

**Tucson Fire Department
When Fire Was Hotter
“Major Events”**



Special thanks to William “Bill” Martin:

When Fire Was Hotter

The Tucson Fire Department has been fighting fires and saving lives in the Old Pueblo for more than 120 years. Started in 1881 as a scrappy, all volunteer force, the department has grown into a modern department nationally recognized for its overall excellence.

From the beginning, Tucson firefighters strove to respond to the needs of the community, as it grew from a lawless territorial outpost into a modern city- today the state's second largest.

Major events for the department and Tucson include:

- 1877 Tucson organized as a municipality
- 1881 Tucson hook & ladder co. organized- Volunteer Fire Co.
 - Jack Boylen 1st Fire Chief from 1881-1886
 - Equipment, 22 buckets, 6 axes, 6 picks, 9 shovels
 - 1st meeting in Gem Tavern
 - Fire bell was purchased
- 1882 Tucson hook & ladder co. reorganized as Tucson Volunteer Fire Association
 - 1st station on Church St.
 - Zechendorf & Co. powder mag. 40,000# of tonite(gun cotton) explodes. Left a 15ft. hole and blew out all lights in town and pulverized 1 acre of earth
- 1883 Tucson Fire Department officially organized
- 1898 Tucson Fire Department pioneer hose co. & hook&ladder disbanded. Hose Co. and hook&ladder ran by volunteers until new fire department formed
- 1899 Fire Department reorganized
 - 21 hours a day, 365 days a year, 1 hour off for each meal
 - 1st paid firefighter was Frank C. Norton
 - \$10 month
- 1900 4 horses purchased- 2 pulled chem. Engine & hose cart, 2-pulled hook & ladder co.
- 1906 Beer went from \$.05 to \$.10
- 1908 Gamewell alarm boxes 20 installed
- 1909 Station 1 built, 142 S. 6th Ave
- 1912 Arizona becomes a state
- 1913 1st motorized 4 cylinder hand crank chemical hose truck
- 1915 2 motor trucks purchased, completely ended need for horses
 - Department becomes fully paid city operation
- 1916 Harness & rigging removed from station 1 on 6th Ave.
- 1917 2nd station built on N. 4th Ave.
- 1923 Park Ave. & E. 9th st (station 3)
- 1930 Last fire horse dies- retired since 1917
- 1933 Local 479 organized- 1st fire dept. union in state of Arizona
- 1934 Fire at Congress Hotel leads to capture of John Dillinger & gang

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- 1937 TFD not to respond to fires outside city limits unless school, hospital or orphanage
- 1942 1st Fire Inspector in service
- 1946 Fred Van Camp, 37 is the first FF to die while on duty. He was accidentally crushed while fighting fire in a city garbage truck
- Drill master H.E. "Chili" Frances was the 1st training officer as the department organized it's 1st training program
 - Fire Prevention Bureau formed
- 1949 All fire dept. vehicles are equipped with three-way radios
- 1950 Airpacks introduced to department- at least 2 on every truck though rarely used
- 1951 Department takes delivery of it's first rescue unit- all FF are qualified as first aid personnel
- 1963 Explosion at Supreme Cleaners- 7 dead, 35 injured
- 1964 Drill Master "Chili" Frances dies when his home catches fire
- 1967 Nursing home fire on E. Pima- 4 dead, several injured
- Fighter jet from DM crashes into Food Giant on S. Alvernon. Plane was loaded with 17,000# jet fuel- 4 dead several injured
- 1969 1st training center at Park & Ajo finishes construction- fully operational
- 1970 Arson fire roars through downtown Pioneer hotel. 28 people die-worst one day loss of life in city's history. 35 FF injured fighting the blaze and during collapse of extension ladder
- Pacific Fruit Express ice plant fire also injures several FF
 - Copper State Chemical 748 E. 16th St. fire injured 74 civilians & 19 FF along with several that became ill the following day. Turning point in regulations that required FF to wear airpacks
- 1972 In the wake of the Pioneer Hotel Fire Tucson purchases a 150 ft. lift platform
- Fire dept. moves into police/fire complex on S. Church Ave.
- 1974 Tucson fire puts 1st paramedic unit in service
- 1975 Fire & Police Dept. walk off job- strike lasts seven days as chief officers man 4 stations in city
- 1978 A-7 from DM crashes near U of A narrowly missing a crowd Mansfield Junior High- 2 dead
- 1984 Tucson Fire Department hires Deanna Lewis as the first female FF, followed by Carol Pranka in 1986 both are no longer on the job
- 1995 Old Tucson studios burn over 200 FF from every department and district battle the blaze
- 1996 The \$14.3 Regional Public Safety Academy opened by class of 97-1
- 1999 Electronic report writing system goes on line
- 2000 TFD reorganizes merging medical division and suppression division into 2 operations divisions
- 2002 Staffing of FD becomes automated through telestaff
- 2003 TFD avoid tragedy when roof collapses on FF at Maverick Saloon Fire
- 2004 TFD begins massive hiring to maintain staffing through retirements and new stations
- Eastside Haz Mat team put into service
 - RRT teams put into place

Greater Tucson Fire Foundation

Thanks you for taking an interest in Tucson Fire Department history —

This is one of many sections that contain information, documents, letters, newspaper articles, pictures, etc. They have been collected and arranged in chronological order or by a subject. These items were collected, organized and entered into a computerized database by Dave Ridings Assistant Chief Tucson Fire Department, Al Ring friend of the department, Greater Tucson Fire Foundation and with the help of many friends and fellow firefighters.

All graphics have been improved to make the resolution as good as possible, but the reader should remember that many came from copies of old newspaper articles. This also applies to other items such as documents, letters, etc.

Credit to the source of the documents, photos, etc. is provided whenever it was available. We realize that many items are not identified and regret that we weren't able to provide this information. As far as the newspaper articles that are not identified, 99% of them would have to be from one of three possible sources. The *Arizona Daily Star*, The *Tucson Citizen* and the *Tucson Daily Citizen*, for which we want to give a special thanks.

Please use this information as a reference tool only. If the reader uses any of the information for any purpose other than a reference tool, they should get permission from the source.

Should the reader have additional information on the above subject we would appreciate you sharing it with us. Please see the names and contact information on the 1st. TFD Archives page right below this paragraph.

