Horses and Professionalism
"Portland Paid Fire Department"

Compiled by Don Porth

It was January 1883 and the newly formed "Portland Paid Fire Department" (PPFD) was beginning operations. The budget submitted to city council showed the following allocations:

Chief Engineer's Salary	2,000
1st Assistant's Salary	500
2nd Assistant's Salary	400
Secretary	900
Superintendent of Fire Alarm	600
Salaries (5) Companies (48) Men	22,140
Rent of Offices for Commissioners	325
Purchase of 14 Horses	3,500
Four new hose carts	1,800
Harnesses and Repairs	650
Horse Blankets	200
No. 2's Engine	4,000
Horse Feed	2,400
Shoeing of Horses	275
Coal and Wood	450
Oil and Sponges	500
Coke	400
Medicines	50
Supplies for Maintaining Fire Alarms	500
Fitting up Commissioner's Office, Books and Stationary	750
Alteration of 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	300
Gas	500

To say it was a fully paid fire department would be misleading. The department was staffed with three firefighters per shift and heavily subsidized by "extramen," minimally paid firefighters that would live their normal lives and work their daily jobs until called in to fight fires. It was also likely a first step toward becoming a full time, paid firefighter when an opening would occur. By virtue of pay, the city could require extramen to participate in training, but their professionalism was still limited. The actual staffing ensured the presence of three regular firefighters and seven extramen at each station.

From the very beginning to current day, firefighters have worked on a shift rotation to ensure that continual coverage was afforded to the citizens of Portland. However, the shifts of modern day are

considerably different than the early days. Upon formation of the PPFD, a shift was 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, with twelve hours off per week to visit your home or leave the station for whatever reason. Members were logged in and out in company journal books, the written records of all activities within the station.

With no pay, extramen (and sometimes paid firefighters), reported their home address as the fire station itself. Those that had actual home address were often located in close proximity to the fire station to which they were assigned. Sometimes an entire row of houses on the same street as the fire station would be owned by firefighters, likely changing hands to other department members if a firefighter was promoted or transferred to another station.

The PPFD began by forming four engine companies and one truck company from the existing volunteer companies. Willamette became Engine 1 and maintained its quarters at the 100 block of Morrison Street. Multnomah became Engine 2 and continued at 69 2nd Street. Columbian became Engine 3 and maintained its location in the 200 block of Washington Street. Protection became Engine 4 and continued at 273 1st Street. Tiger and Couch, the late-comers to the department, would not transition directly to an engine company, but Tiger's quarters were mothballed at 370 4th Street, and would be activated when Truck 2 was put into service in 1888. Vigilance Hook and Ladder became Portland's first truck company with the designation Truck 1 and remained located at 170 4th Street.

The department rolled along with no significant historical accounts for many years. By the mid-1890s, politics would reenter the humble profession. In 1895, PPFD reported seven engine companies, three chemical companies, and four truck companies. The Chief Engineer at the time, Joseph Buchtel, had reached retirement age and was embroiled in the politics of city government. While he had been a big supporter of Mayor George Frank, and had leveraged funds from his firefighter's salaries to fight a city charter proposal that would effectively cut salaries, including the mayor's, his conflict with the chair of the Board of Fire Commissioners, S.R. Farrell, had reached a head. Apparently Farrell had requested permission to renovate a wooden building within the city limits for his personal business and Buchtel had denied his request, citing legal concerns. Buchtel's affiliation with the mayor could not win out over the politics of the day, and Farrell's wish to have Buchtel removed from the Chief Engineer position prevailed.


David Campbell

David Campbell was Buchtel's 1st Assistant Engineer. Buchtel recognized the natural leadership of Campbell and chose him to be his replacement as Chief Engineer. Campbell would begin his service on June 1, 1895, but be relieved of the duty a little more than a year later.

It was also during this time that the competence of the fire department in general was under scrutiny. Fires were extending to multiple buildings, firefighters

seemed to be inefficient in their ability to do the assigned work, and reports of theft among the rank and file were made. Campbell was held responsible for the problems and removed from his position at on September 30, 1896. By no coincidence, Campbell's removal by Mayor Sylvester Pennoyer coincided with the city council ordering fire department salaries to be cut. It was truly a tumultuous time for the fire department.

When the firefighters noticed the pay reduction, a large scale walkout occurred. This was a cause of great embarrassment for Mayor Pennoyer. The pay reduction had apparently been caused by funds being skimmed from wages in order to feed a political lobby intended to change the city charter. This was intended to give Mayor Pennoyer the power to appoint a new fire commission.

The winds of political change continued to shift and David Campbell would be reappointed to Chief Engineer in July of 1898 under the new administration of Mayor Mason. Tinny DeBoest had served as Chief Engineer until Campbell's reappointment. Campbell would go on to serve for the next thirteen years, until his line of duty death on June 26, 1911.


Tinny DeBoest

As the department entered the 1900s, many issues began to unfold. The first was the elimination of extramen in exchange for a fully paid fire department. Portland had grown steadily over the past two decades and construction methods in the city were yielding taller buildings. Any fire occurring in such structures required more manpower. Extramen, while competent, were not able to provide the needed resources in a timely manner.

It was also a time when the budget had shrunk from $150,500 in 1893 to $80,100 in 1900. Horses, being a major expense, had gone neglected since their introduction to the department in 1883 and not one of the 25 horses in service was under the age of fourteen. The department had also expanded to encompass both sides of the Willamette River, which included the annexation of Albina and East Portland. Full time drivers and engineers of the fire department were paid $65 dollars per month in 1900. The remaining 68 extramen, working on an emergency basis only, were paid $15 to $25 per month.

The implementation of civil service was another key issue that naturally mirrored the staffing concerns that led to a fully paid Portland Fire Department. Since 1900, the discussion of a civil service system had been debated among city and state leaders. David Campbell, as well as many city leaders, was not favorable to the civil service idea. However, Campbell wisely got on board with the idea soon after it was adopted into the city charter on March 7, 1903.

A big concern with civil service was that it would current firefighters would lose their jobs due by being declared unfit and have to prove their fitness to be rehired. While the police chief made public

proclamations against civil service reforms, Campbell quietly held his concerns to see how it would play out. In the end, the rehire rate of firefighters and police officers was 100% under civil service.

The civil service reforms would go into effect on June 1, 1904. Firefighters also received an amendment to their shift schedule. While still working seven days per week and 24 hours per day, they would now have 24 hours per week off instead of merely 12. Their pay was $65 per month for the effort. The additional time off was probably considered quite a bonus even though it provided only mild relief from a demanding schedule. This shift schedule would continue until November 1, 1919 when a two-platoon system would be implemented with firefighters working one day on (24 hours) and one day off. This created a 72-hour work week.

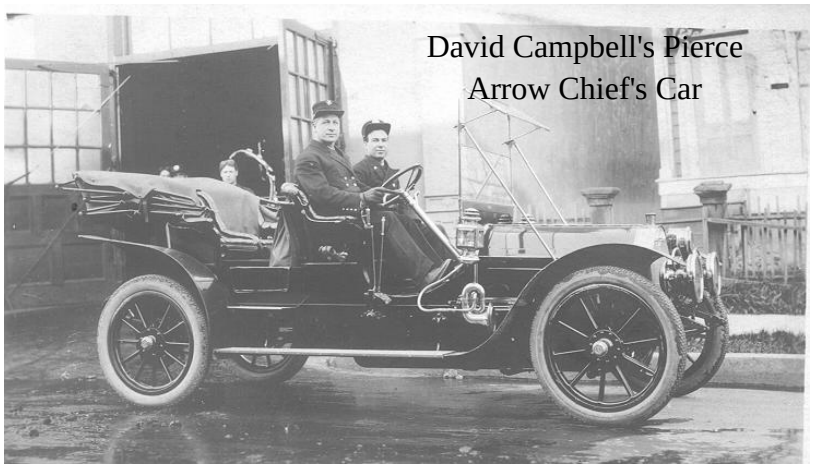
Fireboat George H. Williams, 1903

The final issue of the day was the need for a fireboat. By 1901, Portland was the number one exporter of wheat in the Pacific Northwest and third largest in the United States. Its waterfront was a major part of the regional economy, so any waterfront properties were key to commerce. Many areas of the river had limited land access, so the wooden structures that made up all of the waterfront facilities were in need of fire protection from the water side. The state legislature would approve funding to purchase the first fireboat through a levy approved on January 26, 1903. The first fireboat was launched into the Willamette River on February 27, 1904. The "George H. Williams," named for the mayor at the time, would ply the rivers of Portland for ten years before being joined by a second fireboat.

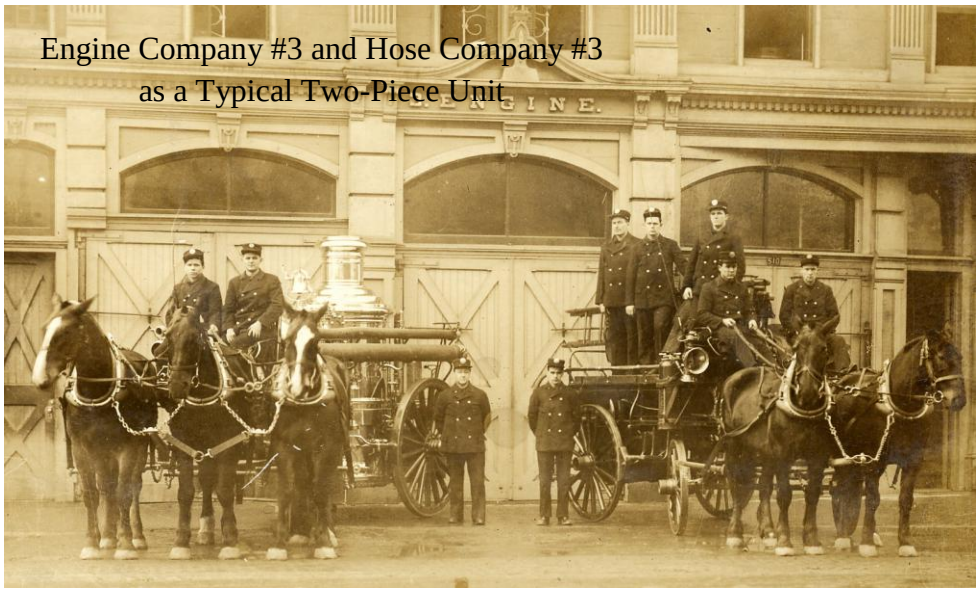
By 1905, the population of Portland had grown to about 162,000 citizens. This did not include the Chinese population or what were termed in various sources, the "disreputable" residents of the city. The Portland Fire Department now boasted 9 engine companies and 4 truck companies along with chemical companies and other specialty equipment and functions. Fire losses had also continued to grow, but the department continued to evolve to keep pace with the changes. It was a challenging battle given the rapid growth of Portland in this era.

The revolution of the internal combustion engine was occurring in the early 1900s and the significance did not escape Chief David Campbell's attention. He began advocating for motorized vehicles as soon as practical application for fire engines came into being. By 1909, Campbell had convinced the powers to be that a motorized vehicle was worth a trial. The first motorized vehicle to be owned and operated by the Portland Fire Department was Campbell's chief's car. It was a Pierce Arrow with high

wheels, a right hand drive, coal oil lamps, and a rubber-bulb horn. It proved to be faster than horses and cheaper to operate.


David Campbell's Pierce Arrow Chief's Car

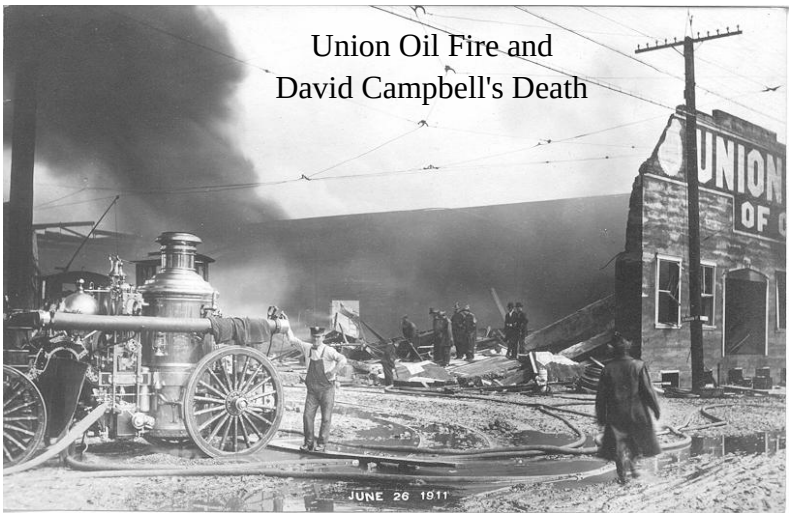
Engine companies of the day operated as a two-piece unit. A horse-drawn steam pumper worked in tandem with a horse-drawn hose wagon. Steamers, being very heavy, could only contain the pump, boiler, fuel, and related equipment. Hose wagons carried everything else (hose, ladders, tools, appliances, and all the firefighters who could fit). This two-piece team needed 4-5 horses to move them to and from fires. Campbell proved the worth of his chief's car by loading all of the firefighters into his Pierce Arrow and beating both the steamer and hose wagon to the scene. It didn't take long for him to convince the city leaders that motorized fire engines would be the way to go.


Engine Company #3 and Hose Company #3 as a Typical Two-Piece Unit

In June of 1910, Campbell and other fire committee members of the Portland executive board traveled to Seattle to witness an actual demonstration of a motorized chemical fire engine at work. The board was impressed and the future of the motorized fire engine was secured. The last horse-drawn vehicles, two American LaFrance steam engines, would be purchased in 1911. That same year, the first two motorized fire engines, both American LaFrance, would be put into service. It would take until April 1920 for the department to become fully motorized.

This no doubt caused great angst among the drivers of the horse teams. Many were Teamsters who had been hired in the 1800s because of their skill at driving and handling teams of horses. This significant change apparently had little impact on the jobs of the drivers, though. Nothing was found about lost firefighter jobs due to this cause.

The year 1911 would also become well known for another significant event: David Campbell's death. On June 26, 1911, Campbell lost his life at the Union Oil Works fire in SE Portland.



Union Oil Fire and
David Campbell's Death

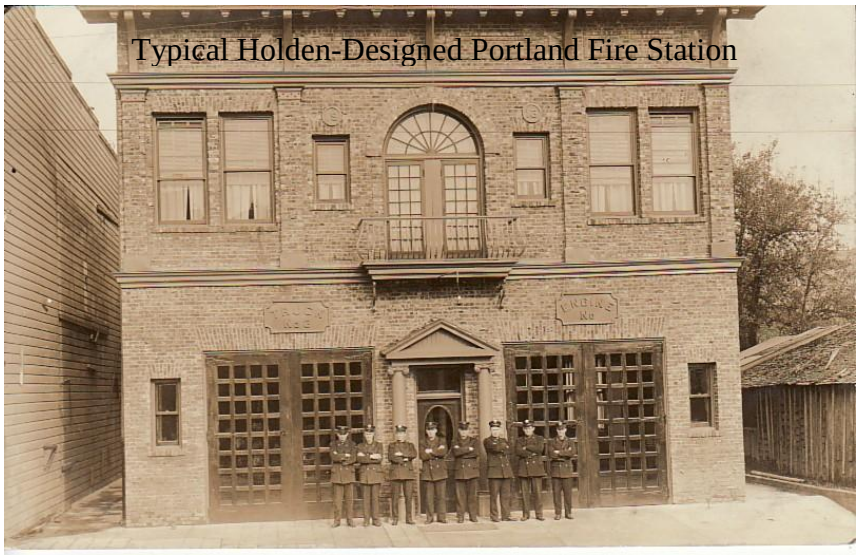
Campbell's leadership would be sorely missed. Stepping up as his replacement was Benjamin Franklin "Biddie" Dowell, a long-time member of the department and trusted member of Campbell's executive staff. Chief Dowell would serve for nine years as the Chief Engineer.

Campbell's administration included two other noteworthy individuals. Mike Laudenklos was a district chief for the city and long time department member. While history is not clear on the specific contributions of his career, he was considered steady, reliable, and a good leader. One of the three fireboats commissioned in 1927 would be named for him (the other two being the David Campbell and the Karl Gunster – both line of duty deaths).


L. G. HOLDEN
BATTALION CHIEF DISTRICT 1

Lee Holden was another district chief of note. Holden made his mark in many memorable ways, including as Chief of the department from 1923 to 1928. Prior to that, he was responsible for the design of fire stations (along with his fire command responsibilities). Many stations would carry his fingerprint for many, many years. While others may have carried his design ideas, two station types were know to be that of Holden's design. The first is the two-story, masonry structures characterized by an equipment and horse area on the first floor, with the living quarters located upstairs. Built primarily between 1911 and 1913, these stations remained in service for many years.

Once Campbell's vision of the motorized fire engine was determined to be the future of the organization, a new station design was implemented. Past stations needed high ceilings on the main floor since the horse harnessing had hung above the apparatus, allowing room for the horses to move into position and have the harnessing dropped onto their backs for a speedy exit. Hay lofts were also a feature of the prior station designs. The motorized fire engine offered


Typical Holden-Designed Portland Fire Station

different opportunities. While a motorized fire engine was of a similar width and length to the horse-drawn equivalent, there was no longer a need for the ceiling space above. Stations could now be more compact, at least height-wise. A station would also no longer need accommodations for 4-5 horses.


Holden's First Bungalow Fire Station - Station 18

In 1913, a new station design (created by Holden) was launched. It would be known as a "bungalow" fire station. It is believed that the design was not only looking to the future but also being considerate of residential interests of the neighborhoods in which they might be built. The first station of this type would be Station 24 in the Irvington neighborhood. The community was calling for a fire station that looked more residential than commercial. Holden came up with the perfect solution in the bungalow. They looked much like a home. Even details like the apparatus bay door were adorned with windows, curtains, flower boxes, and trim to create the look of a normal house. Hose towers, 30 foot tall structures in which to hang hose to allow it to dry, were incorporated into a pit in the ground and often terminated in a dormer on the roof, all to disguise their presence and not distract from the residential surroundings. None of this would be possible without the motorized fire engine, which allowed for a much smaller apparatus and equipment floor. With no provisions for horses at all, this move, made in 1913, was assurance the department was committed to motorization.

The next bungalow station to be built would not be until 1921. Many others would continue until 1928. Holden may have been responsible for other stations as well; history is not clear. However, many of the Holden-designed fire stations remained in Portland as viable commercial or residential buildings for over one hundred years with five remaining in service with the fire department since the time they were built (bungalow stations 11, 15, and 26 as well as station 28 and the Belmont Firehouse).

Another change would occur moving from 1912 into 1913. While it isn't known exactly why, the name of the organization would change from the Portland Fire Department to the Portland Bureau of Fire. The administration of the city would refer to all departments in the city as bureaus from that point forward, creating a unique moniker for the fire department.

In 1914, when the per capita loss through fire was calculated at $6.89 per person for the city, the reputation of Portland as a high-risk city had become well known. Sixteen lives were lost in fires by the end of 1914. Fire insurance companies were threatening to raise rates to the city by 25%.


JAY W. STEVENS
FIRE MARSHALL
BATTALION CHIEF DISTRICT 4

Another man chosen by Campbell as a district chief was Jay Stevens. Stevens began his career in Portland as a Ladderman on June 1, 1904. He rose quickly through the ranks at the fire department and in the early 1910s, had achieved the rank of battalion chief. When Chief Biddy Dowell needed to place more emphasis on fire prevention, Stevens was seen as the man for the job and was selected as Chief Prevention Officer. He was officially appointed by Mayor Albee in 1914 (The Fire Marshal would be a civil service position for over 90 years following before becoming an appointed position in the 2000s) and on March 19, 1915, the Fire Prevention Division of the Portland Fire Department was born.

Stevens turned the dismal fire loss record around quite quickly. Outreach to the public through events such as national "Fire Prevention Week" and a "clean-up and paint-up" campaign in 1916 (resulting in 8,342 vacant lots cleaned up; 1,231 lots planted with useful vegetation; 389 houses painted; 113 shacks removed; 754 neglected premises improved; 459 lesser nuisances abated; 131 large unsightly places cleaned; 43,031 pounds of tire cans collected; $743.46 collected by children for sale of junk; 396 five-ton truckloads of non-burnable rubbish removed) transformed the city. The Fire Prevention Division began realizing immediate results. Fire loss dropped $500,000 in 1915. Thirty-six days went by without an alarm compared with only eight days in 1914. Twenty-one false alarms were recorded in 1915, a mere one-eighth of the 1914 total.

In 1917, Stevens moved onto become the secretary of the National Board of Fire Underwriters. He would also become the state fire marshal for California, serving under four consecutive governors. He received numerous honors over the span of his career and passed away on March 26, 1980 at the age of 95. Posthumously, he was named to the "Hall of Legends, Legacies, and Leaders" of the National Fire Heritage Center on October 14, 2011 for his contributions to the national fire service. His legacy is interlaced throughout the Portland Fire Department, especially considering his relatively short, 13 year career.

Likely resulting from the implementation of civil service in 1903, labor relations had finally become an issue and Portland Firefighter's would begin to organize. While some form of labor support seemed to be present through affiliation with the Central Labor Council and the Oregon State Federation of Labor, Portland Firefighters endeavored to join the International Association of FireFighter's (IAFF) and become a Local affiliate to the IAFF.

The inaugural meeting, held September 10, 1917 opened with the following notes:

"Meeting called at Forester Hall, 129 1/2 Fourth Street, for the purpose of organizing a union

local affiliated with the American Federation of Labor among the members of the Bureau of Fire in the City of Portland. Meeting held between the hours of 11:00 AM and 2:00 PM."

Affiliation with the AFL would be established on February 28, 1918. Given that the 24 hour per day, seven days per week work schedule changed to 24 hours on/24 hours off after the November 6, 1918 referendum vote by the citizens of Portland, it can be presumed that this was the first major labor issue taken up by Local 43.

In a period of about 35 years, the department had come become a wage-paying agency using horses to power apparatus. It had weathered the political storms of civil service and the adversity of a leader lost to the line of duty. Technology evolved from manpower to horsepower then onto the internal combustion engine, both on the road and over the water. Buildings changed, as did the philosophy toward preventing fires. The hallmark of the Portland Fire Department would be continuing change and the ability to adapt and move forward.