

## HAWARDEN....HOW IT ALL BEGAN

### Chapter 17: FIRE FIGHTERS: ANOTHER PROUD HERITAGE

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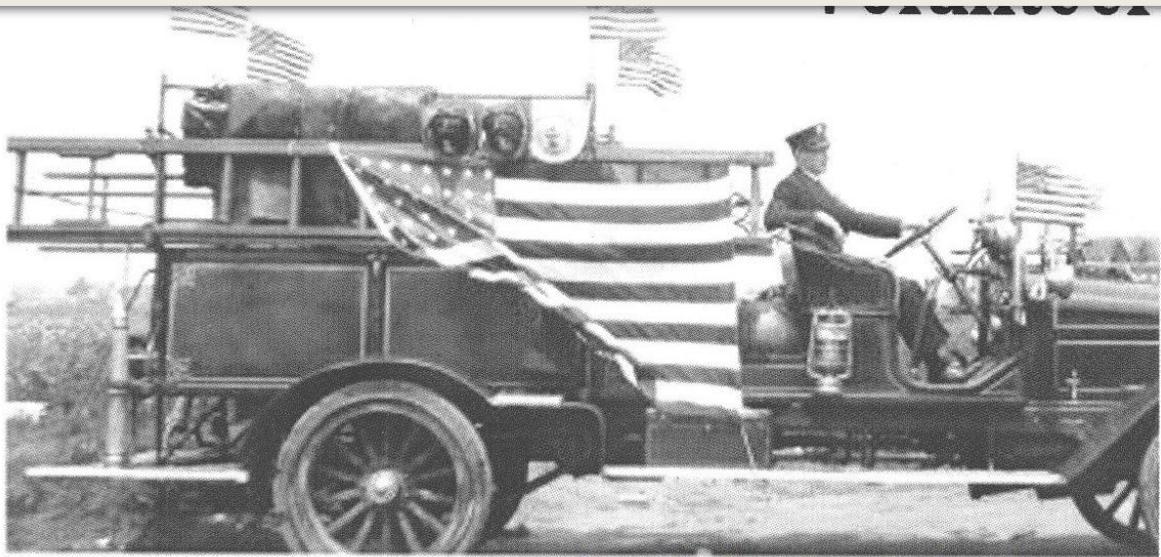
Hawarden's first City Council met on May 6, 1887 and the top of its agenda, was fire protection for Hawarden. Last week's article mentioned that the St. Nicholas Hotel erected in 1883 was the first brick structure in Sioux County. The majority of buildings in town were constructed with wood, making fire a very prevalent enemy.

In September of 1887 a petition was presented asking that a committee be appointed to approach the Chicago and Northwestern Rail Road for permission to connect their steam pump located at the round house to a water main through Kansas Street (Now Central Avenue). The petition was signed by the property owners on Kansas Street and B.T. French headed a committee to confer with the railroad.

In April, 1888, the Fire Committee moved that the council purchase a double steam hand engine, a five foot wheel hose cart, a village hook and ladder truck and five hundred feet of cotton hose. A public meeting was held to discuss this proposal. The general opinion of this group was that it was not logical to purchase a fire engine until the City established a water system, so the matter was dropped at this time.

On April 22, 1891, the Hawarden council met at a special meeting to appoint a temporary Captain of the Hose Team to organize a Fire Company. The Hawarden Fire Department and the Hawarden Hook and Ladder Company were organized at this time. And the first Hawarden Fireman's Ball was held in 1892.

According an interview of Fire Chief, C.H.Sedgwick Sr. in a 1956 Hawarden Independent article, the fire department became known as the J.W. Brewer Fire Department in the early 1900's. According to Chief Sedgwick's account, Mr. Brewer left the Fire Department \$500.00 of his estate to buy a fire truck. The stipulation in the will asked that the fire Department would be named after him. The money was left in the bank until it had grown to \$1050.00, and a Brockway chemical fire truck was purchased. This Brockway truck is still in the possession of the Hawarden Fire Department over 90 years later. The Brockway was in service until 1948 when a Ford 500 gal per minute pumper was purchased. The Brockway was put into storage until 1970 when it was reconditioned and outfitted to represent the Fire Department in parades and other celebrations. 1948 was also the year that the J.W Brewer Fire Department again became known as the Hawarden Fire Department. Mr. Brewer's name was retired along with the truck that his gift at the time of his death helped purchase.



**Circa 1917 Brockway Fire Truck  
J.W.Brewer/Hawarden Fire Dept.**

Chief Sedgwick joined the Fire Department as a young man of 23 in 1905. He was elected Fire Chief in 1917 and remained in that position until his retirement in 1955 at the age of 73.

When Chief Sedgwick joined the company, the only equipment involved consisted of a two-wheel hose cart, which everyone tried to avoid pulling because of its tremendous weight. The cart was necessary at every fire because it carried all the ladders and pails. Generally, the first Dray team to arrive at the fire station pulled the hose cart to the fire and received \$5.00 per fire as payment from the city. Chief Sedgwick stated that he often pulled the hose cart with his pony by attaching the rope to the saddle horn.

At this time the fire station was an old tin shack which stood approximately where the vacant lot south of the First State Bank is located now.

Mr. Sedgwick related that a man named John "Snoggs" Conrad slept on the second floor of the fire house. Snoggs liked to boast that with him upstairs, none of the fire equipment would leave the property without his knowledge. As the story goes, one evening when the fire whistle blew, the firemen quietly sneaked the equipment out of the station, and only woke Snoggs when they returned from putting the fire out. To quote Mr. Sedgwick, "Old Snoggs was the maddest man in town."

The J.W. Brewer/Hawarden Fire Department has served the citizens of Hawarden and the surrounding area in many capacities. Saving property and lives has always been the Department's main goal, but the acts of kindness and philanthropy over the last 122 years are too numerous to be counted. During the depression of the 1930's the Hawarden Fire Department outfitted the needy children of town with shoes and underclothing. When the

hospital was built in 1936 the Fire Department furnished a room. Many years during the depression, the Fire Department sponsored the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations in Hawarden to show their patriotism. The tradition of these acts of kindness and compassion continue to this date.

It was also noted that during Chief Sedgwick's long tenure on the Hawarden Fire Department, only one life was lost and none of the firemen were injured. Mr. Newt Rush was elected to the position of Chief following Mr. Sedgwick's retirement. The members of the fire department at that time voted C.H. Sedgwick honorary Fire Chief for life.

For one hundred and twenty years, the Hawarden Fire Department has stood head and shoulders above any organization when it comes to protecting our homes, our businesses and our families. The Hawarden Fire Department started out with the most meager of equipment and has developed into one of the best equipped departments in the state.

The glory that comes to a fireman is seldom public, but after a late night call, working side by side with other dedicated volunteer firemen your reward comes when you are safe at home and realize that the family and the property you just protected could have been yours.

The duty of the original firefighter was to quench fires and save lives. The firefighters of today are called upon to deal with emergencies that often do not involve a fire. The training, equipment and dedication involved is incredible. A volunteer Fire Fighter holds the security of our lives in their hands, and for 120 years the Hawarden Fire Department has always met or exceeded their goals. Another proud heritage handed down from the early citizens of our town and carried on by the generations who followed.