



Williston Plains Reporter, Wednesday, August 12, 1981

brand new, never used 100,000 bushel annex and the Elevator No. 1 of the Ray Farmers Union Elevator Co. d to the ground during -30° weather on the night of 7, 1961. The photo was taken during the height of the with the camera pointed generally west. Records of elevator were saved by assistant manager Donald ard who later had the misfortune of losing his mobile

home which was set afire by embers from the elevator. The fire was well under way when discovered at 4:20 a.m. by Ray resident Fred Henning. Additional fire fighting equipment and men came to help the Ray firemen from the Tioga and Williston Rural Fire Departments and the oil field firms of Halliburton and Matador. The elevator was rebuilt the following year.

Through the years, the record of the Ray Fire Department has been good

By BILL SHEMORRY

Having an energetic, well-trained fire department is not enough to prevent fires from occurring, but through the years, the actions of a dedicated group of volunteers always result in lower fire losses.

Such is the situation in the eastern Williams County city of Ray.

Friday night, the older part of the Ray Farmers Union Elevator Association took fire, with the automatic alarm sounding at about 10:30 p.m. Responding firemen were greeted with a great ball of fire consuming the top of the structure more than 60 feet high in the air. Because of the location of the fire and the lack of an aerial ladder, it was impossible to extinguish the blaze, and the firemen had to watch the old structure burn to the ground.

However, more important, they were able to prevent the fire from consuming a warehouse located between the old elevator and the new 100,000 bushel capacity elevator which had been built in 1961. If the warehouse had taken fire quickly, a shipment of nitrogen fertilizer contained therein could have exploded. It is believed if this had happened it would have leveled the new elevator and other nearby buildings. News stories have not mentioned what might have happened to the firemen, but to those who were there that night, it must have been a scary feeling.

The burning of the Ray elevator, a disaster anywhere, is even more so in a community the size of that city, where funds are not so readily available for rebuilding. However, the citizens of Ray have faith in their community. They have rebuilt previously when fires have destroyed local facilities. It is likely this will occur again.

In checking through the history of Ray, it becomes readily apparent that, in spite of the Friday night fire, through the years, the Ray city has done mighty well in having few big fires.

Records show that there have been only four, including the one Friday. The other three were the new brick and tile St. Anthony Lumber Yard in 1935, the Ray school in 1948, and the brand new Ray Farmers Union Elevator in 1961. The Ray Fire Department was organized 70 years ago, so that's not too bad a record over all those years. Better than lots of other communities.

If one takes a look at the dates of these big fires, it will be seen there was a span of 13 years between the St. Anthony's and the Ray school fires. Another 13 years went by until the elevator burned in 1961, and now it has been 20 years since that. Something must have been going on during that time that reduced the incidence of fires.

That something was the Ray Volunteer Fire Department. Through the many years of its existence, members of the department have regularly inspected the public buildings in the town. This has gone on year after year and business places and many homes have also come under their scrutiny and suggestions made for better fire safety. There have also been times when the department has made low-cost fire extinguishers available to Ray citizens and many have been installed in businesses and homes. All of this has had some effect on the frequency of fires, and to the good.

The Ray Fire Department had its beginning in November 1911 when 14 of the town's citizens met and formed the organization. The group elected Oscar Johnson as the first fire chief, passed by-laws and named additional officers. Their first piece of fire apparatus was not very impressive, to be sure, but the Ray firemen were very proud of the little red hand-drawn cart with the 30-gallon chemical tank, that was to be the city's all for 19 years.

In 1928 the citizens dug deep into their pockets, purchased a brand new Model A Ford. On this, the local blacksmith, J. P. Cooney, built a body and mounted three 30-gallon chemical tanks.

Eleven years later, when the city installed a water system and hydrants, talk of a new fire truck began. The city then sold its Model A to Wildrose, purchased a 1940 Chevrolet 1½ ton truck on which mechanic Carl Bangs built a fire truck body and installed a pump. This was supplemented in 1942 by a 1929 Chevrolet coupe, loaned to the department by one of its members, Roy Viall and converted into a hose pickup.

Shortly after World War II, a war surplus fire truck was added to the equipment and used principally for fires in rural areas. Since that time, newer equipment has been added as needed and the department now has three fire trucks, an ambulance and other equipment all housed in the recently built firehall and city hall.

The members of the fire department are active in the affairs of the community, through the years serving on municipal, school, and park boards and chamber of commerce and other civic groups.

Unique in fire department operations was the deal the firemen swung when it looked as if the city auditorium would have to be sold during the thirties. A proposed bond issue had failed to pass, but firemen went out in trucks, soliciting donations of wheat which they sold, using the funds to purchase the building and make it into a community center which has been used for many years. The firemen, of course, are its managers and charge a fee for its use to pay for upkeep.

The firemen also have a fund-raising Thanksgiving dance every year to help pay their firemanic expenses. In addition, usually in February, they hold a party at which wives are guests, and are annually thanked for allowing their husbands to get out of bed in the middle of the night to go chasing after fires.

The Ray firemen are also active in the affairs of the state and county firemen. There is never a fire school or convention but what the department is well and actively represented.