

History of Versailles Fire Department Versailles, Ohio

Early fire protection in Versailles (formerly known as Jacksonville) was very informal and consisted of a volunteer bucket brigade, with Swamp Creek being the water supply. As the village expanded, several wells were established to help fight fires.

In March 1871, a committee was appointed by village council to secure hooks, ladders, hoses, and a carriage to haul the new fire equipment. Prices were secured and local businesses were hired to make the necessary equipment. A portion of the combination town hall and township building erected in 1876 was used to house the fire equipment.

In 1884, still a volunteer organization, better and more equipment was purchased by the village. Better water supply was established by digging three large cisterns in different parts of the village, assuring a fairly adequate water supply. The fire department also owned a fire engine at this time that had to be pulled to the fire with draft horses. Charles Treon had a pair of black horses that were typically used for hauling coal. If Charles was not around, the fire engine had to be hand-pulled to the fire by firefighters and citizens. The fire engine had a wood burning, steam driven pump to secure enough pressure to create a strong water stream.

On March 3, 1892 the new fire bell gave its first alarm to alert volunteer members to a fire at Sebastian Worch's smoke house. The department's 16 members were under the leadership of Chief Leonard Marker at the time. This bell still stands as a tribute to past, present, and future members of Versailles Fire Department in front of their current location at 320 Baker Road, which they took occupancy of in 2008. Versailles Fire has called nine men chief throughout the history of the department. After Chief Leonard Marker were Charles Begin, John Didot, Clarence Ward, David Christian, Paul Pierron, Richard Gigandet, Robert Frey, and current Chief Brian Pearson.

On July 6, 1901, a disastrous fire occurred in the village. The fire started in the Old Scheffel Mill, which is now known as the Buckeye Overall Building, and rampaged eastward down Main Street to East Street. The fire destroyed businesses, buildings, and residences. The village's fire engine broke during this incident, but with the assistance of neighboring departments, fire hydrants, and the recently built water works system, a large portion of the east end of Versailles was saved.

In 1907, the fire department was reorganized and modernized with a fire chief, chief engineer, and 12 ladder men. Provision was made for paying the chief an annual salary of \$40, while others on the department received compensation at the rate of one dollar for the first hour when answering fire calls and 50 cents for each additional hour of fire and drill duty.

In 1922, Versailles Fire Department purchased a new ladder truck, the first motorized vehicle ever purchased by the department. At this time, subscriptions were solicited for fire protection to help defray the cost of fire protection for citizens. The subscribers were entitled to one year of fire protection by paying a fixed fee. Non-subscribers were charged for fire calls made by the ladder truck.

In March 1928, citizens, town council, and the volunteer firefighters realized the need for greater fire protection after witnessing the abilities of a neighboring department's new fire truck delivered via rail into Versailles. This new truck also proved the inefficiencies of the village water supply in the event of a large fire as experienced in 1901. A committee was formed, consisting of four members of the fire company, three councilmen, and three representatives from the surrounding farming community. The committee was tasked with the duty of deciding on the cost and make of a new fire engine to protect the Village of Versailles and surrounding

community. A subscription fund was used once again to raise \$5,700 for the purchase of the new, fully equipped fire truck. This 1928 REO fire truck is still on display at the current firehouse and local parades.

Around 1959, the fire department began to use a village garage on North Center Street, just north of the railroad tracks, to store some of their equipment. The village garage was renovated to accommodate the fire department during periods of remodeling at the town hall that currently housed the fire equipment. Over the coming years, the fire equipment moved between these two buildings, often having the equipment split between the two buildings based on available space.

In 1975, the fire department relocated to South Center Street across from the police department, in a building previously occupied by Elson Ford car dealership. This allowed the department to consolidate the equipment that was spread between town hall and the village garage. Over the years, this building served the department well due to its location in the center of town. However, limited space and bay door clearance became an issue as new trucks continued to get larger, forcing the department to defer purchase of several vehicles until construction of the Baker Road facility in 2008.

On August 24, 2000, one of the largest fires in department history occurred at the Weaver Egg farm on Christian Road. Shortly after 3pm, the call came in for a barn fire. Ventilation fans used to cool the chickens spread the fire quickly. Crews battled the fire until early the next morning and contained the fire to two barns, saving the remaining five barns and the egg processing plant, all of which were connected with conveyor belt corridors. Mutual aid was called from 12 neighboring fire departments and four rescue squads, due to the extreme heat of summer. In total, the firefighting effort included 110 firefighters and 29 pieces of apparatus. An estimated 250,000 chickens were lost in the fire.

There are other significant fires that remain in Versailles fire lore. These would include the Poultry Producers Fire in the downtown area in 1969 that destroyed nearly an entire block. In 1970, a train derailment near the current DP&L substation resulted in large amounts of whiskey being spilled along the rail line. In 1989, the Weaver warehouse located in the 300 block of East Ward Street was loaded with tons of cardboard packaging materials and kept Versailles Fire on scene through the night. Also noteworthy would be several visits to the Lost C Nightclub in Frenchtown during the 1990's.

Over the years, Versailles Fire Department has done well at maintaining their truck fleet. Many of the vehicles exceed 30 years old at the time they are replaced. In 2010, Versailles Fire Department acquired a new engine, replacing a 1968 engine. In 2015, the department acquired a new tanker/pumper that replaced a 1986 engine. Over the years, several vehicles have been built or refurbished by the volunteer firefighters, with assistance from local trucking companies. The current tanker was purchased from local trucking company AL Smith at a reduced price, with the frame being extended and a 3,100 gallon tank added. The current brush firefighting truck was modified with the addition of a pump, tank, and tool boxes, then refurbished several years ago in an attempt to extend its useful life. In the 1970's, Versailles Fire was also the recipient of a vehicle from Darke County Civil Defense in the form of a deuce and a half military vehicle that was renovated into a tanker.

In 2008, Versailles Fire Department relocated to a joint Emergency Services Facility with Versailles EMS, at 320 Baker Road. The \$2.3 million, 19,240 square foot facility includes ten bay doors, sleeping quarters, living amenities, training areas, fully functional multi-media training room, and offices for both the fire chief and EMS Administrator. The department's fleet consists of two engines, one tanker, one tanker/pumper, one brush firefighting truck, and an air

compressor trailer. 23 members are under the leadership of Chief Brian Pearson, the 9th chief in department history. In addition to responding to approximately 120 calls for service per year, Versailles Fire Department hosts a bike rodeo for local youth, manages the Grand Parade for the Poultry Days festival, hosts girl scout and boy scout groups, and educates Versailles Elementary School students on fire safety during fire prevention week every October.

Current Roster of Versailles Fire Department:

Brian Pearson	Chief/EMT
Scott Garrison	Assistant Chief/EMT
Kevin Harman	Assistant Chief
Frank Treon	Captain
Dusty Johns	Lieutenant/EMT
Ken Wagner	Lieutenant/EMR
Jason Gibson	Lieutenant
Ted Braun	Firefighter
Kyle Christian	Firefighter
Doug Didier	Firefighter
Bob Frey	Firefighter
Kevin Fulton	Firefighter
Joe Jessup	Honorary Firefighter
Jim Kolonis	Firefighter/EMT
Chad Marshall	Firefighter
Allen Pierron	Firefighter
Matt Ross	Firefighter/EMT
Mostafa Sanati	Firefighter/EMT
Eric Seibert	Firefighter
Dereck Smith	Firefighter
Neal Spradlin	Firefighter
Neal Vogel	Firefighter
Adam Voisard	Firefighter
Greg Wagner	Firefighter/EMT
Brad Yerick	Firefighter