

History of the Fairborn Fire Department by (Ret.) Lt. Robert Shadowens

Textl In 1900, the Villages of Fairfield and Osborn co-existed in Northwest Greene County. Fairfield (left), was a quiet farming community located a few miles south of its neighbor. Osborn (below), was situated on the Mud Run and was supported by the “Big 4 Railroad” and the “Indiana/ Columbus & Eastern Traction Co.” rail systems. Although both Villages had bucket brigades, they were still quite vulnerable to fire due to neither having a motorized fire department. On occasion, the City of Dayton would send help, but by the time they arrived it was usually too late.

With the invention of the airplane by the Wright brothers in 1903, Wilbur Wright Field was built just West of Fairfield. The field grew at a rapid rate, and in turn so did both Villages. In 1913, the Great Flood of the Miami Valley affected the future of both Fairfield and Osborn. To prevent future flooding, the Miami Conservancy District planned to construct five area dams. One of the dams to be constructed placed Osborn directly in a vulnerable flood plain. In 1922, The Huffman Dam was completed, and an organized community effort to relocate the Village of Osborn was in full swing. As both Villages continued to grow, the need for motorized fire protection was quickly becoming a reality, especially after a fire wiped out an entire business block in Fairfield on March 23, 1922.



Shortly after the fire, William “Uncle Bill” Schneider was appointed Fire Chief in Osborn, and a Ford “Model T” pumper was purchased. The first Osborn firehouse was a small wooden building located at the Northwest corner of

Main St. and Pleasant St. In the early 1930’s, the Village of Fairfield purchased a Ford “Model A” pumper and appointed Harrison Null Fire Chief.

Early in the morning on February 9, 1934, the I.O.O.F. building located in Fairfield was totally destroyed by fire. The Fairfield Fire Department received help from Osborn, Wright Field, Patterson Field and Dayton in attempts to extinguish the blaze, but they proved unsuccessful. The total loss of the building was \$30,000. Ironically enough, this was not the first fire in this building. The first occurred in 1869.

The Tri-County Herald newspaper served both Villages during this period and the papers editorial page was highly influential in persuading the Osborn Village council to purchase a new 1935 Ford 500 GPM (gallons per minute) pumper for \$2,100. The vehicle was stationed at the Village firehouse at 16 N. Central Ave. Pete Finlayson was the Fire Chief during this time.

In 1941, Glen Johnson served as the Fairfield Fire Chief. Under Chief Johnson the department purchased a used 1932 Howe Studebaker and also signed a three year contract to provide fire protection to Bath Township for \$900.00. With the United States drawn into World War II, Chief Johnson enlisted into the Army Air Corp. in 1942. The Fairfield Village council appointed M.L.”Bud” Warner as the new Fire Chief. Chief Warner was a charismatic leader that recognized the need to expand the fire department. He was a master fundraiser, and understood the importance of camaraderie in the volunteer fire service. He authorized the renovation of the firehouse and began an active campaign to recruit more firefighters.

In 1945, the citizens of Fairfield overwhelmingly passed a levy to purchase a new 1945 Oren White pumper.



Chief Warner displayed his fundraising skills by leading his department in raffles, bake sales, and collecting donations from local businesses to purchase a 1947 GMC 500 GPM pumper for \$9,600.00.

The Fairfield Fire Department was heavily involved in all types of fire and first-aid training. They had become one of the best trained and well-equipped fire departments in the area. Being faced with numerous large barn fires in the Township, Chief Warner and his firefighters developed and taught fire prevention to local farmers. Barn fires in the area declined drastically in the following years.

During the war, it became difficult for both departments to recruit new firefighters. The departments became very competitive with each other and hard feelings festered through the years. The Village of Osborn later hired Chief Warner to become their Fire Chief also in an effort to unify both departments. Chief Warner held this position for about six months in Osborn. Shortly after Warner's departure, Dave Mayer became the new Fire Chief.

Early in the morning on November 4th, 1947, the YMCA was found fully involved in fire by an engineer operating a switch engine at the local cement plant. He awoke the neighbors with a constant blast of the train whistle. The YMCA, the local library and the USO were a total loss. Chief Mayer stated that the fire was set to cover up a burglary.

In the late 1940's, both Village councils began talks on a possible merger. Chief Warner also began the process of merging the two fire departments and on January 24th, 1948, a one year contract was signed with the Village of Osborn for fire protection. The departments officially merged and became the Fairfield Fire Co. Inc.(below)

At approximately the same time in 1948, the invention of a new service called "Emergency First-Aid" was introduced to the area. That same year a 1948 GMC panel truck was purchased and fitted with state-of-the-art first-aid equipment. Citizens of both Villages now had access to not only emergency assistance, but transportation to local hospitals.



On January 1st, 1950, the Villages of Fairfield and Osborn officially merged to become the incorporated City of Fairborn.

Fire Chief

"Bud" Warner found himself not only the Chief of a City fire department, but also it's first full-time firefighter. Two years later, Chester Kerry and Joe Carbaugh were hired full-time.

The City continued to hire firefighters on a regular basis and on April 4, 1956, the IAFF Local 1235-Fairborn Professional Firefighters was formed.

Also in 1956, a pair of Central 500 GPM pumpers were purchased, and the new Wright-View firestation was opened. The department continued to grow with both volunteer and professional firefighters. In November of 1957, the citizens of Fairborn passed a \$60,000 bond issue, and in 1958 Fire Station #2 at 1164 S. Maple Ave. was opened and staffed with full-time 24/48 hour firefighters.

As the City continued to expand, the downtown business district did also. Everything could be purchased downtown, and Fairborn was rapidly becoming a strong and vibrant commerce center in Greene County. The Fairborn Furniture Store, located next to Foy's 5 and 10 cent store was an important part of the downtown scene. In the afternoon of August 26th, 1966, a fire that started in the basement destroyed the business, and placed the entire business block in jeopardy (below). It was later discovered that the fire was started by children playing with matches.



Fire Chief "Bud" Warner had been on the department since the late 1930's and had become a well-known fixture in firefighting circles all over the state. He was active in both civic and fire service organizations. In 1972, he announced his plans to retire. The City hired Charles Rule to succeed Chief Warner in 1974. Both Chiefs worked together to help develop plans to build two new fire stations in the City.

On November 5, 1970, the department hired Claude Jenkins. Jenkins was the first African-American firefighter hired by the City.

In 1974, the City of Fairborn hired Teri Floren. Floren was not only Fairborn's first female firefighter, but the State of Ohio's first female professional firefighter.

The year 1975 was a pivotal year in the history of the Fairborn Fire Department. It saw the opening of Fire Station #3 at 1000 Yellow-Springs Fairfield Rd., and Fire Station #4 at 444 W. Funderburg Rd. Both the Wright-View

station and Fire Station #2 were closed. That same year, fifteen additional firefighters were hired-which raised each shift's total by five personnel.

In 1976, Chief Rule left the City, and Robert Johnson becomes Fairborn's next Fire Chief. The department's first aerial truck was purchased, a 100' Seagrave Ladder-known as Truck 106 (below). Also remarkable about 1976, is the completion of the City's Police & Fire Complex. This new building housed the police station, jail, dispatch center and fire administration offices.

During the 1980's the relations between the City and the firefighters Local deteriorated to the point of prolonged impasse of contract negotiations. Contract issues were resolved, and the City and firefighters reached an agreement in 1982. Later in 1982, Chief Johnson left the department and Robert Haun was promoted to Fire Chief on October 2, 1982.



On September 24, 1985, M.L. "Bud" Warner was inducted posthumously into the Ohio Fire service Hall of Fame in Reynoldsburg, Ohio. This honor was fitting not only for his 36 years of service with the City, but for his dedication to the fire service throughout the region. He will forever be remembered as Fairborn's first Fire Chief.

During the 1980's and 1990's, several pieces of apparatus were purchased. In 1985, a Sutphen pumper was purchased and housed for many years at Fire Station #1. It was later replaced in 1994 by a 3D Spartan Pumper. In 1990, the original Seagrave aerial was refurbished by Pierce Fire Company and continued to serve the City until replaced in 2001 by a E-One 75' Quint.

In 1991, the City purchased a new KME/Spartan pumper that replaced a 1977 Pierce 1000-gallon pumper-tanker at Fire Station #4.

In the Spring of 1992, Chief Haun retired from the department after a long and successful career in Fairborn. On May 5, 1992, Robert Sponseller was promoted from Battalion Chief to Fire Chief.

With the rise in popularity of Chief Brunacini of the Phoenix Fire Department, a trend to provide greater service for the public began to sweep the nation's fire service.

Customer service became a popular theme, and Fairborn was no exception. In 1996, the department introduced Operation Safety-Net to the citizens of Fairborn. The concept of the Safety-Net program was to provide senior citizens that live alone a way to make contact with someone on a daily basis. If a problem arose, or contact could not be made, crews would confirm the well-being of the resident by performing a house check. The program was an instant success, and is still in service today.

Chief Sponseller retired from the Fairborn Fire Department in 2000. Rudy Weyland was hired from Longview Oregon to become Fairborn's next Fire Chief on November 27th, 2000. Chief Weyland had a long career in the fire service with most of his time being spent as a Battalion Chief in Anaheim, California. Chief Weyland saw the need for new and updated fire facilities and equipment, and worked on ideas to make it happen.

Chief Weyland announced his planned retirement for the end of 2004. On January 1, 2005, Mike Riley was promoted to become Fairborn's seventh Fire Chief. In November of the same year, the citizens of Fairborn passed a 1/4% income tax levy for the purpose of building two new stations and remodeling two others. On March 1, 2006, citizens, City leaders and fire personnel gathered for the groundbreaking. The first new building to be built was new Fire Station #1 located at 495 N. Broad St. This building would replace the existing station #1 at 29 N. Broad St. The Broad St. station had been in service as a fire station for over 80 years (below).



Fire Station #1 was built in 1884 as a schoolhouse. It has a long and fabled history, and hundreds of dedicated firefighters graced her doors through the years. Some of the small children that once played in her halls have returned on occasion as adults to reminisce and tell stories to their own children and grandchildren. It was a sad day when on January 5, 2007, her bays were emptied and the doors were closed for good.

The other new fire facility to be built was Fire Station #2 at 2200 Commerce Center Blvd. In June 2006, Chief Riley announced plans to merge the new station with the Beaver Creek Township Fire Department. Both departments would respond to either City or Township in an effort to fill obvious voids that existed in Southeast Fairborn and

Northwest Beaver Creek. On January 4th, 2007, Fire Station #2 was opened for business.

On January 26, 2007, dedication services were held at the new Fire Station #1. The firefighter memorial was moved from the old station and was rededicated before a crowd of dignitaries, family, friends and local press. There was also a large turnout from retired members. During the ceremony the bell was rung once for each deceased member. The event was concluded with bagpipes being played by Fairborn Police Officer Doug Collie.

The Fairborn Fire Department is poised to serve well into the 21st century and continues to provide the citizens of Fairborn with the highest quality of services possible.



If you have additional information or pictures pertaining to the Fairborn Fire Department, please contact Lt. Brad Eckert at 754-3080.