

**STORY OF CONTRASTS**—One of the first two pieces of fire equipment purchased by the village in 1894, is shown above. Standing on the hose cart, which belonged to Department Number 2, is Albert Zibble, then 2½ and now a member of the Wilmette Fire department. With the force since 1935, Mr. Zibble was born and raised in the first fire station, which was located on Central avenue.

Incidentally, the cart was photographed on the present location of Lloyd Hollister Inc. The buildings in the background are, from left to right, the Edgar T. Paul barn, the Happ blacksmith shop and the Kuttan garage.

In sharp contrast is the modern engine, lower picture, which was purchased in 1942.

## Recall Several Big Fire Losses During Department's History

Answering many three alarm fires in its 52-year history, the Wilmette fire department counted 309 calls and 275 fires for last year, and 314 calls and 233 fires during 1945.

Several conflagrations, ranging in damage from \$10,000 to \$1,000,000, are outstanding events in the records of the fire department. Two occurred to property owned by members of the pioneer Hoffmann family of old Gross Point. In the fall of 1906, a large barn at the Hoffmann Brothers Coal and Lumber yard burned to the ground, consuming wagons, harnesses, and lumber, and killing three horses.

### Lose Store in 1908

Demolished by fire in 1908, was the five-year old general merchandise store which the Hoffmann Brothers had erected at Wilmette avenue and Ridge road. The fire was more devastating because Wilmette had no pumping machines until 1916, and had to depend on fire hydrant pressure, which often sank as low as four pounds during the summer months.

About 1918, seven stores on East Railroad avenue, owned by the Chicago, North Shore and Milwaukee railroad, were completely destroyed by fire.

One of the most expensive fires in

Wilmette's history occurred in the fall of 1918, when the garage owned by Kuttan Brothers and operated by Weber and Allen at 733 Green Bay road (now Ray Meier's Beverage company) burned to the ground with a loss of a million dollars. The fire, which was started by the furnace, destroyed 35 cars.

The garage was later damaged by fire in January, 1922, when it was owned by Weber and Schmidt.

Probably one of the most serious and dangerous fires started during the early part of 1935, at Lyman's Drug store, Fourth and Linden avenue, and resulted in a tremendous damage and loss.

Other large fires of note were at the Presbyterian church, which was completely destroyed on December 19, 1929, and at the St. Augustine's Episcopal church on October 6, 1942.

### Help Fight Winnetka Blaze

Because the Winnetka fire department had no pumper, the Wilmette department with its newly acquired machine was called there on September 12, 1919, to fight a fire which was enveloping a square block of property owned by Banker M. K. Meyer. The fact that the Winnetka Trust and Savings bank, formerly the Bank of M. K. Meyer, was saved has been credited to Wilmette's aid. The rest of the business property was demolished completely.

The Wilmette fire department also aided at the Miralago fire (in No Man's Land), which occurred in March, 1932.

## Hand Pulled Carts Became 1st Fire Rigs

From hand-propelled equipment to the modern fire apparatus of today—that's the story of the Wilmette fire department. The narrative also should report that the force, with the exception of the driver and his assistant, was entirely volunteer until 1935.

The fire department began in 1894, when the village purchased two hose carts and organized two volunteer

forces, one on the east side of the tracks and the other on the west side. Fire department Number 1 was located at 1035 Lake avenue and used the Methodist church bell as an alarm. Number 2 department was housed in J. B. Spencer's barn in Vattman park. An old school bell on top



Walter Zibble

of the barn sounded the alarm. The two companies had a volunteer force of about 40 men.

### Build Station in 1899

The first fire station was built on Central avenue in 1899, thus bringing together all the equipment and disbanding the two former departments.

In 1905, the department received its first horse-drawn wagon, which was purchased from the Chicago Apparatus company. Not until 1906, however, did the department own a team of horses, when a pair was purchased from Evanston.

According to the Village Codes of 1904 and 1907, a \$5 stipend was paid to anyone who loaned a horse to pull the hose cart. One old fire-fighter tells the story of how Billy,

a horse owned by Henderson's Livery, would report to the fire department at the sound of the alarm, no matter where he was in the village and with or without his driver.

### Retain Paid Driver

In 1906, Walter H. Zibble, a horseman and later the fire chief, was hired as driver for the horse-drawn wagon. He was the first and only paid man on the force which then had nine volunteers.

The first motor equipment was purchased in 1916, from the La-France Fire Engine company. Still in service, it is a triple combination fire engine weighing 11,200 pounds and costing \$8,500.

In 1916 the present fire station on Green Bay road was constructed, with occupation in 1917. Also in this year, Martin Kalmes, later captain, was hired to assist Mr. Zibble as driver, becoming the second salaried man.

The village purchased the first hook and ladder for the fire department in 1920. An American LaFrance model, it was completely destroyed in an automobile accident in 1942.

In 1934, the first chief car was purchased. Minus its brilliant red finish, the car is now used by the street department.

### Set Up Paid Department

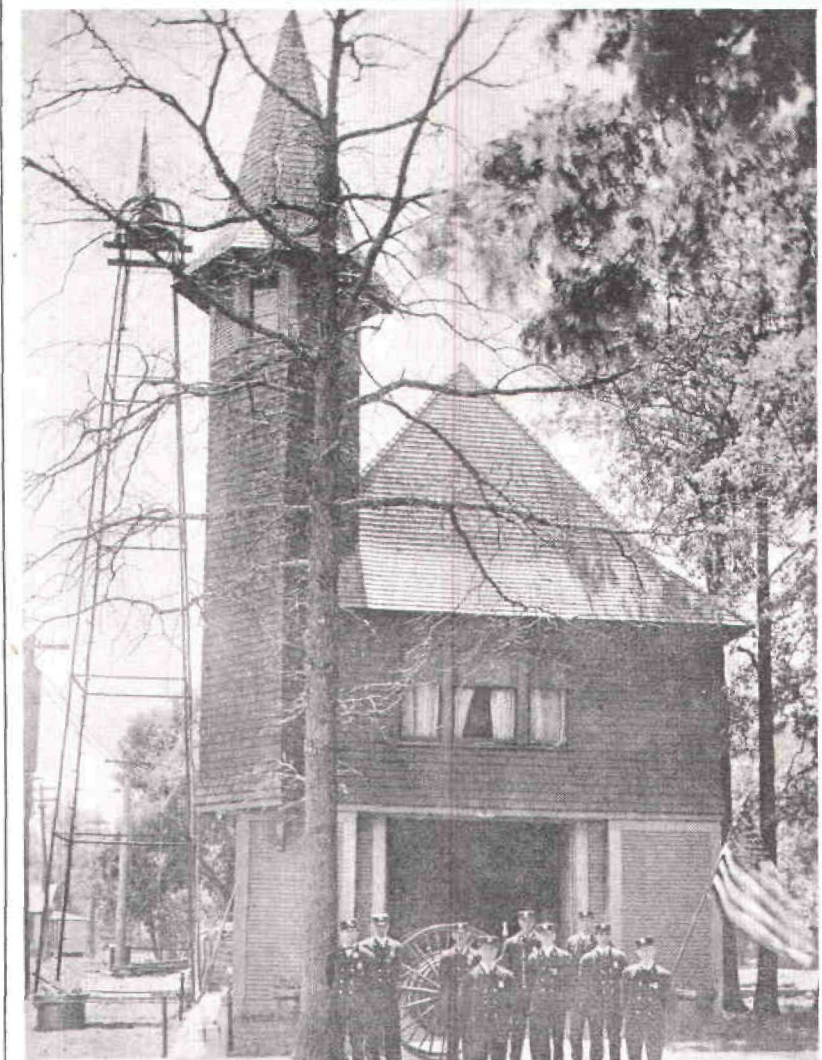
The year 1935, marks the end of the volunteer crew, for then eight men were employed as firemen. From a force of one paid fireman, later two, and a handful of volunteers, the Wilmette fire department has grown until today it has 15 trained men including the chief, and a houseman.

In 1937, the force was presented by a local mortuary with an ambulance, which was discarded in 1945.

A 750-gallon pumper, Seagraves (Corp.) inclosed engine, was purchased in 1942, to offer greater assistance to the fire fighters. A year later a second Seagraves Corporation model, a hook and ladder, was purchased.

During World War II the fire department was supplemented with an auxiliary force of 12 men.

The department has maintained an inhalator squad since 1910.



**FIRE HOUSE OF EARLIER DAYS**—That's the original Wilmette fire house pictured above. It was located on the present grounds of the post office near the alley and faced on Central avenue. At the extreme left is the bell tower, used to sound alarms. The tower attached to the building was for drying the 50-foot fire hoses, and as a look-out. In the second story of the building lived Walter Zibble, the driver, and his family. In front stand the force of 1906—left to right; Roy Henderson, A. C. Wolff, Jacob Smith, George Neithaver, Chief Joseph Steiner, William Herbon, Martin Kalmes, A. E. Wolff and Walter Zibble. Behind the fire fighters stands the old fire cart which was pulled to fires, sometimes by the force and sometimes by a borrowed horse, before 1906.