

Fire Department History



Pioneer Hook and Ladder - Great Falls Fire Department - Great Falls Fire Rescue

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| 1884 | The City of Great Falls, Montana was founded. |
| 1886 | December 23rd, The Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company Volunteer Fire Department was organized. There was no readily available water supply in the city, except to bucket brigade water from the river, so a contract was made with a local businessman who had a water wagon. He would follow the hook and ladder wagon to the fire. |
| 1887 | The first Fire Station was built at 2nd Avenue South between 3rd and 4th Streets. The station cost \$475.00 to build. A bell was purchased to be used as the city fire alarm. This bell was the first brought into Montana. When the Fire Department bought it, there was a crack in it but it was the only one around, so they repaired it and it became the fire alarm bell. |
| 1888 | The City of Great Falls was incorporated. County Commissioners declared Great Falls a CLASS 2 city. An election was ordered for November 10, to elect the first city officials. |
| 1889 | A water plant was created in the city, and a couple of Volunteer hose companies were organized. A two story brick building was built on 2nd Avenue South and 2nd Street as a permanent Fire Station for the 2 Hose companies plus the Hook and Ladder Company. |
| 1891 | The First Hose Wagon was purchased, but there was not enough money to buy a team to pull it with, so they borrowed a team from a nearby livery stable whenever there was a fire. |
| 1892 | The Fire Department was reorganized as a fully paid |

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- 1896 department for the City.
June 1, the city of Great Falls advanced to First class. A watchman was hired to stay at the Fire Station to watch after the apparatus and to sound the alarm if there was a fire.
- 1901 Station #2 was built on 13th Street between 4th and 5th Avenues North. Two story brick and stone building. It had no basement. In 1901 the wages paid Firemen was \$90.00 a month and they were compelled to remain at the station day and night except for meal time. Each fireman was allowed to stay away from the fire station 1 night each week but they still had to respond to every fire call. Total cost for operations at that time averaged about \$950 a month or \$11,400 a year.
- 1910 The department bought the first motorized apparatus in Montana, the Fire Department had 14 people working out of 2 fire stations.
- 1914 February - moved into the central Fire Station built on 2nd Avenue South between 4th and 5th Streets. Originally constructed as City Hall, both the Police and the Fire Department were eventually housed in the building. It cost \$60,000 to build. The 3rd fire station was built on 2nd Avenue Southwest. It was built as a joint Police/Fire station for the Westside of the city. Construction was completed April 16, 1914.
- 1916 The Fire Department had 3 fire stations with 10 men on duty each day. Budget for the year was \$35,360.79 (From December 31, 1916 report)
- 1919 January 28, 1919, The total budget expense of the Fire Department was \$62,398.43 for the year 1918.
- 1920 Great Falls City Population was 24,121, covering 8.16 Square miles.
- 1927 The Fire Department had a total of 30 members working out of 3 fire stations. They were on a two platoon system working a 10 and 14 hour work day. The cost of operating the Fire Department in 1927/28 was \$54,648.
- 1930 City population estimated to be about 35,000 still covering 8.16 Square miles. The Fire Department had 2 engines, 1 Ladder, & 2 hose companies housed in 3 stations. There were a total of 30 men working. (12 were used as call backs, and were on duty at the stations only at night)
- 1937 The working shift system was changed to 3 platoons, each working an 8 hour shift. Each fireman was given one day off in an 8 day period.
- 1939 August 17th - the City closed the Fire Station on 13th Street and 5th Avenue North. This building was later sold. This reduced the Fire Department to one West Side Station and one fire station down town. (The station closure was precipitated by the need to balance the City Budget).
- 1941 In April, a Citizens Advisory group to the City Council was established. In June, \$54,000 in bonds were sold and used to modernize the Fire Department. A Kenworth 1000 GPM Fire Engine, an American LaFrance Spartan 500 GPM fire engine and a Seagraves Ladder Truck were purchased. (Cost

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\$27,000) These fire engines were the first to have totally enclosed cabs, the Aerial did not.

We still had that Ladder Truck in service as our reserve Aerial until 2000. It had all of the hydraulic parts refurbished or replaced, and the aerial ladder was replaced with a new one about 1968. We used it when the 1970 Snorkel - Elevating Platform, was taken out of service.

- 1950 A New "Northside" Fire Station was built on Central Avenue and 33rd Street. Designated Station #3 it cost \$23,826.00 to build - (City Population - 39,214).
- 1952 A 750 GPM Piersh Fire Engine was purchased. Cost \$24,459.
- 1955 The City was given a CLASS 6 grading by the National Board of Fire Underwriters. Population estimated at 42,000, covering 9.88 Square miles. The Fire Department had 3 fire stations and 54 firemen working. The City was given a CLASS 6 grading by the National Board of Fire Underwriters. Population estimated at 42,000, covering 9.88 Square miles. The Fire Department had 3 fire stations and 54 firemen working.
- 1957 Labor Laws changed requirements to a 40 hour work week. The Fire Department complied with the law by changing shift schedules to a 40 hour work week.
- 1958 The Firemen and the City negotiated a 24/48 - 51 hour work week using a Kelly day every 10th shift. This required working a 24 hour shift, followed by 48 hours off duty.
- 1959 The City was graded again, and reclassified to a CLASS 5. Population estimated to be 53,000 covering 13.15 Square miles. The Fire Department had 60 personnel, working out of 3 fire stations, a Fire Chief, an Assistant Fire Chief, 3 Battalion Chiefs, 3 Fire Prevention officers, 9 Captains, and 43 Firemen.
- 1961 A 1000 GPM American LaFrance Fire Engine was purchased (\$23,158) on a 3 year contract. The City had an estimated population of 62,209 covering 14.34 Square miles. There were 18,500 recorded residences within the City.
- 1964 A 1500 GPM American LaFrance Fire Engine was purchased (\$32,523) on a 3 year contract.
- 1967 City Population 66,682, covering 14.93 Square miles. There are 74 employees working for the Fire Department. (68 Firemen, 5 dispatchers and 1 secretary)
- 1969 A \$1,969,000 bond issue was passed for improvement of the Fire Department. The City of Great Falls had a population of 67,182 covering 15.016 square miles.
- 1970 There were 5 new buildings constructed for the Fire Department. One at the corner of 9th Street and 1st Avenue South, Station #1. One at the corner of 6th Street Northwest and the Northwest Truck by-pass next to the Fair Grounds, Station #2. One at the corner of 34th Street and Central Avenue, Station #3. One at Fox Farm road and 18th Avenue Southwest,

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	Station #4. And a New Training Center and Shop at 18th Avenue and 9th Street South. (2008 -- these stations are still in use today)
1971	We moved into the new Fire Department Stations 2, 3, and 4 and took delivery of 3 Seagraves 1250 GPM diesel Fire Engines (\$34,868 each) and the 85 foot Snorkel Aerial Platform. (\$96,450) The platoon system changed to 4 Platoons working the 10/14 shift or 42 hour work week, consisting of 2-10 hour days followed by 2-14 hour nights. 4 days on duty & 4 days off duty.
1972	We moved into new Fire Station #1 on 1st Ave South on January 3rd. The City was graded by the Insurance Services Office (I.S.O.) as a CLASS 4 with 1 being the highest. The Population of Great Falls was estimated to be 62,000 at this time, covering 15.38 Square miles. The Fire Department has 4 fire stations and a training center, 102 employees consisting of the Fire Chief, 7 Chief officers, 20 Captains, 60 Firefighters, 2 Fire Prevention Officers, 6 Dispatchers, a Communications Supervisor, a Master Mechanic and one Secretary. 10 Emergency Employment Act employees were hired during this period. E.E.A. eventually became the CETA Program which ended in 1981. There were 20,750 recorded residences within the City.
1974	Communications were consolidated at the Police Department building and the 24 year old Fire Station on the corner of 33rd Street and Central Avenue was turned over to the City Park & Recreation Department. This reduced Fire department personnel by 6.
1979	The position of Training Officer was eliminated, his duties were combined with those of Assistant Chief. The Fire Prevention Bureau was reduced to 2 uniformed members, 2 civilian inspectors, a secretary and on shift personnel working in the bureau during the 10 hour shift. Engine 11 responding out of Station 1 was discontinued, and assigned personnel were reassigned to prevent the closing of Station #4. There were 78 Personnel employed by the Fire Department at this time.
1980	The Fire Prevention Bureau was reduced to the Fire Marshal, an Inspector and a secretary. Duties and prevention activities of bureau personnel were transferred to platoon personnel.
1981	The Master Mechanic working for the Fire Department transferred to Public Works. The C.E.T.A. program ended, several employees at the Fire Department were laid off. This reduced Fire Department employees a total of 74 personnel.
1982	Employed the State's first female professional firefighter. Purchased a 1980 Chevrolet 1000 GPM single stage fire truck from Billings. (\$64,000)
1983	The City was graded by the Insurance Services Office as a CLASS 2.
1986	The Fire Chief was appointed as the acting Public Safety Director.

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1987	The position of Acting Public Safety Director was discontinued.
1989	The City Commission established a Central Garage motor pool. All Motor Vehicles were made their property and the maintenance of those vehicles became their responsibility. Purchased a 1250 GPM Single Stage Laverne Fire engine built on a Ford chassis. (\$143,786) It has a fully enclosed 5 passenger cab, Top mount pump panel with Flow Meters. In July, 1 secretary (hired in February) was transferred to the Finance Department, 8 firemen were laid off and Station #4 was closed. In September, rehired 1 fireman, changed the Platoon system to 3 Platoons of 20 members each working the 24/48 hour shift with a "Kelly" Day every 5th shift or 44.6 hours a week. 24 hours on duty and 48 hours off duty, and reopened Fire Station #4. (This shift provides 14 people on duty every day)
1990	The City covers 17.349 Square miles, with a population of 58,800. The number of residences within the City is estimated at 24,500. The City still holds a grading of CLASS 2 by the I.S.O. The City purchased 2 New 1250 GPM Laverne Fire Engines. They are each built on a Freightliner truck chassis with a fully enclosed 5 man crew cab. (\$155,000 each) The Fire Department has a total of 64 personnel consisting of a Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief, Fire Marshal, Administrative Assistant, 3 Battalion Chief's, 20 Captains, 25 Engineers, 11 Firefighter 1st class, and a Firefighter.
1991	Hazardous Materials response team was formed.
1994	The platoon system changed back (1971) to 4 Platoons working the 10/14 shift or 42 hour work week, consisting of 2-10 hour days followed by 2-14 hour nights. 4 days on duty & 4 days off duty. Fire Department begins responding on all emergency medical calls. (Total Fire call volume increases 56%)
1995	Mandatory Fitness Program begins. Automatic Electronic Defibrillators placed on each engine company.
1996	Purchased 1996 Smeal Quint (red) for \$402,000.
1998	Fire Department name officially changed to "Great Falls Fire Rescue."
2000	Station 2 begins Advanced Life Support responses with the help of the Carrico ALS Trust. GFFR currently has 5 paramedics. The Training Officer position, which was eliminated in 1979, was reinstated.
2001	Purchased 2200 gallon Freightliner Water Tender for \$127,000. GFFR sent 8 Firefighters to MSU College of Technology to become the first to complete the Paramedic program. (Once again Great Falls leads the state as this has never been done before.) The cost of operating the GFF/R for the year 2000 was 4.4 million dollars.
2004	GFFR purchased 3 Pierce 1250 g.p.m. Triple Combination Pumpers for \$957,530, to replace the 1971 Seagraves engines. The cost to operate GFFR was 4.7 million dollars.

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2005	Officially renamed the Fire training center to The Charles C. Carrico Regional Training Facility.
2006	Purchased a used 1994 Freightliner FL60 for \$20,000 to respond to non fire emergencies. City commissions independent emergency medical system evaluation.
2007	City conducts EMS summit attended by all system components including Police, Fire, Ambulance and Hospital. City establishes Emergency Preparedness position to manage the emergency and disaster planning for the City of Great Falls.
2008	City Commission formally establishes EMS system in Great Falls. (Ordinance 2993)
2009	GFFR awarded FEMA S.A.F.E.R. grant to hire 16 frontline firefighters. Unable to accept grant due to failure of Public Safety Levy.
2010	The City purchased a 2010 Pierce Arrow XT 100' Platform truck for \$867,000 to replace the 1970 85' Snorkel. The City also purchased a new rescue boat for \$32,000.

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