

Members of Portland Fire From 1862

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Only eight men out of 259, who were members of Portland's fire department in 1862 now live to tell of the thrilling experiences had by these men in fighting fires in the pioneer days. All but two of the eight reside in Portland. When they were firemen in 1862, they were in the prime of life for only men in the pink of condition could do the work. Now they are aged and gray.

There were no paid firemen in those early days, the services of the men being voluntary. There were five companies having headquarters in various parts of the city. They were fitted with helmets, speaking trumpets, hose, and the old type of hand-propelled, hand-operated pumpers. There was no water fire system as at present, water being secured from cisterns sunk in various parts of the city.

The firemen were called out by bells. Each company had a bell with a different tone from the others and the ringing of this brought men from their various pursuits to take up the fighting of fire. The pumpers were drawn out by hand to the nearest cistern, hose lines were laid and groups of firemen took turns pumping the machine and handling the hose. Officers directed operations by the speaking trumpets.

In 1862, there were five companies of volunteers. The largest was Multnomah Engine Company No. 2 with 74 members. Of these, five still are alive. They are Joseph Buchtel, W.V. Spencer, E.J. Dehart, and A.B. Stuart, all of Portland, and C.H. Hill now residing at Orting, Washington.

Willamette Engine Company No. 1 was the next largest with 68 members. Only three of these men are still living. They are L.A. Godard and Charles Hutchins, of Portland, and A.J. Remington now residing in eastern Washington.

Columbian Engine Company No. 3 had 43 men, all of whom are dead. Protection Engine Company No. 4 had 32 men, all dead now, and Vigilance Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 had 42 members, now all dead.

There were 25 cisterns in the city with an aggregate capacity of 487,000 gallons. In the private office of Fire Chief Bidy Dowell, a picture of the officers of the department in 1862 is suspended from the wall. Of the men shown, only one is still alive. He is Joseph Buchtel. The group includes Joe Webber, who was Chief of the fire department in 1862, and J.J. Messenger, who served as Assistant Chief. The photo below lists from left to right:

Front Row

- John S. White
- Absalom B. Hallock
- William D. Dellinger
- E.G. Randall
- Thomas Fitzgerald
- J. Thompson
- Theodore B. Trevett

Rear Row

- M.F. Gallagher
- Joseph Buchtel
- Joe Webber (Chief Engineer)
- William B. Clark
- Orin Joynt
- J.B. Dennison
- John J. Messinger (Assistant Chief)

