



*Bill & Bonnie Daniels Firefighters Hall & Museum - Minnesota Fire Museum*

*Line of Duty Death Honorarium*

**Assistant Chief Cornelius “Neil” Josephus Fredericks  
Minneapolis Fire Department  
Line of Duty Death #1, December 4, 1881**

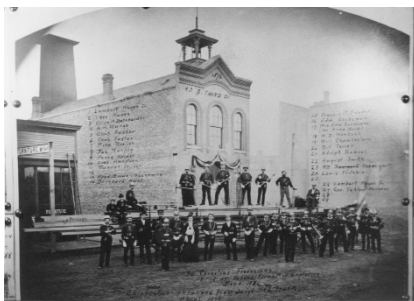
Assistant Chief Fredericks was born December 13, 1837 in Katholisch, Kelberg, Reinland, Prussia (Germany) to Andrea Friederichs and Annae Mariae Metten. He immigrated to the United States circa 1850 with his family at age 4 and they located in Detroit, Michigan. In 1858 he moved to Minneapolis to join his brother in cabinet making, working for Messrs. Curtiss and Vail. He first appeared in the 1860 Census, living in the “2<sup>nd</sup> Ward Township” of Minneapolis. His parents, wife and only child died during the years 1860-1865. In 1861, he enlisted as a private at Fort Snelling to serve in the U. S. Civil War. He re-enlisted on December 23, 1863 at the rank of Corporal and was discharged on September 2, 1865. He first appears in the Minneapolis Fire rosters on February 4, 1868 as a volunteer on the newly formed Minneapolis Hook and Ladder Company. The company was but a company in name until August 10, when a truck was received and housed in a house on Second street. Fredericks eventually rose to the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Chief of the West Division volunteers. U. S. City directories detail his occupation as cabinet maker in 1873 and living on First Avenue. In 1877 his residence is shown at Wall House.



1st Assistant Chief Cornelius Fredericks



Station “A” – on the southwest corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue North and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street was completed in January 1877, to house Germania Hose 3 and “Minneapolis” Ladder 1 of the West Division volunteer department, as well as the Chief’s office and fire alarm telegraph terminal.



“Minneapolis” Ladder 1 volunteers show off their new Babcock horse-drawn city service truck in 1876 in front of Station “E” on 3<sup>rd</sup> street between Nicollet and 1<sup>st</sup> (now Marquette) Avenue South. Station “E”, completed in January, 1873, housed “Mutual” Hose 2 and “Minneapolis” Ladder 1 of the West Division Volunteer department until January, 1877, when Ladder 1 moved to new Station “A”. Cornelius was a member of Ladder 1 and is pictured front row far right.

### **Fatal Accident: Friday, December 4, 1981**

At 3:55 AM, Companies responding to an alarm from Box 252 found flames roaring through all floors of the five-story stone Pillsbury "B" flour mill on 1<sup>st</sup> Street between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues South. Firemen concentrated on preventing fire spread to the four-story Excelsior Mill to the south and the five-story Excelsior Mill to the north, both directly adjoining the burning Pillsbury Mill. About 4:20 AM, flames broke through unprotected windows in the Excelsior Mill, forcing firemen from the building, and soon totally involved that mill also.

Chief Bracket felt confident that the windowless exposed wall of the Minneapolis Mill, covered with several streams, would prevent further fire spread. At 5:12 AM, however, without prior warning, a terrific dust explosion tore through the Minneapolis Mill. Its stone front wall fell straight out, crashing through the platform bridging 1<sup>st</sup> Street over the power canal and carrying four fireman and the mill hand with it. Fellow firefighters immediately pulled two of their comrades, both painfully injured, from the debris, but 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Chief Cornelius Fredericks, Ladderman John Toohey, and the mill hand remained buried in the rubble filling the canal. All were dead when reached much later, as was another mill employee when it blew up. Several other firemen suffered injuries from flying debris, two firemen on the roof escaped death when the blast deposited them unhurt on the roof of an adjoining mill.

By 9:00 AM, brave and tenacious firefighting brought the blaze under control. Four large flour mills had been destroyed with a loss of \$298,168. Firefighters mourned the first Minneapolis Fire Department fatalities in line of duty. The blaze underscored the fearful hazards of the flour milling district, which had prompted Chief Fredericks to predict, with grim accuracy, after an earlier mill fire, "I shall die down there on that platform yet."

*Mill City Firefighters – The First 100 Years – 1879-1979* by Richard Heath

It was claimed that the force of the explosion was felt at Anoka, eighteen miles away. The fire drove numerous rats from the mills; they were crushed by the fee of the multitude. One of the employees of the Pillsbury mill lost \$70 in money and watches, which were in his clothing in the building.

Large numbers of pigeons, blinded by the sudden glare of the flames, flew hither and thither about the mills and finally dashed into the fire.

The discovery of the fire was made by Chas. Oliphant, fireman in the boilerroom of the Washburn B mill. He saw the light and gave the alarm to the six men who were at work in the mill.

*Minneapolis Tribune, December 6, 1881*

Assistant Fire Chief Cornelius Fredericks and Ladderman John Toohey were the first recorded Firefighter Line of Duty Deaths in the State of Minnesota. They died in action fighting a blaze that destroyed four flour mills on 1<sup>st</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> (Portland) Avenue South. Flames starting in the Pillsbury "B" Mill had spread to the Excelsior Mill south of it and were threatening the Minneapolis Mill to the north. Fredericks and Toohey were on 1<sup>st</sup> Street when a violent dust explosion in the Minneapolis Mill blew out its walls, burying them in the debris

### **Funeral: Tuesday, December 6, 1891**

He was survived by three brothers, who, at the time of his death, one lived in Superior City, WI, another of Detroit, Michigan, and the other – Lewis Fredericks of St. Paul.

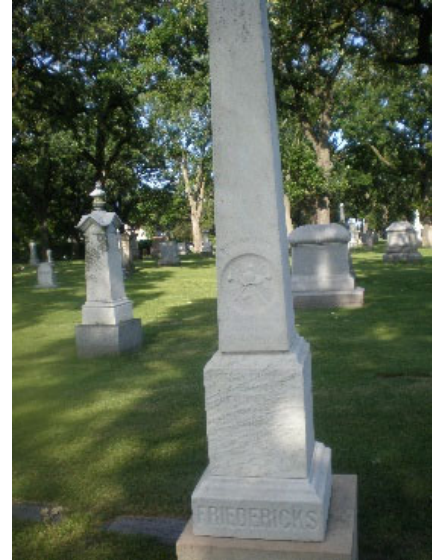
“Neil Fredericks as he was familiarly called by his old comrades of the volunteer department, was a man universally beloved, upright, honorable, courteous, and kind, blessed with executive ability and good judgement, he was always to be depended upon in an emergency. His death caused universal sorrow in Minneapolis, where his memory will be fondly cherished so long as any of the “old guard” live to recount his gallant deeds.” *History of the Minneapolis Fire and Police Departments – 1890, Page 62*

The funeral was held Tuesday, December 6, 1881. From the Minneapolis Tribune that day – “The remains are to lie in state at headquarters from 12 P.M. to 2 P.M. today, where they may be viewed by friends. As deceased is to be interned in the Catholic Cemetery in East Minneapolis, it will preclude the attendance in regalia of members of the secret order to which Mr. Fredericks belonged. His wife and child are buried in the same cemetery, and a burial permit would not be granted without the assurance that the funeral would not be participated by secret societies, as such. .... At the meeting last evening it was resolved that all fire apparatus be dressed in mourning for thirty days, and that all members wear appropriate badges. All of the department and the apparatus with the exception of the steamers, will be in the parade, and the line of procession will form on Second street and Third Avenue North, and be ready to march at 2 P. M. The order of procession will be as follows:

Platoon of Police Band  
Turners Society  
Harmonia Society  
Odd Fellows  
Old Volunteer Firemen  
Visiting Firemen  
Hose Co. No. 2 – Cataract Engine House  
Hose Co. No. 1  
Hook and Ladder Co. No. 2  
Hose Co. No. 2  
Hose Co. No. 4  
Hook and Ladder Co. No. 3  
Hose Co. No. 5  
Hose Co. No. 3  
Hook and Ladder Co No 1, the truck to serve as a hearse  
Mourners in Carriages  
City Council and City Officers  
Citizens.”

**Interment: Tuesday, December 6, 1891**

Cornelius is buried at St. Anthony Cemetery (Catholic Cemetery) in Minneapolis next to his wife and daughter. Plot 199 E6



**Timeline/Documents/Records/Articles:**

1834 – Birth Certificate/Baptism Record – December 13, 1834 Birth, December 14, 1834 baptism to Andreae Friederichs and Annae Mariae Metten in Katholisch, Kelberg, Rheinland, Prussia

1858 – December 5, Minneapolis Tribune – Tribute - Moved with family from Detroit to engage in cabinet making with his brother – employed by Messrs. Curtiss and Vail. In the spring of 1874, he engaged in partnership with Mr. Vail in the undertaking business, and withdrew in May last.

1860 US Census – Age 23, Occupation = Cabinet Maker, Place of Birth – Germany, Living in 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward Township of Minneapolis.

1861 U.S. Civil War Records – Enlistment April 29, 1861, Fort Snelling, Age 24

1863 Minnesota Civil War Soldiers – Induction Date 04/10/1861 – A Third Regiment, Re-Enlisted 23/December 1863, Corporal

1865 – Minnesota Civil War Soldiers - Discharged 02/Sep/1865.

1868 – Minneapolis Fire Department Personnel Roster – Volunteer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Chief, West Division.

1871 – Joined fire department – per Minneapolis Tribune – Foreman Hook and Ladder.

1860-1865 – Parents, Wife, and only child died per Minneapolis Tribune article December 5, 1881

1873 – U. S. City Directories – 1822 to 1995 – Cornelius Fredericks 1<sup>st</sup> av N, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Occupation Cabinet Mkr.

1873, November 19 – Minneapolis Star Tribune – “For First Assistant Engineer, Cornelius received 48 votes, and John II Noble 37 votes, and Fredericks was declared the nominee.

1877 U.S. City Directories – Street Address – Wall House, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

1879 – Minneapolis Fire Department Personnel Roster – Assistant Chief Engineer, Headquarters.

1881 – December 5, Star Tribune article on fire and Tribute – First moved to Detroit with his family,

1881 – Certificate of Death, Neal Fredericks - December 4, 1881, 45 Years of Age – Occupation Assistant Chief Engineer F.D. – Cause of Death Mill Explosion, Crushed by Falling Wall

1881 – December 6, Minneapolis Star Tribune

1890 – History of the Fire and Police Departments Minneapolis – Pages 51-53

1902 – Lee Marble Works, August 25, 1902 – Contract for Headstone – Cornelius Fredericks, Corporal Company A, 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, Minnesota Infantry.

**Fire Chief:**



Chief Winslow T. Bracket  
1872 to 1882