NEW BRAUNFELS FIRST FIRE STATION 1918

I. CONTEXT

The New Braunfels Fire Museum is located at 131 Hill Avenue in New Braunfels, Texas. Before it became a museum, however, it served as the city's first fire station. Constructed in 1918 near the central part of New Braunfels, it housed the city's motorized fire trucks and other firefighting equipment. It continued to serve as Fire Station No. 1 for almost seventy years, until April 1987 when a new Fire Station No. 1 was built next door. Today, 2017, New Braunfels had six fire stations.

The idea of converting the 1918 fire station building to a museum came from Battalion Chief Darren Brinkkoeter who joined the fire department in 1993, and whose father, Roger Brinkkoeter, served with the department. Fortunately, his idea was adopted and having the Fire Museum likely saved the fate of much of the town's original firefighting equipment, which is now on display there. The museum had its grand opening in 1995, on the 150th anniversary of the founding of New Braunfels.

A tour conducted by Darren Brinkkoeter takes visitors back to the earliest times of New Braunfels when there was only the most basic firefighting equipment, buckets of water carried by the local citizens' unofficial bucket brigade. Starting with the display of the special water buckets, you see the evolution to such firefighting equipment as

Battalion Chief Brinkkoeter showing an early "all-in-one" hook & ladder: Photo: J.B. Coers

View of the "hook" of the "all-in-one" hook & ladder, which was used to pull down burning wall and debris. The hook also allowed firefighters to secure the ladder onto windows to climb higher when needed. Photo: J.B. Coers
hose carts, hooks and ladders, and finally some of the early-motorized fire trucks used by the fire department.

A. Early History

Soon after New Braunfels was founded on Good Friday, March 21, 1845, streets were laid out and town lots identified for the new immigrants. Seventy-three years later, in 1918, the first fire station of New Braunfels was constructed on the southeast part of original 1845 city lot 122.

With fireplaces as the primary source for warmth and for cooking, floating ashes landing on rooftops, grassy areas, and trees causing fires was inevitable. In response, the Neu Braunfelser Zeitung reported in October 1858 that a city ordinance of 1857 that prohibited fires within thirty feet from any building was extended. In 1859, the Neu Braunfelser Zeitung reported rumors that the city had begun negotiations for a fire engine, but apparently was not successful in purchasing one or, indeed, it truly was a rumor. Over the years, fires were repeatedly reported in the Neu Braunfelser Zeitung affecting homes, businesses, and mills that were heavily damaged or destroyed.

In 1866, another city ordinance was passed prohibiting the use of straw, hay, etc., to cover roofs. This may have been, in fact, a reminder or an update of an earlier city ordinance. Since much of the early defense against fires came from the citizenry, in February 1867, the city placed fire hooks and ladders at three houses and one at the school in Comal Town, adjacent to New Braunfels.
Braunfels. Bucket brigade volunteers continued to be the primary means to fight the fires for years.

In February 1871, Rudolph Wipprecht, of the New Braunfels Turnverein (Gymnastic Society) proposed a resolution to organize a fire brigade. In March 1871, the Gymnastic Society invited its members and all parties interested in forming a fire brigade to meet. The meeting was a success and in April, policies and rules, as well as the establishment of duties, of the new fire brigade were proposed and accepted. Hermann Seele, a civic leader, was elected as the President. The establishment of the fire brigade, comprised of the members of the Gymnastic Society, made sense because its members generally would have been young men who were in good physical condition and could handle the primitive and physically challenging equipment and the rigors of fighting fires.
Later, in 1874, it was decided to establish the Gymnastic Society fire brigade as a separate organization. It was called the "Turner Company." The name "Turner" is from the German word *Turnerin* meaning "Gymnast" or *Turnverein* meaning "Gymnastics." Even with an organized fire brigade, the problem remained that there was not an adequate water supply distributed within the city with only a few wells and cisterns.

In 1877, the city purchased two fire engine pumps from the city of Galveston. The *New Braunfels Zeitung* noted that a small fire engine house was built for the new equipment. While the manual engines were more efficient, the firefighters still had to depend upon wells, cisterns, or the closeness of one of the two rivers, the Comal and the Guadalupe, to supply sufficient water to extinguish fires. Some of the businesses began to take measures on their own to ensure that sufficient water was available. The owner of the Guadalupe Hotel, for example, had a windmill erected and added a water reservoir on the roof of the hotel in case of a fire.

In December 1877 the Sanborn Map and Publishing Company (Sanborn Map), published a map of New Braunfels reflecting their assessment, for fire insurance purposes, of New Braunfels. Their map below shows the following: Population 1800; No Steam Engine; One Hand Engine; No Independent Hose Carts; Water Facilities, Not Good; 1 hook & ladder truck (See following Sanborn Map).
B. Establishment of Water Mains and Volunteer Fire Department

On March 3, 1884, the New Braunfels City Water Works reported to the city: "Your committee to whom has been referred the proposition of San Marcos Water Works Company for construction of a water works system in New Braunfels respectfully submits that it is to the best interest of any city or town contemplating the construction of water works that the city itself and no individuals or private corporation should own or have control of its water-works." It appears that the proposal by the nearby city of San Marcos to build the water works system for New Braunfels was the impetus for New Braunfels and its Water Works organization to fund and develop its own water works (i.e., water mains and hydrants throughout the city). In June 1885, a final report to the city stated that an agreement had been reached with the Torrey
Manufacturing and Power Company to install a turbine on the Comal River and to provide the city with water.

The June 1885 Sanborn Map and assessment was somewhat the same as in their previous less than positive assessment of 1877. The map reflects a population of 2,000, no steam engine and one hand engine; no independent hose carts; and the water facilities not good. The map does show the location of a small building, which housed a Fire Hand Engine and one Hook and Ladder Truck on the Public Square, the center of town. Since insurance companies relied heavily on the Sanborn Maps, fire insurance premiums would not likely be reduced for the businesses based on this report.
By June 1886, under the direction of Hermann Seele, establishment of water mains and hydrants began throughout the city and a city volunteer fire department was organized. The initial water works system included 20 fire hydrants and a pump.

With the water works in place, steps were taken to purchase additional hoses and other equipment and establish two fire companies. Also in 1886, a city ordinance was passed allowing only non-combustible materials to be used for roofs. In addition, new structures built within one mile of the Plaza had to have the approval of the Mayor. Businesses involved with metal roofing immediately advertised the availability of metal roofing and gutters. The fire companies still had to rely heavily on water buckets, hand-drawn hose reels, and hook and ladder equipment until 1912.

A portion of the 1891 Sanborn map below indicates some of the three miles of water mains laid under the middle of the streets (dotted lines). There were thirty water hydrants in the city, (a few shown as circles on the map). If the water hydrants were not close enough or additional water needed, the fire fighters would dig under the street and pierce the wooden pipes to connect the hose. After the fire, they would plug the hole and mark the side of the street in case the plughole would be needed again. There were no steam or hand engines, but there were three independent carts that the firefighters could use to wheel the hoses to fires. The map also
indicates that the population had reached 2,500. A fire bell was next to the county courthouse shown on the map).

In 1912, the Locomobile of prominent businessman, Harry Landa, caught fire. He offered the remaining chassis to the New Braunfels firefighters at a very low price to be used for building a piece of motorized equipment. The resulting Chemical and Hose Fire Truck allowed the firefighters to reach fires with more firefighting equipment faster. The Fire Truck served the city from 1912 until around 1925. It is interesting to note that, 37 years earlier, the sparks from Landa's chimney started a fire on a neighbor's roof in April 1875. There were two fires reported that day, and the newspaper used the fires as examples for the need for a fire engine and a suitable water supply at that time.
The Sanborn Map Company in 1912 acknowledged the improvements in water supply. In particular, there were water hydrants accessible throughout the city. However, the firefighters still relied primarily on outdated hose carts including the one hook and ladder truck. There were six hose carts listed, two of which were in reserve. One of those was likely the Locomobile converted to a Chemical and Hose Fire Truck.

Soon after the Chemical and Hose Fire Truck was built, the first fire engine was purchased in 1913. This equipment was such a new innovation for the city, that the newspapers ran articles with instructions for all citizens to observe: The fire engine should not be considered a toy; the engine would travel less than the 25 miles per hour, the speed limit for other vehicles; when hearing the engine, citizens are to turn to the right and give the fire engine the middle of the road. It was stated that the rules applied to people walking, on horseback, in wagons or automobiles; and they were told not to follow the fire engine.

C. New Braunfels First Fire Station – 1918

While the city's basic firefighting equipment evolved, from water buckets, hose carts, and a self-made motorized vehicle, to a fire engine to fight fires, it was not until January 1, 1918, that the city constructed its first Fire Station. The initiative to build the Fire Station officially began with the proposal to issue $10,000 in bonds. The bond election was held on September 11, 1917 and at a special city council session on September 13, 1917, the results of the voting indicated a majority of the votes cast were in favor of erecting a fire station.

While the plans had not yet been developed, there were at least 7 proposed sites from local citizens ranging from a free donation up to $12,000. Some of the sites were empty lots while others had buildings of various sizes and construction. The city chose the site offered as a "donation" by Ernest S. Sippel and Jesse J. Sippel. The offer of a donated site was most
fortunate, since the city was prohibited from purchasing land with the money to be raised by the $10,000 bonds. The bonds were for construction of a Fire Station only.

While the land was offered as a donation, the deed transferring the land reflected that the city paid $4,000. A close reading of the offer by the Sippels shows that there was much interest by the "fire boys" as well as many citizens to have the Fire Station at that site. So much so, that the Sippels indicated that there were "subscriptions" (monetary donations) made for the city to use to pay for the 6,706 square feet site. It appears that the donations were given to the city, which in turn paid for the land.

Mayor Alves reminded the council members that the city had been leasing office space in the county courthouse soon after its construction in 1898, and that there was a need to plan and consider office space in the new Fire Station. This may have led to proposing that the initial plans reflect a building 55 feet wide and 75 feet deep. Plans were drawn up by architect L. M. Dielmann from San Antonio and bids requested to construct the Fire Station. Upon opening the bids on December 11, 1917, all exceeded the $10,000 bond limit resulting in all bids being rejected. The city council asked Dielmann to draw up new plans reducing the size to fifty-five feet by fifty-five feet, and to recommend other cost saving alterations by that afternoon. He completed the new plans by the afternoon deadline and estimated the savings would be $3,200.

The following day, December 12, 1917, the city council requested new bids based on the new plans and alterations. On December 21, 1917, the bids were opened and, well known New Braunfels contractor, Ad. F. Moeller was awarded the contract for the new Fire Station with a bid of $8,995. It should be noted that the bid was for construction of the building only and did not include such things as wiring or plumbing, nor did it include costs for furniture, beds, or related expenses.
At a City Council meeting on May 15, 1918, architect Dielmann announced that, except for minor details, the construction of the Fire Station had been completed. The city now had its first Fire Station to house the major firefighting equipment and fire trucks as well as a site for the firefighters to stay and to conduct classroom and physical training.

In addition to having a large area on the ground floor designated as "Apparatus Room," the new station had an office for the City Marshall (Ed Moeller), a consultation room, a locker room, restroom, and an office for the Water Works Superintendent. The second floor had a large hall area, which was suitable for training and allowed for the firefighters to stay overnight. It included a restroom and bath as well as two guardrooms. Apparently, with various modifications made after the awarding of the contract, the cost rose from the initial bid of $8,995 to $10,555.26. Presumably, the city used other funds to pay for the expenses above the $10,000 bond limit. The blue prints below are copies of a few of the original plans by Dielmann.

Blue print of 1918 Fire Station first floor (55' by 55'). *City of New Braunfels. Photo: J.B. Coers 2017*

Blue print of 1918 Fire Station second floor. *City of New Braunfels. Photo: J.B. Coers 2017*
The first Fire Station Chief was Adolf Henne. Other key officials are listed below on the corner stones.
February 1922 Sanborn Maps reflects the location of the 1918 Fire Station and the fire alarm bell on the lot. The description below the Fire Station (labeled Fire Dept. Central Station on map) reads:

"3 Men, 1 Chief, 1 American La France Comb. Type 12 with 750 GPH. Pumper, 1200' 2 ½" C.R.L. Hose, 1 Brockway Comb. Auto Truck with 1000' 2 1/2" C.R.L. Hose, 40 Gal. Chemical Tank. 100' ¾" Rubber Hose, 1 Locomobile Truck with 600' 2 ½" Hose & 500' 2 ½" in Reserve, Chief's Ford Car."  

Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, TX.
D. New Braunfels First Fire Station Becomes Fire Museum

Fire Station No. 1 continued to serve as the primary fire station until April 1987 when a new fire station No. 1 was constructed next door. In 1995, the 1918 Fire Station No. 1 became the New Braunfels Fire Museum. The photos below show some of the larger equipment on display in the museum.

**1886 Hose Cart**
The cart was pulled by firefighters to the fire scene.
Photo: New Braunfels Fire Museum Website.

**This 1923 LaFrance Pumper** is a 105 horsepower, six cylinder triple combination 750 gallon per minute pumper. The spokes on the rims of the tires are made of wood, and the rear axle is chain driven.
Photo: New Braunfels Fire Museum Website.

**1950 Ford Pumper**
This Ford pumper has a 750 gallon per minute pump, eight cylinders, and is still used today in parades and as the hearse for firefighter funerals.

**This 1931 American LaFrance** six cylinder open cab ladder truck came with a pressurized water tank. It has eight different oak wood ladders totaling 175 feet.
Photo: New Braunfels Fire Museum Website.
E. New Braunfels Fire Station No. 1, Virtually Unchanged

New Braunfels Fire Station No. 1, June 5 1927. Photo: N.B. Fire Museum.

New Braunfels Fire Station No. 1, Date unknown, but after June 5 1927. Photo: N.B. Fire Museum

New Braunfels 1918 Fire Station No. 1, (Now Fire Museum). J.B. Coers June 2017
F. New Braunfels Present Fire Museum (1918 Fire Station) Property Information

G. Architectural / Building Characteristics of New Braunfels First Fire Station

The Central Fire Station, currently the New Braunfels Fire Department Museum, is a two-story fire station located in downtown New Braunfels. The building faces south onto Hill Street. Constructed in 1918, it was designed by Leo M. J. Dielmann and exhibits a combination of Mission Revival and Prairie School influences.

Overall, the building’s massing is comprised of a rectangular footprint that emphasizes its horizontal lines. It is constructed of load-bearing brick that rests on a concrete slab foundation and is topped by a
low-pitched hipped roof with widely overhanging eaves. Large paired wood brackets are located beneath the eave at the southwest and southeast corners of the building. A centrally located arched parapet is placed on the roof’s primary (south) façade. Cast stone tops the brick parapet, with additional cast stone triangular detailing located in pilasters at each end. Centrally located within the parapet is a cast stone plaque that reads, “19 N. B. F. D. 18.”

The first level of the primary (south) façade is asymmetrical and is marked by three large garage bays that are recessed within the building, under a rectangular overhang supported by a metal beam and columns that replaced the original arched stucco supports at an unknown date within the historic period. The original garage doors, each of which consisted of four individual wood panels topped by five pairs of rectangular glass lights, were replaced at an unknown date with standard garage doors that contain three horizontal windows centrally located within each door. A single-entry wood door and transom window, topped by a metal awning, is located west of the garage opening. A small cast stone plaque is located at the base of the western corner, extending around to the south corner of the west side. The plaque lists the building’s construction date, building’s use, the architect and contractor, as well as other significant persons involved with the building at the time of its construction. The primary façade’s second floor is symmetrical and is comprised of a centrally located double-door (currently covered and inoperable) topped by a transom, with a small wrought iron balcony. Two 6/1 double-hung wood windows are located on each side of the double-door. Four horizontal bands of contrasting courses of brick separate the two levels, the top of which protrudes slightly from the building.

The first level of the west (side) façade is comprised of two single-entry wood doors with transoms, each capped by a brick arch. A single double-hung wood frame window capped by a brick arch is located south of each entry, with the northernmost 2/2 window smaller than the 4/4 window located to the south. The second level is comprised of two centrally located 4/4 double-hung wood-frame windows capped by a brick arch and flanked on each side by a similar window.

The building’s east side is comprised of two 4/4 double-hung wood frame windows capped by brick arches on the primary level, and three similar windows located on the second level. A single-entry door
with a transom and capped by a brick arch is centrally located on the second floor and accessed via a wrought iron staircase.

Four brick pilasters divide the rear façade into four distinct bays. The two westernmost bays are identical, each having a single 4/4 wood-frame window capped by a brick arch on the first and second levels. A garage door, capped by a rectangular piece of cast stone, is located within the third bay and topped by a double-hung wood window, identical to the others. The easternmost bay consists of electrical equipment attached to the ground level, and a small double-hung vinyl window capped by a brick arch at the second level. A thin line of horizontal brick coursing protrudes from the sill of each second-story window and continues across the rear façade, further emphasizing the building’s horizontal nature.

H. New Braunfels Present Fire Museum (1918 Fire Station) Exterior Views of Building

![Fire Museum: View Front From Southwest Looking Northeast. Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017](image)

![Fire Museum: View from South Corner looking North. Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017](image)

![Fire Museum: View from West corner looking East. Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017](image)
Fire Museum: View from East corner looking West. Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017

Fire Museum: View from North corner looking South. Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017

Fire Museum: View of trusses under eave. Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017

Fire Museum: View of front balcony. Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017
I. New Braunfels Present Fire Museum (1918 Fire Station) Interior Views of Building

Fire Museum: View of fireman's pole. Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017

Fire Museum: View of ceiling in the first floor apparatus room, the location of fire trucks and other equipment. This does not exist elsewhere in the building. Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017

Fire Museum View of stairs to 2nd floor. Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017

Fire Museum: View of second floor "Hall" now with additional walls added to provide offices and/or storage spaces on three sides (see drawing reflecting inside of building below). Photo: J.B. Coers June 2017


J. Biographical Sketch: Leo Maria Joseph Dielmann, Architect

Leo Maria Joseph Dielmann (Leo Dielmann) was an architect and civic leader. The son of John Charles and Maria (Gros) Dielmann, he was born on August 14, 1881, in San Antonio. His father, John Charles Dielmann had emigrated from Germany in 1872 and was a stonemason but later went into construction and supply business.

Leo Dielmann graduated from St. Mary's College in 1898 and later studied architecture and engineering in Germany. He was appointed city building inspector of San Antonio in 1909 by Mayor Bryan V. Callaghan, Jr., and held this position for three years. Dielmann served as an alderman in San Antonio for two years. Early in his career he was active in the building-materials firm of J. C. Dielmann. For the first five decades of the twentieth century he devoted himself entirely to architecture; he was especially noted as a church architect. Among the structures he designed are the Fort Sam Houston Post Chapel; the Conventual Chapel the Science Hall, and other buildings at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio; St. Mary's Catholic Church in Fredericksburg; churches in Brenham, High Hill, Boerne, Seguin, Weimar, and other communities; schools, civic buildings, and residences throughout Texas. Dielmann was a member of the Texas Society of Architects and of the board of trustees of the San Antonio Public

Notable works by Dielmann listed as National Register Historic Places (NRHP) include:

- The Fairmount Hotel, 401 S. Alamo San Antonio, Texas.
- LaBorde House, Store and Hotel, 601 E. Main St., Rio Grande City, Texas.
- Monastery of Our Lady of Charity, 1900 Montana, San Antonio, Texas, Italianate and Gothic architecture.
- Nativity of Mary, Blessed Virgin Catholic Church, FM 2672, High Hill, Texas, built 1906.
- Our Lady of Lourdes Church, 105 N. William St., Victoria, Texas, Romanesque Revival style.
- Park Hotel (opened 1917), known as the Plaza Hotel since 1919, 217 S. River St., Seguin, Texas.
- Post Chapel (Fort Sam Houston), Bldg. 2200, Wilson St., San Antonio, Texas.
- Sacred Heart Catholic Church, 1633 S. Eighth St. Abilene, Texas.
- St. Mary's Catholic Church, 306 W. San Antonio St., Fredericksburg, Texas, gothic-inspired native stone structure.
- St. Mary's Catholic Church, 701 Church St., Brenham, Texas, built 1935.
II. SIGNIFICANCE

In 1918, the city of New Braunfels dedicated its first Fire Station. It is a two-story building constructed of mortar and brick and located near the center of the city.

In the early days after the founding of New Braunfels in 1845, the city had to rely on citizen bucket brigades. As the city grew, it would rely on volunteer firefighters scattered throughout the city. They would use hose carts which had to be carried, or rolled, to the fire, with the hope that a water well or cistern may be close by for water supply. Eventually, a small building was built to hold a hose cart and other equipment and supplies.

The 1918 Fire Station represents the first major step in modernizing firefighting in New Braunfels. It included modern mechanized trucks, a paid staff, sixty volunteers, and a building sufficient to house the firefighting equipment. It also served as a site for the firefighters to stay and to train while on duty. It enabled the firefighter personnel to respond to fires and other disasters such as floods at a moment's notice with proper equipment. The quicker response time meant being able to save more businesses, homes, and other structures from total destruction. It also improved their ability to save lives and reduce injuries due to fire. The building not only served as a place to conduct classroom instruction but also a site for group physical training and team building.

A new Fire Station No. 1 was constructed next door in 1987 and the original Fire Station was converted to a museum in 1995. The museum has served to show the public and new firefighters alike the New Braunfels firefighting history and the evolution in firefighting equipment. It also serves as a tribute to those responsible for protecting its citizens from fire and other catastrophes, as well as those who lost their lives in the line of duty. The role of these first responders has never been to fight fires alone, but to save lives during any emergency or catastrophe that may arise.
III. DOCUMENTATION

Researchers & contributors: John B. Coers, Cindy J. Coers, Wilfred Schlather, Historic Preservation Consultants Hardy-Heck-Moore, as well as the review and proof reading by other Comal County Historical Commission members.

In addition, significant amount information was referred to in the beginning of this narrative consisting of articles and chronologies provided by Historian Myra Lee Adams Goff (e.g., *Around the Sophienburg*, referenced in Endnotes); New Braunfels Fire Department Battalion Chief Darren Brinkkoeter and the Sophienburg Museum and Archives. Battalion Chief Brinkkoeter's narrative history also provided an excellent and detailed historical report of the many and various types of firefighting equipment purchased over the years, not included here. Chronologies of the New Braunfels Fire Department published on various anniversaries of the fire department in the *New Braunfels Herald*, September 4, 1936, the *New Braunfels Zeitung Chronicle*, September 8, 1961, and the *New Braunfels Herald–Zeitung* April 17, 1986, also served as excellent resources in researching for and verifying information in original documents. Lastly, this narrative should not be considered an exhaustive history about the New Braunfels First Fire Station or the Fire Department.