



WEBFOOTER EXTRA

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A History of PFB Fire Station #34



Vintage photo of Portland Fire Station No. 34 which is now the Oregon Stamp Society Building and the home of Webfooters Post Card Club meetings at 4828 NE 33rd Avenue in Portland. Photo Courtesy of Portland Fire & Rescue Archives.

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Vintage photo of the Oregon Stamp Society Building at 4828 NE 33rd Avenue in Portland. This image courtesy of Portland Fire & Rescue Archives, circa 1970.

Built in 1928, the building where The Webfooters are currently meeting was dedicated as Portland Fire Station 34 on November 1, 1928. The station was home to Engine Company 34 which had been newly-commissioned two days earlier on October 30. The cost of construction was \$10,050 and the land was purchased for \$870.

During the period from 1913 to 1928, as more fire stations were needed in the residential areas of Portland and at a time when horse-drawn transport was being phased-out in favor of motorized transport, the architecture of Portland fire stations changed. A new "bungalow" style firehouse was deemed to better blend into the residential neighborhoods as compared to the older, larger, two-story stations found in the urban sections of Portland.

Thirteen fire stations were built from this bungalow architectural template between 1913 and 1928. The last four fire stations that were built had different exteriors, but each had essentially the same floor plan. Station 34, the last station with a bungalow design, shared the same exterior style with five other stations.

The interior layout of the bungalow station was configured to meet the needs of the fire company. The main floor was the primary floor and it served a number of functions. First, it housed the apparatus room which was fronted by a pair of metal exterior doors and disguised to look like bay windows. This engine bay was positioned at ground level on a slight slope toward the street; the rest of the main floor was raised three feet off the ground.

Immediately through the front door was the living-watch room for staff. Walking through the this room, one would first encounter the alcove-like lavatory-locker room containing ten facing lockers and a linen closet on the right side and a small restroom and shower to the left. Beyond that was the dormitory.

A small room at the end of the apparatus room was the Captain's room. The largely open basement contained the kitchenette and dining area, shower, storage closets, and the heating system. The attic was not finished and was used, if at all, for storage. The attic dormer was actually the top of a hose tower starting in the basement and used to hang the fire hoses to dry.

The design of the bungalow fire stations was meant to blend in with their neighbors. Certain design features – strong straight lines, entry columns, a split brick and wood façade, the number of windows, a steeply pitched roofline providing tall gable ends and room for a dormer – were incorporated to “soften” the look of the building and to hide its public-government origins.

The interior floor space of the building was divided and allocated according to the specific spatial and traffic flow needs of the fire company. In an unexpected touch, some nice features were added, including a fireplace, storage built-ins in the living-watch room and the kitchen, wainscoting with veneer panels, boxed beam ceilings, a picture rail throughout, Fir wood floors in the dormitory and cork tile floors in the living-watch room.

Of the thirteen original bungalow fire stations, ten were de-commissioned. Six of those ten former fire stations are privately owned, three are owned and leased by the City of Portland, and one has been demolished. Three original stations are still active: Station 119, formerly Station 37; Station 15 in the southwest hills; and Station 36, Station 26 since 1959, in St. Johns.

All of the bungalows that are still standing have undergone some degree of physical alteration. Although most have been modified on the exterior in some fashion, it is still easy to identify the bungalow profile. Most alterations have occurred to the interior, either opening up common space or dividing open space to accommodate a new use. The privately-owned or used bungalows show mixed usage – clubhouse, community center, union hall, office building, and apartments.

Editor's Note: Information in this article was provided by postal historians Steve King and Charles Neyhart. Images of Fire Station 34/Oregon Stamp Society courtesy of Portland Fire and Rescue Archives.