

---

## BAGPIPE TRADITION AT FIRE DEPARTMENT FUNERALS

Excerpted from Ohio Fire Chief, July 1997

The tradition of bagpipes played at fire department funerals in the United States goes back over one hundred fifty years. When the Irish and Scottish immigrated to this country, they brought many of their traditions with them. One of these was the bagpipe, often played at Celtic weddings, funerals and ceilis (dances).

It wasn't until the great potato famine and massive Irish immigration to the East Coast of the United States that the tradition of the pipes really took hold in fire departments. Factories and shops had signs reading "NINA"-No Irish Need Apply. The only jobs they could get were the ones no one else wanted -jobs that were dirty, dangerous or both - fire-fighters and police officers. It was not an uncommon event to have several firefighters killed at a working fire. The Irish firefighters funerals were typical of all Irish funerals-the pipes were played. It was somehow okay for a hardened firefighter to cry at the sound of pipes when his dignity would not let him weep for a fallen comrade.

Those who have been to funerals when bagpipes play know how haunting and mournful the sound of the pipes can be. Before too long, families and friends of non-Irish firefighters began asking for the piper to play for these fallen heroes. The pipes add a special air and dignity to the solemn occasion.

Associated with cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, pipe bands representing both fire and police often have more than 60 uniformed members. They are also traditionally known as Emerald Societies after Ireland-the Emerald Isle. Many bands wear traditional Scottish dress while others wear the simpler Irish uniform. All members wear the kilt and tunic, whether it is a Scottish clan tartan or Irish single color kilt.

Today, the tradition is universal and not just for the Irish or Scottish. The pipes have come to be a distinguishing feature of a fallen hero's funeral.

Special thanks to Jill Ward for allowing us to repost this information originally found at: <http://www.ci.toledo.oh.us>

Thanks also to Ford Prefect for pointing us to this information.

---

Printed from: <http://www.american-firefighter.com/history/bagpipes.php>

## Saint Florian

Saint Florian, the patron saint of firefighters, was an officer in the Roman army during the third century. Saint Florian had converted to Christianity but kept his new faith a secret to avoid persecution. When ordered to execute a group of Christians during the persecutions of Diocletian, Saint Florian professed his faith and refused to follow the order. He then had a stone tied around his neck and he was thrown into a river where he drowned.

Florian is said to have once stopped an entire town from burning by throwing a single bucket of water onto the fire. Saint Florian is the patron saint of firefighters, chimney sweeps, barrel-makers, soap boilers, harvests, Austria, Poland and others.

---

## First Water

The term "First Water" actually goes back to the 1800's. Back then Fire Departments actually competed with one another. There were very few regulations governing fire department operations. When two departments were in the same area the city or town would often pay the first fire department on scene, while the second received nothing. In other areas it was a matter of pride. The first department to put water on the fire would claim "First Water" and in a way, get credit for fighting that fire. Some departments even hired young kids who would race to a fire on foot and throw a single bucket of water on the flames. This usually did very little or nothing to fight the fire, but it would earn that department the right to claim "First Water".

The phrase is still used in some areas today. When a department is called out to a fire they will often refer to three events: Dispatch time, On scene time, and time of First Water, the moment when the first fire stream actually begins fighting the fire.

---