

ENGINE COMPANY 231 ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SERVICE

The history of Engine Company 231 began on March 12th, 1892, as Engine Company 31 of the old Brooklyn Fire Dept. Engine Company 31 was first located on the original Eastern Parkway, presently 1772 Pitkin Avenue, in a two story wood frame house. The cross street was Williamson Avenue, which several years later was renamed, Watkins Street.

At 14:12 hours Engine 31 went into service with a new Barrett Hose Wagon and an 1888 Clapp and Jones Steamer, the latter pulled by horses "PADDY" and "TANNER".

Guided by its first Commander, Foreman Charles D. Ruddy, Engine 31 responded to its first fire on March 13, less than 24 hours after being placed into service. Foreman Ruddy was a brave and fearless man, highly esteemed not only by his superior officers but by every man who worked under him. He was born in Donegal, Ireland, in April, 1851 and appointed fireman on December 20, 1872. Mr. Ruddy possessed a fine baritone voice and developed such a talent, as a character sketch artist, that comedian Hugh Fay became interested in him. Mr. Ruddy made several appearances with Mr. Fay and became popular with the public.

The Charter Members of Engine Company 231:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>BORN</u>	<u>APPOINTED</u>
Foreman Charles D. Ruddy	04/1851	12/20/1872
Engineer John Moran	08/29/1859	12/03/1888
FF William Canning	01/01/1861	04/02/1885
FF William Lyon	08/12/1869	03/12/1892
FF John Tobin	08/20/1853	06/15/1885
FF William O'Brien	10/27/1853	04/15/1882
FF Francis Strickland	04/01/1843	02/18/1879
FF John Ramsay	02/07/1862	07/19/1891
FF Peter Carney	09/28/1850	05/05/1885
FF Michael McGinn	09/07/1852	08/01/1875
FF Phillip Frey	12/25/1863	03/12/1881

Engine 31 officially became a member of the F.D.N.Y. on January 28, 1898 as a part of the Brooklyn - Queens Division. As a result of this merger there was a duplication of unit numbers, an Engine 31 was also in existence in Manhattan. It was therefore decided that all Brooklyn companies be renumbered as of October 1, 1899 by adding 100 to their previous number. Therefore, Engine 31 became Engine 231.

The present Firehouse became a reality on July 22, 1903 when the City of New York purchased a 50'x100' lot on Watkins Street, from Lewis and Mary Hurst for \$3,400.

Engine 131 and Battalion 34 moved into the new Fire Station, which cost just over \$40,000 to build, on March 4, 1905. One month later, on April 8, Ladder 70 was organized and quartered in the new house as well. Within the following eight years, as the FDNY grew, all three companies were renumbered. Engine 131 became E231, Ladder 70 became L120, and Battalion 34 became Bn44, their designations to this day.

Several other companies would share the quarters of "Watkins St." in later years. Squad 4 was organized here on November 16, 1955 and spent time before moving in with Engine 283 at the old "Bristol St." house. The infamous E232 was reorganized here and performed duty from July 8th 1966, until September 24th, 1971 when Rockaway Ave. "Tin House" opened its' doors. There was a second section of the 44th Battalion from November 1965 until December 27th, 1969, which was a turbulent period in Brownsville and one of the neighborhoods worst periods for fires. The second section eventually became the 58th Battalion now residing with L170 and E257 on Rockaway Parkway.

Engine 231 historically one of the busiest FDNY companies, has battled numerous noteworthy fires. One of its earliest "good jobs" occurred on April 21, 1905, when 19 buildings were consumed by a 4th alarm blaze at Belmont and Thatford avenues. Ironically, very near to this location three quarters of a century later on August 13th, 1980, a major tragedy occurred on Osborne Street just south of Pitkin Avenue and literally a "stones throw" from the firehouse. Several firemen were severely injured and the beloved Chief Frank Tuttlemondo gave his life.

Five other members of Watkins Street have made the supreme sacrifice:

FF Mortimer A. Roberts	E231	02/05/1901
FF Henry J. Kaiser	E231	04/06/1912
FF Frederick V. Erb	E231	07/23/1934
BC Eugene G. Dowd	Bn 44	01/27/1955
FF Robert A. Meill	L120	07/01/1961

The members of Watkins Street have always improvised and come up with unique ways to better serve not only the public they protect, but each other as well. Lester Bourke, a member of E231 from 1960-1970 designed the "Bourke Eyeshields" which continue to be worn on the helmet of every firefighter to this day.

Throughout its history members of E231 have been recipients of many Department commendations. On January 30th, 1922 perhaps one of the most daring rescues in FDNY history occurred which was performed by FF Ed Stiehler E231 who rescued several occupants while being held by his ankles and swung "pendulum style" to save the terrified civilians who were not within reach of ladders. For his actions, he was awarded a Class 1 Dept. Medal, the "Thomas Kenny Memorial Medal. Fittingly, the most recent medal winner was Joseph Coniglio, the company Captain from 1985-1998. Captain "Joey", the lifeblood of the unit was awarded the Dr. John F. Connell Medal for rescuing a woman from a burning building on May 14th, 1989. The legendary commander steered the ship for 14 years and is second in tenure only to Captain Benjamin Levy who held the spot for an astonishing 27 years from 1927-1954!.

Staff Chiefs:

Watkins Street has graduated many of its members from the ranks, including:

John J. O'Rourke	Chief of Department
Elmer Mustard	Chief of Department
Frank Cruthers	Chief of Department
Joseph A. Mills	Deputy Chief and Assistant Commissioner
Brian Clinton	Assistant Chief
Anthony DeVita	Assistant Chief
Allen D. Hay	Assistant Chief
Michael Kearney	Assistant Chief
Thomas Galvin	Assistant Chief
Allen S. Hay	Assistant Chief
James Manahan	Assistant Chief

September 11, 2001

The morning of September 11, 2001, as has been stated numerous times before, was a remarkably beautiful, sunny day. Around 8:30 the firehouse was full as the incoming day tour began relieving the night tour. The kitchen was abuzz with the usual chatter concerning last night's game, lousy meal and workload. The junior men of Watkins Street were busying themselves with their daily routines. Inspecting the rig, checking masks, asking about the night tour, have long been integral parts of a young firefighters day. At 0845 hrs the voices throughout the firehouses fell silent as the dispatcher broadcast news of a third alarm in Manhattan reporting a plane crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Members quickly searched the news channels and switched the kitchen scanner to Manhattan hoping to find out what was going on. Members on the job in 1993 recalled the massive FDNY response and wondered if today's events would be similar. At 0847, a fifth alarm was transmitted as footage begins to break onto the television. Members watch the thick black smoke pour from the upper floors and speculate as to the type of plane, method of attack, etc.

At 0903, the grim reality of the situation was clear as members watched a second plane slam into the south tower. Our city, our country, our way of life, had been attacked. Eng 231 would be called to respond to the North Tower and Lad 120 was relocated to Lad 119 for the duration of the day. As off-duty members streamed into quarters as part of a department-wide recall, they couldn't help but make a mental note of the riding lists posted in quarters.

While Watkins Street lost no members that day, we did not escape unscathed. Lt Dennis Mojica, a firefighter in 120 from 1977-1984 was killed while working with Rescue 1. Brian Cross, a current member of 120, lost his father, BC Dennis Cross of the 57 BN. Brian Davan, also of 120, lost his father-in-law, First Deputy Commissioner and former Chief of Dept. William Feehan on that terrible day.

The next few months were a new defining period in the history of Engine 231 and Ladder 120 and Bn44 as members filled in at firehouses throughout the City, worked tirelessly and without complaint at the site of the former World Trade Center, and attended far too many funerals and memorials. Watkins Street's never ending sense of duty and commitment was also displayed by the long list of retired members who came to quarters, borrowed gear and joined the search. Others volunteered for the unenviable task of handling notifications, and still others visited the firehouse often, simply for a cup of coffee and to offer much needed, heartfelt and greatly appreciated words of encouragement.

Today, E231 is led by Captain Robert Higgins who was a Lt. in E231 and was “hand picked” by his predecessor Captain Coniglio to carry the torch upon his retirement. Captain Higgins has commanded E231 from 1998 until present. E231 maintains as one of the busiest engine companies on the job continuing their reputation of combining intellect along with aggressiveness while protecting their brothers across the floor in L120.

Though hundreds of men have comprised the ranks of the Watkins Street Companies, these units have always maintained a dedication to excellence and a sense of duty. This was most apparent in May 1989 when the members got together and gave a Christian burial to a young infant, whose identity is still unknown. She was found in a suitcase, in a pile of burning rubbish, in a vacant building. After investigations uncovered little, the men of Watkins St. were determined to give this little girl the dignity that she had been denied in her short, brutal life. “The girl in the suitcase” was given a funeral with full department honors, paid for and attended by the members. As the solemn notes of the bagpipes accompanied this tortured soul to rest, many hardened career firefighters wept openly.

The highlight of today's tenants of Watkins Street is certainly evident as the members, led by Eric Schmanski (E231) and Flip Mullen (Ret-L120) have spearheaded “The Wounded Warriors Project” which provides assistance to military personnel who have suddenly found themselves without the benefit of arms or legs as a result of service in Afghanistan or Iraq. Watkins Street is proud to help these veterans enjoy a weekend of skiing in the winter and water skiing in the summer as a very small token of our appreciation for the sacrifices they have made in the name of freedom. The current members have rallied around this cause and strive to ensure that the present generation will do its part to uphold the traditions established before us. Such an act is consistent with the high standards and pride achieved by its members for all those years and emblematic of the “Watkins Street” motto, “The Tradition Continues.”