

Forward, into the Past

"They Help Those Who Are In Need"

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This headline from a September 1960 newspaper article still describes the commitment of the dedicated individuals who, for the past 50 years, have provided volunteer assistance to the Ellenville area as members of the **Ellenville First Aid & Rescue Squad**.

Early in 1955, Eli Bernzweig, a young lawyer who had become attorney Charles F. Kaiser, Jr.'s law clerk, began talking about the need for a **First Aid & Rescue Squad** in the Village of Ellenville. A First Aid Squad had saved Eli's brother when he was in an automobile accident and Eli was impressed that a group of young men and women would give their time to learn the fundamentals of first aid in order to help neighbors and strangers involved in accidents or sudden, possibly life-threatening illness.

A small group of local men and women joined Bernzweig in forming the Ellenville First Aid and Rescue Squad, although newspaper reports and personal narratives don't agree on the exact number. One article says there were 11 original members, two of whom were women; a narrative by Matt Stopard listed 15 members of the 1955 squad; the 1988 annual dinner honored twenty founding members whose names were taken from a plaque in the squad's headquarters.

Names that are included in a picture of the 1955 Squad are, in alphabetical order: Eli Bernzweig, Harry Gorman, George Green, Frank Hyatt, Homer Kuhlmann, Bill Martineau, Clyde Matthews, Macks Milton, Pierce Palmer, Frank Ray, Louise Ray, Wallace Reed, Morton Schlifftman, Ted Schultz, and Matt Stopard. The plaque adds Arthur Distel, Kenneth Mitchell, Frank Ray, Jr., Betty Russett, and Sidney Shapiro. An April 28, 1955, Ellenville Journal specifically mentions Bernzweig (President), Matt Stopard (Treasurer), Harold Ray (Squad Captain), Bill Martineau (First Lieutenant), Macks Milton (Second Lieutenant), and Louise Ray (Sergeant). It would seem clear that the Squad included twenty volunteers before the end of its first year.



The Ellenville First Aid & Rescue Squad held their annual installation dinner (photo above) at Wenig's Saturday, Jan. 9th, 1965. Mr. Harold Linsay, President of the New York State Volunteer Ambulance & First Aid Association attended and performed the installation ceremony. The following officers were installed: Sitting, from left, Treasurer Claire Vogler; Vice President Macks Milton; President Dorothy Burkhouse; Captain William Haight; Secretary Anna Milton, and Asst. Captain Matt Baranoski. Standing, from left, Trustee Irving Jargowsky; Financial Secretary Henry Vogler; Recording Secretary Beatrice Weinberger; Sergeant Helen Van Wert; Lieutenant Theodore Schultz; Bldg. Supervisor August Hull; Trustee Thomas Burkhouse; and Historian Dawn Haight.



Harold ("Deac") Ray had been a First Aid instructor with New York Telephone Company and the Red Cross for many years and, with the permission of the company, offered that training to the members of the **Ellenville First Aid & Rescue Squad** at his home.

Funding initially came from the **Squad** members themselves and then from door-to-door solicitation and donation receptacles in local businesses. Frank Hyatt, one of the founders, remembers going door-to-door in Cragmoor, his assigned area. Others had similar assignments in Napanoch, Wawarsing, Ulster Heights, Spring Glen, sections of Ellenville, etc.

What about an ambulance? Matt Stopard, another founder, remembers that the Squad contacted the Superior Cadillac Ambulance Agency in New Jersey to see if a secondhand ambulance might be available. The agency gave the Squad a 1935 LaSalle Ambulance (actually sold it to them for one dollar) on two conditions: when the Squad bought a new ambulance, they would buy from Superior; and, when the LaSalle was no longer needed in Ellenville, it would be given to another new squad that was getting organized. Frank Hyatt recalls that there was some connection with the Board of Water Supply, but details were not recorded. A 1960 newspaper article reports that the first ambulance was a gift (still the sale for \$1.00) from Worth Motors in Teaneck, NJ.

When Ellenville needed a larger ambulance with more current equipment, the squad lived up to its 1955 agreement and purchased the new ambulance from the Cadillac Ambulance Company in New Jersey. The 1935 LaSalle went to the Grahamsville area, where a new squad was being organized.

Garage space for the original ambulance was donated by Rivan Krieger, owner of the *Wayside Inn*, but the **Squad** still needed a building for meetings and training sessions. They moved into their newly constructed building on **North Main Street** (photo above) on June 11, 1958, finally settling into a home of their own, only three years after they had organized.

The **Ellenville First Aid & Rescue Squad** made its first call in June 1955. The record shows 69 calls in the squad's first year, covering 340.5 miles, and 120 hours and 25 minutes of volunteer time.

During the earliest years, local gas stations took turns providing the ambulance(s) with gas for a month, free of charge.

Pharmacist Clyde Matthews, one of the charter members, donated the initial supplies of bandages, tape, and other essential first aid items. He also volunteered to use his drugstore as a dispatch center, where calls from the Police Department and/or the State Police would come in on a separate line and the squad leader would be called. ➔