

Great Barrington's first Fire Department was begun by a group of nineteen young men who formed the Hope Fire Company in early 1854. They raised awareness of the lack of fire protection for the Town, and also raised enough money to purchase a Button hand pumper, which was delivered by railroad car in June of that year.

Meanwhile, the Great Barrington Fire District was organized to supply the water to the center of town, also in 1854. Soon the District was bringing water to town from the East Mountain Reservoir, and building a fire house on the south side of Castle Street near Main Street.

By 1882 the Hope Fire Company had disbanded and reformed several times, and the District had moved the fire house to Bridge Street. District voters finally approved an expenditure to buy a horse drawn steam pumper after the Congregational Church burned.

1889 saw the beginning of another fire company, this one in the village of Housatonic that called itself The Housatonic Hose Company. They would have to wait almost fifty years before the Town voted to make them the Town's own Fire Department, and buy them apparatus.

At the turn of the century, the old Central Block in Housatonic, and a large portion of the downtown area of Great Barrington, had burned down in seven major fires, the largest of which burned both sides of Railroad Street and spread to Castle Street, prompting the building of a new Fire District station at 20 Castle Street, and the purchase of a horse drawn ladder truck, horse drawn chemical wagon, and, of course, two horses. Things were changing rapidly and the District bought its first motorized fire truck, a 1922 used American Lafrance. By 1932, another pumper and a motorized ladder truck were obtained. The Fire District expanded its water lines also, with the purchase of the Berkshire Heights and Lake Mansfield water lines.

The Town meanwhile bought a 1938 Seagrave pumper for use in Housatonic, and housed it in the new Central Block until a fire station was built on Front Street in 1952. The Housatonic Water Company brought hydrant water to the village of Housatonic.

By 1976, the Fire District had sold its fire station and apparatus on Castle Street to the Town of Great Barrington, combining the two stations into one Department under one Chief. The Housatonic Hose Company and the Hope Fire Company remain in existence today as social wings of the Great Barrington Fire Department, and a third Company, the Great Barrington Fire Fighters Association, combines the members of both. There is also a Support Group to aid firefighters at incidents.

Whether there be fires, medical emergencies, motor vehicle accidents, hazardous materials incidents, or homeland security threats, the Great Barrington Fire Department is ready to answer the call. With five engines, a ladder tower, a brush truck, and a rescue van in two stations, the Fire Department continues to answer the call of the original Hope Fire Company in 1854 for "strong arms and willing hearts" to protect the inhabitants of the Town of Great Barrington.