

## **Portland Paid Fire Department 1946-1983**

The city continues to strive to be the thriving metropolitan center that its founders envisioned in 1844, named at that time on the serendipity of a coin flip, legendary now: Two Yankee traders, Masters Pettygrove and Lovejoy, stand on a hill overlooking the Willamette and debate the merits of 'Boston' or 'Portland' as a proper name for a dream. Let Luck – fine lady that she is – decide because thereafter everything else would be decided by sacrifice. Spinning, the coin glints in the sun. 'Portland' it is. Six years later Thomas Dryer thought about fire, wrote about it, and then organized to fight it.

One hundred thirty-three years hence, Dryer's tiny civilian force looks quaint. But in fact, changes in the department over the years have brought back some of the spirit of civilian participation, both through the city-wide fire prevention programs and through a growing 'civilianization' of the department in its administrative and clerical staffs.

Furthermore, a move to a two platoon/72 hour workweek system and then, in July of 1947, to a three platoon/60 hour week (now 56 hours), opened up the department by allowing firefighters time to integrate into the community. Finally, a modernization program running from 1957 to 1963 streamlined and consolidated the department, reducing the number of districts from five to four (1963) and the number of stations from 38 to 30 (1957).

If these changes give the department a smaller, more civilian-oriented resemblance to earlier days, the introduction of high technology makes the resemblance one in spirit only. The maxim is that the art of fighting fires does not change much; however true that may be, the craft changes rapidly. A partial list of technological improvements includes: lightweight hose and coupling (1966-67); full protection helmets (1968); the phasing out of filter masks in favor of self-contained breathing apparatus (completed in 1972); the introduction of two-way radios which greatly facilitated the coordination of unit movements at fires; full-power, diesel driven engines; closed circuit television for training.

These things, in addition to the continual upgrading of the hydrant and alarm systems as well as the programs of fire prevention, harbor patrol, rescue, and training, have distinguished the post-war era as one in which technology, organizational structure, and individual skill and hard work have melded to make the Portland Fire Bureau a credit not only to its present but to its past as well.