

An alarm sounds.

Its shrill, insistent clang makes all take notice.

When the sound punctuates the daylight hours, town merchants comment aloud to waiting customers, "Wonder where it is," while all, merchant and customer alike, mutter an inward prayer for the safety of their own.

When the alarm and urgent sirens wail through the darkness, those who awaken are forced to take stock of their mortality, forced to think of what the devouring flames might destroy. These citizens turn back to the comfort of their sleep.

But there are those who respond differently. Yes, the same fears, prayers, and questions flash before their inward beings. In fact, their fears for loved ones may be more intense. They have seen what fire can do.

They have breathed in the acrid, suffocating smoke. They have sifted through the smoldering rubble, remnants of lives destroyed. They have watched in awe, fought in vain, the wind-whipped flames. These thoughts and memories are quickly extinguished for this group of men, however, when the town alarm sounds.

They leave their stores, their places of business, the comforts of their leisure time and the security of their homes. They rush with an urgency born from a sense of duty and brew anew with each emergency. A dozen men and more move about their tasks quickly with the effortless coordination that comes with hours of practice.

They have been "called upon to do battle with the flames."

From accompanying the first horse-drawn fire wagon in 1910 to rolling out in the four pieces of firefighting force today, 75 years later, the men who have served as volunteer firefighters in Allendale have dedicated themselves to the safety of their neighbors.

The challenges have been there from the start, from that Christmas morning in 1909 when an upset Christmas tree sparked a fire that destroyed two residences on Myrtle Avenue. Residents at that time remembered other fires that had destroyed property in Allendale, a town that had been founded before the Civil War.

Most notably, they recalled the fire that burned the store and property of Henry Appert of Cottage Place some fifteen years earlier. His store was filled with onions at the time and many remembered how the air smelled of onions for weeks after.

Any fire at that time meant almost certain destruction and possibly loss of life. Neighbors formed "bucket brigades" from the nearest artesian wells to the fires, but without the combination of a strong number of men, adequate equipment, an abundant supply of water, and quick communication, the fires were often beyond control.

These were the challenges then of the men who met in Archer M.E. Hall on New Year's Eve, 1909: to form an organization of volunteers, to raise funds to purchase equipment, to find a central location to meet and to store equipment, to establish procedures which would insure that fires in the town of Allendale would be quenched with speed.

The Volunteers

Fifty-four men came to the first meeting of the new organization. This represented fully one third of the adult male population of Allendale at that time. These determined individuals elected a committee of seven to organize the group. Within the first months of 1910 a constitution was written, committees were formed, a place to meet and store equipment was established, and money was raised to purchase the first hook and ladder truck.

The determination of this early group of men and their apparent influence among the citizens of Allendale, who supported them generously in the early years, was passed along for successive generations. They carried with them a sense of pride that was evident to surrounding boroughs.

This sense of pride was evident when they made their first appearance in Ridgewood's annual July 4 parade. The men supported the orders from their chief that there would be no smoking while in formation and that fines would be imposed on those who did not attend. In addition, they agreed upon wearing a uniform of white duck trousers, white shirts, black bow ties, shoes and belts, white straw hats, gloves and canes. For many years after this appearance, the Allendale department was known as the "silk stocking boys."



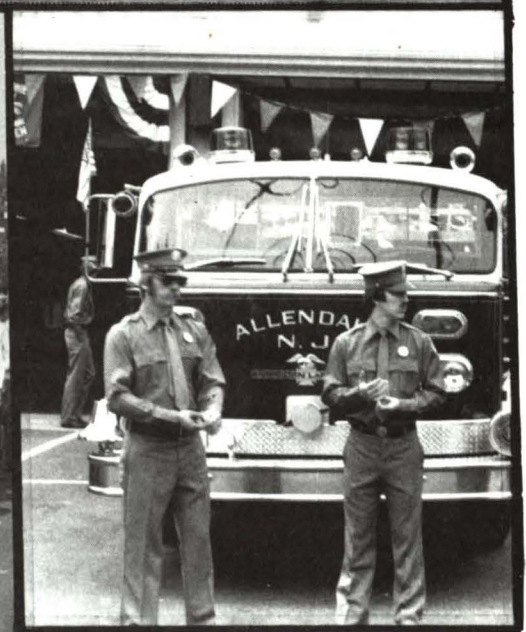
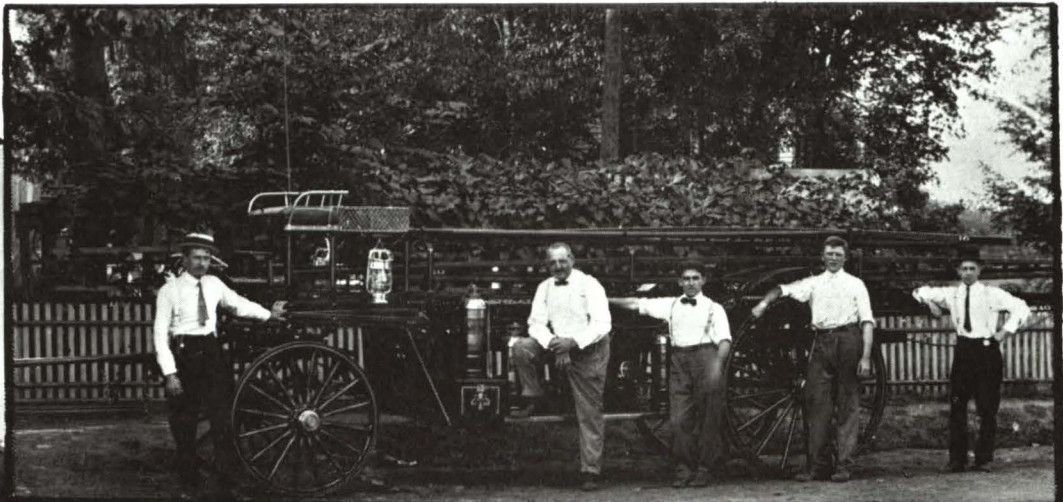
This pride in the appearance of their organization notwithstanding, another quality of the men and women who have served as members of the Allendale Fire Department over the years must be singled out for praise: their willingness to help anyone in need.

From stretching over a mile of hose to help Waldwick firemen battle a blaze in 1921 before Waldwick had installed hydrants, to selflessly giving blood so that a fellow firefighter's ill son might live, these men have not hesitated to come to aid.

While the challenges of the founding members were certainly formidable, today's volunteer faces challenges undreamed of in 1910. The volunteer today is better equipped than his early predecessors, but with the more sophisticated equipment must come a deeper commitment to training. It is no longer adequate or possible for a volunteer to sign up one day and be out fighting fires the next. Hours must be spent in county and state-run seminars, learning how to deal with toxic substances that literally did not exist in 1910.

In addition, today's volunteer is ever more committed to prevention. This means school visits, conducting programs that will ultimately save countless lives, and regular inspections of buildings to insure that fire codes are met.

This is a dedication that cannot be measured in numbers of men, pieces of equipment, or hours spent on the job. It is the dedication that marks 75 years of volunteerism in Allendale.

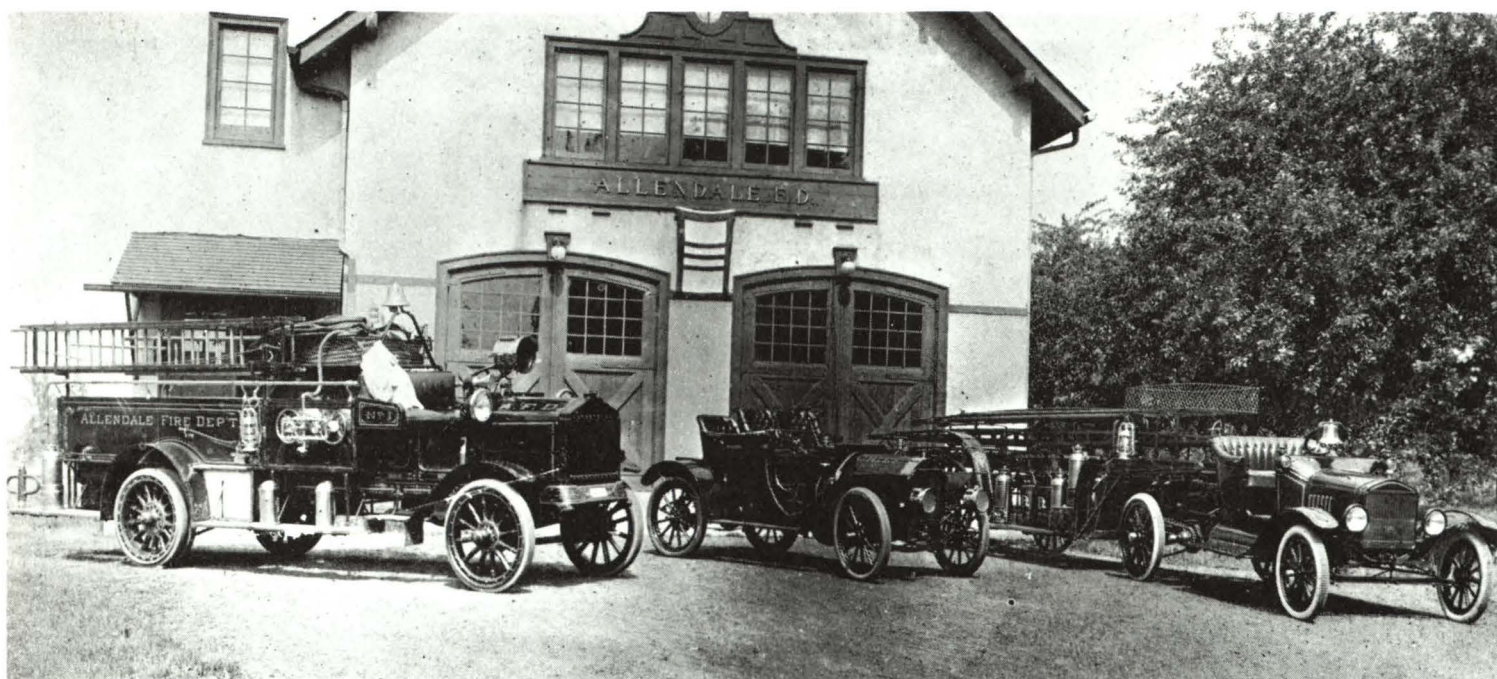


The Equipment

The first pieces of equipment purchased by the founding firefighters in February of 1910 were three chemical extinguishers and eight iron tires. The iron tires, purchased from the Erie Railroad, were the first alarms to be installed in the town.

During these early months of 1910 enough money was received in donations to order a hook and ladder truck for a price of \$995. Before the truck could arrive, however, the newly formed firefighters association had to challenge a fire on East Allendale Avenue. The fire claimed the residence of Albert Zasbriskie, valued at \$25,000.

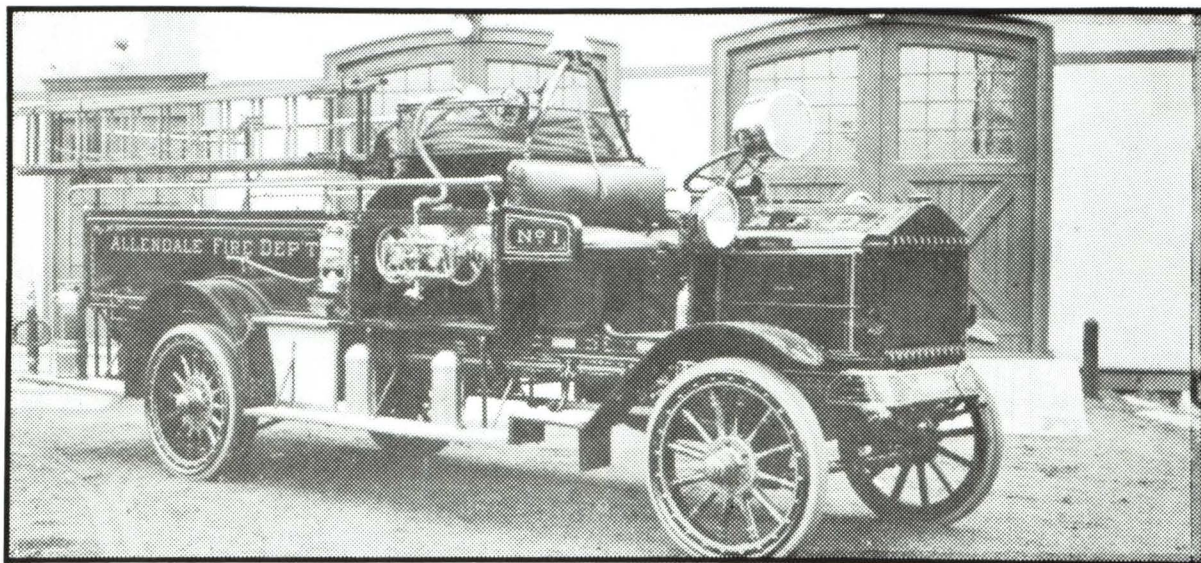
When the truck arrived in August, it was put into immediate use. The volunteers would pull the truck to fires with ropes at first, lacking horses. Later, teams of horses were borrowed from town merchants and a special harness, one that hung from the ceiling of



the firehouse and could be lowered upon the horses, was donated by Dr. Harry M. Archer.

In 1912 the association passed a resolution that ultimately created a horse race for each fire emergency. They voted to pay \$5 to the owner of the first team of horses to reach the fire station when the alarm sounded. A rivalry was established as teams from a lumber yard and two grocery stores raced toward headquarters for the \$5 award.

In a pamphlet published in 1938, it was reported that the original 1910 truck was still in use, attached at that time to a Ford chassis, "but it is looked upon as a relic and will soon be scrapped." By that time, the department boasted of three pieces of equipment: the original truck and a 750-gallon American La France engine purchased in 1928 were kept in the firehouse, while a hose truck with chemical tanks was stored behind a barn behind the Allendale Hotel in the event that a train should block the main equipment from reaching a fire.



Today the fire department operates four pieces of equipment: An American La France 1250 gallon pumper, purchased in 1967, a 1981 GMC Emergency Rescue Vehicle, a 1500-gallon American La France pumper from 1976, and a World War II surplus pumper, a Mack 500-gallon. The department is in the process of selling a 1953 GMC 750-gallon pumper, considered (along with the Mack) an antique in mint condition, because spare parts are no longer available.

In addition to the four vehicles in operation, today's department houses sophisticated pieces of equipment unknown when they started 75 years ago.

A Hurst rescue system (which includes what is commonly known as the "jaws of life") consists of several pieces of life-saving tools. The department also boasts of having on hand about thirty self-contained breathing apparatus packs, each of which is worth almost what the original truck cost in 1910.

That the support of the residents of Allendale is still as strong as it was in 1910 is apparent by a fall, 1984, inventory of the equipment it owns today. That inventory revealed that it would cost well over \$1 million to replace the existing equipment.



The Headquarters

When the new hook and ladder truck arrived in 1910, it was stored in the barn belonging to Mr. V.J. Braun, one of the members of the seven-person organizing committee and one of the department's earliest chiefs. When Chief Braun sold the property in 1912, he offered the barn as a donation to the association if they could find another lot for it. Plans were made to move the barn to a small lot (25' x 50') on Park Avenue, but Mr. John Yeomans then offered a larger plot (50' x 100') if the association could raise enough money to begin construction on a new building.

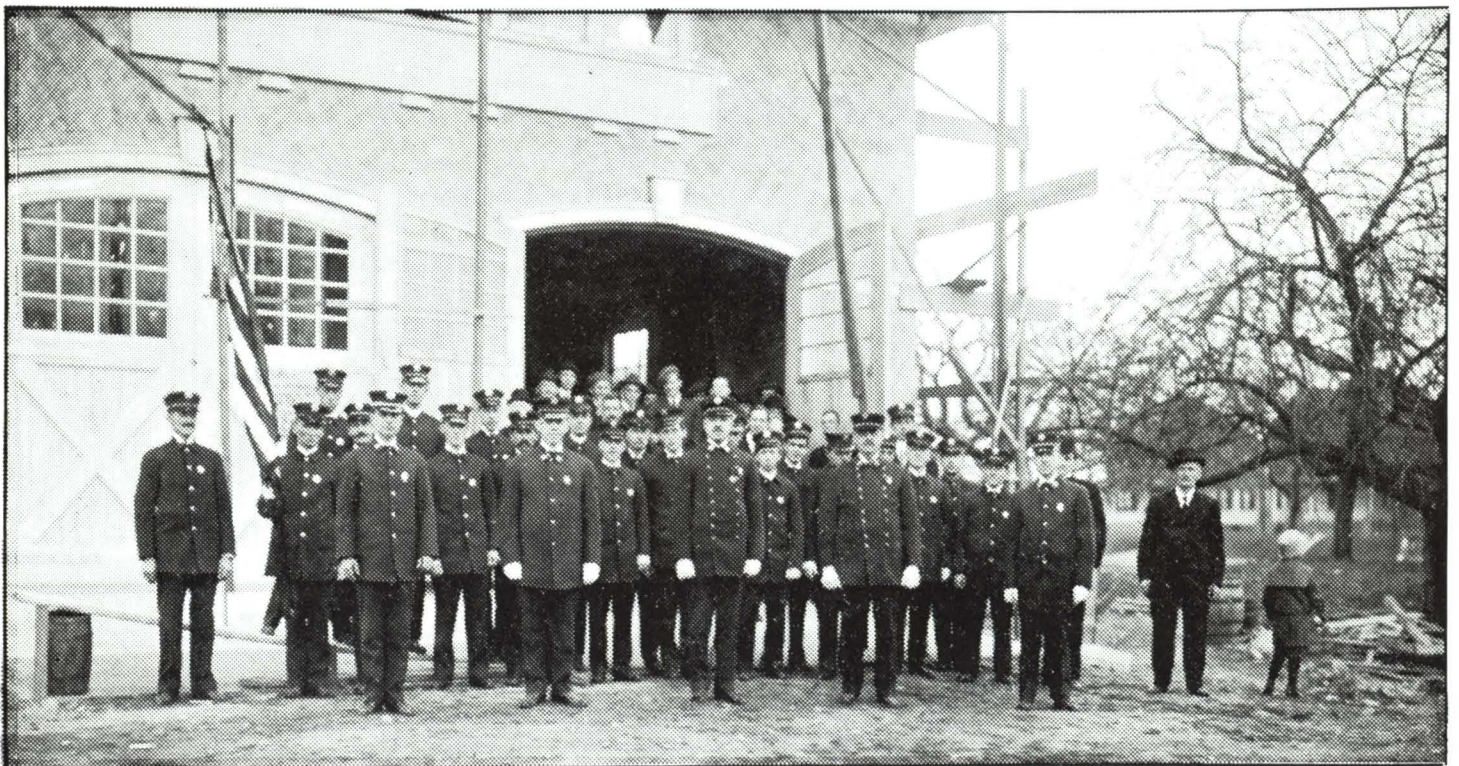
The money was raised and a contract was awarded to S.T. Van Houten Jr. to erect the fire house for the sum of \$6712.00.

Town dignitaries, citizens, and a brass band were on hand for the ceremonies in April, 1913, when the cornerstone was laid. The building quickly became the center of activities in the town, serving as a meeting place for mayor and council, the official office for the Building and Loan Association, the polling place, the municipal court, the drill hall for the Bergen Guards during World War I, a play house for the Allendale Players during the twenties, and the site for dances, card parties, flower shows, dog shows, and graduation exercises for the school.

The firemen and the town took great pride in their new station. In addition to housing the engines, the two-story stucco structure had a pool table, shuffleboard court, and a small kitchen on the ground floor. For years, the firemen would play boxball, a game similar to bowling, in the basement of the headquarters, forming up to six different teams competing in a league. The second floor, frequented by all of the local civic groups, was also a source of pride for the members. These men were serious about their business and somewhat conservative in viewing the festivities that went on under their roof, as was evident in a resolution passed in 1913 forbidding "turket trotting" in their hall upstairs. (This same conservative bent was in evidence immediately after an earlier fund-raising ball in 1911 when the group fined one of the members \$1 for his conduct at the dance.)

The second floor of this structure was ultimately the source of its destruction. A fire that started on the second floor on the day of March 7, 1963, gutted the building despite the two and a half hour fight waged by the firemen and neighboring volunteers from Waldwick, rendering it a total loss.

The present building, with its four bays and attached meeting area, was erected a little over one year after the blaze, on the same piece of property





Answering the Call

Over the 75 years of its existence, the volunteer firefighters of Allendale have worked with unremitting zeal to perfect their techniques for fighting fire.

The old iron tires that served as alarms in years past have been replaced by the sophisticated equipment our modern technology provides. Today every volunteer is issued an electronic paging device which carries with him throughout the day. Equipment reaches the sources of fires or other emergencies faster than ever before.

Changes in the department also include the first female member, a volunteer in the Junior Fire Department. This division of the department has proven itself, over the years, to be an invaluable asset. While Junior members are prohibited from using power equipment or entering burning buildings, they are able to give the kind of back-up support that is both knowledgeable and necessary.

When the volunteers get together in non-emergency times they often reminisce about the times, the many times, they were called out to fight fire. Some of these fires were memorable because even the best efforts of the men could not extinguish the flames in time. One of the earliest fires that the men had to face, in 1913, for example, was caused by defective wiring and destroyed the mansion of Assemblyman George Cook. This fire, as it happened, smoldered for weeks because Mr. Cook's basement had been full of coal, which ignited.

Some of the fires were notable because their hard work saved property and lives. For example, when a bomb exploded in the apartment over one of the local stores, in 1975, the volunteers were able to carry two residents to safety and to prevent other neighboring stores from receiving damage. On that same day, in fact before the men had backed the trucks into the station, they were called to battle a fire that ultimately destroyed much of the Allendale Hotel.

Letters of commendation attesting to their service fill the archives of the department. One from 1920, for example, reads: "It seems but a moment from the sound of the alarm to the arrival of the men with their apparatus. Without their splendid response, there might have been a different tale to tell."

The 75-year history of the Allendale Fire Department is filled with stories of selfless and heroic acts. It is also filled with the knowledge that many of these "different tales" have never been, and never will be, told.



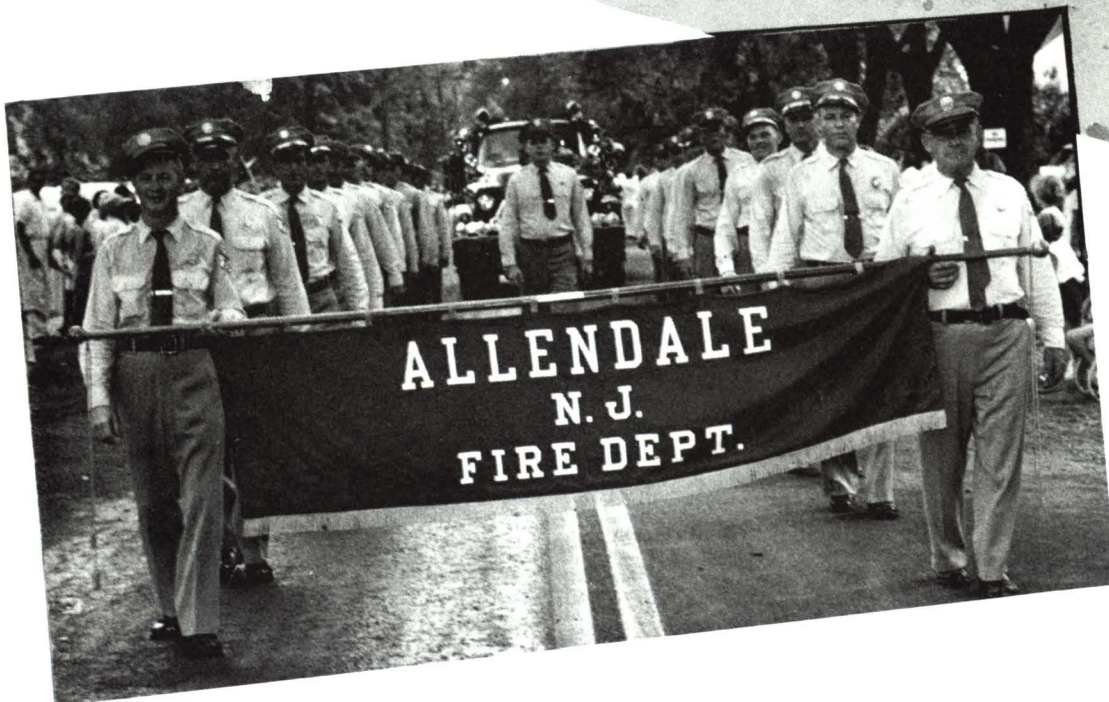
The remains of the mansion of Assemblyman George Cook, 1913. Coal stored in the basement caused the house to smolder for weeks after the fire.



“Without their splendid response, there might have been a different tale to tell.”



*From the archives -
more testimony of service*



Certificate
No. 195

International Association of Fire Fighters'

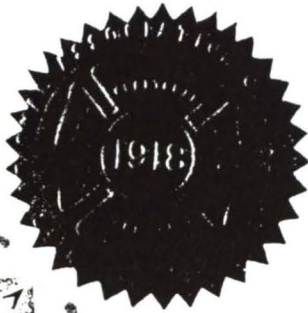
AFFILIATED WITH AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

BRITISH FIRE FIGHTERS RELIEF FUND

Certificate of  Appreciation

WASHINGTON, D. C.

This Certifies that the Members of *Allendale Fire Department*
of *Allendale, New Jersey*
have cooperated wholeheartedly and successfully raised funds for the relief of British Fire Fighters
and their families who have been killed or injured in fire-fighting
operations caused by enemy action. Sincere appreciation and thanks
is hereby extended and this Certificate is hereby awarded.



Given under our hand and seal this *18th* day

of *April* 1941.

Lea M. Bon
President

George J. Richardson
Secretary-Treasurer



*From the archives -
more testimony of service*

