

History of the Milmay Volunteer Fire Company

50 Years of Service 1943-1993

By Thomas Ross (with additional text by Chuck & Cheryl Chiarello and Dotti Down)

The Milmay Volunteer Fire Company was formed on April 13, 1943 at a time when the world was at war in Europe, Asia, Africa and in other areas around the globe. The Company was formed to better serve the needs of the community and its residents for civil defense and fire protection. The response to form the new Company was great even though trucks and equipment were in short supply due to the war time scarcities. Early meetings were held at the Milmay Hotel or at Kupetz Bar.

At the first meeting the following officers were elected: Edward E. McVaugh, President; Clement Pierotti, Sr., President; John Krokos, Secretary; Placido A. Bucca, Treasurer and commissioners Joseph Bullock, Anthony Giacalone and Leno Grossi On August 2, 1943 Howard Strother and Joseph Bordeaux were elected as Commissioners. On January 26, 1944 Dante Romanini was named a Commissioner, Clement Pierotti, Fire Chief; Merigo Brunozzi, Captain; and Dante Romanini, Lieutenant. The first By-Laws were approved in 1944.

A number of informal meetings were held between the Officers of the new Milmay Volunteer Fire Company and those of the Richland and East Vineland Volunteer Fire Companies together with the Buena Vista Township Committeemen to form a new fire district. Milmay had been protected by these two companies for many years. East Vineland protected the properties on the west side of Tuckahoe Road and Richland the east side. Often times both companies were called for duty and their services were very much appreciated in Milmay.

On August 31, 1943 a Charter of Incorporation was presented to the Milmay Volunteer Fire Company by Attorney Philip L. Lipman who was the Township Solicitor at that time. Mr. Lipman had done the legal work at no cost to the Fire Company and in subsequent years he did other legal work and there was never a charge by his office.

Early in 1944 the Buena Vista Township Committee passed an ordinance creating Milmay Fire District Number 6. The northern boundary would be Piacenza Avenue, Weymouth Township as the southern boundary, Maurice River Township on the west and Hamilton Township on the east. In October of 1949, the area known as Buena Borough split from Buena Vista Township which changed the Fire Districts - we were renamed District Number 4.

A Ladies Auxiliary of the Milmay Volunteer Fire Company was formed by the wives and mothers of the members to assist in the raising of necessary funds for the development of the . The women were always there to help in time of need.

Many of the firemen were poultry farmers. When the time came to raise funds a suggestion was made to have a chicken as the prize for the drawing. Much interest developed from this novel idea and over \$1,200.00 was raised. Contributions were accepted from members, residents, businesses and professional people from surrounding areas.



Our first truck with a few of our early members John Malatesta, Clement Pierotti, Dante Romani, Leno Grossi, Albert DeRosa and Leo Pierotti

Because of wartime priorities it was not easy to buy equipment without having a "number" and being on a "priority" list. A 1940 Chevrolet chassis was purchased from Scribner and Lewis in Bridgeton when a number was obtained. Other equipment priorities were received and the New Jersey Fire

Equipment Company of Dunellen, New Jersey was given the job of outfitting the chassis. The truck was delivered on January 2, 1945 and the loan for the purchase was paid a short time later in 1945.

There were thirty-three servicemen from Milmay who had served in World War II. All did not become active in the Company. In the fall and winter of 1945-46 as the men returned to peacetime life some were elected to office in the Fire Company: Thomas Ross, Secretary; Frank Krokos, Vice President; Angelo Grossi, Lieutenant; and John Kupetz, Captain.

Frank Krokos had bought the old Jupin property on Cumberland Avenue before he went into the Army. When he was in Europe he offered the use of the garage for the truck and equipment and a place where meetings could be held. Oddly enough this garage had been built by Mike and Joe Jupin in 1932 after their old storage buildings had been burned as the result of the fire which destroyed the old Milmay Poultry Association Hall in November 1931. That fire



In the early days before the Firehouse was erected, our original Pumper was kept in this garage on Cumberland Avenue, which is still located behind the present day Milmay Inn

was the biggest and most dangerous ever in the town up to that time.

It became apparent that there was need of a fire hall for the housing and storage of the equipment and for the social activities of the community. In the spring of 1946 three lots were purchased for \$1.00 from Buena Vista Township on Cumberland Avenue near the center of town. In the search of the property it was found that the DeRosa family had an interest. Several meetings were held between Attorneys Philip L. Lipman, Joseph Adamo and Joe Novario with Sam DeRosa to resolve the matter and the Company was given a clear title.

The Building Committee included just about every member that had an interest in the Company. There was much dissension on the outside but never at a public meeting. "Morning meetings" were held at the Milmay Post Office where the poultry farmers came to pick up their mail between early morning chores and egg gathering time on the farm. After much deliberation and the results of the "morning meetings," it was agreed and approved to erect a forty by seventy foot building with two stories.

Upon approval for the construction of the building the grounds were cleared by contractor Ed Jennings. The plans were drawn by architect John Fletcher of Vineland and were approved by the State of New Jersey Labor Commission.

Many organizations were holding prize drawings as fund-raisers in the late 1940's, so fire company members figured, why not give it a try. In the fall of 1947 the Fire Company offered a 1947 Chevrolet as the prize to be awarded to a lucky winner before Christmas. About \$2,000.00 was made for this effort. At the drawing, held at the Milmay Hotel, Clement Lisitski of Dorothy was the winner.

With the money raised, estimates for materials were received in the fall of 1947 and concrete footings were poured before the cold winter temperatures set in. In the spring of 1948 William H. "Bill" Frank was in charge of the laying of the blocks with his sons, Bobby and Teddy, and many other volunteers. It was indeed a community effort.

One of the biggest boosters of the company was John Malatesta. He often neglected his own farm and business to go all over South Jersey in search of materials for the building. He located the steel for the beams and girders in Atlantic City and a tower for the siren in Salem County. He bargained with many dealers for prices on lumber, plumbing and electrical supplies. Malatesta "pushed" Angelo Grossi to do most of the welding and fabrication of the steel at the Grossi property; he "nagged" and begged Joe Kupetz, Sverre Andersen and Louis Castellani to do the wiring and electrical work. He convinced members to volunteer whenever and where-ever they would be needed for carpentry work, painting, cleaning up and any other duties.

By November 29, 1948 the building was far from being completed but enough work had been done to house the truck and equipment, and the first regular business meeting was held

Mickey Matwiow and Frank Krokos, owners of the Milmay Hotel at the corner of Tuckahoe Road and Cumberland Avenue, gave the Fire Company permission to install its first siren on top of their building. Fire and emergency calls were received and alarms were sounded to the members and the community from that location. A larger siren was later installed on a tower adjacent to the Fire Hall when three phase electrical current was provided.

In June 1949, Charter Member and first Company President, Edward E. McVaugh passed away at the age of 52 without seeing the future of the company. He was one of the most influential persons to put the Fire Company on a sound basis from its inception. He had a "knack" for working with township officials, attorneys connected with fire company business and with all of the membership to make the Company successful. Clement Pierotti, Sr., was then named President and Frank Krokos was named Vice President.

During construction of the building in 1948 and 1949, there was a need for additional financing. The annual allotment from Buena Vista Township through district taxation, drawings, dinners and donations was not enough for the needs of the Company. There was an indebtedness of \$4,000.00 with an additional \$6,500.00 needed. Bonds were printed and issued in the amount of \$200.00 each to be paid off at 3% interest. Members had first preference for purchasing the bonds and then the general public. Eventually, over \$8,000.00 was raised in this way. Many purchasers of bonds were paid but some never cashed in their bonds and considered it a donation for the good of the Company.

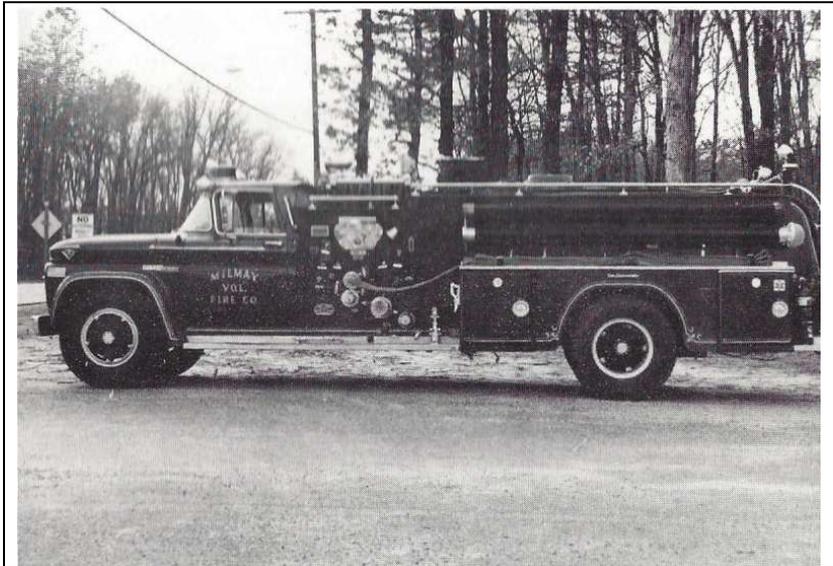
Since part of Milmay is in Cumberland County, a large number of residents of Maurice Township were Charter Members of the Company and many more joined as the Company grew. They have been an integral part of the unit from its inception and have given much time and financial aid to make the Company a success. They have always been a credit to the organization and an inspiration for all. Since 1955 Maurice River Township has contributed an annual appropriation to the fire company.

By Memorial Day 1952, the building was not complete, but the first affair in the new hall was a dance, given by the Dorothy American Legion Post #405. Since that time, many affairs have been held in the building.

A greater interest took place in the Fire Company following the Korean War. A number of new and old residents became volunteers. There was some dissension between the new men and the older volunteers who had served from the beginning. Despite the bickering and arguments that took place, the Company survived. A heating system was installed, the meeting room was improved, and the housing area for the trucks and equipment was fixed up to meet necessary standards.

The upstairs part of the hall had a stage, and a modern kitchen was installed by the Ladies Auxiliary so that dinners, dances and private affairs could be held there. Previously Mickey and Josephine Matwiow had loaned the facilities of the Milmay Hotel for dinners and other fund-raising affairs without cost.

A chassis was donated by Joe and Harry- Bullock of the Bullock Chevrolet Company in September 1955 to be used as a water wagon. A used tank was purchased and installed on the vehicle and a pump was obtained early in 1956.



1963 G.M.C. 1,000 Gallon Tank Pumper

On May 14, 1963 a GMC Pumper was purchased from the Great Eastern Fire Equipment Company for \$15,931.00.

Payments were made annually in the amount of \$2,000.00 with the interest rate at 5%.

In 1963 the Fire Company became a part of the radio communications "net" linking all of

the Fire and Rescue Squads in the area under one control unit. In subsequent years the volunteers worked with Dorothy Volunteer Rescue Squad to assist when ambulance calls were necessary.

In April 1967 the Fire Company sponsored a Boy Scout Troop with William Frank as the Scoutmaster and Fred Milburn and Robert Frank as Assistant Scoutmasters. In eight years of existence over 200 boys from the area took part in the program. Four of the boys became Eagle Scouts.

Several talent shows were presented by the Scouts at the Hall. The shows were attended by over 200 people each time with encore nights added. The local talent made a hit.



A rare photo of one of the Boy Scout Troops that met at the Milmay Firehouse – seen here preparing for the Buena Vista Township 1967 Centennial Parade

The Boy Scout Troop was discontinued when a leader for the boys could not be found. Bill Frank had exhausted his ability to find projects to work on and the Boy Scout project came to a close.

There were a number of serious fires in 1969. Early in the year the old "Killit" Factory building burned down completely. The building had been built about 1890 by the originators of Milmay, the South Jersey Land and Transportation e building had been the

store and office of Joseph Taylor, who had sold land in Maurice River Township. The upper floor of the building had been used for the Milmay School until 1913. It became the property of Dr. Vincenzo Giacalone - the South Jersey Chemical Company and later the Palmero Products Company

There were four suspected arson fires throughout the town and a number of forest fires during the rear- A number of suspects were questioned but no arrests were made by the Police.

On October 16, 1969 the Milmay Hotel was gutted by a fire of unknown origin. The Hotel had been built by the South Jersey Land and Transportation Company about 1890 at the time of the building of the railroad through Milmay to the Shore. Again there was no proof of arson. Chief Eric M. Hensel tells the story that when the firemen went into the building amidst the ruins with smoke still reeking through the air, the phone rang. When he answered the call, it was from radio station WWBZ of Vineland asking for information on the fire. Hensel replied that things were too hot and hung up.

On January 28, 1977 there was a fire at the home of William Konopka next to the Kupetz Bar. The building had been built as a store by William Oesterle in 1932. Konopka died of smoke inhalation in the hospital as a result of the fire. Ernest DeRosa was injured when he attempted to help Konopka.

During the summer of 1973 the New Jersey State Police setup a command Post in the Fire Hall where they could coordinate a plan for the search of a suspected murderer of a gas station owner in Woodbine. The suspect was believed to be in the surrounding area for four days until that man was apprehended

In May 1974 forest fires burned over 4000 acres of woodland and threatened many homes in Maurice River Township from Hesstown to Milmay. Ten volunteer fire companies assisted the Milmay Company and the New Jersey Forest Fire Service in protecting homes from the flames.

In 1976, the Rainbow Squares Dance Club began leasing the Hall for their weekly, sessions. Many of the dancers later left the local club and joined with other clubs in the area, but Rainbow Squares have remained a tenant for 17 years.

On April 15, 1978, a 35th Anniversary Dinner was held at the Weymouth Tavern (Clem's Old Place) in Dorothy. Lifetime Memberships and plaques were presented to former Commissioners Joseph Bullock, Robert Frank, Joseph Giercyk, Leno Grossi, John "Squeak" Kupetz, Howard Strother, former Treasurer Placido A. Bucca, former President Samuel DeRosa, former President and Secretary John Krokos, Sr., former Chief and Commissioner Michael Matwiow, former Chief and President Clement Pierotti, Sr., former Captain Charles Pokorney, former Secretary Thomas Ross and Chief Angelo Grossi. A brief history was given and there were a few speeches. A fine dinner was served and a good time was had by all.



This patch was designed in the early 1980s. It has become the Milmay Volunteer Fire Company emblem.

On June 1, 1980 new postal facilities were dedicated in a room in the rear of the Milmay Fire Company building. Renovations had reportedly cost \$13,000.00. This was brought about by the retirement of Postmaster Helen Mahoney on December 31 1979, who had operated the Post Office from her home. The lease agreements were arranged with the Postal Service by the Officers and Commissioners of the Fire Company, Mayor John Krokos and the Buena Vista Township Attorney Thomas F. Bullock and Mr. Pat Verrechia of the South Jersey Postal Operational Center in Bellmawr, New Jersey. A ten year lease was signed by the Postal Service at that time.

Approximately 60 residents and friends attended the dedication. Mayor Krokos spoke for the community when he said that the Post Office would always be a part of the town with Zip Code 08340 and the identity of Milmay would not be lost. Margaret "Peggy" Heath was the first Postmaster in the new location. In 1990 they renewed the lease for another five years. The post Office has provided the fire company a source of revenue to offset the local tax burden.

On March 27 1981, there was a very serious fire at the International Wood Products Company at the corner of Tuckahoe Road and McDonald Avenue where Palermo Products Company had previously been located. The blaze was first spotted at 5. A.M. Twenty volunteer companies and rescue squads with an estimated 200 men battled the fire. Toxic fumes from the smoke took its toll and 20 or more men were stricken. Eight firemen were hospitalized. Chemicals, paints, and lacquers used in the manufacturing of furniture were the cause for most of the injuries. The fire was brought under control by mid-day.

On August 23, 1981 the Fire Company held a Chicken Bar-Be-Cue at the Buena Vista Township Park on Cedar Avenue. A new 1,000 gallon Pumper was dedicated in memory of the late Commissioner Howard Strother.

Mrs. Victoria Strother accepted the plaque which was then presented to the Company to be attached to the vehicle. Thomas Ross, Master of Ceremonies, commented as follows; "to Howard Strother's memory we have

dedicated this equipment to better serve our community and those of our neighbors."



Dedication of our 1981 G.M. C. Pumper in honor of Howard Strother. The ceremony was held at the Richland Park. Mrs. Strother accepts the honors from Eric R. Hensel and Richard Ewen

On April 9, 1983 a dinner was held at the Chandelier Room at The Fire Points Inn to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the Company. There were 125 members and guests present at the dinner. There was a moment of silence for departed members. Life Memberships and plaques were presented to former Presidents Albert DeRosa and William Frank, former Secretary Ernest DeRosa, former Treasurer Julius DeRosa, Commissioner Henry T. Frank, former Chief John Pierotti, Sr. and former Captain John Pietrosanti, Sr. Ernest Day of the New Jersey Fire Equipment Company of Dunellen, New Jersey was a guest speaker. When he was getting ready to return to his seat he was called back to the microphone. At that time Chief Eric M. Hensel presented him with a Life Membership in the Milmay Volunteer Fire Company. Day thanked the members for their consideration. Music for dancing followed and all who attended had an enjoyable time.

The eighties saw the usual number of drills and maintenance of the equipment. Helmets, boots and other protective turn-out gear as required by the State of New Jersey were purchased in addition to "beepers" and other radio equipment.



The Firehouse is pictured in December of 1989 after the renovation project was completed. Our \$10,000.00 was raised by the members of the Milmay Volunteer Fire Company to make this possible. The huge wreath that hangs around the center window every Christmas was constructed by Chuck Chiarello and David Bachinsky in Chuck's garage

In the fall of 1989 there was a complete "face lift" to the building. A new covering was placed on the outside walls. New automatic overhead doors were installed in the truck bays and a new "apron" was poured with concrete in front. Over \$10,000.00 was raised for the project by the fire company, It was one of the few times that funds were needed over and above the tax collection. The community responded

well.

When it was time to put in the concrete apron at the front of the building the period of 24 hours straight to remove the old apron, level and frame out the concrete. The work started on Friday afternoon and continued under spotlights during the night, finishing Saturday afternoon when was a proud time for our current day members - many descendants and relatives the founding Milmay fathers. Leo F. Foy provided the lighting, Anthony Cinotti removed the old apron and graded with his backhoe and John, Mike and Steve Pietrosanti provided the concrete skills. All other members provided labor. Chuck Chiarello headed the fund-raising and Building Improvement Committee, along with David Bachinsky and John Pietrosanti.

On February 5, 1990 a Karate and Martial Arts Club known as Yi's Karate Club signed a lease to hold classes for students in the Hall. Joseph Vasquez signed the lease for the club.

The fire company has also come to the aid of the community in many non-firefighting ways. None more memorable (in recent years) than the May 1990 help that was provided to Ricco "Richie" Maruffi. A benefit breakfast was held along with the cooperation of the East Vineland Volunteer Fire Company which raised \$4,308.97. The money helped the family when medical bills and other expenses had made times difficult.

For many years the Ladies Auxiliary was inactive until May 2, 1990 when a young group of ladies renamed the Ladies Auxiliary to the Milmay Volunteer Fire Company Women's Association with the following members as Officers: President Bunny Cinotti and Secretary/Treasurer Dotti Down. Many fund-raisers including craft shows, sub sales and bake sales were held to benefit the Company. A check for \$2,500.00 was presented to the firemen on April 17, 1991 to purchase fire equipment.



The Women's Association presenting a check for \$2,500.00 to the Fire Company on April 17, 1991. C. Chiarello, C. Chiarello, B Cinotti, D. Down, T. Benson, A. Cinotti, L. Foy and F. Benson

Recently a new well was dug and a water system installed so that water supplies in the trucks could be replenished without leaving Milmay. The deep well was drilled and it seemed like a long time before the job was finally completed. We now have water sources in the front and rear of the building.

In 1991 John Pietrosante Jr., one of our members who lives within our fire district but resides in Maurice River Township was named a Fire Commissioner in the Cumberland Volunteer Fire Company. That company recently became its own taxing fire district. John's election gives Milmay voice in an area where we are the "prime" mutual aid responding company.

In the summer of 1991 a Committee for the 50th Anniversary of the Milmay Volunteer Fire Company was named. Members included Frank R. Benson II, Chuck Chiarello, Jeff Hammerstedt, Eric R. Hensel, Tom Ross and David Bachinsky. Several meetings were held at the Firehouse and it was agreed to hold a "Kick-off" Dinner in the spring of 1992 to begin the festivities.

On Saturday .April 25, 1992 the 50th Anniversary "Kick-off" Dinner was held with 120 members and guests attending. The dinner was at the Fire Hall and catered by DeThomasi's Five Points Inn.

Speeches were held to a minimum with President Eric R. Hensel welcoming the members and their friends. Among the other speakers were Fire Chief Leo F., Township Committeeman and Fire Company member Chuck Chiarello, and Past Chief and present Commissioner Eric M. Hensel. Tom Ross who was the Master of Ceremonies gave a brief history of the Company. Prizes were awarded to lucky ticket holders and the festivities ended with music and dancing.

It was announced a the dinner that a gala 50th Anniversary Dinner would be held at Merighi's Savoy Inn on April 13, 1993 -and so that brings us to tonight and the future.

There have always been homes and property to protect. During the last decade the Milmay Volunteer Fire Company has assisted the Dorothy Volunteer Fire and Rescue Squad many times. Milmay also provides mutual aid to Estell Manor, Mizpah, Richland, and the East Vineland Volunteer Fire Companies. We assist the new Jersey Forest Fire Service and have gone wherever led. We handle car fires and traffic accidents, false alarms and working structure fires. Our modern firefighters are graduates of fire school and have attended many hours of extended training to meet today's challenges from Hazardous Materials to EMT and CPR training.

Milmay's success in fire fighting has always been a team effort with it's mutual aid companies	
	
<p>House fire on South Jersey Avenue as pictured in the Daily Journal – October 10, 1989</p>	<p>A working structure fire in Dorothy. Yhe Milmay Volunteer Fire Company provides mutual aid to help extinguish this fire at a fellow firefighter's home</p>
	
<p>House fire on South Jersey Avenue – October 10, 1989</p>	<p>Our mutual aid assistance is provided to Mizpah Volunteer Fire Company for a house fire on Bears Head Road</p>

Many generations of families in Milmay have been active in our fire company since 1943. While members have come and gone, the Hensel, Frank, DeRosa, Pierotti, Pietrosanti and other families are still active today. Some have left for personal reasons while others have moved from the community but the nucleus has always been there to make the Company a successful one. There has been some bickering and arguing, but cooperation has been the main factor and hopefully the Milmay Volunteer Fire Company will continue to grow.

Repairs and renovations have kept the Firehouse in shape during the 45 years since the building was erected in 1948. Most recently interior work was done to provide a coat room separate from where the trucks are parked to allow the members to put on "turn-out" gear more safely. That area and the truck bays were freshly painted. In the near future more repairs will be done to the Firehouse. The entrance way to the upstairs and the Hall will be reconditioned along with a new roof.

The Milmay Volunteer Fire Company is a part of the New Jersey Firemen's Association, the Buena Vista Township Firemen's Relief Association and the Atlantic Co Firefighters Association.

The Officers of the Fire Company - President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Fire Chief, Assistant Chief, Captain, Lieutenant and Second Lieutenant are elected by the members of the Fire Company at the first meeting of the year. They are elected for one year terms but may serve for as many terms as the members will have them.

The Board of Fire Commissioners are elected by the residents of the Fire District who are registered voters in Buena Vista Township on the third Saturday in February of each year. There are five Commissioners who prepare an annual budget that is advertised and voted upon.

At the annual Election the amount of money to be raised by taxation is voted on in addition to one or two Commissioners. One Commissioner is elected for one year; two Commissioners are elected for the next two years then back to one Commissioner.

In modern times with fire budgets rising Milmay has gained a reputation for having the thriftiest operation in Buena Vista Township. It's true - but we have never cut corners on service and firefighting skills.

Our 50th Anniversary Celebration is now complete. Someone else will start here for the next time history is written about our Company - and there will be more! In-fact, there's talk of a new fire truck hitting the streets of Milmay in 1995.



Fireman's Prayer

When I am called to duty, God, whenever flames may rage, give me strength to save some life, whatever be its age. Help me embrace a little child before it is too late, or save an older person from the horror of that fate. Enable me to be alert and bear the weakest shout, and quickly and efficiently to put the fire out. I want to fill my calling, and to give the best in me, to guard my every neighbor and protect his property. And if, according to my fate, I am to lose my life, please bless with your protecting hand my family, friends and wife.