

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Old Bridgeville Fire House is a rectangular, two-story, gable-roofed structure located at the southwestern corner of William Street and Union Alley in the small, southern Delaware town of Bridgeville. It is situated half a block south of the main business street. The fire house was erected in 1911 as the town's first fire house and its design is typical of the simple, yet decorative vernacular style popular in small-town commercial and public buildings of early 20th century America. The structure is essentially a box with a combination garage-equipment storage area on the first floor, a meeting room on the second floor and an attic. Its simplicity is relieved by such decorative features as corner pilasters, segmentally arched window and door openings and a simple cupola-bell tower situated astride the gable roof near the front of the building. The primary building material used in construction of the building is a type of rock-faced concrete brick which was manufactured locally and was a popular local building material before the First World War. The building retains a high degree of original integrity both inside and out.

The fire house is approximately 25 feet wide by 35 feet deep and occupies a lot of 30 feet along William Street by 60 feet along Union Alley. The arrangement of window and door openings is basically symmetrical except for the front of the building where at the first floor level are located a pair of wide, hinged paneled garage doors and a small, side doorway. The first floor of the building consists entirely of what was originally a garage and equipment storage area for fire-fighting equipment, except for a small entrance foyer and single flight of stairs on the north, or Union Alley, side of the building. The downstairs level is now used by the Bridgeville Historical Society as a small museum.

The second floor is a simple meeting room with white plastered walls, two window openings in both the front and rear walls and three window openings on each side. The stairwell is surrounded by a wooden railing with turned balusters. All moldings on the second floor and in the first floor vestibule at the foot of the stairs are of the decorative, bullseye type. The attic is accessible only through a trap door in the second floor ceiling. The second floor level has original hardwood floors.

A local manufacturer, Fred Willey, produced the warm gray concrete brick used in construction of the fire house (probably by local builders). Pilasters of the same brick are located at each corner. These together with the segmentally arched window and entrance door openings, circular arched windows in the gable ends at the attic level, and molded box cornices give the building a stylish appearance, albeit a simple one.

While the fire house has undergone several alterations over the years, these do not detract from its original integrity. The first one, which occurred in 1923, was the widening of the original garage doors. Originally the fire company used a hand pumper and other small equipment. When the first motorized fire engine was acquired in 1923, it proved necessary to enlarge the opening to make room for it. Evidence of this alteration is clearly visible in the attached copy of a contemporary photograph showing the new fire engine in front of the building. The only other exterior

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1911 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

The Old Bridgeville Fire House is deemed eligible for the National Register under Criterion "C" in that it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period and method of construction which is important to the history of Bridgeville and southern Delaware. The fire house is a well-preserved example of a type of structure, the construction of which represented an important step in the social history of small towns in early 20th century America. It is architecturally significant not only as a good example of a smalltown volunteer fire company's fire house but because its construction utilized a locally manufactured concrete brick not commonly found in the area.

The Town of Bridgeville, located in northwestern Sussex County in southern Delaware, was already a century and a half old when the fire house was built in 1911. Through most of its early history the town had been a small village with few if any community services. The arrival of the railroad in the mid-19th century provided the impetus for its development as a shipping center for the surrounding region of prosperous farms and orchards. In the 1860's a cannery was established in the town. This and other businesses thrived through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, bringing about a gradual increase in population and prosperity. In the 1890's, Bridgeville became a leading center of strawberry cultivation, a highly profitable venture which thrived until the 1930's. All of these developments were instrumental in the creation of the conditions which made the establishment of a volunteer fire department a virtual necessity in the early 1900's.

The Bridgeville Volunteer Fire Company was established early in 1910. Throughout its first year of existence the company raised money for a building and for equipment. By late 1910, the company had purchased a 30 foot by 60 foot lot at the southwest corner of William Street and Union Alley. The fire house was built early in 1911 at a cost of \$1,100, which had been raised through public subscription and through a variety of fund-raising events. The unusual concrete bricks used in the building were a local product manufactured by Mr. Fred Willey. While rock-faced block is a common building material for that period throughout the country, rock-faced concrete bricks are extremely unusual in terms of southern Delaware architecture. Several other surviving structures in and around Bridgeville were also built in part with bricks from the same source. Of these the fire house is the only public building.

The fire house is also significant within the body of surviving volunteer fire houses for several reasons. Volunteer fire companies were (and still are) extremely important to the social history of southern Delaware. Fire companies are the source of much of the local social

9. Major Bibliographical References

"History of the Bridgeville Volunteer Fire Company" (No date) - A two-page typed document detailing major accomplishments in the history of the fire company.

Interview with Mr. Thurman Adams, president, Bridgeville Historical Soc.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1,800 sq. ft.

Quadrangle name Seaford East

Quadrangle scale 1:2400

UMT References

A

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4	2	8	8	0	6	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification The nominated area is a 30' x 60' rectangular lot beginning at the southwest corner of William St. and Union Alley and running south 30 feet, west 90 degrees for a distance of 60 feet, north 90 degrees for a distance of 30 feet, and east 90 degrees for a distance of 60 feet.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard B. Carter, Sussex County Historic Preservation Planner

organization Sussex Office of Econ. Development date March 20, 1984

street & number P.O. Box 589 telephone (302) 856-7701, Ext. 361

city or town Georgetown state Delaware

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

David R. Shiffth

title _____ date June 29, 1984

For HCERS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 8/9/84

J. Melora Byers
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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The Old Bridgeville Fire House

alterations were the covering of the original wood shingle roof with asphalt shingles and the removal and subsequent replacement of the small cupola. After the fire company sold the building in 1928, it was used for many years for storage until it was acquired by the Bridgeville Historical Society in 1977. The cupola was removed at an unknown time during this period. Shortly after purchasing the building, the historical society had a replica of the original cupola constructed. The cupola is a rectangular structure with a pyramidal roof and simple wooden railings with plain balusters. It was originally the site of a fire bell, then, from the early 1920's on, of a fire siren.

Alterations to the interior have been minor as well. Until the fire house was acquired by the historical society, the first floor had a dirt floor. The historical society had a concrete floor installed to facilitate the use of the area as a museum. Similarly, the wood-framed wall of the stairway was unfinished on the garage side. The other garage walls were simply the same concrete brick visible on the exterior. The stairwell wall has now been covered with a simulated gray brick paneling which closely resembles the other walls. Modern lighting has been installed in the first floor museum area. Replicas of turn-of-the-century hanging oil lamps have been installed in the second floor meeting room. Despite these alterations, the building's function and purpose are still plainly visible.

Nor has the surrounding neighborhood changed substantially since the construction of the fire house, with one exception. Originally a large colonial revival home stood on the adjacent lot to the south, and other residential structures and their outbuildings were situated elsewhere around the building. The house on the south side burned in the late 1970's. The land on which it stood has since been acquired by the historical society which is in the process of developing it into a town park. The focal point is an octagonal band stand, the base of which is made of gray brick closely resembling that of the fire house. All other surroundings remain basically unchanged. Thus, the fire house as it stands today appears substantially the same as it has throughout its history.

The nominated area consists of the original 30'x60' lot at the corner of William St. and Union Alley acquired by the Bridgeville Volunteer Fire Co. in 1910.

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:
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life and political power in addition to their role in the area of public safety. While several small cities in southern Delaware had fire companies before 1910, Bridgeville was one of the earliest small town fire companies. Founding members of these companies were traditionally drawn from a wide social spectrum and included owners of leading local industries, merchants and professional men and blue collar workers and the Bridgeville company was no exception to this rule. Very few southern Delaware volunteer fire companies had what might be called "first generation fire houses" as imposing as the Bridgeville structure. Most were old wood-frame sheds or barns converted for the purpose. Such structures frequently reverted to their original function or were torn down by the late 1920's or early 1930's when larger and more durable fire halls were built. Thus, by the standards of the surrounding region, the Bridgeville structure was comparatively elaborate, reflecting the prosperity of the town at that time.

The building served as a fire house only until 1928 when the fire company followed the lead of several surrounding communities and built a much larger "fire hall" on the main street to house its growing amount of equipment. The new structure also served as a kind of local civic center because of its large second floor hall. The old fire house was sold to a local manufacturing company which used it for many years for storage. Because of its design it was perfectly adaptable to this function without alteration, a fact which explains its high degree of original integrity. Between its construction in 1911 and its sale in 1928, however, the structure served the company and community during a time of growth and modernization. The fire company began its life with equipment propelled by hand or with horses. By the early 1920's, it had its first motorized fire engine. The structure stands today with only minor alterations as a visible reminder of an important era in the history of Bridgeville and southern Delaware.



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