

# INDIANA'S OLDEST *Volunteer* FIRE DEPARTMENT



WASHINGTON CO. #2

"Little Jimmy"

Brief History  
Of the  
Madison  
Fire Department  
& Walking Tour of  
Historic Sites

## About the Madison Fire Department

Organized fire protection in the old city of Madison Indiana can first be traced back to 1821, just twelve years after the city's founding in 1809. Since the beginning, its fire companies have taken the business of firefighting very seriously. The equipment used by the firefighters here has always been of the most advanced design and model. By 1840 the city could boast several hand pumpers, some of which were the same design as being used in New York City and New Orleans, an unheard of feat for a small town like Madison. By 1859 the first steam fire engine was delivered. It was built in Philadelphia by the firm of Reanie & Neafie, and it was among the first steam fire engines West of the Ohio River and among only about one hundred in the entire country at the time. Madison operated a total of nine steam fire engines from 1859 to 1901.

In the years that followed, Madison's fire department has grown to include six independent fire companies, all of whom contract with the city for municipal fire protection.

Today the fire department is unique in the fact that each company operates different colored apparatus which are yellow, red, white, green, red and white and blue. The firefighters of Madison are proud that they are the oldest volunteer fire department in Indiana and arguably the most historic fire department in the country. It is unusual for one to find living history that saves peoples lives and property, but here in Madison one couldn't expect anything less of her proud volunteers. So join us for a tour of this exciting and little known aspect of Madison's history.



### Site of Original Firehouse Main & Walnut Streets

The first fire house was located at the Southwest corner of Main and Walnut Streets and was built in 1830. It was a simple frame two story engine house which measured just 16 x 20 and cost \$13.82 plus a 2% commission for the builder. It was originally occupied by the United Volunteer Fire Company and housed the hand engines, "Hoosier", "Little Red", "Madison" and "Alpha". This firehouse continued to serve the Fair Play Fire Company for nine years until the city constructed a new house for them at Third and Jefferson Streets in 1848-49. It was destroyed by fire in 1848.



### Fair Play Fire Company #1 405 East Main Street

Established on Sept 15, 1841, the Fair Play F.C. No. 1 was organized by members of the old United Volunteer Fire Co. Their motto since 1841 has been "Help One Another", which is still boldly proclaimed on their present apparatus. Eleven members of this company were killed in the Civil War, including Joseph Lanceski who was accidentally shot in Tennessee in 1864. The One's moved into the former Trolley Car Barn on East Main Street in 1888 and soon added the 55 ft bell tower.

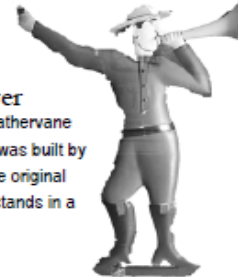


This company was also the first in Indiana to purchase a yellow fire engine in 1969. The interior is not only a working firehouse but a museum as well. They run a yellow E-One pumper.



### "Little Jimmy" Atop Fair Play Bell Tower

Local tinsmith Peter Hoffman constructed this Weathervane for the One's in 1889 for \$28.85. A "New Jimmy" was built by Don Felix of N.H. and placed on the tower after the original was damaged in a storm. Today the 1889 figure stands in a special case in the One's firehouse.



### "Neptune" Hose Carriage Fair Play Fire Company #1

One of the oldest pieces of fire apparatus in the midwest remains here today in Madison. In 1851 a local wagon maker, Ezra Greene was contracted to build a four wheel spider hose carriage of Philadelphia design to be used by the One's. Purchased for \$450.00, "Neptune" was pulled by at least twenty men manning her ropes (up front) and her brakes (in the rear). Today "Neptune" still resides in the One's engine room as she has for over 150 years.



### Washington Fire Co. #2 Oldest Active Firehouse in America

Built just three years after the Two's formation in 1845, this brick engine house is located on West Third Street near West St. When built it was one of two nearly identical firehouses constructed by local builder John Harrington. It is a fine example of a Greek Revival firehouse construction and is in remarkable condition for its age. In 2006 it became the oldest Active fire station built for that purpose in the U.S., after the Hudson, N.Y. fire department closed its 1839 station. The bell tower was once enclosed by a massive wooden louvered cupola which has since been removed.



The building is a perfect example of how historic preservation and the needs of the cities modern fire service can work together in harmony. The company runs a red Seagrave fire pumper.

**6 Western Fire Co. No. 3**  
821 West Main Street

May of 1853 saw the birth of this company which has been located on West Main Street since the beginning. The original 1851 firehouse stood in the front of Lydia Middleton School on W. Main St. In the 1920's, the new station was located across and down the street. Today the company's bell tower still contains its bell, just as four other firehouses in town do. The company still retains a small Civil War cannon known as "Old Smoky" which for many years was fired on July 4th. Although the cannon was missing from 1861 to 1864 it was finally located in 1866. The Three's motto "We Strive to Save", is ornately gold leafed on their current apparatus. Western was the first company to break away from red fire apparatus when a 1939 Seagrave was delivered in White with gold lettering. The company still operates a white Pierce fire engine with hand painted murals on the doors of old.

**7 Walnut Street Fire Co. No. 4**  
Former Quarters 808 Walnut St

Established in 1873 the Four's have been located on Walnut Street since their inception. This brick firehouse is located at 808 Walnut Street and was completed in 1875. Madison's Hook & Ladder Company occupied this building until 1961 when they relocated to Third & Walnut Streets. In 1984 this building almost became the City Fire Museum but the plan did not materialize. Today you can see the original 1929 Ahrens Fox ladder truck in the Four's current firehouse. This company operates a state of the art American LaFrance aerial platform truck, which of course, is painted Kelly Green.



**8 Fireman's Park**  
Vaughn Drive 7 West Street

Located at Vaughn Drive and Jefferson Street this one acre park is dedicated to the volunteers of the MFD. The Washington Fire Co. No. 2 has a fine granite tablet in the park which was erected upon the company's 150th anniversary in 1996.

**9 Civil War Fire Bell**  
In quarters of Walnut St. Firehouse

For the first time since 1874, this 1000 pound fire bell can be viewed by the public. Although this bell rung out countless fire alarms in it's history, it was never meant to be a fire bell at all. It was cast in 1858 by the Buckeye Bell Foundry in Cincinnati, Ohio for Mr. Howell Hinds a plantation owner near Greenville, MS. Somehow the bell was not able to be delivered, and by the time Civil War arrived the bell was still at the foundry in Ohio. In 1868, Mr. Hinds was murdered during a dispute near his Plum Ridge Plantation. Finally in 1874 the newly organized Walnut Street Fire Company, composed almost entirely of German immigrants, purchased the bell for \$710.00. It is now on display in the 'Fours' firehouse and is still rung each month to alert members that the company is meeting is about to begin.



**10 North Madison Fire Co. No. 5**  
1825 Allen Street

Located in North Madison, The "Fives" were organized in 1952. They are located in a two bay station with their original bell mounted over the firehouse. The bell of this company is actually on permanent loan from the Madison School District, as it hung for many years in the Upper Seminary School and was cast sometime before 1850. On April 3, 1974 the firehouse was nearly destroyed in a Tornado and evidence can still be seen of the damage along the rear brick walls. They operate two fire engines, both of which are painted red and white and built by Pierce Manufacturing.

**11 Clifty Fire Co. No. 6**  
631 Clifty Drive

Located on Clifty Drive, on the hilltop, the "Sixes" were organized in 1969, nearly one hundred and twenty-eight years after the Fair Play Fire Company. They are responsible for all vehicle extrication and specialized rescue in the city and area. All of this companies apparatus were painted metallic Blue & White, but in 2008 the company received the Four's 1994 Seagrave ladder truck which will provide an aerial ladder to the hilltop and remains metallic green.



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