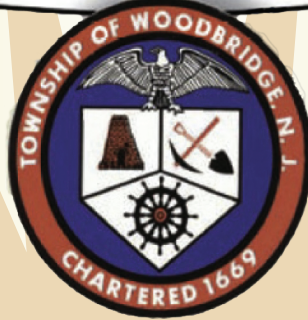


*Chartered 1669*



Historic Tour of  
**WOODBIDGE**

Volume XII

Everyday Heroes:  
A History of Woodbridge's First Responders

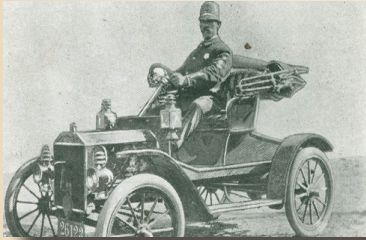
*Compiled by the*  
Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission

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## LAW and ORDER

### Woodbridge Police Department 1 Main Street, Woodbridge

The roots of Woodbridge's earliest forms of law enforcement were transplanted from English law. Judges of local courts, justices of the peace and sheriffs were usually selected by the governor of the colony but it was the practice in Woodbridge, Newark and Bergen to popularly elect judges. Township leaders appointed constables starting in 1669. The exact role of these offices was not always clearly defined. Sometimes those charged with enforcing the law had little knowledge of the law themselves.



**Patrick Cullinane**  
First Uniformed Policeman in  
Woodbridge

Constables executed warrants, escorted prisoners and in Woodbridge from 1695 to 1700 they also collected the taxes. In both criminal and civil matters, Constables were responsible for enforcing the orders of local, county and colonial officials. Community leaders often filled a variety of positions. Samuel Hale, for example, was a Constable in 1680, Associate Justice of the Woodbridge Town Court in 1683, 1687 and 1689, Lieutenant of the Militia Company 1682-1697 and Tax Collector in 1684. James Parker, renowned colonial printer, was a Woodbridge Justice of the Peace.

In the new country, law enforcement in Woodbridge continued much as it did pre-Revolution. Citizens brought complaints and information about possible crimes to the Justices of the Peace and Constables protected public order, served warrants, escorted prisoners and testified in court. They also performed other functions not traditionally associated with law enforcement such as establishing property lines. Since they were sometimes paid by the job, at times they might elect to do a higher paying job such as surveying rather than getting paid less for patrolling the streets for thieves. While Justices of the Peace and sheriffs were crucial parts of the justice system, before the creation of a police department, constables used to take care of what would later be described as "police work."



**Woodbridge Police Department circa 1918**  
Krause, Walsh, Klein, Chief Murphy,  
Romond, Cholar, Dunphy, Simmons  
missed picture

In 1876 a prisoner escaped from the county jail in New Brunswick and headed home for Woodbridge. The sheriff telegraphed Constable John Wesley Thorp to re-arrest the escapee. Thorp tracked down

the man, handcuffed and hobbled him and chained him in a stall overnight before returning the prisoner to the jail. In another instance, Thomas Bunch attempted to scam an invalided, elderly man out of his stove. When the deception was discovered, Justice Newton of Uniontown (Iselin) issued a warrant. Constable Thorp diligently searched for two days before finding his man in Rahway and returning him to Uniontown and then on to the jail in New Brunswick. A resident of Alfred B. Clauss's boarding house was angered then attacked his landlord. Clauss made a complaint before Justice Isaac S. Harned who issued a warrant and then deputized F. P. Harned as a Constable to serve and arrest the accused. Constables were not salaried but paid piecemeal depending on what kind of job, special watchman, warrant server, prisoner capture and delivery for example.

As the close of the nineteenth century approached and Woodbridge's population and economy diversified and grew, it became clear to Township leaders that the existing law enforcement system was no longer adequate to protect Woodbridge's citizens and to detect and investigate crime. In 1895, Township officials made the decision to establish a local police department. \$300 was appropriated by the Township Committee (today's Council) for the annual salary of a policeman to keep all unlicensed peddlers out of the town. Patrick "Big Paddy" Cullinane, a former constable, was named Woodbridge's first policeman on May 14, 1896. His duties were immediately expanded as the police committee passed rules and regulations which Cullinane was responsible for enforcing. These included arresting tramps entering the Township and requiring them to work on the roads in a chain gang for twenty-four hours and fining owners of automobiles over a certain weight for not having wide-enough tires on macadamized roads.



**Patrick Murphy**  
Woodbridge Chief of Police

Over the next several years, Thomas F. Dunigan was appointed Police Commissioner and, after a brief stint by James Lahey, another former constable, Patrick W. Murphy, joined the other "Paddy" as Woodbridge policeman. The department expanded to include another officer, Charles S. Walling, to patrol the Carteret section of Woodbridge Township in 1899. Bicycles, uniforms and winter coats gradually were added to their equipment. By 1905, the Township, which still included Carteret, "boasted of a police force of five men whose main duties seemed to be arresting drunks and persons carrying concealed weapons."

Justices of the Peace adjudicated most police cases, hearing many of them in their own homes.

In 1909, additional deputies were employed because of the strikes and labor unrest in the factories at the clay banks. A 1910 "Ordinance to establish a police department in the Township of Woodbridge in the County of Middlesex" was adopted and Patrick W. Murphy was first appointed Police Inspector then retitled Chief of Police. Murphy was the first officially recognized chief of the Woodbridge Police Department.

While Woodbridge was not free from serious crime, for the most part it was a small town with

small town problems. Officer MacDonald had to track down the owner of the goats which were trespassing on Mr. Caniacioli's property and notify the owner that if they strayed again, the goats would be shot. Thefts, cons, forgery, wandering cows required police attention as well as fatal train and trolley collisions and the Township's first hit-and-run in 1911.



**Woodbridge Police Department**  
Baseball Team 1925

Woodbridge's constables and earliest policemen travelled primarily by foot or horse. Many officers lived along their beat but others, like James Walsh who lived in Woodbridge Proper, had to take two trolleys to get to his patch in Fords and Keasbey. Patrick Cullinane turned down the purchase of a bicycle for the department and asked for uniform winter coats instead. Bicycles were obtained in the following years and in 1913 the department acquired their first motorized transports - one one-cylinder Harley Davidson motorcycle, one two-cylinder and one 7 HP Indian. The first automobile was put into service in 1920.

In 1915, Woodbridge Police joined with Carteret to form their own local of the Police Benevolent Association of New Jersey. Later, when Carteret's force became large enough to qualify on their own, they formed their own local.

As the Township grew, technology and police techniques evolved. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the detective work was handled by the "Four Horsemen" of the Woodbridge Police force - Chief Patrick Murphy, Captain of Detectives James Walsh, Sergeant George Keating and Sergeant Ben Parsons. Prohibition added a new set of criminal challenges. Plainclothes detective Captain James Walsh working with Sergeant Parsons coordinated with federal officers to uncover and shut down several distilling plants (stills) across the Township.

By 1939, George Keating was Chief of a 35-man department that included two Captains, a Detective Sergeant, Rounds Sergeant, Record Department Sergeant, three Desk Sergeants, two Patron Drivers, five Motorcycle officers and nineteen Patrol Officers.



**Woodbridge Police Department**  
1928

The Woodbridge Police Force was integrated in 1954 with the hiring of World War II veteran Lawrence "Homsey" Jefferson who served on the force for 37 years. He was briefly partnered with WPD's second African American officer, Alvin Williams who joined the force in 1957 and was killed in the line-of-duty in 1979.

## LAW and ORDER

In 1957, Anthony W. O'Brien joined the force with nine other officers who comprised the largest entering class up to that time, bringing the Department up to 75. By 1991, WPD was the largest force in the county and one of the ten largest in the state. O'Brien moved up through the ranks to become deputy chief in 1972, chief in 1974 and director in 1984. He retired in 1991.

It took longer for women officers to make a place for themselves on the force. WPD's first female officer was Susan M. McNamara who was hired in 1987 and retired in 2008. She was soon followed by the second female officer, Margaret M. Schmidt Fuller, who started as a dispatcher in 1987 and went through the Police Academy in 1989. She was promoted to Captain in 2006 after seventeen years of service. There are sixteen women officers in today's WPD.

Woodbridge Police Department sought to raise the level of professionalism, review every aspect of policies and procedures and qualify for the "Gold Standard in Public Safety" in 1996 when they began the process to receive national accreditation. The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) has 435 standards that each department must have in place to qualify, an accomplishment that is achieved by the top departments in the country. First accredited in 1999, WPD must re-qualify every three years and has maintained the high standards set for themselves.

Shortly after the planes hit the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, the Middlesex County Prosecutors' Office sent out an urgent request for officers

to form a mutual aid force to go to New York. Nine officers stepped up. First directed to Staten Island Yankees Stadium to set up a collection point for the dead, the WPD volunteers then mustered under the Brooklyn Bridge with officers from all over. Woodbridge's contingent was ordered to secure the borders and only allow emergency personnel to pass. They were stationed at Church Street, close to where the World Trade Center towers once stood.

In 2011, after the retirement of 24 officers, 10% of the force, the department was restructured to be led by a civilian police director and assistant police director instead of a chief.



**From left to right: Ptl. Mike DeCrosta, Ptl. Tim Majek, Ptl. Jeff Olah, Det. Guy Olivieri, Lt. Glenn Skolsky, Lt. Herb Williams, Ptl. John Matty, Ptl. Rich Woods, and Ptl. Robert Kelly after returning from New York on 9/11**

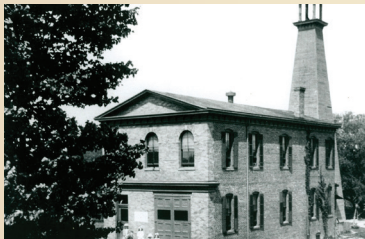
Over the more than one hundred years of its existence, the Woodbridge Police Department has launched many initiatives to meet the needs of the community. WPD coordinates with and supports the Domestic Violence Response Team (DVRT) created with the support and guidance of 3rd Ward Councilman (and later, Mayor) Frank Pelzman. The Safe & Sound Program assists those who are unable to communicate and who may have lost the ability to recognize faces and places. The Junior Police Academy and the Police Interaction courses at the Township's high schools help to familiarize young people with law enforcement and the workings of the department. WPD supports all Township youth and sports programs and Woodbridge PBA Local 38 runs a popular street hockey league.

Since its inception, Woodbridge Police have worked to fulfil their mission "To preserve life and property, and to enforce federal, state, county and municipal law, statutes and ordinances." Today's force is comprised of over 210 officers. While the force has African American, Asian, Hispanic and female officers, their diversity is not as fully reflective of the community as they would like, limited as they are by Civil Service lists. They have adapted methods, used evolving technologies and instituted programs to meet the changing needs of the Woodbridge community. Woodbridge Police have been "leading the way to a safer community" since 1895.

## FIRE and RESCUE

### Woodbridge Fire Company No. 1, District 1 418 School Street, Woodbridge

Fire engulfed several stores on Main Street in 1887, including a barber shop, a grocery and feed store. Nine years later in 1896, flood waters from Heard's Brook rose and broke through a dike. Water rushed into the kiln room of the Salamander plant, sparking a fire that turned into a conflagration, encompassing the entire facility, and destroying the plant which had stood at that location for over seventy years.



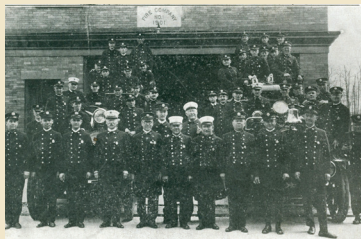
**Woodbridge Fire House & Drying Tower**

For the citizens of Woodbridge, the Salamander fire was the last straw. Since Woodbridge's inception, a fire spelled doom for a structure and, possibly its inhabitants, if the blaze got out of control. Impromptu bucket brigades were formed if there were neighbors nearby but, as in the cases of the Main Street and Salamander fires, those efforts were often not enough to defeat a raging fire.

Early organizing meetings of the Woodbridge Hook and Ladder Co. No.1 were held in "John Weygand Hall" in the fall of 1897. John Weygand had a barber shop on Main Street and his "hall" may have been at that location. By December 16, the meeting location had changed to Phillip's Hall in 81 Main Street, today the location of Il Castello's restaurant, and the membership had elected to change the

name to Woodbridge Fire Company No. 1.

As the new Company recruited and trained volunteers, equipment also was acquired. A fire gong made from the discarded outer-rim of a locomotive wheel was donated to the department in 1897 by E.F. Brooks of the Port Reading Railroad. A hose cart that was the pride of the community until 1924, was purchased in 1898 for \$260. Equipped with a reel, 400 foot of hose and a dozen water buckets, it was designed to be pulled by horse or manpower. Tom and Harry, a horse team from Carpenter's livery stable on Pearl Street, provided the early horsepower. These brave horses would paw wildly in their stalls when they heard the fire gong sounded. WFD histories recount a time when the alarm went off when Tom and Harry were pulling a hearse wagon during a funeral. The dedicated fire equines broke from the cortege and pulled the hearse to the School Street firehouse to report for duty!

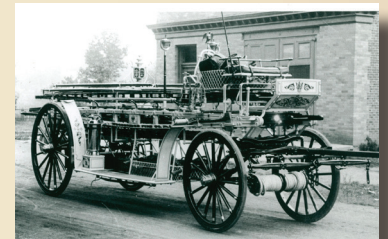


**Woodbridge Fire Company  
1924**

Obtaining property for a centrally located firehouse was of paramount importance. The department purchased a site on the corner of School and Brook Streets for \$350 from E.W. Valentine in November 1899. In 1901, Gorham Boynton provided the plans, J.H. Coddington was contracted to build the station and by October 29, the first meeting was held in the new firehouse. The new structure had a tall tower for drying hose.

In 1910, Henry Mawbey was hired as "fire driv-

er" launching the advent of paid fire fighters in the Woodbridge department. After the title was changed to "fireman" in 1929, the department's professionals organized and formed Local #290 of the International Association of Firefighters.



**Woodbridge Fire Company Cart**

Woodbridge became one of the first fire departments in the state to have a motor-driven apparatus when District 1 purchased a Willy-Overland chemical truck in 1913. An American LaFrance motorized pumper was added to the fleet in 1915.



**Woodbridge Fire Company  
Engine and Firehouse 1924**

After the Morgan armaments explosion on October 4, 1918, the firehouse was used as a shelter for the refugees of the blast. As soon as the refugees were rehoused, the station was used as an emergency hospital to care for victims of the influenza pandemic.

# FIRE and RESCUE

The fire company grew along with the population of the Township and an addition was built at the rear of the building in 1937 providing more space for a dormitory, ambulance and other equipment.

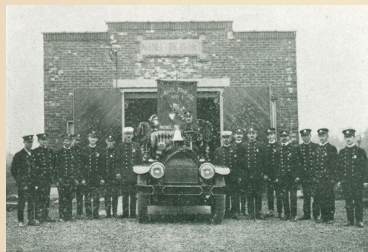


**Woodbridge Fire Department 1967**

A 75' mid-ship mounted ladder truck, purchased in 1943, was the target of a few naysayers who questioned the expense and called it a "painters' wagon." After the ladder truck proved invaluable to rescuers saving victims from the train trestle after the 1951 derailment of the "Broker," all criticism ceased.

End of shift for the old firehouse came in 1967 when it was razed to make way for a new station to be built on the same central location. For over two years the department operated out of the Township Garage then located off Main Street and Woodbridge Center Drive near today's Lowe's. The new firehouse was dedicated on May 18, 1969.

The department was activated and placed on high alert on September 11, 2001. The Middlesex County Fire Academy coordinated volunteers from across the County to assist in efforts at Ground Zero.



**Avenel Fire Department 1924**

District 1's responsibilities include Woodbridge Proper along with the Woodbridge Center complex, commercial and residential properties and Sewaren with its petroleum tank farms, dock facilities, chemical storage, distribution points and residences. Fire prevention and education efforts are a primary focus, and the department employs three full time inspectors and one Fire Official. Comprised of 33 volunteers in the Truck and Engine Divisions and 34 paid firefighters, the Company reached a milestone in 2018 when Charles Kenny became the first Chief from the career ranks. District No. 1's career firefighters provide 24-hour coverage, 365 days a year and drive and operate all the equipment as well as staffing the Fire Prevention Bureau. District 1's community service includes reading Dr. Seuss stories at local elementary schools, Relay for Life, MDA Fun Drive, parades and the Main Street Christmas Stroll. Local #290 also collects coats for kids, holiday gifts for families in need and supports local food banks. Together, the career and volunteer fire fighters of District 1 are always at the ready to protect life and property across the Township.

## **Avenel Fire Company No. 1, District 5 346 Avenel Street, Avenel**

In 1912 a meeting was held at J. B. Edgar's home to appoint Fire Commissioners as part of the formation of a new fire company. In February 1913, the new company was chartered under the name of

Avenel Chemical Company No. 1. On July 12, 1913 the name was legally changed to the Avenel Fire Company No. 1.

The Company built its first fire house in 1919, a hollow-brick structure on the corner of Hyatt Street and Ziegler Avenue. By 1921, the Company's first motor-driven truck, a 250 gallon pumper was housed in the garage.

In the late twenties, the State Highway Commission began planning for a Super Highway to parallel the Lincoln Highway (Route 27.) The new Route 25 (now Route 1) claimed part of the firehouse property. A new plot was purchased and in 1929 a new firehouse was constructed on the corner of Avenel Street and the Super Highway.

The Ladies Auxiliary of Avenel Fire Company No. 1 was formed in 1930. Their mission was to cooperate with the Fire Company whenever called upon. Over the years their support has been an important part of the success of the Company.



**First Motor Driven Fire Truck Avenel Fire Company No. 1**

An addition with three new bays was added to the existing 1929 firehouse in 1955.

A project to gut and completely rehabilitate the firehouse began in 1995. Completed in 1996, the updated complex now includes much needed office and storage space, a gear room and fireman's room.

Across the country, all-volunteer departments have been challenged by a decrease in volunteerism. That trend, combined with local increase in commercial and residential development prompted the Avenel Board of Fire Commissioners to restructure District 5 as a career/volunteer hybrid. At midnight on May 4, 2020, Avenel Fire Company's first career firefighters began work. Eight firefighters were initially hired and four more will be hired to have career firefighters on 24 /7, supplementing existing volunteers.

100 years since its creation, the firefighters of the Avenel Fire Company No. 1 continue, faithfully and unselfishly, to work to protect lives and property and serve their community.

## **Colonia Fire Department, District 12 250 Inman Avenue, Colonia**

U.S. Army Hospital No. 3 had its own fire department and equipment during World War I. Whether that service evolved into a neighborhood department is uncertain however a Colonia Fire Company No. 1 did exist at least by 1923 but dissolved circa 1927. In 1935, Colonia Fire Company No. 1, District 10 was completely reorganized. Chief Charles Ayers led volunteers who fought fires using a fire engine converted from a Chevy Truck and housed in a garage at Edward Cone's house, "The Trees" at 374 New Dover Road. On October 18, 1937, the company responded to an incident on Archangela Avenue. A small plane crashed into a brick, one-story house, tearing down electrical wires in the process, sparking a fire. Both occupants of the plane were killed.

The reconstituted Colonia Fire Company only lasted until 1938 when concerns over the price tag for a firehouse and equipment for District 10 to cover

still-rural Colonia prompted Township Committee to vote to abolish the fire district. District 5 of Avenel was assigned to protect the Colonia community.



**Ladies Auxiliary of Avenel Fire Company No. 1**

In early 1942, as part of World War II Civil Defense efforts, a neighborhood fire-fighting auxiliary was organized to protect the community against incendiary bombing. Volunteers trained with brooms, shovels and "Indian Tanks," water supplies that could be carried on a man's back. After the fears over bombing eased, the auxiliary recognized that Colonia needed a "permanent defense against the hazard of house fires."

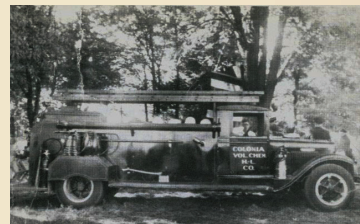
The Colonia Volunteer Chemical Hook and Ladder Company was formed and the Township carved Fire District 12 out of the northern section of the Avenel-Colonia Fire District 5 in 1943 with 30 volunteers, a converted coal truck with a 500-gallon water tank and a gas driven pump. Calls would go to Vesperino's General Store and his family would phone the volunteers.



**Fred Ciegotura Charter Member Avenel Fire Company No. 1. with First Fire Apparatus**

With the help of the Colonia Civic Club, in 1943 the Company raised enough money to build a two-bay firehouse on Inman Ave between N. Pennsylvania Avenue and Cavour Street where the modern fire house stands today.

In 1946 dissension in the fire department led to a schism and a second fire company was started. The upheaval lasted until 1955 when the new company was reabsorbed into reestablished and restructured District 12. The firehouse of the breakaway company at 606 Inman Avenue, was purchased by the VFW in 1960 and is still the home of Colonia Memorial Post 6061.



**Colonia Volunteer Hook & Ladder Engine**

District 12 outgrew their original building and in 1966 a three-bay firehouse was built. Additions were made in 1979 and 2002 to add an additional 3 bays.

In 1973, the fire district was expanded to cover Colonia up to Route 27, previously covered by Avenel District 5.

# FIRE and RESCUE

An Explorer program was begun in 1999 which allowed kids between the ages of 14 to 20 to volunteer and learn what it was like to be a fireman. Many Explorers ended up joining the fire department when they turned 18 and are still members.

Almost 82 years to the day after the precursor of District 12 responded to the Archangela Avenue plane crash, District 12 rose to a similar challenge. On October 29, 2019, a small plane crashed into a home on Berkely Avenue. The pilot was killed but despite the fire that engulfed the impacted home and several surrounding houses, thanks to the efforts of District 12 and other Township first responders, no one else was hurt.

Today, the Colonia Fire Department continues to support their neighbors with fire protection and community events including their Christmas Eve Santa escort which has delighted Colonia for over 45 years.

The department has grown from a two bay firehouse with thirty members and one converted truck to a six bay firehouse with forty plus members, an Explorer group, three engines, a tower ladder, and a rescue.



**Fords Fire Company 1924**

## **Fords Fire Company No.1, District 7 667 King Georges Road, Fords**

Fords Fire Company No.1 was founded in September of 1911 by 22 men who gathered in Mel Clum's General Store at Fords Corner. The men discussed the construction of a new factory in the area and the horrors of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in New York City and concluded that Fords needed a fire company. On September 21, 1911, they sent a certificate of incorporation to the County Clerk's office. The men pooled their money and paid \$125 to the Jensen family for a lot on Corrielle Street. In 1912, the fire department bought a horse-drawn vehicle from the City of Perth Amboy for \$10. A Stutz fire truck was purchased in 1934.

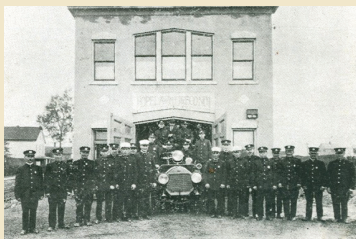
By 1966, the Fords Fire Company expanded into a new firehouse on King Georges Post Road and officially moved in 1967. The new firehouse included two truck bays, sleeping quarters, alarm room, meeting room, offices, and a recreation room.

The Fords Fire Protection Bureau was created in 1986 and in 1994 the Fords Fire Rescue unit was added to District 7's services to respond to emergency medical calls. A renovation of the firehouse in 2006 added a second floor to the facility to house additional offices, sleeping quarters, a ready room and training areas. The local Explorer program, created in 2007, encourages youth to consider careers in fire service. An integral part of the Fords community, the volunteers and career firefighters of Fords Fire Company No.1 educate local children about fire prevention and organize performances and other events to raise money to support community initiatives.

## **Hopelawn Volunteer Engine Company No.1, District 8 127 Loretta Street, Hopelawn**

Hopelawn Engine Company No.1 was established December 1914. The current building was

constructed in 1921. It is a volunteer organization whose founding members included: L. Black, A. Matthew, F. Blum, T. Dwyer, P. Peterson, M. Kochick, O.H. Barrett, P. Matthew, L. Matthews, and B. Horowitz.



**Hopelawn Fire Company No. 1 1924**

The first headquarters was in a barber shop on Florida Grove Road. Until 1916, buckets were used as part of the firefighting equipment. A manually operated bell on the side of the Hope House on Florida Grove Road was part of the local alarm system.

In addition to the Engine Co., Hopelawn is also served by the Hopelawn First Aid Squad, established in 1937. Formerly located at 25 May Street, the squad became an affiliate of the Woodbridge Township Ambulance and Rescue Squad in 2006 and operates out of the Queen Road Station.

In August 1941, there was a freak tornado in Hopelawn. Emergency responders from across the Township rushed to the scene to help find bodies and trapped persons. The Hopelawn Volunteer Fire Engine Company No.1 and Hopelawn First Aid Squad, of course, were first on the scene.

Today, the Hopelawn's fire company protects over 4000 people in a 1.8-mile square area and engages with the community through Santa Rides, Halloween and Easter parades, Fire Prevention Open Houses and more.

## **Iselin Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 District 9 1222 Green Street, Iselin**

After devastating fires at School No. 6 in 1916 and the First Presbyterian Church of Iselin in 1920, residents worried about their dependence on neighboring fire companies. On February 22, 1922, Iselin Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 was incorporated and on January 31, 1923, the Township Committee created Fire District 9 to cover all of Iselin, Colonia and a part of Clark Township. The first firehouse was built at the current location, a site formerly occupied by the Union Chapel.

In 1945, District 9 purchased lots adjacent to the firehouse, and in 1952 construction began on the firehouse expansion. A hall which could host social functions and civic group meetings was added in 1960. In 1972, the original firehouse was razed and a new four-bay station was built. The old hall was adapted into offices and a meeting space. A major renovation to the firehouse was undertaken in 1990.

The first fire apparatus, a hand drawn chemical cart, was donated by the Avenel Fire Company in 1921. The first motorized apparatus, a 1923 Clinton Chemical Hose Truck, was purchased for \$5,000. In 1956, the first two-way radios were purchased. 1964 heralded the acquisition of their first aerial truck, a 75-foot American LaFrance. In 1974, the color of the apparatus was changed from red to lime yellow with the purchase of Engine 5, an American LaFrance pumper.

Increasing traffic congestion on Route 1 worried Menlo Park Terrace residents about Fire Company response times and in 1980 voters approved funds to construct a second firehouse in District 9. Con-

struction for the two-bay Firehouse #2 on West Kelly Street was finished in 1983.

Explorer Post #319, jointly sponsored by the fire company, Board of Fire Commissioners, and the Boy Scouts of America, was established in 1997. The Explorer program introduces girls and boys between 14 and 18 to the fire service. Since 1997, over 50 young men and women have graduated from the Explorer program into the emergency services in Woodbridge and other towns.



**Iselin Chemical Hook and Ladder Co.  
District 11 Auth Avenue & Rt. 27.  
Built 1956**

Fire Company members supported the formation of the Iselin First Aid Squad in 1950. Members participated in the construction of the Woodbridge Township Community Playground in Merrill Park in 1999 and in 2012 dedicated a neighborhood playground built by District 9 on land adjacent to the firehouse that the District had purchased in 1995 after the closing of Flip's Tavern.

The all-volunteer force of the Iselin Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 responds from two stations and provides fire prevention and firefighting and rescue services to the residents, workers and visitors of the Iselin and Menlo Park Terrace sections of Woodbridge Township.



**District 9 Iselin Fire Co. No. 1 1942 with 1936  
LaFrance Pumper and 1923 Clinton Chemical Hose  
Truck**

## **Iselin Chemical Hook and Ladder Company, District 11 20 Auth Avenue, Iselin**

Not long after the creation of Company No. 1, it was realized that responses to fires on the western "other side of the tracks" could be blocked by long, slow moving trains on the grade-level rails. In 1924, Iselin Fire Company No. 2 was formed and then renamed the Iselin Chemical Hook and Ladder Company. Their first firehouse was built by volunteers at 1396 Oak Tree Road. A year later in 1925, a new firehouse was constructed at 10 Harding Avenue. In 1929, responsibility for the fire company was assumed by the Commissioners of the newly created Fire District 11.

By 1956 the Harding Avenue location was too small and a new headquarters was built at 20 Auth Avenue. 10 Harding Avenue was sold in 1963 and a one bay Substation was built at 2 New Dover Road to serve the north end of the District. Renovations and additions enhanced headquarters in 1986 and 1993.

For nearly 100 years, the dedicated firefighters of Iselin Chemical Hook and Ladder Company, Dis-

trict 11 have made innumerable contributions to the community including supplying full turkey dinners to the Woodbridge Food Pantry and toys to the Woodbridge Toy Drive. They put their lives on the line to keep us safe.

**Protection Fire Company No.1,  
District 4  
420 Smith Street, Keasbey**

The oldest fire company in the southern section of the Township was formed in 1908 in response to a fire at the Ostrander Fire Brick Company. Residents determined that a local fire department might have been able to save some of the buildings and on June 1, 1908 a meeting was held at Harry Schoenbrun's general store to discuss forming a volunteer company. Shortly thereafter, Protection Fire Company No.1 was chartered.



**Protection Fire Company No. 1 Keasbey  
1924**

Donations enabled the new company to purchase a ladder, a few pails and other equipment. The company continued to grow and soon purchased a horse-drawn truck from the Stapleton Fire Company for \$75. In 1919, a firehouse was constructed on Smith Street and Crows Mill Road next to School No.8 and the National Fire Proofing Com-

**FIRE and RESCUE**

pany agreed to blow its steam whistle as an alarm. An American La France motor-driven fire engine was purchased in 1922 eliminating the practice of sometimes stopping and asking passing vehicles to unhitch their horses to pull the fire wagon. In 1923 the Ladies Auxiliary was formed to provide support and fundraising assistance to Protection Company No.1.

In 1983, School No. 8 was purchased by the Board of Fire Commissioners for \$1 and the school was torn down to make way for a modern firehouse. Dedicated on June 15, 1985, the new building boasted three bays, a meeting room with kitchen facilities and a day room for fire department members, along with other amenities. Today the Protection Fire Company No.1 continues to protect the citizens of Keasbey.

**Port Reading Fire Company No. 1,  
District 2  
916 West Avenue, Port Reading**

Separated from Woodbridge Proper by a river, and in a rapidly developing community, the Port Reading Fire Company No. 1 informally came together to fight local fires in 1894 but officially organized in 1904 and date their inception from that time.

The new company took out a \$2,000 mortgage to purchase a lot at the corner of West and Port Reading Avenues. The first firemen were summoned to emergencies by the ringing of a metal rail with a sledgehammer and raced to put out fires using a wooden cart laden with water and a hand pump and pulled by two horses named Munk and Punk.

In 1923, at a dinner held, in part to celebrate the purchase of a new siren, area Fire Chiefs complimented the Company on the turnout (56 of the 60 firemen were present), the high standards of the Port Reading department and the need for continued municipal support. Chief O'Brien of Woodbridge

toasted the Company:

*Here's to Port Reading  
And the new fire horn:  
Here's to their firemen  
All fire fighters born.  
And here's to Woodbridge  
Where I live now,  
Here's hoping they never buy another  
\$3,000 cow.*

From the beginning, the firehouse has been a focal point of the community and many families in Port Reading can name generations of relatives who have been Fire Company or Ladies Auxiliary members. For many years there was a waiting list to join. However like many civic organizations today, District 2 has had to confront a shortage of volunteers and has added career firefighters to its ranks to ensure continuity and quality of service.

Given the surrounding industry, today's Port Reading firemen are specially trained in fighting oil and chemical fires. Port Reading Fire Company No. 1, staffed by both professional and volunteer firefighters, continues to protect and serve their community.



**Port Reading Fire Company No. 1 1924**

**AMBULANCE and EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**

**Woodbridge Township Ambulance  
and Rescue Squad  
77 Queen Road, Iselin**

In 1937, a group of young men recognized the need for local emergency service to aid community welfare. With no local hospital or ambulance services, valuable time was wasted when nearby hospitals had to dispatch an ambulance to Woodbridge, pick up the patient, then return to the hospital. The founders of the Woodbridge Emergency Squad knew that time could mean the difference between life and death and were willing "to give up their time so they would be on call in cases of illness, accidents, drownings, rendering first aid, and transporting persons to the hospital with speed and safety."



**Woodbridge Emergency Squad mid 1950's**

By August 1937, WES had registered with the State Police to be part of the Police's emergency program which allowed for only the closest registered squads to be called to an emergency. The public's generosity allowed the purchase of their first ambulance which was kept at the fire house. The Squad, under the leadership of Elbur Richards, consisted of volunteers who responded to calls from their home.

In 1938 they purchased a 1938 La Salle able to

carry four patients at one time, had a search-light and space for a doctor and nurse. Thanks to Charles Paul II, a current life-time member, the Squad now owns the same ambulance and it still runs! In their first year of existence the Squad answered 129 calls including responding to a tragedy on March 2, 1938 when "an engineer of a Central Railroad train was killed and his fireman seriously injured when their train crashed into a Shell Oil Truck." The following year the squad went out on 368 calls compared to 7500 calls/year today.



**Woodbridge Emergency Squad Sons  
& Daughters march in a 1950's  
Memorial Day Parade**

Until the late 1970s, with nearby manufacturing jobs and shift work, squads were staffed by volunteers 24 /7. As the 1980's approached, there was a shortage of volunteers and the squads had to rely on mutual aid. By 1995 there was a critical shortage of day-time volunteers and the Woodbridge Emergency Squad hired career EMT's for daytime coverage.

In 1996, with daytime staffing at a critical level, a meeting of the Township's First Aid Squads was coordinated by the Iselin First Aid Squad to discuss consolidation. It was clear that this was needed to

continue to provide EMS services in the Township. Most Squads opted to continue on their own rather than merge. However, the Woodbridge Emergency Squad and the Iselin First Aid Squad decided to consolidate their services forming the Woodbridge Township Ambulance & Rescue Squad (WTARS) which was incorporated in 1997.

In 1997, the Squad was licensed by the New Jersey Department of Health as a basic life support provider and started billing for service to cover the cost and benefits to the paid staff during daytime hours.

In 2000, WTARS purchased property at the intersection of Routes 1 and 9 and constructed their current headquarters, 77 Queen Road, Iselin. The building includes sleeping quarters, kitchen, offices, a laundry and locker room and space for 16 ambulances. It also has a banquet hall which is rented out to the public.

In 2006, Hopelawn First Aid squad joined the WTARS organization and then, in 2009, the Town Council gave the Fords area to WTARS which, in conjunction with Fords Fire Company, stationed an ambulance 24/7 on the south side of town.

Currently the Squad has approximately 100 volunteers and 30 paid staff and provides not only mutual aid to Woodbridge Township but also South Amboy and North Sayreville.

**Avenel-Colonia First Aid Squad  
105 Avenel Street, Avenel**

The Avenel-Colonia First Aid Squad filed papers of incorporation on August 3, 1945. First operating out of the Avenel firehouse, the squad raised money through scrap metal drives and a minstrel show to

# AMBULANCE and EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

purchase a 1937 La Salle ambulance from Carteret for \$1,000. Charter member Charles Smith instructed the volunteers in first aid and the ambulance was put into service.



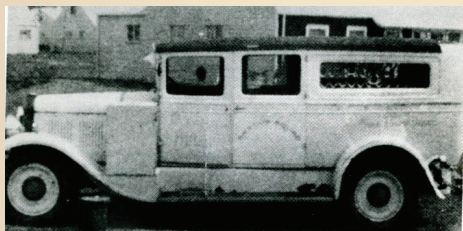
**Woodbridge First Aid Members  
Returning from WWII**

In 1951, a new ambulance was purchased to meet the needs of a growing community and over the years the squad purchased and decommissioned vehicles as technologies improved and wear and tear took its toll. Today the fleet consists of three Box Style Ambulances: a 2020 Ford F-350 4-Wheel Drive model, a 2016 Chevrolet and a 2010 Ford E-350.

In 2010, a series of scandals rocked the Squad, the doors were shuttered and merger talks were held with the Woodbridge Emergency Rescue Squad. While terms could not be agreed upon with the Woodbridge Squad, the Township came to an agreement with the Avenel-Colonia members which enabled it to reopen in 2011. Today the Avenel-Colonia First Aid squad is staffed by volunteers and per diem EMTs and diligently serves the two communities.

## **Colonia First Aid Squad 4 Beekman Avenue, Colonia**

Several Colonia women wanted to start a First Aid unit in 1951 but learned that their organization could not be recognized unless their husbands took the lead. Bob Carey, Walt Pankewich, Sam Nelson, Harry Houghts, Bill Yorke and Bill Barber attended training courses at the South Plainfield First Aid Squad and upon their graduation, the Colonia Squad was officially recognized. The South Plainfield squad donated a 1930 Sayres Scoville Ambulance providing the new Colonia squad its first set of wheels. The 20+ year old transport was parked in the bay of the firehouse at 606 Inman Avenue, today's VFW post.



**Colonia's First Ambulance**

In an era before 911, cell phones or even pagers, alerting members to a medical emergency required ingenuity, persistence, and a team effort. The Woodbridge Police would call the home of Squad Captain Yorke. As he rushed to the firehouse to prepare the rig, Yorke's wife would dial squad members one by one.

Eager for a station of their own, the Colonia First Aid Squad purchased 4 Beekman Avenue for \$3,300. Perfect for their purposes, the ground floor was a two-car garage and the unfinished second story could be completed to meet squad needs.

Over the years, the Colonia First Aid squad has worked hand-in-hand with the Colonia Fire Depart-

ment to protect and care for the Colonia community. District 12 has assumed financial support for the Squad, obtaining equipment, vehicles and funding building maintenance and renovations allowing the volunteer and paid EMTs to focus on their life-saving mission.

## **Iselin First Aid Squad Formerly located on Route 27 (Lincoln Highway), Iselin**

Meeting for the first time on July 10, 1950, in VFW Post #2636 at 11 Auth Avenue, the Iselin First Aid Squad was organized. St. John's First Aid Squad of Fords acted as "godfather," assisting with organizing, training and selling the Iselin squad its first ambulance for one dollar. Iselin First Aid later extended the kindness when they sold the 1938 Dodge for one dollar to the emerging Colonia squad.



**Iselin First Aid Squad Rt. 27**

Charter members included Victor Jansen, Walter Burchak, George Hall, Anthony Poreda and Henry Thorpe. The squad first operated out of St. Cecelia's Quonset hut. Father Willis installed a phone in the garage to facilitate rescue calls but for nearly twelve years calls went to Cooper's Dairy where Mrs. Mary Cooper volunteered as chief dispatcher answering calls on the first ring 24/7.

IFAS purchased a Township owned lot on Route 27, began building and dedicated their new home in September, 1952. The squad trained hard to perform their duties and carry lifesaving equipment. During the '60s and '70s they finished in the top three of so many heavy rescue and youth division competitions of the International Rescue First Aid Squad Association, that the Iselin squad stopped being invited to give other squads a chance to win.

In 1996, the Iselin First Aid Squad, along with the Woodbridge Emergency Squad, recognized that the emergency medical needs of the Township could best be met by combining resources and forces. Other squads were invited to merge but, initially, only the Woodbridge and Iselin squads consolidated. Now operating out of the Woodbridge Township Ambulance and Rescue Squad facility at 77 Queen Road, the dedicated efforts of Iselin emergency medical volunteers continues.

## **Port Reading First Aid Squad 916 West Avenue, Port Reading**

In September of 1970, the Port Reading First Aid Squad was founded. Former Mayor Joseph "JoJo" DeMarino, Patsy Renaldi, Bobby Diee and George Sabol were among the charter members. The squad has dedicated themselves over the last fifty years to providing the highest quality pre-hospital emergency treatment and transport.

In 2007, the squad was able to add a new, fully-equipped Med-Tech ambulance to its fleet through an agreement with the Pro Logis Corporation which was developing an eight-warehouse complex in Port Reading.

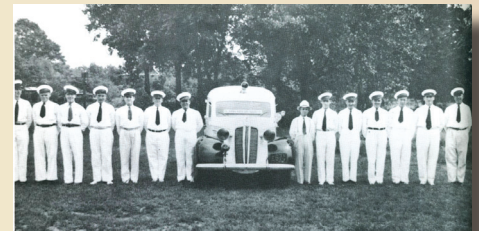
Together with the Port Reading Fire Department,

the Port Reading First Aid Squad delivers holiday cheer with an annual toy drive and tree lighting celebration and continues to serve the community and respond to emergency and life-saving calls

## **St. John's First Aid Squad Formally located at 17 Corrielle Street, Fords**

St. John's First Aid Squad began in 1943 when Reverend George Boyd of St. Peter's Church donated a 1937 model ambulance to St. John's Episcopal Church of Fords. The church membership was not large enough to staff a first aid squad by itself so volunteers from the entire community were sought. Fourteen men responded and formed the St. John's First Aid Squad. Most of the original equipment was donated by the volunteers. The first meetings of the squad were held in St. John's Episcopal Church and thus, when the organization received their charter from the Township, the first aid squad took St. John's for their name. In the early years, meetings took place at St. John's or at the Fire House. In 1951, St. John's First Aid Squad was present and worked diligently during the devastating train derailment along Fulton Street in Woodbridge Proper. The modern headquarters for St. John's Fire Aid Squad was completed in 1951, the same year of the train accident.

In 2009, the Township Council voted to stop the squad from receiving any calls routed through the Township's 911 system as part of an effort to restructure and consolidate the Township's first aid squads. The St. John's Squad and the Fords community protested the changes however without the calls from 911, the squad could not financially survive. In operation for over 65 years, St. John's First Aid Squad closed its doors in 2010 and today the Fords community is protected by the Woodbridge First Aid and Rescue Squad.



**St Johns First Aid Squad Fords**

**Scan the QR code below with your smart device to access the map for the Historic Tour of Woodbridge Volume XII**



Woodbridge has been graced with brave and selfless citizens from its inception – people who have been willing to give up their time, put themselves in harm's way and put the safety and health of others above their own. Today's First Responders – firefighters, police officers and EMTs (Emergency Medical Technicians) continue the traditions of service established by those who made public safety a public good.

Woodbridge's first European settlers brought British-style law enforcement with them and individuals stepped up to serve as Justices of the Peace, Sheriffs and Constables. Colonial Woodbridge was a rural, largely agrarian community. Fires were fought by families and neighbors. Those in need of emergency medical assistance could only hope that there was someone nearby, be it midwife, doctor or healer, who could help.

Over the centuries, as Woodbridge became more populated and economically diverse, ad hoc emergency responses and county-wide legal structures evolved into efficient local organizations designed to meet the needs of a changing, industrializing world. The 1890s saw the formation of both

*In remembrance and with gratitude for Woodbridge's First Responders who sacrificed themselves in the line of duty to protect and serve our community.*

**Constable John Joseph "The Horse" Dowling  
October 18, 1898**

Constable Dowling's death has not officially been recognized as a line-of-duty death however the evidence points to that conclusion and his great-great grandson Kevin Dowling, a career law enforcement professional who is currently serving as a deputy chief for a federal law enforcement agency, believes that the Constable is deserving of this honor. Constable Dowling served the Carteret section of Woodbridge, where he also lived. A formidable imposing man, he was a stalwart officer of the peace and "terror to evildoers in Carteret." On Oct. 18, 1898, returning on foot, from court business in New Brunswick (probably prisoner transport), Dowling stopped by a tavern in Rahway en route to Carteret. Dowling detoured to Rahway to invite a friend to attend his daughter's wedding scheduled for the following week. The Constable never made it home and 18 days later his body was found in a ditch near where he would have passed on his way to Carteret. The conclusion at the time was that Constable Dowling must have been intoxicated, tripped, fell into the ditch and drowned. With the benefit of hindsight and modern investigative methods, the original conclusion may have been a result of anti-Irish sentiment and stereotyping rather than facts. It was well known that individuals whom he had arrested had "threatened the life of the constable." At the time of the Constable's death, he was investigating a murder with a similar modis operandi (assault and drowning.) Kevin Dowling consulted an expert in death investigations to decipher the detailed newspaper descriptions of the case and the evidence points towards an attack that led to Constable Dowling's "line of duty death" by accidental or felonious cause.

**Thomas "TK" Kolarick  
November 11, 2015**

Ex-chief of the Keasbey Protection Fire Company No. 1, TK Kolarick passed away in a recognized line of duty death on November 11, 2015. Kolarick died of complications from a medical emergency health event during an emergency response in September 2015. Thomas "TK" Kolarick joined the

the Woodbridge Police Department and Woodbridge Fire Department.

Early fire fighters were all volunteers although governments encouraged volunteerism by exempting fireman who served for seven years or more from property taxes and other fees. Today, perks for Exempt Firefighters only exempt them from peddler's license fees but their long-term commitment to service continues.

Advances in transportation and medical knowledge in the twentieth century made emergency medical assistance possible and volunteers stepped up to organize and assist their neighbors.

Mutual aid agreements have enshrined the long-time cooperation between all the departments and services. Multiple organizations have responded to all significant tragedies in Woodbridge Township. During numerous fires on Main Street, motel, warehouse, grocery store and nursing home fires, the 1935 Fulton Street explosion, 1940 United Signal Co. explosion in Port Reading, the Shell Oil fire in 1996 and 2012's Hurricane Sandy and more, Township First Responders stood shoulder-to-shoulder to protect our community. After the 1951 derailment of the Pennsylvania Railroad train "The Broker" off

**IN MEMORIAM**

Protection Fire Company No. 1 of Keasbey on August 12, 1974, when he was just 18 years old. He served as an active member for over 41 years until his death. He was a life member of the company.

**Joseph Lewis  
September 18, 1932**



Police Officer Joseph Lewis of Sutton Street in Iselin was killed in the line of duty on September 18, 1932. A twelve-year veteran, Lewis was working the light at the intersection of Avenel Street and Route 25 (today's Route 1), managing Sunday morning church traffic. A group

of motorcyclists blew through the red light nearly striking pedestrians crossing the superhighway. Lewis gave chase on his motorcycle. Approaching the cloverleaf at Route 35, Lewis was overtaking another motorcycle when their handlebars touched. The contact forced the two riders to opposite sides of the road and Lewis collided with a water company truck parked on the side of the road. He died of his injuries several hours later.

**Joseph E. Murawski  
June 17, 2007**

Keasbey Protection Fire Company No. 1 Ex-Chief Joseph E. Murawski died in a recognized line of duty death when he suffered a heart attack on June 17, 2007 while working as a Paramedic for Raritan Bay Medical Center's Mobile Intensive Care Unit. After finishing at a scene of an accident, Mr. Murawski began experiencing chest pains, later going into full cardiac arrest. According to his wife Deborah, "Joe took a negative and always made it a positive. He loved his work in rescue and knew he made a difference."

**Bruce A. Turcotte  
January 19, 2012**

Former Chief of the Hopelawn Engine Company No. 1, Brian A. Turcotte died on January 19, 2012 while responding to a deliberately set residential fire on Jefferson Street in the Menlo Park Terrace sec-

tion of Woodbridge Township. A Hopelawn firefighter for thirty-seven years, Ex-Chief Turcotte had been assisting in stretching hoses so the engine crews could advance to the building. He was found behind the wheel of a rescue truck after suffering a heart attack.

a temporary trestle in Woodbridge Proper killed 85 people, every emergency service in Woodbridge responded and worked tirelessly around the clock to rescue survivors, retrieve the dead and protect the Fulton Street neighborhood from further danger. While we recognize and honor the First Responders who have lost their lives in the line of duty, we cannot forget the other sacrifices made by Woodbridge's everyday heroes. Firefighters have died from job-related cancers. Serious injury, PTSD, depression, heart attacks and other traumas have been endured by those risk themselves to keep us safe.

Today Woodbridge has a nationally accredited police dept, nine fire departments and four first aid squads who work selflessly and collaboratively to protect our community. We thank you for your service.

***"Until you put your life up as collateral for another life, you don't know what lifesaving is about."***

**Lt. Bobby Martin, Detroit Fire Department**

**Eldon L. Raison  
November 13, 1964**



Woodbridge Fire Department Ex-Chief Eldon L. Raison died at his post on November 13, 1964 while responding to a field fire. Long-time member of the department, Raison was also a charter member and past president of the Woodbridge Emergency Squad.

Raison was riding in his engine to a brush fire on Harriet Street when he died from an apparent heart attack.

**Alvin Williams  
September 6, 1979**



Patrolman Alvin Williams died in the line of duty on September 6, 1979. The Iselin resident joined the force in 1958. Williams was eating lunch in Colonia with his partner of 10 years, Patrolman Anthony Zullo. The South Branch of the Rahway River, swollen from Hurricane David,

flowed nearby. Someone shouted that there were children in the water. Williams "hurdled the fence and jumped in feet first." The veteran officer lost his footing on a ledge and Zullo made a vain attempt to try and grab him. Officer Williams tried to grab two children who had fallen from a raft that had capsized in the eddying waters whipped up by the storm's fierce winds. In his attempt to rescue the children, Williams was swept away and drowned along with the children.



# Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission

The mission of the Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission is to inform, educate, advise and unite public officials and the community at large as an advocate for the preservation of the rich history of Woodbridge Township.

## Commission Members

Dr. Dolores Capraro Gioffre,  
Chairperson  
Courtney Lowry,  
Vice Chairperson  
Kathy Jost-Keating,  
Secretary  
Bruce Christensen

Daniel D'Arcy  
Martin S. Genser  
John Lande  
Miguel Martin  
Kevin Rossi  
Wenda G. Rottweiler  
Frank Pelzman

Audrey LaPenta,  
Historical Association  
of Woodbridge Twp.  
Brenda Velasco,  
Township Historian

## Special Thanks to Mayor John E. McCormac



First Responders at the 1951 Woodbridge Train Wreck

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Brochure design by Brandon Powell  
Photographs courtesy of Woodbridge Public Library,  
Harry Bernstein, Lt. Glenn E. Skolsky, Todd Howell and Martin Dress.