

THE HISTORIC FIRE HOUSE IN ORMOND BEACH

By Greg Snell, Esquire

On October 27, 1929, "Black Thursday," the stock market crashed and the United States spiraled into a decade long Great Depression. By the time Franklin Delano Roosevelt was sworn in as President in the spring of 1933, fifteen million people, roughly one-third of all non-farmer workers, were unemployed. In response, in 1935, by executive order, Roosevelt established the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

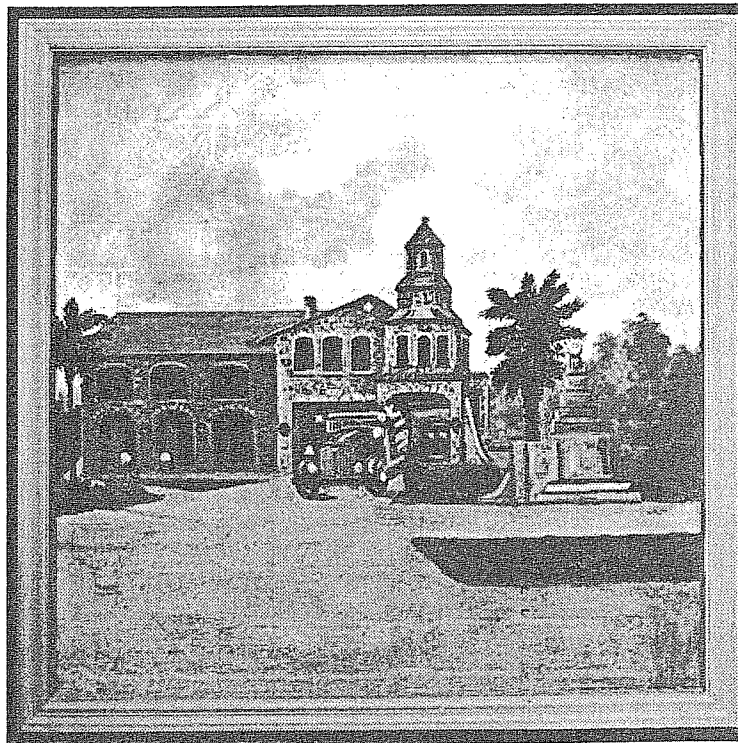
The purpose of the WPA was to provide jobs for the unemployed and that it did. Virtually anyone who needed a job was eligible to be employed by the WPA. During the eight years of its existence the WPA employed nearly 8½ million people and 1,410,000 individual projects costing about \$11 billion were undertaken. In total, 651,087 miles of highways, roads and streets were built and 124,031 bridges, 125,110 public buildings, 8,192 parks and 853 landing fields were constructed, repaired or improved. Almost every community in America has a park, bridge or public building thanks to the WPA.

Ormond Beach has one WPA building, the historic Fire House, located at 160 East Granada Boulevard near the beach. The WPA approved the construction of the Fire House at a cost of \$12,467 during its first year, 1935. Many WPA projects were also partially funded by the cities in which they were located and that appears to most likely have been the case with the Fire House because when construction began on July 18, 1936, the reported

cost was \$22,000. Fifty- two WPA workers were transferred from the Granada Avenue project in Ormond Beach to work on the project.

The Fire House was built to house both the police and fire departments for Ormond Beach, complete with two vehicle bays, office for the police chief and fire chief, a three cell jail downstairs and sleeping quarters for the police chief and the firemen upstairs. It was considered at the time a model facility for communities of similar size. Prior to completion of the Fire House, Ormond Beach had a volunteer fire department and no motorized fire truck.

While yet to be confirmed, there is strong evidence that the architect of the Fire House was Alan J. MacDonough, who for many years lived in Lake County and designed many prominent buildings there. During the time of its construction



Mr. MacDonough was the local head for the WPA. Additionally, he is the ascribed architect for two other well known local WPA projects built about that time, the Bandshell and Clock Tower in Daytona Beach (1937) and the Holly Hill City Hall (1942). In total he already has six buildings for which he was the architect on the National Register of Historic Places, including those mentioned above and also Jackie Robinson Park on City Island in

Daytona Beach. National Register status is in progress for the Fire House and in due course Mr. MacDonough may have another building on the list to his credit.

Like the Bandshell, Clock Tower and Holly

Hill City Hall, the Fire House is made of native coquina. Aside from the coquina, perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Fire House architecture is the extensive use of keystones, many of which are visible outside over windows, doors and arches and some of which are visible inside over windows and doors. The keystones serve both functional and aesthetic purposes. There are covered porches on both the first and second floors bordered by arches. The Fire House has a very well balanced and stately presence. The tower over what was the large bay and firemen sleeping quarters, based on early photographs, seems to have contained a siren.

Under WPA rules the workers could work no more than 30 hours a week. Projects often were slow to be completed and critics suggested that due to the circumstances there was little incentive to complete projects in a timely manner. It was common for workers to eat and sleep at the job site, although it is unknown whether that occurred at the Fire House. Fifteen months after construction started, on October 14, 1937 the fire department and the police department took occupancy. The first prisoner in the jail, which was deemed worthy of a Daytona Beach News-Journal article, was someone named Sam Davis, who was incarcerated for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. The police chief at the time was Daniel Whitehurst.

The Fire House served additional duty during World War II. Within five days of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, on December 12, 1941, fifteen local citizens had taken the qualifying exam to join the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary (USCGA). On December 19, 1941, USCGA Flotilla 1-3, which still exists as Flotilla 44, was formed. A wooden tower behind the Fire House was manned by the USCGA, along with many other similar towers along the coast, one of which still stands at the beach in Ormond-by-the-Sea. From these towers the USCGA monitored the ocean for German submarines or other enemy vessels.

In November of 2006 the firemen left the Fire House for a new home nearby and there ended the continuous occupancy of the Fire House by the fire department after nearly 70 years. The

Fire House was designated a historic landmark by Ormond Beach in 1987. The author, along with co-owner Fred Hudson, extensively renovated the Fire House, and since January of 2008 it has served as the office for his business law firm, Snell Legal.

Many interesting original historic features of the building remain. One of the more popular of those is the original door frame to one of the jail cells. Another is the fire pole, which is now hanging horizontally as part of a large light fixture over a long conference table in what was the large bay. The large bay remains much as it was, other than it is now climate controlled and split into two conference rooms. The ceiling height is essentially the same, the brick and coquina walls are exposed, the floor is concrete and there are keystones over a door and window. There is an original window on the internal staircase to the second floor. An old style rotary dial emergency phone is on the wall on the front porch. Two original light fixtures on the front porch are illuminated, along with the tower, every night.

Everything new in the restoration was done in a style consistent with the time of construction. There are glass paned doors with transoms throughout. The three bathrooms have not only tile floors but tile walls. There are wood floors in the reception area, hallways upstairs and down as well as a conference room, aptly called the "Police Conference Room" just outside the aforementioned original jail cell door frame where skeleton keys hang on the wall. There is a photo on canvas framed on the wall of a painting of the Fire House done by an anonymous folk artist presumably in the 40's on a wall inside Mario's Restaurant in Ormond Beach and which can still be seen there by diners. To see a YouTube video of many Fire House images you can go to the Snell Legal website at snelllegal.com "Our Historic Building" page.

It is not unusual for people to stop, stare and take photographs of the Fire House. Nor is it unusual for people to simply drop in and ask if they can look around. It is just the sort of building that captivates the attention of passers by. Ormond Beach only got one WPA building but it was a

good one. While there remains some doubt as to whether Alan J. MacDonough was the architect there is no doubt that this piece of architecture has well stood the test of time. Snell Legal considers

itself merely the temporary custodian of this revered landmark with an obligation to share it from time to time with the community, which it regularly does in a variety of ways.

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