

## Where There's Smoke; There's Fire by Carol (Klenk) Heck

Before fire trucks and pumpers, and before city water pipes were installed, fires were a community effort. Bucket brigades were one way of dealing with fires. The Madeira Presbyterian church bell would sound the alarm or villagers would pass the message to each other. A chain of men, women, and children would establish themselves from a well or other water source to the blaze. Thank goodness for modern fire and EMS equipment and fire department teams.



Madeira got water service in 1924 and the methods of fire rescue changed. The Meyer Hardware/Lumber Yard suffered two fires in two weeks' time in the year of 1926. At that time, Madeira had a hose and nozzle, an axe, a ladder and a two-wheeled hose cart which was pulled by a volunteer's automobile or Tice's grocery delivery truck. At other times, the men would run down the street pulling the cart behind them. Most of their efforts were no match against the large fires.



In 1927, prominent Madeira businessmen; Walter Meyer, George Bauer, Herb Tice, and Nelson Maham were instrumental in starting the first organized fire department under the name of The Madeira and Vicinity Volunteer Fire Company. Nelson Maham became the first fire chief under this name. Through fundraising, stock sales, minstrel shows and carnivals, they earned enough money for uniforms

and better equipment. A 1927 Graham-Dodge, 4-cylinder pumper, seen above, was soon financed through the Boyer Company. I am sure the firemen thought this truck was an improvement over their old methods. However, it didn't have much horse-power when navigating the equipment load versus the steep hills in the area.

Walter Meyer bought the defunct Traction Car substation building at 6912 Miami Avenue in 1920. In 1928, his renters moved out and he allowed the fire department to move in. See photo to the right.



Also in that year, Indian Hill was growing and they asked to be a part of the Madeira Fire Department. The department became incorporated and the name changed to Madeira and Vicinity Fire Company.

The financial stability was shaky in those early years. Annual dues from the residents were voluntary. In 1930, the Graham-Dodge fire truck was sold and a new 1930 Ahrens-Fox pumper was purchased. In 1931, the department became a non-profit which alleviated the property tax burden and allowed the company to contract with the village of Madeira for their calls. The fire company was paid out of Madeira's general funds. In 1936, a second truck was purchased. It was a 1936 Ahrens-Fox with more power and more volume in its storage tank.

I thought this would be a good time to share a story of how the fire departments worked tirelessly together when the chips were down. This comes directly from the booklet, *Madiera Milestones*. "When the 1937 flood waters rose to point that they covered the Cincinnati Water Works pumping station, the entire area supplied by the Cincinnati system had to turn to alternative methods of supplying their water mains for drinking water and fire protection or simply do without. Since the water works in Milford was still operational, the fire department was called on to supplement the water supply for Indian Hill and Madeira area. The department's 1930 Ahrens-Fox, seen to the right, would soon be put to one of its most rigorous tests. Fire lines were laid from the Milford water systems to two locations in Indian Hill. One line made its way from Glendale-



Milford and Shawnee Run Roads up the hill to Shawnee Run and Park Roads where the Ahrens-Fox was positioned. Another line made its way from the Milford system near Terrace Park to the top of the hill on Old Indian Hill Road. At this position, a pumper from Loveland was placed and both pumpers transferred water from the Milford mains to the Indian Hill and Madeira mains for eleven days without rest. The Ahrens-Fox on Shawnee was refueled without stopping and the pumper on old Indian Hill Road, which was an Ahrens-Fox steam powered pumper was fed coal and wood for eleven straight days until the Cincinnati system was restored."



In 1940, an Indian Hill fire station with two bays was built at Drake and Shawnee Run Roads. One of the pumpers was stationed at this Indian Hill building and the other at the Madeira firehouse. The first full-time employee was Chief Floyd Nelson. Within two years, the department had two more full-timers. Chief Nelson lived in the house adjoining the Indian Hill station and assistant chief, Jack Diversi,



lived at the Madeira station. The name of the fire department changed to The Madeira and Indian Hill Fire Company. This last picture on page 2, is circa 1952, showing the Indian Hill station with four bays. Even today, the address remains 6475 Drake Road.

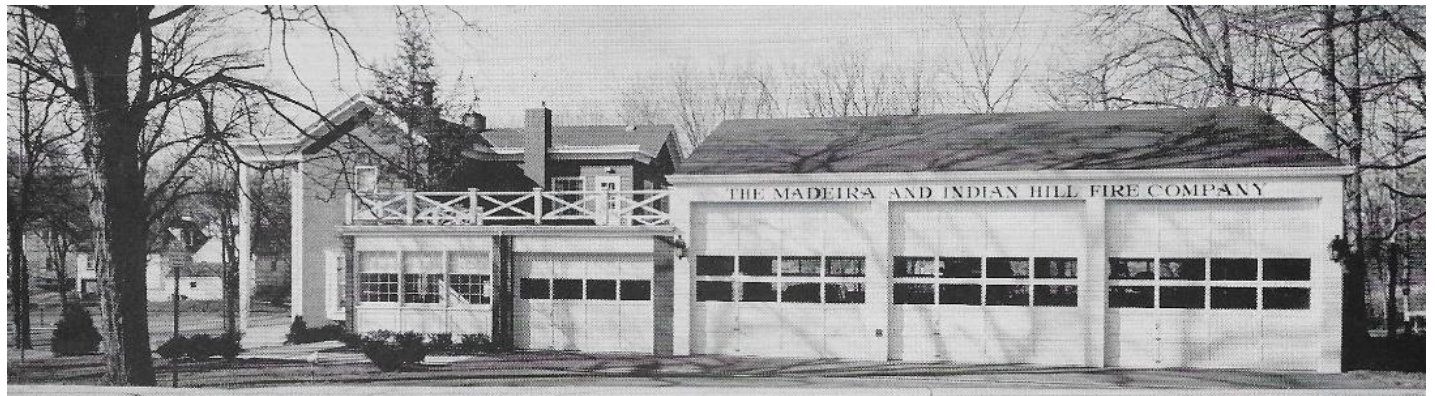
After incorporation of Indian Hill, (1941), the department could have contracts with both villages to furnish services. One of the volunteer firemen went off to WWII. He sold his 1941 Chevrolet dump truck to the fire department. The firemen reconstructed the truck to have a front-mounted pumper. This new handmade pumper truck lasted for 16 years until it suffered a wreck on the corner of Miami and Galbraith in 1957.

Some changes came about in 1944. Neighboring areas started to expand their fire department's territories and Madeira and Indian Hill's service area decreased due to that. A 1924 Pirsch ladder truck was purchased from Mariemont, and 2 years later, a 1946 pick-up truck was added. Growth was slow but steady.

In 1949, Madeira and Indian Hill started their own ambulance service with this handsome Chrysler vehicle, seen to the right. Before this, Deer Park had the only ambulance in the area. Runs were quite costly since they had been outsourced.



Beginning in 1962, the Madeira station relocated their facilities and started using the former home of John L. Hosbrook, seen here in these three pictures. Having a fire station on both sides of the active railroad tracks made sense and lowered the liabilities, thus resulting in cheaper fire



insurance premiums. Now, in case of trains coming through downtown Madeira, Indian Hill was able to get to the southern areas of the district, and Madeira could handle the northern parts.

The home of John L. Hosbrook was built in the 1890's, and served the community as a fire station from 1962-2015. Garages were added to the Miami Avenue side to accommodate the fire trucks and other rescue vehicles. The house was remodeled to allow two firefighters and their families to live on the premises. The four bays and the meeting room faced Miami Avenue as the current bays do today. "In 1964, the department was unique in that it covered three separate geographical subdivisions – a city (Madeira), a village (Indian Hill), and a township (Columbia; Kenwood area)." This last quote and the third photo above were taken from *Cincinnati Bell Bulletin*, April/May, Vol. 55, No. 4, 1964, page 10 and page 14. As this remodel was being done, the Indian Hill station was the only active station for about 10 months.

Madeira and Indian Hill officially became a joint fire department in 1985. Consolidation made it possible to save thousands of dollars on equipment and reduce duplicate efforts. The current building at 7205 Miami Avenue was dedicated in July of 2016.

If you go to their website today, it says, "The Madeira & Indian Hill Joint Fire District is the official name. Principal funding for the operation is provided by the member cities, Madeira and Indian Hill, who split the costs of the district on a 50/50 basis from the General Funds of both cities. Serving the cities of Madeira and Indian Hill, we are one of the oldest cooperative arrangements to provide fire and emergency services between neighboring jurisdictions in the State of Ohio." \*<sup>1</sup>

They no longer have volunteers or "paid by call" firefighters. That is quite impressive. You should stop by The Madeira Fire Station to view the historic items in the display cases in the lobby. Then, take a short walk to The Miller House Museum. It has a fire department display of artifacts and memorabilia if you want to see and learn more.

1. Madeira & Indian Hill Joint Fire District website, [mihjfd.org](http://mihjfd.org)

Sources include:

*The Madeira and Indian Hill Fire Company 1924 to 1950* "A Look at the Beginning" by Larry A. Van Pelt.

*Madeira Milestones*, prepared upon occasion of Madeira's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Incorporation, 1985

*Images of America, Madeira*, by Stephan Johnson and Cheryl Bauer, 2010.

Photos are mostly from the archives of Madeira Historical Society or MIHJFD storage at the Madeira Historical Society.

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Also see, "Unraveling the Hosbrooks" under Madeira Families, and "Madeira's Second Historic Area" under Maps and Homes.