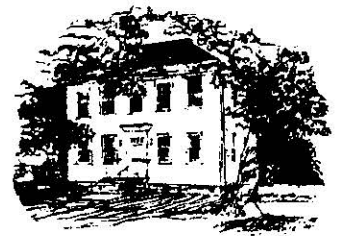


IMAGES

... then and now



Buckingham Lodge
1861

How the Fire Department Mourns



Since the New Year, the Madeira and Indian Hill Fire Department has both lowered the American flag to half staff and flown the mourning banner, both recognizing grief over lives lost. Flag etiquette regulates the use of the US flag, but in recent years, the mourning banner has been placed underneath the US flag displaying public sympathy.

When Cincinnati police officers Daniel Pope and Ronald Jeter were shot and killed in the line of duty in 1997, many area fire and police stations lowered their American flags to half-staff. The Indian Hill Fire Station did not do so, and when a citizen inquired why, it prompted an internal discussion about flag display. Firefighter Ted Bayer, an experienced Boy Scoutmaster, provided copies of the US Code of Regulations about flag etiquette.

The 1976 Code was adopted by Congress and contains rules about lowering the flag. On Memorial Day, the American flag is displayed at half-staff until noon and at full staff from noon until sunset. It is to be flown at half-staff in mourning for principal government leaders, upon presidential or gubernatorial order. The flag is flown at half-staff for 30 days after the death of a President or former President, 10 days after the death of a Vice President, Chief Justice or Speaker of the House, from date of death to date of internment for Associate Justices, and two days for members of Congress.

Because none of these federally mandated conditions were met, the Fire Department was correct in not lowering their flag after the Pope and Jeter tragedy. However members of the department wanted to find a way to deal with future sad incidents. Chief Steve Ashbrock recollected a mourning banner that he had seen, and ordered two – one for Madeira and one for Indian Hill.

In March 2001 the National Flag Company stitched two 5' x 8' banners based on a fax and conversation with the Chief. The silk crepe flags have a black field with a purple swath down the middle—evenly divided into thirds. The black symbolizes loss and sorrow, while purple is reminiscent of heraldic heroes and symbolizes nobility. The banner makes a strong statement when flown.

Anderson Township fireman Bill Ellison died that March in the line of duty, and the mourning banners were flown at both stations in his memory—their initial display. The next time the banners were at half-staff was following the death of a Madeira & Indian Hill firefighter, the aforementioned Ted Bayer, who succumbed to cancer in August, 2001. The next month the banners were used again to commemorate the heroes of the NYFD and NYPD who were lost on 9/11.

The American flag flies continuously at the Indian Hill Fire Station because it is lit. In 2003, it was lowered to half-staff at President Bush's direction after the spaceship Columbia disaster. In March 2003, Cincinnati firefighter Oscar Armstrong was killed on duty in a flashover, and that day the mourning banners were hoisted at the Madeira and Indian Hill stations, demonstrating bereavement for the community loss.

Indian Hill residents have reacted positively to the mourning banner. Firemen have received phone calls and comments that the banner is appropriate. Chief Ashbrock noted that it has been a "positive response in a negative environment." When the nation was heavily involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Fire Department flew Old Glory at full staff and the mourning banner at half-staff. Both the flag and the banner expressed significant aspects of national and local culture.

Thanks to Chief Ashbrock for assistance with this article.