

Chief Burris Hensley

Burris Hensley is considered one of Ashland's great public servants. He joined the Ashland Fire Department on March 8, 1913, when horse drawn apparatus was still being used. Advancing quickly through the ranks, Burris was promoted to Assistant Chief and then Fire Chief on November 16, 1916. Chief Hensley's term as Chief spanned 6 decades as he retired from active duty as Chief on March 31, 1963.

Chief Hensley's watch saw the Ashland department advance from the horse drawn equipment era to one of the most progressive department's in the Commonwealth. The "Chief" as he was affectionately known, oversaw the transformation, to a department in the early 1960's with sophisticated pumper and ladder trucks, three fire stations, and a full-time professional staff.

Men who worked for Chief Hensley say he demanded nothing he wouldn't do himself, he was never "pushy" but motivated them by his own example. He never missed a fire, whether it was just a simple grass fire or it was a major conflagration. He was known as a man dedicated to efficiency and good training of his staff.

Chief Hensley was active in the Kentucky Firefighters Association from its very beginning. Attending our inaugural conference in Louisville in 1919, he worked alongside many of our founding fathers to insure the growth of our association. At the conference in Lexington in 1928, Chief Hensley was elected President of the KFA and hosted our annual convention in Ashland the following year. In later years he was charged with the duty of historian of the organization. The "Chief" was a founding father of the Eastern Kentucky Firefighters Association, and also a member of the Kentucky Armed Forces Advisory Committee, Director of the Fire Service Fourth Mobile Support Group of the Civil Defense Corps, and a member of the International Association of Fire Engineers.

Burris Hensley died on March 21, 1979 at the age of 90. He was honored with a huge procession through the streets of Ashland as his casket was carried on a restored 1922 pumper truck. Many firefighters from throughout the state turned out to say a final farewell to this one Chief that they all dearly loved and respected. His 46 years, 4 months, and 15 days as fire chief is undoubtedly one of the longest tenures in the history of the Kentucky fire service.

Chief Hensley's career saw him lead through two world wars and a depression, yet he managed to stay focused on his job, and active in the KFA, providing leadership and guidance to the Ashland Fire Department and across the Commonwealth.

Tonight, it is our distinct privilege and honor to posthumously induct Chief Burris Hensley into the Kentucky Firefighters Association Hall of Fame. Presenting this award is our Conference Host Fire Chief and former State Fire Marshal, from the Hebron Fire Department, Chief William Martin and accepting on behalf of Chief Hensley, is his son, Mr. Howard Hensley. Please welcome Mr. Hensley.

