

History of the Terra Alta Fire Department

From water buckets and simple hand tools to modern high-output pumper-tankers and thermal imaging technology that can actually “see” fire between walls, volunteers in Terra Alta have been providing emergency services for over 80 years. The history of the department can be traced back to the early 1900’s. In the early days, the fire department consisted of anyone available to carry water. In 1925, concerned citizens met at The Preston Republican Newspaper Building on Washington Street and organized the first efforts toward a formal department called the “booster club”. This club appointed a committee of five members to form the structure and by-laws of a volunteer fire department (White 1990).

First Five Committee Members:

H. Paul Schaffer

M.W. Harris

Fred B. Mayer

H.H. Parsons

F.K O’Kelley

The department’s bylaws and constitution were approved, and on May 4, 1927 the department was formed with fifteen volunteers. The department approached the town council in 1928 to pay ½ the cost a 3-Ton Chassis Fire Truck – the total cost was \$6,200 for which the town paid half and the department paid half. Terra Alta’s first fire truck was housed in the Creed Miller garage adjacent to what is now known as the Preston County Historical Society or the old Terra Alta Bank building on Washington Street. A major project to pay for the new truck was a homecoming celebration held August 8-10, 1929. A key to this early success was community involvement – a tradition that is carried on even today with the departments 4th of July celebration. The first pumper was kept in the basement, and later a volunteer fire whistle “the howler” was placed on the roof of the building.



In the 1960's, the department moved to the old Thomas' grocery store location on State Ave / State Route 7 across from the old Ford garage – what later became Teets' parts. This location served the department for over 30 years and was the home of two of the most famous fire trucks in town – “Big Red” and “Black Beauty” (1965 and 1970 Ford pumpers). This small two garage structure actually would accommodate five pieces of apparatus and firefighting gear on the first floor, while the upstairs held a kitchen and meeting area.



In September of 1989, the department moved to its current location at Shaw Memorial Station. The Shaw estate donated money to assist with the necessary funds to build the new building. The current fire hall contains both an apparatus bay and meeting area / kitchen. The fire hall sits on 5.5 acres of property (The Fireman's Field) owned by the department – which is the location of the 4th of July celebration and the annual demolition derby. Recent improvements to the building have been the addition of an air cascade system and paving the apron area between the fire hall and Route 7.



Although the scope and mission of the department has evolved over time, the core idea of providing safety and protection services to the citizens in and around Terra Alta remains the same. In the early days, the department's mission was solely to fight fires. Today, the department still provides firefighting and suppression services but also emergency medical response, motor vehicle accident response and patient extrication, hazardous materials response, wildland firefighting and public service assistance.

Past Fire Chief's:

C.T Fraley

Frank Zeller

Barney Delauder

James Gregg

Daniel Layton

References:

White, Betty (1990). *The Past is a Key to the Future: A History of Terra Alta, WV and its vicinity*. Parsons, WV: MPC McClain Printing Company.