



THE TORRENT

ISSUE 1

THE FORT WAYNE FIREFIGHTERS MUSEUM

SPRING 2025

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Welcome to our first newsletter

Welcome to our first issue of The Torrent. Our goal is to keep you informed about what is happening at our museum. We will also share ways that you can get involved in everything that happens here. We always welcome feedback on what goes on here so, contact a board member if you have any questions.

Museum Notes

Welcome to the first issue of The Torrent. It is our attempt to keep the membership better informed about the goings on at the museum throughout the year.

A lot of things have been happening over the last several years. Our staff personnel have done a great job keeping the museum open with attendance growing each year. We have been just under 3000 attendance per year since we started regular hours in 2002. We have added space and displays. The museum was just on the first floor in 2002 and we now occupy both floors and an additional room in the back.

We have also embraced technology with the addition of an all-digital theater and several small computer kiosks throughout.



A trip to the museum is fun and informative so, if you haven't been here in a while you might want to visit and see how much we've grown.

"I have no ambition in this world but one, and that is to be a fireman. The position may, in the eyes of some, appear to be a lowly one, but we who know the work which the fireman has to do believe that his is a noble calling. Our proudest moment is to save lives. Under the impulse of such thoughts, the nobility of the occupation thrills us and stimulates us to deeds of daring, even of supreme sacrifice."

Chief Edward F. Croker FDNY

Upcoming Events

Fri. August 22, 2025
Pre-Muster Meet & Greet
7:00 – 10:00

Sat. August 23, 2025
New Haven Muster
10:00 – 4:00

"Saving Santa"
Sun. December 2, 2025
12:00 – 3:00

Fire Hydrants in Fort Wayne

When the city water works system became an effective supplier in 1880, the old fire cisterns were abandoned as rapidly as they could be replaced with fire hydrants. Most of the cisterns were filled in. With the rapid introduction of the new water mains, twenty-four “Lowry” Hydrants were installed. This particular brand of water service connection was place in the center of downtown intersections, with a view to economy and practical use. The principle may have been good, but in practice they were miserable failures and anathema to all firemen, so that mere mention of Lowrys could provoke tears or shouts of rage.

Unlike handy post hydrants, which stand up in plain sight, the Lowrys were not really hydrants at all but a flush type service connection. Hose lines could not be directly connected to the Lowrys; instead, the hose wagons had to carry a “chuck”, or portable hydrant, which was cleverly screwed into place before the valve was opened. Sometimes this valve would not work.

In a temperate climate this “bring your own hydrant” system, though a clumsy method, might be only a minor inconvenience, but in Fort Wayne’s winter weather, the streets were innocent of sand and salt and the Lowrys hibernated beneath snow and ice, until a fire occurred, when the first problem was to locate and dig out the hydrant. Many were not dead center in the intersection because of the Trolley tracks and all of them sat in a depression. If there was no snow, a quick connection, if leaky could be made, if the hydrant worked at all. In freezing weather, before the fire was out the depression was usually full of ice, firmly encasing the valve and Chuck. This did not produce a popular reaction.

By 1897, except nine which were still in place, all had been replaced by the practical post type, and the Water Works Trustees included the following statement in their 1897 report. “The old Lowry hydrants, which were located in the center of the streets, and which have annoyed the Fire Department so long because they were never in working order when wanted in a rush, as in the case of fire, have been replaced with new and improved hydrants at the street curb.

The city had 660 post fire hydrants in 1897, and yet there were never quite enough to suit the fire underwriters. For over 50 years the Water and Fire Departments were criticized for an insufficiency of hydrants, necessitating excessive lengths of fire hose lines.



Lowry Flush Hydrant Chuck



Boston Lowry in use



Post Hydrant

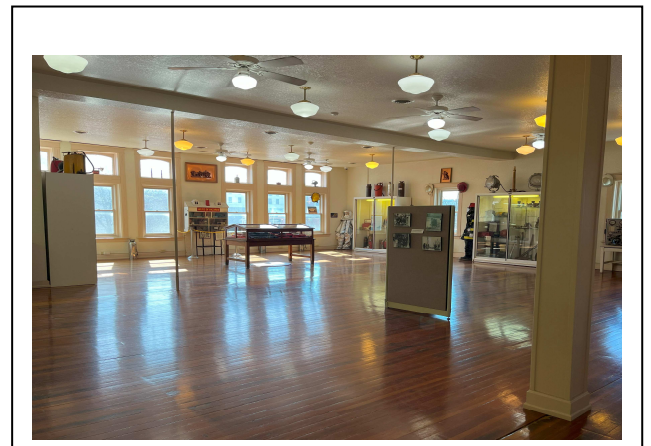
The Museum Evolution

Over the past 25 years the Museum has slowly grown into the multi room tourist destination that it is today. In 1996 the display space consisted of only the first floor of the two-story original building, with one small bathroom upstairs along with a Café'.

The first project done between 1996 and 1999 was to transform the old office into updated Men's and Women's restrooms with a hallway and door to the rear one-story storage area. With that, the idea of being open daily was born.



In 2000 work began on remodeling the large room above the west bays. This room was formerly used as the bedroom, and after closing, storage. New plaster on the walls, additional lights, new outlets, and paint. The old rubber floor was taken up and the wood floor was sanded and sealed. Display cases, pictures and mannequins were added. This room was complete at the beginning of 2002, the same time that staff was hired and we became open for business 5 days a week.



In 2009 work began and was completed on two additional rooms upstairs. These two rooms were the former hay mow to the rear of the second floor used to store oats, hay and straw for the horses which were used in this station from 1893-1920. One of the rooms was transformed into a digital theater, paid for by a grant from the Patricia Mae Franke Foundation, now known as the "Patricia Mae Franke Children's Fire Safety Theater". The other room, The Fire Safety Room, which is used in conjunction with the theater to teach fire safety to school groups.



In 2010 the Café' closed and we now had another room above the east bays to turn into display space. This room was originally the bedroom until 1907, and then Fire Prevention offices. This project was taken on by the Board and done slowly as money came in. It took three years to complete but the room was totally transformed with new drywall, lights, outlets, and the wood floor sanded and sealed. At the same time a small room at the top of the stairs was redone and turned into a conference room. The money for this came from friends of Robert Kiles, who wanted to donate something in his name at the Museum after his death. They gave us just enough to make this the "Robert Kiles Conference Room".



In 2019, the last large renovation project was started. This would be the first of two rooms in the one-story addition to the rear of the building. This is the room that the coal wagons ran out of in the early days of the department. This was another long project that took about two years to complete. It was finished when we received a couple of large donations from Kieth Busse and Steel Dynamics to complete the room. Kieth's father, Earl Busse, was a member of the FWFD from 1946-1976. That money was used to repair and epoxy the concrete floor, new drywall, added lights, and outlets. This room now housed the 1955 American LaFrance engine and one of the Hydrodyne Boats. This room is known as the "Earl Busse, Steel Dynamics Room".



In 2021, technology was added to our museum displays. Small computer screens with short videos, computer games and research material available. QR codes in place of signs, and two large TV's that can play old FWFD fire videos.



Planned Giving

A HUGE "Thank You" to all of you who are members or have been members of the museum. Your support means everything to us. Without your help we may never have grown to where we are today. In the past we have had former members of the department remember us in their estate after passing. Elmer "Doc" Gamon was the first. His estate gave us a sizable donation that helped get the museum up and running. Later on, Margaret Johnson, the first chief's secretary, set up an account with the Community Foundation to take care of her in her last few years, with the museum receiving the remainder of her estate upon her passing. The museum couldn't have expanded as quickly as we did, had it not been for their generous donations. We thank them and their families.

HELP NEEDED

The Museum is always looking for help. We have openings on our Board of Directors. We could use more part time staff. And as always, volunteers to help out with projects and special events. If you would like to help out, contact our Director at the Museum or any of our Board members



Become a Museum member

If you are not a member of the museum and want to be one, there are three simple ways to become one.

Active Firefighters;

1. Go to the FWFD intranet, forms, Union Forms, UN-04 Museum Deduction form. Fill out and return to payroll. (check your pay stub to see if you are a member)

For Retirees and civilians

2. Pick up a membership envelope at the museum, fill out the info, add your money, send back to the museum.

Or

3. Stop by the main branch of the Fire Police City County FCU and get our membership form, fill it out and give to the Credit Union. (It has banking info on it. Do Not bring to us. Leave at Credit Union)

All forms can be picked up at the Museum.

Contact Us

Firefighters Museum
226 W. Washington Blvd.
Fort Wayne, IN. 46802

(260)-426-0051

fwfmuseum@aol.com

Visit us on the web at
www.fortwaynefiremuseum.com

