

# Firefighters' Museum

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You are surrounded instantly by history as you walk through the doors of the museum.

A brass pole that firefighters once slid down when rushing to a fire is before you. Three firetrucks, two of which were horse-drawn, fill the downstairs area of the old engine house. A gift shop is where horses stood in stalls. Bells, signs and other memorabilia line the walls.

Fire hydrants and hose that surround three firetrucks on the lower level act as a barrier between the historic pieces and visitors. This area features a 1909 horse-drawn chemical and hose wagon, complete with wooden wheels. This fire truck acted as an "extension cord" from hydrants to the fire. It carried a chemical extinguisher, but no water. Next is an American LaFrance metropolitan, steam-powered pumper purchased by the Wichita Fire Department in 1902. This truck had a 1,000-gallon-per-minute water discharge.

"That is pretty impressive for over 100 years ago," Sam Cox said. He is a tour guide and retired Wichita firefighter.

The lower level also displays the slightly moth-eaten, well-worn uniform of Lt. C.O. Duffner that was donated by his family. A life net is propped behind the fire trucks. This trampoline-like mechanism was used to coerce victims, trapped above the first floor, to jump out of their windows.

The building had a tin ceiling when built, but this could not be saved. So workers crafted a drop ceiling to resemble the old tin one. The original lighting consisted of two or three bulbs hanging from wires. This was replaced with lighting from an area upscale house.

"We've come a long way in areas like this," Cox said.

The upper level of the museum houses years and years of firefighter history. Display cases full of everything from nozzles to sirens line the walls where lockers and a kitchen once stood. The original wood floors still show a well-worn path where heavy firefighters' boots once ran.

A single metal-frame bed sits in the corner of the room with boots placed to the side. You can look down through the Plexiglas that now covers the hole where firefighters slid down the brass pole. Also featured in the upper bunkroom are two more fire trucks. The first is a nineteenth-century, hand-drawn chemical extinguisher. The second is an 1880 Howe hand pumper. Numerous buckets that the fire brigade used hang from the ceiling on hook ladders. Many helmets line the upper walls.

One of the upstairs display cases is dedicated to Dorothy Koelling, sculptor of the museum's "Final Call" statue. Koelling

was 86 when she created the model that would later be featured in the museum's Fallen Firefighters' Memorial.

"She did it because she loved the firefighters," Cox said. "And we loved her."

The memorial was dedicated in 2002, and is just south of the museum. The memorial courtyard features Koelling's artwork, a life-size bronze statue of a firefighter discovering a comrade's helmet amid debris. Engraved bricks lead up to a winged memorial wall that holds the names of Kansas firefighters who have lost their lives in the line of duty. The names are engraved in black granite and have the respective fire department and date of death. Each of the two sections is five feet tall and 10 feet long. The center portion is also black granite and is six feet tall and five feet wide. This section holds the engraved poem "The Gentle Heroes."

The museum plans to build a new addition just to the east, complementary to the turn-of-the-century architecture of the fire station, a nearby park and the surrounding neighborhood. Additions would include restrooms, more display area and an elevator for handicapped access to the second floor.

■ **Where it is:** The Kansas Firefighters Museum is at 1300 S. Broadway St., Wichita.

■ **Hours:** The museum is open from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. Saturday from May through September and from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m. from October through May; The by appointment for groups larger than 15.

■ **Admission:** \$3 for adults, \$2.50 for those 65 years and older, \$2 for students and free for children less than 5 year old.

■ **Telephone:** 316-263-3426

■ **Website:** [www.kansasfirefightersmuseum.org](http://www.kansasfirefightersmuseum.org)

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