

The Portland Firefighter's Association IAFF Local 43



The First 100 Years

CIRCA 1850



Portland would experience its first significant fire in 1849 when a sawmill was destroyed by a fire. By May of 1853, Portland City Council would appoint the city's Fire Warden to begin work organizing a formal fire department.

On August 1, 1853 the first volunteer company would be accepted by city council for service to the city of Portland. Vigilance Hook & Ladder would go into service that day, followed by Willamette Engine Company #1, just a few days later on August 3rd. Willamette is pictured here.



Volunteer companies were close-knit groups who were dedicated to service. The pride and esprit-de-corp can be seen in this photo of Multnomah Engine Company #2.

“Black Saturday”

August 2, 1873



While not the sole reason, the fire of 1873, which destroyed 22 square blocks of downtown Portland, would cause city leaders to realize a volunteer fire department was simply not enough to provide the protections necessary for a city like Portland.

Excerpt from city council proceedings of January 4, 1882

"The time has come when men cannot serve without pay for 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 . . ."

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For all the good work done by volunteer fire companies, it was simply not enough to keep up with the demands of a growing Portland. By early 1882, city council had determined that the volunteer era would need to end.

On January 1, 1883, the city of Portland would create the "Portland Paid Fire Department." The Paid era began with an annual budget of about \$55,000, which provided salaries for 53 employees.

CIRCA 1895

Early Shift Calendar... “The One-Platoon System”

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift
A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift
A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift
A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift	A Shift
A Shift	A Shift	A Shift				

12 HOURS PER WEEK OFF!!!

6

As city funds came into the picture, so did the concerns over pay and working conditions. By the early 1900s, the firefighter work schedule was 24 hours per day, 7 days per week with 12 hours per week off. Each station had 3 paid firefighters and up to 7 extramen, essentially volunteers who supplemented the paid work force.

1895

Chief David Campbell



By 1895, Chief Joseph Buchtel was embroiled in city politics. He had denied a building permit for a member of the Board of Fire Commissioners and as a result, the Mayor of Portland removed him from his Chief Engineer position.

Buchtel was able to choose his successor. He picked his 1st Assistant, who had been recognized for his natural leadership skills. It was a man named David Campbell. He would take over as Chief Engineer on June 1, 1895.



Over the next year, the fire department was criticized for their performance at fires and for general inefficiency. Chief Campbell would be held responsible and removed from his position on September 30, 1896. This coincided with Mayor Pennoyer ordering a cut in fire department salaries.

When firefighters noticed the pay reduction, they coordinated a large-scale walkout from work. This brought attention to the pay cuts and the fact that Mayor Pennoyer had used these savings to pay people to lobby for a city charter change, essentially giving the mayor the power to appoint new fire commissioners.

At the next election, Mayor Pennoyer would be replaced by Mayor Mason. Mason would reappoint David Campbell as Chief and Campbell would go on to serve for another 13 years, until his death in the Union Oil Fire of 1911.

CIRCA 1903

Chief David Campbell and his Executive Staff

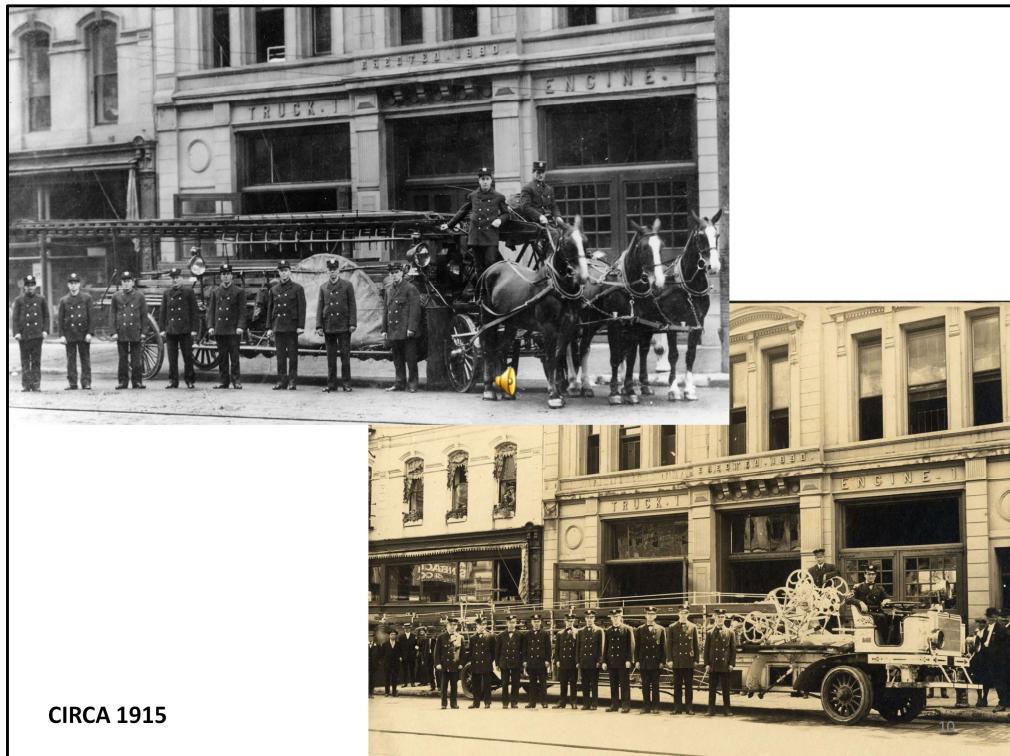


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Upon his reappointment, Campbell began to work toward a fully paid fire department.

A key issue of the day was the development of a civil service system within the state of Oregon. While Campbell was not necessarily in favor, he knew he would have to work with civil service as it was adopted into the city charter on March 7, 1903

Between the advent of civil service and Campbell's desire to become a fully paid fire department, Campbell would finally prevail by eliminating extramen and creating a more professional department. The shift schedule, while still the same, now offered 24 hours per week off rather than the prior 12.



David Campbell's influence would continue to shape the Portland Fire Department as well as labor concerns. As he introduced the motorized fire apparatus to the Department, specialists in handling the horse teams saw dramatic changes coming their way. The city of Portland was also growing at a rapid rate and technology was changing the way fires were fought.

1917



11

On September 10, 1917, the first meeting among members of the Fire Department for organizing a union local affiliated with the American Federation of Labor would be held. They would be known as City Fireman's Union #15776. The meeting would be held at Forester Hall, 129 ½ Fourth Street.

1917



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December 10, 1917 - A ballot was administered which read: Shall "City Firemen's Union #15776 of Portland, Oregon affiliate with both the Central Labor Council and the Oregon State Federation of Labor? The results were Yes-165. No-10.

1918

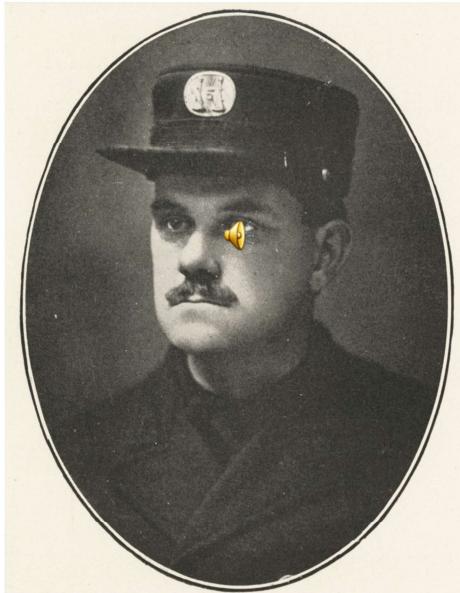
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On February 28, 1918, Local 43 officially became an affiliate of the International Association of Firefighters.

1918

Lester Riley



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The Portland delegate to attend the national Convention in Washington was Lester Riley. He was certified and given credentials. His signature is on the Local 43 charter certificate today. From the inception and for several years to follow, Lester Riley would remain the IAFF District 9 representative.

Pay in 1918

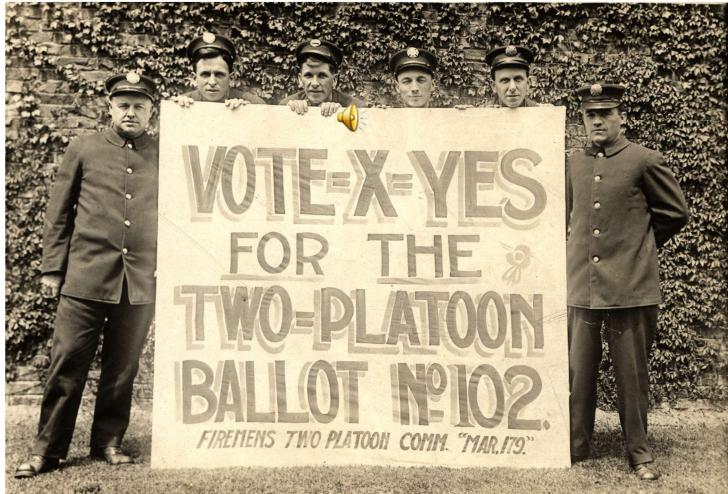
- Hoseman 1st year \$115 2nd year \$125
- Asst. Engineer 1st year \$120 2nd year \$130
- Engineer 1st year \$135 2nd year \$145
- Lieutenant 1st year \$135 2nd year \$145
- Captain 1st year \$150 2nd year \$160

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After formation of Local 43, the pay scale for 1918 was:

Hoseman - first year \$115 - second year \$125
Assistant Engineer - first year \$120 - second year \$130
Engineer - first year \$135 - second year \$145
Lieutenant - first year \$135 - second year \$145
Captain - first year \$150 - second year \$160

November 6, 1918
“The Two-Platoon System”
Passes



16

The shift schedule may have been the final straw that drove the department membership to form a labor union. Many fire departments in the United States used a one day on, one day off work schedule that resulted in a 72 hour work week, a far cry better than the seven days per week, one platoon schedule. The 72 hour work week would go into effect by a vote of Portland citizens on November 6, 1918.

1918

The First Local 43 President



Clyde F. Hughes



Alfred J. Horn

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While Clyde F. Hughes would serve as temporary chairman of the union until it formed, Alfred Horn would be voted in as the first official Local 43 President. While a Portland Firefighter, he completed his law degree and passed his bar exam in 1917. Unfortunately, at age 31, he would die on November 1, 1918 during the influenza epidemic.

1921

More Tragedy...



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Tragedy would remain no stranger to Local 43 leadership. On June 15, 1921, then union president Karl Gunster, would die in the line of duty. Serving as Lieutenant of Engine 22, he was overcome by smoke during a fire at the May Apartments at SW 14th and Taylor. He was honored on the Campbell Memorial and also had a fireboat christened in his name in 1927.

1862 / 2015

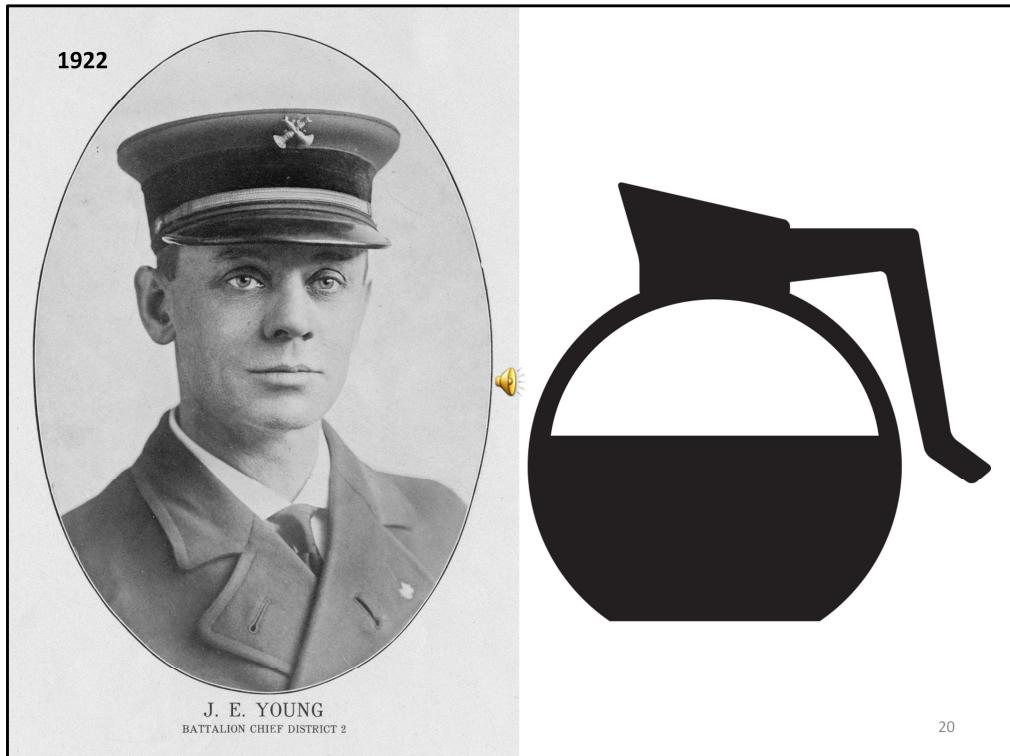
Firefighter's Section Lone Fir Cemetery



Local 43 tackled big issues and small. Union meeting minutes often lacked detail, but provided surprising insight into issues that were important to the membership at the time.

The Firefighter's Section of Lone Fir Cemetery was deeded to Portland Firefighter's on November 16, 1862. Lone Fir Cemetery was under private ownership for decades before coming under Multnomah County ownership in 1928, and Metro ownership in 1997. However, Local 43 has a long history of caring for this special place of rest for Portland Firefighters. The first mention of care came on May 26, 1921 when Local 43 created a committee to look after the graves.

In 2015, Local 43 would step up in a big way by funding the creation and placement of 9 lost gravemarkers for members who had unmarked graves, and 12 commemorative gravemarkers for Campbell memorial Honorees buried in the Firefighter's Section.



October 23, 1922 – A Motion was made and passed to pay for coffee at all larger fires, in cooperation with the Chief, who was John Young at that time.



October 9, 1941 - Motion made and carried that Local 43 protest the method used by the Civil Service Board in the entrance examination and using regular members of the department for tests or as "guinea pigs."

1942

World War II



During World War II, Local 43 spearheaded efforts to maintain jobs for those deployed to the war. It has been estimated that over 50% of Portland Firefighters were absent at some point due to the war.

June 8, 1942 – A Motion was made and carried to adopt a resolution to hold no more civil service examinations until after the war. A Motion was also made, and defeated, that a letter be sent to the commissioners and Chief Grenfell asking that they do not ask deferment from Military service on any members of the Fire Department. It was likely felt that members should not be put in a position to choose between their country and their city.

November 9, 1942 – A Motion was made and carried that Local 43 immediately protest any more civil service examinations until after the war.



For those deployed, they were always in the minds of those who stayed behind. Local 43 took steps to care for the members in the military, when at war or when returning home.

September 10, 1943 – A Motion was made and carried that we do not send "Chesterfield" cigarettes to the boys overseas.

1943



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November 8, 1943 – A motion made and carried to purchase a suitable pennant for our military members with a gold star for those who have died in the service, and a blue star for those in active military service.

1946

3 Platoon System

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	A Shift	B Shift	C Shift	A Shift	B Shift	C Shift
A Shift	B Shift	C Shift	A Shift	B Shift	C Shift	A Shift
B Shift	C Shift	A Shift	B Shift	C Shift	A Shift	B Shift
C Shift	A Shift	B Shift	C Shift	A Shift	B Shift	C Shift
A Shift	B Shift	C Shift				

25

After the war, the effort focused on improved pension benefits and the work schedule. Efforts to move to the 3 Platoon system began.

On May 23, 1946, a motion was made and carried to establish a committee to explore a 60 hour work week that would start on July 1, 1946, move to a 56 hour work week starting July 1, 1947, then move to a 48 hour work week starting July 1, 1948.

Vote of November 2, 1948

- Pension combined with Police Bureau to form the Fire & Police Disability and Retirement Fund
- 21 pieces of fire apparatus purchased
- 6 fire stations built
- 3 platoon system / 56 hour work week to soon follow

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A pension reform initiative would go to the voters of Portland on November 2, 1948. The new pension system, combined with the Police pension fund, went into effect July 12, 1949.

This same voter initiative provided for the replacement of 21 pieces of apparatus and the replacement of 6 fire stations, including the building of the new Central Fire Station at the corner of SW Front Avenue (now Naito Parkway) and Ash Street.

The 3 platoon system, resulting in a 56 hour work week, was soon to follow.



1984-1985



Wages commensurate with other west coast fire departments, pay for being recalled to greater alarm fires, and pay for participating while off duty on Funeral Platoons were key issues during Joe Gray's administration. Success would be found in each area.



Members of Local 43 had a long history of meeting in various labor halls. In 1986, a new idea was hatched by then President Randy Leonard. He suggested a former fire station might make a good union hall and one happened to be available.

Engine 31 had been located at 4530 SE 67th since 1913. In 1927, a bungalow style fire station replaced the original on the same site. It was occupied until 1959 when a major station modernization and relocation project was undertaken. It sat in private ownership until 1986 when it officially became the home of Local 43.

1989

More Pension Reform



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Like all good things, they can usually be made better. The Fire & Police Disability and Retirement Fund would again become the subject of debate in the mid 1980s when Fire District #10 employees were hired by the city of Portland as part of the contractual agreement to provide service for District #10. District 10 employees, working under PERS, had a substantially different retirement benefit than did Portland firefighters. Discussions would revolve around equalization of the systems.

November 7, 1989

56% of the Vote

Thank you citizens of Portland...

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On November 7, 1989, Portland voters chose to reform the pension system. This affected vesting of members, widow protections, and a host of other inequitable provisions of the system.

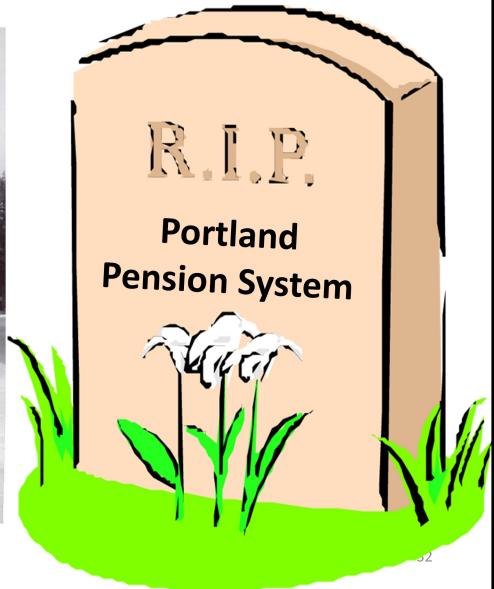
1998 to 2003...



During Tom Chamberlain's administration, from 1998 to 2003, gains were made for retirees when legislation were passed exempting pension benefits from taxation. Longevity pay would also be implemented when members reached the seniority status of 15, 20, and 25 years, boosting pay by 2% at each step. And the union's administrative structure would be modified to include 4 vice presidents instead of the previous 2.

CIRCA 2008

Pensions and Pay



Past President Ken Burns shared that the pension system, established in 1949, would be put to rest with all new hires being enrolled in PERS.

During this same period, all members would be recognized and certified as “apparatus operators” and receive additional pay

November 2, 2010



During the term of President Jim Forquer, Portland voters were again asked to support Portland Fire & Rescue. It was discovered that the apparatus replacement fund within the Fire Bureau's budget was being used for purposes other than apparatus replacement. Commissioner Randy Leonard, in cooperation with President Forquer, put together a bond plan to take to the citizens of Portland. They were advised against such an approach, being warned that a difficult economy would make it difficult, if not impossible, to garner voter support. They forged ahead anyway and were successful in putting together a \$72,400,000 bond to provide for the replacement of ageing fire and emergency response vehicles, to finance the construction of a fire station, and an emergency response center, and provide funding for a public safety emergency radio system. This was passed by Portland voters on November 2, 2010.

2013

S.A.F.E.R



FEMA

Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response Grants



34

During Alan Fershweiler's term (so far), a key success was landing a SAFER Grant to fund 26 firefighter positions that would have otherwise been lost to budget cuts in 2013.

Portland Firefighter's Association IAFF Local 43

Celebrating 100 Years of
Service and Solidarity



Thank you!



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Thank you for sharing this journey of just a few highlights from the past 100 years.