

## The History of the Columbus Fire Dept.

Deciding what to write each month takes some thought. When possible, I try to make this column timely. This past Sunday, I spoke at the Columbus Area Historical Society's Annual Chili and Soup Luncheon. So, I figured why not follow that with this article.

I love history and enjoyed the time that I had researching this topic. I relied on help from others, including John & Darlene Marks, Sue & John Walcott, Pete Kaland, Joe Hammer, and Jan Ulrich who provided historical information to me.

The presentation started in the early days with the formation of three separate fire companies in late 1876. They merged in October, 1877, to become the Columbus Fire Department. There were several state competitions that the department won prior to the turn of the century.

The locations of the fire station over the years was presented. The fire station was actually in city hall from 1893 to 1946. It was located where the current council chambers are today. Prior to the council chambers being located there, that area housed the police department for many years.

On top of city hall above that corner, there was a bell tower (not to be confused with the existing bell tower with the clock). This bell was used to alert the firemen in the early days. The original bell now sits in front of the current fire station.

The department moved into a "new" station in 1946 which was partially located where the current station sits. It remained there until 1973 when it was torn down to build the existing station which opened in 1974.

An array of fire apparatus over the years was presented. This ranged from a horse drawn steamer purchased in 1886 to the first motorized vehicle in 1925 to apparatus purchased in the 1960s and everything in between.

The former "rescue squad" was discussed. It was the city's ambulance service until August, 1977.

Some of the larger fires were mentioned including the Kurth Brewery fire in 1916. This was a major fire that was fought with the horse drawn steamer which pumped water.

On December 30, 1953, The Columbus Water and Light plant on North Water Street had an explosion and ensuing fire. This led to a blackout for the entire city as well as a large, nearby rural area. The public had to deal with no electricity for a couple of days. There being no electricity also affected the fire department's response.

1977 was a bad year for the department. On July 1, there was a large fire at the Stokely Canning Company which is where the present-day Antique Mall is located. Less than four months later, there was a major fire at Columbus Mills on Udey Street by the dam.

A display of former fire chiefs and members from the 1800s to the mid 1900s was also included.

Besides responding to emergency calls, the presentation also highlighted the firemen's other civic involvement. For decades, as the name implies, the firemen operated Fireman's Park until sometime during the 1980s. They also were the ones that hosted the city's 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration prior to today's 4<sup>th</sup> of July committee. A very popular part of that was the drum and bugle corps competition. There was also a firemen's women's auxiliary in the past.

The city of Columbus is rich in history. It's groups like the Columbus Area Historical Society and the Columbus Historic Landmarks & Preservation Commission that highlight and maintain our past.

The fire department is rich in history as well. We still have our first motorized fire apparatus, a 1925 American LaFrance engine, sitting in storage. Many new fire stations are being built to include an area to display their historic artifacts. When we move into a new fire station in a few years, we want to make room for our history to move in with us. It would be a shame not to.

If there are any groups that would like to see this presentation in its entirety and learn more about the fire department's history, please contact me.



The Columbus Fire Department's first motorized vehicle was a 1925 American LaFrance engine. This photo was taken in the mid-1920s outside city hall when the fire department was located there. The engine is still in possession of the department and is currently kept in storage.