



National Fire Heritage Center Newsletter

On the morning of October 16, 1859, Captain John Sinn probably had his breakfast with no idea of the role he was about to play in history. Before the day was over he and the members of three Frederick Fire Companies (Frederick Maryland) would be witness to the ignition of another type of conflagration; a Civil War. At about 10:00 am that day the alarm bell rang.

The three companies were Independent Fire Company, United Fire Company, and the Junior Guards. When serving as firefighters they manned the brakes of hand pumps, but when required to do so they also served as armed militia.

It was in that role that the crews were requested that day. The Independent Rifles who were formed in 1818 and the United Guards were made up of the towns' male citizens. They had often been called out to deal with emergencies other than fires. The Junior Guards were not quite old enough to serve in the regular fire volunteers, but were old enough to help when needed.

Soon, after being assembled the companies mounted a train in Frederick and rolled off to become among the first to deal with the opening of the hostilities that would soon tear the country apart. A fire brand of an abolitionist with the name of John Brown had attempted to seize the arsenal at Harpers Ferry in Virginia. After a 25 mile journey the companies assembled and prepared to take action.

The Military officer sent to quell the rebellion was a well respected army colonel by the name of Robert E. Lee. His aide was a dashing officer by the name of J.E.B Stuart. Arriving with a contingent of the United States Marines he forced the insurgents to give up their defensive positions in the arsenal firehouse. Sinn and the three fire companies played an integral part of the attack and played a significant role in deciding the outcome on that day in October.

In fact, in the fashion to be expected from a fire officer in a leadership role, Sinn turned his attention to the wounded John Brown. He sent for help from a

physician in Frederick, but the aid was refused by Colonel Lee. Notwithstanding the failure, Sinn developed such a rapport with Brown that the rabble-rouser requested Sinn to be one of his character witnesses at his trial. Apparently the testimony did not have much sway because John Brown was quickly tried, sentenced, then hung in what is now Charles Town, VA. (Not much on the appeal process in those days I guess)

The fire engine house where John Brown was captured is within about 50 yards from where it was originally. The engine house was taken down in the 1890s and taken to the Columbia Exposition in Chicago where it was reconstructed. Visitors were charged ten cents to enter the fort. Only 11 people paid to do so.

After the exposition, the building was taken down and brought back to a location near the present day KOA Kampground on the Murphy Farm. It was later moved to the campus of Storer College.

When the national park was designated, the engine house was moved back downtown and placed at its present day location. Through all the moving, the front of the building was reversed. The reversal was never corrected.

What many do not realize was that another battle was to be fought at Harpers Ferry on September 12-15 as part of the Maryland Campaign. And guess who the commanding officer was? General Robert E. Lee.

For more information see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Brown's_Raid_on_Harpers_Ferry

or

<http://www.johnbrownharpersferry.com/>

The significance of all of this actually relates on current day projects of creating the National Fire Heritage Center. How, you ask?

Well, the answer is found in the date of Captain Sinns original deployment. This October will be the 150th Anniversary of the Harper Ferry incident, (1859-2009) and it has raised a lot of interest in all things historical in the area. That is the good news.

And now for more good news, **Chip Jewell** has informed me that the Frederick County Fire and Rescue Museum & Preservation Society has achieved its 501 © 3 status. The wheels of progress are starting to turn.

This was such good news I felt it was time to report it to the Board and/or members. Chip is gaining in confidence every day that the decision to sign the lease is getting closer and closer.

True to his word as our liaison Chip is keeping us well informed of the progress. In fact, **Wayne Powell** and I had an opportunity to meet with him in Emmitsburg twice in the last two weeks.

The first was during the PARADE conference, the second during the FESHE Conference. I was in town for both. While these meetings were very brief they provided me with an opportunity to reflect on the plans, and on some of our planning efforts as we move forward.

One of the purposes of the report to all of you is to remind everyone that there are great numbers of details we will need to attend to if this agreement is consummated.

Look at the Strategic Plan

I would request all of the board members to revisit the strategic plan and look at the tasks we have enumerated. Committees were created to create drafts of a lot of things that we need to be ready sometime in the next 12 months. Those that are tasked with a committee chair role should revisit those ideas, and be prepared to provide some input soon.

Figure 1 - The Building



Some random thoughts came to my mind as I went through the Strategic Plan. We are going to need some furniture to start with, file cabinets, book shelves, tables, chairs, etc.

Last week we received another display cabinet from a local donor. I have developed a “checklist” of possible items we are going to need once we get operations, so now is not too soon to locate them. DO NOT send them to Wayne because we have very limited ability to store things. I will attach that list to the next bulletin.

Fund Raising

As long as we are talking fund raising, we now have a mechanism to raise some funds. Utilizing the t-shirts donated by board members we have a very nice quilt we will be putting up for a drawing at FRI. We have obtained a booth there and are planning on putting our 1st public display on regarding the center. Bill Killen helped get this set up. We have a space and the space did not cost us anything. Over the next three months we will be discussing the fund raising and the booth – so, if you have any ideas, let me know through email. Ideas are needed!

British Librarian

Another bit of news for all concerned, we will soon have a British Colleague visit us. His name is **Michael McKiernan**. If any of you wish to contact him and see where his itinerary takes him, please feel free to do so. He has a link to our process all the way back to the study done by the USFA.

I have been contacted by several more persons with personal collections that can't wait until we are up and running. Once we get our doors open, things should get real interesting.

Travels-

Every once in awhile I get the opportunity to go to a firefighters muster or participate in a fire station open house. This last month I had the chance to visit the California Law Enforcement Badge Collectors event in Stockton. I thought some of you might be interested in what they have done to get their collection in the public's eye.

Figure 2 - Mobile Museum



Figure 3 - Interior of Mobile Museum



Figure 4 - One of the Exhibits



For Badge Collectors

One of the more interesting things I picked up at this meeting was a list of the badge makers hallmarks. As soon as I get it type and cleaned up, I will be posting it on our website for badge collectors. If anybody needs it right away, let me know and I will forward you a copy.

Future Board Meeting

A reminder to everyone that we will have our board meeting at the same time as the Fallen Firefighter Memorial. We also have a tentative opportunity to have a

sort of “meet and greet” with the Frederick County Museum group on Oct. 3rd. Plans are being contemplated for that right now.

Charter Members

My last note to all of you is that we are still in the charter membership stage. I still have 60 more charter pins. I have attached our application to the back of this material. If each of you could acquire one more person to become a charter member, our cause would be advanced in a significant fashion. Please talk to others about our efforts.

Well, my flight is getting ready to land, so I think will stop this draft. I hope some of you saw my column in Fire Chief Magazine where I supported the idea that every fire department needs an archivist and a historian. April 2009 – page 30 Hope to hear from some of you soon.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ronny J. Coleman". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Ronny J. Coleman
President, National Fire Heritage Center



National Fire Heritage Center Application Form

Name:

Mailing Address:

Please do not use PO Boxes unless absolutely necessary. Some postal delivery systems will not deliver packages to these boxes.

City:

State:

Zip:

Country:

Phone:

Cell Phone:

Email Address:

Background, Resume or Experience in Field:

What area of interest do you have with regard to this topic:

- General Membership
- Committee Membership:
- Organizational Leadership