

## Local Township Historian Writes Book Detailing Morristown Fire Fighters

By Henry M. Holden

If you enjoy reading history and have empathy for first responders such as firefighters, then this is one book to be read.

Dr. Robert J. Fredericks presents a compelling story of the Morristown Fire Department which began over 220 years ago.

The author, who spent 40 years in the chemical/pharmaceutical industry, is the past president of the Morris County Historical Society, the Washington Association of New Jersey, and is the Morris Township historian.

"I have an interest in local history," Fredericks said. "I was kicking around the idea of a

book on our local fire fighters, especially since they don't get much credit for what they do, and many take them for granted."

Richly illustrated with more than three dozen color and black and white photos, the photos add another dimension to understanding what the early firefighters endured.

"I walked unannounced in to the Moorestown Fire Department," Fredericks said. "It was a cold January day in 2016. I walked into the Chief Flannigan's office, and he said, 'pull up a chair and make yourself comfortable.'"

"I shared my idea with him about writing a book and the chief said they had been thinking about the same thing," he explained. "I didn't know it at the time but in 2017 it was the 220th anniversary of the formation of firefighting in Morristown and the 150th anniversary



sary of firefighting as we know it today. The timing was fortuitously great. I felt it was a story that needed to be told."

Like any long-lasting organization, the Morristown Fire Department, which officially began to take shape in 1797, started out as a forward-looking organization, and a victim of the technological shortcomings of the day. Initially they used hand-drawn vehicles then

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### Book Detailing Fire Fighters...

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graduated to horse-drawn vehicles and then into the mechanized vehicles in 1912.

"Throughout those years there were several independent fire companies," Fredericks said. "In 1967, two years after the Town seceded from the Township that firefighting as we know it today was created. It really coalesced around 1980 and it became a uniformed and coherent department."

From the beginning there was a concern among the 300 residents of Morristown that some form of fire protection was needed. A small group of prominent citizens met, and agreed on a plan that, "The proprietors of every house pro-

vide at least one ladder each, suitable to the height of the house it was intended for ... and at least one leather bucket (for water) and the proprietors of each two-story, or double house, provide at least two leather buckets," he said.

Why leather and not steel? The author has a surprising answer. Not surprisingly, the ladders were often "borrowed" by painters and carpenters and not returned.

"Flame Fighters of Morristown" is available for \$20 at Acorn Hall, Morristown Library and the Morristown Fire Department. All the proceeds from the sale of the book will go to the Morristown Fire Department.