

History 1867 - 1872

The first fire company in the City of Des Moines was organized in 1865; and was known as the "Hook & Ladder". After the City had purchased an engine, the Company was reorganized under the name of the "Hawkeye Hose Company", with Charley Spofford as Chief Engineer. Pictured to the right is the Headquarters of the Des Moines Fire Department.

In 1867 another Company was organized, the first regular meeting being held on April 1st. This Company was named the "Rescue Hook & Ladder Company", and its services were tendered to the City. On April 8th, the City Council voted to purchase a Hook and Ladder, which upon delivery, was placed under the charge of the Company, which also elected Charley Spofford its Chief Engineer. This Company has been credited with doing effective service. However, in 1868, the City, having purchased a steam fire engine called "The General Crocker" for their use, again reorganized the Company and its old Hook and Ladder truck was turned over to a new organization known as the "Excelsior Hook & Ladder Company", after which both organizations constituted one department under the name of "Rescue No. 1", with Spofford as Chief. Spofford was succeeded as Chief in order by General N.B. Baker, John Miller and William P. Dexter. This consolidated organization continued without other changes until the advent of the Water Works in 1870, when a new Company known as "Fellowship Hose Company No. 2" was organized in East Des Moines. This was followed by the erection of Engine Houses on West Locust and on East Court Avenue, between 6th and 7th Streets on the north side of the street, and the election of William Nafie as Chief.

In 1870, three large cisterns were constructed at three strategic places in the City. The Steamer and the Hook and Ladder were kept in Spofford's barn on West 5th Avenue when not in use.

In 1871, the volunteer Fire Chief was paid \$400.00 a year, with \$50.00 a year paid to 25 volunteer firemen. Two hose reels were placed on each side of the river until the great fire in the Clapp block in the winter of '82-'83, which prompted the organization of the first paid department.