Records of Central Fire Company, No. 1 (Bethlehem, PA)

Creator: Central Fire Company No. 1 (Bethlehem, PA)

Title: Records of the Central Fire Company No. 1

Inclusive Dates: 1894 - 1940

Extent: 1 linear foot (2 boxes)

Abstract: The records of the Central Fire Company, No. 1 consists of Constitutions and bylaws for 1894 and 1921; minutes, reports and notes for 1900-c.1930; roll books and membership rosters 1898-1939; correspondence predominately 1920-1930; financial statements 1920-1940; foreman’s reports 1924-1940; and a few materials relating to firemen’s associations including the Bethlehem Firemen’s Relief Association.

Access to Materials: The collection is open to researchers in the Bethlehem Room.

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Preferred citation: [item], Records of the Central Fire Company No. 1 (Bethlehem, PA), , The Bethlehem Area Public Library Collections.

Historical Note:

Bethlehem had the first hand fire engine in the United States, imported from London in 1763. Over the years there were various volunteer companies.

The Bethlehem Town council voted to construct a central fire station on April 21, 1890. A special 1925 edition of the Bethlehem Daily Times lists the Central fire company as having been organized June 7, 1892 and located at 45 East Broad St. An article from the Bethlehem Times of January 10, 1893 states: “At noon today the old volunteer fire department of Bethlehem virtually went out of existence. Town Council yesterday adopted a set of resolutions disbanding all companies, except the Fairview, and inviting the old firemen to join a new organization to occupy the new Central Fire Station.” Later in the same article, it states “As soon after 12 o’clock noon today as possible a dozen or fifteen firemen held a meeting at the new station and organized a new department temporarily. Chief Van Horn called the meeting to order……The meeting adopted a resolution calling a general meeting for tomorrow night to perfect a permanent organization.” From articles of January 11 and 12, this move was not without controversy.

According to the Preamble to the Constitution and Bylaws adopted May 29, 1894: “Whereas We the undersigned acuated (sic) by an ardent desire to assist our fellow citizens when in danger of Fire have organized ourselves into a Fire Company to be known under the name and Title of the Central Fire Company No. 1 of the Bethlehem Fire Department, and believing to the accomplishment of our object we have adopted the following Constitution and ByLaws for our Government, each member pledging himself for the strict support of the same.”

The Central Fire station which the company occupied was replaced by a new Central Fire station in 1972, and torn down in 1973.

Further materials in the Bethlehem Area Public Library:

   a. Postcard showing a view of the Central Fire Station
Collection Scope and Contents:

The records of the Central Fire Company No. 1, while not complete, offer an insight into the organization and functioning of turn-of-the-century fire departments, as well as materials extending on into the 1940's. As such they provide a window into an interesting time period in the gradual change-over from volunteer to governmentally supervised fire protection.

The records are primarily administrative in nature, and include: Constitutions and bylaws for 1894 and 1921; minutes, reports and notes for 1900-c.1930; roll books and membership rosters 1898-1939; general correspondence from the City Clerk to the fire companies of Bethlehem concerning general fire department matters predominantly from 1920-1930; financial statements 1920-1940; foreman's reports 1924-1940 (detailing specific fire calls); and a few materials of a general nature relating to firemen's associations including the Bethlehem Firemen's Relief Association.

Index Terms
The Records of the Central Fire Company No. 1 are indexed under the following terms in the Bethlehem Area Public Library catalog:

Names:
Central Fire Company No. 1 (Bethlehem, PA)

Subjects:
Bethlehem (Pa.) – Fires and fire prevention.
Central Fire Company No. 1 (Bethlehem, PA)
Bethlehem (Pa.) -- History

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