

"Multnomah County Fire District #10"

Source: Don Handewith and Howard F. Horner

In June of 1932, a house on 83rd and Sandy Boulevard burned to the ground as the Portland Fire Bureau and local residents looked on. The house was located outside the city limits of Portland and the Portland firefighters could not legally assist.

This incident prompted a group of Parkrose residents, with the strong support of the Parkrose Lions Club, to begin a three-year project to legalize rural fire protection districts in Oregon. This required monetary resources, circulating petitions, and strong lobbying of the State Legislature. This effort resulted in the formation of Parkrose Fire District #2 on April 6, 1935. This was the first rural fire protection district formed in Oregon that provided its own fire protection. During the district's operation it had two fire chiefs.

This action opened the doors for the development of Rural Fire Protection Districts across the county to include:

- District #5, Faloma, in 1941
- District #6, Russellville, in 1942
- District #7, Kelley Butte, in 1942
- District #9 at Twelve-Mile Corner (Corner of SE 223rd and Stark) in 1946 (they were formerly the Rockwood District at Gresham City Hall)
- District #13, Rose City in August 1947 (corner of NE 59th and Going Streets)

Fire Districts #5, #6, and #7 did not own equipment or train their own staff. They contracted with other existing fire districts for their fire protection.

A large strip of East Multnomah County remained without fire protection. It stretched from the Columbia River to the Clackamas County Line and from Barker Road (SE 162nd Avenue) on the east to the Portland city limits on the west. Within this area, fire protection was furnished by the Gilbert Volunteers.

The Gilbert Volunteers were led by Fire Chief Henry J. Engel. The fire department operated out of Engel's store and home on SE 136th Avenue, near Ramona Street. The fire siren was mounted on top of Engel's Bell Rose Grocery Store and the water tank fire truck was kept in a hay shed beside the store. A station would later be built across the street.

In the Powellhurst area, protection was provided by the Northern Fire Engineering Company, a private fire protection company owned and operated by Fire Chief Harold Bond. They were located at SE 125th and Division Streets. Bond owned an up-to-date fire truck and employed a crew of four firefighters. He contracted with local residents for fire protection at a cost of \$12.00 per home.

In August of 1946, a fire broke out in the Gilbert area. It was brought under control by the Gilbert volunteers, but the fire prompted area citizens and firefighters to consider ways to provide better fire

protection for the area. They decided to petition Multnomah County to form a fire protection district for that part of the county.

Albert Troge headed the committee to collect the needed signatures, 10% of the property owners which numbered 7,652. Troge turned in the last of the 1,913 needed signatures in April of 1947. On April 22, 1947, the County Commission declared the fire district to be established as Multnomah County Rural Fire Protection District #10.

Fifteen candidates sought to be chosen for the five fire district director positions. The election proved to be a hot one with many different agendas as to how to appoint a fire chief and provide firefighting staff. After the vote, the five chosen board members were W.H. Dana, Bill D. Jones, Don J. Shellhart, James R. Sweatt, and Albert Troge.

The new board offered the fire chief position to Henry Engel, but he refused, citing his work obligation to his store as his first priority. The board then appointed Albert Troge as the first fire chief of Fire District #10.

Chief Troge organized a staff of four full-time firefighters and eighteen trained volunteers. He purchased Mr. Bonds fire truck and the Gilbert tanker that was located at Henry Engel's store.

Other consolidations, which eventually created the entirety of Fire District #10 occurred as follows:

- Troutdale, Fairview, and Wood Village consolidated with District #9 on December 4, 1961
- District #9 consolidated with District #10 on December 14, 1965
- District #7 consolidated with District #10 on May 11, 1966
- District #2 consolidated with District #10 on November 16, 1970
- District #6 consolidated with District #10 on July 12, 1971
- District #13 consolidated with District #10 on November 15, 1971

When the consolidations were completed in 1971, District #10 became the second largest fire department in the state as well as the second largest fire district west of the Mississippi River, with ten stations covering 75 square miles.

The east county drill tower was built in 1969 with the training center classroom and offices completed in late 1971.

In the early 1980s, annexations by the City's of Portland and Gresham began to reduce the size of the District. In 1982 the District alarm room was consolidated with Portland Fire Alarm Dispatch, making for not only a cost savings but eliminating jurisdictional confusion of 9-1-1 operations. Negotiations began in 1983 to enter into an inter-agency contractual agreement with the City of Portland. The 235 Fire District #10 employees became members of Portland Fire & Rescue on July 1, 1984. This contract was to last ten years before the District decides to not renew the arrangement, however all fire department members remained with Portland.

The various districts enjoyed excellent leadership over time. Chief's who served during Fire District #10's tenure included:

- Albert Troge 1947-1956
- Lester Derry 1956-1958
- Ray Hicks 1958-1973
- Richard Ham 1973-1983
- Walter Porter 1984-July 1, 1984

The influx of the 235 members of Fire District #10 into Portland Fire & Rescue had a profound influence over operations and organizational philosophy. Portland would grow by more than the sheer number of firefighters.