

## Developing a Digital Image Collection of Illinois Firefighter Line of Duty Deaths (IFLODD)

### through Outreach and Collaboration

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## Abstract

To reach out fire service user community and further its partnerships with fire departments, fire organizations, and public libraries throughout Illinois, the Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI) Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, applied and received the FY 2007 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant award from the Illinois State Library. The project, "In Memory of Our Heroes: Developing a Digital Image Collection of Illinois Firefighter Line of Duty Deaths (IFLODD)," aims to collect, organize, digitize, preserve, and provide access to historical and cultural materials that document the ultimate sacrifice of more than 700 Illinois firefighters over the past 150 years. The presentation will demonstrate how the library partners with fire organizations, historical societies, fire museums, and libraries to digitize photographs, newspapers, fire station logbooks, and other resources that detail these tragedies for inclusion in an online database. Providing access to this history memorializes the firefighters, increase awareness of their sacrifice, and supply contemporary firefighters with valuable "lessons learned" from the various deaths to enhance the educational endeavors of firefighters and help prevent future tragedies. This project also helps build new relationships with historical societies and fire museums.

## Dedication

The project is dedicated to the Illinois firefighters who served with courage, pride, and honor, and heroically sacrificed their lives in the line of duty. Through the lessons learned from their passing, it is hoped that future lives will be saved.

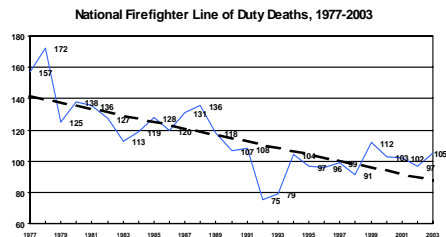
## Background

- The Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI) was designated as the statutory State Fire Academy in 1980.
- IFSI's central objective: To help Illinois firefighters and other emergency services providers develop the core skills required to effectively meet the emergency fire service needs of their communities.
- IFSI's mission: To help firefighters do their job with a goal of reaching every Illinois firefighter with the training, education and information he/she requires each year.
- The state's fire service community consists of 1,293 fire departments and 42,675 firefighters with a 20% annual turnover rate. 70% of the firefighters are volunteers.
- The IFSI Library's Outreach Program since 1999: Provide library and information services to every firefighter at no cost.

## Line of Duty Death (LODD) Statistics and Databases

- Despite decades of training enhancements, research-based equipment developments, and firefighter and fire officer training improvements, contemporary firefighters still face a high risk of losing their life in the line of duty.
- In 2005, 33 states experienced LODD, including Illinois. On average, approximately 100 U.S. firefighters are killed each year while on duty.

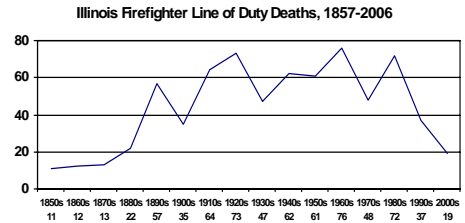
## National Firefighter LODD



## Illinois Firefighter LODD (1857-2005)

- During the past 150 years (1857-present), 82 Illinois fire organizations have experienced LODD tragedies. As of May 2006, at least 709 Illinois firefighters have died in the line of duty, with roughly 85% of those deaths occurring in Chicago alone.

## Illinois Firefighter LODD



## Databases

- Numerous national organizations, such as *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)*, *National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)*, *United States Fire Administration (USFA)*'s *National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Database*, *Illinois Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM)*, collect statistics on firefighter LODD, but this information is often incomplete or only includes national statistics.
- None of these organizations' projects, however, involve a systematic study of firefighter LODD.
- The resources maintained by various fire organizations contradict one another.
- As these resources mainly focus on investigations into the incidents where firefighters died, none of these resources include digitized photos, newspaper clippings, fire station logbooks, stories, interviews, or historical recollections about fallen firefighters and their lives.
- No central searchable database for firefighter LODD in Illinois and no deaths have been documented in an online digital image collection.

## Project Goals

- IFLODD aims to collect, organize, digitize, preserve, and provide access to historical and cultural materials that document the ultimate sacrifice of more than 700 Illinois firefighters over the past 150 years.

## Fire Department Partners

- Chicago, Quincy, Aurora, Naperville; Carthage, Springfield, Alton; Aroma; Ashton; Canton; Countryside; Earlville; Litchfield; Monmouth; Mt. Carmel; Oak Park; Waukegan, Ashkum Township; Atlanta; Belle Rive; Berwyn; Bourbonnais; Brimfield; Cary; Champaign; Channahon; Chebanse; Cherry Valley; Cicero; Depue; Downer's Grove; Elk Grove Township; Evanston; Fairmont; Foosland; Galesburg; Gladstone; Glenbrook; Godfrey; Great Lakes; Granville; Green Valley; Greenville; Gulfport; Gurnee; Herrick; Herrin; Hinsdale; Holbrook; LaGrange Park; Libertyville; Logan-Trivoli; Ludlow; Macomb; Mattoon; Morris; New Lenox; Northbrook; Orland; Peoria; Pleasantview; Robbins; Rockford; Seneca; Seward; South Holland; South Pekin; Steger; Stone Park; Vernon; Villa Grove; Warsaw; Washburn; Western Springs; Westmont; Winthrop Harbor; Woodmere; and Wood River.

## Other Organizational Partners

- The U.S. Forest Service, the Reynolds Metal Company, the Union Oil Company in Romeoville, and IFSI (which lost an instructor from New York City on September 11, 2001).
- Aurora Historical Society
- Chicago Historical Society
- Urbana Public Library's Historical Society
- Chicago Fire Museum
- Aurora Public Library, etc.

# Project Phases

## Phase I (Month 1-3) (October-December 2006)

- Preparation, Planning and Development

## Phase II (Month 4-7) (January-May 2007)

- Implementation and Evaluation Data Collection

## Phase III (Month 7-8) (May-June 2007)

- Review and Evaluation, Reporting and Dissemination

- <http://www.fsi.uiuc.edu/>

**SEARCH RESULTS**  
You are browsing all firefighter records. There are 487 firefighters.

FIREFIGHTER NAME	AGENCY	YEAR OF DEATH
Richard Blumstein	Aston Fire Protection District	2001
Cliff Laffey	Aston Fire Protection District	2001
Roger Armstrong	Atlanta Fire Protection District	2006
Charles Michael Latham	Belleville Fire Department	2004
Theodore Matus	Starkport Hill Community Fire Department	2004
Blanca Saporito	Brownstown Fire Protection District	2003
Blaine Strickland	Brownfield Fire Protection District	1986
Harold L. Strickland, Jr.	Carleton Fire Department	1997
Warren Douglas Blackett	Carriage Fire Department	1997
Richard Moore	Carthage Fire Department	1997
Alvin Maritz	Cary Fire Protection District	1955
Raymond James Franks	Channahon Fire Protection District	2001
Keith Anderson	Chicago Fire Department	1989
Thomas Anderson	Chicago Fire Department	1954
Robert Arp	Chicago Fire Department	1960
Robert Antoniewicz	Chicago Fire Department	1961
George Bartsch	Chicago Fire Department	1928
Arthur Bartsch	Chicago Fire Department	1943
John Barty	Chicago Fire Department	1926
George Beale	Chicago Fire Department	1948
Thomas Beards	Chicago Fire Department	1927
John Bergman	Chicago Fire Department	1962
Edward Benson	Chicago Fire Department	1942
Walter Bensenich	Chicago Fire Department	1971
Edward Blackman	Chicago Fire Department	1966
James Blake	Chicago Fire Department	1965
Wesley Boehmke	Chicago Fire Department	1941
Frank Boone	Chicago Fire Department	1936
Charles Bostant	Chicago Fire Department	1969
Charles Bostant	Chicago Fire Department	1978
Frank Braddy	Chicago Fire Department	1969
Michael Brockmeyer	Chicago Fire Department	1930
John Brennan	Chicago Fire Department	1924

## IMAGE RECORD



Thumbnail [View](#)

**Title** [Bronfield Fire Department](#)

**Author/Creator** [Unknown](#)

**Date** [ca. 1950s](#)

**Copyright** [Bronfield Volunteer Fire Department](#)

**Description** This photograph, taken during the late 1950s, shows members of the Bronfield Volunteer Fire Department in front of the firehouse. The fire engine on the far left is the pump-and-tower ladder truck. The ladder truck is shown when he suffered his fatal heart attack on January 8, 1986. The ladder truck is not present among these firefighters.

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## FIREFIGHTER RECORD

**NAME** [John McRae](#)

**EMPLOYER** [Chicago's Columbian Expedition Fire Department](#)

**STATUS** [Retired](#)

**EMPLOYMENT CLASS** [Private](#)

**AGE RANGE** [Unknown](#)

**GENDER** [Male](#)

**DATE OF DEATH** [1940s?](#)

**DATE OF BIRTH** [Unknown](#)

**CAUSE OF DEATH** [Carbon Monoxide](#)

**Full**

**NATURE OF DEATH** [Suicide](#)

**ATTEMPTED OR DEATH NOT INVESTIGATED**

**TYPE OF DEATH** [Voluntary/accidental](#)

**INCIDENT NUMBER** [Chicago's Columbian Expedition Fire](#)

**CITY** [Chicago](#)

**STATE** [IL](#)

**DATE OF INCIDENT** [1940s?](#)

**TYPE OF INCIDENT** [Suicide](#)

**INCIDENT LOCATION TYPE** [Storage](#)

**INCIDENT ATTRIBUTES** [Fire](#)

[Structural collapse](#)

### INCIDENT SUMMARY

In 1952, Chicago hosted the 1952 U.S. Columbian Exposition, a fair celebrating the 400th anniversary of Columbus' voyage to North America. The \$20 million fair, constructed along Lake Michigan in what is now Jackson Park, included 200 buildings, exhibitors from more than 60 countries, and the world's first ferry wheel. To guarantee the fairground's building exhibitors were covered with white plastic so that each building looked like it was covered out of winter. This idea, that no buildings in the "White City" appear unattractive, later caused a huge fire that killed between firefighters and four children.

The Cook Storage Building was one of the largest buildings at the fair. Built by Hercules Iron Works and the Ice and Refrigeration Machine Manufacturers, the warehouse received portable fuel used by the various fair visitors and also worked as an ice storage tank. The six-story building required a 200-foot run chimney to run the refrigeration unit, but designers believed that the construction would protect the fair's other buildings. To make this, a smaller tower topped with a decorative spire was built around the chimney. The base of the spire was only 10 inches above the chimney's upper rim, causing a narrow fire hazard. But, on June 17, 1953, there was a small fire in the spire, but it was quickly doused. Fair management never warned of the stack, but the acting chief of the Cook's #2 Fire Department stated, "That building—a four-story building and will go up in smoke before long."

Shortly after 7 PM on July 18, heavy smoke was spotted rising from the spire of the Cook Storage Building. Twenty firefighters from both the Chicago Fire Department and the Cook's #2 Fire Department responded quickly, arriving in the top of the tower. The firefighters did not notice when burning gases left from the spire into the main space between the chimney and the main walls of the tower and forced erupted from the tower 10 feet above them. Realizing they had only seconds to escape before the tower collapsed, several firefighters slid down burning hoses and ropes to safety. Others firefighters and one child remained trapped, trapped, and the other jumped to their deaths or perished at the burning debris when the tower collapsed into the building.

An estimated 70,000 spectators witnessed the fire, some with a "bird's eye view from the top of the tower wheel. Initially, the crowd was cheering on the firefighters, but they soon fell silent. The fire department later reported, "There was no warning of a gas released to such a lack of agreement here." Additionally, 27 engine companies from around the city responded and put out the fire before it could spread to other buildings. The fire's phenomenon was not unparalleled to the stack, as in fact, 100,000 people visited the fair on July 11, as the 400 smoking chimneys of the Cook Storage Building was a big show. Luckily no other lives occurred during the first three months of the fair, but the second and greater buildings remained a threat. Within nine months of the fair's close, most of the structure "White City" had been destroyed by fire.

**IMAGE** [Thumbnail](#)

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