and an International Truck purchased in 1967; 65 foot Aerial ladder in 1968; 1,000 gallon Diesel pumper in 1974; and a 75 foot Snorkel in 1975.

In March, 1971, the Crookston Firefighter's Auxiliary was organized. Firemen purchased smart red shirts for the ladies and gave them $50 to get started. Under the leadership of their first president, Mrs. Gerry Granger, the auxiliary worked zealously along with the firefighters toward the Grand Opening of their new fire hall. That successful event took place in May, 1971. Two months later, the Northern Region Firefighter's School was held in Crookston, and the auxiliary served a bountiful dinner at its conclusion.

CROOKSTON NATIONAL GUARD

The National Guard of Crookston was formed in December, 1902. The Armory was built in 1903 for the sum of $31,500, paid one-half by the city and one-half by the state.

The local National Guard Unit was called for the Mexican Border War, World War I, World War II, and the Korean Conflict. They also were called for the St. Paul meat strike in 1948 and the flood of 1950 for better than a month.

In 1931 the "Crookston Gunners" were formed. They were made up of men who belonged to the Crookston National Guard. The team was so good that on one road trip the only team to beat them was Texas A&M.

At the end of World War II, when the Crookston National Guard was to return, there were only twelve enlisted men and no officers left in the unit.

During the weekend of the big fires, the unit of National Guardsmen came on duty in a "no pay" status to help firemen and the police during this disastrous weekend.

The unit at the present time has three officers and 92 enlisted people. As history turns so does the National Guard. In 1975 we were permitted to enlist women in the National Guard. At the present time, we have two women.

A Battalion Medical Company was also activated in 1951. The company consisted of twenty men and five officers. The Company was to render the necessary medical duties for the four companies in the Battalion in the event of being called for any special duties.

It would be impossible to name all the men who served in the two tours of duty. However, some of the better known officers were: T. W. Thy, L. S. Miller, W. N. Betcher, R. H. Sather and Farley Bright.

Both the Headquarters Co. and the Medical Unit were mustered out on December 7, 1952 when the National Guard was again reactivated on the local level.

Pearl Harbor Day is still observed by many former State Guardsmen and their wives every year when they get together for a dinner and social hour.

Co. I, 2nd Infantry of the Minnesota Guard began mobilizing on December 15, 1940 in Crookston. The reason for existence of the Company was to replace the National Guard Company which was to leave for one year's active training on February 10, 1941.

The Company was composed of three officers and 55 enlisted men when the National Guard Company departed for California and their year of training as an Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Events at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 brought an end to any plans of the National Guard returning to its home station after its year of training. This resulted in an increase of strength in Co. I to a high of 97 men and three officers.

Until February 4, 1947, when the National Guard was again reactivated in Crookston, a total of 276 men were processed through the records of Co. I, M.S.G.

These men all served without pay for their weekly drills and periodic summer maneuvers. The Company was ready at all times to assist in disaster or riot control.

In addition to the weekly drills, Company members took part in 11 Battalion assemblies, 39 military funerals and 14 parades.

With the departure, once more, of the National Guard Company because of the Korean War, a State Guard Company was again formed in Crookston.

The Company began functioning as the Headquarters Company of the 5th Battalion on March 12, 1951. Strength was to be built to 60 enlisted men and three officers.

Most of the members of this company had served either in the State Guard or regular service during World War II. As a result, more specialized training was possible, because the necessary basic training had been received in the World War II period.

"Doc" Welter, Fire Chief and the new fire truck.