

after the acquisition of the property the Fire Company held its first meeting in their new building. In December they hosted a public dance and "housewarming party". A bell tower was also built for the bell purchased from the Central Railroad Company. This bell served the community faithfully until 1924 when an electric siren was purchased. The mortgage of \$900 was "finally paid" on March 21, 1905. The first fifteen years of operation has been referred to as "the most romantic period" in the history of the organization. Firefighters had to strike at raw flames with a minimum of equipment and a maximum of common sense. There were no time-tested theories laid out for them; they learned from experience only.

The Borough of Fanwood entered into an agreement on February 20, 1900, with the Fire Company to rent two rooms in the firehouse. These rooms were to be used for the borough offices and the Police Department.

On January 15, 1901, Charles Sheelen, Sr., was elected chief. This was the start of a period of sixty-six years in which only three men held this position: Charles Sheelen, 1901-1930; Frank Hand, 1931-1948; and Ernest Haer, 1949-1966. The devotion of these men could not be questioned, but the burdens caused by time away from their families prompted the fire company to rewrite parts of its constitution and by-laws. Individuals cannot hold any one position for more than four years.

Newspaper articles concerning local fires at this time include the total loss of a lumber yard on South Avenue, a \$10,000 loss of Dr. Westcott's barn and automobiles (the early morning blaze occurring at Martine and North Avenues), and reports of an aged hermit's death as the result of a fire that destroyed his South Avenue shack. Headlines such as "Family Entertains while House Burns", "Firemen Forced To Watch as House Burns" and "Fire in Tree" were not uncommon during this period. One particular newspaper story angered Chief Sheelen. The headline of the December 1916 article read "Poor Fanwood, Three Years without the Clang of a Fire Bell". The article went



*Fanwood's first motorized fire engine, a 1923 REO Speed Wagon, served the borough until 1947.*

on to state that the fire bell hanging in the rickety belfry atop the old firehouse was rusted and cracked. Residents had not heard the tap of the bell in so long that they had all but forgotten about it. In his response Chief Sheelen replied, "I do not know where you got your information but I want to say that this is unwarranted and untrue. There have been several fires in Fanwood during the last month, and the company is in a flourishing condition."

Chief Sheelen submitted his resignation on July 16, 1921, at the regularly scheduled company meeting. The membership decided to "table" the resignation discussion until the next monthly meeting. At that meeting Chief Sheelen requested that his resignation be withdrawn on the grounds of loyalty to the company and to the borough. He continued to serve as chief until 1930.