

# **The History of the Portland Fire Department (1850-1937)**

## **Part 1, The Volunteer Fire Department – 1850 to 1883**

**By Andrew C. Sherbert**

Portland was founded in 1844. Her first meager buildings, hewn from the virgin forest near-about, were protected from fire by a bucket brigade, the buckets being carried and replenished by all able members of the community. This primitive method, under no recorded leadership, obtained until 1850 when the rising village felt the need of more adequate protection.

In the year 1850, a company of volunteer firefighters was organized with Thomas J. Dryer, owner of Portland's first newspaper, The Weekly Oregonian, as foreman. Through voluntary subscription the organization, which was known as Pioneer Fire Company No. 1, had acquired a hand pump, which was many times more effective in extinguishing fires than the earlier bucket brigade.

Portland became an incorporated city through grant of the Territorial Legislature of Oregon. The bill, which was presented to the Legislature December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1850, passed the House January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1851, was signed February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1851, and become effective April 8<sup>th</sup> of that year. At the time of incorporation, the forest came down to the bank of the Willamette River, except that the trees had been cut from Front Street between Burnside and Jefferson Streets. The stumps of the trees had not yet been removed, and as there were no street lights the stumps were white-washed to prevent persons from colliding with them after nightfall.

Despite this primitive setting, Pioneer Fire Company No. 1 had ambitions. Portland was growing; 134 shingled roofs were to be counted on the town site, and her taxable property was placed at more than a half million dollars. Effective as the hand pump was in extinguishing fires, there was a better method, and Pioneer Fire Company No. 1 was determined to have it – a steam fire engine.

But steam fire engines cost a considerable amount of money and it was apparent that it would be quite impossible to obtain one through funds raised by solicited contributions. Eager as every resident was for better fire protection, ready money was scarce, and, too, doubtless there were many whose ideas were not so advanced as those of Dryer and his associates. It appeared that the only certain way to raise the money required for the purchase of a fire engine was to levy tax on all taxable Portland property.

The first move toward this end, was for Pioneer Fire Company No. 1, to offer their services to the newly incorporated City of Portland and thus become a part of city government and have a voice in municipal affairs. This was done, at the ninth meeting of the Common Council, held May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1851. A portion of the transcript of the Council proceedings is as follows:

*“ . . . . . Recorder Caldwell moved that the foreman of the Fire Company formed in this city be heard, which was carried. Thomas J. Dryer on behalf of Pioneer Fire Company No. 1, offered*

*the services of said company to the City to aid in extinguishing fires. On motion of Councilman Thompson it was voted that the thanks of the Council be tendered to Pioneer Fire Company No. 1 and that the report of the Foreman be accepted . . . .”*

Twenty days later, May 26, 1851, an election was held in which a majority voted in favor of a tax levy for the purpose of purchasing a steam fire engine. At the 26<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council, held October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1851, the following action was taken:

*“ . . . . That there be and is hereby levied a tax of one half of one percent upon all taxable property within the City limits for the purpose of procuring a fire engine as authorized by a vote of the citizens of said city at an election held on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of May, A.D. 1851 . . . . “*

The much-desired fire engine, however, was still in the hands of the future as a transcript of the Council proceedings for March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1852, would indicate:

*“ . . . . The following resolution was offered by Councilman Slater and adopted by a vote of the Council: Be it resolved that the Mayor be requested to inform the Council what disposition has been made of the Ordinance levying a tax for the purpose of purchasing a Fire Engine and apparatus (sic). In compliance with the foregoing resolution, the Mayor submitted a communication which was received and ordered to be spread upon the Records. The following is a true copy thereof:*

*‘Gentlemen of the Council – In answer to your Resolution inquiring to know of me disposition I have made of the duplicates levying a tax to collect and raise a fund to purchase a Inigne and Hoes (hose) for the use of the City I will say for your information that they are in my desk without my signature. H. D. O’Bryant, Mayor.’”*

*Hugh D. O’ Bryant was Portland’s first mayor, a native of Georgia, and 38 years of age at the time of his election. The Recorder, W. S. Caldwell, evidently was ashamed of the unscholarly communication from the Mayor as he carefully underlined the word “true” in stating it was a true copy thereof.*

The issuance of City bonds was an unheard of procedure at that early date, municipal purchases commonly being settled for in gold coin at the time of purchase. Three years elapsed before enough money had accumulated in the struggling city’s coffers with which to purchase the long desired steam fire engine. In 1855, the city directed Territorial Governor, George C. Abernethy, then in New York, to act as their representative in consummating the purchase of the engine. At a meeting of the Common Council, held November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1855, the following information was disclosed:

*“Councilman Slater on the Fire Engine Committee gave information as follows: That means are now in New Your City nearly if not sufficient to purchase an engine subject to the order of Governor Abernethy when any engine selected shall be pronounced perfect by an inspector engaged to inspect same. (The importance and seriousness of the transaction may be inferred from the extreme caution with which the City safeguarded her interests, as the following stipulation indicates.) Also to make the matter more sure, Maks-Diamond and Company, of New*

*York, in the case of the death of Governor Abernethy are authorized to draw the money and purchase said engine. He also stated the engine might be expected in about five months . . . .”*

That Governor Abernethy dispatched his fire engine assignment to the satisfaction of the city is evident from the following excerpt from Proceedings of the Common Council, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1856:

*“Communications and bills enclosed Concerning Fire Engine from Mr. George C. Abernethy, New York, received At the hand of the Mayor were read by Councilman Slater and commented on with remarks highly complimentary to Mr. Abernethy for the Interest (sic) he has taken in his Agency for the purchase of a Fire Engine for the City of Portland in which it was supposed he could feel but little interest.”*

After its long journey ‘around the horn’, the fire engine arrived in San Francisco in July, 1856, and a resolution read at a meeting of the Council held July 26, 1856, was as follows:

*“Be it resolved that an order be drawn on the Treasurer for the sum of One Hundred and Thirteen Dollars and Forty Five Cents in favor of G. W. Vaughn for payment of Freight on Fire Engine &c From New York to San Francisco . . . .”*

The fire engine was transferred at San Francisco to a ship bound for Portland, where it arrived shortly after to become the pride of the northwest and to awe and amaze all who beheld it for the first time. The arrival of Portland’s first steam fire engine, on that long-ago day, marked the first important step in the mechanization of the city’s fire fighting equipment which was to culminate in the highly efficient mechanical and intricate and ingenious electrical devices used in fighting fires today.

At this point it may be well to mention that the steam fire engine augmented rather than supplanted the hand pump of that period. The hand pump remained in use for many years after the advent of the steam engine. Until late in the century, and within the memory of many Portland residents, the hand pump appeared regularly at fires. The hand pump was mounted upon a pair of high wheels, for easy mobility, and was equipped with two rocker-bars, which were raised and lowered, seesaw fashion, to actuate the pump plunger. Each rocker-bar was long enough to afford handholds for a half dozen or more persons and the continuous up-and-down motion necessary to the pump’s operation was considered extremely strenuous exercise even among the hardiest members of the community, that is, if the fire was of long duration. To man the pumps as obligatory in an emergency and to refuse to do so was punishable by fines. Ordinance No. 11, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1854, stated in part:

*“That any person or persons may be called upon to assist the Fire Department and failure to comply with this order is punishable by fine . . . Physicians, whilst engaged in their professional duties, are exempt from this order . . . .”*

But manning the pumps did not long remain a duty of franchised Portlanders. The city had a large Chinese population (every fourth Portlander was a chinaman, as late as 1860) and the onerous chore of pumping soon belonged, by command, to the Chinamen, whether willing or unwilling. This seeming display of race preference found justification, in the occidental

conscience, in the case that the Chinese fire-fighter could not understand the shouted commands of the fire chief and was better suited, therefore, to the menial task of bending up and down at the pumps. The white volunteers attended to the more spectacular and less arduous duties of extending hose lines, adjusting connections, and directing the streams of water against the flames.

In the early days Portland had no general water system. Water was obtained from streams, wells, and springs. With the growing use of hand pumps, and following the city's acquisition of a steam fire engine, the need for a more convenient and abundant supply of water for fighting fires became urgent. On November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1855, the following resolution was acted upon at a meeting of the Common Council:

*“Be it resolved that the Committee on Streets and Public Improvements be instructed to obtain from the City Surveyor an opinion or report upon the expediency of constructing at the present season Reservoirs for the use of the Fire Department. Also to obtain from him a proposed plan for constructing said Reservoirs in detail and also an estimate of the cost thereof. . .”*

In a meeting of the Common Council held January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1856, the reservoir plan was adopted in the following resolution:

*“Be it resolved by the Council of the City of Portland: That they adopt the plan recommended by the Committee of the Whole upon arising from the consideration of a plan which had been laid before the Council at a previous meeting. The plan thus adopted is that the Cisterns are to be built of wood and of the particular manner and mechanism as is represented by a model that is presented to the Council of said Committee, the Capacity of said Reservoirs to be fifteen feet square and nine feet deep to be caulked and pitched. . .”*

The construction of the fire cisterns began immediately and soon every important intersection in the congested section of the city had a cistern – installed and filled with water. At first, certain parties contracted to haul water from the river with which to fill the cisterns. Subsequently, the various cisterns were connected by a system of conduits and water was piped from Balch and Carruthers creeks to keep them supplied.

The early pitched-timber cisterns were difficult to keep in repair so were replaced by brick reservoirs. These brick reservoirs were added to from time to time as the city grew and all but three of the original ones are still in use. The City at present has more than 80 fire cisterns located at convenient points in the metropolitan area. In the event of failure of the water supply due to a landslide at the Bull Run headwords, earthquakes, or other local calamity, which might affect the normal functioning of the water system, the fire cisterns would afford ample protection against advance of any conflagration. This added safeguard is taken into account by fire underwriters in establishing insurance rates for Portland property.

In spite of the simple construction of early Portland buildings, and the relatively ample space between structures, there were many potential sources of fire in the early days. Tallow dips, sperm oil and coal-oil lamps were used for illumination and each of these early sources of light contributed its share to the mounting list of burned buildings. The parlor match had not yet been

invented, it being customary for the pioneer household with a cold hearth to either borrow a shovelful of live embers from his neighbor with which to kindle his fire, or to hasten home with a blazing pitch knot retrieved from a neighboring fireplace. Lightning caused fires then, as today. The rapidly growing city constantly extended the clearing in which it nestled and the stumps to be blasted were many. The danger of powder as a source of fire was recognized by the pioneer law-makers as Ordinance No. 34, passed by the Council, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1954, indicates”

*“It shall not be lawful for any person or persons to keep their private use in any one house within the limits of the City of Portland more than five pounds of powder at any one time . . . . It shall not be lawful for any person or persons to keep in any one store building more than twenty-five pounds of powder and that shall be kept in a box, well secured, with the word “Powder” distinctly marked upon it . . . The box shall always be kept within six feet of the main entrance of the building. It shall be the duty of every person keeping the powder to keep it in a conspicuous place on the front of the building a sign with the words “Powder for Sale” conspicuously painted upon it. . . “*

To the end that all ordinances pertaining to fire would be observed by the citizens of Portland, the city was divided into two districts and a fire warden for each district was appointed.

It was the duty of the warden to inspect each building in his district to see that fire regulations were being obeyed. Ordinance No. 1, passed by the Council April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1854, was as follow:

*“There shall be a fire warden in every district, who shall be appointed by the Common Council. It shall be the duty of the fire warden to examine all buildings or places where fires are or may be used, for the purpose of discovering any violations of this or any other ordinance that may be hereafter adopted for the prevention of fires. If, in the opinion of any fire warden, there is a danger to be apprehended from the construction of any fireplace, stove, stove pipe, chimney, or in any other manner from fire, to direct that the danger be corrected, and if the direction is not complied with in a reasonable time, the parties so offending shall be subject to a fine not less than fifteen dollars nor more than fifty, at the direction of the Recorder.”*

This original fire limits of the city (Ordinance No. 1, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1854) were bounded as follows: *“Beginning at the Willamette River and running through Jefferson Street to its intersection with Second street, thence along Second to Ash street; thence along Ash street to the intersection of the Willamette river; thence along the water front to the place of beginning.”* The fire limits were divided into two districts, the first district being that portion of the city lying between Jefferson and Alder streets; the second district being the portion between Alder and Ash streets.

In 1859 Portland was a thriving community with an estimated population of more than 3,000. The fire department had kept pace with the growth of the city. New equipment had been purchased from time to time; stations to house the equipment had been built, and the city was proud of the department and its record of achievement. In April 1863, Mayor David Logan, in his annual message, said of the fire department:

*“ . . . Our Fire Department needs no commendation to recommend it . . . it is a large, experienced and well disciplined Fire Department, ever vigilant in the protection of property from the ravages of fire, by which so much desolation and penury has been caused in the cities of our sister state of California . . . The buildings erected for the use of two of the companies are a credit and an ornament to the city. The judicious expenditure of public money in substantial and elegant public buildings give impetus to enterprise . . . ”*

Mayor Henry Failing, in June 1865, in equally commendatory terms expressed a feeling of pride in the fire department of that day:

*“The taxpayers have been more than repaid during the past year for the expense attending the support of the Fire Department. We have narrowly escaped extensive fires and this has been due to the alacrity of our firemen. Probably no city of its size is better supplied with fire apparatus or can boast of a more efficient department . . . ”*

A further milestone in the trend toward mechanization is seen in the following ordinances; the first, passed March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1867, and the second, passed January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1868:

Ordinance No. 404. *“That the Committee on Fire and Water and Chief Engineer be and are hereby authorized to purchase for the use of Protection Fire Engine Company No. 4, of the Fire Department, one of H. C. Silsby’s 3 class Rotary Steam Fire Engines at a cost not to exceed Five Thousand dollars (\$5,000)...”*

Ordinance No. 460. *“That the Committee on Fire and Water be and are hereby authorized to sell the Hand Engines known as No. 2, and the Hand Engine lately in use by Protection Fire Engine Company No. 4.”*

In 1871 Portland’s Volunteer Fire Department had come of age. In the score of years that had passed since its incorporation no fire of major consequence has visited the city. The department’s development had been well planned and the results attained, gratifying. Portland’s citizen’s felt smugly assured that the department’s valiant and well-organized members would prevent the occurrence of a major fire in the years that were to come. So proud was the city of the record of her fire fighters that an anniversary celebration was planned in their honor and the following ordinance passed, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1871:

*“That the sum of Five hundred be and is hereby appropriated out of the General Fund to defray the expenses of the ensuing celebration of the anniversary of the Portland Fire Department.”*

The city’s attitude of smug assurance suffered a rude shock, however, in the two years that followed. In December 1872, a fire destroyed three important city blocks with a loss estimated at a half million dollars. Inadequate fire-fighting equipment was blamed for this conflagration and agitation was begun immediately for an improved fire department. However, before much had been accomplished in that direction, a second and greater fire, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1873, began at First and Salmon streets and devastated 22 city blocks. This fire was of such magnitude and occasioned so much property loss and personal suffering that the community was long in recovering from its effect. Many families were rendered homeless and, a great many of the

city's business enterprises having been destroyed by the fire, many persons were out of employment.

A committee was formed to assist the destitute refugees in the efforts toward rehabilitation. Funds for the aid of the needs were contributed by able citizens who had had the good fortune to have been unaffected directly by the fire. Distant cities, out of sympathy, offered financial assistance which was promptly refused by the committee, the committee proudly claiming the "refusal of outside help was the only course consistent with the honor and good name of the city." Incidentally, the relief committee was sharply criticized by many for its stand in the matter.

When the fire occurred, Portland's volunteer firemen were summoned to action by a bell, centrally located, which could be heard by all. As the town's boundaries expanded, a larger bell was needed. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1873, the Council passed the following ordinance:

*"The Committee on Fire and Water and the Chief Engineer are hereby authorized to contract for and purchase a Bell for fire alarm purposes of not less than four thousand nor more than forty-five hundred pounds weight and at a cost not exceeding twenty-two hundred dollars,"*

The huge bell was no sooner installed than it was rendered obsolete by the appearance on the market of an electric telegraphic alarm system. The electric alarm having proven its worth, Portland was among the first American cities to contract for one of the new telegraphic alarm systems. An ordinance authorizing the purchase of the system was passed by Council February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1875, and was as follows:

*". . . The Committee on Fire and Water for the City of Portland are hereby authorized to contract for the purchase and erection of telegraph wires, signal boxes, Engine house gongs, Bell-ringing apparatus and such other appurtenances as shall be required to establish a system of automotive telegraphic Fire Alarm: Provision: There shall be not less than two signal boxes, four engine house gongs; and one bell-ringing apparatus for large alarm bell and that the cost of erecting same shall not exceed the sum of Seventy-five hundred dollars."*

The system was installed satisfactorily and the locations of the fire alarm boxes – as listed in the Oregon State Directory for 1880 – were as follows:

No. 4	Hall and First
No. 5	Tiger Engine Company House, Fourth Street
No. 6	Protection Engine Company House, First Street
No. 7	Jefferson and East Park
No. 8	Morrison and Tenth Streets
No. 9	North Eighth and E Streets
No. 12	Morrison and First Streets
No. 13	Washington and Front Streets
No. 14	Second and Oak, at Police Building
No. 15	Ankeny's New Market
No. 16	Clarendon Hotel

No. 21	Corner Fifth and Morrison
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(The State Directory for 1880 also observes that, “The Portland Fire Department is a volunteer body comprising in its ranks many of our best citizens, and to their active exertions, we have more than owed the safety of the city.”)

It seems an anachronism that electricity entered the fire department before the era of the horse, but such, nevertheless, was the fact. An excerpt from a record of the Council proceedings, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1880, is descriptive and explanatory:

*“The Fire Department still maintains its high standard of efficiency. Owing, however, to the rapid growth of the city (Portland’s population was then 21,523) it is necessary that horses should be provided for at least two of the companies to haul the engines. The volunteer firemen have always responded with alacrity when called on at all hours of the day or night, but it requires time after the alarm is sounded for enough of the firemen to reach the engine houses to haul the engines to the scene of the fire, and after they do reach the fire they are exhausted from hard work hauling the engines over the rough, muddy streets and not able to do the hard work required of them, for which they receive no compensation. The horses should be kept ready for service at a moment’s notice . . . .”*

The above suggestion was not acted upon immediately, as two years later, in the Council Proceedings of January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1882, the following communication was recorded:

*“The Volunteer force has been as efficient as could be reasonably be expected for men serving without pay. The time has come when men cannot serve without pay in this arduous work. The services of the men in this department should be paid for. Horses should be provided for a sufficient number of engines to enable them to reach the outer portions of the city in as short a time as possible to prevent the spread of conflagration . . . .”*

On January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1883, by consent of the people, an act was passed establishing a paid fire department for the City of Portland. The act also provided for horses, which marked the beginning of a colorful period in the history of Portland’s fire department. An estimate for the appropriation necessary for the charge from a volunteer department to a paid department, and the amount needed for maintenance for the fiscal year of 1883, was as follows:

Chief Engineer’s Salary	\$ 2,000
1 <sup>st</sup> Assistant’s Salary	500
2 <sup>nd</sup> Assistant’s Salary	400
Secretary	900
Superintendent Fire Alarm	600
Salaries (5) Companies (48) men	22,000
Rent of Offices for Commissioners	325
Purchase of 14 horses	3,500
Four new hose carts	1,800
Harness and repairs	650
No. 2’s Engine	4,000

Horse Food	2,400
Shoeing of horses	275
Coal and wood	450
Oil and sponges	500
Coke	400
Medicines	50
Supplies for maintaining Fire Alarm	500
Filling up Commissioners' Office, Books, Stationary, etc.	750
Alterations to engine houses	2,500
Repairs on apparatus	2,500
Water for year	3,000
Construction of new hydrants	1,200
Construction of new cisterns	3,000
Telephone – expenses of telephone	300
Gas for department	500

Thus was inaugurated a new municipal bureau, Portland's "paid" fire department – and thus was the curtain lowered on Portland's historic Volunteer Fire Department, whose picturesque members for 32 years valiantly stood between Portland and the ever-menacing threat of fire.

## **The History of the Portland Fire Department (1850-1937)**

### **Part 2, The "Paid" Fire Department – 1883 to 1937**

With the inauguration of a paid department an entirely new order prevailed. The roster of volunteer fire-fighters had borne the names of many of Portland's first citizens – including the leading merchants, bankers, lawyers and brokers. During the volunteer days it was not uncommon to witness customers, clerks, and the proprietors of an establishment rushing pell mell from a place of business – to take their pots at the hand-poles and ropes of hard drawn volunteer equipment – in response to the urgent clanging of the alarm bell.

Without the shadow of disrespect for the picturesque volunteer it must be said that the newly inaugurated system promised to be manifestly the better way. Authority was to become more centralized. Rigid discipline could be – though unfortunately was not always – maintained. The paid fireman was to hold his position because of personal qualifications, therefore, it was believed that each would strive to acquaint himself more thoroughly with the duties incumbent upon a successful firefighter. Under the new system 3 permanent firemen and 7 callmen were to be quartered in each station house, ready instantly to spring into action when an alarm sounded. Speed, being the most essential ingredient in any formula of successful firefighting, this was a highly important consideration and a vast improvement upon the old method.

In 1883, the paid fire department's first year, Portland was becoming a city of size and importance with a population approximating 25,000. In the metropolitan district, buildings were commencing to point skyward; four, five, and six story buildings were becoming common and increasingly foot-front values were causing building congestion. Taller buildings brought fire-fighting problems not faced by the doughty volunteer. Firefighting had become a business, and a tremendously serious business. The new personnel needed to be composed of men who were physically able and temperamentally suited to battle fire from the top-most rungs of tall, swaying ladders. Equipment needed to be the best that money could buy and that the inventiveness and ingenuity of the times had made available. These, Portland had, in perhaps as great a measure as contemporary cities of comparable size.

In the early days of the paid department a deterrent to achievement and efficiency was caused by the close linking of the department with politics. Men were appointed or released as much on grounds of political affiliation than on a basis of individual ability. The tenure of office of a fire chief was brief indeed if his political views happened not to find favor with the current administration. Fire department affairs were constantly entangled in political intrigues. This unhappy situation caused continual turmoil within the department – engendered ill feeling among its members – and militated against the department's proper functioning and advancement. In the first twelve years of the paid department's existence, 1883-1895, there had been five fire chiefs appointed:

Thomas A. Jordan	1883
H. Morgan	1884-1892
Robert Holman	1892
John Buchtol	1893
David Campbell	1895

The illustrious David Campbell, perhaps Portland's most colorful fire chief, was chief of the fire department from June, 1895, to September, 1896. Campbell was too rugged an individualist to accede to the wishes of the administration then in power when its wishes did not conform to his own. As a matter of political expediency Campbell was removed from the department at 6:00 p.m., the evening of September 30, 1896, at the instance of Mayor Sylvester Pennoyer. Coincident with Campbell's removal, the Council ordered all fire department salaries cut and all members of the department quit with their retiring chief, to the great embarrassment of the service.

F. De Boest succeeded Campbell, holding the position until July, 1898, when Mayor W. S. Mason, who succeeded Pennoyer, restored Chief Campbell to his former position. Chief David Campbell remained chief until June 26, 1911, when he was killed in line of duty.

David Campbell was a two-fisted man whose experience in firefighting dated back to volunteer days. In his 20's he was also a pugilist of more than local reputation, having had the temerity – and the fistic ability to be recognized by Jack Dempsey (The Nonpareil), a first-string fighter of international renown. An extract from the Oregon, October 10, 1885, announces:

*“Jack Dempsey, hero of 22 fights, arrives here from California and says he is willing to fight David Campbell of this city with or without gloves, for \$2,000 . . . .”* Campbell also fought James J. Corbett t 10 round draw.

Campbell carried his aggressive spirit and fighting prowess into the department, subliming these personal attributes into a high order of executive ability. He was well liked by his subordinates who found him a fair and impartial leader and a dependable friend. He met the gaze of those above him with unswerving directness. His men knew him to be a leader who would not ask them to face a personal hazard he himself would not willingly accept. The truth of the latter statement was borne out at the time of his death in the \$100,000 Union Oil Plant fire, June 26, 1911. His last order to the men of Engine Company 7, perhaps saved their lives. These men were working near a wall which Campbell considered unsafe. He ordered them back out of the danger zone. He himself then fearlessly entered the flaming inferno in search of possibly entrapped persons and to ascertain at first hand the condition of the fire and the means best calculated to extinguish it. An explosion of vapor-filled gas tanks razed the building, burning and burying Chief Campbell. The cities of the entire Pacific coast mourned the tragic passing of the colorful and heroic figure. At a recent memorial program, attended by Chief Grenfell and representative from every company in the fire bureau, City Commissioner Riley paid this high tribute at Campbell’s grave in Riverview Cemetery:

*“The greatest hero, the most outstanding fireman and the most beloved character who ever word the badge of the Portland Fire Department.”*

In 1903, a single step was taken in the direction of greater efficiency of municipal bureaus. That year marked the inauguration of civil service in Portland. Civil service divorced municipal employees from the evils of political control – weeded out the unfit and put an end to nepotism, favoritism, party cliques and alliances, and other unethical practices, which in the past had held real progress in check.

The fire department was quick to benefit from the salutary effect of this innovation. Under civil service, each individual experiences a feeling of security and a sense of permanency not possible formerly when a change of administration might easily mean the termination of his job. An attitude of security made for better morale throughout the department and lent impetus to greater cooperation and achievement.

It must not be inferred, however, that Portland’s fire department had made no advancement prior to this point. At the turn of the century, and despite the obvious disadvantages which accompanied political control, Portland’s fire department suffered little in comparison with fire departments elsewhere in towns of like size. In fact, on occasion, Portland had frequently given proud voice to laudatory comments concerning her fire department and its record. Equipment was considered adequate to the needs of the city and was as advanced in design as could be found anywhere.

The decade 1900 to 1920 saw great population gains in Portland. Rising from a town of 90,000 in 1900, Portland boasted a population of 215,000 ten years later. This tremendous increase in so short a period was due in part to the Alaska gold rush, which brought many settlers to the Northwest; and in part to the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition, celebrated in Portland in 1905, and which brought much favorable publicity and many new residents to Portland. During these boom years the fire bureau was hard put to keep up with the growth extension of the city. Hydrants were insufficient in number to adequately protect the new buildings which were springing up in all quarters. Equipment had to be augmented continuously and new fire stations established and outfitted. The ponderous machinery of municipal government, however, moved more slowly in the purchase of new equipment than the rapid growth of the city warranted, which for a time rendered the city vulnerable to the visitation of a serious conflagration. Fortunately, no fire of outstanding significance occurred during this period of inadequate preparedness.

The efficiency of the fire department – over a period of years – may be measured in dollars and cents. An unerring check upon the efficiency of the department may be found in the figures released annually by the fire bureau relative to total and per capita fire losses. In 1883, the first year of the paid Fire Department, Portland's fire losses aggregated \$319,000, in round figures. By 1910, fire losses had increased to \$905,000. The year 1914 saw the city's fire loss reach the staggering total of \$1,762,493.46, with an accompanying per capita loss of \$6.89. These appalling figures were a matter of serious public concern. Portland's citizens demanded more adequate fire protection, though how it was to be accomplished, few were able readily to explain.

Jay Stevens, appointed fire marshal in November 1914, had a plan. Most fires were caused by carelessness, neglect, or ignorance. He believed that people could be educated to become more careful with fire. He believed that periodic inspections should be made to locate and abate fire hazards. He coined the slogan "The time to fight a fire is before it starts." Commissioner Bigelow and Mayor Albee concurred with Stevens in the belief that the plan was a good one and worthy of trial. The year 1915 saw the establishment of Portland's Fire Prevention Bureau, which bureau has been functioning successfully ever since.

The success of the innovation became apparent upon the publication of National Fire Underwriters figures for 1915, which disclosed the Portland's fire losses had been reduced nearly a half-million dollars in comparison with the year previous. This seemed ample evidence that the fire prevention ideas had merit and was worthy of continuance.

Since the inauguration of the fire prevention bureau, Portland's annual fire losses have crept steadily downward, amounting in 1936 to \$433,040.28, with a corresponding per capita loss of \$1.35. Incidentally, the latter figure is substantially below the national per capita loss average, which was \$2.05 for 1936.

No history of the Portland fire department would be complete without mention of the fire horse and the important part it played in the speeding up of the fire department of earlier times. With the coming of the paid fire department the volunteer firemen unhooked the handpoles and ropes and relinquished their weary job of hauling the swaying hose-carts and

ladder trucks to the speedier and better-able horse. During the two score years that horses figured in the department – until they, in turn, were replaced by still speedier, motorized units – many of these intelligent animals became better known and recognized by the majority of Portland's citizens than were many of the rank and file department members. There was, for example, old Jerry who entered the service in the 80's and remained active in the department for nearly two decades. Jerry was lead horse on Truck 2, Fourth and Montgomery. In his early days he threw every ounce of his strength against his collar as he and his straining partners pulled their brilliant red truck at break-neck speed over the mud, cobblestone, plank, or wood block streets of Portland. Later, when progress brought the smooth asphalt pavement, the eager Jerry tempered his speed somewhat, particularly during the rainy season, following numerous bad falls on this slippery new surface. Jerry with his teeth could pull the rope which opened the fire house doors when an alarm sounded; and also had been trained to grasp his master's cap by its visor and to tip it politely when a lady passed. He died in harness after making a long run to a fire.

Mack, Dad, Bill, Eagle, Hank, Prince, Bismark – were among the pioneer horses of the department. Colonel – who entered the department in the 80's, was reported to have been the fastest fire horse on the Pacific Coast. Colonel died in 1915 at the ripe old age of 33. This famous horse, the late Joseph Buchtel, fire chief in 1893-94, asserted – understood the fire alarms and knew where a fire was as well as the men themselves. He used to haul a single hose reel, following the engine without a driver. So thoroughly ingrained was his sense of duty that once when confined to his stall because of a lame leg, he kicked the side out of his stall and followed the apparatus to a fire. All of the fire horses were highly trained animals and apparently enjoyed the roles they played in fighting fires. A great deal of the glamour surrounding the firefighting business disappeared with the passing of the fire horse.

The first department automobile made its appearance in 1909 – an impressive new Pierce Arrow with high wheels, ponderous wind-shield, right hand drive, coal oil lamps, and rubber-bulb horn – purchased for Chief Campbell's use. It was kept ready for instant use, and in case of an alarm, the chief dashed away at top speed before the battalion chiefs could get their old-fashioned buggies into line. The chief was able to arrive at any downtown fire before the apparatus was at hand and had time to size up the situation and decide what method of action was best to take. So well did this initial piece of motor equipment serve, that it sealed the doom of the fire horse, as agitation immediately thereafter was begun toward motorizing all equipment and apparatus.

The first piece of motor propelled fire apparatus was put into service in 1911. At the close of the year 1913, the department had 17 pieces of motor equipment in service and by June, 1915, the department's motor apparatus had increased to 26 pieces. In April, 1920, the department became completely motorized, the last horse-drawn vehicles being retired from service. Firemen were no longer quartered in stables and it had now become more essential that a fireman understand the function of a spark-plug than to know the correct procedure to follow in treating a spavin.

It was found that the motorized apparatus provided a significantly quicker response, greater range capability and potentially far more versatility in uses. Early in the 1920's a motorized

squad vehicle was commissioned, outfitted with equipment to handle a wider range of emergencies than those at most fires. The squad personnel were trained in first aid as well as in other special skills. In a short while this piece of apparatus became the busiest in the city as people began to value the lifesaving potential of sick a service.

The squad became the forerunner to our present day rescue vehicles. In 1933 the desirability for reaching more people quicker led to the commissioning of a first aid vehicle, the George Baker Emergency Car. This was a 1933 Lincoln auto which allowed for more rapid response. In 1939 with the threat of war and its potential working ahead Portland's Fire Bureau became the first bureau with a disaster vehicle -the Jay W. Stevens Disaster Car. This large vehicle was equipped as a mobile headquarters and first aid station. The value of first aid as a public service and as a necessity in event of war, caused to be effected a bureau-wide training program in standard and advanced first aid and the establishment of stations as first aid treatment locations in 1941.

The motorized apparatus' instant readiness and rapid response created other possibilities which were not fully realized until 1946 when the Bureau's vehicles were outfitted with two-way radios. The radio allowed for more coordination on response to fires and in operations at fires. Communication anywhere, anytime at last allowed for broader expansion in the application of fire prevention and training techniques. Company building surveys were begun in 1946 and by 1950 home inspections and other fire prevention programs which were enhanced by the greater manpower availability due to mobile communications being initiated. Beginning in 1928 with Portland's Fire College, the Bureau yearly increased the quantity of information it disseminated to the members; and with this, came the desire and expectation of more complete retention and practicability by those members. This can be seen by comparing rookie training changes. Until the 1920's training was on-the-job experience; by the 1930's training was still predominately on-the-job training; however, it was expected that a rookie should be acquainted with the written training manual and demonstrate this to the training college. In the 1950's and presently, an intensified training under training officers for one year is the prerequisite for being accepted permanently into the Bureau.

The increasing demands upon the men of the Bureau caused these men to seek greater benefits from their profession -- better hours, pay, and pension. In 1904 the fire fighter worked six and one-half days for sixty-five dollars per month. Through the twenties and thirties a two platoon, seventy-two hour per week schedule was in effect. By 1940 the pension fund for retiring fire fighters was on the verge of insolvency and action was taken to establish our present pension and hour's system.

Firemen petitioned the people for better hours in 1946. In a May referendum of that year the people of Portland rejected a proposed 48 hour work week; undaunted however, the personnel resubmitted a petition for a 60-hour schedule which was accepted in November by the voters. These hours established the present day three platoon system and were the prelude to the present 56-hour work week schedule adopted in 1952.

Better hours were one of the three working conditions to change; the other two were pay and pension. In 1947 the Police and Fire Department submitted a pension proposal to the Portland voter. This plan provided the security and benefits necessary to attract men into the Bureau with careers rather than jobs in mind.

Portland's present-day fire department is a close-knit highly organized structure. It operates with efficiency and a minimum of waste effort. Each member has been carefully selected by competitive examination from a host of applicants. Nothing is left to luck – nothing, to chance. Intelligent supervision and constant striving for high objectives have placed Portland's fire department high among the best rated firefighting organizations in America. The young men who enters the service today is to participate in the perpetuation of an institution rich in worthwhile tradition – replete with accounts of outstanding individual and group achievement – and great because of the cumulative result of the labors of those already serving or who have gone before.

Fire Chiefs - - - - -1851 – 1937

Thomas J. Dwyer	1851
H. W. Davis	1854
S. J. McCormack	1857
W. Hutchins	1858
J. N. Vansycle	1858-59
Joseph Webber	1860-63
Joseph Buchtel	1864
Tom Young	1865-66
W. H. Weed	1867-68
Robert Holman	1869-70
A. A. Williams	1871-72
William O. Bruen	1873-74
A. B. Hallack	1875
J. H. Lyon	1876-77
Harry Morgan	1878-79
Thomas A. Jordan	1880-81
Wm. A. Hart	1882
Thomas A. Jordan	1883
H. Morgan	1884-92
Robert Holman	1892
Joseph Buchtel	1893
David Campbell	1895
F. De Boest	1896-98
David Campbell	1898-1911
B. F. Dowell	1911-20
J. E. Young	1920-23 (retired)
Leo G. Holden	1925-27 (retired)
Edward Grenfell	1928-1959