

Who are we? It's our hope that anyone who reads this history will be able to understand who we are. The things we experienced - ideas, desire, mistakes, loss, courage, vision, failure, commitment, setbacks, emotion, caring, perseverance – make us a great story.

It's good that we've done our history project when we did. Stories like ours shouldn't be lost, and too much already has been. This was a difficult task. Eagle McClure Hose Company's roots go back almost a century. Sibley McClure Hose Company was founded in 1908, and White Eagle Hose Company was formed in 1917.

Unfortunately, very few records from Sibley can be found. There is however a 1923 photograph identifying the following Sibley members gathered around a great-looking old American LaFrance engine:

William Schell, Tom Rogers, Joseph Whitehouse, Matt Bender, Fred Bell, Bill Wade, Jack Howarth, John Sowden, John Bald.

White Eagle has fairly good records, so much more if this narrative is based upon White Eagle's records and recollections from long-time members.

The first meeting of what would become the White Eagle Hose Company Number 4 of Old Forge Borough was held on January 12, 1917. The original Decree of Incorporation issued by Judge James J. O'Neil on March 12, 1917 hangs in the company quarters in what is believed to be the original frame.

Back then, the people in the hilly Austin Heights and Bush Patch sections of Old Forge recognized the need for a fire company located in that section of the borough. Service by the existing fire companies at that time often was often delayed due to the poor road conditions and the nature of fire fighting apparatus of that era. In 1915, the beloved original church of St. Stanislaus parish on Franklin Street in Austin Heights was destroyed by fire, demonstrating even more the need for better fire protection.

The charter listed the following as the first members, all now deceased:

Anthony Kozlowski (Secretary), John Sandrowski, Joseph Taraskiewicz (President), Casimir Strenkowski, Anthony Kielich, Steve Cichy, Stanley Kielich, Joseph Koziol, Thomas Lozinski, Matt Makowski, Frank Chickey (Treasurer).

The first company quarters was a wooden garage at the "top" of Austin Heights, on a lot at Austin and Franklin Streets. Because that building was not much more than a crude shack, the members needed a place to meet. Member Steve Cichy ran Steve's Place, a local watering hole on Franklin Street, and company meetings were held there in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The company charter was proudly displayed on the wall of the tavern.

The company possesses original handwritten meeting minutes from March 16, 1941 to the present. An audit report shows that on March 2, 1941, White Eagle had \$452.44 in its bank account. A company dance was held on May 4, 1941 at the Falcons Hall featuring 4 halves and 2 quarters of beer, 125 glasses, 4 quarts of liquor, 25 pounds of hot dogs, 250 buns, 1 box of gum, 1 box of cigars, 2 cartons of cigarettes, 5 boxes of candy, and 10 cases of soda. Expenditures amounted to \$128.92 and income was \$218.05, for a profit of \$89.13.

To solicit donations for the dance, members canvassed the streets of Austin Heights and other areas, a tradition that continued into the early 1980s.

A “bingo affair” was held November 16, 1941 in the American Legion Hall. Could anyone have guessed that 60 years later, bingo would be the main income source for the company, and a very profitable one at that?

It was reported at the October 19, 1941 meeting that the Burgess (Mayor) of Old Forge suggested the 4 hose companies merge into one Old Forge Fire Department.

These early records show that audits were frequently and meticulously conducted, accounting for every single penny. Members with dues in arrears were subject to dismissal from the organization.

The first automated “engine” was a simple Chevrolet truck.

In early 1948, membership was growing. The spring of that year brought several men who would become long-time members, including Al Doohaluk, Stephen Cichy Jr., and Walter “Lawgy” Sanko.

In the spring of 1950, the company appointed multiple “Fire Wardens” for specific streets in Austin Heights and Bush Patch. The duties and authorities of these Wardens are not specified in company records but some members recall their main function to be warning of fire or emergency.

The first of many fundraising company picnics was held in September 1952. Good thing, because at the end of 1952, White Eagle had less than \$500 in its treasury.

Members began considering plans for a new fire house in early 1953. Membership was continuing to grow, and some meetings were being held in Augustinski’s Hall on Franklin Street from the early 1940s to the early 1950s. It was also decided to make the company picnic an annual event.

A major event occurred in the summer of 1956. The company agreed to build a new cinder block building, at a cost of about \$1500. Member Alex Marhelski was the principal contractor. He received help from Steve Cichy. The first meeting in the new quarters was held on July 22, 1956. At that meeting, a motion was made to purchase the lot adjoining the fire company property. White Eagle was clearly on the move!

One of the most notable acquisitions in the company’s history occurred on May 18, 1959. The company purchased a 1938 Ahrens Fox fire truck from Boonton, New Jersey for \$405. Over the next 40 years, the loud white truck with the open cab would become a symbol of not only the fire company, but of Austin Heights as well.

The company picnic held July 31 and August 1, 1959 made a profit of \$576.33. At the company’s meeting on September 30, 1959, it was decided to put an addition on the “new” firehouse that would contain a furnace and kitchen. Around that same time, the Borough gave the company 800 feet 1 and 1/2 inch hose, 1000 feet 2 and 1/2 inch hose, 1 fire ax, 1 Siamese coupling reducer, 2 1 and 1/2 inch nozzles, and 6 spanner wrenches. These events were a sign that the organization was moving into modern times.

In January 1960, the old Chevrolet fire truck was sold for \$150 to Stanley Chickey. By March 1960, the company coffers were down to \$118.77.

During the September 25, 1960 meeting, a motion to “close the charter” was voted down. However, it was decided in a later meeting to charge a \$5 initiation fee to new members.

The company members were a close-knit group. Shared duties at that time included "furnace detail" to ensure heat was maintained in the building and grass cutting with the old push mower. The first power mower was purchased in 1961. The company books were dutifully audited by a committee of members every year.

A Ladies Auxiliary was formed in 1960. In early 1961, the women of the Auxiliary were the following:

Edna Hynoski, Vera Swanek (President), Helen Ezbianski (Secretary), Regina Marhelski, Lucy Haddock, Helen Swanek, Mary Ezbianski, Carmelia Tetlock, Pauline Doohaluk (Treasurer), Della Chickey, Irene Vishnesky, Rose Suda, Evelyn Schuback. The ladies supported the firemen through raffles, bingos, and other fund-raising activities. They focused on buying and obtaining equipment and utensils for the newly built kitchen. The ladies also assisted by preparing food for and working at the annual picnic. Existing records show that the Auxiliary was active into summer 1964. Apparently, the group gradually disbanded around that time.

A hint of modern day firefighting occurred at the company meeting of March 25, 1962. It was agreed to appoint 10 drivers of the fire truck, and the driver would be responsible for pump operations. The following firemen were appointed as drivers:

Al Doohaluk, Walter Sanko, Matt Olkowski, Paul Ezbianski, Chester Swanek, Elmer Hynoski, Charlie Marhelski, John Schuback, Mike Krenitsky, Ray Kidaloski.

As the company grew, it strengthened its bond with the local community. Saint Stanislaus Church in Austin Heights was developing its Hall on Franklin Street in 1962; White Eagle donated \$25 toward the project. Most company members were also parishioners of Saint Stanislaus Church. Many of the company men frequented Lawgy's Bar at the corner of Mine and Spring Streets, owned by Walter "Lawgy" Sanko, also a member of the company. Often, the sound of the fire siren would empty Lawgy's, but the firefighters would return to quench their thirst after the call was completed. An attempt was made to install an alarm inside Lawgy's that would activate when the siren sounded, but it is unclear as to whether the system actually worked.

In 1963, White Eagle Hose Company was a solidly established organization, and it was reflecting teamwork and strong social connections. Members purchased company dress uniforms for the first time in the early part of that year. Firefighting responsibility was taken seriously, as members agreed that the fire truck could only be taken to parades within a 20-mile radius. Company members also were attending annual "fire schools" held regionally from the early 1960s until the nature of fire training changed decades later.

The 1963 audit showed the company had \$2708.11.

The company held a pig roast at Saint Stanislaus Hall in February 1964. It was another well-attended community event. A ham and kielbasa dinner, with mashed potatoes, tossed salad, and peas and carrots, was held in November 1964 at the church hall. Tickets were \$1.50 for adults and \$1.00 for children. About 300 hungry and happy people attended.

Another major turning point occurred in 1965. The members decided to move the annual picnic that summer from the company grounds at Austin and Franklin Streets to Burner's Park, on Milwaukee Avenue near the bottom of Franklin Street. The grounds of the Old Sibley School at Spring Street and Keyser Avenue were

also available for the picnic, but Burner's was chosen as the site. The picnic would be held at Burner's Park for about the next 25 years, until about 1990.

The following officers were elected on March 28, 1965:

President - Charles Marhelski, Vice President - Joe Dushko, Treasurer - Ed Hoffman, Secretary - John Schuback, Chief - Mike Krenitsky, 1st Assistant Chief - John Schuback, 2nd Assistant Chief - Frank Barmus.

On that day, the company had \$4368.88 in its account.

Attention to firefighting was again apparent as a registration of disabled persons in the borough was completed in April 1965. The Chief reminded drivers to ensure that the fire truck water tank was filled upon return from every call.

White Eagle continued to grow as a dynamic organization with dedicated and forward-thinking members. The group began discussing the need for a new fire truck in August 1965. Acquiring a used military fire truck was considered, but the process involved was not feasible. On Halloween 1965, the Secretary was instructed to contact salesmen of American LaFrance and Ward LaFrance to obtain bids. On January 23, 1966, the company reviewed bids of \$19,710 for an American LaFrance Pioneer I and \$21,218 for a Ward LaFrance Model 75. After discussing the merits of each truck, the group decided to go with the Ward LaFrance.

This decision marked a major milestone for the company. For the first time, the firefighters of White Eagle would have a modern, state-of-the-art firefighting apparatus. More importantly, it was the first of several very aggressive and risky decisions that would result in the further growth and development of the organization.

At that time, \$21,218 was a very substantial amount of money. The Borough promised to provide only \$4000, leaving the company responsible for the balance. This was a daunting challenge.

The new Ward LaFrance was delivered on October 25, 1966, after having been displayed at the State Fire Convention in Scranton.

With the arrival of the new truck, the company began keeping a log of its fire calls. It was also agreed to purchase walkie-talkies to enhance communication.

Another welcome, although less monumental, purchase was made on May 13, 1967. A machine for grating potatoes was bought for \$190. Charlie Marhelski, renowned throughout the Lackawanna Valley for his famous potato pancakes, tried out the machine and gave it his blessing. The company kids were thrilled, because they would no longer have to grate the potatoes by hand.

The most spectacular fire of many years in the Austin Heights area occurred in April 1968 when the old Sibley School was completely destroyed. The early morning fire lit up the sky for miles around. A local landmark was lost.

The 1970 company picnic featured prices for food and drinks that would be bargains by today's standards, as follows:

Shot of whiskey - 35 cents, Hi ball - 40 cents, Beer 7oz bottles - 25 cents, Soda - 10 cents, Clams 14/bag -1 dollar, Potato pancakes -10 cents each, Hamburgs - 35 cents, Hot dogs - 25 cents, Kielbasa sandwich - 50 cents, Pigs in blanket - 25 cents, Clam chowder - 25 cents, French fries - 25 cents, Pizza -15 cents, Pierogi -15 cents, Coffee -15 cents, Cigarettes - 50 cents.

In the summer of 1970, the fire companies of the borough began organizing a fire police unit.

At about the same time the company members began discussing the construction a new fire station. The property across from Lawgy's Bar at Mine and Spring Streets was thought to be coming up for sale and the members felt it would be a good location. Discussions continued for the next few months, and a building committee was appointed on March 13, 1971. However not much progress was made and a new committee was formed in March of 1972.

The Old Forge Borough fire companies held a local fire school on March 25, 1973 near the high school football stadium.

In May of 1973 yet another building committee was appointed. At the company meeting of August 13, 1973, the secretary reported that the July picnic made a profit of about \$5300 dollars. The company now had \$23,969.08 in its treasury. The members then had a discussion that resulted in what may have been their most monumental decision ever. The group agreed to attempt to purchase Burner's Park. The secretary was instructed to send a letter to the owner, Attorney Morris Gelb, expressing the company's interest.

The company received a formal proposal from Attorney Gelb dated August 23, 1973 containing the following terms: The Company could purchase the land for a price of \$45,000. (Although Mr. Gelb had an offer of \$60,000 from another interested party, the firefighters explained that they intended to use the land to build the company and help the community.) A down payment of \$20,000 was requested with the balance being payable with a six year mortgage with a 6% interest rate.

It was originally believed that the land consisted of 6 or 7 acres but it was actually about 15 acres in size. The members agreed to the conditions of the proposal. White Eagle Hose Company became owner of a very valuable and useful property.

At this point in 1973, the company was still running the old Ahrens Fox, in addition to the new Ward LaFrance to fire calls.

In November of 1973, the members decided to have a New Years Eve party at Saint Stanislaus Hall, starting another tradition that would continue for several years. The company also agreed to co-host, along with Sibley McClure Hose Company, a Christmas Party for the neighborhood children.

In February of 1975, the company received permission to move the fire siren from the fire house to the top of Saint Stanislaus Hall because some members were having difficulty hearing the alarm under certain weather conditions. The siren remained on the top of the hall for many years.

Another step forward occurred at the meeting on February 10, 1975. The members began discussing construction of a new firehouse on their property on Burners Park. Another building committee was appointed.

At the company meeting of May 25, 1975, the members agreed to accept a bid from Howard Lane Construction Company of \$61,720 for construction of the company's new fire station. The members further agreed to borrow \$85,000 from the Old Forge Bank to finance the building. The company had again taken another brave initiative.

A citizens band radio was installed in the Ward LaFrance Engine in November 1975; marking the first time Old Forge fire trucks where able to communicate with each other.

A dinner was held honoring long time Borough Fire Chief Charles Gaylets on January 31, 1976 at the American Legion Hall. The price was \$2.50 per person.

The treasury report at the March 9, 1976 meeting showed that there was \$14,665.46 in the company account.

In April 1976, the membership agreed to have the Ahrens Fox painted cream.

Although a profitable company picnic was held in July 1976, members complained about a lack of help. The discussion went further with regard to several members not being active in general. This was a problem that would begin to affect our as well as other volunteer companies up to the present time.

Another first for the company occurred in 1976 when Doris Stull became White Eagle's, and Old Forge's, first female firefighter.

As the new building neared completion, it was decided to charge \$450 for rental of the hall and a \$40 bar fee to include bartenders. For their personal use, members of the company could rent the hall for \$100. Rent for afternoon affairs such as showers and funerals would be \$150.

Admission to the 1976/1977 New Year's Eve party was \$13/person.

1977 would prove to be one of the most "happening" years ever for the company, with several major events and achievements.

In January 1977, company finances were down to \$3475.20. For fund raising for the year, the members considered a bingo, a building dedication dinner, and an envelop drive, in addition to the company picnic.

Modernization of fire-fighting capability continued to receive attention. It was agreed to purchase a Regency 4 FM radio for the Ward LaFrance at a cost of about \$500. The other companies in town also purchased the radios. Reliable communication between the town's fire apparatus was now achieved.

At the March 5, 1977 meeting of the Old Forge Fireman's Relief Association, White Eagle Chief John Schuback was again elected as Borough Fire Chief, a position he held for many years.

The dedication of the new firehouse took place on May 15, 1977. The gala affair, at a cost of \$12.50 per person, began with hot hor-dourves and a cocktail hour. Next was a prime beef dinner followed by a three hour open bar. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held in front of the new building. Keynote speaker for the event was District Attorney Ernie Preate, an Old Forge native. It was a gorgeous sunny spring day to celebrate the result of much hard work, commitment, and risk-taking. More good news was the dinner resulted in a profit of about \$2400, because company accounts were now down to \$1744.50.

A fire safety effort was initiated in the spring when the members agreed to attempt to sell 50 Honeywell smoke detectors to members and friends of the company.

The September 12, 1977 meeting was especially significant. It was decided to begin a weekly bingo, held Wednesday nights at 7:00 PM, as partners with Old Forge Hose & Engine Company. Hose & Engine would supply its bingo machine and a few workers. The profit split would be 60% White Eagle and 40% Hose & Engine. The first bingo netted a total profit of about \$100. Hose & Engine eventually dropped out, and White Eagle continued alone. The bingo would continue and become the largest single source of income for the company. The bingo remains the company's primary source of revenue at the time of this writing, 25 years after it began.

At that same meeting a Junior Firemen program was initiated, with 4 boys proposed for membership, including 14-year old Billy Stull, who would go on to become the present-time Captain of the company and one of the most highly-trained and active firefighters in the Borough.

The fire house bar was open to members on Sunday for the winter beginning October 15.

A spaghetti and meatballs dinner was held in early November 1977, and the company hosted the Northeastern Pennsylvania Volunteer Firemen's Federation dinner. Volunteers from all over the area attended and raved about the great food that was served.

The New Year's Eve dinner featured roast beef, chicken, pigs-in-the-blanket, mashed potatoes, salad, cake and coffee and a buffet of potato salad, macaroni salad, Cole slaw, sausage, and meatballs, all for a cost of \$30/couple which included a pint of whiskey. Everyone had a great time, and the whirl-wind year came to a close.

The 1977 fire reports showed a total of 100 calls, as follows:

19 Structures, 50 grass, 9 Vehicles, 3 Dumps, 12 False alarms, 1 Garbage, 1 Stand-by, 1 Fire drill, 2 Woodpile, 1 Oil spill.

In early 1978, the cash-strapped company decided to hold a pizza, pierogi, and potato pancake sale every Friday during the Lent season.

In March 1978, a fire destroyed Excelsior Hose Company of Duryea. Although struggling financially, White Eagle donated \$100 to Excelsior.

The new fire house became the polling place for the 2nd Ward of Old Forge Borough for the Primary election of May 1978, and has served as such to the present day.

The members also agreed to allow the Old Forge Softball League to continue to use Burner's Park in 1978. The league agreed to maintain and improve the field and to contribute \$500 toward the insurance.

In the autumn of 1978, the new building was still a "work-in-progress". The borough Council agreed to finance the blacktopping of 50 feet of the parking area.

In October 1978, the Borough purchased a 1951 Mack 75-foot aerial ladder truck at a cost of \$15,000. The truck was stationed at White Eagle but members of the other companies were authorized to operate it. For its price, the Aerial proved very useful, serving at some large fires in and out of town.

Saint Stanislaus Church was celebrating its 75th anniversary and the members agreed to support the church by taking a \$25 ad in the jubilee book.

The first year full of the bingo produced a profit of \$3,847.30 for White Eagle and \$2,564.89 for Hose & Engine.

Also in October 1978, the Ahrens Fox, now out of service for several years, was moved to the old fire house for the winter months. This may have marked the beginning of the end for the famous engine, as gradually less attention was devoted to the old war horse.

At the company meeting of November 13, 1978, Chief John Schuback raised the idea of White Eagle merging with Sibley McClure Hose Company. After some discussion, it was agreed that a special meeting would be held to explore this proposal.

The borough reneged on its promise to pay for paving of the parking lot, and the company became responsible for a bill of \$4500. At that time, the company treasury had \$562.60.

1979 began with a well-attended special meeting on January 8 at which the potential merger of White Eagle and Sibley was discussed. By a vote of 21 to 5, the members agreed to form a committee to closely examine the proposal. Care was taken to balance the 9 member committee with individuals both for and against the idea of a merger.

In February 1979, a motion was made to grant a request by the popular local band "The Poets" to run Friday night dances at the company hall. Although badly in need of revenue, the company voted down the motion out of concern for possible rowdy people causing damage and trouble at the firehouse. Once again, the members made a difficult, but wise choice.

At about the same time, Old Forge Hose and Engine decided to withdraw from the bingo. With some trepidation about having enough help, White Eagle decided to continue alone in one of the most fortunate decisions ever made by the members.

From the late 1970s until well in the 1980s, catering affairs in the Company Hall was the main source of revenue. Members, their families, and friends again devoted their own time. The Stulls, Peets, Kovachs, Schubacks, Besancons, Vishneskys, Orechovskys, Frets, Mike Dziuba, Rich Rishko, Ed Hoffman, Al Youshock, and others were some of the "regulars" who literally kept the Company afloat during this time.

At the March 12, 1979 meeting, it was reported that Sibley voted "a flat NO" as to merging with White Eagle.

Although not a Ladies Auxiliary at this time, the "ladies" of the company still did their share in helping out. They held a raffle of a donated quilt and afghan in April 1979 and raised \$295 to purchase decorations for affairs at the company hall.

The company regularly participated in the 1979 firemen's parade season. The Ahrens Fox was a popular attraction, and numerous trophies were won. The members and their families and friends really enjoyed spending those warm summer evenings at a firemen's picnic.

The 1979 bingo profit was \$5720.78.

In August 1980, the company received a letter from Sibley McClure Hose Company requesting to reopen merger discussions. The members agreed, and a 10 person committee was formed to oversee this new proposal.

In February 1981, the company was informed that the Sibley McClure membership had agreed to the merger. White Eagle members would now have to pass a vote on the merger in three consecutive meetings. The first vote occurred at the February 9 meeting and passed 14 to 1.

The second vote of 11 for and 2 abstaining occurred on March 9, 1981. Details on the likely merger were discussed. There would be a 3 year transition period in which officers would be changed. President and Treasurer would be from White Eagle. The eagle would remain as a symbol of the new company. The Ahrens Fox would stay under the White Eagle name.

Also at that meeting, it was decided to not allow the Borough Softball League the use of Burner's Park, mainly due to liability considerations and the fact that the company had already been named in a lawsuit due to the injury of a player.

The final vote on the merger occurred on April 13, 1981 with 11 for, 1 against, and 1 abstaining. Eagle-McClure Hose Company Number 1 was born!

Not long afterwards, one of the most devastating tragedies ever to affect the company, and the whole town, happened in July 1981. A young brother and sister, 8-year old Cheryl and 4-year-old Christopher Ziemba, were brutally murdered by a teenage neighbor boy. It was first thought that the children were merely lost or missing, and the borough firefighters began a large, comprehensive search, with the Eagle McClure firehouse as the base of operations. Evidence of the crime was soon discovered, and the firefighters continued their exhaustive efforts now under the direction of the State Police. The discovery of the children's bodies was especially difficult for everyone. The volunteers' work did not end, however, as within a few days they were called upon again by the State Police to provide logistical support during the apprehension of the suspect. Throughout the horrific experience, it was obvious and even comforting that the new firehouse was a community asset and gathering place.

The first official meeting of the new company was held on August 10, 1981 with the following officers presiding:

President - Bernie Peet, Vice President - Larry Wolyniak, Treasurer - Tom Scandale, Secretary - Ken Petrosky.

30 regular firemen and 6 junior firemen attended. The financial report showed that White Eagle brought \$17,726.19 and Sibley brought \$2904.62 to the new organization.

Nomination of officers occurred as follows: President - Bernie Peet, Vice President - Larry Wolyniak, Treasurer - Tom Scandale, Recording Secretary - Ken Petrosky, Chief - John Schuback, 1st Assistant Chief - Rich Rishko, 2nd Assistant Chief - Carl Orchevsky, 3rd Assistant Chief - Wayne Frutchey, 4th Assistant Chief - Rick Besancon.

At that meeting, a motion was made to sell White Eagle's Ward LaFrance pumper. Sibley McClure's 1975 Mack MB engine would be the company's apparatus. At that same meeting, it was also agreed to hold a dedication dinner on November 7, 1981, preceded by a church service.

Also about that time, some improvements were made to the new firehouse. The addition behind the hall bar was completed, sheetrock was installed in the truck room, and the hall patio was completed and new double doors purchased.

Because of problems getting consistent help for the weekly bingo, it was decided to pay floor workers \$15 per night, beginning in February 1982.

Piece by piece, whenever a few dollars were scraped up, improvements to and purchases for the hall and building slowly continued. A dishwasher, commercial cooler, window shades, electrical supplies, carport, fuel, and utilities were the big-ticket items in early 1982. The good news was that the bingo was growing in popularity, so much so that the members discussed buying addition tables to be set up in the truck room. Membership numbers were good, with usually more than 20 senior members and several junior firemen attending each meeting. However, a frequently discussed problem was that some members would not participate in any activities.

The new "Eagle McClure Hose Co. No. 1" sign for the front of the firehouse arrived in March 1982. It still hangs on the building as of this writing. A chicken dinner was held in April 1982, cost \$4 per dinner, resulting in a profit of \$1500.

Due to rising costs of fuel, it was decided that for parades farther than 10 miles away, each participating member would have to contribute \$1 for gas per parade for the 1982 parade season.

Air conditioning for the firehouse was discussed in August 1982, but it was decided that the \$30,000 price tag was not affordable at that time, even though the 1982 picnic produced a profit of more than \$14,000.

A radio monitor was installed in the truck room in January 1983, so that Lackawanna County Communication Center, AKA "Comm Center", broadcasts could be heard.

In February 1983, it was decided to sell the "Burgers Building" at the corner of Keyser and Sibley Avenues. The building had been owned by Sibley McClure. It was agreed to sell the building to Jonathan Szostek for \$31,000, with \$16,275 to pay off the mortgage and the balance added to the company's savings.

Also at that meeting, it was decided to upgrade the poorly functioning heating system in the truck room, meeting room, and kitchen at a cost of \$5630. It was also reported that the phone lines to the old Sibley firehouse were disconnected, and that the new station was now hooked up to the Lackawanna County Comm Center. Radio protocols were discussed. The fire siren on top of Saint Stanislaus Hall was removed.

An Army surplus 1967 Kaiser 6x6 military vehicle was purchased by the company in September 1983 at a cost of \$250. It was eventually outfitted as a tanker truck.

On October 7, 1983, the 1967 Ward LaFrance engine was sold to the Northmoreland Township Volunteer Fire Company Incorporated for \$15,000. The Ward had served the company, and the community, very well over the years.

By the end of 1983, the firehouse parking lot was completely paved.

The new Saint Stanislaus Center was being dedicated in early 1984, and the Eagle McClure members donated \$100 toward its success.

Facility improvements continued in early 1984, with the purchase of 4 smoke eaters for the hall, a mixer for the kitchen, and sodium vapor lights for the parking lot. Later in summer 1984, two new refrigerators and a new pizza oven were added.

Firefighting equipment received a boost in March 1985 with the purchase of 3 portable radios, another first for the company. Work was also progressing on building a new aerial truck. An organized Fire Police unit was functioning.

As of April 17, 1985, the company was officially designated by Lackawanna County as Station 93, the pumper as Engine 93-3, and the aerial as Truck 93-4.

In October 1985, the company began the process of switching from oil to natural gas for heating.

The members began 1986 with a major achievement - the mortgage on the firehouse was completely paid off!

However, dark clouds were on the horizon. By mid-1986 the company began to slide into some turbulent times which would last for several years. For the first time since the company was formed, serious and difficult to reconcile conflicts between members began to develop. In the past, differences of opinion were eventually resolved, sometimes loudly, but always amicably and with mutual respect. Something was different now, and it would haunt the organization for quite some time. The resignation by several key members from office and other positions

in June 1986 sent the first signal of trouble, but the real extent of the problem was not apparent to many at that moment.

In August 1986, the members again gave attention to the Ahrens Fox engine by establishing a special account for its maintenance. The old symbol of the company and community had fallen into a state of disrepair and it needed to be saved.

Another tradition in which the company helped the community was to allow the Old Forge High School to conduct the annual football bonfire at Burner's Park. Due to liability concerns and problems with the rival high schools involving student altercations, the members voted not to allow bonfires on the company property after the fall 1986 event.

1986 ended with the members voting to purchase a Mack aerial scope for \$37,000. The borough would provide \$25,000. The vehicle required extensive refurbishing.

At the January 1987 meeting, it was reported that the building and land owned by Eagle McClure Hose Company was appraised at \$247,000. The financial report showed the company had \$12,580 in Checking; \$4,343 in a Truck Fund; \$3,921 in a Bingo Checking fund; and \$18,858 in a Money Market.

In early 1988, the company considered building a second building, but the project never was implemented.

The 1951 Mack 75-foot aerial was sold to Keyser Valley Auto Wreckers for \$1,050 at the end of 1988 or the beginning of 1989.

The company suffered a great loss in February 1991 with the passing of long time member Charlie Marhelski. Charlie was the undisputed Potato Pancake King of the entire Lackawanna Valley, as people would come from all over just to delight in his pancakes. He was a distinguished, hard working member of the company and a former President. His characteristic white hair and deep voice added to the respect he received from all as a man of integrity and high values.

The company minutes repeatedly mention a lack of help at bingos and other company affairs. It is obvious that this was always an issue, and that the extra efforts of a few always helped support and preserve the organization.

Tensions and problems continued in early 1992. More officers resigned, and personal commitment and dedication to the company appeared to be sporadic on behalf of some members. The building was described as a "disaster area", with maintenance floundering. An interesting reflection from the minutes is that the officers of the company during this shaky period were "younger" members. Confrontation and suspicion between members was obvious; the company was divided. The minutes of the next several months reflect an organization in complete chaos and disarray, and very close to ruin.

In May 1992, the borough firefighters began a new system where there would be a Borough Fire Chief and two Assistants. Chiefs from each station would become Captains.

A turning point in the company's existence occurred in the spring of 1993. An officer of Eagle McClure was arrested for embezzlement of company funds. As the investigation went on, the extent of the poor financial management practices, and the poor financial health of the company in general, became apparent. The incident received wide attention throughout the area and shocked the membership. Some

thought that the company would not survive. This was the darkest hour of Eagle McClure Hose Company.

But as it turned out, the unfortunate event became a blessing. It started a rebirth of the company. The members again showed their resolve, and their desire to rebuild and preserve a good organization. From this point forward, the company would grow, nurture, and improve. Instead of the end, the company experienced a new beginning.

The members reached back to their roots and elected long-time member Stephen "Sam" Cichy as their new President. Good members began to get involved again, and the comeback had begun. The Eagle was flying again!

At the May 30, 1993 meeting, it was decided to sell the Ahrens Fox. The Boonton, New Jersey Fire Company from which the truck was purchased expressed an interest as they still had the "sister" vehicle. Our members felt this was a fitting future and a good tribute to the beloved old engine. The truck was sold for \$2000. To this day, some argue it was a mistake to sell the old truck.

The company was now conducting an annual envelope drive in lieu of annual picnics to raise revenue. The changing times made getting enough help to run a picnic just too difficult. The members were working as hard as they could to repair the poor financial health of the organization, many already devoting much of their personal time.

At the end of 1993, the company was completing a deal to sell the Tower to Taylor Hose Company Number 1 for \$138,000. More importantly, the purchase of a new E-One pumper/tanker combination was being initiated. The price was \$253,197, considerably more than the \$405 that was paid for the old Ahrens Fox!

About the same time, the company meeting room was re-furnished.

In early 1994, the other two borough fire companies were working out the details of sharing quarters.

By February 1994, all fiscal records of Eagle McClure were computerized. Member Carl Orechovsky, after assuming the office of Treasurer, revolutionized the entire function. Slowly but surely, the company's financial situation was improving.

The new E-One engine was received in early September 1994. The firefighters deserved to be proud of their new state-of-the-art truck. Not only was it yet another outstanding achievement, it was a symbol that Eagle McClure had made a great comeback. An open house was held on September 25 to display and bless the new apparatus.

The next month, October 1994, the 1975 Mack MB engine that was originally purchased by Sibley McClure was sold to a company in Alabama for \$28,000. The truck had been purchased for about \$47,000 and kept in outstanding condition during its years in service.

A building expansion project was initiated in 1995 to expand the hall and implement other building improvements.

Old Forge and the entire region were impacted by severe flooding in January 1996, and the company was busy helping the borough respond. One of Eagle McClure's own, Jack Schuback of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, was appointed by President Clinton to serve as Federal Coordinating Officer and lead the recovery efforts.

Early in 1996, the building improvement project was well underway. It was also decided to proceed with demolition of the old White Eagle fire house.

Also in September 1996, it was decided to discontinue use of the fire siren because all active firefighters were equipped with pagers. Sirens had been used to alert firefighters of calls for as long as anyone could remember, so another era had succumbed to modern times.

A pole barn storage building was erected behind the fire station in November 1996.

Plans for a major meeting room renovation were reviewed in February 1997. A kitchenette, office, crew lounge, and meeting area were created. At the same time, the company decided to purchase its first computer; the Gateway 2000 was another sign that modern times had arrived.

The active firefighters, although small in number, had a willingness and desire to devote much of their personal time at various training courses to obtain appropriate certifications. Their personal sacrifices and commitment resulted in the best-trained firefighting personnel the company had ever had.

In May 1997, the members approved a parking lot paving expansion project. The work would include sealing of the existing paved area. The facility improvements were noticeable and again reflected aggressive and continued efforts to build a better organization.

The financial health of the company was not just stable, it was actually robust. The bingo and annual fund drive were the main source of revenue. The new computer was used to maintain all financial records, and the records were made available for examination by all members at every company meeting. No single person had exclusive control of company funds, and all financial matters were decided by consensus. Information was open to everyone. The members voted to obtain the services of a professional investment planner, and began to invest some of the company's savings.

A new furnace for the truck and meeting rooms was installed in October 1997.

1998 began with the members working on a car for the company's Fire Police, and also embarking on an improvement project to the hall vestibule. New paneling was also installed in the meeting room. On the firefighting front, all air packs were updated. Conversation about remodeling the kitchen occurred in June 1998.

A very notable discussion took place at the company meeting of July 12, 1998. The members talked about using the Eagle McClure facility as an Emergency Operations Center and a disaster Shelter. The planning that began once again demonstrated that the members were always looking for more ways to serve the community. The idea now was to progress beyond pure firefighting and move into comprehensive Emergency Management.

A 100 Kilowatt generator was obtained from the Tobyhanna Army Depot in January 1999. The company decided to make the necessary repairs and incur the installation costs out-of-pocket.

A major kitchen remodeling project was underway in February 1999. The generator project was encountering difficulty, but was proceeding. The members were arranging a meeting with the American Red Cross to discuss sheltering operations.

At the April 1999 Company meeting, the Captain informed the group that a used army vehicle was received from the Pennsylvania Department of Forestry. The company purchased a 9 horsepower pump, a 150 gallon tank, and a hose reel to convert the vehicle into a Brush Truck.

The company proceeded to build an addition to the truck room to house the generator. 50 telephone lines were installed in the building for use in the Emergency Operations Center/Shelter.

On August 18, 2000, a meeting was held between the Old Forge fire companies, Greenwood, and Avoca. The topic was about consolidation of all companies' property and funds. The members of Eagle McClure were overwhelmingly opposed to such a consolidation. They felt that too much dedication, effort, and perseverance had gone into building the organization to risk losing control of the company's future.

As of October 2000, Eagle McClure was running Greenwood's box calls, considerably increasing the number of our company's runs.

In late 2000, discussions were being held with the Borough about recreational development of Burner's Park. The company was considering a joint effort to make park-like improvements to the property.

At that same time, the members were planning to make further building renovations, with a men's room and shower added to the truck room.

During the meeting of January 14, 2001, attention was given to preserving the company's history. Restoration work was done on the White Eagle and Sibley McClure charters, and also the old World War II recruitment poster that hung in the old White Eagle building since as long as anyone could remember. Just before New Year's, a major cleaning of the attic if the station was completed, and several old pieces of firefighting equipment and other memorabilia were saved.

Discussions continued at the March 11, 2001 meeting, and the members agreed upon an ambitious and comprehensive building improvement plan. This included remodeling the two small restrooms; new ceiling, lights, flooring, and paint in the truck room; repair sheetrock, spackle, paint boiler room; repair and paint walls in the hall. Improvements to the front of the building were also discussed, including the erection of a monument.

A digital camera was added to the engine in June 2001. The company received a \$1000 grant from Proctor and Gamble in July 2001 for a radio base station.

Eagle McClure shared the grief of the entire nation after September 11, 2001 when terrorists crashed planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The loss of so many Americans, and especially the brave emergency responders who died trying to help others, will always be deeply felt. Like all Americans, the members strengthened their resolve and desire to help others.

2002 started out on a sorry note with the passing of long-time member Al Doohaluk on January 29, 2002. Al was a war hero, a good member, and a good man.

Truck room renovations began in the spring of 2002. In May 2002, a project was initiated to build a gear room for the firefighters' personal protective equipment. Air conditioning was added to the station's meeting room in time for the summer of 2002. The atmosphere of constant improvement continued on, and the station and

surrounding property reflected a top notch organization. Eagle McClure was looking and feeling good.

Now it is 2003, more than 86 years after that first White Eagle meeting of January 12, 1917 and 95 years after the incorporation of Sibley McClure in 1908. Various projects are underway. Our new, second computer is up and running. A Sheltering exercise with the Red Cross was recently completed, prompting the continued planning for Sheltering and using our facility as an Emergency Operations Center. Friends and family of the members are participating. Standard Operating Procedures are being developed. A special Resources Trailer was put into service. Work will soon be started on the improvements to the front of the station.

These initiatives, along with this history project, represent the attitude and conscience of the people of Eagle McClure. The company is the strongest it has ever been. The active members are small in number, but are comprised of a blend of younger and older individuals who have and show mutual respect for each other. The young firefighters are among the best trained in the area and still do their share taking care of the company. The older members provide their experience and wisdom and try to support the young members. Most uniquely, our company is not just the members; it's also family, friends, and community. The people of Eagle McClure are about teamwork, improvement, and helping others. That's who we are!

May it forever be so...

Thoughts from the author.

It was in the early 1960's, as a young kid, that I became part of this company. My father had just joined White Eagle and was on his way to becoming a very active member. Since that time, our organization and its people have been a constant part of my life. Over the past 40 years, so many things have happened. The "firehouse" has always been there, for all of us.

Creating this history was difficult and time-consuming. And it will never be as good as I wanted it to be. Nearly 100 years of events and life is hard to capture and

depict in a few pages. But at least now we have something that tells our story. Yea, it was hard, but it was interesting, and fun. It was worth it.

Reading through the musty old minutes books and looking at the withered old pictures brought back so many memories. Late some nights, captivated in the records, I could swear I smelled the damp old cinderblocks, stale Camel cigarette smoke, and the remnants of Stegmaier beer as if I was back in the old White Eagle building up on the hill.

But most rewarding of all, I was able to get reacquainted with some very great people who have influenced my life. Too many of them are gone now, but I will never forget them. As I read and researched and remembered, it became so clear to me that our company is about our people. Our company is our people. I wonder if that's why, despite all my travels and all my experiences, I keep coming back here and know I will never leave.

Also I wonder if 100 years from now someone will read this and decide to update our history. And will they think their effort can never be as good as they wanted it to be? Maybe never being as good as we want to be is why we keep getting better.

We're all very lucky to be part of Eagle McClure Hose Company, and part of each other.

Acknowledgements.

One of the most enjoyable things about this project was that everyone aware of it was supportive and helpful.

Thank you to my father, "Chief" John Schuback, for getting me involved in our company, and for his many years of service, dedication, leadership, and vision.

My deepest appreciation and respect goes to the active senior members, for still leading us and for tolerating and understanding the younger members.

I salute the young active members, for their personal sacrifices and efforts in developing their skills, for their respect of the older members, and for being such truly decent people and good friends.

Captain Bill Stull, my friend for many years, has my admiration and gratitude for his commitment and leadership, and his common sense and wisdom. The Captain is often my sounding board and sanity check, and I really appreciate how well we share ideas and thoughts.

I want to give a very special thanks to Junior Firefighter Mike Kapuscinski. No one has helped me more on this project. Mike worked very hard and contributed some really good ideas. He is an outstanding young man and a real friend. Thanks Mike!

Finally, to all the people of Eagle McClure, including those who are gone, but never lost. I am a better person because of you, and you will always be a part of me.

Jack Schuback
2003