

Until the 1940's fighting fires was an unorganized volunteer project. When a fire broke out, the church bell rang and the neighbors would phone each other. Then any able-bodied person would arrive at the scene with ladders, buckets, and anything else they thought they would need to put out the fire. Members of the "bucket brigade" as they were called did not have the benefit of fire training or fire protection equipment except a handkerchief over their mouth.

Then in 1941, Chester High and other citizens decided to organize a volunteer fire department. Chester High was elected Fire Chief with about 12 volunteers. Their equipment consisted of buckets, an axe, and a fire hose. During this period between 1942 and 1943 Hilliard added a fire truck, water tank, and a pumper. Also during this time the Village of Hilliard's water plant was completed, which made a few fire hydrants available for fighting fires. Otherwise water was obtained from dug wells, cisterns (a tank for storing water), cattle watering tanks, ponds and creeks. On Main Street there were two dug wells, which are still there but are covered.

Finally in 1944 The Hilliards Volunteer Fire Department with 28 members became a reality. The first firehouse was on Norwich Street between Main and Wayne. It was a small two bay building with room for a truck and trailer. On February 10, 1944 they made their first run to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Gaymon Wright just west of Leap Road. A Google map of the place where their [house sat is found here](#).

The firehouse had two phones. When a call came in, the people on the two phones would each call three people who then would call three people until everyone was called. Later when more phones and a siren were added, instead of calling everyone when a fire call came in, the person nearest the fire station ran over and turned on the siren and wrote the address of the fire on the blackboard. When the men heard the siren they came to the fire station to see where the fire was and then responded. From 1944-1946, the volunteers were paid \$25 per run. The money was divided equally among the volunteers who made the run. By 1965 the volunteers were paid \$100.00 per run, which was divided among the men who made the run.

In 1964 the name of the fire department was changed from Hilliards Fire Department to Norwich Township Fire Department. Then there was a need for a second fire station. This one would be built on Hilliard Rome Road. Fire House Number 2 was dedicated on August 21, 1967. Now there was a fire station on each side of the railroad tracks that divided Hilliard.

By 1980 the fire department needed more room. Since there now was a railroad underpass on Cemetery Road at Norwich Street, the need for two fire stations on each side of the tracks was not necessary. They decided to build a new firehouse and consolidate all the manpower and equipment into one building. So a new firehouse was built on the Franklin County Fairgrounds and the two old stations were sold. The new firehouse opened on October 31, 1981.

In 1989 the Hilliard Police Department assumed the responsibility of answering fire calls. They were now responsible for the phone calls to the fire department and to dispatch equipment.

As of 1994, the Norwich Township Fire Department serves 23,826 residents with 35 full time employees and 12 volunteers. This is quite different compared to 1940 when there were 510 residents and the ringing of the church bell brought out the "bucket brigade" to fight the fire.

Adapted by Brenda McDougale