

The history of the fire service essay sample

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Did you know that the earliest form of firefighting took place in Rome in 24 B. C? After almost being destroyed by unruly conflagrations, Rome created a fire department consisting of about 7, 000 paid firefighters. Their fire crews responded to and fought fires, and also patrolled the streets with the authority to fine anyone who disobeyed the fire prevention codes (Hashgan). The major piece of firefighting equipment the Roman's used was the bucket, which was passed from hand to hand to deliver water to the fire.

Additionally, they used an ax, which was utilized to remove the fuel and prevent the spread of fire, as well as to make openings that would allow heat and smoke to escape a burning building. Furthermore, in major conflagrations long hooks with ropes were used to pull down buildings in the path of an approaching fire to create firebreaks. And finally, when explosives were available, the Roman's would use them to also form firebreaks (Hashgan). Now that we know the very beginnings of the fire service, let's explore its creation in America.

Firefighting history in America can be dated all the way back to Jamestown, Virginia, where the first English settlement took place. Founded in 1607 by colonists from the London Company, Jamestown was under the command of Captain James Smith (Britannica). Just as things seemed to be going great, a destructive fire demolished most of Jamestown, including the colonists' provisions and lodgings. It was clear that Smith had to do something in order to control these devastating fires, but he was not sure what that was.

Fire prevention in the United States is said to be created in 1630 in Boston. At this time, Boston's Governor John Winthrop outlawed wooden chimneys and thatched roofs. Later, in 1648, Governor Peter Stuyvesant of New Amsterdam (New York City) was the first in the New World to appoint men as fire wardens (Hashagan). These fire wardens were permitted to inspect chimneys and to fine any violator of the fire prevention rules. The fire wardens later appointed eight honorable citizens to the " Rattle Watch". The job of the " Rattle Watch" was to patrol the streets at night carrying large wooden rattles. If a fire was seen, the men spun the rattles, and then directed the responding citizens to form bucket brigades (Hashagan) Bucket brigades are teams of people passing leather buckets full of water down a human chain. At the end of the chain the water is thrown on the fire, and the empty buckets are passed back to the water source. Using the human chain, a constant supply of buckets could be rotated through, providing a steady supply of water (Hashagan). This is recognized as the first step in structured firefighting in America.

About thirty years later, in 1676, Boston suffered numerous arson fires and then finally, a conflagration (Hashagan). This encouraged the Bostonians to send out for the " state of the art" fire engine then being made in England. The three-foot-long, eighteen-inch-wide wooden box arrived with carrying handles and a direct-force pump that fed a small hose. The tub-like section of the engine was kept filled with water by a bucket brigade (Hashagan). These devastating fires also led to the organization of the first paid fire department in North America. On January 27, 1678 the first paid fire department was established in Boston.

Twelve men and a captain were “ hired” by the General Court to care for and manage the engine and be paid for their work. Its captain, Thomas Atkins, was actually the first firefighting officer in the country (Hashagan).

Many years later, in 1736, Benjamin Franklin began asking readers of his “ Pennsylvanian Gazette” to establish firefighting companies. Franklin himself founded the Union Fire Company in Philadelphia, which became the standard for volunteer fire company organization (Hashagan). Soon after that, six volunteer corps were created in Philadelphia. Among the jobs of these volunteer firefighters were setting up bucket brigades, operating pumps, and pulling down burning roofing materials (Hashagan). Along with the establishment of fire companies, fire insurance was also created.

In 1829, a steam fire engine was built in London, but the volunteer fire companies were “ stuck in the olden days” and they were slow to accept it, but in Cincinnati, Ohio, the public forced the firefighters to use the steam engines. Additionally, William F. Channing used telegraph technology to develop the first fire alarm box system in 1852 (Britannica). By April 29, 1852 the first box was struck, and boxes were placed all over the city.

Later, in 1832, the New York Mutual Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 bought a horse to pull their engine. Before long, horses became a part of the fire service all over the country (Hashagan). Many of the horses were trained to the sound of the bell to get out of their stalls and stand at the front of the engine, usually with the help of the Dalmatian, the fire dog (Hashagan). Dalmatians were chosen as fire dogs not only because of the strong bonds

they form with the horses, but also because they guarded the engine. At the sound of the bell, the

dog would “ stir up” the horses and then run outside and bark at the people trying to cross in front of the fire house (Hashagan).

In the year 1870, the aerial ladder wagon appeared. This enabled the firefighters to reach high places, tall buildings, and made putting out fires and rescuing trapped victims easier. Then in 1871 the hose elevator was created. The hose elevator made it possible for the water to also reach tall buildings and high places. Not long after the Great Fire of Boston, gasoline powered firefighting engines were used either as pumping engines or as tractors to pull the equipment. In 1910 the two functions were combined, one engine both propelling the truck and driving the pump (Britannica). Modern equipment is usually diesel powered, and multiple variations of the basic fire engine enable firefighters to respond to many types of emergency situations (Britannica).

Some people feel that fires breed nothing but destructive outcomes, but in reality, there has been some good brought about by some of the most devastating fires in history. Examples of this can be seen through fires such as the Iroquois Theater Fire, The Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire, the Coconut Grove Fire, the New York City marine disaster, and school fires.

The date was December 30, 1903 in Chicago, Illinois. About 2, 000 people were crowded in The Iroquois Theater anxiously waiting for comedian Eddie Foy to perform. During the performance, a spotlight overheated and burst into flames, engulfing the stagehand’s overhead. A piece of cloth fell onto <https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-the-fire-service-essay-sample/>

the stage, and sudden spread all about the theater. “ As the firemen moved in to extinguish the flame, they were met with a triangle of human bodies; all entwined and badly burned (Brannigan).” Luckily of those 2, 000 people, only 602 fell victim to the fire. This fire was an awful tragedy, but inspectors discovered ways that this fire could have been prevented. Some of these include: “ blocked asbestos curtains, installed ventilators that were not in operation, exits not properly marked, exits blocked with draperies, wood, and glass doors, no installed alarm system, no fire protection devices such as extinguishers and standpipes, and no automatic sprinklers in the stage area, even though it was a municipal requirement (Brannigan).” After the investigation, the theater endured a numerous fire safety improvements including the problems addressed above. Hopefully with information the inspectors obtained, building of theaters will be set to a high standard so the chance of fires would be low.

Another example of a devastating fire is the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire in New York City. This fire marked a turning point in how fire codes addressed the issues of occupancy. The majority of the workers at the factory were young immigrant women working under “ sweat-shop-like” conditions. Over 500 workers were packed into the eighth and ninth floors of the ten story building (Brannigan). On March 25, 1911, a fire in the rag bin erupted on the eighth floor.

“ It spread rapidly through the mix of combustible cloth, and soon cutting tables and other fixtures were ablaze... Word of the fire soon began to pass through the workers jammed into the loft building. Workers surged toward

the exits with which they were familiar. They were met with a wall of fire racing up the stairs. Others moved toward another exit, but were blocked by a locked door. When they were finally able to force it, they found that it opened inward. By this time, there were so many people pushing toward the door that the door was jammed shut; people began piling up at this point (Brannigan).”

Finally after firefighters were able to distinguish the fire, they found out that the number of people dying from the blaze was around 146. After a large investigation of the fire, there were many problems that needed solutions. A result of this terrible tragedy was the creation of a new bureau of fire prevention within the fire department. Additionally, labor laws were drawn up that banned many of the conditions that led to the fire, including overcrowding occupancy in the workplace. Furthermore, codes were written which ultimately led to the National Fire Protection Association’s Life Safety Code.

Another devastating fire that we have come to learn from is the Coconut Grove night club fire on November 28, 1942. The Coconut Grove in Boston was a well known night spot that was usually jammed with people. On the night of the fire it was reported that there was over 1, 000 people in the night club that had 600 people occupancy (Brannigan). The fire was said to have started in the basement lounge and then suddenly leaped its way through the club. People were darting towards the entrance (the only exit they knew), and it quickly became jammed. When the fire department arrived on the scene and gained control of the situation, they learned that nearly 491 people died from this fire (Brannigan). Now what did we learn <https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-the-fire-service-essay-sample/>

from this fire? We learned that “ combustible materials must not be used for decorations or in building components, occupancy limit requirements should be strictly enforced, exits need to be kept clear of obstructions and plainly marked, that public assembly buildings must have two separate means of exits that are distant from each other, and that exit doors should swing in the direction of egress traffic flow (Brannigan).” If you thought that all of the fires that we have learned from occur in buildings, you were wrong.

On June 15, 1904 a tragedy occurred on the water in New York City. At approximately nine in the morning the excursion steamer General Slocum moved along the water packed with over 1, 400 passengers. A little while up the river a fire erupted towards the front of the ship. Crew workers tried to conquer the fire with a hose, but they soon realized that the hose did not work. In addition to the hose malfunction, many other things began to go wrong. The lifeboats were lowered incorrectly which resulted in them dumping many people into the water. Passengers slipped into life preservers, but quickly recognized that they did not work. Furthermore, in a desperate attempt to reach land, the captain turned the boat into the wind which caused the fire to move more rapidly throughout the ship. On that sad day, about 1, 200 were killed, and even entire families were wiped out (Brannigan). After another sad examination a number of changes were made such as “ evacuation drills for crew and passengers, firefighting training for crew members, sufficient amounts of the proper firefighting equipment, periodic inspections to insure equipment condition, and sufficient life preservers and lifeboats (Brannigan).

There have been many school fires that have brought about changes in the way the schools handles the fires. Each of the fires led to improvements that benefited children all over North America. These improvements were “ exit drills made mandatory, construction practices made according to code, more school inspections in most places, and a greater emphasis on installed fire protection, alarms, and first-aid firefighting equipment (Brannigan).

I have learned many interesting things while writing this paper. First, I had no idea that the fire service dated all the way back to the Roman’s. It blows my mind that thousands of years ago they were able to organize a fire department with over 7, 000 paid firefighters. Additionally, it really impressed me how the colonists dealt with fighting fires back in the 1600’s. Instead of letting the New World burn to the ground, they were able to unite and form the bucket brigades to battle the fires. Furthermore, I was amazed at how well the way of fighting fires evolved over the years. It seemed like just as the people would come up with a new idea to fight fires, a few years down the road they would come up with something even better to fight fires. And finally, before writing this paper I felt that fires brought nothing but hardship, death, and destruction. But now it seems as if they happened for a reason, and that reason would be to inform us on ways to make buildings safer, and to prevent fires in the future.