

The History of the Covington Fire Department

Picture this: It's November 22, 1909, and the city council chambers are buzzing with a sense of purpose. On that fateful evening, the Covington Fire Department held its very first meeting, and J.T. Swann was appointed as the city's first Fire Chief. Back then, the department was made up of two hose reel companies and one hook-and-ladder company, setting the foundation for what was to come. By early 1910, under the leadership of Mayor Charles G. Smith, the fire department became officially recognized. They even added an assistant fire chief and a new reel company by July of that year. It wasn't just about fighting fires—it was about building a community force that people could depend on.



For years, the firefighters volunteered their time. They didn't receive any financial compensation until 1922, when the city decided to pay the Fire Chief \$100 a year, the Assistant Chief \$50, and gave firefighters a small tax break. It was a modest start, but it recognized their invaluable service. Then came 1919, and with it, progress. The department got its first Ford truck to pull the hose reels, which had previously been hand-drawn. Just a few years later, in 1923, the city stepped up with the purchase of its very first motorized fire truck—a grand American LaFrance pumper with wooden wheels and chain-driven mechanics. It was a game-changer.



The fire department continued to grow. In 1925, V.E. Bouchillon became the city's first paid firefighter, earning \$75 per month to operate and care for the fire truck. That same year, fire hydrants and a telephone were installed at the firehouse, further modernizing their operations.

Over the decades, Covington's fire department evolved, adding new equipment, hiring more personnel, and expanding its reach. By 1957, Rodney Thomas Floyd became the first full-time paid Fire Chief. Under his guidance, the department flourished, moving into a new facility in 1960 and becoming a cornerstone of the community's safety.

Throughout the years, the department celebrated a series of milestones that transformed it from a volunteer force into a modern, professional organization. In 1976, a pivotal moment arrived when Michael Turner became the first African American firefighter to be compensated for his work. This wasn't just a staffing change—it was a powerful statement of progress and inclusion. Turner's journey, from that historic hiring to eventually retiring as a Battalion Chief in 2014, underscored that the department was ready to break down long-held barriers and build a team reflective of the

community's diversity and strength. His legacy symbolized hope and paved the way for a richer, more inclusive future for Covington's fire service.

Another cornerstone in the department's march toward modernization came in 2003, when the Covington Fire Department earned accreditation by the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI). This prestigious accreditation—making the department only the fourth in the state and the 89th in the world to receive it—demonstrated that the department not only met but exceeded rigorous international standards. This achievement was the result of years of diligent work: continually updating training programs, modernizing equipment, refining operational procedures, and even improving insurance ratings (from a Class 3 to a Class 2 by 2014). The CFAI recognition, along with subsequent re-accreditations, stands as a testament to a relentless commitment to excellence and the proactive embrace of innovation in emergency services.



In 2005, the Covington Fire Department experienced an unprecedented milestone with the largest hiring event in its history, marking the addition of a new company to its roster. This expansion brought fresh energy and reinforced the department's capacity to serve the growing community. Just two years later, in 2007, Station 22 was opened on the north end of the response area. This strategic addition improved emergency response times and further solidified the department's commitment to safeguarding lives and property across Covington. These advancements highlighted the department's dedication to adapting to community needs while maintaining its rich legacy of progress and excellence.

Today, the Covington Fire Department isn't just an emergency response unit—it's a living symbol of progress, dedication, and community service. Its storied journey from a modest, volunteer-based



organization in 1909 to a modern, fully professional force mirrors the evolution of the entire community. Each firefighter, every innovative upgrade, and every piece of new equipment tells the story of a team that has continually risen to meet challenges head on. The department has redefined what it means to serve by turning obstacles into opportunities for improvement, constantly striving to protect lives and property with courage and innovation.

The legacy of the Covington Fire Department resonates beyond its operational achievements. It speaks to the spirit of teamwork, to the passion of leaders like J.T. Swann, Rodney Floyd, and those who followed in their footsteps, and to the invaluable contributions of individuals like Michael Turner who shattered glass ceilings. This transformation embodies not only technical progress but also the deep-seated commitment these men and women have to their community. Their steadfast dedication has fortified a legacy that inspires trust and reflects the very heart of Covington—a community that values progress, innovation, and unity.

Are there areas within the City of Covington that you believe need attention from the fire department. This could include places where you've seen fires, areas prone to accidents, or locations you think should have more fire safety measures.