ABBEVILLE FIRE DEPT. MAKES FINE RECORD DURING YEAR

By Ralph R. Bienvenu

Chief P. J. White's Abbeville Volunteer Fire Department's quarters is the town's community center, providing excellent recreational facilities for its members and a spacious and attractive place for banquets and meetings, yet through the alertness of its membership and the constant educational work they are sponsoring it has enabled the 6000 residents here to enjoy the entire year of 1936 without a single serious fire loss.

Just like the many other towns of Louisiana, Abbeville has many frame buildings, its outlying fringes of the city limits are unprotected, and there exists in the business district several fire hazards, but the records will show that from year to year the fire losses have been reduced and in 1935 there were but ten alarms with but $2,559 in losses.

The casual visitor to Abbeville is immediately impressed with the attractiveness of the Abbeville Volunteer Fire Department's quarters, its home-like atmosphere, the general neatness, and its excellent equipment, but the most lasting impression is the sincere hospitality and the congeniality of the members who have won over many friends along this Louisiana Gulf Coast country.

The outstanding feature of the department quarters is the banquet hall in which 100 persons can be served at one time. The place has a fine recreation room equipped with radio, a piano, a number of rockers, easy chairs, writing desks, and reading tables. The quarters have a private office for Chief White, an auditorium used for lectures and demonstration and which can be readily transformed into a club room where the men play cards, dominoes, and other games. There are sleeping quarters, shower baths, rest rooms, and sections for the equipment. The place has a large comfortable veranda.

Aside from these conveniences the quarters are equipped with electric lights, fans, gas heaters, an electric water cooler and storage cabinet, and one of the finest kitchens to be found in any of the fire department homes in cities the size of Abbeville. The kitchen has a seven-hole gas range, a 55-gallon water heater, a 52-gallon kettle fired by natural gas, used to make their fine Creole gumbos and sauce piquantes, and sufficient cooking utensils, dishes, spoons, knives, forks, etc., to serve more than 100 persons at one time. Just back of the kitchen and outside of the home is a three and a half foot by 9 and a half foot barbecue pit.
included in the fighting equipment are an American LaFrance truck with 1200 feet of hose, a 60 gallon booster tank, four foamite extinguishers, gas masks, first aid kits, and a Ford truck equipped with fire fighting equipment. The latter was the first piece of equipment bought by the city in 1918 and is still in good condition. The equipment is kept in excellent working condition in a garage 70 by 70 foot truck house in the station.

The guiding spirit behind Abbeville's excellent fire department is none other than Chief Parkes J. White, intimately known around town as "Deacon".

Chief White was born in Formosa, Kansas in 1895, and is the son of Mrs. Mary Bouligny of Abbeville. He came to Louisiana in 1893. Chief White lived in St. Martin parish, later in Lafourche, and then joined the U.S. Army.

During the year only five alarms were recorded in Abbeville resulting in about $125.00 of fire losses. Few, if any cities in Louisiana can boast of this excellent record.

After serving a few years in the army with Troop K, 14th Cavalry, with headquarters in the Philippines, he returned to the United States and later joined the U.S. Army with headquarters at Fort Logan, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Chief White established himself in Abbeville in 1907, coming here to live. First he established a furniture repairing business and later started the first electrical supply store in Abbeville. Taking an active part in the welfare of the community Chief White has served as a justice of the peace, as fire chief since 1927, is the present council commander of the Woodmen of the World of Abbeville.

Enlargement of the Abbeville Fire Department started with the election of Mr. White as chief in 1927. Prior to Chief White were Chief Alvin LeBlanc who resides in Beaumont, Texas; and Chief P. F. Richard who operates a business in Abbeville. The volunteer group under the direction of Chief LeBlanc and Chief Richard formed the organization which gradually grew into a formidable group.

With the growth of the town, the volunteer group decided that to properly protect Abbeville it was necessary to get a fire truck to replace the hand drawn hose reels. In 1918 the town purchased a Model T Ford truck which was equipped with fire fighting equipment. This equipment was housed in a shed near the former city hall located next to Madeline Square. Eventually a volunteer organized group, Chief White formed a strong organization which united to raise funds to buy a suitable station and to buy more equipment. Through campaigns, fairs, raffles, and benefits the club fared well. Their first request for the purchase of a fire truck was denied, so Chief White and his volunteer group decided to make the first payment on the purchase of an American LaFrance. The group sold bonds at the down payment and paid two notes on the American LaFrance engine and then the city council agreed to take over the remaining payment. The fire department contributed $1000 and the volunteers $500 towards the purchase of the equipment. The council repurchased from the American LaFrance people the old Model T Ford truck which had been taken in on the deal and equipped it with a chemical tank and additional hose. Following the purchase of the American LaFrance and the repurchase of the smaller truck, Chief White prevailed upon the council in 1928 to get two paid men as truck drivers for the department and to have at all times at least one of these drivers at the station.

Several months later the council agreed to fully equip the truck and to purchase boots, helmets, and other equipment.

Chief White's next move was to establish a permanent fire station. The fire department agreed to contribute up to $1000 towards the purchase of the old Renshaw building and site on State street. The site and building was offered to the fire department for $3000.00 with a five percent discount as a gift to the group. Finally the deal was closed, the council agreeing to pay the $2900 and the firemen the $1000.

The volunteers agreed to remodel and furnish the old building into a suitable fire station and club room.

The membership of the volunteer group contributed their work towards remodeling the former building into a suitable fire department, according to Chief White who declared that the labors and material of this group fully amounted to $3000.00. Today the station is really an attractive addition to the city affording a comfortable meeting place for the men of