

## **BeeLines...**

**...by Marybelle Beigh, Westfield Historian**

### **Westfield's First Fire Hall and Lock Up**

According to The History of the Fire Department of Westfield, NY, published in the 1993 Southwestern Firemen's Convention booklet, the fire department was first organized on September 10, 1872, with B.F. Rynd as the first Chief Engineer. The Village Board of Trustees approved the organization of a Volunteer Fire department by Rynd, after they had appointed five Fire Wardens and purchased five fire extinguishers (tanks of water on wheels with a hand pressure pump and hose), and found that they were not able to provide proper protection. At this point, Rynd organized a Hook and Ladder Company with ten men plus the five previously appointed wardens. The Hook and Ladder Truck was designed to be pulled either by men with ropes, or by a horse and hitch. With no electric street lights (Westfield turned on its electric street lights 20 years later, in November 1892), they also had a lantern boy who went ahead of the fire truck/wagon to light the way. There was no fire hall, so equipment was stored at various barns around the village.

Cascade Hose Company No. 1 was the next company formed, April 26, 1893, since more protection was needed for the Village, and one month later they acquired a hose cart. The Village approved the construction of a Fire Hall, on North Portage Street lot 203 (later 18 N Portage), which was dedicated on September 10, 1873. By January 31, 1877, the Fire Department purchased and mounted a special bell in a tower atop the Fire Hall. This bell is now displayed at the new (third) Fire Hall on the corner of Clinton and Market streets.

Soon after the dedication, the Westfield Village Board started having their meetings in the new Fire Hall, having previously held them in the Westfield House, that huge stage coach inn that filled the northwest corner of Main and Portage streets from 1829 to 1884. In 1884, a disastrous fire destroyed the inn, carriage houses, attached businesses, and even some of the McClurg business block buildings on the southwest corner of the same intersection.

The 1881 Chautauqua County Atlas map of the Village of Westfield shows at the corner of Main and Portage, the Westfield House hotel, D. Dix Proprietor, with three business buildings contiguous to the north on Portage. There is one empty lot between these and the Firemen's Hall, then a larger empty lot owned by D. Dix north of the Fire Hall. The earliest Sanborn Map for Westfield, 1886, published in the March 18, 2015, Westfield Republican with last week's BeeLines regarding the Paper Mill and Warehouse, shows the "Ruins of Fire July '84" empty lots on the northwest and southwest corners of Main and Portage, enclosed by dashed lines indicating the location of the buildings destroyed. This Sanborn map also shows the Firemen's Hall "1873" with labels for the Engine and H&L (Hook & Ladder) areas, Bell Tower, and Jail Bas't (basement). Sometime between 1881 and 1886, Hermon L Kent, who purchased the Paper Factory in 1880, had constructed the H.L. Kent & Co. Paper Warehouse on lot 202 (later 20 N Portage) with a small space between the buildings, as shown on the 1886 Sanborn map.

The Westfield Lock Up or Jail was described in a June 1914 official report by Chief Inspector George McLaughlin. It was located in a room 15x16 ft. in the rear sections of the basement of

the fire hall, the floor being concrete and on level with the ground outside. (The ground slopes down from the front of the building on N Portage, toward the rear which is not far from the edge of the cliffs to the fields below that now include the little league baseball field.) The room had a 12 ft. ceiling and was enclosed with brick walls. There were two steel cages, each 5X8 ft., and each contained two bunks and a toilet. Blankets were furnished when necessary. There was also a sink and a cold water faucet in the corridor, and one outside window 3 ft. 2 in. by 5 ft. The room was heated by gas and had electric lights. The entrance hall was shut off from the rest of the basement by a brick wall and a metal-encased door lined with galvanized metal on the inside.

The earliest photo found in the Westfield Historian archives, illustrating this article, is from the early 1890s, and shows the first Westfield Fire Hall, with the Kent brothers' Paper Warehouse immediately next door. These two buildings, along with the annex of the Paper Warehouse built in the late 1890s became the Portage Inn through remodels in 1907 and 1924.