



# Cincinnati Fire Department

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

## Introduction

The Cincinnati Fire Department was the first professional and fully-paid fire department in the United States. Prior to 1853, all local fire departments were volunteer-based companies with varying levels of preparedness and reputation. When Cincinnati inventors Miles Greenwood, Abel Shawk and Alexander Latta introduced a practical version of the steam fire engine to Cincinnati's volunteer fire department, its efficiency helped to convince the city council to establish and fund a professional organization. The steam fire engine, which was pulled by horses and later by automobiles, could pump water more quickly than hand-cranked fire engines, saving precious time during emergencies. Cincinnati residents fundraised enough money to purchase a second steam fire engine for the newly reorganized fire department, and the continued success in Cincinnati popularized the idea of professional municipal fire departments across the country.

## Important Dates

- 1852: Miles Greenwood's foundry, Eagle Ironworks, burns down. This inspires him to work on an improved fire engine design.
- January 1, 1853: Miles Greenwood, Alexander Latta and Abel Shawk present the "Uncle Joe Ross," a steam fire engine named after a supportive city council member, to the Cincinnati Fire Department.
- April 1, 1853: The Cincinnati Fire Department reorganizes as the country's first fully-paid, professional fire department.
- 1854: Cincinnati residents raise money to commission a second steam fire engine from Greenwood, Latta and Shawk. It is named "Citizen's Gift."
- 1854: Providence, Rhode Island, establishes a paid fire department. Other cities follow suit.

## Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), proximity or as phrases: Cincinnati fire department, Miles Greenwood, steam fire engine, firemen's riots.
- Limit your search by date to find information about specific parts of the Cincinnati Fire Department's history.
- Search newspapers in all states, not just Ohio.

## Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- "[Letter from Cincinnati](#)" *National Era* (Washington D.C.), March 31, 1853, Image 3, col. 2.
- "[News Items](#)" *Meigs County Telegraph* (Pomeroy, OH), December 13, 1853, Image 1, col. 1.
- "[A Disturbance Among Firemen in the Twenty-First Ward—Arrest of a Number of the Assailants](#)" *New York Herald* (New York, NY), March 14, 1854, Image 8, col. 3.
- "[Terrible Catastrophe](#)" *Bedford Gazette* (Bedford, PA), December 14, 1855, Image 2, col. 2.
- "[Tremendous Conflagration at Columbus!](#)" *Cincinnati Daily Press* (Cincinnati, OH), November 7, 1860, Image 2, col. 3.
- "[The Fire Department](#)" *Democratic Press* (Ravenna, OH), April 12, 1888, Image 5, col. 3.