**Roachdale Volunteer Fire Department**

The first record of any type of fire-related activities in the town of Roachdale is dated May 25, 1894. Several businesses and homes were affected by a fire that consumed an entire block. In total, six businesses and several houses were destroyed before the flames burned themselves out. The fire began in Wendling & Priest’s hardware store, then moved to the Roachdale News office on the second floor, consuming the telegraph office. All told, over $4000 in damages were reported. During this time, the town of Roachdale did not have an organized fire department of any kind. Local townspeople formed a bucket brigade and did their best to contain the fire, but it proved to be a futile effort. After the fire, local volunteers began to organize a bucket brigade if another fire were to occur.

It is not known exactly when the Roachdale Volunteer Fire Department was officially organized, however, in 1919, the town did purchase a used chemical apparatus that was pulled by horses. The apparatus was housed at the town hall and members of the community were taught how to use it. While not officially called a fire department, these volunteers did respond to fires in town. When, on July 2, 1920, a large house in town caught fire, although they brought the chemical apparatus to the scene, the outcome was not successful and the house was reported to be destroyed.

In contrast, on April 24, 1922, when a house belonging to Charley Stewart caught fire, once again, the chemical apparatus was brought to the scene. The volunteers worked very hard and were able to contain the flames quickly. Little damage was reported.

After a large fire that destroyed a local lumber mill, the town responded to citizens’ demands for better fire protection by organizing a fire department. Roachdale began to respond to fires in town as well as surrounding areas that as yet did not have an organized department. On October 4, 1927, a house about five miles south of Roachdale caught fire. Although the Roachdale Fire Department responded and were able to save all the farm buildings, the home was destroyed. On August 14, 1928, the firemen responded to a Bainbridge request for help save the town from a large fire that started at the oil station. Greencastle Fire Department also assisted, and the town was saved, though the oil station, a house, and an oil truck were destroyed.

With more responses coming in and other towns around the area purchasing newer, more modern fire apparatus, the town of Roachdale voted on August 26, 1955, to purchase a new International pumper truck from the American Fire Apparatus Company based in Battle Creek, Michigan. The truck, at a price of $10,929.25 had a 500-gallon water tank and carried 300 feet of 1.5” hose, 1000 feet of 2.5” hose, and 150 feet of 1” hose plus water cans for grass fires, axes, and extinguishers. The truck was delivered to the department on December 31, 1955 and placed into service the following week, after all 11 members of the department had been trained in how to use it. This purchase provided a significant upgrade in service and capabilities of the department. Franklin & Jackson Townships also helped with purchasing this truck with the agreement that the firemen would respond to fires in those Townships as well. The truck was to be kept in the fire station that was attached to the town hall located at 205 North Indiana Street. Also that year, the town had purchased new turnout coats, helmets and boots for the firefighters.

As more responses began to come in from areas outside of town, the department realized that there was a need to carry even more water to fires. They were able to purchase a 1200-gallon tanker truck that would be capable of meeting the needs of the department. On November 16, 1964, the truck was called to a large house fire three miles east of Roachdale on State Road 236. This truck made five trips to town to get more water, totalling the 15,000 gallons that were needed to extinguish Roachdale members suffered burns and cuts.

On July 3, 1972, a major fire was reported in Roachdale at Gary’s Variety Store and J&M Regal Grocery. Roachdale VFD responded quickly and realized almost immediately that this was a very serious fire, prompting calls to Bainbridge, Crawfordsville, Danville, Greencastle, Jamestown, Ladoga, New Market, and North Salem for assistance. Without the mutual aid assistance, it is likely that the entire downtown district would have been destroyed. Also assisting at the scene were the Montgomery County Red Cross and the Ladies Auxiliary, who provided food and drinks for the firefighters.

On July 4, 1974 at 5:20 a.m. the department received a call to a structure fire. Once again, the business district took a direct hit as several businesses were destroyed. Fire Chief Larry Miller was injured in this fire and transported to Putnam County Hospital for treatment. An Indiana State Police Detective found matches and several items missing at Rust Clothing store and it appeared that a break-in had occurred. This fire occurred directly across the street from the location of a two years prior. Efforts to fight this fire were hampered by several tents and a carnival that was on the street outside the businesses in preparation for the annual 4th of July fireworks event. Once again, mutual aid was requested from Bainbridge, Ladoga, Russellville, and New Market. Crawfordsville brought their newly purchased snorkel truck and were able to position it above the buildings to fully extinguish the fire.

Because Roachdale was a 30-minute drive from the closest ambulances located in Greencastle, Crawfordsville, and Danville, the department wanted to be able to provide this service to the rural areas. In 1976, a local ambulance service came to the area when Putnam Montgomery and Hendricks (PMH) ambulance service was created. For many years, this service provided coverage for parts of Putnam, Montgomery, and Hendricks Counties. Currently, PMH responds to the northern areas of Putnam County and will provide backup coverage to the entire county when Putnam County EMS needs assistance. They responded to 280 runs in 2021.

The department needed to respond to not only fire calls, but also those for other emergencies and its station occupied a space attached to the town hall that was too small to house all the equipment. For these reasons, a new firehouse was built in 1986 across the street from the town hall at 202 North Indiana Street. The 5,000 square-foot station had four bays and provided much needed space for all the trucks and equipment.

The Roachdale Community Volunteer Fire Department continues to serve the citizens of Roachdale as well as the Jackson and Franklin Townships. The department formed a fire district in 1989 to generate necessary funding. As tax revenue began to increase, they were able to significantly upgrade their fire apparatus.