

## *Box 52 Association*



## *The Line Box*



*I·F·B·A· Member club since 1955!*

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Vol. 19 No. 4

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Welcome to the final edition of the 2022-2023 season's Line Box!

The four articles carried over from the third issue are finished in this issue. We have several additional articles for your reading pleasure.

The staff wishes all members a safe and enjoyable summer and we look forward to seeing everyone in September!

We are looking for a copy of the mutual aid response to the Chelsea Conflagration of Sunday October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1973. This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire. We believe that a full response list was compiled by several members of Box 52. Any member who still has the list is asked to notify the Editor as we prepare another Line Box special issue.



## APPARATUS UPDATE By Michael Boynton

All photos by the author

### AMBULANCE DELIVERIES PART 2













## **CAMBRIDGE FIRE Revives EASTER TRADITION**

### **AFTER FIFTY YEARS!**

**Faith Lutheran Church**

**311 Broadway April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**By Frank San Severino Line Box Editor**

*After a 50 year hiatus, Cambridge Fire Department revived a long dormant tradition.....a major multiple alarm fire on Easter Sunday. The last being in 1963 and was the Squires fire and the year before in 1962 the Carsten Coal Company fire in North Cambridge. In 2023 it was a church fire!*

Easter services had ended by noon time. The church was locked up and was un-occupied the rest of its 114<sup>th</sup> Easter Sunday.

At 1731 hours the Cambridge Operations Center transmitted box 285 located at Broadway & Prospect Street for 311 Broadway the Faith Lutheran Church. Responding first due from their quarters in Inman Square, Engine 5 was on scene within two minutes of the box reporting smoke showing. Division 1 Deputy Chief Fredrick Ikles ordered a second alarm on his arrival and issued orders for all engine companies to use big lines for an interior attack. The size-up was a 1.5 story church with heavy smoke showing from the alpha side steeple.

As the six engines on the second alarm jockeyed their big lines into position to start hitting the fire, Rescue 1 reported finding fire in the basement. At the same time Ladder 3 reported to Command that they now had fire showing through the roof and the C/D side of the steeple.

At 1749 the third alarm on box 285 was ordered. The entire CFD fleet was now engaged in trying to stop the fire. Somerville Engine 3 and Tower Ladder 1 had responded on the 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm and arrived in short order on the fireground.

The Faith Lutheran Church was established in the City of Cambridge on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1892 for German emigrants. The church was built in 1909 of wood. A stucco covering was added later. The church has an active membership and offers several community outreach programs, including feeding the homeless with their Faith Kitchen. The main service is held each Sunday at 1000 hrs. Once a month a service is offered in German. The church is a member of the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. The church is located on Broadway between Tremont & Prospect Streets.

About 40 minutes into the fire Command reported that the primary searches of the church were negative and that all companies were still heavily engage. Somerville Tower 1 had arrived on the fireground and was getting into position to hit fire along the roof and steeple area. It was only a few minutes later at 1817 hours that Command ordered the building evacuated and make preparations for defensive operations. At this time a full PAR was ordered. Due to the fire in the steeple a collapse zone was established on the alpha side on Broadway.

The fourth alarm on box 285 was ordered at 1827 hrs. Command ordered two fourth alarm engines to run Blitz lines to the Charlie side to protect exposures in the rear.

The church was now well involved and threatening exposures. A fifth alarm was ordered at 1834 hours with orders for all 5<sup>th</sup> alarm companies to go into staging at Prospect and Harvard Streets. As the fire started to eat through the roof the heavy slate tiles started to fall from the roof endangering firefighters operating at the front and rear of the building.

The progress report at 1849 hours reported heavy fire conditions, multiple master streams and blitz guns in operation. Evacuations of the delta side exposures complete. Evacuations of Charlie side exposures still in progress.

Charlie Sector reported to command that the evacuations were taking place in near zero visibility from the smoke. Cambridge Engine 5 was directed in to assist with additional manpower for the evacuations. Somerville Engine 1 was directed into the Charlie exposure from the Prospect Street side for additional exposure protection.

Rescue Company 1 reported that they had a blitz gun and a big line both uncharged on the alpha side and they were in a protected area to operate them. Command gave them the okay and the lines were charged and started hitting the fire.

Fire conditions continued to worsen as the flames consumed the dry wood of the church. Firefighters were removed from aerial master streams and ground blitz guns and moved a safe distance away.

Watertown Engine 1 arriving on the fourth alarm was directed to take a hydrant on Tremont Street, drop their own supply line and go to work with Cambridge E3. Watertown C1 was designated as Tremont Street sector command. At this time all of the exposures were well protected. Companies had plenty of water to work with and did an admirable job of keeping the fire from igniting additional structures in this tightly packed wood frame dwellings of two and three stories.

As the fire continued to burn, an additional water supply was being secured. Waltham Engine 1 was ordered to relay pump to Cambridge Engine 4. Meantime, on Prospect Street evacuations were reported complete freeing Somerville Engine 1 and Arlington Engine 2 for other duties. They were quickly put to work operating big lines from inside buildings hitting the fire. Somerville Car 3 was directing these lines.

Cambridge Engine 6 was ordered to find another blitz gun and set up on the Charlie side of the fire. Tremont Street sector reported that Belmont Engine 2 was taking a hydrant and laying in an additional line if need for additional exposure protection.

Ladder 4 at approximately 1900 hours reported heavy fire through the roof about 50 feet down from the steeple. At the same time Division 3 reports heavy fire visible from the Charlie sector. Ladder 2 was ordered to hit the fire with its ladder pipe just behind the steeple.

In the rear of the church on the Charlie sector, sector command reported they had 3 blitz guns and Ladder 4's ladder pipe in operation and they also had heavy smoke condition.

At 1941 hours Boston District Chief 11 reported to Command that he heard cracking noises coming from the steeple on the Bravo side. Fire Alarm announced that there was cracking noise from the steeple and all companies to maintain a safe distance.

Another water relay was being set up between Watertown Engine 1 and Cambridge E3. Watertown was laying a line down Tremont Street into Engine 3 to supply an additional blitz gun.

Cambridge C1 Acting Chief of Department Cahill arrived on scene and assumed command of the fire and ordered that the sixth alarm be transmitted at 1946 hours.

Shortly after 2000 hours a new problem presented itself.....flying brands started to drop on to exposure roofs. Companies were quickly deployed to meet the new threats on Prospect, Tremont, down towards Columbia Street. Sixth alarm companies had arrived and were in staging. At 2014 Command reported that the steeple now had fire showing on all sides, all members were advised to stay out of the collapse zone. The command post was relocated from 342 Broadway to the corner of Prospect and Broadway and the collapse zone was 100 feet from the alpha side. All members were evacuated from this area and the apparatus was left in position.

Command ordered all lines shut down for five minutes with the exception of: Ladder 1, Ladder 2, Ladder 4, Somerville Tower 1, Engines 2 and 5.

At 2014 hours another progress report was given on box 285 by Chief Cahill. Reported heavy fire on the first floor, fire venting from the steeple, multiple lines in operating, extensive operations

#### **Box 285 Broadway & Prospect St.**

<b>Alarm</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Engines</b>	<b>Ladders</b>	<b>Res./Other</b>	<b>Chiefs</b>
285	1731	5, 2, 6	<b>3, 1</b>	<b>1</b> , Sqd. 3	Div. 1
2-285	1733	1, 3, 4	<b>2, 4</b>	Sqd. 2, 4	Div. 2
3-285	1749	9, 8, Som. E3	<b>Som TL-1</b>		Som. Car 3
4-285	1827	Wat. E1, Bel. E2, Brkl. E	<b>Brkl. L-2</b>		Wat. C-1
5-285	1834	Wal E-1, Arl. E2. Som E-1	<b>Bos. L-15</b>		Bos. Dist. 11
6-285	1849	Che. E2, Med. E5, New. E-1	<b>Wal. L-2</b>		Camb. C-1

The fire fight went on through the night and with the light of a new day the steeple was still standing. The investigation to find the cause had begun early in the fire by the Cambridge Fire Investigation Unit and the CPD. In the morning they were joined by teams from the Fire Marshal's Office and several federal agencies, including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

Cambridge firefighters and their mutual aid partners prevented a conflagration in the narrow and congested neighborhood.

The Church plans to rebuild and they are receiving help from other local church's for their community outreach programs.

Sir Winston Churchill was correct, history **does** repeat itself!





**Attleboro Saturday April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**42 County Street**

**All photos by applicant Dominic San Severino**

A typical Saturday in Attleboro, lots of medicals, lots of traffic around downtown.

County Auto Repair and Sales occupied two concrete block and wood joisted garage type buildings at 42 County Street. They had closed a few minutes before 1700 hrs.

Shortly after 1720 hours the tones for a box alarm dropped. At the time Engine 1 and Rescue 4 were at a Medical off Wilmarth Street near the Rehoboth line. Fire Alarm announced Engine 1, 5, Ladder 1, Rescue 1 and Batt. 1 to respond. Rescue 1 was returning from the hospital and was covered by Rescue 2 from South Attleboro.

As Battalion 1 and Ladder 1 opened the doors at Fire Headquarters on Union Street, a large black loom up greeted them. The fire scene was less than a quarter mile run.

Battalion 1 reported he had two separate fires at the location. The Bravo exposure was several cars burning against the 2<sup>nd</sup> building, the main fire building had a car fire set against the last service bay and fire had entered the building. Exposure C was the Ten Mile River and the B exposure was the Auto Zone parking lot. Ladder 1 was directed into the lot and to prepare for defensive attack. North Attleborough Engine 5 was responding as the RIT engine.

Engine 5 now arrived first due with Engine 1 still responding from the medical. A second alarm was ordered bringing Attleboro E2, Mansfield Engine and rescue, Norton Ladder 1 to the fire.

Two men were seen in the area just prior to the discovery of the fire. They were questioned about this fire and two other fires that struck auto repair facilities during the week. They were arrested and charged. They are awaiting trial in the Bristol House of Correction in Dartmouth.

The truck parked in front of the facility is the former Mendon Engine 4's 1994 HME/Central States 1250/1250/50 gallons foam. It has been there well over 2 years.





## **The Salem Firebug**

**January – February 1982**

**By Box 52 Secretary Jeff Brown**

### **Part 2**

The day's second fire began at the Masonic Temple 70 Washington Street, corner of Lynde Street. The first call for the fire was reported by an employee who called the fire department and reported a basement fire. The building was not equipped with a master box at that time. Due to the ongoing Armory fire the only company available was Salem Engine 3, a spare pump. It was pressed into service with only two men. Within forty minutes of the first call, the fire was bursting through the roof!

Similar to the other two fires that day, The Masonic Temple fire was in an historic old building. The corner stone was laid in 1915. The building housed numerous commercial occupancies on the first floors. The second floor housed numerous doctor's offices and the third floor was home to over 15 lawyer's offices. The remaining two upper floors were occupied by the Essex Lodge of Mason's. The City of Salem also used space on the third floor to store numerous official and historic records.



Several off-duty members who were called to come into battle the Armory fire were unaware of the Masonic Temple fire. According to then Lt. Tom Brophy (current Box 52 Director) he and fellow crew members arrived at Headquarters to pick up their gear when they were told to report to Washington Street. They thought they were sent to the Washington Street location by mistake. They were unaware of the second fire. Little did they know they were in for a long day.

Salem Deputy Chiefs Francis Bates, and Joseph Sullivan were in charge of a fire that saw only mutual aid companies arriving on all alarms! Middleton Chief George Nash, and Lynn Deputy Chief William Conway lent their experience and expertise. Lynn went to the unusual move of sending double the amount of mutual aid normally allotted. Fortunately, Lynn even at that time, was also a member of District 13's METRO-FIRE, which could provide aid to Lynn if needed.

Lt. Tom Brophy was one of the few Salem firefighters initially assigned to this second fire in less than an hour. Brophy and Firefighter Ed McCarthy were directed to bring a line over the roof of the adjacent supermarket to try to get to the third floor. They were driven out when the evacuation of the building was ordered.

Lynn Deputy Chief Conway requested that his department to send two additional pumps. One of which was E-3, one of the two 1975 American La France pumps equipped with a Tele-squirts in their arsenal.

Once again, five alarms were transmitted. It took several hours but the blaze was finally brought under control. By early afternoon when the Armory fire was brought under control, some of the Salem Companies were redirected to this fire. This second fire, also prompted then Mayor Jean Levesque to declare a state of emergency, impose a curfew and request the National Guard to patrol the streets.

Keep in mind in the early 1980's there were no multi-channel radios. Portable radios usually were assigned to company officers. There were no fire ground channels or repeaters. Salem and numerous surrounding communities were still operating on VHF low band. Lynn, who provided several pieces of mutual aid apparatus was operating on VHF hi-band.

Salem Fire Chief James Brennan at the time of the fires was recuperating at Salem Hospital. He was made aware of the two five alarm fires by a nurse who decided to alert him. Brennan had to be content with watching the plumes of smoke from his room. Deputy Chief Robert Crowley was serving as acting chief for the duration.

While the Salem jakes took a beating with those three fires in 36 hours, they still had to plan and attend the Line of Duty Death services for Firefighter Ray McSwiggin. Five hundred firefighters attended the services. Some department members could not attend as they were still pouring water on the ruins of the two fire locations.

Ray's funeral occurred a year to the day since the Salem's last LODD. Firefighter James Koen, a third-generation member suffered a heart attack at a fire in North Salem. Three of Jim's children James, Kevin (Captain) and Patty followed as the fourth generation. Patty was Salem's first female firefighter. James or Jaime as he is known, is the last of the Koen's still working.

As devastating as the Armory fire was it wasn't the last one. On November 22, 1983, another fire in the basement of the drill shed occurred. The smoky blaze sent 10 firefighters to the hospital and two more suffered injuries from a fall. Two juveniles were later arrested and

charged with arson. The building is now protected by a master box installed during the rebuilding of the historic Armory.

The early 80's was a challenging time for fire departments across the Commonwealth. The implementation of Prop 2 ½ saw numerous layoffs, demotions, a hiring freeze, and station closings.

Salem saw the Ward 1 Station 6 closed and Engine Company 6 disbanded. This resulted in layoffs of 12 firefighters. Salem residents along with the rank and file protested taking up residence in the closed station.

Several members were demoted in rank. And a hiring freeze was ordered on top of the 13 firefighters positions the department was already short. Fortunately, those who were laid off or demoted eventually got their jobs back. The lingering effects were the loss of a neighborhood station and the disbanding of Engine 6.

Twenty years before Prop 2.5, The Salem Fire Department of the 1960's operated with six pumps, two ladders, and a squad with 120 firefighters.

The department today operates four pumps and one ladder. Due to mechanical and electrical issues the 1999 Pierce 100 foot rear mount ladder is permanently out of service. The 2015 Pierce tower suffered damage during a record-breaking cold snap in early February. The former Boston Fire Department Ladder 24, and a few other spare ladders in District 5 area were put in service.

A new Pierce rear mount to replace Ladder 1 is due in late this summer. The recent graduation of eight recruits and the hiring process for an anticipated six additional firefighters over the summer should allow both ladders companies to be in service much of the time. Current staffing levels of 89 members should be achievable.

The five fires in 19 days were one of the busiest and costliest in the modern history of the Salem Fire Department. It is a testament to the firefighters of Salem and the surrounding communities who faced these fires and overcame tremendous challenges.

**JANUARY 11<sup>TH</sup>, 1973**

**PART 2**

**Boston Box 711**

**All Photos Collection of member William Noonan**

**Response and Times by Hon. Member Paul Christian BFD Commissioner Ret.**

The night of the fire I.B.E.W. Local 103 was holding a training class on the second floor of the Ralph Pill Electric Supply Company building. A little after 7:30 PM students noticed smoke seeping through the floor boards from the first floor. They evacuated the building and the alarm was sounded.

Box 711 was sounded and within eleven minutes the third alarm had been transmitted. Low water pressure was a problem until pressure in the mains was increased. Several hydrants close to the building were blocked by vehicles, which the BPD towed away as fast as they could.

During the course of the fire, two explosions occurred and drove crews back.

The allout was sounded on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1973 at 1846 hours. The loss was estimated to be \$ 300,000.







## Timeline Response

Courtesy of Ret. Fire Comm. Paul Christian

Alarm	Time	Engines	Ladders	Rescue
711	1938	39, 25, 3	18, 8, A.T. 1	1
45-711	1941	2, 43		
2-711	1944	8, 26, 21, 50	17, 19	
3-711	1949	24, 10, 42, 40		
Sp. C	1956		23	
4-711	2003	53, 34, 37, 32		
Sp. C	2008		A.T. 2	
Sp. C	2017	17		
5-711	2039	20, 51, 7, 12		



Following morning. Photo by member William Noonan

## **Somerville Box 742**

### **Part 2**

As we researched this fire trying to find the records of the response and were coming up empty handed. Somerville Chief Charles Breen was able to find the original fire report written by Deputy Chief Callan and is printed here with other info from the report.

“Top floor completely involved. Lt. Doherty Ladder 3 sounded 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm. Chief Callan sounded 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm upon arrival.

All water lines with exception of 2 hand water lines used to supply ladder pipes and deck guns to operate on fire. Engine 2 used gun on Simpson Ave. to wet down houses and to extinguish sparks and flying brands coming from heavy volume of fire. Spark patrol also set up on Irving St.

After fire was knocked down all guns were shut down and an inspection of school determined that inside handlines would due extinguishing fire in ceiling of second floor and hot spots in attic. All ladder companies cut holes in floors to drain water and opened ceilings and walls for lines to operate on the fire.

Mutual aid 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm apparatus were dismissed. After through wetting down by 1<sup>st</sup> alarm assignment sound all out and held Engine 6 & Ladder 3 at the scene for the rest of the night.

Relieved by Chief Reardon.”

At the time of the fire, the City had been soliciting bids for demolition of the school and the cause of the fire was “probably set by vandals, Marshall notified.” There was no insurance on the building. The school had been vacant for a number of years.

During the fire a special call was made to Chelsea for two companies with LDH to respond. Chelsea could only send Engine 4 as their second pump was still covering in Eat Boston on the fifth alarm. Newton Engine 4 the 1972 Ward La France “Ambassador” pump carried LDH hose called ‘Zonka” then a German manufactured hose with Storz style couplings just making its way to US Fire Service. Both of these companies assisted upping water supply to the numerous master streams operating at the fire. Mutual aid was who ever could respond. All normal mutual aid was taxed to the limit. Boston was still holding the fifth alarm coverage for box 5-711. Cambridge still had several mutual aid companies covering their stations from the Triple A Plastic the day before. Some interesting mutual aid trivia is: Somerville Engine 4 was covering Boston E-32 and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm they were sent to cover at Somerville’s Broadway station, a normal cover assignment for Engine 32. While responding to cover Som. E-2’s quarters, they were dispatched to thee on the 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm basically as Engine 4/acting Engine 32!

Saugus Engine 1 covered as did Watertown Engine 1 and Malden Engine 2 and Ladder 3.

Somerville deployed all seven front line pumps and Aux Engine 9, 4 ladder companies and the aux. Lighting Unit.

When the 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm was sounded, Fire Alarm reported that only a few 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm companies were able to respond and they would call Newton Control for the balance of the assignment and for coverage. In the middle of these calls the Newton Control radio in fire alarm failed and all calls had to be made by telephone.



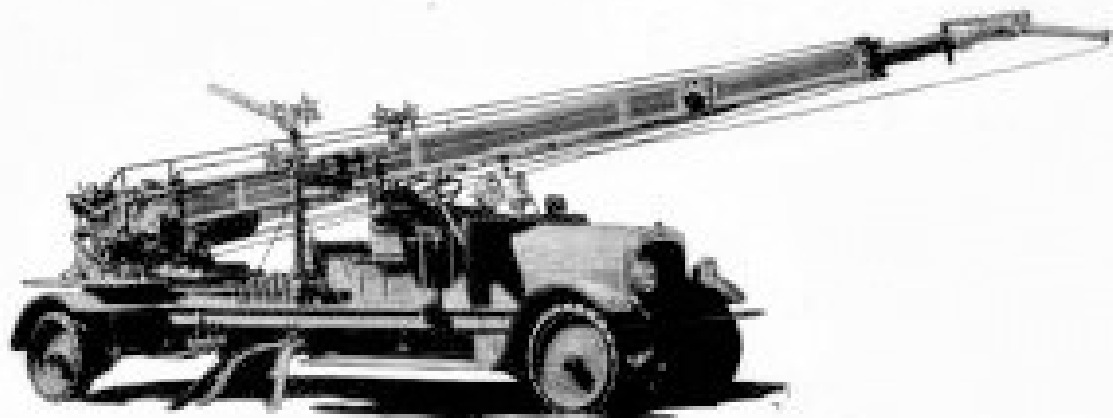
Somerville box 742 was a straight pull @ 2257 hrs, 2-742 @ 2259, 3-743 @ 2303 and the all out at 0511 hrs. Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 1973.

Newton Control and the member fire departments had taken a beating the last two days: with a third alarm plus special calls in Cambridge, a 5<sup>th</sup> alarm in Boston and a few hours later a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm in Somerville that taxed the system. At the time no one could imagine what would happen also most 10 months to the day when Chelsea had its conflagration.

In the first issue of next seasons Line box we will focus on Newton Control and the largest movement of apparatus in the history of the Commonwealth into Chelsea!

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